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“A Big Part Is To Address the Elephant”: International Counseling Trainees’ Experiences in Clinical Supervision in the United States

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“A Big Part Is To Address the Elephant”: International Counseling Trainees’ Experiences in Clinical Supervision in the United States

Abstract

Enrollment of international counseling trainees in graduate counseling programs accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) in the United States is considerably high. Researchers previously revealed that international counseling trainees’ supervision challenges related to language barriers, relationship-building processes, supportive and unsupportive experiences, and limited supervisor attention to diversity issues. In this qualitative study, the authors used reflective thematic analysis to explore the experiences of international counseling trainees (n = 14) in clinical supervision. Four key findings were: (a) the need to address the “elephant”: supervisor failure to address cultural aspects; (b) acculturative challenges and impact on supervision; (c) supportive and unsupportive supervisory alliances; and (d) the need for supervisor cultural curiosity, knowledge, competence, and sensitivity. The authors discuss implications for supervision practice and research.

Keywords

International, Counseling Trainees, Culture, Supervision, CACREP Accredited Programs

International students comprise individuals who are considered non-U.S. citizens and non-immigrants (Nilsson & Andersen, 2004). Across U.S. colleges and universities, enrollment trends over the past 10 years have indicated a consistent rise in the number of international students (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2019). Enrollment data show a total enrollment of 1,095,299 international students, 5.5% of total U.S. students during the 2018-2019 academic year (IIE, 2019; National Association of Foreign Student Advisers [NAFSA], 2020). Enrollment in graduate programs includes those accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), which focuses on training counselors and/or counselor educators. Per the available CACREP Vital Statistics Report (2017), 4.45% of the students enrolled in master's and doctoral-level counseling programs held an international status. Despite constituting a relatively small number across counseling programs, international counseling students usually bring substantial cultural diversity, richness, and exposure to the programs in which they are enrolled. To this end, the literature shows attention to a broad spectrum of topics focused on international counseling students, such as the need for consideration of cultural diversity issues, mental health experiences, psychosocial strengths, doctoral students' identities, acculturation and self-efficacy, the impact of race-ethnicity on self-identity and acculturative stress and, professional and multicultural identity development, to name a few (Anandavalli et al., 2021a; Anandavalli et al., 2021b; Interiano & Lim, 2018; Interiano-Shiverdecker et al., 2019; Interiano-Shiverdecker et al., 2021; Kuo et al., 2021; Kuo et al., 2018). Despite this accumulation of literature on diverse topics of international counseling trainees, there is limited research focused on lived experiences of international counseling trainees in CACREP-accredited counseling programs. In a content analysis of research conducted on international student trainees in counseling between the years 2000-2014, researchers showed content categories such as cultural

adjustment, psychological health, psychotherapy interventions, racism and discrimination, coping and adjustment experiences, and supervision and advising (Pendse & Inman, 2017). A surprising finding from the study was the limited studies examining supervision-related content of international students with the recommendation to focus on supervision training of this population in counseling programs. The authors' recommendations included the need for multicultural awareness and responsiveness in working with international counseling students, as well as the utilization of qualitative or mixed methods approaches to explore their unique experiences (Pendse & Inman, 2017).

International Students and Clinical Supervision in U.S. Counseling Programs

The extant literature on clinical supervision and international counseling trainees indicates mixed findings. Using Bandura's conceptual framework of human agency (Bandura 2001a) that comprises modes of personal agency, proxy agency, and collective agency (Bandura, 2001b). Woo and colleagues (2015) explored the coping strategies of eight international doctoral students during training in supervision. Participant demographic characteristics were; (a) eight females, two males, (b) age between 27 to 45 years, (c) enrollment status at the doctoral level included four in the first year, one in the third year, two in the fourth year, and one Ph.D. candidate, and (d) nationalities were two Korean and one Chinese, Hong Kong Chinese, Taiwanese, Turkish, Ethiopian, and Kenyan. In the results, the authors delineated three distinct categories fitting within the human agency framework. Personal agency happens when individuals exercise their personal skills, resources, and abilities to accomplish a given task. Proxy agency occurs when an individual's circumstances are beyond control; hence, for safety, well-being, and desired outcomes, a more knowledgeable and resourceful individual is sought as an advocate. Collective agency involves accessing resources within groups and/or individuals to perform tasks and achieve goals

successfully (Woo et al., 2015). In Woo et al.'s study, personal agency encompassed personal and professional self-directed strategies such as keeping abreast with the current literature on supervision, including culturally diverse supervision models, assimilation into U.S. culture, and self-reflective processes. In proxy agency, because support from faculty supervisors was not available, the participants relied on mentoring relationships from their home countries for emotional and practical support. The collective agency was related to networking strategies among international doctoral students, including engagement in international student activities and support from international peers to deal with stressful situations (Woo et al., 2015). Moreover, participants noted a lack of understanding of their unique experiences from their American professors, advisors, peers, and supervisors that undermined their abilities and strengths; this was often due to linguistic challenges.

Park et al. (2017) observed similar findings from a sample of 10 international doctoral counseling students. The authors explored the challenges and strategies to overcome before and during practicum and internship courses. Participants were; (a) eight females and two males, (b) enrollment status, doctoral level – three in the first year, four in the third year, and one each in the fourth year and sixth years and, one master's student was in the second year, (c) nationalities – six from South Korea and one each from Malaysia, Ethiopia, Turkey, and Ghana. In the findings, participants cited fear related to language barriers, relationship-building processes with supervisors, lack of cultural sensitivity, as well as supportive experiences from the counseling programs and sites. A notable implication from the study was the need for supervisors' understanding of the professional development and lived experiences of international counseling trainees. It seemed important that as part of the preparation for practicum/internship experiences, international counseling trainees might need more practical information about the American

counseling system. Park et al. also recommended future researchers attend to gender, regional representation in the United States, and participants' country of origin.

In addition, Jang et al. (2014) examined challenges eight international doctoral students encountered during supervision training in counselor education programs. The participants were; (a) six females and two males, (b) age range 25 to 47 years, (c) U.S. residency between 2 to 13 years, (d) enrollment status – four in the second year, one in the third year, two in the fourth year, and one Ph.D. Candidate, and (e) nationalities included one from each of the following countries – China, Ethiopia, Hong Kong China, Kenyan, Taiwan, and Turkey as well as two from South Korea. In the results, challenges noted were related to the structure of supervision courses that entailed both theory and supervision practice, lack of culturally-relevant supervision models and minimal attention to cross-cultural supervision, faculty lack of understanding of unique challenges faced by international students, language barriers, lack of support from peers and faculty, and cultural differences in supervision. Jang et al. recommended consideration of larger sample sizes and using a much broader range of participant nationalities to determine replication;

Another line of research has also addressed multiculturalism in supervising international counseling trainees as clinical supervision provides opportunities for supervisors to broach and discuss multicultural aspects (Borders et al., 2014). Sangganjanavanich and Black (2009) examined multicultural supervision of five international counselors-in-training with the following characteristics; (a) enrollment status – four master's and one doctoral, (b) regional representation – three from Asia and one each from South America and Africa, (c) age range 25 to 26 years and, (d) residency in the United States between one to five years. The authors revealed four thematic observations namely; (a) supervisor insensitivity to the supervisee's cultural background and adjustment struggles; (b) the supervisee's interpersonal isolation; (c) the supervisee's treatment as

a cultural representative; and (d) supervisor disrespect for obvious cultural differences. A supervisor's cultural insensitivity became obvious through prejudiced, derogatory, and hurtful comments that involved cultural stereotyping (Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009). Given the small sample size, the authors recommended more qualitative research studies with larger sample sizes. Relatedly, Reid and Dixon (2012) proposed a culturally responsive supervision model for supervisors working with international counseling supervisees that included: (a) attention to rapport building in the supervisory relationship; (b) discussion of cultural similarities and differences and their impact on the supervisory relationship; (c) expectations for both supervisor and supervisee; and (d) periodic check-ins of the supervisee's experience of the supervisory process.

Despite the accumulation of research on diverse topics of international counseling trainees and the burgeoning literature focused on this population in clinical supervision, the research has consistently addressed doctoral students' experiences in practicum and internship courses as trainees and supervisors. There is still limited empirical research focused on lived experiences of international counseling trainees in CACREP-accredited counseling programs. Given the growing trend of international students in U.S. higher education institutions (NAFSA, 2020), we anticipate a continued presence of international counseling trainees in CACREP-accredited counseling programs. The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine master's and doctoral international counseling trainees' experiences in clinical supervision during practicum and/or internship. A secondary goal of this study is a response to the need for qualitative or mixed-methods research with this population using larger sample size, different countries of origin, gender, and diverse U.S. regional representation. To this end, we addressed the following overarching research questions:

1. What are international counseling trainees' experiences in the clinical supervision they received as part of their counselor training?
2. Based on their experiences, what are suggestions for supervisors and counselor educators when working with international counseling trainees?

Methods

Participants

Because theme development in the reflexive thematic analysis is an evolving, organic, and fluid process, predetermination of specific sample size is considered impossible and problematic (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). We used purposeful sampling that entailed individuals' availability and willingness to participate in the present research (Pallinkas et al., 2013). Participants consisted of 14 international master's and doctoral trainees enrolled in CACREP-accredited counseling and counselor education programs in the United States. Participants met the following inclusion criteria: (a) at least 18 years old; (b) born, raised, and educated in their country of origin before coming to the United States; (c) proficiency in English as a second language; (d) on F1 or J1 Visa; (e) completed at least one semester of practicum or internship; and (f) residing in the United States for at least 1 to a maximum of 10 years. By these criteria, the research team had a certain degree of consistency across the characteristics of international counseling trainees and the timeframe for being in the United States, as well as accessing both masters and doctoral students.

Participants were 11 female and 3 male master's ($n = 5$) and doctoral ($n = 9$) trainees. Their ages ranged from 30 to 47, with an average of 28.85 years. Master's-level trainees were in the third ($n = 2$), second ($n = 2$), and first ($n = 1$) semesters, while doctoral-level trainees were in the fifth ($n = 1$), fourth ($n = 3$), third ($n = 2$), and second ($n = 2$) semesters of their supervised clinical practices. Three participants did not indicate their ages, and one doctoral participant did not

indicate the number of semesters in supervision. The average participants' duration of stay in the United States was 5 to 11 years. Participants collectively represented 13 countries (see Table 1), and 12 out of 14 participants indicated coming from collectivistic cultural backgrounds. For regional representation in the United States, participants attended schools in the South, Southeast, Midwest, North, and Rocky Mountain regions. To protect each participant's identity, we assigned a pseudonym to each individual.

Procedure

Upon receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the first author's institution, we utilized purposeful and snowball sampling strategies for participant recruitment. We contacted potential participants by sending announcements to two forums that draw faculty and students from different countries (i.e., Counselor Education and Supervision Network [CESNET-L] and Association for Counselor Education and Supervision International Students and Faculty Interest Network [ACES-ISFIN] listservs). Those who agreed to participate followed a link in their email that directed them to the consent form and a demographic questionnaire. The consent form detailed the purpose of the study, information on the researchers and their contacts, eligibility criteria, freedom to withdraw at any time, study incentives (i.e., \$20 Amazon gift card drawing upon completion), and potential risks and benefits from the study. The first phase was the participants' completion of the demographic questionnaire (e.g., What is your age? What is your gender? Are you a doctoral or master's student—in practicum or internship? How many semesters of clinical supervision have you received? What is your country of origin? Which of the following would you consider is characteristic of your country of origin: collectivistic, individualistic?). Participants provided their contact email addresses and/or phone numbers to set up a 40–60-minute interview.

During phase two, the first and second authors utilized a semi-structured online protocol using open-ended questions to conduct interviews over 4½ weeks from June 2020 to early July 2020. Before this, participants had the opportunity to ask follow-up questions and/or clarifications and were granted permission for recording their interviews. The interview protocol questions addressed participants' understanding of clinical supervision, experiences in clinical supervision, and suggestions for supervisors and counselor educators in providing clinical supervision of international counseling trainees. Sample open-ended questions were: What has been your experience as an international counseling student in your counseling program? What is your understanding of clinical supervision? Talk about your experience in clinical supervision. What would it be like to share these experiences with your clinical supervisor? You are from [Name of the country], how has that impacted you and/or felt like for you in clinical supervision? In what way/s has your cultural identity influenced your supervisory relationship with your supervisor? Give some specific examples. What recommendations would you like to offer to faculty and supervisors in counselor education programs for them to provide culturally sensitive clinical supervision that attends to the needs of international counseling students? Anything else you may have to share that I haven't asked you about your clinical supervision experience as an international counseling student. Recorded interviews were transcribed through an online transcription website (otter.ai). Additionally, the third author's research assistant completed the transcripts' accuracy evaluation; three research team members followed up by further checking the evaluation process before conducting data analysis.

Data Analysis

We utilized reflexive thematic analysis (TA; Braun & Clarke, 2021b) to guide our data analytic process. Important in reflexive TA is the researcher's active engagement with the data and consistently punctuating the analytic process with questions during the interpretative process

(Braun & Clarke, 2021b). The researcher's contemplative and pondering posture with the data and the analytic process are core elements in reflexive TA. Owing to theoretical flexibility and no fundamental guiding theory in TA (Braun & Clarke, 2021b), we used the Critical Realism (CR) framework in our study. CR distinguishes between ontological (i.e., what is real or the nature of reality) and epistemological (i.e., what is observable or the knowledge of reality) tenets in knowledge and understanding of a phenomenon (Fletcher, 2017). In essence, the real exists independent of human recognition and comprehension, while the observable is known and understood within the context of constructions based on experiences and perspectives through what is seen. Important in CR is the potential for acknowledging otherwise unknown issues as the participants narrate them and provide opportunities for change to occur (Jansen, 2020).

In analyzing the data, we followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of conducting TA: (a) familiarization with the data, (b) generation of initial codes, (c) development of themes, (d) review of potential themes, (e) definition and naming of themes, and (f) writing the report. In the first phase, the first, second, and fourth authors independently read the transcripts and noted their emerging thoughts and ideas about the data. Upon completion, the team debriefed on key observations from their familiarization process. In the second phase, team members generated initial codes and their meanings, with each member independently working through the transcripts with specific attention to the research questions. Then, the research team met and compared their codes, either modifying them or generating new ones. In the third phase, the team focused on identifying the patterns that emerged from phases one and two. As each member completed organizing their codes into initial themes, the team debriefed for consensus; this culminated in the determination of comprehensive themes. In the fourth phase, the team members reviewed, modified, and developed the final themes by examining extracts related to each theme and

determining support for or lack thereof. The team also focused on whether the data supported the themes or if themes overlapped, leading to the likelihood of separate themes and subthemes. Consequently, the team discarded some themes for lack of supporting data, collapsed some themes into one theme, and created new themes. The team completed the fifth phase by defining and labeling the final themes and presented the third author with the themes using specific supporting extracts. Because of having no prior involvement in interviews and data analysis, the third author acted as an auditor to review the themes and extracts. In the sixth and final phase, the first author compiled the report, beginning with the literature review and culminating with the findings.

Research Team

The research team consisted of four researchers—two assistant professors, one associate professor, and a second-year doctoral student, all from three CACREP-accredited counseling programs in the Midwest and Southern regions of the United States. They were former or current international students with a varying number of years of schooling, including enrollment and completion of clinical experiences as part of their CACREP-accredited graduate program curriculum. The authors have provided supervision to domestic and international counseling trainees at either the master's level, doctoral level, or both during their studies. They completed their undergraduate studies in their countries of origin before coming to the United States and experienced different adjustment and acculturation challenges during their transition to American culture. In terms of language, some authors identified English as a second language, and all authors spoke at least one or more languages from their countries of origin. The authors have been involved in conducting qualitative research studies in their lines of research. Based on these factors, the researchers shared more similarities than differences with this study's participants (Berger, 2015).

Hence, they were aware of how potential biases during the data collection, analysis, and interpretation phases might affect how they listened to the participants during interviews.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are crucial elements of trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013). Credibility deals with the congruency of the research findings with reality (Creswell, 2013). Various verification procedures delineated to ensure credibility in qualitative research are: using external audits, rick/thick description of data, negative case analysis, member checks, research bias, triangulation, prolonged observation, and peer review/debriefing; with the recommendation for researchers to engage in at least two in undertaking a study (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the researchers utilized peer review/debriefing and external auditing to verify the accuracy of the data. Further, verification to ensure credibility can be accomplished by keeping a diary or journal (Morrow, 2005) to document any assumptions, biases, and values, and the extent to which these affect decision-making processes from the beginning to the end of the research study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To mitigate risks throughout this research study, team members engaged in documentation by journaling their thoughts, feelings, and assumptions and implemented bracketing (Morrow, 2005) before conducting interviews and through periodic discussions to counter these risks or prejudgments that could taint data analysis procedures. To address the issue of bias from the outset before conducting interviews, the authors openly discussed their biases especially in consideration of their backgrounds and experiences as former or current international student(s). The discussions also addressed some of the unique challenges (such as language barriers and different cultures) this population might encounter during supervision. Upon completion of the interviews, all three authors reviewed the participant interviews. For dependability and conformability, the first author documented the research activities from the

outset, including crafting the research questions and subsequent interview questions during the data collection process. Then, during data analysis, the first, second, and fourth authors maintained journal notes to track their thoughts, feelings, and questions as they immersed themselves in the data, with regular debriefings to discuss these as a safeguard against any influence on analysis and interpretation of the data. The three authors separately engaged in the coding process (i.e., reading the transcripts, generating initial themes, and matching participant extracts) that led them to determine the final themes. During this process, the members held periodic consultation and debriefing meetings for discussions including addressing points of disagreement and/or merging certain themes to capture the participants' stories fully. Finally, the third author audited the entire coding process and provided feedback that was incorporated into the determination of the final themes. The research team addressed the issue of transferability in the section under Procedures.

Findings

The thematic analysis revealed four key themes of experiences that international counselor master's and doctoral counseling trainees had with clinical supervision during their program studies. These were: (a) "a big part is to address the elephant": supervisor failure to address cultural aspects; (b) acculturative challenges and influence on clinical supervision; (c) supportive and unsupportive supervisory experiences; and (d) need for supervisor cultural curiosity, knowledge, competence, and sensitivity.

"A Big Part Is to Address the Elephant": Supervisor Failure to Address Cultural Aspects

This theme describes trainees' awareness of the obvious cultural differences, which Farah referred to in this study as "the elephant" that needed to be addressed for an effective supervisor/supervisee dyadic relationship. It seemed that differences between supervisor and supervisee mattered, though they were not necessarily barriers that impeded the supervisory

relationship. Trainees expected supervisors to create a safe and open atmosphere in which they could discuss these cultural aspects. As Farah noted, the expectation was for supervisors to broach the conversations, and failure to do so does not make the differences disappear.

I think a big, big part is to address the elephant... We are different and it is okay to be different. And, if we as counselors shy away and ignore and try to, what's called like glass ceiling, we don't see it and it's not there; it's not gonna work because it is there.... And so, I think the most important thing for supervisors is to address the differences and that differences actually brings us together instead of break us.... I think this is a big, big part that a lot of faculty would ignore. I don't know why....

In addition, the lack of dialogue and discussion on culturally related content throughout the supervisory process seemed indicative of the supervisor's multicultural incompetence. Because of the supervisor's inattention to cultural topics, it seemed, as Cahil explained, that the onus was on the supervisee to initiate the conversation:

I went to a session expecting him to talk about culture. I would try to talk about it, I would try to give a message or I really, in my mind, at least all I needed to say. I guess I should have said that I would like to explore the cultural differences between you and me. I don't want to be rude, but he was not a culture-focused person. I mean, not a multiculturally competent person. I just didn't have that space. I couldn't talk about it.... At the end, I told him, "I noticed that you never asked me anything about my culture...you know, being a male, and all the other stuff.

Further, the supervisor missed opportunities to address salient cultural characteristics during discussions of client-related issues in supervision. For instance, hesitation to follow through on a supervisor's suggestions seemed to indicate an underlying cause from a supervisee's cultural-

relational dynamic. Hence, a supervisor's failure to broach this matter led to a supervisee feeling discomfort and eventually following the supervisor's suggestions without being aware of the inner tension. As Bulan stated:

So, I grew up listening, a lot of like someone like my mentor, my parents, my grandma, anyone older, and then they have authority. So, I realized that I am shaped in that. And, I listen, I obey, I'll always obey.... My supervisor actually challenged me in one way, it was just like a really hard case that I shared, and I was not comfortable in addressing something. And then my supervisor kind of challenged me, like, "Oh, well, you might want to do that because you want to challenge your client because it's something very salient for the client." And, in my discomfort, I didn't really say that I don't feel comfortable doing it. So, we didn't really explore more why I was not comfortable.... I have to just follow, I guess..., it just builds like tension inside me.

Closely related to this was the assumption that, at a minimum, a supervisor needed to have some basic knowledge and understanding of the supervisee's cultural context. This knowledge was important and helpful in facilitating the supervisory relationship because, as Chen-En observed, "Knowing some general cultural characteristic about that student...I'm from [Name of Country] and there are several well-known characteristics, like hierarchy and productivity and something like respect for older figure.... Basic knowledge will be helpful." From the trainees' perspective, open discussion of culturally related aspects is crucial and needs consistent broaching, particularly when those aspects are obvious in the supervisory relationship. Closely tied to cultural elements is the next theme of the trainees' acculturative challenges and their negative impact on clinical supervision.

Acculturative Challenges and Impact on Clinical Supervision

This theme describes the counselor trainees' acculturative challenges and how these challenges negatively affected their supervisory experiences. The adjustment process and subsequent challenges in a new country and culture, in conjunction with navigating the demands of training, were sometimes difficult for the trainees, who then hoped to find/receive support and understanding from their supervisors and program faculty. Away from her family members, Zain felt isolated and wished her supervisor could initiate conversations about this: "I think one of the biggest things would be to talk to your supervisee about feeling alone because there are not a lot of international students in this profession." Benita felt a lack of direction from her supervisor when seeking help:—"You know, ...we come here, we are usually without family or friends.... When you try to talk to a faculty member about this specific issue..., they're like, 'Oh, your situation is so different than from everyone else.'" Then, for trainees with English as a second language, this factor was a barrier to their performance during clinical field experiences. As some discussions reflected, it was not so much the lack of proficiency in English, but, rather, the discouragement stemming from the supervisor's lack of empathy and/or understanding of how cultural context affected a supervisee's communication abilities. For Chen-En, nonverbal communication from a supervisor was cause for becoming withdrawn during the supervision:

Yeah, because of my language proficiency, that's definitely happening that the supervisor asking me "What was that?"... Then, mostly, my other supervisors and even that supervisor responded like, "Can you say that again?" That person, like her facial expression was like, "What?" That was very minor gesture, but I was very withdrawn at that time.

For Alexa, the supervisor's facial expressions were "confusing, frustrating, and discouraging" occurrences that impeded the supervisory relationship and process: "I had some

difficulty with some professional, some supervisors understanding what I'm saying and that was confusing and frustrating. I think for me...seeing that in their grimaces in their faces was frustrating for me at the beginning, discouraging." The language barrier was also cited for the lack of community and being a part of a community. Bulan described this difficulty:

Building community...or my support system is just not as easy as I thought it will be because of cultural differences, because of again, like maybe a little bit with the English, like, I don't really understand some of the topics that we're talking about, because maybe it's just something...I did not grow up with that.

In summary, the trainees encountered various challenges during their adjustment to a new cultural environment that also manifested during their clinical supervision. In navigating these challenges, trainees discussed both supportive/helpful and unsupportive/unhelpful experiences.

Supportive and Unsupportive Supervisory Experiences

This third theme highlights the trainees' discussions of supportive (e.g., compassion and respect) and unsupportive (e.g., judgment and indifference) experiences in clinical supervision. Given that learning is an important part of the clinical experience for all counseling trainees during their clinical experiences (Goodyear, 2014), a supportive alliance becomes important in supervision. Because Cahil had limited English vocabulary, his supervisor was supportive and understanding as he set personal goals to learn English words specifically "for possible injuries or human bruises."

And she said, maybe actually, it might be a goal for you to go back and check maybe like five to ten English words to describe what you saw.... Well, I felt really good about that. And I was like, yeah, that's my goal. I need to go back and learn, and it actually helped me

since then I have been very careful with different like shapes of things, scars and bruises and other things.

Further, during supervision, for a supervisor not to point out what was done wrong was perceived as supportive. This supportive stance was especially captured in one participant's comparison of her supervisors (i.e., supportive, and unsupportive) with descriptors such as "inhumane" for those who did not conduct and provide feedback during supervision. Support was evident when a supervisor created an empathic, compassionate, and overall supportive supervisory environment. This was important as clinical supervision experiences have the potential to be anxiety-provoking for trainees, especially for international counseling trainees in new educational environment. Commenting on her supervisor, Adaku stated:

He never, you know, he never tried to tell us you have done something wrong, even when you've done something wrong. And you're telling him, you know, I think I did this wrong, but he has never seen it as wrong. You know, he's looked, always looked for a way to encourage you.

Moreover, some trainees discussed their appreciation of their supervisors' awareness not only of the content-related aspects of supervision but also of valuing the supervisee as an individual in the supervisory relationship. Chen-En appreciated how his supervisor focused on the person-of-the-counselor from a professional development standpoint and as a person because he (the supervisor) "really just wanted to talk about me, not about the client"; this made it much easier for Chen-En "to be more open and authentic." Similarly, Fang felt a sense of pride and encouragement when his supervisor saw him as an international counseling trainee through a strengths-based lens:

And I think just the fact that she sees me as an international student with strength rather than with, you know, deficit.... I feel like she is very encouraging. I feel like she has

contributed to that sense of pride.... The feeling that she gave me, she makes me feel good about myself. And she made me feel valuable.

On the other hand, trainees recounted unsupportive supervisory experiences. For example, Alexa experienced her supervisor as more focused on the evaluative component of the relationship and less on her as an international counseling trainee:

...To have a supervisor in the site that I was doing my practicum and internship that was not so supportive and curious...I would say cultural competence to work with me wasn't a nice experience, and I also remember I was feeling that there was always maybe the major thing in my relationship with the supervisor was the evaluative part.... I was feeling judged.... Definitely wasn't a safe place for me to just share my own struggles as an international student, even without their initiation of those.

Further, at the start of her internship, Chun was surprised at her supervisor's hands-off stance, particularly as she came from a cultural context in which she was used to following directions from those in authority. She had limited guidance and help from her supervisor and, in other instances, she wondered whether the supervisor was dealing with her own issues:

I think I was a novice counselor.... I received no guidance at all. And that was very different from, you know, being taught with a set of rules to follow and that kind of thing, especially coming from a background I grew up, where a lot of time being more told what to do. There were definitely times I feel like I received no help. There were times I felt like my supervisor has issues they need to take care of.

As a result, the combination of acculturative challenges and unsupportive supervisory experiences contributed to the trainees' call for supervisors' attunement to cultural competence in supervision.

Need for Supervisors' Cultural Curiosity, Knowledge, Competence, and Sensitivity

This final theme is a suggestion or advice for supervisors and faculty in counseling programs. For instance, as expected in counseling for a counselor working with culturally diverse clients, it becomes important to learn about specific population groups to serve them more effectively in therapy. This, however, was not forthcoming in supervision, a theme encapsulated in Cahil's statement:

...So, kind of back up your knowledge and, you know, go learn.... Sometimes we say we cannot learn all the differences about cultures and stuff. Well, if you're working in [Name of City], ten percent of your clients will be [Name of Group] and because of the huge [Name of Group] population go learn about [Name of Group], how these people came here.... When they talk about this, you would have the base..., learn more and understand your supervisee. Just spend one hour on Google and learn something very silly, you know, learning a [Participant's Country] word, use it. Whatever it is I talked about, because even I want to be safe enough....

As indicated in the following excerpt, another participant (Adeze) wondered how a supervisor could expect a successful outcome with her without cultural competence: "You need to be competent culturally, multiculturally, for you to be able to serve me well. If you don't have that expertise...there's no way you're going to be of any good service to me...." Similarly, cultural curiosity includes the supervisor's openness to learning from the supervisee, such as gaining knowledge about the supervisees' cultural context that may lead to correcting some of the negative assumptions American society develops about their countries of origin. For example, Farah hoped for her supervisor's openness to this dialogue:

And be open. Just tell me about, you tell me about your culture. Help me understand if there is something you know about [Participant's Country], tell me how true this is. What I'm thinking, what I heard, how truthful is it? What I'm hearing about [Participant's Country], is that true, is it not? You know, we tend to ignore this stuff; we don't talk, you don't talk about it because it is awkward. I love to talk about it; I'm not afraid to talk about it...and rarely, I would rarely see a supervisor address that...

Additionally, learning from the supervisee can be accomplished through “reverse mentoring” (Chen-En). In supervision, the supervisor also acts as a mentor guiding a mentee (Amparabeng & Pillay, 2021; Asempapa, 2019), but in reverse mentoring, the trainee provides learning opportunities for the supervisor based on their experiences as an avenue for productive supervision. Chen-En described this process:

As you know, typical mentoring is one of the important issues.... In typical mentoring, someone who has more experience and knowledge and information expertise is giving mentoring to a mentee who relatively has less expertise and less experience. But in reverse mentoring, a person, for example—in this context, international students—can provide mentoring to supervisors to do the best of supervision with international counseling trainees...so the people who know the best about the difficulties and challenges about international students, the international trainees, in reverse mentoring they can provide some mentoring or knowledge...to share their experiences with experienced faculties or doctoral supervisors. I think, yeah, that can be kind of helpful when understanding the underserved people in our education community.

Overall, this final theme seems to be a call to action for supervisors and counselor educators in counseling programs working with international counseling trainees.

Discussion

In this study, we examined master's- and doctoral-level international counseling trainees' experiences in clinical supervision. Representing similarities and differences with the previous literature, our findings highlighted the importance of supervisors' cultural sensitivity, unique responsibilities, and intentional practices as supervisors work with this population. The findings offer directions to supervisors and counselors in counseling education programs to design avenues for trainees to have personally and professionally enhancing experiences in their programs.

First, related to the need to address supervisees' cultural identities and/or values (e.g., interdependence, obedience, and respect for authority) in clinical supervision, this represented trainees' experiences with their supervisors' practices in acknowledging and addressing their cultural background along with their own (supervisor's) cultural background and their influence on the supervisory process. In support of earlier studies with international counseling students (Amparbeng & Pillay, 2021; Li et al., 2018), this theme also underlined the importance of supervisors' willingness to practice culturally sensitive and effective strategies and to utilize best practices of clinical supervision (e.g., initiating supervision, supervisory relationship, diversity, and advocacy considerations; Borders et al., 2014). The need to consider and address international counseling trainees' cultural identities is relevant because failure to broach these identities was a hindrance in addressing a supervisee's clinical needs during supervision. Researchers (e.g., Lee, 2018; Li et al., 2018) highlighted how considering an individual's culture was a key determinant in the construction and meaning-making of the world, particularly when working with supervisees from cultural contexts that espouse a hierarchical way of relating and respect for authority. Further, broaching a supervisee's cultural identity is also crucial when considering that differences and/or similarities such as gender, religion, sexual orientation, or country of origin in supervising

international counseling trainees might be obvious in the supervisory alliance. Hence, a supervisor's failure to attend to the explicit and implicit cultural identities that can potentially foster a safe (as opposed to tense) supervisory environment could be akin to failing in the supervisory role.

Additionally, this theme points to the vital need for supervisors' continuous self-awareness; this corroborates Amparbeng and Pillay's (2021) emphasis on the need for supervisor self-awareness of his or her cultural intersectionality and its potential impact on the supervisory relationship with a supervisee. This supervisor's self-awareness is crucial in enhancing successful supervisory outcomes with international counseling trainees. Similarly, in this theme, we also observed how some international counseling trainees revealed underlying feelings of invisibility from their supervisors, who appeared to be unaware and/or ignorant of their supervisees' cultural make-up and how they influenced their learning and professional growth during supervision. These experiences seemed to negatively impact the trainees' comfort level, safety, and trust in the supervisory process, which also affected their degree of learning during supervision. The supervisor's role in establishing a trusting supervisory alliance, especially specific to international counseling trainees is a critical consideration in the literature (Amparbeng & Pillay, 2021). This is important because our participants' accounts suggested that culturally related discussions need a safe, trusting environment that seemed lacking in some supervisory relationships.

Second, our findings are similar to previous research findings that showed a correlation with acculturative stress among international students in CACREP-accredited counseling programs (Behl et al., 2017; Fan, 2019) and, although not specific to counseling trainees, a correlation between acculturative stress and academic needs (Attrill et al., 2016). In our study, participants underscored the acculturative challenges (e.g., language barriers, loneliness and/or

isolation, navigating immigration requirements, and lack of community) they faced and their influence on clinical supervision. For instance, as stated by one participant, a supervisor's nonverbal communication (e.g., grimacing) due to the supervisee's struggle with pronunciation made it challenging to be authentic in a non-supportive environment. This was particularly difficult for some international trainees without close supportive systems such as family or close friends/peers. It would be assumed that supervisors would be even more attentive and attuned to these trainees' needs, conversely, some participants indicated a lack of supervisor empathy and unawareness of these challenges. Although these challenges are common among international student trainees (Ma et al., 2020), it seemed that a supervisor's lack of understanding and unsupportive style made it even more challenging. A supervisor's genuine interest in understanding each unique international supervisee, their acculturative challenges and/or stressors, and related needs and concerns without assumptions and/or judgments were important factors that trainees hoped for in supervisory relationships. The absence of these considerations was discouraging for several participants, especially within the context of emphasis in the literature on a supervisor's awareness of a supervisee's cultural background and lived experiences as part of best practices in supervision (Borders et al., 2014).

Third, the international counselor trainees reported supportive (e.g., compassion, respect) and unsupportive (e.g., indifference) supervisory approaches. These findings are consistent with those by researchers from other studies (e.g., Jang et al., 2014; Park et al., 2017; Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009) reporting support and lack thereof from faculty and peers. Participants' accounts of supportive experiences are also in line with research observations and findings that showed the centrality of a supportive supervisory relationship in a supervisee's learning experiences (Goodyear, 2014). Thus, supervisors' intentionality in broaching the trainees'

experiences and their impact on the supervisory process seems important to address consistently. Additionally, supportive and unsupportive experiences in our findings also offered parallel reports from international counselor trainees, in that their supervisors' interest in understanding their unique adjustment challenges and needs (e.g., language barriers, social isolation, and academic pressures) appeared critical if international students were to feel safe and supported. Similar to previous research on language barriers and acculturative stressors (Behl et al., 2017), our participants also specified a lack of supervisory dialogue/discussions on their unique adjustment barriers as well as their acculturation process as another common barrier in their clinical supervision experiences. Consequently, participants noted the tension that leads to limited open and honest dialogues about their supervisory needs.

Fourth, the need for supervisors' cultural curiosity, knowledge, competence, and sensitivity appeared important to make the international counselor trainees' experiences more productive and meaningful. This observation is similar to Fickling and colleagues' (2019) argument and advocacy for multicultural competence in supervision and attention to all dimensions and intersections of cultural identities (Amparbeng & Pillay, 2021). It seems important for supervisors to reflect on their cultural competence; thus, calling for supervisor attention to cultural curiosity, humility, and sensitivity was not surprising, especially within the context of "all supervision" being "multicultural supervision" (Borders et al., 2014, p. 8). Supervisors' cultural sensitivity through broaching explicit and/or implicit culturally-related content during supervision might be indicative of respecting the supervisee's cultural background and identities. Five participants reported a lack of attention and discussion of either value systems or explicit identities during supervision, an occurrence that is surprising especially with continued emphasis on respect for individuals' cultural backgrounds in the counseling profession (Ratts et al., 2016). Cultural sensitivity,

including respect for diverse cultural aspects, is crucial in creating a safe, trusting, and comfortable supervisory environment conducive for learning to occur. Because this was missing from the majority of participants' narratives, they missed opportunities for learning. Furthermore, supervisors' attention to their own cultural identities and openness to discussions with supervisees might provide opportunities for modeling and mentoring experiences. As one participant in our study stated insightfully, mentoring can be a two-way process (i.e., reverse-mentoring) as both supervisor and supervisee learn from each other. Although research on reverse-mentoring seems uncultivated ground within the counselor education literature, literature within human resources has defined reverse mentoring as "the pairing of a younger, junior employee acting as a mentor to share expertise with an older, senior colleague as a mentee" (Murphy, 2012, p. 550).

Within the context of this study and counselor education programs, reverse mentoring would occur between an experienced supervisor and a supervisee. Given the emphasis on supervisors' attention to multicultural aspects in supervision (Borders et al., 2014; Fernandes & Lane, 2020), one may expect that supervisee-to-supervisor feedback can provide an opportunity for reverse mentoring since a supervisor can have the opportunity to listen to as well as consider a supervisee's lived experiences and impact in clinical supervision. This is especially important, considering that one characteristic of reverse mentoring is "commitment to support and mutual learning" (Murphy, 2012, p. 550). Given the dearth of literature within the field of counseling on multicultural awareness and respect for individuals' lived experiences (e.g., Borders et al., 2014; Ratts et al., 2016), another surprising finding from this study was the lack of mutual learning (hence, reverse mentoring). In a supervisory relationship, supervisors hold a position of power because of their evaluative role and they are better situated to provide mentoring, but supervisees equally have power in a supervisory relationship (Cook et al., 2018). As a consumer, the supervisee

is a recipient but also has power as a provider of feedback to the supervisor—an effort that creates a crucial interplay for better supervisory outcomes (Cook et al., 2018). This outcome is possible with the supervisor's intentional perception of the supervisee as a contributor and not only a recipient in the supervisory relationship. As stated by one participant, the supervisor's view of her from a strengths-based lens inculcated a sense of pride in her work. Viewing international counselor trainees from a positive rather than a deficit lens (Attrill et al., 2016; Pendse & Inman, 2017) promotes mutual learning which can be a powerful form of empowerment as trainees contribute to their learning process as well as that of the supervisor (Attrill et al., 2016), thus setting reverse mentoring in action.

In conclusion, the provision of effective supervision for international counseling trainees is enhanced through trainees' feelings of safety and trust, supervisor multicultural competence, awareness of trainees' adjustment challenges, open communication and discussions about cultural issues, and supportive supervision working alliances.

Limitations

This study must be contextualized alongside its limitations. First, the generalization of our findings is limited to the characteristics of the international counselor trainees who participated in this study. Findings in this study provide glimpses of different experiences of fourteen international master's and doctoral students in clinical supervision, hence, they are not generalizations of other international counselor trainees. As an example, the residency status of some participants was lower (e.g., one to two years) and others were higher (e.g., five to ten years) which might translate into less acculturation to more acculturation levels in the former and the latter. These levels of acculturation have implications for experiences in clinical supervision, with more acculturated individuals doing much better (e.g., linguistically) than less acculturated. In the

same vein, many of our participants came from collectivistic backgrounds, limiting our understanding of international counseling trainees from individualistic backgrounds. Additionally, given the study's focus on international counseling trainees in CACREP-accredited programs only, it is likely that during the recruitment email process eligible international students chose not to participate in this study. Thus, generalizability to non-CACREP-accredited counseling programs is limited and, the authors can in no way guarantee thematic findings from this study can be replicated. Further, even with a fair U.S. regional representation and enrollment in different CACREP-accredited programs, some programs not represented in this study may have mechanisms, policies, and procedures in place to prepare their international counseling trainees for practicum and internship. Hence, students in these programs might have different narratives related to their experiences in clinical supervision. Second, despite paying special attention to minimizing bias through journaling, debriefings, and discussions, we as researchers all shared similar characteristics with our participants. Therefore, there is a chance that our interviewing, data analysis, and perceptions of the data may have been reflected in the findings. Closely related to this, language differences between the researchers and some participants may have caused a challenge in interpreting and capturing the core of the participants' experiences. Third, we acknowledge that another group of researchers may have asked different questions and arrived at different themes than we obtained in this study.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

A collective look at our findings has significant implications for both clinical supervision practitioners and counselor educators. In supervising international counseling trainees, similar to other research findings, the onus in addressing culturally related topics in clinical supervision was on the supervisors and not the students themselves to initiate these conversations. This may be a

step towards cultural sensitivity during supervision as supervisees might feel more trusting and safer during the process. Additionally, clinical supervisors may not only want to attend to and increase their awareness of their supervisees' cultural backgrounds; they may also need to reflect on and increase their awareness of their own cultural backgrounds, personal values, beliefs, biases, ethnicity, and language. As clearly stated in the need for supervisors' cultural curiosity, knowledge, competence, humility, and sensitivity, supervisor self-awareness appears to be strongly tied to creating a safe and trusting supervisory environment conducive to supervisee learning. Furthermore, supervisors may want to pay special attention to their supervisory style when working with supervisees from different cultural backgrounds. Particularly attending to the supportive and unsupportive experiences theme, supervisors may consider adopting more compassionate, empathic, culturally curious, and sensitive approaches, along with a desire to follow the supervisees' lead to engage in cultural explorations (e.g., adaptation barriers and acculturative challenges) and dialogues of the supervisory process itself. From a practical standpoint, counselor education faculty may consider inviting internal or external individuals who are knowledgeable on international trainees' acculturation issues to conduct webinars or workshops that focus on working with international counseling students in their programs.

Finally, a novel finding points to the need for counselor education program faculty to consider practical opportunities for reverse mentoring to serve international counseling trainees more effectively. These opportunities may range from engaging international counseling trainees in open conversations with faculty about their experiences that eventually impact their academics. In this way, program faculty may become more cognizant of the student's needs, challenges, and/or struggles that may be barriers to their clinical experiences and supervision. Due to possible differences in communication styles that might hinder the trainees' openness in initiating

conversations related to their challenges, faculty may need to honor alternative options that trainees may suggest, such as peer-to-peer conversations that are later presented to faculty for consideration. Supervisors may reflect on feedback given in supervision as a two-way process to make sure that trainees' unique needs, expectations, and concerns are addressed. Given the call for cultural humility, sensitivity, and competence from participants, there is a need for counselor education faculty to review their policies and strategies for diversity and inclusion strategies to support their international counseling trainees during their studies.

In this study, we utilized cross-sectional research via a qualitative design based on interviews with participants and retrospective reflections on their experiences. Longitudinal as well as momentary (e.g., session observations) examinations through qualitative and mixed-methods design could facilitate a more detailed understandings of each of the themes obtained here. For example, examinations of recordings with critical events in the supervision of international counselor trainees may offer further details on how supervisors could address cultural differences in supervision more efficiently and identify what may be empathic successes/failures in clinical supervision of international counselor trainees from different backgrounds. Detailed examinations of what transpires in the supervision room and how supervisors could become more effective in focusing on the four themes could enhance the supervisors' supervisory strategies with their trainees. Similarly, future researchers could center on utilizing our findings through proposed supervision models related to international students' training experiences in U.S. counseling programs. Such efforts could build on and adjust current models of supervision to address the specific needs of international counseling students. The effectiveness of these practices could be further measured/evaluated through quantitative and qualitative inquiries. In addition, we did not differentiate international counseling trainees' supervision experiences by a specific supervisor

(i.e., faculty or site supervisor) in this study. Hence, a participant may have had supportive and unsupportive experiences from either of the supervisory designations. Future researchers may explore the trainees' experiences in clinical supervision with a specific focus on either of these two. Further, considering the majority of participants came from collectivistic countries with more clear-cut relationship dynamics (authority figures), this may have impacted some of their expectations in supervision such as supervisor initiation of culture-related conversations and curious broaching of supervisee non-verbal communication. It might be interesting to explore specifically individualistic versus collectivistic backgrounds and potential impacts in future research. Similarly, due to the differences in residency statuses, it will be interesting to examine international counseling trainees' experiences based on length of time lived in the United States.

Conclusion

Based on these findings, supervisors should consider several factors when working with international counseling trainees during their clinical experiences. Important in the trainees' experiences in supervision is the need for supervisor attention to cultural contexts and their impact on the supervision process, how adjustment needs and challenges, as well as support (or the lack thereof), might contribute to the trainees' overall experiences in clinical supervision. Given the integral role of supervision in overseeing trainees' integration of content into practice, the findings from this study might add to the literature that is specific to clinical supervision for this population. Counselor educators' and supervisors' attention to the study findings might be a step forward in serving the diverse needs of international counseling trainees in counseling and counselor education programs.

Table 1***Characteristics of Master and Doctoral Student Participants***

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Doctoral/Masters Student completed Practicum or Internship	Number of semesters of clinical supervision received	Gender of clinical supervisor	Length of time in the USA	Country of Origin	Country of origin Collectivist Individualistic
Adeze	47	Female	Doctoral/Internship	4	Female	5.75	Dominica	Collectivist
Chen-En	31	Male	Doctoral/Internship	4	Female	2.8	South Korea	Collectivist
Hu-Tsiang	32	Male	Doctoral/Practicum	2	Female	1	Thailand	Collectivist
Emily	37	Female	Masters/Internship	3	Male	3	Canada	Individualistic
Zain	26	Female	Masters/Internship	3	Other	7	India	Collectivist
Alexa	31	Female	Doctoral/Internship	3	Female	8	Greece	Individualistic
Cahil	30	Male	Doctoral/Internship	5	Female	7	Turkey	Collectivist
Farah	36	Female	Doctoral/Internship	3	Gay	6	Saudi Arabia	Collectivist
Adaku	39	Female	Masters/Internship	2	Female	6	Nigeria	Collectivist
Bulan	28	Female	Doctoral/Practicum	2	Female	4	Indonesia	Collectivist
Lee Yin	-	Female	Masters/Internship	2	Female	2	China	Collectivist
Fang	-	Female	Doctoral/Internship	4	Female	7	China	Collectivist
Benita	-	Female	Masters/Practicum	1	-	2	Ecuador	Collectivist
Chun	34	Female	Doctoral/Practicum	-	Male	10	Taiwan	Collectivist

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