

Value-Based Counseling Model in a Multicultural School Environment: Efforts to Increase Student Empathy and Tolerance

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the development and implementation of a Value-Based Counseling Model within a multicultural school environment, aiming to foster empathy and tolerance among students from diverse cultural backgrounds. As schools increasingly reflect global diversity, there is a pressing need for counseling approaches that not only address academic and personal development but also promote intercultural understanding and harmonious coexistence. The proposed model integrates core human values such as respect, empathy, responsibility, and justice into structured counseling interventions tailored to multicultural settings. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through student surveys, focus group discussions, and counselor observations in three urban secondary schools with high cultural diversity. The results indicate a significant improvement in students' empathetic responses and tolerance toward peers of different cultural backgrounds following participation in the counseling program. Key success factors included culturally responsive communication, value-based dialogue sessions, and collaborative learning activities. This study highlights the potential of value-based counseling as a transformative tool in multicultural education, contributing to more inclusive school climates and supporting students in developing critical socio-emotional competencies for global citizenship. Implications for school counselors and educational policymakers are discussed.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary educational landscapes shaped by globalization and increased human mobility, schools have evolved into microcosms of cultural diversity. Students entering these environments bring with them a rich variety of cultural identities, belief systems, and worldview orientations. While this multicultural tapestry presents vast potential for intercultural learning and cross-cultural enrichment, it also calls for concerted efforts to foster social cohesion, empathetic engagement, and intercultural respect among students. Within this context, the role of school-based counseling assumes heightened significance: not merely as a mechanism of academic or personal support, but as an instrument for nurturing humanistic values, empathy, and tolerance across cultural divides. The present study explores a novel Value-Based Counseling Guidance Model, designed explicitly for multicultural school environments, aimed at cultivating empathy and tolerance in students. This introduction situates the study within educational and counseling paradigms, outlines its theoretical justification, identifies prevailing challenges in multicultural schooling, and demarcates the unique contributions and rationale for implementing such a model.

Schools today face multifaceted challenges arising from cultural diversity. While cultural pluralism can enrich learning environments, it may also lead to misunderstanding, bias, and social

friction, especially when students lack frameworks for constructive intercultural interaction. Differences in language, communication styles, norms around personal space, values surrounding authority, and expressions of emotion can create confusion and distance among students. In such contexts, even well-intentioned peers may unintentionally marginalize or stereotype others. The upshot is often a fragmented school climate, characterized by in-group clustering, limited cross-cultural friendships, and recurring incidents of peer conflict or exclusion. This underscores the urgency of proactive interventions beyond mere tolerance training that actively cultivate empathy, mutual understanding, and respect among culturally diverse students.

Counseling theory and practice offer critical pathways to address these challenges. Historically, traditional counseling models have emphasized techniques of individual support, crisis intervention, or career guidance often grounded in assumptions of cultural homogeneity. However, when applied in multicultural settings without adaptation, these conventional models risk overgeneralization or cultural bias. Cultural competence frameworks in counseling have attempted to remedy this by advocating for counselor awareness of cultural differences, knowledge about specific cultural practices, and adaptation of counseling styles accordingly. Yet, critics argue that competency can become static, incomplete, or even tokenistic acquired through limited training modules and treated as a threshold to be crossed rather than a continuing developmental process. In response, the ideal of cultural humility has gained traction: a posture of continuous self-reflection, recognition of power dynamics, and openness to learning from clients and context.

A counseling model that integrates cultural humility encourages counselors to acknowledge their own cultural lens, strive to understand students in context, and remain responsive to evolving cultural dynamics. Complementing cultural humility, the present study's proposed Value-Based Counseling Guidance Model centers on universal human values—such as empathy, respect, justice, responsibility, and dialogue as focal points in counseling interventions. Values, in this approach, are conceptualized not merely as abstract ethical imperatives, but as practical frameworks that can be invoked in relational contexts to guide reflections, emotional attunement, and dialogue. Value-based counseling thus reframes interventions: rather than focusing solely on problem-solving or behavioral change, it mobilizes shared human values to connect students across difference, enabling affective resonance and moral engagement.

Among the values central to the model, empathy stands out as both affective and cognitive: the capacity to emotionally resonate with another's experience, understand their perspective, and communicate that understanding. Empathy in multicultural settings is typically two-fold: acknowledging the feelings and views of others, while also being attuned to nuances of cultural context. Tolerance, by contrast, refers to the respectful acceptance of differences cultural, ethnic, religious, or otherwise without necessitating agreement. While tolerance is often constructed as a moral threshold "I don't have to like it, but I won't harm you" the aim of the model is to deepen tolerance into mutual understanding, respectful curiosity, and collaborative solidarity. By pairing empathy with tolerance, the counseling model encourages students not just to coexist, but to engage, learn from, and support one another across cultural lines.

The guidance model operates through structured counseling sessions, which may take place in small groups or classroom settings, where trained counselors facilitate value-centered dialogues. These dialogues often use value clarification techniques, stories, role-plays, reflection prompts, and facilitated sharing exercises to help students articulate values, hear diverse perspectives, and reflect on how values shape reactions and interactions. For instance, counselors may invite students to recount a moment when they felt misunderstood or excluded and then invite peers to consider what emotional states might be involved and how different values might guide more empathic responses. In such exchanges, the counselor models cultural humility by inviting open-ended questions, acknowledging multiple valid responses, and resisting imposition of "right" answers. Over time, students are encouraged to integrate empathetic reasoning into everyday interactions asking questions like "How might my words affect someone from a different background?" or "What values do we share that can guide how we respond to disagreement?"

From a theoretical standpoint, this model is rooted at the intersection of multicultural counseling theory, positive psychology, and moral education. Multicultural counseling theories highlight the importance of cultural identity development, power awareness, and multicultural sensitivity. Positive

psychology contributes the idea that strengths-based interventions including empathy training, gratitude, and prosocial behaviors can enhance well-being and social connectedness. Moral education draws from ethical and civic frameworks that emphasize moral reasoning, empathy development, and collaborative citizenship. The fusion of these strands empowers the counseling model to operate not just as support, but as proactive moral-social development geared toward shaping school-wide empathy and tolerance. Implementing such a model in actual schools may involve cross-sector coordination: counselor training on multicultural values, curriculum embedding of value-based discussions, structuring safe group sessions, and collaborative engagement by teachers and administrators in reinforcing empathetic norms. Additionally, the model may dovetail with school-wide initiatives such as peer mentoring, restorative justice practices, or intercultural extracurricular clubs that extend value-based dialogues beyond formal counseling. Importantly, the model respects the integrity and autonomy of cultural groups: rather than assuming a homogenizing moral perspective, it invites exploration of both shared and divergent values, encouraging critical reflection on harmful norms while affirming multiple value systems.

The existing literature provides suggestive empirical support. Studies exploring value clarification in middle and high schools underscore its efficacy in fostering empathy, moral reasoning, and prosocial behavior. Similarly, multicultural counseling interventions incorporating cultural humility have demonstrated enhanced counselor effectiveness, trust, and student engagement. Yet, few studies combine value-based frameworks with explicit empathy-tolerance goals in school settings particularly those that track changes over time in student dispositions. This gap underscores the novelty and potential impact of the model proposed here. The present research thus seeks to operationalize and evaluate the Value-Based Counseling Guidance Model in a multicultural school environment, with a focus on improving student empathy and tolerance. Specifically, the study will examine how structured, value-driven counseling sessions influence student attitudes, emotional understanding, and interpersonal behaviors across cultural differences. In doing so, it will explore both quantitative shifts through measures such as validated empathy and tolerance scales and qualitative transformations, via student reflections, narratives, and counselor observations.

Furthermore, the research will attend to contextual moderators such as cultural group composition, previous levels of intercultural contact, and counselor training to understand under what conditions the model is most effective. It will also explore potential unintended consequences for example, whether students feel their cultural identity is misunderstood or minimized and adaptive strategies for ensuring culturally responsive dialogue. In addition, the study will consider implications for school policy and culture. If value-based counseling proves effective, schools may adopt it as part of core pastoral care or character education programs. Counselor training programs may incorporate modules on value-centric dialogue, empathy cultivation, and multicultural humility. Teachers may collaborate to weave values-based discussions into academic instruction literature lessons that explore moral dilemmas, social studies debates anchored in justice and respect. The broader school community parents, administrators, support staff may also be engaged in workshops or norms development around empathetic communication and inclusive values.

Such systemic integration would align with the broader vision of schools as communities of democratic learning. Democratic schools not only impart content knowledge but also cultivate capacities for ethical judgment, civic empathy, and intercultural solidarity preparing students to participate in diverse and pluralistic societies. A Value-Based Counseling Guidance Model could thus serve as both a micro-level intervention and a catalyst for school-wide cultural transformation. Yet, the model is not without potential challenges. Counselors may require extensive training to balance value-based dialogue with cultural sensitivity learning when to prompt deeper reflection versus when to honor silence or complexity. There may be resistance from students or parents who view values discourse as normative or ideological, requiring careful framing and trust-building. Resource constraints such as limited counselor availability or insufficient time may hinder regular implementation. Moreover, establishing reliable measurement of empathy and tolerance remains complex, necessitating mixed-method designs that can capture both attitudinal shifts and relational dynamics.

These challenges notwithstanding, the moral and educational imperative remains clear: multicultural schools must do more than tolerate diversity they must cultivate empathy, mutual respect, and shared humanity. A counseling model that centers values and relational understanding provides a thoughtful, ethically grounded, and relationally rich approach to this imperative. In sum, this study's

introduction has set the stage by first acknowledging the evolving diversity of school settings and the sociocultural challenges they entail. It has then critiqued limitations of traditional counseling models in such contexts and posited cultural humility and value-based frameworks as vital enhancements. Empathy and tolerance have been defined as complementary outcomes, with value-based counseling offering a dual affective-cognitive and moral foundation. The theoretical underpinnings spanning multicultural counseling, positive psychology, and moral education underscore the model's coherence and promise. Finally, the introduction has outlined the study's goals, contextual considerations, implementation pathways, and broader implications both for practice and policy.

By advancing a Value-Based Counseling Guidance Model, this research aims not only to contribute evidence on effective counseling practices for multicultural schools, but also to affirm a vision: educational spaces where students not only learn together, but understand and stand with each other across difference, through empathy, grounded in shared values. In the chapters that follow, the theoretical framing, methodological design, intervention protocols, analytical frameworks, results, and conclusions will be presented in detail setting forth both academic contributions and actionable pathways for schools aspiring to nurture empathetic, tolerant, and interconnected communities.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The research employed a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to evaluate the effectiveness of the Value-Based Counseling Model in enhancing student empathy and tolerance within a multicultural school setting. The study was conducted over a 12-week period in three secondary schools characterized by high levels of cultural diversity. A total of 120 students aged 13–16 participated, with an even distribution across cultural backgrounds. Participants were divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group received structured value-based counseling sessions once a week, while the control group followed the regular school counseling program. Quantitative data were collected through pre-test and post-test assessments using standardized empathy and tolerance scales. The results showed a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group's scores. On the empathy scale, the average score increased from 3.1 to 4.2 (on a 5-point Likert scale), while the tolerance score rose from 3.0 to 4.1. In contrast, the control group displayed only minimal improvements, with no statistically significant changes. Qualitative data were gathered through student reflection journals, focus group discussions, and counselor observations. Thematic analysis of these sources revealed recurring patterns, including increased self-awareness, enhanced listening skills, and more respectful attitudes toward cultural differences. Students reported feeling more connected to their peers and expressed greater willingness to engage in dialogue across cultural lines. Counselors observed that students began applying the values discussed during sessions in real-life interactions, such as conflict resolution and group collaboration. Overall, the results suggest that the Value-Based Counseling Model effectively promotes empathy and tolerance among students in multicultural schools. The combination of value clarification, group dialogue, and culturally responsive facilitation contributed to both attitudinal and behavioral shifts. These findings support the model's potential as a practical and impactful intervention for schools seeking to foster inclusive and harmonious environments. Further research is recommended to assess long-term impacts and explore scalability across different educational contexts.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Significant Empathy and Tolerance Gains Measured Quantitatively

The foundation of our research hinged on measuring changes in students' empathy and tolerance levels using validated psychometric instruments, administered both before and after the intervention in the experimental group. Over a 12-week period, students engaged in structured Value-Based Counseling sessions designed to cultivate key values respect, empathy, justice, responsibility and to cultivate intercultural sensitivity. The results were compelling: mean empathy scores (on a 1 to 5 Likert-type scale) rose markedly, from 3.05 to 4.18, yielding a Cohen's d effect size of 1.38, indicative of a very large impact. On the tolerance measure, scores increased from 2.98 to 4.12, with an effect size of 1.22. Statistical tests (paired-sample t-tests) confirmed that both gains were highly significant ($p < .001$), confirming that the intervention corresponded with robust attitudinal shifts.

In contrast, the control group—which continued with standard school counseling—showed minimal and statistically insignificant changes: empathy rose marginally from 3.02 to 3.15 ($p = .12$), and

tolerance from 2.97 to 3.08 ($p = .18$). This contrast reinforces the likelihood that the structured Value-Based Counseling, not external factors, drove the significant improvements. Moreover, the empirical climb in these metrics was consistent across cultural subgroups (e.g., ethnic, religious, linguistic), although small variations existed students from more collectivist backgrounds tended to start with slightly higher baseline empathy but showed equally notable gains.

These quantitative results underscore the potency of value-driven counseling as an intervention. By making core values explicit and anchoring dialogue in moral frameworks, the program catalyzed measurable attitudinal development with both statistical and practical significance. The findings suggest that educators and counselors can leverage value-based approaches not just as philosophical ideals, but as effective means to foster measurable growth in empathy and tolerance across diverse student populations.

Deepened Cross-Cultural Awareness and Perspective-Taking Dynamics

Parallel to quantitative shifts, qualitative findings illuminate how the Value-Based Counseling sessions fostered a profound transformation in the ways students perceived and engaged with peers from different cultural backgrounds. Through thematic analysis of student reflection journals, focus group interviews, and counselor field notes, several patterns emerged: Heightened Self-Awareness of Cultural Assumptions: Students reported epiphanies like, "I realized I judge others by what I take for granted in my culture," or "I never considered how my tone might sound harsh to someone from another background." This introspection marked a transition from unexamined bias to reflective consciousness. Emotional Resonance Across Difference: Narratives conveyed empathy beyond cognitive understanding. One student recounted, "Listening to my classmate's story of migration, I felt the weight he carried even though our experiences are so different. It shook me." These accounts reflect heartfelt empathy connecting on emotional, not just intellectual, levels.

Curiosity-Driven Engagement: Instead of avoidance or polite distance, students began actively seeking to learn about unfamiliar cultures. Reflection prompts such as "Describe something new you learned about a classmate's beliefs" yielded comments like, "I asked her how her traditions shape her day. I learned we both value family deeply, just in different ways." Dialogue as Bridge: Recorded in transcripts of peer dialogues, students spontaneously framed disagreements by saying, "I don't fully understand your viewpoint, but I want to can you tell me more?" Such statements signal movement from defensive stances to open conversational posture anchored in empathy.

Counselor Observations of Integration: Counselors noted behaviors like students mediating peer disputes by inviting both sides to "explain how they felt," or referencing "shared values" rather than blaming. These real-world applications indicate that perspective-taking moved from session context into everyday interactions. This qualitative evidence illustrates that empathy transcended superficial politeness it grew into relational openness, curiosity, and moral imagination. The counseling model's emphasis on value-based dialogue encouraged students not only to tolerate, but to inhabit others' vantage points, leading to more connected and inclusive peer relationships. These emergent perspective-taking behaviors are promising signs of durable cultural change.

Emergence of Value-Infused Communication Norms in the School Culture

One of the most striking outcomes observed during and after the intervention was the gradual embedding of value-based language throughout the school environment a shift that went beyond the confines of counseling sessions into day-to-day student and faculty communication. Counselors and teachers reported hearing phrases like: "Let's approach this with kindness and open ears, "I may disagree, but I respect your feelings." "We need to listen first, then talk." "Justice means giving everyone a turn let's be fair." These expressions emerged organically, particularly during group work, conflict episodes, or lunchtime discussions. The change was less about scripting and more about internalized value awareness students spontaneously invoked empathy, respect, and fairness.

Modeling by Counselors: In sessions, counselors consistently demonstrated value-driven dialogue. Students learned not only from explicit instruction but from watching counselors question assumptions, ask reflective questions, and respond with emotional attunement. Peer Reinforcement: Students began reminding peers to "stick to our values" when disagreements would escalate. This peer regulation embedded values into the social fabric. Visible Symbols and Reminders: Some classes and corridors displayed value-based posters (e.g., "Empathy first," "Different, but respected"). These had been co-created by students and counselors during sessions, reinforcing messaging. Teacher Adoption: Educators began referencing the value model during instruction: "When we do group debates, remember empathy listen to understand, not just to reply."

Crucially, these emergent norms were student-led, not top-down mandates. This co-construction enhanced authenticity, compliance, and ownership. Across recorded observations and informal feedback, both staff and students noted a more emotionally attuned, respectful school climate comfortable with difference and centered on shared moral touchstones. The diffusion of value-based language serves as a notable behavioral outcome: it reflects internalization of values and the ability to deploy them in real-world, peer-driven contexts. This normalization of empathetic vocabulary and value coaching is indicative of cultural transformation illustrating how sincere interventions can foster deep, school-wide ethos shifts.

Evolution of Cultural Humility and Reflexivity in Students and Counselors

A pivotal element of the Value-Based Counseling Model is its dual emphasis: not only empowering students to listen and empathize, but also encouraging counselors (and indirectly teachers) to practice cultural humility a commitment to ongoing self-reflection, openness, and acknowledgement of power dynamics. Reflection entries revealed students questioning their own cultural frameworks: "I assumed everyone celebrated holidays the same way I do I didn't realize I was acting on my own bias." Another wrote, "I thought being tolerant meant staying neutral but now I think it means defending respect, even if it's uncomfortable. These statements show movement from unwitting ethnocentrism to conscious self-scrutiny a hallmark of cultural humility: recognizing that one's own cultural lens may not be universal and being open to learning from others' lived experiences.

Counselor journals recorded profound self-awareness: "I thought I was being inclusive but I realize I never invited some students to share. I may have unconsciously favored louder voices." Another reflected, "Valuing empathy forced me to listen without agenda scary, but clarifying." Counselors adjusted practices accordingly: they began to intentionally invite quieter or underrepresented voices, refrained from imposing interpretations, and adapted session prompts based on student-group feedback. During dialogs, students noticed and named culturally responsive facilitation: "She listened without jumping in that made me feel safe." Or "He changed the questions based on what we said that felt respectful." These dynamics coalesced to build a relational culture rooted in humility where authority figures did not assume infallibility, but invited shared shaping of conversation. Similarly, students understood that empathy begins with openness to being wrong or uninformed. Such reflexivity deepens relational quality: it disrupts hierarchical communication and invites equitable co-learning. This mutual humility forged trust and deepened the empathetic resonance foundational to the model.

Durable Behavioral Change and Everyday Applications Post-Intervention

Assessing long-term impact is vital. A follow-up conducted four weeks after the intervention ended revealed that many students continued to apply the model's values in real-life situations demonstrating that the intervention had genuine staying power. Peer Mediation by Students: When seating disputes or misunderstandings occurred, students intervened. One described: "Two of us argued over group roles. A classmate stepped in: 'Let's see how both feel then we can share equal parts.' That came straight from the sessions." Inclusive Project Work: Multicultural groups worked collaboratively, ensuring equitable participation. One teacher shared, "I noticed a student reminding others that everyone's ideas matter, opening turns and listening carefully." Subjective Insight Translated to Action: Students began checking in with peers outside their cultural circle: "I asked him how his cultural festival was going he seemed surprised that I remembered and cared." Mentoring Younger Students: Older students informally mentored younger ones in empathy-oriented communication: "Let's ask clearly what they feel, then respond with kindness." Teachers also observed more thoughtful responses to incidents. For instance, when someone used humor that could be culturally insensitive, peers didn't laugh or ignore; instead, they engaged: "Let's explain how that might feel maybe we can find a better joke."

While many behaviors endured, some environments (e.g., unsupervised hallway interactions, PE classes) showed partial slippage. Values weren't always foregrounded unless prompted. This suggests that for maximum durability, value reinforcement needs to be woven into ongoing school life via assemblies, teacher modeling, peer leadership programs, or curriculum integration. Nevertheless, the persistence of value-informed interventions peer mediation, inclusive dialogue, everyday empathy demonstrates that even short-term interventions can seed meaningful, lasting change.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this research affirm the effectiveness of the Value-Based Counseling Guidance Model in enhancing student empathy and tolerance within multicultural school environments. As schools continue to become increasingly diverse, the challenges associated with cultural differences, social integration, and interpersonal misunderstandings demand intentional and proactive responses. This

study demonstrates that when counseling is guided by universal values—such as empathy, respect, justice, and responsibility—it can significantly improve students' emotional understanding and social interactions across cultural boundaries. Quantitative results showed marked increases in both empathy and tolerance scores among students who participated in the structured counseling intervention. These outcomes suggest that value-based approaches provide a strong foundation for meaningful attitudinal change. Complementing this, qualitative data revealed shifts in students' self-awareness, communication styles, and intercultural engagement. Students not only began to understand their own biases and assumptions but also developed the capacity to listen actively, understand diverse perspectives, and resolve conflicts constructively. The model also fostered a more inclusive school culture, as value-driven communication and behavior began to permeate classrooms and peer relationships. Importantly, the counseling model also influenced the broader educational environment. Counselors reported increased cultural humility in their own practices, and teachers observed a more respectful and collaborative atmosphere among students. These ripple effects indicate that the model is not only effective at the individual level but can also contribute to school-wide cultural transformation. In conclusion, the Value-Based Counseling Guidance Model offers a viable, impactful approach for fostering empathy and tolerance in diverse educational settings. Its emphasis on shared human values makes it adaptable, sustainable, and relevant across various cultural contexts. Future implementation should focus on long-term integration into school counseling programs, ongoing training for counselors and educators, and continuous evaluation to ensure cultural responsiveness and lasting impact. As schools strive to build inclusive communities, value-based counseling represents a meaningful step toward cultivating empathetic, respectful, and socially responsible students prepared to thrive in a multicultural world.

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