INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL COUNSELORS' EXPERIENCES WITH CLIENTS FROM DIFFERENT CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS IN THAILAND: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Thailand's growing globalization has led to an increasing number of foreign educators and counselors working in international schools, which serve students from diverse cultural backgrounds. While multicultural counseling has been widely studied in Western contexts, research in Thailand, especially on foreign counselors in international schools, remains limited. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of counselors working in international schools with clients from different cultural backgrounds. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used. Informants consisted of five foreign counselors working in international schools; in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data. The findings revealed three main themes that addressed the research question. First, encountering cultural differences in the counseling context captured counselors' experiences of navigating diverse cultural norms, values, and communication styles. Second, counselors' internal transformation reflected how cross-cultural encounters fostered self-reflection, and adaptation. Third, counselors' personal growth represented the long-term professional and personal development resulting from these experiences, including enhanced cultural sensitivity and broader worldviews. These findings suggest that counselor training should emphasize self-awareness, bias recognition, and openness to clients' worldviews. Schools should support counselors in developing skills to navigate cultural diversity. Further research focusing on counselors from specific cultural contexts is recommended to deepen understanding of culturally responsive counseling approaches.

Keywords: Counselor experiences, Cross-cultural counseling, Cultural diversity, International school counselors, Interpretative phenomenological analysis

INTRODUCTION

Thailand has increasingly entered the context of globalization across various sectors such as business, tourism, investment, and education. This has resulted in a growing influx of labor and professionals from different countries who come to work and reside in Thailand. Among these professionals, a significant number are educators from various countries who have joined international schools in Thailand. Currently, there are around 249 accredited international schools nationwide, with the majority located in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Chonburi. Approximately 35% of the students are foreign nationals from diverse countries (Office of the Private Education Commission, 2025; The Nation, 2024; International School Association of Thailand, 2025). In addition to foreign teachers, some schools also employ foreign counselors to enhance their capacity to support students' psychosocial wellbeing. Counselors play a vital role in supporting students' academic, emotional, and social development in such multicultural contexts. School counselors are among the primary mental health professionals in schools and must possess multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills to work ethically and effectively with diverse populations (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2008; ASCA, 2019). Multicultural counseling competence enables counselors to understand and respond to students' diverse cultural backgrounds, a key factor in fostering wellbeing and inclusion in schools (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Roysicar et al., 2003).

Studies in Western contexts have highlighted school counselors' multicultural competence and professional growth when working with culturally diverse students (Knight, 2010; Dogan, 2017). However, most of these studies reflect Western individualistic perspectives, which differ from Eastern collectivist cultures such as Thailand, where interdependence and social harmony are emphasized (Triandis, 1993; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Despite extensive research in Western contexts, studies in Thailand remain scarce. The only related study is by Sethi (2024), which examined the experiences of Thai counselors who were former international school students. This study found that these counselors had a good understanding of students' cultural contexts but faced challenges such as role conflicts, unequal compensation, and a lack of support teams. However, direct research on the experiences of foreign counselors working in international schools in Thailand is still lacking.

This study aims to explore the experiences of foreign counselors working in international schools in Thailand through a qualitative research design. It employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), an approach for in-depth exploration of individual lived experiences (Smith, 2011).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To explore the experiences of foreign counselors working in international schools in Thailand with clients from different cultural backgrounds, focusing on how they perceive and manage cultural

differences, navigate challenges, and grow professionally and personally through their multicultural counseling experiences.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the lived experiences of foreign counselors in international schools when working with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds?

RESEARCH SCOPE

This study is limited to five foreign counselors working in international schools in Thailand. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), it examines their counseling experiences with clients from different cultural backgrounds. The scope includes how counselors navigate cultural diversity, adapt their approaches to be culturally appropriate, address challenges in cross-cultural interactions, and apply strategies that support effective counseling in multicultural school environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews essential literature related to counseling in international school environments, focusing on multicultural competence, cultural humility, counseling in international school settings, and cultural differences between Western and Eastern contexts.

Multicultural Competence in Counseling

In counseling within culturally diverse contexts, counselors need to possess multicultural competence. Corey (2024) emphasized that effective multicultural counseling requires deep self-awareness, ongoing reflection on one's own biases, and recognition that theories and techniques must be adapted to diverse cultural contexts. The concept of multicultural competence was systematically developed by Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992), who proposed a three-dimensional framework: (1) Beliefs and Attitudes – Counselors must be aware of their personal biases and values, respect and accept cultural diversity, and recognize that certain theories or techniques may not be suitable for everyone. (2) Knowledge – Counselors should have an in-depth understanding of their own and their clients' cultures, including historical background, values, and socio-political influences, to provide appropriate counseling. (3) Skills – Counselors must adapt their methods to align with the client's culture, use culturally appropriate communication, and remain open to continuous self-development to enhance service effectiveness.

Building on this foundation, Mollen and Ridley (2021) argued that multicultural competence should not be understood as a static checklist but rather as a dynamic and evolving process shaped by ethical responsibility and continuous engagement with cultural contexts. In a similar vein, Owen et al. (2011) introduced the concept of Multicultural Orientation (MCO), which underscores

humility and openness to cultural opportunities as critical elements in strengthening the counseling alliance. This perspective is consistent with the American Psychological Association's Multicultural Guidelines (2017), which emphasize the importance of an ecological and intersectional approach that integrates context, identity, and systemic power structures.

The concept of multicultural competence provides a useful lens to examine how counselors navigate culturally diverse school environments, highlighting the interplay of self-awareness, knowledge, and culturally adapted skills (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). This framework guides the understanding of how counselors' beliefs and practices shape interactions with students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Cultural Humility

Counseling in multicultural contexts requires more than specialized knowledge or technical skills. It demands continuous self-reflection, openness to one's limitations in understanding others, and respect for the unique experiences of clients as essential foundations for building trust in the professional relationship. Tervalon and Murray-García (1998) introduced the concept of cultural humility, distinguishing it from cultural competence by framing humility as a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and critique rather than a fixed endpoint. This approach emphasizes the recognition of one's own biases and privileges, the reduction of power imbalances between counselor and client, and the cultivation of client-centered collaboration. Similarly, Corey (2024) highlights that effective counselors must acknowledge the limits of their cultural knowledge and remain open to learning from clients' lived experiences. Counselors are therefore called to engage with clients as the primary source of cultural knowledge, avoiding reliance on generalized stereotypes and adapting their methods to fit individual needs (Hook et al., 2013). More recently, Hook and Davis (2019) elaborated cultural humility as a therapeutic stance characterized by openness, flexibility, and responsiveness, emphasizing that humility is not merely an attitude but a practice embedded in every counseling interaction.

Cultural humility helped explain how counselors acknowledged their cultural limitations, learned from clients, and adapted their approaches within the Thai international school context. Their self-reflection, openness, and efforts to reduce power imbalances aligned with core principles of cultural humility and guided the interpretation of their experiences.

Counseling in International School Settings

School counselors play a crucial role in supporting students' academic, social, and emotional development. This responsibility becomes particularly significant in international schools, where high cultural diversity requires counselors to demonstrate cultural sensitivity and adapt their approaches to meet the unique needs of each student (Center for Mental Health in Schools, n.d.; American School Counseling Association, 2022). Factors such as language differences, variations in emotional expression, patterns of family involvement, and religious values all influence the counseling process and must be

navigated with care (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Roysicar et al., 2003). In Thailand, international schools have continued to expand, especially in major cities with sizable expatriate communities. This expansion has resulted in substantial diversity among both foreign students and Thai students who choose this educational pathway. Such diversity directly shapes the psychosocial needs of students, underscoring the importance of counselors' ability to understand cultural differences and situational contexts. Consequently, counseling approaches cannot be applied uniformly but must be tailored to align with students' distinct identities, experiences, and levels of trust.

Research on international schools further highlights their role as "intercultural meeting grounds," shaping not only students' learning but also the professional demands placed on educators and counselors (Hayden & Thompson, 2013; Savva, 2017). In line with this perspective, Langston and Van Gordon (2024) employed an interpretative phenomenological approach to examine the challenges faced by international school counselors. Their study identified workload pressures, role ambiguity, and cultural navigation as key stressors affecting counselors' well-being. These findings emphasize the need for context-sensitive counseling practices that are responsive not only to the diversity of student populations but also to the lived experiences of counselors themselves.

Cultural Differences Between Western and Eastern Contexts

Counseling in multicultural contexts must begin with an understanding of the worldview and thinking patterns of the clients, which may differ greatly from those of the counselors. These differences often become apparent in how individuals perceive themselves and relate to others, influenced by the cultural values in which they were raised. Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions provide one example of how broad contrasts between Western orientations, typically emphasizing independence, self-expression, and personal decision-making, and Eastern orientations, such as Thai society's emphasis on harmony, group cohesion, and interdependence, shape perceptions, emotions, and social behaviors. While such frameworks offer useful entry points, they risk oversimplifying cultural identity as fixed and uniform. Markus and Kitayama (1991) expanded this East–West distinction by highlighting differences in independent versus interdependent self-construals, while Triandis (2001) emphasized how individualism–collectivism influences not only behavior but also personality development and interpersonal expectations. In the Thai international school context, Deveney (2005) documented how cultural norms such as face-saving, respect for hierarchy, and passive classroom participation affected Thai students' interactions with Western teachers, often leading to misinterpretation of silence as disengagement. More recently, Chen, Benet-Martínez, and Bond (2008) argued that individuals frequently navigate bicultural identities, shifting between cultural frames depending on context.

Understanding cultural differences between Western and Eastern contexts offers insight into how students' and counselors' values, communication styles, and behaviors are shaped

by their cultural backgrounds (Hofstede, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Such frameworks are critical for interpreting interactions in international schools, where cultural norms strongly influence counseling processes and relationships. Nevertheless, these perspectives underline that cultural frameworks are not merely abstract theories but are continuously negotiated in practice. Theoretical models alone cannot capture the nuanced realities counselors face in daily interactions with culturally diverse students. By foregrounding the lived voices of foreign counselors, this study builds on existing frameworks while providing insight into how cultural differences are experienced, interpreted, and acted upon within international schools in Thailand.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts multicultural counseling competence and cultural humility as interpretive lenses to explore foreign counselors' experiences in Thai international schools. Multicultural counseling competence guides understanding of how counselors recognize cultural differences, adapt their approaches, and provide culturally responsive support. Cultural humility emphasizes ongoing self-reflection, openness, and respectful engagement with students' unique cultural experiences. Together, these concepts provide a framework for interpreting how foreign counselors navigate intercultural challenges and respond to cultural diversity in their professional practice.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), developed by Jonathan Smith, to explore individuals' lived experiences through their own perspectives, emotions, and interpretations. IPA enables participants to reflect deeply on their life contexts while acknowledging the researcher's interpretative role (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This method is well-suited to the study's aim of uncovering the meanings in the experiences of counselors and aligns with the researcher's contextual understanding of international schools. It is important to note that IPA is grounded in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), which together provide a framework for an in-depth and nuanced exploration of participants' lived experiences while explicitly recognizing the interpretative role of the researcher.

Participants

Five participants were recruited using purposive sampling to capture rich, detailed accounts from individuals sharing a common experiential context. Recruitment occurred through two channels: (1) a gatekeeper who facilitated access by introducing and connecting the researcher with potential participants, and (2) a research invitation flyer distributed via the email group of school counselors working in international schools in Thailand. Eligible participants were required to have at least one year and less than three years of experience working as foreign counselors in international schools

in Thailand. This criterion ensured that participants had sufficient exposure to multicultural school contexts while allowing for a range of perspectives from both early-career and more experienced practitioners. This sampling approach aligns with recommendations in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) research, which emphasize sample homogeneity for in-depth exploration of lived experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), and with Creswell and Poth's (2018) view that purposive sampling enables researchers to deliberately select participants best positioned to illuminate the phenomenon under study. The participants' demographic and professional characteristics are summarized in Table 1

Table 1 Participants' pseudonyms, gender, cultural background, and years of experience working as counselors in international schools.

Participants (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Cultural background	Year of experience
Lin	Female	Taiwanese	1 year 10 months
Belle	Female	Indian	2 years
Sam	Male	British	2 years 6 months
Tara	Female	British	2 years
Ron	Male	Filipino	2 years 10 months

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews guided by 13 questions designed to explore counselors' experiences, perspectives, and the meanings they attributed to their work within multicultural contexts. The semi-structured interview guide was reviewed and approved by the researcher's advisors and the Institutional Review Board to ensure ethical compliance, clarity, and alignment with research objectives. Feedback from these reviews was incorporated to refine the instruments, ensuring they effectively elicited rich and meaningful data. Interviews were conducted online in private settings, such as participants' offices or the researcher's private room, and each lasted between 60 and 86 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, and observational notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual details, thereby enriching the interpretative analysis.

Table 2 The examples of the interview questions used to guide the conversations, illustrating how the data were collected to capture international school counselors' experiences in multicultural school settings.

1. How do you ensure your approach is culturally sensitive and appropriate for each client?
2. Please share your experience working with clients who are different from you.
3. What are some of the challenges you have faced when counseling clients from cultures different from your own, and how do you approach these challenges?
4. How do you build rapport and trust with clients from different cultural backgrounds?
5. Based on your experiences, what best practices can you suggest for counseling in different cultural environments?

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed from audio recordings into written transcripts to ensure completeness and accuracy. The analysis followed the IPA approach (Smith, 2011), IPA seeks to explore how individuals make sense of their lived experiences through a process of interpretative engagement between participant and researcher. This approach was chosen because it allows for a nuanced understanding of how foreign counselors in international schools construct meaning from their professional and cultural experiences, aligning with the study's aim to capture the depth and complexity of personal interpretations within multicultural contexts. Each transcript was read several times to gain deep familiarity with the content and recorded initial notes in three forms: descriptive comments, which focus on important words, phrases, and sentences reflecting the participants' thoughts and experiences; linguistic comments, which note language features such as word emphasis, pauses, or tone of voice; and conceptual comments, which involve posing questions for further interpretation and in-depth analysis. These notes were then developed into themes by identifying relationships and organizing them into super-ordinate themes and sub-ordinate themes. The researcher analyzed each participant's data independently to remain open to new perspectives and authentically capture individual experiences. After completing all analyses, the researcher then integrated the findings to identify common themes, forming a comprehensive summary of super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes.

Table 3 Example of initial notes and emergent theme.

Participant Statement	Initial Notes		Emergent Theme
	Descriptive Comment	Conceptual Comment	
"I've been surprised at how long some of the Thai students don't have their own room"	Feeling surprised that many Thai students still share a room with their parents, even though they are already adolescents.	This reflects a growing awareness of cultural differences and the "cultural shock" that arises when encountering norms different from one's own.	Cultural Shock

Data Rigor

In this study, methodological rigor refers to the systematic and transparent process used to ensure the quality and integrity of qualitative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Following the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) outlined by Smith (2011), rigor was achieved through careful design, data collection, and analysis. The research scope was clearly defined, involving five foreign counselors working in international schools with experience providing counseling to clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted to capture authentic experiences, alongside rapport-building to encourage open and natural dialogue. Audio recordings supported thorough transcription and analysis, enhancing depth and credibility. The researcher provided evidence for each theme, illustrating similarities and differences comprehensively. Findings comprised three super-ordinate themes and eight sub-ordinate themes, developed through an iterative process of analysis and constant comparison across transcripts. Supported by illustrative extracts, these themes provided deeper interpretative insights, revealing both shared and unique perspectives among participants. This report upholds a high standard of methodological and interpretative rigor consistent with IPA principles, presenting participants' experiences clearly and fostering a nuanced understanding within a culturally diverse counseling context.

To further ensure trustworthiness, the study incorporated Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through prolonged engagement with the data, iterative interpretation, and triangulation. Triangulation involved multiple sources (data from five foreign counselors), multiple methods (interviews and reflective notes), and investigator discussion, in which researchers reviewed and verified coding and interpretations to ensure that findings accurately reflected participants' experiences. Transferability was supported by providing thick descriptions of the research context and participants. Dependability was addressed by maintaining an audit trail of decisions and analytic steps, while confirmability was ensured

through reflexive journaling, in which the researcher recorded personal assumptions and reflections throughout the study.

RESULTS

Themes and Sub-Themes

To provide an overview of the analysis, the major themes and sub-themes that emerged from the counselors' experiences are summarized in Table 4

Table 4 Themes and sub-themes from international school counselors' work with clients from different cultural backgrounds in Thailand.

Themes and Sub-Themes	Quotes from interviews
1. Encountering cultural differences in the counselors' context	
a. Cultural Shock	"They say things like, I'm gonna tell my mom and you'll have to be scared" "I'm surprised that many Thai students still don't have their own rooms" "Her parents said if she's not a doctor, then she's stupid"
b. Mental Health Denial	"I found much less awareness about mental health here than I would expect" "So, beliefs about mental health will be there's nothing wrong with my kid"
c. Language and Communication Barriers	"The most common challenge from cultural diversity is the language barrier" "We have to use someone else as an interpreter"

Table 4 (to)

Themes and Sub-Themes	Quotes from interviews
2. Counselors' internal transformation	
a. Counselors' Awareness of Their Own Cultural Values and Biases	"I think I have my biases...and it's hard sometimes to personally not judge as well" "We should not be telling them they need to do this and that"
b. Openness and Learning the Client's Worldview	"I need to understand their culture...we have to be aware" "I'm very open and ask them to let me know, to help me understand"
3. Counselors' personal growth	
a. Building Relationships and Trust	"Listen to them first" "Trying to be friendly and open and taking my lead from them."
b. Developing Skills for Working with Cultural Diversity	"I do a lot of journaling" "What I want to do is to continue to keep in touch with world issues" "I think just by continuing work or along the way"

Research Findings

To enhance the clarity and coherence of the findings, the results are organized to illustrate how participants (1) perceived and managed cultural differences, (2) navigated challenges in multicultural counseling, and (3) experienced professional and personal growth through these encounters. The three main themes and their corresponding subthemes are presented below as supporting evidence for these dimensions.

Theme 1: Encountering cultural differences in the counselors' context

Subtheme 1.1 Cultural Shock

Counselors experienced cultural tension when encountering values, parenting styles, and family expectations different from their own. They noted that parental control in Thai culture sometimes extended beyond the home, affecting counseling sessions. Concerns about privacy were raised, as close family relationships are common in Thailand, contrasting with Western expectations

of adolescent independence. Counselors also observed that high family expectations could restrict students' autonomy, causing anxiety, and that providing space to talk helped relieve some of this psychological pressure.

Subtheme 1.2 Mental Health Denial

Counselors reported that discussing mental health issues with parents was often met with denial or misunderstanding. Awareness of mental health was generally low, particularly among parents, which limited support and proper treatment. Misconceptions about conditions like ADHD or sexual orientation were prevalent, preventing acknowledgment and assistance for students in need.

Subtheme 1.3 Language and Communication Barriers

Counselors highlighted challenges arising from linguistic differences, particularly with students who spoke little or no English. Communication often required the use of interpreters, which introduced additional complications, including potential difficulties in maintaining confidentiality and effective counselor–student interaction.

Theme 2: Counselors' internal transformation

Subtheme 2.1 Counselors' Awareness of Their Own Cultural Values and Biases

Counselors recognized the importance of being aware of their own values, beliefs, and biases, which are shaped by personal experiences and cultural backgrounds. This self-awareness is essential for providing counseling that respects client diversity. They acknowledged the challenge of avoiding personal judgment and emphasized the importance of supporting clients to find their own solutions rather than imposing culturally influenced views.

Subtheme 2.2 Openness and Learning the Client's Worldview

Counselors highlighted the necessity of being open-minded and learning about clients' cultural contexts to respond effectively to their needs. Understanding the diversity within cultural groups and being mindful of generalizations allows counselors to interact appropriately with students and colleagues. They emphasized creating space for clients to share their perspectives and actively engaging with their experiences to gain deeper insights into their worldview.

Theme 3: Counselors' personal growth

Subtheme 3.1 Building Relationships and Trust

Counselors emphasized that building relationships and trust is essential for effective counseling, particularly with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. Trust creates a safe environment where clients feel comfortable sharing their experiences, emotions, and perspectives. Attentive listening, flexibility, and adapting to the client's needs were highlighted as key strategies for fostering rapport and ensuring clients feel supported and understood.

Subtheme 3.2 Developing Skills for Working with Cultural Diversity

Counselors described developing skills for working with cultural diversity as a continuous process of learning and adaptation. Self-reflection, such as journaling about biases and attitudes, helps counselors adjust their perspectives to better serve diverse clients. Maintaining an open mind, staying informed about global issues, and learning from people of different cultures were identified as important methods for enhancing understanding of clients' experiences. Lifelong learning and gaining experience through ongoing work with diverse populations were also emphasized as crucial for refining approaches and responding effectively to clients from varied cultural backgrounds.

Discussion

The findings highlight the challenges and developmental processes of providing effective counseling in multicultural contexts. Cultural differences, such as parental control, family expectations, and career pressures, often conflict with Western ideals of autonomy (Sung, 2010; Li et al., 2009; Sinsuwan, 2015; Hofstede, 2001). Frameworks like Markus and Kitayama's (1991) self-construal and Triandis's (2001) collectivism help explain differing values, while Thai family expectations shape counseling dynamics (Deveney, 2005). These encounters initially created uncertainty but ultimately fostered professional growth by encouraging reflection on cultural relativism and more flexible counseling approaches.

Exposure to diversity promoted internal transformation, increasing counselors' awareness of personal values and biases, which can unconsciously affect judgments (Bulut et al., 2023; Corey, 2024). This aligns with Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis's (1992) multicultural competence model and perspectives emphasizing competence as an ongoing process (Mollen & Ridley, 2021). Counselors also reported personal growth, including greater empathy, patience, and cultural awareness, which extended to broader life perspectives. Continuous skill development, self-reflection, and understanding clients' worldviews were central to this growth, and multicultural experiences were integrated into both professional identity and personal life, enhancing counseling effectiveness and overall satisfaction (Sue et al., 1992; Hook et al., 2013; APA, 2017; Langston & Van Gordon, 2024).

Compared with studies in Western contexts, the findings reveal both shared and contrasting experiences. While counselors demonstrated reflective practice and pursuit of multicultural competence, challenges such as parental control, indirect communication, and mental health stigma were more pronounced in Thailand, shaping relationships with students and parents. Thus, the developmental process of multicultural competence mirrors Western research but is uniquely influenced by Thailand's collectivist and relational cultural values.

Building on these experiences of professional and personal growth, the study utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to capture the depth and complexity of counselors' lived experiences. By emphasizing participants' meaning-making, IPA revealed how encounters with cultural differences contributed to growth, allowing themes such as cultural awareness,

openness, and transformation to emerge naturally. This approach provided rich, nuanced insights into the experiences of foreign counselors who work in Thai international schools.

CONCLUSION

The research findings reflect the professional development of foreign counselors working in international schools in Thailand. This development begins with encountering differences, such as cultural shock, denial of mental health issues, and language barriers, which affect relationship-building and understanding. Counselors then engage in self-reflection, becoming aware of their biases and values, and open themselves to learning the perspectives of their clients. This leads to internal changes in attitudes, thinking patterns, and counseling approaches. Ultimately, this process fosters personal growth, including enhanced skills, trust, and effective work with cultural diversity. Thus, differences become opportunities for sustainable professional development and growth.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides valuable insights into the experiences of foreign counselors working in Thai international schools, highlighting a unique context that differs from prior research often centered on Western settings. It addresses knowledge gaps regarding engagement with cultural diversity within Thailand's increasingly multicultural society. These findings can inform the development of counselor training programs, better preparing professionals to work effectively with culturally diverse clients, and guide the design of counseling approaches tailored to specific contexts. Moreover, educational institutions and related agencies can benefit from these insights by enhancing counseling quality through culturally sensitive practices.

Participants in this study came from diverse cultural backgrounds, including Asia and Europe. While this diversity broadened perspectives, the cultural similarities between some Asian counselors and Thai clients may have limited deeper analysis of cultural differences. Nevertheless, the study remains credible, providing a comprehensive reflection of counseling experiences in Thai international schools and highlighting opportunities for future research focused on specific cultural groups.

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