

EXPLORING PEER COUNSELORS' MULTICULTURAL UNDERSTANDING: ASSESSING THE URGENCY OF MULTICULTURAL COUNSELING IN ISLAMIC UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

Effective peer counseling needs to have good cultural competence to ensure effective communication with the counselee. Cultural competence is increasingly important in higher education institutions as campuses are places where students from diverse backgrounds gather. Unfortunately, research exploring the perspectives of peer counselors in Islamic universities still needs further exploration. This study aims to bridge this gap by exploring the perspectives of prospective peer counselors regarding their multicultural understanding. Using a cross-sectional survey design, this research explores the perspectives of thirty-four prospective peer counselors in an Islamic university in Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan. The instrument used is a cultural awareness questionnaire developed based on multicultural awareness theory and cognitive stage development theory. The results indicate that the level of multicultural awareness among Islamic university students still needs improvement, as participants expressed agreement with 82% of items related to duality, indicating that they have a limited view of other cultures and their perspectives on other cultures are still influenced by the perspectives of others. This study then offers several implications to enhance their multicultural awareness to prepare them to become competent peer counselors.

Keywords: Peer Counseling, Multicultural Counseling, Multicultural Understanding, Cross-sectional Study

Abstrak

Konseling sebaya yang efektif perlu memiliki kompetensi budaya yang baik agar dapat terhubung komunikasi yang efektif dengan konselinya. Kompetensi budaya semakin penting di perguruan tinggi karena kampus merupakan tempat berkumpulnya mahasiswa dari berbagai latar belakang. Sayangnya, penelitian yang mengeksplorasi perspektif koselor sebaya di perguruan tinggi Islam masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjembatani keterbatasan tersebut dengan menggali perspektif calon konselor sebaya terkait pemahaman multicultural mereka. Dengan menggunakan desain cross-sectional survey, penelitian ini menggali perspektif tiga puluh empat calon konselor sebaya di perguruan tinggi Islam yang berada di Banjarmasin, Kalimantan Selatan. Instrumen yang digunakan adalah angket kesadaran budaya yang dikembangkan berdasarkan teori kesadaran multikultural dan teori pentahapan kognitif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan

bahwa tingkat kesadaran multibudaya mahasiswa perguruan tinggi Islam masih perlu ditingkatkan karena partisipan menyatakan kesetujuan mereka terhadap 82% items terkait duality, yang menunjukkan bahwa mereka melihat budaya lain secara terbatas dan pandangan mereka terkait budaya lain masih dipengaruhi oleh pespektif orang lain. Penelitian ini kemudian menawarkan beberapa alternatif dalam meningkatkan kesadaran multibudaya mereka agar siap menjadi konselor sebaya yang kompeten.

Kata kunci: *Konseling Sebaya, Konseling Lintas Budaya, Pemahaman Lintas Budaya, Cross-sectional Studi*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, cultural diversity in islamic higher education is increasing due to the growing community affected by the number of students from various regional and cultural backgrounds. According to Kleinman & Benson (2006), culture encompasses all things that can be learned to perform a belief, value, and appreciate it. These things include the entirety of ideals, beliefs, skills, tools, customs, and institutions into which each member of society is born. Then, multiculturalism refers to cultural differences that can affect the communication process among group members. Multicultural differences can potentially cause problems in higher education (Torres & Tarozzi, 2020). Thus, cultural factors are crucial to be diagnosed, and psychological support services, such as counseling, are essential to form beliefs related to mental health, behavior, and positive values.

Multicultural counseling competence (MCC) is believed to be an important factor for counselors if they want to provide a better and innovative guidance and counseling services (Ridley, Sahu, et al., 2021). MCC is defined as the ability of the counselors to provide effective counseling services to clients who differs from them culturally (Ivers et al., 2016; Ridley, Mollen, et al., 2021). This means that counselors who have cultural competent can engage and assist individuals from a wide range of cultural backgrounds, as well as acknowledge and respect the diversity of their clients' experiences and identities.

In Indonesia, the urgency to embrace multicultural understanding during the process of guidance and counseling has been emphasized in the regulation from the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 111 of 2014 on Guidance and Counseling, Article 5, point (a), which states that the implementation of guidance and counseling must adhere to the principle of non-discrimination (Kemendikbud, 2014). It means that guidance and counseling services should be implemented by counting the multicultural aspect in order to avoid discrimination in the provision of guidance and counseling services. Therefore, in preparing good counselors in islamic higher education, introducing multicultural awareness to them is essential.

One of common counseling practices in higher education is peer counseling. This practice has been empirically affective to support students because of its huge benefits (Rahmi et al., 2023). The first benefit is students spare more time with their peers so they can be more open to share information (Rachmaningtyas & Khoirunnisa, 2022). Second, peer

support can provide both physical and psychological support because they consider them as a part of their social group (Oktariani et al., 2020). Many research has yielded positive impacts of peer counseling on students' academic outcome (Maheni, 2019), self-regulation in learning (Sumia et al., 2020), students' resilience (Almun & Ash-Shiddiqy, 2021), and students' subjective well-being (Ardiansyah & Tambusai, 2021).

Reviewing the effectiveness of peer counseling makes the researchers assume that preparing peer counselors to be multiculturally competent can be a good way in supporting them to successfully implement multicultural counseling. Thus, exploring their multicultural understanding should become a priority before the implementation started. Although many research has been conducted on multicultural counseling (Hastiani & Rahmi, 2021; Irvine et al., 2022; Iswari, 2017; Kuo et al., 2023; Robinson & Savitsky, 2020; Rumaisha Aqra et al., 2024), research on peer counselors' multicultural understanding in Islamic higher education context still needs further exploration. Therefore, the present study aims to explore peer counselors' multicultural understanding based on the theory of multicultural awareness (Sue, 1996) and cognitive intellectual development theory (Perry, 1999). This study offers implications for providing the basis for the implementation of multicultural counseling for peer counseling in the Islamic higher education context.

METHODS

Since the purpose of the study is to explore peer counselors' multicultural understanding, a cross-sectional survey was employed as a method of study. This method allows the researchers to collect students' current understanding on multicultural perspective at one point in time (Creswell, 2012). To investigate their understanding, a questionnaire was developed based on the theory of cognitive intellectual development (Perry, 1999). According to this theory, students' multicultural understanding can be seen as a hierarchy based on their cognitive intellectual development in four stages: 1) dualism, 2) multiplicity, 3) relativism, and 4) commitment. Faridati and Atmoko (2013) explained these terms. Dualism refers to absolute, black-and-white, right-or-wrong thinking. Multiplicity means acknowledging that some problems can be solved and some answers are yet unknown. Then, relativism refers to understanding the importance of specific contexts of knowledge—everything is relative to other factors. Last, commitment is the highest category in Perry's model. It means that the students attempt to make actual commitments to personal directions and values, evaluate the consequences and implications of their commitments and strive to resolve conflicts, and finally recognize that conflicts may never be fully resolved and make peace with the ongoing struggle.

To measure peer counselors' multicultural understanding, the present study used a ready-adapted questionnaire from Faridati and Atmoko (2013). In their research, the questionnaire had 99 items to observe those aspects of multicultural understanding. Prior to survey, the researchers conducted an expert validation with two experts in multicultural counseling study. Based on their suggestions, the items were reduced into sixty-four. Then, the questionnaire was tried out to assess its validity and reliability. Based on the

result of statistical computation, all items were valid and the reliability score was .97, which means it had good reliability (See Table 1). Those sixty-four items consisted of 17 items for measuring dualism, 25 items for measuring multicliplity, 14 items for measuring relativism, and 8 items to measure commitment.

Table 1. Reliability of the items

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.970	64

The present study conducted at an Islamic University in South Kalimantan. Convenience sampling was used since the researchers were guidance and counselling lectures at that university so they had access to the participants. The participants who filled the questionnaire were those who participated in peer counselling training. The researchers contacted them one by one or via WhatsApp group. They were explained about the purpose of the study and their participation in the study was voluntarily. Based on the result, there were 34 students who were willing to participated in the study.

The questionnaire used Likert scale from 1-4 (1-strongly disagree; 2-disagree; 3-agree; and 4-strongly agree). Based on those scale, the interpretation of the participants' perspective was classified based on Table 2.

Table 2. Likert Four-Point Scale Range Interpretation

Point	Scale Range	Interpretation
4	4.00-3.00	Strongly Agree
3	2.99-2.00	Agree
2	1.99-1.00	Disagree
1	1.00-0.99	Strongly disagree

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Dualism

When the students in the dualism stage, they see the world as black and white. They believe that only one culture is right. Their perspectives and judgments are influenced by others, for examples their parents (Faridati & Atmoko, 2013; Perry, 1999).

Table 3. Peer Counselors' Dualism Perspective

No	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	I think that men are better than women (or vice versa, women are better than men)	1.82	.716
2.	I think that a group of community which I belong to is the right one.	1.88	.640
3.	Regarding beliefs in certain community, whatever my parents say is good or bad, I simply follow that judgment.	2.24	.741
4.	I have a little understanding of the customs of an ethnic group other than my own.	3.03	.758
5.	Regarding a certain ethnic group, whatever my parents say is good or bad, I simply follow that judgment.	2.15	.784

6.	I have a little understanding of other ethnic groups other than my own.	2.88	.640
7.	Regarding a certain ethnic group, whatever my parents say is good or bad, I simply follow that judgment.	2.29	.760
8.	I have a little understanding of the beliefs of other communities besides my own.	2.85	.821
9.	Regarding certain communities, whatever my parents say is good or bad, I simply follow that judgment.	1.76	.699
10.	Regarding certain religions, whatever my parents say is good or bad, I simply follow that judgment.	2.44	.927
11.	I have a little understanding about other cultures other than my own.	2.94	.649
12.	I observe that from various religions, one religion is true while others are considered false.	2.41	1.07
13.	I perceive my culture is the best, compared to others.	1.82	.758
14.	Regarding men and women, whatever my parents say is good or bad, I simply follow that judgment.	2.29	.836
15.	I have a little understanding of a community group other than the one I am a part of.	2.76	.606
16.	Regarding certain cultures, whatever my parents say is good or bad, I simply follow that judgment.	2.35	.774
17.	I have a little understanding about the opposite gender.	2.94	.736

Table 3 shows that most of the students agree with the statements which reflect their understanding on duality. Most of them were disagree only on three items, those are items number 1, 2, and 8. Item number 1 represents their perspective on gender. It confirms that the participants did not discriminate between males or females. They believe that both genders are equal. Items number 2 about their cultural identity, reflecting their understanding that no group should be perceived worse than the others. Each group has their chance to be respected. Last, item number 8 refers to their cultural awareness on the beliefs of other communities. Understanding on this aspect is salient to keep peace among communities in terms of respecting of groups' beliefs. However, it should be noted that most of the peer counselors in the study have the same opinion about the other 14 items. It means their perspectives on other cultures were limited and easily influenced by others.

This finding calls for the necessity to train the peers counselors to have better perspective about multicultural understanding. According to Sue and Sue (1996), to be professional counselors with good multicultural competence, they should have multicultural awareness, which include: (1) the importance of having sensitivity and awareness of each individual's cultural heritage, (2) being aware that cultural backgrounds and experiences can influence attitudes, values, and biases in psychological processes. A counselors who are not sensitive to culture diversity may provide irrelevant intervention for the clients (Barden et al., 2017).

Multiplicity

Perry's theory (1999) mention that people, who are in the multiplicity stage, know that there are more than one culture exists. They aware about other cultures and start using supporting evidence to address issues instead of solely depending on what authorities say, but they count preconceptions and prejudices as acceptable evidence.

Table 4. Peer Counselors' Multiplicity Perspective

No	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	Men and women cannot be judged from the perspective of right or wrong.	3.24	.741
2.	I believe that various community groups can coexist in Indonesia.	3.29	.760
3.	I am beginning to feel that perhaps I am wrong in judging other people's beliefs.	2.71	.719
4.	I realize that living alongside people of different religions can enhance opportunities for cooperation.	3.15	.744
5.	I judge good or bad about a gender based on my personal considerations.	2.88	.880
6.	I am beginning to feel that perhaps I am wrong in judging my own ethnicity.	2.38	.853
7.	Various cultural diversity cannot be viewed solely from the perspective of right or wrong.	3.38	.697
8.	I believe that various religions can coexist harmoniously in Indonesia.	3.38	.697
9.	I am beginning to feel that perhaps I am wrong in judging other groups outside my own.	2.59	.743
10.	I realize that living alongside people from different groups can enhance opportunities for cooperation.	3.26	.666
11.	I judge a group of community as good or bad based on my personal considerations.	2.82	.834
12.	I view various community groups as a harmonious unity.	3.15	.684
13.	I believe that various beliefs can coexist in Indonesia.	3.32	.684
14.	I am beginning to feel that perhaps I am wrong in judging other people's ethnicities.	2.68	.768
15.	I realize that living alongside people of different beliefs can enhance opportunities for cooperation.	3.09	.712
16.	I judge a culture as good or bad based on my personal considerations	2.82	.797
17.	I am beginning to feel that perhaps I am wrong in judging my own gender.	2.47	.896
18.	I believe that men and women can complement each other.	3.41	.701
19.	I am beginning to feel that perhaps I am wrong in judging the culture of communities outside my own.	2.68	.768
20.	I realize that living alongside people from different ethnicities can enhance opportunities for cooperation.	3.24	.605
21.	I judge good and bad about a religion based on my personal considerations.	2.82	.904
22.	I am beginning to feel that perhaps I am wrong in judging my own religion.	2.18	.904
23.	I believe that various ethnic groups can coexist in Indonesia.	3.32	.727
24.	I realize that living alongside people from different cultures can enhance opportunities for cooperation.	3.24	.699
25.	I believe that various cultures can coexist in Indonesia.	3.21	.687

As we can observe from Table 4, it can be seen that most of the participants scale range are between 2.18-3.38, which means that they agree and strongly disagree with those

statements. Some of those statements refers to positive perspectives and the others are negative. Items number 5, 11, 16, and 21 reflects that the participants judge other gender, community, culture, and religion based on their personal consideration. Widodo et al., (2022) suggest that counselor behavior that uses only its own culture as reference should be avoided. However, it should be noted they also positively view other gender, community, culture, and religion to can coexist and provide opportunities for cooperation. Peer counselors whose these perspective can respect their clients whose different worldviews, religion, ethnicities, or gender (Ridley, Mollen, et al., 2021). Counselors with good understanding on other cultures also could modified their techniques so they suit the needs of the counselee (Hastiani & Rahmi, 2021).

RELATIVISM

People who are in the relativism stage believe that their values should be based on context and individual perspective (Perry, 1999). They will search for evidences before coming to the conclusion.

Table 5. Peer Counselors' Multiplicity Perspective

No	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	I control my actions towards the opposite sex.	3.29	.719
2.	I understand that various social groups all have the right to live.	3.44	.705
3.	I respect the beliefs held by others, but I do not follow those beliefs.	3.56	.705
4.	I control my actions towards other cultures that are different from mine.	3.26	.751
5.	I understand that various religions all have the right to exist.	3.38	.697
6.	I respect the gender differences of others, but I do not follow the behaviors of that gender.	3.32	.727
7.	I control myself in acting towards people of a different ethnicity from mine.	3.18	.797
8.	I understand that various beliefs have an equal right to exist.	3.32	.727
9.	I respect the differences of other community groups, but I do not follow the rules within those groups.	3.18	.797
10.	I control myself in acting towards people with different beliefs from mine.	3.32	.806
11.	I understand that various ethnic groups have an equal right to exist.	3.36	.790
12.	I respect the religious differences of others, but I do not follow their religious practices.	3.21	.701
13.	I understand that various cultures have an equal right to exist.	3.44	.746
14.	I respect the different customs of other ethnic groups, but I do not follow those customs.	3.35	.691

From Table 5, it can be analyzed that majority of the participants agree and strongly agree on all statements. The statements reflect the participants perspective in perceiving their ability to control their actions on opposite gender, different social group, different cultures and different beliefs. Seeing their responses, it can be said that they have good understanding on those aspects. As has been theorized by Sue (1996), a multiculturally competent counselor should recognize their own limits in cultural diversity and be able to identify the sources of discomfort when interacting with others students from different cultural backgrounds. Observing the scale range, it also can be noticed that there is a slight increase compared to multiplicity perspective.

COMMITMENT

At the highest level of Perry's model, individuals begin to make real commitments to their personal direction and values. They assess the consequences and implications of these commitments and strive to resolve conflicts. They recognize that some conflicts may never be entirely resolved and accept the ongoing nature of these struggles (Perry, 1999). Thus, individual who reach this stage can easily deal with differences and multicultural issues.

Table 6. Peer Counselors' Perspective on Commitment

No	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	I understand my own culture well.	3.18	.758
2.	I learn to understand the customs of other groups of people.	3.00	.651
3.	I am involved in the development of my own culture without damaging relationships with other cultures.	3.56	.705
4.	I learn to understand the beliefs held by others.	3.35	.646
5.	I understand my gender role well.	3.32	.727
6.	I understand well the customs of the community group I belong to.	3.35	.774
7.	I learn to understand the ethnicities of other people.	3.29	.719
8.	I believe that every religion around me has the right to express their own goodness.	3.32	.727

It can be highlighted from Table 6 that majority of the participants strongly agree on all statements, with mean scores ranging from 3.00 to 3.56. The highest agreement is observed for the statement about being involved in their own cultural development without damaging relationships with other cultures (mean = 3.56). This finding reveals that peer counselors participated in the study has good cross-cultural understanding and know well their own culture. Since Indonesia is considered as a rich culture country, good understanding on other cultures while maintaining good understanding on their own culture is a recommended prerequisite for counselors (Zakiyah et al., 2022). Therefore, a peer counselor should be prepared to have good multicultural understanding so they can effectively engage in cross-cultural counseling (Barden et al., 2017; Widodo et al., 2022). The survey comes to a result that the participants in the present study have good multicultural understand but they do not have a firm position. Sometimes, they can be in the good level of category based on Perry's model, but they also can be in the dualism stage. This conclusion, then, requires a solution from the Islamic higher education institutions to prepare design a multicultural training program for the peer counselors or to embed multicultural knowledge and skills into their curriculum.

CONCLUSION

The present study explores peer counselors' multicultural understanding based on the theory of cognitive stage development. The findings reveal that the participants shows good understanding of multicultural issues in counseling, but do not have a firm commitment. Based on this result, this study suggests some practical recommendations. First, it is an urgency for islamic higher education to provide a multicultural training for

peer counselors. This training should be designed carefully so they have a firm commitment and be able to implement it during the process of peer counseling. Psychoeducation stage cognitive-experiential (CSE) training model, for example, can be an alternative for the design of training. Second, the inclusion of multicultural knowledge and issue also can be inserted in the islamic higher education curriculum so every student get the chance to improve their multicultural competence. Since we live in a multicultural world, so that have multicultural awaranness is beneficial for every individual.

This present study, of course, has its limitation. It is small-scale research so it may have limited generalizability. The sample size is relatively small and specific to a particular context, which may not fully represent the broader population. Next study is recommended to cover broader participants or areas. Other kinds of research design, such as research and development, also can be employed to develop and implement a multicultural counseling training in islamic higher education.

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