INTERROGATING THE UNIVERSALITY CLAIMS OF THE PRINCIPLES OF COUNSELLING: TOWARDS AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Counsellor-training programmes at different levels of professional certification generally include a course or, at minimum, a topic on the principles of counselling. Within this area of study are assumptions, values, standards, and guidelines intended to provide direction for counsellors in their professional practice. Such assumptions and suppositions are, to a considerable extent, value-laden.

The counselling session, however, essentially belongs to the client. Consequently, the counsellor's personal values, morals, beliefs, or worldview should not be imposed on the client. Rather, the counsellor is expected to provide a supportive and non-judgemental environment in which clients can explore their concerns freely. Counselling as a helping profession has consequently emphasised the recognition and respect of clients' values and their freedom to uphold those values within appropriate professional, legal, and ethical boundaries.

This paper takes a critical look at the principles of counselling, particularly the claim that such principles are universal, and explores the possibility of developing an Islamic perspective on their foundations and applications. The discussion is based on the premise that Islam provides comprehensive guidance for human life and offers principles that can inform responses to human concerns and professional practices. The paper is organised under the following major headings:

1. Meaning, Samples, Focus, Scope and Universality of the Principles of Counselling
2. Universality Claims of the Principles of Counselling
3. The Philosophical Roots of Principles and the Islamic Options
4. Interrogations and the Unfolding of the Argument
5. Maqasid al-Shariʿah as an Alternative Islamic Perspective
6. Conclusion

2.0 MEANING, SAMPLES, FOCUS, SCOPE AND UNIVERSALITY OF THE PRINCIPLES OF COUNSELLING

This section provides a brief review of the meaning, examples, focus, scope, and universality of the principles of counselling. The purpose is to establish a conceptual foundation for examining the universality claims associated with these principles.

2.1 Meaning of the Principles of Counselling

Principles of counselling may be understood as fundamental rules, values, standards, and guidelines that provide direction for counselling practice. They are intended to guide counsellors in understanding clients, establishing appropriate professional relationships, making responsible decisions, and selecting suitable interventions for clients' concerns.

What is considered beneficial to a client should take into account the client's worldview, values, circumstances, and orientation. Principles of counselling also help to protect the dignity, values, and worldviews of clients while guiding professional practice (Bina Bangsa et al., 2025).

In simple terms, principles of counselling concern the counsellor's thoughts, attitudes, decisions, and actions in the process of helping a client. They provide a framework within which professional counselling can be conducted responsibly, ethically, and with due regard for the welfare and individuality of the client.

2.2 Sample Principles of Counselling

Examples of principles commonly associated with counselling include respect for the dignity and worth of every person; acceptance of the client; empathy and understanding; confidentiality and privacy; non-discrimination; client autonomy and freedom of choice; professional competence; objectivity and impartiality; beneficence, or the promotion of client welfare; non-maleficence, or avoidance of harm; and justice and fairness.

Other principles include informed consent, respect for cultural and individual differences, and professional responsibility and accountability (Ambarsari et al., 2023).

Although these principles are widely recognised in contemporary counselling literature, their philosophical and cultural foundations deserve critical examination. A principle that appears universal may nevertheless reflect particular assumptions about human nature, freedom, morality, autonomy, welfare, and the purpose of human existence. Consequently, a principle may require interpretation and adaptation when applied to clients whose religious or cultural worldviews differ from the philosophical tradition from which the principle originated.

2.3 Focus of the Principles of Counselling

The focus of the principles of counselling concerns the major areas of professional practice that are intended to regulate and promote effective counselling. Patterson (1996), in discussing multicultural counselling, identifies important areas relating to the client, the counselling relationship, client autonomy, confidentiality, ethical practice, human development, and cultural differences.

The primary focus is the well-being, dignity, needs, rights, and development of the client. Counselling is generally organised around helping clients understand themselves, cope with difficulties, make appropriate decisions, and pursue meaningful personal, educational, social, or vocational goals.

Another major focus is the development of a healthy counsellor-client relationship. Trust, respect, acceptance, empathy, understanding, openness, and appropriate professional boundaries provide important foundations for such a relationship. A constructive counselling relationship creates an environment in which clients can discuss their concerns with an appropriate sense of psychological safety.

The principles of counselling also recognise the client's participation in decisions affecting their life. The counsellor normally assists rather than unnecessarily controls the client. At the same time, counsellors are expected to protect information disclosed by clients. Confidentiality is important for establishing trust and encouraging honest communication, although it is subject to relevant ethical and legal limitations.

Professional competence is another important area of focus. Counsellors are expected to practise within the limits of their competence, avoid exploitation, maintain appropriate professional boundaries, accept responsibility for their professional actions, and make referrals when necessary.

Counselling is concerned not only with the resolution of immediate problems but also with personal growth and development. It may address emotional, social, educational, career, family, and interpersonal development. In addressing these concerns, due consideration should be given to cultural and individual differences, including differences in language, values, socioeconomic circumstances, cultural background, and personal experiences.

2.4 Scope of the Principles of Counselling

The scope of the principles of counselling refers to the range of situations, activities, populations, settings, and professional concerns to which counselling principles apply. McFadden (1996) discusses counselling from a transcultural perspective and highlights the importance of considering counselling across diverse contexts.

The principles of counselling may apply to individual and group counselling, family counselling, educational counselling, career and vocational counselling, personal-social counselling, rehabilitation counselling, developmental counselling, and crisis and adjustment counselling. They

may also be relevant across different stages of human development, including childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and later adulthood. The specific counselling approach may vary according to the developmental needs and circumstances of the client.

Counselling principles also operate across diverse settings, including primary and secondary schools, universities and colleges, hospitals and healthcare institutions, rehabilitation centres, workplaces, community organisations, religious institutions, government and non-governmental organisations, and private counselling practices.

The scope further encompasses a wide range of issues and concerns, including academic difficulties, career decisions, relationship problems, family issues, adjustment difficulties, stress, decision-making, personal development, social difficulties, and educational and occupational transitions.

Professional responsibilities also form part of the scope of counselling principles. These include assessment, diagnosis where professionally appropriate, counselling intervention, record keeping, referral, consultation, research, professional development, supervision, and evaluation of counselling services (McFadden, 1996).

3.0 UNIVERSALITY CLAIMS OF THE PRINCIPLES OF COUNSELLING

Universality in counselling generally refers to the proposition that certain fundamental values underlying counselling are applicable to human beings across different national, cultural, religious, educational, and geographical contexts. For example, the desire to be treated with dignity and respect can be found across many societies. Similarly, trust, empathy, fairness, privacy, and concern for human welfare are important components of helping relationships in many cultural contexts (Fischer, Jome, & Atkinson, 1998).

However, universality does not necessarily mean that counselling should be practised identically everywhere. A distinction should therefore be made between the general value of a principle and the manner in which that principle is interpreted and applied. It may be inappropriate to impose one person's worldview when attempting to address the concerns of another person whose worldview is substantially different.

The meaning and application of principles may vary according to culture, religion, law, professional codes, and social circumstances. Thus, even where certain fundamental principles are widely shared, their interpretation and practical application may require cultural and contextual adaptation.

Kich (2003) discusses universality in therapeutic contexts in terms of dimensions such as human dignity, respect, empathy, beneficence and non-maleficence, justice and fairness, autonomy, confidentiality, professional competence, and cultural adaptation.

Human dignity entails regarding every client as a person of inherent worth. A counsellor should not deliberately maltreat, humiliate, or discriminate against a client. Respect for the individual is

therefore a fundamental feature of responsible counselling practice. Clients should be treated as persons whose experiences, perspectives, and circumstances deserve serious consideration.

Empathy involves making a genuine effort to understand the client's feelings, experiences, and perspective. It enables the counsellor to appreciate the client's experience without prematurely judging or dismissing it (Kich, 2003).

Counselling is also concerned with promoting the welfare and development of the client. Beneficence refers to the obligation to provide assistance that is beneficial, while non-maleficence requires the counsellor to avoid unnecessary harm. Counsellors should therefore avoid practices that unnecessarily expose clients to psychological, social, professional, or other forms of harm.

Justice and fairness require clients to receive equitable and non-discriminatory treatment. Counselling services should not be based on arbitrary prejudice or unjust exclusion.

Autonomy ordinarily involves respecting clients' participation in decisions affecting their lives and supporting informed decision-making within the limits of law, safety, professional responsibility, and relevant ethical requirements. Similarly, confidentiality and privacy are fundamental features of professional counselling, although their precise limits may vary according to law, professional codes, and circumstances.

Consequently, even when core counselling principles are widely shared, their application should remain culturally sensitive. Communication styles, family involvement, concepts of privacy, help-seeking behaviour, religious commitments, and understandings of well-being may differ substantially across cultures and communities.

4.0 THE PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF PRINCIPLES AND THE ISLAMIC OPTIONS

4.1 The Philosophical Roots of Principles

The philosophical roots of principles refer to the fundamental ideas, assumptions, and schools of thought from which principles governing conduct, education, leadership, counselling, governance, and human relationships are derived.

A principle is essentially a guiding proposition concerning what is considered right, valuable, desirable, or appropriate. The philosophical foundations of a principle therefore influence how right and wrong, desirable and undesirable, and appropriate and inappropriate are understood.

This issue is particularly important for Muslim counsellors because Islam is understood by Muslims as a comprehensive way of life that provides guidance concerning spiritual, social, moral, economic, and other dimensions of human existence. Consequently, the philosophical foundations of counselling principles deserve examination from an Islamic worldview.

Metaphysics concerns the nature of reality and addresses fundamental questions such as: What is reality? What is the nature of human existence? What is the place and purpose of human beings in

the universe? Principles may consequently be influenced by assumptions about human nature, freedom, consciousness, and existence.

Epistemology concerns the nature, sources, acquisition, justification, and validation of knowledge. It provides foundations for principles relating to evidence, rational inquiry, learning, research, and decision-making.

Axiology concerns values and what is regarded as worthwhile. It is one of the most direct philosophical foundations of principles because principles often express values such as justice, honesty, responsibility, equality, compassion, and freedom. For example, the value of justice supports the principle of treating people fairly.

Ethics provides another important foundation for moral and professional principles. It is concerned with questions of right and wrong conduct and with values such as good character, honesty, courage, responsibility, and wisdom. Professional codes of conduct frequently reflect ethical traditions.

Logic provides principles for distinguishing valid reasoning from faulty reasoning. It supports consistency, clarity, rationality, objectivity, and systematic decision-making.

Humanistic philosophy has strongly influenced modern counselling through its emphasis on human dignity, autonomy, freedom, personal growth, and self-development. The principle of respecting the individuality of each person is closely associated with this tradition.

Pragmatism evaluates ideas partly in terms of their practical usefulness and consequences. It encourages experimentation, problem-solving, flexibility, and continuous improvement. Natural-law traditions, on the other hand, hold that certain moral principles may be grounded in human nature, reason, or a higher moral order.

Religious philosophies, including Islam, Christianity, and other religious traditions, have also contributed ideas concerning justice, honesty, compassion, responsibility, human dignity, and social responsibility.

4.2 Islamic Views and Options

Principles are therefore not merely isolated rules. They are generally connected to deeper beliefs concerning reality, knowledge, values, human nature, morality, and rational action. The claim that a principle is universal is consequently also a claim that the underlying assumptions and values have general validity.

From an Islamic perspective, these foundational questions should be considered in the light of revelation. Questions concerning human nature, the purpose of human existence, moral responsibility, and the relationship between human beings and their Creator cannot be adequately addressed solely through assumptions about humanity.

Islam provides an epistemological framework in which revelation occupies a central position in the acquisition and validation of knowledge. Knowledge is highly valued in Islam and is connected to belief, moral conduct, and responsible living. Islamic intellectual tradition also recognises different categories and forms of knowledge, including obligatory religious knowledge and useful worldly knowledge such as medicine, law, engineering, and other disciplines.

Islamic principles are rooted in a comprehensive worldview in which human beings, society, and the universe are understood in relation to Allah as Creator and ultimate source of authority. Islamic principles therefore draw upon divine revelation while also recognising reason, moral responsibility, human experience, and contextual considerations.

Tawhid, the affirmation of the absolute oneness of Allah, constitutes a fundamental foundation of the Islamic worldview. Belief in the oneness and sovereignty of Allah establishes Him as the Creator and ultimate source of authority. From this perspective, counselling principles for Muslim clients should be examined in relation to Tawhid and the wider Islamic conception of human nature, purpose, morality, and responsibility.

5.0 INTERROGATIONS AND THE UNFOLDING OF THE ARGUMENT

Within an Islamic framework, the fundamental rules, values, and standards that guide counselling practice should be examined in relation to authoritative Islamic teachings. Client welfare, dignity, autonomy, the counselling relationship, ethical practice, and human development remain important concerns. However, from an Islamic perspective, the meaning and ultimate purpose of these concepts should also be examined in relation to Islamic understandings of human welfare and development.

The scope of counselling principles extends across people, problems, settings, and professional functions. This raises an important question: to what extent can principles developed within particular philosophical and cultural traditions legitimately claim universal validity?

The existence of different cultural, religious, moral, and social traditions suggests that universal claims require careful qualification. For example, concepts such as autonomy, individual freedom, family responsibility, privacy, and welfare may be understood differently across societies. Consequently, counselling principles should be interpreted with sensitivity to cultural and religious contexts.

This does not necessarily mean that all counselling principles lack universal relevance. Rather, it suggests that a distinction should be made between principles that may have broad human relevance and the philosophical interpretations or applications attached to those principles. Values such as dignity, respect, empathy, fairness, confidentiality, competence, and concern for human welfare may be widely recognised, while their precise meanings and applications may vary.

From an Islamic perspective, the human person may be understood as possessing dignity while also bearing moral responsibility before Allah. Principles such as ʿ**adl** (justice), **raḥmah** (mercy

and compassion), **shūrā** (consultation), **amānah** (trust and responsibility), and avoidance of harm can therefore provide important foundations for counselling practice.

This perspective is particularly relevant when counselling is practised among Muslim populations. The counsellor may maintain appropriate professional standards while ensuring that counselling interventions are sensitive to the client's religious and cultural worldview. The central issue is therefore not simply whether counselling principles are universal, but also the philosophical basis, interpretation, and contextual application of those principles.

6.0 MAQASID AL-SHARIʿAH AS A SOURCE OF AN ALTERNATIVE ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

Shariʿah may be understood as the divine legal and moral framework that guides Muslim life. It encompasses not only legal provisions but also guidance concerning ethics, social relationships, family matters, religious obligations, and other dimensions of human conduct. As discussed by Zayed (2021/2022), Islamic law is principally associated with the Qur'an, the teachings and practice of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and the wider sources and methodologies of Islamic jurisprudence.

The objectives of Shariʿah are directed towards justice, equity, mercy, welfare, and the proper ordering of human life. Their application requires attention to context, appropriate jurisprudential understanding, and commitment to fairness and compassion. Where attention is directed to the higher purposes and objectives of Shariʿah, the concept of **Maqasid al-Shariʿah** provides an important framework.

Maqasid al-Shariʿah, or the higher objectives of Shariʿah, can provide an important philosophical and ethical foundation for counselling from an Islamic perspective. Rather than viewing counselling merely as a set of techniques for addressing psychological, educational, social, or behavioural problems, an Islamic approach can view counselling as a helping process directed towards human well-being in accordance with the purposes of divine guidance.

The major objectives of Shariʿah are commonly discussed in terms of the protection and promotion of religion, life, intellect, lineage or family, and wealth. These objectives can provide a framework for deriving and organising principles relevant to counselling practice.

6.1 Preservation of Religion

The preservation of religion is commonly identified as the first of the essential objectives of Shariʿah. From an Islamic counselling perspective, spirituality and religious commitment may therefore be recognised as important dimensions of human well-being.

The counsellor should, where appropriate and consistent with the client's wishes and professional boundaries, help the client understand personal difficulties within an appropriate spiritual and moral framework. This does not imply imposing religious beliefs on clients. Rather, where the client identifies Islam as an important component of their worldview, counselling may

appropriately recognise values such as faith, patience, hope, repentance, gratitude, trust in Allah, personal responsibility, and ethical conduct.

Spiritual development can therefore constitute an important component of counselling for Muslim clients who wish to integrate their religious worldview into the counselling process.

6.2 Preservation of Life

The preservation of life is another major objective of Shariʿah. From this perspective, counselling should give substantial attention to the physical, psychological, emotional, and social well-being of clients.

Principles derived from this objective should include the protection of client welfare, prevention of harm, identification of significant difficulties, appropriate supportive intervention, crisis response, and the promotion of healthy coping strategies.

This objective reinforces the importance of non-maleficence and beneficence in counselling while placing these values within an Islamic conception of human welfare.

6.3 Preservation of Intellect

The preservation of intellect is traditionally identified as another essential objective of Shariʿah. Counselling principles derived from this objective should support sound judgement, problem-solving abilities, emotional regulation, responsible decision-making, and appropriate education.

The objective also supports attention to behaviours and circumstances that may impair sound judgement and responsible decision-making. Islamic counselling can therefore encourage self-understanding, informed decision-making, responsible conduct, and the pursuit of beneficial knowledge.

6.4 Preservation of Family and Lineage

The preservation of family and lineage constitutes another important objective of Shariʿah. This objective has direct relevance to parenting guidance, marriage counselling, family counselling, and interpersonal relationship counselling.

Counselling guided by this objective can assist clients in developing effective communication, mutual respect, responsible parenting, constructive conflict-resolution skills, and appropriate responsibilities towards spouses and family members.

Such an approach recognises the importance of family relationships while addressing individual concerns within a broader social and moral context.

6.5 Preservation of Wealth and Property

The preservation of wealth and property is also identified as an essential objective of Shariʿah. Counselling can contribute to this objective through financial, vocational, and business-related guidance.

An Islamic orientation to financial counselling may emphasise responsible financial behaviour, lawful means of earning, avoidance of exploitation and fraud, responsible management of resources, and protection of legitimate property and wealth.

This objective demonstrates that counselling from an Islamic perspective can extend beyond narrowly psychological concerns to include economic and vocational dimensions of human well-being.

6.6 Broader Objectives Relevant to Counselling

Contemporary discussions of Maqasid al-Shariʿah have also highlighted broader objectives and values, including dignity and respect, justice, prevention of harm, promotion of welfare and benefit, personal responsibility and accountability, balance, moderation, and protection from harm (Alias et al., 2025).

These broader objectives can provide additional foundations for counselling principles. They also demonstrate the potential of Maqasid al-Shariʿah to serve as a bridge between Islamic ethical thought and contemporary professional counselling, particularly where principles are interpreted in a culturally and religiously responsive manner.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The discussion in this paper has examined the meaning, focus, scope, and universality claims associated with the principles of counselling and has considered their philosophical foundations from an Islamic perspective.

The analysis suggests that while many counselling principles have broad relevance across cultures, their interpretation and application cannot be completely separated from the philosophical, cultural, religious, legal, and social contexts within which counselling takes place. Concepts such as autonomy, dignity, welfare, justice, confidentiality, family responsibility, and personal development may be widely recognised, but their meanings and applications may differ across worldviews.

From an Islamic perspective, the foundations of counselling principles should therefore be considered in relation to the Islamic conception of human nature, human dignity, moral responsibility, knowledge, and the purpose of human existence. Tawhid provides a fundamental worldview within which these issues can be understood, while Islamic ethical concepts such as ʿadl, raḥmah, shūrā, and amānah provide important values for professional helping relationships.

Maqasid al-Shariʿah provides a particularly useful philosophical and ethical framework for developing an Islamic perspective on counselling. Its objectives move counselling beyond the mere elimination of symptoms towards the holistic welfare and development of the individual. The protection of religion, life, intellect, family and lineage, and wealth provides a framework through which counselling purposes and practices can be examined.

At the same time, an Islamic approach to counselling should not be understood as a rejection of professional counselling standards. Rather, it can provide an additional philosophical and ethical foundation through which established professional values are critically examined, interpreted, and applied in ways that are consistent with the religious and cultural worldviews of Muslim clients.

Islamic counselling can consequently be understood as a helping process aimed at promoting psychological, social, intellectual, moral, spiritual, familial, and material well-being within an Islamic framework. Maqasid al-Shariʿah offers a potentially productive bridge between Islamic ethical thought and contemporary counselling principles, provided that professional competence, client rights, appropriate safeguards, and relevant ethical and legal requirements are maintained.

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