A Bibliometric Review of Counselors' Professional Competency Literature

Deasy Yunika Khairun
Indonesia University of Education

Agus Taufiq
Indonesia University of Education

Yusi Riksa Yustiana
Indonesia University of Education

Nandang Budiman
Indonesia University of Education

Ibrahim Al-Hakim
Indonesia University of Education

Abstract: Research on counselor professional competencies has gained attention due to its crucial role in shaping effective counseling practices and strengthening professional identity. Although a growing body of literature exists, the motivations, contexts, and findings remain diverse. Therefore, this study conducts a bibliometric analysis to map the patterns and directions of research on counselor professional competencies. A total of 241 documents, comprising 223 journal articles and 18 reviews, were extracted from the Scopus database covering the period from 1957 to 2025. We employed RStudio, VOSviewer, and Microsoft Excel for citation, content, and network analyses. The bibliometric analysis was complemented by a systematic review of relevant publications. The results reveal that the United States dominates the research output, followed by Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Co-authorship patterns show relatively low levels of international collaboration. The cartography analysis identified three major research clusters: (1) ethics and professional practice in genetic counseling, (2) clinical supervision and counselor professional development, and (3) clinical competencies, counseling practice, and therapeutic effectiveness. This study represents the first bibliometric review of counselor professional competencies, addressing gaps in the literature and offering directions for future research, particularly in the integration of supervision, cultural competence, and the development of professional identity in diverse socio-cultural contexts.

Keywords: Counselor professional competencies, Clinical supervision, Professional identity, Bibliometric analysis

Introduction

Professional competence is a fundamental construct in the discipline of guidance and counseling. It represents the integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and ethical values that enable counselors to deliver effective and responsible services to clients (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). The development of competence is often viewed as the cornerstone of counselor professionalism and identity formation (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003). Similar to the way *ethical practice* defines credibility in other helping professions such as medicine and social work, competence ensures the accountability and quality of counseling interventions (Corey et al., 2014; McMahon & Patton, 2018). While counselor competence has been widely discussed conceptually in Western contexts, its

contextual, cultural, and spiritual dimensions have only recently begun to receive attention in global scholarship (Høybye-Mortensen, 2015; Montonye et al., 2020).

Contributions of professional competence to counseling outcomes extend beyond technical proficiency. Competence also encompasses relational and reflective capacities—such as empathy, ethical sensitivity, and cultural responsiveness that influence clients' well-being, self-understanding, and behavioral change (Barreira Arias et al., 2015; Brooks et al., 2013). Moreover, in diverse educational and clinical settings, competence development has been linked to counselor supervision, continuous professional learning, and organizational support systems (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Borders et al., 2016; Coelho et al., 2024). However, despite its critical role, competence remains an evolving construct, continuously shaped by social expectations, professional standards, and cultural contexts (Zabek et al., 2023).

After a review of existing studies, it appears that research on professional competence in counseling has spanned multiple dimensions. Studies have explored ethical and legal issues (Hurt-Avila & Castillo, 2017), clinical supervision and training models (Kyung Lee et al., 2009), counselor identity and professional development (Papakota, 2016), and therapeutic effectiveness (Akhtar et al., 2024). Although early studies conceptualized competence from general skill-based perspectives, recent investigations have emphasized reflective practice, supervision quality, multicultural competence, and spiritual integration (Ahmad et al., 2025; Schmidt et al., 2023; Worthington & Dillon, 2011)The growing interest in counselor competence research motivates this study to conduct a bibliometric and thematic review of the global literature to identify key research trends, major themes, and emerging scholarly directions.

This study extends that scholarly pursuit by systematically identifying, categorizing, and analyzing the intellectual structure of research on counselor professional competence through bibliometric analysis. The research aims to map influential topics, key thematic dimensions, and prominent contributors across decades of development in the field. Using data extracted from the Scopus database, a refined sample of peer-reviewed documents was analyzed. We employed bibliometric visualization tools such as VOSviewer and RStudio, along with Microsoft Excel for citation, co-authorship, and keyword co-occurrence analyses. Given the interdisciplinary nature of counseling, the dataset includes studies from psychology, education, health sciences, and social work to capture a comprehensive perspective on professional competence.

The bibliometric review resulted in three dominant thematic streams: (1) *Ethics and Professional Practice in Counseling*, (2) *Clinical Supervision and Professional Development*, and (3) *Clinical Competence, Counseling Practice, and Therapeutic Effectiveness.* Among these, clinical supervision emerged as the most frequently cited and conceptually developed area, reflecting its central role in counselor training and competence enhancement. The trend analysis also shows a steady increase in publications over the past two decades, demonstrating growing scholarly attention to competence-based supervision and culturally responsive counseling practice. The most active contributors to this domain are authors affiliated with universities in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and emerging institutions in Southeast Asia.

Our bibliometric and thematic findings yield three key insights. Firstly, supervision-based competence development remains the focal point of empirical research, emphasizing its effectiveness in fostering counselor growth and ethical maturity. Secondly, cultural and spiritual competence has emerged as a vital area of inquiry, acknowledging that counseling must adapt to diverse social, cultural, and religious contexts. Thirdly, competence assessment and validation models are gaining prominence, calling for the integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches to measure counselor performance more holistically. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 describes the methodology. Section 3 presents the bibliometric results and mapping analyses. Section 4 provides a detailed thematic and content analysis of the selected literature. Section 5 discusses the research agenda and future directions. Finally, Section 6 concludes the study with a synthesis of findings and implications for professional practice, counselor education, and future research.

Method

This study employed a bibliometric method to produce quantitative insights on the literature concerning professional competence in counseling. Bibliometric analysis, when combined with content analysis, has become increasingly popular among researchers in education, psychology, and social sciences (Koskinen et al., 2018). To ensure reliability and validity, bibliometric review was integrated with descriptive and thematic examination, allowing both quantitative and conceptual interpretations of the data (Martínez-Climent et al., 2018). Bibliometric analysis, by its merit, is an emerging approach in counseling research, where it provides a

systematic mapping of publication patterns, citation networks, and thematic developments over time. This method is distinguished from traditional review techniques by its capacity to reveal comprehensive and data-driven insights into the evolution and structure of the discipline (Donthu et al., 2021).

Study Design

We employed a three-stage methodological process, which has been modified for this study who adopt an innovative approach in conducting a meta-literature review of Sukuk literature (Paltrinieri et al., 2023). The first step involves examining recognized databases to find relevant publications for metaliterature review. The second step of the literature review process begins with a quali-quanti approach that uses bibliometric citation analysis and content analysis to group existing studies in meaningful groups. Finally, apply co-authorship and cartography analysis to provide an in-depth analysis of past studies on Sukuk.

We relied on the Scopus database to collect our data. Scopus, owned by Elsevier, is a well-known publisher for - high-quality content. It is the most recognizable and widely used database for rigorous scientific production. Essentially, while maintaining the expected level of quality, we sacrificed the coverage since the selected database will not cover the literature universe on the phenomenon of interest.

Before going to the search functions using Scopus, we conducted a brief brainstorming session with experts to identify the keywords that are to be efficient and convenient for our task. Next, we conducted a simple keyword analysis of the literature using Scopus engine search refinement options. The brainstorming session was crucial as we could easily match the keywords from the literature with those from the experts. This has contributed significantly to the validity of the search. Table 1 shows the keywords used in the investigation.

Table 1. Search keywords and the number of manuscripts

Keyword	Document
TITLE-ABS-KEY ("professional competenc*" OR "professional capacit*" OR "professional qualification" OR "competenc* in the profession" OR "professional skill*") AND (counselor)	338
TITLE-ABS-KEY ("professional competenc*" OR "professional capacit*" OR "professional qualification" OR "competenc* in the profession" OR "professional skill*") AND (counselor) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCUMENT TYPE, "Article" and "Review"))	270
After manual filtration (missing author, title, DOI, abstract, or keywords)	241

Researcher intervention was necessary to refine and filter out manuscripts that did not align with the study's objectives. For example, several retrieved documents focused on unrelated topics such as teacher qualifications in other disciplines or general professional training not specific to counseling and thus were excluded from the dataset. After this systematic filtering, the search process resulted in 270 journal articles and review papers, which were further screened through a manual cleaning process.

During the manual verification stage, documents missing essential bibliographic elements such as author names, titles, abstracts, DOIs, or author keywords were removed. Each paper was also examined briefly to confirm its relevance to the topic of professional competence in counseling. Following this process, 241 valid documents were retained for analysis.

This refined dataset represents a comprehensive and high-quality collection of literature directly related to the competence, qualification, and professional development of counselors. Two aspects make this dataset unique: first, it demonstrates a focused inclusion of only peer-reviewed journal articles and reviews to ensure credibility and methodological consistency; and second, it captures publications spanning diverse disciplinary perspectives, including education, psychology, and health sciences, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of counselor competence.

These 241 documents formed the empirical foundation of the bibliometric and content analyses conducted in this study. The data were subjected to various bibliometric mapping techniques to answer the research questions. Section 2.3 discusses these analyses in detail. Additionally, the Appendix presents a list of the ten most frequently cited publications on counselor competence to complement the bibliometric findings. It is

believed that the classification of these articles and the thematic review of each stream will provide researchers with a comprehensive overview of the literature, objectives, findings, and methodological approaches in the field of counselor professional competence.

Tools and Type of Analysis

We use three bibliometric analysis tools: RStudio, VOSviewer, and Microsoft Excel. RStudio is widely used to generate bibliographical data for the dataset. VOSviewer was used to perform network and content analysis. VOSviewer enables the users to create and visualize bibliometric networks (Van Eck & Waltman, 2023). These visualizations are often called maps used to perform various network analyses, such as the co- authorship and co-occurrence. This relationship network can be constructed for authors, sources, countries, and keywords. VOSviewer was also used. We used Microsoft Excel to complement RStudio, as the graphs from the latter were not easily editable as it was done using Excel.

The analyses progressed in three folds. Firstly, we performed a general performance analysis. This section extracted public info about the dataset and the literature growth over the years. We also addressed critical aspects of the literature, such as the most relevant authors, their base countries, and affiliations. We performed an analysis using Bradford's Law to address the key sources. Secondly, we performed a citation analysis. This section addressed the most cited documents, references, and sources, together with the sources and authors' impact. Thirdly, we performed a network and content analysis using co-citation and co-occurrence analysis. Finally, we employed the hierarchical analysis (dendrogram) to ensure the most accurate clustering.

Results and Discussion

Table 2 provides a general overview of the collected data consisting of 241 documents published between 1957 and 2025, sourced from 152 journals, books, and other outlets. These documents record an annual growth rate of 3.84% and an average of 17.81 citations per paper, with an average document age of 13.9 years. A total of 812 authors contributed to this collection, including 37 single-authored documents. Collaboration is relatively strong, with an average of 3.61 co-authors per document and 14.94% of the publications involving international co-authorships. In terms of content, the dataset covers 1,320 Keywords Plus and 1,849 Author's Keywords, while the distribution of document types shows 223 articles and 18 reviews.

Table 2. Summary of the review

Summary of the review	Description	Results
	Main Information About Data	
	Timespan	1957:2025
	Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	152
	Documents	241
	Annual Growth Rate %	3.84
	Document Average Age	13.9
	Average citations per doc	17.81
	References	0
	Document Contents	
	Keywords Plus (ID)	1320
	Author's Keywords (DE)	1849
	Authors	
	Authors	812
	Authors of single-authored docs	37
	Authors Collaboration	
	Single-authored docs	37
	Co-Authors per Doc	3.61
	International co-authorships %	14.94
	Document Types	
	Article	223
	Review	18

Figure 1 illustrates the year-wise distribution of the 241 documents published from 1957 to 2025. While the early decades show minimal activity, there has been a noticeable increase in scientific production since the early

2000s. The upward trend is marked by fluctuating yet consistent growth, culminating in a peak of nearly 20 publications in recent years. This pattern indicates that the research area has gained increasing attention and relevance, especially in the last two decades.
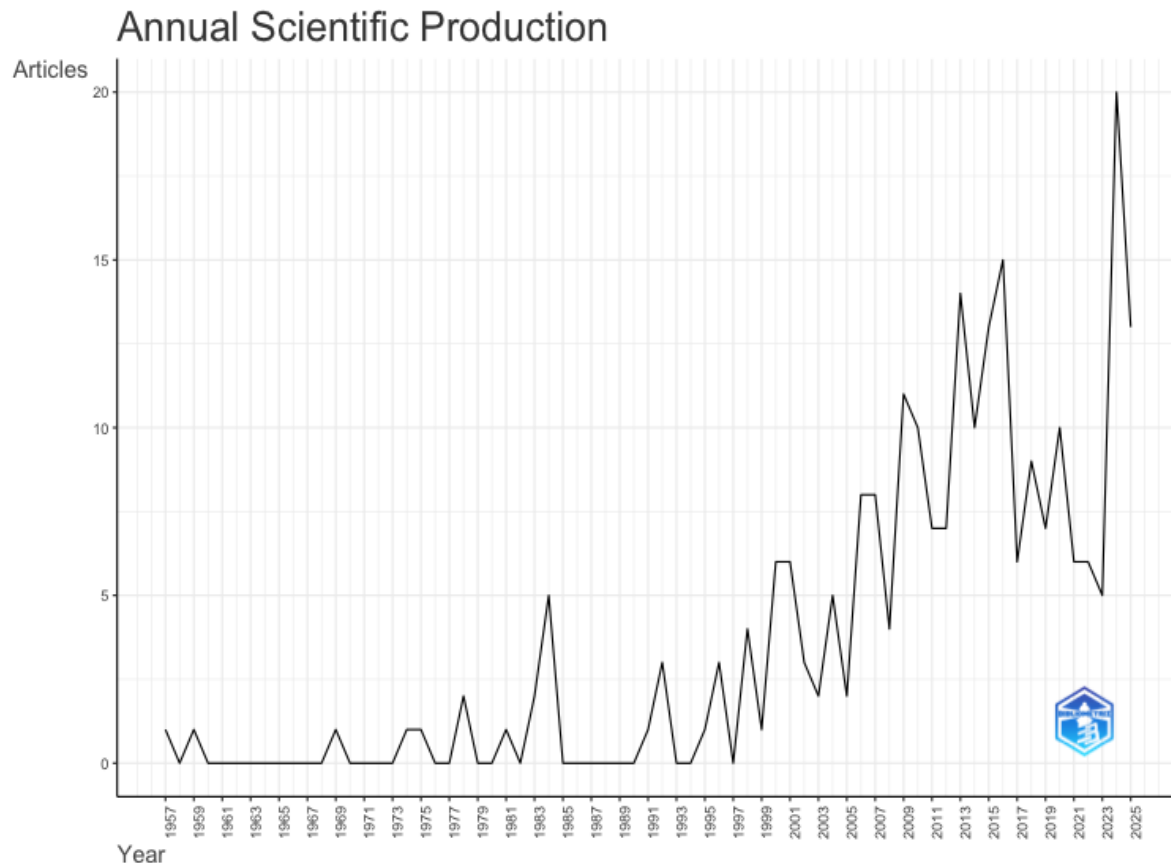

Figure 1. Document growth by year

Most Influential Authors, Affiliations, and Countries

The growth of articles in this field was strongly influenced by the contributions of authors, affiliations, and core sources. Figure 2 presents the most relevant authors in counselor professional competencies literature. McCarthy-Veach, Patricia McCarthy emerges as the most impactful researcher with six published articles, followed by Leroy, Bonnie with five. Several other authors, such as Banerjee, Jacques, Barlow-Stewart, Kristine and Callanan, Nancy contributed three publications each, suggesting that although a few scholars dominate, the field is also supported by a broad base of contributors with moderate productivity.

Figure 3 highlights the most relevant affiliations. The University of Minnesota Twin Cities stands out with the highest number of publications (20), followed by the University of British Columbia (13) and the University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine (12). Other institutions such as the University of Pennsylvania, Texas Christian University, and the University of Pittsburgh recorded between 8 and 10 publications each. This distribution underscores the dominance of North American universities in advancing counselor professional competency research, while also showing contributions from a diverse set of global institutions.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of publications by country. The United States leads overwhelmingly with 436 publications, followed at a considerable distance by Australia (49), Canada (44), and the United Kingdom (41). Other countries with emerging research presence include China (27), Turkey (22), South Africa (21), Malaysia (19), the Netherlands (18), and France (14). This indicates that while the research field is strongly concentrated in Western countries, contributions from Asia and other regions are gradually increasing.

Finally, Figure 5 applies Bradford's Law to identify the core sources of publications in this field. The results indicate that journals such as the Journal of Genetic Counseling, Journal of Clinical Psychology, and Journal of Substance Abuse form the core sources of research output. As Bradford's Law suggests, these few journals

account for a significant proportion of the total articles, while many other journals contribute fewer publications. This reflects the central role of specialized counseling and psychology journals as the primary venues for disseminating research on counselor professional competencies.

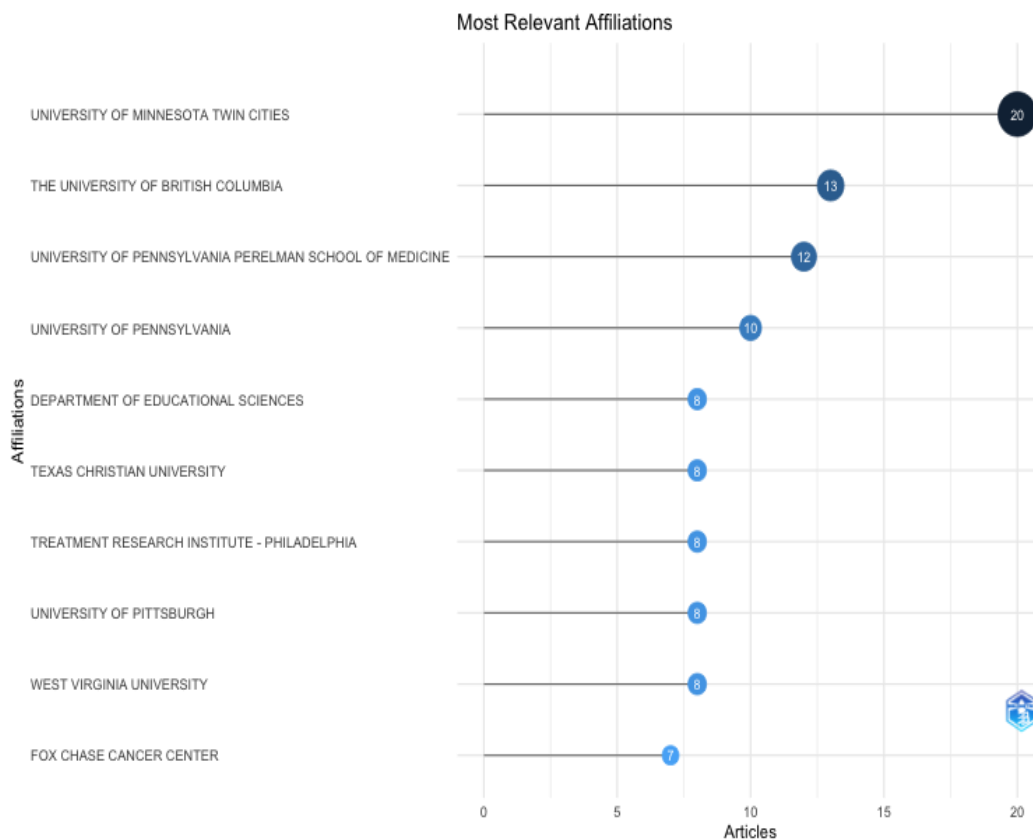Figure 2. Most relevant authors in counselor professional competencies literature

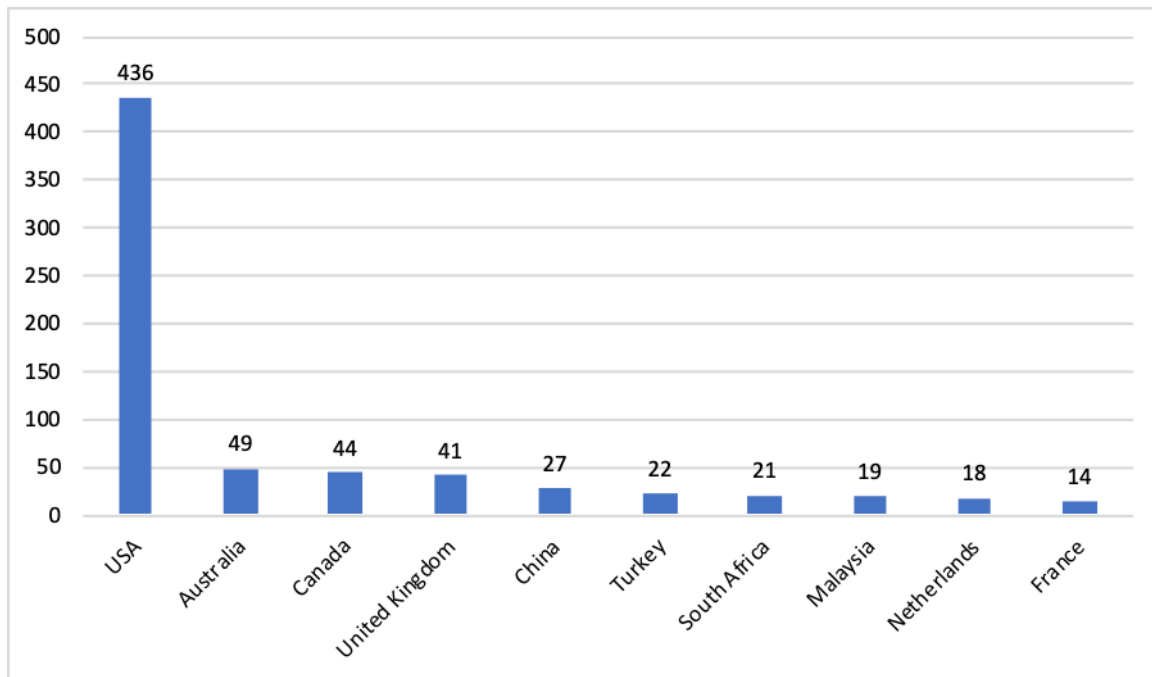
Figure 3. Most relative affiliations

Figure 4. Most relevant countries
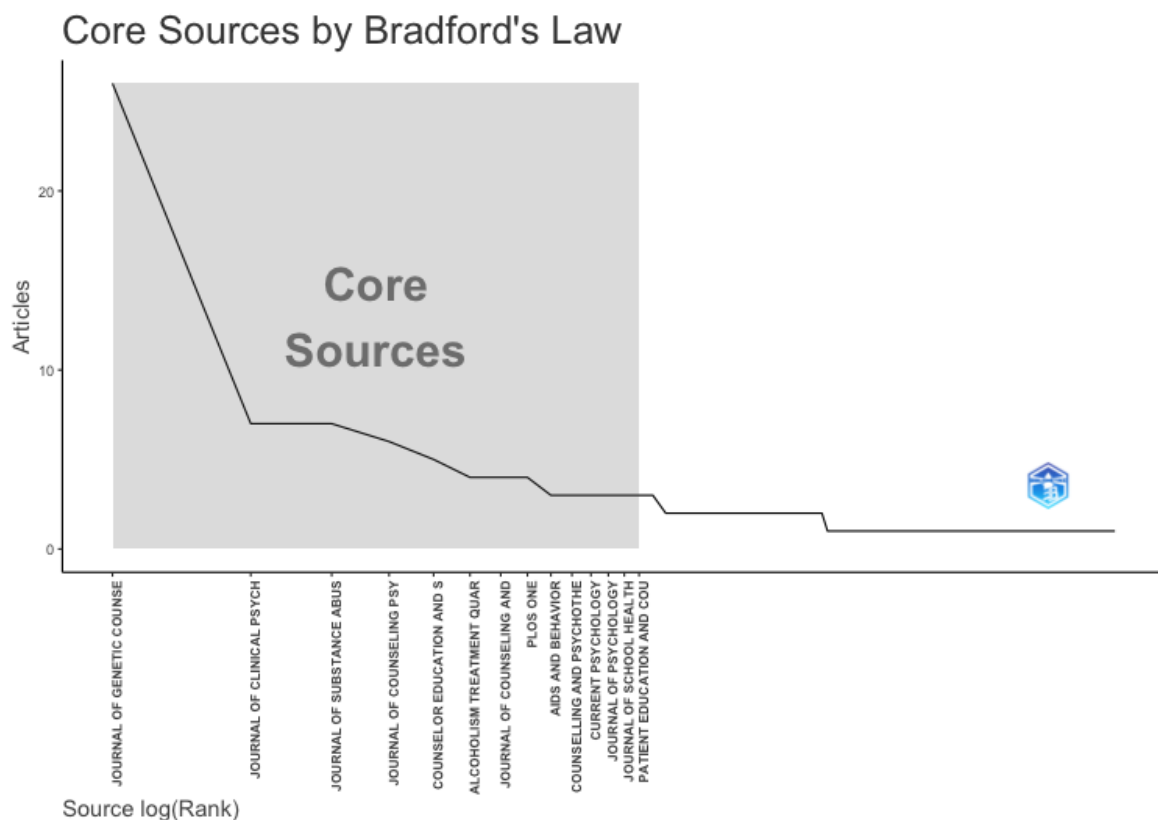
Figure 5. Bradford's law

Citation Analysis

Citation analysis states the connection between two documents. This analysis has been criticized for mispresenting the quality evaluation of a paper due to negative citations (citation of incorrect results), self-citations, and neglecting the time frame given for citations, among others (Seglen, 1989). Despite these criticisms, citation analysis is still a worthy indicator of influence (Garfield, 1979).

Table 3. Top ten cited global document

Author	Title	Year	Journal	Citations
Constantine, Madonna	Racial microaggressions against African American clients in cross-racial counseling relationships	2007	Journal of Counseling Psychology	309
Barber, Jacques, Gallop, Robert, Crits-Christoph, Paul, Frank, Arlene, Thase, Michael Edward, Weiss, Roger, Connolly-Gibbons, Mary Beth	The role of therapist adherence, therapist competence, and alliance in predicting outcome of individual drug counseling: Results from the National Institute Drug Abuse Collaborative Cocaine Treatment Study	2006	Psychotherapy Research	161
Crits-Christoph, Paul Siqueland, Lynne,Chittams, Jesse, Barber, Jacques,Beck, Aaron, Liese, Bruce, Onken, Lisa Simon,Thase, Michael Edward, Frank, Arlene, Luborsky, Lester	Training in cognitive, supportive-expressive, and drug counseling therapies for cocaine dependence	1998	Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology	121
Bryant-Davis, Thema, Ocampo, Carlota	A therapeutic approach to the treatment of racist-incident-based trauma	2006	Journal of Emotional Abuse	110
Borders, Di Anne	Best practices in clinical supervision: Another step in delineating effective supervision practice	2014	American Journal of Psychotherapy	101
Battaglia, Tracy Ann, Finley, Erin Liebschutz, Jane	Survivors of intimate partner violence speak out: Trust in the patient-provider relationship	2003	Journal of General Internal Medicine	99
Gaume, Jacques, Gmel, Gerhard, Faouzi, Mohamed, Daeppen, Jean Bernard	Counselor skill influences outcomes of brief motivational interventions	2009	Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment	96
Broome, Kirk, Knight, Kevin, Hiller, Matthew , Simpson, Dwayne	Drug treatment process indicators for probationers and prediction of recidivism	1996	Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment	79
Ali, Badar Sabir, Rahbar, Mohammad Hossein,Naeem, Shifa, Gul, Asma, Mubeen, Sanober, Iqbal, Aliya	The effectiveness of counseling on anxiety and depression by minimally trained counselors: A randomized controlled trial	2003	American Journal of Psychotherapy	77
Yelland, Jane Susanne, Riggs, Elisha May, Szwarc, Josef, Casey, Sue, Duell-Piening,Philippa,Chesters, Donna, Wahidi, Sayed Shukrullah, Fouladi, Fatema, Brown, Stephanie Janne	Compromised communication: A qualitative study exploring Afghan families and health professionals' experience of interpreting support in Australian maternity care	2016	BMJ Quality and Safety	63

This section provides citation analysis of the most cited documents, as well as the impact of authors and sources. Table 3 presents the top ten globally cited documents in the field of counselor professional competencies. The analysis shows that several articles have received considerable recognition, with the leading documents accumulating the highest citation counts and shaping the discourse of this area. While a few papers dominate in terms of global citations, the distribution suggests that scholarly attention is relatively dispersed across multiple works rather than concentrated in a single seminal study.

Table 4 highlights the impact of authors measured through h-index, g-index, and m-index. McCarthy-Veach, Patricia McCarthy records the highest impact with an h-index and g-index of 6, supported by 199 total citations across six publications since 2001. Leroy, Bonnie follows closely with five publications and 184 citations. Notably, Barber, Jacques, although with fewer publications, demonstrates significant influence with 335 citations and an h-index of 3, suggesting a high citation rate per paper. Other scholars such as Crits-Christoph, Paul F. and Bartels, Dianne M. also stand out with substantial citation counts, indicating their contributions are highly valued within the field despite moderate productivity levels.

Table 5 presents the sources' impact. The Journal of Genetic Counseling emerges as the most influential source with an h-index of 15, a g-index of 22, and 528 total citations across 26 publications since 1992. Other important outlets include the Journal of Counseling Psychology with 376 citations and the Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment with 240 citations. Specialized journals such as Counselor Education and Supervision, Journal of Counseling and Development, and Patient Education and Counseling also contribute to the visibility of research in this domain. The distribution of source impact indicates that while a few journals particularly Journal of Genetic Counseling—act as the core publication venues, research dissemination remains supported by a diverse range of counseling and psychology outlets. Overall, the citation patterns suggest that the field is not dominated by a single author or source. Instead, influence is distributed across multiple contributors and journals, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of counselor professional competencies research.

Table 4. Authors' impact

No	Author	H Index	G Index	M Index	TC	NP	PY Start
1	Mccarthy Veach Patricia Mc Carthy	6	6	0,24	199	6	2001
2	Leroy Bonnie S.	5	5	0,2	184	5	2001
3	Barber Jacques	3	3	0,1	335	3	1996
4	Bartels Dianne	3	3	0,12	120	3	2001
5	Brown-Rice Kathleen A.	3	3	0,231	53	3	2013
6	Callanan Nancy	3	3	0,088	56	3	1992
7	Crits-Christoph Paul	3	3	0,107	288	3	1998
8	Furr Susan	3	3	0,230	53	3	2013
9	Austin Jehannine	2	2	0,125	59	2	2010
10	Barlow-Stewart Kristine	2	3	0,117	28	3	2009

H-index=an author has an h-index of 'h' when they have h papers that have been cited h times at least, G-Index=is where the top G articles have together received G citations, M-index=is the H-index divided by the number of years that an author has been active, Tc=Total citation, Np= Number of papers, Py_Start = publication year start

Table 5. Sources' impact

No	Source	H Index	G Index	M Index	Total Citations	No. of Publications	Publication Years
1	Journal Of Genetic Counseling	15	22	0,441	528	26	1992
2	Counselor Education And Supervision	5	5	0,357	126	5	2012
3	Journal Of Substance Abuse Treatment	5	7	0,167	240	7	1996
4	Journal Of Counseling Psychology	4	6	0,058	376	6	1957
5	Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly	3	3	0,167	15	4	2008
6	Journal Of Clinical Psychology	3	4	0,067	22	7	1981
7	Journal Of Counseling And Development	3	4	0,115	99	4	2000
8	Journal Of School Health	3	3	0,15	49	3	2006
9	Patient Education And Counseling	3	3	0,272	72	3	2015
10	Plos One	3	4	0,231	69	4	2013

Note: H-index=an author has an h-index of 'h' when they have h papers that have been cited h times at least, G-Index=is where the top G articles have together received G citations, M-index=is the H-index divided by the number of years that an author has been active, Tc=Total Citation, Np=Number of papers, Py_Start=publication year start

Network Analysis

Co-authorship Analysis

To further understand the collaborative structure of research on counselor professional competence, we conducted a co-authorship analysis using the fractional counting method to minimize the influence of publications with multiple authors. Two separate analyses were performed: (1) co-authorship by author and (2)

co-authorship by country. The threshold for both analyses was set at a minimum of one document and one citation, ensuring comprehensive inclusion of relevant collaborations.

Figure 6 illustrates the co-authorship network among authors. The visualization reveals the presence of three major clusters of collaboration. The largest cluster (in red) includes researchers such as Thase, Luborsky, Crits-Christoph, Frank and Beck who are strongly connected through their contributions to studies on clinical competence and therapeutic effectiveness. The second cluster (in green), led by Connolly-Gibbons, Crits-Christoph Gallop and Weiss represents collaborations focusing on supervision and professional development. The third cluster (in blue), including Barber, Calvo, Mercer and Krakauer centers on empirical investigations of training outcomes and counselor performance. The connections between clusters indicate a moderate level of inter-group collaboration, suggesting that research on counselor competence remains concentrated within specific author networks.
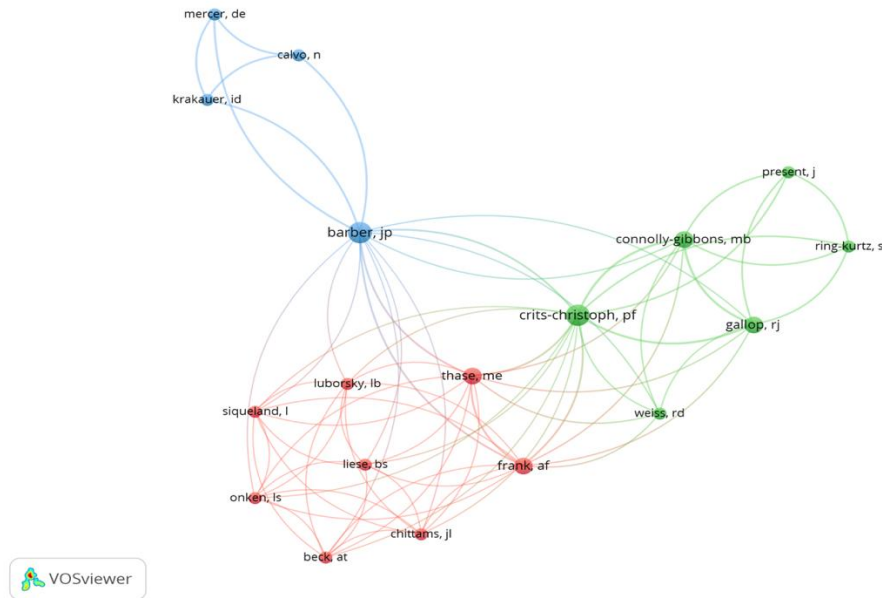

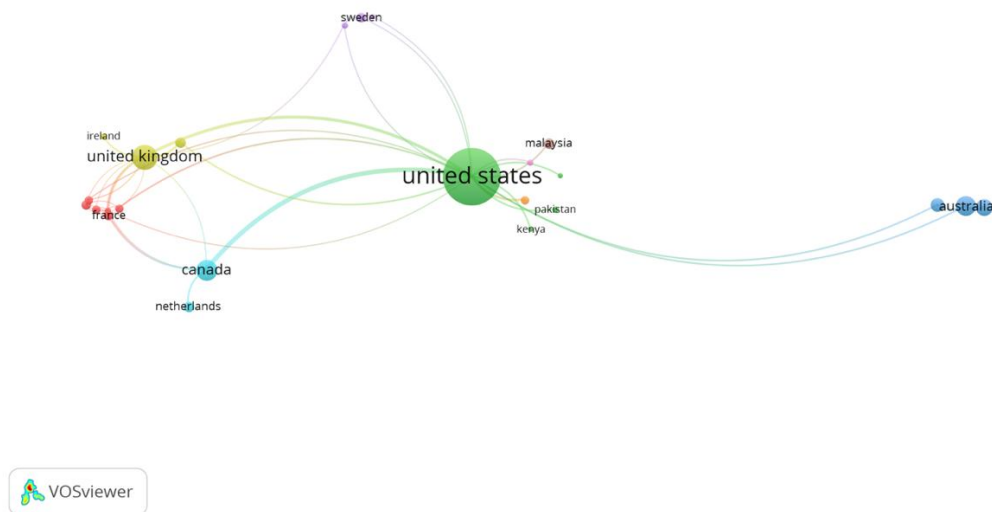Figure 6. Co-authorship by author

Figure 7. Co-authorship by countries

Figure 7 presents the co-authorship network by countries. The United States dominates the global research landscape, forming the central node with extensive links to the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. These countries demonstrate strong intercontinental collaboration, reflecting the maturity of research networks in Western contexts. Other participating countries such as Malaysia, Pakistan, and Kenya appear as emerging contributors, primarily connected through co-authorship with U.S.-based institutions. The United States–Australia link forms the most distinct bilateral collaboration, whereas European countries (United Kingdom, France, Netherlands, and Sweden) show regional interconnectedness with moderate cross-continental engagement.

Cartography Analysis

We performed a cartography analysis to identify the underlying research themes based on keyword co-occurrence. Using VOSviewer, the co-occurrence method was applied with all author keywords as the unit of analysis. The minimum number of occurrences was set to three. The results are presented in Figure 8, and the detailed keywords, occurrences, and total link strength are summarized in Table 6. The link strength represents the degree of connection between related terms.

The analysis reveals three primary clusters, represented in *red*, *green*, and *blue*. The first cluster (red) focuses on *genetic counseling ethics*, characterized by keywords such as *"code of ethics," "confidentiality," "genetic counseling," "interpersonal communication,"* and *"organization and management."* This cluster highlights discussions on ethical codes, confidentiality, and interprofessional collaboration as fundamental aspects of professional competence in healthcare and counseling settings.
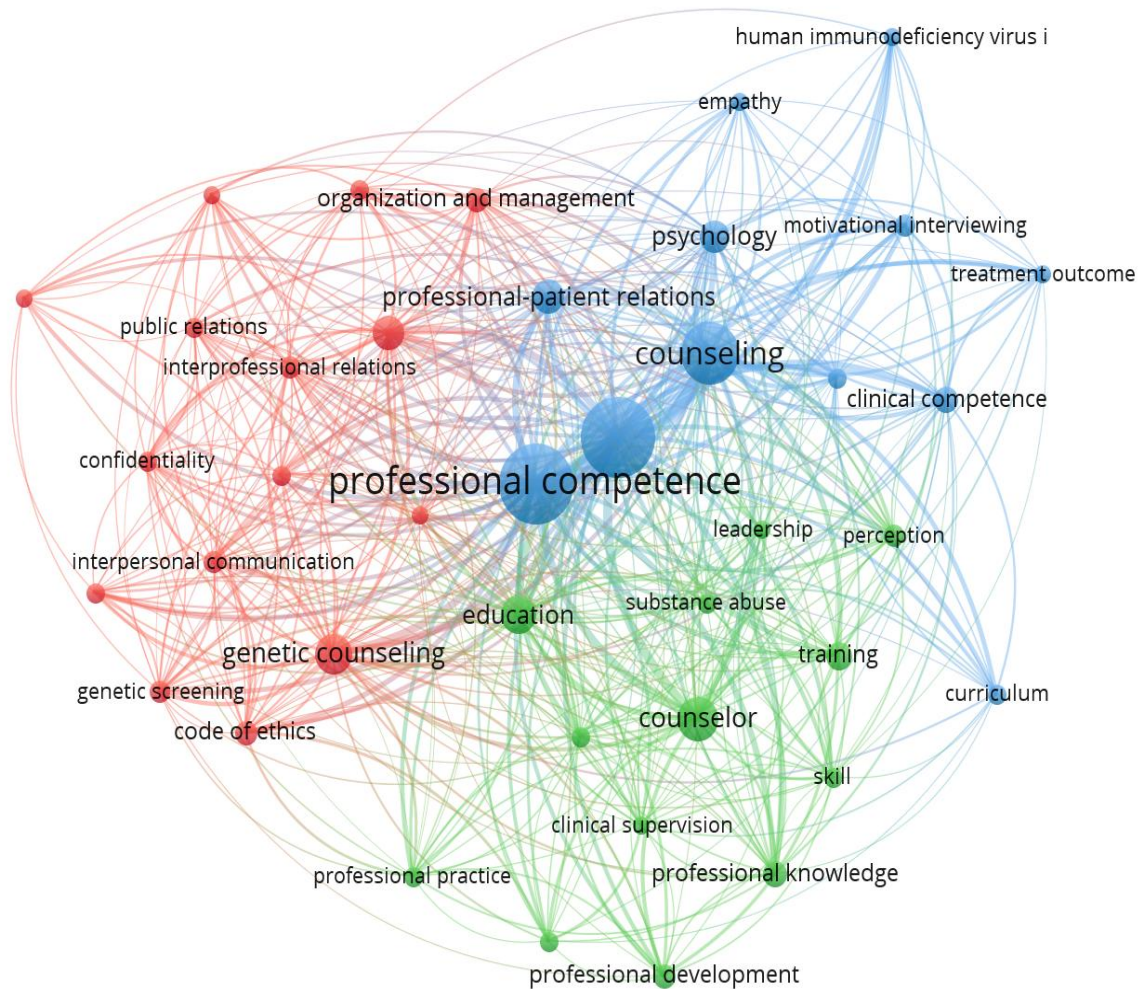

Figure 8. Keyword co-occurance

Table 6. Keywords and the number of occurences along with the link strength

Keywords and the number of occurences along with the link strength	No.	Keyword	Occurences	Total link strength
	Cluster 1 : Genetic counseling ethics			
	1.	Code of ethics	15	15
	2.	Confidentiality	11	11
	3.	Consultation	9	9
	4.	Cultural competence	9	7
	5.	Decision making	10	10
	6.	Genetic counseling	40	39
	7.	Genetic screening	13	13
	8.	Information processing	9	9
	9.	Interpersinal communication	13	13
	10.	Interprofessional relationship	13	13
	11.	Medical genetics	10	10
	12.	Organization and management	14	14
	13.	Physician	10	10
	14.	Public relations	10	10
	15.	United states	30	30
	Cluster 2 : Clinical supervision & growth			
	1.	Clinical supervision	9	9
	2.	Counselor	46	44
	3.	Education	37	37
	4.	Leadership	9	9
	5.	Mental health	10	9
	6.	Perception	12	12
	7.	Professional development	14	12
	8.	Professional knowledge	17	17
	9.	Professional practice	10	10
	10.	Self concept	11	11
	11.	Skill	11	11
	12.	Substance abuse	10	10
	13.	Training	19	18
	Cluster 3 : Counselor competence & therapy			
	1.	Clinical competence	16	16
	2.	Counseling	93	93
	3.	Curriculum	10	10
	4.	Empathy	9	8
	5.	Human	155	155
	6.	Human immunodeficiency virus infection	9	9
	7.	Motivational interviewing	13	13
	8.	Professional competence	157	148
	9.	Professional-patient relations	30	30
	10.	Psychology	26	25
	11.	Substance-related disorders	11	11
	12.	Treatment outcome	9	9

The second cluster (green) represents *clinical supervision and professional growth*. This cluster is dominated by keywords such as *"counselor," "education," "professional development," "training," "professional knowledge,"* and *"clinical supervision."* The theme indicates that professional competence is largely developed

through supervision, continuing education, and reflective learning processes that strengthen counselor expertise and ethical awareness. The third cluster (blue) corresponds to *counselor competence and therapeutic effectiveness*. It includes terms such as *"professional competence," "counseling," "clinical competence," "psychology," "empathy,"* and *"treatment outcome."*

This cluster integrates clinical performance and relational effectiveness, demonstrating that competence extends beyond technical skill to encompass empathy, motivation, and client-centered outcomes. Based on the above analysis, we finalize three thematic clusters representing the intellectual structure of professional competence research in counseling. Detailed discussions of these clusters and their corresponding research agendas are presented in the following section.

Content Analysis and Research Agenda

Research Streams

The bibliometric mapping reveals three major research streams that characterize the scholarly evolution of counselor professional competence. These streams collectively highlight the field's transition from ethical foundations to competence-based supervision and the pursuit of clinical effectiveness across counseling contexts.

(a) Research Stream 1: Ethics and Professional Practice in Genetic Counseling

This stream represents the ethical and philosophical foundation of professional counseling. It primarily focuses on the development of ethical frameworks, professional standards, and counselor responsibility in protecting client welfare and promoting autonomy. Studies extensively discuss ethical dilemmas in genetic counseling, highlighting the counselor's role in navigating confidentiality, informed consent, and client decision-making autonomy (Alliman et al., 2009; Pichini et al., 2024; Saleh et al., 2009).

While these works have advanced ethical professionalism, most are conducted within Western medical contexts, thus limiting their generalizability to multicultural or religious counseling environments. Few studies address how ethical competence might be influenced by counselors' spiritual beliefs or by Islamic ethical frameworks in practice. Future studies should, therefore, explore *ethics-informed counseling* models that incorporate cultural and spiritual values, particularly within non-Western settings, to build more inclusive and culturally grounded standards of professional conduct.

(b) Research Stream 2: Clinical Supervision and Professional Development

The second stream centers on the role of supervision as a mechanism for enhancing professional competence, reflective practice, and counselor accountability. Borders (Borders, 2014) and Furr (Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016a) emphasize supervision as a structured and collaborative learning process that strengthens counselors' confidence, self-awareness, and adherence to ethical standards. Studies further conceptualize supervision as a developmental model that fosters professional identity and competence through feedback and evaluative reflection (Woo et al., 2013). In a similar vein, Bernard (2017,2019) and Goodyear (2019) discuss supervision as a quality assurance mechanism that bridges training and clinical practice.

Despite these significant contributions, the literature reveals limited empirical work connecting supervision competence to measurable counselor performance or client outcomes. Most supervision models are designed in Western counselor education systems, with little adaptation for cultural or spiritual contexts. Future research should therefore investigate supervision frameworks that integrate multicultural sensitivity, spiritual awareness, and culturally appropriate evaluation mechanisms to enhance professional development among counselors working in diverse or faith-based settings.

(c) Research Stream 3: Clinical Competence, Counseling Practice, and Therapeutic Effectiveness

The third stream focuses on the development of clinical competencies that underpin effective counseling practice and positive therapeutic outcomes. Core skills such as empathy, case formulation, and intervention fidelity as predictors of treatment success (Crits-Christoph et al., 1998). Similarly, researchers highlight the role of therapist competence and adherence to evidence-based practice in improving client outcomes in addiction and mental health counseling (Battaglia et al., 2003; Mahdi et al., 2014; Pendergast et al., 1995; Zabek et al., 2023).

Researchers further explore how competence-based training enhances counselor effectiveness through structured reflection and experiential learning (Brown & Carrola, 2022; Hill et al., 2018).

Although this line of research has significantly contributed to defining clinical competence, the literature remains dominated by technical and procedural dimensions, with minimal consideration of cultural or spiritual factors. There is still limited integration of religious or Islamic perspectives in explaining how counselors apply professional competence in diverse client populations. Future research should aim to build integrative competence models that unify psychological expertise, ethical discernment, and spiritual awareness, enabling counselors to practice within value-based and culturally responsive frameworks.

These three streams delineate the evolution of counselor professional competence research from ethical and philosophical foundations to supervision-based development and clinical mastery. Together, they underscore the need for future inquiry that situates ethical, supervisory, and clinical competencies within multicultural and faith-informed paradigms, particularly in contexts such as Islamic counseling where spirituality and professionalism intersect.

Research Agenda

We extend our discussion on the research clusters in this section and outline the relevant research agenda concerning counselor professional competence. Through the bibliometric analysis, we identified several research gaps that pave the way for future investigations in ethics, supervision, and clinical competence in counseling practice.

First, within the ethics and professional practice research sclusters, most studies focus on ethical dilemmas and professional responsibilities in genetic and clinical counseling contexts (e.g. McCarty et al., 2023; Suguitan et al., 2019). However, these discussions remain conceptual and largely confined to Western frameworks of bioethics and professional codes. There is a limited empirical exploration of how ethical decision-making is influenced by counselors' cultural, spiritual, and religious backgrounds, particularly in non-Western and Islamic contexts. Future research should therefore focus on developing culturally grounded ethical models that integrate moral reasoning, spiritual sensitivity, and cultural humility in professional counseling practice.

Second, in the clinical supervision and professional development research cluster, the literature highlights the central role of supervision in promoting counselor growth, self-reflection, and competence enhancement (Borders, 2014; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016b; Watkins, 2020). Yet, most of these studies adopt theoretical or descriptive approaches, with few empirical validations linking supervision practices to measurable counselor or client outcomes. The supervision models also remain heavily influenced by Western pedagogical systems, with minimal adaptation to cultural or faith-based contexts. Therefore, future research should emphasize developing competence-based supervision frameworks that are responsive to cultural diversity, professional ethics, and the realities of school-based or Islamic counseling environments.

Third, within the clinical competence, counseling practice, and therapeutic effectiveness research clusters, scholars have contributed significantly to identifying the skills and attributes that predict effective counseling performance (Barber et al., 2017; Kessler, 1998; Kivlighan, 2008). However, empirical findings often isolate technical and procedural competencies from the relational, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of counseling (Montonye et al., 2010; Woodhouse & Hogan, 2020). There is a pressing need for integrative competence frameworks that bridge these domains and articulate how professional skill, empathy, and cultural-spiritual awareness jointly enhance therapeutic outcomes. Future research could explore competence integration models that align psychological expertise with religious and moral foundations, particularly in faith-sensitive or Islamic counseling contexts.

Finally, across all three clusters, a consistent gap emerges in terms of measurement and evaluation tools for assessing counselor competence holistically. Most existing instruments were designed in Western contexts and do not fully capture the cultural, ethical, and spiritual nuances of counseling in multicultural societies. Future studies should therefore aim to design and validate context-specific competence assessment tools that reflect both universal standards of professional practice and the distinctive moral and spiritual orientations of diverse counseling environments.

Table 7. Research gap and future research agenda

Research Stream	Contribution	Research Gap	Future Research Question/Agenda	Authors
Ethics & Professional Practice in Genetic Counseling	McCarthy Veach developed an ethical framework for genetic counseling emphasizing confidentiality, informed decision-making, and integration of cultural values.	Still focused on Western contexts and has not been tested in multicultural settings.	How can genetic counseling codes of ethics be adapted to non-Western socio-cultural contexts?	(Alliman et al., 2009)
	Austin highlighted ethical conflicts between client autonomy and family involvement.	Limited empirical evidence on managing ethical conflicts in collectivist societies.	How do counselors balance individual rights with family/community norms in practice?	(Dunlop et al., 2011)
	Leroy & Constatine emphasized the importance of cultural competence in multicultural counseling.	Cultural competence has not yet been systematically integrated into counselor training curricula.	How can cultural competence integration into counselor education improve multicultural counseling	(Bower et al., 2002; Fallowfield & Roberts, 1992)
	Barlow-Stewart highlighted the issue of genetic information confidentiality.	No adaptation of confidentiality guidelines for societies with extensive family involvement.	How can confidentiality principles be applied in collectivist family contexts?	(Saleh et al., 2009b)
	Callanan provided the conceptual foundation for counseling ethics codes.	Mostly conceptual, with little empirical validation.	How effective is the implementation of counseling ethics codes in daily practice?	(Borders et al., 2016)
Clinical Supervision & Professional Development	Borders formulated best practices in clinical supervision.	Few longitudinal studies on the long-term impact of supervision.	What are the long-term effects of clinical supervision on counselor competence?	(Borders, 2019)
	Brown-Rice showed that supervision supports counselors in managing personal and professional issues.	Lack of comparative studies across different settings (school, clinic, community).	How does supervision effectiveness vary between school, clinical, and community settings?	(Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016b)
	Furr emphasized the role of supervision in shaping counselor professional identity.	Limited studies connecting supervision to identity development outside Western contexts.	How does supervision contribute to professional identity formation in non-Western contexts?	(Rice & Furr, 2013)
	Bartels stressed the importance of supervision in maintaining training quality.	Few empirical studies linking supervision models with training outcomes.	How do different supervision models affect the quality of counselor training graduates?	(Bower et al., 2002)

	Callanan discussed models of supervision.	Remains conceptual, with little empirical testing across models.	Which supervision model is most effective in enhancing counselor performance?	(Corey et al., 2014)
Clinical Competence, Counseling Practice & Therapeutic Effectiveness	Barber demonstrated the link between therapeutic alliance and treatment outcomes.	Research still based on Western samples, not yet tested cross-culturally.	How does therapeutic alliance relate to counseling outcomes in developing countries?	(Barber et al., 2017)
	Crits-Christoph developed instruments to assess clinical competence and link it to treatment outcomes.	No globally standardized instrument for competence assessment.	How can valid cross-cultural instruments for counselor competence assessment be developed?	(Crits-Christoph et al., 1998)
	Constatine highlighted empathy and multicultural competence as key to counseling effectiveness.	Few studies on adapting counseling techniques to non-clinical settings.	How do empathy and multicultural competence influence counseling effectiveness in schools and communities?	(Kılıç, 2025)
	Gaume showed that motivational interviewing skills enhance therapy effectiveness.	Limited research on its application in developing countries.	How can motivational interviewing be adapted in community-based settings?	(Gaume et al., 2009)
	Ali connected counselor competence with mental health services in developing countries.	Few studies address counselor competence within non-Western health systems.	What is the role of counselor competence in improving access to mental health services in developing contexts?	(Stevens et al., 2017)
	Bryant-Davis emphasized cultural sensitivity in trauma counseling.	Few empirical studies on culturally-based trauma counseling effectiveness.	How does counselor cultural sensitivity impact trauma counseling outcomes?	(Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006)

Conclusion

Due to its vital role in ensuring the quality and ethical integrity of counseling services, professional competence has attracted growing global attention from scholars, practitioners, and policymakers in the field of guidance and counseling. The objective of this study was to present a systematic and bibliometric review of the literature on counselor professional competence. We employed bibliometric and thematic mapping approaches to achieve the objectives, which can be summarized into three main outcomes.

Firstly, we identified and discussed the bibliometric profile of publications related to counselor competence and professional development. Using data retrieved from the Scopus database and analyzed through R-studio, we observed that most studies originated from Western countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. However, an increasing body of research has also emerged from Asian contexts, including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Turkey, reflecting a growing recognition of cultural and contextual perspectives in counselor professionalism. The most influential journals in this field include the *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *Counselor Education and Supervision*, and *Psychotherapy Research*. Prominent authors, such as

Bernard JM, Borders LD, and Stoltenberg CD, have made seminal contributions in defining supervision models, competence frameworks, and ethical standards.

Secondly, the study identifies three dominant research themes in the literature: (1) *Ethics and Professional Practice in Counseling*, which focuses on moral responsibility, client welfare, and ethical decision-making; (2) *Clinical Supervision and Professional Development*, emphasizing supervision models, reflective practice, and competence-based training; and (3) *Clinical Competence, Counseling Practice, and Therapeutic Effectiveness*, which connects counselors' professional skills with client outcomes and service quality. These themes highlight how counselor competence is understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, affective, behavioral, and ethical domains.

Thirdly, based on the analysis, several research gaps and future directions were identified. The majority of existing studies are conceptual or descriptive, with limited empirical validation of competence frameworks across diverse cultural and institutional contexts. Future research should explore how competence develops dynamically through supervision, continuing education, and multicultural engagement. There is also a pressing need to investigate spiritual and religious dimensions of competence, particularly in culturally diverse societies where counselors must integrate faith-based values with professional standards. Moreover, competence assessment methods should evolve toward mixed-method approaches that capture both observable behavior and internal professional growth.

Finally, this study suggests that future research on counselor professional competence should move toward integrative, contextual, and empirical paradigms. Scholars may examine how supervision models enhance ethical sensitivity and reflective functioning; how competence development impacts client well-being; and how institutional, cultural, and spiritual factors shape counselors' professional identity. The role of digital technology, peer collaboration, and intercultural supervision in competence formation also warrants further exploration. In addition, developing a standardized competence assessment framework adaptable across different educational systems could substantially advance both counselor training and professional regulation worldwide.

Recommendations

Based on the bibliometric and thematic analyses, several recommendations can be made for advancing future research, counselor education, and professional practice in the field of counselor competence:

Integrative Competence Frameworks:

Future studies should move toward developing integrative models of counselor competence that unify ethical, clinical, cultural, and spiritual dimensions. Such frameworks will enable a more holistic understanding of professional competence that reflects the complex realities of counseling practice across diverse contexts.

Cross-Cultural and Faith-Based Contexts:

Researchers are encouraged to expand empirical investigations beyond Western paradigms to include culturally and spiritually informed approaches. Studies in Islamic, Asian, and other non-Western contexts can illuminate how cultural and religious values influence professional identity and competence formation.

Supervision and Reflective Practice:

Counselor education institutions should strengthen supervision models that incorporate reflective practice, ethical sensitivity, and intercultural understanding. Longitudinal and comparative research is needed to examine how supervision contributes to sustainable competence and counselor well-being.

Competence Assessment and Measurement:

There is a pressing need to design and validate assessment tools that measure counselor competence holistically. Future instruments should integrate behavioral indicators, ethical reasoning, and reflective capacity while being adaptable to different educational and cultural systems.

Technology and Digital Competence:

With the increasing adoption of tele-counseling and online supervision, future research should explore digital competence as an emerging aspect of professional qualification. Integrating digital literacy into competence frameworks will enhance counselors' adaptability in technology-mediated counseling environments.

Policy and Professional Standards:

Policymakers and professional associations should use bibliometric insights to revise national standards, certification criteria, and continuing professional development requirements. Competence frameworks should explicitly address ethical responsibility, inclusivity, and cultural responsiveness.

Interdisciplinary and International Collaboration:

Collaborative research networks between counseling, psychology, education, and health disciplines are essential to strengthen global knowledge exchange. Increasing co-authorship and cross-country partnerships will foster innovation and the contextual adaptation of competence models.

Integration of Spiritual and Religious Competence:

As counseling practice becomes increasingly multicultural and faith-sensitive, scholars should explore how spiritual competence can be ethically and effectively integrated into professional counseling. This line of inquiry can contribute to developing culturally congruent models of care in Islamic and other faith-based educational settings.

Scientific Ethics Declaration

* The authors declare that the scientific ethical and legal responsibility of this article published in EPESS journal belongs to the authors.

* The authors declare that all procedures followed in this study were conducted in accordance with scientific ethical principles. The data analyzed were obtained from publicly accessible databases (Scopus) and did not involve any human participants, personal data, or experimental interventions. The study adheres to academic integrity standards, including transparency in data handling, citation, and interpretation.

Conflict of Interest

* The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest

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Author(s) Information

Deasy Yunika Khairun
Indonesia University of Education (Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia), Jl. Dr. Setiabudi No.229, Indonesia
Contact e-mail: *deasyyunikakhairun.88@upi.edu*

Agus Taufiq
Indonesia University of Education (Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia), Jl. Dr. Setiabudi No.229, Indonesia

Yusi Riksa Yustiana
Indonesia University of Education (Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia), Jl. Dr. Setiabudi No.229, Indonesia

Nandang Budiman
Indonesia University of Education (Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia), Jl. Dr. Setiabudi No.229, Indonesia

Ibrahim Al Hakim
Indonesia University of Education (Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia), Jl. Dr. Setiabudi No.229, Indonesia

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