

THE ETHICAL LANDSCAPE OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING SERVICES: PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS, IMPLEMENTATION, AND CHALLENGES IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Tb. Moh. Irma Ari Irawan¹, M Solehuddin², Ahmad Rofi Suryahadikusumah³, Alice Asiedu⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia

Corresponding Email: msolehuddin@upi.edu

Article Information

Received : December 17, 2025

Revised : December 24, 2025

Accepted : December 27, 2025

Abstract

Ethical codes form the foundation of counseling professionalism, protecting clients and maintaining professional integrity. The digital era presents complex ethical challenges regarding data confidentiality, counselors' digital competence, and professional boundaries in virtual spaces. This study comprehensively explores the philosophical foundations, structure, implementation, and challenges of ethical codes for guidance and counseling in national and international contexts, identifying regulatory gaps in the digital era. This research employed a narrative literature review approach examining publications from 2015-2025 sourced from Scopus, Google Scholar, ERIC, PubMed, PsycINFO, and national journal portals. Analysis was conducted through thematic content analysis, encompassing systematic information extraction, thematic categorization, comparative analysis of Indonesian and international ethical codes, narrative synthesis, and critical interpretation of theoretical and practical implications. Results of this research indicate that ethical codes are rooted in philosophical foundations (ontology, epistemology, axiology) with universal principles: autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, fidelity, and veracity. International comparison reveals ACA and ASCA (US) emphasize client protection and digital technology; BACP (UK) focuses on values-based practice; PACFA and ACA Australia prioritize cultural diversity; while ABKIN Indonesia emphasizes socio-cultural norms and national educational goals. Digital era challenges include digital data confidentiality, counselors' digital competence gaps, professional boundaries on social media, digital informed consent, and cross-border counseling. International associations have updated their ethical codes to include specific digital counseling regulations, yet Indonesia lacks comprehensive chapters on cyber counseling. Indonesian ethical codes, ABKIN, need to revise its ethical codes by adding chapters on cyber counseling, strengthening enforcement mechanisms, and integrating digital ethics into counselor education curricula.

Keywords: : *code of ethics, guidance and counseling, philosophical, implementation, digital challenges.*

Introduction

Guidance and counseling as a credible profession fundamentally depends on the existence of ethical codes that are consistently adhered to in professional practice. Codes of ethics serve as the foundation for defining responsibilities, authority, service domains, and counselors' obligations toward clients in particular and society in general. Anyone who claims to be a counselor is required to comply with the professional code of ethics (Sanyata, 2013). Ethics represent a defining characteristic of a profession, as they express

its core purposes, values, and mission. Moreover, ethical frameworks are essential for assisting professionals in making appropriate decisions, particularly when facing complex or dilemmatic situations (Reamer, 2012; Hawamdeh et al., 2022).

Historically, guidance and counseling has evolved since the early twentieth century, initially focusing on career development, later expanding to encompass mental health services and becoming integrated into educational systems. The transition from a social movement to a recognized profession was marked by efforts to unify professional organizations and formalize ethical codes (Pribadi, 2020). Contextual factors characterizing each historical era have contributed to professional development by shaping codes of ethics and standards of conduct (Buckley, 2024). Revisions of ethical codes often reflect significant societal and professional concerns emerging at particular points in time (Wibowo, 2018).

In Indonesia, guidance and counseling has developed since the 1960s while facing various challenges, including cultural adaptation, public mistrust, and relatively low professional standards (Gunawan & Wahab, 2015). Issues of counselor professionalism have been widely discussed in scholarly publications and debated in national conferences. The counseling profession must continuously attend to psychological, educational, social, and economic dimensions, as guidance and counseling is inherently an interdisciplinary process aimed at facilitating student development (Solehuddin et al., 2022).

Within the context of rapid digital technological advancement, counseling ethics now confront unprecedented challenges. Richards and Viganó (2013) argue that online counseling practices raise complex ethical issues related to data confidentiality, digital informed consent, and professional boundaries. Stoll et al. (2020) further emphasize that counselors must understand the ethical implications of technology use in service delivery, including privacy concerns, data security, and digital competence. A bibliometric study by Kumar et al. (2024) demonstrates a significant increase in scholarly attention to ethical issues in digital mental health services since 2000, with primary emphasis on confidentiality, informed consent, and the quality of digital services.

Furthermore, recent meta-synthesis analyses indicate that guidance and counseling ethical codes must be grounded in core ethical principles, accommodate cultural diversity, and remain responsive to technological advancements (Engebretson & Harris, 2019). Integrative ethical decision-making models, along with counselor education grounded in experiential learning and reflective practice, are crucial for addressing contemporary challenges and gaps. Strengthening ethical standards—particularly in counselor training, technology use, and cultural sensitivity—can enhance the integrity, equity, and effectiveness of counseling services in the future (Yasinta et al., 2025; Bazla et al., 2024).

Numerous studies have examined specific aspects of counseling ethics, including fundamental moral principles, multicultural issues, and technological challenges (Firdaus et al., 2025; Azzahra et al., 2024; Djovana et al., 2023; Zhong et al., 2021; Bakshi & Goss, 2019; Pope & Vasquez, 2021; Harris & Birnbaum, 2015). However, these studies tend to remain fragmented and have not yet provided a holistic understanding of the interrelationships among philosophical foundations, Indonesian regulatory frameworks, international developments, and the demands of the digital era. To date, no comprehensive study has integrated ontological–epistemological–axiological analysis, cross-national comparisons of ethical codes, and digital ethical challenges within a single analytical framework. This gap underpins the importance of the present study.

Additionally, technological developments over the past decade have introduced new challenges that require counselors to understand principles of digital data protection, professional boundaries in virtual spaces, and the use of online platforms in counseling processes. These changes necessitate updates to national ethical regulations as well as the enhancement of counselors' professional capacities. This study aims to comprehensively

explore the philosophical foundations, structural frameworks, implementation practices, and challenges of guidance and counseling ethical codes in both national and international contexts. A deep understanding of ethical codes is essential to affirm professionalism, sustain the profession's existence, and ensure that counseling remains relevant in the context of ongoing societal and technological change.

Method

This article employs a comprehensive and integrative narrative literature review approach to analyze professional codes of ethics in guidance and counseling. The literature was limited to publications from 2015–2025 based on several considerations: (1) this period represents the era of digital transformation in counseling services; (2) major ethical codes that serve as key professional references were developed or substantially revised within this timeframe; and (3) contemporary issues such as the use of artificial intelligence in counseling, digital data protection, and social media ethics have emerged and expanded significantly over the past decade.

The literature search was conducted using multiple databases, including Scopus, Google Scholar, ERIC, PubMed, PsycINFO, and Indonesian national journal portals (SINTA and Garuda). The search utilized keywords such as “code of ethics,” “professional ethics,” “counseling ethics,” “digital counseling,” “online counseling,” “ethical challenges,” “technology in counseling,” “multicultural competence,” and their combinations. Inclusion criteria consisted of: (1) relevance to the research focus; (2) publication between 2015 and 2025; (3) availability in Indonesian or English; and (4) academic credibility demonstrated through peer-reviewed sources. Data analysis was conducted using thematic content analysis, following several stages: (1) systematic information extraction; (2) thematic categorization; (3) comparative analysis of Indonesian and international counseling ethical codes; (4) narrative synthesis; and (5) critical interpretation of theoretical and practical implications.

Result and Discussion

Philosophical Foundations of Guidance and Counseling Codes of Ethics

Philosophically, ontology examines the nature of reality, including the reality of values and their relationship to professional practice. Moral metaphysics (metaethics) further explores whether ethical values are universal or context-dependent (Welfel, 2015; Corey et al., 2019). Within this framework, codes of ethics address the nature and existence of moral values that underlie professional guidance and counseling practice, clarifying the essence of ethical practice and the counselor–client relationship. According to Gladding (2016), ethics refers to the study of human behavior and values, particularly concerning what is considered right and wrong in professional interactions. Ontology in counseling ethics relates to the nature of human existence and interpersonal relationships, assuming that each individual possesses intrinsic worth and autonomy. These assumptions are central to ethical practice and guide counselors to respect clients as unique individuals with their own experiences and value systems, thereby fostering relationships grounded in mutual respect and understanding (Amari, 2020; Levitt & Aligo, 2013).

From an epistemological perspective, ethical codes emerge from the collective construction of knowledge regarding shared values agreed upon by the professional counseling community. Epistemology questions how ethical values are known and understood, and how such ethical knowledge is developed and validated in counseling practice (Welfel, 2015; Corey et al., 2019). These values are intended to ensure the protection of clients' rights while simultaneously defining expectations and standards for

practitioners. The foundational principles established are widely recognized universal ethical principles, namely autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and fidelity (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001; Welfel, 2015).

These principles guide ethical decision-making and shape professional standards of counselor behavior, including: (1) Autonomy, which involves respecting clients' rights to make their own decisions and determine their life directions. In non-Western contexts such as Indonesia, autonomy is often interpreted as relational autonomy, emphasizing collective decision-making and family involvement (Leach & Harbin, 1997; Parsonson & Alquicira, 2019); (2) Non-maleficence, the obligation to avoid actions that may harm clients, which serves as a primary priority in all counseling interactions; (3) Beneficence, the commitment to promoting clients' well-being and optimal development; (4) Justice, ensuring fair and equitable access to counseling services without discrimination based on cultural background, religion, race, or socioeconomic status; (5) Fidelity, maintaining trust and professional commitment within the counseling relationship, including honoring agreements and safeguarding confidentiality; and (6) Veracity, upholding honesty and transparency in communication with clients, colleagues, and other stakeholders.

Counseling ethics encompasses ethical awareness, ethical sensitivity, ethical reasoning, ethical judgment, ethical choice, and ethical practice, all of which involve ethical codes, professional standards, and legal regulations (Gladding, 2016; Welfel, 2015). These principles are not merely abstract ideals but must be translated into concrete actions through ethical decisions encountered in counselors' daily practice (Welfel, 2015). From an axiological standpoint, codes of ethics examine which values should be upheld and prioritized in professional guidance and counseling practice. Axiology addresses questions such as "which values matter" and "why these values matter" within the counselor-client relationship (Corey et al., 2019; Welfel, 2015). Ethical codes are normative in nature and focus on principles and standards governing professional relationships. Their existence aims to standardize professional conduct, minimize personal bias, and provide a shared reference framework—commonly referred to as professional ethics—defined as beliefs about conduct and propriety guiding professional practice.

Ethical codes serve both symbolic and substantive functions. Symbolically, they provide a shared ethical language and standards that enable accountability across diverse groups, while substantively, they offer concrete protection of client rights and regulate professional behavior (Lipworth et al., 2020). Ultimately, ethical codes aim to enhance public trust in the integrity of a profession and protect clients from incompetent or unethical practitioners (Reamer, 2012). In the counseling profession, codes of ethics function to (a) guide counselors' professional conduct, (b) safeguard client welfare, and (c) provide a basis for societal oversight of counseling practice (Gladding, 2016; Wibowo, 2018; Wheeler & Bertram, 2019).

Implementation of Guidance and Counseling Codes of Ethics in Indonesia

Indonesia's counseling code of ethics was developed by the Indonesian Guidance and Counseling Association (ABKIN) and formally established through Decree No. 009/SK/PB-ABKIN/VIII/2018. The code comprises seven main components: (1) Qualifications and Competence, emphasizing professional values, attitudes, skills, and certification; (2) Information, Testing, and Research, regulating data management and research subject confidentiality; (3) Service Processes, governing professional relationships, including informed consent and confidentiality; (4) Consultation and Collegial Relationships, emphasizing consultation and referral practices; (5) Institutional Relationships, regulating counseling services within organizational contexts; (6) Private Practice and Reporting, addressing licensing and service standards; and (7) Professional

Compliance, regulating sanctions for ethical violations administered by ABKIN's Ethics Review Board (ABKIN, 2018).

Welfel (2015) and Corey et al. (2019) identify five fundamental elements common to counseling ethical codes: (1) Professional Competence, requiring counselors to possess adequate knowledge and skills while recognizing the limits of their competence; (2) Respect for Client Dignity, including respect for autonomy, which in Indonesia is often interpreted through a relational autonomy framework involving family participation; (3) Responsible Use of Power, prohibiting misuse of professional authority; (4) Enhancement of Public Trust, requiring counselors' actions to strengthen societal confidence in the profession; and (5) Primacy of Client Welfare, prioritizing clients' interests over personal or institutional concerns.

Ethical enforcement mechanisms are carried out by Ethics Review Boards at national and provincial levels, which promote ethical awareness, evaluate ethical violations, and serve as expert witnesses in legal proceedings (ABKIN, 2018). In practice, counselors are required to provide services based on mutual agreements, respect client dignity, prioritize client welfare, avoid discrimination, deliver comprehensive services, and clearly explain counseling goals and mutual responsibilities.

Confidentiality is a foundational ethical principle essential for building client trust (ACA, 2014; BACP, 2018). Counselors may disclose information only with client consent or when ethically and legally justified. Counseling settings must ensure privacy, safety, and client comfort, while counselors are obligated to clarify the nature and purpose of counseling and monitor client well-being throughout the process. Despite these frameworks, implementation faces significant challenges. Confidentiality in Indonesia is hindered by strong social stigma, institutional barriers, and inconsistent legal frameworks (Setiawan, 2006; Faulk et al., 2022; Lubis et al., 2019). Counselors frequently encounter dilemmas between maintaining confidentiality and fulfilling mandatory reporting obligations (duty to warn) in cases involving violence, substance abuse, or suicidal ideation (Sivis-Cetinkaya, 2015). Ethical enforcement mechanisms remain weak due to unclear national professional identity, inconsistent ethical competence among counselors, and regional disparities in standards (Granello & Gunawan, 2023; Wijaya et al., 2019; Pelizzo & Ang, 2008).

Significant gaps also exist in multicultural and spiritual competence. Ethical codes tend to remain Eurocentric and insufficiently responsive to multicultural client needs (Rentería et al., 2020; Henry et al., 2023). Clients' spiritual and religious identities are often treated as secondary considerations despite their central importance for many individuals (Hage et al., 2006; Levitt & Balkin, 2003). Integrating spirituality into counseling practice faces barriers such as counselor discomfort, limited training, and concerns about imposing personal values (Adams et al., 2015; Piedmont, 2024). Ethical violations are categorized into five types: (1) general violations that tarnish the profession; (2) violations against clients, such as breaches of confidentiality or abuse; (3) violations related to employing institutions; (4) violations involving colleagues; and (5) violations against professional organizations (ABKIN, 2018).

Sanctions range from verbal or written warnings to revocation of ABKIN membership, suspension of independent practice licenses, and referral to legal authorities (ABKIN, 2018; ACA, 2022). Enforcement procedures emphasize objectivity and transparency, including complaint verification, counselor clarification, opportunities for defense, tiered resolution mechanisms, and the right to appeal (ACA, 2022; NBCC, 2023). Sanctions are designed not merely as punitive measures but also as remedial efforts to enhance counselors' ethical competence.

Comparative Analysis of Counseling Codes of Ethics Across Countries

In the United States, the American Counseling Association (ACA) publishes the ACA Code of Ethics (2014), which emphasizes client protection, professional responsibility, and the ethical use of technology in counseling services. The code highlights informed consent, confidentiality in online counseling, and continuous professional development (ACA, 2014). Additionally, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) issued the Ethical Standards for School Counselors (2022), which specifically address school-based counseling and prioritize students' best interests, confidentiality, parental collaboration, and educational technology use.

In the United Kingdom, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) developed the Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions (2018), emphasizing honesty, justice, and respect for human dignity. This framework adopts a values-based approach that prioritizes client welfare and requires ongoing critical reflection and supervision (BACP, 2018).

Australia hosts two major counseling associations: the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) and the Australian Counselling Association (ACA). PACFA's Code of Ethics (2017) focuses on accountability, professional responsibility, and cultural sensitivity. The ACA's Code of Ethics and Practice (Version 16, 2022) emphasizes ethical conduct in counseling practice, research engagement, technological competence, and maintaining healthy professional boundaries. Both organizations highlight inclusivity, client well-being, and protection from harmful practices (PACFA, 2017; ACA, 2022).

In Indonesia, ABKIN established the Guidance and Counseling Professional Code of Ethics (2018) as the primary ethical guideline for school and community counselors. The code stresses professional dignity, client confidentiality, respect for local cultural norms, and alignment with national educational goals. However, unlike the ACA or ASCA codes, ABKIN's ethical framework does not yet comprehensively regulate digital counseling services and social media use, indicating a pressing need for revision to remain responsive to contemporary developments (ABKIN, 2018).

Table 2.1. Comparison of Guidance and Counseling Codes of Ethics Across Countries

| Key Aspect | United States – ACA (2014) & ASCA (2022) | United Kingdom – BACP (2018) | Australia – PACFA (2017) & ACA (2022) | Indonesia – ABKIN (2018) |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| Purpose & Scope | Protects client/student interests, upholds professionalism, and regulates counseling practice, including digital counseling. | Emphasizes values-based practice, client well-being, honesty, and justice. | Emphasizes accountability, professionalism, and cultural diversity. | Upholds professional dignity and service quality; protects counselors, clients, and the public; supports national educational goals. |
| Confidentiality | Strong focus on client/student privacy; exceptions apply in cases of serious harm; explicitly includes digital services. | Protects confidentiality, with exceptions based on legal obligations and safety risks. | Emphasizes confidentiality and informed consent, including in online counseling. | Protects client confidentiality; exceptions apply if there is risk of harm to self or others; limited guidance on digital services. |
| Relationships with Clients & Other Parties | ASCA: collaboration with parents and teachers | Emphasizes balanced relationships, | Trust-based professional relationships, | Emphasizes collaboration with schools, families, |

| | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| | while prioritizing students' best interests. ACA: clear professional boundaries and avoidance of conflicts of interest. | transparency, and public accountability. | public accountability, and maintenance of professional boundaries. | and communities to achieve national educational objectives. |
| Multiculturalism & Inclusion | ASCA highlights social justice, cultural diversity, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. | Respects human dignity and cultural diversity; encourages critical reflection on bias. | Emphasizes cultural sensitivity within Australia's multicultural society. | Respects local cultural values and social norms. |
| Technology & Digital Media | ACA & ASCA explicitly regulate the use of technology, social media, online counseling, and digital privacy. | Not extensively detailed, but acknowledges ethical challenges related to technology. | PACFA & ACA regulate online counseling practices and ethical use of digital media. | Does not explicitly regulate digital counseling services or social media use. |
| Professionalism & Competency Development | Requires continuing education and mandates reporting of ethical violations by colleagues. | Requires ongoing supervision and continuous self-reflection. | Requires continuing professional development, research engagement, and professional accountability. | Emphasizes service quality improvement through internal professional association development. |

A comparison of counseling codes of ethics across countries reveals shared foundational principles such as confidentiality, client autonomy, and professional responsibility. However, their interpretation and implementation are strongly shaped by cultural, legal, and local value systems. In the United States, the ACA Code of Ethics published in 2014 and the ASCA Ethical Standards released in 2022 emphasize client protection, professional accountability, and the ethical use of technology in counseling services. These codes place strong emphasis on individual autonomy, explicit informed consent, and clear boundaries regarding multiple relationships. Importantly, the ACA Code contains a dedicated and comprehensive section known as Section H on distance counseling, technology, and social media, which specifically addresses ethical challenges in digital and online counseling contexts (Firmin et al., 2019).

In the United Kingdom, the BACP Ethical Framework published in 2018 emphasizes a values based practice approach that prioritizes client well being above personal or institutional interests. This framework places particular emphasis on honesty, justice, and respect for human dignity, while highlighting ethical reflection and moral responsibility as essential elements of professional counseling practice. In Australia, both the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia in 2017 and the Australian Counselling Association in 2022 underscore inclusivity, client welfare, and protection from harmful practices. These ethical frameworks strongly emphasize cultural diversity and professional accountability within Australia's multicultural social context.

Overall, counseling codes of ethics function as professional references that guide counselors in performing their roles ethically and responsibly while safeguarding clients' interests. Although universal principles such as confidentiality, integrity, and professionalism serve as a common ethical foundation, each country formulates and operationalizes its ethical codes in distinct ways that reflect its social, cultural, and

educational contexts. Comparative analysis indicates that the United States places greater emphasis on confidentiality, student protection, and digital ethics. The United Kingdom prioritizes values based practice. Australia highlights cultural diversity and professional accountability. Indonesia emphasizes socio cultural norms and national educational objectives. Despite these contextual differences, all ethical codes demonstrate a shared commitment to confidentiality, professional integrity, client well being, and the continuous development of counselors' professional competence.

Issues and Challenges of Counseling Codes of Ethics in the Digital Era

In the context of the twenty first century, codes of ethics continue to evolve in response to digital challenges such as telecounseling, data and cyber security, and increasingly complex multicultural issues (Richards and Vigano, 2013; Stoll et al., 2020). Ethical codes function to ensure that, despite changes in technology and society, counselors remain firmly grounded in universal principles such as confidentiality, client autonomy, and non maleficence, which refers to the obligation to avoid harm.

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed guidance and counseling practice. Whereas counseling services were previously delivered exclusively through face to face interactions, they are now increasingly conducted through various online platforms, including web based counseling applications, social media, and cross regional communication systems (Richards and Vigano, 2013; Ifdil et al., 2020). This transformation presents new opportunities while simultaneously generating ethical challenges that must be addressed carefully by counselors.

Digital Confidentiality and Privacy

One of the most critical issues in digital counseling is confidentiality and privacy. In traditional face to face counseling, confidentiality is relatively easier to maintain. However, technology mediated services expose counselors and clients to risks such as data leakage, cyber attacks, and misuse of personal information (Stoll et al., 2020). Consequently, contemporary ethical standards require counselors to possess adequate understanding of data security and the use of platforms with appropriate encryption standards, end to end encrypted communication, secure data storage in accordance with applicable regulations, risks associated with cloud storage and data backup, and protocols for responding to data breaches.

Digital technology has fundamentally altered counseling practices by shifting service delivery from in person settings to video conferencing, instant messaging applications, electronic mail, and specialized online counseling platforms. Digitalization also increases the risk of inaccurate or misleading information resulting from the spread of unverified content, which may disrupt the counseling process and negatively affect clients (Safiranita et al., 2023). To support effective digital counseling, engaging and accessible content development is essential, along with user friendly interface design that enhances client engagement and comfort (Sardjono and Perdana, 2024).

The protection of personal data has become a critical ethical concern in digital counseling. Ethical codes must accommodate personal data protection regulations, such as Law Number Twenty Seven of Two Thousand Twenty Two concerning Personal Data Protection in Indonesia, which further increases regulatory complexity when integrated with religious legal principles (Putra et al., 2024). Counselors must understand ethical and legal standards related to privacy and data security, including encryption, secure cloud storage, and data breach protocols (Shafik, 2025).

In Indonesia, additional challenges include low levels of digital literacy among counselors and the general public (Afrina and Zulaikha, 2024), unequal digital infrastructure across regions, and weak accountability mechanisms for digital platforms.

Informed consent in digital counseling must therefore include clear explanations regarding technological risks, privacy limitations, platform security procedures, emergency protocols, and client rights (Shafik, 2025). Studies from neighboring contexts indicate that the implementation of privacy enhancing technologies remains limited due to concerns about readiness, vendor accountability, and sustainability (Gan et al., 2019). Among Indonesian adolescents, digital ethical literacy remains low, increasing vulnerability to cyberbullying and privacy violations (Prasetyo et al., 2023; Rini et al., 2023).

Digital Competence of Counselors

Digital competence in counseling encompasses technical proficiency in using digital counseling platforms, legal understanding of data protection regulations, risk awareness related to technology use, digital communication skills to establish rapport and therapeutic alliance in virtual settings, and online crisis management through appropriate emergency protocols. Empirical evidence indicates significant gaps in digital readiness among Indonesian counselors, particularly among senior practitioners (Suwendi et al., 2025; Afrina and Zulaikha, 2024). Limited training in ethical electronic counseling reduces counselors' self efficacy and negatively affects service outcomes (Asri et al., 2024; Zainudin et al., 2022).

Ethical standards have continuously evolved to address confidentiality, professional boundaries, and client safety in digital counseling. The American Counseling Association introduced a comprehensive section on distance counseling, technology, and social media that regulates legal considerations, informed consent and security, client verification, distance counseling relationships, and record management (ACA, 2014). The American School Counselor Association developed virtual school counseling competencies that emphasize appropriate technology use, digital student records, privacy protection, and ethical social media engagement (ASCA, 2022). Similarly, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy updated its ethical framework to include guidance on technology use in practice, online supervision, professional accountability, digital literacy, and cyber security awareness (BACP, 2018).

A major gap in Indonesia is the absence of a comprehensive section on digital counseling within the ABKIN Code of Ethics, despite the substantial increase in online counseling practices during and after the COVID nineteen pandemic (Ifdil et al., 2020). Digital competence extends beyond technical application skills to include conceptual understanding of ethics, regulation, and relational dynamics in digital counseling contexts. Counselors must be able to use online communication platforms effectively, securely, and in accordance with professional standards, including mastery of basic platform features, audio visual quality management, and security settings.

Furthermore, counselors must understand the legal framework governing personal data protection. In Indonesia, this includes compliance with Law Number Twenty Seven of Two Thousand Twenty Two, which requires counselors to ensure secure management of client data such as session records, recordings, and assessment documents. Counselors must also recognize technological risks such as network instability, data breaches, and cyber attacks, and prepare appropriate security protocols. Research indicates significant digital competence gaps between younger and older counselors, highlighting the need for structured training programs focused on digital counseling ethics, platform security, crisis management, and professional accountability (Kumar et al., 2024).

Professional Boundaries in Social Media

The digital era introduces new challenges in maintaining professional boundaries, particularly when counselors and clients are connected through social media. Interactions

outside formal counseling sessions may blur professional roles and compromise objectivity (Kolmes, 2012). Social media enables personal communication that may undermine professional boundaries, create dual relationships, and increase ethical risk.

The American School Counselor Association emphasizes that school counselors should not form personal social media connections with students, as such interactions may create dual relationships and compromise professional judgment (ASCA, 2022). Counselors are also discouraged from communicating with students through unapproved platforms or sharing excessive personal information accessible to students. Similarly, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy recommends maintaining separate professional and personal accounts, declining social media connection requests from active clients, and managing digital footprints with caution (BACP, 2018).

In Indonesia, these challenges are amplified by intensive communication cultures mediated through instant messaging applications. Risks include client data leakage, dissemination of sensitive information, and blurred professional boundaries. Clear social media usage policies, digital ethics training, and content supervision are therefore essential. Educational institutions and professional organizations must develop specific guidelines for counselors' social media use and integrate principles of digital citizenship that emphasize ethics, literacy, and digital safety (Prasetyo et al., 2021; Nurhayati et al., 2025).

Cross National Counseling Services

Internet based counseling enables counselors to serve clients across national borders, but this expansion introduces complex ethical challenges (Richards and Vigano, 2013). Cross national counseling involves differences in legal regulations, licensing requirements, professional standards, and cultural and linguistic contexts. Legal jurisdiction in cases of malpractice is often unclear, raising questions about responsibility and applicable legal frameworks. Differences in mandatory reporting obligations across countries further complicate ethical decision making in high risk cases.

Counselors providing cross national services must understand the legal and regulatory requirements of the client's country, obtain appropriate licensure if required, and provide informed consent that explains jurisdictional limitations and legal risks. Emergency protocols tailored to the client's location are also essential to ensure timely crisis response. Ethical practice in multicultural contexts requires counselors to develop cultural humility through continuous self reflection and lifelong learning, recognizing the intersectional nature of client identities (Burn, 1992; Thomas, 1998; Renteria et al., 2020).

Integrating ethical principles with multicultural competence enhances justice and effectiveness in counseling services while reducing bias and marginalization. Asset based approaches that emphasize client strengths rather than deficits have been shown to improve outcomes for clients with intersecting identities or disabilities (Rosenberger, 2024). Meta analytic evidence demonstrates that enforceable multicultural ethical standards reduce bias and improve service quality (Arredondo, 1999; Tao et al., 2015).

Informed Consent in Digital Counseling

In digital counseling, informed consent must be broader and more comprehensive than in traditional face to face services (ACA, 2014). Digital informed consent should include explanations of technological risks, privacy limitations, platform security procedures, emergency protocols, and client rights (Shafik, 2025). Clients must be informed about potential technical disruptions, confidentiality limitations, data protection measures, emergency response procedures, communication policies for asynchronous contact, payment systems, data storage and deletion procedures, and service termination

policies. Comprehensive informed consent ensures that clients fully understand the conditions and consequences of digital counseling before engaging in services.

Ethical Code Updates by International Professional Associations

In response to rapid digital transformation, international professional associations have updated their ethical codes to ensure safe, professional, and ethically sound counseling services. The American Counseling Association introduced a comprehensive section addressing distance counseling, technology use, social media ethics, informed consent, client verification, and record management (ACA, 2014). The American School Counselor Association developed virtual counseling competencies to guide ethical digital service delivery in educational settings (ASCA, 2022). The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy incorporated guidance on technology use, online supervision, professional accountability, and cyber security awareness into its ethical framework (BACP, 2018).

In Indonesia, although the Indonesian Guidance and Counseling Association has established a professional code of ethics, explicit regulation of digital counseling remains limited. Scholars have recommended revising the code to include a dedicated chapter on cyber counseling, covering scope of practice, digital competence standards, platform security requirements, digital informed consent, social media boundaries, online supervision mechanisms, and emergency response protocols (Ifdil et al., 2020). These recommendations underscore the urgent need to update ethical guidelines to align Indonesian counseling practice with global technological developments and international standards. In conclusion, counseling codes of ethics in the digital era must remain adaptive to technological change while firmly grounded in core professional principles such as confidentiality, competence, professional boundaries, informed consent, and client protection. Strengthening ethical guidelines for digital counseling is essential to ensure that counseling services remain relevant, credible, and trustworthy in an increasingly digital society.

Conclusion

The professional code of ethics in guidance and counseling constitutes a fundamental foundation for ensuring professionalism, protecting clients, and maintaining the integrity of the profession. This review demonstrates that ethical codes are grounded in strong philosophical foundations encompassing ontology, epistemology, and axiology, with universal principles such as autonomy, beneficence, non maleficence, justice, fidelity, and veracity. The digital era introduces complex ethical challenges that have not yet been fully accommodated within the Indonesian counseling code of ethics. Issues related to digital data confidentiality, counselors' digital competence, professional boundaries on social media, digital informed consent, and the use of artificial intelligence in counseling necessitate comprehensive updates to ethical guidelines.

International professional associations such as the American Counseling Association, the American School Counselor Association, and the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy have introduced specific regulations addressing technology based counseling practices, whereas Indonesia still requires significant strengthening of ethical regulation in this area. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that the Indonesian Guidance and Counseling Association undertake a revision of its code of ethics by adding a dedicated chapter on cyber counseling, counselors' digital competence, security standards, guidelines for digital informed consent, social media boundaries, and online supervision mechanisms. Enforcement of the code of ethics should also be strengthened through effective monitoring systems, transparent complaint procedures, and reinforcement of the Ethics Review Board.

This study has several limitations, particularly the scope of international code comparisons, which was limited to the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Therefore, perspectives from other countries remain underexplored. Future research is recommended to conduct empirical qualitative or quantitative studies on Indonesian counselors' perceptions and practices regarding ethical codes, particularly in digital service contexts. Further studies should also include broader international comparisons to obtain more diverse perspectives, examine the effectiveness of ABKIN ethical enforcement mechanisms through case studies of violations and their resolution, and investigate the ethical implications of artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies in counseling services.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Professor. Dr. H. M. Solehuddin, M.Pd., M. A. for his guidance and scholarly reinforcement regarding the core scientific foundations of Guidance and Counseling, particularly in the area of professional ethical codes.

Author Contributions Statement

Tb conceptualized the study, conducted the literature analysis, and wrote the initial draft, as well as performed data curation, substantive editing, and reference validation. Rofi contributed to the conceptualization of the study, literature analysis, peer review, and substantive editing. Alice carried out validation and substantive editing. Solehuddin provided supervision and final validation. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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