

CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN COUNSELING: INVESTIGATING THE INFLUENCE OF LANGUAGE BARRIERS ON CLIENT-COUNSELOR DYNAMICS

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ABSTRACT

Cultural competence in counseling is an essential aspect of providing effective mental health services, particularly in a diverse and multicultural society. This study aims to investigate the influence of language barriers on client-counselor dynamics within the context of cultural competence. An Expost facto survey design was adopted for the study. The targeted population for the study comprised all librarians in Akwa Ibom State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 160 librarians in Akwa Ibom State. This gave a total of 160 respondent used for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Cultural Competence in Counseling and Language Barriers to Client-Counselor Dynamics Questionnaire" (CCCLBC-CDQ). Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out by an expert in test, measurement, and evaluation in order to ensure that the instrument has the accuracy, appropriateness, and completeness for the study under consideration. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.84, and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics meant to answer the research questions and simple regression analysis meant to test the hypothesis. The test for significance was done at 0.05 alpha levels. The study revealed that that language barriers do manifest in the counseling setting; language barriers positive impact the establishment of rapport between clients and counselors; language barriers positively influence clients' perceptions of counselor empathy and cultural understanding and that counselors do employ positive strategies to address language barriers and enhance cultural competence. The study concluded that the influence of language barriers on client-counselor dynamics is multifaceted, affecting communication, cultural understanding, and power dynamics within the therapeutic relationship. Strategies such as counselor training, professional interpreters, and technological solutions emerge as crucial components in enhancing cultural competence in the presence of language diversity. One of the recommendations made was that counselling organisations should ensure the availability of qualified interpreters who are fluent in both the client's language and the counselor's language. This may involve hiring interpreters or utilizing professional interpreting services.

Introduction

Cultural competence in counseling has emerged as a critical dimension in contemporary therapeutic practice, recognizing the diversity of clients and the importance of tailoring interventions to individual cultural contexts. Within this multifaceted realm, the influence of language barriers on the dynamics between clients and counselors represents a compelling area of investigation. As societies become increasingly multicultural and interconnected, the ability to navigate linguistic differences in therapeutic settings becomes paramount for effective counseling outcomes. This study seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of cultural competence in counseling, emphasizing the intricate interplay between language barriers and the client-counselor relationship, with a focus on key concepts and theories. Cultural competence according to Pedersen (2019) in counseling encapsulates the awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary for counselors to engage effectively with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. The field has evolved from a recognition of the limitations of a one-size-fits-all approach to therapy, highlighting the need for a more nuanced and culturally sensitive understanding of the client's worldview. The acknowledgment that culture influences every aspect of human experience underscores the significance of integrating cultural competence into counseling practices. Language, as a fundamental aspect of culture, plays a pivotal role in shaping communication and understanding between clients and counselors. According to Nyarks (2022;20) language as well as life is a growing phenomenon. As such, as the campaign grows there is every leadenly for new development to come relatively or positively. When individuals from different linguistic backgrounds come together in a counseling setting, language barriers can become a substantial obstacle. Miscommunications, misunderstandings, and the potential for the misinterpretation of therapeutic goals are heightened, underscoring the need for counselors to navigate these challenges with cultural competence (Smith et al., 2019).

However, cultural competence is not a static skill but rather a dynamic process that requires ongoing self-reflection, learning, and adaptation. As counselors engage with clients from diverse linguistic backgrounds, they must continuously assess and refine their cultural competence to ensure that their interventions align with the unique needs and perspectives of each individual (Garcia & Mancini, 2020). This adaptive approach is particularly pertinent when addressing the complexities introduced by language barriers in the counseling relationship. A variety of theoretical frameworks underpin the understanding of cultural competence in counseling, providing valuable insights into how language barriers may influence the therapeutic process. The Multicultural Counseling Competencies Model (Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis, 1992) and the Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1970) offer lenses through which to examine how counselors and clients navigate the challenges posed by linguistic diversity. By grounding the investigation in established theoretical frameworks, this study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the intricacies involved in culturally competent counseling across language divides.

One of the primary challenges posed by language barriers in counselling relationship is the potential for miscommunication, misunderstanding, and misinterpretation. Nyarks (2014) stressed that barriers could be avoided through straight forward discussions instead of trusted discussions. These challenges can hinder the development of rapport and trust between clients and counselors, impeding the therapeutic process (Bernal et al., 2019). Additionally, language barriers may contribute to clients feeling marginalized or misunderstood, creating a sense of disconnect that can compromise the effectiveness of counseling interventions. Several studies have highlighted the interconnectedness of language, culture, and counseling outcomes. For instance, a seminal work by Smith and Trimble (2016) demonstrated that clients who perceive their counselors as culturally competent are more likely to experience

positive counseling outcomes. Similarly, studies by Zhang and Dixon (2020) underscored the importance of language-congruent counseling in promoting better understanding and engagement. In light of the increasing cultural diversity in contemporary societies, the need for counselors to develop and hone their cultural competence skills has never been more pressing. As populations become more heterogeneous, the likelihood of encountering clients with diverse linguistic backgrounds rises, making it imperative for counselors to navigate the complexities of language barriers with sensitivity and proficiency.

Statement of the Problem

Cultural competency is a crucial factor in facilitating efficacious and significant engagements between clients and counselors within the counseling discipline. An essential element of cultural competency that warrants investigation is the impact of language barriers on the dynamics between clients and counselors. Language has a crucial role as a primary vehicle for people to articulate their ideas, feelings, and experiences, hence establishing its indispensable significance within the realm of therapy. The presence of language obstacles may hinder the process of successful communication, leading to an increased likelihood of misinterpretation, misunderstanding, and a breakdown in the establishment of therapeutic rapport. Language barriers may present themselves in several ways, including disparities in spoken languages, dialects, and even non-verbal communication patterns that are influenced by cultural subtleties. The presence of these obstacles presents significant problems for counselors who want to provide the highest quality of care and assistance to clients from varied language backgrounds. Clients may have challenges in expressing their emotions due to a limited command of the predominant language. This may impede the effectiveness of therapy and possibly lead to feelings of isolation or dissatisfaction. Additionally, the presence of language obstacles may potentially amplify power imbalances within the client-counselor dynamic, as clients may experience a sense of disempowerment or marginalization when they are unable to effectively articulate their thoughts and emotions. The presence of this disparity might potentially obstruct the cultivation of trust and restrict the counselor's capacity to customize therapies that are congruent with the client's distinct cultural milieu. The primary objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex characteristics of language barriers in counseling. By doing so, it seeks to provide valuable knowledge that can be used to enhance training programs, shape legislative initiatives, and establish effective guidelines for counselors who engage with individuals from varied linguistic backgrounds.

Purpose of the Study

1. To examine the nature and extent of language barriers in the counseling setting.
2. To investigate how language barriers impact the establishment of rapport between clients and counselors.
3. To assess the influence of language barriers on clients' perceptions of counselor empathy and cultural understanding.
4. To explore strategies employed by counselors to address language barriers and enhance cultural competence.

Research Questions

To guide this investigation, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. How do language barriers manifest in the counseling setting?
2. What impact do language barriers have on the establishment of rapport between clients and counselors?
3. How do language barriers influence clients' perceptions of counselor empathy and cultural understanding?
4. What strategies do counselors employ to address language barriers and enhance cultural competence?

Rationale of the Study

Language, as a fundamental component of culture, plays a pivotal role in shaping individual identities and communication styles. In the context of counseling, language barriers can pose significant challenges to the establishment of rapport, mutual understanding, and effective therapeutic interventions. Limited proficiency in the language spoken during counseling sessions can hinder the client's ability to express their thoughts and emotions, leading to potential misunderstandings and barriers to progress.

Overview of Cultural Competence in Counseling

The concept of cultural competence in counselling pertains to the proficiency of counsellors in effectively engaging with individuals who possess varied cultural origins. The concept encompasses the comprehension and recognition of the impact of culture on an individual's cognitive frameworks, moral principles, and actions. Cultural competence extends beyond basic cultural knowledge, encompassing the capacity to communicate effectively with individuals from varied origins while recognising the influence of culture on their values, beliefs, and behaviours. The importance of cultural competency is emphasised by the American Counselling Association (ACA), which underscores the necessity for counsellors to cultivate the requisite knowledge, skills, and awareness to effectively engage with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds (ACA, 2014). Self-awareness is a basic part of cultural competence. In order to prevent the imposition of personal values onto clients, it is imperative for counsellors to engage in introspection and critically examine their own cultural biases and views. The act of introspection allows counsellors to engage with clients in a non-judgmental and genuinely curious manner, facilitating the development of a therapeutic alliance based on trust and mutual comprehension (Sue, 2016). Cultural competence encompasses the acquisition of cultural knowledge, which entails comprehending the historical, social, and cultural elements that contribute to the formation of clients' identities. The acquisition of this knowledge empowers counsellors to customise their interventions in order to address the distinct requirements of individual clients, taking into account the impact of culture on aspects such as patterns of communication, dynamics within the family unit, and tendencies towards seeking assistance (Pedersen, 2019). However, the attainment of cultural competence extends beyond the mere comprehension of cultural subtleties; it also encompasses the recognition and accommodation of linguistic variety.

Ponterotto et al. (2010) assert that counsellors have the ability to incorporate cultural competency into the therapeutic process through a range of strategies. Effective communication is a fundamental aspect that necessitates that counsellors modify their communication approaches in order to coincide with the preferences of their clients. This may entail employing nonverbal indicators, being cognizant of linguistic disparities, and attentively attending to clients' narratives in order to acquire an understanding of their

cultural viewpoints. The importance of cultural competency is especially significant in the processes of assessment and diagnosis. The lack of cultural sensitivity in standardised evaluation methods might result in the misreading of clients' experiences and symptoms. In order to effectively assess individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, it is imperative for counsellors to possess the necessary skills to employ culturally appropriate assessment methods. This entails acknowledging and understanding the variances in expression and symptomatology that may exist across different cultural groups, as highlighted by Hays (2016). Furthermore, it is imperative that therapies are culturally sensitive, duly considering the cultural values and preferences of clients. According to Bernal, Jimenez-Chafey, and Rodriguez (2019), the utilisation of culturally adapted therapy strategies has the potential to improve client engagement and outcomes. This is because individuals are more inclined to connect with therapies that are congruent with their cultural origins. Nonetheless, the influence of cultural competence in counselling on the results of therapeutic therapies is significant. Numerous studies continuously demonstrate that individuals seeking counselling services are more inclined to actively participate in and derive positive outcomes from the therapeutic process when they consider their counsellors to possess cultural competence (Fuentes, Bartolomé, & Nichols, 2020). Counsellors that possess cultural competence demonstrate enhanced abilities in establishing trust and rapport with their clients, hence fostering an environment conducive to open communication and collaborative engagement within the therapeutic process (Smith, Trimble, & Heung, 2015). In addition, the implementation of culturally competent counselling practices contributes to the improvement of evaluation and diagnostic precision. According to Sadowsky, Kwan, and Pannu (2019), counsellors who possess a comprehensive understanding of their clients' cultural background are less prone to misconstruing behaviours or pathologizing cultural norms. Consequently, this enhanced understanding facilitates the development of treatment plans that are more precise and culturally sensitive. Consequently, this phenomenon contributes to improved therapy results and heightened levels of customer contentment.

Implications of Language Barriers in Counseling

Language obstacles manifest when there exists a disparity in linguistic aptitude between the recipient of counselling services and the counsellor. Various obstacles might hamper the efficacy of communication and inhibit the establishment of a robust therapeutic partnership. Research has shown that the presence of language barriers might result in the occurrence of misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and a diminished sense of connection between those seeking counselling services and their therapists (Hansson et al., 2017). The influence of language barriers on the counselling process becomes notably significant when therapists do not possess fluency in the client's first language. Nevertheless, the presence of language obstacles may have a substantial influence on the calibre and effectiveness of counselling sessions.

Psychological Implications

Language has a pivotal role in facilitating the communication of ideas, sentiments, and personal encounters. As opened by nyarks (2023;9) no aspect a human activity can be successful without the effective use of language. Human beings need to share ideas, expending and emotions with other people in the society or in the environment. The lack of a shared language between clients and therapists poses a hindrance to the therapeutic process. Wampold and Brown (2018) conducted a research that emphasizes the potential hindrance of language limitations in fostering rapport and trust between clients and counsellors. The establishment of a therapeutic alliance heavily relies on the efficacy of communication, and disparities in language may result in misinterpretations, false beliefs, and a deficiency in

establishing a relationship. In addition, the presence of language difficulties might exacerbate sentiments of seclusion and dissatisfaction among clients, so constraining their capacity to effectively express intricate emotional states. Within the framework of multicultural counselling, the lack of proficiency in effectively communicating one's thoughts and emotions has the potential to intensify preexisting mental health concerns and impede the advancement of therapeutic interventions (Smith et al., 2019). Counsellors must possess an acute awareness of the psychological ramifications associated with language limitations and use culturally sensitive strategies to effectively address and overcome the communication divide.

Cultural Implications

The relationship between language and culture is intricate, and when persons with different linguistic origins seek therapy, cultural subtleties play a crucial role in the therapeutic process. Sue & Sue (2016) underscore the significance of cultural competency within the field of counselling, emphasizing that language constraints have the potential to exacerbate cultural misconceptions. The perpetuation of stereotypes, reinforcement of biases, and challenges in achieving cultural sensitivity for therapists can be attributed to misunderstandings arising from linguistic differences. The process of addressing cultural implications encompasses more than just language translation; it requires a comprehensive comprehension of the client's cultural context. It is vital for counsellors to possess an understanding of the manner in which language is intricately intertwined with cultural contexts. This entails acknowledging that specific words or phrases may possess distinct interpretations across diverse cultural environments (Lin & Tseng, 2017). By cultivating cultural humility and accepting diversity, counsellors are able to effectively manage the complexities of language and culture in order to provide mental health treatment that is more inclusive.

Practical Implications

The presence of competent interpreters and translated materials is crucial in addressing language obstacles, since it entails practical concerns that need to be taken into account. The research conducted by Flores et al. (2020) highlights the need of using skilled translators in counselling sessions. The authors emphasize that depending on family members or untrained persons may jeopardize the confidentiality and efficacy of treatment. Additionally, the absence of translated materials and examinations may impede the ability to make precise diagnoses and develop effective treatment plans. It is important for counsellors to actively support and possess the means to accommodate the needs of a linguistically varied clientele. This process entails engaging in partnerships with language specialists, creating translated resources, and demonstrating a dedication to continuous professional growth in the domain of cross-cultural counselling competences (Hays, 2016).

However, the implications of language barriers in the field of counselling extend to other aspects, including psychological, cultural, and practical elements. In order to effectively tackle these problems, mental health practitioners should place a high priority on linguistic variety and recognise the significant influence that language has on the therapeutic process. Counsellors have the potential to provide a mental health care environment that is both inclusive and successful via the cultivation of cultural competency, the use of expert interpreters, and the active promotion of the production of translated materials. In conclusion, the acknowledgment and implementation of strategies to address language barriers contribute to enhancing the equity and efficacy of counselling services for diverse individuals seeking assistance with their mental well-being.

Influence of Language Barriers on Client-Counselor Dynamics

The core of achieving excellent therapy results is in the use of effective communication strategies. The presence of language hurdles may indeed have a substantial impact on the client-counselor relationship, giving rise to many difficulties that go beyond mere linguistic disparities. Language functions as a conduit via which individuals may articulate their feelings, ideas, and personal encounters. When there is a lack of shared language between clients and therapists, it might hinder the emotional communication. The study conducted by Smith et al. (2018) emphasises the difficulty clients may have in effectively expressing their emotions, resulting in feelings of frustration and the risk for miscommunication. Counsellors, however, may have difficulties in precisely perceiving and effectively responding to the subtle emotional subtleties shown by their clients. The relationship between language and culture is very complex, and the interplay between these two factors significantly influences therapeutic encounters. Kim and Lee (2019) claim that the presence of language hurdles has the potential to intensify cultural misconceptions, hence impeding the establishment of trust and rapport between a counsellor and their client. The significance of cultural competence in the field of counselling is of utmost importance, and the presence of language barriers presents a distinctive obstacle in attaining this competence. The cornerstone of effective treatment is in the formation of a strong therapeutic relationship and the cultivation of trust between the client and the counsellor. Garcia and Mancini (2020) believe that the presence of linguistic hurdles might impede the establishment of this collaborative partnership. The establishment of effective communication is crucial in creating an environment that promotes safety and comprehension. In situations where language acts as an obstacle, clients may have reluctance in expressing themselves, thereby impeding the progress of therapy. There is a correlation between language barriers and disparities in treatment results. According to a study conducted by Chen et al. (2021), it has been proposed that individuals who encounter language obstacles may have a potential drawback in terms of the effectiveness of their therapy. The presence of miscommunications or a dearth of clarity in therapeutic instructions has the ability to impede development, so exerting an influence on the overall efficacy of the counselling process. Acknowledging the widespread impact of language obstacles, therapists have the ability to use several tactics in order to alleviate their effects. According to Flores and Benuto (2017), many treatments have been proposed to improve communication in therapy settings including individuals from different linguistic backgrounds. These interventions include the provision of language interpretation services, the presence of bilingual counsellors, and the use of visual aids. It has been indicated that these strategies may effectively enhance communication in cross-linguistic therapeutic contexts. Moreover, it is important to provide continuous training to counsellors in order to enhance their cultural competency and proficiency in handling linguistic variety.

Communication Challenges

The establishment of effective communication serves as a fundamental element in the counseling process, facilitating clients in expressing their worries while enabling counselors to offer substantial assistance. The presence of language hurdles can give rise to challenges in effectively conveying one's thoughts and emotions, hence resulting in instances of miscommunication and the potential for misunderstandings to occur. The inherent nature of this therapeutic procedure presents a considerable challenge. According to Kirmayer et al. (2019), the experience of frustration or feeling unheard by clients can have a significant impact on the development of trust and rapport.

Limited Access to Information: The presence of language hurdles can hinder the precise and effective transmission of information between individuals seeking counseling services and

their counselors. Clients may encounter difficulties in effectively articulating their thoughts and emotions, resulting in narratives that are incomplete or prone to misinterpretation. The aforementioned constraint poses a hindrance to the counselor's capacity to acquire a thorough comprehension of the client's experiences, which may potentially undermine the efficacy of the therapeutic intervention (Dodd et al., 2017).

Misinterpretation and Cultural Nuances: The presence of language barriers frequently leads to instances of misinterpretation, since the intricate subtleties, cultural nuances, and idiomatic idioms may become obscured during the process of translation. According to Horevitz et al. (2018), it is possible for counselors to inadvertently misinterpret the remarks made by their clients, which can result in actions that are erroneous or a lack of awareness of cultural settings. The aforementioned problem becomes particularly prominent when engaging with clientele who possess varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Power Imbalance and Trust Erosion: The efficacy of counseling is contingent upon the establishment of trust and the maintenance of a balanced power dynamic. Nevertheless, the presence of language obstacles might amplify existing power disparities, leading to a heightened sense of vulnerability and disempowerment among clients. According to Hernández et al. (2019), it is possible for clients to see counselors as lacking understanding or empathy, which might impede the establishment of a therapeutic bond. The erosion of trust has the potential to hinder the client's inclination to disclose personal information and actively participate in the counseling process.

Emotional Expression and Validation: The presence of language difficulties presents substantial challenges for clients in effectively articulating intricate emotions. Clients may encounter difficulties in articulating their emotions, resulting in feelings of dissatisfaction and a perception of being emotionally disconnected. Furthermore, counselors may encounter difficulties in validating and demonstrating empathy towards clients due to limitations in language that impede the expression of emotional experiences (Fong et al., 2020).

Inequality in Access to Services: The presence of language barriers serves as a contributing factor to the disparities observed in individuals' access to counseling services. Individuals lacking proficiency in the primary language of a given location may encounter difficulties while attempting to locate and utilize suitable counseling services. The perpetuation of gaps in mental health care might result in reduced access to therapeutic support for particular populations (Kim et al., 2016).

Interference with Therapeutic Techniques: Counselors frequently utilize diverse therapeutic strategies in order to enhance communication and effectively meet the needs of their clients. Nevertheless, the execution of these strategies may be impeded by language hurdles. For instance, the efficacy of expressive therapies or cognitive-behavioral interventions may be diminished when clients encounter difficulties in comprehending or expressing themselves in the designated therapeutic language (Dodd et al., 2017).

Lack of Standardized Assessment Tools: The lack of standardized assessment instruments available in different languages presents a substantial obstacle in the proper evaluation of clients' mental health. The validity and reliability of assessment measures may be influenced by language-specific nuances, which can pose limitations on the counselor's capacity to make well-informed decisions on diagnosis and treatment planning (Horevitz et al., 2018).

Educational and Training Gaps: The presence of diverse languages in counseling settings highlights the imperative for counselors to get broad education and training. There is a possibility that professionals may exhibit a deficiency in their proficiency in several

languages or cultural competency, resulting in a potential limitation in their capacity to effectively cross language barriers (Hernández et al., 2019).

However, the various obstacles presented by linguistic hurdles within the context of client-counselor interactions are wide-ranging and complex. To tackle these issues, a holistic approach is necessary, encompassing the training of counselors in linguistic diversity, the promotion of cultural competency, and the development of resources that promote effective communication across language barriers. Through the acknowledgment and reduction of these obstacles, the counseling profession can endeavor to offer fair and comprehensive mental health assistance to individuals hailing from various linguistic origins.

Strategies for Enhancing Cultural Competence in the Presence of Language Barriers

Navigating the complexities of cultural competence amidst language barriers requires strategic approaches to foster understanding and connection. Employing effective communication tools, such as language translation services and cultural sensitivity training, becomes pivotal. Encouraging open dialogue, embracing diversity, and promoting inclusive environments are integral components of these strategies. By prioritizing linguistic inclusivity and cultural awareness, individuals and organizations can bridge gaps, cultivate mutual respect, and create a more harmonious and enriching intercultural experience.

Language Training Programs: Effective communication is at the core of cultural competence, and language proficiency is a key factor in breaking down barriers. Implementing language training programs for individuals working in diverse environments can significantly enhance cultural competence. Research by Smith and Jones (2018) demonstrated that employees who underwent language training reported increased confidence and effectiveness in cross-cultural interactions.

Cultural Sensitivity Workshops: Understanding and respecting cultural nuances is crucial for effective communication. Cultural sensitivity workshops can provide individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate diverse cultural landscapes. These workshops promote awareness, empathy, and a deeper understanding of cultural differences, which are crucial elements of cultural competence, as Garcia et al. (2019) highlight.

Utilization of Technology: In the digital age, technology plays a pivotal role in overcoming language barriers. Translation apps, virtual interpreters, and language-learning apps can aid in real-time communication. A study by Wang and Kim (2020) emphasized the positive impact of technology in facilitating cross-cultural communication, making it more accessible and efficient.

Culturally Competent Leadership: Leadership sets the tone for organizational culture. Culturally competent leaders promote an inclusive environment and encourage effective communication across language differences. According to research by Chen et al. (2017), organizations with culturally competent leaders are better equipped to navigate language barriers and create an atmosphere conducive to cultural understanding.

Cross-Cultural Collaboration: Encouraging collaboration among individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds fosters mutual understanding. Research by Lopez and Nguyen (2016) highlighted the positive outcomes of cross-cultural collaboration, such as

increased creativity and innovation. Actively involving diverse teams in decision-making processes promotes a culture of inclusivity and cultural competence.

Cultural Competence Assessments: Regular assessments can help gauge an individual's or organization's level of cultural competence. Implementing cultural competence assessments allows for the identification of strengths and areas for improvement. Studies by Smith et al. (2019) demonstrated that organizations that regularly assess their cultural competence are more likely to implement targeted strategies for improvement.

Community Engagement and Partnerships: Engaging with local communities and establishing partnerships can provide valuable insights into cultural norms and practices. According to Johnson and Rodriguez (2018), this strategy encourages respect and mutual learning. Collaborating with community leaders and organizations helps bridge language gaps and enhances overall cultural competence.

Language Support Services: Providing language support services, such as professional interpreters and translation services, is essential for effective communication. A study by Lee and Garcia (2021) emphasized the importance of these services in healthcare settings, where accurate communication is critical. Institutions that invest in language support services demonstrate a commitment to cultural competence.

Moreover, enhancing cultural competence in the presence of language barriers requires a multifaceted approach. Language training programs, cultural sensitivity workshops, technology utilization, culturally competent leadership, cross-cultural collaboration, cultural competence assessments, community engagement, and language support services collectively contribute to breaking down language barriers and fostering a more inclusive and culturally competent environment. By implementing these strategies, individuals and organizations can navigate linguistic challenges while promoting effective cross-cultural communication.

Theoretical Framework

The Multicultural Counseling Competencies Model

In 1992, Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis developed the Multicultural Counselling Competencies (MCC) Model to explain and practice multicultural counseling. MCC was characterised as counsellors being conscious of their own worldviews, prejudices, and attitudes about racial and ethnic minorities, understanding their clients' worldviews, and implementing culturally responsive interventions and procedures with clients. Sue (1998) defines MCC as the capacity to respect and collaborate with other cultures and groups. MCC has culture-specific expertise to deal with distinct client demographics, he said. In 2010, Cornish and colleagues defined MCC as “the extent to which a psychotherapist is actively engaged in the process of self-awareness, obtaining knowledge, and implementing skills in working with diverse individuals”. In their study of counsellor behaviour, Owen, Tao, Leach, and Rodolfa (2011) defined MCC as “a way of doing” that assesses counsellors' intercultural awareness and expertise. MCC definitions, aspects, and counsellor MCC models are always evolving. According to Sue and colleagues (1992), MCCs contain awareness, knowledge, and skills for comprehending and overcoming language difficulties.

Awareness: Sue et al. (1992) defined awareness as being aware of one's (and others') views, attitudes, and privileges. To change actions and attitudes, one must be conscious that their

own views may harm underrepresented groups. This MCC category may also be difficult since many childhood ideals are regarded truth and right. This attitude may be problematic given the growing diversity in higher education and human services. Understanding how our beliefs enable or hinder services to everyone is crucial, according to Wilson, Gines, and Caldwell (2015). Being aware of oneself and others helps underrepresented groups succeed.

Knowledge: When gaining the second level of the MCC, it is crucial to consider the context (Sue et al., 1992). It is posited that this particular category may be comparatively more accessible to get due to its reliance on easily accessible information sources such as books, individuals, and the internet. In several instances, the acquisition of knowledge is driven by the desire to comprehend and then use the acquired information. There are several approaches to acquiring information, although it is crucial to discern the most effective strategy that aligns with one's own preferences and thereafter follow this trajectory in order to enhance the quality of services given to the intended recipients.

Skills: The last stage of the Multilevel Curriculum Continuum (MCC) pertains to the development and acquisition of abilities. In their study, Sue et al. (1992) found that skills play a crucial role in enabling individuals to effectively provide services for underrepresented populations. The mere acquisition of awareness, knowledge, and skills does not guarantee the practical application of knowledge pertaining to the multicultural counselling competence (MCC) as evidenced by previous studies (Wilson et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2016). However, the current and historical outcomes indicate a demand for more proficient professionals working in the fields of education and human services to effectively address the evolving global landscape.

Implication of MCC Model to the Current Study

MCC has significant implications for counselling cultural competency progress and implementation. The model outlines the essential traits counsellors need to work with clients from different cultures. This framework includes cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills with a commitment to social justice. By bringing these skills into therapy, practitioners may better serve clients from varied cultural backgrounds. Self-awareness and cultural identity understanding are key to the strategy. Counsellors should self-reflect on their biases, beliefs, and assumptions to understand how these may affect client relationships. Creating a culturally sensitive and inclusive treatment space requires self-reflection. Additionally, the Multicultural Counselling Competencies Model promotes cultural knowledge of varied client groups. This includes understanding cultural values, practises, and communication styles among communities. Culturally competent counsellors may tailor their approaches to individual clients, fostering a more successful therapeutic relationship. Language barriers may also affect multicultural counselling client-counselor relationships. Communication is crucial to therapy, and language problems may lead to miscommunication. Language barriers may hinder rapport, appraisal, and client expression. Interpretation services and culturally competent assessment tools are used by culturally competent counsellors to overcome language obstacles. The Multicultural Counselling Competencies Model helps counsellors learn and improve cultural competence. Counsellors must include language-barrier-overcoming tactics to actively and effectively connect with clients from different languages. This promotes inclusive, effective therapy practises.

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT)

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) is a widely recognised framework within the field of communication studies that explores the intricacies of how individuals adjust their communication styles in response to social contexts. Howard Giles developed the CAT in the

1970s, and it offers useful insights into how people modify their language, accents, and nonverbal behaviors to improve social interactions. This theory goes beyond mere linguistic adjustments, delving into the psychological and sociological dimensions of communication. Communication Accommodation Theory emerged as a response to the limitations of previous communication theories, particularly those that overlooked the dynamic nature of interpersonal communication. Howard Giles, the pioneer of CAT, sought to address this gap by proposing a theory that considered the ways individuals adjust their communication strategies to achieve social goals. Giles initially introduced the theory in the early 1970s, and since then, it has undergone several refinements and expansions. Giles and his colleagues developed CAT through a series of studies examining language convergence and divergence in various social contexts. The 1991 study by Giles, Coupland, and Coupland that looked at communication accommodation in intergroup contexts is one of the foundational works in the development of CAT. This study laid the groundwork for understanding how language adjustments contribute to social identity and group dynamics.

The concept of convergence and divergence is central to the theory of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). CAT proposes that individuals use two main adaptation methods, namely convergence and divergence. Convergence refers to the process by which people modify their communication habits in order to conform to the norms and preferences of their conversational partners, hence promoting a feeling of similarity. In contrast, divergence involves purposeful use of language and nonverbal strategies to highlight disparities, hence placing attention on societal divisions (Danowski et al., 2009). However, Social Identity Theory (SIT) is strongly linked to the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), whereby humans classify themselves and others into social groups based on similar features. According to the theoretical framework, individuals engage in a process of adapting their communication patterns in order to emphasise or diminish social group identities, hence playing a role in the development of in-group and out-group dynamics. The purposes of accommodation in communication include a range of objectives, such as seeking social acceptability, fostering unity, and maintaining a good social identity. The theory places focus on the strategic selection of accommodation tactics by people, which is influenced by their perception of the social situation and their communication objectives. The application of CAT has expanded to examine the communication dynamics associated with race, gender, and power. Studies conducted in these specific areas have shown the ways in which people adapt their communication strategies in order to traverse complex social hierarchies and power dynamics (Giles et al., 1991).

CAT in Practice: Real-world Applications

Intergroup Communication: Research by Giles and colleagues (1991) has explored the application of CAT in intergroup communication. The study demonstrated that individuals tend to converge or diverge based on their perceptions of group identity. In multicultural workplaces, for instance, employees may adjust their communication styles to align with the dominant group or distinguish themselves, influencing perceptions of inclusion and acceptance.

Health Communication: CAT has found relevance in health communication contexts, particularly in doctor-patient interactions. Street (2003) investigated communication accommodation in healthcare settings and found that patients were more satisfied when physicians adjusted their communication styles to match the patients' preferences. This highlights the importance of accommodation in promoting effective communication and patient well-being.

Media and Technology: The influence of CAT extends to the realm of media and technology. Walther's (1996) Social Information Processing Theory suggests that online communicators adapt their language and communication style to establish social bonds. The concept of hyperpersonal communication, where individuals engage in more positive and intimate communication online than face-to-face, aligns with CAT principles of convergence in mediated communication.

Implication of CAT to the Current Study

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) plays a crucial role in enhancing cultural competence in counselling, especially in the context of language barriers between clients and counsellors. CAT suggests that individuals adjust their communication style to accommodate or align with others, emphasising the importance of effective communication in interpersonal relationships. Applying CAT to counselling can significantly impact the dynamics between clients and counsellors, particularly when language differences come into play. Cultural competence in counselling involves understanding and respecting diverse cultural backgrounds, including language nuances. By adopting the principles of CAT, counsellors can adjust their communication patterns to align with the cultural and linguistic preferences of their clients. This accommodation helps build rapport and trust, creating a more supportive environment for effective therapy. For example, if a client comes from a culture that values indirect communication, a counsellor using CAT might adapt their style to convey empathy through nonverbal cues and implicit language, fostering a more comfortable therapeutic relationship. Language barriers, a common challenge in counselling, can hinder effective communication and jeopardise the therapeutic process. CAT provides a framework for counsellors to navigate these barriers by adjusting their communication strategies. Counsellors can employ various accommodation strategies, such as simplifying language, using visual aids, or incorporating the client's native language when appropriate. This not only improves understanding but also conveys a commitment to respecting and valuing the client's linguistic and cultural background. Moreover, CAT in cultural competence acknowledges the bidirectional nature of accommodation. Clients may also adjust their communication styles to align with the counsellor, fostering a sense of collaboration and mutual understanding. This reciprocal adaptation contributes to a more inclusive and culturally sensitive therapeutic space. However, the implications of communication accommodation theory for cultural competence within counselling are profound. By recognising and adapting to the communication preferences of clients, particularly when language barriers exist, counsellors can create a more inclusive and effective therapeutic environment. This approach not only enhances the quality of counselling but also promotes a deeper understanding and appreciation of diverse cultural perspectives, fostering positive client-counsellor dynamics.

Study Area and Methodology

The study area is Akwa Ibom State. Akwa Ibom State is one of the thirty-six (36) states in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. (Akwa Ibom Property and Investments Company Limited, 2005). Akwa Ibom occupies a total landmass of 7,245,935 square kilometers of Nigeria's wealth basin, the South-South zone of the Delta region. It lies between Latitude 4° 33' and 5° 33' North of the Equator and Longitudes 7° 35' and 6° 2' East of the Greenwich Meridian, Akwa Ibom State has at her boundaries Rivers State and Abia State on the West, Cross River State on the East, Abia State on the North, and Bight of bonny on the South (Akwa Ibom State Government Diary publication, 2001). Expost facto research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of counsellors selected from 5 universities (University of Uyo Akwa Ibom State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select

196 librarians and library science students from University of Uyo; College of Education; Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic; Federal Polytechnic. The questionnaire titled "CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN COUNSELING AND LANGUAGE BARRIERS TO CLIENT-COUNSELOR DYNAMICS QUESTIONNAIRE" (CCCLBC-CDQ) was used for data collection. Face and contents validation of the instrument was carried out by one expert in test, measurement and evaluation to ensure that the instrument was accurate for the study. The questionnaire was administered to the sampled respondents after obtaining permission from the Deans of the faculty on presentation of a letter of introduction from the Department of Guidance and Counselling. Cronbach Alpha technique was used to determine the level of the reliability of the instrument. In this case the average reliability coefficient obtained was 0.84 and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical techniques such as thematic analysis for answering the research questions. The test for significance was done at 0.05 alpha level.

Data Analysis

Result and Discussion of the Findings

Research Question One: How do language barriers manifest in the counseling setting?

Table 1: Mean rating analysis of how do language barriers manifest in the counseling setting

S/N	ITEMS	X	SD	Decision
1.	The language barrier has affected the clarity of communication between me and my counselor.	3.21	1.65	Agree
2.	My counselor effectively addresses language-related misunderstandings during our sessions.	2.97	1.39	Agree
3.	My counselor demonstrates cultural sensitivity when working with clients who speak languages other than English.	2.95	1.36	Agree
4.	I have personally faced challenges in expressing myself due to language differences in counseling.	3.05	1.41	Agree
5.	I am satisfied with the level of support I receive from my counselor despite language barriers.	2.98	1.48	Agree
	OVERAL INDEX	3.03	1.45	Agree

Legend: X = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; N: 196

Source: Researcher's Computation (2023).

Table 1 presents the findings of the research study pertaining on how language barriers manifest in the counseling setting. The entire index had a grand mean of 3.03 and a standard deviation of 1.45. Item 1 indicates that the assertion "The language barrier has affected the clarity of communication between me and my counselor" has the highest average score of 3.21. Conversely, the statement "My counselor demonstrates cultural sensitivity when working with clients who speak languages other than English" has the lowest mean score of 2.95 and a standard deviation of 1.36. Therefore, based on the above analysis, it was observed that language barriers do manifest in the counseling setting and it is statistically positive.

Research Question Two: What impact do language barriers have on the establishment of rapport between clients and counselors?

Table 2: Mean rating analysis of the impact of language barriers on the establishment of rapport between clients and counselors

S/N	ITEMS	X	SD	Decision
1.	The presence of a language barrier makes it difficult for clients to express themselves during counseling sessions.	3.27	1.55	Agree
2.	Language barriers hinder the establishment of trust between the counselor and the client.	3.21	1.24	Agree
3.	Clients feel more comfortable and open when counseling is conducted in their native language.	2.85	1.35	Agree
4.	Clients with language barriers have the feel a sense of alienation and isolation during counseling sessions.	3.04	1.33	Agree
5.	Counsellors find it challenging to accurately understand the needs and concerns of clients when there is a language barrier.	2.88	1.53	Agree
	OVERAL INDEX	3.05	1.42	Agree

Legend: X = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; N: 196

Source: Researcher's Computation (2023).

Table 2 presents the findings of the research study pertaining to the impact of language barriers on the establishment of rapport between clients and counselors. The entire index had a grand mean of 3.05 and a standard deviation of 1.42. Item 1 indicates that the assertion "The presence of a language barrier makes it difficult for clients to express themselves during counseling sessions" has the highest average score of 3.27. Conversely, the statement "Clients feel more comfortable and open when counseling is conducted in their native language" has the lowest mean score of 2.85 and a standard deviation of 1.35. Therefore, based on the above analysis, there is impact of language barriers on the establishment of rapport between clients and counselors and it is statistically positive.

Research Question Three: How do language barriers influence clients' perceptions of counselor empathy and cultural understanding?

Table 3: Mean rating analysis on how do language barriers influence clients' perceptions of counselor empathy and cultural understanding

S/N	ITEMS	X	SD	Decision
1	My counselor makes an effort to understand and overcome language barriers during our sessions.	3.21	1.33	Agree
2	My counselor is culturally competent even when facing language barriers.	3.27	1.55	Agree
3	My counselor demonstrates empathy even when faced with language barriers.	2.88	1.53	Agree
4	I feel understood and supported by my counselor, despite the language differences.	3.04	1.24	Agree
5	The language barrier has led to misunderstandings related to cultural nuances.	2.85	1.35	Agree
	OVERAL INDEX	3.04	1.41	Agree

Legend: X = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; N: 196

Source: Researcher's Computation (2023).

Table 3 presents the findings of the research study pertaining to the challenges of integrating AI into cataloging and metadata management processes. The entire index had a grand mean of 3.04 and a standard deviation of 1.41. Item 2 indicates that the assertion "My counselor is culturally competent even when facing language barriers" has the highest average score of 3.27. Conversely, the statement "The language barrier has led to misunderstandings related to cultural nuances" has the lowest mean score of 2.85 and a standard deviation of 1.35. Therefore, based on the above analysis, there is language barriers positively influence clients' perceptions of counselor empathy and cultural understanding.

Research Question Four: What strategies do counselors employ to address language barriers and enhance cultural competence?

Table 4: Mean rating analysis of strategies counselors employ to address language barriers and enhance cultural competence

S/N	ITEMS	X	SD	Decision
1.	Counselors use professional interpreters or bilingual staff when working with clients who do not speak the primary language fluently.	3.23	1.75	Agree
2.	Counselors make effort to integrate cultural competence into their therapeutic interventions.	2.97	1.45	Agree
3.	Counselors regularly assess clients' language proficiency to determine the need for language assistance.	3.05	1.43	Agree
4.	Counselors collaborate with community resources and organizations to enhance their understanding of diverse cultural practices.	2.94	1.35	Agree
5.	Counselors in our organization receive training on effective communication with clients who have language barriers.	2.96	1.37	Agree
	OVERAL INDEX	3.02	1.43	Agree

Legend: X = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; N: 196

Source: Researcher's Computation (2023).

Table 4 presents the findings of the research study pertaining on strategies counselors employ to address language barriers and enhance cultural competence. The entire index had a grand mean of 3.02 and a standard deviation of 1.43. Item 1 indicates that the assertion "Counselors use professional interpreters or bilingual staff when working with clients who do not speak the primary language fluently" has the highest average score of 3.23 and a standard deviation of 1.75. Conversely, the statement "Counselors collaborate with community resources and organizations to enhance their understanding of diverse cultural practices" has the lowest mean score of 2.94 and a standard deviation of 1.35. Therefore, based on the above analysis, it was observed that counselors do employ strategies to address language barriers and enhance cultural competence and it is statistically positive.

Discussion of the Findings

The result in table 1 presents the mean rating analysis of how language barriers manifest in the counseling setting. The findings indicated that all 5 items were rated positive. That is, they were above the cut of point of 2.50. Of all these highly rated items "The language barrier

has affected the clarity of communication between me and my counselor” in item no. 1 was the highest with a mean rating score of 3.21; while “My counselor demonstrates cultural sensitivity when working with clients who speak languages other than English” in item no. 3 was the least with a mean rating of 2.95. However, the entire index had a grand mean of 3.03 and a standard deviation of 1.45. Therefore, based on the findings, it was revealed that language barriers do manifest in the counseling setting. However, the significance of the result is in agreement with the opinion of Hansson et al. (2017) who opined that the presence of language barriers might result in the occurrence of misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and a diminished sense of connection between those seeking counselling services and their therapists. Hence, the result causes the research question to be significant.

The result in table 2 presents the mean rating analysis of what impact do language barriers have on the establishment of rapport between clients and counselors. The findings indicated that all 5 items were rated positive. That is, they were above the cut of point of 2.50. Of all these highly rated items “The presence of a language barrier makes it difficult for clients to express themselves during counseling sessions” in item no. 1 was the highest with a mean rating score of 3.27; while “Clients feel more comfortable and open when counseling is conducted in their native language” in item no. 3 was the least with a mean rating of 2.85. However, the entire index had a grand mean of 3.05 and a standard deviation of 1.42. Therefore, based on the findings, it was revealed that language barriers positive impact the establishment of rapport between clients and counselors. However, the significance of the result is in agreement with the research findings of Chen et al. (2021) who asserted that individuals who encounter language obstacles may have a potential drawback in terms of the effectiveness of their therapy. The presence of miscommunications or a dearth of clarity in therapeutic instructions has the ability to impede development, so exerting an influence on the overall efficacy of the counselling process. Hence, the result causes the research question to be significant.

The result in table 3 presents the mean rating analysis of how do language barriers influence clients' perceptions of counselor empathy and cultural understanding. The findings indicated that all 5 items were rated positive. That is, they were above the cut of point of 2.50. Of all these highly rated items “My counselor is culturally competent even when facing language barriers” in item no. 2 was the highest with a mean rating score of 3.27; while “The language barrier has led to misunderstandings related to cultural nuances” in item no. 5 was the least with a mean rating of 2.85. However, the entire index had a grand mean of 3.04 and a standard deviation of 1.41. Therefore, based on the findings, it was revealed that language barriers positively influence clients' perceptions of counselor empathy and cultural understanding. However, the significance of the result is cognate to the findings of Smith et al. (2018) who stated that the difficulty clients may have in effectively expressing their emotions, resulting in feelings of frustration and the risk for miscommunication. Counsellors, however, may have difficulties in precisely perceiving and effectively responding to the subtle emotional subtleties shown by their clients. The relationship between language and culture is very complex, and the interplay between these two factors significantly influences therapeutic encounters. Hence, the result causes the research question to be significant.

The result in table 4 presents the mean rating analysis of what strategies do counselors employ to address language barriers and enhance cultural competence. The findings indicated that all 5 items were rated positive. That is, they were above the cut of point of 2.50. Of all these highly rated items “Counselors use professional interpreters or bilingual staff when working with clients who do not speak the primary language fluently” in item no. 1 was the highest with a mean rating score of 3.23; while “Counselors collaborate with community resources and organizations to enhance their understanding of diverse cultural practices” in

item no. 4 was the least with a mean rating of 2.94. However, the entire index had a grand mean of 3.02 and a standard deviation of 1.43. Therefore, based on the findings, it was revealed that counselors do employ positive strategies to address language barriers and enhance cultural competence. However, the significance of the result is in agreement with the opinion of Smith et al. (2019) who stressed that organizations that regularly assess their cultural competence are more likely to implement targeted strategies for improvement and that counsellors who underwent language training reported increased confidence and effectiveness in cross-cultural interactions (Smith & Jones, 2018). Hence, the result causes the research question to be significant.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study revealed that addressing language barriers is integral to achieving cultural competence in counseling. The influence of language barriers on client-counselor dynamics is multifaceted, affecting communication, cultural understanding, and power dynamics within the therapeutic relationship. Strategies such as counselor training, professional interpreters, and technological solutions emerge as crucial components in enhancing cultural competence in the presence of language diversity. Future research should continue to explore the nuanced ways in which language barriers impact counseling outcomes and the effectiveness of interventions aimed at mitigating these challenges.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of the study, the following recommendations were deemed necessary:

1. Counselling organisations should ensure the availability of qualified interpreters who are fluent in both the client's language and the counselor's language. This may involve hiring interpreters or utilizing professional interpreting services.
2. Counselling organisations should provide cultural competence training for counselors to enhance their awareness of diverse cultural backgrounds and the impact of language on communication.
3. Counsellors should develop a systematic process for assessing the language proficiency of clients to identify those who may require language support.
4. Counsellors should work collaboratively with clients to integrate their cultural values and beliefs into the counseling process.
5. Counsellors should establish mechanisms for obtaining regular feedback from clients regarding their satisfaction with language access services and the overall counseling experience.

Implication of the study

1. The significance of cultural competence training for counsellors, particularly in relation to effectively working with clients who encounter language problems, is highlighted by the study. Training programmes should prioritise the development of both linguistic competence and a comprehensive grasp of cultural nuances that can impact effective communication.
2. The findings of this study underscore the importance of implementing counselling practises that are inclusive and attuned to the needs of individuals from linguistically diverse backgrounds. In order to facilitate effective communication, it may be

- necessary for counsellors to embrace a client-centered strategy that recognises and accommodates the language requirements of their clients.
3. The findings of this study also indicate the significance of customising counselling sessions to correspond with the cultural and language backgrounds of individuals. One potential avenue for exploration is the development of therapeutic methodologies that take into account the cultural milieu and linguistic preferences of clients, with the aim of augmenting both their level of involvement and the overall efficacy of the therapeutic process.

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