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# Challenges In Implementing Intercultural Counselling In Indonesian Educational Contexts: University Students' Perceptions

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## Abstract

The existence of cultural diversity is an undeniable fact of life that influences individual behaviour and all human activities, including counselling. Therefore, it is vitally crucial to examine the prevailing culture when performing counselling. The present study adopts a qualitative research strategy using data processing that provides descriptive data, including interviews and observations, to evaluate the problems associated with the application of intercultural counselling in the Indonesian educational system. Specifically, this article investigates the perceptions of university students about cultural awareness and intercultural counselling. A random sampling technique was used to pick 88 university students currently enrolled at various Indonesian universities as the study's samples. The three phases of data analysis are data reduction, data display, and data verification. According to the study's findings, there were primarily three challenges: (1) cultural-based issues in intercultural counselling; (2) communication-based issues in intercultural counselling; and (3) linguistic-based issues in intercultural counselling.

## Introduction

Intercultural counselling is one of the themes that has become an important debate among researchers and counsellors worldwide. This is due to the increasing demand of counsellors who have multicultural competences to work in globalized world, the rising issues of psychological illness due to high density of working conditions, and high degree of uncertainty of living conditions across the globe. Due to these reasons, intercultural counselling and challenges are essential for further investigation particularly in higher education.

The condition of having university students from diverse cultural backgrounds causes each student to have a unique personality, attitude, disposition, and ideology. Even though there are similarities among the students, there is still the potential for a social issue to arise. We understand that cultural variety can contribute to conflict and societal discontent. In fact, there

have been numerous disputes on a number of Makassar campuses, both across faculties and amongst regional nationalities. When pluralism's diverse disagreements cannot be controlled and resolved judiciously, a conflict that leads to division ensues. This condition of multicultural students is susceptible to the likelihood of a variety of intercultural confrontations, whether they include area culture or campus culture. The cultural characters offered by each student tend to introduce unique experiences based on the regeneration received, allowing for diverse perspectives.

Globally, there is increasing studies of challenges of intercultural counselling. For example, Jokela and Walve (2017) investigated the common problems of intercultural counselling occur in European countries and Jaladin (2013) researched the multicultural counselling challenges and barriers in Malaysian education contexts.

Specifically, there is still limited studies on intercultural counselling challenges within Indonesian contexts. As a consequence, there is limited publication on the themes of intercultural counselling and challenges in Indonesia on the academic journals. Therefore, this research aims to fulfil this knowledge gap, by exploring the challenges of intercultural counselling in Indonesian education contexts. This present study can provide significant input and implication for the understanding of intercultural counselling and challenges both locally and globally.

## Literature review

### Concept of intercultural counselling

Counselling is a procedure that assists individuals in overcoming obstacles to their own development and achieving optimal personal growth. The process can occur if there is an individual interaction in which the individual's unique requirements, goals, and potentials are expressed as an issue requiring professional assistance. Individuals' difficulties, whether light or serious, of various hues should not be allowed to gather in the mind. Counselling is required so that difficulties and disagreements do not persist for an extended period of time. Especially if people with problems originate from diverse cultures, habits, natures, and personalities, the counselor must grasp and study the culture and customs of each individual with problems. Due to the diverse cultural backgrounds of the individuals being assisted, a greater understanding of counselling services is required. Intercultural counselling, also known as multicultural counselling, refers to a therapeutic relationship with two or more people whose cultural background, values, and lifestyles are distinct (Hilert & Tirado, 2019).

### Challenges of intercultural counselling

There are three important challenges in intercultural counselling: language, communication, cultural and power challenges. The language challenges include the way people talk, they to use the language and the choice of appropriate expression to use. Garcea (2005) argues that different language expression can be very challenges for people in intercultural counselling. Despite people comes from one nation, people use different local

languages and different action to communicate in their daily activities.

The communication process become one of the challenges in intercultural counselling. Every counsellor has certain style of communicating and delivering their messages to others. Similarly, clients from different cultural backgrounds have certain communication styles. The different communication styles between counsellors and clients may cause difficulty in counselling practices. Therefore, overcoming communication barriers become of the challenges in intercultural counselling (Mandalios, Nummela, Sipilä, 2011.)

Cultural differences makes it challenging in a multicultural counselling since different roles, genders, and different cultural values occur in counselling practices. Gothoni and Siirto, (2016) believe that individual cultural differences can be a challenge in implementing intercultural counselling. The cultural differences reflects their values, their philosophical beliefs, ways of lifes, perceptions and the way they accept the differences in a multicultural setting.

### Research methods

The present study employs a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research involves data processing that yields descriptive data, including interviews and observations. In an effort to display these data in a manner that is more accessible, a descriptive strategy is used. The samples of the study were selected through random sampling technique which comprised of 88 university students currently enrolled in various universities of Indonesia. A research participant consent along with the questionnaire instrument link was sent through the lecturers' forum which they shared to the students and thus acquired the 88 participants of the study.

The descriptions are interpretive in character, employing generally accepted theories and frameworks to enable comprehension of the data in accordance with the aims of the research. Simultaneously occurring, qualitative analysis comprises of three activities: data reduction, data presentation, and data verification.

Continuous data reduction occurs so long as a qualitatively oriented endeavor is ongoing. Data reduction is the process of selecting with an emphasis on simplification, abstraction, and transfer.

## Result

The result of the questionnaires distributed to participants of the study, it appears that there are three major challenges: cultural, communication, and language challenges

### a. Cultural-Based Issue in Intercultural Counselling

The first challenge is the cultural issue that constitutes of 52.3% of the participants in this study. There are several reasons why different cultures became a challenge: commencing a conversation, accepting differences, respecting differences, and mingling with people from cultures.

For me, differences also need time to adapt and after that start to understand (P5).

It might be a bit difficult at first, but as time goes by and I can understand that person's culture and accept whatever that person's culture is, then I will try to build good communication with that person (P10)

The results of the cultural is quite similar to the findings of Efendi (2018) where the results stated that the barrier to communication for the Banjar tribal community is the locals' inherent behaviours, which occasionally make one ethnic group or an individual feel uncomfortable; prejudice is an individual trait, not a community-wide phenomenon. According to Efendi (2018:89), the Banjarese would attempt to communicate in their native language, but if they do not understand, they then switch to Indonesian. This is their strategy for accommodating ongoing interaction. Evidently, there should be a medium to instil knowledge and understanding on the importance of adapting particularly in intercultural counselling. A cultural barrier to communication exists primarily when two people from different cultural backgrounds interact (Roslan, 2019). In the process of intercultural counselling, common

understandings between communicators are crucial for an efficient and profitable communication process.

### b. Communication-based Issue in Intercultural Counselling

The second challenge is dealing with communication issue. Counselling communication is essentially a sort of interactive communication between two parties through the development of a situation in order to gather the information necessary for making proper judgments. It is a sign of professionalism in some culture to talk clearly and leave no space for misunderstanding. While there are some where individuals favour indirect communication. People approach issues with ambiguous references. A person from a direct culture risks coming across as insensitive, whereas a person from an indirect culture risks appearing unclear (Daria, 2022). Participants (30,07%) in this study believed that different ways of communication, different delivering modes, and different messages were challenging issues in intercultural counselling.

For me there is no problem and I don't find it difficult if I start to build communication, interact, and get along with other people who are different cultures from me (P11).

The factors that can impede communication are as follows: a) communicator stutters (biological barriers), communicators are not credible/not authoritative and do not understand the communicant's characteristics (education level, age, gender, etc.) -other) or nervous communicators (psychological barriers), and women are unwilling to open up to their male counterparts (gender barriers). b) Communicators with hearing loss (biological hurdles), non-concentrated communicators (psychological barriers), and a woman blushing when discussing sexual issues with a male (gender barriers). c) Communicators and communicants lack an understanding of the prevalent socio-cultural context, which can give rise to varying perceptions. d) Communicators and communicants are biased towards one another, which might result in apathy and rejection. e) Communication is constant in one direction from the communicator to the communicant, preventing the communicant from requesting an explanation. f) Communication consists solely

of verbal explanations / words, making it tedious. g) Inappropriate use of media or difficulties with communication technologies (microphone, telephone, power point, etc.). h) Language differences resulting in diverse interpretations of particular symbols (Carlucci, 2020; Bushnaq, 2018). Therefore, the factors that inhibit communication are the communicator's stuttering, which suggests he lacks authority within himself, the communicator's lack of concentration, which causes him to experience differences in perception, the communicator's excessive seriousness, which makes the conversation tedious, and the language barrier, which makes it difficult to understand.

### c. Linguistic-based Issue in Intercultural Counselling

The other challenge is the language problems that can be a barrier for practicing intercultural counselling in a multicultural setting. The communication process is crucial in influencing the success of message interpretation. The essence of communication is process. A process is fundamental and ubiquitous. Schram (1983) stated that communication will proceed well if the communicator and the communicant share the same sphere of experience. Conversely, if the communicator's experience differs from the communicant's experience, it will be difficult to comprehend each other; the situation becomes uncommunicative (miscommunication). In the realm of intercultural counselling, both the accuracy with which a message's meaning is interpreted and the manner in which communication is conducted are crucial. A counsellor's fault in communicating a message to the client would result in the misunderstanding of the message. For instance, when World War II began. When the allies (the United States) requested that Japan surrender, Japan responded with the terms "mokusatsu" It signifies "no remark until a decision is reached". However, the word mokusatsu was interpreted as "ignore" by the Domei News Agency, which implies "don't care." This miscommunication contributed to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II. As such is the case for this study where one participant stated:

Yes, sometimes it is difficult, and sometimes it is easy because there are many cultures that we may not understand, such as language, which makes it difficult for us to communicate with other people (P13).

Lack of proficiency in the language used by the participants in communication might result in misconceptions. Even nonverbal communication frequently has several and even contradictory meanings. Non-verbal communication is communication that occurs without continuous speech (Prayatni, et al. 2020). Body language and social context are essential components of any communication. Not the words themselves, but how they are expressed. Because nonverbal communication has multiple meanings, misinterpretation can arise when people from various cultures interact. Due to cultural variances in nonverbal communication, individuals can unintentionally cause offense to others. As many of them, such as smiles and sobs, are intrinsic, facial emotions are comparable throughout most civilizations. In essence, the effectiveness of intercultural counselling in language aspect depends on how the intended meaning is communicated.

Cultural awareness is the tolerance, comprehension, and appreciation of cultural differences. This cultural awareness is unquestionably essential for everyone to truly comprehend and appreciate the diverse cultures that exist in every civilization around. This is owing to the fact that many conflicts occur as a result of a person or group of people not understanding the diversity, since so many other communities also have their own culture. People forget that culture is produced in accordance with the social structure. Nevertheless, people have a tendency to treat all cultures similarly. This is what frequently leads to misconceptions and interethnic clashes. It can be seen from the data that the majority had high awareness of culture and had respect to other cultures.

### Discussion

Communication is central to every perception, behaviors, and competent acts. Humans cannot be said to interact socially if they do not communicate with one another through the symbolic exchange of information, ideas,

intentions, and emotions. Culture influences how we understand both vocal and nonverbal information offered by other people. When engaging with people from a different culture, humans typically carry their culture with them. Humans cannot deny the significance of communication in all parts of life, including counselling. Due to the importance of communication in virtually every element of human existence, communication studies are also conducted with and from a variety of scientific fields. An intercultural counsellor must possess not only expertise in the fields of counselling or psychology, but also communication skills. However, it should also be remembered that communication requires not only communication-related knowledge and abilities, but also an artistic touch. Thus, intercultural communication is both an art and a science. To develop a better understanding of Intercultural counselling in Indonesia, there needs to be an extensive study on the challenges of intercultural counselling in the perspective of higher education students. Based on the results of the study, it implied that there were mainly three elements concerning to the challenges, namely: (1) cultural-based issue in intercultural counselling, (2) communication-based issue in intercultural counselling, and (3) linguistic-based issue in intercultural counselling.

To remedy these issues, intercultural counselling teaching in higher education should be taught; (1) everyone who speaks pays attention to the feedback provided by the interlocutor in both verbal and nonverbal language, and then appropriately interprets the feedback, (2) each person is an individual with distinct psychological, social, economic, cultural, and educational origins. By comprehending, one can employ the most effective communication strategies, (3) In this, pandemic times direct engagement (face-to-face) is more compelling, therefore it can overcome communication hurdles. Communicators are able to integrate verbal and nonverbal language. In addition to selecting words, eye contact, facial expressions, other body language, and meta-language (signs outside of language) can be utilized to enhance communication, and (4) the vocabulary adopted should be easily comprehensible; avoid using terms that are difficult for listeners to comprehend. Use simple phrase patterns (canonical) since complex sentences make it difficult to comprehend the message.

## Conclusion

Counselling is required as a remedy for a variety of issues and student backgrounds. The implementation of multicultural counselling in education is crucial, as it will give clients with a sense of security. When clients interact with counsellors/teachers who understand themselves and their background, they would feel more assured. Counsellors/teachers tasked within schools should possess certain qualities such as intercultural counselling competence. The present study implies three challenges to consider in Intercultural counselling. First, intercultural counsellors must be conscious of their personal beliefs and of the clients. Second, they must understand the features of counselling in general especially in the communication aspect. Third, they must comprehend the influence of ethnicity to language use and pay attention to the environment. With the knowledge of counsellors and the use of intercultural counselling, it is envisaged that students as clients would become more at ease with service and more effective in offering answers to client problems. Jarvis (2006) explains that the human learning process occurs in a paradoxical state, namely a state that results from the culmination of life's paradoxes. In addition to scientific, technological, economic, and societal concerns, the dilemma also generates human problems. This indicates that systematic efforts and interventions are required to steer humanity away from the abyss of disgrace and toward a brighter and higher quality. Hence, it vital for Indonesia to foster students' cultural awareness and respect of other culture for the future of the multicultural nation.

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