

# Theoretical Construction of an Intercultural Counseling Module for Addressing Bullying in Multicultural Elementary Schools

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## INTRODUCTION

Bullying in elementary school is a serious developmental issue and has a direct impact on children's psychosocial well-being. At this stage, children are in a crucial phase of identity formation, social skill development, and internalization of moral values. Exposure to bullying, whether as a perpetrator, victim, or witness, has the potential to cause long-term impacts, such as anxiety, low self-esteem, emotional withdrawal, and decreased motivation and academic achievement (Sulvia, 2014). Therefore, bullying at the elementary education level cannot be viewed as a temporary behavioral problem, but rather as a developmental and systemic phenomenon that requires early, structured, and continuous intervention.

At the national level, bullying remains one of the main problems faced by children in educational settings. The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) reported around 3,800 cases. Bullying throughout 2023, with the largest proportion occurring in formal education units (KPAI, 2023). This situation indicates that schools, which should be safe spaces for children's growth and development, remain vulnerable to psychological and physical violence. Despite various prevention policies and programs having been implemented, bullying at the elementary school level continues to occur, which indicates that existing interventions have not fully addressed the underlying social and cultural dynamics.

Similar conditions were also found in Jambi Province. Data show that the number of bullying cases increased from 102 in 2022 to 145 in 2023. A few events even attracted public attention, including the case of severe physical abuse and violence between students spread through social media (Jambi Provincial Education Office, 2023; JambiLink, 2024). This finding confirms that bullying in Jambi is not merely a matter of individual behavior, but rather a systemic problem that is formed through interactions between students, school culture, and the broader socio-cultural context.

Several studies have shown that bullying is influenced by multiple factors. Individual factors include low empathy and weak self-regulation (Nugroho et al., 2020). Socio-cultural factors include seniority norms, peer pressure, and the normalization of aggressive behavior in social interactions (Howard, 1991). Meanwhile, school environmental factors are characterized by weak school policies, limited teacher supervision, and suboptimal counseling competency in handling bullying comprehensively (Nengsих, 2023). This complexity underscores the need for interventions that are not only universal but also culturally responsive and grounded in the local context.

Jambi Province is characterized by a multicultural society, comprising local ethnic groups such as the Jambi Malay, Kerinci, and Suku Anak Dalam, as well as immigrant groups such as the Javanese, Batak, Minangkabau, Bugis, and others. This cultural diversity is a valuable social asset, but if not managed appropriately, differences in values, communication styles, and social norms can give rise to prejudice, miscommunication, and unequal power relations among students. In the context of multicultural elementary schools, these dynamics can manifest themselves in the following ways: bullying based on ethnicity, language, or social identity (Pohan et al., 2024). However, guidance and counseling services in elementary schools are still dominated by generic modules that do not optimally integrate intercultural perspectives and local cultural values.

Several previous studies have emphasized the importance of a culturally rooted approach to preventing and treating bullying. Sulvia (2014) emphasized the need for personal-social counseling programs tailored to the developmental characteristics of elementary school students. Gaines (2022) demonstrated that problem-based learning can contribute to reducing antisocial behavior and bullying by strengthening critical thinking skills. In contrast, Intani (2023) found that an arts-based approach was effective in building a peaceful life, although its effectiveness was limited to secondary education. However, a significant research gap remains, particularly in the development of intercultural counseling modules based on local wisdom, specifically designed for multicultural elementary schools.

In response to this gap, this study uses a qualitative approach, Grounded Theory. This study aims to explore the experiences of teachers, school counselors, and students in dealing with bullying in multicultural elementary schools in Jambi Province. This study aims to identify relevant intercultural values and construct an intercultural counseling module based on local wisdom, including values such as deliberation, mutual cooperation, and social harmony.

By basing the conceptual framework on empirical field data, this research is expected to make theoretical contributions to the development of intercultural counseling, while also offering a contextual and culturally responsive intervention model for prevention and treatment efforts in multicultural elementary schools.

## **Research Objectives**

This study aims to construct a conceptual framework for intercultural counseling in addressing bullying in multicultural elementary schools through the exploration of teachers' experiences, counselors' experiences, and students' experiences, as well as the identification of intercultural values based on Jambi local wisdom. Approach Grounded Theory used to develop a theoretical framework that is based on empirical field data and represents the socio-cultural dynamics surrounding the practice of bullying in elementary schools (Khan et al., 2014; Vollstedt & Rezat,

2019). This research is expected to contribute to strengthening the theoretical foundations of intercultural counseling in the educational context, with a multicultural basis.

## METHODS

### Design

This research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing the Grounded Theory method, which aims to develop a conceptual framework for an intercultural counseling module based on Jambi local wisdom in addressing bullying in multicultural elementary schools. Grounded Theory was chosen because it enables the production of theories that depart from empirical data in the field (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), making it relevant to understanding the phenomenon of bullying in a multicultural context.

### Participants and Procedure

The research was conducted in multicultural elementary schools in Jambi Province, selected through purposive sampling based on several key considerations. These schools reflect significant ethnic and cultural diversity, including Jambi Malay, Kerinci, Javanese, Batak, Minang, Bugis, and Suku Anak Dalam communities. Additionally, the schools have reported cases of bullying in verbal, physical, and social forms, making them relevant to the focus of this study. The selected schools are considered representative of the social dynamics experienced by students in multicultural educational settings. In total, this study involved 24 participants from three multicultural elementary schools in Jambi City.

The participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that all individuals had direct and relevant experience with bullying, enabling the collection of in-depth and meaningful qualitative data (Palinkas et al., 2015). The participants consisted of eight classroom teachers and four Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers who are actively involved in students' learning, care, and behavioral management. Additionally, twelve elementary school students were included based on their roles in bullying dynamics, specifically as victims, perpetrators, or witnesses. Student selection also considered ethnic and cultural diversity to reflect the school's multicultural context. The involvement of both teachers and students from diverse backgrounds was expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the practices, challenges, and needs of counseling services in addressing bullying in multicultural elementary schools.

### Instruments

This study uses researchers as the main instrument (human instrument) who played a direct role in the process of data collection, interpretation, and analysis (Creswell & Garrett, 2008). To maintain the direction of data collection, supporting instruments were used in the form of semi-structured interview guides, participant observation sheets, and field notes. The research data included primary data in the form of in-depth interview transcripts, observation results, and documentation, focus group discussion, as well as secondary data in the form of school documents, case reports on bullying, and policies related to prevention and handling bullying.

Data collection focused on three main dimensions. In the individual dimension, interviews focused on exploring self-regulation, empathy, and students' experiences as victims, perpetrators, or witnesses, bullying, with questions like "How do you feel and react when you experience or witness bullying at school?" And "What usually triggers conflict between students?".

The socio-cultural dimension highlights the impact of seniority norms, peer pressure, and cultural background differences, with questions such as, "Do cultural differences affect relationships between students at this school?" And "How do schools resolve conflicts related to these differences?".

Meanwhile, the dimensions of the school environment and counseling services focus on the

role of teachers and Guidance and Counseling teachers, the implementation of policies on anti-bullying, as well as the need to develop an intercultural counseling module, with questions such as "What is the school procedure for handling bullying cases?" And "Are the existing counseling services appropriate to the multicultural conditions of the school?".

Data validity is guaranteed through the application of the principle of trustworthiness, which covers credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility obtained through source triangulation and techniques, as well as member checking, transferability maintained through a detailed description of the research context, whereas dependability and confirmability were strengthened through recording the research process systematically, as well as researcher reflection and peer review.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is carried out by following the stages of Grounded Theory, which include open coding, axial coding, selective coding, and theoretical memo (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The analysis was conducted simultaneously with the data collection process, allowing for adjustments to strategies as needed. dynamics in the field (Khan et al., 2014). To ensure the validity of the data, this study applies four criteria of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Enworo, 2023; Ferdiansyah, 2015). The techniques used include source triangulation, member checking, audit trails, and expert validation.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

#### ***Phenomenon of Bullying Elementary School Students in Jambi City***

The results of field exploration at three multicultural elementary schools in Jambi City show that bullying remains a significant and recurring problem in everyday school life. The most dominant form of bullying is verbal bullying, such as teasing related to ethnicity, accent, and family background, as well as social bullying in the form of exclusion and the formation of exclusive groups. Bullying Physical violence is relatively less frequently reported, but is still found, particularly in the relationships between upper-grade students and lower-grade students. One classroom teacher stated that.

*"...Children often tease their friends because of their accent or their hometown. They think it's a joke, but it's incredibly hurtful for the person being teased..."*(Grade 3 Teacher).

*Meanwhile, one of the victim students revealed: "...I didn't dare tell the teacher, because I'd be called overreacting or incapable. It was better to just keep quiet..."*(Student, victim of bullying).

These findings indicate that bullying is not only perceived as deviant behavior but has been normalized as part of social interactions in schools. This condition is reinforced by teachers' confessions, which indicate a limited understanding and lack of skills in handling multicultural dynamics sensitively. Thus, the phenomenon of bullying in Jambi City cannot be separated from the socio-cultural context of multicultural elementary schools, as is also reflected in data from the KPAI (2023) and the Jambi Provincial Education Office (2023).

Initial analysis (open coding) produced several key concepts, namely: (1) cultural differences between students that trigger teasing, (2) seniority norms that are strengthened in the school environment, (3) limited teacher skills in intercultural counseling, and (4) minimal school policies related to bullying prevention. These concepts indicate an imbalance in power relations in students' social interactions. In the local context, the practice of bullying is often influenced by the dominance of certain groups. Researchers have found that students from ethnic majorities, such as Jambi

Malays, tend to have more dominant social positions than students from immigrant or minority ethnicities, such as Bugis or Chinese. A guidance counselor stated:

*"...Children who come from the majority group often feel more entitled to control or tease their friends who are different..."* (Guidance and Counseling Teacher).

This finding aligns with the concept of imbalance in power relations in Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2014), where bullying is understood as a manifestation of symbolic and structural domination. Cultural differences then form a hidden social hierarchy that facilitates behaviors such as teasing, exclusion, and intimidation.

At the level of axial coding, the initial concepts are grouped into three main categories. First, individual factors include low empathy, weak self-control, and minimal student awareness of the psychological impacts. Second, socio-cultural factors encompass ethnic stereotypes, the legitimacy of seniority norms, and peer pressure. Third, school environmental factors are characterized by the absence of policies. Anti-bullying, what is clear is the limited teacher training, as well as the suboptimal role of school counselors. The relationship between categories shows that bullying does not stand as a mere individual behavior, but rather as a structural phenomenon reproduced through social norms and school cultural practices. A classroom teacher asserted:

*"...Sometimes teachers themselves are confused about what to do, because there are no clear written rules about bullying..."* (Grade 5 Teacher).

At the level of selective coding, the central category that emerged was "intercultural values in counseling." These values are seen as the conceptual foundation for designing interventions relevant to the context of multicultural elementary schools in Jambi. These values include cross-cultural empathy, social justice, open communication, and Jambi local wisdom, such as deliberation, mutual cooperation, and Malay traditional values that emphasize social harmony. A guidance counselor explained:

*"...If children are taught to understand the feelings of friends from different cultures, they are usually more accepting and less likely to tease them..."* (Guidance and Counseling Teacher).

These values demonstrate that intercultural counseling serves not only as a curative strategy but also as a preventive one in disrupting the reproduction of cultural domination practices. Thus, the findings of this study confirm that the development of an intercultural counseling module based on Jambi's local wisdom is a contextual and strategic approach to addressing bullying in multicultural elementary schools.

### ***Intercultural Counseling Module Framework for Elementary School Students in Jambi City***

Based on the results, selective coding. The central category that emerged was intercultural values in counseling, which became the basis for constructing an intercultural counseling module for elementary school students in Jambi City. The developed module framework includes three main things, interconnected dimensions: conceptual, practical, and applicative.

The conceptual dimension focuses on students' understanding of bullying from the perspective of Jambi's local culture. In this dimension, bullying is positioned as a behavior that conflicts with local wisdom values, such as the principles of mutual respect, deliberation, and living in harmony. This approach helps students understand that teasing based on ethnicity, language, and social background not only harms individuals but also violates cultural norms upheld in Jambi society.

The practical dimension aims to develop cross-cultural empathy through contextual

counseling strategies. The identified strategies include the use of Jambi folklore, cross-ethnic group games and techniques, and role-play, which represent bullying situations in a school setting. These activities are designed to encourage students to recognize others' perspectives, manage emotions, and develop inclusive social skills.

The application dimension provides guidance on module implementation for teachers and school counselors. This dimension includes case identification procedures, bullying, preventive and curative counseling intervention steps, as well as follow-up mechanisms involving collaboration between schools, students, and parents. Thus, the module is not only conceptual but also operational and easy to implement in guidance and counseling service practice. Overall, the research findings confirm that bullying in elementary school multiculturalism in Jambi City is influenced by the interaction between individual, socio-cultural, and social factors. School institutional environment. Through the approach of Grounded Theory, intercultural values covering cross-cultural empathy, social justice, open communication, and local wisdom of Jambi were identified as the main foundation in designing the intercultural counseling module. The module the results have the potential to be a relevant local culture-based intervention model for strengthening efforts to prevent and handle bullying in multicultural elementary schools, especially in the Indonesian context.

### ***Conceptual Model of Intercultural Counseling Module***

Based on the results of selective coding, this research develops a conceptual model of the Intercultural Counseling Module, which describes the systematic relationship between causal factors, bullying, intercultural values, counseling strategies, and the expected outcome. This model was developed through an analytical process, Grounded Theory, and represents the empirical dynamics found in a multicultural elementary school in Jambi City. As shown in the following image.

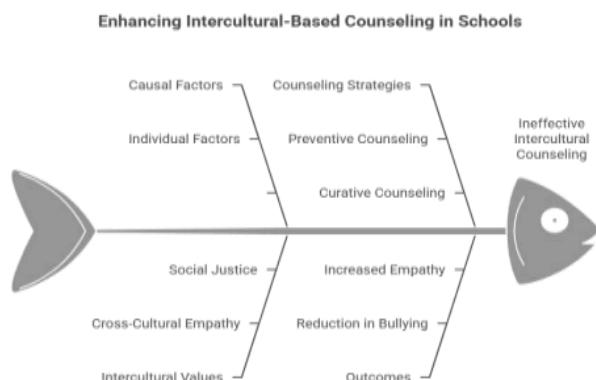


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Intercultural Counseling Module

This conceptual model illustrates that bullying does not occur in isolation, but rather is influenced by the interaction of individual, socio-cultural, and school environmental factors. These factors are then mediated by intercultural values based on Jambi's local wisdom, which is further operationalized through intercultural counseling strategies to produce psychosocial changes and a more inclusive school climate.

## Discussion

Bullying, in the context of basic education, is increasingly understood as a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be explained solely through the individual characteristics of the perpetrator or victim. International literature places bullying within the framework of the social ecological approach, which emphasizes the interactions between individuals, peer groups, school culture, and broader social structures (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Swearer & Hymel, 2015). The findings of this study support this perspective by demonstrating that the practice of bullying at school in Jambi City reflects power relations shaped by cultural norms, seniority structures, and institutional school policies.

In many societies with hierarchical social structures, bullying often functions as a mechanism for the reproduction of social dominance (Bourdieu, 1991; Smith et al., 2016). The dominance of the majority culture and the legitimacy of seniority found in this study align with the arguments of Howard (1991) and Thornberg (2018), who suggest that aggressive behavior in schools often gains symbolic justification through social norms considered normal. Thus, bullying is not only an individual deviant act but also a social practice that is normalized in everyday interactions. These findings strengthen the critique of the anti-bullying approach, which places too much emphasis on controlling individual behavior without touching on the cultural structures and power relations that surround it.

From an intercultural counseling perspective, this study contributes to the expansion of theoretical frameworks that have focused on individual counselor competencies, such as cultural self-awareness, cross-cultural knowledge, and intervention skills (Sue et al., 2009; Pedersen, 2014). The findings of this study indicate that the effectiveness of intercultural counseling at the elementary education level depends heavily on the integration of local cultural values as part of the intervention strategy. This approach aligns with the principles of culturally responsive counseling and indigenous psychology, which view local culture not as a passive context, but as an active resource in the counseling process (Ratts et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2018).

Jambi's local wisdom values, such as deliberation, mutual cooperation, and the principle of living in harmony, have conceptual alignment with universal values in character education and social justice. In international literature, these values are viewed as protective cultural assets that can strengthen social cohesion and suppress aggressive behavior in the school environment (UNESCO, 2020; OECD, 2019). By integrating these values into an intercultural counseling module, this study demonstrates how a local approach can enrich counseling practices that have been dominated by generic Western models.

**Usage Grounded Theory** This study strengthens the methodological position of qualitative research as a means of building contextual theories rooted in specific social realities. Charmaz (2014) emphasized that Grounded Theory allows researchers to capture dynamic and hidden social processes, including power relations and symbolic meanings in everyday interactions. The results of this study confirm that local cultural structures and bullying practices are inseparable and require intervention approaches that are sensitive to the social and cultural context.

In practice, international literature confirms that effective anti-bullying interventions must be context-sensitive and involve the entire school ecosystem (Cross et al., 2018; Espelage & Hong, 2017). The intercultural counseling module developed in this study aligns with these principles, as it not only targets student behavioral change but also strengthens the role of teachers and counselors as agents of school cultural change. This approach builds upon research findings in Indonesia, which are still largely dominated by intercultural counseling programs. Anti-bullying based on rules and sanctions (Ifroh et al., 2019; Nengsih, 2023), by offering interventions that are more dialogical and rooted in local cultural values.

However, it is theoretically important to recognize that cultural contexts are dynamic and heterogeneous. Therefore, generalizations of local wisdom-based intercultural counseling models

need to be made with caution. The literature emphasizes the importance of continuous adaptation to social and cultural changes in implementing educational interventions (Banks, 2015). Therefore, further research is needed to test the flexibility and effectiveness of this module in other cultural contexts, as well as to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to measure the long-term impact on reducing delinquent behavior and bullying.

## **Implications**

The findings of this study strengthen the development of intercultural counseling theory in elementary schools by confirming that bullying is a socio-cultural phenomenon, not merely individual behavior. The integration of cross-cultural empathy values and Jambi's local wisdom is positioned as a conceptual foundation in designing contextual and culture-based counseling interventions. For teachers and guidance counselors, this research emphasizes the need for a shift from handling bullying as a reactive approach to a preventive approach based on intercultural counseling. Guidance and counseling teachers are expected to integrate cross-cultural empathy, reflective dialogue, and contextual counseling activities into guidance and counseling services, as well as build collaboration with classroom teachers and parents to create an inclusive school climate.

## **Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research**

Despite making significant theoretical and practical contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the theoretical construction of the intercultural counseling module was developed based on the socio-cultural context of multicultural elementary schools in Jambi City, so generalizing the findings to other regions with different cultural characteristics requires caution. Second, this study focused on developing a conceptual model based on Grounded Theory and has not yet tested the effectiveness of the module quantitatively in reducing the intensity of bullying or increasing students' cross-cultural empathy. Third, the involvement of research subjects is still limited to teachers, counselors, and students in several partner schools, so the perspectives of educational policymakers have not been thoroughly explored. Therefore, further research is recommended to test the effectiveness of the module through an experimental design or mixed methods, broaden the cultural context of the research, and integrate this intercultural counseling module into school policies and the national character education curriculum.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research strengthens the understanding that bullying in elementary school students in Jambi City is a multidimensional and contextual phenomenon. The values of intercultural and local wisdom have proven to be key elements in designing interventions for counseling. Thus, this study makes a significant contribution to the intercultural counseling literature. while providing practical solutions for handling bullying in multicultural elementary schools in Indonesia.

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## **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT**

MF, MA, ZU, and MZ approved the final version of this article.

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