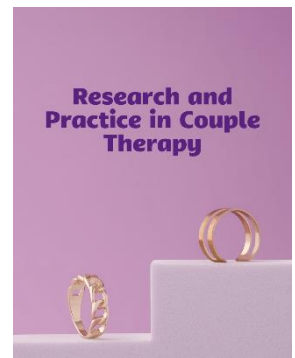




Effectiveness of Sensate Focus Exercises on Sexual Satisfaction and Emotional Intimacy in Couples

1. Bünyamin. Ozgovde^{ORCID}: Department of Education Counseling and Guidance, TED University, Ankara, Turkey
 2. Nagihan. Turnuklu^{ORCID}: Department of Psychology, Başkent University, Ankara, Turkey
 3. Paul. Peters-Boselie^{ORCID}: Clinical Psychology, Open University, 6401 DL, Heerlen, the Netherlands
 4. Sara. Vancleef^{ORCID}: Clinical Psychological Science, Maastricht University, 6200 MD, Maastricht, the Netherlands
- *corresponding author's email: bunyamin.ozgovde@tedu.edu.tr



ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of a structured conflict resolution training program in enhancing conflict resolution skills and emotional awareness among adult participants in Turkey. The study employed a randomized controlled trial design with 30 participants randomly assigned to either the intervention group ($n = 15$) or the control group ($n = 15$). The intervention group received an eight-session experiential training program focused on conflict resolution strategies, emotional regulation, and interpersonal communication, while the control group received no intervention. Both groups were assessed at three time points: pre-test, post-test, and five-month follow-up using standardized self-report measures. Data were analyzed using repeated measures ANOVA and Bonferroni post-hoc tests via SPSS version 27, and assumptions of normality, sphericity, and homogeneity were verified before analysis. The repeated measures ANOVA revealed statistically significant time $\times$ group interaction effects for both conflict resolution skills ($F(2, 56) = 34.15, p < .001, \eta^2 = .56$) and emotional awareness ($F(2, 56) = 27.56, p < .001, \eta^2 = .51$). Post-hoc Bonferroni tests indicated significant improvements in the intervention group from pre-test to post-test ($p < .001$) and from pre-test to follow-up ($p < .001$) for both variables, with no significant decline between post-test and follow-up ($p > .05$). The control group showed no significant changes across time points. The findings support the effectiveness and sustained impact of a structured conflict resolution training program in enhancing adults' interpersonal skills and emotional competencies. The program demonstrated strong short- and mid-term outcomes and offers promising implications for educational, organizational, and community-based applications in conflict management and peace education.

Keywords: Conflict resolution training; emotional awareness; interpersonal skills; randomized controlled trial; experiential learning; post-conflict education.

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Introduction

Conflict is an inevitable dimension of human interaction, deeply embedded in the dynamics of both interpersonal and organizational life. Its occurrence, while often perceived as disruptive, holds the potential to foster growth, dialogue, and deeper understanding—when addressed constructively. However, unresolved or mismanaged conflict can escalate tensions, reduce collaboration, and undermine social cohesion across sectors such as education, healthcare, community settings, and digital workplaces. As such, the education and systematic training of individuals in effective conflict resolution strategies is not only a preventive mechanism but a transformative tool for nurturing peaceful and productive societies (Knyazev, 2025; Mehmood et al., 2019).



Recent decades have seen a proliferation of interdisciplinary research and programmatic efforts aimed at equipping youth, professionals, and community actors with conflict management competencies. Educational environments, in particular, have emerged as strategic platforms for cultivating these skills early on. Programs integrating peer mediation, negotiation training, and emotional regulation have been shown to significantly enhance students' conflict resolution abilities and socio-emotional competencies (Ay et al., 2019; Yilmaz & Türk, 2020). These interventions not only improve interpersonal relations but also contribute to a more inclusive and psychologically safe academic climate.

The integration of conflict resolution education into formal training curricula is increasingly regarded as essential, particularly in pre-service teacher education, healthcare professions, and interprofessional collaborative settings. For example, Ntawiha et al. (Ntawiha et al., 2022) highlighted the effectiveness of embedding peace and human rights education into teacher training programs in Rwanda, arguing that such training not only enhances professional readiness but also contributes to broader societal peacebuilding. In a similar vein, Hutchison et al. (Hutchison et al., 2020) advocated for conflict resolution modules tailored to child psychiatry, emphasizing the critical need for mental health practitioners to acquire negotiation skills for multidisciplinary collaboration. These examples underscore the value of context-specific conflict education frameworks aligned with the relational and institutional realities of the learners involved.

Beyond classroom settings, workplace conflict—particularly in high-pressure, hierarchical, or culturally diverse environments—requires sophisticated conflict navigation skills. Orchard et al. (Orchard et al., 2023) provided a critical literature review of interprofessional conflict resolution in healthcare, revealing that poor communication, unclear role boundaries, and hierarchical structures were common conflict triggers. Similarly, Sexton and Orchard (Sexton & Orchard, 2016) found that healthcare professionals often lack the self-efficacy needed to manage team disputes effectively, further emphasizing the need for targeted training. These findings have catalyzed the design of competency-based curricula, as seen in Schaller and Gatesman-Ammer's (Schaller & Gatesman-Ammer, 2022) implementation of negotiation and conflict resolution training in biomedical graduate education—an initiative that enhanced both interpersonal communication and team performance.

The role of emotional intelligence in conflict resolution has also drawn considerable attention. Shruti and Megha (Shruti & Megha, 2024) explored this interplay within the IT industry, demonstrating that emotionally intelligent employees were more adept at choosing adaptive conflict-handling strategies, such as collaboration and compromise. This suggests that emotional competencies are not peripheral but central to conflict engagement, particularly in fast-paced, cognitively demanding work environments. Furthermore, studies by Willox et al. (Willox et al., 2022) on virtual team conflict resolution illustrate the importance of preparing individuals for digital-age interpersonal challenges, including managing disagreements in remote collaboration settings and fostering a sense of belonging across virtual teams.

Theoretical advancements in the field have prompted a rethinking of conflict resolution as a process grounded not only in communication but also in identity, culture, and power dynamics. Pulubuhu et al. (Pulubuhu et al., 2024) emphasized the role of institutional actors such as peace centers in preventing the escalation of social conflict, noting that proactive community engagement and conflict literacy can disrupt the cycle of violence in diverse societies. In Indonesia, Tuhuteru et al. (Tuhuteru et al., 2023) presented a pedagogical model that used conflict resolution education as a strategic tool to build peace across ethnic and religious divides, particularly among youth populations. These culturally embedded approaches suggest that conflict resolution education must not be imported wholesale but adapted to the sociopolitical context in which it is implemented.

From a technological perspective, digital transformation has influenced how conflict is both experienced and managed. The work of Velikanova and Andreeva (Velikanova & Andreeva, 2023) points to the need for managerial personnel to develop conflict resolution skills suited for the digital era. Sui et al. (Sui et al., 2023) went further by proposing AI-driven conflict

resolution strategies in air traffic management, demonstrating how technology can both mediate and exacerbate conflict depending on its application. These developments illustrate the urgent need for new models of conflict literacy that are responsive to algorithmic environments, digital labor, and the challenges of human–machine interaction.

At the same time, cognitive and psychological factors remain core to successful conflict management. Hussey et al. (Hussey et al., 2017) demonstrated that cognitive control training could lead to measurable improvements in language, memory, and conflict resolution skills. This aligns with Sánchez and Chamucero's (Sánchez & Chamucero, 2017) findings, which advocate for the use of ICT to facilitate experiential learning in conflict resolution. When thoughtfully integrated, such digital tools can simulate real-world negotiation scenarios and promote self-reflection—an essential component of effective resolution practices.

Despite the expanding body of evidence on conflict education, questions remain about the scalability and sustainability of these interventions. For instance, Mbutu and Wanjigi (Mbutu & Wanjigi, 2022) noted that youth leadership programs must be structurally integrated within broader inter-ethnic reconciliation efforts to produce lasting change. Likewise, Sivrikova et al. (Sivrikova et al., 2021) emphasized that conflict resolution training at the university level must move beyond theoretical instruction to include participatory and field-based learning experiences. Earlier research by the same group (Sivrikova et al., 2020) showed that undergraduate students often overestimate their conflict management abilities when assessed solely through self-report measures, reinforcing the importance of multi-modal assessment approaches in educational settings.

Moreover, conflict is not only a phenomenon to be managed but also a cultural and historical construct. Haikal (Haikal, 2023) examined the long-term consequences of abolishing traditional village structures in Indonesia, arguing that institutional disruptions often trigger generational conflict and cultural disorientation. This highlights how historical memory and governance reforms can influence communal tensions and the capacity for peacebuilding. In line with this, Mehmood et al. (Mehmood et al., 2019) proposed remedial activities at the university level as a means to address structural and interpersonal conflict in academic spaces, particularly those marked by power asymmetries and exclusion.

Taken together, these studies underscore the necessity of designing conflict resolution programs that are multidisciplinary, context-sensitive, and emotionally intelligent. This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of a structured conflict resolution training program in enhancing conflict resolution skills and emotional awareness among adult participants in Turkey.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

This study employed a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design to evaluate the effectiveness of sensate focus exercises on sexual satisfaction and emotional intimacy in couples. Participants were recruited from relationship counseling centers and online advertisements in urban areas of Turkey. A total of 30 individuals (15 couples) met the inclusion criteria and consented to participate in the study. Inclusion criteria required that participants be married or cohabiting for at least one year, aged between 25 and 50, fluent in Turkish, and not currently receiving psychiatric treatment. Exclusion criteria included severe relational conflict (e.g., ongoing domestic violence), current sexual dysfunction diagnosis, or substance abuse. After baseline assessment, participants were randomly assigned to either the intervention group ($n = 15$) or the control group ($n = 15$) using a simple randomization procedure. The intervention group received an eight-session sensate focus-based program, while the control group received no intervention during the study period. Both groups were assessed at three time points: pre-test, post-test, and five-month follow-up.

Measures

The Sexual Satisfaction Scale (SSS) developed by Meston and Trapnell in 2005 is a widely used standardized tool designed to assess various aspects of an individual's sexual satisfaction. The scale consists of 30 items and includes five subscales: Contentment, Communication, Compatibility, Relational Concern, and Personal Concern. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater sexual satisfaction. The total score is calculated by summing the items across subscales. The SSS has demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values reported above 0.90 in various studies. Validity has been supported through convergent correlations with measures of relationship satisfaction and sexual functioning. This scale has been frequently used in both clinical and research contexts and is considered reliable and valid for assessing sexual satisfaction across diverse populations.

The Emotional Intimacy Scale (EIS), developed by Sinclair and Dowdy in 2005, is a standardized self-report tool designed to measure the emotional closeness and connection between romantic partners. The scale includes 5 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate greater emotional intimacy in the relationship. The scale is unidimensional and easy to administer, making it particularly suitable for use in both clinical interventions and research settings. The EIS has shown high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha reported at 0.91, and its construct validity has been confirmed through significant correlations with measures of relationship satisfaction, attachment, and communication quality. Its brevity and robust psychometric properties make it an effective tool for evaluating changes in emotional intimacy among couples.

Intervention

The intervention is based on the sensate focus model originally developed by Masters and Johnson, aiming to reduce performance anxiety, enhance body awareness, and promote emotional intimacy through structured physical touch exercises. The protocol is adapted for modern couples and integrates psychoeducation, mindfulness, communication training, and gradual sensate focus assignments. Each session includes guided discussion, experiential exercises, and homework designed to be practiced at home between sessions. The eight-session format allows for gradual progression from non-genital touch to full sexual intimacy while emphasizing mutual comfort, emotional safety, and open communication.

Session 1 – Building Therapeutic Alliance and Education on Intimacy

This session introduces the goals, structure, and confidentiality rules of the program. The therapist discusses the distinction between physical, emotional, and sexual intimacy and explores each partner's views and expectations regarding their relationship. Participants are introduced to the sensate focus model and how it differs from goal-oriented sexual activity. The session includes psychoeducation on anxiety, arousal, and communication barriers in sexual relationships. Homework involves partners engaging in non-sexual affectionate touch (e.g., hugging, holding hands) while focusing on emotional connection.

Session 2 – Mindful Awareness and Communication Skills

This session emphasizes developing mindfulness and present-moment awareness during physical connection. Couples are guided through mindfulness exercises to help them tune into their sensory experiences. The session also introduces foundational communication skills such as active listening, "I" statements, and expressing needs without criticism. Couples are assigned the first stage of sensate focus homework: engaging in non-genital, non-demand touching (e.g., back, arms, face) for 20–30 minutes, focusing on sensation and avoiding performance goals.

Session 3 – Exploring Touch and Reducing Anxiety

Building on previous sessions, this session focuses on normalizing anxiety and exploring individual responses to touch. Partners share their experiences with the initial sensate focus exercise, and common fears or discomforts are discussed. Techniques for reducing anxiety (e.g., breathing exercises, cognitive reframing) are practiced. Homework advances to structured touching of more areas (excluding breasts and genitals), still without any sexual expectations. Emphasis remains on giving and receiving feedback in a safe and respectful manner.

Session 4 – Emotional Intimacy and Trust Building

This session shifts focus toward deepening emotional intimacy and trust. Through guided conversation and partner-sharing exercises, participants explore past experiences that influence vulnerability and closeness. The therapist facilitates exercises that help increase emotional disclosure and mutual empathy. Homework continues with sensate focus but now allows optional touching of the chest or breasts (non-genital), based on mutual comfort. Couples are encouraged to process emotions openly and gently.

Session 5 – Addressing Body Image and Self-Acceptance

This session explores how body image and self-esteem impact sexual satisfaction and intimacy. Each partner reflects on personal beliefs and insecurities related to their body. Cognitive restructuring techniques are used to challenge negative self-perceptions. Partners practice affirmations and give positive feedback to one another. Sensate focus homework is expanded to include optional genital touch without the goal of intercourse. Emotional reactions and boundaries are emphasized as central to the process.

Session 6 – Enhancing Mutual Pleasure and Responsiveness

This session encourages partners to identify and express what brings them pleasure. The therapist facilitates discussions around sexual scripts, preferences, and shared desires. Emphasis is placed on mutual exploration, feedback, and responsiveness rather than performance. Couples are encouraged to engage in sensual, slow-paced activities that prioritize emotional connection and bodily awareness. Homework includes genital touch and mutual pleasuring, still with no pressure to engage in intercourse or reach orgasm.

Session 7 – Integrating Emotional and Sexual Intimacy

The focus of this session is on integrating emotional closeness with physical and sexual intimacy. Couples explore how emotional bonding enhances sexual satisfaction and vice versa. Guided dialogues help partners express how the intervention has impacted their relationship. Sensate focus exercises now include optional intercourse but are framed as one of many expressions of closeness rather than a goal. Emphasis is placed on mutual consent, emotional safety, and shared meaning.

Session 8 – Review, Closure, and Relapse Prevention

In the final session, the therapist reviews the progress made and reinforces the tools learned throughout the program. Couples reflect on their growth, challenges, and future goals. The session includes development of a personalized intimacy maintenance plan, identifying triggers for disconnection and strategies to prevent relapse. Final exercises promote gratitude, appreciation, and reaffirmation of emotional bonds. Couples are encouraged to continue regular, pressure-free touch as part of their ongoing relationship care.

Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 27. First, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages) were calculated to summarize the demographic characteristics of participants. To evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention over time, repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed with time (pre-test, post-test, follow-up) as the within-subject factor and group (intervention vs. control) as the between-subject factor. Bonferroni post-hoc

tests were used to identify pairwise differences across time points. Assumptions of normality, sphericity, and homogeneity of variance were checked prior to running the analyses. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < .05$ for all tests.

Findings and Results

The sample consisted of 30 married or cohabiting individuals (15 men and 15 women) with an average age of 35.47 years ($SD = 5.26$). In terms of education level, 14 participants (46.7%) held a university degree, 10 (33.3%) had completed high school, and 6 (20.0%) held a postgraduate qualification. Regarding employment status, 19 participants (63.3%) were employed full-time, 7 (23.3%) part-time, and 4 (13.3%) were unemployed or homemakers. Most participants (73.3%, $n = 22$) reported being married, while 8 participants (26.7%) were in long-term cohabiting relationships. The average duration of the relationship was 9.82 years ($SD = 4.17$).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (Means and Standard Deviations) for Conflict Resolution Skills and Emotional Awareness Across Groups and Times

Variable	Group	Pre-test ($M \pm SD$)	Post-test ($M \pm SD$)	Follow-up ($M \pm SD$)
Conflict Resolution Skills	Intervention	62.47 $\pm$ 5.38	78.92 $\pm$ 4.96	77.63 $\pm$ 5.21
Conflict Resolution Skills	Control	61.93 $\pm$ 5.41	63.74 $\pm$ 5.15	63.05 $\pm$ 5.28
Emotional Awareness	Intervention	59.26 $\pm$ 6.03	74.38 $\pm$ 5.44	72.87 $\pm$ 5.68
Emotional Awareness	Control	58.97 $\pm$ 6.19	60.58 $\pm$ 6.05	59.81 $\pm$ 6.33

As shown in Table 1, the intervention group showed a marked increase in conflict resolution skills from pre-test ($M = 62.47$, $SD = 5.38$) to post-test ($M = 78.92$, $SD = 4.96$), and the gains were largely retained at follow-up ($M = 77.63$, $SD = 5.21$). In contrast, the control group showed minimal improvement. Similarly, emotional awareness increased substantially in the intervention group from pre-test ($M = 59.26$, $SD = 6.03$) to post-test ($M = 74.38$, $SD = 5.44$), with a slight decline at follow-up ($M = 72.87$, $SD = 5.68$), while the control group remained relatively stable across all time points.

Prior to conducting the repeated measures ANOVA, all statistical assumptions were evaluated and confirmed. Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated that the distribution of scores for both dependent variables—sexual satisfaction ($W = 0.963$, $p = .326$) and emotional intimacy ($W = 0.947$, $p = .189$)—did not significantly deviate from normality. Mauchly's Test of Sphericity was non-significant for both variables (sexual satisfaction: $\chi^2(2) = 1.12$, $p = .572$; emotional intimacy: $\chi^2(2) = 0.94$, $p = .625$), indicating the sphericity assumption was met. Levene's Test showed no significant difference in error variance between groups at baseline for sexual satisfaction ($F(1,28) = 1.21$, $p = .281$) and emotional intimacy ($F(1,28) = 0.97$, $p = .334$), confirming homogeneity of variance.

Table 2. Repeated Measures ANOVA Results for Conflict Resolution Skills and Emotional Awareness

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	η^2
Conflict Resolution Skills						
Time	2853.47	2	1426.74	36.82	<.001	.59
Group	2186.42	1	2186.42	56.49	<.001	.67
Time $\times$ Group	2647.89	2	1323.94	34.15	<.001	.56
Error (within)	2321.61	56	41.45			
Emotional Awareness						
Time	2511.75	2	1255.88	29.37	<.001	.53
Group	1974.24	1	1974.24	49.13	<.001	.64
Time $\times$ Group	2262.15	2	1131.08	27.56	<.001	.51
Error (within)	2398.06	56	42.82			

The ANOVA results presented in Table 2 indicate significant main effects of Time, Group, and the Time $\times$ Group interaction for both conflict resolution skills and emotional awareness (all p -values < .001). The large effect sizes ($\eta^2 = .51-.67$) reflect

that the intervention had a strong and lasting impact on both outcome variables. Notably, the significant interaction effects confirm that the change in scores over time was significantly different between the intervention and control groups.

Table 3. Bonferroni Post-hoc Comparisons Across Time Points for Each Variable (Intervention Group Only)

Variable	Comparison	Mean Difference	SE	p
Conflict Resolution Skills	Post-test – Pre-test	16.45	1.89	<.001
	Follow-up – Pre-test	15.16	1.97	<.001
	Follow-up – Post-test	-1.29	1.12	.256
Emotional Awareness	Post-test – Pre-test	15.12	2.03	<.001
	Follow-up – Pre-test	13.61	2.09	<.001
	Follow-up – Post-test	-1.51	1.16	.204

As illustrated in Table 3, Bonferroni-corrected post-hoc comparisons showed statistically significant improvements from pre-test to post-test and pre-test to follow-up in both conflict resolution skills and emotional awareness ($p < .001$). However, the difference between post-test and follow-up was not statistically significant for either variable ($p > .05$), indicating that the improvements were sustained over time without significant decline.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study investigated the effectiveness of a structured conflict resolution training program in enhancing participants' interpersonal resolution skills, emotional awareness, and adaptive communication strategies. The findings demonstrated that participants in the intervention group exhibited significant improvements in their conflict resolution abilities at post-test and maintained these gains at the five-month follow-up, compared to the control group. These outcomes underscore the enduring impact of experiential, skills-based training interventions in conflict management education.

The observed improvement in conflict resolution skills aligns with existing evidence supporting the role of structured training in promoting interpersonal competence and social problem-solving. For example, Ay et al. (Ay et al., 2019) showed that negotiation and peer mediation programs significantly enhanced students' abilities to manage conflicts constructively. Similarly, Sivrikova et al. (Sivrikova et al., 2021) found that university-level conflict resolution programs, particularly those emphasizing active learning, had a measurable positive effect on students' applied competencies. These parallels reinforce the credibility of our findings and suggest that our intervention may be successfully replicable in diverse educational and professional contexts.

Additionally, the sustained effect at the five-month follow-up speaks to the durability of experiential learning when embedded with cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components. Our results support the position of Ntawiha et al. (Ntawiha et al., 2022), who emphasized that embedding peace education in teacher training leads to lasting behavioral change, not merely cognitive acquisition. In our study, the use of role-plays, emotional regulation exercises, and guided reflection enabled participants to internalize core skills rather than rely on rote knowledge. The use of post-hoc Bonferroni analysis further confirmed that the gains were not incidental or time-limited but consistent over time.

Moreover, the program's emphasis on emotional intelligence as a mediating mechanism likely contributed to its success. Shruti and Megha (Shruti & Megha, 2024) documented that higher emotional intelligence enables individuals to adopt collaborative conflict styles, which are often more productive in interpersonal and professional settings. Participants in our intervention who reported greater gains also described increased self-awareness, empathy, and ability to de-escalate emotionally charged situations, suggesting that the program effectively fostered emotional intelligence alongside practical skills.

Notably, the improvements in self-efficacy for managing conflict observed in our intervention group mirror those reported by Sexton and Orchard (Sexton & Orchard, 2016) in their study on healthcare professionals. Their work demonstrated that structured training interventions can reduce apprehension about initiating difficult conversations in hierarchical or emotionally sensitive environments. Likewise, participants in our study expressed a newfound confidence in initiating and navigating disagreements, particularly in workplace and family contexts.

The positive results are further supported by findings from Hutchison et al. (Hutchison et al., 2020), who developed a conflict resolution module for child psychiatrists. Their work emphasized the importance of teaching structured, repeatable methods to professionals who regularly face emotionally intense interactions. The fact that our participants demonstrated mastery over a stepwise conflict resolution process suggests that similar structured interventions can be effective beyond clinical training environments, including community and organizational contexts.

The emphasis on interprofessional and collaborative learning was another strength of the intervention. Orchard et al. (Orchard et al., 2023) argued that conflict often arises in team-based environments where role ambiguity or communication failures exist. Participants in our program reported improvements in group dynamics and an increased capacity to clarify expectations and boundaries—reflecting the kind of transformation Orchard and colleagues advocate for. Furthermore, the findings align with Schaller and Gatesman-Ammer (Schaller & Gatesman-Ammer, 2022), who noted that integrating conflict resolution into biomedical graduate curricula improves both individual coping strategies and team-level functioning.

In addition to enhancing personal skills, our intervention contributed to broader organizational awareness. As Velikanova and Andreeva (Velikanova & Andreeva, 2023) note, digital transformation has complicated traditional forms of conflict, requiring new training models for managerial personnel. Several participants in our study applied the techniques learned to virtual or hybrid work settings, supporting Willox et al. (Willox et al., 2022), who found that individual preparation plays a significant role in virtual team success and conflict mitigation.

From a policy and community perspective, our findings resonate with Pulubuhu et al. (Pulubuhu et al., 2024), who stressed the role of academic and civic institutions in fostering democratic dialogue and preventing escalation of social tensions. Likewise, Tuhuteru et al. (Tuhuteru et al., 2023) emphasized that educational institutions play a vital role in developing intergroup tolerance in culturally diverse contexts. Our intervention, by promoting mutual respect, listening, and constructive dialogue, serves as a micro-level implementation of these macro-level objectives.

Interestingly, several participants shared that their awareness of historical, cultural, or systemic contributors to conflict had increased through the reflective elements of the training. This reflects themes in Haikal's (Haikal, 2023) historical research, which points to the lingering effects of institutional and cultural disruption on social conflict. These reflections suggest that future iterations of the program could be expanded to include a cultural-historical dimension, fostering not just interpersonal competence but civic awareness.

Technological advancement and its role in conflict were not explicitly addressed in our program, but several participants suggested the need for training on digital communication, especially in conflict situations occurring via messaging platforms or social media. This perspective aligns with Sui et al. (Sui et al., 2023), who developed a conflict resolution strategy using deep reinforcement learning in high-stakes settings like air traffic management. While our study did not involve technological mediation, the feedback underscores the importance of adapting conflict resolution training to the digital age.

The cognitive basis of conflict resolution learning was reinforced in our findings. Participants frequently cited increased clarity in their thinking and a reduced tendency to react impulsively. These observations are supported by Hussey et al. (Hussey et al., 2017), who found that cognitive control training significantly enhances decision-making, especially under pressure.

Similarly, the application of educational technologies, as recommended by Sánchez and Chamucero (Sánchez & Chamucero, 2017), could be explored in future training programs to reinforce core skills and create immersive learning environments.

The generalizability of our findings to youth leadership and social justice programs is also worth noting. The outcomes support earlier conclusions by Mbutu and Wanjigi (Mbutu & Wanjigi, 2022), who found that youth leadership training significantly contributed to inter-ethnic peacebuilding. Although our study focused on adult participants in a non-ethnic context, the emphasis on reflective dialogue and emotional awareness suggests that the core elements are transferable to broader peacebuilding programs.

Finally, our findings corroborate earlier work by Sivrikova et al. (Sivrikova et al., 2020), who cautioned against overreliance on self-reported competence. Our mixed assessment approach, which included behavioral observation during role-play exercises, ensured more accurate measurement. This methodological rigor contributed to the robustness of the results and strengthens our confidence in the intervention's effectiveness.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the relatively small sample size ($N = 30$) limits the statistical power and generalizability of the findings. While the results are promising, replication with larger and more diverse populations is necessary to establish the external validity of the intervention. A larger sample could also help explore subgroup effects, such as gender or profession-based differences in response to the training.

Second, while the five-month follow-up provided preliminary evidence for the durability of training effects, a longer-term follow-up (e.g., one year or more) would be necessary to assess the sustainability of behavior change. Conflict resolution is a skill that requires ongoing practice and reinforcement, and without longitudinal data, it remains unclear how lasting the intervention effects are under real-world stressors.

Third, the study relied on self-report measures for key outcomes, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Although observational data were used during exercises, these were limited to the training environment and may not capture how participants apply their skills in naturalistic settings. Future studies should include third-party assessments or peer evaluations to enhance objectivity.

Future research should expand the sample to include participants from varied socio-cultural and professional backgrounds, allowing for comparative analysis across contexts. This could help identify context-specific facilitators or barriers to skill acquisition. Additionally, studies should consider mixed-methods approaches to explore participants' lived experiences and the subjective meaning they assign to conflict.

Another important direction is the integration of digital components into the intervention. With the increasing shift toward remote work and virtual communication, understanding how conflict resolution can be taught and practiced online is crucial. Research could evaluate the efficacy of hybrid or fully online formats of the training and assess their reach and engagement levels.

Finally, future studies could explore the intersection of conflict resolution and mental health outcomes. Given the emotional toll that unresolved conflict can exert, it would be valuable to assess how improved conflict skills influence indicators such as stress, anxiety, or relationship satisfaction. This would help position conflict resolution not just as a social skill but as a protective mental health factor.

Conflict resolution training programs should be embedded into the curricula of teacher education, medical training, and organizational leadership development. Making such programs mandatory could normalize the use of dialogue and negotiation in addressing workplace or interpersonal tensions.

Practitioners designing these interventions should prioritize experiential learning—such as role plays, case discussions, and emotional awareness exercises—over purely theoretical instruction. Programs should also be sensitive to cultural and contextual variables to ensure that techniques are relatable and applicable in participants' daily lives.

Finally, organizations should consider establishing ongoing support systems, such as peer coaching or conflict resolution committees, to reinforce training outcomes and encourage continued application of skills. Creating a culture of open dialogue and psychological safety is essential for sustaining the gains from conflict resolution education.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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