

Tepo Asa Aroa as a Contextual Ethical-Relational Framework in School Counseling: A Phenomenological Study in Multicultural School Settings

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Abstrak. Penelitian ini mengkaji *Tepo Asa Aroa* sebagai kerangka etika relasional kontekstual dalam layanan bimbingan dan konseling di sekolah pada konteks multikultural di Indonesia. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain fenomenologi deskriptif, dengan partisipan tiga konselor sekolah dan sepuluh siswa melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan analisis dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *Tepo Asa Aroa* terinternalisasi sebagai filosofi relasional yang membentuk interaksi konseling melalui lima dimensi: emosional-spiritual, kolaboratif, harmonis, inklusif, dan integritas. Dimensi ini mendorong kepercayaan, keterbukaan, dan keterlibatan siswa, serta memperkuat working alliance dan efektivitas layanan. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa nilai budaya lokal dapat menerjemahkan prinsip etika universal ke dalam praktik yang kontekstual. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan konseling sekolah berbasis budaya melalui model etika relasional yang operasional.

Kata Kunci: T etika relasional; layanan konseling sekolah; responsivitas budaya; *Tepo Asa Aroa*; working alliance

Abstract. This study examines *Tepo Asa Aroa* as a contextual ethical-relational framework in school counseling services within a multicultural Indonesian setting. Using a qualitative descriptive phenomenological design, data were collected from three school counselors and ten students through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. The findings indicate that *Tepo Asa Aroa* is internalized as a relational philosophy that shapes counseling interactions through five dimensions: emotional-spiritual, collaborative, harmonious, inclusive, and integrity. These dimensions foster trust, openness, and student engagement, thereby strengthening working alliance and enhancing counseling effectiveness. The study demonstrates that local cultural values can translate universal ethical principles into culturally meaningful practices in collectivistic contexts. The findings contribute to the development of culturally responsive school counseling by

providing an operational ethical–relational model grounded in local wisdom.

Keywords: cultural responsiveness; ethical–relational practice; school counseling services;

Tepo Asa Aroa; working alliance

A. INTRODUCTION

School counseling supports students' psychosocial development and well-being. Its effectiveness depends on how well counseling practices align with students' cultural contexts. In Indonesia, school counseling draws heavily on Western-based models, such as person-centered approaches and evidence-based interventions grounded in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), that shape counselor training, supervision, and professional standards (Gopal et al., 2024; Harrison & Kee, 2024; Sing-Kiat Ting et al., 2022; Yöntem et al., 2024).

While these models are empirically supported in Western contexts, their individualistic orientation often conflicts with the collectivistic values of many school settings, which emphasize relational harmony, family involvement, and communal decision-making (Dizon et al., 2025; Juhaidi et al., 2024; McGreevy et al., 2026; Widiana et al., 2025). Drawing on cultural mismatch theory, this incongruence between counseling frameworks and students' cultural orientations can be theorized to weaken the perceived relevance and legitimacy of counseling services in school contexts. Empirically, this pattern is reflected in reports of limited student engagement in schools with strong collectivistic norms (Juhaidi et al., 2024), lower service utilization among students who perceive individually oriented counseling as culturally incongruent (Widiana et al., 2025), and diminished trust in counselors when relational and familial considerations are not incorporated into the counseling process (Dizon et al., 2025; McGreevy et al., 2026).

Scholars identify an ethical gap when Western frameworks are applied in non-Western school contexts. Tensions arise between universal ethical principles, such as confidentiality and individual autonomy, and culturally grounded norms that prioritize relational accountability and collective well-being (Day-Vines et al., 2020; Levitt et al., 2022; Vandament et al., 2022; Zhao & Stone-Sabali, 2021). In response, the field increasingly emphasizes indigenization, culturally grounded frameworks, and the development of cultural humility in school counseling practice (Day, 2023; Harrison & Kee, 2024; Heidelberg et al., 2025; Perron et al., 2023; Wang & Wang, 2021).

Local wisdom offers a concrete pathway to contextualize ethical–relational

practice. *Tepo Asa Aroa*, rooted in the Mori community of Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, refers to “being of one heart” and emphasizes unity, relational harmony, and the alignment of emotion, thought, and action. In Morowali Utara Regency, this value operates not only as a cultural norm but also within school life and institutional identity.

Culturally grounded approaches such as adapting communication styles, incorporating local values, and aligning interventions with students’ sociocultural contexts are associated with stronger engagement, acceptability, and working alliance in school counseling (Fatchurahman et al., 2021; Lund et al., 2024; Pham et al., 2023; Silveus et al., 2023; Vandament et al., 2022; Wilbur et al., 2024). Yet, this literature often remains descriptive of culturally responsive implementation rather than explaining the specific ethical-relational mechanisms through which cultural values operate in counselor student micro-interactions. In particular, *Tepo Asa Aroa* is still under-theorized as an ethical-relational framework, because existing approaches do not clearly map how its locally grounded dimensions translate into trust, openness, and sustained student engagement in practice

This study addresses this gap by identifying and operationalizing five dimensions of ethical-relational practice grounded in *Tepo Asa Aroa* within school counseling interactions, emotional spiritual, collaborative, harmonious, inclusive, and integrity. It further develops a culturally congruent conceptual model to explain how these culturally grounded dimensions shape working alliance and ethical decision-making in school-based counseling.

B. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Relational Ethics in Contemporary School Counseling

School counseling is culturally embedded, making ethics inherently relational. Dominant Western models, including person-centered counseling and evidence-based approaches such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), generally emphasize individual autonomy, direct self-disclosure, and individually framed confidentiality (Gopal et al., 2024; Harrison & Kee, 2024; Sing-Kiat Ting et al., 2022; Yöntem et al., 2024). In collectivistic school contexts, however, these assumptions intersect with norms that prioritize family, social connectedness, and shared decision-making (Dizon et al., 2025; Juhaidi et al., 2024; McGreevy et al., 2026; Widyana et al., 2025).

Accordingly, ethical principles such as beneficence, autonomy, justice, and fidelity are often interpreted relationally. Benefit and harm may be assessed in

terms of their effects on family and community, while autonomy may be enacted as relational autonomy (Ansloos et al., 2022; Ibrahim-Dwairy, 2026; Perron et al., 2023; Wilbur et al., 2024). Ethical tensions arise when confidentiality or reporting duties conflict with collective responsibility. Relational ethics therefore places the counselor–student relationship at the center of ethical judgment, yet the literature remains limited in explaining how these principles operate in micro-level school counseling interactions (Dollarhide et al., 2021; Wantu et al., 2025; Wilbur et al., 2024; Wilcox et al., 2023).

Indigenization and Local Wisdom in Counseling Practice

Recent scholarship positions indigenization as a response to the limits of individualistic counseling frameworks. Local wisdom is increasingly viewed as an ethical-relational orientation that re-centers contextual meaning, relationality, and community participation. The literature highlights three broad tendencies: emphasizing interconnectedness across school, family, and community systems; adapting evidence-based interventions through language, metaphor, storytelling, and family-oriented formats; and advancing accountability, reciprocity, and place-based healing as corrective orientations to overly individualistic practice (Ansloos et al., 2022; Fatchurahman et al., 2021; Haft et al., 2022; Lund et al., 2024; Pham et al., 2023; Silveus et al., 2023).

Empirical studies further show that integrating local practices can improve student engagement, cultural safety, and, in some cases, psychosocial outcomes, although questions of fidelity, measurement, and institutional power remain (Lund et al., 2024; Muslim et al., 2026; Pham et al., 2023; Ratu et al., 2019, 2025; Wilbur et al., 2024). At the systemic level, counselor education that incorporates cultural humility and collaborative leadership appears to support the sustainability of such approaches (Hook et al., 2016; Hook & Davis, 2017; Levin et al., 2023; Perron et al., 2023; Ratu et al., 2024).

Empathy, Working Alliance, and Trust in Multicultural Contexts

Multicultural and culturally responsive counseling frameworks treat empathy, unconditional positive regard, and genuineness as context-sensitive relational capacities. Ethnocultural empathy requires attention to students' worldviews, while cross-cultural studies show variation in expectations regarding counselor behavior and listening styles (Tittler et al., 2022). In culturally grounded practice, these qualities are often expressed through attentive listening,

authenticity, and relational sensitivity (Perron et al., 2023; Wilbur et al., 2024).

Working alliance, defined as the collaborative bond, shared goals, and agreed tasks in counseling, is a central mechanism of change. In school counseling, stronger working alliance is associated with better engagement and intervention outcomes, while culturally adapted counseling improves acceptability and trust (McGreevy et al., 2026; Oh et al., 2023; Slaton et al., 2023). In Indonesia, relational quality is strongly shaped by ethical perception, especially confidentiality and professional boundaries. Perceived weaknesses in confidentiality reduce trust and willingness to disclose, whereas ethical adherence, cultural humility, and adaptive communication strengthen relational safety (Faizin & Budianto, 2025; Hidayat, 2023; Nur Maulida et al., 2023; Oknita, 2025; Rahmadewi, 2022).

Integration of Local Values in School Counseling Ethics

In Indonesia, integrating local wisdom into school counseling is increasingly viewed as essential for making practice more relevant and culturally grounded. Culturally adapted interventions using local metaphors, narratives, and group-based approaches have been shown to increase student participation and engagement, while policy discussions emphasize cultural humility and the translation of universal ethical principles into locally meaningful practice (Fatchurahman et al., 2021; Harrison & Kee, 2024; Heidelberg et al., 2025; Ratu et al., 2020, 2022).

Local wisdom also provides a philosophical foundation for counseling knowledge, ethics, and practice. At the program level, such values can be operationalized through comprehensive school counseling involving teachers, families, and community stakeholders, but implementation must remain anchored in confidentiality, professional boundaries, and counselor competence (Faizin & Budianto, 2025; Perianto, 2018; Ratu et al., 2025; Sanchez-Maddela & Dela Cruz-Cada, 2024; Syahril et al., 2025; Weridity & Manuputty, 2024). Within this context, *Tepo Asa Aroa* can be conceptualized as a relational ethical framework grounded in unity, harmony, and integrity, yet its operation in school counseling practice has not been clearly mapped, particularly at the level of trust, working alliance, and ethical decision-making.

Theoretical Synthesis and Conceptual Model

Taken together, the literature suggests that collectivistic school contexts require ethical principles to be interpreted relationally, with local wisdom functioning as a bridge between professional ethics, counselor–student relational

quality, and students' experience of trust. Within this framework, *Tepo Asa Aroa* may be understood as the point of convergence between local cultural values, ethical-relational practice, and working alliance.

As illustrated in Figure 1, *Tepo Asa Aroa* occupies the foundational level of the model through the values of unity, harmony, and integrity. These values are translated into ethical-relational practices, including contextual empathy, unconditional positive regard, confidentiality as moral trust, respect for difference, and counselor authenticity. In turn, these practices shape key relational outcomes in school counseling.



Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model of *Tepo Asa Aroa* in school counseling.

C. RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design and Approach

This study adopts a qualitative approach using a descriptive phenomenological design grounded in Husserlian tradition. The approach is intended to examine participants' lived experiences and to capture the essential meanings of the phenomenon within its natural context. The analytical focus is directed toward how *Tepo Asa Aroa* is interpreted, enacted, and negotiated as an ethical-relational practice, and how it shapes the quality of counselor-student working alliance in school settings (Goodman-Scott et al., 2025; Xiong et al., 2022).

Given the ethical, relational, and cross-cultural dimensions of the phenomenon, descriptive phenomenology provides an appropriate framework for exploring meaning structures grounded in participants' experiences (Hereford

et al., 2023; Kriofske Mainella et al., 2024; Wambui Preston & Kemer, 2025). The researcher adopts a reflexive stance throughout the study, with bracketing applied from research design to data analysis to minimize the influence of prior assumptions and to maintain analytic focus on participants' perspectives.

Research Context and Duration

The study was conducted in Morowali Utara Regency, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, specifically at a public senior high school (SMA Negeri 1 Lembo) and a public vocational high school (SMK Lemboraya). These sites were selected due to their cultural relevance, as *Tepo Asa Aroa* remains actively practiced as a social value within the local Mori community. This context provides information-rich cases that are suitable for phenomenological inquiry.

The research was carried out over one academic semester in 2026, with intensive data collection conducted during a two-month period from January to February. The research process included field orientation, institutional permissions, data collection through interviews, observations, and document review, followed by transcription, preliminary analysis, and validation through triangulation and participant confirmation.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the phenomenon under study. In phenomenological research, this strategy is used to identify individuals who can provide rich and meaningful descriptions of their lived experiences (Wambui Preston & Kemer, 2025; Xiong et al., 2022).

The study involved three school counselors and ten students who had participated in counseling services at the selected schools. Counselors met the criteria of having at least two years of professional experience and familiarity with the local cultural value of *Tepo Asa Aroa*. The participants included K-01 (39 years old, 13 years of experience, Mori-Javanese background), K-02 (27 years old, two years of experience, Mori background), and K-03 (26 years old, two years of experience, Mori background), all of whom demonstrated engagement with culturally informed counseling practices.

Student participants consisted of ten students aged 15 to 18 years who had attended a minimum of three counseling sessions. Some students had participated in up to five or six sessions, indicating relatively sustained engagement with the counseling process. S-01 (17 years old) and S-02 (18 years old) were Grade 12 students at a public senior high school (SMA Negeri 1 Lembo) who had each

attended five counseling sessions. S-03 (17 years old) had participated in six sessions. S-04 (15 years old) and S-05 (16 years old) were Grade 10 students who had each attended three sessions. From a public vocational high school (SMK Lemboraya), S-06 (16 years old), a Grade 10 student, had attended three sessions, while S-07 (17 years old), S-08 (17 years old), S-09 (16 years old), and S-10 (16 years old), all Grade 11 students, had participated in three to four counseling sessions. This level of engagement ensured sufficient experiential depth to support phenomenological analysis. Participant selection was conducted in accordance with ethical procedures, including informed consent and voluntary participation.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed within 48 hours to preserve contextual accuracy. The interview protocol explored participants' experiences of *Tepo Asa Aroa* in counseling interactions, including its role in shaping relational processes.

Observations were conducted to capture nonverbal communication, interactional dynamics, and contextual features of counseling sessions. Documentary data included counseling records and school guidance program materials relevant to the implementation of counseling practices. The use of multiple data sources enabled triangulation and enhanced the richness of the dataset.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted iteratively throughout the data collection process, following procedures aligned with descriptive phenomenology as articulated by Moustakas. The process began with bracketing and repeated reading of transcripts to achieve immersion in the data.

Significant statements were identified through line-by-line analysis and coded inductively while preserving participants' language. Codes were compared continuously (constant comparison) to refine and consolidate meaning units. These units were then organized into themes and subthemes through an iterative process.

Themes were elaborated using both textural descriptions (what participants experienced) and structural descriptions (how the experience was shaped within school, cultural, and relational contexts). The final stage involved synthesizing the essence of the phenomenon, capturing the core meaning of

ethical-relational practice grounded in *Tepo Asa Aroa*.

Analytically, the process focused on identifying how the dimensions of *Tepo Asa Aroa*—including contextual empathy, unconditional positive regard, confidentiality as moral trust, respect for difference, and counselor authenticity—are enacted in practice and contribute to the development of working alliance. This procedure ensures that findings reflect both the lived experiences of participants and the structural meanings of the phenomenon (Hereford et al., 2023; Wambui Preston & Kemer, 2025).

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness was established through methodological and data triangulation, reflexivity, and member checking. Data from interviews were cross-validated with observational notes and documentary evidence to enhance credibility. Reflexivity was maintained through bracketing and reflective journaling to document analytic decisions and researcher positioning.

Member checking was conducted by sharing summaries of findings with selected participants to ensure accuracy of interpretation. Ethical procedures included obtaining informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, maintaining participant anonymity, and securing data storage for academic use only.

Procedural Flow

The research procedure followed a systematic sequence, including preparation (field orientation, permissions, and instrument development), data collection (interviews, observations, and document review with immediate transcription), iterative analysis (coding, theme development, and synthesis), and quality assurance through triangulation, member checking, and audit trail. This process ensured a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of how *Tepo Asa Aroa* functions as an ethical-relational framework in school counseling practice.

D. RESEARCH RESULTS

Overview of the Findings Structure

To provide an initial orientation to the empirical structure of the findings, Table 1 summarizes the major themes identified across cases. The table functions as a conceptual map that guides the presentation of results before detailed

descriptive accounts are elaborated.

Table 1. Summary of Major Themes Across Cases

Major Theme	Focus of Findings
Understanding of <i>Tepo Asa Aroa</i>	How counselors and students interpret “being of one heart” in counseling relationships
Implementation in counseling relationships	Manifestations of <i>Tepo Asa Aroa</i> in communication, empathy, acceptance, harmony, and authenticity
Implementation challenges	Conceptual, structural, and operational barriers in applying local values
Relational outcomes	Changes in openness, trust, and effectiveness of counseling services
Integration with universal ethics	Alignment with unconditional positive regard, confidentiality, justice, and autonomy
Adaptive strategies	Capacity-building and technical adjustments in practice
Essence of the phenomenon	Core meaning of <i>Tepo Asa Aroa</i> as lived relational ethics
Five dimensions of implementation	Operationalization in basic and responsive counseling services

Following this overview, the findings are presented in two components. The first component provides descriptive findings grounded in field data, while the second presents an integrative configuration that highlights patterns across themes without extending into broader theoretical interpretation.

Descriptive Findings

Research context and service environment

The findings are derived from in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis conducted in two secondary schools in Lembo District, Morowali Utara Regency, Central Sulawesi, namely a public senior high school (SMA Negeri 1 Lembo) and a public vocational high school (SMK Lemboraya). Both schools are located in the cultural context where *Tepo Asa Aroa* originates and continues to function as a living social value.

The physical conditions of school counseling services in both sites reveal contextually relevant constraints. At the public senior high school, counseling services are provided by a single counselor in a relatively small room located at the back of the school, temporarily shared with the school health unit due to ongoing construction. Although basic facilities are available, the room is not

soundproof, which may affect confidentiality. At the vocational high school, two counselors operate in a larger and more accessible counseling space; however, its proximity to the main road introduces intermittent noise disturbances. These conditions indicate that while counseling services are established in both schools, limitations related to privacy and comfort remain.

The broader school context is multicultural. While the majority of students are from the Mori ethnic group, others come from Bugis, Javanese, Torajan, and additional backgrounds. This diversity is significant, as the findings reflect not only the presence of *Tepo Asa Aroa* as a local value but also its enactment within a heterogeneous school environment.

Understanding of Tepo Asa Aroa

Counselors interpret *Tepo Asa Aroa* not merely as a regional slogan but as a relational philosophy. It is understood as “being of one heart,” referring to the alignment of emotion, thought, and action in interpersonal relationships, including counseling interactions.

“Tepo Asa Aroa is not just a slogan... it is a way of life. It means being of one heart... in counseling this means the counselor and student truly connect... the counselor must feel what the student feels.” (K-01)

Counselors further emphasize that the concept implies shared responsibility and collaboration in problem-solving rather than a one-sided intervention.

“It teaches that we do not solve problems alone... counseling is a shared process between counselor and student.” (K-02)

In contrast, students’ understanding is less conceptual and more experiential. While some students recognize the general meaning of “unity” or “non-discrimination,” they primarily relate the value to their lived experiences of being understood, accepted, and not judged during counseling.

“I think it means being united and not discriminating.” (S-01)

“During counseling, I felt understood... there was no distance... maybe that is what it means to be of one heart.” (S-03)

“At first I was afraid... but the counselor was kind and did not judge me... it felt like talking to my own mother.” (S-07)

These findings indicate a distinction between counselors’ philosophical

understanding and students' relational experience of the value.

Implementation of Tepo Asa Aroa in counseling practice

The implementation of *Tepo Asa Aroa* is reflected in how counselors establish trust, demonstrate empathy, respect differences, create a safe environment, and maintain authenticity. At the initial stage of counseling, counselors actively reduce students' anxiety through informal conversation, warm communication, and non-hierarchical interaction.

"I always begin by making students comfortable... asking about their life... showing that I care about them as a person... this is part of becoming 'one heart' first." (K-02)

"I sit at the same level as the student... not behind a desk... so we can talk heart to heart." (K-01)

Students consistently report that these strategies foster comfort and openness.

"At first I was very afraid... but the counselor was friendly... I became comfortable and could talk freely." (S-02)

"The counselor listens and helps me find my own solutions... I feel valued." (S-06)

Observational data reinforce these patterns, showing open body language, active listening, and supportive gestures. The value is therefore enacted not only verbally but also through embodied relational presence.

Empathy is conceptualized as an affective engagement rather than solely cognitive understanding.

"It is not enough to listen... we must feel from the heart." (K-03)

Students perceive this as genuine emotional understanding.

"The counselor understands my feelings... that is why I trust her." (S-09)

The value also manifests in respect for diversity. Counselors adapt communication styles to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds without imposing personal perspectives.

"I adjust my language... some students prefer local language, others formal... I follow them." (K-02)

Students experience this as acceptance and non-imposition.

"The counselor respects my perspective and does not force her opinion." (S-08)

A safe and harmonious counseling environment is consistently

emphasized.

"I try to make the counseling space safe... without judgment." (K-01)

Students describe the counseling space as secure and supportive.

Authenticity is another central aspect, reflected in honesty and congruence.

"If I do not know something, I say it... we find solutions together." (K-03)

Students interpret this as sincerity and trustworthiness.

Challenges in Implementation

The implementation of *Tepo Asa Aroa* is accompanied by several challenges. First, not all students are familiar with the concept, particularly those from non-Mori backgrounds. Counselors therefore prioritize the essence of the value rather than its terminology.

"Not all students know the term... but the values are universal." (K-02)

Second, time constraints and workload limit the depth of relational engagement.

"Ideally it requires time... but I serve many students." (K-01)

Third, infrastructural limitations affect confidentiality. Observations confirm that counseling rooms are not fully soundproof, potentially reducing students' willingness to disclose sensitive information.

Relational Outcomes of Implementation

The application of *Tepo Asa Aroa* is associated with increased openness, trust, and perceived effectiveness of counseling services. Counselors report that students become more willing to engage, and counseling spaces are increasingly perceived as safe.

"Students are more open... the counseling room is no longer seen as a frightening place." (K-01)

Students similarly describe a shift from fear to voluntary engagement.

"Now I come by myself... I trust the counselor." (S-02)

Documentary data indicate an increase in voluntary counseling participation, suggesting broader changes in service utilization patterns. Stronger relational bonds are also associated with greater cooperation and sustained engagement in counseling processes.

Integration with Universal Ethical Principles

Tepo Asa Aroa is enacted in alignment with universal counseling ethics. In terms of unconditional positive regard, counselors emphasize acceptance without

discrimination.

"It means accepting everyone without distinction... aligned with unconditional positive regard." (K-01)

Confidentiality is interpreted as a moral trust rather than merely a professional obligation.

"Confidentiality is a moral responsibility... a trust that must be protected." (K-02)

These findings indicate that local values provide culturally meaningful interpretations of ethical principles in school counseling.

Adaptive Strategies in Practice

Counselors develop adaptive strategies to sustain practice under constraints. These include professional development through training and peer discussion, as well as technical adjustments such as structured scheduling and prioritization of cases.

"I attend trainings and discuss with colleagues... it helps improve practice." (K-02)

"I organize schedules and prioritize cases... sometimes I use break time for short sessions." (K-01)

These strategies indicate that the implementation of local values requires both conceptual understanding and procedural adaptation.

Integrative Configuration of the Findings

The integrative analysis reveals that *Tepo Asa Aroa* functions as a lived ethical-relational framework in school counseling practice. Its essence lies in aligning emotion, thought, and action between counselor and student to create a safe, equal, and harmonious relational space.

This essence is expressed through five interrelated dimensions: emotional-spiritual, collaborative, harmonious, inclusive, and integrity. These dimensions are operationalized across both guidance curriculum and responsive counseling services, encompassing assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation stages. Observations indicate that responsive counseling sessions typically last 45–

50 minutes and include instances of deep empathic engagement.

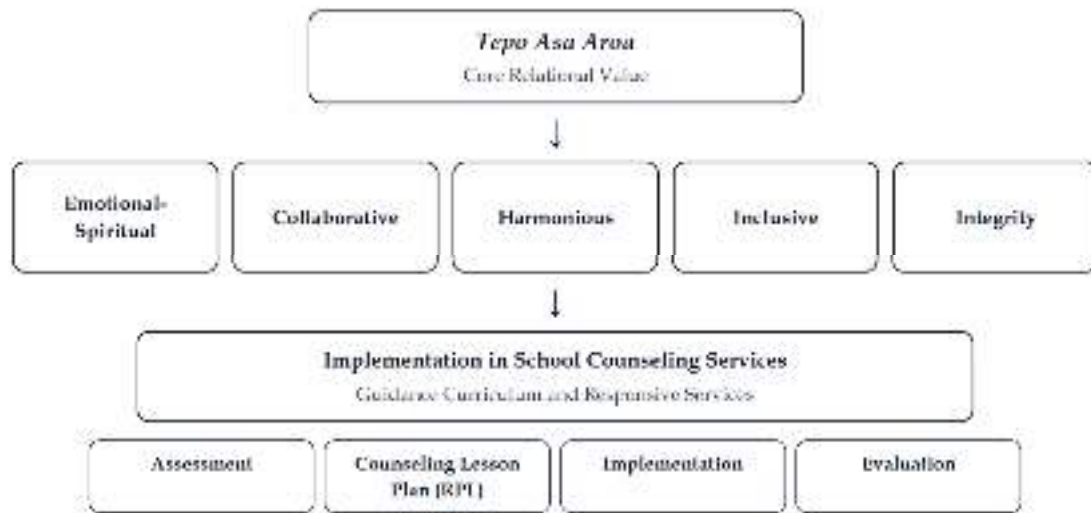


Figure 2. Five dimensions of *Tepo Asa Aroa* implementation in school counseling services.

The figure illustrates that *Tepo Asa Aroa* functions as the core relational value that connects the five dimensions of practice. These dimensions are enacted across different service formats and stages of counseling, demonstrating how local wisdom is operationalized within everyday counseling interactions.

Overall, the findings indicate that *Tepo Asa Aroa* is reflected in how counselors build rapport, maintain confidentiality, respect diversity, negotiate constraints, and create relational conditions that enable students to engage more openly in counseling.

E. DISCUSSION

Understanding and Internalization of Tepo Asa Aroa in School Counseling Contexts

The findings indicate that *Tepo Asa Aroa* is internalized in counselors' day to day relational conduct, rather than being treated merely as a cultural symbol. Specifically, counselors enact "being of one heart" through an integration of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions that shapes how rapport is built, how confidentiality and professional boundaries are maintained, and how relational conditions are created to enable students to engage more openly in counseling.

This pattern of internalization occurs at a practical level evidenced in how

counselors operationalize relational safety and respect for diversity during counseling interactions thereby strengthening the counselor student relationship in ways consistent with relational ethics in school counseling. Moreover, these findings align with prior work showing that local cultural values often function implicitly in professional practice, influencing decision making and relational behavior without being explicitly stated. In this sense, *Tepo Asa Aroa* serves as an operational relational orientation: it provides a structured, practice-guiding framework that addresses the conceptual gap in the literature regarding the systematic articulation of local values into ethical relational counseling mechanisms, rather than leaving them at the level of general culturally framed principles

Tepo Asa Aroa as a Contextualized Ethical-Relational Framework

The study further demonstrates that *Tepo Asa Aroa* functions as a contextualized ethical-relational framework within school counseling services, distinguishing it from broader multicultural ethics frameworks by specifying how local relational values are operationalized into counsel-ready mechanisms. Rather than replacing universal ethical principles, this value system translates them into culturally meaningful relational practices within collectivistic student contexts, where counselor-student interaction is guided by “being of one heart,” and expressed through an integration of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. In this framework, *Aroa* is enacted as affective empathy, while harmony contributes to the creation of a safe relational space and inclusivity and integrity resonate with justice and genuineness in day-to-day counseling conduct.

These findings align with scholarship that treats local wisdom as a culturally responsive adaptation of counseling ethics rather than a rejection of universal standards (Dizon et al., 2025; Harrison & Kee, 2024; Mahaswa & Hardiyanti, 2025; Ratu et al., 2019; Tohri et al., 2022). Importantly, the study’s contribution goes beyond conceptual positioning: it addresses the documented lack of clarity about how local values are operationalized in ethical counseling practice by showing that *Tepo Asa Aroa* is internalized and enacted through relational processes that foster trust, openness, and sustained engagement mechanisms consistent with working-alliance goals in school contexts.

Implications for Working Alliance and Relational Outcomes

The implementation of *Tepo Asa Aroa* is associated with enhanced trust, openness, and perceived effectiveness of counseling services. Trust develops as counseling spaces are experienced as safe and nonjudgmental, while openness increases when students feel understood and accepted. These relational conditions, in turn, support more effective engagement in the counseling process.

These findings are consistent with literature identifying trust and working alliance as central mechanisms of change in counseling (Holland, 2015; Langer et al., 2021; Sing-Kiat Ting et al., 2022; Wang & Wang, 2021). Mechanistically, *Tepo Asa Aroa* operates through culturally responsive communication, cultural humility, and alignment of counseling goals with students' relational values. Such mechanisms reduce cultural ruptures and enhance perceived understanding, thereby strengthening relational bonds and facilitating engagement (Comstock et al., 2008; Kang & Kim, 2023; Park et al., 2019; Purgason et al., 2016).

Implementation Challenges and Adaptive Strategies

Despite its relevance, the implementation of *Tepo Asa Aroa* is constrained by several factors. These include limited conceptual familiarity among students from diverse cultural backgrounds, high counselor workload, and infrastructural limitations affecting privacy. These challenges are consistent with broader literature highlighting structural barriers in school counseling, including high caseloads, limited resources, and insufficient institutional support (Edirmanasinghe et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2025; Levitt et al., 2022; Martin et al., 2024).

In response, counselors adopt adaptive strategies by emphasizing the substantive values rather than terminology, managing time strategically, and adjusting service delivery practices. These adaptations indicate that *Tepo Asa Aroa* functions not only as a philosophical orientation but also as a practical resource for maintaining relational quality within institutional constraints.

Implications for Multicultural School Counseling in Indonesia

The findings have important implications for multicultural school counseling in Indonesia. At the practice level, local wisdom can be integrated as a lens for translating counseling principles into culturally meaningful forms, thereby enhancing student engagement and acceptability of services. At the level of counselor education, the results support the importance of experiential learning, cultural humility training, and culturally responsive supervision

(Foronda et al., 2022; Frie & Timm, 2023; Lekas et al., 2020; Vandament et al., 2022; Watkins et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2021, 2023).

At the policy level, the implementation of ethical-relational practice requires institutional support, including adequate counselor staffing, reduced administrative burden, and provision of confidential counseling spaces. Existing literature emphasizes that systemic support is essential for sustaining culturally responsive counseling practices (Chong et al., 2024; Harrison et al., 2026; Mason et al., 2024; Wilcox et al., 2024; Zhu et al., 2021, 2025). Furthermore, integrating local values into school counseling contributes to the preservation of cultural identity within educational settings.

Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the development of a contextualized ethical-relational framework by identifying five dimensions of *Tepo Asa Aroa* implementation: emotional-spiritual, collaborative, harmonious, inclusive, and integrity. These dimensions provide an operational model for understanding how local values are enacted within school counseling services.

The findings reinforce the view that integrating local wisdom constitutes a culturally responsive adaptation of counseling ethics, translating universal principles into collectivistic contexts (Arjaya et al., 2024; A. Chan et al., 2015; Comstock et al., 2008; Pack-Brown et al., 2008; Triastari et al., 2021; Zhang & Dixon, 2001). At a mechanistic level, the model suggests that local values strengthen counseling relationships through emotional connection, collaborative engagement, and the creation of safe relational spaces processes consistent with the study's reported links among safe, nonjudgmental counseling spaces, increased student openness, and enhanced perceived counseling effectiveness. These relational conditions align with literature on reducing cultural ruptures and enhancing perceived understanding (Chan & Hedges, 2025; Duquette et al., 2023; Garner et al., 2024; Purgason et al., 2016).

Additionally, the study advances multicultural counseling discourse by providing an operational ethical relational model grounded in local wisdom, articulated through five implementation dimensions (emotional-spiritual, collaborative, harmonious, inclusive, and integrity). Importantly, these dimensions are not presented as imported theory constructs; rather, they are derived from field data through qualitative descriptive phenomenological methods using interviews, observations, and document analysis, with triangulation across data sources, and then synthesized to identify the core

meaning and operationalized dimensions of the lived ethical-relational practice.

Limitations

This study is limited to two schools in Morowali Utara, which may affect the transferability of findings to other contexts. Structural constraints, including workload and limited privacy, also influence the implementation of counseling practices. Furthermore, not all participants explicitly understood the term *Tepo Asa Aroa*, meaning that interpretations are primarily grounded in relational experiences rather than conceptual awareness.

These limitations highlight that ethical-relational practice based on local values is highly context-dependent, shaped by both sociocultural and institutional conditions. Nevertheless, the findings provide a foundation for further research and support the positioning of *Tepo Asa Aroa* as a meaningful framework for ethical-relational practice in school counseling.

F. CONCLUSION

This study establishes *Tepo Asa Aroa* as a contextual ethical-relational framework that meaningfully shapes counselor-student relationships within school counseling services. The findings demonstrate that this value does not operate merely as a symbolic cultural reference but is internalized in practice and enacted through relational processes that foster trust, openness, and sustained student engagement. In this respect, the study reinforces the position that culturally grounded ethical orientations can strengthen working alliance and support effective counseling outcomes in collectivistic school contexts.

A key contribution of this study lies in the articulation of five operational dimensions of *Tepo Asa Aroa*—emotional-spiritual, collaborative, harmonious, inclusive, and integrity—which together provide a structured framework for understanding how local cultural values are translated into ethical-relational practice. These dimensions clarify the mechanisms through which cultural values shape relational quality, particularly through empathy, acceptance, authenticity, and the creation of safe counseling spaces.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that the integration of local wisdom can be systematically embedded within school counseling services through culturally responsive assessment, relationally oriented session structuring, and the use of culturally meaningful language, metaphors, and

interaction styles. These practices can be implemented across both preventive services, such as classroom guidance and group activities, and responsive services, including individual counseling. At the same time, ethical safeguards—such as confidentiality, professional boundaries, and informed consent—must remain central to ensure relational trust and professional integrity.

At the institutional level, effective implementation requires alignment with school policies, manageable counselor caseloads, and the provision of adequate and private counseling spaces. Without such structural support, the sustainability of ethical-relational practice may be constrained despite counselors' efforts to adapt.

Nevertheless, the implementation of *Tepo Asa Aroa* remains context-dependent, influenced by counselor capacity, institutional conditions, and sociocultural diversity. Future research is therefore needed to examine the applicability of this framework across diverse cultural and educational settings, as well as to assess its impact on measurable counseling outcomes, including its scalability and adaptability beyond the original study context.

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