

THE PARADOX OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN MARRIAGE: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS IN OYO STATE

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Abstract:

The importance of marital harmony cannot be overstated when considering its impact on one's personal life, family life, and social relationships, especially for people who face emotional and psychological challenges in their jobs. In the Nigerian context, economic stresses, job strains, and changing family values have increased conflicts in marriage; however, little is known about how emotional intelligence plays a role in marital life here. This study qualitatively explores the influence of emotional intelligence on marital harmony among secondary school teachers in Oyo State, Nigeria, addressing a gap in context-sensitive, experience-based research. Guided by Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory and Family Systems Theory, the study adopts a phenomenological research design to examine teachers' lived experiences of emotional awareness, regulation, empathy, and interpersonal communication in marriage. Data were generated through in-depth semi-structured interviews with purposively selected married secondary school teachers and analysed using thematic analysis. Results indicate that emotional intelligence plays a key role in achieving harmony in marriages in that it is an important factor in effective communication, emotional regulation in times of conflict, empathic understanding, and supportiveness between partners. The personal accounts of participants shed light on how occupational stress and cultural expectations can influence emotional response within the context of marriage. This study adds to existing knowledge by emphasising the importance of emotional intelligence in facilitating marital harmony.

Keywords: Communication, Conflict Resolution, Empathy, Relationship Satisfaction, Psychological Well-being

Introduction

Peace in marriage is an essential factor in ensuring individual and family happiness, creating a positive impact on individual careers especially in professions that require a high degree of emotional work such as teaching. Teachers act as key agents within the education system, being

involved in emotional processes associated with interaction with pupils, parents, and other support staff (Olowu, 2021). Marital peace can be understood as the presence of mutual understanding, emotional intimacy, effective communication, and the ability to resolve conflicts, all of which provide for the psychological and social well-being of spouses (Gottman & Silver, 2015). The issue of marriage peace in Nigeria is closely tied with socio-cultural aspects, including traditional gender roles, community obligations, and coping with occupational stress, which does not only limit but also facilitate marital; Oladipo, 2019). In this regard, the correlation between marriage and occupational stress among secondary school teachers in Oyo State can be explained through the concept of emotional labour involved in teaching, which entails dealing with difficult classroom situations, catering to varying learning requirements, and reconciling work and personal life.

Defined as the skill of recognising, controlling, and managing personal and other people's emotions, emotional intelligence has become one of the most essential determinants of effective interpersonal behaviour and relationship management (Goleman, 2019; Mayer et al., 2016). In marriage, for instance, the skill of recognising and regulating emotions, empathy towards the partner, and proper management of emotionally stressful events become key factors in creating harmonious marital relations. Although earlier studies have managed to discover quantitative links between marital satisfaction and emotional intelligence in an international, little information exists about how emotional intelligence manifests itself in the qualitative experience of teachers in Nigeria with regards to their marital lives. This issue becomes especially relevant when considering the peculiarities of Oyo State, where social traditions and work-related factors could affect emotional management and relationship-building processes differently than elsewhere.

The existing research gap in this study lies in insufficient empirical research on how emotional intelligence is displayed in marital life of teachers at secondary schools in Oyo State. In most of the previous studies conducted, there were quantitative studies that could prove certain trends but did not give attention to the personal and contextual aspect of the emotions of people (O). Teaching continues to be one of the most emotionally stressful occupations in addition to society's gender-related expectations of teachers as well as family responsibilities. There is therefore a need for more research in this area.

The major focus of this study is to investigate the impact that emotional intelligence has on marital relations amongst teachers of secondary schools in Oyo State. The study explores the effect of emotional intelligence on marital harmony, with particular attention to teachers' perception on the influence of emotional intelligence on marriage, how emotional intelligence contributes to harmonious relationships, and how occupational and socio-cultural contexts affect emotional intelligence in marriages. The study is based on three main research questions. These include: How do teachers perceive emotional intelligence as it relates to marital relationships? How does emotional intelligence impact marital harmony? What is the role of occupational and cultural factors in impacting emotion in marriage?

Conceptual Clarifications and Literature Review

The concept of emotional intelligence has emerged as one of the most potent frameworks in psychology today in its examination of human behaviour, relationships, and well-being. This rise

in importance is largely due to the understanding that cognitive intelligence by itself is not adequate in explaining the manner in which people deal with their emotions and the social world around them. In cases of intimate interactions such as marriage and family, it is more often than not the level of emotional competence that will defines the success and stability of any intimate relationship. Emotional intelligence is generally defined as an individual's ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and use emotions in themselves and other people (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2016). Here, emotions are not considered disruptive factors but rather sources of information on how people can act. While this definition highlights the skills associated with emotional intelligence, there are other definitions that focus on traits.

Goleman (2019) incorporates all these approaches into four domains which are interconnected with each other: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. The domain of self-awareness can be defined as the ability to realise the emotional state of a person, know what causes it, and comprehend its effect on behaviour and emotions. People who have high levels of self-awareness show more emotional awareness and can make rational decisions regarding how to react in emotionally loaded situations (Gross, 2015). Self-management means controlling impulses, tolerating distress, and expressing emotions properly according to situational requirements and objectives. Empathy is an element of social awareness, which allows perceiving other people's emotions, being sensitive and compassionate to other people's feelings (Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2011; Schutte et al., 2007). Within marital relationships, these dimensions of emotional intelligence assume heightened importance because marriage represents a sustained, emotionally intensive partnership that requires continuous negotiation of needs, expectations, and differences.

Emotionally intelligent people tend to practice open communication, show patience in times of conflicts, and adopt appropriate conflict management techniques (Akanle & Adejare, 2020). Emotional intelligence helps individuals to understand their partner's emotions properly, react to their emotional signals appropriately, and avoid harmful behavioural patterns like defensiveness, avoidance, and aggression. As such, it serves as a safeguard from relationship degradation by creating emotional security and stability (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000; Malouff et al., 2014). According to Lopes et al (2005), emotionally intelligent husbands and wives have the ability to recognise any threats to their relationships, control themselves in times of stress and ensure relational harmony takes precedence over personal satisfaction.

The significance of emotional intelligence becomes increasingly apparent when the topic is understood in the context of the realities faced by secondary school teachers at work. Teaching is commonly known as one of the most emotionally intense professions, involving constant interpersonal contact, great responsibility, and performance expectations. Secondary school teachers constantly have to deal with classroom management issues, problematic behaviour, pressure from administrators, and parents and community members. In doing so, teachers are involved in what Hochschild (2012) calls emotional labour, which refers to the control and expression of emotion in line with job requirements. This may be mentally draining because sometimes teachers are required to mask negative emotions or demonstrate positivity in spite of pressure.

Research shows that when teachers engage in emotional labour for long periods of time, stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion result (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Kyriacou, 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). This becomes even more problematic in Nigeria because of issues such as overcrowded classes, lack of teaching materials, low pay, and insufficient infrastructures. If work stress is left unchecked, it might carry over into family affairs, where one may notice that mood, patience, and reactivity are affected in their spousal relationship.

This evidence highlights the idea that emotional intelligence is not just a personal resource but also an intermediary element facilitating transition from the sphere of professional life to the area of family relationships. Earlier research done in Nigeria by researchers such as Akanle & Adejare (2020) indicates that occupational stress and work-family conflict experienced by teachers may be responsible for marital conflicts and communication breakdowns within the family. They point out, people possessing high levels of emotional intelligence experience higher-quality social interactions due to their ability to handle interpersonal tension and create a positive atmosphere. In other words, those skills required by teachers when building relationships with students can be transferred into the realm of marital relations. Emotional intelligence, therefore, works as a mediator that transforms workplace issues into empathy or marital stress.

In its turn, marital harmony is a complementary construct that stands for overall marital quality related to emotional, communicative, and behavioral aspects. According to Gottman and Silver (2015), there are several critical signs of healthy relationships, such as effective communication, successful management of conflicts, emotional intimacy, mutual support, and shared meaning. All these components can be regarded as consistent with the ideas about satisfaction and stability in marriages developed by Fincham and Beach (2010) and Bradbury et al. (2000).

The marriage in Nigeria occurs within a larger socio-cultural construct emphasising unity in family relations, sense of collective duty, and prescribed gender roles. As pointed out by (2022), the satisfaction experienced by Nigerian couples depends on how they perceive their role-related duties, mutual respect, and responsibilities to the larger family unit. Akanle and Adejare (2020) add that gender division of labour and cultural norms around emotions influence negotiations around power distribution and marital intimacy in such relationships. According to Johnson (2004), African gender relations cannot be understood using Western-based theories as they differ significantly from the former.

All existing literature agrees on the positive relationship between emotional intelligence and marital outcomes. Research conducted across the globe reveals that people with high emotional intelligence tend to have a high level of satisfaction in marriage, effective communication, and fewer cases of destructive conflicts (Hussain et al., 2020; Malouff et al., 2014). The same results are revealed in the African context, where emotional intelligence predicts marital adjustment and relational well-being. Still, most studies apply survey designs rather than qualitative methodology.

Despite the importance of the evidence provided through quantitative studies regarding the association between emotional intelligence and marital outcomes, they fail to capture much of what happens regarding how people relate to emotional intelligence in terms of their own interpretations of their experiences in marriages. For instance, such studies do not capture how

social and occupational contexts, including one's history, affect people's interpretations of their emotional expressions. In such cases, this becomes especially true when it comes to teachers since they experience unique pressures because of their jobs and social backgrounds. In this case, the use of the phenomenological approach will be used to fill the research gaps by considering the teachers' experiences of emotional intelligence in relation to marriage. Since phenomenology emphasises the meanings and interpretations of human experience, this approach will make it possible to achieve deeper knowledge about emotional intelligence in relation to marriage, where emotional intelligence will be perceived as an interactional construct and not a personality trait (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2022).

Another objective of the study is to interpret the relationship between emotional intelligence and harmonious marriage amongst secondary school teachers in Nigeria. Despite the fact that there exists literature demonstrating a relationship between emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction, very few researchers have considered the experiences of the Nigerian teachers with regards to this relationship. The study will, therefore, aim at addressing this gap.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research design using phenomenology to investigate the impact of emotional intelligence on marital bliss among married secondary school teachers in Oyo State, Nigeria. It was thought to be the most suitable method because it focuses on the way people make sense of their own experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The target population for the study consisted of married secondary school teachers in both public and private secondary schools in Oyo State. This group was selected for the study since teachers are known to engage in emotional labour, occupational stress, and interaction with other people, which can have an effect on marriages.

A total of 30 participants took part in the study. Six participants (three married couples) were selected for in-depth interviews from Ibadan, Oyo town, and Saki. Each couple participated in individual and joint interviews to provide both personal and shared perspectives on emotional experiences in marriage. In addition, three focus group discussions were held amongst married teachers in Ibadan, Oyo town, and Ogbomoso, comprising of eight individuals in each discussion, selected from public and private secondary schools. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, with a specific focus on emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, communication, conflict management, occupational stress, cultural expectations, and marital harmony. Participants were expected to provide insights based on personal experiences concerning marriage problems, emotional support, reconciliation, and growth in relationships.

Interviews and discussions were all audio-recorded with the participants' permission and transcribed verbatim. All ethical considerations were strictly followed throughout the data collection process. The purpose of the study was clearly explained to participants; their willingness to participate and have their confidentiality guaranteed, were assured, and all participants were anonymised using pseudonyms. Data obtained were subjected to thematic analysis grounded in phenomenological approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Repeated reading of the transcripts enabled identification of recurring patterns and themes regarding emotional intelligence and

marital harmony. Interpretative phenomenological analysis approach was also used to further understand the meaning that the participants gave to their experiences (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022).

Case Studies: Exploring the Influence of Emotional Intelligence on Marital Harmony among Secondary School Teachers in Oyo State

Case Study 1: Ibadan – Balancing Work Stress and Marital Communication

Mr. Adebayo is a teacher in a government secondary school where he teaches mathematics. His wife also works as a teacher of English Language in a private secondary school. They have been married for eleven years and they have three kids. Their marriage began to face some challenges with the increase in the cost of living, high transportation cost, payment of fees and their workloads increasing tremendously. Mr. Adebayo would always be too tired from supervising extra classes and teaching students in preparation for their examinations. On her part, Mrs. Adebayo had to face challenges of coping with work at the schools and domestic duties.

Financial crisis was one of the issues causing problems in the relationship. Mrs. Adebayo mentioned the fact that her husband never communicated openly regarding issues about their finances. She felt neglected and assumed that her husband had everything bottled up inside him, until he finally got angry over small things. Mrs. Adebayo said during the interview that “sometimes he comes back and does not communicate with anyone. When I ask what the problem is, he would say nothing. Then later, he gets angry at trivial matters.” In contrast, Mr. Adebayo reflected: “I thought I was protecting my family by not talking about the financial problems. I did not want her to worry. But later I realised that my silence was making things worse.”

As time went on, the couple gradually began to repair their relationship through deliberate efforts to build emotional awareness and communication skills through several counselling sessions which emphasised self and social awareness and management. Mrs. Adebayo suggested holding daily talks during dinner time once the kids had retired. In such talks, they discussed money issues, parenthood struggles, and work stress. According to Mr. Adebayo: “I was taught to express myself and stop bottling up my feelings. I opened up, and she became more sympathetic, and we had less frequent conflicts.” Similarly, Mrs. Adebayo came to understand the significance of being empathic. “I realised that he had his own share of stresses. Rather than getting agitated and criticising him for looking miserable, I learned to calmly inquire about his problems.”

With the development of higher emotional intelligence, the couple devised a more positive approach to dealing with conflicts. Instead of worsening situations by arguing or using offensive language, they would take a pause until their feelings were under control. As one of the participants mentioned, “Whenever we are both irritated, we just pause and resume our discussion later, since we will otherwise say things that we will regret.” This incident is based on several underlying assumptions of Emotional Intelligence Theory, including the concepts of emotional regulation, self-awareness, and empathy, thus making inter-personal interactions more effective. In addition, this case can be regarded as an example of Family Systems Theory, according to which the stability of a marriage depends on effective communication within the family.

Case Study 2: Oyo Town – Emotional Regulation, Cultural Expectations, and Mutual Support

The Adeolas are citizens of Oyo town. Mrs. Adeola is actually employed at the Local Government Primary School whereas Mr. Adeola also teaches but in another government secondary school within the same area of Oyo town. The couple is eight years married. Their relationship was influenced by cultural factors such as gender roles and household duties. According to Mr. Adeola, he had thought of himself as a man and deserved respect. This means he should not be asked about his decisions. On the other hand, Mrs. Adeola was under pressure since she was supposed to teach and take care of most of the domestic chores. She stated that "after school, I would cook, clean clothes, help the kids with their homework and get things ready for the following day." Mr. Adeola stated that "in my family, I saw the women doing all the household chores. I never knew nor really cared that my wife could be feeling so pressured."

Mrs. Adeola's condition would worsen each time she vented her frustrations. Most times, Mr. Adeola viewed such reactions from his wife as disrespectful. As per Mrs. Adeola, "Whenever I said I was tired, he saw that as being disrespectful and it led to arguments." Everything changed following the participation in a marriage seminar held at their local church, where emotional awareness and communication were emphasised. At that point, Mr. Adeola understood that his wife's complaints did not come out of any disrespect, but rather, exhaustion. He noted: "I realised she was not fighting me; she was only calling out for assistance. It helped me in understanding her better." On the other hand, Mrs. Adeola learned how to ask for what she wanted without shouting. She noted that, "I would simply tell him, 'I am tired today, can you please take care of the kids?'"

These progressive changes in the behaviour of Mr. Adeola can be attributed to some of the competencies associated with emotional intelligence, such as empathy, self-regulation, and interpersonal skills. The increased participation in house chores and attention to his wife's emotional needs indicate effective emotional attunement and sharing of relational responsibilities. These feelings of being less overwhelmed emotionally by the husband and supported show further evidence of the role of emotional intelligence in contributing to the level of marital satisfaction due to emotional balance within the relationship. This is consistent with the theory of Emotional Intelligence, which posits that awareness and control of emotions lead to better communication. Moreover, the case highlights another aspect of the theoretical framework, which is Family Systems Theory. The couple says, "we talk before it gets worse." This shows a shift towards cooperation and communication that help maintain the balance of the marriage. In conclusion, one could say that the use of empathy and emotional regulation help achieve marital balance.

Case Study 3: Saki – When Emotional Intelligence Becomes a Source of Anxiety

Mr. and Mrs. Oladipo are married secondary school teachers living in Saki. Mr. Oladipo teaches Economics in a public secondary school, while his wife teaches Biology in a private secondary school. They have been married for thirteen years and have two children. To outsiders, they appeared to have a stable and peaceful marriage because they rarely argued openly and often supported one another in public. However, beneath the surface, Mrs. Oladipo's high level of emotional sensitivity gradually became a source of anxiety in the marriage. She was highly observant and constantly paid attention to her husband's mood, tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, and daily routines.

While this emotional awareness initially helped her to understand and support him, it later became excessive and difficult to manage. Mrs. Oladipo explained: “I could easily tell when something about him changed, even if it was very small. If he greeted me in a different tone or looked tired, I immediately started worrying.” Because Mr. Oladipo was naturally introverted and often exhausted after work, he sometimes preferred silence when he returned home. However, his wife interpreted this silence as emotional distance, rejection, or hidden anger. She stated: “If he came home and sat quietly, my mind would begin to race. I would start wondering whether I had offended him, whether he was keeping something from me, or whether our marriage was changing.”

At times, Mrs. Oladipo became so anxious that she repeatedly questioned her husband about his feelings. She would ask whether he was angry, unhappy, or disappointed in her. If he responded briefly or said that nothing was wrong, she often found it difficult to believe him. According to Mr. Oladipo: “There were times when I honestly had no problem. I was only tired from work or thinking about school issues. But because she was so focused on my mood, she would continue asking questions until both of us became frustrated.” The anxiety created by this pattern eventually began to affect the marriage negatively. Mr. Oladipo started feeling that he was under constant emotional observation and could not freely express tiredness, stress, or silence without it being misunderstood. He reflected: “I felt like I could not just be quiet or have a bad day. Every small change in my mood became something serious. It became stressful because I felt I had to keep reassuring her all the time.”

Mrs. Oladipo also recognised that her emotional awareness had become excessive: “I realised that I was overthinking everything. Instead of helping our relationship, I was becoming anxious and making him anxious too.”

The turning point came when the couple attended a counselling session organised through their church. During the session, they learned that emotional intelligence does not only involve recognising emotions in others, but also managing one’s own emotional reactions. Mrs. Oladipo began to understand that not every mood change carried deep meaning and that her husband’s silence did not always signal danger or conflict.

Mr. Oladipo also learned to communicate more clearly about his emotional state. Rather than remaining silent, he began telling his wife directly when he was stressed, tired, or simply needed time to rest. He explained: “Now, if I need some quiet time after work, I tell her immediately so she does not worry unnecessarily.” Mrs. Oladipo added: “I have learned to pause before reacting. I no longer assume that every silence means rejection. Sometimes people are just tired, and that is normal.”

Over the period of time, the couple showed a more balanced combination of awareness of emotions and their regulation, indicating that emotional intelligence works best in combination with trust, patience, self-control, and good communication skills. This notion is consistent with Emotional Intelligence Theory, which underscores emotional regulation and interpersonal skills as important components of sustaining positive and functional relationships. Moreover, the case illustrates an

application of Family Systems Theory, which views marital stability through the lens of relational equilibrium characterised by a balance of emotions and reciprocity, thus reducing conflicts between spouses and promoting cohesion between them. Still, the case shows that poor management and imbalance of emotional intelligence can lead to excessive emotional reactivity, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion.

Discussion and Analysis

Analysis and interpretation of findings are discussed in this section based on semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion conducted amongst married secondary school teachers in Ibadan, Oyo Town, and Saki in addition to Ogbomoso for focus group discussion sessions. The phenomenological research approach is applied in interpreting and analysing findings collected from married secondary school teachers in Oyo state on the lived experience and understanding of emotional intelligence in marital relations.

From analysis, it is evident that emotional intelligence is neither inherent nor a fixed personal trait, but rather an adaptive process shaped by occupation-based emotional stress and relational patterns in marital life. Lived experiences of emotional awareness and self-regulation were identified from both interviews and focus group discussions. Individual interviews were found to be richer in self-examination and reflection with regard to self-awareness and self-monitoring of emotions as a process preceding interactions in marital relations. On the other hand, focus groups offered a collective understanding of emotional control as a requirement in marital life among teaching professionals.

Such findings correspond with the Emotional Intelligence Theory put forth by Goleman. Nevertheless, the findings of the phenomenology extend the scope of the theory to show that emotional regulation is dynamic and dependent on context like fatigue, job pressure, and marital pressure. Within the framework of Family Systems theory, emotional regulation is a stabiliser that enables the prevention of the shift of workplace pressures into marital tensions in order to maintain balance in the relationship. Moreover, the theme of empathy and communication came up as being important in the maintenance of marital harmony. Participants pointed out that in most cases, marital tension does not arise due to lack of love; rather it arises due to misunderstanding of emotions and poor timing in communication. The focus group sessions revealed a common norm within the society that patience and emotional restraint in marriage was important, whereas individual interviews offered insight into the selectivity of empathy based on emotions and situations. The Oyo Town participants showed that interpretation of emotional withdrawal as mere fatigue led to enhanced communication and decreased marital tension.

This result supports Family Systems Theory, which views marriage as an emotionally dependent system where each person's emotional behaviour impacts the other. In this case, emotional intelligence is seen as a relational phenomenon instead of an individual attribute, affecting the interactional and emotional responses between spouses. The role of occupational stress and cultural factors also influenced emotional intelligence in marriage. The participants indicated how stress related to their profession, such as work overload, dealing with problematic students, and dealing with the administration, often resulted in emotional instability during their marital life.

Nevertheless, through the interviewees' responses, there emerged personal and gendered aspects of this issue, especially for the women teachers who expected themselves to appear emotionally calm despite the internal strain they feel.

The above discovery reveals that emotional intelligence exists in much larger social cultural contexts. Emotional intelligence is not merely a psychological construct for the individual, but a form of social regulation of emotions based on norms of masculinity, femininity, professionalism, and marital duties. The implication of this revelation is that emotional intelligence exists in cultural contexts that have an impact on the expression or suppression of emotions between spouses. One of the most important findings about emotional intelligence that emerged from the analysis is the paradox of emotional intelligence, whereby increased sensitivity to emotions may be anxiety-inducing. This issue stood out in the individual interviews, particularly in the cases involving the couples from Saki, as there were several situations whereby heightened emotional awareness led to misinterpretation of behavior in marriage. Simple things like silence and fatigue were often construed as evidence of marital problems or emotionally-driven distance.

Whereas the issue was also mentioned by participants during the focus groups, it became even more apparent during the one-on-one interviews regarding the extent of the emotional intensity experienced. This implies that too much of emotional awareness may lead to a psychological burden rather than remaining an advantage where there is no element of trust and emotional self-control. These results build upon Emotional Intelligence Theory since they reveal that emotional awareness, on its own, cannot guarantee a harmonious relationship but must go hand in hand with trust, patience, and a well-balanced mind. Taking into account the Family Systems Theory framework, it becomes possible to understand that the described contradiction is characterised by a feedback cycle whereby the emotional hypervigilance of one partner raises emotional tension in the other partner, creating a poor emotional climate within the marriage.

In terms of methodology, it is also important to mention how differences in data sources affect the research results. The interviews yielded more emotional exposure, vulnerability, and self-reflection, while focus group discussions created shared standards for interpreting married people's behaviour and its social acceptance. Methodological triangulation increases the validity of the results, since it reveals the complex nature of emotional intelligence in marriage, including both private experience and social construction. Thus, emotional intelligence in marriage is demonstrated to be a constantly developing process influenced by numerous personal, professional, and cultural elements. On the one hand, emotional intelligence plays an important role in making relationships harmonious through emotional awareness, self-control, empathy, and effective communication. On the other hand, it can cause anxiety and tension in marital relations if emotional sensitivity is too high.

Results and Findings

Analysis of the collected data using the thematic approach revealed several interrelated insights into how emotional intelligence influences marital harmony among married secondary school teachers in Oyo State. Consistent with the phenomenological approach used, the findings were drawn from the lived experiences, interpretations, and meanings given by the participants, with special emphasis on the distinctions between the two different types of narratives presented in

individual interviews and focus group discussions. The following are four main themes that were identified from the collected data: The theme of Emotional Awareness and Self-Regulation in Marital Interactions was recurrently found in the data collected from individual interviews and focus group discussions, albeit to a greater extent in the former. Teachers who took part in the interviews generally defined emotional awareness as the ability to recognise their emotional states before acting out toward their partners. Most of the interviewed teachers stated that teaching could be an emotionally tiring profession, especially because of classroom management, administrative responsibilities, and financial stress.

Another common phenomenon among the interviewees was the emotional pausing strategy, wherein individuals would postpone their conversations until they were emotionally stable. In this regard, one individual said: "After having a hard time at work, I do not initiate the conversation. First, I calm down and then talk since I may say things I regret." The same individual added: "Now and then, I ask myself if I am really upset about my husband or if it is only the result of my fatigue from studies." Focus group discussion echoed the same trend, only this time as a profession-based coping strategy for teachers, and thus implying that emotional regulation is well known within the teaching profession. Generally, these findings suggest that emotional self-regulation acts as a shield against emotional bleeding from work to the marital relationship, thus ensuring stability in these relationships.

Empathy and Communication in Marital Relations was also a key highlight of the research. This finding was evident in both sources of the data, with focus group discussions showing behavioural norms and interviews giving examples and context of empathising. Participants defined empathy as the capacity to understand a spouse's emotions and react appropriately rather than act impulsively. The teachers pointed out that the cause of marital discord did not lie in the absence of love between partners, but instead lay in misinterpretation of emotional cues, improper timing in communication, or emotional inattentiveness. One participant mentioned, "At times my wife feels exhausted and doesn't want to talk. However, I have learnt that patience is needed in such situations." Another stated, "When I listen without attempting to justify myself, the issue becomes resolved quickly and in a peaceful manner."

Based on the discussion, participants came to an agreement that patience, listening, and emotional restraint are important qualities of a spouse. Furthermore, couple's accounts provided evidence of effective communication patterns based on proper emotion identification. In one story of Oyo Town, a husband considered his wife's emotional silence as an expression of disrespect, until he realised she was tired and emotionally overloaded. This realisation played an instrumental role in developing positive communication between the partners. As the study demonstrated, empathy functions as an interpersonal skill that promotes emotional synchronisation between the spouses.

Empathy was also explained as the ability to understand the feelings of a spouse and act accordingly, rather than react impulsively. Teachers pointed out that many marital problems did not stem from lack of love but resulted from misunderstanding of emotional signals, wrong timing of communication or emotional immaturity of one or both spouses. A participant observed: "Sometimes she is tired and does not wish to talk immediately. I have learnt not to push her into

talking about anything.” Another participant observed: “When I listen and do not try to defend myself, everything gets resolved very easily and peacefully.”

In focus group discussions, patience, willingness to listen and emotional restraint were recognised as important marital virtues, reflecting the presence of a common culture of emotional maturity in marriages. Couple histories provide a clear illustration of the role of better emotional comprehension in minimising conflict. For example, the husband in the story on Oyo town misunderstood his wife’s silence as a sign of disrespect, while later came to realise that it stemmed from tiredness and emotional saturation. Thus, empathy can be seen as a relational competence fostering emotional synchronicity between partners. These findings highlight that emotional intelligence in marriage is not solely an individual capacity but is deeply influenced by structural and socio-cultural conditions.

A notable, and rather surprising, discovery, especially through in-depth interviews (especially the narratives of the Saki couple), is the possibility of unintended consequences from emotional intelligence when it fails to strike a proper balance. It was mentioned by participants that emotional sensitivity could lead to over-analysis and over-interpretation of actions by the other spouse. Silence, fatigue, or lack of communication, for instance, was seen as symptoms of underlying tensions or conflicts. As one participant remarked, "When my husband is silent, I instantly start imagining things that aren't there." Or as another participant stated, "Eventually, I began getting anxious because I kept on trying to decipher what my husband meant."

While the focus group participants acknowledged this effect in less specific terms, they nonetheless stressed the importance of keeping one’s emotions in check and maintaining mutual trust in marriage. In some cases, participants have learned to temper their tendency to interpret emotions, realising that they do not necessarily call for any kind of action. As one participant confessed, "Sometimes, silence doesn't necessarily mean that something terrible is going to happen. People just get tired." Emotional intelligence was generally perceived as a relational and contextual phenomenon by all respondents and information sources.

In all, the research shows that emotional intelligence promotes marital happiness through the following factors: emotional awareness; self-regulation; empathy; communication skills. Nonetheless, it should be noted that there is one important limitation – excessive emotional awareness can result in such problems as: anxiety; emotional analysis; conflict; communication difficulties. It is worth mentioning that distinctions between individual interviews and focus groups in regard to depth, honesty, and emotional intensity increased the validity of research findings because of triangulation. In general, emotional intelligence of secondary school teachers living in marital unions in Oyo State can be viewed as a dynamic process depending on occupational stress, cultural norms, and communicative context.

Recommendations

The following recommendations, which seek to build upon the findings from this study, are made to promote marital harmony, boost emotional intelligence among teachers, and create effective support systems within institutions and families in Nigeria. Interventions aimed at marital counselling and family therapy should deliberately incorporate emotional intelligence as a formal

part of the counselling process and not treat it as a by-product of counselling sessions. The counsellors should formulate counselling methods that will deliberately foster self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and communication among spouses. These methods should go beyond mere counselling techniques by involving practices such as identifying emotions, reflective listening, and reducing escalation of conflicts through proper communication between spouses. Most importantly, these programmes should be culture-based, considering the marital dynamics, gender stereotypes, and family structures in Nigeria that influence how individuals express their emotions and conduct themselves in relationships.

Furthermore, counsellors conducting family therapy should acknowledge the paradoxical nature of emotional intelligence observed in this study, especially the potential for excessive emotional surveillance to cause anxiety among partners. Thus, counsellors should assist couples in distinguishing between normal emotional monitoring and over-analysis of emotions. The former can be addressed through educating the individuals on setting emotional boundaries, reframing their thoughts regarding their spouses' actions, and conducting activities that promote trust, thus lowering hypervigilance and emotional misinterpretations among couples.

In the education sector, there is need to include the aspect of emotional wellness within teacher welfare policy since there is the emotional aspect involved within teaching. In this regard, the concerned authorities in the education sector, schools' administrations, and other policymakers must put in place well-coordinated teacher wellness programmes whose main objective is to lower stress levels at the work place and prevent emotional bleed-through to teachers' home lives. The programmes may involve stress reduction measures such as emotional resilience programmes, mindfulness, among others. It is important that teacher development programmes take the aspect of developing emotional intelligence within the teaching profession. In this regard, the focus will not only be on training teachers in terms of their pedagogy, but also in how to handle themselves emotionally when dealing with people. As such, emotional aspects such as self-regulation, empathy, communication under stress, and conflict resolution may form part of teacher professional development programmes.

Moreover, educational institutions need to fortify institutional infrastructure that targets the emotional state of teachers. This may entail setting up counselling and psychological services within institutions or education boards, ensuring access to counsellors and providing confidential platforms for emotional expression. Schools must also explore options for workload sharing, better administration, and flexible working hours wherever possible to alleviate the constant emotional drain on teachers. In relation to the well-being of the marital relationship, public awareness programmes can be devised to make couples aware of the significance of emotional intelligence in ensuring a successful relationship. These programmes can be conducted in community workshops, religious organisations, media, and social welfare agencies. Some of the skills which need to be taught include emotional listening, proper and respectful communication, patience in situations involving conflict, and the need to offer each other emotional support.

It is equally important to develop gender sensitive intervention strategies keeping in mind the fact that cultural expectations affect the way emotionality is expressed by different genders. In order to promote a balance of emotionality by both husband and wife, the pressure on women to be

composed and that on men to hide their vulnerabilities must be reduced. Ultimately, future intervention strategies should focus on developing an integrative approach which takes into consideration individual factors, professional aspects, and family issues. Emotional intelligence must not only be regarded as a personal attribute which contributes to teaching efficiency and success in marriages, but also as a social phenomenon which influences these domains.

Conclusion

This research was designed to assess the impact of emotional intelligence on the marital harmony of married secondary school teachers in Oyo State, Nigeria, with respect to its objectives that aimed at examining the emotional awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and communication skills of teachers, alongside the impact of occupation and culture on these constructs. From the findings generated using the phenomenological approach of analysing the in-depth interviews and focus group discussion, it can be said that emotional intelligence significantly helps in maintaining marital harmony. Emotional awareness and self-regulation among some teachers enabled them to deal well with work-related pressures and prevented the spilling of work-related emotions into their personal space, thus avoiding marital conflicts. On the same note, empathy and good communication skills improved couples' comprehension of each other's situation and helped resolve any conflict constructively.

The findings from the study are consistent with the Emotional Intelligence Theory formulated by Goleman as the domains of self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skill are evident in the participants' experiences. Nevertheless, the study expands on this theory by showing that emotional intelligence is a relational and contextual phenomenon besides being individual-based. The findings also corroborate Family Systems Theory since emotional reactions in marriage are interdependent; that is, emotional behaviour of one partner can affect the other. The emotional regulation of one spouse often contributed to stability in the relationship, while imbalance led to instability.

Notably, one paradox emerges from the findings: although emotional intelligence is beneficial in marriage relationships, extreme emotional intelligence and over-sensitivity to spousal actions can create anxiety and instability in the relationship. In essence, the need to balance emotional intelligence and other relational factors cannot be underestimated. In sum, emotional intelligence plays a key role in achieving harmony in marital relationships of teachers; however, for that purpose, it must not only be personal but also relational in nature.

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