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**Perceived Multicultural Counselling Competence of
Professional Counsellors in Malaysia:
a National Survey**

By

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Perceived multicultural counselling competence of professional counsellors in Malaysia: A national survey

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Abstract

A national survey was conducted to investigate the dimension and extent of multicultural counselling competency (MCC) of counsellors who are registered with the Malaysia Board of Counsellors and had practised multicultural counselling in Malaysia. A total of 508 counsellors (response rate of 34%) from various states and work settings completed the surveys using either the pen-and-paper (mailed) or electronic (online) surveys. The survey questionnaire was a 47-item Multicultural Counselling Survey-Malaysian Counsellor Edition (MCS-MCE), which comprised 2 main instruments: Demographic and MCC questionnaire. An exploratory factor analysis revealed more than the three proposed dimensions (awareness, knowledge, and skills) in the literature as constituents of MCC. There was no significant difference in perceived MCCs due to completion of multicultural courses, but significant differences were observed due to ethnicity and participation in recent multicultural training. Direct implications for education, training and development of counsellors and trainees are discussed.

Keywords:

Multicultural counselling
Multicultural counselling competency
Professional counsellors
Malaysian counselling profession
Multicultural training

Introduction

The Malaysian counselling profession has undergone substantial development since the last two decades. This is evidenced by a number of milestones. First, a proliferation of counsellor education programs introduced and offered at various universities and colleges in Malaysia for both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. This indicates more trained counsellors are needed by the country to tackle the people involved in socio-psychological problems (Salim

& Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2005; See & Ng, 2010). As Malaysians come from diverse cultural backgrounds, it is assumed that counsellor education programs should be able to prepare counsellors who can work well with culturally diverse clients in the Malaysian context. Second, the development is evidenced by the introduction of several policies and guidelines to regulate the training of counsellors and practice of counselling among professional counsellors in Malaysia. This comprises the introduction of Malaysian Counselling Association or locally known as PERKAMA Code of Ethics in 1994 and its revised edition in 2008, the introduction of Counsellors Act 580 in 1998 (implementing the requirement for registration and licensure for all practising counsellors), the introduction of standard guidelines for counsellor training in 2000, and the introduction of specific codes of practice in 2005. This development indicates that Malaysian counsellors have a legal-ethical responsibility to provide quality counselling services to clients from diverse cultural backgrounds and contexts. Yet, the Malaysian counselling profession has not yet formulated a set of standards or guidelines for use to evaluate the standard practice of multicultural counselling in the Malaysian context.

Counsellors' Multicultural Competence

Previous literature has demonstrated that the need for counsellors to be multiculturally competent, especially when working with ethnic-minority clients in a specific multicultural context (Laungani, 2004; Whaley & Davis, 2007). This resulted in numerous proposed models of MCC (e.g., Sadowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, & Wise, 1994; Sue et al., 1998; Sue & Sue, 2008), several attempts at operationalization of MCC (Arredondo et al., 1996), several developments of MCC instruments for assessing MCC among practising counsellors and trainees (e.g., Multicultural Counselling Inventory [MCI; Sadowsky et al., 1994], the Multicultural Awareness/Knowledge/Skills Survey [MAKSS; D'Andrea et al., 1991], and the Multicultural Counselling Knowledge and Awareness Scale [MCKAS; Ponterotto et al., 2002]), and several research studies with a focus on assessing counsellors' MCC using self-report instruments (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999), observer-rated measures (Multicultural Competency Checklist: Ponterotto, Alexander, & Grieger, 1995), or practice demonstration (Cartwright, Daniels, & Zhang, 2008).

Among the existing models of MCC, the model by Sue et al. (1992) attracts more attention among scholars and researchers around the globe. This is because the model is an extension of the pioneer model, which proposes three core dimensions of MCC: (a) *beliefs* and *attitudes* regarding racial and ethnic minorities, the need to check biases and stereotypes, and the development of a positive orientation towards multiculturalism; (b) *knowledge* of one's own worldview, knowledge of cultural groups with whom one works, and knowledge of socio-political influences on members of these groups; and (c) *skills*, strategies and interventions needed to work with minority groups within a cross-cultural counselling context (Sue et al., 1982). Sue et al. (1992) incorporated these dimensions into their 3 (Characteristics) x 3 (Dimensions) matrix, but emphasise explicitly three core characteristics of a multiculturally competent to further clarify the multicultural competencies. These are awareness of counsellors' own assumptions, values, and biases; understanding the worldview of the culturally different client; and developing appropriate intervention strategies and

techniques. This resulted in a set of 31 detailed criteria or standards for judging the quality of multicultural competence. Such standards have been formally endorsed by the American Counselling Association (ACA) and the American Psychological Association (APA). Numerous MCC concepts have also been infused into the 2005 ACA Code of Ethics to highlight the importance of becoming a multiculturally competent counselling professional in today's globalised world (D'Andrea & Heckman, 2008a; Pack-Brown, Thomas, & Seymour, 2008). This development implies that assessment of MCC among professionals is necessary to ensure culturally appropriate counselling services to an increasingly diverse clientele. However, the state and extent of MCC among professional counsellors in Malaysia are still unknown.

Among the most widely used and extensively reviewed MCC instruments found in research literature are the self-reported measures such as MCI, MAKSS, CCCI-R, and MCAS because they have generally acceptable internal consistency reliability across different populations and settings (Dunn, Smith, & Montoya, 2006). Although proven to be useful tools for counsellor preparation, there are several limitations and criticisms associated with their use in research. These involve, for example, the cultural relevance of such measures to be used in multicultural contexts other than the USA region (Cheung, 2000; Lonner & Ibrahim, 2008), the inconsistency of the factor structures of these instruments or a lack of clarity of construct (Ponterotto, Gretchen, Utsey, Rieger, & Austin, 2002; Pope-Davis & Dings, 1995), and the failure to address diversity issues (e.g., differences in age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, physical ability) in the MCC standards because most focus on working with ethnic-minority groups (Hays, 2008). This poses some challenges for international researchers to use any of the existing instruments in their specific cultural contexts because these assessment tools may be biased (based on Eurocentric values and norms) and may not be culturally relevant to be applied to populations in other context-specific cultures outside the USA region.

Relevant MCC studies found in the literature were mostly surveys conducted in the USA context using American samples from the racial/ethnic-majority and ethnic-minority groups. Some studies focus on practising professional counsellors (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999; Wheaton & Granello, 2002), and the majority focus on graduate trainees who were enrolled in postgraduate counselling programs (Cates, Schaeffle, Smaby, Maddux, & LeBeauf, 2007; Constantine, 2001c, 2001d). A limited number of relevant MCC surveys were found in Australia (Khawaja, Gomez, & Turner, 2009; Pelling, 2007), Britain (Glockshuber, 2005), and New Zealand (Selvarajah, 2006). Although these existing studies are useful as references for designing the current study, the findings may not be culturally relevant and sensitive to the specific cultural context of Malaysia. For example, Holcomb-McCoy and Myers conducted a national survey among 500 professional counsellors, who were members of the American Counselling Association (ACA), to explore their perceived MCCs and the impact of training. The survey instrument was a 61-item questionnaire named as the Multicultural Counseling Competence and Training Survey (MCCTS). They found five factors – awareness, knowledge, definitions, racial identity development, and skills – as constituents of MCCs. According to them, 'this finding suggests

that the Multicultural Competencies comprise more than the three dimensions proposed in the literature' (Halcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999, p. 299). They further examined professional counsellors' perceptions of their multicultural competence and found that these respondents perceived themselves to be most competent on the definitions and awareness factors. In contrast, the respondents perceived themselves to be the least competent on the racial identity and knowledge dimensions. Among a list of demographic variables (i.e., professional counsellors' work setting, educational level, ethnicity, gender, and age) examined in the study, only ethnicity was found to be statistically significant and influenced the knowledge, awareness, racial identity, and skill factors of MCCs.

Overall, although this research was conducted a decade ago, the findings were very relevant to inform the development of the current research because empirical studies on multicultural counselling in a specific cultural context other than the USA have been limited. Furthermore, it would be interesting to know whether the structure of the MCC instrument used in the present study, using professional counsellors in Malaysia as sample, consistent with this previous research.

This paper reports a national survey study as part of a PhD research project. The purpose of the study was to explore the nature and extent of MCC among practising professional counsellors in Malaysia. The specific aims of the present research were to:

1. Identify the factor structure of the multicultural counselling competencies of professional counsellors;
2. Determine the extent that professional counsellors perceive themselves to be multiculturally competent based on the extracted factors;
3. Compare the self-reported multicultural counselling competencies of counsellors by (a) gender, (b) ethnicity, (c) completion of multicultural counselling courses, and (d) attendance/participation in multicultural training workshops/seminars.

Method

Participants

A total of 508 registered-practising counsellors participated and responded to the survey (response rate of 34%). Three hundred and sixty nine participants responded via the mailed survey and 139 participants responded via the online survey. There were 259 males (51%) and 249 females (49%). The majority of them were Malays (378; 74.4%) by ethnicity, Muslims (403; 79.3%) by religion, and aged 40 and above (55.4%). Overall, the percentages of the survey participants in terms of gender and ethnic background showed similar patterns to those of the study population. This provides some evidence that the sample is representative of the overall population and the results can be generalised to the whole population.

Measures

A 47-item survey, The Multicultural Counselling Survey - Malaysian Version (MCS-Mal), was developed based firmly on the findings of previous research and drawing on two existing

scales (i.e. the MAKSS-CE-R: Kim, Cartwright, Asay, & D'Andrea, 2003; and the MCKAS: Ponterotto, et al., 2002), with some item-modifications and item-additions. The survey was divided into two main sections: Section A (15-item demographic information comprises participants' personal background, education and training, and work) and Section B (32-item Multicultural Counselling Competency Scale -Malaysian Counsellor Edition or MCCS-MCE). Items in Section A were mostly multiple choice questions (MCQs), while all items in Section B used a variety of five-point Likert scale response format such as '1: Strongly Disagree - 5: Strongly Agree', '1: Very Limited - 5: Very Good', and '1: Totally Not True - 5: Totally True'. The scoring of these items followed the indicated numerical choices but the scores were converted into mean scores in order to interpret results easily.

Procedure

The MCS-Mal was mailed to the 1500 prospective respondents along with a self-addressed reply paid envelope, a pen, a mini notebook, a cover letter containing information on the purpose of research, the Explanatory Statement (which contained information regarding ethical approval from the Monash University Standing Committee on Ethics in Research involving Humans, and from the LKM), researcher contact information, and a reminder note to inform them to return the completed survey within two weeks of receiving it. In line with the strategies to encourage high response rate discussed in previous literature (Heppner, Wampold, & Kivlighan, 2008; Pelling, 2007; Pelling, Brear, & Lau, 2006), two sets of reminder letters were also used. The first reminder letter was sent to all participants in the fourth week after the initial mailing, and the second reminder letter was sent to all participants after two weeks of the second mailing. As an alternative strategy to encourage return of the surveys, follow-up emails and electronic reminders were also used in this study. A total of 538 surveys were returned (initial response rate of 36%) to the researcher. Data analysis was performed using the SPSS statistical package (version 17.0).

Results

Factor Structure of MCC

A principle component analysis (PCA) with an oblimin rotation was performed to investigate the underlying factors of items in Section B of the survey (Pallant, 2007). Results from KMO and Bartlett's test indicated that factor analysis was appropriate. From the Total Variance Explained Table, only nine components recorded eigenvalues above 1 and these components explained a total of 62 percent of the variance. In contrast, results from the Scree Plot indicated only six factors. However, when the initial eigenvalues were compared with the corresponding value from the random results generated by parallel analysis, there were six factors obtained. A forced factor solution of six factors was performed and it resulted in the identification of six factors that explained 52% of the variance of the MCC items. Table 2 shows the factor loading of the six factors as well as their eigenvalues and the percent of variance explained by each factor. In addition, alpha coefficients for each factor are also shown in this table. The alpha coefficients ranged from .28 to .85, with the highest internal consistency resulting for Factor 1 and 3, and the lowest for Factor 6.

A review of the items associated with each factor resulted in the identification of Factor 1 as *Multicultural Counselling Skills* with the minority client groups (e.g., "How well would you rate your ability to accurately assess the counselling needs of lesbian clients?"). Factor 2 was defined as *Multicultural Counselling Knowledge* (e.g., "There are initial barriers and challenges related to the cross-cultural counselling relationship"). Factor 3 comprised of

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items that asked for *Understanding of Multicultural Issues* (e.g., “At present, how would you rate your understanding regarding differences in ethnicity among Malaysians”). Factor 4, defined as *Multicultural Attitudes & Beliefs*, included items on multicultural issues in Malaysia (e.g., “Persons in ethnic minority groups have problems in accessing counselling services from counsellors who are predominantly female Malay-Muslim”). Factor 5 was defined as *Multicultural Counselling Experiences* with the majority client groups (e.g., “How would you rate your ability to effectively treat a client whose cultural background is from the non-Bumiputera group?”). Factor 6, *Multicultural Counselling Awareness*, included items about counsellors’ beliefs (e.g., “Counsellors should treat clients equally regardless of their cultural backgrounds”). The six-factor solution reflected the three MCC domains of Sue et al. (1992; 1982) because the foundational components of awareness, knowledge, and skills remain unchanged.

Table 2
Factor Loadings of MCC Items and Internal Consistency of Factors

| Factor | Items with Highest Loadings | Factor Loadings | α Coefficients | Eigenvalue/Variance (%) |
|--------|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | B30 | .88 | .85 | 6.30/20 |
| | B29 | .88 | | |
| | B31 | .78 | | |
| | B28 | .61 | | |
| | B27 | .36 | | |
| 2 | B19 | .75 | .76 | 3.49/11 |
| | B17 | .74 | | |
| | B20 | .69 | | |
| | B16 | .68 | | |
| | B18 | .68 | | |
| | B22 | .40 | | |
| 3 | B10 | -.82 | .85 | 2.33/7 |
| | B11 | -.79 | | |
| | B12 | -.77 | | |
| | B13 | -.76 | | |
| | B9 | -.73 | | |
| | B15 | -.57 | | |
| 4 | B14 | -.49 | .56 | 1.72/5 |
| | B3 | .71 | | |
| | B7 | .62 | | |
| | B2 | .58 | | |
| | B8 | .55 | | |
| 5 | B4 | .42 | .83 | 1.48/5 |
| | B24 | .82 | | |
| | B23 | .74 | | |
| | B25 | .73 | | |
| | B26 | .53 | | |
| 6 | B32 | .47 | .28 | 1.28/4 |
| | B5 | .61 | | |
| | B6 | .61 | | |
| | B1 | .35 | | |

Self-Reported MCC of Malaysian Counsellors

Descriptive statistics using means and standard deviations were used to examine counsellors' self-reported MCC based on the above factors. Table 3 presents details of the descriptive results.

Table 3
Mean and Standard Deviations for Factors of MCC

| | N | M | SD |
|-----------------------------------|-----|------|-----|
| Multicultural Skills | 497 | 3.26 | .72 |
| Multicultural Knowledge | 498 | 3.59 | .64 |
| Multicultural Understanding | 508 | 3.82 | .57 |
| Multicultural Attitudes & Beliefs | 490 | 2.82 | .66 |
| Multicultural Experiences | 508 | 3.81 | .55 |
| Multicultural Awareness | 503 | 4.14 | .59 |

The mean ratings of competence for each factor, as shown in Table 3, were mostly between 3 (moderately competent) to 4 (competent) except for Factor 4 (somewhat competent) and 6 (extremely competent). Overall, the participants perceived themselves to be most competent on Multicultural Awareness, Multicultural Understanding, Multicultural Experiences, and Multicultural Knowledge. In contrast, they perceived themselves to be the least competent on the Multicultural Attitudes & Beliefs and Multicultural Skills.

Comparisons of Self-Reported MCCs with Gender, Ethnicity, and Multicultural Education and Training

A series of independent-samples t-tests and a one-way ANOVA were performed to address the final aim of the research. The first independent-samples t-test was performed to compare the MCC scores for males and females. There was no significant difference in scores for males ($M=3.56$, $SD=.34$) and females, $M=3.54$, $SD=.34$; $t(506)=.73$, $p=.47$ (two tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference=.02, 95% CI: -.04 to .08) was very small (eta squared=.001). This means that only .1 per cent of the variance in MCC is explained by participants' gender.

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of ethnicity on self-perceived MCC. Participants were divided into four groups according to their ethnicity (Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Other) and the mean plot among these four groups was depicted in Figure 8.

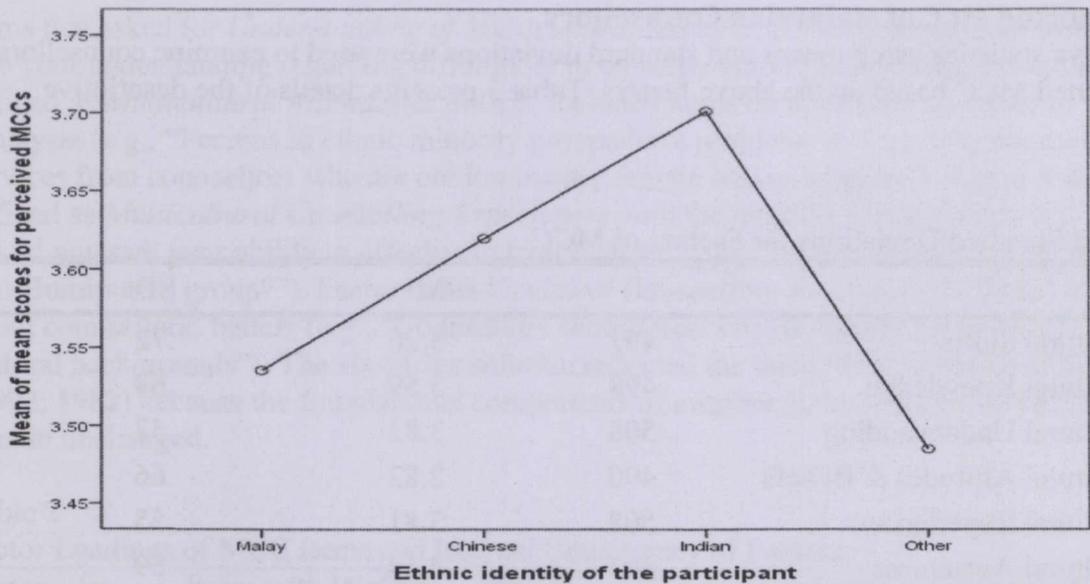


Figure 1. Comparisons of mean scores for the different ethnic groups.

Results showed a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in MCC scores for the four ethnic groups: $F(3, 504) = 3.10, p = .026$. Despite reaching statistical significance, the actual difference in mean scores between the groups was very small. The effect size, calculated using eta squared, was .02. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test failed to suggest which group was statistically different from which other group. However, the mean plot indicates that among the three major ethnic groups in Malaysia, counsellors from ethnic minority groups (Chinese and Indian) in various professional fields generally perceived themselves to be more multiculturally competent than their peers' from the dominant group (Malay).

To investigate any significant differences between groups due to multicultural education and training factors, two independent-samples t-tests were performed. The first test was conducted to compare the MCC scores for participants' completion of multicultural education (MC courses completed versus MC courses uncompleted). There was no significant difference in MCC scores for those who had completed multicultural counselling courses ($M=3.56, SD=.33$) and those who had not completed multicultural counselling courses, $M=3.51, SD=.38; t(506) = -1.50, p=.13$ (two tailed). In contrast, results from the second t-test, which compared the MCC scores with participants' participation in recent training in multiculturalism, showed a significant difference in scores for those who had attended multicultural professional development training in the past five years ($M=3.59, SD=.35$) and those who had not ($M=3.52, SD=.33, t(506) = -2.46, p=.014$ (two tailed). Both findings indicate that although the majority of participants completed their multicultural counselling education, it does not affect their perceived MCCs. Their self-perceived MCCs can only be affected by their recent participation in multicultural professional development training in the past five years.

Discussion

Although there are some potential limitations of this study such as the use of self-report measure and the low return rate (34%) of the survey, the results suggest a number of significant issues for counsellor preparation and future counselling research. Firstly, the present study revealed six factors (skills, knowledge, understanding, awareness, experiences, and beliefs) as constituents of MCC instead of the three proposed dimensions (awareness, knowledge, and skills) in the literature. This finding is consistent with some findings from previous research (Constantine & Ladany, 2001; Halcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999), which suggests that the MCC comprise more than the three dimensions proposed by the literature. However, a closer examination of these factors seems to be consistent with the 3(counsellor characteristics) x 3(dimensions) model of MCC as proposed by Sue et al. (1992). This finding implies that to develop MCCs among counsellors, the education and training programs should be able to address issues in the key areas of multicultural counselling (i.e., multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills) as well as enhance counsellor qualities to become multiculturally aware, more understanding of culture and diversity, and multiculturally experienced.

Secondly, the results of this study suggest that professional counsellors in Malaysia, as a collective community, perceive themselves to be multiculturally competent. Malaysian counsellors perceived themselves to be most competent on the multicultural awareness and understanding factors, which are two core qualities of a multiculturally competent counsellor proposed by Sue et al.'s (1992) model. In contrast, the respondents perceived themselves to be least competent on the multicultural attitudes and beliefs, and skills dimensions. This finding is inconsistent with research findings from the USA context because the former suggests that counsellors' awareness, knowledge and understanding about culture and diversity in Malaysia is far more adequate than their beliefs/attitudes and skills, especially when involving clients from ethnic minorities. This is in line with the learning objectives of most counsellor preparation programs in Malaysia, whereby these programs emphasize more on the "knowing what" cultural differences exist in the Malaysian society rather than "knowing how" (i.e., a combination of beliefs/attitudes and skills) to recognize and successfully deal with such differences in a counselling process with culturally diverse clients. In addition, the low ratings of participants regarding multicultural attitudes/beliefs and skills might reflect the Malaysian counsellors' preference for convenient practice of culture-match counselling (e.g., ethnic-matching counselling) rather than practising multicultural counselling in a broader sense.

Thirdly, the current results also showed that Malaysian counsellors' perceived MCCs differed significantly by ethnicity (Malays, Chinese, Indian, and Other) recent participation in professional development training on culture and diversity. This finding provides answers and empirical evidence to Holcomb-McCoy and Myers's (1999) question of 'where and when do counsellors acquire their multicultural competence?' (p.299). Empirical evidence indicates that counsellors acquire and develop their multicultural competence through a socialisation process during the development of their racial/ethnic identity, completion of postgraduate counselling programs and recent participation in professional development training on culture

and diversity. The most intriguing finding was the effect of significant differences in participation in recent multicultural training on counsellors' perceived MCCs. The finding suggests that as a professional in a multicultural context, Malaysian counsellors have to seek more opportunities to get continuous and up-to-date education and training in multicultural counselling in order to become multiculturally competent. Overall, these results imply that there is a strong relationship between ethnicity and MCC and between counsellor professional development training and MCC.

Last but not least, it is surprising that although previous research studies suggest that multicultural courses increase the multicultural competence of counsellors (D'Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991; Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999; Robles-Piña & McPherson, 2001; Sadowsky, Kuo-Jackson, Richardson, & Corey, 1998), the results showed that there were no significant differences between the self-perceived MCCs of counsellors who completed multicultural counselling courses and those who did not. This finding is consistent with the finding from previous research (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001), which suggests that there is no significant relationship between completion of multicultural courses and counsellors' perceived multicultural competence. Several conclusions can be drawn from this finding. First, it could be that the syllabus in the multicultural courses and the MCCs are not linked and, thus, address different dimensions of multicultural competence. Second, because the multicultural counselling courses are simply included and not yet infused in the counsellor education programs in Malaysia, the results could imply that these courses have not had sufficient multicultural components needed to develop counsellors' MCCs.

Implications and directions for future research

The knowledge garnered from this study indicates that MCC is a broad and multidimensional construct and is a very important foundation in the practice of multicultural counselling. This has direct implications for counsellor preparation in the field of professional counselling in Malaysia.

Firstly, the education and training of counsellors should incorporate and emphasise all six components of MCC in the development of better counsellor education programs and multicultural counselling courses. Perhaps counsellors and trainees should be first introduced to the six core qualities of MCC (multicultural skills, knowledge and beliefs and attitudes, awareness, understanding, and experience) revealed in this study, which underlie the dimensions of MCC and core characteristics of a multiculturally competent counsellor. This can be successfully achieved through an experiential teaching-and-learning process or infusing these qualities in the current curriculum of counsellor education programs or current policies pertaining to counsellor preparation in Malaysia.

Secondly, to better educate and train counsellors to become multiculturally competent practitioners in the field of multicultural counselling, the findings suggest several potential implications for better practice. First, the findings seem to suggest that the counsellor education and training programs should place more emphasis on the practical components of counselling in the curriculum. Currently, according to the standards for accreditation of counsellor education and training programs in Malaysia (Lembaga Kaunselor Malaysia,

2003), the allocated hours for the practical component in a bachelor and Master degree program are 66 (out of 120 total hours) and 33 (out of 48 total hours), respectively. This raises some concerns regarding the quality of the graduates produced by these theory-based programs. Perhaps it is high time that policy makers reviewed the relevant policy pertaining to standards in counsellor education and training in Malaysia. It is recommended that the allocated hours for the practical components for both bachelor and masters programs should be increased in order to make sure that the trainees have sufficient practical training with culturally diverse clients during their preparation time. Second, the teaching and learning process should place more emphasis on the multicultural components of the counsellor education and training programs. Perhaps the inclusion of the Cultural and Social Diversity component or multicultural counselling courses is insufficient to contribute to counsellors' multicultural competence. So, the solution for policy makers is two-fold: by increasing the allocated number of credit hours for the social and cultural diversity component and by infusing and emphasising the multicultural components in the teaching-and-learning of the other seven core components of the counsellor education programs.

Third, perhaps the way that these multicultural courses are developed does not focus on all the dimensions of MCC revealed in this study. So, course coordinators and counsellor educators should include training in the curriculum that focuses on all the six components of MCC when they develop multicultural counselling courses at their respective faculties or universities. In particular, they should place more emphasis on issues pertaining to multicultural beliefs and attitudes and multicultural skills because these dimensions received the lowest MCC mean ratings.

Fourth, it could be that the way that these multicultural courses are taught does not meet the prescribed standards to produce multiculturally competent counsellors. The findings seem to suggest three recommended solutions for counsellor educators. The first involves screening the MCCs of all counsellor educators/trainers involved in the education, training, and professional development of counsellors or trainees first before they are qualified to teach or practice, especially teaching multicultural courses. This will ensure that these educators have strong theoretical knowledge of MCC as well as the relevant multicultural abilities. The second lies in the teaching lesson plans, in which counsellor educators should carefully develop to incorporate and provide for in vivo learning experiences and activities as well as emphasising multicultural skills using hypothetical cases.

Finally, there should be a standard assessment procedure to determine graduating students' MCC level based on their self-report ratings in order to preliminary predict the quality of their multicultural counselling practices after graduation. By doing this, counsellor educators contribute to prepare future counsellors to be multiculturally competent when counselling diverse clients in the Malaysian context. Therefore, it is timely to impose a requirement for all institutions that offers counsellor education programs to consistently review their existing programs and courses in order to keep abreast with the current thinking and development in the multicultural counselling field. All these can be achieved if the Malaysian counselling profession formulates a set of culturally relevant standards or guidelines to evaluate multicultural counselling practices in Malaysia.

Overall, the results and implications underline that multicultural counselling is a rapidly recognised area of counselling practice in Malaysia. Multicultural counselling competency needs to be integrated into all counselling in Malaysia. Continuing support from practising counsellors, counsellor educators and training institutions, government and non-government bodies to promote and enhance current theoretical understanding and practice of multicultural counselling is needed. Future research should be directed for improving the current education and training of counsellors in Malaysia.

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