

Counselling Ethics within Multicultural and Pluralistic Contexts in Nairobi County, Kenya

Lettemicael Meles Beyene¹, Jasper Isoe²

¹Doctoral Student, Tangaza University, Nairobi, Kenya

²Senior Lecturer, Tangaza University, Nairobi, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Counseling ethics are, known as crucial elements of professional practices, especially in multicultural and pluralistic counseling contexts where practitioners work with individuals with diverse religious and cultural values and different worldviews. In Kenya, counselors work within highly multicultural and pluralistic contexts often facing multiple ethical dilemmas such as issues concerning ethical decision-making, professional competence and issues related to boundary management. Despite the great need for ethically grounded counseling practice that reconcile the professional code of ethics and local cultural values, limited empirical studies have been done living a gap on how counseling trainees navigate these challenges in multicultural and pluralistic counselling contexts. The present study explores the lived experiences of ten (N=10) postgraduate counselling trainees concerning ethical practice in multicultural ad pluralistic counseling contexts in Kenya. The study mainly focused on three objectives: a) major challenges faced by postgraduate counseling trainees faced b) the role of training, supervision and curriculum in preparing postgraduate trainees c) strategies employed by postgraduate trainees to navigate ethical dilemmas in multicultural and pluralistic counselling setup in Kenya. The study used a qualitative phenomenological approach grounded in Edmund Husserl's theory of lived experience and Derald Wing Sues' multicultural framework. Data was, collected through the use of, a semi-structured interview that enabled to capture participants' perspectives and daily experiences. The collected data was transcribed, coded and analyzed using the thematic analysis. The identified key themes include challenges in reconciling the professional code of ethics and clients' cultural and religious values, difficulties in maintaining professional boundaries, and the role of supervision, training, and curriculum in preparing counselling trainees. The findings highlight that ethical counseling in multicultural and pluralities setup like Kenya is contextually negotiated and culturally grounded. Moreover, the findings underscore the need for culturally sensitive training, supervision and curriculum, which equips trainees with deeper knowledge and practical skills.

Key Terms: Multicultural-Counselling, Ethical-Principles, Ethical-Dilemmas, Counselling-Trainees

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Multicultural and pluralistic setup in counseling practice refer to therapeutic contexts which actively acknowledge clients background such as their worldview, their lived experience, their personal, cultural and religious values. Furthermore, multicultural counselling considers clients' race, ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic factors, which may affect client's mental well-being. As noted by recent scholars such as Turhan (2020) and Mwit (2024), multicultural counseling acknowledges that there is no single theory of framework that can fully address human experience and it involves multiple frameworks to promote flexibility, inclusiveness and dialogue practice.

Globally, some efforts have done to enhance multicultural competency. In line with this, Mwit, (2024) revealed that integrating social justice frameworks and adapting to evidence based interventions are some of the efforts made at global level. Despite these advancements, gaps continue mainly in societies with low and



middle income, where Western frameworks dominate counselling ethics frameworks leaving no room for indigenous healing practices as highlighted by Skafi (2022).

According to recent scholarships, psychological disorders indicate that there is a need for culturally sensitive counseling in places where the Western frameworks are not applicable. For instance, studies show that in Sub-Saharan Africa, PTSD, depression and anxiety affect approximately 12.5%, 15.3% and 11.8% of youth respectively Jakobsson et al. (2024). As it is, documented by Harper et al. (2021) about 10% of the population in Kenya experience mental health challenges, hindered by stigma, cultural misconceptions, and limited access to services of culturally responsive counseling. Additionally, Wakoli (2024) noted that language barriers, limited number of counselors and structural inequalities are of challenges, which affect quality-counseling services in Kenya.

Ethics in counseling provides guidelines for good professional conduct, which provide counselors with guidance on rights, obligations and fairness. Contemporary scholars such as Banks et al. (2022) and Varkey (2021) highlight ethical principles like autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice help counselors to ensure morally responsible counseling practice. Specifically, counseling ethics protect both clients and practitioners in integrating moral reasoning, applying personal and professional values, maintaining boundaries and safeguarding clients' welfare (Corey et al., 2021; Welfel, 2020; American Counseling Association, 2014).

Locally, counseling operates in a multicultural and pluralist society posing many ethical challenges to counselors, particularly to counselling trainees. Postgraduate counselling trainees often face ethical dilemmas arising from cultural, religious, and communal differences, with limited supervision and guidance from regulatory bodies such as the Kenyan Guidance, Counselling and Psychological Association (KGCPA) and the Counselors and Psychologists Society of Kenya (CPS-K) (Njonge, 2023; Moodley et al., 2021; Wango & Mungai, 2020). Understanding the challenges faced by postgraduate trainees and the role of training, supervision and curriculum, which is the main objective of the study, is crucial to sensitize institutions and curriculum developers to enhance culturally responsive practice and professional competence, which can equip trainees well.

Statement of the Problem

The multicultural and pluralistic nature of Nairobi, where diverse people with diverse cultural and religious values and different worldview intersect, pose significant challenge for counselling practice. Corey et al. (2021) highlight that counselors face multiple challenges related to ethical dilemmas particularly around professional boundaries, cultural expectations, and different value systems. This phenomenon becomes more challenging in the context of counselling trainees who are still with limited professional skill and practical skill. Wango & Mungai (2020) also argue that counselling trainee in Kenyan counselling setup frequently encounter diverse ethical challenges associated with insufficient supervision, limited culturally embedded training. They also encounter significant challenges related to tensions between the universal ethical principles and the indigenous communal values of clients.

Despite these major challenges, limited evidence exist on how trainees perceive, respond to and navigate ethical dilemmas, or if the current training, supervision and curriculum adequately prepare postgraduate trainees leaving a critical gap on the need of a qualitative research which examines the lived experiences of postgraduate counseling trainees in multicultural and pluralistic setup in Kenya.

Purpose of the Study

The present study aims at exploring the lived experiences of postgraduate counselling trainees in multicultural and pluralistic contexts in Kenya. The study mainly focuses on assessing the main challenges faced by postgraduate trainees, the role of training, supervision and curriculum in preparing counselling trainees and the strategies adopted by postgraduate counselling trainees to navigate the challenges they face while working with diverse population.



Research Objectives

1. To examine the challenges postgraduate counseling trainees face while working in multicultural and pluralistic counseling context in Kenya.
2. To identify the role of training, supervision and curriculum in preparing postgraduate counseling trainees for multicultural counselling practice.
3. To determine the strategies used by postgraduate students to navigate ethical dilemmas in multicultural counseling.

Research Questions

1. What are the main challenges the postgraduate counseling trainees face while working in multicultural and pluralistic counseling set up in Kenya?
2. How do postgraduate counseling trainees describe their experiences with training, supervision, and curriculum preparation for ethical counseling practice in multicultural and pluralistic contexts in Kenya?
3. What strategies do postgraduate counseling trainees employ to navigate ethical dilemmas in a pluralistic and multicultural counseling set up in Kenya?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Professional ethics act as the foundation stone in counseling practice by providing clear guidance for confidentiality, decision-making, and culturally responsive practice (Corey et al., 2021). In multicultural counselling contents, professional ethical principle can be complex to apply as practitioners are, expected to navigate challenges related to various cultural norms, value systems, and power dynamics while maintaining client dignity and welfare (Welfel, 2020). According to Corey et al. (2021), counsellors often face diverse challenges in multicultural and pluralistic counselling setup. In the same way, Wango and Mungai (2020) highlight that counselling in the Kenyan context where Wester-oriented ethical principles intersect with the traditional practices and this pose significant challenge for postgraduate counselling trainees. These scholars further indicate that the regulatory bodies in Kenya such as the Kenya Counselors and Psychological Association (KCPA), the Kenyan Association of Professional Counselors (KAPC), and the Children Act and Data Protection (CADP) provide ethical guidelines for ethical conduct and accountability, competent decision-making, confidentiality and culturally sensitive practice in counselling. Despite this, postgraduate counselling trainees face diverse challenges in multicultural counselling in Kenya.

Theoretical Framework

The present study employed the Phenomenological Theory that was, developed by Edmund Husserl (1931) and the Multicultural Counselling Framework, which was, advanced by Derald Wing Sue (1982). The two theories provide complementary viewpoints for understanding the ethical challenges that the postgraduate counselling trainees encounter in the multicultural counselling setups in Kenya.

Edmund's phenomenological theory, which focuses on the importance of examining the lived experiences of individuals and the meanings the individuals attach to those experiences where the researcher employed to identify participants' perspectives and daily experiences. Moreover, this theory is, relevant to the present study as it enabled an in-depth exploration on how postgraduate counseling trainees experienced, interpreted, and made sense of ethical dilemmas encountered in their counseling practice in multicultural contexts. Farther more, the theory enabled the researcher to capture trainees' personal difficulties concerning, ethical decision-making, professional boundaries, and culturally influenced counseling situations. Therefore, this theory was appropriate to this study as it provided grounded methodological lenses to examine the complexity of ethical experiences within real-life counseling contexts.

In contrast, Sue's multicultural counseling framework is practice-oriented and focuses on the importance of cultural competence in counseling which makes it suitable for this study. It mainly focuses on counselors'



awareness of their own cultural values and biases, knowledge of diverse cultural backgrounds, and the development of culturally appropriate intervention skills. Additionally, Sue highlights the role of power, privilege, and social context in shaping counseling relationships and ethical practice. In this study, Sue's Multicultural framework was, used to explain how cultural, religious, and linguistic differences and societal expectations pose ethical challenges for multicultural counselling.

Employing these two complementary frameworks was essential for the current study. While Husserl's phenomenological theory provided a basic understanding about the subjective and personal lived experiences of trainees, Sue's multicultural framework offered insight into the contextual and cultural factors that shape counselling-trainees lived experiences. The two theories enabled a comprehensive analysis of how ethical challenges are both experienced, and constructed within multicultural counseling environments; thereby strengthening the study's theoretical and practical relevance.

CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Major Challenges Faced by Postgraduate Counseling Trainees

Contemporary scholarship highlight that multicultural competence is crucial in ethical counselling practice. Scholars such as Ridley et al. (2025), Sue & Sue (2022) and Chen et al. (2023) argue that counselors with a deeper awareness, knowledge and skills are better equipped to manage ethical dilemmas arise from multicultural counselling contexts. However, empirical studies show that postgraduate counseling trainees encounter multiple challenges in multicultural and pluralistic counselling setups. These include reconciling Western-based ethical standards with local cultural norms, managing conflicts between individual client rights and communal or societal expectations, navigating language and communication barriers, and addressing ethical dilemmas related to power imbalances or culturally sensitive issues and managing professional boundaries (Moodley et al., 2021; Njonge, 2025; Demircioğlu et al., 2025).

Additionally, contemporary scholars such as Wango and Mungai (2020) and Isik et al. (2024) indicate that counselling practitioners face multiple challenges associated with limited supervision, unclear locally adapted indigenous ethical guidelines, practical skill-oriented training, and insufficient exposure to multicultural counselling practice. Houser and Thoma (2023) likewise highlight that there is significant tension between the universal ethical guidelines which include autonomy, confidentiality and justice with the indigenous values which focuses on communality which calls for the need of critical reasoning and cultural sensitivity among multicultural counselling practitioners. Scholars such as Rachels and Rachels (2019) highlight that, different ethical theories including Utilitarianism, Deontological Ethics, Virtue Ethics, and Ethics of Care provide basic guidelines on how to navigate challenges faced in multicultural counselling setups. Moreover, Sidgwick (1874); Gilligan (1982) and Tronto (2013) reveal that these theories emphasize on critical reasoning, culturally grounded communication styles, and the importance of character development in ethical decision-making, which are essential components to this study. Contemporary scholars highlight that these ethical frameworks can help counselling trainees to better reconcile the conflicts arise between professional code of ethics and the culturally grounded practices and expectations (Corey et al., 2021) while providing multicultural counselling in Kenyan contexts.

Role of Training, Supervision, and Curriculum in Preparing Counselling Trainees

Training, supervision and curriculum design are important aspects in counselling trainee preparation. Recent scholarship reveal that training, supervision and curriculum design play crucial role for counselling trainees to navigate challenges associated with multicultural counselling (Chen et al., 2023; Demircioğlu et al., 2025). Likewise, scholars such as Isik et al. (2024) and Ermansons et al. (2024) argue that well-structured training programs, which combine cultural competency, ethical reasoning, and practical skills-oriented training, can enhance trainees' preparedness by enabling them to navigate challenges aroused from multicultural counselling setups. Additionally, it is noted that supervision, in particular, provides a reflective space for trainees to discuss ethical dilemmas, receive guidance on culturally responsive interventions, and integrate theoretical knowledge into practice (Kadushin & Kadushin, 2014).



Contemporary literature indicates that curriculum development that gives priority to multicultural counseling principles, ethical decision-making, and the integration of local cultural knowledge has been, shown to improve trainees' confidence and competence in ethically complex situations (Welfel, 2020; Corey et al., 2021). In the Kenyan multicultural and pluralistic counselling context, well-developed curriculum is very crucial the gaps in trainees' preparedness to navigate culturally specific ethical challenges and to align counseling practice with both professional codes and local cultural norms (Wango & Mungai, 2020; Njonge, 2025).

Strategies Employed by Postgraduate Counselling Trainees

Postgraduate counselling trainees use different strategies to navigate challenges related to counseling practice in multicultural contexts. Scholars note that strategies employed by counseling trainees often include reflective practice, consultation with supervisors or peers, culturally informed adaptations of Western counseling models, and ongoing professional development focused on cultural competence (Chen et al., 2023; Demircioğlu et al., 2025; Isik et al., 2024). Additionally, counselling trainees also draw upon ethical theories, which focus on right decision-making, integrating principles of justice, beneficence, and respect for client autonomy with an awareness of local cultural contexts (Xing & Zheng, 2025).

Empirical scholarship indicate that the strategies employed by counselling trainees enhance ethical reasoning, promote cultural sensitive communication, and foster professional resilience among trainees (Kadushin & Kadushin, 2014). Postgraduate trainees often combine theoretical knowledge, practical supervision, and adaptive strategies, trainees to be able maintain client welfare while navigating the complexities inherent in multicultural and pluralistic counseling contexts (Ermansons et al., 2024).

While contemporary literature establishes the importance of ethical competence, supervision, and training in multicultural counseling; there remains a critical gap in empirical studies exploring the lived experiences of postgraduate counseling trainees in multicultural and pluralistic Kenyan contexts (Corey et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2023; Demircioğlu et al., 2025) which the current study focuses on. Most of the existing scholarships focus theoretical knowledge by emphasizing on what counselling trainees should know instead of focusing on how trainees gain practical skills in practice leaving a gap on practical skills (Isik et al., 2024). Addressing is gap is crucial for developing culturally grounded strategies, which can enhance postgraduate counselling trainees' ability of good decision-making, multicultural competence and cultural responsive counselling practice.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The current study was, guided by the phenomenological qualitative research design to examine the lived experiences of postgraduate counselling trainees in a selected private university in Nairobi, Kenya. The reason for employing this methodology lied on the nature of the research problem that aimed at examining how postgraduate counselling trainees perceive, interpret, and navigate the challenges associated with ethical dilemmas in multicultural counselling contexts. Thus, a phenomenological design is appropriate as it allows for an in-depth exploration of these subjective experiences and the meanings trainees attach to them.

Phenomenological approaches are widely recognized for their effectiveness in capturing lived experiences and uncovering how individuals construct meaning from their daily interactions (Badil et al., 2023). In the context of this study, the design facilitates an understanding of how postgraduate trainees make sense of professional and ethical challenges arising from cultural diversity, conflicting values, and contextual constraints (Adeniran & Tayo-Ladega, 2024). The persistence of ethical dilemmas in multicultural counseling settings such as tensions between professional ethical standards and cultural expectations, language barriers, and limited culturally adapted guidelines demonstrates that this is a real and pressing problem, particularly in non-Western contexts like Kenya.

By doing so, the researcher ensured that the chosen research design and methodology are well-suited to add-



ssing the study's aim, as they enable a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of the ethical challenges faced by postgraduate counseling trainees in multicultural and pluralistic settings.

Study Site

The study was, conducted among postgraduate counseling trainees enrolled in a counseling program at a selected private university in Nairobi, Kenya. Participants included both local and international students representing diverse cultural, ethnic, and national backgrounds. Nairobi, being as one of the Africa's most multicultural and pluralistic cities hosts diverse communities from across Kenya and beyond. This pluralistic nature creates a dynamic environment where diverse cultural and religious values and diverse communication styles meet and pose significant challenge for counseling practitioners.

Participants and Sampling

The study involved ten (10) postgraduate counseling trainees enrolled in a Master's program, in counseling psychology at a selected private University in Kenya, drawn from an estimated population of approximately 45 students. The target population was, considered appropriate due to their direct engagement in counseling practicum, which exposes them to real-life ethical and multicultural counseling situations. Participants were, selected based on specific inclusion criteria, namely being currently enrolled in the program and having undertaken some level of counseling practice, while those without practicum experience were excluded to ensure the relevance of the data.

A purposive sampling technique was, employed to identify participants with rich and relevant experiences related to the phenomenon under study. This approach is widely recommended in qualitative research as it allows for the selection of information-rich cases that can provide in-depth insights into the research problem (Patton, 2015). Participants were, recruited based on their availability, willingness to participate, and direct experience in counseling practice.

The sample size of ten participants was, deemed adequate in line with qualitative research principles, particularly the concept of data saturation, where no new significant information emerges from additional data collection. Empirical evidence suggests that saturation in interview-based studies is often achieved within a relatively small sample, typically between 9 and 17 participants, especially when the study population is relatively homogeneous and the research focus is clearly defined (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). This sample size also allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, consistent with phenomenological research approaches (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection

Data for this study were, collected using semi-structured interview guides with postgraduate counseling trainees, which enabled to obtain in-depth insights into their lived experiences, particularly ethical dilemmas encountered in multicultural and pluralistic counseling contexts. Scholars like Kallio et al. (2016) reveal that semi-structure interview guide is appropriate for qualitative study as it is flexible and allows the researcher structured questions by allowing participants probing, which can enhance emergence of themes, and capturing rich in-depth information.

Participants were, interviewed in a safe and confidential environment, which encouraged them to share openly and honestly. Each interview session took 45-60 minutes and was audio recorded with the consent of participants. Participants were, also fully informed that the purpose of the study was purely for academic use and that they had the right to withdraw at any stage without any consequences.

The study also strictly adhered to research ethical considerations throughout the data collection process. Observed ethical considerations include voluntary participation, confidentiality, and secure data storage. Moreover, to protect participants' identities, all data were anonymized using coded identifiers (P1-P10) means participant 1 - participant 10 during both data collection and analysis.



Data Analysis

Data for the current study were, analyzed through thematic analysis. This approach is very suitable for qualitative research, which aims to identifying, interpreting and reporting patterns in relation to participants lived experiences. Data analysis included transcription, reading and rereading for familiarization, coding and categorizing themes in relation to the study objectives. In line with this, Braun and Clarke's (2022) argue that transcribed data should be, reviewed in detail before generating codes, refine them and finally cluster them into meaningful themes. The employment of this technic enhanced methodological rigor by ensuring systematic data presentation as major themes and systematic interpretation in line with the objectives of the study.

Ethical Considerations

The present study observed research ethical guidelines throughout the research process. Participants were, given clear information on voluntarily participation, confidentiality and informed consent was, signed. Prior to signing the consent, detailed explanation was given on the purpose of the study; that the study aimed for academic purpose only and that the information they shared would be kept confidential, anonymous and secure. Participants were, also informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequence. The ethical considerations employed in this study ensured that the study upheld utmost standard of safety, dignity, confidentiality of participants and the ethical research conduct.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The present study explored the lived experience of post-graduate counselling trainees in multicultural and pluralistic counseling setup in Nairobi, Kenya. This section particularly presents the integrated analysis of both findings and discussions collected from participants supported by existing literature. The study adopted a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore participants live experience. The study also employed a purposive sampling technique to select ten participants based on data saturation. Data for this study were, collected through semi-structure interview guide. The interviews were audio recorded with the participants informed consent and were later transcribed verbatim to ensure that participants responses were captured accurately and truthfully.

Data for this study were, analyzed through systematic thematic data analysis process. The researcher read the transcripts repeatedly to ensure familiarization and assimilation of the collected data. Data were, coded and labeled using meaningful symbols, to keep participants anonymity and to facilitate data analysis. The codes then were organized and grouped into broader theme in relation to the objectives of the study. The findings and the discussion of this study are, presented in three themes aligning with the objectives of the study. These themes include: a) major challenges faced by postgraduate counseling trainees b) the role of training, supervision and curriculum and c) strategies used by postgraduate trainees to navigate these challenges. Moreover, participants' voices are, maintained the way they were, shared by situating them within existing literature. The study strictly adhered to research ethics such as informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity to ensure participants safety and dignity.

Major Challenges Postgraduate Counseling Trainees Face

The findings in this study reveal that postgraduate counselling trainees face many interconnected challenges while working in multicultural and pluralistic contexts in Kenya. According to the reports from participants, these challenges include language barriers, cultural differences, dilemma about confidentiality and boundary management issues and ethical decision-making problems.

Language barrier was, identified as one of the major challenges faced by participants. According to their report, many clients spoke only in their mother tongue and could not communicate in English or Kiswahili and that this limited their communication, which even made them look for translators. Moreover, some of the counseling trainees shared that they come from other nationalities and do not understand Kiswahili and they found it very challenging.



Participant 2 explained:

“I, as a foreigner who does not speak Kiswahili, was very challenged by my inability to communicate effectively as many of my clients were not able to speak English. As a result, I had to rely on translators, which extended the duration of my practicum beyond the expected time-frame and limited the openness of my clients.” (Participant 2)

In line with language barrier, Participant 5 added:

“People may think that it is the international trainees only who are challenged by language barriers, but communication barriers also occur among Kenya counseling trainees when working with clients from different tribes who speak only their mother tongues.” (Participant 5)

These findings concerning language barrier are, supported by the arguments of Chen et al. (2023), who argue that language barriers weaken therapeutic rapport and complicate counseling processes. This is because relying on interpreters introduces concerns related to confidentiality, accuracy of meaning, and disruption of the natural flow of interaction, which may affect trust building between counselor and clients.

Cultural differences also emerged as one of the major challenges, which significantly influenced counseling interactions. Counselling trainees shared that they faced multiple challenges that roused from diverse belief systems and practices and communication styles, which was different from the instructions given in their theoretical training.

In line with this Participant 5 reported:

“I found working and helping clients from different communities very challenging. Like the Massai, they practice early marriage, which influences the participation of females in formal education, and it is hard to help them in this regard. (Participant 5)

Participant 2 likewise shared:

“Some clients are not ready to see counselors younger than themselves and they prefers counselors who are advanced in age. This indicates that there is cultural differences in help-seeking behavior among clients.” (Participant 2)

Similarly, Participant 5 further added:

“Psychological issues in some communities are attributed with witchcraft and ancestral curse and this makes counselling difficult as at times you may not be able to explain this to the clients. At times I found it very difficult to create awareness or explain these issues to my client who believed that she was bewitched while her issue was severe depression caused by some traumatic experiences.” (Participant 5)

These findings underscore that there is the substantial conflict and mismatch between the Western-based counselling practice and culturally grounded practice and understanding of mental health. These findings are consistent with that of Xing and Zheng (2025) who discovered that cultural beliefs and norms influence counselling process.

Participants also identified substantial dilemma with confidentiality issues particularly in counselling which involved minors. It was, noted that counselling trainees were, and challenged by parents whose cultural expectations often prioritized communality and family involvement over individual privacy.

Participant 1 revealed that her experience as follows:

“We as Africans, we value family life and we believe that parents should know everything that is going on with their children and nothing should remain hidden from them. This posed a great challenge on



me particularly concerning confidentiality on whether to keep the issue confidential or report to the family for the betterment of the minor. You know, this is not an easy thing.” (Participant 1)

This finding aligns with Corey et al. (2021) who argues that ethical tensions often arise when professional standards and indigenous values conflict each other and that this is common in the African counselling set which prioritize collectivism over individualism.

Participants also reported that professional boundary management issue was one of the significant challenges they faced as some clients expected to create deeper relationships, which goes beyond their professional limits.

Participant 3 stated:

“Some of the clients expected me to have ongoing contact and relate with them as a close friend, including family visit. Some others also expected me to provide material assistance, which is beyond the scope of counselling. This indicates that many clients have limited knowledge on the role of counsellors and counselling.” (Participant 3)

Moreover, Participant 4 added:

“Some clients expected material assistance which include house rent, food staff, clothing and home visit.” (Participant 4)

According to the trainees’ explanations, the expectations on material assistance from their clients posed a great challenge on them, requiring them to maintain professional boundary at the same time remain culturally responsive and empathetic.

Participants also identified that ethical decision-making was another challenge they encountered, particularly when the concerns shared by the clients conflict with the trainees’ personal, cultural or religious values.

In line with this, Participant 6 reported:

“Sometimes clients share problems which are conflicting with my personal, religious or cultural values and I find it very hard what to say. For instance, in cases of abortion, or rape. I sometimes get tempted to influence their decisions by imposing my personal values.” (Participant 6)

This finding is consistent with Welfel (2020), who argues that counselling trainees often encounter challenges associated with ethical uncertainty while working in multicultural counselling contexts. According to Welfel, these dilemmas require not only theoretical knowledge about ethical codes but also practical skills on how to apply them with flexibility and cultural sensitivity.

Role of Training, Supervision, and Curriculum in Preparing Counselling Trainees

The findings of this study indicate that training, supervision and curriculum play important role in preparing postgraduate counseling trainees for multicultural counseling practice in Kenya. However, the findings also reveal that training, supervision and curriculum do not adequately prepare trainees to navigate challenges related to multicultural counseling. Participants reported that training provided fundamental knowledge and basic counseling skill; but this was, perceived as not adequate in equipping them to handle challenges face in multicultural counseling contexts.

In relation to training provided Participant 4 stated:

“The kind of training we get in our college provides us with basic knowledge and skills which is very good to start, but it does not help us well to face the multiple challenges which arise from multicultural counselling contexts which we encounter.” (Participant 4)

In the same way, Participant 10 added:



“Yes, the curriculum provides basic guidance on how to navigate challenges in a very general way, but not very deep and related to our context as it is based on Western culture.” (Participant 10)

The findings concerning training and curriculum support the assertion made by Demircioğlu et al. (2025), suggesting that formal training, which mostly focuses on theory, should be supported by practical training, related to multicultural skills which can help trainees navigate challenges related to multicultural issues. The findings also suggest that the dominance of Western based curriculum limits its applicability to local counselling contexts creating a gap between theory and practice.

Participants also highlighted supervision as one of the major components. They reported that supervision provided them opportunity for reflection, feedback and guidance and served as a bridge between theoretical knowledge and practice. Despite its importance, trainees also acknowledged some limitations about supervision.

In line with this, Participant 8 noted:

“As counselling trainees, we know that supervision is very crucial for our career as we are also beginners, but the number of well-trained counselors is limited, especially in distant places and far villages.” (Participant 8)

Similarly, participant 7 explained:

“As trainees, we postgraduate counseling students have only basic theoretical knowledge and not grounded in practical skills. We need good supervision, which can help us navigate the challenges we face. However, the number of the counselors we have is limited and I don't think those we have are also particularly prepared for multicultural supervision.” (Participant 7)

The reports from the counselling trainees align with Isik et al. (2024) suggesting that supervision is crucial for counselling competence development. Nevertheless, availability, accessibility and multicultural competence of counselors is limited and this reduces the effectiveness of supervision.

As the findings suggest, training and curriculum offer trainees theoretical knowledge, while supervision provide them with practical and reflective support. However, their accessibility, their nature and their contextual limitation creates a gap suggesting the need for more cultural sensitive curricula, practical training and improved supervision systems, which can help trainees navigate challenges related to multicultural counseling contexts.

Strategies Employed by Postgraduate Counselling Trainees

The findings reveal that postgraduate counselling trainees employ variety of strategies despite they encounter challenges arise from multicultural counseling setups. The strategies include personal and professional approaches. Trainees shared that they employ personal strategies, which include patience, reflection, deep understanding and acceptance when they face some challenges, which enabled them to control their emotions, remain open-minded and take right decision.

Participant 1 explained:

“When I find myself in dilemmas and not knowing what to do, I buy time to give time to the client to think and take good decision. Buying time not only helps the client but also gives room to me to pray, reflect and read more.” (Participant 1)

Additionally, Participant 9 stated:

“When I am in dilemma especially related to cultural differences, I try to accept my clients the way they are and really try not to put my personal, cultural and religious values on them as we all have different background.” (Participant 9)



These reports indicate that self-awareness, emotional regulation and cultural sensitivity are very crucial in counseling practice practiced in multicultural and pluralist setups.

Trainees also reported that they used professional strategies, which include adherence to counseling ethical principles such as maintaining professional boundaries, client autonomy, empathy and confidentiality, which helped them navigate different challenges. Participants highlighted that adherence to counselling ethics are very crucial and gave them guidance in complex situations. They also shared that they engaged in continuous learning through reading and self-reflection, which helped them understand their clients' issues better. Trainees also employed professional distancing to maintain professional space and avoid emotional over-involvement.

Collaborative strategies such as peer consultation, and supervision were, also highlighted as crucial support mechanisms. Trainees shared that they seek peer assistance and professional help from supervisors.

Participant 3 stated:

“When I face some challenges related to decision making, I first share with my colleagues and then with my supervisors. This has been helping me to navigate some challenges which I faced.”
(Participant 3)

These findings support the assertion of Chen et al. (2023), Demircioğlu et al. (2025) and Isik et al. (2024) who noted the importance of reflective practice, supervision and experimental learning in developing multicultural counseling competence. The strategies employed by counseling trainees reflect variety of ethical frameworks including deontological ethics, utilitarian reasoning, virtue ethics, and ethics of care, and phenomenological perspective that focuses on understanding client's daily experiences.

The responses from counselling trainees reveal that they actively involve adaptive, reflective and collaborative strategies to navigate challenges, which arise from multicultural counseling contexts. The findings not only inform trainee's personal capability and resilience but also points out the need for strengthening institutional support systems such as culturally sensitive training, accessibility of quality supervision and frameworks relevant to local counseling practices.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the lived experiences of postgraduate counseling trainees in multicultural and pluralistic counseling contexts in Kenya. The study focused on three major themes such as the challenges faced by postgraduate counseling trainees, the role of training, supervision, and curriculum, and the strategies employed by trainees to navigate these challenges. The findings highlighted that postgraduate counselling trainees face diverse challenges associated with language barriers, personal, religious and cultural value conflicts and some issues related to professional boundary managements. The findings further underscore that despite training, supervision and curriculum provide a vital basis for counselling practice; they are often insufficient to fully, prepare counselling trainees for multicultural counselling setups. Consequently, counselling trainees relied on the combination of personal and professional strategies, which include personal reflection, prayer, peer and supervisor consultation and adherence to ethical codes. The study reveals that effective multicultural counselling in Kenyan context requires not only theoretical knowledge and technical competence but also culturally rooted approach, ethical flexibility and practical skills.

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