Formulating the Malaysia Counsellor Performance Indicator (M-CPI): Insights from Needs Analysis and Semi-Structured Interviews

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the initial phase of developing the Malaysia Counsellor Performance Indicator (M-CPI), a new assessment tool designed to evaluate counsellor performance. Employing a mixed-method research design, the study commenced with a needs analysis conducted through an online survey, which garnered responses from 102 participants. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine (9) participants to identify essential components of the M-CPI. The analysis revealed eight critical domains of counsellor performance: (i) knowledge (theoretical and knowledge transfer), (ii) skills (case management, practical skills, and academic/professional writing), (iii) interpersonal relationships and interaction, (iv) cultural and religiosity, (v) professional roles and expertise, (vi) ethics and legality, (vii) attitudes and personality, and (viii) referral practices. The findings underscore the multifaceted nature of counselling competencies, laying the groundwork for the M-CPI and enhancing the assessment of counsellor performance in Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, the field of counselling has evolved significantly, reflecting the country's diverse cultural landscape and the growing recognition of mental health issues. Counsellors play a crucial role in promoting mental well-being and facilitating personal growth among individuals. Recent studies emphasize the importance of establishing performance evaluation frameworks that ensure counsellors meet the evolving demands of their clients and the community (Koh et al., 2021; Lee & Ahmad, 2022). Currently, the instruments used to measure counsellor performance often lack specificity and relevance to the Malaysian context, highlighting the necessity for localized performance indicators that reflect the unique challenges and expectations faced by counsellors (Chong & Toh, 2023; Tan et al., 2023).

This study aims to formulate Malaysia-specific counsellor performance indicators through a thorough needs analysis and semi-structured interviews with practising counsellors. This approach will provide valuable insights into the competencies and skills required for effective counselling while identifying gaps in existing performance measurement tools (Rahman & Lee, 2022). The significance of this research lies in its potential to enhance professional standards in counselling, ultimately leading to improved client outcomes and establishing a more robust framework for accountability in the profession (Ismail et al., 2023). By aligning performance indicators with the cultural and social dynamics of Malaysia, the study will contribute to the ongoing development of a skilled counselling workforce capable of effectively addressing the mental health needs of the population.

Research Objectives

The research objectives encompass the following aims:

i) To identify the essential competencies required for effective counselling in Malaysia.

ii) To formulate a comprehensive framework for the M-CPI that reflects the unique cultural, social, and professional needs of Malaysian counsellors.

Research Questions

This study aims to address the following research questions in relation to the Malaysia-Counsellor Performance Indicator (M-CPI):

i) What essential competencies are required for effective counselling in Malaysia?

ii) How can these competencies be incorporated into a comprehensive framework for the Malaysia Counsellor Performance Indicator (M-CPI) that addresses the unique cultural, social, and professional needs of Malaysian counsellors?

Literature Review

Several frameworks and models are essential for evaluating counsellor performance. The Iceberg Model of Competencies illustrates that effective counselling requires both visible skills and underlying traits, emphasizing the importance of attitudes and values (Katz et al., 2022). Competency-Based Frameworks outline specific skills necessary for effective practice, with recent studies highlighting the need for cultural competence and adaptability (Harrison et al., 2021). Performance Appraisal Systems utilize self-assessments and peer reviews for a comprehensive evaluation, showing effectiveness in enhancing accountability and professional growth (Brewster et al., 2020). Multidimensional Models consider various performance aspects, including client outcomes and professional development, reinforcing the need for a holistic approach to evaluation (Smith & O'Sullivan, 2023). Evidence-Based Practice Models stress the integration of empirical research in evaluating effectiveness, emphasizing the importance of data-driven decisions in counselling (Rogers et al., 2021).

Finally, Reflective Practice Models encourage counsellors to self-reflect on their experiences to identify strengths and areas for improvement, with recent findings supporting its role in professional development (Nguyen et al., 2022). Together, these models provide a holistic approach to understanding and enhancing counsellor performance. By recognizing that effective counselling relies on both observable skills and deeper traits, the M-CPI can include criteria that assess not only technical competencies but also personal attributes such as empathy, cultural sensitivity, and ethical judgment (Katz et al., 2022). This dual focus ensures a more holistic evaluation of counsellor effectiveness. The M-CPI can outline specific competencies essential for counselling practice in Malaysia, including communication skills, cultural competence, and ethical decision-making (Harrison et al., 2021). By defining these competencies clearly, the indicator can guide professional development and training programs.

The integration of self-assessments, supervisors and peer reviews within the M-CPI can enhance accountability among counsellors and provide multiple perspectives on performance (Brewster et al., 2020). This approach allows for a well-rounded evaluation that considers various stakeholders' insights. The M-CPI should evaluate performance across multiple dimensions, including client outcomes and professional development, as these factors are critical indicators of counselling effectiveness (Smith & O'Sullivan, 2023). This ensures that the performance indicator reflects a comprehensive view of a counsellor's impact.

The M-CPI can incorporate evidence-based metrics to assess counselling outcomes effectively, ensuring that the practices align with the latest research findings and best practices (Rogers et al., 2021). This will enhance the credibility and relevance of the performance indicator. By promoting need analysis as part of the initial phase of developing the M-CPI, counsellors can continuously evaluate and improve their practice. This aligns with recent findings that highlight the importance of reflective practices in professional development (Nguyen et al., 2022).

In summary, leveraging these models and frameworks will enable the formulation of the M-CPI to be comprehensive, relevant, and aligned with current best practices in counselling. This approach not only enhances the evaluation process but also supports the ongoing professional development of counsellors in Malaysia.
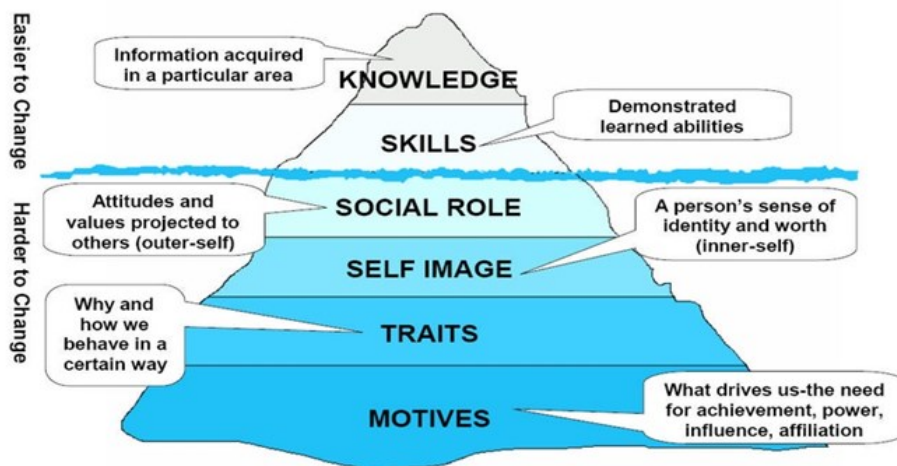

Figure 1:   *Iceberg Model of Competencies*

The iceberg model of competencies **(Figure 1)** plays an importance role to illustrates that visible skills and knowledge comprise only a small portion of a person's overall competencies, while deeper, less visible attributes such as values, attitudes, and personality traits lie beneath the surface. This model can be instrumental in formulating questions for need analysis by encouraging researchers to explore both observable behaviours and underlying characteristics that contribute to effective performance. For instance, the need analysis ask respondents to rate the importance of specific skills alongside their perceptions of the values and attitudes that support those skills in practice. By adopting this comprehensive approach, the survey can yield richer insights into the competencies necessary for success in various roles (Schulte, 2022).

In the Malaysian context, multicultural counselling self-efficacy is particularly vital due to the country's rich tapestry of ethnicities and cultures, including Malay, Chinese, Indian, and indigenous groups. Counsellors must possess cultural competence to navigate the diverse values, beliefs, and practices of their clients effectively. A pertinent needs analysis question could be, "How confident do you feel in your ability to engage with clients from different cultural backgrounds prevalent in Malaysia?" This inquiry can uncover areas where counsellors may need further training or support, ultimately enhancing their effectiveness in providing culturally sensitive services (Ng et al., 2023). By integrating the iceberg model of competencies, which emphasizes that underlying attributes such as values and attitudes are crucial for effective performance, counsellors can better understand the deeper

aspects of their self-efficacy. This holistic approach not only helps identify specific skills that need development but also fosters a greater awareness of the personal qualities that contribute to successful multicultural counselling, leading to improved outcomes for clients across Malaysia.

Methodology

This mixed-method study employs a sequential exploratory design to formulate the Malaysia- Counselor Performance Indicator (M-CPI), focusing on the initial phase of the process. In this phase, researchers first conduct a needs analysis to identify the key components essential for the M-CPI, ensuring that the framework aligns with the specific cultural and contextual demands of counselling in Malaysia. Following this, semi-structured interviews with relevant the experts in the field are conducted to gather qualitative insights that inform the item writing constructs. This combination of quantitative and qualitative methods allows for a comprehensive understanding of the competencies required for effective multicultural counselling, ultimately leading to the development of a robust initial draft of the M-CPI (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2022).

Table 1: *Research design process Phase One*

Objectives	Process
• To identify the essential competencies required for effective counselling in Malaysia. • To formulate a comprehensive framework for the M-CPI that reflects the unique culture, social and professional needs of Malaysian counsellors.	1) Need Analysis 2) Semi-Structured Interview 3) First draft of M-CPI (item writing & constructs)

In this mixed-methods study, data collection for the needs analysis involved a quantitative survey with 102 respondents, aimed at identifying the key components necessary for establishing best practice indicators for counselling competency in Malaysia. The needs assessment focused on six (6) critical components: knowledge, skills, interpersonal relationships, interaction with other professionals, multicultural awareness, and religiosity, alongside ethics and professionalism. Notably, three of these components knowledge, skills, and interpersonal relationships were adapted from Iannelli (2000) Counsellor Performance Indicators, which emphasize essential counsellor skills such as paraphrasing, managing confrontation, and formulating both open and closed-ended questions. The interpersonal relationship component pertains to maintaining professional rapport during counselling sessions. The remaining three components were informed by contemporary Malaysian studies, including Yusoff and Ghazali's (2022) work on the Modification of the Counsellor Performance Inventory and Azizah et al. (2015), which highlight the significance of multiculturalism in a multi-ethnic society. The effectiveness of a competent counsellor in Malaysia is further underscored by Mohd Jaladin (2019), who emphasizes the importance of interactions among counsellors, clients, and other professionals.

In addition to the survey, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with nine experts, all registered counsellors with over fifteen years of experience in supervision. These participants, primarily Heads of Department and senior lecturers, provided valuable insights into the competencies required for effective counselling practice in Malaysia, enriching the overall data collection process (Nor Mazlina, 2022; Wan Marzuki, 2019).

The researcher conducted interviews with experts to gather insights for the needs assessment analysis of the Malaysia-Counselor Performance Indicator (M-CPI). This process aimed to provide an overview and initial understanding of the issues to be discussed during the interviews. The interview protocol consisted of six questions:

1. What components are required to measure the counsellor's performance in your organization? (This serves as a demographic question.)
2. What mechanisms or components are utilized for measuring counsellors performance? Please explain the details of these components.

3. Do you believe the components currently in place are sufficient for measuring counsellors performance?
4. From your perspective, can the measurement components be improved?
5. Who do you believe should be responsible for answering the performance indicators: supervisors/superiors or the counsellors themselves (self-rating)?
6. If there were one indicator that could be adopted to measure counsellors performance development, would you consider using it to evaluate your staff?

Each interview session lasted between 60 to 90 minutes, during which the experts demonstrated strong commitment and provided valuable insights for the development of the M-CPI. The experts noted that implementing these indicators could lead to significant improvements in the supervision of counselling competence in Malaysia.

Findings

In the initial phase of developing the Malaysia counsellor performance indicator, the findings from the needs analysis indicate that over 50% of counsellors possess a solid awareness of their skills and knowledge, which is crucial for effective practice. This self-awareness among counsellors is significant as it contributes to their professional development and enhances the quality of counselling services provided. Research by McLeod (2020) emphasizes that self-awareness is a foundational element in the counselling profession, as it enables practitioners to reflect on their competencies and areas for improvement, ultimately leading to better client outcomes. Therefore, the high percentage of counsellors demonstrating awareness of their skills underscores the importance of integrating this aspect into performance indicators, ensuring that they reflect both competence and the continuous growth of counselling professionals in Malaysia. The explanation below show the results for each construct related to this study.

For the first construct Knowledge: There are six (6) items of this construct. For item one (1), two (2), three (3) and four (4) majority respondents answered agree at the score of four (4). For item five (5) and six (6), majority respondents indicated strongly agree. Thus, findings have shown that majority of respondents reflected that they were knowledgeable. The mean scores between items were slightly different and there were no significant differences between them. Details on the percentage, frequency, mean and standard deviation were illustrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2: *Percentage and Frequency of Knowledge Construct*

Items	Frequency	Percentage
1. I am knowledgeable in conducting individual counselling session	56	54.9%
2. I am knowledgeable in conducting group counselling session	57	55.9%
3. I am knowledgeable in conducting guidance activities that was assigned to me	48	47.1%
4. I am knowledgeable in understanding the theory when conducting counselling session	48	47.1%

	50	49.0%
5. I am knowledgeable in understanding the theory when conducting counselling session	50	49.0%
6. I am knowledgeable in understanding the stages/process when conducting counselling session	50	49.0%

Skills consisted nine (9) items. Majority respondents answered agree for items one (1), two (2), five (5) and six (6). Moreover, items three (3) until nine (9) showed strongly agree on skills.

Result showed the majority of respondents skilful in counselling skills. Details on the percentage and frequency in Table 3.

Table 3: *Percentage and Frequency of Skills Construct*

Items	Frequency	Percentage
1. I am skilful in facilitating client to develop goal setting during counselling session	50	49.0%
2. I am skilful in using reflection of content in counselling session	58	56.9%
3. I am skilful in using reflection of feeling in counselling session	51	50.0%
4. I am skilful in using paraphrasing in counselling session	51	50.0%
5. I am skilful in using open-ended questions in counselling session	57	55.9%
6. I am skilful in using closed-ended questions in counselling session	55	53.9%
7. I am skilful in using restatement in counselling session	54	52.9%
8. I am skilful in using confrontation in counselling session	42	41.2%
9. I am skilful in using summarisation in counselling session	49	48.0%

Interpersonal Relationship Construct: There are seven (7) items of this construct. For items one (1), three (3), four (4) and five (5) majority respondents answered strongly agree at the score of five (5). Hence, items two (2), six (6) and seven (7) majority respondents answer agree at the score of four (4). Result showed majority of respondents reflected that they are good in interpersonal relationship. Details on the percentage and frequency in Table 4.

Table 4: *Percentage and Frequency of Interpersonal Relationship Construct*

Items	Frequency	Percentage
1. I have good relationship with my client	65	63.7%
2. I communicate effectively with my client	51	50.0%
3. I clearly understand my clients' story	54	52.9%
4. I understand the body language of my client.	50	49.0%
5. I understand the non-verbal communication of my client.	46	45.1%
6. I understand the non-verbal behaviour of my client	50	49.0%
7. I am confident in conducting counselling session	52	51.0%

Interaction: There are four (4) items of this construct. For items one (1), two (2) and four (4) majority respondents answered strongly agree at the score of five (5). Hence, items three (3) majority respondent answer agree at the score of four (4). Result showed majority of respondents reflected that they are good in interaction. Details on the percentage and frequency in Table 5.

Table 5: *Percentage and Frequency of Interaction Construct*

Items	Frequency	Percentage
1. I have good interaction with my client	60	58.8%
2. I have good working alliance with my client	55	53.9%
3. I am able to conceptualise clients' issue in counselling session	50	49.0%
4. I am able to encourage client to interact in counselling session	55	53.9%

Multicultural and Religiosity: There are four (4) items of this construct. For items one (1), two (2) and three (3) majority respondents answered agree at the score of four (4). Hence, items four (4) majority respondent answer strongly agree at the score of five (5). Result showed majority of respondents reflected that they are good in multicultural and religiosity. Details on the percentage and frequency in Table 6.

Table 6: *Percentage and Frequency of Multicultural and Religiosity Construct*

Items	Frequency	Percentage
1. I understand client from different cultural background	51	50.0%
2. I am able to conduct counselling session with client from multicultural background	55	53.9%
3. I am able to tolerate with client from multicultural background	50	49.0%
4. I am able to conduct counselling session with different religion client	53	53.0%

Ethics and Professionalism: There are four (4) items of this construct. For items one (1) until five (5) majority respondents answered strongly agree at the score of five (5). Result showed majority of respondents reflected that they are good in understanding ethics and professionalism. Details on the percentage and frequency in Table 7.

Table 7: *Percentage and Frequency of Ethics and Professionalism Construct*

Items	Frequency	Percentage
1. I understand the counselling ethical as a counsellor when conducting counselling session	65	63.7%
2. I am applying ethics during counselling session	67	65.7%
3. I am professional in conducting counselling session	67	65.7%
4. I prepare reports and documentations of counselling session according to Malaysia Board of Counsellors	51	50.0%

The results from the Percentage and Frequency analysis concerning various constructs namely knowledge, skills, interpersonal relationships, interaction, multicultural competence, and ethics and professionalism provide a robust justification for identifying the key components to include in the Malaysia Counsellor Performance Indicator (M-CPI). These constructs not only reflect essential competencies for effective counselling but also align with contemporary frameworks that emphasize a holistic approach to counsellor evaluation.

Recent studies highlight that a well-rounded assessment of counsellor performance must incorporate these dimensions to ensure comprehensive service delivery (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2016). Specifically, the inclusion of multicultural competence and ethical professionalism is critical, as they foster inclusive practices and uphold the integrity of the counselling profession (Sue et al., 2019). Thus, integrating these constructs into the M-CPI will enhance its relevance and effectiveness in evaluating counsellor performance in Malaysia.

Table 8: *Result from Semi-Structured Interview (Construct suggestion)*

No	Name of Construct	Suggestion by an Expert (participant)
1.	**Knowledge (Theoretical and knowledge transfer)**	Participant 01,02,03,04,05,06,07,08,09
	Example Comment: *"Measuring performance of counsellor is including the knowledge. It is not only the theoretical knowledge but the transferring knowledge to other is also consider as performance indicator."*	Participant 02
2.	**Skills (Case management, practical skills and academic/professional writing)**	Participant 01,02,03,04,05,06,07,08,09
	Example Comment: *"Component skills for instance the ability of managing the case, practical skill and academic or professional writing importance in counsellor performance"*	Participant 05
3.	**Interpersonal Relationship and Interaction.**	Participant 01,02,03,04,05,06,07,08,09
	Example Comment: *"For me in measuring performance of counsellors, the element of interpersonal relationship and interaction with client is one of importance component", because we are counsellor have to have to kind of attribute"*	Participant 01
4.	**Cultural and Religiosity**	Participant 01,02,04,05,08,09
		Participant 02
	Example Comment: *"Since our country have multi-racial community, so component related to cultural, and religiosity is need to consider"*	
5.	**Professional Roles and Expertise**	Participant 01,03,05,08,
		Participant 03
	Example Comment: *"As a counsellor the professionalism and their expertise are importance in ensuring the effectiveness of counselling session with client and their profession"*	
6.	**Ethics and Legality**	Participant 02,03,04,05 ,09
		Participant 04
	Example Comment: *"Mastering the knowledge and understanding of ethics and legality when dealing with multiracial client is important. Protecting client right is one of condition for counsellors when conducting client session"*	
7.	**Attitude and Personality**	Participant 01,04,05,
		Participant 01

Example Comment: *"Warm, friendly and approachable is the attitude and personality that should have by counsellors. So, client would like to turn up to the session"*

8.	**Referral**	Participant 01,03,04,05,07,08

Example Comment: *"As a counsellor he or she need to do referral, if necessary, if not it will cause trouble to the client"* — Participant 04

9.	**Articulate Philosophy of Profession**	Participant 01,02,03, 09

Example Comment: *"Counsellor need to enhance their ability in order to understand the clients' issues from different perspective, and they is also need to enrol in competency workshop"* — Participant 02

The findings **(Table 8)** indicate a consensus among experts regarding the inclusion of the constructs of knowledge, skills, and interpersonal relationships in the Malaysia Counsellor Performance Indicator (M-CPI), highlighting their fundamental role in effective counselling practice. These constructs are universally acknowledged as essential components that contribute significantly to a counsellor's effectiveness and client outcomes. Conversely, other constructs received varied support, with some experts suggesting their inclusion based on specific contextual needs or emerging trends in the counselling field.

This variation may reflect differing priorities or experiences among practitioners, emphasizing the dynamic nature of counselling competencies. Nevertheless, all identified constructs are deemed important, warranting further examination in the next phase of testing content validation. This step will ensure that each construct is appropriately integrated and relevant to the Malaysian context, ultimately enhancing the reliability and applicability of the M-CPI.

Table 9: *Content Validation by Experts for Each Construct in percent (%)*

No	Construct	P 01	P 02	P 03	P 04	P 05	P 06	P 07	P 08	P 09
1.	Knowledge (8 items)	100%	80%	100%	90%	90%	90%	90%	100%	80%
2.	Skills (11 items)	90%	80%	70%	100%	90%	80%	90%	100%	100%
3.	Interpersonal Relationship (11 items)	100%	90%	70%	100%	90%	80%	90%	100%	100%
4.	Multicultural Aspect (4 items)	90%	90%	90%	100%	90%	100%	90%	100%	40%
5.	Professional Roles and Expertise (11 items)	100%	90%	90%	90%	80%	80%	100%	100%	100%
6.	Ethic and Legality (4 items)	90%	80%	90%	100%	100%	100%	90%	100%	40%
7.	Attitude and Personality (8 items)	100%	80%	80%	100%	90%	90%	90%	100%	80%
8.	Referral (4 items)	100%	90%	100%	100%	90%	100%	90%	100%	40%
9.	Articulate philosophy of profession (4 items)	100%	80%	90%	100%	90%	100%	100%	100%	40%

Among the nine constructs identified, most received validation from experts with results ranging from 70% to 100%. However, Participant 09 expressed concerns regarding certain constructs, such as multicultural competence, ethics and legality, referral, and articulating the philosophy of the profession, rating them lower at approximately 40%. This feedback suggests that some items within these constructs may require revision or rewording to enhance clarity and relevance. Conversely, Participant 08 provided a perfect score of 100% for all constructs, reinforcing their overall acceptability.

These findings indicate that while the majority of constructs are supported, there is a need for refinement based on expert feedback. As noted by McLeod (2020), incorporating expert insights is vital for ensuring that performance indicators accurately reflect the necessary competencies in a given context. The researchers will work to edit and improve the items and constructs based on the experts' comments, ultimately enhancing the robustness of the Malaysia Counsellor Performance Indicator (M-CPI).

DISCUSSION

The results of the percentage and frequency analysis underscore the importance of incorporating key constructs; knowledge, skills, interpersonal relationships, interaction, multicultural competence, and ethics and professionalism—into the Malaysia Counsellor Performance Indicator (M-CPI). This integration not only aligns the M-CPI with contemporary frameworks for holistic counsellor evaluation but also addresses the unique needs of the Malaysian counselling profession. The recognition of multicultural competence and ethical professionalism as essential components is particularly significant in Malaysia, where the diverse cultural landscape necessitates that counsellors possess the skills to navigate various cultural contexts while maintaining ethical standards (Koh et al., 2021; Lee & Ahmad, 2022). The findings affirm that effective counselling in Malaysia requires an assessment framework that reflects these competencies, thereby enhancing the overall quality of mental health services.

The feedback from experts, particularly the concerns raised by Participant 09 regarding certain constructs, highlights a critical area for improvement within the M-CPI. This necessitates a careful revision of constructs, especially in areas that are perceived as less relevant or clear. The mixed validation results indicate a pressing need for ongoing dialogue within the counselling community to refine these performance indicators (Tan et al., 2023). As noted by Rahman and Lee (2022), incorporating expert insights is crucial for developing instruments that accurately reflect the competencies needed in the Malaysian context. The current state of the counselling profession in Malaysia, characterized by varying levels of training and professional development, underscores the urgency of this refinement. By aligning the M-CPI with expert input and contemporary needs, this study aims to enhance professional standards, ultimately fostering a more competent and ethical counselling workforce capable of addressing the mental health challenges faced by the Malaysian population.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this study has successfully identified critical constructs for the Malaysia Counsellor Performance Indicator (M-CPI), including knowledge, skills, interpersonal relationships, interaction, multicultural competence, and ethics and professionalism that diverse in nine (9) constructs. The findings reveal that while most constructs received strong validation from experts, there are areas requiring refinement, particularly in multicultural competence and ethical considerations. These insights underscore the necessity for a tailored performance indicator that reflects the unique cultural and professional landscape of counselling in Malaysia.

Looking ahead, future research should focus on the continuous refinement of the M-CPI based on evolving professional standards and emerging mental health needs in Malaysia. Engaging a broader pool of stakeholders, including clients and community leaders, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the competencies required for effective counselling. Additionally, longitudinal studies could assess the long-term impact of the M-CPI on counselling practices and client outcomes. However, this study is not without its limitations. The reliance on expert feedback, while valuable, may not capture the full spectrum of perspectives from practising counsellors across diverse settings. Furthermore, the sample size was limited, which could affect the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should consider a larger and more diverse participant base to enhance the robustness of the conclusions drawn.

Practically, the implementation of the M-CPI has significant implications for the counselling profession in Malaysia. It can serve as a foundation for developing training programs, enhancing supervision practices, and informing policy-making in mental health services. By establishing a clear set of performance indicators, this study aims to elevate the standards of counselling practice, ultimately leading to improved mental health outcomes for clients in Malaysia.

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