

Counselling Self-Efficacy and Emotional Intelligence as Predictors of Multicultural Counselling Competence among Secondary School Counsellors Handling Clients with Sexual Orientation Disorder in Pahang, Malaysia

Shahida Nalini Binti Mat Sabri, Dr. Norsayyidatina Binti Che Rozubi

Department Of Guidance & Counselling, Faculty of Human Development, Sultan Idris Education University

DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v16-i4/28051>

Published Date: 27 April 2026

Abstract

The present study examined the influence of counselling self-efficacy and emotional intelligence on multicultural counselling competence among secondary school counsellors in Pahang, Malaysia. The study aimed to determine the extent to which counsellors' beliefs in their professional capabilities and their ability to manage emotional information predict their competence in handling clients with sexual orientation disorder. Employing a quantitative correlational design, data were collected from a sample of trained school counsellors through standardised instruments measuring counselling self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and multicultural counselling competence. Descriptive and inferential analyses, including Pearson correlation and multiple regression, were performed to determine the relationships and predictive strength among variables. The findings revealed significant positive correlations between counselling self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and multicultural counselling competence. Regression results indicated that both counselling self-efficacy and emotional intelligence were significant predictors of multicultural counselling competence, accounting for a substantial proportion of the variance. These findings underscore the importance of emotional awareness, professional confidence, and cultural sensitivity in ensuring effective counselling practices for clients with diverse sexual orientations. The study highlights implications for counsellor education, supervision, and multicultural training programmes in Malaysia.

Keywords: Counselling Self-Efficacy, Emotional Intelligence, Multicultural Counselling Competence, Secondary School Counsellors, Sexual Orientation Disorder, Malaysia

Introduction

In recent years, the counselling profession has faced growing demands for cultural competence, particularly when addressing issues related to gender identity and sexual orientation diversity. In Malaysia, the increasing visibility of clients with sexual orientation disorder has challenged school counsellors to deliver services that are not only ethical but also culturally sensitive and psychologically informed. Multicultural counselling competence is, therefore, recognised as an essential professional skill that integrates self-awareness, cultural knowledge, and appropriate intervention strategies (Sue et al., 1992).

In recent years, the counselling profession has encountered increasing demands for culturally responsive practices, particularly in addressing issues related to gender identity and sexual orientation diversity. Globally, the emphasis on multicultural counselling competence reflects the need for practitioners to effectively engage with clients from diverse sociocultural backgrounds in an ethical and inclusive manner. Within the Malaysian context, this need is further intensified by socio-cultural and religious sensitivities surrounding sexual orientation, which pose unique challenges for school counsellors in delivering appropriate interventions. Despite the growing recognition of multicultural competence as a core professional requirement, there remains a critical concern regarding the extent to which counsellors are adequately prepared to manage such complexities in practice. Specifically, the ability to work effectively with clients presenting sexual orientation-related concerns requires not only technical knowledge but also strong psychological resources, including confidence in one's counselling abilities and the capacity to regulate emotional responses in sensitive situations. Counselling self-efficacy and emotional intelligence have been widely acknowledged as fundamental psychological constructs influencing professional effectiveness. Self-efficacy determines the extent to which counsellors believe in their capability to execute counselling tasks successfully, while emotional intelligence facilitates adaptive interpersonal functioning, empathy, and emotional regulation. These attributes are particularly crucial in multicultural counselling contexts, where practitioners must navigate cultural differences, personal biases, and emotionally charged interactions.

However, empirical evidence examining the combined influence of counselling self-efficacy and emotional intelligence on multicultural counselling competence remains limited, particularly within non-Western settings such as Malaysia. Existing studies have predominantly focused on Western populations, thereby limiting the generalisability of findings to culturally distinct contexts. Furthermore, research addressing counselling practices involving clients with sexual orientation-related concerns in Malaysia remains scarce, largely due to the sensitivity of the topic.

Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by investigating the predictive roles of counselling self-efficacy and emotional intelligence in shaping multicultural counselling competence among secondary school counsellors in Pahang, Malaysia. By doing so, the study offers both theoretical and practical contributions to the field, particularly in strengthening culturally responsive counselling practices within educational settings.

The role of the counsellor in a multicultural context requires self-efficacy belief in one's capacity to perform counselling tasks effectively (Bandura, 1986) and emotional intelligence, the ability to recognise, understand, and manage emotions within oneself and others (Mayer

& Salovey, 1990). Counsellors with strong self-efficacy are more confident in handling clients with complex psychosocial backgrounds, while emotionally intelligent counsellors are more capable of empathic engagement and self-regulation during challenging sessions.

Despite numerous studies in Western contexts highlighting the interplay between self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and multicultural competence (Constantine, 2001; Lent et al., 2003), there remains a paucity of empirical research examining these variables among Malaysian school counsellors. Moreover, the topic of sexual orientation disorder continues to be culturally sensitive, often resulting in limited training and support for practitioners. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by examining how counselling self-efficacy and emotional intelligence predict multicultural counselling competence among secondary school counsellors in Pahang, Malaysia.

Literature Review

Counselling Self-Efficacy

Counselling self-efficacy refers to the counsellor's belief in their ability to perform counselling-related tasks effectively (Larson & Daniels, 1998). It is grounded in Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, which posits that individuals' beliefs about their capabilities influence their motivation, behaviour, and performance outcomes. High counselling self-efficacy correlates with better client rapport, greater session productivity, and reduced counsellor anxiety (Lent et al., 2003). Previous studies also indicate that counsellors with high self-efficacy demonstrate higher levels of multicultural competence and adaptability (Owen et al., 2011).

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI), as defined by Mayer and Salovey (1990), encompasses the ability to perceive, assimilate, understand, and regulate emotions in oneself and others. Within the counselling context, EI enables practitioners to remain empathic, manage stress, and respond appropriately to clients' emotional expressions. Research has consistently shown that emotional intelligence contributes significantly to counsellor effectiveness, self-awareness, and therapeutic alliance (Eastabrook et al., 2005; Chan & Wong, 2019). Studies also suggest that emotionally intelligent counsellors are better equipped to engage in multicultural counselling, as they can navigate cultural differences with empathy and openness (Brackett et al., 2011).

Multicultural Counselling Competence

Multicultural counselling competence (MCC) is conceptualised as a counsellor's awareness, knowledge, and skills in working with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds (Sue et al., 1992). Effective multicultural counsellors demonstrate an understanding of cultural factors influencing client behaviour, awareness of their own biases, and the ability to employ culturally appropriate strategies. In the Malaysian context, MCC is critical for counsellors dealing with clients experiencing sexual orientation disorder, where socio-religious sensitivities can influence therapeutic processes (Hashim & Othman, 2020).

Linking the Variables

Empirical studies have highlighted strong interconnections between counselling self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and multicultural competence. Counsellors who believe in their

professional abilities tend to engage more confidently in cross-cultural sessions (Constantine, 2001), while those with high emotional intelligence are more adaptive and empathic in culturally diverse settings (Petrides et al., 2016). Thus, both constructs are theoretically and empirically linked to multicultural competence.

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986) and Mayer and Salovey's Emotional Intelligence Model (1990). Bandura's theory emphasises the role of self-efficacy in determining human functioning, asserting that individuals' beliefs about their abilities influence their choices, effort, and persistence. Within the counselling context, this theory suggests that counsellors who perceive themselves as competent are more likely to engage effectively in culturally challenging situations.

Mayer and Salovey's Emotional Intelligence Model (1990), on the other hand, focuses on emotional perception, understanding, and regulation. The model posits that emotional intelligence enhances interpersonal relationships and decision-making — both of which are critical for effective multicultural counselling. Integrating both frameworks, this study proposes that counselling self-efficacy and emotional intelligence jointly contribute to multicultural counselling competence.

Methodology

The study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationships between counselling self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and multicultural counselling competence among secondary school counsellors in Pahang, Malaysia.

Population and Sample

The population consisted of certified school counsellors serving in government secondary schools across Pahang. Using proportionate stratified random sampling, a total of 200 respondents participated in the study. The sample was deemed adequate according to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table.

Instruments

Three standardised instruments were utilised:

1. Counselling Self-Efficacy Scale (CSES) – adapted from Larson et al. (1992), measuring confidence in counselling skills.
2. Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) – based on Schutte et al. (1998), assessing emotional perception, understanding, and regulation.
3. Multicultural Counselling Competence Scale (MCCS) – adapted from Sodowsky et al. (1994), evaluating awareness, knowledge, and skills related to multicultural counselling.

Each instrument used a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) for the CSES, EIS, and MCCS in this study were .89, .86, and .91, respectively, indicating high internal consistency.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through online and paper-based surveys distributed with the approval of the Malaysian Ministry of Education. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation)

were computed to describe respondents' levels of counselling self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and multicultural competence. Inferential analyses included Pearson correlation and multiple regression to test the hypothesised relationships among variables

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics

The analysis revealed that the respondents demonstrated high levels of counselling self-efficacy ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.42$), moderately high emotional intelligence ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.48$), and high multicultural counselling competence ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.45$). These results indicate that most secondary school counsellors in Pahang possess strong professional confidence, emotional awareness, and multicultural skills necessary to work with clients from diverse backgrounds, including those experiencing sexual orientation disorder.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Counselling Self-Efficacy, Emotional Intelligence, and Multicultural Counselling Competence (N = 200)

Variable	Mean	SD	Level
Counselling Self-Efficacy	4.12	0.42	High
Emotional Intelligence	4.05	0.48	Moderately High
Multicultural Counselling Competence	4.10	0.45	High

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the study variables. The findings revealed significant positive correlations between counselling self-efficacy and multicultural counselling competence ($r = .67$, $p < .01$), and between emotional intelligence and multicultural counselling competence ($r = .59$, $p < .01$). The results also indicated a significant correlation between counselling self-efficacy and emotional intelligence ($r = .54$, $p < .01$).

Table 2

Pearson Correlations among Variables

Variable	1	2	3
1. Counselling Self-Efficacy	—	.54**	.67**
2. Emotional Intelligence	.54**	—	.59**
3. Multicultural Counselling Competence	.67**	.59**	—

Note: $p < .01$ (two-tailed)

These findings indicate that counsellors with higher self-efficacy and emotional intelligence are more likely to exhibit greater multicultural counselling competence. This aligns with previous studies (Constantine, 2001; Lent et al., 2003) emphasising the importance of personal confidence and emotional regulation in enhancing multicultural effectiveness.

Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine whether counselling self-efficacy and emotional intelligence significantly predicted multicultural counselling competence. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 197) = 86.45$, $p < .001$, with an R^2

value of .468, indicating that the two predictors jointly explained approximately 46.8% of the variance in multicultural counselling competence.

Table 3

Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Multicultural Counselling Competence

Predictor	β	t	Sig. (p)
Counselling Self-Efficacy	.51	8.42	.000
Emotional Intelligence	.34	6.87	.000
R²	.468	—	—
F (2,197)	86.45	—	.000

Both counselling self-efficacy ($\beta = .51$, $p < .001$) and emotional intelligence ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$) were significant predictors. Counsellors with greater confidence in their counselling skills and stronger emotional intelligence exhibited higher levels of multicultural competence.

Discussion

The results of this study confirm that counselling self-efficacy and emotional intelligence are crucial determinants of multicultural counselling competence among secondary school counsellors in Pahang.

The significant positive relationships among the three variables reinforce Bandura's (1986) notion that self-belief influences behaviour and performance. Counsellors who trust in their professional abilities are more willing to engage with culturally sensitive clients, including those struggling with sexual orientation issues.

Similarly, the findings support Mayer and Salovey's (1990) emotional intelligence model, which underscores the role of emotional regulation and understanding in effective interpersonal interaction. Counsellors with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to navigate clients' emotions and manage their own affective responses during challenging sessions.

The results are consistent with prior international findings (e.g., Chan & Wong, 2019; Owen et al., 2011) showing that both constructs enhance counsellors' ability to deliver culturally competent services. Within the Malaysian context, these findings provide empirical evidence supporting the integration of emotional intelligence training and self-efficacy development into counsellor education programmes.

Implications and Recommendations

This study offers several important contributions to the field of counselling, particularly in advancing the understanding of factors that enhance multicultural counselling competence within a culturally sensitive context. First, from a theoretical perspective, the study extends existing literature by empirically examining the integrated role of counselling self-efficacy and emotional intelligence within a non-Western setting. This contributes to the cross-cultural validation of established psychological constructs and addresses the current imbalance in the literature, which is predominantly Western-centric.

Second, the study provides practical implications for counsellor education and professional training. By identifying counselling self-efficacy and emotional intelligence as significant predictors, the findings highlight the necessity of incorporating these components into training curricula and supervision practices. This enables the development of more holistic training models that emphasise not only cognitive competencies but also emotional and psychological preparedness.

Third, the findings are particularly relevant for policymakers and educational authorities, including the Ministry of Education Malaysia, in designing evidence-based interventions and continuous professional development (CPD) frameworks. Strengthening these competencies among school counsellors is essential in ensuring the delivery of inclusive, ethical, and culturally responsive counselling services in schools.

Moreover, this study has direct implications for counselling practice, especially in managing clients with sexual orientation-related concerns. Counsellors equipped with higher levels of self-efficacy and emotional intelligence are more likely to demonstrate professional confidence, emotional stability, and cultural sensitivity, which are critical for establishing effective therapeutic relationships and improving client outcomes.

Finally, the study contributes to the broader discourse on multicultural counselling by foregrounding the importance of context-specific research. It provides a foundation for future empirical and qualitative investigations aimed at exploring culturally nuanced counselling practices, intervention strategies, and client experiences within Malaysia and similar sociocultural settings.

Conclusion

This study established that both counselling self-efficacy and emotional intelligence significantly predict multicultural counselling competence among secondary school counsellors in Pahang, Malaysia. The findings affirm that counsellors' belief in their professional abilities and their capacity to manage emotions are key contributors to culturally responsive practice.

By integrating theoretical foundations from Bandura's (1986) and Mayer and Salovey's (1990) models, this study underscores the need for continuous development of counsellors' psychological and emotional competencies. Future research could explore qualitative perspectives on counsellors' lived experiences when handling clients with diverse sexual orientations and cultural backgrounds.

References

- Abdullah, M., & Zakaria, N. (2021). Developing multicultural sensitivity among Malaysian school counsellors. *Malaysian Journal of Counselling, 26*(1), 55–70.
- Aldridge, A. A., & Kim, H. Y. (2020). Emotional intelligence and multicultural competence: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Counselling Psychology, 67*(3), 312–325.
- Arbabi, M., & Mehdinezhad, V. (2018). The role of emotional intelligence in professional competence development among counsellors. *International Education Studies, 11*(9), 145–155.
- Azmi, N. A., & Yusuf, R. (2022). Counselling self-efficacy and resilience among trainee counsellors: Implications for practice. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counselling, 7*(47), 80–95.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Prentice-Hall.
- Brackett, M. A., Rivers, S. E., & Salovey, P. (2020). Integrating emotional intelligence in education and counselling. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11*(4), 291–302.
- Chan, S. Y., & Wong, K. L. (2019). The relationship between emotional intelligence and multicultural counselling competence among counsellors in Malaysia. *Asian Journal of Counselling, 26*(2), 112–130.
- Cheung, C., & Hwang, A. (2020). Cultural empathy and multicultural counselling skills in Asian contexts. *Asia Pacific Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy, 11*(3), 187–201.
- Constantine, M. G. (2001). Predictors of observer ratings of multicultural counselling competence in Black, Latino, and White American trainees. *Journal of Counselling Psychology, 48*(4), 456–462.
- Eastabrook, J. M., Flynn, J. J., & Hollenstein, T. (2018). The role of emotional intelligence in effective helping relationships. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly, 31*(1), 56–73.
- Hashim, R., & Othman, N. (2020). Multicultural counselling competence among Malaysian counsellors: Challenges and opportunities. *Malaysian Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 13*(2), 15–28.
- Huang, W., & Lin, C. (2021). Linking emotional regulation, empathy, and multicultural competence among counselling professionals. *Journal of Psychology and Behavioural Science, 9*(1), 45–63.
- Ibrahim, S., & Mat Nor, N. (2023). Understanding counsellors' perceptions of self-efficacy in multicultural settings: A Malaysian perspective. *Malaysian Online Journal of Counselling, 10*(1), 33–47.
- Kim, H., & Hays, D. (2021). Predictors of multicultural counselling competence among school counsellors: A structural equation modelling approach. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 43*(4), 610–627.
- Korkut Owen, F., & Owen, D. W. (2020). Emotional intelligence and counsellor training: A systematic review. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Research, 8*(2), 134–149.
- Larson, L. M., & Daniels, J. A. (1998). Review of the counselling self-efficacy literature. *The Counselling Psychologist, 26*(2), 179–218.
- Lee, J. A., & Cazabon, M. (2022). Exploring counsellor self-efficacy and multicultural competence in diverse educational settings. *Journal of Multicultural Counselling and Development, 50*(1), 45–59.
- Lent, R. W., Hill, C. E., & Hoffman, M. A. (2003). Development and validation of the Counsellor Activity Self-Efficacy Scales. *Journal of Counselling Psychology, 50*(1), 97–108.

- Mayer, J. D., & Salovey, P. (1990). Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality, 9*(3), 185–211.
- Noor, S. F., & Arshad, M. (2023). Emotional intelligence and counselling performance among Malaysian trainee counsellors. *Asian Journal of Counselling, 28*(2), 97–113.*
- Owen, J., Leach, M. M., Wampold, B. E., & Rodolfa, E. (2011). Multicultural counselling competencies: Standards and implications. *Journal of Counselling & Development, 89*(3), 360–370.
- Petrides, K. V., Mikolajczak, M., Mavroveli, S., Sanchez-Ruiz, M. J., Furnham, A., & Pérez-González, J. C. (2016). Developments in trait emotional intelligence research. *Emotion Review, 8*(4), 335–341.
- Rahman, M. N., & Idris, F. (2022). Emotional intelligence and self-efficacy as predictors of counsellor adaptability. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development, 11*(1), 211–223.
- Schutte, N. S., Malouff, J. M., Hall, L. E., Haggerty, D. J., Cooper, J. T., Golden, C. J., & Dornheim, L. (1998). Development and validation of a measure of emotional intelligence. *Personality and Individual Differences, 25*(2), 167–177.
- Sue, D. W., Arredondo, P., & McDavis, R. J. (1992). Multicultural counselling competencies and standards: A call to the profession. *Journal of Counselling & Development, 70*(4), 477–486.
- Tang, C. S., & Lau, T. (2021). Emotional intelligence and professional efficacy in the helping professions. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education, 13*(5), 1324–1338.*
- Wong, J. L., & Nadarajah, S. (2020). Self-efficacy and cultural competence among Malaysian counsellors-in-training. *Malaysian Journal of Psychology, 34*(2), 75–90.*
- Yeo, K. L., & Lim, T. J. (2022). The mediating role of emotional regulation in the relationship between self-efficacy and multicultural counselling competence. *Asia Pacific Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy, 13*(1), 101–120.*