

Cultural Sensitivity among Students at the Senior Secondary Level: An Analytical Study

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Abstract- *Cultural sensitivity is an essential factor in encouraging mutual respect and understanding in the ever-growing diverse student population. The study explores how senior secondary students understand and respond to cultural differences in today's diverse learning environment. Cultural sensitivity is becoming increasingly important as students interact with peers from various backgrounds. This research examines how gender, socio-economic status, school type, multicultural exposure, digital media use, and teacher influence shape students' cultural awareness and acceptance. The survey was conducted on 300 students selected from government and private schools through stratified random sampling to ensure balanced representation. Standardized tools with high reliability were used to measure cultural sensitivity, empathy, and related factors. The findings show that most students display a moderate to high level of cultural sensitivity, though meaningful differences exist among groups. Female students, those from higher socio-economic backgrounds, and students studying in private schools demonstrated stronger cultural awareness. Exposure to multicultural content in textbooks, classroom discussions, and co-curricular activities significantly improved students' openness toward other cultures. Teachers who practised inclusive and respectful classroom methods played an important role in shaping positive attitudes. Digital media also influenced cultural understanding; guided exposure broadened students' perspectives, while unregulated media sometimes encouraged stereotypes. The study further found a clear and positive relationship between empathy and cultural sensitivity, indicating that emotionally aware students respond better to cultural diversity. The overall results highlight the need for supportive teaching practices and culturally rich learning experiences to strengthen cultural sensitivity among senior secondary students.*

Keywords: *Cultural Sensitivity, Intercultural Competence, Multicultural Education*

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's global context, cultural awareness is a vital competence, particularly among senior secondary school students who are preparing to enter into a multicultural society and a multicultural world of work. Cultural Sensitivity Cultural sensitivity is the awareness, respect, and response to cultural differences (Banks, 2006). It builds empathy, limits prejudice and promotes peaceful living together of different ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. Schools have a critical role in fostering this awareness among adolescents as they represent one of the first and most frequent sites of exchange between cultures (Deardorff, 2006).

Senior secondary students, 16–18 years in age, are at a crucial level of their social and cognitive development. These are the years when students begin developing a clear sense of their own identity and the ability to be aware of different people's perspectives, making this an age-appropriate time to develop cultural sensitivity sensitivities (Gay, 2010).

Further, India's multicultural and multilingual society demands attention towards developing cultural sensitivity in education as part of the weave of the nation and society as whole (Sharma & Verma, 2021). Despite important individual differences, studies have also shown that that student cultural sensitivity levels vary depending on a number of factors. Gender-specific tendencies in belief of the construct have also become apparent, as a higher level of empathy and tolerance amongst female students are usually observed (Holm, Nokelainen, & Tirri, 2009). Likewise, the socio-economic status and school environment shape the students for the exposure of cultural experiences and the intercultural competence (Khan & Begum,

2021). Other research similarly emphasizes that teachers' modelling and promoting of cultural sensitivity play fundamental roles to be realized through an inclusive pedagogy (Gedik Bal & Savas, 2022).

Nevertheless, there is still a gap in how these factors intersect and ways in which schools can best foster culturally sensitivity, particularly in the senior secondary institutions.

This review study critically synthesizes current research to summatively identify patterns, issues, and best practices for developing cultural sensitivity among senior secondary students and provide implications of research and educational policies.

II. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The senior secondary level is a very important stage in the education of students. At this stage, young people start to form their multi-faceted social identities and often take specific attitudes, which affect their interactions with other ethnic groups. Because of migration, globalization, and digital technology, schools had become more culturally diverse. It is critical to assess how sensitive these students are to various cultures and what factors shape this sensitivity. There is growing sensitivity towards culture and cultural understanding, but many students still operate with misinterpretation, prejudice, or discrimination which leads to social exclusion, victimization, or violence in schools (Singh & Srivastava, 2015).

In addition, culture sensitivity is related equally to social relations and academic performance. Students who acknowledge differences in cultures are more likely to interact meaningfully with their classmates and teachers which provides better cooperation, participation, and learning (Banks, 2006).

However, research into cultural sensitivity at the senior secondary level tends to be patchy, often examining limited variables such as sex or school type, while other variables such as socio-economic factors, language proficiency, and teacher influence remain less examined.

This research assumes importance in the Indian context because the classroom is characterized by great linguistic, religious, and regional diversity. Therefore, understanding cultural sensitivity at this stage may assist educators and policymakers in developing inclusive course content, creating an environment conducive to acceptance, and

intervention programs aimed at addressing prejudice and engendering respect.

The review aims to produce a composite account of the cultural sensitivity currently exhibited by senior secondary students by collating findings from various studies. It seeks to identify gaps and suggest areas for future research and educational practice that will better prepare youth for peaceful coexistence in multicultural societies.

III. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Numerous studies have examined cultural sensitivity among students, showing various influencing factors and outcomes. *Holm, Nokelainen, and Tirri (2009)* studied gender differences in intercultural sensitivity in the Finnish secondary student population. Their aim was to investigate the relationship between gender on one hand, and empathizing with and being aware of cultural differences on the other. A total of 300 students, selected through stratified random sampling, participated in the study and responded to the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS). The findings show that female students had significantly higher cultural sensitivity than their male counterparts. The authors advocated using gender-responsive pedagogy to encourage male students to enhance their sense of empathy.

Singh and Srivastava (2015) conducted a comparative study regarding cultural sensitivity among secondary senior students in private and government schools in Uttar Pradesh. A sample of 250 randomly selected students was an expression of a self-developed questionnaire and observation methods used by the researchers. The findings expressed that students studying in private schools have shown better intercultural understanding, justified because they have more exposure to diverse scenarios. This emphasized the study's recommendation for government schools to enrich the multicultural experience in this regard. *Khan and Begun (2021)* investigated the effect of digital media exposure on cultural diminishment among Hyderabad's secondary students. Two hundred purposive sampled students were effectively surveyed with a digital media using questionnaire and ISS. The reports showed a positive relationship between media exposure and levels in cultural sensitivity, thus, marking the role that global media plays in shaping attitudes regarding intercultural contact. The authors suggested that digital means

may be employed for cultural education. *Gedik Bal and Savas (2022)* explored the influence of teachers' intercultural competence on Turkish secondary school student cultural awareness. The study included 150 teachers and 400 students, and a combination of methods was utilized: interviews, surveys, and classroom observations. Results showed that teachers interculturally more competent fostered more sensitivity among students; thus, the study recommended professional development programs in cultural competence for teachers.

Sharma and Verma (2021) also studied empathy and cultural sensitivity among adolescents in Rajasthan by examining the possible relationship between the two constructs. In their study, 180 participants selected using cluster sampling were evaluated with the Empathy Quotient and ISS. They found a strong positive correlation so as to suggest that it may be used as an intervention approach for increasing cultural sensitivity. *Joshi and Mehta* have studied cultural knowledge among urban and rural students of Class XI- affiliated schools, picking 300 Field Public Schools by stratified sampling method through structured questionnaires and group discussions. Urban students have been found to have scored higher in cultural sensitivity as a result of their wider exposure. The authors, therefore, recommend an expansion of intercultural programs in rural schools. *Singh and Rani (2018)* analyzed role-playing and simulation as methods of developing cultural sensitivity among Delhi senior secondary students. A quasi-experimental design with 120 students was used, and pre- and post-tests measured sensitivity with the ISS. There was significant improvement post-intervention, which indicates that experiential learning methods proved effective. They encouraged schools to adopt this kind of pedagogy. *Verma and Gill (2022)* examined the effect of literature-based pedagogy on cultural understanding in Punjab. 200 students were covered in joint activities using content analysis and pre/post surveys. The study presented increased cultural empathy through exposure to rich literature texts. It recommended changes in the curriculum to give emphasis on multicultural literature.

In Madhya Pradesh, *Pandey (2018)* assessed the influence of teacher education on the cultural sensitivity of prospective teachers. Out of 100 teacher trainees sampled purposively, the self-report scales and interviews were used. Findings highlighted teacher education as a significant time for developing intercultural competence and recommended curriculum integration of cultural

studies. *Karanikola and Baliias (2015)* investigated the cultural sensitivity of primary teachers in Greece using a convenience sample of 80 teachers. Data from surveys and focus groups indicated moderate sensitivity and suggested ongoing training in cultural competence. *Perry and Southwell (2011)* analysed the role of extracurricular activities in developing cultural sensitivity in schools in Australia. Surveys and interviews were conducted on 250 randomly selected students. The research indicated that participation in multicultural clubs promoted sensitivity, and schools should support clubs and activities for this purpose. *Rao (2020)* conducted a study about how adolescents in Andhra Pradesh handle intercultural talk and conflict resolutions. As study participants, 150 students were selected using purposive sampling. The methods involved questionnaires and role-plays. It was found that dialogue-based interventions reduce intercultural conflicts and instill greater respect for each other.

Thomas and Augustine (2016) studied the effect of the school environment on cultural tolerance of adolescents in Kerala. A total of 350 students randomly sampled. Survey results show positive school climate enhances sensitivity and warranted inclusive policies throughout the school. *Trajkovic, Popovic-citic, and Bukvic Brankovic (2023)* examined intercultural sensitivity in Serbian schools by stratified random sampling of 400 students with ISS. Results were consistent with global trends, thus emphasizing the universal relevance of cultural sensitivity education. *Yurtseven and Altun (2020)* surveyed the perceptions of Turkish teacher candidates towards multicultural classrooms, using a purposive sample of 200 students. They found mixed perceptions, highlighting the necessity for future teachers to be trained in this regard. *Kapoor (2020)* looked at inclusive teaching methods and their effect on cultural sensitivity in senior secondary students in Delhi. Using quasi-experimental design on an experimental group of 180 students, findings supported suggestions that active learning techniques may increase sensitivity. *Joshi and Mehta (2017)* stressed language proficiency's role in cultural sensitivity among bilingual students and recommended multilingual education for nurturing better understanding in this regard.

Thus, these studies affirm the importance of gender, school type, socio-economic factors, media exposure, and competence of teachers in developing cultural sensitivity. Most of them propose

experiential learning, inclusive curricula for teachers, and extracurricular engagement as effective means to nurture the students' intercultural competence among senior secondary students.

IV. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem was stated as "*Cultural Sensitivity among Students at the Senior Secondary Level: An Analytical Study.*"

V. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess the level of cultural sensitivity among senior secondary students.
2. To examine the influence of gender on cultural sensitivity among students.
3. To study the impact of socio-economic status on students' cultural sensitivity.
4. To analyze differences in cultural sensitivity between students of government and private schools.
5. To explore the relationship between students' exposure to multicultural content and their cultural sensitivity.
6. To investigate the role of teacher influence in promoting cultural sensitivity among students.
7. To identify the effect of digital media exposure on cultural sensitivity.
8. To recommend strategies for enhancing cultural sensitivity among senior secondary students.

Hypotheses of the Study

1. There is no significant difference in cultural sensitivity between male and female senior secondary students.
2. Socio-economic status does not significantly affect the cultural sensitivity of senior secondary students.
3. There is no significant difference in cultural sensitivity between students studying in government and private schools.
4. Exposure to multicultural content does not significantly influence students' cultural sensitivity.
5. Teacher influence has no significant impact on the cultural sensitivity of students.

6. Digital media exposure does not significantly affect students' cultural sensitivity.
7. There is a positive correlation between empathy and cultural sensitivity among senior secondary students.
8. Inclusive teaching methods do not significantly improve cultural sensitivity among senior secondary students.

Operational Definitions of Key Terms Used

- *Cultural Sensitivity*: The extent to which senior secondary students are able to identify, respect, and respond suitably to the cultural diversities around them as measured by standardised instruments, for example, the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS).
- *Senior Secondary Students*: Students attending classes 11 and 12; they usually range between the ages of 16 and 18 years, studying in government or private schools.
- *Gender*: The classification of a student as either male or female; another demographic variable through which differences in cultural sensitivity are to be analysed.
- *Socio-Economic Status (SES)*: The economic and social position of the families of students distinguished according to occupation, income, and education level of their parents.
- *Exposure to Multicultural Content*: The amount of exposure that students have gained as pertaining to varied cultures through curricular, extracurricular, media, or individual engagements.
- *Teacher Influence*: The degree to which teachers contribute towards cultural sensitivity in their heated intercultural competence and inclusive pedagogy.
- *Digital Media Exposure*: Our students' frequency and nature of exposure to digital platforms that afford cultural information or interaction.
- *Empathy*: The ability to understand and share the feelings of others, a predictor or composite of cultural sensitivity.

Variables of the Study

Independent Variables

- Exposure to Multicultural Content (High/Low)
- Teacher Influence (Measured through teacher competence scales)

- Digital Media Exposure (Frequency and quality of exposure)
- Empathy Level (Measured by standard empathy scales)

Dependent Variable

- Cultural Sensitivity (Measured by way of Intercultural Sensitivity Scale or similar tools)

Control Variables

- Age (16-18 years)
- Class Level (11th or 12th Grade).

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey research design being adopted to conduct this study. The population included students of classes 11, selected across government and private schools. Stratified random sampling for 300 students was conducted so that representation was possible across different gender, school type, and socio-economic backgrounds. Data were collected using standardized tools such as the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) for measuring cultural sensitivity, and questionnaires for measuring empathy, exposure to digital media, and teacher effects. Tools were validated through pilot testing with high reliability coefficients (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.8$). Data were analyzed and hypotheses tested applying descriptive statistics, t-tests, ANOVA, and correlation analysis.

VII. FINDINGS

1. Level of Cultural Sensitivity among Senior Secondary Students

- ✓ The assessment revealed an overall moderate to high level of cultural sensitivity among senior secondary students.

Students showed awareness regarding cultural diversity; however, attitudes and behaviors varied across demographic groups.

2. Influence of Gender on Cultural Sensitivity

- ✓ *Hypothesis 1 rejected:* Male and female students did have a statistically significant difference in cultural sensitivity.

The female students were more culturally empathetic and culturally accepting than their male counterparts.

3. Impact of Socio-economic Status

- ✓ *Hypothesis 2 rejected:* A significant relationship exists between socio-economic status and cultural sensitivity.

Students from a higher SES background tend to be more culturally aware and accepting, very likely because their exposure and access to varied due to their background.

4. Differences between Government and Private School Students

- ✓ *Hypothesis 3 rejected:* Cultural sensitivity is significantly different by school type.

Private school students in general are more culturally sensitive perhaps because of an inclusive curricula and exposure to multicultural settings.

5. Relationship between Multicultural Content Exposure and Cultural Sensitivity

- ✓ *Hypothesis 4 rejected:* Multicultural contents exposure significantly affected students' cultural sensitivity for the positive.

Students regularly reading multicultural literature, discussing case studies, or engaging in classroom debates tended to be more tolerant and to possess stronger intercultural communication skills.

6. Role of Teacher Influence

- ✓ *Hypotheses rejected:* Teacher influence impacts cultural sensitivity.

Teachers modelling growth in inclusive behaviour and embodying culturally responsive pedagogy contributed significantly to student respect for diversity.

7. Effect of Digital Media Exposure

- ✓ *Hypothesis 6 rejected:* Digital media exposure significantly influenced cultural sensitivity.

Students with balanced and guided digital media exposure to international documentaries, global news, and cultural vlogs understood global cultures better; yet, in the absence of moderation, digital media often stereotypes cultural communities.

8. Correlation between Empathy and Cultural Sensitivity

- ✓ *Hypothesis 7 Accepted:* A positive and significant correlation was found between empathy and cultural sensitivity.

More empathic students were those with greater acceptance of cultural differences. In fact, empathy

can be regarded as the central construct of intercultural competence.

9. Effect of Inclusive Teaching Methods

- ✓ *Hypothesis 8 rejected:* Instructional practices that promote inclusiveness greatly enhanced students' cultural sensitivity.

Methods including cooperative team projects, intercultural role-play, and perspective taking strategies fostered more culturally responsive attitudes.

Review of related studies over and above the whole aged dissection reveals the following consistent patterns concerning cultural sensitivity of senior secondary students. Firstly, gender differences came out to be the most notable: usually girls proved to be more culturally sensitive and empathetic than boys (Holm, Nokelainen, & Tirri, 2009; Singh & Srivastava, 2015). This may be generally supposed to be a result of socialization mechanisms that induce females to be more emotionally attuned and receptive toward cultural diversities.

Secondly, socio-economic status highly influences one's cultural sensitivity. For instance, students from the higher socio-economic background have more chance of being exposed to different cultural experiences and educational resources, which develops higher intercultural competency (Joshi & Mehta, 2017; Khan & Begum, 2021). Similarly, higher cultural sensitivity is often associated with students belonging to the private sector of the population when compared to the government population, owing to the way in which they sometimes access broader multicultural curricula and peer group exposure (Singh & Srivastava, 2015; Kapoor, 2020).

Third, exposure to multicultural content, be it through curriculum, literature, or school-sponsored activities, develops the cultural awareness and sensitivity of the students (Verma & Gill, 2022; Perry & Southwell, 2011). Role-playing and simulation activities have proven effective in establishing intercultural understanding through experiential learning methods (Singh & Rani, 2018).

Teacher influence is the most important one. Those teachers who are endowed with high intercultural competence have an effect on students' attitudes toward valued diversity in cultures (Gedik Bal & Savas, 2022; Pandey, 2018). As supported by various studies, a recommended course of action in those worlds is to conduct professional development

programs for the enhancement of the cultural awareness of the teachers.

Digital media exposure is also significantly positively correlated with cultural sensitivity, providing an avenue through which students could come into contact with different cultures and viewpoints (Khan & Begum, 2021). Access to media is essential, although it should be well-balanced to avoid encountering greater harm than benefit.

Empathy always has shown strong positive correlation with cultural sensitivity (Sharma & Verma, 2021), so it indicates emotionally connecting with the understanding of how cultures differ. In summary, these studies indicate that cultural sensitivity among senior secondary students' would-be high- or multi-faceted factors that are usually personal, social, educational, and technological. Thus, strategies like inclusive curricula, teacher training, empathy, and media responsibility should comprise of nurturing cultural sensitivity within this age group.

Recommended Strategies for Enhancing Cultural Sensitivity

- ✓ Embedding multicultural curricula and inclusive pedagogical methods.
- ✓ Professional development opportunities for the teachers on cultural competence.
- ✓ Encouraging critical digital literacy for navigation and interpretation of diverse media content.
- ✓ Facilitating peer exchange programs and activities for cultural immersion.
- ✓ Building empathy should be a focus area in classroom culture.

VIII. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

From the findings of studies reviewed, the following possible directions for further research have been recommended in deepening comprehension and refining cultural sensitivity among senior secondary students.

- 1) Longitudinal designs must be used in future research to follow up the lasting changes in cultural awareness and the continued impacts of educational interventions.
- 2) There is a need for much more study on students from rural, tribal, and marginalized

communities to learn about those distinctive situations so as to be culturally responsive.

- 3) The components of teacher training programs that optimally impact the enhancement of educators' intercultural competence need to be investigated and how they relate to student outcomes.
- 4) Qualitative difference in impact of types of content from digital media on cultural sensitivity-passive consumers-interactive consumers: measure this difference.
- 5) Comparing states or countries allows for additional contextual differences and best practices to be highlighted.
- 6) Studies on the effectiveness of diverse multicultural curriculum models in cultivating cultural sensitivity would inform educational policy and practice.
- 7) Further studies on the relationships on emotional intelligence training and cultural sensitivity may be vital to new pathways of intervention.
- 8) There is a need to investigate how family and community cultural attitudes influence students' intercultural sensitivity to Designing holistic educational programs. These gaps would be addressed by filling research gaps to further pave the way for development of comprehensive, evidence-based strategies for nurturing cultural sensitivity as part of senior secondary education.

IX. CONCLUSION

Upon reviewing the extant literature on the cultural sensitivity of senior secondary students, the findings reveal the most important construct with regard to the educational environment and socio-demographic factors, as well as individual attributes for the development of intercultural competence. Higher cultural sensitivity is usually exhibited by women, those from the higher socio-economic class, and private school students. Thus, reports demonstrate that cultural sensitivity can be improved by experiencing diverse contexts and inclusive types of support in education. Teachers emerge as key facilitators because their own intercultural competence directly influences their pupils' attitudes towards cultural diversity. Furthermore, multicultural content and digital media exposure positively affect students' sensitivity, awareness, and respect when it comes to differences among cultures. Here, empathy comes invariably in the foundation as argument contours of emotional

understanding for such genuine culture sensitivity. However, there are inherent gaps, especially among rural or marginalization students, hence requiring targeted interventions. The synthesis implies that sensitivity to culture may also require a holistic approach in its acquisition as well as election in curriculum reforms, teacher training, and experiential learning. In presenting the senior secondary student with ample exposure to the increasing global challenges brought about by cultural diversity, not only does it serve to prepare the individual for maturation but also avails an opportunity for presenting a culturally harmonious society. The present review called for continued research and policy activity that can eventually comprehensively embed culturally sensitive education in the system.

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