



# CULTURAL DIVERSITY AWARENESS ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF PERCEPTION AND PRACTICES ON GRADE 12 HUMSS STUDENTS

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**Abstract.** This quantitative correlational research investigates the relationship between cultural diversity awareness and social development among Grade 12 Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) students at Initao National Comprehensive High School. The study examines students' levels of awareness regarding cultural differences, their appreciation of cultural traditions, and their knowledge of cultural practices, and how these factors impact their empathy, openness, and tolerance. A total of 139 students were selected using a stratified random sampling method. Data were gathered through a validated 32-item survey

questionnaire and analyzed using mean scores and Pearson correlation. Results revealed that students demonstrated a high level of cultural awareness and social development. Furthermore, findings indicated a statistically significant positive relationship between cultural diversity awareness and social development outcomes. The study highlights the importance of incorporating cultural awareness into educational settings to promote inclusivity, empathy, and harmonious social relationships among students.

**Keywords:** *Cultural diversity awareness, social development, cultural practices, humanities, social sciences, inclusive education*

## Introduction

Cultural diversity is a crucial aspect of society that influences how individuals interact with one another. In schools, students come from diverse cultural backgrounds, bringing with them unique traditions, beliefs, and values. In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) promotes cultural diversity through the K to 12 curriculum, integrating cultural awareness into subjects such as *Araling Panlipunan*, *Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao*, and MTB-MLE. DepEd's Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program also safeguards the rights and heritage of Indigenous learners, fostering inclusivity and respect. The National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC) of Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development (GUCCHD) states that, according to Winkelman (2005), awareness of cultural differences and their impact on behavior is the beginning of intercultural effectiveness. He argued that cultural self-awareness includes recognizing one's own cultural influences upon values, beliefs, and judgments, as well as those derived from professional work culture. Understanding and appreciating these differences can help students develop respect, empathy, and social skills. However, some students may not be fully aware of cultural diversity, which can lead to misunderstandings, biases, or conflicts.

The significance of cultural awareness in educational contexts has been recognized in many educational frameworks. For instance, the Philippine Department of Education's guidelines stress the promotion of cultural sensitivity and inclusion as part of students' overall development. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1979) explains how individuals categorize themselves and others based on cultural identity, while Bennett's (1993) Intercultural Sensitivity Theory outlines how engagement with cultural differences evolves from ethnocentric to ethnorelative stages. More recent frameworks, such as Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020) and Global Competence (OECD, 2022), emphasize that cultural awareness is not only about identity but also about the ability to collaborate, empathize, and act effectively in diverse contexts. Together, these theories provide a crucial foundation for understanding the impact of cultural awareness on social development outcomes, including empathy, openness, and tolerance. Educational policies worldwide also emphasize the importance of fostering inclusivity and cultural awareness in students, thereby reinforcing the value of cultural sensitivity in both academic and social settings.

Recent studies have revealed the crucial role of cultural diversity awareness in shaping social behaviors such as empathy, openness, and tolerance. Research by Briones (2022) found that students with heightened cultural awareness show

increased tolerance and empathy toward peers from different backgrounds. Similarly, Lara et al. (2021) observed that students who engage in culturally diverse experiences tend to become more open to new cultural perspectives. However, few studies have specifically examined the influence of cultural diversity awareness on the social development of high school students, particularly in terms of empathy, openness, and tolerance. This gap in existing research highlights the need for further investigation into the relationship between cultural awareness and social development, particularly among high school students in the Philippines.

Although previous studies have highlighted the importance of cultural awareness, few have focused on high school students in the Philippines. Most studies have focused on university populations (e.g., Santos & Lee, 2024; Burgos et al., 2024), leaving a gap in understanding how younger students experience cultural diversity and its relationship to empathy, openness, and tolerance. Furthermore, the direct influence of cultural awareness on specific social outcomes such as empathy, openness, and tolerance remains underexplored. This study addresses that gap by investigating the relationship between cultural diversity awareness and social development among Grade 12 HUMSS students at Initao National Comprehensive High School.

Thus, this research aims to determine the relationship between cultural diversity awareness and social development among Grade 12 HUMSS students at Initao National Comprehensive High School. Specifically, it aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of cultural diversity awareness among learners in terms of:
  - 1.1 Awareness of cultural differences;
  - 1.2 Appreciation of cultural traditions; and
  - 1.3 Knowledge of cultural practices?
2. What is the level of social development of learners in terms of:
  - 2.1 Empathy;
  - 2.2 Openness; and
  - 2.3 Tolerance?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the level of cultural diversity awareness and the level of social development outcomes among learners?

The findings will help educators, administrators, and policymakers improve strategies for promoting inclusivity and cultural awareness in schools. By identifying the factors that shape empathy, openness, and tolerance, the study intends to provide recommendations for developing more inclusive programs and fostering harmonious school environments. Ultimately, it seeks to contribute to students' holistic growth and intercultural competence.

Bennett's Intercultural Sensitivity Theory (1993) provides a foundational framework for understanding how individuals interpret and interact across cultural differences, presenting a developmental continuum that leads to deeper cultural understanding. This theory underpins various aspects of awareness, such as recognizing cultural differences, appreciating cultural traditions, and acquiring knowledge of cultural practices. For instance, Grothaus et al. (2020) highlighted the role of school counselors in promoting inclusivity through culturally sustaining programs, while Eden et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of fostering inclusivity through cultural competence. Gregersen-Hermans (2015)

demonstrated that exposure to cultural diversity in itself does not always enhance intercultural competence—a reminder that deliberate programmatic design is often needed to nurture intercultural growth.

Transitioning from intercultural sensitivity to identity formation, Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (1979) explains how individuals adopt group norms, values, and behaviors upon identifying with particular groups. This categorization influences social development aspects such as empathy, openness, and tolerance. Kiremitci and Coskun (2020) found that a strong social identity correlates with empathy and prosocial behaviors. Özdemir et al. (2021) observed that adolescents generally become more open to diversity over time. Moreover, Jagers et al. (2019) discussed the role of social and emotional learning (SEL) in promoting tolerance and equity, especially in diverse school environments.

Various empirical studies further support these theoretical foundations. Baltes et al. (2015), for example, employed a descriptive quantitative design to investigate the social development of Grade 11 HUMSS students at the same school, finding that cultural diversity awareness is correlated with higher social competence. Complementing this, Bennett (1986) argued that cultural awareness is fundamental for effective intercultural communication, emphasizing that individuals with high cultural sensitivity adapt better and avoid misunderstandings. Similarly, Constantin et al. (2015) stressed the importance of cultural education in universities for global engagement, highlighting how understanding diverse perspectives enhances personal and professional development.

Hernandez (2020) employed a descriptive research approach to examine the demographic profiles of educators, highlighting the importance of describing educational contexts. Marvi (2023), through qualitative interviews with teachers, noted that personal narratives provided deeper insights into classroom cultural dynamics, which could not be captured quantitatively. This handbook emphasizes that building intercultural competence begins with enriching attitudes such as empathy, openness, and curiosity (Deardorff, 2009, p. 479), and underscores that intercultural training "provides opportunities to ... develop empathy and reduce prejudice," promoting effective and appropriate communication and behavior in diverse educational settings

In a related context, Habeb (2019), building on Baylan and Huntley (2003), revealed a positive correlation between students' cultural awareness and understanding of English culture in EFL settings. Villafuerte (2024) employed a descriptive-correlational design to investigate the impact of various classroom components on cultural diversity and social science learning outcomes. Zhang & Caiyun (2015) found a positive correlation between cultural awareness and engagement. This suggests that students who develop stronger cultural awareness are more likely to engage actively in classroom and social activities, which is particularly significant for Philippine high school students who are exposed to multiple cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Fatima et al. (2024), employing a survey method guided by the achievement motivation model, found that students acknowledged their cultural stereotypes and recognized the importance of diversity in urban environments. Garcia and Pantao (2021) emphasized the importance of cultural sensitivity among teachers, showing that educators who respect cultural differences manage classrooms more

effectively. Although Baltes (2015) cautioned about small sample sizes, the findings still suggest increased cultural harmony within diverse school environments.

Moreover, Aras and Akbay (2022) demonstrated that cultural awareness activities have a positive impact on students' attitudes, enhancing empathy and intercultural understanding. This finding is consistent with McCrae and Sutin (2023), who linked personality traits like openness to students' adaptability and success, thereby reinforcing the role of personal characteristics in social and academic development.

Further validating the connection between cultural awareness and social behavior, the study 'Tolerance of Diversity in Adolescents and Its Relationship with Self-Esteem and Empathy' (Lozano & Etxebarria, 2007) showed that empathy and self-esteem contribute significantly to tolerance. Students who understand and care for others' emotions tend to be more accepting, which enhances their social development. As reiterated in *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (Deardorff, 2009), cultural awareness helps eliminate biases and prejudices, fostering the ability to empathize and strengthening social cohesion in diverse communities.

In synthesis, the present study aligns with the works of Baltes et al. (2015), Bennett (1986), and Constantin et al. (2015), all of which examine how cultural awareness affects students' development and communication. While some studies focus on linguistic challenges or university contexts, the current research emphasizes high school students' social development. Similarly, Hernandez (2020) and Marvi (2023) contribute insights into demographic and teacher perspectives, while the present study prioritizes student experiences. Habeb (2019), Villafuerte (2024), and Zhang & Caiyun (2015) provide empirical evidence on the benefits of cultural awareness for academic and social outcomes. Fatima et al. (2024) and Garcia and Pantao (2021) further validate the role of stereotypes and teacher practices in shaping cultural sensitivity (user-provided references). Although Baltes (2015) cautioned about small sample sizes, the findings still suggest increased cultural harmony within diverse school environments. Moreover, Aras and Akbay (2022) demonstrated that cultural awareness activities have a positive impact on students' attitudes, enhancing empathy and intercultural understanding. This finding is consistent with McCrae and Sutin (2023), who linked personality traits like openness to students' adaptability and success, thereby reinforcing the role of personal characteristics in social and academic development. Further validating the connection between cultural awareness and social behavior, the study 'Tolerance of Diversity in Adolescents and Its Relationship with Self-Esteem and Empathy' (Lozano & Etxebarria, 2007) showed that empathy and self-esteem contribute significantly to tolerance. Students who understand and care for others' emotions tend to be more accepting, which enhances their social development. As reiterated in *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (Deardorff, 2009), cultural awareness helps eliminate biases and prejudices, fostering the ability to empathize and strengthening social cohesion in diverse communities. Overall, these interconnected studies highlight the crucial role of cultural diversity awareness in promoting empathy, tolerance, and positive social development in diverse educational settings.



## Methodology

This study employs a quantitative correlational research design, which, according to Creswell (2014), enables researchers to describe and measure the degree of relationship between two or more variables—in this case, cultural diversity awareness and social development. The independent variables include awareness of cultural differences, appreciation of cultural traditions, and knowledge of cultural practices, while the dependent variables are empathy, openness, and tolerance. The design seeks to establish whether a significant relationship exists between the two sets of variables.

The research was conducted at Initao National Comprehensive High School in Misamis Oriental, Philippines, a public secondary institution characterized by its culturally diverse student population and inclusive programs. The participants were Grade 12 students from the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) strand, selected through stratified random sampling to ensure fair representation across four sections (HUMSS A–D). From a total population of 157 students, a sample size of 139 was determined using Slovin's formula, with a 5% margin of error. Respondents were then proportionally allocated by section.

Data were collected using a researcher-made 32-item questionnaire divided into two sections: 17 items measured cultural diversity awareness (awareness of cultural differences,  $\alpha = .759$ ; awareness of cultural traditions,  $\alpha = .798$ ; knowledge of cultural practices,  $\alpha = .810$ ), while 15 items measured social development (empathy,  $\alpha = .764$ ; openness,  $\alpha = .724$ ; tolerance,  $\alpha = .703$ ). Responses were rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree). The instrument, validated by experts through the Office of Research, Development, and Extension Services (OVRDES) of Initao College, was pilot-tested and yielded an overall Cronbach's Alpha of .878, indicating good internal consistency. Data collection involved securing consent from school authorities and respondents, explaining the study's purpose, and ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation. Completed questionnaires were checked for accuracy and encoded for statistical analysis.

For data analysis, descriptive statistics, particularly the mean, were used to determine students' levels of cultural diversity awareness and social development. The average rating for each sub-variable was interpreted using a verbal interpretation scale to describe the respondents' overall perceptions. To determine the relationship between variables, the study employed the Spearman rho correlation, which measures the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two continuous variables. A positive, negative, or near-zero value would indicate the nature and strength of the relationship, with the p-value guiding statistical significance at a 0.05 level. This comprehensive approach enabled the researcher to assess whether cultural diversity awareness has a significant correlation with social development among the target participants.

## Results

This study examines the relationship between cultural diversity awareness and social development among Grade 12 HUMSS students at Initao National Comprehensive High School. It examines how learners' awareness of cultural

differences, appreciation of cultural traditions, and knowledge of cultural practices are related to their levels of empathy, openness, and tolerance. By analyzing these aspects, the study aims to understand how awareness of cultural diversity influences the social development of senior high school students.

**Problem 1: What is the level of cultural diversity awareness among learners in terms of awareness of cultural differences, appreciation of cultural traditions, and knowledge of cultural practices?**

**Table 1.**

*Respondents' Perception of their Level of Cultural Diversity Awareness among Learners in Terms of Awareness of Cultural Differences*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description
1. I am aware that cultures have different customs and traditions.	3.46	0.67	Strongly Agree
2. I recognize that people from different cultures communicate differently.	3.24	0.57	Agree
3. I understand that values and beliefs differ among cultures.	3.35	0.56	Strongly Agree
4. I value diverse cultural perspectives in discussions.	3.17	0.56	Agree
5. I value the importance of respecting cultural differences	3.51	0.66	Strongly Agree
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.35</b>	<b>0.41</b>	<b>Very High</b>

**Legend:** 1.00-1.74 = Strongly Disagree; 1.75-2.49 = Disagree; 2.50-3.24 = Agree; 3.25-4.00 = Strongly Agree

Table 1 shows the respondents' perception of their level of cultural diversity awareness, specifically regarding awareness of cultural differences. The overall mean score is 3.35 with a standard deviation of 0.41, which falls under the "Strongly Agree" category, interpreted as "Very High." The highest-rated item is "I value the importance of respecting cultural differences" (M = 3.51, SD = 0.66), followed by "I am aware that cultures have different customs and traditions" (M = 3.46, SD = 0.67). The lowest-rated, albeit still high, is "I value diverse cultural perspectives in discussions" (M = 3.17, SD = 0.56), categorized as "Agree" with a "High" interpretation.

**Table 2.**

*Respondents' Perception of Their Level of Cultural Diversity Awareness among Learners in Terms of Appreciation of Cultural Traditions*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description
1. I appreciate learning about diverse cultural traditions.	3.27	0.57	Strongly Agree
2. I believe in preserving and celebrating cultural traditions.	3.22	0.56	Agree
3. I enjoy participating in cultural activities.	3.20	0.56	Agree
4. I am open to integrating elements of other cultures into my life.	3.18	0.61	Agree
5. I am interested in sharing my own cultural traditions with others.	3.24	0.71	Agree
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.22</b>	<b>0.38</b>	<b>High</b>

**Legend:** 1.00-1.74 = *Strongly Disagree*; 1.75-2.49 = *Disagree*; 2.50-3.24 = *Agree*; 3.25-4.00 = *Strongly Agree*

Table 2 presents the respondents' perception of their cultural diversity awareness in terms of appreciation of cultural traditions. The overall mean is 3.22 with a standard deviation of 0.38, interpreted as "Agree" and categorized as "High." The highest-rated statement is "I appreciate learning about diverse cultural traditions" (M = 3.27, SD = 0.57), suggesting a strong interest among students in gaining knowledge about various cultural customs. Close behind is "I am interested in sharing my own cultural traditions with others" (M = 3.24, SD = 0.71), indicating a reciprocal openness to both learning and sharing. Other indicators—such as a belief in preserving traditions (M = 3.22), enjoyment of cultural activities (M = 3.20), and openness to cultural integration (M = 3.18)—also reflect a consistent level of high appreciation for cultural diversity. However, the latter item was rated the lowest.

**Table 3.**  
*Respondents' Perception of Their Level of Cultural Diversity Awareness among Learners in Terms of Knowledge of Cultural Practices.*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description
1. I am aware of traditional clothing in various cultures.	3.27	0.64	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
2. I am aware of different cultural music and dance forms.	3.38	0.61	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
3. I am aware of cultural festivals and celebrations.	3.35	0.60	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
4. I understand cultural customs related to food.	3.14	0.65	<i>Agree</i>
5. I am aware about different traditional arts and crafts across cultures.	3.24	0.73	<i>Agree</i>
6. I am aware of cultural practices in marriage and family.	3.24	0.70	<i>Agree</i>
7. I am aware of different cultural approaches to education.	3.26	0.59	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.55</b>	<b>0.38</b>	<b>Very High</b>

**Legend:** 1.00-1.74 = *Strongly Disagree*; 1.75-2.49 = *Disagree*; 2.50-3.24 = *Agree*; 3.25-4.00 = *Strongly Agree*

Table 3 illustrates the respondents' level of cultural diversity awareness in terms of their knowledge of cultural practices. The overall mean is 3.55 (SD = 0.38), which is interpreted as "Strongly Agree" and categorized as "Very High." The highest-rated item is "I am aware of different cultural music and dance forms" (M = 3.38, SD = 0.61), followed closely by "I am aware of cultural festivals and celebrations" (M = 3.35, SD = 0.60). These results indicate that students are most familiar with observable and celebrated expressions of culture. Conversely, the lowest-rated item is "I understand cultural customs related to food" (M = 3.14, SD = 0.65), categorized as "High." Other items, such as awareness of traditional arts and crafts (M = 3.24) and cultural practices in marriage and family (M = 3.24), received slightly lower yet still positive ratings.

## **Problem 2: What is the level of social development of learners in terms of empathy, openness, and tolerance?**

**Table 4.**



*Respondents' Perception on Their Level of Social Development of Learners in Terms of Empathy.*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description
1. I am aware of traditional storytelling methods in various cultures.	3.12	0.68	Agree
2. I value diverse cultural perspectives.	3.19	0.58	Agree
3. I am aware of the emotions of people from other cultures.	3.19	0.63	Agree
4. I empathize with individuals from different cultures.	3.08	0.62	Agree
5. I appreciate cultural challenges such as language barriers.	3.17	0.68	Agree
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.15</b>	<b>0.45</b>	<b>High</b>

**Legend:** 1.00-1.74 = Strongly Disagree; 1.75-2.49 = Disagree; 2.50-3.24 = Agree; 3.25-4.00 = Strongly Agree

Table 4 presents the respondents' perceptions of their level of empathy, an important aspect of social development in culturally diverse settings. The overall mean is 3.15 (SD = 0.45), which falls under the "Agree" description and "High" interpretation. All five indicators received similar ratings, with the highest being "I value diverse cultural perspectives" and "I am aware of the emotions of people from other cultures" (both with a mean of 3.19). This suggests that students generally recognize and appreciate the feelings and perspectives of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. The lowest-rated statement, "I empathize with individuals from different cultures" (M = 3.08), still received a "High" interpretation, suggesting that while students are empathetic, there may be some difficulty in deeply connecting or emotionally resonating with those from unfamiliar cultural contexts.

**Table 5.**

*Respondents' Perception of Their Level of Social Development of Learners in Terms of Openness.*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description
1. I enjoy learning about different cultural traditions.	3.49	0.56	Strongly Agree
2. I am comfortable interacting with diverse cultures.	3.43	0.53	Strongly Agree
3. I believe diverse cultural perspectives improve me.	3.53	0.55	Strongly Agree
4. I am open to new cultural experiences.	3.45	0.55	Strongly Agree
5. I seek opportunities to learn about other cultures.	3.48	0.57	Strongly Agree
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.48</b>	<b>0.41</b>	<b>Very High</b>

**Legend:** 1.00-1.74 = Strongly Disagree; 1.75-2.49 = Disagree; 2.50-3.24 = Agree; 3.25-4.00 = Strongly Agree

Table 5 reveals that the respondents perceive themselves to have a very high level of openness to cultural diversity, with an overall mean of 3.48 and a standard deviation of 0.41. All five indicators fall within the "Strongly Agree" range, interpreted as "Very High." The highest-rated item is "I believe diverse cultural perspectives improve me" (M = 3.53), suggesting that students view cultural differences as valuable contributors to their personal and social growth. The statement with the lowest mean is "I am comfortable interacting with diverse cultures" (M = 3.43), although it is still within the "Very High" category. This might imply that while students are generally open, some may experience slight hesitation when engaging directly with individuals from culturally different backgrounds.

**Table 6.**

*Respondents' Perception of Their Level of Social Development of Learners in Terms of Tolerance.*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description
1. I respect diverse cultural opinions, even when I disagree.	3.23	0.65	Agree
2. I listen to and consider differing viewpoints with an open mind.	3.29	0.58	Strongly Agree
3. I support cultural expression without discrimination.	3.24	0.65	Agree
4. I practice patience toward different customs and traditions.	3.20	0.65	Agree
5. I avoid negative assumptions based on cultural background.	3.25	0.45	Strongly Agree
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.43</b>	<b>0.41</b>	<b>Very High</b>

**Legend:** 1.00-1.74 = Strongly Disagree; 1.75-2.49 = Disagree; 2.50-3.24 = Agree; 3.25-4.00 = Strongly Agree

Table 6 presents the respondents' perception of their tolerance toward cultural diversity. The results indicate a very high level of tolerance, with an overall mean of 3.43 and a standard deviation of 0.41, falling under the "Strongly Agree" category. The highest-rated item is "I listen to and consider differing viewpoints with an open mind" ( $M = 3.29$ ), suggesting that learners are open to engaging with diverse perspectives. Closely following is "I avoid negative assumptions based on cultural background" ( $M = 3.25$ ), also in the "Strongly Agree" range. Three other indicators — respect for diverse opinions ( $M = 3.23$ ), support for cultural expression ( $M = 3.24$ ), and patience toward different customs and traditions ( $M = 3.20$ ) — all received "Agree" ratings, but are still interpreted as "High" in terms of tolerance.

**Problem 3. Is there a significant relationship between cultural diversity awareness and social development outcomes among learners?**

**Table 7.**

*The Significant Relationship between Cultural Diversity Awareness and Social Development Outcomes among Learners.*

Variables		$r_s$ value	df	p-value	Remarks
Awareness of Cultural Differences	Empathy	0.337	137	<0.001	Significant
	Openness	0.310	137	<0.001	Significant
	Tolerance	0.322	137	<0.001	Significant
Appreciation of Cultural Traditions	Empathy	0.430	137	<0.001	Significant
	Openness	0.494	137	<0.001	Significant
	Tolerance	0.475	137	<0.001	Significant
Knowledge of Cultural Practice	Empathy	0.469	137	<0.001	Significant
	Openness	0.412	137	<0.001	Significant
	Tolerance	0.183	137	<0.001	Significant
Overall		0.584	137	<0.001	Significant

**Note:** Results are considered statistically significant at a p-value of  $\leq 0.05$ .

The findings presented in Table 7 reveal a statistically significant relationship between cultural diversity awareness and the social development outcomes of Grade 12 HUMSS students at Initao National Comprehensive High School, as shown by Spearman's correlation test. The variable Awareness of Cultural Differences was found to have significant positive correlations with empathy ( $r_s =$

0.337,  $p < 0.001$ ), openness ( $r_s = 0.310$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and tolerance ( $r_s = 0.322$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that students who are more aware of cultural differences also tend to exhibit higher levels of these social traits. Similarly, Appreciation of cultural traditions demonstrated even stronger correlations with empathy ( $r = 0.430$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), openness ( $r = 0.494$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and tolerance ( $r = 0.475$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that valuing and respecting cultural traditions contribute significantly to positive social behaviors. Additionally, Knowledge of cultural practices was also positively associated with empathy ( $r = 0.469$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), openness ( $r = 0.412$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and tolerance ( $r = 0.183$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), although the correlation with tolerance was comparatively lower. Overall, the composite correlation between cultural diversity awareness and social development outcomes yielded a strong and significant relationship ( $r_s = 0.584$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), confirming that heightened cultural awareness is meaningfully linked with greater empathy, openness, and tolerance among learners.

## Discussion

The results in Table 1 indicate that the majority of students possess a very high level of awareness of cultural differences, particularly in recognizing the importance of respect and understanding customs and traditions across cultures. The relatively lower rating of valuing diverse perspectives in discussions may suggest a gap between cognitive awareness and behavioral application in collaborative settings. While students are generally knowledgeable about and respectful of cultural differences, they may not yet fully integrate this understanding into active, interpersonal engagement such as group discussions or decision-making processes. The findings imply that students at Initao National Comprehensive High School are well-prepared cognitively to navigate multicultural interactions. However, there is a need for instructional strategies that promote the practical application of cultural awareness—such as intercultural dialogue exercises, inclusive classroom discussions, and collaborative tasks that involve multicultural viewpoints. Strengthening these aspects will help bridge the gap between knowing and doing, fostering a learning environment where diversity is not only acknowledged but also actively engaged and appreciated. These findings align with Aichhorn and Puck (2017), which emphasizes that cultural awareness is a crucial prerequisite for effective and respectful communication in multicultural contexts. Their research suggests that awareness of cultural nuances reduces the likelihood of miscommunication and conflict, and enhances the quality of interpersonal relationships. Thus, students' strong awareness in this study reflects a positive trend toward social harmony and inclusivity, as supported by global literature on intercultural competence.

Also, the results in Table 2 show that students highly value cultural traditions and express a deep appreciation for both learning and sharing cultural practices. The strongest appreciation lies in cognitive and affective awareness, where students express interest and pride in cultural diversity. However, the comparatively lower score on integrating elements of other cultures into one's own life may indicate a cautious or selective approach to cultural blending, where appreciation does not always translate to personal adaptation. This suggests that students may prioritize respectful observation and participation over full cultural integration, possibly

influenced by strong ties to their own cultural identity or limited exposure to multicultural environments. The data suggest that students have developed a respectful and open-minded perspective toward cultural traditions, which is crucial in fostering intercultural empathy and global citizenship. Their willingness to learn about and share cultural practices can serve as a solid foundation for inclusive education and community engagement. However, to deepen intercultural competence, educators might consider introducing activities that foster experiential interaction with other cultures, such as cross-cultural exchanges, multicultural festivals, or project-based learning that involves other ethnic or linguistic groups. Encouraging students to move from appreciation to intercultural collaboration and adaptation can enhance their ability to function effectively in diverse social and professional settings. These findings are supported by Morriseau and Fowler (2023), whose concept analysis “A Concept Analysis of Cultural Appreciation in Addressing the Wholistic Health Needs of Indigenous People” defines cultural appreciation as encompassing awareness, understanding, and a willingness to learn and respect cultural practices. It stresses that cultural appreciation should go beyond superficial recognition to include genuine engagement and integration when appropriate. This closely mirrors the respondents’ strong inclination to learn about and celebrate traditions, while cautiously navigating the process of personal integration.

Additionally, the findings in Table 3 reveal that students possess a strong awareness of cultural practices, particularly in expressive domains like music, dance, and festivals—likely due to their visibility and integration into school or community events. This suggests that the curriculum or extracurricular activities may prioritize these surface-level cultural expressions, making them more accessible and memorable. On the other hand, the lower ratings for food customs, traditional crafts, and family practices indicate a gap in deeper cultural understanding. These areas, often rich with symbolic meaning and closely tied to identity and values, may not be as thoroughly addressed in students’ learning experiences. This distinction supports the notion that students are more knowledgeable about what is readily observable than about what requires critical cultural interpretation. The data suggest that while students have developed basic cultural literacy, there is a need to enhance their intercultural competence by deepening their knowledge of less visible aspects of culture. Integrating lessons on family systems, food rituals, traditional art forms, and educational philosophies from various cultures can provide a more holistic understanding of diversity. These deeper cultural insights can promote empathy, reduce stereotypes, and encourage respectful engagement in multicultural settings. Teachers can address this by incorporating project-based learning, inviting cultural bearers or guest speakers, or using multimedia materials that highlight the meaning and function of different cultural practices beyond mere celebration. The findings align with Byram and Fleming (1998), who emphasize that genuine cultural awareness extends beyond surface recognition. The study explains that acquiring knowledge of cultural practices requires understanding the underlying beliefs and behaviors that inform them. Byram and Fleming (1998) argue that when students are offered structured and reflective cultural education, they develop stronger intercultural communication skills and more empathetic worldviews. Their research highlights the importance of equipping students not just to observe cultural differences, but to understand, respect, and adapt to them. This supports the current study’s conclusion that knowledge of cultural practices is essential for cultivating a well-

rounded, culturally aware individual prepared for the challenges of an interconnected world.

Moreover, the results in Table 4 suggest that the Grade 12 HUMSS students of Initao National Comprehensive High School demonstrate a commendable level of empathy toward individuals from diverse cultures. Their consistent agreement with all indicators reflects an overall positive social disposition—they are not only aware of cultural differences but are also attempting to understand and appreciate them emotionally. However, the slightly lower score on the item about directly empathizing with people from different cultures suggests that while cognitive empathy (awareness and perspective-taking) is present, emotional empathy (feeling with others) may still be developing. This could be due to limited intercultural exposure or opportunities for meaningful interaction with people of different cultural backgrounds. These findings underscore the importance of fostering emotional engagement and cultural sensitivity in students. Schools can provide opportunities such as cultural immersion activities, empathy-building workshops, and collaborative projects that bring students into closer contact with diverse groups. Doing so can help move students from a place of recognition and appreciation to one of emotional connection and solidarity, which is a more profound form of empathy. Empathy is foundational to peaceful coexistence, conflict resolution, and inclusive education. Thus, developing this trait not only benefits personal growth but also contributes to a more respectful and compassionate school culture. This interpretation aligns with the study by Gokalp and Inel (2022), “An Analysis of Secondary School Students’ Empathy Skills in Terms of Student- and School-Related Variables,” which emphasized that empathy is influenced by student involvement in social and cultural activities, gender, and the school environment. Notably, students who frequently engage in intercultural and extracurricular activities tend to exhibit higher empathy levels. Moreover, they found that empathy enhances peer relationships, reduces prejudice, and fosters social harmony—all of which are crucial in multicultural educational settings. These insights reinforce the current study’s findings, underscoring that knowledge of cultural practices contributes not only to intellectual understanding but also to emotional growth and social connectedness.

Notably, the results in Table 5 indicate that Grade 12 HUMSS students from Initao National Comprehensive High School demonstrate a strong willingness to explore, understand, and embrace cultural diversity. Their high ratings across all indicators demonstrate that openness is not only a passive attitude but an active interest in engaging with other cultures, seeking knowledge, and enriching their worldview. The slightly lower comfort level in direct interaction with diverse groups may indicate limited real-world intercultural exposure, which, although not impeding their openness, could be addressed through more inclusive and experiential learning opportunities. Nonetheless, their mindset is clearly geared toward inclusivity, acceptance, and growth, hallmarks of well-developed social maturity. This high level of openness is crucial for students living in an increasingly globalized society. It positions them to thrive in multicultural environments, whether in higher education, workplaces, or community settings. Their mindset contributes to reduced cultural bias, increased adaptability, and the ability to build meaningful connections across cultural lines. Schools and educators can further nurture this trait by creating more interactive and immersive cultural experiences—such as international partnerships, cultural exchange programs, and intercultural dialogue sessions. These initiatives not only reinforce students’ openness but also



enhance their intercultural competence and leadership skills. These findings align with Elom et al. (2024), who reported that students with high levels of openness tend to be more adaptable, flexible, and prepared for real-world challenges. Similarly, HUMSS students in the present study demonstrated readiness to engage with diverse situations and people, suggesting a strong foundation for their future academic and social success. Additionally, Aldrup et al. (2022) found that empathy and openness are mutually reinforcing traits that enhance student relationships and social development. In the present study, the very high level of openness complements the students' high empathy (Table 4), indicating that they are not only intellectually open but also emotionally receptive and socially equipped to engage effectively in multicultural settings.

Furthermore, the findings in Table 6 indicate that HUMSS Grade 12 students at Initao National Comprehensive High School exhibit a socially mature and respectful attitude toward cultural differences. Their willingness to listen with an open mind and refrain from cultural stereotyping reflects emotional intelligence and intercultural sensitivity. The slightly lower means in some items may suggest the need for further experiential learning to deepen their patience and appreciation for customs that may be unfamiliar or vastly different from their own. Nonetheless, the consistency of high to very high responses across all indicators suggests that tolerance is a well-developed trait among these learners, which contributes significantly to their holistic social development. Tolerance plays a critical role in creating inclusive, respectful, and peaceful environments — in schools and beyond. The students' high levels of tolerance indicate they are well-prepared to navigate and contribute positively to multicultural settings. As future professionals and community members, their ability to suspend judgment and approach differences with understanding and patience positions them as agents of harmony and bridge-builders across cultural divides. Educational institutions can sustain and further develop this quality by embedding multicultural education, inclusive dialogues, and intercultural exchange programs into the curriculum. Encouraging discussions on global issues and diversity-related challenges can further enhance their ability to respond to real-world intercultural dynamics. This conclusion aligns with Septian et al. (2023), who found that exposure to diversity and inclusive teaching significantly contributes to students' tolerance. This reinforces the present findings that educational context and cultural exposure positively shape learners' attitudes. Another relevant study, Lozano and Etxebarria (2007), emphasizes the connection between tolerance, empathy, and self-esteem. Since earlier tables (especially Table 4) reveal high empathy among the same group of students, this supports the idea that interrelated social-emotional competencies—such as empathy and self-respect—enhance tolerance, enabling students to build meaningful relationships with people from diverse backgrounds.

Ultimately, the results in Table 7 suggest that students who are more aware of cultural differences and appreciate cultural traditions tend to be more empathetic, open-minded, and tolerant in their interactions with others. The exceptionally high correlations under “Appreciation of Cultural Traditions” suggest that when students move beyond awareness and develop a personal value for diverse traditions, their social development is further enhanced. Interestingly, among the individual outcomes, openness had the strongest correlation ( $r = 0.494$ ) with appreciation of traditions, showing that cultural immersion and respect for practices different from one's own encourage cognitive flexibility and inclusivity. Meanwhile, empathy and tolerance were also positively associated, supporting

the idea that intercultural understanding builds stronger emotional and interpersonal capacities. These findings underscore the vital role of cultural diversity awareness in cultivating socially competent students. As learners become more exposed to and appreciative of multicultural contexts, they develop the interpersonal traits necessary for harmonious coexistence, global citizenship, and respectful engagement. Educational interventions that promote cultural exchange, storytelling from diverse cultures, heritage appreciation days, or inclusive classroom discussions can significantly influence students' ability to navigate complex social environments. Schools, therefore, should integrate cultural education across subjects, not only as a moral imperative but as a developmental tool for preparing students for life in an interconnected, pluralistic world. This study's findings resonate with Pandey (2023), who reported that exposure to diverse cultures in secondary schools enhances students' tolerance and understanding. Similarly, Fatima et al. (2024) emphasized that greater cultural awareness nurtures empathy and openness, reinforcing the link observed in the present research. The study is further supported by Tabanao (2024), who asserts that cultural awareness enhances students' adaptability and academic interactions, and by Magsanay et al. (2024), who find that intercultural sensitivity significantly shapes social competencies, particularly empathy and tolerance. The present study builds on this by highlighting how the richer diversity and dynamic interactions in Initao National Comprehensive High School further strengthen the development of intercultural competence, suggesting that context and exposure play crucial roles.

To conclude this study, the aim is to determine the level of cultural diversity awareness among learners in terms of their awareness of cultural differences, appreciation of cultural traditions, and knowledge of cultural practices. The students demonstrate a high level of cultural diversity awareness, as evidenced by their strong understanding of cultural differences, appreciation for traditions, and knowledge of various cultural practices. Also, the students show a strong level of social development, particularly in terms of empathy, openness, and tolerance. The study confirms a significant relationship between cultural diversity awareness and social development, pointing out that students who are more culturally aware are also more socially developed. The findings revealed that the respondents' overall perception of cultural diversity awareness was high. These results suggest that students are both informed and respectful of cultural diversity, which is a key factor in promoting inclusive and harmonious social interactions. The findings stated that students are capable of putting themselves in other people's shoes and are willing to accept new ideas and experiences, and show respect towards different views and beliefs. The learners also demonstrate an admirable level of positive behavior, particularly in terms of empathy, openness, and tolerance. The research additionally identified a strong correlation between respondents' awareness of cultural diversity and their social development levels. This suggests that students with better awareness of cultural differences, respect for cultural traditions, and understanding of cultural practices tend to exhibit higher empathy, openness, and tolerance.

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed. Initao College should continue to foster a culturally inclusive and participatory learning environment. The Teacher Education Program is encouraged to offer courses on multicultural education and global citizenship to prepare future educators. Teachers should adopt varied teaching strategies and integrate

multicultural content to support diverse learners. Students are urged to reflect on personal biases and actively explore different cultures through reading, discussion, and participation in cultural events. Lastly, future researchers are recommended to involve a broader range of participants and explore demographic differences, such as gender, ethnicity, and religion, to gain deeper insights.

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