

BETWEEN IDEALITY AND REALITY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGES OF DEVELOPING CROSS-CULTURAL COUNSELOR COMPETENCIES IN THE CONTEXT OF TEPA SELIRA VALUES IN JAVANESE CULTURE

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Abstract

Cross-cultural competence is an essential ability that counselors must possess in order to provide effective counseling services for clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, in practice, the development of this competence still faces various challenges, such as counselors' limited cultural understanding and the lack of integration of local cultural values in counselor education and training processes. This study aims to analyze the challenges in developing counselors' cross-cultural competence in the context of the true values within Javanese culture. This study employed a literature review method by examining various relevant scientific sources concerning counselors' cross-cultural competence and the value of tepa selira. The findings indicate that the value of tepa selira has strong relevance in supporting the development of counselors' cross-cultural competence because it embodies empathy, respect for others, and cultural sensitivity. The integration of tepa selira values can serve as a strategy to strengthen counselors' competence so that counseling services become more contextual, culturally sensitive, and responsive to clients' needs.

Keywords: Counselor, Cross-Cultural Competence, Javanese Culture, Tepa Selira

1. Introduction

Cross-cultural counseling is an important competency for counselors in serving clients from diverse cultural backgrounds, which includes the ability to understand values, customs, beliefs, communication patterns, and socio-cultural characteristics so that the counseling process takes place effectively. According to Derald Wing Sue and David Sue, multicultural competence includes awareness of one's own cultural values, understanding the client's background, and appropriate intervention skills, because without these, counseling experiences cultural bias that affects the relationship between the counselor and the client (Sue, 2019).

In Indonesian education, cross-cultural competence is crucial. Multicultural education provides equal learning opportunities without distinction of background (Sasa et al., 2025). Different backgrounds can be a strength if managed positively, but they also have the potential to give rise to conflicts such as bullying, verbal abuse, and disrespectful behavior if they are not instilled with the values of empathy and appreciation. Therefore, guidance and counseling services emphasize counseling skills in achieving developmental tasks, as well as the importance of developing empathy and service integration (Nafilasari & Indreswari, 2023).



There are cases occurring in schools. One such case occurred in Cilacap Regency, Central Java, where a junior high school student was bullied by his peers. According to police, the incident was triggered by the victim's perceived involvement with a group or gang (Detiknews, 2023). This case demonstrates that group identity, narrow solidarity, and power relations among peers can lead to aggressive behavior when not accompanied by self-control and social empathy. Simple conflicts can escalate into violence because students perceive group differences as a threat, rather than something to be valued.

Another case occurred in Purwakarta, West Java, when several high school students mocked a teacher in class, using inappropriate language, and even pointing the middle finger at him. The incident garnered public attention because it demonstrated a decline in students' respect for educators and a weakening of ethical interactions in schools (Bagaskara, 2026). This action is not just a violation of the rules, but an indication of low social awareness, weak self-control, and a lack of internalization of the value of respect for others.

These two cases demonstrate that educational issues are not only related to academics, but also to character, social relations, and cultural sensitivity. Both cases reflect a lack of empathy between students and teachers, and a decline in respect for teachers, resulting in a disconnect between ideal educational values and student behavior. In this situation, school counselors play a crucial role as facilitators of student development and cross-cultural competence, helping them understand adolescent relationships, peer groups, youth communication, the influence of social media, and local values to ensure the counseling process achieves its goals. Cultural diversity can impact the effectiveness of counseling services if counselors lack adequate cultural skills (Roza, 2022).

In Javanese culture, *tepa selira* is relevant to this issue, because it includes an attitude of tolerance, the ability to position oneself, maintain feelings, respect feelings and consider the impact that occurs (Valencya et al., 2025) *Tepa selira* is an important part of Javanese socio-cultural ethics, emphasizing harmony and respect, which aligns with counseling principles such as empathy and acceptance. Internalizing *tepa selira* helps students understand others, appreciate differences, control themselves, and act respectfully (Nafilasari & Indreswari, 2023).

Research conducted by Nafilasari and Indreswari (2023) found that integrating *tepa selira* values into group guidance services can increase student empathy. Furthermore Setiawan (2018) emphasized that multicultural competence is crucial for effective counseling in diverse communities, but research linking it to *tepa selira* values as a response to students' social problems is still limited.

Based on this description, this study aims to analyze the challenges of developing cross-cultural counselor competencies based on the value of *tepa selira* in Javanese culture. It aims to demonstrate the role of local values in strengthening professional competency in responding to issues related to empathy and respect. This process can contribute to more conceptual, preventative, and culturally sensitive counseling practices.

2. Methods

This research uses a literature study method. The literature study method in this article is used as an approach to collect and analyze information from various relevant sources. Literature study can be defined as a systematic process of gathering important data related to a topic or problem (Febrianto et al., 2024). The data collection was conducted by reviewing and evaluating various sources, such as books, scientific articles,

and other written materials that support research related to Javanese cultural *tepa selira* in developing counselor competency.

3. Results and Discussion

The value of *tepa selira* is one of the values in Javanese culture that emphasizes tolerance, empathy, and understanding the feelings of others, to be a guideline for maintaining relationships between people (Valencya et al., 2025). According to Franz Magnis-Suseno, *tepa selira* reflects an individual's awareness of maintaining social balance by upholding respect for others as part of the ethics of social life (Suseno, 2003). Thus, this value not only functions as a social norm, but also becomes the basis for forming an empathetic attitude in social interactions.

In counseling, the value of *tepa selira* (respect and empathy) is closely related to empathy, which enables counselors to understand clients' emotional experiences, fostering a warm and supportive relationship. Gerald Corey stated that empathy is a crucial factor in building a warm and trusting relationship, as clients feel understood, valued, and accepted for who they are. Furthermore, a counselor's integrity can be seen in their honesty, consistency, and responsibility in carrying out their professional role (Aurora et al., 2026). Therefore, the value of *tepa selira* supports the formation of an empathetic attitude through understanding others' feelings and sensitivity in interactions.

Although cross-cultural competence is important in counseling practice, developing it still faces challenges, particularly in counselors' limited understanding of their clients' cultures. Consequently, approaches that fail to consider values and norms, trigger cultural bias, and hinder the counselor-client relationship. A lack of cultural skills among counselors can impact the effectiveness of services because counselors may interpret clients' problems based on their own cultural perspectives (Roza et al., 2022).

Counselors need to possess cross-cultural competence to provide effective services to clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. This competence includes awareness of personal cultural values and biases, an understanding of the client's culture, and the skills to apply counseling approaches appropriate to the client's needs. Multicultural awareness is crucial for counselors to accept and understand differences in opinions, perspectives, and other aspects of their clients. Counselors need to change their personal perspectives, equip themselves with adequate cultural knowledge, and understand various forms of discrimination, stereotypes, and racism (Firdaus et al., 2025).

According to Bastoni, multicultural counselors need to have a number of competencies, including: 1) sensitivity to culture, 2) awareness of cultural differences between themselves and their clients, 3) the ability to create a sense of comfort and acceptance despite differences, knowledge of the client's cultural background, mastery of counseling skills and techniques, 4) responsive communication, 5) and the ability to convey counseling results in clear and easy-to-understand language (Nursyamsiya et al., 2025). Counselors who understand this value are expected to be able to position themselves appropriately to understand the client's condition, thereby establishing a warmer counseling relationship that respects diversity.

Cultural differences influence understanding and communication patterns in the counseling process. Therefore, counselors need to possess a high level of sensitivity and multicultural awareness to understand clients' characteristics and provide assistance appropriate to their cultural context. Furthermore, counselors need to be multiculturally aware of the diverse characteristics of clients throughout the counseling process (Nabila et al., 2024). Lack of cultural

skills in counselors can affect the effectiveness of services because counselors can potentially interpret client problems based on their own cultural perspectives (Roza, 2022).

Apart from limited cultural understanding, multicultural counseling also faces obstacles, such as low development of multicultural competencies in counselors (Saud et al., 2025). Competency development has so far focused on a general theoretical approach, while understanding local wisdom has not been a primary focus. This situation leaves counselors underprepared to deal with the diverse cultural dynamics of their clients. Integrating local cultural values, however, can help counselors develop cultural sensitivity that is more contextual and appropriate to their clients' social environment.

The value of *tepa selira* (concern) has great potential in supporting the development of counselors' cross-cultural competence because it embodies the principles of empathy, respect for others, and sensitivity in maintaining interpersonal relationships. These values align with the basic competencies counselors need when dealing with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds (Widiyanti, 2024). Therefore, the value of *tepa selira* can be a relevant cultural foundation in strengthening the professional competence of counselors.

Besides strengthening empathy, implementing the value of *tepa selira* also helps counselors reduce ineffectiveness in the counseling process. This is because *tepa selira* is the ability to understand and feel what others are experiencing. This attitude encourages individuals to focus not only on themselves but also consider the feelings and conditions of others in every action. Thus, a person will be more careful in their speech and behavior to avoid offending or hurting others (Valencya et al., 2025).

The basic competencies possessed by counselors form the basis for facing challenges. Ethics and competence are important foundations for counselors to become qualified professionals (Silmy, 2024). These findings suggest that developing counselors' cross-cultural competence is not only achieved through a theoretical approach, but also through strengthening local cultural values relevant to counseling principles. In the Javanese cultural context, the value of *tepa selira* can serve as a foundation for building counselor competence that is more empathetic, sensitive to diversity, and responsive to clients' cultural needs (Kristiyasamudra et al., 2026). Thus, utilizing local cultural values becomes one strategy in bridging the gap between ideal competencies and counseling practices in the field.

The implications of this study indicate that developing counselors' cross-cultural competencies should be directed not only at mastering multicultural counseling theory, but also at understanding and integrating local cultural values into counseling practice. The value of *tepa selira* can serve as a foundation in training prospective counselors to strengthen empathy, cultural sensitivity, and the ability to build counseling relationships that respect diversity. Therefore, strengthening counselor competencies based on local cultural values is a strategic step to increase the effectiveness of cross-cultural counseling services.

4. Conclusion

Developing cross-cultural competence is crucial for improving the effectiveness of counseling services in culturally diverse communities. However, its development still faces challenges, particularly in cultural sensitivity and the integration of local values. The study's findings indicate that the Javanese value of *tepa selira* is relevant for supporting counselors' cross-cultural competence because it emphasizes empathy, respect, and sensitivity to clients'

circumstances. Therefore, integrating tepa selira values can be a strategy to strengthen counselors' competence, making counseling services more contextual and culturally sensitive.

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