



## **The Effectiveness of Negotiation Skills Training In Resolving Marital Conflicts among Selected Christian Literate Couples in Lagos Metropolis**

**Makinde, Bola O. & Ayeyika Funmi**

Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Lagos, Nigeria

Corresponding author: Makinde, Bola O., Faculty of Education, University of Lagos, Nigeria

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**Abstract.** This study investigated the effectiveness of negotiation skills training in resolving marital conflicts among selected Christian literate couples in Lagos metropolis. The study adopted a pre –test, post-test quasi experimental design. The sample consisted of 120 literate Christian couples. 60 couples each were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups respectively. The participants were given a pre-test self – designed questionnaire titled “Spousal Conflict Resolution Pattern Questionnaire” (SCR PQ). The experimental group was lectured for a period of four weeks on negotiation skills after which the post – test was carried out. The hypotheses were analyzed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). Results of the hypotheses indicated that there was a significant mean difference between the experimental group and control group. It also showed that gender and length of marriage do not have any significant influence on spousal conflict resolution pattern. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended that counsellors and couples should be given extra training on communication, negotiation skills and cohabitation related skills that will enhance marital stability. This could be done through seminars and workshops on marriage counselling so as to enable them function maximally in marriage counselling among others.

**Key words:** negotiation, conflicts, communication, cohabitation.

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## INTRODUCTION

Marriage is the union between man and woman as husband and wife. It is a social institution that is designed among other things to ensure the happiness and fulfillment of the men and women who contract into it (Okwun, 2011). Marriage according to Makinde (2001) is the relationship that unites a man and a woman. It is a contract requiring an agreement between the two persons involved – a relationship arising from such agreement is such that will make them live together as husband and wife forever. Olusanya (1990) also defined marriage as a sacred and permanent contract between a man and a woman who have consented to live a life of fidelity and caring for each other for the purpose of promoting their mutual growth and welfare throughout their lives. The institution is however not without its problems. As Kehinde (2002) puts it, marriage is like a house, while new, it sparkles with fresh smells with lots of surprises, romance and new discoveries about those involved, which makes each day exciting to both partners but experiences have shown that not long after a family is established, both partners become major sources of individual's problems.

However, disagreements and conflicts are part of the daily lives of many couples because marriage provides a fertile ground in which the seeds of conflict can germinate (Lingren, 1997). Conflicts are also inevitable between the individuals involved in marriage relationship. Most marriages these days are riddled and afflicted with problem of mal-adjustment that often results in divorce. It is difficult to provide accurate statistics of the actual rate of divorce in Nigeria due to the fact that not all cases of divorce are reported and recorded but literate and media reports indicate a high rate of divorce (Yahaya, 2008). Esere (2000) noted that about forty percent (40%) of the marriages contracted every year in Nigeria end up in divorce or separation. Similarly, Hurley (2005) stated that divorce rate has increased markedly in United States, Britain, South Korea, Canada, Brazil, Nigeria and South Africa to mention but a few countries.

### **Nature of marital conflicts**

The term 'conflict' can be described as a state of opposition. According to Hornby (2006), conflict means a disagreement and a quarrel. Sotonade (1998) also defined conflict as the struggle for control over another person's behavior or action. A disagreement in marital relationship becomes a conflict when it goes beyond the normal intellectual difference that characterizes marital relationships to the emotional realm involving feelings of anxiety or anger and followed by abusive languages and hostile actions. In as much as conflict exists, the two parties at least still have a relationship, no matter how bad it may be. The conflict may lead them to hurt each other or to forgive and forget but the conflict shows that something about the relationship is still important to the people involved.

In marital conflicts, the individuals or groups involved are seen as basically competing with each other and power is seen as the decisive factor in interactions (Bryan, DeVault & Cohen, 2005). According to Justin (2004) in Okwun (2011), conflict is seen as a situation whereby a husband and wife desire goals which may be perceived as attainable by one but not by both. In such situations, the characteristic of the family reflects incompatibility, interactive struggle and interference. Kiuwer, Heesink & Van De Vliert (1997) opined that the absence of overt conflicts does not mean that there is no conflict only that it is not openly expressed. This is also characteristic of most Christian couples that partake in this study; they use religiosity to cover up conflicts and render them covert. Collins (1983) stated that couples need to learn how to negotiate marital conflicts as they arise in families at critical developmental times.

### **RESOLVING CONFLICTS USING NEGOTIATION SKILLS**

The term 'negotiation' can be defined as the usual bargaining exercise where two or more people are involved and required to demonstrate competencies in all aspects relevant to the issue at stake (Makinde, 2007). Research has shown that money, housework and sex are the common conflict areas among couples (Bryan & De Vault, 1994) and Szinovacz, 1987). No matter the area or cause of conflicts,

it must end to pave way for a peaceful coexistence. Regan (2003) pointed out many ways to end conflicts such as giving in though with resentment, using force to impose your will thereby creating bitterness in your opponent, blaming your opponent, using sarcasm and avoiding him/her. All these are less productive. Kieren, Maguire & Hurlbut (1996) suggested more positive and more productive strategies among which are compromise, agreement, assertion, reasoning and negotiation which is the thrust of this paper. Active listening, rational argument and supporting the opponent/partner are pertinent to conflict resolution.

However, to use the negotiation skill effectively, three sub-skills are necessary according to Regan (2003) viz:

1. **Agreement:** this means to freely agree with your spouse as a gift; this is quite different from giving in due to threats or coercion and it is likely to be appreciated by your partner.
2. **Bargaining:** this is unlike bargaining in politics or market place; it is getting the best for both of you with a focus on the relationship trusting that the partner will do the same. Here there is no winner and no loser. The usual question should be 'If you get what you want, how will it affect your spouse and the marriage? The solution should be fair to both.
3. **Coexistence:** there is a common saying that certain problems that cannot be solved can be endured; in some marriages, differences are expressions of different personalities hence differences that cannot be resolved can be lived with. Cupach & Spitzberg (1994) opined that communication is fundamental to genuine intimacy because if we do not talk about what we like or want, we cannot get either. Communication is a learned behavior and couples should employ it maximally.

**Hence,** instead of getting mad at the manner of pressing the toothpaste (as some men press midway instead of from the bottom), or keeping the paste-cap miles apart, we can jokingly remind our partners the disadvantages of either. Money conflicts that occur over limited resources or differences in values can also be discussed amicably.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF NEGOTIATION SKILLS**

When a relationship is threatened by continual conflicts, there is the possibility of re-negotiating it instead of terminating it. This can only occur if the issue is confronted before either party has decided that there is no point in continuity (Berko & Wolvin, 1985). Negotiation according to Thomas (2011) is the only interactive communication process that may take place whenever we want something from someone else or another person wants something from us.

Bornstein & Bornstein (1985) also affirmed that negotiation is that specific type of problem-solving behavior that culminates in the settlement of a mutually acceptable behavioural exchange when partners were previously unable to resolve their differences just because they did not learn how to communicate. Couples achieve marital happiness and satisfaction when they work together to resolve issues and problems that emanate between them. Reaching a consensus together builds intimacy which unpleasant circumstances and unexpected crises cannot easily destroy. This will enhance obedience to the Biblical injunction which stipulates that husbands should love their wives while wives should submit to their husbands (Ephesians,5; 22-26).

Consequently, this study hinges on the assumption that if effective communication and negotiation skills are taught to couples, they will live well-adjusted lives. This study therefore examined the effects of negotiation skills training on resolution of marital conflicts among Christian literate couples in Lagos state.

### **Statement of the problem**

Marriage is a divine situation which should be a special relationship for life and harmoniously integrate the husband and wife into becoming “one flesh” (Sotonade & Olusola, 2006).

Despite efforts in creating harmonious living relationship in marriage, the incidence of marital conflict is still prevalent. Scholars, school teachers and churches are at a loss on the options available for proffering solutions to this situation.

Most marriages especially among the literate class have been undergoing trying times as stated by Undiyaundeye & Ugal (2006) and Crew (1995) who in separate studies found that educated couples, despite their educational qualifications and religious affiliations have discrepancies in their views concerning marital conflicts especially as it concerns their values and marriage expectations. Substantial body of research findings suggest that there is an increased prevalence in marital conflict which affects the homes and the well-being of the family (Filani, 1984; Ulo, 1999, Gbende & Akuma, 2002; Justin, 2004 & Okwun, 2001). Hence, they emit patterns of behavior that is markedly different from the accepted standards within the society and they are likely to produce maladjustment that necessitates the application of negotiation skills.

Researchers, church leaders and educators working with families especially dysfunctional homes have expressed concern about the difficulties that divorce and separation have created in establishing an egalitarian society (Ulo, 1999; Odoemelam & Justin, 2004; Okwun, 2011). There is crisis definitely when it comes to the frequency of divorce. Infatuation wears off, sexual misbehavior sets in, communication problem develops, trust and honesty are missing and children manifest a whole new set of maladaptive behaviors. This is quite sad.

Similarly, another school of thought concluded that finance, childlessness among couple and issues of relatives often bring about family rancor and deep seated discontent in family life. There has also been a disturbing assertion to the extent that the inability of the couples to manage conflict is responsible for the conflict that has bedeviled the family.

Equally worrisome is the notion that some people handle anger in marriages by suppressing or venting it; anger however makes negotiation difficult. According to Virginia (1988), anger is a signal for change; but this change is for a non-negotiable stance. This paper therefore sets out to find out the effectiveness of negotiation skills training in resolving marital conflicts among literate Christian couples in the study area.

### **Purpose of the study**

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of negotiation skills training in resolving marital conflicts among literate Christian couples in Lagos metropolis.

The study also aimed at investigating the impact of gender and length of marriage of couples on the effectiveness of the negotiation skills training in resolving marital conflicts.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. Is there any significant mean difference in the spousal conflict resolution pattern between participants exposed to negotiation skills training and the control group?
2. Is there any significant mean difference in the spousal conflict resolution pattern between the participants exposed to negotiation skills training and the control due to gender?
3. Is there any significant mean difference in the spousal conflict resolution pattern between participants exposed to negotiation skill training and the control group due to their length of marriage?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses will guide the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the spousal conflict resolution pattern between participants exposed to negotiation skills training and the control group

2. There is no significant difference in the spousal conflict resolution pattern between participants exposed to negotiation skills training and the control group due to gender.
3. There is no significant difference in the spousal conflict resolution pattern between participants exposed to negotiation skills training and the control group due to length of marriage.

### **Scope of the study**

Though the problem under study is a nationwide phenomenon, the study is restricted to Lagos metropolis. Lagos is a busy densely populated metropolitan city wherein anger can be induced by the burnout experienced in traffic and the workplaces; once fagged out, couples may just retire to bed with little or no time for communication not to talk of negotiation after a hectic day's job.

### **Methodology**

The sample for this study consisted of 120 randomly selected married Christian couples (intact family) from Lagos metropolis who have been married for between 1 – 20 years.

### **Research design**

The Quasi – experimental pre-test, post-test, control group design was employed for this study.

### **Instrumentation**

A 'Spousal Conflict Resolution Pattern Questionnaire' (SCR PQ) designed by the researchers was used for the study. The instrument contains sections A and B. Section A sought to obtain demographic information on the couple as per sex, age and length of marriage. Section B contains 25 items on SCR PQ measured on a four – point Likert – type Scale with responses ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).



### Reliability and Validity of the Instrument

The instrument was administered on fifty (50) respondents who were not part of the main study. This is to ascertain the reliability using split – half method of reliability the scores were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r). A coefficient value of 0.69 was obtained. This reveals a high reliability of the instrument. Experts in the field of Guidance and Counselling and Measurement and Evaluation were consulted to ascertain the face and content validity of the instrument.

### DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant mean difference in the spousal conflict resolution pattern between participants exposed to negotiation skills training and the control group.

**Table 1: Descriptive Data on Pre and Post test scores of the Participants across the Experimental conditions.**

Group	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean Difference	
	N	Mean	SD	Mean		SD
Training Group,	60	58.07	4.40	26.72	3.20	31.35
Control Group	60	58.10	3.97	46.08	8.90	12.02
<b>Total</b>	120	58.09	4.19	36.40	12.10	21.69

Evidence from Table 1 shows that participants exposed to negotiation skills training instructions had the highest mean difference of 31.35, whereas the Control Group had 12.02. To determine whether a significance difference exists in negotiation skills scores between participants, one-way ANCOVA was used and the results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: ANCOVA Test of Difference in negotiation skill between Training and Control Groups.**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean of Squares	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	11275.32	2	5637.66	125.56	.000
Covariates	23.29	1	558.56	0.52	.473
Experimental condition	11247.75	1	11247.75	250.50	.000
Error	5253.48	117	44.90		
Corrected Total	16524.52	119			

\*Significant at 0.05; df=1 & 117; F critical= 6.90

The ANCOVA results presented in Table 2 shows that for the Experimental condition, the F-value obtained was 250.50 as P-value < 0.05, given 1 and 117 degrees of freedom at the 0.05 level of significance. This therefore suggests that training on negotiation skill was effective pattern in resolving conflicts among couples. Therefore hypothesis 1 was rejected. This also showed that negotiation skills training had greater impact on the participants' spousal conflict resolution pattern than their Control Group counterparts.

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant mean difference in the spousal conflict resolution pattern between participants exposed to negotiation skills training and control group due to gender.

**Table 3: Descriptive Data on Pre and Post test scores of participants between Experimental Condition and Gender on spousal conflict resolution pattern.**

Group	Gender	Pre-test Scores		Post-test Scores			
		N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean
<b>Difference</b>							
Training Group	Male	30	59.30	3.20	26.87	3.34	32.43
	Female	30	56.83	5.10	26.57	3.10	30.26
Control Group	Male	30	58.10	4.15	46.40	9.25	11.70
	Female	30	58.10	3.85	45.77	8.67	12.33
<b>Total</b>		120	58.08	4.08	36.40	6.09	21.68

Evidence from Table 3 shows that the male and female participants exposed to negotiation skills Training Instructions had mean difference of (32.43 and 30.26 for the males and the females), whereas the Control Group had (11.70 and 12.33) for male and female respectively. This shows that male participants were better in spousal conflict resolution pattern than their female counterparts. To determine whether a significant difference exists due to gender and experimental conditions, a two way ANCOVA was utilized and the results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: 2 x 2 ANCOVA Tests of the Effects of Experimental Condition and Gender on spousal conflict resolution pattern.**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean of Squares	F	Sig
<b>Corrected Model</b>	11278.79	3	3759.60	83.07	.000
<b>Covariates</b>	20.22	1	20.22	0.45	.505
Gender	3.46	1	3.46	0.08	.783
<b>Experimental Group</b>	11247.98	1	11247.98	248.53	.000
<b>Error</b>	5250.02	116	45.26		
<b>Corrected Total</b>		119			

**\*Not significant at 0.05; df =1 & 116; F-critical= 6.90**

Table 4 shows that a calculated F-value of 0.08 for gender was not significant at 0.05 level of significance with degree of freedom of 1 and 116 because P-value > 0.05, while F-value of 248.53 for experimental condition was significant at 0.05 with degree of freedom of 1 and 6.90 since P-value is < 0.05. Hypothesis two was therefore accepted. It was concluded that there is no significant difference of spousal conflict resolution pattern between male and female in the training and control groups.

**Hypothesis Three:** There is no significant mean difference in the spousal conflict resolution pattern between the participants exposed to negotiation skills training and control group due to length of marriage.

**Table 5: Descriptive Data on Pre and Post test scores of participants between Experimental Condition and length of marriage.**

Experiment	N	Length Of Marriage	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean Difference
			Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	
Training	17	1- 5 YEARS	57.06	5.19	26.24	2.80	30.82
	28	6-10 YEARS	58.14	4.54	26.75	2.61	31.39
	7	11-15 YEARS	60.43	2.88	27.86	2.04	32.57
	8	16 YEARS AND ABOVE	57.88	2.59	26.63	6.07	31.25
Control	17	1- 5 YEARS	57.00	5.10	48.71	3.04	8.29
	33	6-10 YEARS	58.73	3.75	43.06	10.71	15.67
	7	11-15 YEARS	58.14	2.04	52.71	2.63	5.43
	3	16 YEARS AND ABOVE	57.33	1.15	49.00	5.57	8.33
Total	120		58.09	3.41	37.62	4.43	15.75

Evidence from Table 5 shows that the participants exposed to Training Instructions whose length of marriage was 11-15years had the highest mean difference of 32.57. The participants whose length of marriage was 1-5years had the least mean difference of 30.82 while participants whose length of marriage were 6-10years and 16years and above had the mean difference of 31.39 and 31.25 respectively. Whereas the participants in the Control Group whose length of marriage was 6-10years had the highest mean difference of 15.67. The participants whose length of marriage was 11-15years had the least mean difference of 5.43 while participants whose length of marriage were 1-5years and 16years and above had the mean difference of 8.29 and 8.33 respectively. This shows that the participants whose length of marriage was 11-15years improved in spousal conflict resolution pattern. To determine whether significant difference exists due to length of marriage and experimental conditions, a two way ANCOVA was utilised and results are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6 : ANCOVA Tests of the Effects of Experimental Condition and length of marriage on spousal conflict resolution pattern.**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean of Squares	F	Sig
Corrected Model	11696.52	5	2339.30	55.19	.000
Covariates	27.04	1	27.04	0.64	.426
Length of Marriage	421.20	3	140.40	3.31	.023
Experimental Group	11232.75	1	11232.75	265.00	.000
Error	4832.28	114	42.39		
Corrected Total		119			

**\* significant at 0.05; df =3 & 114; F-critical= 3.98**

Table 6 shows that a calculated F-value of 3.31 for length of marriage was not significant at 0.05 level of significance with degree of freedom of 3 and 114 because F-calculated(3.31) is less than F-critical(3.98),  $P > 0.05$  while F-value of 265.00 for experimental condition was significant at 0.05 with degree of freedom of 1 and 114 since P-value is  $< 0.05$ . Hypothesis two was therefore not rejected. It was concluded that there is no significant difference of spousal conflict resolution pattern due to length of marriage among participants in the training and control groups.

## DISCUSSION

The general objective of this research is to carry out investigation on the effectiveness of the negotiation skills training in resolving marital conflicts. The study was carried out in Lagos state.

The findings showed that participants who were exposed to the negotiation skills training achieved a significantly high degree of marital conflict resolution than couples who did not receive any treatment. This result further gives credence to the stands of Patterson et al (1975) and Esere (2000) on the effectiveness of negotiation skill training in resolving marital conflict among couples.

Hypothesis two stated that there was no significant difference in spousal conflict resolution pattern between couples exposed to the experimental conditions due to gender. The findings showed that gender of respondents does not influence the

marital conflict resolution pattern. According to Esere & Idowu (2000), the majority of couples have one or two disagreements per month. That is to say whether couples communicate or not, conflicts are natural between them, it only depends on the way they negotiate to reach agreement.

The third hypothesis proposed that there is no significant mean difference in the spousal conflict resolution pattern between participants exposed to negotiation skills training and control group due to length of marriage. The analyzed data in respect of this hypothesis confirmed this stand. Osiki (1995) reported that there was no direct relationship between years in marriage by married couples and marital adjustment.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Consequent upon these findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Counsellors and couples should be given extra training on communications, negotiation skills and sex related skills that enhance marital stability. This could be done through seminars and work shops on marriage counselling so as to enable them function maximally in marriage counselling.
2. Courses in family and marriage counselling, interpersonal relationship and negotiation skills should be made compulsory for counsellors in training and effort should be made to introduce Marital Guidance and Counseling as a course at the first degree level.
3. Couples should agree freely with the partner as a gift rather than a sign of weakness; couples should bargain for the interest of the marriage and be allergic to anger 'till death do them part'.
4. Finally, the researchers recommend the setting up of marital counselling clinics in all nooks and crannies of Nigeria most especially in metropolitan cities.
5. Christian couples should downplay religiosity but orchestrate peaceful cohabitation and meaningful communication.

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