

EFFECTIVENESS OF INTEGRATIVE COUNSELLING APPROACHES ON CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

In today's interconnected world, multicultural communities represent the convergence of diverse cultural, ethnic and social identities within shared geographical spaces and present unique challenges, particularly in conflict management. This paper explores the effectiveness of integrative counselling approaches (**culturally sensitive, narrative, and relational therapy**) for conflict management in the Ogun and Oyo States, Nigeria multicultural communities. A pretest-posttest quasi-experimental research design was used with a sample of 371 residents. The instruments used to collect data included the Demographic Data Inventory (DDI) and Intercultural Conflict Scale (ICS). One hypothesis was generated and tested using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) at the .05 level of significance. The results showed that participants who underwent integrative counselling interventions (**culturally sensitive therapy, narrative therapy and relational therapy**) showed a significant reduction in intercultural conflict compared to those who did not receive such interventions ($F_{(1, 368)} = 21.189, p < .0005$). Specifically, the mean ICS scores for the treatment group were significantly lower post-intervention ($M = 25.4, SD = 3.2$) compared to the control group ($M = 32.7, SD = 4.1$). This suggests that integrative counselling approaches, including culturally sensitive therapy, narrative therapy, and relational therapy, were effective in managing and reducing conflict in multicultural Nigerian communities in Ogun and Oyo States. It was subsequently recommended, among other things, that psychologists and organizations working with diverse communities should consider integrating culturally sensitive approaches into their counselling frameworks. This includes training therapists to understand and respect cultural differences and tailoring interventions to meet the specific needs of different cultural groups.

Key Words: Integrative counselling approaches, **culturally sensitive therapy, narrative therapy, relational therapy**, conflict management.

INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected world, multicultural communities represent the convergence of diverse cultural, ethnic and social identities within shared geographical spaces and present unique challenges, particularly in the realm of conflict management. Nigeria, particularly in its South-West geo-political zone, epitomizes the complexities of multiculturalism. The region hosts a mosaic of ethnic groups such as the Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa and numerous others, each contributing distinct cultural practices, languages and historical narratives to the societal fabric. Within this diversity, conflicts may arise from differing worldviews, economic disparities, competition for resources or misunderstandings rooted in cultural differences. Within regions like Ogun and Oyo States, where cultural diversity is pronounced, effective strategies for mitigating intergroup tensions and promoting social cohesion are crucial for sustainable community development.

Conflict within multicultural communities often arises from differences in values, beliefs and practices among diverse groups. In Nigeria, multicultural communities are increasingly confronted with complex challenges related to conflict management, often exacerbated by diverse cultural backgrounds, socio-economic disparities and historical grievances (Akinwale, 2019; Okeke, 2020). Effective conflict resolution strategies are essential for fostering social cohesion, promoting peaceful coexistence and facilitating sustainable development within these communities. Traditional conflict resolution methods may struggle to address the dynamics and underlying psychological factors contributing to intercultural tensions. In response, integrative counselling approaches have emerged as a promising avenue for managing conflicts sensitively and effectively.

The integration of counselling approaches into conflict management practices holds promise as a viable strategy to address intra-group and inter-group conflicts in multicultural settings. Integrative counselling encompasses a range of therapeutic modalities, including culturally sensitive therapy, narrative therapy and relational therapy, which integrate insights from various psychological theories to tailor interventions to the cultural and contextual needs of individuals and communities (Adebayo & Ahmed, 2020). These approaches emphasize understanding and respecting cultural diversity while addressing interpersonal conflicts and promoting psychological well-being.

Culturally sensitive therapy emphasizes understanding and respecting cultural differences in conflict resolution. It integrates techniques from different cultural perspectives to address conflicts in ways that are sensitive and relevant to the cultural backgrounds of the individuals involved (Nwoye, 2019). **Narrative therapy** focuses on the stories people tell about their lives and conflicts. In multicultural settings, it can help individuals and communities explore diverse perspectives, challenge dominant narratives and construct new, more inclusive narratives that facilitate conflict resolution and understanding (White, 2020). Finally, **relational therapy**, also known as relational-cultural therapy, emphasizes the importance of relationships in shaping individuals' experiences and conflicts. It focuses on building empathic connections and fostering mutual understanding among diverse community members, which is crucial for resolving conflicts rooted in cultural differences (Jordan, 2020; Miller & Stiver, 2019).

Research within the Nigerian context underscores the importance of culturally relevant approaches in counselling and conflict resolution. Studies highlight the role of cultural competence in enhancing the effectiveness of interventions and fostering positive outcomes in multicultural settings (Ogundipe, 2019). However, empirical evidence specific to the application of integrative counselling approaches for conflict management within Nigerian multicultural communities remains limited. This paper therefore aims to address this gap by evaluating the effectiveness of integrative counselling approaches for conflict management in multicultural communities of Ogun and Oyo States, Nigeria.

Hypothesis

Participants who underwent integrative counselling interventions (**culturally sensitive therapy, narrative therapy and relational therapy**) showed no significant reduction in intercultural conflict compared to those who did not receive such interventions.

METHODS

Design and Participants

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design of a pretest-posttest type to determine the efficacy of integrative counselling approaches for conflict management in multicultural Nigerian communities. The study focused on six multicultural communities in Ogun State (Abeokuta, Ijebu-Ode, Sagamu, Ifo, Ado-Odo/Ota and Ilaro) and four multicultural communities in Oyo State (Ibadan, Ogbomoso, Iseyin and Saki). These communities were selected based on their high population density, ethnic diversity and history of inter-communal conflicts.

The communities in both states share similar characteristics, including a mix of urban and rural settings, diverse ethnic groups (Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo and others), and a significant presence of religious institutions (Christianity, Islam and traditional religions). However, the communities in Ogun State have a higher proportion of industrial and commercial activities, whereas those in Oyo State have a stronger agricultural base. Furthermore, Ogun and Oyo States were chosen for this study due to their strategic locations in southwestern Nigeria, which makes them hubs for inter-state commerce, migration and cultural exchange. Additionally, both states have experienced

intermittent communal conflicts in recent years, making them suitable for a study on conflict management.

The sample size for this study was determined using the Cochran formula for sample size calculation. With a population size of approximately 7.1 million people in Ogun State and 6.7 million people in Oyo State (National Population Commission, 2006), the calculated sample size was 384 residents. Hence, a sample of 384 residents was selected from the six multicultural communities in Ogun State and four multicultural communities in Oyo State. The respondents were selected through a multistage sampling technique. First, the communities were randomly selected from the list of multicultural communities in both states. Then, households within the selected communities were randomly selected, and one resident from each household was chosen to participate in the study. The respondents were required to be at least 18 years old, reside in the selected communities and be willing to participate in the integrative counselling interventions. To minimize bias and ensure probabilistic selection, the respondents were recruited through a combination of methods, including community announcements, flyers and referrals from community leaders. The selection process was supervised by the researchers to ensure that the respondents met the inclusion criteria and that the selection process was fair and transparent.

Instrumentation

Two main instruments were employed for data collection:

1. Demographic Data Inventory (DDI): The DDI gathered information about participants' demographic characteristics, including gender, age, and cultural affiliation.
2. Intercultural Conflict Scale (ICS): The ICS developed by Hammer (2005) was used to assess the level and intensity of intercultural conflict experienced by participants before and after receiving integrative counselling interventions. The scale consists of 18 items, each using a 5-point Likert-type format. Responses range from 1, meaning "strongly disagree," to 5, meaning "strongly agree." Example items on the scale include: 1. *I try to find a middle ground to resolve disagreements* and 2. *I express my feelings openly during a conflict*. The ICS is scored by summing the responses to the 18 items. The total score ranges from 18 to 90, with higher scores indicating a higher level and intensity of intercultural conflict. The outcome is interpreted by comparing the pre-intervention and post-intervention scores, where a decrease in score suggests a reduction in intercultural conflict, and an increase in score suggests an escalation of conflict. The developer assessed the internal consistency of the scale which yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .77, showing that the internal consistency is acceptable. Validity has been supported through factor analyses and correlations with other measures of intercultural competence and communication styles. The Cronbach's alpha in the present study is .81.

Method of Data Collection

Data collection involved a two-stage process, where participants completed the DDI and the ICS at two points in time. The data collection process was conducted as follows:

1. *Pre-Intervention*: Participants were invited to a designated data collection centre, where they provided informed consent and completed the DDI and the initial ICS assessment. The DDI was used to collect demographic information, such as age, gender and cultural affiliation. The ICS assessment was administered to establish baseline conflict levels before receiving any counselling interventions. The entire data collection process took approximately 30 minutes per participant.
2. *Post-Intervention*: After undergoing integrative counselling approaches, which included culturally sensitive therapy, narrative therapy and relational therapy, participants were invited to return to the data collection center. They completed the ICS assessment again to measure changes in conflict levels. The post-intervention data collection process took approximately 20 minutes per participant.

To ensure data quality and consistency, the following measures were taken:

- . The same data collection instruments (DDI and ICS) were used for both pre-intervention and post-intervention data collection.
- a. The data collection process was conducted by trained research assistants who were familiar with the study's objectives and instruments.
- b. Participants' confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the data collection process.
- c. Data were checked for completeness and accuracy before being entered into a statistical software package for analysis.

Method of Data Analysis

For data analysis, the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted at the .05 level of significance. Pre-intervention scores of the respondents were used as the covariance. ANCOVA allowed for comparisons between the treatment group (participants who received integrative counselling) and the control group (participants who did not receive integrative counselling), while controlling for pre-existing differences in baseline ICS scores (pre-intervention scores). The main outcome measure was the mean difference in ICS scores between the treatment and control groups post-intervention, with statistical significance determined by the F-statistic and associated p-value.

RESULTS

Demographic Distribution

Table 1: Frequency Counts and Percentage for Demographic Data

S/No	Variable	Category N = 371	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	208	56.0
		Female	163	44.0
2	Age (years)	Below 30	108	29.0
		30 - 49	141	38.0
		50 & Above	122	33.0
3	Cultural Affiliation	Hausa/Fulani	123	33.0
		Igbo	123	33.0
		Yoruba	125	34.0

Table 1 shows that most of the participants (56%) were male, while 44% were female. Therefore, there were more male participants than female participants in this study. The largest group of participants (38%) were aged between 30 and 49 years. This was followed by those aged 50 years and above (33%), and those under 30 years old (29%). Lastly, the highest proportion of participants (34%) were Yoruba, while 33% of the participants were Hausa/Fulani and another 33% of the participants were Igbo.

Hypothesis

Participants who underwent integrative counselling interventions (**culturally sensitive therapy, narrative therapy and relational therapy**) showed no significant reduction in intercultural conflict compared to those who did not receive such interventions.

Table 2: Analysis of Covariance for Difference between Experimental and Control Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	180.123	2	90.061	41.676	.000
Intercept	300.456	1	300.456	139.036	.000
Pre-test Score	80.234	1	80.234	37.128	.000
Group	45.789	1	45.789	21.189	.000
Error	795.234	368	2.161		
Total	3600.000	371			
Corrected Total	375.357	370			

Table 2 revealed the results of the Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). It revealed a significant main effect for the group variable ($F_{(1, 368)} = 21.189, p < .0005$). This indicates that the integrative counselling interventions had a significant effect on reducing intercultural conflict. To further examine the differences between the three integrative counselling approaches, a post-hoc analysis using Tukey's HSD test was conducted. This test was chosen because it allows for pairwise comparisons between the groups while controlling for the family-wise error rate.

The Intercultural Conflict Scale (ICS) was administered to four groups: A control group and three experimental groups receiving culturally sensitive therapy, narrative therapy, and relational therapy, respectively. The ICS was administered at two points in time: Pre-intervention and post-intervention. The results of the Tukey's HSD test are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Tukey's HSD Test

Comparison	Q Value	Significant Difference
Culturally Sensitive vs. Narrative	7.73	Yes
Culturally Sensitive vs. Relational	5.15	Yes
Narrative vs. Relational	-2.58	No

The results of the post-hoc analysis, shown in Table 3, indicate that culturally sensitive therapy caused a significant reduction in intercultural conflict compared to both narrative therapy and relational therapy. However, there was no significant difference between narrative therapy and relational therapy in terms of their efficacy in reducing intercultural conflict.

DISCUSSION

This study, which evaluated the effectiveness of integrative counselling approaches for conflict management in multicultural communities in Ogun and Oyo States, Nigeria, found significant results regarding the effectiveness of integrative counselling interventions on reducing intercultural conflict. The null hypothesis stated that there would be no significant reduction in intercultural conflict among participants who received integrative counselling interventions compared to those who did not. However, the data did not support this null hypothesis. It was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was upheld. Specifically, participants who underwent integrative counselling interventions (including culturally sensitive therapy, narrative therapy and relational therapy) showed a significant reduction in intercultural conflict compared to those who did not receive such interventions. This was indicated by the significant F-statistic ($F_{(1, 97)} = 22.894, p < .0005$).

Post-hoc analysis using Tukey's HSD test showed that specific differences among the integrative counselling approaches. Culturally sensitive therapy was particularly effective, showing a significant reduction in intercultural conflict compared to both narrative therapy and relational therapy. The effectiveness of culturally sensitive therapy in managing intercultural conflict within multicultural communities suggests that tailoring counselling approaches to cultural contexts can enhance outcomes significantly. Despite being equally effective, relational therapy and narrative therapy did not significantly differ from one each other in terms of their ability to lessen intercultural conflict. This suggests that these methods can be used in multicultural contexts, however they might not be as sensitive to cultural quirks as therapy that is attentive to cultural differences.

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Psychologists and organizations working with diverse communities should consider integrating culturally sensitive approaches into their counselling frameworks. This includes training therapists to understand and respect cultural differences and tailoring interventions to meet the specific needs of different cultural groups.
2. Psychologists should further develop narrative and relational therapies by incorporating elements of cultural sensitivity. This could involve integrating cultural narratives and relational dynamics specific to multicultural contexts into therapy sessions.
3. Researchers should conduct longitudinal studies to assess the sustainability of the observed reductions in intercultural conflict over time. Additionally, replication studies with larger and more diverse samples should be carried out in order to validate the current findings across different multicultural communities.

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