

Article

Religiosity and Cultural Diversity Awareness Among College Students in Mindanao

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Abstract

This study explored the link between religiosity and cultural diversity awareness among Filipino college students enrolled in a state college in Mindanao. A descriptive–correlational design was used, with data collected from first to third-year students through adapted and validated survey instruments. These tools measured both religious beliefs and practices, as well as students’ awareness, and sensitivity toward cultural differences. Findings showed that respondents generally reported a high level of religiosity and a very high level of cultural diversity awareness. Correlation analysis revealed a significant moderate positive relationship between the two variables, suggesting that students who are more engaged in their faith also tend to demonstrate greater respect and openness toward peers from different cultural backgrounds. The results indicate that religiosity may encourage values such as empathy, moral responsibility, and inclusiveness, which are essential in a multicultural campus environment. The study underscores the constructive role of religious orientation in fostering cultural understanding and harmonious interactions among students. These insights may help higher education institutions design programs that integrate religious formation with multicultural education to promote inclusive campus communities.

Keywords: *religiosity, cultural diversity awareness, Filipino college students*

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Introduction

Cultural diversity has become a central concern in higher education, particularly in the Philippines, where students represent a wide range of cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Colleges and universities are tasked not only with preparing learners academically but also with cultivating respect, understanding, and constructive relationships among individuals who do not share the same heritage. Awareness of cultural diversity—defined as the ability to recognize and appreciate differences in values, traditions, and social practices—plays a vital role in fostering inclusive learning environments where students feel acknowledged and respected. Research in multicultural education emphasizes that when learners develop this awareness, they tend to demonstrate stronger communication skills, deeper empathy, and a greater willingness to collaborate across cultural lines (Banks, 2019; Gay, 2018; Tabanao, 2024).

At the same time, religiosity continues to exert a strong influence on Filipino students' everyday lives. Religious beliefs and practices shape values, moral orientations, and interpersonal interactions both inside and outside the classroom. International scholarship suggests that religiosity can encourage compassion, moral sensitivity, and openness toward people with different perspectives (Saroglou, 2022; Hayward & Krause, 2020). Within higher education, these qualities may directly affect how students respond to cultural differences and how they engage with diversity in campus settings.

Despite the significance of both religion and culture in Philippine society, research examining their intersection remains limited. Local studies often focus separately on students' cultural awareness or their religious involvement, but few explore whether religiosity contributes to sensitivity toward cultural differences (Majan & Allaba, 2025; Dela Cruz et al., 2025). International findings point to a possible association between religiosity and positive intercultural attitudes (Putnick et al., 2021), yet these insights have not been systematically examined among Filipino college students—particularly in Mindanao, where cultural and religious diversity is especially pronounced.

Given this gap, it is important for higher education institutions to better understand how religiosity may influence students' openness and responsiveness to diverse cultural groups. Such knowledge can inform the design of programs that strengthen mutual respect and support inclusive practices across campuses. The present study therefore investigates how religiosity relates to cultural diversity awareness among Filipino college students. By examining the connection between these two constructs, the study aims to contribute insights that can guide future

initiatives in multicultural engagement, interfaith dialogue, and student development efforts in higher education.

Methodology

This study is grounded in the perspective that students' beliefs and values shape how they interact with others in diverse social settings, particularly within educational environments. Multicultural education scholars argue that values and worldviews influence students' capacity to engage across differences (Banks, 2019; Gay, 2018). In higher education, religiosity often informs moral reasoning, empathy, and openness, while cultural diversity awareness reflects students' ability to recognize and respect differences. Guided by this framework, the study examined the relationship between religiosity and cultural diversity awareness among Filipino college students.

A descriptive–correlational research design was employed to describe the levels of religiosity and cultural diversity awareness of the respondents and to determine the association between these two variables. This design was considered appropriate because the study sought to examine existing conditions and relationships without manipulating any factors (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The participants were first-year to third-year college students enrolled in a state college in Mindanao. A total of 651 students took part in the study. Respondents were selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across year levels and academic programs. Participation was voluntary, and ethical standards were strictly observed. Prior to data collection, the purpose of the study was explained to the respondents, and informed consent was obtained. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured throughout the research process, following ethical guidelines for educational research.

Data were gathered using two adapted and validated survey instruments. Religiosity, adapted from Katz and Schmida (1992), was measured using a questionnaire that assessed students' religious practices, beliefs, and adherence to religious teachings. The instrument underwent content validation by subject-matter experts and obtained a very high Aiken's V value of 0.988, indicating excellent content validity. Reliability testing yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.758, which reflects acceptable internal consistency.

Cultural diversity awareness was measured using the Cultural Diversity Awareness Questionnaire (CDAQ), adapted from the Cultural Diversity Self-Assessment by the Special Populations and CTE Illinois Leadership Project (2016),

which focused on students' openness, respect, sensitivity, and attitudes toward cultural differences. Expert validation resulted in an Aiken's V value of 0.750, confirming the instrument's validity. Reliability analysis showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.947, demonstrating very high reliability and strong internal consistency of the items.

The questionnaires were administered in printed form and completed by the respondents during their vacant periods to avoid disruption of regular classes. Trained research assistants facilitated the distribution and retrieval of the instruments to ensure completeness and accuracy of responses.

For data analysis, descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to determine the levels of religiosity and cultural diversity awareness. Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was employed to examine the relationship between the two variables. All statistical tests were conducted using a standard level of 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The sample was composed mostly of female students, who accounted for more than half of the total participants, while male students comprised a smaller portion. This distribution reflects common enrollment patterns in many Philippine state colleges, where female participation in higher education tends to be higher (Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2022; UNESCO, 2021). Such representation suggests that the findings largely capture the perspectives of female students, although male views remain adequately represented to allow meaningful analysis across groups.

In terms of ethnocultural affiliation, the respondents came from diverse indigenous and cultural groups. Cebuano students formed the largest group, followed closely by Tagakaulo, Manobo, and Blaan respondents. A smaller proportion identified as Muslim, while a few belonged to other ethnolinguistic groups such as Ilocano, Ilongo, and Waray. This diversity highlights the multicultural nature of the student population and provides a strong context for examining cultural diversity awareness. The presence of multiple ethnocultural groups suggests that students are regularly exposed to cultural differences, which may influence their attitudes toward inclusion and intercultural interaction (Molintas, 2004; Pertierra, 2013).

Regarding religious affiliation, the majority of the respondents identified as Roman Catholic, reflecting the dominant religious tradition in the Philippines. A considerable number belonged to other Christian denominations, while a smaller group identified as Muslim. This mix of religious backgrounds indicates that, despite Catholic dominance, the campus environment includes students from different faith

traditions. Such diversity is relevant to the study, as daily interactions among students of varied religious backgrounds may shape both religiosity and openness to cultural differences (National Statistics Office, 2010; Pew Research Center, 2017).

The demographic profile shows that the respondents represent a culturally and religiously diverse student population. This diversity provides a meaningful foundation for examining the relationship between religiosity and cultural diversity awareness, as students' beliefs and practices are situated within a pluralistic campus setting.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	438	67.28
Male	213	32.72
<i>Ethnocultural Affiliation</i>		
Blaan	84	12.90
Cebuano	197	30.26
Tagakaulo	186	28.57
Manobo	145	22.27
Muslim	22	3.38
Others (Ilocano, Ilongo, Waray, etc.)	17	2.61
<i>Religious Affiliation</i>		
Roman Catholic	442	67.90
Islam	34	5.22
Christian Denominations	175	26.88
n=651		

Religiosity Level of the Respondents

The results in Table 2 show that the respondents demonstrated a high level of religiosity. Overall, students actively practiced their faith through regular participation in religious rituals, observance of holy days, fasting, prayer, and respect for religious traditions. Practices such as attending religious festivals, giving offerings, and praying before meals received high mean ratings, suggesting that religious activities remain an important part of students' daily lives. These findings are consistent with earlier studies highlighting the centrality of ritual practice in Filipino religiosity (Cornelio, 2016; Clavel, 2014).

The data also reveal strong belief-oriented religiosity. Students expressed firm belief in God, miracles, creation, resurrection, and the moral teachings of their religion, including the idea of rewards and punishments for actions. The highest ratings were given to beliefs related to God's guidance over individuals and the divine creation of the world, indicating that faith plays a meaningful role in shaping students' values and worldview. Respect for religious leaders and acceptance of religious laws further

reflect a strong sense of religious commitment. This aligns with Saroglou's (2011) four dimensions of religiosity—belief, practice, experience, and community—which emphasize the integration of doctrinal faith with lived practice.

In terms of religious discipline, students consistently observed dietary rules both at home and outside, followed prescribed fasting days, and respected periods of mourning. Although some items showed slightly higher variation, the overall pattern suggests that students attempt to apply their religious teachings not only in private settings but also in public and social contexts. This echoes Glock and Stark's (1965) multidimensional model of religiosity, which highlights the behavioral dimension as a key expression of faith.

These results indicate that religiosity among the respondents is not limited to personal belief alone but is expressed through regular practice and daily behavior. This strong religious orientation may influence how students interact with others, shape their moral decisions, and foster respect for diversity within the campus community. Such findings support previous research showing that religiosity can contribute to moral sensitivity and openness in multicultural settings (Hayward & Krause, 2020; Saroglou, 2022).

Table 2. The Level of Religiosity of the Respondents

ITEMS	MEAN	SD	DESCRIPTION
Take part in the holy days of the faith.	4.19	0.81	High
Follow the religion's rules about how men and women interact.	3.98	0.88	High
Keep dietary laws at home.	4.00	0.89	High
Continue observing dietary laws even outside the home.	4.02	0.89	High
Respect days of mourning.	4.12	1.79	High
Join in fasting when it is prescribed.	3.94	0.95	High
Say prayers before meals.	4.06	0.84	High
Offer prayers to mark the close of holy days.	4.03	0.88	High
Celebrate religious festivals.	4.07	0.86	High
Give offerings or tithes.	4.06	0.86	High
Believe in miracles.	4.18	0.83	High
Respect the authority of religious leaders.	4.16	0.85	High
Accept the idea of rewards and punishments based on teachings.	4.13	0.88	High
Believe that God watches over each person.	4.35	0.81	High
Believe in resurrection after death.	4.14	0.95	High
Believe that a divine being created the world and all living things.	4.27	0.84	High
Accept the oral laws of the faith.	4.26	0.81	High
Religiosity	4.12	0.66	High

Level of Cultural Diversity Awareness of the Respondents

Table 3 indicates that the respondents demonstrated a very high level of cultural diversity awareness overall. This suggests that students are generally mindful, respectful, and open when engaging with peers from different cultural backgrounds. Such findings are consistent with earlier studies highlighting the importance of intercultural sensitivity in Philippine higher education (De Guzman & Tan, 2007; UNESCO, 2021).

Most items received very high mean ratings, reflecting strong awareness of personal biases, respect for diverse beliefs, and a willingness to learn from others. Students reported being open to improving their understanding of diversity, asking questions when uncertain, and avoiding judgments based on appearance or stereotypes. These results suggest that students are not only aware of cultural differences but are also reflective about how their own attitudes and actions affect others. This aligns with Banks' (2019) framework of multicultural education, which emphasizes self-reflection and critical awareness as essential components of diversity learning.

High ratings were also noted in items related to inclusion and interaction. Students valued support among different cultures, felt comfortable communicating with people from other backgrounds, and made efforts to ensure that everyone feels accepted. This indicates that cultural awareness is expressed not just in beliefs but also in daily social behavior and peer interactions. Such findings echo Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, which highlights empathy and inclusive communication as markers of advanced intercultural competence.

Some items were rated slightly lower, though still within the high range. These include speaking against offensive comments and recognizing that having one friend from another race does not automatically mean cultural competence. This suggests that while students are generally respectful, there may still be hesitation in actively confronting bias or a need for deeper understanding of what true cultural competence involves. Similar challenges have been noted in studies of intercultural competence among Asian students, where respect is emphasized but direct confrontation of prejudice is less common (Chen & Starosta, 2000).

The findings show that students possess a strong foundation of cultural diversity awareness. They recognize the importance of respect, inclusion, and understanding in a multicultural campus. This level of awareness creates a positive environment where differences are acknowledged and valued, supporting harmonious relationships and meaningful engagement among students from varied cultural backgrounds. These results reinforce the role of higher education in promoting intercultural competence and inclusive practices (UNESCO, 2021; Banks, 2019).

Table 3. *The Level of Cultural Awareness of the Respondents*

ITEMS	MEAN	SD	DESCRIPTION
Aware of personal biases and their effects.	4.18	0.77	Very High
Open to improving in diversity awareness.	4.16	0.74	Very High
Ask for clarification when unsure.	4.21	0.79	Very High
Speak against offensive comments.	3.81	1.00	High
Stand up against discrimination.	4.10	0.84	Very High
Avoid derogatory jokes.	4.10	2.19	Very High
Know that one friend of another race doesn't mean cultural competence.	3.99	1.87	High
Recognize that lack of diversity can exclude others.	4.04	2.18	High
Value support among different cultures.	4.35	0.78	Very High
Avoid judging without facts.	4.20	0.82	Very High
Have friends from different backgrounds.	4.23	0.85	Very High
Communicate well with people of other cultures.	4.16	0.82	Very High
Respect different beliefs and opinions.	4.27	0.77	Very High
Make sure everyone feels accepted.	4.34	2.14	Very High
Avoid language that stereotypes.	4.16	0.80	Very High
Aware of stereotypes about own group.	4.14	0.81	Very High
Encourage others from different cultures to speak up.	4.27	0.77	Very High
Accept that others may think or react differently.	4.11	0.83	Very High
Respect beliefs different from own upbringing.	4.14	0.80	Very High
Do not judge by appearance.	4.07	0.88	Very High
Try to overcome how others stereotype me.	3.94	0.79	Very High
Include diverse people in group decisions.	4.09	0.79	Very High
Build connections with people of other cultures.	4.08	0.82	Very High
Believe "color blindness" ignores culture and history.	4.02	2.19	High
Avoid generalizing one person's behavior to others.	4.11	1.48	Very High
See people from all backgrounds as equally skilled.	4.07	0.79	Very High
Validate, not justify, experiences of discrimination.	4.00	0.87	High
Learn and appreciate other cultures and traditions.	4.20	0.80	Very High
Acknowledge unfair policies against minority groups.	4.08	0.87	Very High
Understand how racism can affect people internally.	4.13	0.81	Very High
Believe race is a social idea, not a biological fact.	4.09	0.82	Very High
Recognize that people's experiences shape how they relate to others.	4.18	0.79	Very High
Cultural Diversity Awareness	4.13	0.57	Very High

The Relationship Between Religiosity and Cultural Diversity Awareness

Table 4 shows that the respondents demonstrated a moderate and significant positive relationship between religiosity and cultural diversity awareness. This means

that students who report stronger religious beliefs and practices also tend to show higher levels of respect, openness, and sensitivity toward cultural differences. Similar findings have been noted in international studies, where religiosity was linked to empathy and prosocial attitudes that support intercultural understanding (Saroglou, 2011; Hayward & Krause, 2020).

The results suggest that religiosity may reinforce values such as compassion, moral responsibility, and respect for others—qualities that are also central to cultural diversity awareness. In many traditions, religious teachings emphasize kindness, fairness, and peaceful coexistence. These values can help shape positive attitudes toward people from different cultural backgrounds, encouraging students to engage more thoughtfully in diverse social settings (Cornelio, 2016; Pew Research Center, 2017).

It is also important to note that religiosity does not appear to limit cultural openness. Instead, the findings indicate that faith may contribute to students’ ability to appreciate diversity on campus. This supports the idea that religious formation can play a constructive role in promoting inclusive and respectful interactions within multicultural environments. In higher education, where students regularly encounter peers from different ethnic and religious groups, such integration of faith and cultural awareness can strengthen social harmony and mutual respect (Banks, 2019; Bennett, 1993).

The results highlight the potential of religiosity as a supportive factor in building intercultural competence. By linking spiritual values with everyday practices of inclusion and respect, students may be better equipped to navigate diversity in ways that foster understanding and cooperation. This underscores the importance of considering both cultural and religious dimensions when designing programs that aim to promote inclusivity in higher education.

Table 4. *The Relationship Between Religiosity and Cultural Diversity Awareness*

VARIABLES	R-VALUE	DESCRIPTION	P-VALUE	INTERPRETATION
Religiosity Cultural Diversity Awareness	0.455	Moderate Correlation	0.000	Significant

Conclusion

This study looked at the levels of religiosity and cultural diversity awareness among college students in a state college in Mindanao and examined how the two are related. The findings show that students generally displayed a high level of religiosity. Their faith was expressed not only through personal beliefs but also through regular practices such as prayer, observing holy days, and following religious traditions. These

practices seemed to shape their values, moral outlook, and sense of responsibility toward others.

The results also revealed that students had a very high level of cultural diversity awareness. They showed respect for cultural differences, recognized their own biases, and were open to interacting with peers from different backgrounds. While students were mostly inclusive and respectful, some areas—like speaking out against offensive remarks—suggest that there is still room to build stronger confidence in confronting bias.

Most importantly, the study found a moderate but significant positive relationship between religiosity and cultural diversity awareness. This means that students who were more engaged in their religious beliefs and practices also tended to be more open, respectful, and sensitive toward cultural differences. Rather than limiting openness, religiosity appeared to support values such as compassion, empathy, and respect, which are essential in a multicultural campus environment. Similar findings have been noted in studies linking religiosity with prosocial behavior and intercultural sensitivity (Saroglou, 2011; Hayward & Krause, 2020).

Overall, the results highlight that religiosity and cultural diversity awareness can coexist and even strengthen one another in higher education. In a campus setting where students come from varied cultural and religious backgrounds, faith traditions may serve as a positive resource for promoting inclusion, understanding, and harmonious relationships (Banks, 2019; Bennett, 1993).

For future research, it would be useful to explore other factors that influence cultural diversity awareness, such as peer interaction, campus climate, or participation in multicultural programs. Longitudinal studies could also examine how religiosity and cultural awareness change over time. In addition, qualitative approaches may provide deeper insight into how students interpret their faith and cultural experiences in everyday campus life.

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