# The Counselor Multicultural Competence: An Exploration Study of Counselor Competence in the Counseling Process

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Abstract. Many changes in the education system affect the professionality level practiced by counselors. Cultural diversity and acculturation pushed a counselor to be more professional in counseling multicultural skills. This research aims to discover a counselor's skill in multicultural competence that consist of foundation dimension, multicultural dimension, and multicultural counseling. This competency is important and needed in Indonesia as a country with more heterogeny in social, culture, and religion. The research method was used as descriptive quantitative research through the Counselor's Multicultural Competence Scale (CMCS) that was distributed to 100 school counselors in Padang, Indonesia. The result shows that 60 school counselors have a low foundation dimension and multicultural dimension, 50 have low multicultural counseling, and 10 have high three dimensions. This research results recommend a new approach and model for educating and developing a counselor's skills in a multicultural approach to counseling.

Keywords: Counselor Competence, Counseling Practice, Multicultural Competence, School Counselor

## **INTRODUCTION**

The competence of an educator plays a crucial role in the realm of education, as it is an indispensable factor in fostering a nurturing and conducive learning environment (Alfaiz et al., 2019). One of the significant outcomes in the counseling process is the development of character, which is intricately linked to the quality of counseling services provided. However, a noteworthy challenge arises from the dynamic and multicultural nature of the counseling relationship, which stems from the convergence of diverse cultural backgrounds between counselors and their clients (Hastiani et al., 2020).

Indeed, cultural differences play a pivotal role in shaping the counseling experience and influencing the outcomes achieved through the process. It is vital for counselors to possess the necessary competencies to navigate these cultural differences effectively. As highlighted by Hogan's (2013) research findings, counselors need to possess a minimum of four skills in cultural competency to ensure that counseling is carried out accurately and yields the desired value essences. This not only requires a deep understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures but also the ability to adapt counseling approaches to meet the specific needs and expectations of clients from various cultural backgrounds.

In line with the aforementioned perspective, the educational realm also recognizes the significance of implementing a multicultural strategy to promote inclusive learning environments. Educators need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to embrace diversity and foster positive changes in students' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects (Constantine & Sue, 2005). By adopting a multicultural approach, educators can create an inclusive atmosphere that celebrates and respects the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of their students. This, in turn, enhances the overall educational experience and contributes to students' holistic development. Therefore, the cultivation of cultural competence among educators and counselors is essential for ensuring the effectiveness of both the educational and counseling processes. By developing these competencies, professionals in these fields can better address the challenges posed by cultural differences and provide a supportive environment that facilitates growth, understanding, and positive change for all individuals involved.

Multicultural competence assumes a paramount role not only in education but also in the practice of counseling itself. Even when individuals share the same culture and race, it remains essential to acknowledge and comprehend the nuances of diverse values. This recognition arises from the understanding that values are shaped within the context of society's smallest and most intimate cultural climate: the family. Within the family, both genetic and behavioral factors contribute to the transmission of specific values to the younger generation (Alfaiz et al., 2019a; Julius et al., 2022). Consequently, these personal values acquired through familial interactions play a significant role in defining individuals' cultural identities, even within the broader context of shared cultural and racial backgrounds (Alfaiz, Zulfikar, & Yulia, 2017; Alfaiz et al., 2019b).

For counselors, it becomes imperative to comprehend this unique cultural fabric as a manifestation of individuality within social dynamics. Embracing and effectively engaging with diverse cultures necessitates the acquisition of specific skills that contribute to the formation of human character. Hogan (2013) highlights four crucial cultural competency skills that are essential for counselors engaged in multicultural practice. These skills encompass a deep understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity, enabling counselors to navigate the complexities and intricacies of diverse cultural contexts with sensitivity and competence.

In the realm of education and society, various studies have explored the multifaceted aspects of multiculturalism, particularly emphasizing students' socio-cultural empathy (Julius et al., 2022). Such research endeavors shed light on the impact of multicultural factors on individuals, unveiling how the absence of a firm grasp on multicultural skills can lead to acculturation stress. To mitigate these challenges, counselors and educators must be equipped with the necessary competencies to foster understanding, respect, and empathy within diverse cultural settings. This is vital in addressing the pressures and conflicts that arise from acculturation processes. Furthermore, research by Padilla (cited in Hogan, 2013) delves into the realm of cultural uniqueness, highlighting the pivotal role it plays in shaping a positive social character and fostering a positive self-concept (Hastiani et al., 2020). By understanding and valuing the cultural distinctiveness of individuals, counselors can promote an inclusive and supportive environment that nurtures personal growth and development.

However, there is currently a scarcity of research that comprehensively explores the extent and nature of counselors' multicultural skills in the context of counseling practice. These skills encompass a multidimensional and multilevel understanding of cultural foundations, effective communication in multicultural settings, and the ability to adapt traditional counseling approaches to accommodate diverse cultural backgrounds. This research aims to address this gap by examining

counselors' skills in multicultural competence, which comprise dimensions of foundational understanding, multicultural awareness, and multicultural counseling techniques.

The primary objective of this research is to uncover valuable insights and paradigms related to the practical implementation of multicultural skills in counseling. It seeks to shed light on the significance of counselors' understanding and integration of cultural values, which can positively influence the character and behavior of their clients. The findings from this study will serve as a preliminary exploration, laying the groundwork for future research and the development of training materials that can enhance counselors' multicultural skills. By delving into the intricacies of multicultural competence and its implications for counseling practice, this research aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field. Ultimately, it strives to provide practical guidance and resources that will empower counselors to navigate multicultural dynamics effectively and facilitate positive therapeutic outcomes for diverse client populations.

## **METHOD**

This research employs a quantitative descriptive approach to delve into the perceptions and knowledge of high school counselors in the city of Padang regarding their counseling behaviors and skills. By adopting this approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and detailed description of the counselors' experiences and practices in the field. The utilization of an ex post facto design further contributes to the research's objective of uncovering factual information based on the actual responses and behaviors of the participating counselors.

The target population for this study comprises high school counselors across the entire city of Padang. However, due to practical considerations and the need for efficient data collection, a sample size of 100 counselors was selected. The selection process considered various factors, such as the counselors' proximity to educational institutions and their involvement in counseling activities. By focusing on counselors located in the central area of Padang, where educational institutions and the flow of information are concentrated, the research aims to tap into a rich pool of knowledge and expertise. Additionally, counselors in this area are more likely to be exposed to diverse cultural influences, given the urban setting, thus providing valuable insights into multicultural competence.

In this study, the researchers utilized the Counselor's Multicultural Competence Scale (CMCS) as the instrument to measure the counselors' multicultural competence. The validity of each item in the scale was tested, and it exhibited a reliability value of 0.890, with a significance level of <0.05. The CMCS instrument was developed by the research team, drawing inspiration from Mikel Hogan's (2013) theory while adapting it to the cultural context of Indonesia. It is important to note that no modifications were made to the CMCS; rather, it was developed purely based on Hogan's theory, with adaptations made to align with Indonesian culture.

The Counselor's Multicultural Competence Scale (CMCS) comprises three sub-variables: the foundation dimension, the multicultural dimension, and the multicultural counseling dimension. The foundation dimension includes aspects such as multicultural knowledge, experience of diversity, and familiarity with theories of cultural diversity. The multicultural dimension encompasses skills related to adapting to and communicating in socially diverse settings. Lastly, the multicultural counseling dimension focuses on the application of traditional counseling approaches and their conversion into a multicultural framework.

The data analysis in this research involved a descriptive data analysis process using the score classification norm based on the Sturgess criteria. The analysis included calculating the respondents' achievement scores by comparing them to an ideal score and a range of scores. This analysis aimed to assess the extent to which the respondents' scores accurately reflected their original conditions when responding to the CMCS instrument. By applying the Sturgess criteria, the researchers were able to classify and interpret the respondents' scores in a meaningful way. This approach provided insights into the counselors' levels of multicultural competence based on their achievement scores. It allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the counselors' proficiency in various dimensions of multicultural counseling.

## **FINDINGS**

# Understanding Culture as Multidimensional and Multilevel

A counselor's ability to comprehend and grasp culture, both universally and within specific contexts, is a vital aspect of their role as a helping professional (Jim & Pistrang, 2007). It requires sharpness and thoroughness, making it a profession that not everyone can undertake. The distribution of scores indicating the level of cultural understanding among 100 school counselors in the foundational dimension is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Counselor Understanding of Culture in Foundation Dimension					
	Classification	Score Range	Frequency		

Classification	Score Range	Frequency
Very High	≥ 126	10
High	102-125	20
Low	78-101	10
Very Low	≤77	60
Total		100

Table 1 reveals that there is a significant lack of information and knowledge among school counselors regarding cultural and multicultural values in the foundational dimension. Out of the 100 respondents, only ten school counselors demonstrated a high level of understanding and competence in this area, while 60 school counselors exhibited a deficient level of understanding in terms of their cultural foundation dimension.

# **Understanding Communication in Multicultural**

The multicultural dimension of competence assesses the counselor's understanding of the various aspects of multicultural communication that they need to comprehend and master (Dodson, 2013). The distribution of scores indicating the level of understanding of communication as the multicultural dimension among 100 school counselors is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The Counselor Understanding of Communication in Multicultural Dimension

Classification	Score Range	Frequency
Very High	≥ 126	20
High	102-125	10
Low	78-101	10
Very Low	≤77	60
Total		100

Table 2 reveals that there is still a significant lack of information and knowledge among school counselors regarding multicultural communication. Among the 100 respondents, only 20 school counselors demonstrate a high level of understanding and competence in this area, while 60 school counselors exhibit a deficient level of understanding and practice in multicultural counseling communication.

# Practicing Traditional and Modified Counseling with Culture

In the counseling profession, the process of practicing counseling techniques and adapting them to clients' cultural values is crucial. Modifying counseling approaches to suit the cultural context is also essential (Pedersen, et al., 2015). Table 3 presents the data on multicultural counseling practices.

Table 3. The Distribution of Counselors' Scores in Understanding Multicultural Counseling Dimension

Classification	Score Range	Frequency
Very High	≥ 126	30
High	102-125	10
Low	78-101	10
Very Low	≤77	50
Total		100

From Table 3, it is evident that school counselors still lack sufficient information and knowledge regarding multicultural counseling practices. Out of the 100 respondents, only 30 school counselors demonstrate a high level of understanding and competence in this dimension. However, 50 school counselors exhibit a deficient level of understanding and proficiency in practicing and modifying counseling techniques in the multicultural counseling dimension.

# **DISCUSSION**

# The Foundation Dimension of Counselors

The research findings highlight a pressing need for comprehensive attention and development to enhance school counselors' understanding of cultural and multicultural values. Failing to address this issue can have far-reaching consequences, potentially limiting the effectiveness of the counseling process and confining counselors to operating within a narrow cultural scope or homogeneous social contexts.

When individuals primarily interact within homogeneous environments, their understanding of the world beyond their own cultural boundaries tends to be limited. This lack of exposure can result in a decreased openness and tolerance towards diverse perspectives and experiences (Constantine & Sue, 2005). Conversely, individuals who are immersed in heterogeneous social communities, particularly those residing in multicultural urban areas, tend to exhibit greater levels of social empathy and cultural competence (Julius et al., 2022; Yandri et al., 2019).

The ability to comprehend and appreciate diverse cultures, as well as the willingness to engage with them in social interactions, plays a pivotal role in individuals' personal growth, competitiveness, and resilience (Hastiani, 2020; Alfaiz et al., 2019c). A strong foundation of cultural understanding and knowledge cultivates open-mindedness, critical thinking, and positive social

relations. However, the data findings indicate that counselors still face significant challenges in attaining a high level of multicultural competence, particularly in understanding cultural values and character traits, as well as recognizing and appreciating the differences between their own internal culture and the broader social community.

To address these challenges, it is imperative to provide comprehensive training programs that equip counselors with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate and engage with diverse cultural contexts. Encouraging counselors to actively interact with individuals from different backgrounds and facilitating opportunities for comparative social studies can further enhance their multicultural competence (Ponterotto, 2008; Yuzarion et al., 2018).

Emphasizing the importance of additional training and support cannot be overstated. By bridging the gap and enhancing counselors' cultural competence, they will be better prepared to effectively serve the needs of their diverse student populations, foster meaningful connections, and contribute to the creation of an inclusive and supportive educational environment. Such efforts will undoubtedly have a positive and lasting impact on both individual students and the broader school community.

## The Multicultural Dimension of Counselors

The research findings emphasize the urgent need for attention and development in enhancing school counselors' understanding of multicultural communication. It is crucial to provide additional training and support to address the existing gaps and improve counselors' competence in this dimension. By doing so, counselors will be better equipped to effectively communicate and engage with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, ultimately facilitating more culturally sensitive and inclusive counseling experiences.

According to Hogan (2013) and Garcia et al. (2013), the development of multicultural counseling communication involves understanding various aspects of culture or ethnicity, including family background, socio-cultural context, and both verbal and non-verbal language cues from the client's environment. This is important because the multicultural process encompasses four distinct stages: conformity, resistance, redefinition, and new identity.

At the conformity stage, clients are in the process of familiarizing themselves with and learning about cultures outside their own. They may attempt to adopt certain aspects of these cultures if they align with their personal preferences. As clients progress to the resistance stage, they may encounter conflicts between their values and the values of the cultures they are exploring. In response, they may defensively cling to their own culture, rejecting or even displaying cultural arrogance towards other cultures. This can create barriers to effective communication and understanding.

Counselors must be aware of these dynamics and be able to recognize clients who struggle with establishing good communication due to cultural arrogance or an inability to accept other cultures. The redefinition stage marks a critical turning point, where individuals begin to let go of cultural arrogance and embrace the reality that different cultures coexist and contribute to a collective society. During this stage, counselors play a crucial role in accepting clients as they are and providing professional assistance in navigating the challenges associated with cultural diversity. In the final stage, the new identity stage, counselors and clients have developed a new identity that integrates various cultural influences into a heterogeneous socio-cultural life, without compromising one's core identity. This stage represents a state of openness, understanding, and appreciation for diverse cultures.

Understanding these stages of the multicultural process allows counselors to better support clients as they navigate their own cultural journey. By fostering acceptance, promoting cultural humility, and providing guidance, counselors can help clients develop a more inclusive and culturally sensitive perspective. Ultimately, this facilitates effective communication, builds strong relationships, and promotes positive personal growth and well-being in a multicultural context (Hogan, 2013; Budiman, 2016).

The focus of counselors should be on understanding and navigating these stages, actively learning and adapting in order to practice effective multicultural counseling. However, the previous findings indicate that the application of multicultural counseling techniques within the students' socio-cultural environment is still not fully understood. This highlights the importance of enhancing counselors' understanding of multicultural communication and the socio-cultural context of their clients. By bridging this gap and developing multicultural competence in counseling, counselors can foster better relationships, understanding, and support for their diverse student populations. This will ultimately contribute to more effective and meaningful counseling outcomes in a multicultural educational setting.

# The Multicultural Counseling Dimension of Counselors

The practice of adapting Western counseling approaches to Eastern social cultures, particularly in the context of West Sumatra, is crucial for counselors to effectively engage with clients and meet their unique cultural needs. While Western counseling approaches may possess rationality and logic, they may not fully resonate with clients who prioritize their cultural values and personal beliefs. Therefore, it is essential for counselors to have the ability to modify and tailor their approaches to align with the cultural and spiritual contexts of their clients.

In West Sumatra, the tazkiyatun nafs counseling approach exemplifies the importance of integrating Eastern values, particularly Islamic principles, into the counseling process (Alfaiz, et al., 2019d). This approach allows clients to feel a deeper connection and engagement with counseling as it aligns with their religious and spiritual beliefs. By incorporating cultural elements and values into counseling, counselors can create a safe and supportive environment that acknowledges and respects the clients' cultural identities.

Furthermore, Western counseling approaches can be adapted to encompass spirituality, even though they may initially appear distant from it. For instance, the psychoanalytic approach, which traditionally focuses on rational drives, can be modified to include an understanding of spirituality and its influence on human behavior and well-being (Cameron, et al., 2019; Jackson, 2006; Malikiosi-Loizos, 2020). This integration allows counselors to address the spiritual dimensions that are significant in Eastern cultures and create a more comprehensive and culturally sensitive counseling experience.

By promoting the development of multicultural counseling competencies and encouraging the adaptation of counseling approaches, counselors can better serve the diverse needs of their clients. Training and support should be provided to equip counselors with the necessary knowledge, skills, and cultural awareness to navigate the complexities of multicultural counseling. This includes understanding cultural norms, beliefs, and practices, as well as effectively communicating and establishing rapport with clients from different cultural backgrounds.

In conclusion, the practice of multicultural counseling requires counselors to go beyond a one-size-fits-all approach and adapt their strategies to accommodate diverse cultural contexts. By incorporating cultural values, beliefs, and spirituality into counseling, counselors can foster a deeper

understanding, connection, and trust with their clients. This ultimately leads to more effective and meaningful therapeutic outcomes, promoting holistic well-being for individuals from various cultural backgrounds.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The findings of this research clearly indicate that there is a need for training and improvement in the multicultural competence of counselors. Various aspects influence this competence, highlighting the importance of adopting a new approach and model for educating and developing counselors' skills in multicultural counseling. In order to enhance multicultural competence and optimize the counseling process for clients in need, the development of a training module is crucial. This module should focus on improving counselors' understanding and ability to effectively engage with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. It is particularly important to address the challenges arising from a homogeneous environment, which can contribute to weaknesses in multicultural competence. These research findings serve as a foundation for future research in module development, aimed at ensuring that counseling services are tailored to meet the needs and values of clients from different cultures. By embracing a multicultural approach, counselors can provide more inclusive and effective counseling services that promote positive outcomes for clients.

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# **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION**

Author	Contribution
Alfaiz	As the author, provide a research idea, develop a CMCS
	Scale, interpret the analysis data, arrange an article, and
	submit and revise.
Augusto Da Costa	As an informant for updated information and reference in
	multicultural literature and as a proofreader in the english
	language of the article
Yuzarion	As an author to make an add-on about another literature and
	revise the Indonesian language before translating and
	proofreading
Andre Julius	Provide an administration in the field, such as respondents,
	and another formality, such as permission to conduct
	research.
Hengki Yandri	Provide an administration in the field, such as respondents,
	and another formality, such as permission to conduct
	research.
Azmatul Khairiyah Sari	Provide an administration in the field, such as respondents,
	and another formality, such as permission to conduct
	research.
Ryan Hidayat Rafiola	As an author to make an add-on about another literature and
	revise the Indonesian language before translating and
	proofreading