

Multicultural Competencies in Counselling (MCC) Practices in Kenya and Zimbabwe

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Abstract: Multicultural competencies (MCC) have been widely authorized and put into practice in both training and Counselling programs. It is deemed as unethical for counselors and psychologists to provide services to a population that is culturally dissimilar if they have not had any education and training in multicultural competencies. This study therefore seeks to ascertain if practicing Counsellors in Kenya and Zimbabwe implement Multicultural competencies during Counselling sessions as expected of them. The study adopted phenomenological research design study. Purposive sampling was employed to sample ten (10) respondents. Data was collected through interviews and was analyzed thematically. Findings revealed that although counselors from Zimbabwe seem to lack training in multicultural counselling, counselors from Kenya and Zimbabwe showed some degrees of cultural awareness and practices from the perspective of being culturally conscious. Language barrier was identified as a major challenge to multicultural counseling practice. The study recommends inclusion of multicultural counseling in the counselors training and continue education in the same for those who already have training in multicultural counseling. Counselors among the people of different culture and language may need to learn the language of the people or at least make use of professional interpreters who are conversant with ethical principles in counseling.

Keywords: Attitude, Counselor, Kenya, Knowledge, Multicultural Competencies, Skills, Zimbabwe

I. Introduction

The current society has a wide range of cultures, hence the term 'multicultural'. A society is described as multicultural when it is composed of people from different cultures, colors, nationalities and languages living together in one community. (Ogharanduku & Tinuoye, 2020). There is a desirable proficiency in understanding multiculturalism especially in the field of Counselling psychology. It has become the professional responsibility of all counselors to develop essential multicultural competencies needed to provide culturally competent counseling (ACA, 2014). Multicultural counseling is a type of counseling where the therapist addresses the struggles of a client whose race, gender, socioeconomic background, religion, or any other part of their identity doesn't fit in with the majority.

Multicultural Counselling competency is a theoretical and practical movement about racial, ethnic and cultural differences in the counseling process (Hotifah, & Hamidah, 2019). Chiboola (2019) asserts that people in all societies at all times have experienced emotional or psychological distress and behavioral problems and, in

each culture, there have been well established indigenous ways of helping people to deal with these difficulties. The development of multicultural competencies (MCC) is foundational in the professional growth of a Counselling psychologist (Collins, 2018). The ASCA, (2016) has published ethical standards, which counselors are obligated to serve their services to all regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, and race

As the understanding of multiculturalism broadens and encompasses the vast majority of presenting issues that the clients bring to Counselling sessions, it is important for a counsellor to be culturally competent at work and understand the large part played by culture in people's daily life. This will not only benefit the client, but the counselor will grow professionally. According to Rosmadi (2019), each person's level of awareness is determined by their ability to judge a situation accurately from their viewpoint and the viewpoints of members in other cultures.

According to Arnold (2022), cultural competency is achieved through defining cultural competence, understanding the steps needed to develop cultural competence, navigating the barriers that prevent cultural competence, relating communication to cultural competence, and extensive education and/or training. There has been to a lesser extent scholarly consideration to look into aspects on knowledge, skills, attitude of counselors on Multicultural Competencies. Multicultural counseling competence must continue to evolve as we gain new understanding through research and societal changes (Ratts et al. 2016; Ridley et al. 2021b). It is against this background that this study seeks to establish experiences of Multicultural Competencies in Counselling Practices in Kenya and Zimbabwe.

Multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills are accepted as the critical elements of an effective counseling process (Ozel & Yildiz 2021). Awareness is critical because to modify behaviors and attitudes, there must be awareness that one's own dispositions may have negative consequences on those who may be considered part of underrepresented groups. (Wilson et al., 2017). Yogi, as cited by Hladik et al. (2016) asserted that a responsive counselor culturally should apply knowledge, awareness, and skill into his multi-culture to face various clients' problems which come from different cultural environments. According to Arnold (2022), culturally competent helping professionals are ones who are actively in the process of becoming aware of their own values, biases, assumptions about human behavior, preconceived notions, personal limitations, and so forth. Shallcross L. (2013) reports that the ACA President Cirecie West-Olatunji is in agreement of counselors embracing the notion that multicultural competence is ever changing and demands constant work and attention. Cultural competency is essential for counselors who want to be effective in counseling culturally diverse clients (Arnold 2022).

Knowledge is directly related to counselors' behavior in the session and influences the way he/she responds to an issue at hand. Arnold (2022) explains that knowledge is identifying and understanding the barriers that culturally diverse client face in receiving counseling or mental help. Mugai et al. (2019) agree that counsellor's effective use of knowledge power can affect the thoughts, feelings, or behavior of subordinates like clients. Knowledge can be gained through experience, but this is not the only way one can acquire knowledge. Knowledge can also be achieved through rational thought. Mugai and colleagues add that counsellors with knowledge power have been known to make quicker decisions and speak and act more compared to others, especially on issues that are important to them. Wilson et al. (2019) echo that while there are several ways to gain knowledge, it is vital to identify which method works for you and pursue this path to provide better services for the people you are serving. This will be a good addition to the knowledge of client's culture. Arnold (2022) explains that developing cultural competence start with cultural humility. A counselor must know that they have much to learn about other cultures and that this quest is virtually never ending.

Basic skills used during counselling session is the development of trained skills and experienced obtained by counsellor candidate during their education. (Noor et al., 2018). Counselors need to familiarize themselves with the context that is used in the multicultural counseling. Noor et al emphasized that to obtain the skills the counsellors have to seriously pass some training phases. They need to establish concepts and make them transferable to other contexts. The skills component is the ability to use culturally appropriate helping

tactics and strategies to culturally different people and groups (Sue, 2019). The term skill is more appropriately applied to describe the Counselor's MCC performance during a session.

The attitude of a counselor plays a noteworthy position in a counseling session. Pryor et al. (2016) define attitude as a positive, negative, or neutral feeling toward some object or behavior. In this study, "attitude" indicates the counselors' sense of curiosity towards multiculturalism, and his/her thinking and feelings about multiculturalism. The aim of this study was to assess the level of multiculturalism integration in the counseling practices in Kenya and Zimbabwe.

II. Objectives

The focus of this research is to draw information about the degree of attitudes, knowledge, and skills in Multicultural Competencies applications by counselors in Kenya and Zimbabwe. The results of the study are expected to display the importance of MCC in counseling, add literature on MCC and be the basis for further research on MCC in counselling. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

- (i) How do practicing counsellors in Kenya and Zimbabwe apply knowledge, skills and attitude in MCC?
- (ii) What are the challenges practicing counselors face if, or, at the time of, implementing MCC in Kenya and Zimbabwe?
- (iii) What can be done to determine appropriate interventions for practicing counselors to deal with challenges met when encountering MCC in Kenya and Zimbabwe.

III. Research Methodology

This study followed a qualitative approach, specifically phenomenological research design by using face to face interviews. Ten (10) practicing counselors, 5 from Kenya and 5 from Zimbabwe were purposively sampled out in Kenya and Zimbabwe.

Findings

Demographics Information

Of the 10 interviewed participants, there were seven and three males, holding master's (7) and doctorate (3) degrees. Four out of the five participants in Kenya had training in multiculturalism while none of the participants in Zimbabwe had initial training. A half of the participants have between 1-5 years of counseling practice experience, two have been practicing for between 11 and 15 years, two have also been practicing between 16 and 20 years, while one has been a counselor for more than 20 years.

Awareness of MCC

The participants were asked about their awareness of their own culture and the culture of their clients. Participants from Kenya and Zimbabwe stated that they were aware of their cultures and the culture of their clients in their counseling practices. Also, that they were able to manage feelings relating to cultural differences. The area of awareness in multicultural counselling competencies were expressed in the following statements:

"I am able to understand and appreciate with people of different cultures other than mine" (Participant Z3, September 16, 2022).

"I always explore to know more about how cultural factors are influencing the client problem" (Participant K4, September 30, 2022).

"I work not to get shocked by what clients' reports and to evaluate the feelings of the client based on their perspective." (Participant K1, September 3, 2022).

“I bracket out all biases, prejudices and pre-conceived ideas I have about client’s Culture”. (Participant Z5, October 1, 2022).

A participant from Zimbabwe stressed that, although multicultural counselling is not part of counseling training in the country, there is multicultural awareness when she stated,

“I am not trained in MCC but am aware of cultural diversity”. (Participant Z4, September 23, 2022).

Knowledge, Skills, and Attitude

Table 1 shows the themes on knowledge, skills, and attitude on the participants on MCC.

Table 1

Thematic Presentation of Multicultural Knowledge, Skills, and Attitude

Theme	Sub-theme	Response
Knowledge	Own culture	There are some degrees of knowledge about counselors’ own culture. The degrees ranged from <i>“Quite a lot”</i> to <i>“Just a little”</i> .
	Culture of client	The counselors from Kenya and Zimbabwe have some knowledge about the clients’ cultures especially those who share the same culture with the counselor. For example, a counselor said, <i>“Those that I share culture with, I know. The others I research or get to know their culture from them”.</i> (Participant Z2, September 5, 2022).
Skill	Promoting client mental health and well being	The Counselors reported that they promote client mental health and well-being in a culturally competent manner by several ways which include but not limited to listening, accommodating, accepting, and removing biases. A Counselor stated that he displayed multicultural skills by: <i>“Exploring client’s issues and supporting them to find solutions for their issues based on what is possible for them in their environment; by doing what they feel works for them better.”</i> (Participant K3, September 14, 2022).
Attitude	Attitude towards cultural values and beliefs	All participants reported that they had positive attitude towards cultural values and beliefs of the clients of the area of their practice. A participant mentioned: <i>“I respect other cultures and avoid being judgmental.”</i> (Participant Z1, September 4, 2022). Another expressed: <i>“I am flexible enough to tailor the sessions to best serve the client during the counselling relationship.”</i> (Participant K5, October 4, 2022).

Challenges Faced by Counselors in Multicultural Counselling

The study also investigated the challenges practicing counselors face when implementing MCC.

Several counselors mentioned that there was *communication barrier between counselors and their clients due to counselor’s inadequacies in local language*. One respondent said,

"Language differences was a barrier. Majority of the clients around are illiterate". (Participant K2, September 6, 2022).

Another respondent expressed,

"Some clients cannot express themselves in English". (Participant Z1, September 4, 2022).

It was also observed that counselors were not confident when handling a client whose culture is not familiar to theirs. One respondent voiced,

"Lack of enough knowledge specifically when I get a client from a culture that I have not explored or read about". (Participant K4, September 30, 2022).

There was also lack of culturally appropriate interventions to deal with challenges met when encountering MCC. All the counselors from Zimbabwe expressed that there was need for training in multicultural competencies. A Participant said,

"We need more trained Counselors". (Participant Z1, September 4, 2022).

Another participant noted,

"There is need for more continuous education and personal discoveries to understand different cultures. (Participant K3, September 14, 2022).

Some counselors expressed that having a mindset about particular culture of a client can be a challenge. A participant mentioned,

"In other words, counselors need to avoid stereotypes and cultural biases." (Participant K5, October 4, 2022).

Participating counselors expressed that counselor's rigidity may be a challenge to MCC. One expressed,

"It is essential for all counselors to be flexible in embracing diverse cultures to journey comfortably with clients." (Participant Z2, September 5, 2022).

There was also an indication of lack of training in MCC. Counselors expressed the need to undergo MCC training. One participant commented that,

"MCC should be compulsory during training and every counselor should know about this". (Participant Z3, September 16, 2022).

It was noted that not being genuine to one's self or being open to learn from the client can be a challenge to MCC. One counselor asserted,

"As a counselor it is important to be true to self and reflect on self of where there may be difference with clients. This will enable the counselor to know if they can or cannot go through the healing process with the clients". (Participant K5, October 4, 2022).

IV. Discussion

This study sought information about the degree of attitudes, knowledge, and skills in Multicultural Competencies applications by counselors in Kenya and Zimbabwe. The study affirmed the importance of MCC in counseling practice. This finding concurs with Collins (2018) who asserts that the development of multicultural competencies is foundational in the professional growth of a counselling psychologist. This could be assumed that positive attitude makes the client feel welcomed, heard, understood, valued, and supported by the counselor. It will also break any cultural barrier that may exist between the counselor and client. This finding corroborates with Thobani (2018) who echoes that as global cultural diversity continues to grow and brings different people together, the need for inter-culturalism becomes more evident.

There was mention of communication barrier between counselors and clients as a challenge. This is in agreement with Arnold (2022) who identifies language as a common barrier to counselling. Linguistic mismatches that occur between clients and counselors can be problematic in delivering mental health services to ethnic minority groups. Arnold (2022) emphasize that communication and cultural competence go hand and hand. Language is critical to psychotherapeutic practice. Language helps build good rapport and effective communication between the counselor and client. This finding is supported with Costa (2020) who points out that there is insufficient "talking about the talk" in training for psychotherapists, who may

end up unprepared when facing clients – and possibly interpreters – with unusual linguistic profiles which may change the dynamics in the session.

These imply that majority of counselors understood themselves in terms of their own culture and had knowledge, skills and attitude on MCC. This finding supports Wilson et al., (2015) who noted that it is essential to understand how our values facilitate or not facilitate services to all.

Lastly, it is quite evident that almost half of the participants are not trained in Multicultural Counselling even though they are utilizing the methods. This could be because most of them are senior counselors who are quite experienced. However, those untrained feel there is need for competence training in this area for effective Counselling to people of various cultures. There is therefore need for further research to find out if all counselors in Zimbabwe are not trained in MCC since most of those interviewed are not trained.

V. Conclusion

Multicultural Competencies in Counselling (MCC) Practices in Kenya and Zimbabwe was investigated in this study. Both Kenyan and Zimbabwean counselors show some degrees of multicultural awareness in their counseling practices, despite the Zimbabwean counselors lacking formal training in multicultural counseling. One challenge to the multicultural counseling practice, among others, was language barrier. This needs to be professionally addressed.

VI. Recommendation

It is recommended that multicultural counseling be taught in all counseling training colleges. Also, continue education in the same area should be encouraged by the stakeholders in counselors' training, and online training be developed for them.

It is also important that counselors who work in a community of a cultural and language difference learn the language of the people with whom s/he have therapeutic alliance. The use of professional interpreters may also bridge the language barrier in counseling.

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