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Multicultural Counseling Approach: Understanding the Role of Culture in Counseling Relationship Dynamics and Counselor Competence Development

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand the role of culture in the dynamics of counselling relationships and the development of counsellor competencies through a multicultural counselling approach. The research method used is a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), which collects, analyses, and evaluates relevant scientific articles published between 2021 and 2025. Data sources were collected from various academic journals focusing on multicultural counselling and the influence of culture in counselling practice. The available literature was analysed to identify trends, gaps, and patterns. The study results show that multicultural counselling is essential in providing services that are inclusive and responsive to the cultural diversity of clients. Counsellors must have three primary competencies: self-awareness, knowledge, and skills, to interact effectively with clients from various cultural backgrounds. The conclusion reveals that developing multicultural competencies in counsellors is essential to ensure that counselling services can address clients' emotional and psychological needs from different cultural backgrounds. The implications of this study indicate the importance of integrating multicultural education and training into counsellor development programs to provide more effective and inclusive services.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami peran budaya dalam dinamika hubungan konseling dan pengembangan kompetensi konselor melalui pendekatan konseling multibudaya. Metode penelitian ini adalah Systematic Literature Review (SLR), yang mengumpulkan, menganalisis, dan mengevaluasi artikel-artikel ilmiah yang relevan yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2021 hingga 2025. Sumber data dikumpulkan dari berbagai jurnal akademik yang berfokus pada konseling multibudaya dan pengaruh budaya dalam praktik konseling. Analisis dilakukan untuk mengidentifikasi tren, kesenjangan, dan pola yang ada dalam literatur yang tersedia. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konseling multibudaya sangat penting dalam memberikan layanan yang inklusif dan responsif terhadap keberagaman budaya klien. Konselor harus memiliki tiga kompetensi utama, yaitu kesadaran diri, pengetahuan, dan keterampilan, untuk berinteraksi secara efektif dengan klien yang berasal dari berbagai latar belakang budaya. Kesimpulan mengungkap bahwa pengembangan kompetensi multibudaya pada konselor sangat penting untuk memastikan bahwa layanan konseling dapat menjawab kebutuhan emosional dan psikologis klien yang berasal dari latar belakang budaya yang berbeda. Implikasi dari penelitian ini menunjukkan pentingnya integrasi pendidikan dan pelatihan multikultural dalam program pengembangan konselor, sehingga mereka dapat memberikan layanan yang lebih efektif dan inklusif.

1. INTRODUCTION

Counselling is a process of interaction between two parties, namely the counsellor and the counselee, which takes place in a professional setting and is designed to support behavioural change in the counselee (Rosfiani et al., 2022). As the dynamics of society evolve, particularly in social and cultural aspects, such as shifts in values and

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beliefs, an increase in interracial, interethnic, intertribal, or intercultural marriages both within and between nations, changes in education policy, and shifts in leadership styles, these factors influence the models and approaches used in counselling practice (Pedersen et al., 2002). The resolution of individual problems in counselling is likely influenced by the culture that shapes the individual. Culture plays a role in the daily life of the counselee, including how the counselee thinks, acts, and makes decisions. Research by Shen et al. (2017) shows that multicultural counselling provides assistance that considers the cultural dimensions related to the values and identities of individuals or groups, combined with cultural strategies in implementing services. Every type of counselling has a multicultural dimension, because each counselee comes with a unique perspective and background regarding the world (Atkinson, 1997). In line with this statement, counsellors must be aware of their behaviour concerning counselees from different cultural backgrounds. The highest level of awareness of cultural diversity is referred to as cultural competence, which involves a deep understanding of a particular group so that counsellors can recognize values and biases that may exist more comprehensively (Chu et al., 2016)

Multicultural counselling requires a comprehensive understanding of the client's cultural background (Tao, et al., 2015). In the Big Indonesian Dictionary, "culture" results from thought, intelligence, or customs. Grammatically, 'culture' comes from "culture, " emphasizing how humans think. Therefore, culture can be interpreted as everything related to human thought, including ways of thinking, behaviour, and physical creations produced by a community. Another study conducted by states that the cultural diversity that exists in society today has the potential to be one of the intervention approaches in dealing with problematic behaviour in adolescents (Geldard, et al., 2019). Various factors, both internal and external, influence problem behaviour in adolescents. For this reason, counsellors need to provide counselling to these adolescents. Behavioural counselling and a multicultural approach can be applied in the intervention process because culture helps shape an individual's lifestyle (Rahmawati & Utomo, 2024).

With the rapid development of globalization and the increasing role of counselling, the relationship between counsellors and clients is no longer limited to one culture (Koç & Kafa, 2019). However, it can involve individuals from various cultural backgrounds. Therefore, counsellors must understand their clients' cultures well to bridge any differences that may arise in the counselling process. In his research, he explains that multicultural counselling encompasses three important aspects. First, there is an appreciation for the uniqueness of each individual. Second, there is an awareness that counsellors bring their cultural backgrounds into the counselling process. Third, there is an understanding that clients from racial and ethnic minority groups have cultural values that influence their patterns of interaction and communication. From this explanation, researchers know that multicultural counselling is a process of interaction between counsellors and clients who come from different cultural backgrounds, so it is important for counsellors to understand other cultural concepts and values in order to provide appropriate and practical assistance in accordance with the cultural views of the client. The culture and customs brought by the client will grow and be influenced by their surroundings. Culture is a manifestation of behaviour reflected in human relationships or interactions, which contains elements of beliefs, values, and norms or rules that are adhered to.

In counselling practice, multicultural counselling recognizes, respects, and considers cultural, ethnic, racial, religious, linguistic, sexual orientation, gender, socioeconomic status, and other identities inherent to individuals (Ifdil, 2011). The main goal of multicultural counselling is to provide sensitive, inclusive, and effective counselling services to all clients, regardless of their cultural background. Therefore, studying multicultural counselling is critical because today's society is increasingly diverse regarding culture, race, religion, language, and social background. Multicultural counselling aims to ensure that the counselling services provided can reach and meet the needs of all individuals without cultural bias (Matsumoto, 2000).

There is still a gap in the study of multicultural counselling approaches, indicating a significant difference between theory and practice in integrating cultural understanding into the counselling relationship (Nuha & Muslihati. 2025). Although multicultural counselling theoretically emphasizes the importance of sensitivity to the client's cultural background, many counsellors still lack the practical skills to deal with complex cultural diversity in counselling sessions. Existing training is often not sufficiently in-depth or focused on real-world application, resulting in counsellors' competence in dealing with cultural diversity not being optimally honed. This creates a gap in implementing counselling services that are inclusive and responsive to the needs of clients from various cultural backgrounds.

This study aims to analyze the role of culture in the dynamics of multicultural counselling relationships and identify the gap between theory and practice in its application. This study aims to understand the importance of understanding cultural concepts in counselling practice and to examine the challenges counsellors face in dealing with the cultural diversity of their clients. In addition, this study also aims to explore the development of

counsellors' multicultural competencies to create counselling services that are more inclusive, empathetic, and responsive to the needs of clients from various cultural backgrounds.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, which collects, analyses, and evaluates information obtained from various written references or relevant literature. SLR aims to identify trends, gaps, and patterns in existing research and provide a comprehensive overview of the topic being studied. In this context, SLR is used to explore literature related to multicultural and cultural counselling in counselling practice.

2.2 Research Subjects

The object of this research is various scientific articles that discuss multicultural counselling, culture, and cultural aspects in the counselling context. The articles used as research objects were selected based on their relevance to the topic and specific criteria set by the researcher, such as publication within the last five years (2021–2025) and a focus on multicultural counselling.

2.3 Data Collection

The data collection process was carried out by searching for articles through Google Scholar using keywords such as "multicultural counselling," "culture," and "cultural." The researcher set criteria for selecting articles: only articles published within the last five years (2021–2025) and relevant to multicultural counselling. The data collected came from various academic journals, such as the Journal of Education, Edukasi Elita, Dialogika: Journal of Communication Research, Journal of Citizenship Virtues, and various other related journals focusing on education, counselling, and socio-culture.

2.4 Data Analysis

After the data was collected, the next step was to conduct a systematic data analysis in three main stages: (1) Compiling relevant sources, (2) Examining these sources to evaluate their suitability for the research topic, and (3) Compiling and analysing the selected sources based on the established criteria. This analysis aims to identify key trends, find gaps in the existing literature, and draw conclusions that support the development of a multicultural counselling approach.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

The research covers 15 articles published in the last five years, from 2021 to 2025. The results of the literature study are presented in this table:

Table 1. The Nature of Multicultural, Cultural, and Cultural Counselling

No	Researcher(s)	Title	Research Findings
1	Moch. Syihabudin Nuha, Muslihati (2025)	Multicultural Counseling in Addressing Problematic Adolescent Behavior	The study found that adolescent delinquency in Indonesia is very diverse, ranging from mild behaviors like swearing, disrespecting parents, skipping school, joining certain groups, to more serious actions such as criminal acts, drug abuse, and theft. Counselors who are aware of their own culture and able to understand, appreciate, and respect the cultures of others will have an easier time establishing deep relationships with clients. Additionally, counselors can integrate local cultural values into the counseling process to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of counseling services.
2	Rosyid Arfan Gustama, Moch. Syihabudin Nuha, Muslihati (2025)	Multicultural Counseling in Gender Equality and	The study showed various issues related to gender equality and fairness, such as stereotypes where women are seen as soft, beautiful, and emotional,

No	Researcher(s)	Title	Research Findings
		Awareness Education for Students	while men are perceived as strong, rational, masculine, and not allowed to show emotions like crying. Multicultural counseling can be used to help students experiencing discrimination or feeling like part of a minority group. This service has proven effective in addressing gender equality and fairness issues in the school environment.
3	Bakhrudin All Habsy, Marissa Nabilla Putri Anwar, Lisa Septiani (2025)	The Development of Social-Psychological Identity in Multicultural Counseling	Based on the findings, the development of identity in the social psychology context shows that identity is flexible and influenced by social dynamics. Identity is formed through categorization, identification, and social comparison processes, which then influence individual interaction patterns. Therefore, multicultural counseling requires competencies such as awareness of cultural diversity and skills to help clients address identity-related issues.
4	Tabita Tindie Yuliana, Aulia Rizkika Saraswati, Bakhrudin All Habsy (2025)	The Concept of Multicultural Guidance and Counseling Today	The research findings reveal that through multicultural counseling, counselors need to develop awareness, knowledge, and relevant skills. This includes understanding cultural differences, values, and the personal experiences of clients. Multicultural counseling focuses not only on differences but also on unity and understanding between cultures, which ultimately strengthens social cohesion in diverse communities.
5	Siti Dwi Yasinta, Disma Nadya Shakila, Rita Munifah Ramadhan, Bakhrudin All Habsy (2025)	Multicultural Counseling Training in Counselor Education	Based on the research findings, multicultural counseling training plays a crucial role in enhancing counselors' ability to handle clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. With a better understanding of cultural aspects, counselors can minimize bias, improve communication effectiveness, and design interventions that are more suitable for the clients' conditions and needs.
6	Salwiyah Fitriani, Tri Rahma Dana, Purnama Sari, Tri Nur Putri, Halimatus Sa'diyah (2025)	Collective Personality: Culture Shaping Thinking Patterns and Behavior in Society	The research findings show that the relationship between culture and personality is evident from the fact that culture emerges from interactions among people in society, as a result of the fusion of the creativity, feelings, and will of each individual, which then gives birth to new values and norms. These values and norms become guidelines followed by each member of society, distinguishing them from other groups with different value systems.
7	Musyaffa Dafa Firdaus, Fhito Atma Kumariaksy, Bakhrudin All Habsy (2025)	Understanding the Role of Ethics and Competence of Counselors in Multicultural Counseling	The study found that ethics in counseling emphasizes respect for personal rights and cultural differences, while multicultural competence involves a comprehensive understanding of the cultural values of clients and the skills to adapt counseling approaches to individual characteristics. The implementation of multicultural counseling plays a role in minimizing prejudice and discrimination in social relationships.
8	Inggit Widyanika, Tharifah Haibaty Kurniawan, Wardah Rikza Firdaus, Bakhrudin All Habsy (2025)	Multicultural Guidance and Counseling Models	The study showed that various counseling models can be adapted to the client's background, such as (1) culture-focused models, (2) integrative models, and (3) ethnomedical models. Counseling practitioners

No	Researcher(s)	Title	Research Findings
			need to adapt these models to align with local cultures so that the services provided are more effective.
9	Rita Handayani, Nur Azmi Wiantina, Putri Nurina (2024)	Intercultural Communication Conflict and the Role of Multicultural Counseling at Pesantren Daarul Mansur	The study revealed that intercultural communication conflicts at Pesantren Daarul Mansur can be minimized by implementing guidance and counseling services based on multicultural principles. This approach aims to raise awareness among students that cultural differences do not have to be a source of conflict but can be an opportunity for mutual understanding and growth. With the support of teachers and mentors as facilitators, students are equipped with an understanding of each other's unique cultures and inclusive communication skills.
10	Mohammad Rizky Adi Syahputra, Muhammad Yunus Efendi, Bakhrudin Al Habsy (2024)	Multicultural Perspectives in Guidance and Counseling	The study found that multicultural counseling is a highly relevant approach in Indonesia's culturally diverse society. Each individual has a unique cultural background influenced by various factors such as ethnicity, religion, customs, and life experiences. Therefore, counselors need not only to understand but also to respect the cultural differences of clients, including values, social norms, and perspectives that may differ from their own culture. Counselors must also recognize that each client has a unique way of expressing themselves and dealing with their issues.
11	Muktarruddin, Irma Oktavia, Dwiva Ramadhani Ginting, Ahmad Sakban Dwiva, Fadhlan Habib, Mansyursyah Margolang (2023)	The Role of Cultural Communication in Fostering Religious Harmony in Kuta Gerat Village, Munthe Karo Subdistrict	The study showed that the spread of Islam in Kuta Gerat Village began with the marriage of a Javanese Muslim woman and a Karo Protestant man. Various traditions and cultures in the village are maintained and routinely practiced, which helps preserve harmony among the residents and makes it difficult to separate them.
12	Agnes Vanesia, Enick Kusrini, Evita Putri, Inggit Nurahman, Alfindo, Tohap Pandapotan Simaremare (2023)	The Importance of Multicultural Education Values in Society	The study found that multicultural education aims to foster sympathetic attitudes, show appreciation, respect, and care for individuals with diverse religions and cultures. This education is directed at creating a strong, progressive, just, prosperous, and peaceful society without discrimination based on ethnicity, race, religion, or culture.
13	Abdul Wahab Syakhrani, Muhammad Luthfi Kamil (2022)	Culture and Civilization: An Overview from Various Experts, Forms of Culture, 7 Universal Cultural Elements	The study concluded that habits that develop in a society are a form of adaptation to their environment. However, these adaptation methods are not always uniform. Each social group may choose different approaches even when faced with the same situation.
14	Dwi Ananda Nur Umami (2022)	Knowledge and Skills of School Counselors Regarding Multicultural Counseling in Indonesia	Based on the findings, the level of knowledge and skills among counselors in multicultural counseling is still relatively low. Guidance counselors still have limited understanding of clients' cultural backgrounds and tend to equate them with their own culture. This condition affects the effectiveness of the counseling process for the clients.
15	Muhamad Johani Rinawati, Japar (2021)	The Influence of Modern Culture on the Original Culture of Kasepuhan Sinar Resmi	The study found that the Kasepuhan community adapted to cultural norms followed in Kasepuhan Sinar Resmi, such as considering life as something valuable, and understanding human creations as tools to fulfill daily needs. Cultural values related to the

No	Researcher(s)	Title	Research Findings
			existence and position of humans in the dimension of time are very future-oriented.

Research on multicultural counselling consistently shows that this approach is critical in dealing with various problems arising from cultural differences in society. One of the main findings from several studies is the need for deep cultural awareness in counselling practice. Counsellors who can understand and appreciate cultural differences can build better relationships with their clients and increase the overall effectiveness of counselling services. This awareness helps counsellors design approaches that are more sensitive and relevant to the needs and values of their clients.

3.2. Discussion

Based on the results of the analysis in Table 1, it is known that multicultural counselling is an important effort in providing fair, comprehensive services that support the success of each individual, regardless of the client's background. With this approach, counsellors can help their clients achieve better emotional and psychological well-being. It is mentioned that in the counselling process, counsellors must have a good understanding of the clients they are dealing with, and one of the elements that needs to be the focus of attention is culture. Culture encompasses the patterns of traditions, customs, values, norms, language, beliefs, and ways of thinking formed in a society, passed down from generation to generation, and become the distinctive characteristics that differentiate that community (Syahputra et al., 2024). In line with this statement, the study states, "The indigenous people of Kasepuhan Sinar Resmi are part of the Banten Kidul Indigenous Community, which still maintains a way of life based on ancient Sundanese traditions. Various ancestral legacies, such as in agriculture, house building, wedding ceremonies, and other traditional rituals, are still practiced (Syakhrani & Kamil, 2022). In their agricultural practices, they follow rules such as planting rice only once a year, using local seeds, and performing a series of traditional rituals at each planting stage, both in rice fields and on farms." This shows that culture functions as an identity, a means of communication, and a way of passing on knowledge.

The study shows that cross-cultural communication is important in building harmony among religious adherents. In line with this explanation, researchers found that harmony among diverse communities can be established through cultural communication. Culture is key in guiding a person's mindset and behaviour in a social environment (Umami, 2022). Through culture, norms, values, beliefs, and social practices are passed down and accepted by society. This cultural heritage then influences individuals' perspectives on the world and guides their behaviour in their daily activities (Yasinta et al., 2025)

Culture results from human intellect and creativity in pursuing an ideal life, encompassing everything humans create, tangible and intangible. Humans and culture are a unity that continuously coexist and interact with various aspects of the surrounding environment (Vanesia et al., 2023). To survive, both must be able to adapt to that environment. Research Widyanika et al. (2025); Yuliana et al. (2025) shows that culture is considered adaptive because it provides humans with various ways to adjust, both to the body's physiological needs and to their physical-geographical and social environments. Thus, researchers know that culture is a comprehensive system encompassing ideas, actions, and human creations in social life, which humans acquire and possess through learning.

Counselling is a process of psychological interaction between a counsellor and a client that aims to assist in resolving problems the client faces (Sanberk & Akbas, 2015). With the development of globalisation and the expansion of counselling practices, the relationship between counsellors and clients is now not limited to one culture. However, it can involve individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, counsellors need to have a deep understanding of the cultural background of the counselee in order to bridge any differences that may arise in the counselling process. Cultural diversity or multicultural elements in schools are an important foundation in building an inclusive and adaptive educational environment (Eden et al., 2024). Students have different cultural backgrounds. School counsellors must have an understanding of their students' backgrounds and cultures (Çetin et al. 2018). An Analysis on School Psychological Counselors' Dealing with Difference in Multicultural Contexts. International Journal of Progressive Education, 14(3), 93-112. Et al., 2018). Research shows that various forms of gender inequality are still found in school environments, such as sidelining women in leadership positions in groups or classes, as well as the existence of stereotypes that are firmly attached to specific genders, for example, women are considered only suitable for cooking, dressing up, and giving birth. Other research explains that clients' culture can encourage guidance counsellors to realise the importance of understanding multicultural counselling and to increase multicultural awareness in responding to differences, no matter how small. Therefore, counsellors need

to change clients' ways of thinking by equipping them with adequate knowledge about culture, stereotypes, and racism, as well as a deep understanding of various forms of discrimination.

Furthermore, other studies explain that training in multicultural counselling also highlights the importance of adaptive communication skills. This ability allows counsellors to handle communication difficulties that often arise due to language and cultural expression differences. A multicultural approach in counselling also plays a role in reducing stigma related to mental health, especially in communities that uphold traditional values (Ran et al., 2021). This approach makes clients feel more accepted and valued in their cultural context, increasing their comfort and access to counselling services.

The results of these studies explain that counsellors can support clients in achieving optimal emotional and psychological well-being through this approach. Culture refers to behaviours learned from a community and is generally considered a tradition or custom passed down from generation to generation. Meanwhile, culture encompasses everything related to human thought or intelligence that reflects a group's thinking, behaviour patterns, and work. In cross-cultural counselling, counsellors must have three primary competencies: awareness, knowledge, and skills.

4. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The implications of this study are as follows:

a) Theoretical Implications

The study's results on the nature of multicultural counselling reinforce the understanding that counselling cannot be separated from the client's cultural context. By understanding culture and cultural heritage as a system of values, norms, and behaviours that are learned and passed down, this study provides a more solid theoretical basis for developing a counselling approach that is open and responsive to the diversity of the client's background.

b) Practical Implications

The results of this study can be used as a basis for developing guidance programs that are not homogeneous but adaptive to cultural plurality in schools, for example, by including activities that introduce and appreciate cultural diversity as part of character building and tolerance.

5. CONCLUSION

Multicultural counselling plays a vital role in creating counselling services that are inclusive and accessible to all individuals, regardless of their cultural background. This approach allows counsellors to explore their clients' diverse social and emotional dynamics, helping them achieve optimal psychological and emotional well-being. Culture, which functions as a set of values, norms, and behaviours learned within a group, is the foundation that influences how clients express themselves and interact with the world around them. On the other hand, culture encompasses broader thoughts and behaviour patterns that reflect a community's worldview, which also impacts their personal experiences in the counselling process.

In cross-cultural counselling, counsellors must master three key competencies that form the basis for building effective relationships with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. Self-awareness, knowledge, and skills are not only important competencies in understanding cultural differences but also in tailoring the counselling approach to the needs and cultural perspectives of the client. Counsellors with high self-awareness will better manage personal biases and treat each client with respect and deep understanding. Knowledge of multiculturalism principles provides counsellors with a framework for understanding the cultural context that influences clients. At the same time, their skills enable them to devise appropriate strategies for dealing with clients' problems in a culturally sensitive manner.

In conclusion, the success of multicultural counselling depends on the counsellor's ability to integrate social-emotional competence with cultural knowledge in daily practice. Counsellors who can accommodate cultural diversity will help clients feel valued and understood, creating space for clients to develop emotionally and psychologically. This research implies the importance of multicultural counselling education and training in counsellor training programs, so they are better prepared to deal with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. Thus, counselling services can more effectively support individual well-being, strengthen interpersonal skills, and build harmonious relationships in an increasingly multicultural society.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

All authors contributed to this research. Siti Khotimatul Khusniyah designed the study and supervised the research process. Hanif Aftiani was responsible for data collection and analysis. Andri Krisetyo Nugrahani contributed to the literature review and manuscript preparation. All authors discussed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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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