Decolonizing Counseling Practice: Multicultural Innovations and Social Justice in a Systematic Review of Scopus Database Study

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Abstract. This study aims to (1) identify research trends in multicultural counseling innovations based on Scopus data from 2019–2025, and (2) explore the decolonization of counseling practices through a systematic analysis of the development of multicultural competence and social justice in counseling psychology. This inquiry is particularly relevant as universal counseling models rooted in Western norms are increasingly regarded as insufficient to address the diverse needs of global societies. The focus is directed toward understanding how decolonization challenges the dominance of Western perspectives, incorporates local wisdom, and promotes the role of counselors as agents of social advocacy. A systematic literature review was conducted on 173 Scopus-indexed articles published between 2019 and 2025, with screening procedures guided by the PRISMA framework. The findings demonstrate that multicultural counseling innovations have advanced through multiple approaches, including culturally responsive cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), systematic adaptation models such as the Southampton Adaptation Framework, and the integration of traditional practices rooted in indigenous communities. The study further reveals that the effectiveness of psychological interventions is largely determined by the extent of cultural adaptation, while inadequate adaptation risks reproducing bias and reinforcing social inequities. In conclusion, decolonizing counseling emerges as a transformative paradigm that emphasizes the integration of indigenous knowledge, critical awareness of systemic injustice, and the counselor's role as a catalyst for social change. These insights carry significant implications for advancing inclusive counseling theories and developing contextually grounded practices that respond effectively to multicultural societies in the era of globalization.

Keywords: counseling decolonization; multicultural competence; social justice; systematic literature review; counseling innovation

INTRODUCTION

The development of multicultural counseling has undergone a significant transformation since the introduction of the Multicultural Counseling Competencies (Sue et al., 1992). Universal models rooted in Western norms are increasingly regarded as inadequate in addressing the complex counseling needs of today's diverse global societies (T. B. Smith & Trimble, 2015). When counselors fail to integrate cultural contexts into their practice, counseling may inadvertently generate bias, perpetuate marginalization, and even reproduce social injustice (Bulut et al., 2023)

The need for culturally sensitive counseling approaches has become increasingly urgent in the context of globalization, migration, and cross-cultural dynamics (Nam & Kim, 2025). Several studies emphasize that the success of

psychological interventions lies not only in the effectiveness of techniques but also in the extent to which cultural adaptation is implemented (Arundell et al., 2021; Huey et al., 2023), the failure to undertake cultural adaptation has even been regarded as a human rights issue (Dalmia et al., 2023). Therefore, systematic examinations of culturally grounded and innovative counseling practices are essential for shaping new directions in the development of counseling theory and practice.

Recent research highlights the emergence of diverse innovations in culturally grounded counseling. Culturally responsive CBT has been shown to be effective across different populations, including Asian, Latinx, and refugee communities(Delgado et al., 2025; Huey et al., 2023). The Southampton Adaptation Framework was developed to guide the systematic adaptation of interventions without compromising the integrity of the original model (Naeem et al., 2024). Other conceptual frameworks, such as cultural pragmatism, encourage alternative ways of applying cultural competencies (Yahalom & Brown, 2023). Traditional practice–based approaches, such as ceremonial rituals within American Indian communities, have also been recognized as effective in reducing substance use problems (Chase-Begay et al., 2023). Likewise, the involvement of Indigenous communities in the design of mental health interventions has been shown to enhance program relevance and acceptance (Lee et al., 2022; Wendt et al., 2022). Despite these advances, methodological diversity and limited sample sizes remain challenges in establishing global standards (Heim & Weise, 2021; Spanhel et al., 2021). It is within this context that the decolonization of counseling practice gains its relevance, by challenging the dominance of Western perspectives that have long served as the mainstream in counseling theories and interventions. Since most counseling models were developed in the United States and Europe, their application to non-Western societies often fails to fully align with clients' social, cultural, and lived realities.

Decolonization therefore demands critical awareness of power structures and systemic inequities including issues of race, ethnicity, social class, gender, religion, and the legacies of colonialism that shape both psychological experiences and counseling relationships. Furthermore, it calls for the integration of local wisdom, cultural values, and living traditions into counseling services, thereby making them more relevant, contextual, and meaningful to clients. At the same time, counselors are expected not only to serve as facilitators of individual change but also as advocates who promote broader social transformation toward justice and equity. In this way, the decolonization of counseling practice represents a crucial step in building a more inclusive, responsive, and culturally attuned paradigm of counseling for global societies.

Although the literature on multicultural counseling has expanded considerably, several critical gaps remain. First, most empirical evidence continues to be dominated by studies conducted in high-income countries, leaving counseling practices in developing contexts underrepresented(Sangraula et al., 2021). Second, research has often focused narrowly on clinical effectiveness without examining the mechanisms through which cultural adaptation enhances engagement and therapeutic outcomes (Heim & Knaevelsrud, 2021). Third, cultural adaptations are frequently implemented in an ad hoc manner without standardized frameworks, making replication and cross-study comparisons difficult (Day et al., 2023; Heim & Knaevelsrud, 2021). In addition, strong epistemological biases persist, as much of the research remains grounded in the WEIRD paradigm (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic), which tends to overlook local epistemologies and cultural wisdom (Anjum & Aziz, 2024; Kryś et al., 2024). As a result, innovative counseling models rooted in Indigenous knowledge are often marginalized within global academic discourse.

This study offers novelty through a systematic literature review approach that not only inventories multicultural counseling practices but also analyzes the mechanisms, frameworks, and effectiveness of cultural adaptation across diverse contexts. Unlike previous reviews that primarily focused on normative discourse(Mollen & Ridley, 2021; O'Hara et al., 2021), this article emphasizes the integration of distinctive practices such as traditional healing practices (Chase-Begay et al., 2023), cultural pragmatism (Yahalom & Brown, 2023) , and digital innovations in culturally responsive counseling(Spanhel et al., 2021). In addition, the study highlights the role of culture-based counseling in contemporary contexts, including post-pandemic mental health care (Korte et al., 2022) and the use of digital

platforms to expand accessibility (Spanhel et al., 2020). By integrating cross-disciplinary perspectives, this study contributes to the formulation of a multicultural counseling framework that is more inclusive, contextualized, and oriented toward social justice.

METHOD

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design to identify, analyze, and synthesize empirical evidence on culturally grounded and innovative counseling approaches. The review process follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure methodological rigor, transparency, and replicability of findings (Dietrich et al., 2022) (Page et al., 2022). Through this systematic framework, the study maps both historical and contemporary developments in multicultural counseling and critically evaluates the empirical foundations and their implications for clinical practice (Joo & Liu, 2020).

Literature search strategy

The literature search was conducted using the Scopus database for publications from 2019 to 2025. The search strategy employed Boolean operators (AND, OR) and controlled vocabulary by combining keywords (Cichewicz, 2023; Joo & Liu, 2020) as *"culturally innovative counseling" OR "unique counseling approaches" OR "culturally based counseling" OR "multicultural counseling."* This process initially yielded 827 documents. Screening was then carried out following the PRISMA stages, resulting in 173 documents for trend analysis. From these, the 15 most highly cited articles relevant to the research topic and objectives were selected for in-depth literature review (Page et al., 2022)

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Eligible articles included original studies employing quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods approaches that explicitly explored culturally innovative counseling practices (Xian et al., 2024). Priority was given to studies providing empirical data on the effectiveness, feasibility, or acceptability of interventions across diverse populations (Aeschlimann et al., 2024). Conversely, theoretical reviews, commentaries, editorials, or studies limited to translation without substantive cultural adaptation were excluded (Spanhel et al., 2020). Eligible articles were original studies employing quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods approaches that explicitly examined culturally innovative counseling practices (Xian et al., 2024).

Data Extraction and Analysis

Data from each study that met the inclusion criteria were systematically extracted, covering the abstract, research design, cultural context, participant characteristics, intervention details, cultural adaptation strategies, measurement instruments, and empirical findings. Particular attention was given to documenting the mechanisms of cultural adaptation within therapeutic models. Studies that integrated traditional problem-solving practices such as narrative and community-based storytelling rooted in Indigenous traditions were also prioritized to highlight forms of counseling innovation aligned with cultural values (Chase-Begay et al., 2023; Richer & Roddy, 2022). The analysis aimed to synthesize best practices while identifying methodological gaps and approaches, thereby providing opportunities to develop a more applicable multicultural counseling framework across diverse global contexts..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Included Studies

The study selection process is presented in Figure 1. A total of 827 records were identified through databases and registers, of which 249 records were screened after removing ineligible entries. From these, 235 reports were sought for further review, but 62 could not be retrieved. Subsequently, 173 reports were assessed for eligibility, with 158 excluded for being non-English (n = 1) or having fewer than 10 citations (n = 157). Finally, 15 studies met the inclusion criteria and were incorporated into this systematic review.

Priority was given to studies providing empirical data on the effectiveness, feasibility, or acceptability of interventions across diverse populations. The subject areas were limited to *Psychology* (152) and *Social Sciences* (93), and only document types classified as articles (173), open access, and written in English were included. From these, 15 manuscripts with the highest citation counts were selected for review.

The detailed selection process is illustrated in the
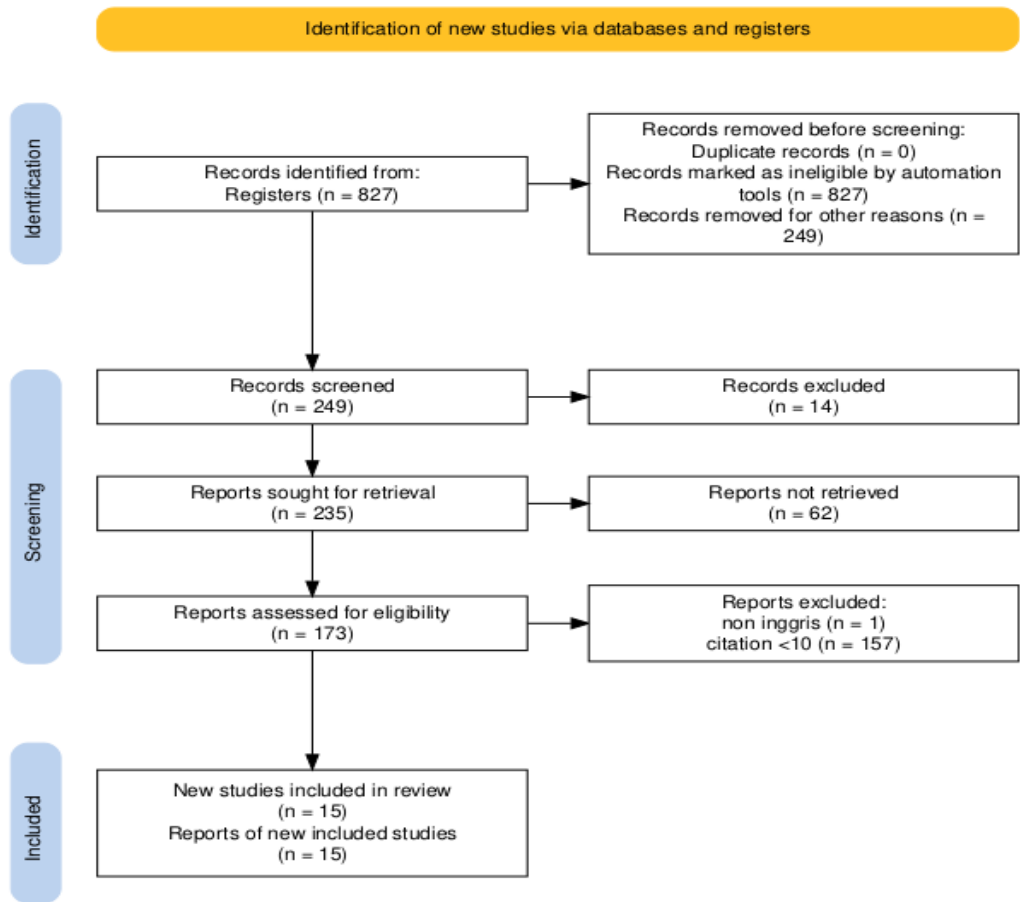PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1).

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Document Selection from Scopus (2019–2025)

Distribution of Publications on Multicultural Counseling Innovations and Practices from Scopus (2019–2025)
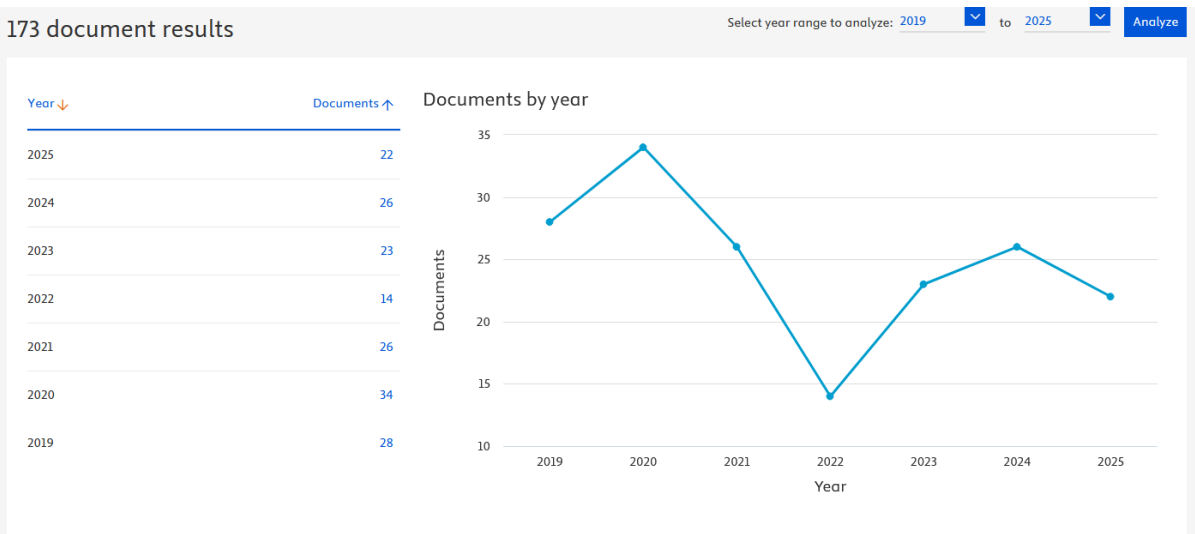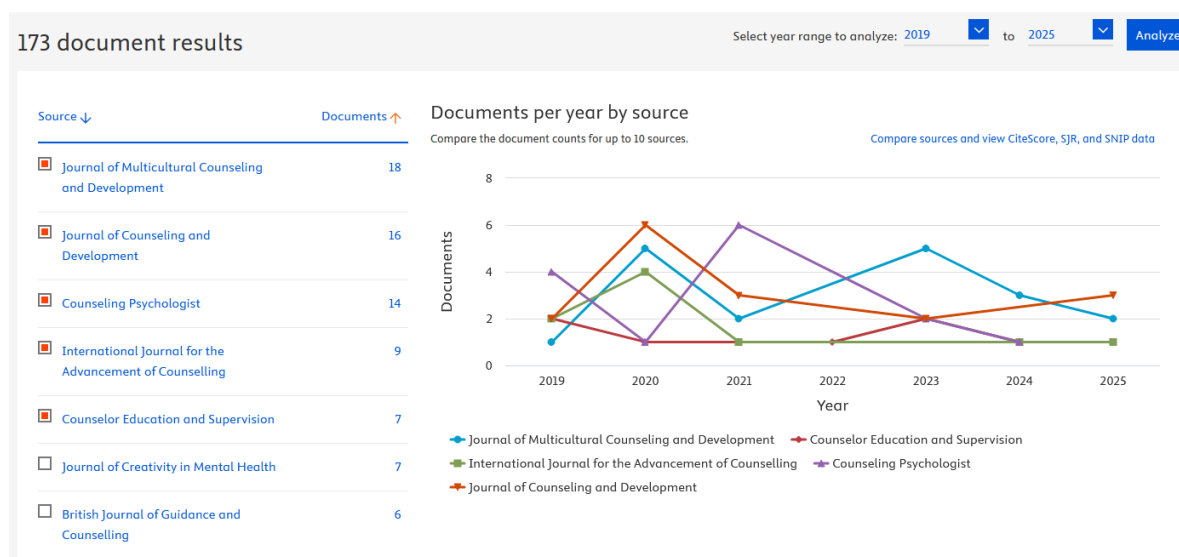

Figure 2. Distribution of Publications on Multicultural Counseling Innovations and Practices from Scopus (2019–2025)
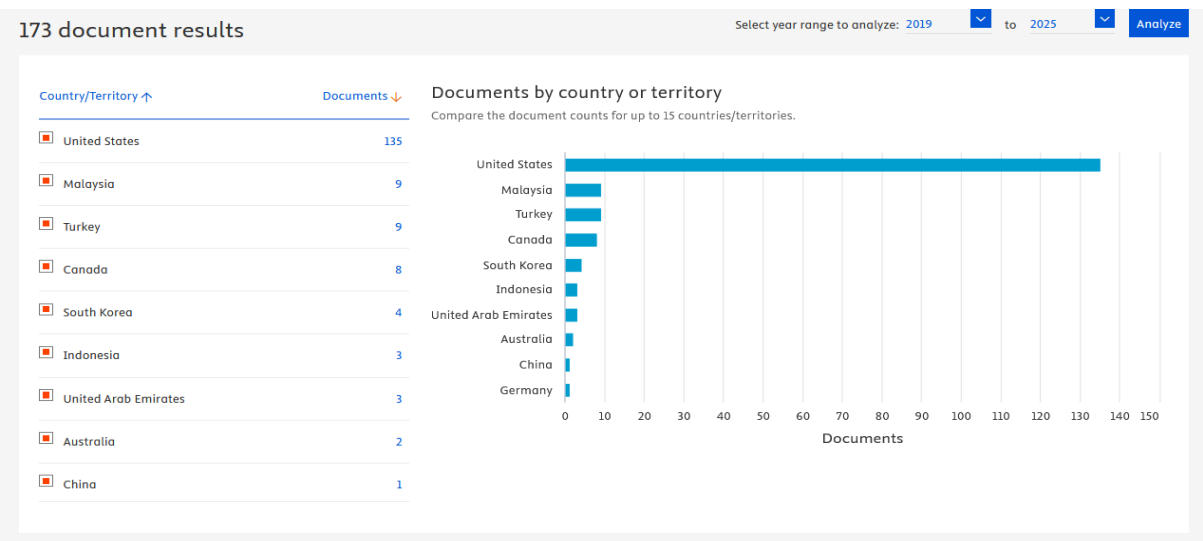
The results of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 173 documents distributed between 2019 and 2025 reveal the dynamic development of research on the examined topic. The data in Figure 2 illustrate a fluctuating publication trend, with the highest number of documents recorded in 2020 (34 publications), followed by a sharp decline in 2022 (14 publications). Subsequently, a recovery was observed in 2023 (23 publications) and relative stability in 2024 (26 publications), although the number decreased again in 2025 (22 publications). This pattern suggests that while there was consistent research interest during the early period (2019–2020), a significant decline occurred due to external factors and shifts in research focus, which was later followed by revitalization efforts in the subsequent years. These findings highlight that research in the field of innovation and practice in multicultural counseling is dynamic and highly sensitive to both global and local contexts. Therefore, more sustainable research strategies are needed not merely to follow trends, but to provide long-term contributions to the advancement of knowledge.

The analysis of the data in Figure 3, comprising 173 documents published between 2019 and 2025, shows that research on innovative and practical approaches in multicultural counseling is distributed across various reputable international journals. The highest contributions are recorded in the Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development (18 articles), followed by the Journal of Counseling and Development (16 articles), and The Counseling Psychologist (14 articles). Annual publication trends reveal fluctuating dynamics across these journals, with the peak observed in 2020, marked by a significant increase in several outlets, particularly the Journal of Counseling and Development and the International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling. Afterward, a noticeable decline occurred in 2022, before stabilizing and demonstrating consistency during the 2023–2024 period. These findings indicate that multicultural counseling remains a highly relevant research focus, with several leading journals serving as primary dissemination channels, while also reflecting that research trends are shaped by global academic dynamics and the surrounding sociocultural context.


Figure 3. Document Distribution by Journal Sources on Multicultural Counseling Innovations and Practices from Scopus (2019–2025)

Figure 4. Document Distribution by Country/Territory

Based on the results of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 173 documents, the distribution of publications by country shows a strong dominance of the United States with 135 articles, far surpassing the contributions of other countries such as Malaysia (9 articles), Turkey (9 articles), and Canada (8 articles). In contrast, Asian countries such as South Korea (4 articles), Indonesia (3 articles), the United Arab Emirates (3 articles), Australia (2 articles), as well as China and Germany (1 article each) made relatively smaller contributions. These findings indicate that research on culturally based and multicultural counseling approaches remains concentrated in Western countries, particularly the United States, which serves as the central hub for the development of multicultural counseling theory and practice. Nevertheless, the involvement of Asian countries, including Indonesia and Malaysia, has begun to emerge, signaling the expansion of discourse into non-Western contexts, although contributions are still limited. This trend presents significant opportunities for developing countries to enrich the global perspective through research grounded in local contexts and cultural wisdom.
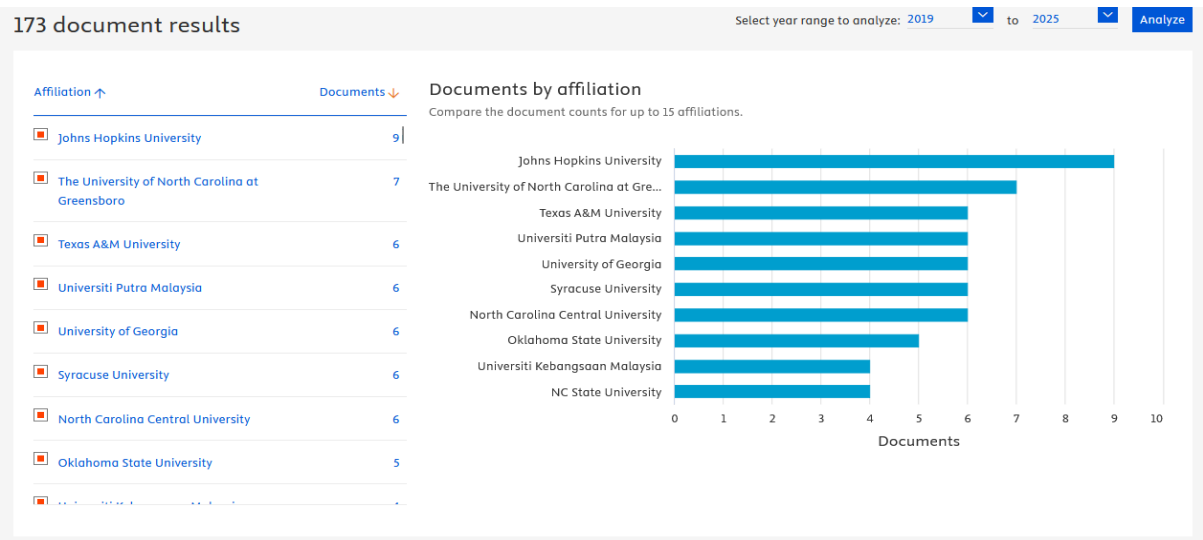
Figure 5. Distribution of Documents by University Affiliation in Multicultural Counseling Publications

Based on Figure 5, publications related to multicultural counseling predominantly originate from universities in the United States, with Johns Hopkins University ranking highest by contributing 9 articles, followed by The University of North Carolina at Greensboro with

7 articles. Other institutions showing notable productivity include Texas A&M University, the University of Georgia, Syracuse University, and North Carolina Central University, each with 6 articles. Meanwhile, from the Asian region, Universiti Putra Malaysia and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia also contributed with 6 and 4 articles, respectively, highlighting the involvement of Malaysian higher education institutions in expanding the global perspective on multicultural counseling. These findings confirm that research centers on multicultural counseling remain largely dominated by American universities; however, contributions from Asian institutions have begun to emerge, offering the potential to enrich the development of counseling knowledge through culturally grounded approaches.

Table 1. Results of literature review analysis on topics and findings of Multicultural Counseling Innovations and Practices

Author	Topic	Findings
(Singh et al., 2020)	Decolonizing counseling practice through multicultural competence and social justice	Integrating social justice theory with the MSJCC enables counselors to decolonize practice by addressing systemic inequities. This involves examining power, privilege, and oppression within the counseling relationship, fostering critical consciousness, and promoting advocacy for liberation. Counselors must embrace this framework to move beyond traditional boundaries and create more equitable practices.
(Day-Vines et al., 2020a)	The Multidimensional Model of Broaching Behavior (MMBB) as a heuristic for multicultural counseling and social justice competence	The MMBB provides a framework for counselors to deeply explore REC concerns, aligning with the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) by fostering self-awareness, therapeutic relationships, and social justice advocacy. It emphasizes addressing systemic barriers and promoting client well-being.
(DeBlaere et al., 2019)	Evolution and the Future of Social Justice in Counseling Psychology	Counseling psychology must advance its social justice efforts to dismantle oppression, move beyond comfort zones to deepen commitment, broaden perspectives, and collaborate with partners to promote equity and justice.
(Day-Vines et al., 2021)	Strategies for Addressing Race, Ethnicity, and Culture in Counseling	Its alignment with Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) and outlining the broaching process
Danica G. Hays (Hays, 2020)	Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies: Research and Innovation	Multicultural and social justice counseling competencies are foundational, yet significant research gaps remain. Addressing these gaps requires innovative methodologies, a focus on intersectionality, and a commitment to advocacy and community-engaged research to ensure culturally relevant and socially just practice.
(King & Borders, 2019)	Experimental Investigation of White Counselors Addressing Race and Racism	The study found that the way White counselors frame initial statements about race and racism significantly affects clients' evaluations of their cultural competence.
(Dollarhide et al., 2021)	A Comprehensive Model for Social Justice Supervision	Social justice supervision has limitations, making it essential to transform the counseling profession. It emphasizes that this model, requiring strong commitment, can empower new counseling practices by integrating social justice skills and attitudes into supervision, ultimately benefiting both counselors and clients.

Table 1. continued…

(Killian & Floren, 2020)	The Impact of Pedagogy on Multicultural and Social Justice Competence of Counselor Trainees	Pedagogical approaches significantly influence the growth of counselor trainees in multicultural relational skills and social justice advocacy. Furthermore, pedagogical strategies promote the development of multicultural knowledge and awareness, with experiential learning and community engagement showing greater impact in specific areas, highlighting the importance of intentional pedagogical choices in counselor education.
(Ridley, Mollen, et al., 2021)	Operationalization of Multicultural Counseling Competence and Its Challenges	The future of multicultural counseling competence must explicitly state therapeutic change as a goal, clarify general versus specific applications, use precise terminology, and integrate subcomponents of the definition. Existing models have limitations, and an integrated model is needed to address these issues and provide clear guidance for practitioners
(Fickling et al., 2019)	The Application of Multicultural and Social Justice Competence in Clinical Supervision	Developing multicultural and social justice competence in clinical supervision is a complex personal process. Supervisors must address their own identities, enhance self-awareness, discuss cultural dynamics, and advocate for models that promote supervisor development and improve client well-being.
(Ridley, Sahu, et al., 2021)	A Process Model for Multicultural Counseling Competence	The process model of multicultural counseling competence is a tool for mental health professionals to effectively utilize culture to facilitate therapeutic change. It is considered ongoing work, encouraging researchers to advance knowledge and enhance practice.
(Levy & Travis, 2020)	Mixtape Creation Reduces Stress in Adolescents Through Group Counseling	Hip Hop–based group work, particularly utilizing the Mixtape Creation Critical Cycle, effectively reduces stress and depression in adolescents. This highlights the value of culturally relevant interventions and the flexibility in leadership style for positive adolescent well-being outcomes.
(Gonzalez-Voller et al., 2020)	A Longitudinal Study of Multicultural Competence in Counselor Education	Counselors' perceived multicultural competence increases over time during their master's programs, with the greatest gains occurring early on. This suggests that multicultural training in counseling programs enhances competence and should continue to be explored.
(Mollen & Ridley, 2021)	Rethinking Multicultural Counseling Competence in Counseling Psychology	Multicultural counseling competence has gained significant attention in mental health, transforming professional psychology. Despite its merits, the lack of clear definition and operationalization creates an unseen trail.
(Wilcox et al., 2020)	Multicultural Competence in Therapists: Self-Report vs. Performance, and Related Factors	Awareness of privilege is the most consistent predictor of multicultural competence, including performance-based measures. A significant finding is the widespread failure of participants to address clients' sociocultural context in case conceptualization, highlighting a critical gap in current multicultural training and practice.

Decolonizing Counseling Practice and the Evolution of Social Justice

In the context of counseling, decolonizing practice carries profound significance as it challenges the dominance of Western perspectives that have long shaped mainstream counseling theories and interventions (Mokgolodi, 2023; Rutter & Camarena, 2015). Most counseling models originated in the United States and Europe, and when applied to non-

Western societies, they often fail to fully align with the distinct social, cultural, and experiential realities of clients. Consequently, decolonization demands critical awareness of power structures and systemic injustices, including issues related to race, ethnicity, social class, gender, religion, and the legacies of colonialism, all of which influence psychological experiences and the counseling relationship. Furthermore, decolonizing counseling practice necessitates the integration of local wisdom, cultural values, and living traditions within communities, making counseling services more relevant, contextual, and meaningful for clients. Simultaneously, counselors are called upon not only to facilitate individual change but also to act as advocates promoting social transformation toward justice and equity. Thus, decolonizing counseling practice represents an effort to construct a more inclusive, responsive, and culturally attuned counseling paradigm that meets the needs of multicultural global societies.

Decolonizing counseling practice involves shifting from dominant Western paradigms toward approaches that are more inclusive, equitable, and contextualized, incorporating both multicultural competence and social justice frameworks (Middleton et al., 2023; Mokgolodi, 2023). Evidence suggests that such decolonization can be operationalized through the integration of the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) as a critical framework (L. C. Smith & Shin, 2008). Counseling moves beyond intrapersonal support to examine the dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression that shape counselor–client interactions. This approach emphasizes critical consciousness, advocacy, and liberation, positioning counseling as a vehicle for social transformation.

Within this context, counseling psychology is also called to continually evolve, moving beyond academic and professional comfort zones. Social justice practice must advance in collaborative, intersectional, and transformative directions to dismantle systemic oppression effectively. The novelty of these findings lies in shifting counseling from a traditional, individualistic model toward a decolonial, social justice–oriented practice that emphasizes structural change, thereby expanding the meaning and scope of the counseling profession

Innovative Models and Strategies for Multicultural Competence

The Multidimensional Model of Broaching Behavior (MMBB) has emerged as an important heuristic, enabling counselors to explore issues of race, ethnicity, and culture more deeply (Day-Vines et al., 2020b). Broaching helps counselors connect the dimensions of the therapeutic relationship with social advocacy while reducing resistance in addressing sensitive topics. Experimental research has even found that White counselors who employ broaching strategies are perceived by clients as more culturally competent.

Beyond the MMBB, various other process models have been developed, including social justice–based supervision and creative approaches such as Hip Hop–based group counseling through the Critical Cycle of Mixtape Making (Levy & Travis, 2020). These strategies emphasize cultural relevance and flexibility in counseling style. The novelty lies in leveraging heuristic models and creative interventions that operationalize multicultural competence not merely as a concept, but as a tangible practice within counseling relationships and group interventions.

Implementation, Research, and Challenges of Multicultural Competence

Research indicates that multicultural and social justice competence is considered foundational, yet significant conceptual and methodological gaps remain. Longitudinal studies confirm that counselor training enhances multicultural competence, particularly during the early stages of education; however, gaps persist in terms of definition, operationalization, and application in clinical supervision. Furthermore, self-report versus performance research reveals that many counselors fail to integrate sociocultural context into case conceptualization, signaling a critical gap in practice.
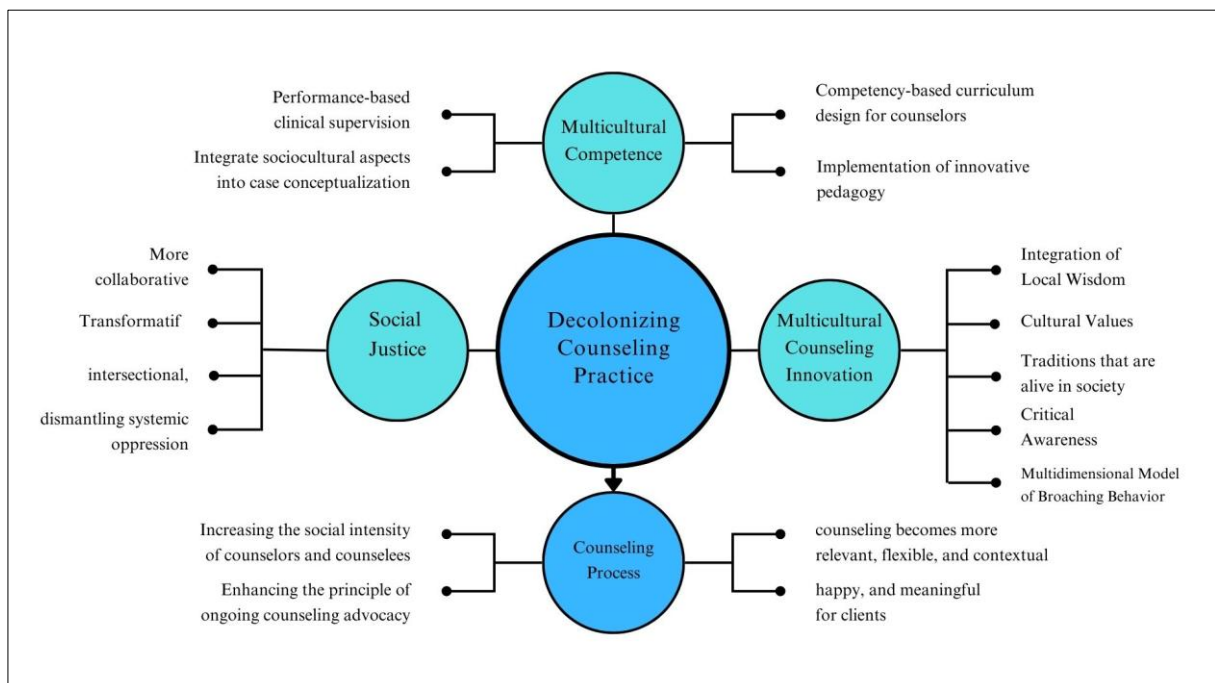
Pedagogical innovations, such as experiential learning and community engagement, have proven more effective in fostering multicultural awareness than traditional methods. This underscores the need for intentionally designed curricula in counselor education. The novelty of this perspective lies in emphasizing that developing multicultural competence is not merely a matter of theoretical definition, but also involves pedagogical implementation, clinical

supervision, and performance-based evaluation to produce practitioners who are truly competent within complex social contexts.

Discussion

These research findings reinforce the literature emphasizing the importance of integrating multicultural competence and social justice in counseling practice. Previously, (Sue et al., 2019) emphasized that multicultural counseling is the fourth competency in professional psychology, but this study's contribution expands the focus toward decolonizing practice, placing social justice as a transformational orientation. The Multidimensional Model of Broaching Behavior (MMBB) has proven to be a significant innovation because it links the exploration of race, ethnicity, and cultural issues with social advocacy, going beyond the traditional framework that is more centered on the individual client. Thus, this study complements previous research such as (Ratts et al., 2016) on Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) by providing a practical heuristic framework that can be implemented in counseling relationships and clinical supervision.

Figure 6. Overview of Decolonization Counseling Practices: Multicultural Innovation and Social Justice

Another novelty lies in the emphasis on innovative pedagogical approaches and creative interventions, such as the Critical Cycle of Mixtape Making, which have rarely been integrated into the discourse on multicultural competence. This study demonstrates that culturally relevant strategies not only enhance counselors' skills but also have tangible impacts on client well-being, particularly among adolescents. Emphasizing direct experience, social justice based supervision, and performance-based counselor evaluation provides a new pathway to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Accordingly, this research fills a gap in the literature by offering an integrative model that combines social justice theory, broaching strategies, critical pedagogy, and culturally grounded innovations as a forward-looking direction for the development of multicultural counseling

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

The main conclusions from the findings are: (1) the development of research in multicultural counseling is still largely dominated by Western paradigms, yet significant opportunities are emerging for developing countries to enrich the global knowledge base with research grounded in local contexts and cultural wisdom, thereby supporting the emergence of more inclusive and globally relevant multicultural

counseling models; (2) overall, these findings affirm that decolonizing counseling practice through the integration of multicultural and social justice competencies is a strategic step toward establishing practices that are more equitable, culturally relevant, and transformative. Heuristic models such as the MMBB, experiential pedagogical approaches, and culturally based creative interventions demonstrate substantial potential in bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Therefore, it is recommended that counselor education, research, and clinical supervision place greater emphasis on critical and innovative approaches that not only enhance individual counselor skills but also promote sustained social advocacy. This step is essential to ensure that future counseling can effectively respond to social complexities and support the sustainability of justice within counseling psychology.

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