

Interpersonal Conflict Resolution Among Students in Multicultural Schools: An Interpretive Study Grounded in the Local Value of *Songu Lara Mombangu*

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Abstract. Amid growing cultural diversity in Indonesian schools, this study investigates interpersonal conflict among students in multicultural secondary schools and explores how the local value *Songu Lara Mombangu* informs school-based conflict mediation. Using a qualitative multiple-case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis in two culturally diverse schools in Central Sulawesi. Findings reveal that conflict arises not from ethnic identity but from miscommunication, differing social norms, and peer dynamics. Although students' awareness of *Songu Lara Mombangu* is limited, its values are reflected in practices of cooperation and relational repair. The study highlights the importance of culturally responsive counseling grounded in local wisdom and contributes to social identity and intersectionality perspectives. These insights support inclusive educational policies and training programs aligned with students' cultural realities. **Practically, the findings inform culturally responsive counseling, teacher training, and inclusive school policies.**

Keywords: conflict resolution, cultural diversity, culturally responsive counseling, interpersonal conflict, *Songu Lara Mombangu*

A. INTRODUCTION

In today's increasingly interconnected and diverse era of globalization, secondary schools serve as microcosms of broader societal diversity. Within these environments, adolescents learn to navigate complex and culturally varied social interactions. In Indonesia – a country characterized by immense ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity – schools function not only as academic spaces but also as

meeting grounds for intercultural engagement. Ideally, such diversity fosters mutual respect, empathy, and inclusive citizenship. However, in the absence of cultural sensitivity and adequate institutional support, diversity can also lead to misunderstandings, exclusion, and interpersonal conflicts among students (D'hondt et al., 2021; Espinoza et al., 2019).

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by heightened sensitivity to peer relationships, identity exploration, and emotional intensity, which increases vulnerability to conflict, particularly in multicultural contexts with differing norms and values (Lin et al., 2025; Schotte et al., 2022; Spitzerová et al., 2025). Cultural misunderstandings—such as misinterpretations of verbal and nonverbal cues, differing notions of respect, and incompatible social expectations—are common sources of conflict (Costa et al., 2021; Lustig, 1997). In this context, school-based counseling, including experiential group approaches such as role-playing, plays an important role in fostering interpersonal skills and serves as a preventive strategy to reduce social friction among students (Nanda et al., 2025).

The interplay between cultural diversity and conflict is evident in multicultural school settings in Indonesia, particularly in regions such as Central Sulawesi. Students from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds often experience subtle exclusion, discomfort in peer interactions, and barriers to social integration (Bardach et al., 2024; Munniksma et al., 2022). These conditions highlight that, without institutional strategies promoting intercultural understanding, cultural diversity may both enrich and fragment social relationships (Grütter et al., 2021; Hooijsma et al., 2021).

However, conventional school counseling models often fail to address the culturally specific dynamics of interpersonal conflict. School-based tensions may also reflect underlying power relations embedded in pedagogical practices and curricula, rather than merely individual misunderstandings (Firmanyah et al., 2024). Furthermore, multicultural counseling services in Indonesian schools remain constrained by limited counselor competencies and the lack of contextualized technical guidelines, indicating the need for more reflective and applicable school-based counseling frameworks (Wantu et al., 2025).

Previous studies have examined interpersonal conflict in educational settings from psychological, behavioral, and communicative perspectives. However, these approaches often overlook the cultural dimensions shaping both the nature and resolution of conflict. Even when culture is considered, frameworks

tend to reflect Western-centric perspectives, limiting their relevance for students in non-Western or Indigenous contexts (Lustig, 1997; Rocha & Gomides, 2024; Hernández et al., 2023; Idilbi et al., 2024).

A key gap in the literature is the limited integration of local cultural values into educational and counseling practices. Although intercultural education is widely emphasized, few studies explore how local wisdom can inform conflict mediation in schools (Castro et al., 2024; Quilaqueo et al., 2023). Local values such as *Nosarara Nosabatutu*, which emphasize unity and solidarity, have potential as foundations for school counseling (Ratu et al., 2019). However, the application of local philosophies – such as *Songu Lara Mombangu* – within practical school-based counseling strategies in multicultural Indonesian contexts remains largely unexplored.

This study addresses these gaps by examining interpersonal conflict among adolescents in multicultural secondary schools in Parigi Moutong, Central Sulawesi, with a focus on the local philosophy *Songu Lara Mombangu*. Rooted in Kaili culture, this value emphasizes unity, mutual respect, and collective responsibility, and reflects peace-oriented principles such as empathy, cooperation, and deliberation (Ratu et al., 2024).

Although traditionally practiced in communal life, *Songu Lara Mombangu* holds strong potential as a conceptual foundation for culturally responsive counseling and school-based conflict mediation. By exploring its application in educational contexts, this study seeks to contribute to more inclusive and contextually grounded conflict resolution frameworks.

The objective of this research is to understand how cultural diversity shapes the forms and experiences of interpersonal conflict among students, and to explore how *Songu Lara Mombangu* can inform culturally sensitive assessment and mediation strategies within school counseling practice. This approach offers both theoretical and practical contributions: theoretically, by expanding the discourse on educational conflict through a local cultural lens; and practically, by providing tools for educators and counselors that align more closely with students' cultural realities.

B. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Interpersonal Conflict in Educational Contexts

Interpersonal conflict within school settings is understood as the result of complex and ongoing social interactions among students. Conflict does not always

manifest through overt physical or verbal aggression; it often appears subtly as tension, misunderstanding, or social withdrawal. This aligns with findings emphasizing that relational aggression and social exclusion are common forms of conflict in secondary schools and significantly impact students' academic performance and emotional well-being (Bardach et al., 2024; Espinoza et al., 2019).

During adolescence, conflict becomes increasingly complex due to heightened sensitivity to recognition and social acceptance. Group dynamics and differing communication styles may further exacerbate tensions, especially during group projects or classroom discussions. School conflicts should be viewed as dynamic social processes influenced by group norms and social experiences (Govaris et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2025; Schotte et al., 2022).

Cultural Diversity as a Determinant of Interpersonal Conflict

In multicultural school contexts, cultural diversity is not merely a passive backdrop but an active force shaping interaction patterns and the potential for student conflict. Differences in language, values, and communicative norms may lead to divergent perceptions of appropriate behavior (Lustig, 1997).

Identity exploration and differing cultural norms can intensify ingroup-outgroup dynamics. Students often form peer groups based on cultural similarities, which may result in the social exclusion of minority-group students. Intercultural education initiatives are essential for bridging these gaps and fostering social cohesion (Bardach et al., 2024; Hooijsma et al., 2021; Munniksmma et al., 2022; Spitzerová et al., 2025).

Social and Communicative Mechanisms in Multicultural School Settings

Interpersonal conflict is frequently mediated through social and communicative mechanisms embedded in students' daily lives, including language choice, humor styles, and tone of voice. Misunderstandings in communicative context may escalate into broader conflicts. Humor intended to build rapport can be misinterpreted and cause offense (Costa et al., 2021; Williams & Hamm, 2018).

Inclusive communication, sensitive to cultural diversity, plays a pivotal role in reducing potential conflicts and strengthening peer relationships. Supportive school environments and culturally responsive teachers can mitigate tensions and enhance intergroup relations (Duong et al., 2022; Idilbi et al., 2024;

Padmanabhanunni et al., 2023).

Peer group dynamics and social identity also contribute to the potential for conflict. When group identity is defined exclusively, students may display loyalty that results in discriminatory behavior toward outgroups. Conversely, positive intergroup interaction can serve as a means to reduce stereotypes and foster intercultural understanding (Kornienko et al., 2024; Nakata et al., 2025; Nault et al., 2024; Sircar et al., 2021).

Culturally Responsive School Counseling and Local Wisdom Frameworks

Culturally responsive counseling emphasizes the importance of understanding students' cultural backgrounds in assessment and conflict mediation processes. Counselors must engage in self-reflection regarding cultural biases that may affect the counseling process (Constantine & Gushue, 2003).

Effective counseling services involve open discussions about cultural differences and the development of empathy and perspective-taking skills. This approach also encourages collaboration between schools and families to reinforce students' cultural identities and social support networks (Brinson et al., 2004; Dežan & Sedmak, 2023; Lapresta-Rey et al., 2022).

Integrating local cultural values into educational and counseling practices is increasingly recognized as a strategic approach. Expressing local culture in character education and applying frameworks like *Songu Lara Mombangu* from Kaili culture are vital to effective assessment and conflict mediation (Lustig, 1997; Putra et al., 2021).

Positioning Songu Lara Mombangu within the Global Discourse on Multicultural Education

Global multicultural education discourse increasingly emphasizes the inclusion of local cultural values as integral to conflict resolution. Curricula that integrate local values enhance student engagement and foster intercultural empathy. However, empirical evidence remains limited in guiding their practical application (Aydogan et al., 2024; Fye et al., 2022).

The literature affirms the necessity of embedding local cultural values into conflict resolution strategies to foster more inclusive and socially harmonious learning environments. This study reinforces the argument that local approaches have strategic value in enriching global educational discourse and advancing culturally relevant counseling practices. As such, this theoretical foundation offers

a culturally grounded lens to examine school-based conflict, informing both the methodological approach and interpretative framework of this study.

This study is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework that conceptualizes interpersonal conflict in schools as a dynamic social process shaped by adolescent development, cultural diversity, and communicative interactions. Conflict is not only expressed through overt aggression but also through subtle forms such as tension, exclusion, and misunderstanding within peer dynamics (Bardach et al., 2024; Espinoza et al., 2019; Govaris et al., 2021). In multicultural school contexts, cultural diversity influences communication styles, group formation, and in-group-out-group dynamics, which may intensify conflict (Lustig, 1997; Munniksma et al., 2022).

These conflicts are mediated by social and communicative mechanisms, including language use, humor, and relational norms (Costa et al., 2021; Williams & Hamm, 2018). Therefore, culturally responsive counseling is essential, emphasizing cultural awareness, empathy, and inclusive communication (Constantine & Gushue, 2003). The integration of the local value *Songu Lara Mombangu*, which highlights unity and collective responsibility, further strengthens this approach. Thus, this study integrates developmental, cultural, communicative, and counseling perspectives to provide a holistic understanding of interpersonal conflict in multicultural school settings.

C. RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study was conducted from November 27 to December 5, 2025, covering all stages from obtaining permission and selecting participants to data collection and analysis. Data analysis was carried out using thematic coding, beginning with interview transcription, followed by in-depth reading, initial coding (*open coding*), categorization (*axial coding*), and the identification of main themes (*selective coding*), which were then interpreted to address the research focus. The validity of the data was ensured through triangulation by comparing interview, observation, and documentation results, as well as through *member checking*, in which participants were asked to confirm the findings to ensure the accuracy of the data and the researcher's interpretations.

This study employed a qualitative approach using an interpretative multiple-case study design to explore interpersonal student conflict within multicultural secondary schools and how the local wisdom of *Songu Lara Mombangu* is understood and operationalized in guidance and counseling

practices. The interpretative approach allows for the examination of subjective meanings, social processes, and relational dynamics from participants' perspectives, which cannot be reduced to measurable variables (Creswell, 2015; Lustig, 1997).

The multiple-case design was chosen to capture thematic patterns of interpersonal conflict across different school contexts without performing quantitative comparisons between cases. Each school was treated as a case unit, while the analysis aimed to synthesize cross-case findings to understand conflict as a social practice embedded in school contexts, interpersonal relationships, and prevailing cultural values. This approach aligns with the view that interpretative studies can capture the nuances of social interaction and identity within educational conflict experiences (Leonard & Van Ommering, 2011).

Research Site and Context

The research was conducted in two secondary education institutions in Central Sulawesi Province: State Senior High School 1 Parigi and State Vocational High School 1 Parigi in Parigi Moutong Regency. These schools were purposively selected as they represent multicultural school environments with diverse ethnic, linguistic, and social practices among students.

Student ethnic backgrounds include Bugis, Kaili, Gorontalo, Javanese, Balinese, Torajan, and Arab-Bugis, creating a dynamic intercultural interaction space relevant for examining adolescent interpersonal conflict. The multisite selection aimed to capture variation in socio-cultural contexts without shifting the research focus from thematic understanding of conflict and counseling practices.

Furthermore, the local value of *Songu Lara Mombangu*, embedded in Central Sulawesi's social practices, served as an interpretive framework to understand principles of togetherness, collective responsibility, and relational restoration in multicultural school contexts.

Participants and Sampling Strategy

The study involved 15 participants, including students, school counselors, and vice principals. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants with direct experiences in school social dynamics and conflict. The ethnic diversity of participants reflected the social realities under investigation and enabled in-depth exploration of how cultural differences shape conflict perceptions and

resolution strategies (Nakata et al., 2025).

Data Collection

Three primary techniques were employed to generate rich data: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews uncovered personal narratives about conflict experiences and revealed management strategies within intercultural learning settings (Amedome et al., 2024), while observation captured direct interactions and non-verbal expressions crucial to understanding conflict (Atıcı, 2007). Document analysis provided additional context through school administrative data and guidance and counseling program materials.

Researcher Role and Instruments

The researcher acted as the main instrument, responsible for designing interview guides, conducting observations, and analyzing data reflectively. To ensure interpretative accuracy, reflexivity was maintained through field journals and peer discussions, aiming to reduce potential bias (Charlton & Barrow, 2002).

Data Analysis Procedure

Thematic analysis was conducted through data reduction, categorization, and interpretation. Transcripts from interviews and observations were coded based on themes such as conflict patterns, cultural response strategies, and the integration of local values. Validity was strengthened through technique and source triangulation, along with member checking (Saunders et al., 2015).

Data Validity and Trustworthiness

Reliability was ensured through qualitative trustworthiness strategies, including prolonged field engagement, audit trails of analytic procedures, and peer debriefing (Bray et al., 2012). Triangulation and participant validation further enhanced the credibility and minimized interpretive bias (Barnes & Tisdall, 2025).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical protocols involved informed consent and confidentiality assurances. Data collection adhered to ethical principles suited for working with adolescents as a vulnerable group (Obiezu-Umeh et al., 2021), and participants' identities were anonymized with full withdrawal rights upheld. The principles of non-maleficence and participatory ethical reflection were maintained throughout

the study (Newcomb et al., 2015).

D. RESEARCH RESULTS

Descriptive Findings (Results)

Multicultural Contexts as Background of Interpersonal Conflict

The findings presented in this section are derived from interviews and field observations involving students, school counselors, and school management personnel. To protect identities, direct quotations are coded as S1–S10 (students), BK1–BK2 (counselors), and WK1–WK2 (vice principals). Data triangulation was conducted through integrating interview results, direct classroom and schoolyard observations, and documentation from school programs and counseling services.

In the multicultural school settings of Parigi Moutong. Cultural identity was not explicitly labeled but manifested through daily communication practices. For example, a student noted, “you can see the differences in the way people talk, show respect, and their habits” (S1), illustrating that diversity is a lived experience in social interaction. Interpersonal conflict in these settings was primarily triggered not by cultural identity per se, but by differences in how everyday behaviors were interpreted, with communication styles—intonation, language use, and social etiquette—emerging as major sources of friction.

Communication and Social Mechanisms as Mediators of Conflict

To further understand how these conflicts unfold in everyday school life, the following theme explores the specific communicative and social mechanisms that mediate peer interactions. Cultural diversity was evident in differing communicative and social norms. For instance, intonation was often misunderstood, with a student noting, “people think I'm angry, but my voice is naturally loud” (S5). Local language unfamiliarity also contributed to social distancing, as highlighted by a student who said, “I don't understand my friends' local expressions” (S2).

These dynamics were evident during classroom and informal interactions. Jokes often escalated tension; one student admitted having a “minor fight because the joke went too far” (S3). A counselor reported more serious bullying, such as “mocking someone's parents' names” (BK1), reflecting deeper threats to identity and dignity. Observational data confirmed that most conflict incidents stemmed from teasing and insults rooted in ego and self-esteem issues.

Classical guidance sessions incorporating Social Emotional Learning (SEL) were reportedly effective in raising awareness about bullying and served as

preventive strategies to de-escalate conflict. Despite tensions, students generally showed willingness to restore relationships, indicating that conflict is viewed as a relational event open to repair.

Peer group dynamics and social identity also mediated conflict. Strong ingroup affiliations were observed, leading to subtle outgroup discrimination, a pattern evident in student clustering along cultural lines.

Assessment and Intervention Practices by School Counselors

In response to these interpersonal challenges, schools have developed various counseling and intervention practices aimed at conflict resolution. Conflict resolution in institutional settings typically followed a stepwise process, beginning with homeroom teachers and escalating to counselors or student affairs staff. “It starts with the homeroom teacher, then the counselor, and finally me,” said a vice principal (WK1).

Counselors administered surveys to “identify student issues” (BK1), followed by observations and interviews (BK2). Tools such as sociometry and case logs were used to map student relationships. Challenges included initial student resistance and the fast-paced evolution of conflict, particularly influenced by social media.

Counselors adapted by employing flexible, context-sensitive approaches. Group counseling was reported to help build student confidence in navigating peer interactions and promoting dialogue, clarification, and negotiation during interpersonal tensions. Counseling practices that incorporated local and religious values were observed to improve psychosocial outcomes such as self-acceptance. Counselors with cultural awareness were better equipped to identify root causes of conflict and facilitate resolution.

Songu Lara Mombangu as a Framework for Social Mediation

Beyond formal interventions, the integration of cultural values such as *Songu Lara Mombangu* emerged as a crucial component of social mediation within the school context. Students’ understanding of the term *Songu Lara Mombangu* varied. One student admitted, “I don’t know yet” (S1), while another interpreted it as “united in building together” (S5).

Although the term was reportedly “not often introduced to students” (WK1), its ethos was embedded in school activities and counseling services. Field observations showed that activities such as communal cleaning, arts

performances, and classroom discussions served as practical expressions of this value. Counselors defined it as “building togetherness and mutual respect in school” (BK1) and “creating a safe, supportive, and cooperative school environment” (BK2).

Interpretation (Discussion)

The findings indicate that interpersonal conflict in multicultural school settings is not primarily caused by cultural identity itself, but rather by differences in communication styles and the interpretation of everyday behaviors. This suggests that conflict emerges at the level of interaction rather than identity. Misinterpretations of tone, language, and social norms appear to be key triggers of tension, highlighting the importance of communication competence in diverse environments. Additionally, peer group clustering reflects underlying social identity processes that may contribute to subtle forms of exclusion.

Despite the presence of conflict, students’ willingness to repair relationships suggests that conflict is perceived as a normal and manageable part of social interaction. This creates opportunities for preventive interventions, such as Social Emotional Learning, to strengthen students’ interpersonal skills.

The role of school counselors is crucial in addressing these dynamics. Their use of structured yet flexible approaches demonstrates responsiveness to complex student interactions. However, challenges such as student resistance and the influence of social media indicate the need for more adaptive and proactive strategies.

Furthermore, the integration of local cultural values such as *Songu Lara Mombangu* provides a culturally grounded framework for conflict mediation. Even when not explicitly taught, these values are embedded in school practices and contribute to fostering mutual respect, cooperation, and social harmony. This underscores the importance of incorporating local wisdom into culturally

responsive counseling practices.

Table 1. Summary of Major Themes

No	Major Theme	Key Findings
1	Multicultural Contexts	Cultural differences appear in daily communication and behavior
2	Communication & Social Mechanisms	Misunderstanding of tone, language, and jokes trigger conflict
3	Counseling Practices	Stepwise intervention and adaptive counseling strategies are used
4	Songu Lara Mombangu	Promotes togetherness, respect, and social harmony

E. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that interpersonal conflict in multicultural school settings is deeply influenced by the interaction of communication practices, peer group dynamics, and cultural identities. These dynamics resonate with prior research suggesting that intercultural misunderstandings often stem not from overt cultural labels but from more nuanced aspects such as intonation, humor, and social etiquette (Nakata et al., 2025; Spitzerová et al., 2025; Williams & Hamm, 2018). Communication styles, including perceived aggressiveness or informality, carry cultural significance, highlighting how language and behavior function as both expressions and constructions of identity (Idilbi et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2021).

These findings invite a deeper reflection on the theoretical lenses of social identity and intersectionality, as adolescents' affiliations to peer groups often influence intergroup perceptions and the emergence of implicit exclusion. The observed clustering of students along cultural lines raises important questions about the hidden mechanisms of social distance and how identity salience may exacerbate divisions within diverse school contexts (Ayiasi et al., 2022). While cultural diversity holds transformative potential, it simultaneously reveals vulnerabilities in peer relationships that, if unaddressed, may reproduce subtle forms of segregation.

Culturally responsive counseling appears not merely as an institutional response, but as a vital practice that requires ongoing critical engagement with students' lived realities. The application of tools such as sociometry and peer

mapping enabled counselors to grasp relational dynamics more effectively and tailor their interventions accordingly. Rather than positioning culture as a static backdrop, these methods actively incorporate it into the fabric of school counseling (Brinson et al., 2004; Leigh-Osroosh et al., 2023). Person-centered group counseling, in particular, offers promise in fostering inclusive emotional environments, though its success depends on how deeply it resonates with students' social experiences (Safitri et al., 2025).

A particularly compelling insight lies in the operationalization of *Songu Lara Mombangu*, which transcends symbolic representation and becomes a relational ethic embedded in collective school practices. While students' awareness of the term varies, its enactment through extracurricular activities and counseling interactions reflects an underlying value system grounded in mutual respect and communal solidarity. This observation challenges assumptions that local wisdom is peripheral or anecdotal; instead, it underscores its potential to inform structurally embedded conflict mediation approaches. It prompts reconsideration of how educational institutions can meaningfully integrate indigenous values without reducing them to tokenism (Côté & Evans, 2025; Lustig, 1997; Putra et al., 2021).

This study contributes both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it deepens the discourse on multicultural education by illustrating how local values such as *Songu Lara Mombangu* can complement and expand global frameworks for conflict resolution. Practically, it points to the critical need for educators and counselors to be trained not only in intercultural communication, but in the reflective incorporation of local sociocultural norms. The use of SEL-based programs and participatory initiatives like Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) offers a promising route for enhancing students' multicultural self-efficacy and conflict competence (Ratu et al., 2025). Furthermore, the documented improvement in psychosocial indicators such as assertiveness and self-acceptance reinforces the value of culturally rooted interventions in adolescent development (Ratu et al., 2022; Syahril et al., 2025).

Nonetheless, the study's geographic limitation—focusing only on two schools in Central Sulawesi—poses constraints on the broader applicability of its findings. Expressions of *Songu Lara Mombangu* may vary across regions and cultural groups, which warrants caution in assuming transferability. Moreover, the study did not engage with the digital dimension of adolescent conflict, an increasingly relevant arena that intersects with school-based dynamics. Future

inquiries may benefit from longitudinal and multi-sited research designs that examine how culturally grounded models of conflict mediation can be institutionalized and adapted across educational settings.

In summary, the discussion encourages a move beyond affirmation toward a more critically reflective engagement with cultural values in education. Embedding indigenous concepts like *Songu Lara Mombangu* into school counseling is not merely a gesture of inclusion—it is a strategic and contextually grounded practice for building socially cohesive and culturally attuned educational environments.

Scientific Contribution

This study makes a significant contribution to both theory and practice in multicultural education and school counseling. Theoretically, it extends existing frameworks of intercultural conflict by demonstrating how local cultural values, such as *Songu Lara Mombangu*, can complement and enrich global perspectives on conflict resolution. Rather than positioning culture as a static background, this study highlights its dynamic role in shaping communication practices, peer interactions, and conflict experiences within school settings.

Practically, this research underscores the importance of culturally responsive counseling approaches that integrate local sociocultural values into intervention strategies. It provides evidence that combining Social Emotional Learning (SEL) with culturally grounded practices can enhance students' interpersonal competence, self-acceptance, and conflict resolution skills. Furthermore, the study offers a contextual model for educators and counselors to develop more inclusive and culturally attuned learning environments.

F. CONCLUSION

In an increasingly diverse educational landscape, understanding the subtle dynamics of interpersonal conflict in multicultural schools is essential for developing inclusive and responsive educational systems. This study demonstrates that such conflict is more often triggered by miscommunication, differences in expression, and everyday interaction styles than by cultural identity per se. Elements such as tone of voice, the use of humor, and differing norms of social etiquette emerge as sensitive sites for misinterpretation, particularly among students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Peer group dynamics and attachment to social identity further reinforce both exclusion and solidarity, shaping

interpersonal relationships in significant ways.

In this context, school counseling practices serve as a critical site for intervention. Counselors with cultural competence and an understanding of students' social environments are more capable of implementing inclusive and effective mediation strategies. Although not always formally recognized by students, the value of *Songu Lara Mombangu* is embedded in school social practices as a guiding principle for collaboration and relational restoration.

Theoretically, this study offers a culturally grounded extension to existing theories of social identity and intersectionality, highlighting the strategic potential of integrating local cultural values within conflict resolution frameworks. Practically, the findings underscore the importance of embedding local wisdom into teacher training programs and institutional policies. This can be implemented through structured school counseling programs, such as integrating culturally responsive modules into group counseling sessions that emphasize empathy, mutual respect, and conflict resolution based on the principles of *Songu Lara Mombangu*. School counselors can also apply tools such as sociometry and peer mapping to identify patterns of student interaction and address potential conflicts early. In addition, classroom guidance sessions incorporating Social Emotional Learning (SEL) can be adapted to include culturally relevant scenarios that reflect students' daily experiences, enabling school-based interventions that are contextually relevant and socially sustainable.

This study is limited by its geographically narrow scope and the absence of analysis on digital forms of conflict, which are increasingly prominent in adolescent interactions. Future research should encompass broader sociocultural settings and pilot culturally grounded counseling interventions across various regions to evaluate their efficacy and scalability.

Ultimately, embedding local cultural values into educational practice is not only a matter of inclusion, but a necessary strategy for nurturing socially cohesive and empathetic school environments.

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