



Validating Self-Efficacy in the Multicultural Relationship Scale for High School Students

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Abstract: Despite the growing cultural diversity in secondary schools, validated instruments to measure student self-efficacy in multicultural relationships remain scarce within school counseling frameworks. This study developed and validated the Multicultural Relationship Self-Efficacy Scale (SMRS), a 20-item instrument grounded in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. A scale development design was employed with 745 high school students. Content validity was established via expert panel evaluation, and construct validity was examined through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The results confirmed a four-factor structure—Cultural Respect, Supportive Relationship, Emotional Insight, and Mutual Acceptance—explaining 63.25% of the total variance. The scale demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.92$). While model fit indices were within the marginal to acceptable range ($\chi^2/df = 2.11$; SRMR = 0.064; CFI = 0.871; TLI = 0.850; RMSEA = 0.089), all standardized factor loadings were strong ($\lambda \geq 0.60$), and discriminant validity was confirmed via HTMT ratios (0.61–0.78). These findings provide reliable empirical evidence for the SMRS as a diagnostic tool for school counselors to assess and enhance adolescent multicultural competence. By addressing a critical measurement gap, this study enables the development of targeted, culturally responsive interventions designed to foster inclusive school climates.

Keywords: high school; multicultural relationships; self-efficacy; validity

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INTRODUCTION

At the high school level, cultural or multicultural competency is a key factor for students in communicating, interacting, and collaborating with diverse peers (Guzman et al., 2016). It reflects their ability to respect, value, and respond appropriately to peers from all cultural backgrounds. As younger members of the generation, high school students must develop this competency before transitioning to higher education or the job market, as those with strong cultural competency are more likely to engage in positive social interactions, work effectively in diverse environments, and build healthy relationships with peers. Conversely, students with low cultural competency may struggle with intolerance, leading to difficulties in adapting to multicultural settings (Sari & Yüce, 2020).

Cultural competency is closely related to multicultural relationship self-efficacy (MRS). While cultural competency refers to the ability to work effectively across cultures (Chu et al., 2022; Sue & Sue, 2013), MRS, drawing from Bandura's social cognitive theory (2001), is an individual's belief in their ability to perform tasks or behave effectively in culturally diverse situations (Hladík et al., 2012; Valls-Figuera et al., 2023). Individuals are more likely to develop and apply multicultural competencies when they believe they can succeed. In addition, students with high MRS are more motivated to engage in cross-cultural interactions and apply multicultural skills. Conversely, individuals trained in these competencies may function effectively in real-world multicultural settings even when their self-efficacy is low. Previous studies indicated that students with lower MRS can have significant psychological and behavioral problems. Among them are social withdrawal (Um, 2024), generalized anxiety disorder (Kim & Kim, 2024), bullying behavior (Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2022), and struggles with conflict of self-identity in multiple cultures (Ma, 2025). These challenges highlight the importance of fostering multicultural relationship self-efficacy to promote positive social interactions and emotional well-being among students. In such situations, school counselors can play a crucial role in addressing these issues through inclusive education, cultural exchange programs, and supportive counseling interventions.

There are several reasons why high school counselors should promote MRS among their students. Cultural self-efficacy could increase creativity in bicultural dyads (Camargo et al., 2020). Students with higher competencies tend to exhibit greater intercultural self-efficacy, and it can foster positive intercultural communication and reduce anxiety in multicultural interaction (Wawrosz & Jurásek, 2021). Other reasons include that, for successful learning, students were expected to engage with peers in collaborative learning activities (Tullis & Goldstone, 2020). Meanwhile, Carroll et al. (2009) emphasized the importance of developing self-efficacy early in life to support strong self-beliefs and engagement in academic and school-related activities.

Therefore, promoting MRS among high school students is critical for enhancing their cross-cultural competence, learning engagement, and ability to thrive in diverse social and learning environments.

Students with lower MRS require particular help from school counselors, as culturally responsive interventions can promote positive outcomes in a diverse student population (Sue & Sue, 2013). However, an effective intervention must begin with assessment using a valid and reliable instrument to measure students' current levels of MRS (McCawley, 2009; Taherdoost, 2016). Utilizing such assessments enables them to design programs that accurately address students' specific needs, fostering stronger peer relationships and enhancing self-efficacy. Without a reliable measurement tool, they risk implementing necessary interventions that may overlook underlying issues, potentially resulting in ineffective outcomes. Therefore, counselors should use a valid assessment tool to develop responsive, impactful counseling programs that genuinely support students' MRS.

Recently, several tools have been developed to measure self-efficacy in multicultural relationships. Among them are the Transcultural Self-Efficacy Tool (TSET) for nurse students (Jeffreys, 2000), the Cultural Self-Efficacy Scale for Ascents (CSES-A) (Briones et al., 2009), and the Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for Children (SEQ-C) (Minter & Pritzker, 2017). TSET comprises cognitive, practical, and affective subscales intended to measure nurse student self-efficacy regarding cultural factors that may influence nursing care for clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. The CSES-A encompasses self-efficacy in interacting effectively with people from diverse cultures, comprehending various lifestyles, interpreting information from other cultures, managing feelings of loneliness, and acquiring and understanding elements of other languages. Meanwhile, SEQ-C consists of social, academic, and emotional self-efficacy domains. In relation to such instruments, MRS, according to Bandura, is categorized as specific self-efficacy (Bandura, 2006), so measuring it requires other appropriate tools. However, none of the mentioned tools specifically addressed it, including for high school students. Based on this consideration, there is a need to develop a new or adapted scale to fill this gap so that school counselors can confidently assess students' MRS.

Accordingly, this study aims to design and validate the Self-Efficacy in Multicultural Relationship Scale (SMRS) specifically for the high school population. It seeks to fill a critical measurement gap by providing a psychometrically sound instrument that enables school counselors to identify students struggling with multicultural relational efficacy. By utilizing this tool, counselors can design evidence-based interventions to foster social-emotional growth and inclusive school climates. Furthermore, the SMRS serves as a practical resource for advancing multicultural competencies essential for students' success in increasingly diverse academic and professional environments. To achieve these goals, the research addresses the following objectives: 1) to develop a theoretical framework and item pool for measuring multicultural relationship self-efficacy based on Social Cognitive Theory; 2) To evaluate the content validity of the SMRS through expert judgment and pilot testing; 3) to examine the internal structure of the SMRS using Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (EFA and CFA), and 4) to assess the internal consistency and discriminant validity of the resulting factor structure.

METHODS

The SMRS was developed through following established guidelines for scale development research (Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). The development process comprised three sequential stages: item development, scale development, and scale evaluation (Boateng et al., 2018; Taber, 2018). The first stage involved identifying the construct's theoretical domains and generating an initial pool of items through an extensive review of relevant literature. An expert panel then evaluated the content validity of SMRS. The review was conducted using a double-anonymized procedure to minimize potential bias in judgment. In the second stage (scale development), the preliminary version of the SMRS was administered to a small group of students to assess item readability and clarity. This step aimed to reduce potential misunderstandings and minimize measurement error prior to large-scale administration. In the final stage (scale evaluation), the revised SMRS was administered to a larger sample to examine its construct validity. An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to identify the underlying factor structure, followed by a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to test the adequacy of the measurement model (Brown, 2015; Finch et al., 2016).

This study recruited participants who could provide the necessary data to achieve the research objectives. The sample consisted of school counselors recruited through purposive sampling based on years of experience and professional certification. Additionally, students were selected by utilizing a combination of cluster and random sampling methods. The demographic characteristics of participants, categorized by instrument development stage, are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Breakdown Demographic Data

Stage and Category	Demographic	n	% / Statistics
Stage 1: Item Development	School Counselors (N=5)		
Gender	Male	1	20%
	Female	4	80%
Work Experience	Years of Experience	-	M=12.4
Location	Provincial Capital	5	100%
Stage 2: Scale Development	Students (N=30)		
Gender	Male	14	46.7%
	Female	16	53.3%
Age	Years	-	M=15.7, SD=0.80
Grade Level	10th, 11th, 12th	30	10 per grade
Stage 3: Scale Evaluation	Students (N=745)		
Gender	Male	291	39.1%
	Female	454	60.9%
Age	Years	-	M=15.9, SD=0.82
Grade Level	10th	248	33.3%
	11th	248	33.3%
	12th	249	33.4%
Location	Provincial Capital	2	(2 Cities)
	District Capital	6	(6 Districts)

During SMRS development, we used three instruments. First, a Content Validity Review Form was created to assess the relevance of SMRS items to their respective domains. This form contained 28 items, rated by an expert panel on a scale from 1 (strongly not relevant) to 4 (strongly relevant). Next, a Readability Form was used to examine student understanding of the SMRS items. This form also had 28 items, rated by students on a scale from 1 (Strongly not understood) to 5 (Strongly understood). Students answered each question, rated its clarity, and provided comments when they felt it was unclear. Finally, the finalized SMRS, comprising 28 items, was administered to assess its construct validity and reliability. Participants rated each item using a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree), or with reverse scoring applied to certain items.

Data analysis followed a structured, multi-stage instrument development process. Initially, the dataset was scrutinized for missing values and cleaned to ensure integrity. Afterward, they were reviewed by the peers to determine their preliminary validity. During the item development stage, the Scale and Item Content Validity Index (I-CVI) methods (Lynn, 1986; Polit et al., 2007) were applied, in which the number of participating experts determined the acceptable threshold for each item. In this study, five experts independently evaluated the relevance of each item to its respective domain. Following Lynn's recommendation, an item was considered acceptable if it achieved a minimum I-CVI of 0.86 out of 1.00. Subsequently, we calculated the Scale Content Validity Index (S-CVI) by averaging the I-CVI scores across all items. An S-CVI value of 0.90 or higher was adopted as the criterion for acceptable scale-level content validity, indicating adequate alignment between items and their intended domains. During the scale development phase, a readability assessment form was administered to respondents to evaluate item clarity. An item was considered adequately readable if it obtained a score between 55 and 65 out of 100, reflecting a moderate level of comprehension (Lutfiyah & Supardi, 2019). To examine construct validity and reliability, we employed Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) procedures (Tavakol & Wetzel, 2020). Statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25 for EFA and SmartPLS Version 4 for CFA, in accordance with methodological standards (Chua, 2024; Watkins, 2018). EFA was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25, while CFA was performed using SmartPLS Version 4.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In the first stage of item development, an intensive literature review was conducted to determine the domains and items of the SMRS. The existing relationship scales by Aydoğdu (2021), Panagiotou et al. (2021), Hladik (2014), and Kalavasonlu & Akcamete (2024) served as the basis for item generation. However, because the SMRS design focused on self-efficacy, the study adapted them to fit this construct, integrating self-efficacy and multicultural relationship concepts into the item composition. The preliminary version of the SMRS consisted of 28 items organized into four domains as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Content Validity of SMRS

Domain	Indicators	Mean of I-CVI Values
Intimacy	Emotional connection	1.0
	Mutual trust	1.0
	A sense of closeness and bonding	1.0
Popularity	Likes	1.0
	Admired	1.0
	Recognition	1.0
Trust	Reliability	1.0
	Truth	1.0
	Ability	1.0
Insightfulness	Strength	1.0
	Perceiving	1.0
	Analytical thinking	1.0
	Intuition	1.0
	Collaboration	1.0
S-CVI		1.0

Each domain included specific indicators, with each indicator represented by two items measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Following the initial item generation, the expert panel assessed the instrument's content validity using the I-CVI and S-CVI formulas. The results demonstrated that all items achieved an I-CVI of 1.00, and the S-CVI similarly reached 1.00. These scores indicated that every item was highly relevant to its designed domain; consequently, all items were retained for further analysis.

During the development of the SMRS, the items were administered to a small group of students to identify poorly worded items and to allow revisions to improve readability, ultimately reducing the cognitive burden on respondents. The results revealed that the readability scores of 28 items ranged from 0.67 to 0.90, with only minor revisions required for three items. The lowest readability item was "Express my sadness with friends from various cultural backgrounds," and the highest was "Respect cultural differences when interacting with them." [Table 3](#) presents the readability values for the SMRS.

Table 3. Readability of SMRS's by Domains

Domain	Average of Readability Score
Intimacy	80,50
Popularity	79,16
Trust	83,12
Insightfulness	83,4
Total Average	81,78

These values indicated that the items possessed strong readability. The findings show that the SMRS is appropriate for senior high school students, a conclusion supported by similar studies that used readability questionnaires ([Pratiwi & Dewi, 2022](#); [Romadhoni et al., 2024](#)). This subjective assessment approach was chosen over the Flesch–Kincaid Reading Grade (FKG), which relies on mechanical metrics such as average syllables per word and sentence length ([Patalay et al., 2018](#)). By using a respondent-based readability form, the study ensured that the items were not just structurally simple but also conceptually clear to the target adolescent population.

After readability testing and revising, the SMRS was administered to 715 students, and inter-item and item-total correlations were calculated to measure the extent to which scores on one item were related to scores on all other items in the SMRS. The results revealed that the item-total correlations among the 28 items were statistically significant (ranging from 0.533 to 0.716). These suggested that each item was consistent with the overall construct measured by the scale. Therefore, all items were retained for further analysis. For confirmation of these findings, a higher correlation value is generally better for consistency, and excessively high correlations (>0.80 or 0.90) may indicate redundancy, while low correlations (< 0.15) suggest that items do not belong in the same scale ([Pituch, 2016](#)). Thus, the results suggest that the scale in the present study meets the recommended criteria for acceptable inter-item and item–total correlations.

Prior to factor extraction, we assessed the items' communalities; according to established criteria, an item is considered to sufficiently explain a factor if its extraction value is greater than 0.50. In the initial round of analysis, the KMO statistic was 0.931, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was 10173.228 ($p < 0.001$); however, eight of the 28 items yielded extraction values below 0.50. Consequently, these items were removed to maintain the scale's integrity.

Table 4. KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test			
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		Approx. Chi-Square	0.926
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity		df	7322
		Sig.	190
			0.000

In the second round (see Table 4), the KMO value was 0.926, significantly surpassing the minimum threshold of 0.50 and confirming the adequacy of the sample for factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was highly significant ($p = 0.000$), indicating that the correlation matrix contained significant relationships suitable for structure detection. As shown in the final output (Table 5), the remaining 20 items all possessed extraction values greater than 0.50. Following the recommendations of Stefana et al. (2024), these items were deemed acceptable for further analysis as they effectively explained the underlying factors. Cronbach's alpha method was employed to evaluate the internal consistency of SMRS. The results are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5. Reliability of SMRS

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.922	0.926	20

Reliability analysis for the final 20-item scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficient of 0.922, indicating high internal consistency. Furthermore, the "alpha if item deleted" analysis showed that values remained stable between 0.917 and 0.922, suggesting that every item contributed meaningfully to the overall scale. These results significantly exceeded the widely accepted threshold of 0.70 to 0.95 for instrument reliability (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Consequently, these findings confirm the high internal consistency and stability of the SMRS in measuring multicultural relationship self-efficacy.

Before conducting the exploratory analysis of the SMRS, the data's suitability was verified to ensure it met the assumptions for factor extraction. We employed Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation to determine the scale's underlying structure. The analysis revealed that four factors emerged with eigenvalues greater than 1.00 (8.376, 1.676, 1.429, and 1.169). Collectively, these four factors accounted for 63.253% of the total variance, indicating a robust representation of the SMRS construct among students. A detailed overview of the factor loadings and the exploratory structure is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Eigenvalues (EV) and Total Variance Explained

	Factors	Eigen-Values	Communalities	Mean	SD	Loading Factor
Item	Cultural Respect	8.376				
InP2	Appreciate their various cultural values.		0.727	8.74	1.754	0.804
TS2	Respect cultural differences when interacting with people from other cultures.		0.667	8.55	1.818	0.732
TS1	Show openness toward cultural diversity when interacting with them.		0.669	8.29	2.005	0.726
InP1	Recognize the various cultural perspectives of my friends.		0.640	7.90	2.078	0.702
TA2	Have the ability to understand what they are saying.		0.562	7.83	2.12	0.675
InC1	Join with them to solve the problem collaboratively.		0.557	8.09	2.108	0.488
Item	Supportive Relationships	1.676				
ITE2	Show my empathy when they are in a difficult moment.		0.748	8.14	2.007	0.819
ITE1	Express my sadness with friends from various cultural backgrounds.		0.665	8.01	1.815	0.803
TR2	Keep my commitment to them.		0.597	8.01	2.038	0.623
TT1	Express my genuine feelings with them.		0.561	7.45	2.490	0.619

	Factors	Eigen-Values	Communalities	Mean	SD	Loading Factor
ITS2	Sacrifice for their sake.		0.522	8.57	1.755	0.578
TT2	Openly share my true emotions with them.		0.510	8.57	1.755	0.492
Item	Emotional Insight	1.429				
InI2	Grasp their feelings intuitively without questioning them.		0.686	7.14	2.326	0.809
InAT2	Clarify my insight into various issues with them.		0.656	7.01	2.335	0.713
InI1	Understand their emotions intuitively.		0.666	7.14	2.326	0.712
InAT1	Send their feedback on my understanding of the issue.		0.514	6.46	2.520	0.629
Item	Mutual Acceptance	1.169				
PL2	Be invited to join their groups.		0.729	6.58	2.520	0.823
PAd1	Have a uniqueness respected by them.		0.685	6.99	2.395	0.777
PL1	Be accepted as close friends by them,		0.690	6.82	2.534	0.767
PAd2	Show good attitudes admired by them.		0.598	7.70	2.154	0.512

Table 6 shows that the SMRS loading factor values range from 0.492 to 0.823. In the context of specific considerations, an EFA loading factor value ≥ 0.40 is generally acceptable for item retention, as found in other studies (Sigudla & Maritz, 2023; Taherdoost et al., 2020). Based on this consideration, the EFA results were sufficient, and these items were retained for CFA. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted during the scale evaluation stage to assess the fit of the four-factor structure identified through EFA. Under this procedure, the model was tested against multiple fit indices to verify its structural integrity. As depicted in Figure 1, the CFA model consists of four latent variables: Cultural Respect, Supportive Relationship, Emotional Insight, and Mutual Acceptance. These values inside the blue circles likely represent composite reliability (CR) or R^2 ; all are above 0.80, indicating excellent internal consistency and construct reliability. Meanwhile, the correlations among the latent constructs range from 0.613 to 0.776, suggesting moderate to strong positive relationships.

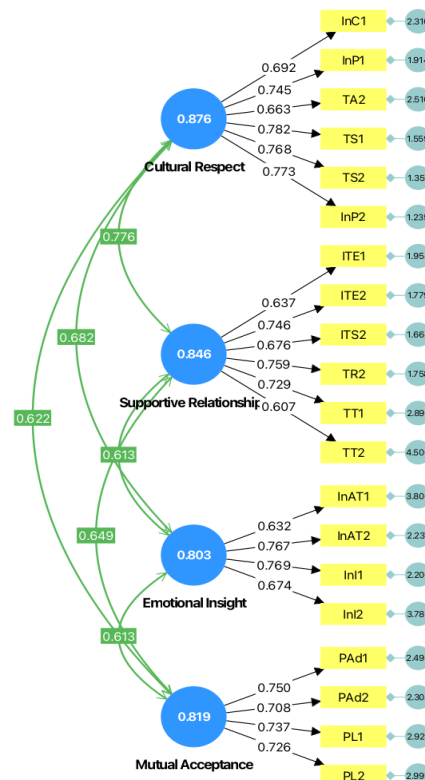


Figure 1. The CFA of SMRS

Furthermore, the factor loadings of each item are all above 0.6, fulfilling the minimum acceptable standard for CFA (ideal is ≥ 0.70 , but 0.60–0.70 is still satisfying in exploratory research). Further details of the CFA were presented in [Table 7](#).

Table 7. Model Fit Indices for the SMRS Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Fit Index	Obtained Value	Recommended Threshold	Interpretation
Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio	0.611- 0.778	<0.85	Acceptable
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	0.871	>0.90	Marginal
TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index)	0.850	>0.90	Marginal
RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error)	0.089	>0.90	Marginal
SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Residual)	0.064	>0.90	Acceptable

The model fit indices in [Table 7](#) suggest that all values meet the CFA threshold ([Brown, 2015](#); [Roos & Bauldry, 2022](#)). Overall, these findings indicate that the SMRS achieves a generally adequate but somewhat borderline model fit. The development of the SMRS results in a refined 20-item scale. For its reliability, there are four commonly used methods: test-retest, interrater, parallel forms, and internal consistency ([Bruton et al., 2000](#)), each serving a distinct purpose and offering particular strengths. For example, [McCrae et al. \(2011\)](#) emphasize that test-retest reliability is an important psychometric property for new scale development. However, according to [Bandura \(2006\)](#), in measuring self-efficacy, reliability should be evaluated primarily through internal consistency, specifically using Cronbach's alpha. Elaborating on Bandura's view, the obtained Cronbach's alpha of 0.933 indicates 'excellent' internal consistency for SMRS, far exceeding the 0.70 to 0.80 thresholds typically recommended for psychometric reliability. [Taber \(2018\)](#) outline 17 interpretive categories, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from low (0.11) to excellent (0.930-0.94). In common practice, reliability should not be significantly lower than 0.7 and ideally not significantly lower than 0.8. The obtained Cronbach's alpha of 0.933 indicates that the individual domains of the SMRS are highly reliable.

EFA identified four coherent factors for the SMRS's items—cultural respect, supportive relationships, emotional insight, and mutual acceptance—which accounted for 63.253% of the total variance, with factor loadings ranging from 0.492 to 0.823 ($p < 0.001$). The results of the CFA indicate that the CFI and TLI values do not meet the ideal threshold of ≥ 0.90 . The RMSEA value of 0.089 slightly exceeds the commonly accepted cutoff of 0.08, yet the SRMR value below 0.08 indicates that the standardized residuals remain within an acceptable level of model-data fit. Overall, they fall within an acceptable range for exploratory models or instruments in the early stages of development ([Hair Jr. et al., 2014](#)). In summary, while the CFI and TLI fell just below the traditional 0.90 threshold, the model demonstrated acceptable localized fit ($SRMR < 0.08$) and reasonable parsimony, consistent with early-stage instrument development ([Hair Jr. et al., 2014](#)).

As previously discussed, the results of EFA and CFA reveal a new structure for the SMRS consisting of four latent factors. This structure differs slightly from the initial proposed domains of intimacy, popularity, trust, and insightfulness. These changes are justifiable for several reasons, including item performance, empirical vs. theoretical structure, and statistical considerations ([Goretzko, 2023](#)). EFA often leads to the merging, splitting, or eliminating theorized domains, with item distributions and latent structures adjusting to better reflect observed correlations and factor loadings ([Howard & Henderson, 2023](#)). The shifts from initial theoretical domains to empirically derived factor structures are a common and meaningful outcome of EFA, especially in the development of complex, multidimensional instruments like the SMRS. In sum, the results of the EFA and CFA are coherent and mutually reinforcing, indicating a stable and valid measurement model.

The SMRS's four-factor structure also implies that this tool can measure how students apply their beliefs consistently across different relational contexts, such as in school, where its diversity climate can shape their academic achievement and social well-being ([Maratia et al., 2025](#)). These findings enhance understanding of related studies, which suggest that teaching self-efficacy in multicultural school settings is positively associated with students' academic and psychological adjustment ([Ialuna et al., 2023](#)). Additionally, they highlight the importance of culturally responsive social-emotional learning efforts in strengthening these multicultural competencies within school settings ([Chernicoff et al., 2025](#)). Finally, this supports the growing consensus in recent studies that self-efficacy is not only specific to individual tasks but is also embedded in social and cultural contexts, particularly when guiding interpersonal relationships in diverse environments ([Nguyen et al., 2024](#)).

Moreover, the emergence of four distinct factors suggests that students conceptualize MRS through nuanced, layered dimensions rather than simplistic models of cultural tolerance. This shift reflects a more sophisticated understanding rooted in mutuality, identity affirmation, and relational depth, mirroring dynamics often observed in the counseling process ([Kim et al., 2020](#)). Specifically, the Cultural Respect and Mutual Acceptance factors align with research on how diversity climates influence social adjustment and the integration of individuals into new social "fabrics" ([Yu et al., 2024](#); [Zhang et al., 2023](#)). In an adolescent context, this suggests that the SMRS captures the specific competencies required to bridge perceived dissimilarities among

peers, transforming diversity from a potential source of friction into a foundation for social cohesion."

Furthermore, the emotional insight—rooted in emotional attunement—serves as a critical bridge for interpersonal understanding (Decety & Jackson, 2004; Mignault et al., 2023). By fostering the ability to feel understood and to attune to others from diverse backgrounds (Koole & Tschacher, 2016), this dimension moves the SMRS beyond mere social skill into the realm of deep relational competence. While these factors relate to Chen and Starosta's (Chen & Starosta, 2018), model enhances the depth of interpersonal understanding and attunes appropriately to others from different backgrounds. More than these relations, the SMRS factors are relevant to constructs found in Chen and Starosta's model of intercultural sensitivity. Chen & Starosta's (2018) model of intercultural sensitivity, the SMRS uniquely advances the field by framing these qualities as beliefs about competence (self-efficacy) rather than general dispositions. By synthesizing the multidimensionality of multicultural competence—awareness, knowledge, and skills (Rodríguez, 2022) — into an internally referenced, self-efficacy-based measure, the SMRS provides a specific psychological roadmap for adolescent development.

Although empirical studies on Multicultural Relational Self-Efficacy (MRS) remain scarce, the validation of the SMRS significantly extends the existing literature by addressing three critical gaps. First, while Kabir and Sponseller (2020) offered a foundational look at intercultural communication, their eight-item SEIC scale lacks the multidimensional depth required to capture the complexity of modern adolescent interactions. Second, the SMRS shifts the focus from static personality traits—such as those measured by the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) (Summerfield et al., 2021) to dynamic efficacy beliefs. By grounding the instrument in Bandura's (1997) framework, the SMRS measures a student's *confidence* to act, which is a stronger predictor of actual behavioral persistence in diverse settings than general dispositions like "open-mindedness". Finally, whereas dominant scales like the MCSS (Sheu et al., 2012) and the Cultural Self-Efficacy Scale (CSS) (Herrero-Hahn et al., 2017) were designed for specialized professional cohorts (e.g., counselors and nurses), the SMRS provides a much-needed youth-centered metric. It captures how high school students navigate the specific social pressures of peer diversity, filling a notable void in developmental psychometrics.

The results of the current study support Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1977), which posits that individuals' beliefs in their capabilities significantly influence their motivation, emotional well-being, and social functioning. The SMRS can assess confident engagement in cross-cultural interactions, persistence in facing interpersonal challenges, and positive peer relationships. These findings also align with broader self-efficacy and intercultural competence theories (Hoff, 2020), suggesting that a student's "efficacy-to-relate" is the psychological foundation for cultural sensitivity and effective communication. Consequently, the SMRS functions both as a rigorous psychometric tool and a practical framework for school counselors, enabling them to foster social integration through targeted interventions that build students' intercultural confidence.

This study provides a valuable tool for school counseling practice. The SMRS enables school counselors to assess students' levels of multicultural relationship self-efficacy and identify those who may require further support. From a developmental perspective, counselors can help students understand their level of multicultural relationship self-efficacy and how it influences peer acceptance and the formation of friendships. In addition, counselors can use SMRS subscale scores to identify specific areas where students may experience difficulties. For example, a student may achieve high scores in Cultural Respect but lower scores in Emotional Insight, suggesting the need for targeted interventions, such as perspective-taking activities or empathy-building exercises. Based on these assessments, counselors can design appropriate counseling interventions for students with low levels of multicultural relationship self-efficacy. Ultimately, the use of this scale can foster a more inclusive school climate and promote multicultural education.

CONCLUSION

This study developed and validated the student Multicultural Relationship Self-Efficacy Scale (SMRS) to assess high school students' confidence in building relationships with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds. The results indicate that the SMRS demonstrates satisfactory psychometric properties. Content validation confirmed the relevance of the items, and readability testing showed that the instrument is appropriate for senior high school students. Exploratory factor analysis reduced the initial 28 items to 20 and revealed a four-factor structure comprising cultural respect, supportive relationships, emotional insight, and mutual acceptance, explaining a substantial proportion of the variance. Confirmatory factor analysis further supported this structure, showing acceptable reliability, factor loadings, and discriminant validity, although some model fit indices were slightly below ideal thresholds. Rooted in Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, the SMRS provides a promising instrument for assessing multicultural relationship self-efficacy among high school students in culturally diverse educational settings. In practice, school counselors should use the SMRS to design targeted interventions aimed at strengthening students' relational confidence and fostering a more inclusive school climate. Finally, future research should expand the scale's generalizability through cross-cultural validation and establish its predictive validity by linking SMRS scores to real-world behavioral outcomes.

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