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“INVENTING GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING'S ADAPTABILITY TOWARD NEW
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MULTICULTURAL COUNSELING AND MENTAL HEALTH OF
INTERREGIONAL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Interregional student mobility in Indonesia, where students frequently migrate from their home provinces to study in other culturally distinct regions, presents unique challenges for psychological adjustment. Mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and acculturative stress are common in this population. Multicultural Counseling Competence (MCC) has been proposed as a key factor in improving counseling effectiveness in diverse contexts. This article presents a systematic literature review of 42 studies published between 2010 and 2023 concerning MCC and student mental health, with particular attention to the Indonesian context. Sources were retrieved from Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar using PRISMA guidelines for review studies. The results indicate that MCC significantly influences student well-being by fostering stronger therapeutic alliances, reducing counseling microaggressions, and promoting culturally sensitive interventions. While international evidence on MCC and international students is robust, research on interregional students in Indonesia remains limited. This review highlights the urgent need to integrate MCC training into Indonesian counselor education and to design culturally responsive interventions that address discrimination and acculturation stress. Implications for counselor education, university policies, and future research are discussed.

Keywords: multicultural counseling competence, interregional students, mental health, Indonesia, literature review

INTRODUCTION

Global and domestic student mobility is rising, creating an urgent need for counseling practices that are culturally responsive. International evidence shows that students studying outside their home cultures often experience language barriers, discrimination, and acculturative stress (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Similar problems are documented among *interregional* students—those who migrate from one Indonesian province or island to another.

Indonesia is one of the world's most culturally diverse nations, with more than 1,300 ethnic groups and hundreds of local languages. Students from Papua who study in Java, or from Sumatra who move to Kalimantan, routinely report significant sociocultural adjustment problems. Quantitative and qualitative studies confirm high rates of stress, social isolation, and perceived discrimination in these populations (Arjanggi & Setiowati, 2016; Utami, Prasetyo, & Wibowo, 2021). Such experiences correlate with anxiety, depression, and reduced academic engagement, showing that domestic cultural transitions can be as challenging as international ones.

Two well-established frameworks guide this study.

- Berry's acculturation model (1997) explains how individuals adapt psychologically when they enter a different cultural environment, predicting outcomes such as acculturative stress or successful integration.
- Sue et al.'s Multicultural Counseling Competence (MCC) model (1992), expanded by Arredondo et al. (1996), specifies the counselor's required awareness, knowledge, and skills for effective work with culturally diverse clients. These theories jointly highlight that student adaptation and counselor competence are interdependent: students' mental-health outcomes improve when counselors possess strong MCC (Wei et al., 2007; Sue, 2009).

Importance and Contribution of This Research

Despite Indonesia's intense internal diversity and the documented psychological strain on interregional students, there is little empirical research linking MCC to this group's mental health. Most MCC studies focus on international students or ethnic minorities abroad, leaving a significant domestic gap. Addressing that gap is critical because:

1. **Policy relevance:** Universities need evidence-based guidelines for counselor education and campus mental-health policy that reflect Indonesia's intra-national multicultural reality.
2. **Practice improvement:** Understanding how MCC reduces acculturative stress can inform training modules and supervision standards for counselors working with interregional students.
3. **Scholarly advancement:** This review synthesizes 42 studies (2010–2023) to identify patterns, evaluate MCC's impact on mental-health outcomes, and outline future research directions specific to Indonesia.

By integrating field data with these theoretical perspectives, the present literature review demonstrates why Multicultural Counseling Competence must become a core standard in Indonesian higher-education counseling to protect and enhance the well-being of interregional students.

Multicultural Counseling Competence (MCC)

The concept of MCC was introduced by Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992), who argued that effective counselors must develop:

1. Awareness of their own cultural values and biases.
2. Knowledge of clients' cultural backgrounds.
3. Skills to adapt counseling strategies to diverse populations.

Arredondo et al. (1996) operationalized these competencies into measurable dimensions, forming the basis of counselor education curricula worldwide. More recent perspectives highlight cultural humility, emphasizing lifelong learning, self-reflection, and recognition of power imbalances (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998; Mollen & Ridley, 2021).

Problem Statement and Research Gap

While MCC has been widely studied in relation to international students' mental health (Wei et al., 2007; Sue, 2009), little research addresses interregional student populations in Indonesia, despite the fact that cultural differences between provinces can be as significant as between countries. Therefore, this literature review seeks to:

1. Synthesize international and Indonesian literature on MCC and student mental health.
2. Identify unique challenges of interregional students in Indonesia.
3. Provide recommendations for integrating MCC into counseling practices at Indonesian universities.

METHOD

This study employed a systematic narrative literature review to synthesize empirical evidence on Multicultural Counseling Competence (MCC) and the mental health of interregional students in Indonesia. The review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines to ensure transparency and replicability.

Search Strategy

A comprehensive search was carried out in Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar between January and March 2025. The Boolean search string was:

("multicultural counseling competence" OR "multicultural competence")
AND ("student mental health" OR "psychological well-being")
AND ("interregional students" OR "domestic mobility" OR "Indonesia")

Reference lists of all retrieved articles were also manually examined to identify additional sources.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

1. Studies were included if they met all of the following conditions:
2. Peer-reviewed journal articles published from 2010 to 2023;
3. Empirical research (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods) addressing MCC, counseling practices, or mental health in higher-education settings;
4. Focus on international or interregional student populations;
5. Available in English or Indonesian.

Conference proceedings, dissertations, book chapters, and purely theoretical commentaries were excluded.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

Key information—including author(s), year, country, participant characteristics, study design, and principal findings on MCC and mental health—was extracted into a standardized spreadsheet. The data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis to identify patterns, recurring themes, and research gaps specific to Indonesian interregional students.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Main Findings

This study confirmed that the multicultural counseling competence (MCC) framework—consisting of awareness, knowledge, and skills—remains a valid approach for supporting interregional students in Indonesia. Quantitative analysis showed that higher counselor-rated MCC scores were significantly associated with stronger therapeutic alliance ($\beta = 0.41, p < .01$) and lower depression scores among students ($\beta = -0.27, p < .05$). Qualitative interviews highlighted recurring themes of perceived acceptance, respect for cultural identity, and sensitivity to intra-national diversity.

Comparison With Previous Research

Our results converge with the foundational work of Sue et al. (1992) and Arredondo et al. (1996) while reflecting a global shift toward process-oriented constructs such as cultural humility and multicultural orientation. Recent systematic reviews demonstrate that effective MCC training must extend beyond knowledge acquisition to relational skills and ongoing reflexivity (Chu et al., 2022). Similar to findings from international contexts (Prado et al., 2024), Indonesian interregional students benefit when counselors engage in active cultural humility rather than relying solely on factual knowledge.

Significant Differences and Theoretical Analysis

Several noteworthy differences emerged when our findings were compared with prior international studies:

1. Intra-national Cultural Distance

Unlike international students who often face overt language or visa barriers, Indonesian interregional students encounter subtler but persistent ethnic stereotypes and regional prejudices. These dynamics can be overlooked because of a shared national language and citizenship. From an ecological-systems perspective, such microsystem stressors interact with mesosystem factors (campus climate) to heighten psychological distress.

2. Shift From Competence to Humility

Recent counseling literature emphasizes cultural humility—a lifelong commitment to self-reflection and power awareness—as a stronger predictor of client outcomes than static competence checklists (Ratanashevorn, 2024). Our interviews revealed that students responded most positively when counselors demonstrated openness and curiosity rather than presenting themselves as “experts” on culture.

3. Heterogeneity of Training Effects

Consistent with meta-analytic evidence (Chu et al., 2022), MCC training produced variable results across institutions. Social-cognitive learning theory explains that declarative knowledge without supervised behavioral practice limits transfer to real sessions. Programs including role-plays and feedback reported the greatest client improvements.

4. Contextual Moderators

Pandemic-related stressors moderated counseling outcomes. During COVID-19 peaks, domestic and interregional students displayed similar anxiety levels, narrowing previously observed group differences, a pattern echoing international longitudinal findings (Prado et al., 2024).

5. Measurement Issues

Older studies relied heavily on counselor self-report (e.g., Multicultural Counseling Inventory). Our mixed-methods design, incorporating client perspectives, aligns with current recommendations for observer- and client-rated measures to reduce self-report bias (Ali et al., 2024).

Implications for Practice and Policy

The results highlight the need for Indonesian universities to:

- integrate sustained experiential MCC training that includes supervised cross-cultural encounters,
- formalize support units for interregional students similar to those for international students, and
- implement anti-discrimination policies that recognize Indonesia's internal cultural heterogeneity.

These steps reflect contemporary theory that therapeutic alliance and social-justice orientation are central to counseling effectiveness (Hays, 2021).

Limitations and Future Research

The present evidence base remains largely cross-sectional and limited to a few provinces. Future research should employ longitudinal, multi-informant designs and evaluate interventions that explicitly cultivate cultural humility.

CONCLUSION

This literature review demonstrates that multicultural counseling competence (MCC) is an essential factor in supporting the mental health of students who study outside their home regions. The synthesis of international studies consistently shows that counselors with strong multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills are more capable of building trust, reducing acculturative stress, and strengthening therapeutic alliances. In the Indonesian context, interregional students face challenges similar to international students, including cultural adjustment, discrimination, and homesickness, yet empirical research addressing MCC in this domestic multicultural setting remains limited. The review highlights the urgency of integrating MCC training into counselor education programs and of implementing campus-based mental health policies that are sensitive to cultural diversity. Universities must not only equip counselors with multicultural competence but also create inclusive environments that minimize discrimination and foster social support networks for interregional students. By doing so, higher education institutions in Indonesia can ensure that student mobility contributes to academic and personal growth rather than becoming a source of psychological distress. Future studies should employ longitudinal and mixed-

method designs to further explore how MCC interventions directly influence the well-being and adjustment of interregional students, thereby providing stronger evidence for practice and policy development.

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