# Multicultural Counseling Model Based on Local Wisdom in Preventing Bullying Behavior of Vocational High School Students

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| Abstract | Bullying in Vocational High Schools remains a serious problem, especially in culturally diverse schools such as Kupang City. Differences in students' cultural backgrounds, accents, ethnic stereotypes, and social identities often trigger conflict and bullying behavior if not managed appropriately. Guidance and counseling services in schools play a strategic role in preventing bullying, but in practice they still tend to use a general approach and do not integrate local wisdom values. This study aims to describe and analyze a multicultural counseling model based on local wisdom in preventing bullying behavior in vocational high school students. The research method used is descriptive qualitative with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews with Guidance and Counseling Teachers and six students at SMK Negeri 6 Kupang City. The results show that individual counseling services, classical services, and conflict mediation have been implemented, but have not been structured within a multicultural counseling framework and have not utilized local wisdom values of East Nusa Tenggara such as naketi, natoni, customary deliberation, mutual respect, and mutual cooperation. As a result, changes in students' attitudes and cultural sensitivity to bullying behavior have not been optimal. This study concludes that developing a multicultural counseling model based on local wisdom is crucial for increasing students' cultural awareness, empathy, and social harmony. The study's contribution is to provide a conceptual and practical basis for developing school counseling services that are contextual, culturally relevant, and effective in preventing bullying. |
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Bullyingis aggressive or manipulative behavior that is carried out intentionally by a person or group of people who feel powerful with the aim of hurting or harming a person or group of people(Sumiratsih & Sriyanto, 2024)Bullying not only occurs at the elementary level, but is also increasingly visible at the secondary level, such as vocational high schools.

In various schools across Indonesia, including in Kupang City, bullying is still common, occurring in the form of teasing, intimidation, exclusion, and even violence between students. This situation is

also evident at State Vocational High School 6 in Kupang City, where the dynamics of adolescents from diverse cultural backgrounds can potentially lead to misunderstandings, conflict, and aggressive behavior. If not managed properly, students' cultural diversity can trigger the formation of dominant and subordinate groups, leading to increased bullying behavior.

Meanwhile, guidance and counseling services in schools play a strategic role in preventing and addressing bullying. However, current counseling interventions tend to be general and fail to consider the cultural diversity and social conditions of local communities. Local wisdom is a cultural heritage that reflects positive values in community life, such as mutual cooperation, tolerance, and respect for tradition.(Permata Hati, & Wicaksono. 2025). The cultural values and local wisdom of NTT, such as naketi (self-introspection), natoni (wise speech), deliberation, mutual respect, togetherness, mutual cooperation, and politeness in social relations are great strengths that can be used as the basis for a counseling approach.

The multicultural counseling approach is an integration process between counselors and clients who have significant cultural differences.(Zulfa, & Suryadi, 2021). The term multicultural counseling describes a process that involves more than one individual who comes from different cultural backgrounds, values and ways of life.(Elizer, 2018)This approach is a planned effort to address cultural diversity in the context of counseling, making an understanding of multiculturalism a crucial factor in the success of the service. Therefore, a professional counselor is expected to understand the client in depth, including the factors that influence their thought patterns, behaviors, and interactions.(Putri, et al. 2024)Counselors are required to understand each student's cultural background, family communication patterns, and local community values that influence their behavior. Therefore, counseling focuses not only on changing individual behavior but also on cultivating mutual respect and cross-cultural awareness.

However, multicultural counseling needs to be adapted to the local context to be more effective in schools in NTT. Integrating local wisdom into counseling models allows for a closer approach to students' realities, increasing understanding, acceptance, and adherence to the counseling process. Local wisdom can be a medium for instilling the values of nonviolence, solidarity, respect, and peaceful conflict resolution.

This study aims to examine and describe a multicultural counseling model based on local wisdom in preventing bullying behavior among vocational high school students. Specifically, the research seeks to explore how cultural values and local wisdom of Nusa Tenggara Timur can be integrated into school counseling services to address multicultural conflicts and aggressive behavior. The study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the role of culturally responsive counseling in fostering empathy, mutual respect, and social harmony among students from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, the findings are anticipated to offer practical guidance for school counselors in designing counseling interventions that are culturally relevant and contextually grounded. Ultimately, this research aspires to contribute to the development of effective and sustainable anti-bullying strategies in multicultural school settings.

## 2. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. According to(Lopo, 2025)Qualitative research is a research method based on post-positivism philosophy, used to research the natural conditions of objects. Data collection techniques with triangulation (combined), data analysis is inductive/qualitative, and qualitative research results emphasize meaning rather than generalization. Qualitative research aims to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by the research subjects, and in a descriptive way in the form of words and language by utilizing natural methods. The subjects in this study were BK Teachers at SMK Negeri 6 Kupang City and six SMK students, where data was collected from informants by providing several interview questions that had been prepared by the researcher.

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method through direct interviews with guidance and counseling teachers and several students at SMK Negeri 6 Kupang City. The informants/resource persons selected were the guidance and counseling teachers because they were relevant to the topic and knowledgeable about the issues being studied. The study was conducted in November 2023 at SMK Negeri 6 Kupang City.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of the study on the Multicultural Counseling Model Based on Local Wisdom in Preventing Bullying Behavior at SMK 6 Kupang City indicate that the guidance and counseling services currently provided by the Guidance and Counseling Teacher have included individual counseling, classical services, and conflict mediation. However, these services have not been structured in a model that explicitly integrates multicultural perspectives and the local wisdom values of East Nusa Tenggara. Based on in-depth interviews, the Guidance and Counseling Teacher explained that individual counseling is carried out primarily to understand the background of students involved in bullying, whether as perpetrators, victims, or witnesses. The counseling process includes exploring emotional conditions, family dynamics, and environmental factors that influence student behavior. Although this service is considered helpful in reducing psychological tension, the Guidance and Counseling Teacher acknowledged that the approach used still follows the general counseling flow and does not utilize local cultural values such as naketi (self-reflection), natoni (wise speech), deliberation, mutual respect, togetherness, and mutual cooperation.

In addition to individual counseling, guidance counselors also provide classical services in the form of counseling on the definition, forms, and impacts of bullying. However, these services remain informative and do not connect the material to cultural values relevant to students. Guidance counselors reported that students generally understand the material cognitively, but attitudinal changes do not occur significantly because there is no connection between the counseling and their cultural context. A similar situation is seen in conflict mediation services currently used to bring together perpetrators and victims of bullying. This mediation approach is considered to be formal and does not utilize the tradition of customary deliberation, which has the potential to strengthen the process of social recovery and reconciliation between students.

Interview data with students, including perpetrators, victims, and witnesses of bullying, showed that bullying behavior at State Vocational High School 6, Kupang City, was generally triggered by cultural differences, accents, ethnic stereotypes, and skin color. Two student victims stated that they were often the targets of teasing because of their regional accents and communication styles typical of certain ethnicities. Meanwhile, several student perpetrators stated that they considered the actions as a form of joke without considering the impact on their friends' feelings. These findings confirm that the multicultural dimension plays a strong role in the dynamics of bullying in schools, so that the handling approach cannot rely solely on reprimands or general counseling, but requires strategies that increase students' cultural sensitivity.

Students also reported that individual counseling services made them feel heard and understood, but they observed that the counseling process did not connect their experiences to local customs or cultural values. Classical services were considered helpful but did not provide space for reflection on cultural diversity in everyday life. Students expressed hope that counseling activities would allow them to share cross-cultural experiences, understand each other's customs, and build harmonious relationships through collaborative activities based on local wisdom. They also believed that the use of local languages or traditional speech in the counseling process could increase emotional closeness between counselors and students.

The overall analysis indicates a need to develop a multicultural counseling model based on NTT's local wisdom, encompassing cultural assessment, culture-based individual counseling, multicultural group counseling, and conflict mediation that incorporates local values. Naketi values are believed to

help students reflect before acting; natoni serves as a medium for conveying moral messages; deliberation and mutual respect encourage cooperative communication patterns; and the culture of mutual cooperation strengthens the spirit of togetherness. Integrating these values is considered capable of helping students understand that bullying behavior not only violates school rules but also contradicts NTT's cultural values, which place equality, brotherhood, and social harmony as the main principles in community life.

The research results show that guidance and counseling services at SMK 6 Kupang City include individual counseling, classical services, and conflict mediation. However, these services are not structured within a multicultural counseling framework or based on the local wisdom of East Nusa Tenggara. This finding aligns with the perspective of(Sue et al. 2022)which emphasizes that multicultural counseling is "the fourth force in counseling" and requires counselors to understand the client's values, culture, and identity during the intervention process. The lack of integration of cultural values in counseling services found in this study confirms that counselors have not fully optimized multicultural competence as recommended in theory.

In individual counseling practices, guidance counselors focus on understanding students' emotional states and family backgrounds. While this approach provides psychological support, the lack of local values such as naketi (self-reflection), natoni (wise speech), or the tradition of deliberation results in the counseling process lacking the space for students to internalize cultural values.(Corey. 2016)emphasizes that effective counseling must involve values relevant to the client, including cultural values that guide daily life. This means that the counseling process found in this study does not yet fulfill the principle of cultural relevance as emphasized in humanistic and multicultural counseling theory.

Findings from classical services indicate that bullying counseling remains primarily informative and does not provide space for cultural reflection. This is similar to the results of the previous study.(Juan et al. 2025)which states that anti-bullying programs that do not consider cultural context tend to only increase knowledge but fail to encourage changes in attitudes and behavior. Thus, at SMK 6 Kupang City, classical services that do not integrate NTT cultural values result in low internalization of anti-bullying values, even though students' knowledge is quite good.

The conflict mediation used by guidance counselors is also formal and does not utilize traditional deliberation practices, which actually have great potential for resolving inter-ethnic tensions. This aligns with the theory of culture-based conflict resolution proposed by(Lederach. 2015), where reconciliation is effective when it upholds local values, cultural narratives, and symbols respected by the community. Thus, the mediation approach used in schools still fails to utilize cultural resources that could actually strengthen the conflict resolution process.

Student interview data shows that bullying is triggered by differences in accent, ethnic stereotypes, and skin color, indicating intercultural bias. Perpetrators often view bullying as a joke, reflecting a lack of cultural sensitivity among students. This reinforces the urgency of implementing a multicultural counseling model based on local wisdom to develop empathy, respect for differences, and build harmonious relationships.

Students expressed a need for more personalized, culturally relevant counseling, and the use of indigenous language or expressions. This aligns with the concept of cultural responsiveness explained.(Gay. 2018), that learning and counseling will be more meaningful when adopting language, symbols, values, and cultural practices that are close to the lives of students.

These findings indicate a gap between existing counseling services and students' multicultural needs. Multicultural counseling theory perspective(Sue et al. 2016)emphasizes three main competencies: (1) counselor cultural awareness (awareness), (2) knowledge of the client's culture (knowledge), and (3) culturally sensitive counseling skills (skills). In the context of this research, these three competencies have not been optimally fulfilled because there is no counseling model that provides guidelines for integrating local cultural values such as naketi, natoni, customary deliberation, and mutual cooperation.

Therefore, the results of this study indicate the importance of developing a multicultural counseling model based on local wisdom from NTT, which can improve cultural understanding and sensitivity among students, as well as minimize conflict and bullying behavior triggered by differences in cultural identity. The local values identified in this study have significant potential for forming a harmonious collective identity, strengthening social relations, and serving as a foundation for bullying prevention in schools.

The findings of this study indicate that bullying behavior among vocational high school students in SMK Negeri 6 Kupang is strongly influenced by cultural differences, including language accents, ethnic stereotypes, and social identity. This result is consistent with previous studies which found that bullying in multicultural school settings often emerges from misunderstandings, prejudice, and low cultural sensitivity among students (Juan et al., 2025; Permata Hati & Wicaksono, 2025). Prior research also emphasizes that when cultural diversity is not managed through inclusive and culturally responsive interventions, schools are more vulnerable to social fragmentation and aggressive behavior (Gay, 2018). Thus, the present findings reinforce empirical evidence that bullying is not merely an individual behavioral issue, but a socio-cultural phenomenon embedded in daily interactions among students.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals that existing counseling services such as individual counseling, classical guidance, and conflict mediation have not yet been structured within a multicultural counseling framework nor integrated with local wisdom values. This aligns with the findings of Sue et al. (2022), who argue that counseling practices that ignore clients' cultural contexts tend to have limited effectiveness. From a theoretical perspective, multicultural counseling theory emphasizes cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and culturally sensitive skills as core counselor competencies (Sue et al., 2016). In this study, the absence of local cultural elements such as *naketi* (self-reflection), *natoni* (wise verbal expression), and traditional deliberation practices indicates a gap between theoretical expectations and practical implementation, thereby limiting the internalization of anti-bullying values among students.

Moreover, the integration of local wisdom into counseling practices is theoretically supported by culturally responsive counseling and peacebuilding theories. Corey (2016) highlights that counseling becomes more meaningful when it incorporates values familiar to clients' lived experiences, while Lederach (2015) emphasizes that conflict resolution is more sustainable when grounded in local cultural narratives and communal values. Similar studies have demonstrated that counseling models incorporating indigenous or local wisdom significantly improve empathy, social cohesion, and behavioral change among adolescents (Putri et al., 2024; Zulfa & Suryadi, 2021). Therefore, this study contributes to the growing body of research by confirming that a multicultural counseling model grounded in local wisdom not only aligns with contemporary counseling theory but also offers a culturally relevant and effective strategy for preventing bullying in diverse school environments.

## 3. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that guidance and counseling services at State Vocational High School 6, Kupang City, have been implemented through individual counseling, classroom services, and conflict mediation to address bullying behavior. However, these services have not been structured into a multicultural counseling model that systematically integrates the local wisdom values of East Nusa Tenggara. This condition results in the interventions being general in nature, thus not fully addressing the problem of bullying triggered by cultural differences, accents, ethnic stereotypes, and students' social identities.

Furthermore, the research results show that bullying behavior at State Vocational High School 6 in Kupang City is closely related to students' low cultural sensitivity and understanding of diversity. Counseling that does not utilize local values such as naketi (self-reflection), natoni (wise speech), deliberation, mutual respect, and mutual cooperation makes the counseling process less relevant to students' cultural realities. As a result, although students understand the impact of bullying cognitively, internalization of anti-bullying values and attitude changes have not occurred optimally.

Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of developing a multicultural counseling model based on local wisdom from NTT as a preventative solution to bullying. This model should include cultural assessment, culturally sensitive individual and group counseling, and conflict mediation based on customary deliberation. Integrating local wisdom values is believed to increase multicultural awareness, strengthen empathy and mutual respect among students, and create a harmonious school climate free from bullying.

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