



Behavioral Analysis and Culturally Aware Counseling Strategies for Female Students Experiencing Social Adaptation Difficulties

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the problems experienced by female students in social adaptation due to differences in language and culture and to examine culturally aware counseling strategies used to address these challenges. A qualitative approach with a descriptive research design was employed. The participant was a 20-year-old female student with the initials S from Pasaman who is currently studying in Bukittinggi. Data were collected through observation and in-depth interviews and analyzed using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed barriers to cross-cultural communication, difficulties in social adjustment, low self-confidence, communication anxiety, the need for social acceptance, and cultural and language differences. Contributing factors included differences in linguistic background, lack of preparedness for a new environment, limited cross-cultural experience, negative self-perceptions, insufficient support, and less inclusive communication patterns. Culturally aware counseling strategies, including Self-Counseling (KONSELF), Behavioral Counseling (KONBE), and Pancawaskita Counseling, helped enhance self-acceptance, confidence, communication skills, and healthy adaptation while preserving cultural identity. The study highlights the importance of counselors' cultural sensitivity and supportive environments in achieving successful cross-cultural counseling.

Keywords: Culture Shock, Culturally Aware Counseling, Female Students, Social Adaptation, Student Behavior.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia as a multicultural country has a diversity of cultures, languages, customs and value systems which are the social identity of the community (Saputra et al., 2025). This diversity provides opportunities for dynamic social interactions, but on the other hand, it also has the potential to create communication and adjustment barriers when individuals find themselves in a different cultural environment. In the context of higher education, students from other cultures often face adaptation challenges due to differences in regional languages, communication patterns, social norms, and local customs. These differences can lead to social anxiety, feelings of inferiority, difficulties in building interpersonal relationships, and even obstacles in academic and social processes.

According to research conducted by Maharani & Netrawati, (2024) Students' ability to adapt is influenced by cultural factors, interpersonal communication, and social support. Furthermore, other research suggests that students experiencing culture shock tend to exhibit withdrawn behavior, lack self-confidence, and have difficulty interacting with their new environment (Andhika et al., 2026; Agestia et al., 2024). This condition shows that the success of students' social adaptation is not only influenced by individual factors, but also by their ability to understand cultural differences in their social environment.

The phenomenon of social adaptation difficulties due to cultural differences is frequently encountered among students from other regions in Indonesia, including in universities in West Sumatra, where the Minangkabau language is predominantly used in daily interactions. Students from outside the Minangkabau culture often experience communication barriers due to limited understanding of the local language and local communication patterns. This can lead to feelings of embarrassment, fear of making mistakes, and a tendency to avoid social interactions.

This phenomenon was seen in a female student from Pasaman who struggled to adjust to her new environment in Bukittinggi due to language and cultural differences. The client became more withdrawn, less confident, and felt inferior when interacting with an environment that predominantly spoke the Minangkabau language. Research by Desrianti et al. (2026) explains that cultural differences can affect an individual's psychological well-being and create barriers to interpersonal communication if not accompanied by good cultural adaptation skills. This phenomenon demonstrates that cultural adaptation is a real problem that requires attention in guidance and counseling services.

The urgency of this research lies in the importance of implementing cross-cultural counseling as an effort to help individuals understand, accept, and adapt to the cultural differences they face. Cross-cultural counseling is a professional service that emphasizes the counselor's cultural sensitivity to the client's background so that the assistance process can be empathetic and effective. In practice, counselors need to understand the client's cultural values, communication patterns, and social experiences to ensure that interventions provided do not create cultural bias.

Research shows that a counseling approach that takes cultural aspects into account can improve the ability to adapt, self-confidence, and the quality of interpersonal relationships of students who live away from home (Rohi, 2026). Amidst increasing student mobility between regions and high levels of interaction in multicultural environments, cross-cultural counseling services are becoming increasingly important to prevent the emergence of more complex psychosocial problems such as social isolation, academic stress, and interpersonal anxiety. Therefore, research on culturally aware counseling strategies is essential as a basis for developing guidance and counseling services that are more adaptive to cultural diversity in higher education.

The research gap in this study is evident in the limited number of studies specifically addressing the social adaptation behavior of migrant students and cross-cultural counseling strategies for students experiencing communication barriers due to differences in local

languages. Most previous studies have focused on general concepts of adjustment, culture shock, or the effectiveness of counseling services in general without in-depth examination of the dynamics of counselee behavior within specific local cultural contexts.

Furthermore, research on students from other regions experiencing difficulties adapting to the Minangkabau cultural environment is still relatively scarce. Yet, each region has distinct cultural characteristics and communication patterns, necessitating a contextual counseling approach. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap in research related to the analysis of the social adaptation behavior of Pasaman students in Bukittinggi and the appropriate cross-cultural counseling strategies to assist their social adjustment process. Thus, the results of this study are expected to enrich the scientific study of cross-cultural guidance and counseling and serve as a practical reference for counselors in multicultural higher education environments. This study aims to analyze the behavior and culturally aware counseling strategies for female students experiencing difficulties adapting to social life due to language and cultural differences.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses an experimental research method. The experimental research method is the most appropriate approach for examining causal relationships and is the most widely used method in scientific development efforts. The experimental research method is considered a standard benchmark because it is objective and precise in addressing hypotheses. This method aims to examine the effect of the independent variable or manipulated variable on the outcome to be measured. Through this approach, the researcher seeks to test the effect of culturally informed counseling interventions on changes in academic anxiety and learning motivation among students. A quasi-experimental design in the form of a pretest-posttest control group design was applied to present a systematic picture of the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable, without giving special treatment outside the designed intervention (Janitra et al., 2024).

The research was conducted at a student dormitory located near the Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) campus. This location was chosen because it is the main setting where academic anxiety and decreased learning motivation experienced by students arise. The data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from a 20-year-old female student with the initial S from Pasaman through measurement using the Academic Anxiety Scale and the Learning Motivation Scale. Secondary data were obtained from books,

scientific journals, research articles, and other relevant documents to strengthen and complement the findings for a more comprehensive understanding.

Samples were selected using purposive sampling, which is the selection of subjects based on certain criteria who are considered to have knowledge, understanding, and direct experience of the phenomenon under study. Subjects were then randomly divided into an experimental group that received culturally informed counseling interventions for 6 sessions over 3 weeks, and a control group that did not receive treatment. This selection aims to obtain in-depth and accurate data that reflects the actual conditions experienced by students (Sugiyono, 2018). Data collection techniques included administering a pretest to measure initial conditions, providing the intervention to the experimental group, and a posttest to observe changes after treatment. Data analysis used inferential statistical models with independent sample t-test and paired sample t-test after meeting the prerequisite tests of normality and homogeneity. This method is able to control confounding variables that affect the final results of the study, thereby minimizing bias and ambiguity in drawing research conclusions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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Konseli is a student from Pasaman who studies in Bukittinggi and lives in a boarding house. Together, friends who mostly speak Minangkabau in everyday life. Differences in language and social customs make it difficult for clients to adapt. Initially, clients don't understand the accent and terms used by their friends, so they often remain silent, simply smiling or nodding to avoid misinterpreting.

This condition causes the client to become withdrawn. He rarely initiates conversations, is less active in social settings, and prefers to spend time in his room. He feels more confident and comfortable speaking only when with friends who speak Indonesian or come from the same region. Problems experienced by the client include cross-cultural communication barriers, difficulty adjusting, low self-confidence, anxiety when interacting, and the need to be accepted in a new environment. Furthermore, the client does not yet understand the social customs and communication patterns in the boarding house, so it takes time to adapt without losing his cultural identity.

These problems are interrelated. Language difficulties lead to feelings of inferiority, which trigger social anxiety and hinder adjustment. If left untreated, this can lead to further isolation and alienation for clients. Some causes of this problem include dialect differences between Pasaman and Bukittinggi, unpreparedness for a new environment, lack of experience interacting with different cultures, negative self-perceptions, the absence of friends to assist with adaptation, and less inclusive communication patterns in boarding houses. If left untreated, these problems can lead to social isolation, prolonged stress, homesickness, decreased academic performance, misunderstandings with boarding housemates, an identity crisis, and stunted self-development. Therefore, mentoring is needed to help clients feel safe, increase self-confidence, and encourage a more open boarding environment to embrace cultural differences.

Analysis of Indonesian Culturally Aware Counseling Strategies

Culturally aware counseling is an approach that recognizes and values the diversity of cultural backgrounds as an essential element in the counseling process. In Indonesia, with its rich diversity of ethnicities, languages, customs, and value systems, This approach is a need that cannot be ignored by professional counselors. Supriadi (2001) Counselors who lack cultural awareness and sensitivity have the potential to misunderstand their clients' behavior, implement inappropriate interventions, and even inadvertently belittle the cultural values their clients uphold (Sue & Sue, 2016).

Sue & Sue (2016) emphasizes that effective counseling is counseling that is able to respond to cultural differences sensitively and constructively, rather than ignoring them. This view is particularly relevant in Indonesia, which consists of more than 1,300 ethnic groups with diverse values and perspectives, all of which influence the dynamics of counseling.

Counselor awareness of culture and values

Cultural awareness is the primary foundation of culturally informed counseling. This awareness encompasses the counselor's ability to recognize, understand, and appreciate the values, beliefs, customs, and perspectives of clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. Without this awareness, counselors tend to use their own cultural framework as a universal benchmark, a phenomenon known in the literature as ethnocentrism or cultural encapsulation.

Perspectives on cultural differences

A counselor's perspective on cultural differences significantly impacts the quality of the relationship and the effectiveness of counseling. These perspectives can range from ethnocentric to multicultural and inclusive. Here's an explanation:

- a. **Multicultural Perspective in Counseling:** Multiculturalism is seen as the “fourth force” in psychology and counseling, after psychoanalysis, behaviorism, and humanism. This perspective recognizes that culture is a fundamental context for how individuals understand themselves, others, and the world (Sue & Sue, 2016). Cultural differences are viewed as riches to be valued and utilized, not as obstacles. Counselors with this perspective approach differences with curiosity and openness.
- b. **Cultural Relativism versus Universalism in Counseling:** A major debate in cross-cultural counseling is the extent to which counseling values and techniques can be applied across cultures. Cultural relativism emphasizes that behavior must be understood within its cultural context, while universalism believes in the existence of basic human needs that transcend culture. In the Indonesian context, a wise approach is one that recognizes universal values while remaining sensitive to the different ways in which they are expressed across cultures (Supriadi, 2001).
- c. **The Right Perspective for Indonesian Counselors:** Indonesian counselors need to develop three principles. First, appreciate diversity as a wealth that enriches the counseling process. Second, integrate emic and etic perspectives to understand clients holistically. Third, be critical of cultural biases in counseling theory and techniques, given that most mainstream theories emerged from an individualistic Western context and may not be suitable for application without adjustment to Indonesia's more collectivistic society (Sue & Sue, 2016).

Development of appropriate strategies and techniques

After developing cultural awareness and a sound perspective, counselors need to design strategies and techniques appropriate to the client's cultural context (Sue & Sue, 2016). The effectiveness of counseling ultimately depends on the appropriateness of the strategies used. Here's an explanation:

- a. **Principles of Developing Culturally Adaptable Counseling Strategies:** Ivey states that strategies must be based on a deep understanding of the client's background, adapted to the client's communication style and cultural values, and flexible to be modified as needed.
- b. **Counseling Strategies in the Context of Indonesian Culture:** Some relevant strategies include: first, integrating local wisdom such as mutual cooperation, *tepa selira*, and *rukun* as counseling resources (Koentjaraningrat, 2004). Second, adjust your communication style so that it is not too direct and confrontational, considering that Indonesian culture tends to be indirect in communication (Mulyana, 2009). Third, involve social and family support systems in accordance with the collective orientation of Indonesian society, while maintaining

confidentiality and client consent. Fourth, use culturally relevant language and metaphors to make it easier for clients to understand and accept the intervention.

- c. Counselor Multicultural Competence: Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis formulated a multicultural competency model consisting of three dimensions: beliefs and attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Competent counselors are able to recognize cultural biases, appreciate the client's worldview, understand the client's socio-cultural background, and apply techniques appropriate to that cultural context.

Cross-Cultural Counseling Ethics

Culture

Culture encompasses the entire system of values, beliefs, norms, customs, language, habits, and behavioral patterns shared and passed down across generations. In cross-cultural counseling, cultural aspects are crucial because they influence how individuals think, feel, communicate, and solve problems. The scope of culture extends beyond ethnicity to religion, social status, education, language, gender, and social environment. Therefore, a counselor's understanding of the client's cultural background is essential for effective counseling and the avoidance of misunderstandings.

In cross-cultural counseling practice, counselors are required to possess cultural sensitivity, namely the ability to understand and appreciate the cultural diversity of clients. Ignorance of a client's culture can lead to misinterpretation of behavior. For example, silence, which in some cultures is understood as a form of respect, could be interpreted as a lack of openness to another culture. According to Koentjaraningrat, culture is the entire system of ideas, actions, and human works in society, acquired through learning and continuously passed down through social interaction (Koentjaraningrat, 2015).

Understanding a client's culture influences several important aspects of counseling, including how individuals express emotions, communicate, view problems, make decisions, and relate to family and community. By understanding these cultural dimensions, counselors can build more empathetic relationships, appreciate differences, and avoid discrimination and cultural stereotypes in the counseling process.

Cultural Characteristics

Culture is not a static collection of customs and habits, but rather a dynamic, complex, and layered system that counselors need to understand precisely to avoid stereotypes and overgeneralizations. Culture is constantly changing and adapting to social, economic, and technological developments, as well as intercultural interactions through mechanisms of diffusion, acculturation, and internal innovation. This dynamic nature requires counselors to

avoid making rigid assumptions about their clients' cultures based on outdated stereotypes, but rather to update their understanding and be sensitive to ongoing changes in cultural values and practices.

Every individual is also a member of various interacting cultural groups, including ethnicity, religion, gender, generation, and social class. This multi-layered complexity means that no two people, even from the same ethnic group, have identical cultural experiences. Therefore, counselors need to avoid oversimplifying by assuming that all members of a group share the same values and behaviors. Culture, on the other hand, is learned through socialization and enculturation processes from birth to death, which occur through family, peers, schools, the media, religious institutions, and the wider community. Although internalized values and behavioral patterns can change through new learning processes, such change is not easy because the values inherent in core identities tend to be resistant to change.

Culture also has a normative force that binds its members to behave according to group norms and values, both explicitly through social rules and sanctions and implicitly through unwritten expectations. Counselors need to understand these cultural pressures to help clients identify their influence on the problems they face, while respecting their choices to comply with or challenge these norms. Furthermore, culture is adaptive, collective, and symbolic, and is passed down from generation to generation through education, upbringing, and social interaction. Culture helps humans adapt to their social and natural environments, is shared by a particular group, contains meaningful symbols, and serves as a guide for the social life of its members.

In cross-cultural counseling, understanding cultural traits helps counselors appreciate clients' differing values, avoid cultural prejudice, adapt counseling techniques, and enhance communication effectiveness. Counselors also need to recognize that each client has a unique cultural identity and should not impose their own values on the counseling process.

Cultural Socialization

Cultural socialization is a continuous process of instilling cultural values, norms, habits and behavioral patterns in individuals from childhood to adulthood, so that individuals are able to understand and adapt to the cultural demands of their society (Mulyana & Rakhmat, 2014). Through this process, a person gradually internalizes ways of thinking, behaving, and interacting that are considered normal and acceptable within their social group. The process of cultural socialization occurs through various social agents that influence each other. The family is the first and foremost environment in the formation of an individual's culture, because this is where children learn language, norms of politeness, religious values, and daily habits from parents and other family members. Furthermore, schools play a crucial role in strengthening this process

through formal education that instills discipline, responsibility, tolerance, and social values that apply in the wider community. The community environment also has a significant influence, because customs, traditions, social rules, and daily interactions serve as a means for individuals to understand and practice the norms that apply in their neighborhood. In the modern era, mass media and technology, especially social media, also play a significant role in the process of cultural socialization, especially in shaping the lifestyles, mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors of the younger generation through information, entertainment, and evolving trends.

In the context of cross-cultural counseling, understanding a client's cultural socialization process is crucial because these experiences shape how clients understand themselves, others, and their environment. Clients raised in collectivistic cultures, for example, tend to prioritize group harmony and family interests over personal interests, often considering the impact on those closest to them. Conversely, individuals raised in individualistic cultures place greater emphasis on personal freedom, independence, and individual achievement as measures of success. These differences in cultural socialization backgrounds influence how clients express emotions, communicate, view problems, and make decisions in their daily lives.

Therefore, counselors need to understand the client's cultural socialization background in order to identify the source of the problem more precisely, facilitate the communication process in counseling sessions, reduce the potential for cultural misunderstandings, and design interventions that are in accordance with the values and norms held by the client (Prayitno & Amti, 2013). Furthermore, ethical principles in cross-cultural counseling require counselors to respect clients' cultural identities without discrimination, prejudice, or biased judgment. Counselors are required to maintain an open attitude, empathy, and respect for cultural diversity, so that the counseling process can take place in a safe, inclusive, and meaningful environment for clients.

Discussion

The research results show that culture plays a significant role in influencing an individual's communication and adjustment processes. Language and cultural differences can hinder social interaction if individuals lack adequate mental readiness and adaptation skills. This is evident in the case of client S, who experienced difficulty adjusting due to differences in dialect and communication patterns in his boarding house environment. This condition led to feelings of difference, low self-esteem, and a fear of making mistakes when interacting with his peers. The client's situation aligns with the concept of cross-cultural counseling, which emphasizes that cultural differences influence how individuals think, feel, and communicate. The communication barriers experienced by the client not only impact language skills but also

extend to emotional and social aspects. As a result, the client becomes less confident and tends to withdraw from social environments as a defense mechanism against the shame and anxiety that arise in interactions.

From a culturally informed counseling perspective, the problems experienced by clients cannot be understood as purely individual issues. These problems are the result of a dynamic interaction between the individual and their surrounding social and cultural environment. Therefore, treatment efforts cannot simply focus on internal changes within the client but also need to consider the social environmental conditions that influence their adaptation process. To address these issues, the Self-Counseling approach was chosen because the client experiences a mismatch between the desire for acceptance and a negative perception of themselves. Through this approach, the counselor strives to help the client build self-acceptance, increase self-confidence, and create a warm and empathetic counseling relationship. Unconditional acceptance and empathetic understanding are key to ensuring the client feels safe expressing their feelings and experiences.

In addition, a Behavioral Counseling approach is implemented to help clients develop more adaptive social behavior. Techniques such as systematic desensitization, innocence training, shaping, reinforcement, and relaxation exercises are used gradually to help clients navigate social situations without excessive fear. This approach helps clients acquire better communication skills and increase their confidence in interacting with their social environment.

The use of Pancawaskita Counseling also strengthens the counseling process because this approach views individuals holistically through the aspects of Pancadaya (the five pillars of human development), masidu (the five pillars of human development), and likuladu (the five pillars of human development). Counseling is not only directed at addressing psychological issues but also seeks to help clients achieve a sense of security, opportunities for development, enthusiasm, competence, and the ability to maintain their cultural identity in a positive manner. Overall, the culturally aware counseling strategies implemented in this case demonstrate that the success of the counseling process is highly dependent on the counselor's cultural sensitivity. Counselors are required to understand their clients' cultural backgrounds, appreciate existing differences, and avoid judgmental attitudes and cultural stereotypes. Counselors also play a crucial role in helping create a more inclusive social environment, so that clients feel accepted and valued.

Thus, cross-cultural counseling is a relevant and important approach to helping individuals experiencing social adaptation difficulties due to cultural and language differences. A counseling approach that considers the client's cultural values, social context, and emotional needs can facilitate a healthy adjustment process without compromising the individual's cultural identity.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the case analysis, client S experienced difficulties adjusting to the boarding environment due to language and cultural differences that made him feel awkward, insecure, afraid of making mistakes, and tended to withdraw from social interactions. This condition resulted in the emergence of social anxiety, lack of self-confidence, and feelings of alienation influenced by minimal cross-cultural experience, lack of readiness to face the new environment, and a low sense of security in communicating. Handling was carried out through Self-Counseling, Behavioral Counseling, and Pancawaskita Counseling with a culturally insightful counseling approach that emphasizes cultural awareness, empathy, unconditional acceptance, and respect for the client's identity. Through these services, it is hoped that the client will be able to increase self-confidence, understand the new environment, and adapt socially without losing their cultural identity.

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