

Young Couple's Perceptions on the Influence of Inter-Cultural Marriages: Insights from Mucheke, Masvingo Urban

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Abstract

This qualitative study sought to explore young couples' perceptions on the influence of intercultural marriages in an Afrocentric context. Using interpretive phenomenology methodology and purposive sampling strategy, six spouses were interrogated. In-depth interviews were administered. Data were analyzed using a qualitative thematic approach. The results showed that the union of couples from diverse cultural backgrounds was a precursor to marital conflict. Three themes were uncovered from the data: (a) Reconstruction of shared meaning in a relationship based on common grounds, similar goals, commitment, and compromise. (b) Creation of the spirit of tolerance. (c) Holy Bible is the manual of marriage. It was recommended that marriage experts must design and deliver critical training programs that highlight insight to young couples bound in intercultural marriages. Furthermore, young adults need to have a deeper understanding of cross-cultural dynamics before they commit themselves.

Keywords: Young couple, Inter-cultural marriage, Tolerance, Compromise, Social conventions.

1. Introduction

Marriage is one of the oldest and strongest relationships in the realm of governing human behavior. There is a variety of explanations resonating with the desire of human organisms to be united through marriage. In the majority of these factors, cultural reasons have peculiar features because they are products of human ingenuity, human emotions, and intergenerational intents that are propagated from birth. (Malafouris, 2021). The marital bond is identified as a dyadic affair between husband and wife characterized by the position and duty of "wife" in reciprocity with the status and role of "husband" (Mukashema et al., 2021). In this view, the husband and wife acquire statuses that stretch from institution to friendship, which may last and endure in their family life cycle (Vu, 2021). Ideally, they demonstrate bidirectional roles that facilitate the attainment of their material, sexual, emotional, psychological, and divined desires for their existence (Revord et al., 2021). According to DeRobertis and Bland (2020) human organisms' propensity to being is largely informed by their genetic codes and life experiences.



The degree to which cross-cultural marriage and intimacy are acknowledged in contemporary society at the nodes of the cultural conventions wherein these dynamic forces occur (Raymo & Park, 2020). The issue of inter-cultural marriages has an impact on how couples relate (Sultana, 2021). This has been evident globally with the factors of snowballing mobility having an effect on the marital realm as well as affecting the undercurrents of the emergence of new fashions and forms of relations and marriages. Migrations are favorable to a number of families and romantic settlements relating to cultural and ethnic diversity (Edwards, 2020; Vertovec, 2021). In light of global migrations, families turned out to be pacesetters of multiculturalism and individual ways of navigating this phenomenon in everyday life, anchored in deep negotiations (Teichert, 2020). Families experiencing plenty of tensions amongst their members stemming from various styles of communication, are plagued by these potential conflicts. On a more practical level, languages, religious fundamental beliefs, tolerance level of the migrating spouse, social links, cultural variances in parental flairs, social obligations, gender roles, behavioral patterns and rudiments (Barker and Cornwell, 2019).

Ideally, most individuals who tasted the marital institution may probably wholeheartedly testify that conflict is an inextricable ingredient in all marriages. (Husain et al, 2021). So long as two individuals with divergent frames of reference cleave their lives together, problems begin. Their distinct experiences, traits, and cultural values lay the base which determines the superstructure of their union (Uzum et al., 2019). These apparent variances may seemingly appear attractive and exciting at the preliminary stages but may also be sources of tension and even fierce contestation (Jamo, 2019). In contemporary society, the index of interpersonal relationships is evolving. Profound ties between individuals of divergent cultural backgrounds are becoming more rampant and cross-cultural marriages are on the increase (Nasr Isfahani et al., 2018; Bratter et al., 2022). The complexity of cross-cultural ties has been crystallized in research as the partners in such marriages are each furnished with an opposite set of rules, diverse values, customs, and worldviews, different ways of relating to one another, and dissimilar approaches to regularizing differences (Rogan et al, 2018). Even though conflict within romantic cross-cultural relationships may be due to personality variances or extenuating aspects (Garcia, 2006) intercultural conflict ensues as well for the reason that the individuals hold assorted values and objectives, and exploit clearly different conflict and communication flairs (Ha, 2020).

Ideally, effective communication is an expensive ingredient in intercultural marriages owing to the fact that these marriages are uniquely susceptible to conflict. In this vein, couples are seldom unconscious of the influence culture has on their cognitive domains, emotions, and behaviors (Lan, 2019). Partners are sometimes reconciled to the idea that their personal beliefs about their spouses' actions are objective and truthful (Bhatoo & Bhowon, 2018). In a sense, these peculiar characteristics of intercultural marriages are seemingly cautionary to abstain from getting married outside one's own culture (Venterová, 2018). Nonetheless, intercultural marriages are progressively becoming common. Hardiyani (2019), Vazquez et al (2019) and Ferrell (2021) articulated a range of advantages obtained in intercultural marriages for instance cementation of bonds, a distinct sense of identity,



decrease of ethnocentricity, and new rituals. Lewicky (2018) opines that in some countries like Japan, cross-cultural marriages seemingly flourish as much as intracultural affairs.

Long ago there was perpetuated in Zimbabwe the belief that a couple will attain the bliss of marriage and become fruitful when they are people of the same culture (Dodo, 2021). Upon reflection, however, up-to-the-minute and digital technology has turned the world into a global village. It fueled the occurrences of dual culture and cross-cultural interaction among people and subsequently increased the worldwide number of Intercultural Marriages (Gabrenya, 2020). As alluded to before, the notion that for a marriage to last only people of the same culture must be married has been challenged as evidenced by the emergence of globalization and the adoption of Western values in Africa, particularly in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe is located in Sub-Saharan Africa, sharing borders with Botswana, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zambia. The country has a great diversity of languages, communities, beliefs, and customs. The Shona and Ndebele people are the two biggest ethnicities (Garutsa et al., 2018). The Shona informs the mainstream of the populace, that is, roughly 80%. They conventionally have a solid county clan structure accessorized by six main groups which are the Manyika, Ndaue, Zezuru, Karanga, Korekore, and Rozvi (Brett, 2018). These groupings are generated on the pretext of language and cultural likenesses (Byram and Wagner, 2018). The Ndebele encompass roughly 14% of the inhabitants having two major ethnic clusters which are the Ndebele and Kalanga as well as the Tonga (Maphosa, 2021). In a case where a couple is accessorized by Shona and Tonga tribes, many a time a dual culture relationship conflict is imminent (Mkwananzi et al., 2021). The explanation is that through marriage a family ensures its survival and continuation and descent through the male line. Ordinarily, after marriage, a woman leaves her family of orientation and cleaves to her husband. Upon reflection, however, the Tonga culture is matrilineal, in that the descent is through the female and the husband moves into the home area of the wife (Mudimba, 2020). This state of affairs may need a lot of compromise and understanding from both parties to harmonize their different specific frames of reference.

Zimbabwe attained independence from the United Kingdom in 1980, after succeeding years of British colonization but the aftermath of the white imperialism remains apparent in the faculties that prompt the functioning of society (Rönnbäck & Broberg, 2019). This is especially more noticeable in the extensive use of English as a standard language, the embracing of Christianity, and related Christian family morals. The imperial effect has left a dichotomy in the conventions and principles of Zimbabweans (Chitando, 2018). For instance, the nation runs under a dual legal system integrating mutually traditional law and Roman-Dutch Law (Christensson, 2020). Traditional leaders administer traditional law whereas Roman-Dutch Law is viewed as the conventional law. The two legal systems are valid and any decision made independently by either instrument is legitimately binding (Matsika, 2021). For instance, in customary marriages, property rights throughout the marriage or after divorce or death are exclusively under the jurisdiction of man. Bequeathing of the estate and custody of children is determined by male relatives of the husband. Women may retain property that is ordinarily related to their domestic role such

as, kitchenette utensils (Mousourakis, 2019). In this culture, all immovable property is also considered a man's even if there is also a woman's involvement in acquiring it. However, with the civilization now, there are also civil marriages now whereby if a marriage ended by death or divorce, widows and wives have a right to claim a share in the husband's estate (Matunhu et al., 2019). If a couple consists of one radical traditionalist and a civil one, it might be quite a misunderstanding on how to go about the inheritance matter. Toward this end, this study will focus on sociological, ethnic-racial, religious, political, anthropological, geographical, and economic variables in an endeavor to explain intercultural marriages.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- To examine the influence of different traditions on married couples.
- To establish couples' ability to integrate similarities and differences.
- To suggest strategies for harmonizing spouses bound in inter-cultural marriages.

2. Materials and Methods

The study was anchored on qualitative research methodology. The qualitative research paradigm essentially focused on examining the thoughts, perceptions, and feelings of respondents (Belotto, 2018). Of notice, this paradigm ensures an appreciation of the perceptions of young couples towards intercultural marriages in their specific contexts.

The researchers, in part, exploited the phenomenological research design. Ideally, the operational term in a phenomenological study is 'describe'. In this study, the mandate of the researchers was to describe the phenomenon in question with terrible exactness, abstaining from any pre-conceived framework, but holding on to truth and facts. According to Welman and Kruger (1999, p. 189) as cited in Zaheer et al., (2021) "the phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved" The intent of this study, at the initial emphasis, was to elicit data relating to the perceptions of the study participants with regards to the phenomenon of the influence of intercultural marriages.

2.1 Population and Sampling Techniques

The target population of this research was couples who were married not more than five years. In this study, the researchers used purposive sampling, identified by Welman and Kruger (1999) cited in Latifa (2021) as the popular significant form of non-probability sampling, to establish the key participants for a study. The selection of the sample was based on the researchers' judgment and the purpose of the research (Singh et al, 2021). Looking for participants who had an impression of the phenomenon to be researched, the study sample was characterized by six (6) participants, that is, three (3) females and three (3) males. All participants were couples residing in Mucheke, Masvingo urban.



2.2 Data Gathering Instrument

In-depth interviews were adopted as a data collecting tool. In-depth interviewing is conceptualized as a qualitative study procedure that involves the administration of comprehensive individual interviews with a small quantum of participants to establish their insights on a particular concept, program, or status quo (Mataruse, 2021). Interviewers were favored for they offer a better chance to ask follow-up inquiries, investigate for supplementary information, and revert back to main questions at a later stage in the interview to create a rich appreciation of attitudes, insights, and observations. Moreover, because in-depth interviews may possibly be so insightful, it is probable to recognize exceedingly treasured results swiftly.

2.3 Data analysis Procedure

Thematic analysis was harnessed to sift data because it is an applied data analysis method for qualitative academics. Of note, thematic analysis is a technique for scrutinizing qualitative data that involves searching across a data set to recognize, evaluate, and report recurring patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2019). It is also a process for relating data, but it also encompasses an explanation in the processes of choosing encryptions and creating themes.

3. Results and Discussion

Influence of different traditions on married couples

The findings of this study crystalized that the influence of divergent cultural backgrounds sometimes has undesirable consequences on the interest of couples. One female spouse remarked;

Sometimes it is frustrating having to completely forget your culture and adapt to that of your mate, however, the wife tends to compromise more and conform to the husband's culture since our society is patriarchal.

It was also established that couples from diverse backgrounds compromise and emotionally blend so as to meet halfway in trying to accommodate the differences in both cultures. This resonates with Mudimba (2020) who details that this state of affairs may need a lot of compromise and understanding from both parties to harmonize their different specific frames of reference. The study revealed that couples from divergent backgrounds are expected to understand each other else it leads to schism. This finding corroborates Ha (2020)'s assertion that intercultural conflict ensues as well for the reason that the individuals hold assorted values and objectives, and exploit clearly different conflict and communication flairs.

While the notion of compromising and emotionally blending is applauded the study noted some approaches that couples of diverse backgrounds are using. For example, participants posited;

...Couples should discuss issues to do with cultural expectations from both cultures. These issues include cultural expectations regarding gender roles and also how responsibilities are desired in their relationship.....by educating yourself and your

family about the other culture. This can ease surprises and defuse potential conflicts.....couples should first identify major similarities and differences within their relationship. In so doing they try to identify cultural expectations from both cultures. They can reconstruct a shared meaning in their relationship based on common grounds, similar goals, commitment, and compromise....

These views are consistent with Lewicky (2018) who opines that in some countries like Japan, cross-cultural marriages seemingly flourish as much as intracultural affairs.

Couples' ability to integrate similarities and differences

While couples were expressing their concerns about the challenges, they were encountering in intercultural marriages, responses from other participants were guided with solutions to making the matrimonial experience conducive to them. One participant had this to say;

We create and foster a spirit of tolerance and also establish boundaries between families of orientation and procreation.... ...He tries to help me understand his culture so that it becomes easier for me to adapt.

This revelation confirms Mkwanzani et al (2021)'s submission that in a case where a couple is accessorized by Shona and Tonga tribes, many a time a dual culture relationship conflict is imminent. On the contrary, these findings are controversial with Mudimba (2020) who opines that the Tonga culture is matrilineal, in that the descent is through the female and the husband moves into the home area of the wife.

Be that as it may, the study revealed that couples were keen to depend on God the creator, the author of the marriage institution.

...the Bible is our guideline (manual of life)....

The research established that a number of couples in Masvingo endeavor to short circuit cultural conflict by using neutral language as a major communication symbol. Participants remarked that;

...we use English to avoid either of our languages dominating...as well as Shonadue to the fact that the environment we are in is dominated by the Shona language.

This finding corroborates Rönnbäck and Broberg (2019)'s assertion that This is especially more noticeable in the extensive use of English as a standard language, the embracing of Christianity, and related Christian family morals.

...both languages but the father's language should be the major one considering that our culture is patriarchal.

This is consistent with Chitando (2018) who opines that the imperial effect has left a dichotomy in the conventions and principles of Zimbabweans. Upon reflection, however, Africanization of social conventions always come to the



fore. The male figure, who is the head of the family, ordinarily dominates and override the competing cultural values in a patriarchal context.

Quite evidently, concerns of the harmonization of diverse cultural values were shared by some of the couples; Below are some of the verbatim quotes from participants,

...we encourage our children to learn both languages that is Shona and Ndebele. This way they can at least view two different aspects of culture...and may not hold stereotypical views of diverse cultures.....both languages because it will make them appreciate the two cultural conventions. They learn more than just words, they learn people's customs and life patterns that can be invaluable for the rest of their life.....by choosing the positives and negatives of the two cultures and jointly choose which parts will best fit in your relationship....

These responses from couples demonstrated that the intercultural marriages were not user friendly. This was more noticeable on the percentage of spouses who tried to navigate the intercultural puzzle in order to bring balance in marriage. Be that as it may, the study revealed that couples were keen to initiate their children to learn and weave through both cultural conventions that were accessible at their disposal. The research established that a number of couples in intercultural marriages were heavily plagued by the differences prescribed by their specific frames of reference. Ideally, most couples focused more on positives than negatives in the process. This corroborates with Ferrell (2021) who articulated that a range of advantages were obtained in intercultural marriages for instance cementation of bonds, a distinct sense of identity, reduction of ethnocentricity, and new conventions.

Strategies of harmonizing spouses bound in inter-cultural marriages.

The study revealed that there is much that needs to be done by marriage professionals in the society in order to facilitate attainment of bliss in intercultural marriages. Toward this end, couples opined that;

...educate the professionals in the society to help the society understand more about the institution of marriage.....sensitization (education) to accept each other's opinions and filter what is bad.....conduct awareness campaign and support growth for open discussion....

This study uncovered that information will capacitate young adults that transitioning from dating to marriage in making informed decisions regarding cross-cultural marriages. Participants remarked;



...pre-marriage counseling might help the pair understand their marriage type and what they might go through due to the cultural differences and how to tackle the issues if they arise....

The foregoing submission demonstrates that it is of paramount importance for dating couples to seek counsel from chaperones knowledgeable on matters related to intercultural marriages. The study also revealed that while seeking advice from key informants was key, it was imperative for dating couples, in part, to approach life on a reality check principle.

...learn each other's culture during courtship, have time to discuss pros and cons of their culture, be prepared to let go bad behavior initiated by cultural codes...(that which annoy your partner), tolerate and compromise....

This is contradictory to Venterová (2018)'s assertion that these peculiar characteristics of intercultural marriages are seemingly cautionary to abstain from getting married outside one's own culture. The study uncovered that couples from diverse cultures as they form and manage relationships, should redefine their identity because following a single culture can be cumbersome in that there can be different and conflicting expectations. Therefore, couples should be open-minded and create a new framework, and set values based on trust and compromise. This is consistent with Jamo (2019) who aptly posits that the existing similarities and differences can be exciting and attractive but may also create tension and even fierce contestation. Moreover, in some cases, couples are anchored on openness and internal willingness as strategies to offer to compromise with the partner's cultural codes.

...being open-minded and having a divergent view on differences, that is, treating diverse cultures with respect and also viewing them as a chance to learn and assimilating and incorporating different cultural practices which cement relationships....

This sharply contrasts with Dodo (2021)'s assertion that long ago there was perpetuated in Zimbabwe the belief that a couple will attain the bliss of marriage and become fruitful when they are people of the same culture.

4. Conclusion

The study concluded that the challenges imposed by cross-cultural conventions were not good enough to deter young adults from engaging in intermarriages. Couples in every sense, were encouraged to tolerance and compromise. Charged with the responsibility for viewing each other's culture as equally important and not belittling or ridiculing it. This study revealed that communication is the key to every faculty that prompts the functioning of a matrimonial settlement. Communication helps in dealing with insecurities and, in the long run aid in making adjustments around cross-cultural conventions. Some couples who were not well accomplished in cross-cultural rudiments could not enjoy the bliss of intercultural marriages. Pre-marital counselling needed quite a



length of time in order to impart necessary skills to couples bound in intermarriage settlements. It also emerged that diverse cultural conventions were a source of conflict. Some of the couples, who were open-minded had it on record that their home schools taught their children to weave through diverse cultural dictates. This harmonization ensured harmony at the nodes of the family life cycle. This study revealed that globalization was the brainchild of intercultural marriages and young couples were encouraged to embrace the new normal. It was also established that one's specific frame of reference plays a pivotal role in the process of determining the family superstructure. Of note, ardent Christian couples surrendered their sustenance in the hands of God the Creator who is the author of the marriage institution. Toward this end, young adults of the day must take a careful, thoughtful, and sensitive consideration regarding marrying cross-cultural suitors.

5. Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of this study:

- (i) Marriage experts must design and deliver critical training programs that highlight insight to young couples bound in intercultural marriages.
- (ii) Young adults need to have a deeper understanding of cross-cultural unions before they commit themselves.
- (iii) Young couples must be guided by the Holy Bible, which is the manual of marriage.
- (iv) Holding all things constant, young adults should abstain from marrying life partners of diverse cultural backgrounds.
- (v) Young couples bound in intercultural marriages must learn to compromise and tolerate their spouses unconditionally.
- (vi) Future studies should focus also on strategies that ensure balance in intercultural marriages, which can be an index of the family life cycle in the first world.
- (vii) Future studies should target a larger sample of the population so as to obtain a more inclusive range of experiences.

6. Implications of the Study

The study zeroed on perceptions of young couples but did not take into account the opinions of significant others who are equally affected by the conversations of those bound in cross-cultural marriages. Upon reflection, however, there is need to harmonize experiences of young couples and views of relatives regarding intercultural marriages. In terms of perception, cross-cultural marriages seemingly are not consistent with Afrocentric social conventions. Furthermore, the young couples seem not to have more insight about the dynamics of intercultural marriages hence the need for generation of strategies to deal with the phenomenon in question.



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