

Efficiency of Secondary School Teachers in Conducting Various Cultural Counseling Services

¹Kamarul Md Shah, ¹Jasmi Abu Talib and ²Farah Mukhtar

¹University Malaysia Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia

²Institutes of Education, Campus of Raja Melewar, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

Abstract: Multicultural counseling competencies are one of the important aspects to the practice of counseling teachers in order to provide effective counseling services. However, studies of multicultural counseling competencies among counseling teachers in Malaysia are still not sufficient to serve as a referral source. This study aims to identify the level of multicultural counseling competencies as a whole and by domain competence as practiced by counseling teachers in Malaysia. The study also aims to identify the difference levels of multicultural counseling efficiency of the respondents based on gender, race, level of education and professional experience in the counseling area. This study consisted of 275 counseling teachers who had been randomly selected in one of the states in Malaysia. The instrument used in this study was developed by the researchers based on the theory, interviews, expert panel and also reviews of literature. The findings showed that the overall mean score of the respondent's multicultural counseling competency level is at a high level. While in terms of the mean levels of competence in accordance with the awareness, knowledge and cultural skills domains are at a high level compared to the domain of consciousness which was at a moderate level. The study also found that there were significant differences in the level of multicultural counseling competencies among the respondents based on the level of education. In contrast, there were no significant differences in the efficiency of the respondents based on gender, race and professional experience. This study suggested implications for counseling training in improving the efficiency of multicultural counseling.

Key words: Counseling teachers, multicultural counseling efficiency, counseling process, culture, race

INTRODUCTION

Counseling services in Malaysia have started to grow rapidly in line with the needs of today's society. Multicultural counseling competencies are an important aspect in ensuring a more effective counseling process and have become the practice of most counseling teachers. However, studies on the efficiency of multicultural counseling in Malaysia are still not abundant as compared to the studies in the West that can be used as reference sources (Kamarul and Amat, 2010) while efficiency should also be part of the personal and professional qualities of the teachers and also school counselors as it has effects to the self-efficacy and efficiency of counseling teachers in the course of effective guidance and counseling. Indirectly, multicultural counseling is an approach based on cultural diversity in guidance and counseling services that support the formation and inculcate the values of an aspiring country in the concept of 1 Malaysia (Kamarul and Amat, 2010). Therefore, this research aims to identify the level of multicultural counseling competency among secondary school counseling teachers in Malaysia.

The Malaysian Ministry of Education statistics for 2010 showed that the number of counseling teachers in secondary schools was 1,907 men and 3,560 women from the total of 5,467 people who supported the vision and mission of guidance and counseling services in the school system in Malaysia. On the other hand, the student statistics showed that the total number of students in secondary schools was 2.33 million. There were 1,163,430 male students and 1,163,797 female students. While in terms of breakdown according to races, there were 71.8% of Bumiputera, especially Malays and only 28.2% of non-Bumiputera or students from other races such as Chinese and Indians. This situation reflects the diversity of students that lead to cultural diversity among high school students who need help from counseling teachers in providing guidance and counseling services.

Counseling teachers need to understand the situation of multicultural and how they can be carried out in the guidance and counseling services. Multicultural competence can be attributed to a counselor who has the ability to integrate the cultural factors into various theoretical approaches and techniques, including measurement, prevention and counseling (Gim *et al.*,

1991). Multicultural counseling is one of the main tasks of counseling teachers in addition to individual and group counseling, crisis counseling, family counseling and so on. In particular, counselors should have the knowledge, self-awareness, sensitivity and skills that are relevant and apt to work in a multicultural population.

Research objectives: In this study, a counseling teacher refers to a teacher who provides guidance and counseling services, has academic qualifications in the field of counseling and exercises counseling for secondary school students. In general, this study aims to identify the level of multicultural counseling competencies among teachers in Malaysia. Apart from counseling, this study also aims to identify the level of efficiency in a variety of domains within the competence of multicultural counseling. Furthermore, this study also aims to identify the difference levels of multicultural counseling competencies among respondents based on gender, race, level of exercise counseling and professional experience. Based on the purpose of the study mentioned, the research questions are as follows:

- What is the level of multicultural counseling competencies among counseling teachers?
- What is level of multicultural counseling competencies in the domain of competence among counseling teachers?
- Is there any significant difference in the efficiency of multicultural counseling based on the gender of counseling teachers?
- Is there any significant difference in the efficiency of multicultural counseling based on the race of counseling teachers?
- Is there any significant difference in the efficiency of multicultural counseling based on the level of formal training of counseling teachers?
- Is there a significant difference of multicultural counseling competencies based on the counseling teacher's work experience?

Literature review: Gim *et al.* (1991) found that multicultural counseling is not only for individual therapy or group psychotherapy which usually occurs in the traditional counseling theory but they also suggested that it highlights the techniques for counselors to include life skills such as leadership and mentoring which allows the clients to have their own identity and culture. The next suggestion is counselors could provide information about life in the United States and support the legislation that places an emphasis on multiculturalism. This information provides an insight into the social influences on ethnic relations and its implications for the counseling process.

Arredondo and Toporek (2004) also found that the research, writing and clinical practice of the concept of ethnic minorities has become a research agenda but it is still not enough. This situation illustrates that counselors could be biased in their work when it is related to ethnic diversity which this will indirectly affect the counseling process. Herrnstein and Murray stated that there is a relationship between ethnicity and intellectual development in ethnic minority groups. Their study found that some ethnic groups differ in terms of academic achievement.

In addition, there are positive impacts and consequences when understanding the various cultures in a counseling relationship. According to Gym professionals in the mental health industry showed that the importance of understanding the culture of the client or those who are dealing with issues of culture could create more trust, credibility and efficiency. This study was supported by McRae and Johnson (1991) who stated that other than understanding themselves as a culture it is also important for a counselor to examine the relationship between counselor and client which is categorized as either having the same or different cultural values, attitudes, national identity and related issues of power, control and repression. Variables that accurately reflect the multicultural competencies among counselors are indicated by the different characters or the personal qualities.

To succeed in multicultural counseling competencies is complex which includes many factors such as through professional experience and educational training. With their accreditation procedures and accountability measurement, counselor training programs should be done systematically and be able to show proof of training in counseling skills and expertise in various cultures in accordance with the accreditation by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). However, McCoy and Myers (1999) found that there were no significant differences in the efficiency of one's own cultural diversity among the accreditation graduates. This research has been studied in depth in order to answer the question regarding the effectiveness of accreditation graduates, in which they showed no efficiency in various cultures. Based on this study, factors such as education, training, curriculum, assessment and supervisory experience in a program that is accredited need further research to observe its effect.

A counselor's education training is an important part to acquire the skills and competencies in multicultural counseling. It also includes the awareness of multicultural counseling counselors about their own cultural bias and their view of clients from various ethnic cultures. Counselors should always be able to assess their

capability to deal the requests from clients of various cultures (Gim *et al.*, 1991). To gain an understanding of the client's culture can affect the counseling process. At the outset, it helps counselors to gain self-awareness and become more knowledgeable and sensitive to the client's issues that give significant effects in relation to culture. Studies on multicultural counseling competencies among counselors have identified several characters:

- Self-awareness about the attitude or opinion of the counselors towards culture
- Recognition and sensitivity to the attitudes of the client's life
- Knowledge of the culture at the workplace
- An understanding of the impact of national identity, the pressure of minority groups and adjustments to the status of minorities
- Understand the sociopolitical minority groups
- Competency specifically in dealing with different batches
- The ability to be sensitive to the culture and the ability to translate a strategy of recovery of the culture, skills and interaction in counseling

One of the few features that counselors require is multicultural competency (Arredondo *et al.*, 1996; Gim *et al.*, 1991; Sue *et al.*, 1992a, b). The related literature review showed that multicultural counseling competencies is one of the important personal qualities of professional and qualified counseling teachers. This efficiency can also define the smooth process of the counseling conducted. Therefore, the aim of this study is consistent with its requirements in order to help improve the effectiveness of school counseling services at secondary schools in Malaysia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is a quantitative research using a survey method, in which a set of questionnaires was used to collect data. The data obtained was analyzed using the SPSS Software version 22.0. Mean score, t-test and one-way ANOVA were used to test the hypothesis in the research questions. This study also involved a population of 930 counseling teachers in one of the states in Malaysia. Based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970a, b) the required sample for this study was 272 counseling teachers only. However, for the purposes of this study, the sample used was 275 teachers. Stratified sampling was used to obtain the sufficient amount for analyzing data and answering the research questions. The appropriate sampling method was used to obtain samples of a large

number of the population; not uniform, not balanced and comprehensive (Noraini, 2010; Sidek, 2002; Wiersma, 2000). A set of questionnaires was developed by the researchers to measure the efficiency of multicultural counseling. This questionnaire consisted of 26 items representing the three main domains of awareness, knowledge and skills. The alpha coefficient value is 0.92. The efficiency of multicultural counseling in turn was divided into five categories:

- Very low (mean score of 1.00-3.00)
- Low (mean score between 3.01-5.00)
- Average (mean score between 5.01-7.00)
- High (mean score between 7.01-9.00)
- Very high (mean score between 9.01-11.00)

These categories were constructed and adapted according to the scale that was proposed by several statisticians (Betz *et al.*, 1996, 2005; Betz, 2002; Chaney *et al.*, 2007).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study discusses the findings based on the issues reviewed in the scientific research with the support of the literature review.

Background of the respondents: A total of 275 secondary school counseling teachers were involved in this study. In summary, a total of 216 (78.5%) were female counseling teachers and 59 (21.5%) were male counseling teachers. In terms of race, the majority of the respondents were Malay counseling teachers which was 213 (77.5%) as compared to 32 (11.6%) Chinese counseling teachers and only 30 (10.9%) Indian counseling teachers. Next, the response of the survey indicated that the counseling teachers selected have different qualifications in the field of guidance and counseling, such as at the diploma level, there were 4 teachers (1.5%) at the undergraduate level; there were 217 (78.9%) at the master's degree level, there were 54 teachers (19.6%) and there was none at the doctorate level. The respondents also have various levels of experience in performing the duties as counseling teachers at secondary schools such as there were 84 teachers (30.5%) with experience of 5 years and below; 94 teachers (34.2%) with 6-10 years of experience; 64 people (23.3%) with 11-15 years experience and those who have >16 year of experience were 33 people (12.0%) (Table 1).

The counseling teacher's level of multicultural counseling competency: The mean level of multicultural

Table 1: Background of the respondents

Background respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Genders		
Male	59	
Female	216	21.5
Race		78.5
Malay	213	77.5
Chinese	32	11.6
Indian	30	10.9
Experience (years)		
Below 5	84	30.5
6-10	94	34.2
11-15	64	23.3
>16	33	12.0
Level of education		
Degree	221	80.4
Master	54	19.6

counseling competencies of the respondents was 8:12 which is in the high category (7.01-9.0). In general, the higher category is considered quite satisfactory because they are in a category higher than the mean for the very high category (mean between 9:01-1:00). This situation may occur because of the setting in Malaysia where the teachers who in charge of implementing the counseling services to students of all races are provided space and opportunities for multicultural counseling competencies, especially through informal training. Most of the studies mentioned that school counselors need to understand the various cultures that exist in their work environment and how this task should be carried out in providing guidance and counseling services. Multicultural counseling competency is required when a counselor has the ability to integrate cultural factors into various theoretical approaches and techniques which include the aspects of measurement, prevention and counseling (Gim *et al.*, 1991). Thus, the students and the multicultural society will be a good experience that is useful for counseling teachers to build multicultural counseling competencies.

In general, the counseling training in Malaysia also stresses on the importance of multicultural counseling competency training in accordance with the requirements of recognition by the Malaysian board of counselors. It is also in line with the needs of the counseling program in the United States of America. The multicultural counseling training will encourage every coach to discover their self-exploration as cultured individuals and understand other cultures, describing in detail the theory, defense, social justice and efficiency of various cultures, developing skills to improve the mental health of the clients and supporting the understanding of the counselor's role in eliminating bias, prejudice, oppression and discrimination intentionally or unintentionally.

Table 2: Mean scores of multicultural counseling competencies domain for secondary school counseling teachers

Domain	Frequency	Mean score	Interpretation
Awareness	275	6.82	Medium
Knowledge	275	8.97	High
Skills	275	8.36	High
Overall	275	8.12	High

This means that efficiency is not only obtained through formal education but includes informal education, such as personal reflection and thinking process and also the understanding of the counseling teachers about the culture. Therefore, the efficiency of multicultural counseling teachers in Malaysia is supported by the diversity of the students in a school, other than the training that covers all aspects of the diversity of culture. However, this level of efficiency can be improved to a rating of "very high".

Multicultural counseling competencies in the competency domain: The total scores of the three domains in this questionnaire were 8.12. It shows that the efficiency of multicultural counseling among high school teachers as a whole was at the higher level. The mean score for each domain in the multicultural counseling competencies in this was calculated using SPSS 20.0. However, based on the mean scores shown in Table 2, the mean score of the knowledge domain is the highest mean which is 8.97 as compared to the expertise domain which is 8.36 whereas the mean score for the awareness domain is 6.82. This analysis showed that in terms of multicultural counseling competencies among domains, the knowledge domain is the highest domain that the respondents have followed by cultural skills domain and in contrast, the cultural awareness domain was at the medium level.

Based on the definition of the theory of multicultural counseling, these findings illustrate that the respondents have knowledge about the client's various cultures regarding their view of the world and also their own culture. They have acquired the skills of intervention strategies in dealing with clients of various cultures during the counseling sessions conducted. Besides, they were conscious about themselves of their own culture and this could lead to bias and discrimination towards their clients of different cultures during the counseling sessions. Therefore, the results of this study coincides with the findings of the previous studies that multicultural counseling competencies include awareness, knowledge and skills domains. These awareness, knowledge and skills domains are interdependent on each other. A counselor can have one of them but to be more effective, a counselor requires all three (Pedersen and Carey, 2003; Sue *et al.*, 1982).

The awareness, knowledge and cultural skills domains can also be understood through personal reflection during the counseling sessions conducted. Cultural awareness includes the process of understanding cultural bias, the tendency to stereotype, referral sources of the minority group and also the power in a relationship. Cultural knowledge includes the understanding of attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviors of a certain culture. As for cultural skills, it is focused on the communication skills and learning process of a counselor to become more aware of specific cross-cultural issues (Benavente, 2004; Pope and Reynolds, 1997; Sue *et al.*, 1992a, b; Wear, 2003). All these components seem to exist in the efficiency culture behavior and they are also prerequisites for working effectively and ethically with people from all backgrounds. Furthermore, all three of these components are not necessarily visible depending on the achievement of culture efficiency. For example, culture awareness is a self-reflective skill that does not increase the cultural skills. Knowledge culture can also be an important part in the stereotypes and discrimination towards culture if it is not combined with culture awareness. Apart from that logically, cultural skills cannot be reached without a good knowledge of the culture. Therefore, at least three of these components must be exist in counseling teachers in order to demonstrate their culture competency (Table 2).

Multicultural counseling competencies based on gender:

The t-test showed that there is no significant difference in terms of gender and multicultural counseling competencies among the respondents, $t(273) = -0.510$, $p = 0.611$ (0.05). This means that the counseling teachers, regardless of their gender have the same multicultural counseling competencies (Table 3). However, many studies showed that the gender factor influences the counseling services (Gold and Hawley, 2001; Utsey *et al.*, 2000; Robinson, 1999; Hays, 1996; Stevens, 1995). Gold and Hawley (2001) found that the effects of the socialization process can directly affect the counseling students to cooperate with clients who had more sensitive issues during the counseling training. They suggested that the counselor training program should emphasize on the importance of sensitivity of the counseling teachers regarding the gender aspects. According to Stevens (1995), there were differences in the theories regarding the importance of gender issues in counseling training programs. This means that counseling teachers need to be more sensitive regarding the effect of gender during the multicultural counseling process.

Clients also sometimes prefer to meet counselors of the opposite gender. This situation often occurs in

Table 3: ANOVA analysis on multicultural counseling competencie's differences based on gender, race, education level, and professional experience

Variables	F-values	df between group	df within groups	Sig.
Gender	0.620	2	272	0.611
Race	1.323	3	271	0.268
Education level	13.946	2	272	0.020*
Professional experience	2.265	3	271	0.081

counseling but no special attention is given. This is because many have thought that an effective counselor can accept anyone to be his or her clients. However, this assumption is not necessarily true. Arredondo *et al.* (1996) have stressed on the need for cultural sensitivity, in particular, how gender awareness can positively affect the counseling relationship. This view is supported with the findings of Dupuy *et al.* (1994) who claimed the importance of gender and its implication on the counseling professionalism. They showed the need to emphasize on gender sensitivity and its implication towards the clients during the training. Although, this study found no difference in terms of efficiency by the counseling teachers regardless male or female, the counseling training should emphasize on gender awareness so that the counseling process can be carried out more effectively.

Multicultural counseling competencies based on race:

As for the race factor, the ANOVA analysis results also showed that there is no significant difference; the F-value $(3,271) = 1.323$ and $p = 0.268$ ($p > 0.05$) between the dependent variable, race and the level of multicultural counseling competencies (Table 3). This shows that there is no difference in the level of efficiency of multicultural counseling based on race among the counseling teachers

However, the Chinese counseling teachers have a higher level of multicultural counseling competency than the Indian and Malay counseling teachers. This might happen due to several factors, such as the need to provide counseling services to the majority of students who are not from the same race, the ability to acquire more than one language and so on. In the previous studies, they discussed the emphasis to be given to the issues of race and ethnicity in practicing counseling where this has become an important aspect as it can help in establishing therapeutic counseling and mental health counseling during multicultural counseling sessions (Sue *et al.*, 1982). Although in the graduate program, they have included multicultural counseling it was insufficient and did not become an important part of counseling related to the issues of race and ethnicity (Arredondo *et al.*, 1996). Therefore, counseling practitioners should realize that the

race, culture and ethnicity factors play an important role in the lives of not only to the minorities but also to the majority (Sue and Sue, 1990). This also shows that the race and ethnicity factors can affect the teacher's own counseling services and the counseling session provided.

Although, the findings of this study showed there was no difference in the level of efficiency of multicultural counseling based on race, the previous studies indicated that it did affect the counseling teacher's views of the client and the culture that might become their perception in stereotyping and discriminating against their client. This will definitely affect the process of the multicultural counseling conducted. According to Arredondo *et al.* (1996) national and ethnic identities have become a major focus in the development of multicultural counseling competencies. The stereotypes of a nation that occur in a society have affected the perception, characteristics and behavior among trainer counselors (Ponterotto *et al.*, 2000). Stereotype also affects the counseling student's custom or habit, in which they use them to develop their view towards the world when they are conducting professional counseling. Counselors who have different views of the world with their clients are not aware of these differences and seem to be inculcating negative characteristics to their clients (Sue and Sue, 1990). The negative effects of this should be avoided; including the influence of race and ethnicity is also an important part in multicultural counseling services.

Multicultural counseling competencies based on the level of formal training: The t-test showed that there were significant differences of multicultural counseling competency level based on education level, $t(273) = -2814$, $p = 0.005$ (0.05). This means that counseling teachers who have underwent counseling training at the master's degree level have higher scores (mean = 8.5) than the teachers who have only underwent the training at the first degree level (Table 3). This situation may be due to the occurrence of in-depth learning when the counseling teachers pursue their study at a higher level. The multicultural training generally begins at the basic level of the first degree (Lee *et al.*, 1999). In addition, the knowledge about different cultures is also increased where at the bachelor's level, learning is more focused on the concept of introduction only. At the graduate level (master) it has more emphasis on the application aspects of the counseling knowledge. This shows the increasing knowledge of the teachers when they pursue their master's degree in counseling.

In addition, there are several models on multicultural training that aim to improve the efficiency of multicultural

counseling (Pedersen and Carey, 2003; McIntoch, 2001; Brislin and Bhawuk, 1999; Hays, 1996; Helms and Carter, 1991; Diaz and Jacobsen, 1991). According to Maldonado (2005), education training is one of the important aspects to prepare the students in multicultural counseling. Multicultural counseling training is part of that process. The study also suggested that taking the multicultural course could generate the multicultural counseling competencies compared to those who did not take the course. Davis and Coleman (1994) found that trainers who took cultural course, cultural workshop or took more credit hours in multicultural course will acquire more multicultural skills and knowledge as compared to those who did not take the multicultural courses. Therefore, the input of multicultural and cultural activities acquired during studies does affect the efficiency of multicultural counseling teachers. In general, master's degree students are also considered more matured than undergraduate students. Thus, it is likely that the master's level students have a higher level of efficiency than the undergraduate students.

Multicultural counseling competencies based on counseling teacher's professional experience: For work experience, the ANOVA test showed that there is no significant difference, namely the $F(3, 271) = 2.265$, $p = 0.081$ (0.05) between the dependent variable which is the experience level of professionalism with multicultural counseling competencies (Table 3). This means that the teacher's professional counseling experience did not affect the efficiency of multicultural counseling competencies. Professional experience means the period of time a teacher conducts counseling or provides guidance and counseling services in various settings. Theoretically, experience as a counselor should not affect the efficiency of multicultural counseling teachers. The longer the counseling teachers practice counseling or work in the field should also increase their efficiency in cultural diversity.

This situation might occur because they have underwent the same counseling training but with different durations of counseling training hours. It showed that the counseling training received had more impact on efficiency than experience. For new counselors, counselor training is the initial stage of steady and sustained efforts, along with their willingness to learn that will also generate success from time to time. Larson (1998) suggested that this is vital to the counselor's profession because it can identify the specific training and appropriate interventions to improve the effectiveness of the counseling services provided.

The experiences of conducting counseling can be increased from time to time. According to Manese *et al.* (2001), the counselor trainees can work with clients of various cultures while undergoing practical training or supervision to develop appropriate skills or intervention where this would improve their professional experience. Clinical supervision is also part of the professional counseling experience. Supervisors can be their role models and provide knowledge about the efficiency of various cultures to ensure the counselors as the future generation who will meet the needs of the changing demographics of the society (Arrendondo *et al.*, 1996). In fact, the efficiency of multicultural counseling begins during training and ongoing formal supervision during performing their daily duties as a counselor.

CONCLUSION

The counseling and guidance services are an important aspect in schools. It can develop accordance to the different needs of races and cultures in Malaysia. Therefore, counseling teachers must remain a high quality of service that is relevant in the school system. This quality includes the efficiency in various multicultural counseling. The diversity of races and cultures of the students demand the counseling teachers to improve their counseling efficiency. This study evaluated the efficiency of multicultural counseling teachers on culture. The efficiency of multicultural counseling teachers who are involved in this study was at the high level of efficiency. However, it still needs to be improved to the highest level, namely at the level of "very high". The finding also showed that only the level of education is significantly different. This illustrated that the higher the knowledge those counselors have the higher the level of multicultural counseling competencies. In addition, the questionnaires used in the survey can also be improved to ensure more valid findings. Apart from that, since the study is the first study to examine the efficiency of multicultural counseling among teachers, it is suggested that larger studies should be conducted to find the real situation related to this multicultural competence among secondary school counseling teachers. The reliability and validity of the instruments can also be addressed in the future in order to ensure that the instruments have good validity and can be used in a larger population.

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