



# The development of students' cultural awareness through an Indonesian cross-cultural counseling

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# The development of students' cultural awareness through an Indonesian cross-cultural counseling

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## ABSTRACT

The research was motivated by the difficulties of prospective counselors in understanding the culture of origin of their counselee in cross-cultural counseling practices. The research aims to increase the cultural awareness of prospective counselors towards the counselee they help. This type of research is action research carried out through three cycles, namely, 1) prospective counselors understand the counselee's culture from expert who have a different cultural background from the counselee, 2) prospective counselors understand the counselee's culture from peers who have a different background from the counselee, and 3) prospective counselors understand the culture of individual who were born and raised in the counselee's culture. The population in the research was 110 students from the BK UIN Bukittinggi department studying cross-cultural counseling. Samples were drawn using the accidental techniques as many as 40 people. The research data were processed using difference test (t-test). The results of the research reveal that prospective counselors understand the counselee culture more easily than individuals who were born and raise in the counselee culture. The result of this research recommend using sources from the culture origin to increase prospective counselors awareness of the counselee's culture in cross-cultural counseling.

## Keywords:

Cultural awareness  
Cross-cultural counseling  
Culture

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## Introduction

The study of culture is always interesting and never ends. Cross-cultural issues have increased since the 1960s, which underlies the increased awareness of cultural differences (Sue, D. W., Sue, D., Neville, H. A., & Smith, 2022); (Rahmawati et al., 2020). The increasing of this awareness has also been accompanied by the re-emergence of divisive racist attitudes (Eleftheriadou, 2018); (Ridley, C. R., Mollen, D., Console, K., & Yin, 2021). This is one of the basics of the need for a cross-cultural approach in the field of counseling for life in the 21st century (Utomo, P., Suherman, M. M., & Tayaban, 2022); (Kourgiantakis, T., & Bogo, 2017). The cross-cultural approach in the field of counseling and psychology is considered the fourth strength, after psychodynamic, behavioristic, and humanistic (Danso, 2018); (Summers, L. M., Nelson, L., & LCMHC, 2022). Cross-cultural counseling is defined as a counseling process carried out between counselors and counsees who have different cultures (Ridley, C. R., Sahu, A., Console, K., Surya, S., Tran, V., Xie, S., & Yin, 2021); (Hanafi, H., Hidayah, N., Mappiare-AT, A., & Atmoko, 2020). Cross-cultural counseling occurs when the counselor and the counselee who interact each other in the counseling process have cultural differences (Oller, M. L., & Teeling, 2021); (Bathje, G. J., Pillersdorf, D., & Eddir, 2022). Indonesia, as one of the largest multicultural countries in the world, has the possibility of a cross-cultural counseling process being greater than other monocultural countries.

Counseling in cross-cultural settings requires special attention so that the counseling process can run effectively (Zakiyah, A., Rahmat, H. K., & Sa'adah, 2022); (Pierre, Y., Rathee, N. K., & Rathee, 2021). Counselors in the cross-cultural counseling process require certain skills, abilities, and values in addition to counseling skills in general (Mollen, D., & Ridley, 2021); (Sudarmin et al., 2018). One of the important dimensions that cross-cultural counselors need to have is cultural awareness (Zhu, P., Luke, M. M., Liu, Y., & Wang, 2023); (Kourgiantakis, T., & Bogo, 2017). It is important for counselors to have cultural awareness so that they can have an understanding and awareness that cultural factors will affect their development and view of themselves. Therefore, it is necessary for counselors to know that their values and behaviors will affect other people. This will have a substantial impact on the development of the counselee and the counseling process (Singh, A. A., Nassar, S. C., Arredondo, P., & Toporek, 2020). The ability to recognize and respect cultural differences is defined as cultural awareness (Hawkins, J. M., Bean, R. A., Smith, T. B., & Sandberg, 2022).

Cultural awareness is also said to be the ability to look out and be aware of cultural values that exist outside of oneself (Kourgiantakis, T., & Bogo, 2017); (Lee, H. S., Knutson, D., Koch, J. M., Brown, C., & Keyes, 2022), and to understand that culture can influence human values and behavior (Martinez, J. K., & Dong, 2020). Cultural awareness can help counselors interact and communicate in a diverse and culturally diverse way. In the context of cross-cultural counseling, cultural awareness can help the counselor understand the counselee from the point of view of the counselor's culture. Cultural awareness can prevent misunderstanding and misinterpretation, which can be the forerunner of friction between cultures (Sengkey, M. M., Aditama, M. H. R., & Tiwa, 2020); (Killian, T., & Floren, 2020). Misunderstanding can occur because they are not aware of their own cultural rules and project them onto others (Lee, H. S., Knutson, D., Koch, J. M., Brown, C., & Keyes, 2022). Without good knowledge of the client's culture, it is easier for the counselor to make assumptions than to find out the meaning of the behavior displayed by the client. Counselors with knowledge and awareness of cultural systems will be more skilled in helping counsees from certain cultural groups, able to share the same views with counsees, or make better and more appropriate interventions while maintaining personal integrity (Kim, N., Oh, S., & Han, 2022).

One of the efforts to develop the cultural awareness abilities of prospective counselors is to provide cross-cultural counseling lectures. In this course, prospective counselors will be equipped with various understandings and skills in the implementation of cross-cultural counseling, one of them is cultural awareness (Kim, N., Oh, S., & Han, 2022); (Yusri, F., Arfida, Y., & Putri, 2023). In the cross-cultural counseling process, a counselor should have cultural sensitivity and avoid cultural bias so that they can respect cultural differences and be culturally responsive (Singh, A. A., Nassar, S. C., et al, 2020); (Summers, L. M., Nelson, L., & LCMHC, 2022). In cross-cultural counseling lectures, the counselor's sensitivity to (1) clients' perspectives of different cultures, (2) sensitivity to the counsees' personal perspectives, and (3) the skills needed to work with clients of different cultures will be developed (Ridley, C. R., Sahu, A., et al, 2021); (Davis, D. E., DeBlaere, et al, 2018). Some things that need to be considered by counselors in understanding culture and its influence on counsees include: (1) culture involves communication in certain patterns; (2) understanding the language used in certain cultures; (3) understanding one's own culture by comparing it with other cultures; and (4) culture is involved in all phases of human life (Gonzalez-Voller, J., Crunk, A. E., et al, 2020); (Zamudio, G., Wang, C. D., & Jin, 2020).

The diversity of students' cultural backgrounds does not necessarily increase the ability of cultural awareness to develop by itself. Students of the FTIK UIN Bukittinggi BK department come from various ethnic groups and cultures in Indonesia, such as Javanese, Gayo, Malay, Karo, Mandailing, Minangkabau, Sundanese, Nias, and others, so that cross-cultural interactions often occur. Even though they are used to cross-cultural interactions, it does not mean that students' cross-cultural interactions take place without difficulties and problems. These difficulties and problems can be seen in the lack of knowledge of students about different cultures, difficulties in conveying thought and ideas, associations that are culturally limited, and views and reactions "strange" to different cultures.

This simple phenomenon can lead to the bigger problems and friction later on. In addition, this phenomenon is an indication of the undeveloped cultural awareness of students at the maximum level as expected, while cultural awareness is a must for BK Study Program students, firstly because cross-cultural interactions have occurred, secondly because interactions can cause friction, and thirdly because of the prospective future profession. This prospective counselor requires cultural awareness.

In this research, efforts to develop cultural awareness were carried out through three cycles, namely, 1) prospective counselors understand the counselee's culture from expert who have a different cultural background from the counselee, 2) prospective counselors understand the counselee's culture from peers who have a different background from the counselee, and 3) prospective counselors understand the culture of individual who were born and raised in the counselee's culture. This research was conducted to achieve counselor competency standards in cross-cultural counseling, including 1) understanding culture that can affect individual and group behavior, 2) understanding and showing subjective acceptance between counselors and counsees, and 3) being sensitive, tolerant, and responsive to the counselee's cultural differences.

## Methods

The research is conducted as the type of action research. Action research is usually carried out in educational settings by teachers to formulate improvement programs for learning activities (Newman, M., & Gough, 2020); (Zawacki-Richter, O., Kerres, M., et al, 2020). The procedure for implementing action research were carried out through three cycles, namely, 1) prospective counselors understand the counselee's culture from expert who have a different cultural background from the counselee, 2) prospective counselors understand the counselee's culture from peers who have a different background from the counselee, and 3) prospective counselors understand the culture of individual who were born and raised in the counselee's culture. The population in the study is all students of the BK department of FTIK UIN Bukittinggi who took part in cross-cultural counseling lectures, amounted to 110 people. The sampling technique used in this study is accidental sampling, namely sampling that coincidentally met with the researcher and met the criteria as a data source (Pandey, P., & Pandey, 2021); (Mishra, S. B., & Alok, 2022). All students have the same opportunity to be sampled in research activities with a sample of 40 students from BK FTIK UIN Bukittinggi.

The instrument used to collect cultural awareness data in this research is a simple questionnaire. The questionnaire was adapted (with necessary modifications) from the instrument related to the existing cultural awareness, namely the cultural competence self-assessment checklist developed by the governments of Canada and Colombia. The empirical validity test was conducted by involving 30 respondents outside the sample. Based on the validity test using Pearson correlation analysis or product moment, by correlating the score of each item with the total score, all the items used in the instrument have been declared valid, as many as 30 items. The level of reliability of the instrument tested using Cronbach's Alpha was 0.844. The research data (pretest and posttest) were then processed using descriptive and comparative statistics.

## Results and Discussion

### Result

The development of student cultural awareness in this study was carried out in three cycles. The initial profile of student cultural awareness and its development in each cycle is presented in table 1.

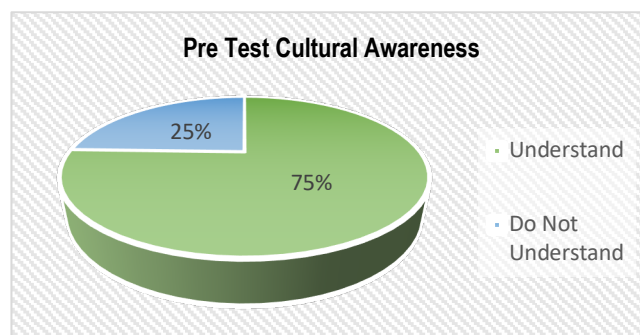
Based on the data in table 1, the average pre-test score of cultural awareness is 90.65, with a percentage of 75.5%, and SD 12.3, which is in the medium category. The highest score for cultural awareness is 113, while the lowest score is 57, with a score range of 56. This means that students' understanding of cultural awareness is still at an ordinary level; sometimes there are still

misunderstandings between individuals of different cultures; and sometimes it is still difficult to distinguish their own culture from the culture of others.

**Table 1.** Recapitulation of the initial profile and development of student cultural awareness in each cycle

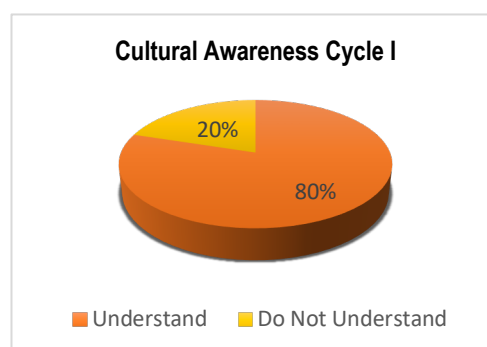
Kinds of data	Pre test	Cycle I	Cycle II	Cycle III
Mean	90,65	95,88	99,83	101,65
Standar Error	1,947	1,346	1,428	1,434
Standar Deviasi	12,315	8,513	9,032	9,071
Variances	151,669	72,471	81,584	82,285
Minimum	57	65	80	77
Maximum	113	108	116	113
Sum	3626	3835	3993	4066
Persentase	75,5%	79,9%	83,2%	84,7%

Other things that can happen include not being able to understand that a person's mindset, feelings, and behavior are influenced by the culture they adhere to. In fact, sometimes they still judge actions based on their own culture as better than those of other cultures. The increase in student cultural awareness scores can be seen from the increase in the lowest score obtained by students in cycle II, which is 65. The percentage of students' cultural awareness pre-test scores can be seen in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** The score percentage of Pre Test Cultural Awareness

Based on the data in table 1, the average score of cultural awareness in the first cycle is 95.88 with a percentage of 79.9%, and SD 8.5 is in the high category. The highest score for cultural awareness is 108, while the lowest score is 65, with a score range of 43. This means that students' understanding of cultural awareness increases after being given treatment in the first cycle by bringing in experts with different cultural backgrounds from the counselee's culture to be understood. In cycle I, the expert will explain various important points that prospective counselors should understand so that their cultural awareness develops. The percentage of students' cultural awareness scores in cycle I can be seen in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** The percentage score of students' Cultural Awareness cycle I

Based on the data in table 1, the average cultural awareness score in cycle II is 99.83, with a percentage of 83.2%, and SD of 9.03, which is in the high category. The highest score for cultural awareness is 116, while the lowest score is 80, with a score range of 36. This means that students' understanding of cultural awareness increases after being given a treatment in cycle II by discussing it with peers whose cultural background is different from the counselee's. In cycle II, the peer will explain various important points that prospective counselors should understand so that their cultural awareness develops and then conduct discussions about various things that need to be discussed. The increase in students' cultural awareness scores can be seen from the increase in the lowest score obtained by students in cycle II, which is 80. The percentage of students' cultural awareness scores in cycle II can be seen in Figure 3.

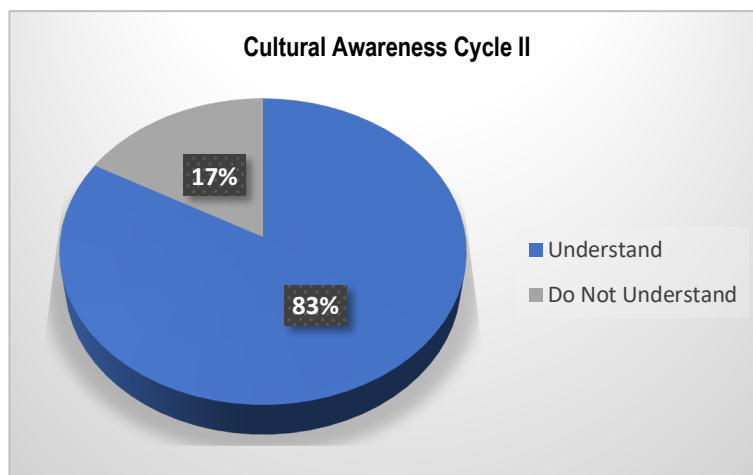


Figure 3. The percentage score of students' Cultural Awareness cycle II

Based on the data in table 1, the average cultural awareness score in cycle III is 101.65, with a percentage of 84.7%, and SD 9.07, which is in the high category. The highest score for cultural awareness is 113, while the lowest score is 77, with a score range is 36. This means that students' understanding of cultural awareness increases after being given treatment in cycle III by discussing it with experts who were born and raised in the counselee's culture to be understood. In cycle III, the expert will explain various important points that prospective counselors should understand so that their cultural awareness develops, then conduct discussions about various things that need to be discussed. The increase in students' cultural awareness scores can be seen from the range of scores obtained by students in cycle III, which is getting smaller by the day, namely 36. The percentage of students' cultural awareness scores in cycle III can be seen in Figure 4.

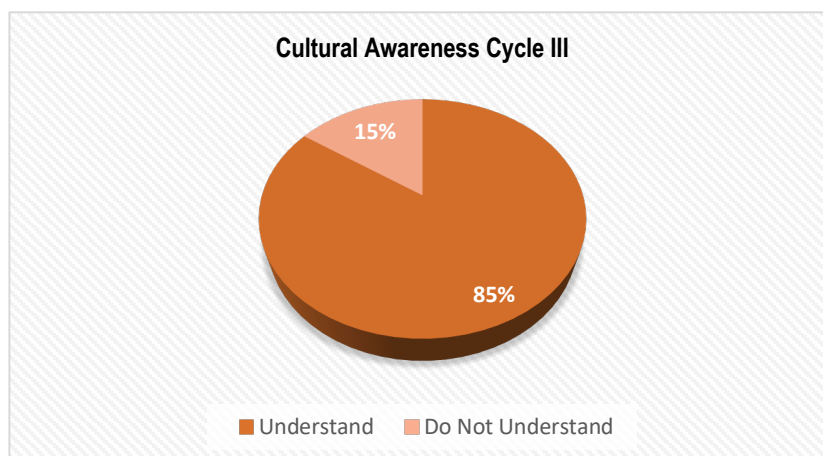


Figure 4. The percentage score of students' Cultural Awareness cycle III



**Table 2.** Recapitulation of student cultural awareness test results in each cycle

Data	T-Test Value	Score of Sig.(2-tailed)	Conclusion
Pre test vs Cycle I	-2,282	0,028	There is the difference
Cycle I vs Cycle II	-1,840	0,073	There is the difference
Cycle II vs Cycle III	-0,850	0,401	There is no the difference
Pre test vs Cycle III	-4,921	0,000	There is the difference

Based on the data in table 2, it is known that the cultural awareness ability of students during the pre-test is different from the cultural awareness ability of students in the first cycle, with a value of  $t = -2.282$  and a sig. (2-tailed) of 0.028. This is indicated by the average score of cultural awareness in the pre-test stage of 90.95, while the average score of cultural awareness in the first cycle is 95.88. This means that there is an increase in the student's cultural awareness score in the first cycle after cultural awareness is discussed together with experts with different cultural backgrounds from the counselee. The treatment given by the expert can increase the cultural awareness of students.

Based on the data in table 2, it is known that the cultural awareness ability of students in cycle I is different from the cultural awareness ability of students in cycle II, with a value of  $t = -1,840$  and a sig. (2-tailed) of 0.073. This is shown by the average cultural awareness score in the first cycle of 95.88, while the average cultural awareness score in the second cycle is 99.83. This means that there is an increase in the cultural awareness score of students in cycle II after cultural awareness is discussed together with peers who have different cultural backgrounds from the counselee. The treatment and discussion carried out with peers can increase the cultural awareness of students.

Based on the data in table 2, it is known that the cultural awareness ability of students in cycle II is not different from the cultural awareness ability of students in cycle III, with a value of  $t = -0.850$  and sig. (2-tailed) of 0.401. This is indicated by the average cultural awareness score in the second cycle of 99.83, while the average cultural awareness score in the third cycle is 101.65. This means that there was no significant increase in the student's cultural awareness score in cycle III after cultural awareness was discussed with experts with the same cultural background as the counselee. The treatment and discussion carried out with experts did not have a significant effect on the students' cultural awareness scores.

Based on the data in table 2, it is known that the cultural awareness ability of students during the pre-test is different from the cultural awareness ability of students in cycle III, with a value of  $t = -4.921$  and sig. (2-tailed) of 0.000. This is indicated by the average score of cultural awareness in the pre-test of 90.95, while the average score of cultural awareness in the third cycle is 101.65. It means there is a significant increase in the cultural awareness score of students in cycle III after cultural awareness is discussed with experts and peers with different cultural backgrounds from the counselee and the discussion is carried out with experts with the same cultural background as the counselee. Treatments and discussions carried out with experts and peers with different cultural backgrounds from the counselee and experts with the same cultural background as the counselee can increase student cultural awareness.

### Discussion

Based on the results of the study, it was revealed that the initial score of student cultural awareness at the pre-test stage was in the medium category. Sometimes there are still misunderstandings between individuals of different cultures when interacting because of their lack of understanding of their cultural differences. The culture adopted by a person will indirectly affect the mindset, feelings, and behavior of individuals (Acquah, E. O., & Commins, 2018); (Summers, L. M., Nelson, L., & LCMHC, 2022). The habits carried out by individuals in daily life are also influenced by culture. It can be said that various activities carried out by humans in their lives cannot be separated from cultural influences. From the human mind, there are various cultures around us. Cultural diversity requires having cultural competencies so that humans can carry out personal and professional relationships better in cross-cultural settings. One of the cultural competencies is cultural awareness

(Kourgiantakis, T., & Bogo, 2017); (Yusri, F., & Afrida, 2022). In the context of counseling, culturally competent counselors have several criteria, one of them is cultural awareness. Cultural awareness is characterized by having knowledge about various beliefs, traditions, rules, and lifestyles, which can then become more perfect by having cultural sensitivity, namely an open attitude and the readiness to accept differences (Sue, D. W., Sue, D., Neville, H. A., & Smith, 2022); (Oller, M. L., & Teeling, 2021). The low ability of the counselor's cultural awareness in cross-cultural counseling can cause problems. (1) the counseling process is hampered because of the language used by the counselee, (2) the counselor's error in interpreting the behavior displayed by the counselee, (3) the emergence of prejudice in the counselor due to cultural differences between counselors and counsees, and (4) having difficulty balancing values between counselors and counsees, so that the implementation of cross-cultural counseling is disrupted (King, K. M., & Summers, 2020); (Arthur, 2018); (Sue & Sue, 2018).

Based on the research that has been done, to develop students' cultural awareness skills, three actions are carried out through three cycles. In the first cycle, the development of cultural awareness skills was carried out by bringing in an expert in cross-cultural counseling to help prospective counselors understand various things about the counselee's culture that they wanted to understand. The experts who are brought in do not have the same cultural background as the client's culture, which makes sense. The expert provides an explanation of the culture that prospective counselors want to understand for their counsees. Based on the student's cultural awareness score data after being given treatment in the first cycle, there was an increase from the pre-test score of 98.58, with a percentage of 79.9% being in the high category. There was a significant increase in students' cultural awareness scores in the pre-test compared to scores in cycle I. The development of cultural awareness is very important for a counselor in cross-cultural counseling. Cultural awareness can be increased by (1) emphasizing the importance of the uniqueness of the individual's culture, (2) being aware that carrying personal values is the influence of his culture, and (3) acknowledging that the counselee also carries values and behaviors that are influenced by his culture (D. G. Hays, 2020); (Matthews, J. J., Barden, S. M., & Sherrell, 2018). It takes guidance from professional experts to understand the influence of culture, beliefs, behavior, and other things on counsees from different cultural backgrounds who are trying to build relationships in the counseling process and to develop cultural awareness in counselors (Benjamin, J. Z., Heredia Jr, et al, 2021); (Acquah, E. O., & Commins, 2018).

In the second cycle, the development of cultural awareness is done by discussing the client's culture that he wants to understand with a selected peer, where this peer does not have the same culture as the counselee who wants to be understood. The discussion of the counselee's culture that he wants to understand is continued by discussing various things that are still in doubt about the counselee's culture that he wants to understand. The cultural awareness score of students increased after being given treatment in the second cycle to 99.83, with a percentage of 83.2% being in the high category. There was a significant increase in students' cultural awareness scores after being given treatment in cycle II. Counselors can have professional discussions with others to help understand how the cultural system works and its influence on the counselee's behavior (Akbar, N., Eshariyani, E., et al, 2023); (Gonzalez-Voller, J., Crunk, A. E., et al, 2020). Counselors who have knowledge and awareness of cultural systems will be more skilled in helping counsees from certain cultures, be able to share the same point of view with the counselee, or make the better interventions while maintaining personal integrity (Shi, Q., & Carey, 2021); (Rahmawati et al., 2020). Professional discussions with peers can help to (1) develop the skills needed to work with counsees from different cultures, (2) develop cultural knowledge and awareness in assisting counsees from different cultures, and (3) develop understanding in the use of counseling theory to avoid cultural bias (Zhu, P., Luke, M. M., Liu, Y., & Wang, 2023); (Lorelle, S., Atkins, K., & Michel, 2021).

In the third cycle, the development of cultural awareness was carried out by bringing in experts from the client's culture who wanted to be understood. This expert was born and raised in the same culture as the person he wants to understand, so he really understands the ins and outs of the person's culture that he wants to understand. The expert will explain various important things about the client's culture that he wants to understand and then discuss them through the discussions that occur.



The cultural awareness score of students did not experience a significant increase after being given treatment in the third cycle of 101.65, with a percentage of 84.7% being in the high category. There was no significant increase in students' cultural awareness scores after being given the treatment in cycle III, because it was more of an emphasis on understanding than in the previous two cycles. Discussion of the counselee culture that he wants to understand with native speakers of that culture will further increase his understanding of the components of cultural differences (Melamed, L., Casado Pérez, J. F., & Hunt, 2020); (Darmawani, E., Ferdiansyah, M., & Putra, 2020). Native speakers of a particular culture will help counselors (1) recognize the values and beliefs held, (2) be aware of cultural qualities and traditions, (3) understand the socio-political environment that affects the lives of members of the culture, (4) be able to share ways of view with the counselee, and (5) be more creative in the use of the necessary counseling techniques (Bathje, G. J., Pillersdorf, D., & Eddir, 2022); (Setyono, B., & Widodo, 2019). If cultural awareness can be developed, it can be used by counselors and counsees to understand each other's culture.

The provision of three different treatments in the study had an impact on the development of student cultural awareness in the implementation of cross-cultural counseling (Lianasari, D., & Purwati, 2022); (Killian, T., & Floren, 2020). The discussion of the counselee's culture with experts in the field of cross-cultural counseling makes students' understanding about cultural awareness develop even though the expert does not have the same cultural background as the counselee. Flexibility and similarity in mindset with peers can also help in developing students' cultural awareness, even though peers do not have the same cultural background as the counselee (Hawkins, J. M., Bean, R. A., et al, 2022) (Wong, P. T., & Wong, 2020). Through native speakers of the counselee's culture, which also contributes to the development of students' cultural awareness, various important matters related to the counselee's culture can be explored. Culturally responsive counselors should try to use multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills in the implementation of cross-cultural counseling with counsees who are culturally different (Utomo, P., Isa, N. J. M., & Ilhamuddin, 2023); (P. A. Hays, 2022). The implementation of counseling services with an insight into Indonesian culture can be realized by developing the cultural awareness of counselors properly through various appropriate methods. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the implementation of cross-cultural counseling lectures to develop the cultural awareness skills of students based on Indonesian culture, so as to create young counselors who can interact well with counsees from all cultural backgrounds in Indonesia.

It is hoped that the implementation of this Indonesian culture-based Cross-Cultural Counseling course can develop the cultural awareness of prospective counselors (in this case, students of the BK department, FTIK UIN Bukittinggi). Furthermore, the results of this research are expected to be used as material for consideration for the development of the Guidance and Counseling department in general and the preparation of the curriculum in particular.

## Conclusion

Giving different and focused treatment to discuss the culture of the counselee to be served can increase the cultural awareness of prospective counselors in the implementation of cross-cultural counseling. Cultural awareness of students can be increased by discussing the counselor's culture with experts in the field of cross-cultural counseling and peers with different cultural backgrounds from the counselor, which will be understood to open the horizons of thinking for prospective counselors. The arrival of experts with the same cultural background as the counselee, who will be understood, will increasingly have a positive influence on the development of student cultural awareness. The method used in this study can be applied in cross-cultural counseling lectures to increase students' cultural awareness abilities. The research conducted is expected to make a positive contribution to the Guidance and Counseling study program in developing strategies that can be used in cross-cultural counseling lectures. Preparation of semester lecture plans (RPS) for cross-cultural counseling lectures based on Indonesian culture can support the development of student cultural awareness in a better direction.

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