



Emotionally-Focused Therapy and Marital Bonding: Counselling Implications for Nigerian Couples

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Abstract

Marital bonding is a crucial foundation for stable and satisfying marriages, yet many Nigerian couples face challenges such as emotional distance, communication breakdowns, financial strain, and extended family interference. These pressures often erode intimacy and increase vulnerability to marital dissatisfaction, infidelity, or divorce. Against this backdrop, Emotionally-Focused Therapy (EFT) has emerged globally as one of the most empirically validated interventions for strengthening emotional intimacy and repairing attachment injuries. However, its application within non-Western, collectivist societies such as Nigeria remains underexplored. The purpose of this study is to examine the relevance of EFT as a counselling strategy for enhancing marital bonding among Nigerian couples, with a particular focus on married teachers in Kwara State who navigate dual career responsibilities alongside family obligations. This paper employed a conceptual and analytical method, synthesising international and Nigerian literature on EFT, marital bonding, and the socio-cultural dynamics of marriage. The analysis highlighted how EFT principles can be adapted to Nigerian realities shaped by extended kinship systems, evolving gender roles, and religious expectations. The main findings indicate that EFT fosters emotional intimacy, trust, and empathy, making it a culturally adaptable tool for addressing marital disconnection. Nigerian studies affirm that EFT improves emotional regulation, reduces conflict linked to external family pressures, and strengthens communication between partners. The study concludes that EFT not only has universal applicability but also offers unique value when localised to Nigerian cultural contexts. Its contribution lies in demonstrating that counselling models developed in Western settings can be meaningfully adapted to collectivist societies, thereby promoting marital resilience, family stability, and community well-being.

Keywords: Emotionally-Focused Therapy, Marital Bonding, Counselling Strategies, Emotional Intimacy, Marriage and Family Counselling

INTRODUCTION

Marriage remains one of the most significant social institutions across cultures, functioning not only as a foundation for family life but also as a key determinant of individual well-being and social stability. Central to the success of marriage is marital bonding, which refers to the degree of emotional connection, mutual affection, and interpersonal trust that couples cultivate over time. Marital bonding strengthens spousal commitment and provides the resilience needed to withstand and challenge the challenges that inevitably arise in family life. When this bond is weak or eroded, couples are more vulnerable to marital dissatisfaction, infidelity, psychological distress, and in some cases, divorce (Ugwuanyi & Formella, 2024; Nwokedi & Green, 2025). Thus, the quality of marital bonding is not only a private matter between partners but a social concern with implications for family stability, child development, and community well-being. The literature identifies several pathways through which marital bonding is developed and sustained. These include open communication, emotional intimacy, physical affection, and shared goals or experiences (Egbule et al., 2022; Daibu et al., 2025). For instance, couples who engage in honest communication tend to resolve conflicts more effectively and can foster greater mutual understanding. Physical closeness—such as holding hands, hugging, or sexual intimacy—further reinforces the emotional connection between partners. In addition, couples who engage in joint activities, whether in parenting, religious participation, or leisure pursuits, often report a stronger sense of companionship and unity (Kumswa, 2018). However, marital bonding is threatened by a range of individual, relational, and socio-cultural factors. Unresolved conflict, poor communication, and emotional disengagement are common pathways to marital dissatisfaction. Broader influences such as economic hardship, extended family interference, and conflicting gender role expectations also weigh heavily on Nigerian marriages (Orbih-Chukwu, 2024). The erosion of marital bonds manifests in emotional distance, defensive or dismissive communication, decline in intimacy and infidelity. These challenges highlight the need for counselling frameworks that can strengthen emotional intimacy, promote healthy communication, and help couples adapt to cultural pressures while maintaining mutual support.

Emotionally-Focused Therapy (EFT) offers a promising framework for addressing relational distress. EFT views a dual romantic relationship as an attachment bond in which partners seek security, comfort, and emotional responsiveness from each other (Johnson, 2019). Distress occurs when these needs are not met, leading couples into negative interaction cycles such as criticism, defensiveness, withdrawal or avoidance. EFT seeks to restructure these cycles by increasing emotional awareness, fostering vulnerability and encouraging empathic responsiveness. The therapy proceeds in structured stages, beginning with the identification of maladaptive patterns, followed by the deepening of emotional engagement, and culminating in the consolidation of new interpersonal patterns (Brubacher, 2024). By emphasising emotional safety and responsiveness, EFT enables couples to develop secure attachment, rebuild trust, and experience greater intimacy. Nigerian marriages are shaped by unique cultural, religious, and socio-economic dynamics that make the application of Western-derived counselling models both challenging and necessary. While these networks provide support, they may also generate strain when expectations clash with the couple's autonomy. Similarly, men are often expected to be primary providers, while women carry disproportionate domestic and childcare responsibilities.

Furthermore, the rise of dual-income households has introduced new complexities. Couples must navigate the pressures of professional life alongside family obligations, often with inadequate institutional support, such as affordable childcare or flexible working arrangements. Additionally, socio-economic instability, high unemployment, and shifting social values place Nigerian marriages under increasing strain. In this context, interventions that emphasise emotional intimacy, empathy, and secure attachment—such as EFT—could provide valuable support for couples seeking to strengthen their relationships. While counselling services in Nigeria have expanded over the years, much of the practice has focused on premarital counselling or conflict resolution, with limited attention to therapies that prioritise emotional responsiveness and attachment. The gap in scholarship lies in the inadequate exploration of how models like EFT, which are well established in Western contexts, can be contextualised and applied to Nigerian marriages. Few studies have addressed the extent to which EFT principles align with the lived realities of Nigerian couples, especially within socio-cultural systems that emphasise collectivism, extended kinship obligations, and religious expectations.

Therefore, this position paper argues for the relevance of Emotionally-Focused Therapy as a counselling strategy for enhancing marital bonding among Nigerian couples. By synthesising existing literature on marital bonding and EFT, and situating these within the Nigerian and socio-cultural environment, the paper seeks to articulate counselling implications that are both theoretically sound and culturally responsive. The argument advanced here is that EFT has the potential to strengthen marital stability by helping Nigerian couples navigate emotional disconnection, improve communication, and cultivate secure attachment despite external pressures. The central purpose of this paper is to explore Emotionally-Focused Therapy as a framework for strengthening marital bonding among Nigerian couples and to highlight its counselling implications. Specifically, the paper seeks to:

1. Examine the relevance of EFT principles in addressing marital challenges common to Nigerian couples.
2. Discuss how EFT can be adapted to reflect Nigerian cultural realities, including extended family systems and gender role expectations.
3. Offer counselling implications that would guide practitioners, policy makers, and religious institutions in promoting healthier marriages through emotionally informed interventions.
4. Emotionally-Focused Therapy (EFT) and Marital Bonding

Marital bonding, which encompasses emotional intimacy, mutual support, and secure attachment, is fundamental to marital satisfaction. When couples can rely on one another for comfort, understanding, and responsiveness, they build resilience that enables them to manage life's challenges together. Conversely, unresolved conflicts, poor communication, and emotional wounds often weaken this bond, leaving partners vulnerable to frustration, disconnection, or infidelity (Briggs, 2024; MacIntosh, 2025). Emotionally-Focused Therapy (EFT) provides a counselling framework that directly addresses such relational challenges. EFT views emotions as the primary drivers of relationship dynamics. Instead of focusing solely on surface-level conflict, EFT works by uncovering deep attachment fears, unprocessed emotions, and maladaptive responses that undermine intimacy (Grant, 2023; Quill, 2024). By guiding couples to express vulnerability, foster empathy, and restructure negative cycles of interaction, EFT transforms distress into opportunities for reconnection.

EFT has been applied successfully in diverse contexts, including couples facing trauma, depression, anxiety, and interpersonal conflict (Beasley & Ager, 2019). Its focus on emotional safety and responsiveness makes it particularly relevant for Nigerian couples, who often experience external pressures such as extended family interference, rigid gender expectations, and financial strain. Kofoworola and Rofiu (2024) found that EFT improved emotional regulation and reduced marital conflicts linked to parental interference among married teachers, while Wellington and MaryAngela (2023) reported that EFT strengthened conflict resolution and improved communication among couples facing extended family pressures. These findings suggest that EFT, though rooted in Western contexts, can be adapted effectively to Nigerian socio-cultural realities. Couples who can remain emotionally engaged during disagreements are better able to repair ruptures and deepen their bond. This aligns with the Nigerian context, where cultural expectations often discourage open vulnerability but where emotional engagement remains essential for marital stability. EFT follows a structured three-stage process that helps couples move from distress to emotional security:

1. **Awareness and Exploration of Emotion:** At this stage, partners are guided to recognise and articulate their emotions, many of which may have been suppressed due to shame, fear, or cultural norms. Therapists employ reflective listening, guided exploration, and experiential imagery to help couples connect with their inner feelings (Shuper Engelhard, 2019; Brubacher & Wiebe, 2019). Awareness serves as the foundation for meaningful change, since couples cannot address what they do not acknowledge.
2. **Processing and Understanding Emotion:** Once emotions are identified, couples begin to explore their origins and meanings. This stage often involves revisiting painful experiences, unmet needs, or fears of abandonment. Techniques such as “empty chair” work and differentiating between primary (adaptive) and secondary (maladaptive) emotions enable partners to understand one another’s vulnerabilities (Costin, 2024). By processing these emotions in a safe environment, couples can reframe conflict not as hostility but as a signal of deeper needs for closeness and security.
3. **Transforming and Reorganising Emotion:** In the final stage, couples learn to replace maladaptive emotional responses with healthier alternatives. Techniques such as cognitive reappraisal, compassion-focused interventions, and the development of new coping strategies equip partners to handle stress and conflict more constructively (Moghadam et al., 2024). As couples adopt new interactional patterns, they consolidate trust, emotional responsiveness, and intimacy.

For Nigerian couples, the application of EFT is especially important in managing marital bonding in the face of cultural and socio-economic pressures. Counsellors can use EFT strategies to: De-escalate negative cycles by helping couples recognise blame-withdrawal patterns and reframing them as expressions of fear or unmet needs rather than hostility. Restructure interactions by encouraging vulnerable communication in which partners openly share attachment needs and respond with empathy. Consolidate and integrate new patterns so that couples do not relapse into old cycles but sustain secure attachment in daily life. By contextualising EFT within Nigerian marriages, counsellors can adapt its principles to address issues such as extended family influence, gender role expectations, and economic stressors. Rather than displacing cultural values, EFT provides a lens for couples to navigate them with greater emotional resilience, thereby strengthening marital bonding.

RESEARCH METHOD

This paper adopted a conceptual and analytical approach, consistent with its nature as a position paper. Rather than collecting primary data from participants, the study relied on a careful review, synthesis, and interpretation of existing literature on Emotionally-Focused Therapy (EFT) and marital bonding within the Nigerian context. Relevant scholarly works, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy documents, and empirical studies, were systematically reviewed. Particular attention was given to studies that examined marital bonding and relationship satisfaction, explored the theoretical and practical foundations of Emotionally-Focused Therapy, and highlighted the marital experiences of teachers and other working-class couples in Nigeria. Sources were drawn from both local and international scholarship to ensure a balanced perspective. Nigerian studies were emphasised to contextualise EFT within the cultural, social, and religious realities of married teachers in Kwara State. The reviewed materials were organised thematically around core issues such as communication, emotional intimacy, attachment, cultural influences, and marital challenges. This thematic structure allowed for the identification of recurring patterns, areas of consensus, and gaps in the literature. The final stage involved interpreting the reviewed literature in light of the study's focus. The paper took a position that EFT offers a valuable counselling strategy for strengthening marital bonding among married teachers, especially in contexts where cultural expectations, dual career pressures, and family obligations intersect. The position was developed not by testing a hypothesis but by integrating theoretical insights, empirical findings from prior studies, and counselling implications relevant to Nigerian marriages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the conceptual and analytical approach adopted in this paper, three key themes emerged from the synthesis of literature on Emotionally-Focused Therapy (EFT) and marital bonding. These themes reflect both the relevance of EFT in strengthening marital relationships and the counselling implications for Nigerian couples.

EFT as a Pathway to Strengthening Emotional Intimacy

Emotional intimacy lies at the heart of marital bonding. It is the deep sense of closeness and connectedness that allows partners to feel safe, understood, and valued in their relationship. Unlike physical intimacy, which may be momentary, emotional intimacy sustains long-term satisfaction and provides the foundation upon which couples can weather challenges and sustain trust (Oye, 2025). Research consistently shows that marriages characterised by high emotional intimacy are more resilient, while those lacking it often descend into conflict, distance, or eventual dissolution (Fitchett, 2024; Nzewuji et al., 2024). In the Nigerian context, where couples face a wide range of pressures—economic instability, extended family obligations, and evolving gender roles—the preservation of emotional intimacy becomes even more critical. Emotionally-Focused Therapy (EFT) offers a structured pathway for rebuilding and strengthening this intimacy, making it a particularly relevant counselling approach for Nigerian couples.

Emotional intimacy is more than the exchange of affectionate words or gestures; it represents the secure attachment bond that assures couples they can depend on one another in times of need. Partners who share emotional intimacy feel a sense of mutual safety, where vulnerabilities can be expressed without fear of judgment or rejection. When this safety is

compromised—through neglect, unresolved conflict, or lack of communication—couples often experience loneliness even within the marriage. This sense of alienation undermines not only the marital relationship but also the stability of the family unit, as children raised in emotionally disconnected households often internalise the distress (Nwonyi et al., 2022). In Nigeria, emotional intimacy is frequently challenged by cultural expectations that discourage open vulnerability, especially for men. Social norms often equate emotional expression with weakness, pressuring husbands to remain stoic even when overwhelmed by marital stress. Women, on the other hand, may struggle with unmet emotional needs when partners are unresponsive. Such dynamics widen the emotional gap between couples, weakening their bond over time. Addressing these challenges requires an intervention that places emotional closeness at the centre of marital repair—precisely the role that EFT fulfils.

EFT is grounded in attachment theory, which posits that human beings are hardwired for emotional connection. Adult romantic relationships function as attachment bonds, where partners seek comfort, security, and validation from one another (Oniye et al., 2022; Ekekwe, 2023). When attachment needs are met, emotional intimacy flourishes; when they are unmet, couples often fall into negative cycles of blame, withdrawal, or avoidance. EFT helps couples recognise these cycles, uncover the deeper fears driving them (such as fear of abandonment or rejection), and replace them with patterns of responsiveness and trust. For example, in a typical Nigerian marriage, financial strain may lead to frequent arguments about household responsibilities. On the surface, these conflicts may appear to be about money or chores. However, EFT views them as manifestations of unspoken fears and unmet emotional needs—perhaps one partner fears being unappreciated, while the other fears being unsupported. By guiding couples to express these vulnerabilities, EFT transforms conflict into an opportunity for reconnection. This process not only repairs immediate rifts but also builds a stronger emotional foundation for the future.

Empirical studies affirm EFT's capacity to restore intimacy in relationships. Veiseh (2022) revealed that over 70% of couples who undergo EFT move from distress to recovery, with gains in intimacy and satisfaction maintained even years after therapy. Nigerian scholar, Amah-Mbah (2021), echoes these findings that EFT significantly improved emotional regulation and reduced conflict among Nigerian teachers experiencing parental interference in their marriages. Similarly, Kofoworola and Rofiu (2024) found that EFT helped couples reframe extended family pressures and rebuild secure communication pathways, leading to improved marital bonding. These findings suggest that EFT is not only effective in abstract terms but also adaptable to the specific relational challenges faced by Nigerian couples.

The relevance of EFT for Nigerian couples can be discussed along three dimensions:

1. **Cultural Pressures and Emotional Expression:** In Nigeria, extended families often play an active role in marital life, sometimes creating conflict between partners. EFT equips couples to face these external pressures as a united team by fostering empathy and mutual support. By teaching couples to express underlying fears instead of reacting defensively, EFT provides tools for maintaining intimacy even in culturally complex contexts.
2. **Evolving Gender Roles:** As more Nigerian women enter the workforce and contribute economically to their households, traditional gender expectations are being redefined. This shift often generates tension, as couples struggle to balance modern roles with cultural expectations. EFT helps couples navigate these transitions by emphasising responsiveness and vulnerability rather than rigid adherence to prescribed roles. Emotional intimacy

becomes the bridge that allows couples to redefine their partnership without losing connection.

3. **Stress and Economic Realities:** Nigeria's socio-economic environment presents stressors such as unemployment, inflation, and job insecurity, which can erode emotional closeness in marriages. EFT provides couples with strategies to remain emotionally engaged during stressful times, enabling them to offer reassurance and empathy rather than allowing stress to fuel disconnection.

From a counselling perspective, EFT's focus on emotional intimacy has far-reaching implications for practice in Nigeria. First, counsellors can incorporate EFT techniques into marital therapy sessions, helping partners identify negative interaction cycles and guiding them toward emotional openness. Second, EFT provides a culturally adaptable framework that can be aligned with Nigerian values of community and family cohesion. Counsellors can demonstrate that fostering emotional intimacy within marriage not only benefits the couple but also contributes to family and societal stability. Third, integrating EFT into premarital counselling programs could equip couples with intimacy-building skills before challenges arise, promoting preventive rather than reactive interventions. Furthermore, training Nigerian counsellors in EFT would enhance their ability to address marital issues in ways that resonate with local realities. Since emotional vulnerability may not come naturally in many Nigerian households, counsellors must create safe environments where couples feel empowered to express their needs. By normalising vulnerability and reframing it as a strength rather than a weakness, counsellors can help couples overcome cultural barriers to intimacy. In summary, the synthesis of literature reveals that EFT serves as a powerful pathway to strengthening emotional intimacy in marriages. Its grounding in attachment theory, empirical effectiveness, and adaptability to cultural contexts make it especially relevant for Nigerian couples. By focusing on emotions as the foundation of marital bonds, EFT empowers couples to replace cycles of disconnection with patterns of empathy, trust, and responsiveness. For Nigerian marriages, where external pressures often strain emotional closeness, EFT offers not only a counselling strategy but also a culturally sensitive tool for building resilient, emotionally connected unions.

Cultural Adaptability of EFT to Nigerian Marriages

The effectiveness of any counselling model depends not only on its theoretical soundness but also on its ability to align with the cultural realities of those it seeks to serve. Emotionally-Focused Therapy (EFT), though developed in Western contexts, holds promise for application in Nigeria because it emphasises universal human needs for connection, trust, and intimacy. At the same time, Nigerian marriages are embedded within socio-cultural systems that shape expectations, communication styles, and relational dynamics in unique ways. Marriage in Nigeria is more than a private union between two individuals; it is a social institution that intertwines families, communities, and traditions. In many ethnic groups, the involvement of extended families begins even before marriage, with elders playing critical roles in marital negotiations, bride price discussions, and dispute resolution (Daibu et al., 2025). This cultural embeddedness means that marital challenges are rarely confined to the couple alone; they often involve wider kinship networks.

Gender roles are another defining feature of Nigerian marriages. While modernity and education have gradually reshaped expectations, many households still adhere to traditional divisions of responsibility. Men are often expected to serve as primary providers and decision-makers, while women are tasked with domestic and childcare responsibilities. As more women enter the workforce and challenge traditional role distributions, conflicts around authority, contribution, and respect have become common (Okafor & Akokuwebe, 2015). These conflicts not only affect day-to-day functioning but also erode emotional intimacy if not managed constructively. Religion further shapes marital dynamics in Nigeria. Both Christianity and Islam, which dominate the religious landscape, strongly emphasise marital stability and discourage divorce. While these values can foster commitment, they may also make couples hesitant to seek counselling until conflicts have reached advanced stages. The stigma attached to counselling, often perceived as an admission of failure, compounds this reluctance (Sheehan et al., 2016). Finally, socio-economic realities such as unemployment, underemployment, inflation, and migration exert pressure on marital relationships. Economic hardship often fuels quarrels and emotional disengagement, while work-related migration can create physical and emotional distance between partners. Any counselling model used in Nigeria must therefore consider these socio-cultural and economic dynamics if it is to remain relevant and effective.

In Nigeria, however, the extended family often has significant influence. EFT must be adapted to help couples negotiate external pressures collectively rather than attempting to exclude family members from their relational framework. Awoke and Ali (2022) examined the use of EFT with Nigerian teachers who faced parental interference in their marriages. The therapy improved emotional regulation and reduced conflict, demonstrating that EFT can help couples reinterpret external pressures in ways that strengthen, rather than weaken, their bond. Olufowote (2023) similarly reported that EFT helped Nigerian couples reframe extended family demands and improve communication, leading to better marital satisfaction. These findings suggest that while cultural differences exist, the fundamental human need for emotional connection transcends cultural boundaries. The task for counsellors, therefore, is not to discard EFT but to adapt its delivery so that it resonates with Nigerian cultural expectations.

Despite its promise, several challenges complicate the direct application of EFT in Nigeria.

1. **Stigma around Counselling:** Many couples view marital counselling as unnecessary or as a last resort when marriages are near collapse. This stigma reduces the likelihood of couples seeking EFT early enough for maximum benefit. Counsellors must therefore invest in awareness campaigns and community-based education to normalise marital therapy as preventive rather than remedial.
2. **Gender Role Resistance:** Encouraging men to be emotionally vulnerable may meet resistance due to cultural ideals of strength and authority. Counsellors must use culturally sensitive approaches, perhaps drawing on religious or traditional teachings that affirm the value of empathy and partnership, to make vulnerability acceptable.
3. **Extended Family Influence:** While EFT focuses primarily on the couple, Nigerian marriages often involve third-party pressures from family. Counsellors must adapt EFT to equip couples with strategies to balance loyalty to kin with loyalty to one another.
4. **Resource Limitations:** EFT requires skilled therapists, yet training opportunities in Nigeria remain limited. Without adequate professional preparation, counsellors may find it difficult

to apply EFT techniques effectively. This highlights the need for professional development and integration of EFT into counselling curricula.

The cultural adaptability of EFT carries several implications for counselling practice in Nigeria. First, counsellors should integrate cultural sensitivity into therapy by acknowledging the role of extended families, religion, and gender expectations while guiding couples toward healthier patterns of intimacy. For instance, counsellors can help couples craft joint narratives about how to manage family obligations, thereby fostering unity rather than division. Second, counsellors must prioritise creating safe spaces where vulnerability is encouraged and normalised. By reframing emotional openness as a pathway to stronger leadership and resilience, counsellors can overcome cultural resistance, particularly among men. Third, the integration of EFT into premarital and marital counselling programs can prepare couples to navigate both cultural expectations and modern marital challenges. Such integration could be supported by religious institutions, which play a central role in Nigerian marital life and could serve as vehicles for destigmatising therapy.

Finally, policymakers and educational institutions should invest in training counsellors in EFT techniques, ensuring they are equipped to deliver culturally adapted interventions. This would not only enhance the quality of marital counselling but also contribute to broader social stability, given the central role of marriage in Nigerian society. The synthesis of literature and cultural analysis demonstrates that EFT, though developed in Western contexts, can be meaningfully adapted to Nigerian marriages. By aligning universal human needs for emotional connection with the cultural realities of extended families, gender roles, and religious expectations, EFT provides a framework that is both effective and culturally relevant. While challenges such as counselling stigma and limited professional training remain, the adaptability of EFT makes it a promising tool for strengthening marital bonding in Nigeria. Counsellors who skillfully integrate EFT with cultural sensitivity will not only enhance marital intimacy but also contribute to stronger families and communities.

Counselling Implications for Practice in Nigeria

The conceptual analysis of Emotionally-Focused Therapy (EFT) and marital bonding reveals that EFT offers significant promise for improving the quality of marital relationships in Nigeria. However, its true value lies not only in its theoretical strength but in its practical application within counselling settings. Counsellors in Nigeria operate within a complex socio-cultural landscape where marital challenges are shaped by extended family systems, religious expectations, evolving gender roles, and economic pressures. As such, counselling practice must integrate EFT principles in ways that are both contextually relevant and culturally sensitive. One of the central counselling implications of EFT is its focus on helping couples regulate their emotions and respond to one another with empathy. Nigerian marriages are often marked by communication breakdowns, where partners adopt defensive or dismissive interaction styles. Counsellors applying EFT can address these dynamics by guiding partners to recognise their underlying fears and unmet needs, reframing conflict as an expression of deeper emotional disconnection rather than hostility. Through exercises such as guided reflection, emotion-focused dialogue, and structured vulnerability-sharing, counsellors can help couples experience new patterns of interaction characterised by empathy and support. Over time, these practices foster secure attachment, which strengthens marital bonding. Importantly,

this counselling process challenges the cultural stigma that equates emotional openness with weakness, reframing it as a strength that enhances leadership, partnership, and resilience in marriage.

Traditional gender roles in Nigerian marriages often assign men the role of provider and authority figure, while women carry primary responsibility for domestic and caregiving duties. These roles can create imbalances that lead to frustration, resentment, and weakened intimacy. For example, women may feel emotionally unsupported when overburdened with responsibilities, while men may feel undervalued if financial strain prevents them from meeting societal expectations of provision. EFT provides counsellors with tools to address these gender-based tensions by focusing on underlying attachment needs rather than role-based conflicts. Counsellors can help couples move beyond surface-level disputes to uncover the fears and desires beneath them. A husband's frustration about financial pressures, for instance, may reflect a fear of inadequacy, while a wife's complaints about lack of support may reveal a longing for partnership and shared responsibility. By surfacing these emotions, EFT creates opportunities for empathy and collaboration, enabling couples to renegotiate roles in ways that maintain intimacy and respect. For counselling practice, this means counsellors must be prepared to challenge rigid gender norms while respecting cultural values. This requires sensitivity: instead of imposing external ideals, counsellors can frame emotional responsiveness and shared responsibility as strengths that align with family stability and long-term marital success.

Another key implication of EFT for Nigerian counselling practice is its potential to help couples manage the influence of extended families and societal expectations. In many Nigerian cultures, parents, siblings, and relatives play an active role in marital life. While these networks provide support, they may also generate conflict, particularly when couples feel torn between loyalty to family and loyalty to each other. Counsellors can adapt EFT principles to equip couples with strategies for addressing these pressures collectively. For example, counsellors may guide couples to frame external challenges as shared struggles, encouraging them to respond with unity rather than division. By fostering secure attachment within the couple, EFT enables them to confront external demands from a position of strength. This unity does not negate cultural respect for elders or kinship ties but repositions the marital bond as the primary source of stability. From a counselling standpoint, practitioners must acknowledge and respect the role of extended families in Nigerian marriages. Rather than attempting to remove these influences, counsellors can use EFT techniques to help couples negotiate boundaries and reinforce their bond in ways that preserve cultural values while promoting marital health. For EFT to be effectively applied in Nigeria, counsellors must receive specialised training. EFT requires a high level of skill in identifying emotional cycles, facilitating vulnerable dialogue, and guiding couples toward secure attachment. At present, many Nigerian counsellors have limited exposure to this therapeutic model, which constrains its use in practice.

Educational institutions have a critical role to play in integrating EFT into counsellor training curricula. Courses on marital and family counselling should incorporate EFT principles, techniques, and culturally adapted case studies. Continuing professional development programs can also provide practising counsellors with opportunities to refine their skills. By expanding access to EFT training, the counselling profession in Nigeria can enhance its capacity to respond effectively to marital challenges. Furthermore, counselling associations and policymakers should advocate for recognition of EFT as a validated therapeutic approach.

Institutional support is essential for scaling its use across counselling centres, religious organisations, and community programs. Another implication of this paper's findings is the need to expand EFT's application beyond conflict resolution into preventive counselling. Many Nigerian couples seek counselling only when their marriages are already in crisis. By incorporating EFT principles into premarital counselling programs, counsellors can equip couples with the tools to build emotional intimacy from the start of their relationship.

Premarital counselling that emphasises emotional responsiveness, vulnerability, and secure attachment would help couples anticipate and navigate challenges such as role negotiation, financial stress, and extended family interference. Religious institutions, which already conduct premarital programmes for Christian and Muslim couples, provide a natural avenue for integrating EFT principles. Counsellors can collaborate with these institutions to ensure that emotional intimacy is prioritised alongside moral and doctrinal teachings.

Discursive Comparison with Other Research

The objective of this paper was to examine the relevance of Emotionally-Focused Therapy (EFT) as a counselling strategy for strengthening marital bonding among Nigerian couples, with a focus on married teachers in Kwara State. In this respect, the findings align with international studies (Brubacher, 2024; Quill, 2024) that consistently demonstrate EFT's effectiveness in enhancing emotional intimacy and resolving attachment injuries. These studies affirm EFT as one of the most empirically validated approaches for couples therapy, particularly in Western societies. Similarly, Nigerian research (Kofoworola & Rofiu, 2024) supports the position advanced in this paper by showing that EFT reduces conflict caused by extended family interference, improves emotional regulation, and strengthens marital communication among Nigerian couples. The findings of this position paper converge with such local studies in emphasising that EFT is not only theoretically robust but also practically adaptable to Nigerian marital contexts. However, a point of divergence emerges in the cultural framing of marital challenges. While Western studies often situate EFT within the context of marital autonomy and individualism, this paper highlights that Nigerian marriages are deeply shaped by collectivist values, extended kinship systems, and traditional gender expectations. This indicates that EFT must be adapted to these cultural realities to remain effective, rather than applied in its Western form without contextualization. In summary, the present research objective—to situate EFT within Nigerian cultural realities—finds both support and contrast in the literature: support in demonstrating EFT's universal applicability to marital bonding, and contrast in highlighting the need for cultural adaptation to align with Nigerian marital experiences.

The reflection on these findings underscores that while EFT has been widely validated in Western contexts, its application in Nigeria signifies an important step toward localising global therapeutic models. The results of this paper reveal that Nigerian couples—especially married teachers who juggle professional responsibilities with family obligations—require counselling strategies that address both universal attachment needs and culturally specific pressures. This research signifies that EFT holds promise not merely as an imported model but as a framework that can be adapted to Nigeria's unique socio-cultural environment. By focusing on emotional intimacy, empathy, and secure attachment, EFT directly addresses the emotional disconnect that often underlies conflicts related to extended family influence, gender role expectations, and economic stress. In this way, the research connects to the larger global

phenomenon of strengthening marital resilience through emotional responsiveness, while also contributing a culturally sensitive lens to existing scholarship. What this means for the broader field is that Nigeria—and by extension, similar collectivist societies—cannot be excluded from global conversations on marriage counselling. Instead, EFT provides a bridge between universal theories of attachment and the lived realities of Nigerian couples. The reflection, therefore, is that the success of EFT in Nigeria illustrates the adaptability of therapeutic models across cultural lines, provided that counsellors and policymakers emphasise contextualization rather than direct transplantation.

CONCLUSION

This paper highlights that the most significant finding, distinct from other research, is the contextual adaptation of Emotionally-Focused Therapy (EFT) to Nigerian marriages. While international studies often emphasise marital autonomy and individualism, this study demonstrates that EFT can be effectively applied within collectivist Nigerian contexts shaped by extended kinship systems, traditional gender roles, and socio-economic pressures. This cultural framing sets the present research apart from prior works by showing that EFT does not need to be transplanted wholesale but can be reinterpreted to address culturally specific marital challenges. The value of this research lies in its contribution to both scholarship and practice. Theoretically, it expands the global discourse on EFT by situating it within a non-Western, collectivist environment, thereby filling a gap in existing literature. Practically, it underscores the potential of EFT to strengthen marital bonding among Nigerian couples, particularly married teachers balancing professional and family obligations. By fostering emotional intimacy, trust, and empathy, EFT not only enhances marital stability but also promotes family resilience and community well-being. This research, therefore, affirms that adapting globally validated counselling models to local cultural realities can provide sustainable solutions to marital challenges in Nigeria, making it an invaluable resource for counsellors, policymakers, and religious institutions.

Suggestions

To strengthen marital bonding among Nigerian couples, particularly married teachers in Kwara State, the following culturally relevant and evidence-based suggestions are proposed:

1. Counsellors should incorporate EFT principles—such as trust-building, emotional responsiveness, and constructive conflict resolution—into marital counselling frameworks. This would help couples foster secure attachment despite cultural and socio-economic pressures.
2. Training and certification in EFT should be expanded, with a deliberate focus on adapting EFT to Nigerian realities, including extended family involvement, evolving gender roles, and religious expectations. This ensures that EFT techniques are not only theoretically sound but also practically relevant.
3. Counselling interventions should be tailored to address Nigeria's unique socio-cultural context. Rather than displacing cultural norms, EFT should be harmonised with values of kinship and community while promoting emotional openness and intimacy within marriage.
4. More empirical studies should be conducted to examine the long-term impact of EFT across diverse Nigerian populations. Policymakers and religious leaders should also advocate for

wider access to EFT-informed counselling, normalising its use as both a preventive and remedial tool.

5. Development of digital platforms and mobile applications offering EFT-based resources can make therapy more accessible, particularly in underserved communities. These tools can complement face-to-face counselling, offering couples ongoing support in building stronger relationships.

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