

An Investigation of Multicultural Counseling Competence and Multicultural Counseling Self-Efficacy for Counselors-in-Training

Sejal M. Barden · Jennifer H. Greene

Published online: 19 November 2014
© Springer Science+Business Media New York 2014

Abstract Counseling necessitates clinicians to be culturally competent and self-efficacious in order to ethically and effectively work with diverse client populations. This study investigated the relationship between counselor education students' ($N=118$) levels of self-reported multicultural counseling competence (MCC), multicultural counseling self-efficacy (MCSE), and demographic data (gender, ethnicity, level of education). Contrary to prior research, results indicated that student gender and ethnicity did not affect MCSE or self-reported MCC. However, students who had been in graduate education longer had higher self-reported MCC and higher levels of multicultural knowledge. Discussion and implications of findings are provided.

Keywords Multicultural competence · Multicultural self-efficacy · Counselor education

Introduction

Multiculturalism has been the focus of empirical research and scholarly discourse for over three decades (Hill, Vereen, McNeal, and Stotesbury 2013). Counselor preparation programs emphasize diversity training in preparation standards (Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP] 2009) and cultural competence in ethical standards (American Counseling Association [ACA] 2005). Developing into a multiculturally competent counselor is a multifaceted process that requires counselor trainees to (a) acquire knowledge related to their clients' cultural backgrounds, (b) reflect and increase personal awareness of values and biases, and (c) apply culturally appropriate skills and interventions when working with diverse clients (Coleman 2004; Sue et al. 1992).

In addition to knowledge, awareness and skills, having multicultural counseling competence (MCC) requires counselors to be self-efficacious, or believe in their ability to work with clients from

S. M. Barden (✉)

Department of Child, Family, and Community Sciences, University of Central Florida, College of Education and Human Performance, P.O. Box 161250, Orlando, FL 32826, USA
e-mail: sejal.barden@ucf.edu

J. H. Greene

Department of Counseling, Leadership, Adult Education & School Psychology, College of Education, Texas State University, 601 University Drive, San Marcos, TX 78666-4684, USA

diverse backgrounds. Counselor self-efficacy (CSE), which involves counselors' beliefs or judgments about their capability to perform specific counseling related behaviors (Bandura 1999), has been found to have direct associations with effective counseling. People with higher levels of self-efficacy tend to set higher goals, exhibit stronger commitment, have more motivation, more resilience, and greater perseverance; and are, therefore, more likely to meet their goals (Bandura 1986; Larson and Daniels 1998). On the other hand, researchers (e.g., Holcomb-McCoy and Myers 1999) highlight that counselor trainees tend to lack efficacy when working with clients from diverse backgrounds, emphasizing the need to increase understanding of and a focus on multicultural counseling self-efficacy (MCSE), involving a counselor's belief in her/his ability to successfully counsel someone from a different cultural background than her/his own (Constantine and Ladany 2000).

Challenges in Empirical Research for MCC and MCSE

One major challenge and limitation in measuring MCC is the typical self-report nature of all the major MCC assessments. Scholars (e.g., Constantine and Ladany 2001) have suggested that assessments focused on measuring MCC tend to utilize counselors' self-reported beliefs about their ability to provide effective counseling services to diverse client populations, rather than observing their actual abilities to provide such services and, therefore, may be actually just measuring a form of efficacy rather than competence.

While the validity of the self-report nature of competence assessments is problematic, self-efficacy measures are likely to have strong content validity, given that self-efficacy is by definition amenable to a self-report format (reasonable for individuals to self-report their own confidence in completing specific tasks). Therefore, participants may be less susceptible to bias when responding to their perceived confidence compared to their perceived competence. Through obtaining more accurate self-reported data on counselor trainees' perceived level of confidence, educators may be able to provide tailored interventions such as mastery and modeling based on actual developmental levels to increase confidence and competence. Lastly, Worthington and colleagues (Worthington et al. 2007) highlight that, on the basis of social cognitive theory, efficacy measures should be responsive to training and supervision, thereby increasing as time in graduate school increases, and may be predictive of actual multicultural counseling tasks; potentially replacing existing self-report competency measures.

In sum, findings in the empirical research are mixed regarding the validity of measuring self-reported MCC and the relationships between MCC and MCSE. Constantine and Ladany (2001) suggest that both MCC and MCSE have important distinctions; however, they highlight the need to further understand the relationship between the constructs. Given that MCSE is a part of MCC, measuring both MCSE and self-reported MCC will provide a more complete robust view of MCC. Measuring the relationship between the constructs will further add to current information about each and their overlap.

Furthermore, the specific demographic factors influencing the development of MCC and MCSE are mixed across studies, with researchers (e.g., Chao 2012; Holcomb-McCoy et al. 2008; Holcomb-McCoy and Myers 1999; Sheu and Lent 2007) typically finding that gender, ethnicity, and amount of time in graduate education have positive relationships with total scores on both MCC and MCSE. Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to the literature through increased understanding of similarities and differences between self-reported scores on MCC and MCSE and relative influences of the demographic variables on total scores. We begin with a brief overview of MCC and MCSE.

Multicultural Counseling Competence

For the purpose of this research, multicultural counseling competence (MCC) is defined as a counselor's knowledge of different racial and cultural groups, awareness of personal attitudes/beliefs, and ability to use appropriate counseling skills when working with a diverse range of cultural groups (Holcomb-McCoy and Day-Vines 2004; Sue et al. 1992). Despite counselor education preparation programs' efforts to train students in multicultural counseling, graduates often report feeling ineffective and unprepared to work with clients from culturally diverse backgrounds (Holcomb-McCoy and Myers 1999). More specifically, literature on MCC highlights gaps in the development of skills and practical coursework of counselor trainees, although the literature does not reveal why such gaps exist or what factors contribute to the varying levels of MCC for counselor trainees (Hill et al. 2013). Furthermore, research in MCC fails to consistently acknowledge cultural backgrounds including ethnicity and gender of counselor trainees and how that may impact self-reported competence. Holcomb-McCoy and Myers (1999) found that ethnicity significantly influenced several areas of MCC; specifically, knowledge, awareness, racial identity, and skills. On the other hand, Chao's (2012) results indicated that gender and age had no effect on the MCC areas of multicultural knowledge or awareness. In sum, there are identified discrepancies in our understanding of the relationship between counselors' demographic factors and their self-reported MCC.

Multicultural Counseling Self-Efficacy

Results from a meta-analysis (e.g., Larson and Daniels 1998) on CSE indicated that higher self-efficacy was related to perseverance in the face of challenging counselor tasks, highlighting the need for fostering self-efficacy to be a primary objective of counselor preparation programs. Several studies have investigated the development of CSE; however, researchers have found mixed findings related to what specific counselor trainee factors have an effect on that development. Melchert, Hays, Wiljanen, and Kolocek (1996) found positive relationships between students' level of training, clinical experiences, and CSE. On the other hand, results from a meta-analysis (e.g., Larson and Daniels 1998) on the relationship between levels of training for counseling students and self-efficacy yielded mixed results on the strength and direction of the relationship between training and CSE.

Relationships between self-efficacy and the tendency to persist in the face of demanding counseling tasks are clear, and challenges of working with clients from diverse backgrounds have been well documented (e.g., Constantine 2001; Holcomb-McCoy and Myers 1999); hence, it is essential to understand the impact of CSE, specifically MCSE, on cross-cultural counseling relationships. Based on self-efficacy research, it seems logical that counselors with high MCSE would persist in the face of difficult tasks when working with clients with differing cultural backgrounds than their own.

Furthermore, although there is limited research on factors related to MCSE, initial data suggest that findings are mixed for factors that may influence MCSE. Sheu and Lent (2007) found that students' levels of MCSE differed significantly based on reported time in graduate training; masters students having higher MCSE scores than undergraduate students (effect sizes were small to moderate and ranged from 0.099 to 0.134 for full scale and subscale scores) and doctoral students having higher scores than masters students (effect sizes were small to moderate and ranged from 0.040 to 0.065). In addition, the amount of graduate level multicultural training significantly correlated with school counselors' levels of MCSE (Holcomb-McCoy et al. 2008).

In addition to levels of experience, researchers (e.g., Sheu and Lent 2007) indicate that ethnicity is a strong predictor of self-reported MCC and of MCSE, with students from ethnic, non-white, backgrounds tending to have higher self-reported MCC and MCSE scores. For example, Holcomb-McCoy and colleagues (2008) found that ethnicity was significantly related to MCSE, with minority school counselors having significantly higher MCSE than white school counselors. Similarly, Sheu and Lent (2007) found that minority students had higher MCSE, with small to medium effect sizes reported. Constantine and Gushue (2003) found that ethnic/racial minority counselors had higher scores than White trainees on multicultural knowledge. On the other hand, Smith and colleagues (2006) conducted a meta-analysis on multicultural training and found no significant differences between White and racial/ethnic minorities on self-reported MCC. In sum, mixed empirical findings on the relationship between self-reported MCC and MCSE, and recognized limitations of self-reported MCC, illustrate the need for research focused on understanding self-reported MCC and MCSE and factors that influence them.

Purpose of the Study

The development of multicultural competence and multicultural self-efficacy are primary foci of counselor preparation programs. Given that researchers (e.g., Larson and Daniels 1998; Sheu and Lent 2007) indicate mixed findings on the distinction between constructs (i.e., MCSE and self-reported MCC) and factors that influence development of the constructs (i.e., gender, ethnicity, and time in graduate school), further empirical research is warranted. Therefore, the three research questions guiding this investigation were: (a) What is the relationship between counselor education students' levels of MCSE and self-reported MCC? (b) What is the relationship between counselor education students' MCSE, self-reported MCC and specific demographic data (gender, ethnicity, amount of time in graduate preparation program)?, and (c) Is there a difference between MCSE and self-reported MCC based on grouping by gender, ethnicity, and amount of time in a graduate preparation program?

Methods

Participants

Graduate counselor education students ($N=118$) enrolled in a CACREP accredited program at a large metropolitan university in the southeastern United States contributed data to the current investigation. Approval was obtained to conduct the study from the University's Institutional Review Board. One hundred and thirty-seven (137) students were invited to participate in the study, with 118 completing all data collection instruments (87.6 % usable response rate). Participants were recruited using purposive, convenience sampling to obtain participation from students at differing points in their graduate education. Recruitment was done in the participants' classes (e.g., Introduction to Counseling, Group Counseling, Doctoral Seminar, etc.). The researchers introduced the study and obtained informed consent from potential participants during their class time.

Instruments

The two self-report constructs investigated were (a) multicultural counseling self-efficacy (*Multicultural Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale–Racial Diversity Form* [MCSE-RD]; Sheu and

Lent 2007) and (b) self-reported multicultural counseling competence (*Multicultural Counseling Competence and Training Survey-Revised* [MCCTS-R]; Holcomb-McCoy and Day-Vines 2004). The primary variables used to examine the constructs were mean scores calculated from the MCSE-RD and MCCTS-R and the mean scores for the instruments' appropriate subscales.

MCSE-RD

The MCSE-RD is a 37-item Likert-type scale designed to measure counselors' self-perceived ability to counsel racially diverse clients. Participants rate the degree to which they feel confident in their ability to accomplish each item (ranging from "0" *not confident* to "9" *very confident*). For example, participants rate their level of confidence on items such as [I can] "Help the client to clarify how cultural factors (e.g., racism, acculturation, racial identity) may relate to her or his maladaptive beliefs and conflicted feelings", and [I can] "Assess relevant cultural factors (e.g., the client's acculturation level, racial identity, cultural values and beliefs)." The MCSE-RD is comprised of three sub-scales: (a) Multicultural Intervention (MI), (b) Multicultural Assessment (MA), and (c) Multicultural Session Management (MSM).

The MCSE-RD has high internal reliability; Cronbach's alphas on sub-scales range from 0.92 to 0.98 and total score reliability of 0.98 (Sheu and Lent 2007). In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.94 for full-scale, 0.89 for MI, 0.87 for MA, and 0.95 for MSM. According to Sheu and Lent (2007) the test-retest reliability scores of the sub-scales for the MCSE-RD were between 0.69 and 0.99 and for the total score of the MCSE-RD the correlation coefficient was $r=0.77$. The three MCSE-RD sub-scales also correlated with each other, with intercorrelations falling between 0.67 and 0.85 and all of the sub-scales having a strong correlation with the full-scale score ($r>0.83$). In the current study, intercorrelations between sub-scale scores were between 0.57 and 0.74 and intercorrelations between the full-scale score and the sub-scale scores were between 0.78 and 0.95. The MCSE-RD is scored by computing mean scores and mean sub-scale scores as indicated in the scoring manual; higher scores demonstrating higher levels of perceived multicultural self-efficacy (Sheu and Lent 2007). Both full-scale and sub-scale scores were utilized in the current investigation.

MCCTS-R

The MCCTS-R is a 32-item scale designed to measure counselors' self-perceived multicultural counseling competence. Answers to items are on a four-point Likert-type scale (ranging from "1" *not competent* to "4" *extremely competent*). Sample items from the MCCTS-R include: "I am aware of how my cultural background and experiences have influenced my attitudes about psychological processes", and "I can identify my negative and positive emotional reactions toward persons of other racial and ethnic groups." The MCCTS-R is divided into three sub-scales/factors: a) Factor 1: Multicultural Terminology, b) Factor 2: Multicultural Knowledge, and c) Factor 3: Multicultural Awareness.

Holcomb-McCoy and Day-Vines (2004) found adequate coefficients for internal consistency ($\alpha=0.85-0.97$). In the current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficients were 0.95 for full-scale, 0.96 for Factor 1: Multicultural Terminology, 0.95 for Factor 2: Multicultural Knowledge, and 0.63 for Factor 3: Multicultural Awareness. Intercorrelations between the sub-scales were between 0.43 and 0.59; between sub-scales and the full-scale the intercorrelations were between 0.62 and 0.95. The MCCTS-R is scored by computing mean scores and mean sub-scale scores as indicated in the scoring instructions; with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived multicultural counseling competence.

Data Analysis

A correlational design was selected for this research, as the primary purposes of the investigation were to determine the relationships between counselor education students' perceived levels of MCSE and MCC as they occurred in their natural state, without manipulation (Heppner et al. 2008), and to determine the influence of demographic variables on the constructs. After the data collection process, the data were scored, entered into a database, and analyzed by SPSS (Version 20.0), using Pearson product-moment correlations (two-tailed), linear multiple regression, and analysis of variance (ANOVA). We used the data collection instruments' mean scores, allowing us to reduce the variability between responses, enabling estimates to be more precise (Tabachnick and Fidell 2007). Sub-scale scores were used to provide further information per the scoring instructions of the instruments.

Prior to the data analyses, the data set was examined to assess the fit between the distribution of the variables and the assumptions of the statistical analysis, such as normality, homogeneity of variance, linearity, and multicollinearity; no assumption violations were identified. In addition, a sample size of 118 was considered acceptable for identifying a medium effect size (power=0.80) at the 0.05 level (Cohen 1992).

Results

Participant Characteristics

Descriptive data and measures of central tendency indicated that the majority of the 118 participants were master's level students (86.6 %, $n=103$). The other 15 participants (12.6 %) were doctoral counselor education students. The majority of participants were female (80.7 %, $n=96$) with one individual describing his or her gender as 'other'. Participants self-identified within five distinct racial/ethnic groups; 76 (63.9 %) identified as Caucasian/White, 13 (10.9 %) as Black/African American, 12 (10.1 %) as Latino/Latina, 8 (6.7 %) as Asian, 1 (0.8 %) as Native American, and 9 (7.6 %) identified as 'other.' The overall ethnic distribution of participants was consistent with previous research. In line with previous research, we grouped ethnicity into two categories; either Minority or Caucasian/White (Holcomb-McCoy et al. 2008; Sheu and Lent 2007).

The participants' length of time in their programs varied; with the majority of the sample (66.1 %, $n=78$) identifying as 1st year master's students, 23 (19.3 %) as 2nd year master's students, 2 (1.7 %) as 3rd year master's students, 7 (5.9 %) as 1st year doctoral students, 7 (5.9 %) as 2nd year doctoral students, and 1 (0.8 %) as a 3rd year doctoral student. Participants' time in graduate school was grouped into two categories; either as 'less time', which was based on having less than 1 year of completed graduate school ($n=78$, 66.1 %) and 'more time', as having one or more years of completed graduate school ($n=40$, 33.9 %).

Relationship between MCSE-RD and MCCTS-R Scores

To assess the relationship between counselor education students' levels of MCSE and self-reported MCC, a multiple linear regression (MLR) analysis was applied to the outcome variable, full-scale mean scores on the MCSE-RD ($M=6.18$, $SD=1.29$), and the predictor variables, the three sub-scale mean scores from the MCCTS-R (Factor 1: Multicultural Terminology, $M=3.30$, $SD=0.58$; Factor 2: Multicultural Knowledge, $M=2.30$, $SD=0.61$; Factor 3: Multicultural Awareness, $M=3.26$, $SD=0.47$). Overall, the predictor variables

accounted for 37.3 % ($R^2=0.373$) of the variance in full-scale mean scores on the MCSE-RD. Multicollinearity was assessed and ruled out due to the VIF score being 1.59. Multicultural Terminology and Multicultural Knowledge had statistically significant beta coefficients, with the beta weights suggesting that for every unit increase in Multicultural Terminology there was a 0.329 unit increase in MCSE-RD, and for every unit increase in Multicultural Knowledge there was a 0.382 unit increase in MCSE-RD.

MLR analysis was applied to the outcome variable, full-scale mean scores on the MCCTS-R ($M=2.69$, $SD=0.50$), and the predictor variables, the three sub-scale mean scores from the MCSE-RD (MI, $M=6.52$, $SD=1.21$; MA, $M=4.43$, $SD=2.24$; MSM, $M=6.51$, $SD=1.63$). Overall, the predictor variables accounted for 34.6 % ($R^2=0.346$) of the variance in full-scale mean scores on the MCSE-RD. Only MI and MA had statistically significant beta coefficients, with the beta weights suggesting that for every unit increase in MI there was a 0.381 unit increase in MCSE-RD and for every unit increase in MA there was a 0.212 unit increase in MCSE-RD.

Pearson product–moment correlation (two-tailed) analysis supports the findings of a statistically significant relationship between scores on the MCSE-RD and MCCTS-R ($r=0.58$, $p<0.001$; 33.6 % of the variance explained), with moderately strong correlations and indicating a large effect size. Therefore, as counselor education students' MCSE scores increased, their self-reported MCC scores also increased. Sub-scale (factor) scores correlated with each other and with full-scale mean scores across constructs. The mean scores of the sub-scales from the MCCTS-R were correlated with the full-scale mean scores for the MCSE-RD (Factor 1: Multicultural Terminology, $r=0.50$, $p<0.001$; Factor 2: Multicultural Knowledge $r=0.53$, $p<0.001$; and Factor 3: Multicultural Awareness, $r=0.43$, $p<0.001$). The mean scores of the sub-scales from the MCSE-RD were correlated with the full-scale mean scores for the MCCTS-R (MI, $r=0.55$, $p<0.001$; MA, $r=0.47$, $p<0.001$; and MSM, $r=0.49$, $p<0.001$).

In sum, results from this study suggest that MCSE and self-reported MCC have moderately strong correlations, yet are significantly different from one another. The 33.6 % of variance accounted for by the relationship leaves 66.4 % accounted for by other factors, leaving the conclusion that the constructs MCSE and self-reported MCC, though strongly related, are separate constructs.

Multicultural Self-Efficacy

To assess the relationship between MCSE and gender, ethnicity, and time in graduate school, a multiple linear regression (MLR) analysis was applied to the outcome variable MCSE, as measured by full-scale and sub-scale scores on the MCSE-RD and the predictor variables of gender, ethnicity (identification as Caucasian/White or as a Minority), and time in graduate school (less than 1 year or at least 1 year). These variables were chosen for the analyses due to their prevalence as grouping and predictor variables in prior research.

None of the variables (gender, ethnicity, or time in graduate school) either separately or together were significant predictors of full-scale mean scores on the MCSE-RD. However, when looking at the sub-scales of the MCSE-RD, time in graduate school predicted 6.1 % of variance in scores on the Multicultural Session Management (MSM) sub-scale of the MCSE-RD, $R^2=0.061$, $F(1,118)=7.55$, $p<0.01$. Additionally, time in graduate school also had a statistically significant beta coefficient. Beta weights suggested that with every unit increase in time in graduate school there was a 0.246 unit increase in MSM. The Pearson product-moment correlation (two-tailed) analysis supported these results, indicating a statistically significant relationship between time in graduate school and MSM scores ($r=0.230$, $p<0.05$).

A Factorial Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to look at the differences between the scores on the MCSE-RD based on gender, ethnicity, and time in graduate school. Based on Levene's test of homogeneity of variance, the dependent variables appeared to be distributed equally across groups. Therefore, the researchers ran an ANOVA and found that there were no statistically significant differences in scores on the MCSE-RD based on gender, $F(1, 108)=0.70, p>0.05$; ethnicity, $F(1, 108)=0.10, p>0.05$; or time in graduate school, $F(1, 108)=0.40, p>0.05$.

Multicultural Counseling Competence

To look at the relationship between self-reported MCC and gender, ethnicity and time in graduate school, a multiple linear regression analysis was also applied to the outcome variable MCC, as measured by scores on the MCCTS-R and the predictor variables of gender, ethnicity, and time in graduate school. Together the predictor variables accounted for 13.4 % of the variance in scores on the MCCTS-R, $R^2=0.134, F(1, 114)=5.725, p<0.01$). The only predictor variable with a statistically significant beta coefficient was time in graduate school. Specifically, beta weights indicated that for every unit increase in time in graduate school, there was a 0.355 unit increase in MCCTS-R scores. The Pearson product-moment correlation (two-tailed) analysis supported those results indicating a statistically significant relationship between time in graduate school and MCCTS-R scores, $r=0.34, p<0.001$.

When doctoral students were factored out and master's students were looked at as a separate group, the year in the program was also a statistically significant predictor of total MCCT-S scores, $R^2=0.065, F(1, 97)=6.735, p<0.05$. The predictor variable, year in program, had a statistically significant beta coefficient as related to the full-scale scores of the MCCTS-R. Specifically, beta weights indicated that for each unit increase in time in graduate school there was a 0.255 unit increase in MCCTS-R scores. The Pearson product-moment correlation (one-tailed) analysis supported the results, indicating a statistically significant relationship between year in program and MCCTS-R scores, $r=0.255, p<0.01$.

When looking at the sub-scales of the MCCTS-R and the predictor variables of gender, ethnicity, and time in graduate school, the predictor variables predicted 17.7 % of variance on Multicultural Knowledge of the MCCTS-R, $R^2=0.177, F(1, 115)=8.029, p<0.001$. The only predictor variable with a statistically significant beta coefficient was time in graduate school, with beta weights indicating that for every unit increase in time in graduate school there was a 0.410 unit increase in Multicultural Knowledge. The Pearson product-moment correlation (two-tailed) analysis supported the results, indicating a statistically significant relationship between time in graduate school and Multicultural Knowledge, $r=0.396, p<0.001$.

A Factorial Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to look at the differences between the scores on the MCCTS-R based on gender, ethnicity, and time in graduate school. There were no statistically significant differences in scores on the MCCTS-R based on gender, $F(1, 107)=0.47, p>0.05$, or ethnicity, $F(1, 107)=0.79, p>0.05$. However, there was a statistically significant difference in scores on the MCCTS-R based on time in graduate school, $F(1, 107)=5.06, p<0.05$, with students with at least 1 year in graduate school having higher scores ($M=2.93, SD=0.40$) than students with less than 1 year of experience ($M=2.58, SD=0.49$). The practical significance of these findings based on effect size is small to medium, with 4.5 % of the variance in MCCTS-R scores being accounted for by time in graduate school, with a power to detect that difference of 0.61 (Cohen 1988; Pallant 2010).

Additionally, a Factorial ANOVA was conducted to explore differences between scores on the three sub-scales of the MCCTS-R based on the grouping variable, time in graduate school. The only sub-scale that showed a statistically significant difference in score based on the

amount of time in graduate school was Multicultural Knowledge, $F(1, 108)=6.08, p<0.05$. In this sub-scale, students with at least 1 year of experience had higher scores ($M=2.64, SD=0.48$) than students with less than 1 year of experience ($M=2.13, SD=0.59$). The power to detect this difference was 0.69. The practical significance of these findings based on effect size is small to moderate, with 5.3 % of the variance in Multicultural Knowledge scores being accounted for by time in graduate school. In the next section, we discuss the results as they pertain to counseling and counselor education.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to increase understanding of the relationship between self-reported multicultural counseling competence (MCC) and multicultural counseling self-efficacy (MCSE), and to understand how demographic factors such as gender, ethnicity, and amount of time in graduate education can influence these elements for counseling graduate students. There was a moderate relationship between self-reported MCC and MCSE that was supported by correlations both between full-scale scores and sub-scale scores both within and between constructs after ruling out multicollinearity, indicating that the constructs are related yet the scales were not measuring the same construct. In other words, results from this study indicate that self-report measures of MCC were not measuring MCSE, although some authors have suggested that self-report MCC and MCSE are essentially the same construct. This conclusion was based on the strength of the relationship between the constructs as evidenced by the correlation. A stronger relationship would have been closer to 1.0. The relationship found was statistically significant but only 33.6 % of variance was explained by the relationship, indicating that other factors accounted for the other 66.4 % of variance. Therefore, in conclusion, the constructs were found to be significantly related but not synonymous.

Results also indicated a strong relationship between MCSE, self-reported MCC, and amount of time in graduate school. One aspect of MCSE, multicultural session management (MSM), was predicted by the amount of time in graduate school, which is consistent with prior research connecting education with MCSE (Holcomb-McCoy et al. 2008; Sheu and Lent 2007). Amount of time in graduate education did not predict full-scale MCSE, just the sub-scale MSM. Unlike some prior studies on MCSE, our results did not indicate that gender or ethnicity predicted MCSE. On the other hand, amount of time in graduate school was predictive of self-reported MCC when comparing master's and doctoral students and comparing master's students starting a counseling program to master's students who were further along in their graduate program.

Variance in self-reported MCC was explained by the combined variables gender, ethnicity, and amount of time in graduate school, but the amount of time in school was the only significant predictor. In sum, counseling trainees who had had more time in graduate education, having completed more course work and perhaps had more supervised clinical experiences or related work experiences, perceived themselves to be more self-efficacious and multiculturally competent than their peers in areas such as multicultural knowledge and multicultural session management, although there did not appear to be a relationship between time in graduate school and self-reported confidence in their multicultural skills (i.e., multicultural interventions) as reported through the MI sub-scale of the MCSE-RD.

Research findings on factors that influence self-reported MCC and MCSE have been mixed. For example, results have indicated both significant relationships between ethnicity and MCSE (e.g., Holcomb-McCoy et al. 2008; Sheu and Lent 2007) and non-significant relationships (i.e., results from the current study). Hill and colleagues (2013) found that

significant differences existed based on ethnicity and self-reported MCC, with African American and Hispanic counselor trainees scoring significantly higher than their Caucasian and Asian counterparts (Hill et al. 2013). The incongruence between the current study's findings and prior research may be related to differences in demographic makeup of this research sample versus other samples.

Another explanation of understanding incongruence in findings related to the significance of racial/ethnic status may be understood from a recent study (Chao 2013), indicating that after the interaction effect for racial/ethnic identity and multicultural training was controlled for, racial/ethnic identity moderated associations between race and self-reported MCC. Chao's research suggests that previous results that found differences between White and racial/ethnic minority students and self-reported MCC could be attributed to the strength of racial identity, with lower levels of racial identity being related to lower levels of self-reported MCC. Therefore, one avenue to increasing reported MCC may be to increase counseling students' racial/ethnic identity development.

The 'non effect' or lack of significant relationships between time in graduate school and factors of perceived multicultural competence such as multicultural intervention or multicultural awareness indicate that multicultural courses may not influence students' perceptions of being a multiculturally skilled counselor or ability to accurately assess and intervene with culturally diverse clients. Findings from this study highlight that, in general, master's and doctoral students do not perceive themselves to be multiculturally competent and are not largely confident in their abilities to work with clients from diverse backgrounds. In sum, similar to findings from Holcomb-McCoy and colleagues (2008), results from this study highlight the need for multicultural pedagogy to increase focus on skill acquisition, thereby potentially increasing self-awareness and self-efficacy for counselor trainees.

Implications for Counselor Education

This study provides several implications for the development of multiculturally competent counselors. For one, the relationship between self-reported MCC and MCSE indicates that the constructs are strongly related, although not identical. Therefore, it is important to foster both MCC and MCSE in developing counselors. This research supports the influence of time in counselor education programs on both self-reported MCC and multicultural session management (MSM), an aspect of MCSE, with more time in school having a strong positive relationship with the knowledge-based sub-scales of both constructs but having no influence on skills-based sub-scales. Findings from this study highlight the gap in contemporary pedagogical practices, as they seem primarily focused on trainees acquiring multicultural knowledge (e.g., Priester et al. 2008), failing to account for necessary skill acquisition and development of personal self-awareness.

Therefore, there is a need to re-conceptualize current pedagogical multicultural practices and embrace the challenge of incorporating more direct involvement and experiences with culturally diverse others to increase trainees' skills and awareness. Furthermore, increased confidence and belief in one's abilities to overcome challenges enables one to maximize use of resources and persist through difficult challenges, implying that direct involvement and experiences with related tasks are directly related to increasing self-efficacy (Bandura 1986).

It is imperative for counselor preparation programs to support and encourage direct interaction and involvement with persons from diverse backgrounds. One method that has demonstrated effectiveness in increasing counselor trainees' perceived MCC and MCSE is engaging in cultural immersion experiences in which counselor trainees are immersed in cultures different from their own for extended periods of time (cf., Barden and Cashwell

2013; Canfield, Low, and Hovestadt 2009; Coleman 2006; DeRicco and Sciarra 2005). Specifically, cultural immersion experiences provide opportunities for students to connect with different cultures, challenging existing worldviews and promoting their intrapersonal development (e.g., self-awareness, self-efficacy) (Coleman 2006; DeRicco and Sciarra 2005). Barden and Cashwell (2013) found cultural immersion effective in obtaining skills in working with clients from diverse backgrounds, indicating that counselor trainees reported feeling increased efficacy and confidence after participating in cultural immersion experiences. In sum, focusing on cultivating multicultural self-efficacy through direct experiences in which counselor trainees are immersed in multicultural populations may to some extent increase trainees' competence and efficacy, thereby increasing effectiveness when working with culturally diverse clients.

Limitations

Results from the current study found that time in graduate training was a predictor of both multicultural counseling self-efficacy and self-reported multicultural counseling competence; however, results should be considered in light of limitations. Limitations for the current study include lack of randomization within the sampling procedures, geographical limitations of the sample, small effect sizes, and potential impact of social desirability on scores, since the measures were self-reports. Given that participants were limited geographically due to convenience, results should be generalized with caution. Additionally, although similar to the demographic makeup of most large southeastern U.S. counseling programs, the sample for the current study had limited diversity.

Another limitation of the study includes the relatively small effect sizes and lack of statistical significance for aspects of the hypotheses tested. Lastly, due to the nature of current assessments for multicultural competence being self-report measures, the tendency for participants to have answered assessments in socially desirable ways may be inflated, although recent research has confirmed that there is no relationship between self-reported MCC and social desirability (Chao 2013). Although there are several limitations to the current study, results provide useful information to inform this body of literature.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should consider an extension and replication of the current study, including larger and more diverse samples. Given the mixed findings in empirical research on demographic factors that influence counseling trainees' perceived competence and self-efficacy when working with culturally diverse clients, further research in this area is warranted. Additionally, future research would benefit from comparing differences between self-perceived competence and observed competence that can be measured more concretely, such as through behavioral observation or client outcome data. Future research could investigate critical incidents that students report as being significant in their development of multicultural competence and efficacy in order to build on existing pedagogical methods. Lastly, given that efficacy measures are amenable to self-report, future research may consider replacing existing self-report competency measures and focusing more on efficacy measures. Building on Bandura's self-efficacy theory, intentional inclusion and empirical testing of including mastery experiences and relative influence on counselor development would be useful in continuing to bridge the gap between classroom experiences and practical applications of knowledge and skills.

Conclusion

Counselors in the United States and elsewhere continue to work with increasingly diverse clientele. Despite this reality, there is limited empirical evidence on demographic variables and other factors that influence the development of cultural competence and multicultural self-efficacy for counselor trainees. Practical implications of this study's findings include tailoring multicultural curricula to effectively increase multicultural knowledge, awareness, skills, and efficacy. This would include a focus on pedagogical strategies that would increase competence in the tripartite areas of MCC and the related area MCSE. We believe that focusing empirical research on specific characteristics and dispositions of counselor trainees will advance the preparation of developing culturally sensitive and efficacious counselors.

References

- American Counseling Association. (2005). *ACA Code of Ethics*. Alexandria: Author.
- Bandura, A. (Ed.). (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- Bandura, A. (1999). Moral disengagement in the perpetration of inhumanities. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 3(3), 193–209.
- Barden, S. M., & Cashwell, C. S. (2013). Critical factors in cultural immersion: a synthesis of relevant literature. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 35, 286–297.
- Canfield, B. S., Low, L., & Hovestadt, A. (2009). Cultural immersion as a learning method for expanding intercultural competencies. *Family Journal*, 17(4), 318–322.
- Chao, R. C. (2012). Racial/ethnic identity, gender-role attitudes, and multicultural counseling competence: The role of multicultural counseling training. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 90, 35–44.
- Chao, R. C. (2013). Race/ethnicity and multicultural competence among school counselors: multicultural training, racial/ethnic identity, and color-blind racial attitudes. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 91(2), 140–151.
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Cohen, J. (1992). A power primer. *Psychological Bulletin*, 112, 155–159.
- Coleman, H. L. K. (2004). Multicultural counseling competencies in a pluralistic society. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 26, 56–66.
- Coleman, M. N. (2006). Critical incidents in multicultural training: an examination of student experiences. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 34(3), 168–182.
- Constantine, M. G. (2001). Multiculturally-focused counseling supervision: its relationship to trainees' multicultural counseling self-efficacy. *The Clinical Supervisor*, 20, 87–98.
- Constantine, M. G., & Gushue, G. V. (2003). School counselors' ethnic tolerance attitudes and racism attitudes as predictors of their multicultural case conceptualization of an immigrant student. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 81(2), 185–190.
- Constantine, M. G., & Ladany, N. (2000). Self-report multicultural counseling competence scales: their relation to social desirability attitudes and multicultural case conceptualization ability. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 47(2), 155–164.
- Constantine, M. G., & Ladany, N. (2001). New visions for defining and assessing multicultural counseling competence. In J. G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, L. A. Suzuki, & C. M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. (2009). *The 2009 Standards*. Alexandria: Author.
- DeRizzo, J. N., & Sciarra, D. T. (2005). The immersion experience in multicultural counselor training: Confronting covert racism. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 33, 2–16.
- Heppner, P. P., Kivlighan, D. M., & Wampold, B. E. (2008). *Research Design in Counseling*. Belmont: Thomson Brooks/Cole.
- Hill, N. R., Vereen, L. G., McNeal, D., & Stotesbury, R. (2013). Multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills among American counselor trainees: Group differences in self-perceived competence based on dispositional and programmatic variables. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 35, 261–272.

- Holcomb-McCoy, C. C., & Day-Vines, N. (2004). Exploring school counselor multicultural competence: a multidimensional concept. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 37, 154–162.
- Holcomb-McCoy, C. C., & Myers, J. E. (1999). Multicultural competence and counselor training: a national survey. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 77, 294–302.
- Holcomb-McCoy, C., Harris, P., Hines, E. M., & Johnston, G. (2008). School counselors' multicultural self-efficacy: a preliminary investigation. *Professional School Counseling*, 11(3), 166–178.
- Larson, L. M., & Daniels, J. A. (1998). Review of the counseling self-efficacy literature. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 26(2), 179–218.
- Melchert, T. T., Hays, V. L., Wiljanen, L. M., & Kolocek, A. K. (1996). Testing models of counselor development with a measure of counseling self-efficacy. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 74, 640–644.
- Pallant, J. (2010). *SPSS Survival Manual*. New York: Allen & Unwin Book Publishers.
- Priester, P. E., Jones, J. E., Jackson-Bailey, C. M., Jana-Masri, A., Jordan, E. X., & Metz, A. J. (2008). An analysis of content and instructional strategies in multicultural counseling courses. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 36, 29–39.
- Sheu, H.-B., & Lent. (2007). Development and initial validation of the multicultural counseling self-efficacy scale-racial diversity form. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 44, 30–45.
- Smith, T. B., Constantine, M. G., Dunn, T. W., Dinehart, J. M., & Montoya, J. A. (2006). Multicultural education in the mental health professions: a meta-analytic review. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 53, 132.
- Sue, D. W., Arredondo, P., & McDavis, R. J. (1992). Multicultural counseling competencies and standards: a call to the profession. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 70(4), 477–486.
- Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2007). *Using multivariate statistics* (5th ed.). New York: Allyn and Bacon.
- Worthington, R. L., Soth-McNett, A. M., & Moreno, M. V. (2007). Multicultural counseling competencies research: A 20-year content analysis. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 54(4), 351–361.