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## WHAT DRIVES CULTURAL AWARENESS? INVESTIGATING ELEMENTARY STUDENTS' BELIEFS AND PERCEPTIONS ON LOMBOK ISLAND

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## ABSTRACT

*This study aims to examine the factors that influence cultural awareness among elementary school students on Lombok Island, particularly focusing on the roles of cultural beliefs and perceptions. Additionally, this research seeks to understand how these factors interact and whether socio-economic status, ethnicity, and religion moderate their effects on cultural awareness. The research employs an explanatory quantitative design, utilizing a structured questionnaire to measure students, cultural beliefs, perceptions, and awareness. A total of 193 elementary school students from diverse socio-economic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds participated. Data were analyzed using multiple regression, mediation, and moderation analyses to assess the relationships between cultural beliefs, perceptions, and awareness. The findings indicate that cultural beliefs and perceptions significantly impact cultural awareness. Mediation analysis reveals that cultural perceptions strongly mediate the relationship between cultural beliefs and cultural awareness, highlighting the importance of students' interpretations of cultural norms and values. Additionally, moderation analysis shows that ethnicity significantly moderates the relationship between cultural beliefs and cultural awareness, while socio-economic status and religion do not have significant moderating effects. These results suggest that fostering cultural awareness among elementary school students requires a deeper understanding of how cultural beliefs and perceptions interact. Implementing culturally responsive pedagogy—such as ethnic storytelling, multicultural activities, and reflective discussions—can effectively enhance students' cultural awareness. Future research should explore additional contextual and environmental factors that influence the development of cultural awareness.*

**KEYWORDS:** Cultural Awareness, Cultural Belief, Cultural Perceptions, Elementary Student, Intercultural Understanding.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural awareness has become a vital dimension of contemporary education in an increasingly interconnected and globalised world (Dilekli and Tezci, 2020; B. Wang et al., 2023). For education systems to adequately prepare learners for the challenges of the twenty-first century, it is essential that students not only develop an understanding of their own cultural heritage but also cultivate a respectful appreciation of the cultures of others. In Indonesia, a country distinguished by its exceptional ethnic diversity and cultural richness, fostering cultural awareness among young learners is particularly important for sustaining social harmony, strengthening mutual respect, and promoting inclusive communities (Trivyadakis, 2023). On Lombok Island, situated in the West Nusa Tenggara Province, the interaction between the indigenous Sasak culture and other Indonesian as well as international influences creates a distinctive context in which to examine the development of cultural awareness at the primary school level. This context also provides an opportunity to explore how cultural awareness may contribute to broader goals in education for sustainability.

The development of cultural awareness in childhood has received growing scholarly attention because of its potential to advance social sustainability and intercultural competence. Awareness of cultural diversity at an early age is essential for cultivating empathy, minimising prejudice, and fostering constructive intergroup relationships (Kang et al., 2023; Pan et al., 2023). Yet, the process of developing such awareness does not occur automatically. It is influenced by a range of factors including societal values, educational practices, and personal experiences. In the context of Lombok, pupils' awareness of culture is often shaped by their beliefs regarding their own identity and by their perceptions of other cultural groups (Ma, 2019). These beliefs and perceptions are mediated by interactions with family, community, teachers, and the media. However, little is known about how these dynamics operate in Lombok's primary education system, particularly in rural areas where cultural traditions remain strong while exposure to broader cultural diversity is relatively limited.

Previous studies on cultural awareness in Indonesia have largely concentrated on secondary or higher education students (Bratož and Sila, 2022; Morán et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021). Consequently, a substantial gap remains in the literature with regard to how younger learners in primary schools engage with and internalise concepts of cultural

diversity. Furthermore, much of the existing research has been conducted in large urban centres, which has led to an underrepresentation of rural and semi-rural regions such as Lombok (Anar et al., 2020). This imbalance has limited scholarly understanding of how cultural awareness is cultivated among children who may have less exposure to global cultural flows but whose experiences are deeply informed by local traditions. In the case of Lombok, there is a particular need to investigate how cultural awareness is shaped by traditional practices, socio-economic conditions, and family influences. Such an investigation is crucial not only for filling gaps in the literature but also for advancing knowledge of how cultural awareness contributes to the goals of sustainable education.

The present study offers a novel contribution by examining the beliefs and perceptions of primary school pupils in Lombok as factors that drive cultural awareness (Fotakopoulou et al., 2020). By analysing the interaction between these beliefs and perceptions, the study provides new insights into the ways in which cultural awareness is developed among young learners (Michalakis and Caridakis, 2022; Phipps, 2022). In situating cultural awareness within the broader framework of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), the research underscores the significance of cultural understanding as a key component of sustainability in teacher education. Pupils who are encouraged to develop cultural awareness are more likely to become socially responsible and environmentally conscious citizens, thereby supporting the long-term sustainability of their communities.

The principal objective of this study is to explore the factors that influence cultural awareness among primary school pupils on Lombok Island. Specifically, the study investigates how pupils' beliefs and perceptions about culture interact to shape their awareness of cultural diversity, while also considering demographic variables such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, and religion. By addressing these gaps, the research seeks to inform the design of educational strategies that integrate cultural awareness into sustainability-oriented curricula. In this way, the study aims to contribute both to the academic discourse on cultural awareness in Indonesia and to the practical advancement of teacher education for sustainability.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. Cultural Belief

Cultural belief refers to the collective values, norms, and practices within a community that shape

individuals' perceptions and behaviours. For primary school pupils, such beliefs are often transmitted through family traditions, religious teachings, and social expectations (Dong and Kang, 2022; C. Wang et al., 2021). Beliefs concerning the importance of education, gender roles, or cooperation, for example, influence the ways in which children engage with their learning environment. The assessment of cultural beliefs commonly involves surveys or interviews that explore attitudes towards specific practices and the extent to which families adhere to shared cultural values.

Cultural beliefs exert a profound influence on pupils' attitudes towards learning and academic achievement (Bertrams, 2021). A strong belief in perseverance and the value of education can enhance motivation and resilience in facing academic challenges, whereas beliefs that minimise the significance of formal schooling may hinder student engagement. Instruments for measuring these beliefs typically include Likert-scale questionnaires and ethnographic approaches that examine familial and community influences. The impact of cultural beliefs is particularly significant in the formative years of cognitive and social development (Dilekli and Tezci, 2020). Teachers and educational practitioners need to recognise these beliefs and incorporate them into their pedagogical approaches to foster culturally responsive classrooms. By aligning learning with pupils' cultural backgrounds, educators can promote inclusivity and enhance educational outcomes.

## 2.2. Cultural Perception

Cultural perception refers to the ways in which individuals interpret and make sense of cultural symbols, norms, and behaviours within their environment (Rayan, 2022; Stephens and Eaton, 2020). Among primary school pupils, cultural perception is shaped by their immediate surroundings, including family, peers, teachers, and media. Understanding pupils' perceptions is essential because these influence how they respond to cultural diversity. Indicators of cultural perception often include the ability to identify, describe, and reflect upon cultural practices and symbols, assessed through interviews or classroom observations.

In educational settings, cultural perception shapes pupils' interactions with peers, teachers, and learning materials (Zhang et al., 2020). For instance, perceptions of fairness may be informed by cultural norms concerning authority and equity (Ahmad et al., 2024; Boyd Williams et al., 2022). Similarly, students' willingness to engage with multicultural

content depends on how relevant they perceive it to be to their own lives. Cultural perception scales and thematic analysis of student reflections are among the methods used to examine these dynamics.

For young learners, cultivating open and inclusive cultural perceptions is critical for building empathy and social cohesion (Gupta et al., 2023). Teachers can support this process by incorporating diverse cultural perspectives into lessons and encouraging pupils to share their own cultural experiences. Such practices expand students' horizons and foster respect for cultural diversity.

## 2.3. Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness is the ability to recognise and understand both one's own cultural framework and that of others (Morán et al., 2021; Phipps, 2022). In primary education, cultural awareness allows students to appreciate differences and similarities among people, thereby contributing to a respectful and inclusive learning environment (Kalkbrenner et al., 2022). Measurement tools may include self-assessments, peer reviews, and observational checklists that evaluate pupils' ability to acknowledge and value cultural diversity.

The development of cultural awareness in childhood plays a pivotal role in shaping both social interaction and academic experience (B. Wang et al., 2023). When students recognise cultural differences, they are more likely to demonstrate cooperation, empathy, and open-mindedness. Educational activities such as role play, cultural exchanges, and reflective discussion are effective strategies for developing cultural awareness in classroom settings (Bahtiyar Karadeniz, 2020; Ma, 2019).

Cultural awareness also serves as a foundation for global citizenship and intercultural competence (Bratož and Sila, 2022). Embedding cultural awareness in the curriculum prepares pupils not only for academic success but also for meaningful participation in a diverse society. This is closely aligned with the goals of holistic and sustainable education, which aim to nurture cognitive, social, and emotional skills.

## 2.4. Conjecture of the Study

This study posits that the interaction between cultural beliefs and cultural perceptions plays a decisive role in fostering cultural awareness among primary school pupils. Cultural beliefs provide the foundational values and norms inherited from families and communities, while cultural perceptions shape the ways in which children interpret and engage with cultural diversity. The dynamic

interplay between these constructs creates a framework through which pupils develop nuanced awareness of cultural difference. It is anticipated that stronger and more positive cultural beliefs and perceptions are associated with higher levels of cultural awareness and willingness to engage with diverse practices.

Demographic variables, including socio-economic status, ethnicity, and religion, are also hypothesised to mediate this relationship. Pupils from different socio-economic backgrounds may encounter varying degrees of cultural exposure, which in turn influences their beliefs and perceptions. For example, children from urban or more affluent families are likely to have greater opportunities for multicultural interaction. Similarly, ethnic and religious affiliations may shape distinct cultural narratives that inform pupils' worldviews. These demographic variables are therefore expected to contribute to broader patterns of cultural awareness within the student population.

Finally, this study assumes that cultural awareness is not solely the product of individual beliefs and perceptions but is also a reflection of the wider socio-cultural environment. Schools, communities, and families provide crucial ecosystems for cultural learning.

Through peer interactions and culturally inclusive curricula, students are expected to acquire a deeper and more holistic understanding of cultural diversity. By examining these interrelationships, this research seeks to explain how pupils in Lombok cultivate cultural awareness and to generate insights that may inform culturally responsive and sustainability-oriented educational practices.

**3. METHODS**

**3.1. Research Design**

This study employed a quantitative explanatory research design, with a structured questionnaire

serving as the primary instrument for data collection (Creswell, 2014). This approach enabled the systematic assessment of key variables and supported a comprehensive statistical analysis to address the research objectives. The main focus was to examine the factors influencing cultural awareness among primary school students, particularly the interaction between cultural beliefs and cultural perceptions. Multivariate analyses were applied to test the relationships between variables, including multiple regression analysis to identify direct effects, mediation analysis to examine the role of cultural perception as a mediator, and moderation analysis to determine whether demographic factors, such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, and religion strengthened or weakened the relationships between constructs.

**3.2. Participant**

The study involved 193 primary school students on Lombok Island, Indonesia, who participated in an online mathematics learning programme between August and December 2023.

Participants were selected using a convenience sampling technique, while ensuring diversity in socio-economic status, ethnicity, and religion to obtain a representative dataset (Krishnaswamy et al., 2012). This strategy allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the varied backgrounds that could influence students' cultural awareness.

**3.3. Measurement**

**Student Cultural Belief**

Student cultural belief was measured using specific items from the Cultural Belief and Values questionnaire by Ngueutsa et al. (2023). This questionnaire originally consisted of the following. Detailed information about the instrument and the survey wording is provided in Table 1.

*Table 1: Cultural Belief and Values Questionnaire.*

No	Dimensions	Items	Example item wording
1	Cultural beliefs and values related to the protection and celebration of life	1-8	Participating in public rites of purification of one's village.
2	Cultural beliefs and values related to identification to the group	9-11	Improving one's level of fluency in one's mother tongue.

**Student Cultural Perception**

Student cultural perception was assessed using selected items from the Cultural Perception

questionnaire developed by Abdollah et al. (2016). The questionnaire comprises seven main dimensions 29 items.

The instrument demonstrated strong internal

reliability Cronbach's alpha of  $\alpha > .78$ . Table 2 provides detailed descriptions of the instrument and survey items.

**Table 2: Cultural Perception Questionnaire.**

No	Dimensions	Items	Example item wording
1	Social Harmony	1-3	Care for common good.
2	Oneself values	4-8	I would solve a problem by myself.
3	Humane oriented	9-13	Environment problems concerned
4	Ethnic Ancestry	14-20	Portraying a strong community identity.
5	Religiosity	21-23	Religion influence on actions and behaviours.
6	Environmental	24-27	Association with members of my ethnic group.
7	Group collectivism	28-29	Sacrifice self-benefits for the interests of others.

### Student Cultural Awareness

Student cultural awareness was assessed using selected items from the Cultural Awareness questionnaire developed by Rew *et al.* (2003). The

questionnaire comprises four main dimensions and 32 items. Table 3 presents detailed descriptions of the instrument and survey items.

**Table 3: Cultural Perception Questionnaire.**

No	Dimensions	Items	Example item wording
1	General educational experiences	1-4	The instructors at this school adequately address multicultural issues.
2	Awareness of attitudes	5-12	I think my beliefs and attitudes are influenced by my culture.
3	Classroom and clinical instruction	13-28	During group discussions or exercises, I have noticed the teacher make efforts to ensure no student is excluded
4	Research issues	29-32	The students at this school have completed task studies that considered cultural differences.

The data analysis commenced with a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to assess the validity and reliability of the instruments, administered to a sample of 193 elementary school students. Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations, with acceptable thresholds set below 0.85. Composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were also examined to confirm reliability and convergent validity, with thresholds of  $CR \geq 0.70$  and  $AVE \geq 0.50$  (Hair *et al.*, 2019). For the Cultural Beliefs instrument, the HTMT, CR, and AVE values were found to be 0.65, 0.75, and 0.63, respectively. The Cultural Perception instrument demonstrated HTMT, CR, and AVE values of 0.72, 0.82, and 0.68. Lastly, the Cultural Awareness instrument reported HTMT, CR, and AVE values of 0.46, 0.88, and 0.71. Collectively, these results established that all three instruments met the criteria for validity and reliability, confirming their appropriateness for data analysis in this study.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were calculated to provide an overview of the data, including means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis. These metrics helped assess the data's suitability for further

statistical testing.

Normality tests were then performed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov or Shapiro-Wilk test, supported by skewness and kurtosis evaluations. The results confirmed that the data met the normal distribution assumptions, allowing for parametric tests. Hypothesis testing was done using multiple statistical methods to address the research objectives. Multiple regression analysis determined the direct relationships between the independent variables (cultural beliefs, cultural perceptions, and demographic factors) and the dependent variable (cultural awareness).

Mediation analysis, conducted using the bootstrapping method, examined whether cultural perceptions mediated the relationship between cultural beliefs and cultural awareness. The significance of the indirect effects was assessed through bias-corrected confidence intervals. Moderation analysis was also performed to investigate the conditional effects of demographic factors (such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, and religion) on the relationships between cultural beliefs, perceptions, and awareness. Interaction terms were created, and their significance was tested to understand whether these demographic factors amplified or attenuated the relationships. This

comprehensive analytical process provided detailed insights into the interconnections between cultural and demographic factors influencing elementary students' cultural awareness.

**4. RESULTS**

**4.1. Descriptive Analysis of Respondents**

This study involved 193 primary school students from diverse socio-economic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds on Lombok Island. The sample was selected to capture a wide range of perspectives and

experiences, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing students' cultural awareness.

Table 4 presents the demographic distribution of respondents, including socio-economic status, ethnicity, and religion. The sample was dominated by students from low-income households (48.7 per cent), those of Sasak ethnicity (38.9 per cent), and Muslim respondents (53.4 per cent). This distribution reflects the diversity of the student population in the research area.

*Table 4: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents.*

Aspect	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Socio-Economic Status		
Low income	94	48.7
Middle income	63	32.6
High income	36	18.7
Ethnicity		
Sasak	75	38.9
Samawa	51	26.4
Bojo	39	20.2
Javanese	28	14.5
Religion		
Islam	103	53.4
Hindu	82	42.5
Other	8	4.1

In addition to demographic characteristics, descriptive analysis was conducted on the primary research variables: Cultural Beliefs (CB), Cultural Perceptions (CP), and Cultural Awareness (CA), alongside quantitative demographic variables such

as income, ethnicity, and religion. Table 3 summarises descriptive statistics, including minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation values.

*Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables.*

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Cultural Beliefs	193	42	80	61.74	7.299
Cultural Perceptions	193	36	60	49.62	4.719
Cultural Awareness	193	29	53	43.99	4.877
Income	193	1	3	1.70	0.766
Ethnicity	193	1	4	2.10	1.080
Religion	193	1	3	1.51	0.578

The mean scores for CB, CP, and CA indicate moderate-to-low variation. CB and ethnicity show wider data dispersion, reflecting notable differences across respondents, whereas CP, CA, and religion are more clustered around their respective mean values. These findings suggest that cultural, socio-economic, ethnic, and religious factors may significantly contribute to students' cultural awareness and merit further statistical testing.

**4.2. Classical Assumption Test**

Classical assumption tests were conducted to ensure the appropriateness of the dataset for regression modelling.

The normality test, performed using both the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk statistics, indicated that the variables Cultural Beliefs (CB), Cultural Perceptions (CP), and Cultural Awareness (CA) were not perfectly normally distributed ( $p = 0.000$  for all).

Nevertheless, given the sufficiently large sample size ( $N = 193$ ), the data were considered suitable for

parametric analysis. These results are presented in Table 4, Normality Test Results (Kolmogorov-

Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk).

**Table 4: Normality Test Results (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk).**

Variable	N	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Statistic	Sig.	Shapiro-Wilk Statistic	Sig.
CB	193	0,148	0,000	0,875	0,000
CP	193	0,123	0,000	0,875	0,000
CA	193	0,140	0,000	0,877	0,000

The linearity test using ANOVA confirmed statistically significant linear relationships between the independent and dependent variables ( $p < 0.05$ ). Although deviations from linearity were also

significant, the overall relationships remained valid for regression analysis. The detailed outcomes are shown in Table 5, Linearity Test Results (ANOVA).

**Table 5: Linearity Test Results (ANOVA).**

Variable Relationship	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
CP_M * CB_X	Linearity	24,494.446	1	24,494.446	276.579	0.000
	Deviation from Linearity	4,852.285	21	231.061	2.609	0.000
	Within Groups	15,055.601	170	88.562	-	-
CA_Y * CP_M	Linearity	42,939.301	1	42,939.301	1,578.783	0.000
	Deviation from Linearity	2,871.477	43	66.779	2.455	0.000
	Within Groups	4,025.264	148	27.198	-	-
CA_Y * CB_X	Linearity	24,451.619	1	24,451.619	221.278	0.000
	Deviation from Linearity	6,599.080	21	314.242	2.844	0.000
	Within Groups	18,785.342	170	110.502	-	-

The linearity test, conducted through ANOVA, examined the relationships among the study variables to determine whether they could be represented in a linear form. The results are presented in Table 5, Linearity Test Results (ANOVA).

The analysis indicated that the relationship between Cultural Beliefs (CB) and the mediator, Cultural Perceptions (CP), was statistically significant ( $F = 276.579$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). However, the deviation from linearity was also significant ( $F = 2.609$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that while the overall relationship is linear, some non-linear patterns exist within the data. Similarly, the association between Cultural Perceptions (CP) and the dependent variable, Cultural Awareness (CA), was highly significant ( $F = 1,578.783$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), with the deviation from linearity again reaching significance ( $F = 2.455$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The direct relationship between Cultural Beliefs (CB) and Cultural Awareness (CA) followed a comparable pattern, with a significant linear effect ( $F = 221.278$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) alongside a significant deviation from linearity ( $F = 2.844$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Taken together, these results confirm that linear relationships exist among the variables under study, despite the presence of some deviations from linearity. This finding justifies the application of

regression analysis, as the significant linear components outweigh the effects of non-linear variation in the dataset.

The multicollinearity test was then conducted using tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values. As presented in Table 6, tolerance values exceeded the recommended minimum of 0.10 and VIF values remained far below the threshold of 10. These results demonstrate that no multicollinearity was present among the predictor variables.

**Table 6: Multicollinearity Test Results.**

Predictor Variable	Tolerance	VIF
CB_X	0.448	2.230
CP_M	0.448	2.230

The multicollinearity test indicated that both predictor variables, Cultural Beliefs (CB\_X) and Cultural Perceptions (CP\_M), had tolerance values above the minimum threshold of 0.10 and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values below the critical cut-off of 10. These results demonstrate the absence of serious multicollinearity, confirming that the predictors are statistically appropriate for inclusion in the regression model.

Finally, the Glejser test was employed to assess heteroscedasticity. The results demonstrated that no independent variables had a statistically significant

effect on the absolute residuals ( $p > 0.05$ ). This confirms that the error terms were homoscedastic, thereby meeting the regression assumption of constant variance. The findings are summarised in Table 7, Heteroscedasticity Test Results (Glejser Test).

**Table 7: Heteroscedasticity Test Results (Glejser Test).**

Model	Variable	Standardised Beta	t	Sig.
1	CB_X	0.136	1.276	0.203
	CP_M	-0.268	-2.517	0.013

Taken together, the outcomes of these diagnostic tests demonstrate that the dataset satisfies the fundamental assumptions required for regression analysis. This strengthens the robustness and

statistical validity of the path regression models applied in this study.

### 4.3. Hypothetical Test

**Multiple Regression** The first hypothesis test was conducted using Multiple Regression Analysis. This analysis aims to determine the extent to which independent variables, such as Cultural Awareness, Cultural Beliefs, and Cultural Perceptions, collectively influence the dependent variable. With this approach, the researchers can identify the contribution of each independent variable to changes in the dependent variable, as well as assess the strength and direction of these relationships. The results of the multiple regression analysis are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8: Multiple Regression Analysis.**

a) Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	825.338	2	412.669	20.961	.000b
Residual	3740.641	190	19.688		
Total	4565.979	193			

R Square = .181  
 Adjusted R Square = .172  
 a. Dependent Variable: Cultural Awareness  
 b. Predictors: (Constant), Cultural Perceptions, Cultural Beliefs  
 a) Cultural Perceptions, Cultural Beliefs

Based on the results of the regression analysis, the ANOVA test indicates that the regression model involving the predictor variables Cultural Beliefs and Cultural Perceptions significantly affects the dependent variable Cultural Awareness ( $F = 20.961$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The R Square value of 0.181 suggests that the two predictor variables collectively explain 18.1% of the variance in cultural awareness, while factors outside the model explain the remaining 81.9%. The Adjusted R Square value of 0.172 indicates the model's stability, even with adjustments for the number of variables and sample size. These results suggest that cultural beliefs and perceptions make a significant contribution to shaping cultural awareness.

**Mediation and Moderation Analysis** Although the regression analysis demonstrates a significant influence of Cultural Beliefs and Cultural Perceptions on Cultural Awareness, the relatively low R Square value (18.1%) indicates that other factors also contribute to this outcome. To gain a deeper understanding of these dynamics, mediation and moderation analyses were conducted. Mediation analysis aimed to examine whether one of the independent variables, Cultural Beliefs or Cultural Perceptions, acts as a mediator that strengthens its impact on Cultural Awareness. Table 9 reports the mediation test results for Cultural Perception as a mediator between Cultural Belief and Cultural Awareness.

**Table 9: Mediation Test for Cultural Perception.**

Model	Outcome Cultural Perception		t	p
	Coeff	Se		
Content	38.9092	2.8015	13.8888	.0000
Cultural Belief	.1735	.0451	3.8504	.0002
Model	Outcome Cultural Awareness		t	p
	Coeff	Se		
Content	19.5117	3.8667	5.0461	.0000
Cultural Belief	.0908	.0455	1.9932	.0477
Cultural Perception	.3803	.0704	5.3993	.0000

The results show that Cultural Belief significantly predicts Cultural Perception (Coeff = 0.1735,  $p =$

0.0002), and Cultural Perception in turn strongly predicts Cultural Awareness (Coeff = 0.3803, p = 0.0000). The direct effect of Cultural Belief on Cultural Awareness remains significant (Coeff = 0.0908, p = 0.0477), but its magnitude decreases when

Cultural Perception is included, suggesting a partial mediation effect. The following table 10 reports the mediation test for Cultural Belief as a mediator between Cultural Perception and Cultural Awareness.

**Table 10: Mediation Test for Cultural Belief.**

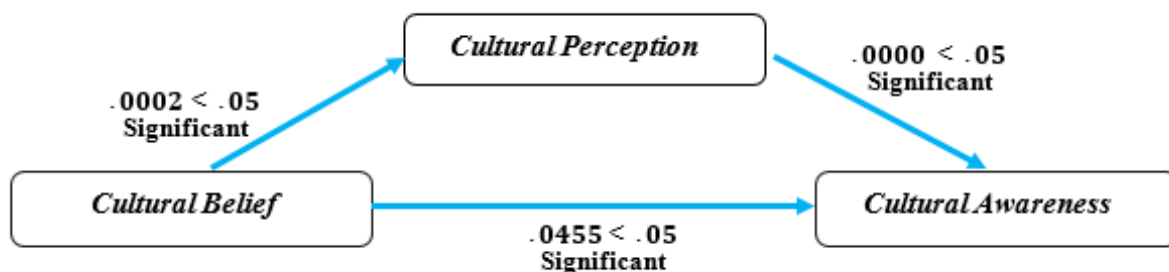
Outcome Cultural Perception				
Model	Coeff	Se	t	p
Content	41.1378	5.3736	7.6555	.0000
Cultural Perception	.4151	.1078	3.8504	.0002
Outcome Cultural Awareness				
Model	Coeff	Se	t	p
Content	19.5117	3.8667	5.0461	.0000
Cultural Perception	.3803	.0704	5.3993	.0000
Cultural Belief	.0908	.0455	1.9932	.0477

The analysis indicates that Cultural Belief also has a direct influence on both Cultural Perception and Cultural Awareness. However, its mediating role is weaker compared with that of Cultural Perception. This highlights the critical role of perceptions in bridging the effect of beliefs on awareness, positioning Cultural Perception as the stronger mediator in the overall model.

Conversely, while Cultural Belief demonstrates a significant direct association with both Cultural Perception and Cultural Awareness, its mediating

role is comparatively weaker. This finding reinforces the conclusion that Cultural Perception functions as a more effective mediator, serving as the primary mechanism through which Cultural Belief shapes students' awareness of cultural diversity. In other words, perceptions operate as a lens that contextualises beliefs, transforming them into meaningful awareness. Figure 1 illustrates the mediation interaction among the three variables.

**4.4. Visualization of Mediation Test**



**Figure 1: Mediation Interaction between Cultural Belief, Cultural Perception, and Cultural Awareness.**

After conducting the mediation analysis, a moderation analysis was performed to examine how certain demographic and contextual factors, specifically income, ethnicity, and religion, may influence the strength or direction of the relationships between the predictor variables (Cultural Beliefs and Cultural Perceptions) and the dependent variable (Cultural Awareness). The aim of this analysis is to determine whether the effects of Cultural Beliefs and Cultural Perceptions on Cultural Awareness vary across different levels of these moderating variables. By doing so, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of the contextual conditions that either enhance or diminish

the influence of cultural perceptions and beliefs, thereby offering deeper insights into the development of cultural awareness. Table 11 presents the moderation test results examining the interaction between Cultural Belief, Cultural Perception, and the moderating factor.

**Table 11: Moderation Test.**

Model	Coeff	Se	t	p
Content	16.6803	25.9033	.6439	.5204
Cultural Belief	.4896	.4129	1.1859	.2372
Cultural Perception	.6006	.5212	1.1522	.2507
Int_1	-.0085	.0083	-1.0185	.0308

The results in Table 10 show that the interaction term (Int\_1) has a negative and significant coefficient (Coeff = -0.0085,  $p = 0.0308$ ), suggesting that Cultural Perception significantly moderates the relationship between Cultural Belief and Cultural Awareness. Table 12 reports the moderation test results for demographic variables, focusing on the effects of ethnicity, income, and religion.

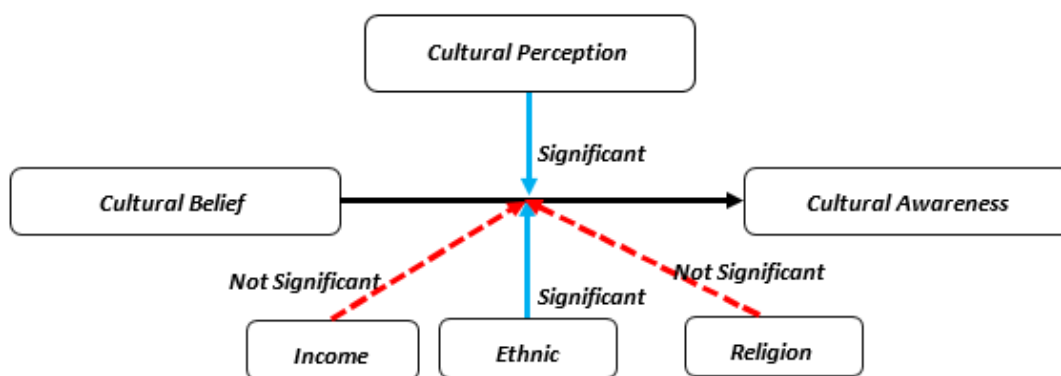
**Table 12: Moderation Test of Demographic Variables.**

Model	Coeff	Se	t	p
Content	36.0462	5.6916	6.3333	.0000
Cultural Belief	.2089	.2089	2.3256	.0211
Ethnicity	1.0290	2.3215	.4432	.6581
Int_1	-.0554	.0372	-1.4888	.0138

As shown in Table 12, ethnicity significantly moderates the relationship between Cultural Belief and Cultural Awareness (Coeff = -0.0554,  $p = 0.0138$ ), whereas income and religion do not demonstrate significant moderation effects ( $p > 0.05$ ).

Taken together, the moderation results in Tables 11 and 12 indicate that cultural perception and ethnicity exert meaningful influences on cultural awareness, while income and religion have negligible impacts.

This suggests that perceptual and ethnic diversity play a stronger role in shaping students' cultural awareness than socio-economic or religious background. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of these moderation effects.



**Figure 2: Visualization of Moderation Test.**

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1. Cultural Awareness in Young Learners

The findings of this study demonstrate that Cultural Awareness among young learners is significantly influenced by Cultural Beliefs and Cultural Perceptions, which together account for 18.1% of the variance observed. At first glance, this proportion might appear modest. However, it should be interpreted within the context of the multifactorial nature of cultural awareness, which has long been understood as a complex and dynamic construct rather than one determined by a single dimension. Reflecting on this, I recognise that young learners' awareness is shaped not only by what they believe or perceive but also by the myriad interactions, discourses, and lived experiences they encounter within school and community environments.

These results are consistent with prior scholarship. Kang et al. (2023) and Michalakis and Caridakis (2022) both emphasised the contextual complexity of cultivating cultural sensitivity, arguing that awareness is built upon a foundation of social

interaction and cognitive negotiation. Similarly, Bratož and Sila (2022) and Morán et al. (2021) suggested that personal beliefs and perceptions act as building blocks for intercultural competence, particularly in multicultural learning contexts. The present findings affirm these perspectives and strengthen the argument that cultural awareness is best viewed as a process of continual engagement rather than a static outcome.

The mediating role of Cultural Perceptions is especially revealing. It suggests that awareness is not only a matter of what learners intrinsically value but also of how they interpret and interact with cultural norms around them. Smith et al.'s (2021) cultural dimensions theory supports this observation, pointing out that perceptions of constructs such as collectivism or power distance significantly influence how learners situate themselves within diverse cultural contexts. As an educator reflecting on this, I am persuaded that classroom strategies cannot merely transmit cultural beliefs in abstract form. Instead, they must provide authentic experiences through which learners can develop informed

perceptions, thereby reinforcing their awareness in more sustainable ways.

Contrary to expectations shaped by previous studies that foreground socio-economic factors (Pan et al., 2023; Caetano et al., 2020), this research identified a limited role for demographic variables such as Income and Religion. This divergence is noteworthy, as it invites a rethinking of the frameworks through which cultural awareness is understood. If socio-economic conditions do not uniformly dictate cultural awareness, then more weight must be given to experiential, cognitive, and dialogic processes in educational practice. Here, strategies such as storytelling, cultural immersion activities, and collaborative projects emerge as powerful tools, as also noted by Ma (2019) and Wang et al. (2023).

The relatively low explanatory power of the model indicates the presence of additional, unexplored variables. Future inquiries should attend to institutional, policy, and community factors, as these often exert subtle yet profound influence on learners' worldviews. Pan et al. (2023) demonstrated how school culture and policies can act as levers of cultural competence, thereby reminding us that educational practice must be seen within the broader ecology of social systems.

### 5.2. *Interplay of Student Beliefs and Perceptions*

The mediation analysis underscores cultural perceptions' centrality in bridging cultural beliefs' influence on cultural awareness. This finding aligns with Gupta et al.'s (2023) social learning theory, which posits that individual beliefs culminate in altered perceptions and behaviors when reinforced through interaction and observation. The partial mediation effect observed in this study suggests that perceptions are not merely a passive outcome but actively shape the pathway through which beliefs impact awareness.

The robust coefficient of Cultural Perceptions ( $Coeff = 0.3803, p = 0.000$ ) indicates its dominant role in the mediation model. This supports the findings by Triandis Ranjbar et al. (2023) and Sabolova et al. (2020), who emphasized that perceptions of cultural norms are critical in navigating and internalizing intercultural experiences. Interestingly, the diminished direct effect of cultural beliefs on cultural awareness when perceptions are accounted for corroborates findings by Khayati and Ariail (2020), who argued that perception acts as a filter or lens through which beliefs are contextualized.

Furthermore, this study's findings diverge from

research that positions beliefs as the primary drivers of cultural learning. For example, Manley et al. (2023) theory of planned behavior emphasizes beliefs as central antecedents to attitudes and awareness. However, the current results highlight the complementary role of perceptions, suggesting a more interactive relationship between these variables (Boyd Williams et al., 2022; Hoyle, 2021). This interplay provides critical insights for curriculum designers aiming to balance belief-based instruction with perception-driven experiential learning.

Overall, the findings highlight the potential of perception-based interventions in fostering cultural awareness. Programs that integrate reflective practices, such as journaling or group discussions, could amplify students' cultural perceptions, enhancing their overall awareness. Such strategies align with constructivist educational theories, emphasizing active learner engagement's importance in constructing meaningful cultural understanding.

### 5.3. *Demographic Influences*

The moderation analysis reveals that Ethnicity, but not Income or Religion, significantly moderates the relationship between Cultural Beliefs and Cultural Awareness. These findings echo earlier work by Chen et al. (2018) and Menegatti (2017), who argued that ethnic diversity enriches cultural learning by exposing individuals to a broader range of values, traditions, and practices. The significant interaction coefficient ( $Int\_1 = -0.0554, p = 0.0138$ ) and underscores ethnicity's nuanced role in shaping the belief-awareness dynamic.

The negligible impact of Income and Religion contrasts with traditional assumptions in multicultural education that socio-economic and spiritual factors are pivotal to cultural learning. This finding challenges studies by Rasmitadila (2020), emphasizing the socio-economic context as a determinant of cultural competence. Instead, the current results align more closely with Abduh et al. (2023) ecological systems theory, which highlights proximal social interactions, such as ethnicity-based experiences, over distal socio-economic conditions.

The findings highlight the contextual salience of ethnicity within multicultural education. Prior research (Casillas, 2014; Mauilyda et al., 2024; Weigelt, 2009; Yin et al., 2020) demonstrates that ethnically diverse learning environments foster empathy, intercultural competence, and mutual respect, thereby underscoring ethnicity as a pivotal moderating variable in shaping students' social and cognitive outcomes. In contrast, the absence of significant results related to religion may reflect the

relatively secular orientation of cultural education in the studied context, where religious distinctions are not foregrounded in pedagogical practices. This suggests that while ethnic diversity functions as a visible and influential marker of cultural identity, religious identity may remain less emphasized in classroom interactions.

The implications of these results point to the importance of adopting culturally responsive pedagogical approaches that deliberately recognize and utilize ethnic diversity as a learning resource. Integrating culturally situated practices, such as ethnic storytelling, traditional knowledge systems, and multilingual instructional materials, can enhance students' cultural awareness and engagement more effectively than standardized, homogenized teaching models. These practices align with the theoretical framework of culturally responsive pedagogy (Nolan & Lunney Borden, 2023), which emphasizes the necessity of grounding curriculum design in learners' lived cultural experiences and identities.

#### **5.4. Reflections on Sustainability and ESD**

From a broader perspective, these findings resonate strongly with the principles of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Cultural awareness is not a peripheral competency; it is central to sustainability, as it equips learners to engage respectfully and productively in pluralistic societies. In reflecting on the results, I am struck by how beliefs and perceptions about culture parallel the attitudes and behaviours necessary for sustainable living: they both require openness, reflexivity, and the willingness to navigate complexity.

Embedding cultural awareness in education therefore becomes an act of sustainability in itself. UNESCO's ESD framework emphasises the integration of social, cultural, and ecological dimensions of learning. By cultivating cultural awareness, we prepare learners not only to recognise diversity but also to collaborate across differences in addressing global challenges such as climate change, inequality, and resource management. For me as an educator, this is perhaps the most profound implication of the study: cultural education is inseparable from sustainability education.

Practical strategies can extend from this insight. For example, storytelling that integrates cultural heritage with environmental knowledge, or project-based learning that connects ethnic traditions to sustainable practices, can foster awareness that is both culturally and environmentally grounded. Such integrative approaches illustrate that cultural awareness and sustainability are not parallel agendas

but mutually reinforcing dimensions of holistic education.

Taken together, the findings affirm that Cultural Beliefs and Cultural Perceptions play a significant role in shaping Cultural Awareness, with Ethnicity acting as a salient contextual moderator. Yet beyond statistical associations, the study prompts a reflection on the purpose of cultural education within the broader project of sustainability. By consciously designing pedagogies that target perceptions, leverage ethnic diversity, and link cultural learning with sustainable practices, educators can nurture learners who are not only culturally competent but also globally responsible.

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## **6. CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that Cultural Beliefs and Cultural Perceptions significantly influence Cultural Awareness, with Cultural Perceptions acting as a strong mediator. These findings suggest that while beliefs about cultural values provide an important foundation, learners' perceptions of their cultural environment play a decisive role in shaping awareness. This aligns with Bandura's social learning theory and Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, both of which emphasise the influence of social interactions and cultural contexts on individual development. The moderation analysis shows that Ethnicity significantly moderates the relationship between Cultural Beliefs and Cultural Awareness, whereas Income and Religion do not. This result underscores the value of ethnic diversity in fostering intercultural learning, suggesting that exposure to multiple ethnic experiences deepens awareness more effectively than socio-economic or religious differences alone. Such insights provide practical direction for designing curricula that respond to the realities of diverse classrooms. Pedagogically, the study highlights the importance of culturally responsive strategies that strengthen students' perceptions of diversity. Activities such as ethnic storytelling, cultural simulations, and structured

group discussions can help learners internalise cultural values more meaningfully. At the same time, the study acknowledges its limitations, including its geographically narrow scope and relatively homogenous sample. Future research should extend to broader and more varied contexts, ideally through longitudinal designs, to capture the dynamic nature of cultural awareness over time. Crucially, these findings resonate with UNESCO's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly SDG 4.7,

which calls for education that fosters global citizenship, appreciation of cultural diversity, and sustainable development. By identifying perceptions and ethnicity as key drivers of cultural awareness, this research contributes to the international discourse on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). It demonstrates that cultivating cultural awareness in young learners is not only vital for intercultural competence but also essential for building inclusive and sustainable societies.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

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