

THE ROLE OF MULTICULTURAL COUNSELING IN PREVENTING BULLYING BEHAVIOR AT STATE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL 01 BENGKULU TENGAH

Amelsa Sopya Bella^{1*}, Bella Sulistiya Ningsih¹, Marsela Oktavia¹, Fanny Nurhaliza¹, Lara Sepnida Awalia¹, Juwanto¹

¹ Guidance and Counseling Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Prof. Dr. Hazairin, SH Bengkulu, Indonesia

Email correspondence: amelsasopyabella@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

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Bullying remains one of the most persistent social problems in schools, particularly in culturally diverse educational environments where differences in ethnicity, religion, language, and social background may trigger discrimination and aggressive behavior. This study aimed to examine the role of multicultural counseling in preventing bullying behavior among students at State Senior High School 01 Bengkulu Tengah. A quantitative correlational research design was employed involving 60 eleventh-grade students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using structured questionnaires measuring multicultural counseling, consisting of cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and cultural skills, as well as bullying behavior, including physical, verbal, relational, and cyberbullying. Instrument validity was examined using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. Data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, Pearson Product-Moment correlation, and simple linear regression using IBM SPSS Statistics. The findings indicated that all questionnaire items were valid, and the overall instrument demonstrated good reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.82). Descriptive analysis showed that students perceived multicultural counseling positively, with 85% reporting agreement that counseling services had enhanced their understanding of tolerance, empathy, and respect for cultural diversity. Verbal bullying emerged as the most prevalent form (38%), followed by relational bullying (30%), physical bullying (18%), and cyberbullying (14%). Correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between multicultural counseling and bullying behavior ($r = -0.682, p < .001$), indicating that stronger implementation of multicultural counseling was associated with lower levels of bullying. These findings suggest that multicultural counseling represents an effective preventive strategy for fostering tolerance, empathy, and inclusive social relationships while reducing bullying behavior in multicultural school settings.



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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in developing students' academic competence, social responsibility, and character while fostering respect for diversity within increasingly multicultural societies. Schools are not only institutions for knowledge acquisition but also social environments where students from different ethnicities, religions, languages, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds interact daily. Such diversity provides valuable opportunities for developing tolerance, empathy, and intercultural understanding. However, when differences are not managed constructively, they may become sources of prejudice,

discrimination, social exclusion, and bullying among students. Consequently, schools require educational strategies that not only promote academic achievement but also cultivate mutual respect and peaceful coexistence among diverse student populations.

Bullying has become one of the most persistent social problems affecting educational institutions worldwide. It is generally defined as repeated aggressive behavior intentionally directed toward individuals perceived as weaker physically, psychologically, or socially (Harahap & Maryolo, 2018). Bullying occurs through various forms, including physical aggression, verbal harassment, relational exclusion, and cyberbullying facilitated by digital technologies. These behaviors create unsafe learning environments and negatively affect both victims and perpetrators. Victims commonly experience anxiety, depression, fear, low self-esteem, declining academic motivation, and social withdrawal, whereas perpetrators frequently demonstrate reduced empathy, poor emotional regulation, and persistent antisocial behaviors (Ambarwati et al., 2025; Fatimah et al., 2024). Therefore, bullying should be understood not merely as individual misconduct but as a complex educational and psychosocial issue requiring preventive intervention at the institutional level.

Bullying behavior encompasses several interrelated dimensions. Physical bullying involves behaviors such as hitting, kicking, pushing, or other forms of direct physical violence intended to harm victims (Andriyani et al., 2024). Verbal bullying includes insulting, mocking, threatening, name-calling, and humiliating others through spoken language. Relational or social bullying refers to intentionally excluding peers from social groups, spreading rumors, damaging friendships, or manipulating social relationships to isolate victims (Khairunisa et al., 2022). In addition, cyberbullying has become increasingly prevalent through social media platforms, messaging applications, and other digital communication technologies, enabling perpetrators to intimidate or embarrass victims beyond school boundaries. These various forms of bullying frequently emerge from limited empathy, inadequate self-control, intolerance toward diversity, and negative stereotypes regarding individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Kristiyasamudra et al., 2026).

Indonesia's multicultural society presents unique challenges and opportunities for educational institutions. As one of the world's most culturally diverse countries, Indonesia consists of hundreds of ethnic groups, regional languages, religious traditions, and cultural practices that are represented within schools. Diversity itself does not inherently produce conflict; rather, bullying often arises when students fail to appreciate cultural differences or develop prejudicial attitudes toward peers from different backgrounds. Consequently, multicultural schools require educational approaches capable of strengthening intercultural competence while reducing discriminatory attitudes. In this context, multicultural counseling offers an appropriate framework for promoting mutual understanding and preventing bullying behavior among adolescents (Ceres et al., 2026).

Multicultural counseling is an approach to guidance and counseling that acknowledges cultural diversity as an essential component of the counseling process. Rather than applying uniform intervention strategies, multicultural counseling recognizes that individuals' beliefs, values, communication styles, identities, and behavioral patterns are shaped by their cultural experiences (Rahmawati et al., 2021). The primary objective of multicultural counseling is to assist individuals in understanding cultural differences, appreciating diversity, and establishing harmonious interpersonal relationships free from prejudice and discrimination (Yusnita et al., 2023). Within school settings, multicultural counseling emphasizes empathy,

openness, respect, cultural sensitivity, and inclusive communication, thereby creating learning environments where every student feels accepted regardless of cultural background (Rahmah et al., 2024).

The theoretical framework of multicultural counseling generally comprises three major competencies. The first is cultural awareness, referring to counselors' and students' ability to recognize their own cultural values, assumptions, biases, and identities while appreciating those of others (Umami, 2022). The second is cultural knowledge, involving an understanding of cultural diversity, social structures, traditions, communication patterns, and the unique characteristics of different communities. The third is cultural skills, defined as the ability to communicate effectively, resolve conflicts constructively, and implement counseling interventions that are culturally responsive (Valencya et al., 2025). Collectively, these competencies encourage empathy, reduce stereotypes, and facilitate positive interactions among students from diverse backgrounds (Rifani, 2022).

Within educational settings, multicultural counseling contributes significantly to bullying prevention because it encourages students to perceive diversity as a valuable social resource rather than a source of conflict. Guidance and counseling teachers can integrate multicultural principles into classroom guidance, group guidance, group counseling, peer counseling, and preventive educational programs aimed at strengthening tolerance, empathy, cooperation, and conflict-resolution skills (Ananda et al., 2025). Through these interventions, students are encouraged to recognize the harmful consequences of bullying while developing respectful attitudes toward peers with different cultural identities. Consequently, multicultural counseling supports the development of inclusive school climates characterized by mutual respect, psychological safety, and positive peer relationships (Seprianto et al., 2023; Surbakti et al., 2024).

Although multicultural counseling has increasingly attracted scholarly attention, empirical evidence regarding its role in preventing bullying within Indonesian senior high schools remains relatively limited, particularly in schools characterized by substantial cultural diversity. Previous studies have generally emphasized multicultural counseling in relation to cultural adaptation, interpersonal communication, or counselor competence rather than examining its preventive contribution to bullying behavior. Furthermore, little is known about how multicultural counseling practices are implemented by school counselors within diverse educational environments and how these practices influence students' attitudes toward tolerance and bullying prevention. This gap highlights the need for context-specific research that explores multicultural counseling as a preventive strategy rather than solely as a remedial intervention.

State Senior High School 01 Bengkulu Tengah represents an appropriate context for investigating this issue because its students come from diverse ethnic, cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Preliminary observations conducted by the researchers indicated that verbal teasing, social exclusion, stereotyping, and discriminatory interactions occasionally occurred among students, suggesting the presence of bullying behaviors associated with cultural differences. These conditions underscore the importance of strengthening multicultural counseling services to cultivate empathy, tolerance, and intercultural understanding while preventing bullying behaviors within the school community.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the role of multicultural counseling in preventing

bullying behavior among students at State Senior High School 01 Bengkulu Tengah. Specifically, the study seeks to examine how multicultural counseling contributes to developing cultural awareness, tolerance, empathy, and positive social interactions that support the creation of a safe, inclusive, and violence-free educational environment. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically to the development of the multicultural counseling literature and, practically, to the improvement of guidance and counseling services in culturally diverse schools.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between multicultural counseling and bullying prevention among students at State Senior High School 01, Bengkulu Tengah. A quantitative correlational design was selected because it enables researchers to examine the magnitude and direction of relationships between variables using objective measurements and statistical analysis (Ramdhan, 2021; Sugiyono, 2019). The study population comprised all eleventh-grade students enrolled at State Senior High School 01 Bengkulu Tengah. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique in which respondents are chosen according to predetermined criteria relevant to the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2019). The inclusion criteria consisted of active eleventh-grade students who had participated in school guidance and counseling services and were considered capable of providing information regarding multicultural counseling and bullying behavior. Data were collected using structured questionnaires based on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), which is widely used to measure respondents' attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral tendencies in educational and social research (Sugiyono, 2019).

The independent variable was multicultural counseling, operationalized through three dimensions: cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and cultural skills (Umami, 2022; Valencya et al., 2025). The dependent variable was bullying behavior, measured across four dimensions: physical bullying, verbal bullying, relational (social) bullying, and cyberbullying (Harahap & Maryolo, 2018; Khairunisa et al., 2022). Prior to data collection, all questionnaire items were subjected to validity testing using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation coefficient and reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha to ensure the instruments' validity and internal consistency (Ramdhan, 2021; Sugiyono, 2019). Data analysis consisted of descriptive statistics to summarize respondents' characteristics and variable distributions, followed by inferential statistics, including the Pearson Product-Moment correlation test and simple linear regression analysis, to determine the influence of multicultural counseling on bullying prevention among students. All statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Ramdhan, 2021).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study was conducted at State Senior High School 01 Bengkulu Tengah involving 60 eleventh-grade students to examine the role of multicultural counseling in preventing bullying behavior. Data were collected using questionnaires measuring multicultural counseling and bullying behavior and were analyzed through validity, reliability, descriptive, correlation, and regression analyses. Prior to hypothesis testing, the research instruments

were subjected to validity and reliability testing to ensure their appropriateness for data collection.

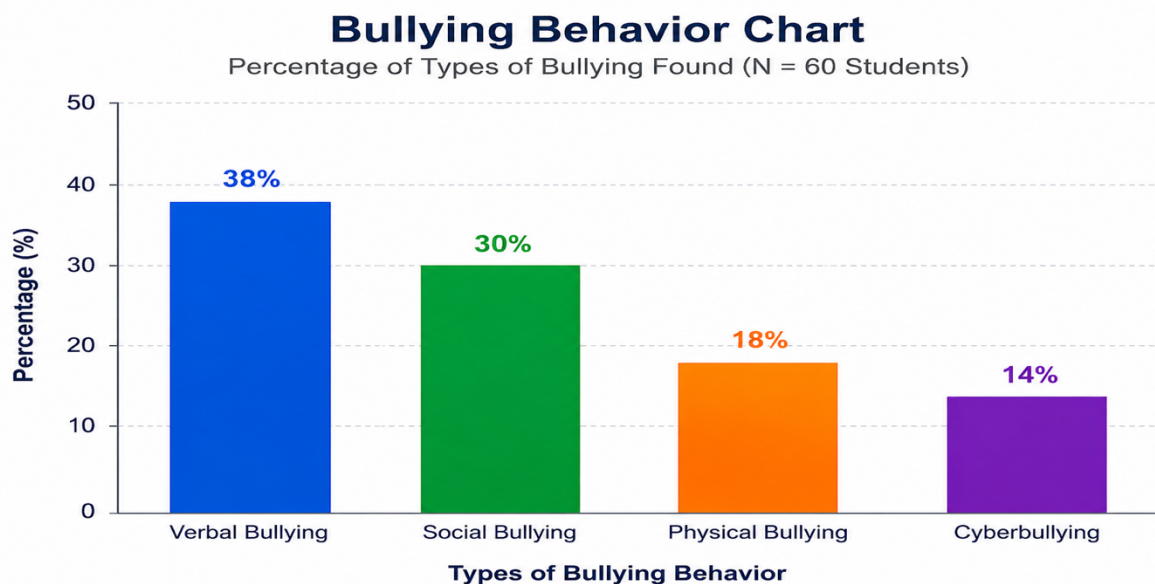
The validity test showed that all questionnaire items were valid, with each item producing a correlation coefficient higher than the critical value ($r_{table} = 0.254$, $\alpha = 0.05$). Furthermore, the reliability analysis produced a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.82, indicating high internal consistency and confirming that the instruments were reliable for measuring both multicultural counseling and bullying behavior. These findings demonstrate that the research instruments met the psychometric requirements for subsequent statistical analyses.

Descriptive analysis revealed that students generally perceived the implementation of multicultural counseling positively. Approximately 45% of respondents selected *strongly agree*, while 40% selected *agree* regarding statements indicating that school counseling services had successfully promoted tolerance, empathy, respect for diversity, and appreciation of cultural differences. These findings suggest that multicultural counseling has been implemented effectively within the school context and has contributed to students' awareness of cultural diversity.

Despite these positive perceptions, bullying behavior was still identified among students. The most frequently reported form was verbal bullying (38%), including teasing, mocking, and assigning offensive nicknames, followed by relational bullying (30%), such as social exclusion and deliberate isolation of peers. Physical bullying and cyberbullying were also reported but occurred less frequently than verbal and relational forms. The predominance of non-physical bullying indicates that many students continue to perceive verbal aggression as harmless joking, despite its potentially serious psychological consequences.

Figure 1.

Distribution of Bullying Types among Students



Source: data processing results

The findings indicate that verbal bullying represents the most dominant form of bullying at State Senior High School 01 Bengkulu Tengah. This pattern is consistent with previous research suggesting that verbal aggression is often normalized within adolescent peer groups

because it rarely results in visible physical injuries, although it may generate significant emotional distress and long-term psychological harm (Fika & Maknun, 2023; Qamaria & Astuti, 2020).

To examine the relationship between multicultural counseling and bullying behavior, a Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis was performed. The results yielded a correlation coefficient of $r = -0.682$ with a significance value of $p = 0.000$, indicating a statistically significant and strong negative relationship between the two variables. These findings demonstrate that increased implementation of multicultural counseling is associated with lower levels of bullying behavior among students. Accordingly, the research hypothesis was accepted, confirming that multicultural counseling significantly contributes to bullying prevention in the school.

The strong negative correlation supports the theoretical assumptions underlying multicultural counseling. According to the multicultural counseling framework developed by Derald Wing Sue and David Sue, effective counseling requires counselors to recognize and integrate clients' cultural values, beliefs, social identities, and communication patterns into the counseling process (Aisah & Ruswandi, 2020). This framework emphasizes three fundamental competencies: cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and cultural skills, which enable counselors to facilitate respectful interactions among individuals from diverse backgrounds (Pradika et al., 2024).

Within the present study, these three multicultural competencies appeared to contribute substantially to students' social development. Cultural awareness enabled students to recognize and appreciate differences in ethnicity, religion, language, and traditions without developing prejudice. Cultural knowledge increased students' understanding of social diversity and reduced stereotypes toward peers from different backgrounds (Haryanti & Prasasti, 2023). Meanwhile, cultural skills strengthened students' communication abilities, conflict-resolution skills, and interpersonal relationships, thereby reducing opportunities for discriminatory behavior and bullying (Azizah et al., 2023).

The findings also support the bullying theory proposed by Dan Olweus, which defines bullying as intentional, repetitive aggressive behavior involving an imbalance of power between perpetrators and victims (Ashari et al., 2021). According to this theory, bullying commonly develops because of limited empathy, weak self-regulation, peer influence, and discriminatory social environments (Karim et al., 2023). The present findings indicate that multicultural counseling addresses these risk factors by strengthening empathy, tolerance, and mutual respect among students.

The effectiveness of multicultural counseling observed in this study is further supported by the person-centered theory of Carl Rogers, which emphasizes empathy, unconditional positive regard, and genuine acceptance as essential conditions for healthy psychological development (Khowatim, 2020). Through multicultural counseling activities, students were encouraged to understand others' perspectives, appreciate differences, and develop positive interpersonal relationships. As a result, they became less likely to engage in aggressive behaviors directed toward classmates from different cultural or social backgrounds (Yasinta et al., 2025; Iftirosy et al., 2025).

Similarly, the findings are consistent with the social learning theory proposed by Albert Bandura, which argues that behavior develops through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within social environments (Habsy et al., 2025). In schools where counselors

and teachers consistently demonstrate inclusive attitudes and respectful communication, students are more likely to imitate these positive behaviors, contributing to reductions in bullying and improvements in peer relationships (Fika & Maknun, 2023).

Beyond reducing bullying behavior, multicultural counseling also contributed to improving the overall school climate. Students demonstrated greater openness toward interacting with peers from different cultural backgrounds, stronger emotional regulation during interpersonal conflicts, and increased willingness to cooperate across diverse social groups (Valencya et al., 2025; Gustama et al., 2025). These changes suggest that multicultural counseling influences not only individual attitudes but also the broader social environment by fostering inclusion, tolerance, and mutual respect.

Collectively, these findings reinforce the strategic role of school counselors in promoting positive social development. Guidance and counseling services extend beyond addressing students' personal problems by cultivating empathy, cooperation, cultural sensitivity, and respect for diversity throughout the school community (Atmojo & Wardaningsih, 2019). Consequently, multicultural counseling should be considered an essential preventive strategy for reducing bullying while simultaneously strengthening inclusive educational environments. Schools are therefore encouraged to institutionalize multicultural counseling through comprehensive anti-bullying programs, character education, intercultural dialogue, and continuous activities promoting tolerance and respect for diversity, thereby establishing safe, harmonious, and inclusive learning environments.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that multicultural counseling plays a significant role in preventing bullying behavior among students at State Senior High School 01 Bengkulu Tengah. Statistical analysis revealed a strong and significant negative relationship between multicultural counseling and bullying behavior ($r = -0.682$, $p < .001$), indicating that improvements in students' multicultural understanding are associated with lower levels of bullying. The findings further showed that students generally perceived multicultural counseling services positively, particularly regarding the development of cultural awareness, empathy, mutual respect, and appreciation for diversity. Among the various forms of bullying identified, verbal bullying was the most prevalent, followed by relational bullying, physical bullying, and cyberbullying. These results emphasize that non-physical forms of bullying remain the primary challenge within the school environment. The implementation of multicultural counseling helped students develop greater tolerance, improve interpersonal relationships, and recognize cultural differences as positive assets rather than sources of conflict.

Overall, the findings confirm that multicultural counseling is an effective preventive approach for creating a safe, inclusive, and harmonious school climate. Therefore, schools should strengthen multicultural counseling through comprehensive guidance and counseling programs, anti-bullying campaigns, character education initiatives, and collaborative activities that promote respect for diversity. Future studies are encouraged to employ larger samples, involve multiple schools, and adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to further examine the long-term effectiveness of multicultural counseling in reducing bullying behavior.

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