



Sundanese Local Wisdom 'Ngajen ka Batur' Values and Their Relevance in Multicultural Counseling: Concepts and Implications

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ABSTRACT

This study was motivated by the importance of understanding local cultural values in the multicultural counseling process. This study aims to explore the responses of Cikondang Traditional Village residents to advice given by outsiders and to explore the local cultural values that play a role in this process. The research method was qualitative, with data collection techniques in semi-structured interviews and participatory observation of traditional leaders and residents. The study results show that the residents of Kampung Adat Cikondang are open and receptive to advice and input from outsiders. They demonstrate values such as congruency, empathy, and unconditional positive regard. However, the implementation of the advice given depends on the decision of the local traditional leaders. The conclusion reveals that cultural compatibility between counselors and clients, based on local wisdom, can increase the effectiveness of counseling in indigenous communities. This study contributes to developing multicultural counseling theory and practice based on local culture in Indonesia.

KATA KUNCI

Nilai-nilai Kearifan
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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh pentingnya pemahaman nilai-nilai budaya lokal dalam proses konseling multikultural. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi respons warga Kampung Adat Cikondang terhadap saran yang diberikan oleh orang luar, serta menggali nilai-nilai budaya lokal yang berperan dalam proses tersebut. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif deskriptif, dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa wawancara semi-terstruktur dan observasi partisipatif terhadap tokoh adat dan warga setempat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa warga Kampung Adat Cikondang terbuka dan menerima dengan baik saran serta masukan dari orang luar. Mereka menunjukkan nilai-nilai seperti keselarasan diri (congruency), empati (empathy), dan penerimaan tanpa syarat (unconditional positive regard). Namun, pelaksanaan saran yang diberikan bergantung pada keputusan tokoh adat setempat. Kesimpulan menungkap bahwa kesesuaian budaya antara konselor dan klien, yang berbasis pada kearifan lokal, dapat meningkatkan efektivitas konseling dalam komunitas adat. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan teori dan praktik konseling multikultural berbasis budaya lokal di Indonesia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known as an archipelagic country with a high level of cultural diversity. The vastness of Indonesia's territory, consisting of thousands of islands from west to east, makes this country geographically rich, which creates social and cultural diversity among its people (Parapat et al., 2024). Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency, there are more than 1,300 ethnic groups living in Indonesia, each with its own cultural heritage, language, and values (BPS, 2020). This diversity is the identity and strength of the Indonesian nation because each

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ethnic group has a unique way of interpreting life, establishing social relationships, and maintaining harmony with other individuals and the environment. These values are reflected not only in cultural symbols such as traditional clothing or ceremonies but also in the community's mindset and philosophy of life. One of the cultures in Indonesia and is still preserved today is the Sundanese culture, which has a unique philosophy, namely "*ngajen ka batur*", which originated in the traditional village of Cikondang, West Java.

The philosophy of "*ngajen ka batur*" is generally an attitude of appreciating and respecting others. Philosophically, "*ngajen ka batur*" is not just ordinary politeness, but also involves the values of empathy, tolerance, and maintaining the dignity of others. In other words, "*ngajen ka batur*" means respecting or honouring others. This concept is closely related to Sundanese cultural principles such as *silih asih*, *silih asah*, and *silih asuh*, which emphasise loving, reminding, and guiding one another (Ma'mur, 2017). In Sundanese culture, "*ngajen ka batur*" is an important foundation for creating harmonious relationships between individuals and groups (Siregar, 2020). The philosophy of "*ngajen ka batur*" is related to various aspects of the Sundanese way of life, such as manners and speech, politeness, and respect for elders. These values reflect a mutual attitude of empathy in social interactions. Through the "*ngajen ka batur* philosophy," the Sundanese people can create an atmosphere of mutual respect and support effective communication (Sutisna, 2021).

Multicultural counseling is an approach in counseling practice that strongly emphasizes sensitivity to cultural diversity, values, language, and social identity of both the counselor and the client. Hence, the intervention is more relevant and effective (Yusuf, 2016). Another definition states that multicultural counseling is an approach that places racial, ethnic, and cultural differences as crucial elements in counseling practice, so that counselors need to develop cultural awareness and reflect on their own biases to increase the relevance of interventions (Hotifah & Hamidah, 2019). From the two definitions above, multicultural counseling is a counseling approach that places cultural diversity, values, language, and social identity as important aspects in the assistance process. This approach requires counselors to have cultural sensitivity and awareness, including reflection on self-bias, so that the services provided are relevant to the client's background.

Based on the definition of the *ngajen ka batur* philosophy and multicultural counseling itself, multicultural counseling based on the "*ngajen ka batur*" philosophy aligns with the principles of Carl Rogers' humanistic theory. Rogers emphasizes the importance of authenticity (congruency), empathy, and unconditional positive regard in the counseling relationship. Rogers' view states that every individual has value and potential, so they must be treated unconditionally with respect (Rogers, 1961). In counseling, the "*ngajén ka batur*" philosophy is beneficial for counselor-client meetings in Sundanese culture (Nuraisyah & Yuliawati, 2020). When counselors apply this value, the counseling relationship becomes more open, warm, and safe for clients to express themselves. On the other hand, the counselee also feels valued, accepted, and not judged, so the counseling process runs more effectively.

Several previous studies in Indonesia have discussed local values, but not many have specifically raised the value of "*ngajen ka batur*" as the primary focus. Even in a literature search, no research has been found that specifically examines the value of "*ngajen ka batur*" in the context of traditional villages or Sundanese culture in depth, especially in the indigenous community of Cikondang in West Java. In fact, the Cikondang community is known to uphold the value of "*ngajen ka batur*" in their daily lives as part of their ancestral heritage and philosophy of life. Based on this, this study will specifically examine the value of *ngajén ka batur* in the indigenous community of Cikondang in West Java. This study is important because no previous research specifically explores this value in the context of local wisdom and its relationship with the humanistic approach in counseling.

This study aims to explore and examine in depth the value of "*ngajen ka batur*" and its relevance to multicultural counseling in guidance and counseling based on local Indonesian cultural values. This study will focus on examining the philosophy of "*ngajen ka batur*" as it relates to Carl Rogers' theory of the three characteristics of the counselor-client relationship: congruency, empathy, and unconditional positive regard.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-qualitative design, which is a technique that describes and interprets the meaning of the collected data by paying attention to and recording as many aspects of the situation being studied at that time as possible, to obtain a general and comprehensive picture of the actual situation (Kriyantono, 2006). This approach was chosen because it is suitable for exploring socio-cultural phenomena locally, particularly in examining the cultural compatibility between counselors and counsees in indigenous communities. An exploratory case study design is relevant in understanding the dynamics of the relationship between

indigenous leaders and visitors, the social interactions during field visits, and the cultural values that form the basis for accepting or rejecting outside influences. In the context of this study, a descriptive-qualitative design can help interpret the response to the presence of outsiders or external parties as symbols of counselors from different cultural backgrounds, with indigenous communities as symbols of counselees.

2.2 Research Subjects

The research location was in the traditional village of Cikondang at Jl. Cikondang No.1, Lamajang Village, Pangalengan District, Bandung Regency, West Java 40378. Cikondang Traditional Village was chosen because this community is one of the traditional villages in Bandung Regency that still upholds Sundanese cultural values in everyday life and shows openness to outsiders, making it relevant for describing the dynamics of cultural compatibility between counselors and counselees.

The research subjects or participants selected based on these criteria included Mr. W (community leader), a group of women (Mrs. N, Mrs. Id, Mrs. E, Mrs. R, and Mrs. Ii), the neighbourhood association chairwoman, and the prominent traditional leader, Abah A. The participants were selected because of their active involvement in preserving customs and direct experience interacting with outsiders.

2.3 Data Collection

Data collection for this study was conducted entirely on Wednesday, May 21, 2025, regarding interview guidelines and observation guidelines that had been prepared before the fieldwork. The main techniques used were semi-structured interviews and participatory observation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted regarding a set of questions prepared in advance. The interview process was carried out in turn with the primary informants who had been determined based on the purposive sampling technique, starting with Mr. W (community leader), followed by a group of women from the community (Mrs. N, Mrs. Id, Mrs. E, Mrs. R, and Mrs. Ii), then the head of the neighborhood association, and finally the prominent traditional leader, Abah A.

During the interview process, the researcher recorded the interviews to document the answers and observe non-verbal cues and social dynamics that arose during the interaction. Specifically, during the interview with Abah A, in addition to asking questions, the researcher was also invited to visit sacred areas such as traditional houses, ancestral burial grounds, and forbidden forests. In addition, the researcher also conducted observations based on observation guidelines that had been designed beforehand. Observations were made by observing the social environment, cultural expressions, interaction between residents and immigrant groups, and nuances of acceptance or caution in intercultural communication. During these visits, researchers continued to follow local customs and manners as a form of respect for local cultural values, while still recording visible cultural phenomena for observation data purposes.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was conducted manually using a descriptive-qualitative approach. After the entire interview process, the researchers transcribed the recorded data verbatim to preserve the integrity of the meaning and context of the informants' statements. Next, the researchers identified and grouped the main themes that emerged from the interview data, especially those related to patterns of cultural interaction, community attitudes toward outsiders, and symbolic meanings that reflect the principle of cultural compatibility between counselors and counselees. Data from the observations were also analysed regarding the observation guidelines prepared in advance.

The researcher observed cultural expressions recorded in social behaviour, nonverbal attitudes, communication practices, and traditional symbols that emerged during field visits. Although the analysis was not conducted using special coding software, the researcher still applied a systematic and reflective process by referring to the thematic analysis procedure from Braun & Clarke (2006).

The findings were interpreted based on the counselor-client cultural fit theory framework (Sue & Sue, 2008; Ridley & Kelly, 2007) so that the analysis retained its depth of meaning and theoretical relevance. As part of a qualitative approach that prioritises richness of meaning, the analysis was also reinforced with direct (verbatim) quotations from informants' statements to show an authentic representation of indigenous peoples' views. The analysis process was conducted reflectively and contextually so that the resulting interpretations remained consistent with local values and the real experiences of the participants.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

a) Village Profile

The traditional village of Cikondang is located in Lamajang Village, Pangalengan Subdistrict, Bandung Regency, West Java. This village is one of the Sundanese traditional communities that still preserves its ancestors' cultural values and traditions from generation to generation. There are two meanings behind the name "*Cikondang*" itself. Strategically, the name "*Cikondang*" comes from the word "*Ci*," which means water, and "*Kondang*," which refers to the kondang tree, indicating the presence of water sources and kondang trees in the area. The name "*Cikondang*" means "*Cik*," which means *ngancik* (in Indonesian, it means to reside or live), and "*Kondang*," which means *kasohor* (in Indonesian, it means famous). The meaning is that there is a famous person who lives in Cikondang. In the past, there were about 40 traditional houses in this village. However, a significant fire in 1942 destroyed most traditional houses, leaving only one house belonging to Mr. Anom Samsa, now the main house and centre of traditional activities. As a traditional leader, Mr. Anom plays an important role in preserving traditions and is a central figure in decision-making. The people of Cikondang Traditional Village live in a social order governed by traditional values and unwritten laws inherited from their ancestors. One form of preservation can be seen in the rules for building houses, where people are prohibited from building houses with walls and are not allowed to sleep facing south. In addition, traditional ceremonies such as *hajat bumi* and harvest traditions are still routinely held as a form of gratitude and respect for nature and the Creator.

Apart from preservation in the form of buildings and traditional ceremonies, the local community also preserves the philosophy of "*ngajen ka batur*", which means mutual respect and honour among fellow villagers in the traditional village of Cikondang, West Java. This philosophy is not only a form of respect for others, but also a habit of communicating politely, ethically, and understandingly (Situngkir & Prasetyo, 2015). In the traditional village of Cikondang, the value of "*ngajen ka batur*" has become a daily principle of life that governs the entire community. Not only that, the application of the philosophy of "*ngajen ka batur*" can also be seen in how the indigenous community responds to input from outside parties. The community there has a principle of remaining open to suggestions or input, while still maintaining cultural values and the feelings of others. If the suggestion is in line with traditional values and is approved by traditional leaders, then the suggestion will be implemented for the common good. However, the advice is not in accordance with traditional principles. In that case, the community will subtly convey their rejection without offending the party's feelings that provided the input (Yulianti, 2015). Residents prioritise respect in accepting outside input and politely reject it if it does not conform to traditional values. This shows that traditional values are maintained with wisdom in communication between individuals (Rohmatuloh et al., 2023).

According to Carl Rogers, the researchers focused on examining the three characteristics of the counselor-counselee relationship. These three characteristics include congruency, empathy, and unconditional positive regard.

b) Self-congruence (*Congruence*)

"There is a culture from the city or whatever my father sometimes restricts and does not mix with and maintain. Now they can hold cell phones and ride motorcycles, but in the past they were not allowed to." (Informant W). In this statement, the informant describes the community's efforts to preserve local cultural values so that outside cultures do not influence them. When cultures from other cities or regions enter their area, traditional leaders restrict them so they do not freely mix with existing traditions. In the past, using cameras or cell phones to take pictures was considered inappropriate and prohibited, but as times changed, these rules began to be relaxed, so people are now allowed to use cell phones and take pictures. This reflects the dynamics of a culture that strives to maintain its local identity while adapting to modern technological developments. The change in policy regarding the use of cell phones is a clear example of this adaptation process. In the past, people were prohibited from using cell phones to take pictures because it violated traditional rules. However, these rules have now been relaxed in line with the increasing need for documentation and the changing times.

"Yes, it is essential, but if you want to come here, you have to learn about the customs and culture and other things, so that they are preserved, and you will be respected. However, if you do the opposite, you will be gently rejected so as not to hurt them." (Informant, neighbourhood association leader). The informant's statement explains the importance of understanding and respecting local customs and culture when interacting with the local community. The informant emphasised that anyone who comes to the area needs to learn the rules, traditions, and cultural values so that their presence is accepted and does not cause conflict. Preserving customs is considered very

important because they contain noble values that can be passed on and spread to the next generation and outsiders. However, when new elements are considered contrary to local customs and culture, they are rejected subtly so as not to cause offence or social conflict.

"It is necessary, so usually when we want to give advice, we do not say it directly, but we filter it first with the elders." (Informant N). This statement explains that any input or advice submitted is not immediately accepted, but goes through a process of filtering and joint consideration by the leaders or elders in the community. This shows that decisions are not made individually but collectively, with priority given to the views of elders or community leaders considered more experienced.

"If the suggestion leads to a change in customs, it cannot be accepted, because the customs here have been passed down from generation to generation." (Informant R). This statement shows the community's firm attitude in preserving customs passed down from generation to generation. Suggestions or input to change customs are considered unacceptable because customs are seen as a collective identity with sacred value and binding social life. Customs are not merely practical habits, but a legacy from ancestors that must be preserved. Therefore, even though the community is open to new ideas or concepts, when these have the potential to change the essence of customs, they will automatically be rejected, but in a polite manner.

c) Empathy

"If anyone does not know, just accept it first and then ask your father... accept it first, consider it and discuss it first." (Informant A). This statement reflects an open and empathetic attitude towards differences in understanding or new information. By first accepting something that is not yet understood, people do not rush to reject or judge, but instead try to put themselves in the other person's situation and respect different perspectives. This attitude aligns with the value of empathy, which is listening, understanding, and feeling another person's point of view before making a judgment. The process of weighing and further discussion shows that empathy is not only a matter of feelings, but also involves healthy communication skills and appreciation for the process of thinking together to achieve a deeper understanding.

"On average, the mothers here welcome and accept anyone who wants to give. Those who want to learn are welcome to learn. But if the advice leads to a change in customs, then it is not possible." (Informant I). This statement illustrates the community's openness, especially the mothers, in accepting assistance or learning as long as it does not conflict with their customs. From the perspective of empathy, this shows a balance between openness to others and respect for one's cultural identity. Empathy is reflected here when outsiders who come to provide input understand that the community continues to uphold traditional values as an important part of their identity. That way, outsiders who want to interact need to listen and understand their needs and respect the boundaries set by traditional values. This empathetic attitude helps create harmonious relationships because interactions are based on mutual understanding, without imposing changes that could offend or destroy existing traditions.

"It is important to be receptive to knowledge as long as it does not contradict our beliefs, but if it does, we must reject it politely... so we must be able to express our rejection appropriately." (Informant R). The informant's statement emphasises the importance of openness to receiving knowledge from others during socialisation, as long as the knowledge or information received does not conflict with one's values, principles, or beliefs. However, if the information conflicts, rejection should be done subtly and respectfully. This is closely related to the value of empathy, which is the ability to understand the feelings, perspectives, and conditions of others. With empathy, a person not only focuses on rejecting the message's content but also considers the feelings of the person conveying it. This attitude reflects respect for others, maintains social harmony, and avoids unnecessary conflicts, so communication remains mutually constructive.

3. Unconditional Positive Regard

The third finding shows the openness of the Cikondang Traditional Village community in responding to suggestions and input from outside parties. This attitude is not necessarily manifested in unlimited acceptance, but rather through a process of filtering and consideration based on the values of the village. This openness is based on the community's orientation to accept any ideas that are considered beneficial while maintaining harmony with the prevailing customary norms.

"We are definitely open. If there is advice from outsiders, we accept it if it is positive and aimed at progress." (Informant N).

Informant N's statement describes unconditional acceptance of others, without any negative judgment when outsiders arrive. In this statement, the Cikondang Traditional Village community shows openness to dialogue with outsiders and continues to provide honest explanations. The phrase "if it promotes progress, it will definitely be

accepted" indicates that the community's acceptance of outsiders is not limited by their social or cultural background or status, but rather by the essence of their intentions and the benefits they offer. The community is willing to be open to interventions or suggestions that are considered to bring progress, without judging them first. Even suggestions that are not entirely appropriate will still be heard and processed wisely, as stated by Informant A:

"We will listen to such suggestions. However, we will discuss them first with our elders and leaders here... However, the suggestions will not be rejected outright."

Informant A's statement shows that the advice given will be filtered and considered fairly and wisely, not because of rejection, but as a form of respect for the values of the indigenous community. The phrase "the advice is not rejected outright" shows that the local community's assessment of outsiders is not based on assumptions, but on a process of acceptance and consideration rooted in respect and social responsibility. In other words, the community does not intend to sever ties or belittle the intentions of outsiders, even though the advice given may not be accepted definitively.

3.2. Discussion

The cultural value of *"ngajen ka batur"*, which is still maintained in the traditional village of Cikondang, shows that every social interaction must consider the local cultural structure to be accepted and have an optimal impact. Thus, a deep understanding of local cultural values is fundamental for counselors who want to build meaningful relationships with clients from traditional backgrounds. Counselors' efforts to build meaningful therapeutic relationships with their clients are called the counselor-client cultural fit approach in multicultural guidance and counseling. Sue & Sue (2008) define the counselor-client cultural fit approach as an approach in counseling that emphasizes the importance of counselors being aware of their own cultural identity, understanding the diversity of their clients' worldviews, and being able to adjust the counseling process sensitively and responsively to their clients' cultural backgrounds.

In line with this understanding, Ridley & Kelly (2007) state that counselor-client cultural fit is the counselor's ability to adapt to reflect, understand, and accommodate the client's worldview. Furthermore, Daulay et al. (2022) define counselor-client cultural compatibility as the alignment of values, norms, and communication patterns that directly influence the effectiveness and depth of the built therapeutic relationship. The counselor-client cultural fit approach emphasizes the importance of counselors having cultural self-awareness, understanding the client's worldview, and being able to adapt the counseling process to the client's cultural background. Carl Rogers argues that three main characteristics must be possessed by someone involved in a counselor-client relationship (Sapira, 2023). These three characteristics have also been widely discussed and reinforced by other experts in studies on the qualities of counselors. The three characteristics include congruence, empathy, and unconditional positive regard.

a) Congruence (Self-Harmony)

Counselors must maintain integrity without increasing sensitivity to cultural differences (Sanyata, 2006). Viewing the client's problems from various cultural perspectives is a crucial skill. Counselors must be open to cultural differences and accommodate values, norms, and beliefs that may differ between individuals. Thus, counselors do not only adapt to one culture, but can integrate and respect cultural variations in their counseling approach. This will enrich the counselor's understanding of the client, create an inclusive environment, and help counselors provide more effective and culturally relevant services.

"There is a culture from the city or whatever, sometimes my father restricts and does not mix and maintain it. Now they have cell phones and can ride motorcycles, but in the past, it was not allowed." (Informant W)

"Yes, it is essential, but if we want to come here, we must learn about customs, culture, and other things, so that they are preserved, and we will spread the knowledge to others... However, if it is contradictory, it is rejected politely, not to hurt them." (Informant Mrs. RT).

The above interview results indicate that the community respects local cultural values and expects outsiders (including counselors) to understand local customs well before interacting or providing input.

This is evident from Informant A's statement, which emphasizes the importance of learning about the culture to avoid misunderstandings and mentions the subtle rejection of suggestions that contradict traditional values to protect outsiders' feelings. This statement shows a culturally sensitive communication strategy, a tangible form of a counselor's *congruence*. To achieve this, counselors must have insight and understanding of cultural diversity (Setyaputri, 2024). Research shows that counselors with a broad understanding and knowledge of their clients' culture can conduct cross-cultural counseling more effectively (Putri, 2023). Counselors who respect and honor

their clients' cultural values succeed in building better relationships and increasing their clients' trust during counseling sessions.

"It is necessary, so usually when you want to give advice, you do not say it directly, but you filter it first through the fathers and mothers." (Informant N)

Based on the interview results, informant N said that community leaders usually filter all forms of outside advice before it is widely accepted.

These results show that in local culture, social authorities such as traditional leaders or parents are important mediators and guardians of values. Informants R and A made similar statements, highlighting how the community tends to preserve traditions passed down from generation to generation and limit the influence of outside cultures so that they do not interfere with inherited values. This study aligns with research findings showing that decision-making in dispute resolution in the Urug customary law community involves the customary chief as a neutral mediator in the mediation process after deliberations fail to produce an agreement (Dirkareshza et al., 2024). Customs abroad in one study show that in Inuit communities, important decisions are usually made through discussion and seeking mutual agreement or consensus (Ferrazi et al., 2019). This process strongly emphasizes the importance of consulting with elders so that the decisions made are wise and accepted by all community members.

The results of this analysis emphasize the importance of congruence between counselors and clients, particularly in understanding how communities make decisions and process outside advice. In communities that uphold the role of traditional leaders and traditional values, clients tend to be more open and feel understood when counselors align their attitudes, values, and approaches with the cultural reality in which they live. The counseling relationship will be more effective when counselors can demonstrate authenticity and congruence between their thoughts, feelings, and actions, especially by respecting the existing social structure.

"If the advice leads to a change in customs, it will not work, because the customs here have been passed down from generation to generation." (Informant R)

This finding is reinforced by the observations, in which Observer Post 1 noted that residents were open to visits from outsiders, but only as long as the purpose of the visit did not conflict with or attempt to change their customs. This means this openness is conditional and accompanied by collectively maintained value boundaries. In addition, Observer Post 4 noted that community leaders, such as the neighbourhood association chairwoman, had an open attitude and could explain diverse points of view while maintaining a friendly and inclusive attitude. This reflects that the community can accept differences if the communication process is sensitive to the existing cultural context.

Overall, these results show that in multicultural counseling, the application of congruence is not only a matter of the counselor's authenticity, but also the skill to adapt to and respect local social and cultural structures. Counselors need to position themselves appropriately within the social order, build trust-based relationships, and deliver interventions with consideration for traditional authority and local wisdom.

b) Empathy

Counselors need to empathise and form a mental picture of the emotional experiences of their clients. Not only that, counselors must also be able to increase their sensitivity to these feelings to have a high tolerance level, namely by imagining a situation from the client's point of view (Mahdi, 2023). Rogers in Darmiyati (2003) states that *"appreciating the client's feelings as if experiencing them oneself, and understanding what the client says from their perspective, are the two main indicators of empathy."* Rogers also recognises empathy as a way of life or attitude crucial to therapeutic change (Clark, 2007). Clark states that counselors can feel and understand the conditions experienced by the client by exploring a deeper understanding of the problems faced by the client. This approach shows sympathy and actively involves the counselor in the client's perspective and experience. This helps build strong emotional bonds and increases understanding of the client's condition.

International Cultural Empathy (ICE) states that empathy is demonstrated by affective acceptance, where the counselor accepts the client's feelings and experiences without judgment, intellectual understanding, which is the effort to understand the values, norms, and cultural symbols that influence the client's behavior, as well as integrative skills that include the use of communication and counseling approaches that are sensitive to cultural differences (Pedersen et al., 2008). Informants R and A, who were interviewed, showed that the people of Cikondang Traditional Village have their own way of responding to outsiders. They do not immediately reject input, but prioritise input acceptance, with a process of receiving, filtering, and considering. This shows that the people of Cikondang Traditional Village have an empathetic attitude. This result is supported by the opinion that individuals with empathy are more able to accept differences, critically filter information, and consider diverse perspectives in social interactions (Lubis et al., 2024).

"If someone does not know, they accept it first and then ask their father... accept it first, weigh it up and discuss it first." (Informant A)

The response shown by informant A demonstrates a structured form of social-communal empathy in which the local community understands that newcomers may not yet be familiar with local values. Therefore, the local community does not immediately judge or reject suggestions but allows open discussion in a culturally sensitive manner. This is also explicitly conveyed by the community of mothers who say they will accept anyone who makes an effort to learn about the local culture. This aligns with the opinion that mutual empathy is demonstrated by the local community's attitude of not immediately judging newcomers negatively, but rather providing space to get to know each other and engage in open and respectful dialogue about cultural differences (Chen & Chen, 2024).

"On average, the mothers here welcome and accept anyone who wants to give. Those who want to learn are welcome to learn. But if the advice leads to a change in customs, then it cannot be accepted." (Informant I)

As stated by Informant I, not all advice can be accepted, especially if it refers to changes in customs. Suppose there is advice from outsiders that contradicts the local values of the newcomers. In that case, the local community will try to convey the advice to avoid offending outsiders subtly. As stated by Informant R:

"It is important to be receptive to knowledge as long as it does not contradict our beliefs, but if it does, we reject it politely... so we have to be careful in how we express our rejection." (Informant R)

This statement indicates that the community pays attention to the advice given and the process of communicating their rejection of the advice. This is reinforced by participatory observations conducted by researchers to understand nonverbal communication. Informant W leaned forward and smiled while answering interview questions. Leaning forward indicates humility, respect for the interlocutor, and interest in listening. In the Sundanese cultural context, this gesture also reflects an attitude of "someah" (friendly) and "ngajén ka batur" (respecting others). Meanwhile, in counseling, leaning forward indicates readiness to build an equal and non-intimidating two-way relationship.

Not only informant W, but the relaxed atmosphere at informant I also illustrates a sense of psychological security in interacting (no pressure), allowing for relaxed and honest communication. Although the women initially felt awkward, they became open and comfortable with the conversation. Meanwhile, the joking style interspersed by Mrs. RT in the discussion showed emotional flexibility and an effort to create closeness through humor. Despite language limitations, Mrs. RT was very friendly, which relaxed the atmosphere. In local culture, humour is a bridge that breaks the ice in formal situations and builds familiarity.

Non-verbally, the indigenous people of Cikondang are culturally aware of accepting "different" newcomers as long as they remain within the same value system. The empathy of the Cikondang community is demonstrated not only by how they listen to and understand newcomers but also by how they position themselves not to directly reject them but rather respond subtly and consider the context being discussed. In the context of counseling, nonverbal communication shows that empathy is demonstrated through words, body language, the atmosphere of the interaction, and emotional expressions that support the creation of a warm and mutually understanding therapeutic relationship.

This study is in line with research findings that show that empathy can strengthen social networks that support diversity and solidarity among citizens and maintain local harmony. This multicultural empathy is considered an important skill that supports the creation of social harmony amid diversity (Fahira et al., 2025). Other research results also show that multicultural empathy positively correlates with multicultural counseling competence. One of the determinants of multicultural counseling, namely multicultural empathy, becomes a signal to measure counselors' overall multicultural counseling ability (Budiman, 2016; Permadi et al., 2015).

c) Unconditional Positive Regard

Unconditional positive regard is a concept in counseling that emphasises unconditional acceptance and appreciation of the client, without negative judgment. In practice, counselors must accept clients in all circumstances without judgment, for example, not judging the economic condition of the client's family. This principle is practised in real life by the people of Kampung Adat Cikondang through their openness and unconditional acceptance of outsiders, as long as their intentions and goals are positive and constructive. This attitude is reflected in the statement of one informant:

"We are definitely open. If there is advice from outsiders, we accept it, as long as it is positive and the goal is to progress." (Informant N).

Informant N's statement describes unconditional acceptance of others, without negative judgment when outsiders arrive. In this statement, the Cikondang Traditional Village community shows openness to dialogue with outsiders and continues to provide honest explanations. The phrase "if it promotes progress, it will definitely be

accepted" indicates that the community's acceptance of outsiders is not limited by the social, cultural, or status background of the person giving the advice, but rather by the essence of the intention and benefits offered. The community is willing to be open to interventions or advice that are considered to bring progress, without judging them first. Even suggestions that are not entirely appropriate will still be heard and processed wisely, as stated by Informant A:

"We will listen to such suggestions. However, we will discuss them first with our elders and leaders here... However, the suggestions will not be rejected outright."

Informant A's statement shows that the advice given will be filtered and considered fairly and wisely, not because of rejection, but as a form of respect for the values of the indigenous community. The phrase "the advice is not rejected outright" shows that the local community's assessment of outsiders is not based on assumptions, but on a process of acceptance and consideration rooted in respect and social responsibility. In other words, the community does not intend to sever ties or belittle the intentions of outsiders, even though the advice given may not necessarily be accepted in the end.

Observations from the field reinforce this, as noted by Observer Post 1, that Informant A was very open; his answers were coherent and appropriate to the context. Informant A was friendly and very welcoming. Observer Post 3 also noted that the women were smiling, responding with jokes, and showing comfort in their interactions. Furthermore, the outsiders' background did not influence this friendly attitude, as was consistently noted at several observation posts. Upon further observation, the social atmosphere created by the local community was very supportive of the outsiders' presence. The community did not show a closed or suspicious attitude. The community also did not accept outsiders selectively; they treated everyone equally, regardless of their background. As long as outsiders did not interfere with the core values of the upheld cultural traditions, the community would continue to accept their presence. This is in line with similar research by Nugraha (2018), which states that the community in Kampung Naga itself accepts outsiders unconditionally. This shows an open attitude and respect for outsiders without sacrificing their cultural values, as long as the interaction does not interfere with the cultural order they uphold.

Overall, this shows that the people of Kampung Adat Cikondang can accept newcomers positively and without judgment if their intentions are good. This reflects the principle of unconditional positive regard in creating a safe space in counseling relationships because of the trust and acceptance of the client without prejudice towards the counselor. Rogers (1957) similarly shows that unconditional positive regard increases the possibility of forming a safe relationship and supports the personal development of the counselee. This aligns with other research findings, showing that accepting fellow citizens or non-citizens occurs comprehensively and equally, strengthening the community's harmonious and inclusive communication patterns (Marhamah et al., 2015). This acceptance is reflected in the community's attitude, which does not discriminate against individuals based on personal characteristics such as education, gender, or religion in communication and information exchange. The community emphasizes compliance with traditional values and social norms inherited from their ancestors, but all citizens accept all advice regardless of their backgrounds.

Research by Hasan et al. (2023) shows that unconditional acceptance can illustrate the openness between traditional elders and the younger generation towards intergenerational perspectives, while still accepting each other for cultural preservation. This attitude is an important foundation for creating harmonious and sustainable relationships in cultural preservation and utilisation. Old cultural values are accepted as a valuable inheritance without conditions and adapted wisely to remain relevant to the times.

4. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

a) Theoretical Implications

This study theoretically reinforces the importance of a culturally appropriate approach in multicultural counseling. Rogers' concept highlights local values and norms, as seen in the Cikondang indigenous community, which shows that humanistic counseling theory needs to be further developed by taking cultural diversity into account. This encourages a review of the counselor-counselee relationship theory, which has always been individualistic, to be more inclusive of the social-communal dynamics and cultural norms that shape the counselee's attitude towards change. This approach aligns with the principle of counselor-centred service, where understanding the counselee's background is the primary basis for building an effective counseling relationship. These three characteristics cannot be separated from the cultural context in which the counselee was raised. Therefore, the development of multicultural counseling is a concrete form of expanding Rogers' humanistic principles to be more relevant in a pluralistic society.

b) Practical Implications

In multicultural counseling, congruence must be demonstrated in a way that is acceptable in the culture of the counselee. Not only is *congruence* necessary, but *empathy* is also one of the characteristics that must be present in multicultural counseling. In terms of empathy, counselors need to understand the client's world from their perspective truly. Counselors must show unconditional positive regard without judging the client's choices, values, or cultural identity. Guidance counselors must understand that congruence, empathy, and unconditional positive regard have a very contextual cultural scope. In practice, guidance counselors must build a counseling atmosphere and relationship based on understanding the students' culture, by displaying authenticity (congruence), showing empathy (empathy) towards the students' cultural background, and providing unconditional positive regard. As active listeners, guidance counselors certainly need to understand the complexity of students' values and not rush to judge or give advice that contradicts the cultural beliefs held by students. Counseling practices will be more effective if guidance counselors can adjust their communication style and convey advice in a way that does not threaten the values held by students. Through this attitude, students are expected to feel safer, more comfortable, valued, and open in expressing their problems.

c) Managerial Implications

The results of this study show that schools need to incorporate cultural awareness into their guidance and counseling teacher development programs. This is so that congruence, empathy, and unconditional positive regard can be applied appropriately. In implementing this, guidance and counseling teachers need support from school policies that can encourage openness, respect student diversity, and involve community leaders. Multicultural competence can be incorporated into planning guidance and counseling services based on student needs. School principals and personnel need to establish regular evaluation and training forums for guidance and counseling teachers so that the characteristics of counselor-counselee congruence can be instilled in guidance and counseling teachers.

d) Methodological Implications

The methodological implications based on the results of this study emphasise that a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design efficiently reveals local cultural values such as "*ngajén ka batur*" in the context of multicultural counseling. The researcher's direct involvement in the field through semi-structured interviews and participatory observation provided a deeper understanding of non-verbal cultural expressions, symbolic meanings, and social practices that quantitative surveys cannot capture. In addition, this study emphasises the importance of verbatim transcription in preserving the authenticity of the data and cultural meanings contained in the informants' statements. For future research, ethnographic (delving into culture through long-term involvement) or phenomenological (delving into individual subjective experiences) approaches can be considered to explore the dynamics of counselor-counselee relationships in indigenous communities more in-depth and sustainably.

5. CONCLUSION

This study is motivated by the fact that cultural compatibility between counselors and clients can be a key foundation in building effective counseling relationships, especially in indigenous communities such as Kampung Cikondang, which uphold the value of "*ngajen ka batur*" (respecting others). A multicultural counseling approach that respects cultural differences is hoped to be more relevant and positively accepted in a society that upholds traditional values and has a distinctive social structure. Based on the study's results, it was found that local values such as *ngajen ka batur* are reflected in how the community accepts, filters, and responds to outside input. This shows that the indigenous community of Cikondang has a cultural communication mechanism that aligns with the principles of multicultural counseling. The community shows openness to outsiders, as long as traditional values are respected. Whether or not the advice given is implemented depends on the decision of the traditional leaders there. However, the community will convey the results of their decision to implement or not implement advice from outsiders politely and without offending. This attitude aligns with Carl Rogers' three main principles of counseling: congruency, empathy, and unconditional positive regard, which are reflected in the behaviour of Cikondang residents towards outsiders. Thus, what was expected in the introduction, that cultural compatibility between counselor and client is important in building a harmonious and effective relationship, is in line with the social reality in Cikondang Village.

This study has limitations in scope and subjects, which are limited to the indigenous community of Cikondang Village. Therefore, future researchers are advised to expand the scope of the study to other indigenous communities

in Indonesia to compare and enrich the understanding of the application of cultural compatibility in counselor-counselee relationships across regions and ethnic groups. In addition, future research can also use a mixed methods approach to combine qualitative and quantitative data so that the results obtained are more comprehensive and measurable. It is also recommended that the relationship between cultural appropriateness and the effectiveness of counseling outcomes be explored, including measuring the psychological impact on the counselee. Researchers can also develop a local wisdom-based counselor training model to follow these findings. With this approach, future research is expected to contribute more to developing contextual, adaptive, and relevant multicultural counseling practices for the needs of Indonesia's diverse society.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

DBP contributed to analysing the results of interviews on unconditional positive regard, searching for journals that support the interview findings, and collecting data. HKF contributed to data collection and article writing. KPW contributed to data collection and article preparation, searching for relevant journal sources to support the discussion in the introduction. MRAA contributed to the background and data collection. RA contributed to data collection, included all the verbatim results in the article, analysed the interview results by searching for relevant journals to support the interview results on self-congruency and empathy, wrote the abstract, reviewed the background, and wrote the conclusion. YVR contributed to the preparation of the entire research methods section of the article, compiled the verbatim transcripts and processed them into research data, reviewed the content of the article (including editing, paraphrasing, and synthesising the content of the discussion), and checked the accuracy of the citations and reference list. MS contributed as the lecturer during data collection and revised the title.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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