

The Relationship Between Multicultural Self-Efficacy and Cultural Bullying Awareness Among Students in Public and Islamic Senior High Schools

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Abstract

While research has highlighted a rise in bullying among senior high school students, limited investigations have examined its correlation with self-efficacy and cultural factors. This study investigated the relationship between Multicultural Self-Efficacy (MSE) and Cultural Bullying Awareness (CBA) among students attending public and Islamic senior high schools. Correlation and comparison analysis were performed involving a total of 400 students, equally drawn from both types of schools, and aged between 15 and 17 years (39% male, 61% female), selected through stratified random sampling. This study employed the Self-Efficacy in Multicultural Relationships Scale ($\lambda = 0.492 - 0.823$; $\alpha = 0.922$) and the Culturally Driven Bullying Awareness Questionnaire ($\lambda = 0.510 - 0.890$; $\alpha = 0.776$) to measure students' self-efficacy and awareness. A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship between these variables, whereas independent samples t-tests were employed to assess the differences among the student groups. The results indicated a moderate positive correlation between the two variables ($r = 0.456$, $p < 0.01$). The variance in MSE between public and Islamic senior high school students was not statistically significant ($p = 0.237 > 0.05$), while the CBA showed a significant difference ($p = 0.032 < 0.05$), with Islamic school students performing better than public school peers. These results clarified that although multicultural self-efficacy had a positive correlation with awareness of cultural bullying, they emphasized the differences in educational systems between the two types of schools in promoting inclusivity and fostering anti bullying.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's multiethnic communities, growing diversity in school settings is inevitable. In such diversity comes a greater need for positive intercultural interactions. Since every ethnic group possesses a distinct cultural identity and serves vital functions within its community across generations (Hamer & McFarland, 2023), cultural encounters in the school environment do not always seem manageable (Rozkwitalska et al., 2016). The positive one may pertain to improving cultural competence (Witt, 2016), opportunities for personal growth (Montuori & Fahim, 2004), heightened sensitization to happiness and contentment, community, learning, and education, fostering a sense of culture, overarching gratitude, and immersive experiences (Nelson & Luetz, 2021). Conversely, negative ones may manifest as instances of cultural bullying (Martínez-Santiago et al., 2023). It can occur at various education levels, such as in schools (Wu & Jia, 2023) and colleges (Vera et al., 2023). However, bullying in school settings is crucial since cultural encounters among students are more intensive by daily relationships among students.

The concept of cultural bullying remains poorly comprehended, leading to varied interpretations of its meaning. Essentially, bullying is an unwanted aggressive behavior by a person or group against a targeted victim that has the intent to harm either physically or emotionally (Kallman et al., 2021). There are numerous causes of bullying, some of them generated by cultural, racial, ethnic, or even religious differences. The cultural bullying refers to the subtle aggressive behaviors exhibited by individuals or groups of students, often rooted in racial or ethnic-cultural prejudice, language, or religion (Andres et al., 2020). Whatever the causes, this behavior is related to the power, pain, persistence, and premeditation framework (Koo, 2007). Thus, in a cultural context, such bullying may manifest as acts of cultural domination designed to intimidate, control, or harm others. These intentional actions aim to assert control or dominance, causing emotional, psychological, or physical harm to the victims. The repetitive nature of these behaviors at certain times intensifies their impact, making it challenging for victims to escape or manage the situation. Moreover, the doers often deliberately plan their actions to maximize harm, exploit specific vulnerabilities, and avoid being identified by authority figures.

Culture-driven bullying or often referred to as cultural bullying, is not a phenomenon exclusive to certain ethnic groups. Historically, it has been observed in various forms and contexts (Hymel & Swearer, 2015; Xu et al., 2020). Nowadays, cultural bullying has been increasingly evident in school environments (Maunder & Crafter, 2018). The emergence of new technologies and social media has expanded the scope and methods of bullying, making it easier for individuals to engage in harassment and intimidation anonymously or from a distance (Hollá, 2016). Research on culturally related bullying has been conducted in various educational settings, including elementary schools (MacDonald & Swart, 2004), middle and high schools (Basilici et al., 2022; Jan, 2015; Rana et al., 2020). In Indonesia, however, such studies remain relatively limited. Existing work has only focused more on public schools (Sinulingga et al., 2025; Tas'adi & Fanany, 2023; Widiharto et al., 2019) and Islamic boarding schools (Barus et al., 2023; Hafidzi et al., 2024). In contrast, research in Islamic senior high schools (*Madrasah Aliyah*) has generally addressed bullying more broadly (Parinduri et al., 2023). These studies conclude with calls for further research to deepen understanding of the prevalence and possible interventions. Notably, no studies have directly compared patterns of cultural bullying between public and Islamic schools. Such a comparison is crucial to identify which educational contexts may be more effective in preventing cultural bullying. The absence of this research leaves the phenomenon insufficiently understood. Given its harmful consequences, similar to other forms of bullying, cultural bullying in both types of schools warrants serious attention from school counselors.

Several studies have tried to explore the correlates of cultural bullying. For example, [Görzig et al. \(2017\)](#) listed cultural values and socioeconomic stratification among other factors to the bully. Meanwhile, [Park et al. \(2021\)](#) considered sociocultural values as one of several factors contributed to cyberbullying. Although indirectly relating to the cultural context of bullying, additional factors listed by [Li et al. \(2024\)](#), such as high frequency of using social networking sites, distrusting people, gender, grade level of schooling, poor relationships between family members, parental neglect, and unpopularity at school, are believed as a manifestation of cultures related to bullying. Meanwhile, [Morcillo et al. \(2015\)](#) highlighted poor social adaptation and academic performance, strict parental discipline, lack of school support, exposure to violence, delinquent peers, and children's familiarity with culture as all risk factors for bullying others. From this perspective, cultural bullying should be approached by different angles.

Given the fact that public and Islamic high schools often serve as triggering environments for cultural bullying, exploring their profound effects is necessary for school counselors. Cultural bullying, as noted by [Ismaili \(2014\)](#), yielded negative repercussions for both victims and aggressors. Similar effects were victims experienced deteriorating classroom conduct ([Gomes, 2020](#)), diminished academic performance ([Al-Raqqad, 2017](#)), and reduced of psychological well-being and social adjustment, which often indicated to increased psychological distress and negative physical health symptoms ([Rigby, 2003](#)). Moreover, the study by [Wolke et al. \(2015\)](#) highlighted the long-term effects of bullying, such as anxiety, depression, suicidal tendencies, self-harm, sleep disturbances, such as nightmares or night terrors, strained relationships with parents, limited social circles, and a lack of confidants among victims. Conversely, aggressors might develop heightened emotional insensitivity and sensitivity to reward ([Valera-Pozo et al., 2021](#)). For such effects, school personnel, particularly school counselors, had to pay attention to the potential negative influence of bullying ([Foon et al., 2020](#)).

Cultural bullying can have a significant impact on students, yet to overcome it they need to have awareness of this issue. Having awareness of this type of bullying enables students to identify biases, prejudice, or stereotypes they may perceive about different cultural groups. The concept of awareness is related to self-awareness, known as objective self-awareness (OSA), was introduced by Duval and Wicklund in 1972 ([Silvia & Duval, 2001](#); [Wicklund, 1972](#)). It grew and gained popularity since it gave a new perspective in helping individuals to recognize themselves as separate individuals who have capabilities in internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions ([Goleman, 2006](#)). When they feel aligned with them, awareness can increase confidence and recognize systemic stereotypes. Conversely, if people assume they fail to meet standards, they feel anxious or defensive. From this perspective, the awareness is an essential competence that leads students to greater empathy, respect, and positive social interactions, making it a key factor in preventing bullying based on cultural differences. Since awareness is a personal state, it is possible to measure constructively in the context of cultural bullying ([Sutton, 2016](#)).

Although schools' role in preventing bullying, developing bullying awareness, and providing inclusive curriculum related to cultural self-efficacy was well recognized ([Abayomi & Daniels, 2021](#); [Gaffney et al., 2021](#); [Yosef, 2022](#)), other studies proved that not all school personnel were always clearly aware of the bullying cases identified in the school environment ([Paljakka, 2023](#)). The unawareness was considered related to several correlates, such as teacher incompetence in relation to bullying ([van Verseveld et al., 2020](#)), teachers' perception of bullying ([Clagon, 2020](#)), and teachers' self-efficacy ([Fischer et al., 2020](#)). As alternative of understanding this type of bullying, ones should start by knowing students' self-efficacy themselves about multicultural relationships and its relation possibility to their cultural bullying awareness.

Self-efficacy, derived from Bandura's social learning theory (1977, 1982), referred to an individual's judgment of their ability to carry out actions needed to deal with prospective situations. It represented a generative capability requiring the coordination of cognitive, social, and behavioral skills into integrated courses of action to serve various purposes. For its implementation, the concept distinguished two types of self-efficacy: general and specific self-efficacy. General self-efficacy reflected the belief in one's competence to cope with a wide range of stressful or challenging demands, while specific self-efficacy was pertained to confidence in performing a particular task (Luszczynska et al., 2005). From this perspective, multicultural self-efficacy, of which multicultural relationships form a part and which constitutes the focus of this study, is one example of the specifics. Thus, its definition would be an individual's belief in their capabilities to engage with people from diverse cultural backgrounds effectively. This engagement will generate awareness to certain phenomena, such as peer social acceptance that is more likely to recognize and stand up against cultural bullying. These phenomena were confirmed in several studies (Gebauer et al., 2021; Yosef, 2022). The findings indicated that students with strong self-efficacy were likely to get along well with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds. The underlying belief is that positive interaction with such peers can shape their perception and attitude toward those cultures. A positive perception may motivate one to bond to a satisfying relationship, whereas a negative perception can lead to unsatisfying interactions, potentially resulting in cultural bullying.

Rationale of the Study

As Indonesia is known for its multicultural society, issues related to cultural bullying and multicultural relationships in public and Islamic high school settings remain significant and are not yet comprehensively understood. Verkuyten & Thijs (2013) highlighted how multicultural education programs shaped student perceptions and interactions, while Khalil et al. (2024) emphasized the role of training programs in preventing bullying and prejudice among adolescents. Several studies identified self-efficacy as a necessary correlate of awareness (Caldwell & Hayes, 2016; Pevec-Zimmer et al., 2024; Veiga Díaz, 2023). These can be applied in the current research context, in which, when students have problems in both variables, measuring their self-efficacy and awareness will provide information prior to giving intentional intervention. This argumentation brings this study to explore a deeper understanding of public and Islamic high school students on multicultural self-efficacy and cultural bullying awareness.

Purpose of the Study

This study examined the relationship between public and Islamic senior high school students' multicultural self-efficacy (MSE) and their cultural bullying awareness (CBA). In addition, this study also compared student groups of both schools on MSE as well as CBA. Hypotheses (H) are there is a significant positive relationship between students' multicultural self-efficacy and their cultural bullying awareness (H1), there is a significant difference in students' multicultural self-efficacy between public and Islamic senior high school students (H2), and (H3) there is a significant difference in students' cultural bullying awareness between public and Islamic senior high school students

METHODS

Research Design and Procedures

This study applied correlational and comparative research methods (Christensen et al., 2014; Leavy, 2017). The research procedures (Figure 1) comprised seven steps: (1) planning and designing the study, (2) developing instruments, (3) selecting respondents, (4) collecting data, (5) processing and cleaning data, (6) analyzing data, and (7) interpreting and reporting results.

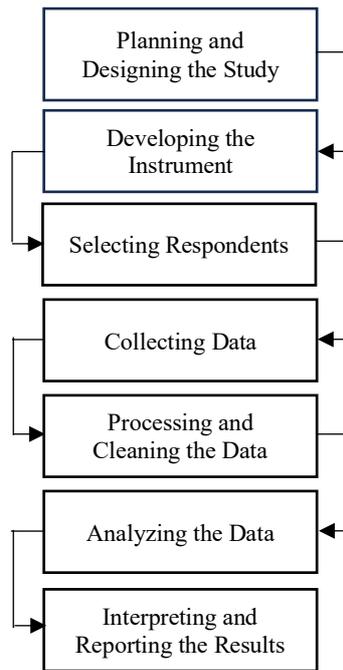


Figure 1. Research Procedures

Participants

Conducted in Palembang, the Capital City of South Sumatera Province in Indonesia, the study comprised of 26.390 student population attending 24 public senior high schools (PSHS) and 3 Madrasah Aliyah, Islamic-based public senior high schools (ISHS) in academic year of 2024 while the sample consisted of 400 tenth- and eleventh-grade students (Mean age = 15.31 years old; Standard Deviation = 0.74). Stratified random sampling was employed by first of all, dividing the population into two strata based on school type (PSHS and ISHS). From each stratum, two schools were randomly selected. Within each selected school, students were further stratified by grade level (10th and 11th), and 100 students were randomly selected in equal numbers from each grade. The following table 1 presents the respondents’ demographic data.

Instruments

Self-efficacy in Multicultural Relationship Scale (SMRS)

The scale used to measure students’ MSE consisted of a self-report of 20 items on a scale of Bandura (2006) (from 0 = Cannot do all to 10 = Highly can do), divided into four dimensions: intimacy (3 items), popularity (7 items), trust (7 items), and insightfulness (3 items). The reference of these dimensions was a scale developed by Aydogdu (2022). Since his scale only covered peer relationships, this study further developed it into the context of multicultural relationship self-efficacy. The SMRS was formatted on a web-based scale before being administrated to the students. Its development involved five school counselors and 715 senior high school students. The scale publicized a high content validity index (S-CVI=1.00), high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.922$), and good construct validity with item loading factors (λ)

Table 1. Respondent demographic data (N=400)

Respondents	Gender				N
	Male (38,75%)		Female (61,25%)		
Grade	10 th	11 th	10 th	11 th	
PSHS (50%)	44	45	56	55	200
ISHS (50%)	32	34	68	66	200
Total	76	79	124	121	400

between 0.492 –0.823. Some examples of each dimension were “Show my empathy when they are in a difficult moment.”, “Feel safe when I am with them.”, “Show open-mindedness about cultural differences when interacting with them.”, and “Join with them to solve a problem collaboratively.”.

Culturally-Driven Bullying Awareness Questionnaire (CBAQ)

The CBAQ used to measure students' (CBA comprised of five domains and 15 items that referred to components of awareness proposed by Bizzarri et al. (2022). The domains were types of bullying (4 items), characteristics of bullying (2 items), effects of bullying (2 items), cause and risk factors (4 items), and how to deal with bullying (3 items). Through these domains, the scale measured how students can recognize signs and symptoms of cultural bullying behavior, recognizing overt and subtle indications of victimization, and various forms of cultural bullying, including physical, verbal, social, and cyberbullying. Each scale asked the students to respond to items utilizing the same 5-point response scale: (a) strongly agree, (b) agree, (c) neutral, (d) disagree, and (e) strongly disagree. The questionnaire revealed a high scale content validity index (S-CVI=1.00), high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.776$), and construct validity with item loading factors (λ) between 0.510 - 0.890. Before being administered to the students, the CBAQ was formatted on the web. Several instances of its items were “Looking suspiciously at people of different ethnicities will make them feel uncomfortable.”, “Making jokes about others' customs can cause negative reactions.”, and “Social norms within a cultural group can lead to discrimination against those outside that group.” Its development involved five school counselors and 854 senior high school students.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with data cleaning to remove possible errors and inconsistencies, as well as to handle missing values. Descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations (*SD*), were used to summarize MSE and CBA data. Prior to hypothesis testing, a normality test was conducted. Correlation analysis using Pearson product moment was employed to examine the relationships between MSE and CBA, while independent-samples *t*-tests were used to compare PSHS and ISHS groups on these variables. Scatter plots were generated to illustrate the data patterns from the correlation analysis. All analyses were conducted in SPSS Version 25.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study aims to investigate the relationship between students' MSE and their CBA. The final procedure of this study is to present the results of the investigation. In this section, the data of measurement in detail are displayed in Tables 2 and 3. These show the measurement results of students' multicultural self-efficacy and cultural bullying awareness ($N=400$). In the MSE, the item with the highest mean score was item 20: "Join with them to solve problems collaboratively," which received a mean score of 8.77 and a standard deviation (*SD*) of 1.78. This score indicated a strong agreement among respondents with this statement, suggesting that responses were relatively consistent. Conversely, the item with the lowest mean score was item 10: "Openly share my true emotions with them." It had a mean score of 6.20 and an *SD* of 2.42. This lower score signified less agreement, and the higher *SD* suggested greater variability in response. Overall, the average mean score across all statements was 7.59, indicating a generally high level of agreement among respondents, while the *SD* of 2.15 pointed to moderate variability in their responses.

Table 2. Data of MSE ($N=400$)

No	Statement	Mean	SD
1	Express my sadness with friends from various cultural background.	8.25	1.86
2	Show my empathy when they are in difficult moment.	6.51	2.42
3	Sacrifice for the sake of them.	7.52	2.10
4	Be accepted as close friends by them,	7.06	2.54
5	Be invited to join their group.	7.32	2.18
6	Have a uniqueness respected by them.	7.23	2.23
7	Show good attitudes admired by my them.	7.07	2.51
8	Keep my commitment to them.	7.45	2.33
9	Express my genuine feelings with them.	8.09	1.99
10	Openly share my true emotions with them.	6.88	2.48
11	Have ability to understand what they are saying.	7.16	2.39
12	Show open-minded about cultural differences when interacting with them.	7.65	1.98
13	Respect cultural differences when interacting with them.	8.02	1.98
14	Recognizing the various cultural perspectives of my friends.	7.68	2.19
15	Appreciate their various cultural values.	7.00	2.44
16	Seek feedback on my understanding of an issue from them.	8.26	1.71
17	Clarify my insight into various issues with them.	7.90	2.14
18	Understand their emotions intuitively.	8.76	1.67
19	Grasping intuitively their feeling without questioning them.	8.17	1.97
20	Join with them to solve problem collaboratively.	8.84	1.63
	Grand Mean Score	7.64	2.24

Table 3. Data of CBA ($N=400$)

No.	Item	Mean	SD
1	Looking suspiciously at people of different ethnicities will make them feel uncomfortable.	3.06	1.04
2	Certain words, whether spoken or written, are often used by people to insult other ethnicities.	2.69	0.89
3	A quick way to spread cultural rumors to various groups is through social media.	3.22	0.90
4	Smartphones are very prone to being used to mock other people's cultures.	2.93	0.96
5	Embarrassing others' customs can result in social conflict.	3.29	0.93
6	Degrading other people's cultures is often done by those who believe that their ethnic culture is superior.	2.96	0.95
7	Making jokes about other people's customs can cause negative reactions.	3.01	0.95
8	Students who hate other ethnicities tend to display intolerant behavior.	3.08	0.99
9	Group of students from the same ethnic background are often more likely to pressure their peers to ridicule individuals from different ethnic backgrounds.	2.61	0.92
10	Students from the majority ethnic group often hesitate to harass those from the minority ethnic group.	2.41	0.78
11	A culturally unsupportive school environment can lead to mutual insults among students.	3.02	0.84
12	Social norms within a cultural group can lead to discrimination against those outside that group.	2.81	0.79
13	Reporting students who mock the traditional clothing I wear to a teacher is a wise choice to stop their actions.	3.15	0.85
14	Asking a teacher for help to deal with someone who mocks my ethnic traditions would be futile.	2.60	0.88
15	Expressing pride in my local language, which others demean, may stop their behavior.	2.72	0.83
	Grand Mean Score	2.90	0.93

Table 4. The Correlation between MSE and CBA ($N=400$)

	MSE	CBA	p
MSE	1	0.456**	0.000
CBA	0.456**	1	0.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

For CBA, item number 3, "A quick way to spread cultural rumors to various groups is through social media," had the highest mean score at 3.32 with a standard deviation of 0.94. It is closely followed by item 5, "Embarrassing others' customs can result in social conflict." It had a mean of 3.31 and a standard deviation of 0.98. They indicated a strong agreement that cultural misunderstandings could lead to social conflict. A calm response could effectively address cultural insults. In addition, item 10, "Students from the majority ethnic group often hesitate to harass those from the minority ethnic group," had the lowest mean score of 2.60 with a standard deviation of 0.82. This lower score suggested less agreement, indicating that harassment by the majority group may occur more frequently or that hesitation was not as common. Overall, the average mean score across the items was 3.04, with a standard deviation of 0.95, reflecting moderate variability in response.

For further analysis, before conducting the hypothesis test, the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test was used to examine the data normality of MSE and CBA. The results showed that the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test yielded a significance value of 0.320, which was greater than 0.05. Therefore, the data could be considered normally distributed, meeting the normality assumption, and providing a basis for conducting a correlation test between these two variables. The result of the test posted in Table 4 shows Pearson correlation coefficient between MSE and CBA reached $r = 0.456$, $p < 0.01$. This coefficient is categorized as a moderate correlation.

It suggests that as students become more aware of cultural bullying, the multicultural self-efficacy multicultural tends to increase. Additionally, the significance value ($p = 0.000$) confirms that this correlation is statistically significant, suggesting that the observed relationship is unlikely to have occurred by random chance. The scatter plot below (Figure 2) illustrates the image of correlation.

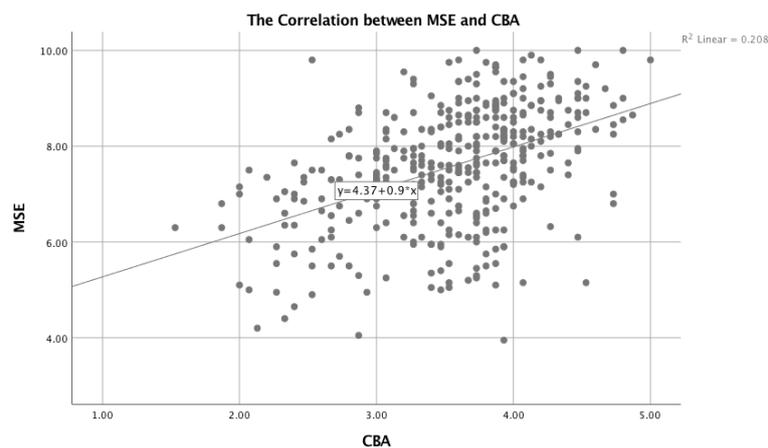


Figure 2. Scatter Plot MSE and CBA

The scatter plot illustrates the relationship between MSE and CBA with a fitted regression line. The coefficient of determination (R^2) = 0.208 suggests that CBA can explain about 21% of the variance in MSE. The equation of the regression line is $y = 4.37 + 0.97x$, meaning that for each unit increase in CBA, MSE increases by approximately 0.97. It implies a moderate positive correlation between the two variables—as the awareness increases, the self-efficacy tends to improve. While this relationship is statistically meaningful, it also suggests that other

factors contribute to students' self-efficacy beyond their awareness. Further discussion could explore additional influencing factors to gain a more comprehensive understanding of this dynamic.

Further analysis examines whether the two groups (PSHS and ISHS) have equal variances. The results of MSE's analysis suggested the F value = 15.742 and Sig. (p -value) = 0.000, indicating a statistically significant difference in variances. Since $p < 0.05$, the study rejected the assumption of equal variances. The t -test for equality of means revealed that in both cases (equal variances assumed and not assumed), the t -values are 1.184 and 1.200, respectively. The p -values (Sig. 2-tailed) are 0.237 and 0.231, both exceeding 0.05, indicating that the difference in MSE between public and Islamic senior school students was not statistically significant. Meanwhile, the mean difference of 2.90702 suggested that Islamic school students had slightly higher self-efficacy, but this difference was not meaningful statistically. The 95% confidence interval (-1.91820 to 7.73223) included zero, reinforcing that the difference was not statistically significant.

Meanwhile, for data analysis of CBA, the independent samples test examines differences in CBA between public and Islamic school students. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances shows The F value = 0.123 and Sig. (p -value) = 0.726 > 0.05. This means the assumption of equal variances holds, so the conclusion refers to the first row for interpretation. For the t -test for Equality of Means, the t -value = 2.151, and the p -value (Sig. 2-tailed) = 0.032 less than 0.05, indicating a statistically significant difference in CBA between public and Islamic school students. The mean difference was 1.72094 suggesting that ISHS's students had higher in CBA than PSHS' students. In addition, the 95% confidence interval (0.14770 to 3.29417) did not include zero, confirming that the difference was significant.

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the relationship between MSE and CBA among students from PSHS and ISHS, as well as the differences between these groups in both variables. The first finding supported the first hypothesis, showing a moderate correlation ($r = 0.456$) between MSE and CBA. The second finding did not support the second hypothesis, whereas the third finding confirmed that the two groups differed significantly in CBA. A moderate positive correlation might initially appear surprising—given that higher self-efficacy in multicultural relationships would intuitively suggest a reduction in bullying. The students who have higher confidence in interacting across different cultural backgrounds tend to have a greater self-awareness of culturally-driven bullying. However, the relationship is not strong enough, suggesting other factors may also influence it. Meanwhile, a significant difference in CBA in which students from ISHS are higher than PSHS suggests several factors may contribute to different levels of awareness.

For the first findings, theoretically, several factors may influence the extent to which the two variables interact, leading to a moderate correlation. Students with higher MSE are likely to have more exposure to diverse cultural contexts at home, in their neighborhood, or at school. Such exposure may increase their awareness of cultural differences, which in turn can enhance their sensitivity to the role of appropriate cultural understanding in preventing bullying incidents. According to [Jin et al. \(2023\)](#), cultural values significantly influence self-efficacy, so for students engaged in diverse environments, their awareness of these values can improve their ability to identify instances of cultural bullying. They may recognize human processes such as cultural bias, in-group favoritism, and the preference for similarity, all of which contribute to social distance and create ongoing challenges to building positive group relationships ([Harrell, 2017](#)). Moreover, students who possess this awareness are better equipped to develop self-efficacy, enabling them to overcome obstacles and appreciate their culturally diverse peers, which can, in turn, reduce bullying tendencies ([Abacioglu et al., 2023](#)). In this context, the

students with higher MSE are more empathetic and culturally sensitive toward their peers. This increased awareness helps them recognize behaviors that may constitute cultural bullying and understand their impact on victims. A study by [Okagbue et al. \(2022\)](#) supports this explanation that the affectionate dimensions of multicultural education are important in promoting positive behavior and significantly lessening bullying tendencies among students. Nevertheless, the correlation value in this study was only moderate level rather than strong. This suggests that while MSE contributes to reducing bullying, it is not sufficient on its own. Other influential factors—such as peer group norms ([Wiertsema et al., 2023](#)), school climate ([Fu et al., 2024](#)), family upbringing ([Laeheem, 2013](#)), and the presence of systemic stereotypes ([Sapouna et al., 2022](#))—may continue to sustain bullying behaviors despite individual students' high self-efficacy. These factors may explain why the relationship does not reach a strong level.

In relation to such explanation, the current findings support the study of [Carol et al. \(2019\)](#), who suggest high school students should develop learning and life competencies, such as self-awareness and self-efficacy. Learning these competencies can be expanded and has an impact on increasing MSE and CBA. By creating mixed-ability groups in culture classes, [Zhou & Colomer \(2024\)](#) found the significant role of cooperative learning in promoting the development of multicultural understanding, critical thinking, and social responsibility among students. Confidence in engaging with peers from different cultures may lead to greater appreciation and respect for cultural diversity. It can reduce prejudice and stereotypes, promoting a more accepting and equitable environment. Several studies found a positive relationship between both variables in different contexts, such as in career readiness ([Alfaiz et al., 2021](#)), listening strategies ([Yosef et al., 2023](#)) and leader effectiveness ([Caldwell & Hayes, 2016](#)). These findings support the construct of the current study regarding the correlation between both variables.

The second finding indicates that while students in both groups demonstrate similar levels of multicultural self-efficacy as found in previous study ([Yosef, 2022](#)), there are significant differences in their cultural bullying awareness. Several factors may contribute to this disparity. Firstly, despite of the ISHS and PSHS share comparable curriculum in general subjects, such as civics, Indonesian language, English, and mathematics, ISHS incorporates more Islamic content into its curriculum and teaching ([Muhajir, 2019](#); [Zulfatmi, 2023](#)). This may enhance its students' awareness and ability to demonstrate appropriate behaviors, particularly in relation to bullying. In addition, students of ISHS may place a greater emphasis on religious-based multicultural education, diversity, and anti-bullying initiatives, thereby fostering a heightened awareness of bullying that stems from cultural differences among its students ([Siraj et al., 2023](#)). It is likely that teaching around cultural issues, discrimination, and antibullying are more frequent within ISHS, contributing to a greater vigilance in recognizing such behaviors. Another contributing factor could be ISHS's implementation of holistic intervention by its teachers which may lead students to be more sensitive to the recognition of culturally driven bullying ([Pasaleron et al., 2023](#)).

Implication

This study has some implications for school counseling. First, the moderate positive correlation between in multicultural self-efficacy (MSE) and cultural bullying awareness (CBA) suggests that the students with higher multicultural self-efficacy may not necessarily engage less in bullying but are more aware of cultural differences and their impact on social interactions. To address this, schools should integrate multicultural education and empathy training into the curriculum to enhance the students' ability to appreciate diversity while reducing biases that could contribute to bullying. Increasing MSE through multicultural education or social-emotional learning programs could further help enhancing CBA. Additionally, school counseling programs should implement targeted interventions that not

only address bullying, but also foster an inclusive school environment, meaningful peer interactions, and support systems that promote cultural inclusion and empathy. By creating a positive school climate, counselors can help students develop stronger multicultural self-efficacy while mitigating bullying behaviors rooted in cultural misunderstandings.

Second, since there is no significant difference between PSHS and ISHS students in MSE but in CBA, this suggests that the students across different school settings may develop similar enthusiasm levels in multicultural interactions, but their CBA varies. It calls for differentiated intervention programs to enhance the students' awareness in each school environment. For instance, ISHS students might benefit from various forms of discussion that highlight cultural biases within religious perspectives, while PSHS students could engage in activities that address intercultural sensitivity in diverse settings. Lastly, school counselors should promote peer-led discussions and counseling sessions where students can openly share experiences regarding cultural differences and bullying. Encouraging positive intergroup contact and collaborative projects among students from diverse backgrounds can reinforce inclusive behaviors and prevent the reinforcement of cultural stereotypes that contribute to bullying.

Limitation

The current study reveals a moderate correlation between MSE and CBA. However, some limitations need some consideration. A sample size of 400 respondents may be insufficient for generalizing the findings in broader areas. Consequently, the findings may explain incomprehensively the relationship or differences. Several hidden variables, such as personal attitudes toward diversity, prior experiences with multicultural interactions, exposure to anti-bullying education, or students' social support systems may be overlooked so that it is a moderate than higher correlation. Furthermore, the school or community environment, including cultural norms, policies on bullying, and inclusive programs, might affect the students' awareness of cultural bullying but have not been covered by this study.

Future studies should investigate suggested variables to understand the dynamics involved more comprehensively. Increasing the sample size would help refine the confidence intervals around correlation estimates, as smaller samples, like in this study, tend to exhibit more variability, leading to wider confidence intervals and less precision in estimating relationships and differences within the population. Additionally, future research explores the dynamic connection between students' MSE, CBA, and bullying behavior over time. In addition, investigating the potential influence of other variables, such as personality traits and exposure to cultural diversity, that might mediate or moderate the relationship between both variables in both types of schools could yield significant insights. Studies focusing on exposure to culturally diverse environments, whether through education or community activities, may help clarify whether strengthening multicultural self-efficacy fosters greater empathy and mitigates bullying behaviors. Analyzing these mediators and moderators would provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping this complex relationship and offer actionable insights for designing targeted interventions.

CONCLUSION

Public and Islamic senior high schools serve as micro-communities that represent broader societal diversity, exposing students to peers from diverse cultural backgrounds. To some extent, without adequate multicultural self-efficacy and cultural bullying awareness, this can trigger bullying. This study finds a moderate correlation between MSE and CBA, somewhat indicating that the higher the self-efficacy level, the higher the cultural bullying awareness among senior high school students. The findings also reveal a significant difference between the students of PSHS and ISHS in the awareness, implying both groups do not have similar

characteristics on this variable. These findings highlight the need for adequate interventions to improve the self-efficacy and awareness in culturally diverse school settings.

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AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The authors of this study balanced roles according to their expertise. The first author developed the research design, coordinated team members to do the research, and finalized the article. The other authors helped collect and analyze data, wrote a draft, and revised the article. MV helped with proofreading and revising the article.

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