



ENUGU STATE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

**Volume 11
Number 1,
2026**

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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PUBLISHED BY

**Faculty of Social Sciences,
Enugu State University of Science And Technology**

Culturally Responsive Counselling in Teacher Preparation: Addressing ACEs in Diverse Nigerian Classrooms

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Abstract

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) significantly affect children's cognitive, emotional, and social development, with far-reaching implications for learning and school adjustment, particularly within culturally diverse contexts such as Nigeria. Despite the increasing prevalence of childhood adversity linked to poverty, domestic instability, community violence, and displacement, teacher preparation programmes in Nigeria remain insufficiently equipped to address the psychosocial and cultural dimensions of learners' needs. This position paper argues for the integration of culturally responsive counselling into teacher education as a strategic approach to addressing ACEs in diverse Nigerian classrooms. Drawing on ecological systems theory and trauma-informed educational principles, the paper conceptualises culturally responsive counselling as a framework that enables teachers to interpret student behaviour within cultural contexts while providing supportive, non-punitive, and inclusive responses to trauma-related challenges. It further examines the limitations of current teacher preparation practices, highlighting gaps in counselling competencies, cultural awareness, and trauma literacy among educators. The paper proposes key strategies for reform, including curriculum integration of ACEs and trauma-informed pedagogy, development of counselling micro-skills among teachers, experiential learning approaches, and strengthened school-based support systems. Policy implications are also discussed, with emphasis on the need for regulatory bodies to embed culturally responsive and trauma-informed competencies within teacher education standards. The paper concludes that equipping teachers with culturally responsive counselling skills is essential for fostering emotionally safe classrooms, improving learner engagement, and promoting equitable educational outcomes for children affected by adversity.

Keywords: *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs); culturally responsive counselling; teacher preparation; school counselling.*

Introduction

The Nigerian classroom represents one of the most culturally and educationally complex learning environments globally, shaped by deep ethnic plurality, linguistic diversity, varying religious worldviews, and pronounced socio-economic inequalities. While such diversity can enrich pedagogical interaction and broaden learners' perspectives, it simultaneously creates layered challenges for teaching and learning, particularly in relation to the identification and

support of learners exposed to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). ACEs—referring to potentially traumatic events such as physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, neglect, household dysfunction, and exposure to community violence—have been consistently associated with disruptions in neurodevelopment, emotional regulation, cognitive functioning, and long-term educational attainment (Felitti et al., 1998; Shonkoff et al., 2012; Hughes et al., 2017). These effects are especially significant in school contexts, where impaired self-regulation and executive functioning often manifest as behavioural difficulties, disengagement, and poor academic performance.

In the Nigerian context, the burden of ACEs is intensified by structural inequalities, widespread poverty, unstable family systems, and recurrent exposure to conflict-related trauma, including displacement arising from insurgency and communal violence in several regions. These contextual realities place a substantial proportion of learners at heightened risk of toxic stress, which interferes with brain architecture and compromises learning readiness (Shonkoff et al., 2012). Empirical scholarship further confirms that cumulative exposure to adversity significantly increases the likelihood of emotional dysregulation, aggression, withdrawal, absenteeism, and diminished academic engagement among school-aged children (Anda et al., 2020; Hughes et al., 2017). Within such conditions, schools become not only sites of learning but also critical environments for psychosocial stabilization and resilience-building.

Despite the increasing recognition of the educational implications of childhood adversity, teacher preparation programmes in Nigeria remain largely oriented toward instructional competence, with limited systematic integration of trauma-informed education and culturally responsive counselling competencies. Consequently, many teachers enter the profession without adequate preparation to recognize the subtle and culturally mediated manifestations of trauma or to respond in ways that are both psychologically supportive and culturally appropriate. This gap is particularly consequential in classrooms where behavioural expressions of distress may be misinterpreted through disciplinary rather than developmental or psychosocial lenses, resulting in punitive responses that may further exacerbate learner vulnerability (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Crum, 2022). The absence of structured training in ACEs and culturally responsive counselling therefore represents a critical weakness in teacher education that has direct implications for educational equity and student wellbeing.

Culturally responsive counselling provides a theoretically grounded and practically relevant framework for addressing this gap. Rooted in multicultural counselling theory, it emphasizes cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and culturally appropriate helping skills that enable practitioners to interpret behaviour within its sociocultural context and respond with empathy and effectiveness (Sue et al., 2022). In educational settings, culturally responsive counselling aligns closely with trauma-informed pedagogical approaches, which prioritize safety, trust, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural humility as foundational principles for learning environments (SAMHSA, 2014; Brunzell et al., 2016). Within teacher preparation, this framework extends beyond awareness to include the development of practical competencies such as emotional attunement, relational engagement, classroom-based psychosocial support, and referral literacy for complex cases.

This paper, therefore, advances the position that integrating culturally responsive counselling into teacher preparation is essential for effectively addressing ACEs in Nigeria's diverse classrooms. It argues that teacher education must move beyond narrowly defined pedagogical training to include structured development in trauma literacy, cultural competence, and

school-based psychosocial support skills. Drawing on established theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, the paper examines the systemic gaps in current teacher preparation programmes, explores the pedagogical and policy implications of integrating culturally responsive counselling, and proposes strategies for embedding these competencies within pre-service and in-service teacher education.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this paper is grounded in the premise that children's learning and psychosocial adjustment are shaped by the dynamic interaction among adverse life experiences, cultural meaning systems, and the responsiveness of educational environments. In Nigeria, where learners are socialized within diverse ethnic, linguistic, religious, and socio-economic contexts, the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) cannot be fully understood apart from the cultural frameworks that influence how adversity is experienced, interpreted, expressed, and addressed. At the same time, teachers occupy a pivotal position within the school microsystem and are uniquely placed to either mitigate or exacerbate the impact of trauma. This paper therefore conceptualizes culturally responsive counselling in teacher preparation as the mechanism through which teachers acquire the competencies needed to recognize culturally mediated manifestations of ACEs and to create classroom environments that foster safety, resilience, and academic success.

The conceptual model is underpinned by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which posits that child development is shaped by interactions across nested environmental systems, including family, school, community, and broader societal structures. ACEs originate primarily within the child's immediate and surrounding contexts, while schools represent a key microsystem capable of providing stability and support. Teacher preparation operates at the mesosystem and exosystem levels by influencing the quality of interactions between educational institutions and learners. National policies, cultural norms, and professional standards at the macrosystem level either facilitate or constrain the integration of culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices. This ecological perspective highlights that meaningful support for children affected by adversity requires coordinated action across multiple systems rather than isolated classroom interventions.

In this framework, culturally responsive counselling functions as the transformative bridge linking knowledge of ACEs to effective educational practice. It enables teachers to interpret students' experiences within their cultural and developmental contexts, to implement trauma-sensitive strategies, and to collaborate with families and support professionals. These processes are expected to produce proximal outcomes such as improved teacher efficacy, stronger teacher-student relationships, and more inclusive classroom climates. Over time, these changes should contribute to distal outcomes including better emotional regulation, increased school engagement, improved academic achievement, and enhanced resilience among students affected by ACEs.

The framework therefore posits a sequential relationship in which exposure to ACEs influences student functioning; culture shapes the interpretation and manifestation of these experiences; teacher preparation develops culturally responsive counselling competencies; and these competencies inform.

Challenges in Nigerian Classrooms

One of the most salient challenges is Nigeria's extraordinary cultural and linguistic diversity. With more than 500 languages and over 250 ethnic groups, Nigerian classrooms frequently bring together learners whose worldviews, communication styles, disciplinary expectations,

and emotional expressions differ substantially. While this diversity is a valuable educational asset, it can also create interpretive difficulties for teachers who have not been trained to understand behaviour within cultural context. A child who avoids eye contact may be demonstrating culturally prescribed respect rather than disengagement. Another who appears unusually quiet may be responding to trauma, but silence may also be reinforced by social norms that discourage children from speaking openly in the presence of adults. Without cultural competence, teachers may misinterpret such behaviours as defiance, indifference, or low ability, resulting in inappropriate disciplinary responses and missed opportunities for support (Gay, 2018; Sue et al., 2022).

A second challenge arises from the high prevalence of childhood adversity in the Nigerian context. Many children are exposed to poverty, domestic violence, parental conflict, neglect, harsh disciplinary practices, bereavement, child labour, and insecurity associated with banditry, communal conflict, and insurgency. In some regions, particularly in the North-East, displacement and disruption of family life have compounded these stressors. These experiences affect brain development, emotional regulation, executive functioning, and social competence, often manifesting in behaviours such as aggression, hypervigilance, withdrawal, inattentiveness, absenteeism, and declining academic performance (Felitti et al., 1998; Hughes et al., 2017; Chenube et al., 2025). Because these manifestations frequently resemble common classroom management issues, teachers may respond punitively rather than therapeutically, thereby reinforcing rather than alleviating the child's distress.

Cultural beliefs and social norms may further obscure the identification of ACEs. In many communities, family matters are regarded as private, and children are socialized to endure hardship without complaint. Corporal punishment may be viewed as a legitimate expression of parental care, while emotional suffering may be minimized or attributed to spiritual causes. These beliefs can reduce help-seeking, discourage disclosure, and normalize experiences that have significant developmental consequences. Teachers who are unfamiliar with these cultural dynamics may underestimate the severity of students' experiences or hesitate to intervene for fear of violating community norms. At the same time, culturally insensitive responses may alienate families and erode trust between schools and communities.

Teacher-related factors represent another major challenge. Most teacher preparation programmes in Nigeria have historically emphasized subject content and pedagogy, with limited attention to child mental health, counselling skills, or trauma-informed practice. As a result, many teachers enter the profession without the knowledge required to recognize signs of toxic stress or the skills needed to respond constructively. Even when teachers are aware that a child is struggling, they may feel uncertain about how to engage the student, communicate with caregivers, or make appropriate referrals. This lack of preparation can lead to frustration, diminished efficacy, and reliance on authoritarian disciplinary approaches that may retraumatize vulnerable learners.

The shortage of school-based mental health resources further compounds these difficulties. Although guidance and counselling is recognized as an important component of educational support, many schools either lack qualified counsellors or have counselling units that are poorly staffed and underutilized. In rural and underserved communities, access to psychologists, social workers, and child protection services may be minimal or nonexistent. Consequently, classroom teachers are often the first—and sometimes only—adults positioned to notice changes in students' behaviour and emotional functioning. Without specialist

support, however, teachers may be left to manage complex cases beyond their training and capacity.

Structural conditions within schools also create formidable barriers. Overcrowded classrooms, high pupil-teacher ratios, limited instructional materials, and intense pressure to meet academic targets restrict teachers' ability to provide individualized attention. In such settings, there is little time to build relationships, conduct informal check-ins, or implement differentiated strategies for students experiencing emotional difficulties. Frequent disruptions such as strikes, insecurity, and irregular school attendance can further weaken the continuity and predictability that trauma-affected children need to feel safe and engaged. Moreover, many schools operate within disciplinary cultures that prioritize compliance and examination performance over social-emotional development.

Teacher well-being is another often overlooked concern. Educators working in high-stress environments may experience burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary traumatic stress, especially when they repeatedly encounter students with complex psychosocial needs. Teachers who are themselves coping with economic hardship or personal adversity may find it difficult to maintain the emotional availability required for sensitive and supportive engagement. Without institutional support and opportunities for self-care, even well-intentioned teachers may become overwhelmed, detached, or punitive.

Policy and systemic limitations also impede progress. Although national policy documents emphasize inclusive and quality education, there is limited explicit guidance on how teacher education programmes and schools should address childhood trauma and cultural responsiveness. The absence of standardized screening procedures, referral protocols, and competency benchmarks contributes to inconsistent practice. Furthermore, insufficient funding for mental health and psychosocial support in education constrains innovation and scale-up of effective approaches.

Taken together, these challenges underscore the complexity of implementing culturally responsive counselling in Nigerian classrooms. They reveal that supporting children affected by ACEs requires more than individual teacher commitment; it demands coordinated reforms across teacher preparation, school systems, policy structures, and community partnerships. Recognizing these barriers is an essential first step toward designing interventions that are contextually relevant, culturally grounded, and capable of transforming classrooms into environments where vulnerable learners are understood, supported, and empowered to succeed.

Culturally Responsive Counselling Strategies for Teacher Preparation

Preparing teachers to address Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in Nigeria's culturally heterogeneous classrooms requires more than the addition of isolated courses on classroom management or child development. It calls for a fundamental reorientation of teacher education toward a model that recognizes the interplay between culture, trauma, and learning. Culturally responsive counselling offers such a framework by equipping teachers with the dispositions, knowledge, and practical skills needed to interpret students' behaviours within their sociocultural contexts and to respond in ways that promote healing, resilience, and academic engagement. Rather than viewing disruptive behaviour, withdrawal, or poor academic performance as evidence of indiscipline or low ability, teachers trained in culturally responsive counselling learn to consider how children's experiences of adversity and the

cultural meanings attached to those experiences shape classroom functioning (Gay, 2018; Sue et al., 2022; Chenube, Aluede & Marire-Nwankwo 2025).

The first strategic implication for teacher preparation is the systematic integration of trauma and culture-related content into the formal curriculum. Teacher education programmes should move beyond traditional emphasis on instructional methods to include explicit learning experiences on the prevalence, manifestations, and developmental consequences of ACEs. Trainee teachers need a solid understanding of how chronic exposure to abuse, neglect, parental conflict, household dysfunction, poverty, and community violence affects attention, memory, executive functioning, emotional regulation, and social relationships (Felitti et al., 1998; Hughes et al., 2017). Equally important is an appreciation of the ways in which cultural beliefs influence how adversity is interpreted and expressed. In many Nigerian communities, behaviours such as silence, avoidance of eye contact, emotional restraint, or heightened obedience may reflect cultural socialization practices rather than pathology. Conversely, cultural norms that normalize harsh discipline or discourage disclosure of family problems may mask the presence of trauma. Embedding these issues in educational psychology, guidance and counselling, child development, and practicum courses would ensure that future teachers acquire an integrated understanding of learner diversity.

Beyond conceptual knowledge, teacher preparation must prioritize the development of practical counselling competencies that can be applied in everyday classroom interactions. Teachers are not expected to function as therapists; however, they require foundational helping skills to build trusting relationships, observe behavioural indicators of distress, respond empathetically, and make appropriate referrals when necessary. Such skills include active listening, emotional validation, culturally sensitive communication, conflict de-escalation, and the use of strengths-based language. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) demonstrated that teachers' social and emotional competence is strongly associated with positive classroom climate and improved student outcomes. For children affected by ACEs, these relational competencies are particularly critical because supportive relationships with caring adults can buffer the effects of toxic stress and foster resilience (Center on the Developing Child, 2021). Within the Nigerian context, where many schools have limited access to professional mental health services, the classroom teacher often represents the most accessible and consistent source of psychosocial support.

A culturally responsive counselling approach also requires deliberate cultivation of teacher self-awareness. Effective responses to trauma are undermined when teachers interpret students' behaviour through stereotypes, moral judgments, or culturally narrow assumptions. Teacher preparation programmes should therefore incorporate structured opportunities for critical reflection on personal beliefs about discipline, parenting, culture, and childhood adversity. Reflective journals, guided discussions, autobiographical narratives, and supervised practicum debriefings can help teacher trainees examine implicit biases and understand how their own socialization influences their responses to learners. This process is consistent with multicultural counselling scholarship, which emphasizes self-awareness as the foundation of cultural competence (Sue et al., 2022). In Nigeria, where beliefs about child-rearing and acceptable disciplinary practices vary across ethnic, religious, and socio-economic contexts, reflective competence is indispensable for avoiding ethnocentric interpretations of student behaviour.

Experiential learning constitutes another essential strategy for preparing teachers to respond effectively to ACEs. The complex realities of trauma and culture cannot be fully understood

through lectures alone. Case studies, simulations, role-plays, and problem-based learning activities enable trainees to apply theoretical concepts to realistic scenarios drawn from Nigerian classrooms. For example, trainees may be asked to develop culturally appropriate responses to a child displaced by insurgency, a learner exhibiting aggression following domestic violence, or a student whose chronic absenteeism is linked to caregiving responsibilities. Such experiences promote critical thinking, collaborative problem solving, and professional judgment. They also help future teachers appreciate that culturally responsive counselling involves flexibility, contextual understanding, and sensitivity to the strengths and vulnerabilities that each learner brings to school.

Another critical strategy is the intentional alignment of teacher preparation with trauma-informed pedagogical principles. Trauma-informed education emphasizes physical and emotional safety, predictability, trustworthiness, empowerment, collaboration, and cultural humility (SAMHSA, 2014). When incorporated into teacher training, these principles encourage educators to design classrooms that minimize triggers, foster a sense of belonging, and support student autonomy. Practical applications include establishing consistent routines, using restorative rather than punitive disciplinary practices, offering choices, and incorporating social-emotional learning activities. Research suggests that trauma-informed practices can improve student engagement, reduce behavioural difficulties, and enhance teacher efficacy (Brunzell et al., 2016; Dorado et al., 2016). For Nigerian teachers, these approaches are particularly valuable in settings where students face multiple adversities linked to insecurity, poverty, family disruption, and social instability.

The effectiveness of culturally responsive counselling is further strengthened when teacher preparation emphasizes collaboration and systems thinking. Children's responses to adversity are shaped by interactions across home, school, and community contexts. Accordingly, teachers must be trained to work collaboratively with school counsellors, parents, social workers, health professionals, and community leaders. Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective underscores the importance of coordinated support across these systems. In practice, teacher trainees should learn how to communicate concerns sensitively to caregivers, engage families as partners, and navigate referral pathways for specialized services. In Nigeria, where family and community structures remain central to child development, such partnerships can enhance cultural relevance and increase the likelihood of successful intervention.

Given the dynamic nature of cultural and psychosocial challenges, pre-service preparation alone is insufficient. Continuous professional development is necessary to sustain and deepen teachers' competencies in culturally responsive counselling. Workshops, peer coaching, communities of practice, and online learning platforms can provide opportunities for teachers to update their knowledge, share experiences, and refine intervention strategies. Ongoing support is especially important because working with trauma-affected learners may expose teachers to secondary traumatic stress and emotional exhaustion. Training programmes should therefore include self-care, emotional regulation, and resilience-building strategies to safeguard teacher well-being and professional effectiveness (Hydon et al., 2015).

Taken together, these strategies suggest that culturally responsive counselling should be conceptualized as a core component of teacher professionalism rather than an optional specialization. Integrating trauma literacy, cultural competence, counselling skills, reflective practice, experiential learning, collaborative engagement, and continuous professional development into teacher preparation will better equip Nigerian educators to meet the needs of students affected by ACEs. Such preparation has the potential to transform classrooms into

psychologically safe and culturally affirming spaces where adversity is met with understanding, and where all learners are supported to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Policy and Practice Implications

The integration of culturally responsive counselling into teacher preparation has far-reaching implications for educational policy and professional practice in Nigeria. If the educational system is to respond effectively to the developmental and academic consequences of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), policy frameworks must move beyond narrow conceptions of teacher competence that prioritize subject mastery alone. Teachers should be prepared as whole-child educators who understand the interplay between trauma, culture, and learning, and who possess the relational and counselling competencies needed to support students from diverse backgrounds. Embedding these competencies within national teacher education and school improvement policies would represent a significant step toward a more equitable, inclusive, and psychologically responsive educational system.

At the policy level, there is a compelling need to revise national standards for teacher education to explicitly incorporate competencies in trauma-informed and culturally responsive practice. Regulatory bodies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), and Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) play a strategic role in shaping programme accreditation requirements and professional standards. These agencies should require teacher education institutions to include structured coursework on ACEs, child mental health, multicultural counselling, social-emotional learning, and trauma-informed pedagogy. Such content should not be treated as peripheral but as essential knowledge for all teachers, particularly in a country where many children are exposed to poverty, family disruption, violence, displacement, and other forms of adversity. Aligning these areas with accreditation and licensure requirements would institutionalize a preventive and developmental approach to educational practice.

Policy reform should also extend to curriculum design and practicum requirements within faculties of education and colleges of education. Pre-service teachers should be assessed not only on lesson planning and instructional delivery but also on their capacity to create emotionally safe classrooms, build culturally respectful relationships, and respond appropriately to students experiencing distress. Teaching practice supervision instruments can be revised to include indicators such as empathy, inclusive classroom management, culturally sensitive communication, and effective referral decision-making. This would send a clear message that supporting students' psychosocial well-being is an integral aspect of professional competence rather than an optional addition to teaching.

At the institutional level, teacher education providers should establish interdisciplinary partnerships between departments of education, psychology, and guidance and counselling. Such collaboration would enrich programme content and ensure that teacher candidates receive a coherent preparation that integrates developmental science, counselling theory, and classroom application. Universities and colleges may also develop simulation laboratories, case repositories, and practicum experiences that expose trainees to realistic scenarios involving children affected by ACEs in culturally diverse contexts. These innovations would bridge the persistent gap between theory and practice and better prepare teachers for the complex realities of Nigerian classrooms.

The implications for school practice are equally significant. Schools need clear policies and procedures for recognizing and responding to students whose behaviour or academic

difficulties may be linked to adversity. These policies should articulate referral pathways, confidentiality safeguards, documentation procedures, and collaborative roles for teachers, counsellors, administrators, and families. Where possible, every school should maintain a functional counselling unit staffed by qualified professionals who can provide direct support and consultation to teachers. In settings where specialist personnel are limited, school systems can designate trained focal persons and establish referral relationships with community-based mental health and child protection services.

Classroom practice should reflect a shift from punitive disciplinary traditions toward restorative and supportive approaches. Many behaviours that are commonly interpreted as insubordination, laziness, or lack of interest may in fact be adaptive responses to chronic stress. Teachers trained in culturally responsive counselling are more likely to ask what a child may be experiencing rather than what rule has been broken. This perspective encourages the use of strategies such as predictable routines, relational check-ins, positive behaviour supports, de-escalation techniques, and opportunities for student voice and choice. These practices are not only beneficial for trauma-affected learners but also contribute to healthier and more inclusive learning environments for all students.

The successful implementation of these reforms depends on sustained professional development. Ministries of education, school proprietors, and professional associations should provide in-service training on trauma-informed education and culturally responsive counselling. Such training should be ongoing rather than one-off, allowing teachers to deepen their understanding, share experiences, and receive coaching on practical challenges. Professional learning communities can further strengthen implementation by fostering peer support and collaborative problem-solving. Given the emotional demands of working with vulnerable students, professional development should also address teacher well-being, self-care, and strategies for preventing burnout and secondary traumatic stress.

Policy attention must also be given to monitoring and evaluation. To ensure accountability and guide continuous improvement, educational authorities should develop indicators for assessing the extent to which teacher education programmes and schools are implementing culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices. Relevant indicators may include teacher knowledge and attitudes, classroom climate, referral rates, student attendance, behavioural incidents, and measures of academic engagement. Robust evaluation systems will generate local evidence to inform policy refinement and resource allocation, and will strengthen the case for scaling effective interventions.

The broader implication of integrating culturally responsive counselling into teacher preparation is its potential to advance educational equity. Children who have experienced adversity are often among the most marginalized in school systems, and cultural misunderstandings can further compound their exclusion. By preparing teachers to recognize strengths, honour cultural identities, and respond compassionately to behavioural and emotional difficulties, the education system can reduce barriers to participation and achievement. This aligns with national and global commitments to inclusive, quality education and affirms the role of schools as protective environments that foster resilience, belonging, and holistic development.

In practical terms, the policy agenda emerging from this position paper calls for a coordinated, multisectoral response. Teacher education institutions must redesign curricula; regulatory agencies must revise standards; schools must strengthen counselling and referral

systems; and governments must invest in capacity building and supportive infrastructure. When these efforts are pursued systematically, culturally responsive counselling can become a transformative force in Nigerian education, equipping teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners and enabling children affected by ACEs to experience school as a place of safety, affirmation, and opportunity.

Future Directions and Conclusion

Further research is needed to estimate the prevalence and patterns of ACEs among Nigerian school-aged children, to explore regional and cultural variations in their presentation, and to examine how these experiences interact with gender, disability, socioeconomic status, and displacement. Such studies would strengthen the evidence base required for designing interventions that are both scientifically sound and culturally relevant. There is also a need for intervention research evaluating the effectiveness of culturally responsive counselling within teacher education and school settings. Experimental, quasi-experimental, and longitudinal studies could assess whether pre-service and in-service training improves teachers' trauma literacy, cultural competence, counselling self-efficacy, and classroom practices. At the student level, outcomes of interest include emotional regulation, school attendance, behaviour, academic engagement, and achievement. Qualitative investigations may further illuminate how teachers, students, and families perceive these interventions and what contextual factors facilitate or hinder implementation.

Curriculum innovation represents another important direction. Faculties and colleges responsible for teacher education should collaborate with experts in counselling, psychology, and child development to design structured modules on ACEs, trauma-informed pedagogy, and culturally responsive counselling. These modules should be accompanied by locally relevant teaching resources, case studies, and practicum tools. Future work may include the development and validation of competency frameworks and assessment instruments to measure teacher readiness in this area. Establishing such tools would support programme accreditation, quality assurance, and comparative research across institutions. Policy-oriented research is equally necessary. Studies examining the extent to which current standards of the National Universities Commission, National Commission for Colleges of Education, and Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria address trauma and cultural responsiveness could provide an empirical basis for policy revision. Economic analyses exploring the costs and benefits of integrating psychosocial support into teacher preparation and school systems would further strengthen advocacy efforts.

Future practice should also prioritize stronger partnerships among schools, families, communities, and child-serving agencies. Community-based participatory approaches can help ensure that interventions reflect local beliefs, languages, and priorities while fostering trust and sustainability. In areas affected by conflict or displacement, collaboration with humanitarian and mental health organizations may provide additional expertise and resources. Digital technologies, including online professional development and mobile-based psychosocial tools, offer promising avenues for extending support to teachers in remote and underserved settings.

Attention to teacher well-being must remain central to future initiatives. Supporting students with complex trauma histories can be emotionally demanding, particularly in contexts where teachers face overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and their own stressors. Future programmes should therefore incorporate supervision, peer support, and self-care strategies designed to reduce burnout and secondary traumatic stress. Strengthening teacher well-being

is not only an ethical imperative but also a prerequisite for sustaining compassionate and effective practice.

In conclusion, culturally responsive counselling in teacher preparation represents a transformative and contextually relevant strategy for addressing ACEs in Nigeria's diverse classrooms. Integrating trauma literacy, cultural competence, counselling skills, and trauma-informed pedagogy into teacher education, Nigeria can prepare educators who are better equipped to recognize the hidden effects of adversity and to respond in ways that affirm students' identities and promote resilience. Such preparation has the potential to improve classroom climate, strengthen teacher–student relationships, and enhance both psychosocial and academic outcomes for vulnerable learners.

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