

Emotional-Focused Skills as Determinants of Marital Satisfaction Among Postgraduate Students

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Abstract

Marital satisfaction holds paramount importance for postgraduate students, given the profound impact of higher education on emotional well-being. This study investigated emotional-focused skills as determinants of marital satisfaction among postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria. A descriptive research design of correlation type was used. The population of the study was 1,193 postgraduate students of Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin. The sample was 300 postgraduate students from the Faculty of Education, Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria using the Slovin sample size determination formula. Emotional Focus Skills Questionnaire (EFSQ) and Marital Satisfaction Scale (MSS) duly validated by the owners with the reliability coefficient at Cronbach Alpha of 0.93 and 0.82 were used for the study. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at 0.05 level of significance. Results showed that emotional awareness has a positive relationship with marital satisfaction among postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria. The study also indicates that emotional regulation has a positive relationship with marital satisfaction among postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria. The study showed that emotional intelligence has a positive relationship with marital satisfaction among postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria. The study concludes among others that emotional awareness has a positive relationship with marital satisfaction among postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria. Based on the conclusion, the study recommends among things that postgraduate schools should hire a professional marriage counsellor to assist postgraduate students with marital challenges; school counsellors should employ the use of emotional-focused counselling skills to help improve awareness and regulate negative emotions to sustain marital satisfaction. This research contributes to the existing literature by specifically examining the relationship between emotional-focused skills and marital satisfaction among postgraduate students, filling a gap in current academic discourse.

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INTRODUCTION

Marriage is an intimate relationship between a man and a woman. The marital relationship can be peaceful and as well be hostile depending on the perceptions of couples. Peaceful marital relationships enjoy more happiness and understanding from couples which is reflected in their behavioural patterns and enables them to be proactive in conflict management. Marriage is also a legally approved relationship between husband and wife (Almunahi, 2018). One of the signs of marital satisfaction is health, peace and happiness with constructive interactions and expression of love with one another including intimacy (Valentine et al., 2021). Marital satisfaction is an individual positive perception and assessment of a marital relationship and a situation when marital needs or goals are met in marriage (Anyamene, 2020). Various factors can lead to marital problems among which are the fruit of the womb and finance and the rest. From the inception of a marital relationship, husband and wife are wished and blessed with children who are regarded as God's gift to the family. However, if the marriage is unable to produce a child for certain periods, pressure will start to come in from both husband and wife's parents or relatives and friends. This is likely to cause friction between couples and if not managed properly could result in conflict or marital dissatisfaction and even divorce. The divorce rates were high among adults aged 35–39 in recent years (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007). Also, the expression of emotions can have significant impacts on marriage. Mordka (2016) described emotion as a complex experience of consciousness, bodily sensation, and behaviour that reflects the personal significance of a thing, an event, or a state of affairs and marital affairs.

Emotion-focused skills such as emotional awareness, emotional regulation and emotional intelligence are capable of solidifying the relationship because when there is a poor understanding of negative emotions (anger, bad mood and sadness) between husband and wife; it is bound to be conflict in the marital relationship (Abro et al., 2015). However, positive emotions include happiness, high mood joy and love (Ching & Chan, 2020). Couples need to be aware of these emotions to foster marital satisfaction. Emotion awareness represents the ability to encode an ensemble of sensory stimuli providing information about the emotional state of another individual. It describes one's own emotions and those of others (Lane & Smith, 2021). This ability is unique to skills (Ferretti, & Papaleo, 2019), which can be practiced in the marriage to achieve marital satisfaction. In the same vein, Onwuegbuzie et al. (2013) observed that emotional regulation refers to the process individuals use to manage and respond to their emotional experiences in inappropriate and adaptive ways. It encompasses strategies to amplify, maintain, or decrease one's emotional responses. Mazzuca et al. (2019) and Namdar et al. (2020) showed that intrapersonal and interpersonal mechanisms in the regulation of emotion were pointers to longer-term marital relationships.

In addition, emotional intelligence is the ability of the husband or wife to identify, organize and understand each other emotions especially the negative emotions which are unpleasant and destructive (Abro et al., 2015), to avoid unnecessary disagreement that can disrupt the marriage. Jardine et al. (2022); Abiodun et al. (2022); UI-Hassan (2016) showed that emotional intelligence has a significant relationship with marital satisfaction. Also, Suri and Kochhar (2021) observed that emotional self-control, emotional self-awareness or empathy were also crucial requisites for a successful marriage through proper adjustment to emotions. However, Anyamene (2020) indicated that there was a significantly low relationship existing among married teachers' emotional intelligence and their marital satisfaction. The proper deployment of these skills could bring about marital adjustment in the marriage. Marital adjustment is another important skill to achieve marital satisfaction (Balalami et al. 2019), this is because the process has to do with couples' performance as one indivisible entity in life, commitment to life, marital life satisfaction, and agreement in marital life. Emotional-focused skills are part of the counselling approaches which has been researched and found to be effective in resolving marital challenges. Emotional-focused skills were effective in reducing marital conflict between couples, enhancing communication and marriage quality as well as increasing marital satisfaction and

significantly impacting marital adjustment and sexual satisfaction (Ghahari et al., 2021; Vazahapilly & Remez, 2018).

Emotional-focused skills such as emotional awareness, regulation, and intelligence have contributed to the achievement of marital satisfaction. For instance, Namdaretal. (2020), Azizi (2018) and Omidi and Talighi (2017) showed that increased emotional regulation has a positive relationship with marital satisfaction. Also, emotional awareness had a positive relationship with marital satisfaction (Nawaz et al., 2023; Beirn, 2014; Ebrahim et al., 2022). Similarly, emotional Intelligence has a strong positive relationship with marital satisfaction (Yuan et al., 2022; Heidari et al., 2017). However, Madahi and Samadzadeh (2013), Jardine et al (2022) and Suri and Kochhar (2021) revealed a weak but positive relationship between trait emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction. Hence, the emotional-focused skills as determinants of marital satisfaction among postgraduate students in Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, was examined. Marital dissatisfaction is a great challenge which has given birth to most of the societal problems witnessed in the society. In the absence of urgent attention to resolve marital dissatisfaction between couples may likely into the consequences of the following problems quarrelling, conflict, domestic violence, battery, victimization, divorce and death. It was based on this, that the study investigated emotional focus skills as determinants of marital satisfaction among postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria.

Previous studies have focused on the effectiveness of emotionally focused couples communication programmes on marital quality, marital adjustment, sexual satisfaction and acceptance (Ghahari et al., 2021) and others. However, little attention has been paid to the impacts of emotionally focused skills like emotional awareness, emotional regulation and emotional intelligence on marital satisfaction in Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria. Hence, the study examines emotional focus skills as a determinant of marital satisfaction among postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria.

METHODS

A descriptive research design of correlation type was used in this study, because the paper examined the level of existence of the relationship between independent and dependent variable i.e. emotional focused skills as predictors of marital satisfaction among postgraduate students in Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin. Population was 1,193 (PGD= 201; Masters= 751; PhD= 241) Postgraduate students. The sample was 300 married postgraduate students across five Faculties (Education, Language, Humanities, Arts and Social Science and Nursing) at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria using Slovin's sample size determination formula (Susanti et al, 2019). A purposive sampling technique was used to select married respondents across the five Faculties at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin. The reason was that it was observed that married postgraduate students have more experience in marriage. The emotional-focused Skills Questionnaire developed by Grant et al. (2018) and the Marital Satisfaction Scale by Olanrewaju and Busoery (2022) duly validated by the owners with a reliability coefficient at Cronbach Alpha of 0.093 and 0.82 were used for the study. Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance. Data collected were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study outcomes highlight the crucial position of emotional-targeted abilities in shaping marital pleasure amongst postgraduate students. By recognizing the impact of empathy, conversation, and battle resolution on marital relationships within the context of higher training, institutions and individuals can work toward fostering healthier and greater pleasing partnerships throughout this segment of life. As the significance of emotional-focused capabilities becomes increasingly more evident, research and practical interventions can contribute to the well-being and fulfilment of postgraduate students in their private lives and relationships.

Table 1. Emotional Awareness and Marital Satisfaction among Postgraduate Students in Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria

Variable	N	Mean	Std.	df.	r.cal.	Sig.	Remark
Emotional awareness	300	14.5302	1.3071	298	0.03	.018	Ho: Rejected
Marital satisfaction	300	12.6020	1.5914				

The relationship is significant at $r.cal. = 0.03$; $df=298$; $p. < 0.05$.

Table 1 reveals that the calculated r-value of 0.23 is greater than the p-value of 0.05 at 298 degrees of freedom. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant and positive relationship between emotional awareness and marital satisfaction among postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria.

Table 2. Emotional Regulation and Marital Satisfaction among Postgraduate Students in Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria

Variable	N	Mean	Std.	df.	r.cal.	Sig.	Remark
Emotional Regulation	300	10.8301	1.3205	298	0.20	0.02	Ho: Rejected
Marital satisfaction	300	8.6402	1.5026				

The relationship is significant at $r.cal. = 0.20$; $df=298$, $p.=> 0.05$. Table 2 shows that the calculated r-value of 0.20 is greater than the p-value of 0.05 at 298 degrees of freedom. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant and positive relationship between emotional rejection and marital satisfaction among postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Marital Satisfaction among Postgraduate Students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria.

Table 3. Emotional Intelligence and Marital Satisfaction among Postgraduate Students in Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria

Variable	N	Mean	Std.	df.	r.cal.	Sig.	Remark
Emotional Intelligence	300	14.7106	1.4530	298	0.31	0.01	Ho: Rejected
Marital satisfaction	300	12.6491	1.6128				

The relationship is significant at $r.cal. =0.31$; $df=298$; $p.= > 0.05$.

Table 3 shows that the calculated r-value of 0.31 is greater than the p-value of 0.05 at 298 degrees of freedom. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant and positive relationship between emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction among postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria.

The study indicated that there is a significant and positive relationship between emotional awareness and marital satisfaction among postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria. This finding suggested that awareness of their emotions through self-observation makes to avoid strong feelings of hate, and jealousy. Also, it has assisted them in expressing maladaptive emotions which may constitute in vivo emotional exposure thereby accepting feelings of acceptance and commitment which have a positive relationship with marital satisfaction. This finding agreed with Nawaz et al. (2023), Ebrahim et al. (2014) and Beirn (2014) showed that emotional awareness had a

positive relationship with marital satisfaction. However, women were more aware emotionally than men in marriage (Croyle & Waltz, 2002). Vazahapilly and Remez (2018) added that emotional awareness ensures good communication which enhances marital satisfaction in a relationship. Similarly, Rostami and Kermani (2014) show that emotion-focused intervention has been effective in increasing the indicators of marital satisfaction in couples.

The study found that emotional regulation has a positive relationship with marital satisfaction among postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria. The finding is in line with the response of the respondents that gaining reflection and emotional insights helps them to integrate the fact that certain maladaptive emotions can occur in interpersonal relationships. Also, corrective emotional experiences are required to modify emotions and only a more adaptive emotion can modify a maladaptive emotion. The majority of them agreed that they do regulate or manage emotional intensity when arises. This finding agrees with the increase in emotion regulation has a positive relationship with marital satisfaction (Namdar et al., 2020; Namdaretal., 2020; Mazzuca et al., 2019; Azizi, 2018; Omid & Talighi, 2017; Dalgleish et al., 2014). The study discovered that emotional intelligence has a positive relationship with marital satisfaction among postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria. This result indicated that emotional intelligence is an ingredient to foster marital satisfaction between couples. This result correlates with Yuan et al. (2022), Ul-Hassan (2016) and Heidari et al (2017) showed that emotional intelligence has a strong positive relationship with marital satisfaction. However, Madahi and Samadzadeh (2013); Jardine et al (2022); Suri and Kochhar (2021) revealed a weak but positive relationship between emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the study concludes that emotional awareness has a positive relationship with marital satisfaction among postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria. The study also concludes that emotional regulation has a positive relationship with marital satisfaction among postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria. The study concludes that emotional intelligence has a positive relationship with marital satisfaction among postgraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria. Based on the results, the following recommendations were made: Postgraduate students should maintain a level of emotional awareness by frequently contacting professional marriage counsellors for students with marital challenges. This is to enable the students to improve on the level of their awareness of negative emotions which could impact their marital affairs. The university counsellor should employ emotion-focused counselling training to help married postgraduate students acquire emotional regulation skills. This would help the postgraduate students of Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin who are experiencing marital dissatisfaction should be assisted using emotionally focused counselling skills. This would help to improve the coping mechanism and help in emotion regulation for the attainment of marital satisfaction. Postgraduate students should endeavour to inculcate a high level of emotional intelligence skills to be able to respond more appropriately to the negative emotions in their marital life to continue enjoying the existing satisfaction.

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