International Counseling Advocacy: Exploring the Attention toward International Counseling in US Journals through Content Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Mental health needs have received increased attention throughout the world, most notably in response to the impact of global events, such as pandemics and other world crises. Professional counselors offer a unique position to contribute to global mental health needs and to advocate for counseling in ways that advance the profession globally. This study reviews counseling themes internationally within the framework of multicultural competency, advocacy, and social justice, which remain areas of focus in the United States of America (US). Researchers utilized a content analysis approach to investigate the level of attention international counseling issues have received among key US professional counseling journals. Core themes identified among the journals included attention toward international students, country-specific counseling history, client cultural identity, career counseling, multicultural competence, international counseling students, and mental health practice. Practical applications for increasing international cultural competence, supporting international students, addressing career support, and advancing professional development throughout the world reflect tangible recommendations.

KEYWORDS: international counseling, counseling advocacy, content analysis, multicultural competence, mental health awareness.

The value of recognizing culture and multicultural competence in counseling continues to advance within the counseling profession in the United States (US) (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014; Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2016; Ratts et al., 2016). Multicultural competency, advocacy, and social justice have remained corresponding values that receive careful attention throughout the major professional associations and literature influencing continued professional development (ACA, 2014; American Mental Health Counselors Association [AMHCA], 2020; Gerstein & Ægisdóttir 2007; Ratts et al., 2016). Counseling values and standards offer vital knowledge for researching, practicing, and influencing the counseling profession to advance the value of all people, and are reflected in the many articles and textbooks addressing the importance of multicultural competency. Professional counselors in the US may expand their growing multicultural focus to include international counseling issues and advocate for the development of counseling as a profession to meet the growing mental health needs worldwide.

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The purpose of this study is to inform professional advocacy by investigating the level of attention the counseling profession's most recognized journals in the US devoted to international counseling issues. A content analysis illuminated historical themes that emerged regarding international counseling, and future research needed for advancing the counseling profession on a global scale. The guiding research questions for the study included: How frequently are international counseling issues addressed among key US counseling journals? What themes on international counseling are represented among the journals?

For the purposes of this study, international counseling may be understood as the application of professional counseling research and practice applied in cross-cultural contexts (i.e., applying counseling principles from one country in another country), often in ways that are foreign to that particular setting otherwise. Multicultural counseling, frequently reflected in the literature discussed, refers to concepts of research and practice regarding multiple cultures supported in the same context (i.e., applying principles about multiple cultures within the same country).

Literature Review

This review of the literature explored the discussion around international counseling, while recognizing the more common discussions around multicultural counseling priorities and how they are applied within the US (Ratts et al., 2016). Exploring the literature in this manner carried no assumption that other cultures must apply these standards, but it served as a starting point from which US counseling professionals may conceptualize the application of multicultural counseling concepts internationally. Further content from the literature addressed the approaches of international mental health advocacy, and how it informs professional counseling activity.

Multicultural Counseling Priorities

Research in multicultural counseling competency, professional counseling advocacy, and social justice in counseling became prominent themes for understanding reasons to consider international efforts, and such research can both benefit and inform multicultural awareness among US counselors and abroad (ACA, 2014; Ratts et al., 2016).

Multicultural Counseling Competencies

The concept of Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC) in the US began largely with the work of Sue et al. (1992). This effort was revised when the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD) appointed a committee to update the MCC (Ratts et al., 2016) to reflect key developments within the profession, especially the increasing role of social justice. These competencies continue to influence the expectations translated into our codes of ethics, and licensing standards across the country (ACA, 2014).

As the work of revising the MCC advanced, those commissioned by AMCD updated the terminology to Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) to reflect the development of the standards more clearly (Ratts et al., 2016). The inclusion of the concept of social justice became an important update based on the factors influencing mental health in the US. Recognizing systems of oppression and injustice demonstrated significant factors influencing the cultural experience of many groups of people.

Cultural identity influenced the updates further, such as understanding one's context and the intersectionality of various identities. Ratts et al., (2016) demonstrated the significance of these identities with both the client(s) and the counselor and highlighted this consideration by developing

a model that considers one's status as privileged or marginalized. Considering intersectionality of multiple identities, even this model reflected limited identities one may carry. One may be privileged in one area, while marginalized in another.

Professional Counseling Advocacy

Another important emphasis within professional counseling is the role of advocacy, which is reflected as a clear expectation within ethical standards (ACA, 2014; AMHCA, 2020). In the *ACA Code of Ethics*, section A.7.a, highlighted, "When appropriate, counselors advocate at individual, group, institutional, and societal levels to address potential barriers and obstacles that inhibit access and/or the growth and development of clients" (ACA, 2014, p. 5). This standard reflects different approaches and skills for levels of engagement in which a counselor may be involved. In conjunction with the MSJCC, ACA highlighted a strong emphasis on the "removal of systemic barriers or obstacles that inhibit client access, growth, and development" (ACA, 2014, p. 5). The identified standards demonstrated how professional advocacy may involve enhancing client awareness, working within local government to advance changes that support greater mental health, or promoting research and literature to influence legal policy changes.

Advocacy within the profession is a top priority for graduate programs to educate and empower students with a greater understanding of advocacy in their work. CACREP (2016) emphasized the importance of developing student knowledge and skills to include advocacy in correlation with traits of leadership and social justice. CACREP counseling graduate programs must provide opportunities for students to learn how to not only advocate for clients at the individual, systemic, and policy levels, but also to do the same for the profession and professional identity. AMHCA (2020) likewise reflected heightened attention on advancing the profession by working to remove barriers to serve more people.

Social Justice in Counseling

One of the core purposes of revising the MSJCC was to include a framework for understanding the connection of multicultural awareness to social justice within an American framework (Ratts et al., 2016). The heart of this effort to exercise social justice centers around efforts to end injustice and oppression wherever it exists throughout the multi-layered and integrated facets of society. This update reflected an important movement within the profession to highlight the role counselors can play to advance social justice. Social justice and advocacy frequently appeared together within the literature, and often within the context of cultural awareness and support (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2016, Ratts et al., 2016).

One of the core values expressed in the *ACA Code of Ethics* included, "promoting social justice" (ACA, 2014, p. 3), although not much of the document details how counselors accomplish this task in their practice. The information appeared limited regarding how counselors can continue advancing practical applications of social justice into the professional counseling experience.

Adapting Concepts Internationally

While the counseling profession continues to advance with conceptualizing multicultural counseling through changing times in the US, a growing body of literature continues to highlight the advancement of professional counseling internationally.

Organizational Focus

The National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) seemed to ignite attention toward international counseling issues in the US by launching the Mental Health Facilitator initiative in the early 2000s (Hinkle, 2014; Schweiger, 2005). This program developed from concerns within the World Health Organization ([WHO], 2013), which later initiated a 'closing the gap' campaign to highlight the needs of 450 million people without access to mental healthcare throughout the world.

Ongoing efforts have advanced international counseling to address the need to serve international communities with excellence (Gerstein & Ægisdóttir 2007; Schweiger 2005; WHO 2013). The need remains significant throughout the world, and the profession in each country has a unique opportunity to help advance efforts to make services more accessible to people and groups throughout the global community. Organizations such as the International Association for Counselling ([IAC], 2022a), helped focus advancements in the profession that may be applicable across cultures, nationalities, and borders. The work of IAC continues to expand the knowledge of international counseling issues to advance the application of counseling in contexts throughout the world with a developing model of transcultural counseling training (IAC, 2022b).

Broadening Cultural Perspectives

The work of updating multicultural counseling in the US remains an important and viable focus of professional attention for US counseling professionals. Recognizing the limitations of seeing beyond our own lenses in the US (Ratts et al., 2016) will help avoid the dangers of overgeneralizing concepts we adopt and apply (Yoon & Portman, 2004).

Chiu (1996) suggested a broader understanding of multicultural competence is more important now than ever due to the unprecedented mobility of people across national and regional borders. The cultural lenses we all possess influence even recognition of different baselines observed from one culture to the next. Various experiences people may be facing culturally have influenced client experiences and responses to counseling interventions.

Cultural standards in professional counseling in the US have been understood largely within the context of practice within the US (Ratts et al., 2016). There is significant benefit to this focus in the literature, as counselors strive to serve diverse populations with excellence within their borders. Intersectionality affects client interactions and outcomes, both as identified by the client and the counseling professional (Ratts et al., 2016; Tsang et al., 2003). At the same time, Xiong et al. (2021) reminded counselors and educators that even core concepts of leadership and advocacy have been experienced with some discomfort among international students who experience those qualities differently based on cultural values.

Having common areas of research internationally provides an opportunity to advance practice for counselors both domestically and abroad. Perron et al. (2016) emphasized the significance of counseling traits recognized by international counseling experts as most important across cultures. The trait described as "respect and preserve the dignity of all people" (p. 164) was highlighted as highly significant in applying across international cultural contexts. Core themes relevant across cultures also were identified as "valuing people," "personal character," and "multicultural intentionality" (Perron et al., 2016, p. 171).

International Student Presence

Opportunities to research and understand applications of international multicultural counseling may be found within the literature on international students. International students present highly relevant, reliable, and valid sources of data to help inform and advance their understanding of multicultural applications that are acceptable in other contexts. International students have faced significant barriers as they obtained professional degrees in the US, even those receiving degrees in counseling (Kuo et al., 2021). Kuo et al. found that international counseling students in particular were often much more engaged with advocacy needs and efforts within the profession.

Perron and Tollerud (2017) described unique insights provided by international counseling students. Unique cultural nuances became evident with the development of the counseling profession across countries. Yoon and Portman (2004) also identified several critical issues in cautiously understanding much of the literature on counseling within the context of the US, and demonstrated the deficiencies of many early conversations of multicultural counseling. Such aspects included the homogeneity of standards as a profession, neglecting to observe environmental factors, a focus on pathology rather than development, and the identification of success in relation to acculturation with host country ideals and values.

International Counseling Advocacy

The WHO (2003) offered clear needs for advocacy of mental health that reflected the complexity of mental health needs internationally. This form of advocacy for the WHO included "a variety of different actions aimed at changing the major structural and attitudinal barriers to achieving positive mental health outcomes in populations" (p. 9). International counseling applications presented the opportunity to expand attention on mental health and make a difference on a global scale (Ratts et al., 2016). Ratts et al. identified the importance of applying the MSJCC when approaching various cultures competently. In a similar manner, IAC advocated for the expansion of counseling to the world, making their mission "To serve as an international leader and catalyst for counsellors and counselling associations by advancing culturally relevant counselling practice, research and policy to promote well-being, respect, social justice and peace worldwide" (IAC, 2022b, para. 2). The very nature of IAC's work in collaboration and advocacy shows the vast expressions of counseling that exist through the world mapping project (IAC, 2022b), where the presence of professional counseling associations was identified. Antonio Guterres (2020), Secretary-General of the United Nations in 2020, made a public call for governments to ensure they maintain mental health services during the COVID-19 pandemic to avoid "the severe mental health consequences" that would result (Guterres, 2020, para. 13).

Methodology

Krippendorff (2019a) explained how content analyses are based in qualitative research, and that researchers can draw valid conclusions from systemic procedures of coding when the phenomena are derived from reliable sources. Krippendorff's (2019b) methods of content analyses guided the deductive method of recognizing themes emerging from the data. Utilizing a content analysis enables US professional counselors to recognize the amount and types of literature that have been produced regarding international counseling issues, and it highlights the further advocacy needed to address important mental health needs that exist globally. Exploring the most recognized professional counseling journals in the US also helps broaden counselors' perspectives

and practices regarding multicultural competency, advocacy, and social justice and avoids isolation and limited awareness of global concerns.

While no direct content analyses with an international focus were observed in the literature, the researchers consulted a variety of research standards practiced among content analyses utilized within the counseling profession and related fields (Prosek & Burgin, 2020; Webber et al., 2017; Yoon et al., 2011), along with parallel studies that applied standards of research for systemic reviews and meta-analyses within the scope of human services (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Goss, 2016; Literati et al., 2009; Moher, et al., 2009). Krippendorff's (2019b) six guidelines for conducting content analyses were adapted into this study by integrating them throughout the structure: unitizing, sampling, recording, reducing, inferring, and narrating.

Research Team

The research team included three investigators from the Counseling Department at Northwestern University, who collaborated on the study. One researcher served as Clinical Assistant Professor and research sponsor, and the other two researchers participated in an emerging scholar program for graduate students advancing their skills in research and scholarship. Each researcher provided equal insight and reflection on the research method and the procedure for coding and synthesizing the data as described in the procedure.

Procedure

Once the purpose of the study was determined, the researchers discussed materials that would be most beneficial for maintaining the integrity of the content analysis. The research questions guided the focus of ensuring the data represented the counseling field within the US, while adequately describing the interests of counseling development internationally (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Content Analysis Procedure and Data Analysis
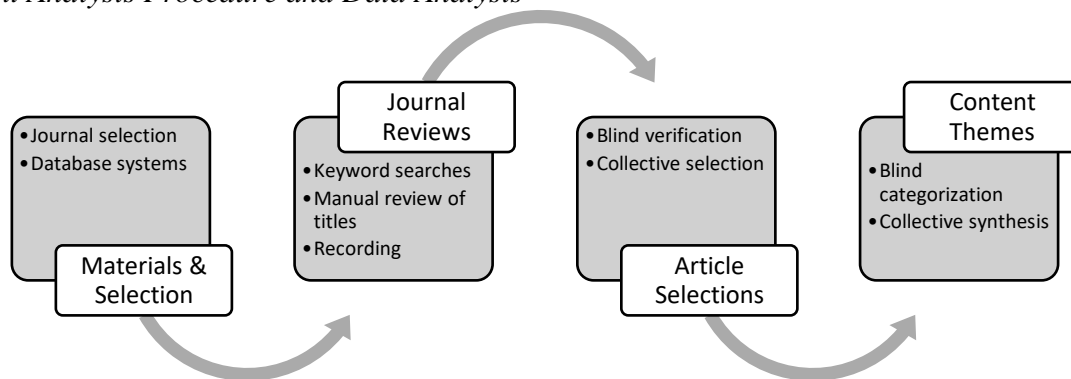
Materials and Selection

Journal Selection. The first eligibility requirement for selecting journals was that the source was a professional counseling journal based in the US. The researchers first decided to research journals associated with the two most prominent counseling associations in the US—the American Counseling Association (ACA, and its associated divisions including the American Mental Health Counselors Association [AMHCA], formerly an ACA division), and the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC). These organizations were determined to be most

prominent in the US because they hold the largest professional counselor memberships in the country, they remain intricately involved in the licensing process at the state and federal levels, and they were historically influential in the development of the profession in the US as a whole (Perron, 2019). The 12 professional journals attributed to these associations offer a perspective of the scholarly literature broadly representative of attention to international issues. The authors do not claim that these journals are exhaustive because many other valuable journals also contribute meaningfully to the counseling field in the US. The selection process known as *unitizing* (Krippendorff, 2019b) within these journals yielded the selection of 7,967 articles from these 12 "flagship" journals used to represent the field of counseling (see Table 1): *The Professional Counselor* (the main journal of NBCC), the *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* (the main journal of AMHCA), and *Journal of Counseling & Development* (the main journal from the ACA) provided a definite starting point based on the historical roles these associations held with advancing counseling both within the US and internationally (Perron, 2019). Additional sources included all the journals produced by ACA divisions, including the *Journal of Multicultural Counseling & Development*, *The Career Development Quarterly*, *Journal of Humanistic Counseling*, *Journal of Employment Counseling*, *Journal of College Counseling*, *Journal of Addictions & Offender Counseling*, *Counseling and Values*, *Counselor Education & Supervision*, and *Adultspan Journal*. Focusing on these 12 scholarly journals provided the necessary boundaries for ensuring adequate representation of counseling-specific research. Researchers explored all the articles published from the date each journal began publication through November 2020.

Database Systems

The research team utilized resources available to explore the identified journals, and the primary mode of the search was used with association and library databases, including direct journal archives found on their related websites.

Journal Reviews

Keyword Search Terms. Researchers determined keyword search terms to explore within the journals. *Sampling* procedures outlined by Krippendorff (2019b) highlighted the importance of targeted keyword searches. Keywords used in the study included "international," "counseling," "global," "mental health," and "global advocacy." These terms reflected concepts of competency, professional advocacy, and social justice as represented in the literature. All articles were reviewed by title, abstract, and discussion sections to determine the goodness of fit for the study.

Manual Review. In addition to the keyword searches, researchers manually reviewed the titles of all articles in the journals by reviewing each issue's table of contents. If articles did not include any of the keyword search terms, but they explored areas of interest pertinent to this study, they were included in the list of articles for review by the researchers.

Recording. Each of the 162 articles was recorded with the full abstract, author, date, title, publication details, and page numbers. Standard procedures for *recording* (Krippendorff, 2019b) with both the combination of keyword searches and manual reviewing yielded 162 articles that were initially considered for the study. No particular attention was given to the research design of articles for the purposes of this study, as this was not a critical element for addressing the research questions.

Data Analysis

The process of *reducing* (Krippendorff, 2019b) enabled the researchers to represent the data obtained from the procedures described. Frequency counts of international counseling articles emerged through a careful article selection process. *Inferring* then resulted from coding procedures utilized by the research team, which resulted in the established content themes.

Article Selections

Blind Verification. All researchers participated in another layer of review with blind analysis. This meant each person read through descriptions of all the collected articles independently to verify which articles qualified for the study based on: a focus on international counseling, advocating for the unique needs of counselors offering services to someone outside their own country of origin, advocating for the development of the counseling profession in countries outside the US, or learning about cross-cultural counseling application outside the US. Each researcher independently selected which articles were appropriate for the study or not.

Collective Selection. After separately determining which articles were appropriate individually, the team gathered to review the results and make collective determinations on which articles to keep in the study, and which ones to remove due to misalignment with the purposes of the study. Out of the 162 initial articles, 151 of the collective sources were selected to remain in the study. Most of the articles considered inapplicable focused on general multicultural counseling with residents of the US. The focus of these articles was not international, but rather a focus on multicultural counseling domestically within the US.

Content Themes

Blind Categorization. The researchers engaged in an additional blind review of the articles to consider themes that arose from the content. This qualitative analysis of the data highlighted key patterns of generalizations that could be drawn from the content of the articles in the study (Erickson, 1986). Each member of the research team independently coded the material and defined core themes developed out of a careful analysis of the data. The researchers compiled a list of themes to review with team members before moving to the next step of the process.

Collective Synthesis. Each researcher first identified themes evident within the data independently, then met as the research team to make a collective determination of themes from the data. The team synthesized the data into themes addressing the purpose of the study. The team unanimously identified seven themes represented in the data: International students, Country-specific counseling history, Client cultural identity, Career counseling, Multicultural competence, International counseling students, and Mental health practice.

Narrating

The researchers utilized *narrating* to answer the key research questions for the study (Krippendorff, 2019b). The frequency and means of the articles from each journal are described in detail, and the details about the percentage of each of the themes identified also provide details for what content is offered through the professional journals identified.

Trustworthiness

The research team worked to enhance the trustworthiness of this study through several layers of blind review as described in the procedure and data analysis. Articles required unanimous approval from the research team to be included in the study. The researchers agreed with the vast majority of conclusions related to article selection and the inclusion of coding and themes for the study, but the discussion offered the opportunity to clarify the rationale and consider alternative perspectives with each article or theme that yielded differing conclusions. This attention to detail resulted in a unanimous conclusion that 151 of the 162 articles would appropriately fit the purposes of this study and that seven themes adequately captured the results.

Results

The content analysis offered data to consider in light of international counseling and the advancement of the profession across the globe. A total of 162 articles were initially selected in the search process. Through blind review and collective selection, 11 articles were removed from the study for a total of $n = 151$ articles included for analysis.

Journal Details

Table 1 shows the 7,967 articles represented by the 12 flagship journals spanning from 1967 to 2020 with varied focus and intent. All articles commonly represented the counseling profession in the US through identification with core professional associations (see Table 1).

Table 1
Counseling Journals Reviewed with Applicable Articles

Journal Titles	Total articles published by November 2020	Total articles applicable	Percentage
Journal of Multicultural Counseling & Development	693	55	7.9%
Journal of Counseling & Development	1,555	34	2.2%
Journal of College Counseling	426	14	3.5%
The Professional Counselor	299	11	5.0%
Journal of Employment Counseling	387	11	2.8%
Counselor Education & Supervision	436	8	1.8%
Journal of Mental Health Counseling	542	7	1.3%
The Career Development Quarterly	636	4	0.6%
Counseling and Values	406	3	0.7%
Journal of Humanistic Counseling	196	3	1.5%
Adultspan Journal	204	1	0.5%
Journal of Addictions & Offender Counseling	212	0	0%
Total Articles	7,967	151	1.9%

Article Frequency

The research team determined that $n = 151$ articles offered input to the discussion and research regarding international counseling issues (ICI). This means 1.9% of the overall articles produced over 53 years addressed the focus of research for this study (see Table 1). The *Journal of Multicultural Counseling & Development* (*JMCD*) clearly demonstrated the highest rate of publication for ICI articles with 7.9% ($n = 55$). The *Journal of Counseling & Development* (*JCD*) offered the second highest representation of articles with 2.2% ($n = 34$).

A middle range of articles included journals with 11-14 ICI articles. The *Journal of College Counseling,* 3.5% ($n = 14$), *The Professional Counselor (TPC)*, 5.0% ($n = 11$), The *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 2.8% ($n = 11$). The remaining journals demonstrated fewer articles for the study: *Counselor Education & Supervision (CES)*, 1.8% ($n = 8$), the *Journal of Mental Health Counseling (JMHC)*, 1.3% ($n = 7$), *Career Development Quarterly*, 0.6% ($n = 4$), *Counseling and Values*, 0.7% ($n = 3$), *Journal of Humanistic Counseling*, 1.5% ($n = 3$), *Adultspan Journal*, 0.5% ($n = 1$), and *Journal of Addictions & Offender Counseling*, 0%.

Percentage Comparisons

Comparing the rates of publication between journals above the average ($> 1.9\%$) and those below average ($< 1.9\%$) for the selected US journals offers another data point to consider. *JMCD* still demonstrated the highest percentage of articles addressing the concerns of ICI with 7.9% ($n = 55$). Several other journals offered ICI articles that were above average, including *TPC*, 5.0% ($n = 11$), *Journal of College Counseling*, 3.5 % ($n = 14$), *Journal of Employment Counseling,* 2.8% ($n = 11$), and *JCD*, 2.2% ($n = 34$).

The remaining journals offered percentages that were below the average, with the *CES*, 1.8% ($n = 8$), *Journal of Humanistic Counseling*, 1.5% ($n = 3$), *JMHC*, 1.3% ($n = 7$), *Counseling and Values*, 0.7% ($n = 3$), *Career Development Quarterly*, 0.6% ($n = 4$), *Adultspan Journal*, 0.5% ($n = 1$), and the *Journal of Addictions & Offender Counseling*, 0%.

Content-Analysis Themes

As described in the methodology, the research team reviewed all of the applicable articles ($n = 151$) and presented a consensus of themes identified in Table 2. The identified themes offered insight into understanding the level of attention provided to ICI, along with the nature of the most pertinent topics. Some of the articles reflected content from more than one category and were shown in each. The content themes recognized by the research team included: International students, Country-specific counseling history, Client cultural identity, Career counseling, Multicultural competence, International counseling students, and Mental health practice.

The most common theme represented through the content analysis was "International students." The results showed that 27.8% ($n = 42$) of the articles represented the targeted emphasis on international students within the US. This category may be defined as articles highlighting the mental health needs of college students attending college outside their country of origin. Examples of these articles would include the help-seeking attitudes of Guatemalan students (Figueroa et al., 2020), and culturally-responsive counseling among Asian international students (Zhang & Dixon, 2001). The second most frequent theme was "Country-specific counseling history." These articles recorded historical accounts of the development of counseling in particular countries, and the topic was reflected in 26.5% ($n = 40$) of the articles. Examples included the expansion of counseling and

counselor education programs in Australia and New Zealand (McWhirter, 1987), and the development of counseling and related issues in Iran (Fatemi et al., 2015).

Table 2
Themes Identified Among Articles in the Content Analysis (*n* = 151)

Themes	# Articles	%
International students	42	27.8%
Country-specific counseling history	40	26.5%
Client cultural identity	29	19.2%
Career counseling	17	11.3%
Multicultural competence	13	8.6%
International counseling students	11	7.3%
Mental health practice	8	5.3%

Note. Some articles were counted in more than one category

The remaining themes represented less than 20% of the articles in each category in this study. "Client cultural identity" accounted for 19.2% (*n* = 29), and reflected articles devoted to understanding cultural identity for the counseling process, such as understanding Pakistani-American cultural identity to enhance counselor awareness (Bashir & Tang, 2018). "Career counseling" was a category reflected in 11.3% (*n* = 17) of the articles and may be understood as international counseling issues related to career development, such as the exploration of hope-centered career competencies among internationally educated professionals (Clarke et al., 2018). "Multicultural competence" (8.6%, *n* = 13) was defined as the study of multicultural competence in counseling practice in international contexts (outside the US), such as the investigation of perceived cultural competence of Malaysian professional counselors (Arora et al., 2016). "International counseling students" appeared in 7.3% (*n* = 11) of the articles and was defined as a category addressing the experiences of international students studying professional counseling. An example is reflected in a study of acculturative stress experienced by international students enrolled in CACREP counseling programs (Behl et al., 2017). The "Mental health practice" category (5.3%, *n* = 8) provided a category that addressed a variety of mental health best practices related to international needs and contexts. Forms of best practice were addressed in topics such as self-efficacy and training for counselors of refugee clients in international contexts (Isawi & Post, 2020), and supporting mental health needs for international sojourners returning to their home countries (Kostohryz et al., 2014).

Risk of Bias

The research team strove to reduce the risk of bias throughout the review process. Several natural areas in which bias could have influenced the results of this study are worthy of note. Researcher bias had the opportunity to enter the process from the moment the investigators decided upon the journals to include in the review. While the researchers made determinations about the significance of journals based on the prominence of each association, others could determine other criteria to reflect a different interpretation of what might be the most prominent journals in the US. Researcher bias could also be influential with the keywords used to explore the literature, the articles determined as applicable (including the 11 articles designated inapplicable), and the themes identified in the process. While efforts were described to minimize risk of researcher bias in these ways, the potential for biased decisions remains.

A careful review of the data must recognize factors related to the context of the journals and articles themselves. In the US, MCCs did not gain prominence until the early 1990s, after the first MCCs were published (Sue et al., 1992). It also was not until 2002 that the CACREP (2022) Board of Directors first offered a Statement of Core Values to include standards for respecting diversity and culture in accredited counselor educational programs. Articles prior to this time naturally would not reflect as much attention to these issues.

The researchers strove to mitigate any risk of bias by approaching the data with transparency and consultation throughout multiple layers of the study (see Figure 1). Attempts to reduce confirmation bias were reflected by the article review process previously described, where each article received blind review for appropriateness of fit, followed by a collective determination of selection for any discrepancies. The data still carries many layers of interpretation from the investigators involved, so validity of the data remains limited to the perspectives and interpretations of the research team.

Discussion

The heart of this study truly was to investigate and understand. The research team functioned from the premise that having greater awareness of the presence of research and conversation about ICI would offer benefits to the overall counseling profession in the US. The purpose of researching flagship journals within the counseling profession of the US supported a spirit of collaboration that naturally emerged from the content analysis, reflecting the list of seven themes that supported greater international awareness of professional counseling developments throughout the globe (see Table 2). The research questions drove the content analysis to increase awareness of the frequency of international counseling issues, along with the themes evident in the literature. Reviewing the content analysis provides the opportunity to increase knowledge of themes evident in various topical areas. The review of journals also provided more attention to the topic of ICI, which may help identify resources to advance further research and development of the profession on a global scale.

Professional Counseling Applications

The content analysis provided a variety of overlapping themes that helped inform a variety of issues as they relate to international counseling. Earlier reflections on the literature in the US pointed to a consistent discussion around multicultural competence, counseling advocacy, and social justice (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2016; Ratts et al., 2016). A broader review of international issues reveals how these areas of focus may not include other important developments taking place internationally within the profession (Chiu, 1996; IAC, 2022a; Perron et al., 2016; Tsang et al., 2003; Yoon & Portman, 2004). The content analysis revealed themes that can be applied to enhance international cultural competence, address the growing need of international students (counseling students or otherwise), address career support, and learn from professional developments of the profession in other countries and cultures.

International Cultural Competence

Enhancing international cultural competence was reflected in a variety of themes emerging from the literature. Multicultural competence clearly supported the high expectations counselors carry to maintain ethical and competent practice within the US (ACA, 2014; AMHCA, 2020). The themes from the study that related to this important value included multicultural competency, client

cultural identity, and mental health practice. *JMCD* offered the greatest amount of focus on international issues in counseling, as might be suggested in the name. This heightened attention to international counseling in *JMCD* may not be unexpected because *JMCD* remains focused on multicultural developments in the profession.

Counseling professionals can apply concepts and international cultural competence beginning with the articles represented in this study. While multicultural counseling competence continues to influence the field of counseling (Ratts et al., 2016), developing a perspective of international cultural competence may be an important next step in recognizing the impact we share across the globe (Gerstein & Ægisdóttir, 2007; Perron et al., 2016).

International Students

International student support continues to be a growing theme within the literature (Kuo et al., 2017; Perron & Tollerud, 2017). The study highlighted the significance of discussion and research surrounding international students within the counseling profession. This category may be conceptualized by observing the presence of two of the prominent themes within the study: international students and international counseling students. It is worth noting that if the themes of international students and international counseling students were combined, they would reflect an even higher representation of 35.1% ($n = 53$). The research team found the separation of these two themes helpful to distinguish because the focus remained similar but different between them. Recognizing this category also seems relevant because there was a general focus from two of the flagship journals highlighted in the study, dealing largely with international college students and mental health counseling: *Journal of College Counseling* and *Counselor Education & Supervision*.

The counseling profession has a tremendous opportunity to learn from the perspectives that international students bring to their experience in the US, and to serve their needs in ways that honor their ethnic and national heritages (Perron & Tollerud, 2017). These themes and the journals that highlight them also provide helpful resources for combatting the challenges that naturally come with international education (Kuo et al., 2021).

Career Support

Career support within the international counseling context receives further attention than the researchers expected due to the high representation in the current study. Not only was career counseling identified as a theme of the study, but 2 of the 12 journals explicitly focused on career support (*Journal of Employment Counseling* and *The Career Development Quarterly*).

Professional standards reinforce the need for counselors to maintain an awareness of career counseling practices and approaches to meet the needs of their clients adequately (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2016). When approaching international counseling situations, it will be important for counselors to be aware this theme may be a prominent concern for people they encounter in counseling. The cultural context should offer clarity on how to approach clients and colleagues appropriately with career development in mind.

Professional Developments

Another application of the data is reflected in the general professional developments that will help inform counseling practice both in the US and in international settings. The themes that highlight the country-specific counseling history provided helpful descriptions of how counseling developed and continues to advance in various countries and cultures. This data will be valuable

for any counselors wanting to make a difference with clients from that nationality or ethnicity in the US, or when going to other cultures to engage client needs. The theme of mental health practice also provided helpful information on how counseling is practiced in different multicultural settings. Understanding these applications and developments remains important to help counselors avoid overgeneralizing concepts from the US in settings where they may not be as applicable (Yoon & Portman, 2004).

Limitations

Limitations are important to identify in an effort to advance the transparency of this content analysis and the applications drawn. While the content was restricted to specific journals in the US by design, it also places a limitation on how expansive the content of international counseling may be in other journals both in and out of the US. There may be many international journals that address mental health counseling, along with other journals in the US that might offer greater attention to ICIs. This content analysis can be expanded beyond the scope of this study in other journals and settings influential to the field of counseling. Further exploration is needed to enhance reliability and generalizability.

Future Directions

The data reflected helpful perspectives for understanding the presence of ICI within the US. Only 1.9% of the counseling journals in this study reflected content on this topic. Out of that group of journals, *JMCD* reflected the most careful attention and offered helpful directions with how to include the needs of international issues in future research, scholarship, and practice. Future recommendations would include advancing scholarship and research in counseling abroad to provide the opportunity to impact more people who may not have access to such services. Also, increasing international counseling scholarship is recommended to help expand the awareness of appropriate applications of the profession in different contexts. This focused research can make tremendous differences in serving clients not only internationally, but also domestically within the US. Similar content analysis studies among other US or international journals in counseling, mental health, and related fields are recommended for increased attention and advocacy of international counseling.

The world continues to demonstrate how human beings affected in one part of the world may impact the rest of the world over time. International challenges, such as economic recessions, world wars, and worldwide pandemics, reflect the growing interconnectedness we all experience as humans. Even advancements in technology, the internet, and social media have provided a unique time in history that allows instant communication and influence all over the world. The researchers recommend that greater ICI be reflected in research and scholarship to support increased awareness and service to populations that do not enjoy the access available in countries like the US.

Conclusion

The world continues to exhibit mental health needs that impact people, families, groups, communities, and cultures uniquely throughout the world (WHO, 2013). Initial reflections on the literature demonstrated the importance the counseling profession places on multicultural counseling competencies within the US, often in conjunction with professional applications of counseling advocacy and social justice in counseling (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2016; Ratts et al.,

2016). These central areas of focus provided a strong rationale for advocating for further awareness of international counseling issues, as often reflected with attention from international organizations and a growing focus on the shared challenges of international mental health (Gerstein & Ægisdóttir 2007; IAC, 2022b; Schweiger 2005; WHO, 2003).

The content analysis helped investigate and understand research on international counseling among the most recognized flagship journals for professional counseling in the US. The results provided a framework to understand themes that conceptualize the type of content currently receiving the most attention. The themes highlighted a focus on international students, country-specific counseling history, client cultural identity, career counseling, multicultural competence, international counseling students, and mental health practice. Counselors in the US and everywhere are recommended to directly enhance the application of these themes to implement a broader focus and avoid idiosyncratic applications that may only apply within the US (Yoon & Portman, 2004). Areas of continued attention can address the needs of international students and aspects of career support that were so highly reflected in the results. Recognizing and learning from professional development as it occurs throughout the world will serve to enhance awareness and improve the counseling profession as a whole.

Counselors in the US and everywhere are recommended to advance research and scholarship in international counseling because mental health needs throughout the world remain high. Our global society continues to become more closely connected through both difficulties and advancements. Lack of services in one part of the world affects the impact of mental health within that community and potentially impacts the state of mental health throughout the global community. The research, themes, and applications of this study provide a recommended starting point in the US to advance continuing professional research, advocacy, and practice with international counseling.

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