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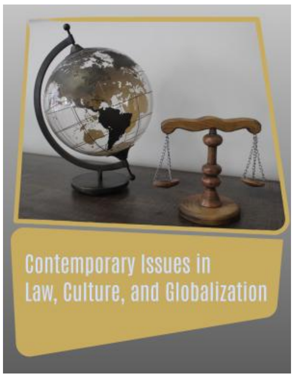

Cultural Diversity and Judicial Decision-Making in Contemporary Courts

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore how cultural diversity is perceived, interpreted, and managed by legal professionals in judicial decision-making processes in contemporary courts. This qualitative study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with 24 legal professionals in Tehran, including judges, attorneys, prosecutors, court administrators, and legal scholars with experience in cases involving cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious, or migration-related dimensions. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, and recruitment continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. Data were collected through individual interviews lasting 45–75 minutes. Interviews focused on participants' experiences of culturally diverse litigants, interpretation of cultural evidence, communication barriers, perceptions of neutrality and fairness, and institutional challenges in adjudication. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed through thematic analysis using NVivo software. Trustworthiness was strengthened through peer debriefing, member checking, reflexive memo-writing, and maintaining an audit trail. Analysis generated four main categories: cultural context as an interpretive resource, procedural communication and linguistic barriers, judicial impartiality under conditions of cultural difference, and institutional limitations in culturally responsive adjudication. Participants emphasized that cultural diversity rarely determines judicial outcomes directly, but it shapes how facts, credibility, intention, family obligations, social norms, and litigant behavior are understood. While some judges considered cultural background necessary for contextual interpretation, others feared that excessive reliance on culture could threaten equality before the law. Participants also reported difficulties related to translation, courtroom demeanor, gender norms, minority status, and limited professional training in cultural competence. Cultural diversity influences judicial decision-making not as an alternative source of law, but as a contextual factor affecting interpretation, communication, credibility assessment, and perceptions of procedural justice. Contemporary courts require structured guidelines, judicial education, reliable interpretation services, and culturally informed reasoning practices to balance equality, impartiality, and contextual fairness.

Keywords: cultural diversity; judicial decision-making; contemporary courts; legal pluralism; procedural justice; cultural competence; qualitative research; Tehran

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Introduction

Contemporary courts increasingly operate in societies characterized by cultural, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and normative diversity. Migration, urbanization, globalization, transnational family relations, and plural forms of social belonging have transformed the social composition of litigants who enter judicial institutions. Courts are therefore no longer merely institutions for applying abstract legal rules to formally defined disputes; they are also sites where state law encounters diverse moral worlds, family systems, community expectations, religious commitments, linguistic practices, and culturally embedded understandings of responsibility, harm, honor, obligation, and justice. This does not mean that culture should override law. Rather, it indicates that judicial decision-making often takes place in a complex interpretive field where formal legal norms and social meanings intersect.

Judicial decision-making has traditionally been described through formalist models that emphasize legal texts, statutory interpretation, precedent, evidence, and procedural rules. From this perspective, judges are expected to decide cases through neutral application of legal principles. However, socio-legal scholarship has long challenged the assumption that judging is a purely mechanical activity. Legal realism, behavioral legal studies, and empirical judicial politics have shown that judicial decisions are shaped not only by legal doctrine but also by institutional settings, cognitive processes, professional norms, social background, courtroom interaction, and perceptions of legitimacy (Baum, 2006; Epstein & Knight, 1998; Guthrie et al., 2007; Posner, 2008). Judges work within law, but they also interpret facts, evaluate credibility, assign meaning to conduct, and construct narratives of responsibility. These interpretive functions become especially significant when litigants come from culturally diverse backgrounds.

The concept of culture in legal settings is difficult and sometimes controversial. Culture can refer to shared practices, symbols, values, religious commitments, language, kinship structures, gender expectations, customary norms, or historically produced forms of social identity. Yet culture is never fixed, homogeneous, or determinative. Scholars of multiculturalism have warned that legal systems may essentialize minority communities if culture is treated as a stable explanation for individual behavior (Phillips, 2007). A person's conduct cannot be reduced to ethnicity, religion, nationality, or community membership. At the same time, ignoring cultural context may produce another form of injustice: the false assumption that all litigants enter court with the same linguistic resources, institutional familiarity, social power, and normative background. The central challenge for contemporary courts is therefore to recognize cultural context without stereotyping, and to preserve equality before the law without imposing culturally blind interpretations of social behavior.

Legal pluralism provides an important theoretical lens for understanding this challenge. Legal pluralism refers to the coexistence of multiple normative orders within a social field, including state law, religious norms, customary practices, family expectations, professional rules, and community-based conflict resolution mechanisms (Merry, 1988; Tamanaha, 2008). In plural social settings, individuals may navigate several normative systems simultaneously. For example, a family dispute may involve statutory family law, religious expectations, kinship obligations, and community reputation. A commercial dispute may involve formal contract law alongside trust-based norms of ethnic or neighborhood networks. A criminal case may involve legal definitions of intent or coercion, while litigants interpret the same events through concepts of shame, honor, duty, or survival. Courts must decide according to state law, but they often encounter facts that are meaningful only when placed within broader normative contexts.

The literature on cultural defense illustrates both the promise and danger of cultural reasoning in courts. Renteln (2004) argues that cultural evidence may help courts understand defendants' motivations, intentions, and social circumstances. Such evidence does not necessarily excuse conduct, but it can contribute to more accurate and equitable adjudication. However, critics caution that cultural defense arguments may reinforce stereotypes, especially when minority cultures are portrayed as backward, patriarchal, violent, irrational, or incompatible with modern legal norms. Courts may also apply cultural reasoning asymmetrically, treating minority practices as "cultural" while assuming majority norms to be neutral or universal. Thus, the legal use of culture requires careful boundaries: culture may illuminate context, but it should not erase agency, justify harm, or replace legal standards.

Judicial impartiality is also complicated by research on cognitive bias. Studies in behavioral legal decision-making suggest that judges, like other decision-makers, may be influenced by intuitive reasoning, implicit associations, framing effects, and unconscious biases (Guthrie et al., 2007; Rachlinski et al., 2009). Rachlinski and colleagues (2009) found that judges may hold implicit biases, although professional motivation and conscious effort can reduce their influence. Kang and colleagues (2012) similarly argue that courtroom actors—including judges, lawyers, jurors, and witnesses—may be affected by implicit bias, requiring institutional strategies to reduce its impact. In culturally diverse courts, implicit bias may shape how judges perceive credibility, emotional expression, silence, eye contact, gender roles, accents, religious dress, migration status, or unfamiliar family practices. These factors are often not legally decisive in themselves, but they may influence how evidence is interpreted.

Procedural justice theory adds another important dimension. Tyler (2006) argues that people are more likely to view legal authorities as legitimate when they perceive procedures as fair, respectful, neutral, and voice-giving. In culturally diverse courts, procedural justice depends not only on formal access to hearings but also on whether litigants understand the process, can communicate effectively, feel respected, and believe that their social background has not been misread or prejudged. Grootelaar and van den Bos (2018) show that trust in judges is connected to litigants' perceptions of procedural fairness, although the relationship can be moderated by outcome concerns and prior experiences. For culturally diverse litigants, a technically correct judgment may still appear unjust if the process is linguistically inaccessible, culturally dismissive, or symbolically humiliating.

Judicial diversity has also become a central issue in debates on fair adjudication. Empirical studies have examined whether judges' gender, race, and social identity influence decision-making patterns, particularly in cases involving discrimination, gender-based claims, civil rights, or minority interests (Boyd et al., 2010; Boyd, 2016). The purpose of judicial diversity is not to suggest that judges should decide cases based on identity, but to recognize that professional judgment is enriched when courts include varied social experiences and when institutional perspectives are not monopolized by a narrow social group. A more diverse judiciary may improve public confidence, reduce blind spots, and broaden interpretive sensitivity in cases involving cultural difference.

Despite extensive scholarship on legal pluralism, cultural defense, implicit bias, procedural justice, and judicial diversity, there remains a need for qualitative research examining how legal professionals themselves understand cultural diversity in everyday judicial practice. Much of the existing literature is theoretical, doctrinal, or based on quantitative models of judicial behavior. Less attention has been given to how judges, attorneys, prosecutors, court staff, and legal experts describe the practical dilemmas of cultural diversity: when culture is legally relevant, when it becomes stereotyping, how translation affects credibility, how courtroom rituals privilege some litigants over others, and how institutional constraints shape judicial reasoning.

Tehran provides a valuable context for exploring these issues. As a large metropolitan legal environment, Tehran courts encounter people with different ethnic, linguistic, religious, socioeconomic, and migration backgrounds. Legal professionals may face disputes involving family law, criminal responsibility, labor conflict, migration-related vulnerability, minority customs, gender expectations, and transnational relations. In such settings, judicial decision-making requires balancing formal legal equality with contextual understanding. The court must neither ignore diversity nor allow cultural arguments to undermine rights, especially the rights of women, children, migrants, and marginalized groups.

Accordingly, this study explores how cultural diversity is perceived and managed in judicial decision-making among legal professionals in Tehran. The study asks: How do legal professionals describe the role of cultural diversity in contemporary courts? What kinds of cultural issues become relevant in judicial decision-making? How do judges and other legal actors balance impartiality, equality, and contextual interpretation? What institutional limitations affect culturally responsive adjudication? By addressing these questions, the study contributes to socio-legal understandings of judicial reasoning and offers practical insights for improving procedural fairness in culturally diverse courts.

Methods and Materials

This study employed a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to explore meanings, experiences, perceptions, and interpretive practices rather than measure predetermined variables. The phenomenon under investigation—how cultural diversity enters judicial decision-making—is complex, context-dependent, and embedded in professional judgment. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were appropriate for eliciting detailed accounts of courtroom experiences, interpretive dilemmas, institutional constraints, and professional reflections.

The study was informed by an interpretivist socio-legal perspective. This perspective assumes that judicial decision-making is not only a formal legal process but also a meaning-making activity shaped by legal rules, institutional routines, cultural assumptions, professional identities, and courtroom interactions. The study did not seek to evaluate the correctness of judicial decisions. Rather, it explored how legal professionals understand the relevance of cultural diversity in judicial reasoning and procedural fairness.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling from legal professionals working in Tehran. Inclusion criteria were: at least five years of professional experience in the legal or judicial field; direct or indirect experience with court cases involving culturally diverse litigants; willingness to participate in an interview; and ability to discuss professional experiences without disclosing confidential case details. The final sample consisted of 24 participants: 8 judges, 7 attorneys, 3 prosecutors or legal officers, 3 court administrators or mediators, and 3 legal scholars with practical experience in judicial training or legal consultation.

Recruitment continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. Initial saturation was observed after 21 interviews, when no substantially new themes emerged. Three additional interviews were conducted to confirm the stability and depth of the categories. This sample size is consistent with qualitative research emphasizing saturation as a guiding principle in interview-based studies (Guest et al., 2006; Hennink et al., 2017).

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews. Interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes and were conducted in private professional settings or through secure online communication when in-person meetings were not feasible. The interview guide included open-ended questions such as: How do you understand cultural diversity in contemporary courts? In what kinds of cases does cultural background become relevant? How do judges distinguish between relevant cultural context and irrelevant cultural claims? What communication barriers arise in culturally diverse cases? How do cultural assumptions affect credibility assessment? What institutional resources are needed to improve fairness in such cases?

Follow-up questions were used to clarify meanings, obtain examples, and explore tensions in participants' responses. Participants were asked not to disclose names, case numbers, or identifiable information about litigants. With consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Field notes were written after each interview to document contextual impressions, emerging ideas, and reflexive observations.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis followed an iterative process involving familiarization with transcripts, initial coding, searching for categories, reviewing categories, defining themes, and writing analytic interpretations

(Braun & Clarke, 2006). NVivo software was used to organize transcripts, code interview segments, compare categories, retrieve quotations, and maintain analytic memos. Coding began inductively, allowing concepts to emerge from the data. After initial coding, similar codes were grouped into broader categories. These categories were then refined by comparing them across participant groups and examining negative or divergent cases.

To enhance trustworthiness, several strategies were used. Credibility was supported through member checking with selected participants, peer debriefing with two qualitative researchers, and repeated engagement with the transcripts. Dependability was strengthened through an audit trail documenting coding decisions, category development, and revisions. Confirmability was addressed through reflexive memo-writing, especially regarding the researcher's assumptions about law, culture, and judicial neutrality. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the study context, participant characteristics, and analytic categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017).

Participation was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent before the interviews. They were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw, confidentiality protections, and the anonymization of all interview material. No identifiable case information was collected or reported. Participants were assigned codes such as P1, P2, and P3. Audio files and transcripts were stored securely and accessed only by the research team. The study followed ethical principles of confidentiality, informed consent, voluntary participation, and avoidance of professional or legal harm.

Findings

The study included 24 participants from Tehran. Of these, 13 were male and 11 were female. Participants' ages ranged from 29 to 58 years. In terms of age distribution, 8 participants were between 29 and 39 years old, 10 were between 40 and 49 years old, and 6 were 50 years old or above. Regarding professional role, 8 participants were judges, 7 were attorneys, 3 were prosecutors or legal officers, 3 were court administrators or mediators, and 3 were legal scholars or judicial trainers. Professional experience ranged from 5 to 28 years; 7 participants had 5–10 years of experience, 11 had 11–20 years, and 6 had more than 20 years. Sixteen participants reported frequent involvement in cases with cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious, migration-related, or family-normative dimensions, while 8 reported occasional involvement.

Participants described cultural diversity as an interpretive resource that may help courts understand the social meaning of conduct, intention, conflict, and responsibility. They emphasized that culture should not replace statutory law, but it may clarify the background of disputes, particularly in family conflicts, inheritance disputes, criminal cases involving intention or coercion, and cases involving migrants or minority communities. Several participants argued that judicial reasoning becomes incomplete when cultural context is ignored. One judge stated, "The law gives us the framework, but the facts come from people's lives. Sometimes a sentence, a silence, or a family reaction cannot be understood without knowing the cultural background" (P4, judge). However, participants also warned against using culture as an automatic explanation. An attorney explained, "Culture can help the court understand why something happened, but it should not become a ready-made excuse. The individual still has agency, and the rights of others must remain protected" (P11, attorney). This category shows that participants viewed culture as relevant mainly at the level of factual interpretation, credibility assessment, motive, and proportionality, rather than as an independent source of legal authority.

The second category concerned communication barriers in culturally diverse courtrooms. Participants reported that language differences, dialects, unfamiliar legal terminology, low legal literacy, and dependence on informal translators can affect litigants' ability to present their claims. Courtroom communication was described as highly formal, fast-paced, and shaped by professional assumptions that many litigants do not share. One court administrator noted, "Some people say yes to everything because they are afraid or because they do not understand the legal meaning of the question. Later, the file shows that they accepted something, but in reality they did not understand it" (P16, court administrator). Participants also emphasized that demeanor may be culturally misread. Avoiding eye contact, emotional restraint, silence, or indirect speech may be interpreted as evasiveness, disrespect, or weakness, while in some cultural settings these behaviors may indicate respect, shame, fear, or gendered expectations. A defense attorney stated, "I have seen clients judged by their way of speaking before their evidence was really heard. Accent, clothing, and nervous behavior can quietly shape the atmosphere of the hearing" (P8, attorney). This finding suggests that procedural fairness depends not only on formal access to court but also on meaningful communication and culturally cautious interpretation of courtroom behavior.

Participants repeatedly discussed the tension between cultural sensitivity and judicial impartiality. Many believed that judges must be open to cultural context but must avoid favoritism, stereotyping, or unequal standards. Some participants viewed cultural arguments with suspicion, especially when they appeared to justify gender inequality, violence, child marriage, coercive family pressure, or denial of individual rights. One prosecutor stated, "We cannot allow someone to say, 'This is our culture,' and then ignore harm. Culture cannot be higher than justice or human dignity" (P14, prosecutor). At the same time, participants acknowledged that claims of neutrality may conceal majority cultural assumptions. A legal scholar explained, "The court often thinks it is neutral, but the official language, the dress code, the style of argument, even what is considered 'reasonable' may reflect the dominant culture" (P21, legal scholar). Judges described impartiality as an active discipline requiring awareness of one's assumptions. One participant stated, "Impartiality is not blindness. It means seeing the context but not becoming captured by it" (P2, judge). This category indicates that cultural diversity requires a more reflexive understanding of impartiality—one that combines equal legal standards with awareness of how cultural assumptions may enter judicial interpretation.

The fourth category concerned institutional constraints that limit culturally responsive judicial decision-making. Participants identified heavy caseloads, limited hearing time, inadequate interpreter services, lack of cultural competence training, insufficient expert testimony, and absence of clear guidelines for evaluating cultural evidence. Judges reported that time pressure often prevents deeper exploration of social context. One judge explained, "In principle, we should understand the background, but in practice there are many files, limited time, and little institutional support. The system expects speed more than interpretation" (P6, judge). Attorneys also noted that cultural evidence is often introduced informally and inconsistently. Some judges welcome contextual explanation, while others dismiss it as irrelevant. A lawyer stated, "There is no clear method. One judge may listen carefully; another may say culture has nothing to do with the case. So the result depends too much on personal sensitivity" (P10, attorney). Participants recommended judicial education, professional interpreters, cultural expert consultation, written guidelines, and clearer reasoning in judgments where cultural context is considered. This category reveals that culturally responsive adjudication cannot depend only on individual judicial awareness; it requires institutional resources and procedural safeguards.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that cultural diversity influences judicial decision-making primarily through interpretation rather than direct legal substitution. Participants did not suggest that cultural norms should replace formal law. Instead, they described culture as a contextual factor that may help courts understand facts, intentions, relational obligations, communication patterns, and the social meaning of disputed conduct. This finding aligns with legal pluralism theory, which emphasizes that state law operates alongside other normative orders in socially diverse settings (Merry, 1988; Tamanaha, 2008). Individuals who enter court may be shaped by family expectations, religious norms, migration histories, minority identities, or community-based understandings of obligation. The court must decide according to law, but it cannot always interpret the facts accurately if it ignores these normative backgrounds. At the same time, the participants' caution against cultural determinism reflects Phillips's (2007) warning that culture should not be treated as a fixed explanation for individual behavior. The finding also corresponds with Renteln's (2004) argument that cultural evidence may improve fairness when used to clarify context, while not necessarily excusing unlawful conduct. Thus, the study supports a balanced approach: culture may be legally relevant when it improves factual understanding, but it should not become a blanket justification or a basis for unequal rights.

The first category, cultural context as an interpretive resource, contributes to socio-legal debates on the relationship between law and culture. Rosen (2006) conceptualizes law as a cultural system, meaning that legal reasoning is itself embedded in social meanings, symbols, and classifications. Participants' accounts supported this view by showing that judicial interpretation involves more than reading statutes; it involves understanding narratives, motives, credibility, and social relationships. In culturally diverse cases, the same behavior may have different meanings depending on context. Silence may indicate fear, respect, trauma, or strategic avoidance. Family pressure may be interpreted as ordinary advice, coercion, or social control. A gift may be seen as affection, compensation, bribery, or customary obligation. Judicial interpretation must therefore distinguish between legal relevance and cultural background. The findings suggest that contemporary courts need an interpretive vocabulary that allows culture to be considered without turning culture into stereotype. This is particularly important in cases involving minority litigants, migrants, women, and socially vulnerable groups, whose conduct may be more easily misread through dominant assumptions.

The second category, procedural communication and linguistic barriers, supports procedural justice theory. Tyler (2006) argues that legal legitimacy depends heavily on whether people believe they were treated fairly, respectfully, and neutrally, and whether they had a meaningful opportunity to express themselves. Participants' descriptions show that culturally diverse litigants may face procedural inequality even when formal rules are applied equally. If a litigant does not understand legal terminology, lacks access to a qualified interpreter, or feels intimidated by courtroom rituals, the right to be heard becomes incomplete. Grootelaar and van den Bos (2018) similarly emphasize the relationship between perceived procedural justice and trust in judges. The present findings extend this argument by showing that procedural justice in culturally diverse courts requires linguistic accessibility and cultural caution in interpreting demeanor. Courts often rely on speech patterns, emotional expression, and behavioral cues to assess credibility. However, such cues are culturally variable and may be affected by trauma, gender norms, class position, migration status, or fear of authority. Therefore, procedural fairness requires judges to avoid overreliance on culturally specific expectations of "proper" courtroom behavior.

The third category, judicial impartiality under conditions of cultural difference, reveals a central normative tension. Participants viewed impartiality not as ignoring culture but as managing cultural context carefully within the boundaries of equal rights and legal standards. This finding is consistent with behavioral research showing that judges, like other decision-makers, may be influenced by intuitive judgments and implicit associations (Guthrie et al., 2007; Rachlinski et al., 2009). Kang et al. (2012) argue that implicit bias may affect courtroom actors and that institutional interventions are needed to reduce its influence. In the present study, participants did not usually describe bias in explicit terms; rather, they referred to subtle processes such as assumptions about accents, clothing, emotional expression, gender relations, and minority status. These subtle processes may influence credibility assessments even when judges consciously value neutrality. The findings therefore suggest that impartiality should be understood as an active professional practice involving self-awareness, reasoned explanation, and institutional safeguards. "Color-blind" or "culture-blind" neutrality may appear fair, but it can reproduce dominant cultural assumptions if it refuses to examine how those assumptions shape interpretation.

The fourth category, institutional limitations, demonstrates that culturally responsive adjudication cannot rely only on individual goodwill. Participants described heavy caseloads, insufficient time, lack of qualified interpreters, absence of cultural competence training, and inconsistent treatment of cultural evidence. These findings align with Anleu and Mack's (2017) argument that judicial authority is performed through everyday courtroom practices under institutional pressures. Judges do not decide cases in ideal deliberative conditions; they work within crowded dockets, procedural deadlines, evidentiary limits, and organizational expectations. Posner (2008) similarly emphasizes that judging is influenced by institutional and pragmatic constraints. In this study, participants indicated that even judges who value contextual understanding may be unable to explore cultural factors adequately because the system prioritizes speed and formal processing. The absence of clear guidelines also creates inconsistency: cultural context may be taken seriously in one courtroom and dismissed in another. This threatens both equality and predictability. A more systematic approach to cultural evidence could help judges distinguish relevant context from stereotype, excuse, or prejudice.

The findings also have implications for debates on judicial diversity. Participants did not claim that judges from particular backgrounds automatically decide culturally diverse cases better. However, several accounts suggested that varied professional and social experiences may improve interpretive sensitivity. This is consistent with empirical literature indicating that judicial identity and panel composition can influence decision-making in some contexts (Boyd et al., 2010; Boyd, 2016). Judicial diversity should therefore be understood not as identity-based partiality but as an institutional resource that may reduce blind spots and improve public confidence. Courts that reflect broader social diversity may be better positioned to recognize how law is experienced by different communities. Nevertheless, diversity alone is insufficient without training, ethical standards, transparent reasoning, and procedural safeguards. A diverse judiciary may improve interpretive capacity, but institutional design is necessary to convert diversity into fair adjudicative practice.

Overall, the study suggests that cultural diversity affects judicial decision-making through four interconnected mechanisms: contextual interpretation, communicative accessibility, bias management, and institutional capacity. These mechanisms show that culture is not an external issue occasionally added to legal reasoning. It is often present in the background of fact-finding, credibility assessment, litigant participation, and perceptions of legitimacy. However, cultural responsiveness must be bounded by rights, equality, and judicial accountability. Courts should neither ignore cultural difference nor romanticize it. They should ask disciplined questions: Is the cultural context relevant to a legal issue? Does it help explain intention, vulnerability, coercion, or misunderstanding? Does reliance on culture risk stereotyping a group? Does it undermine the rights of another party? Has the litigant had a meaningful opportunity to speak and understand the process? Such questions allow courts to incorporate cultural awareness while preserving the rule of law.

This study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted with a limited sample of legal professionals in Tehran; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all courts or legal systems. Second, the study relied on participants' self-reported experiences, which may be shaped by memory, professional self-presentation, or reluctance to discuss sensitive issues such as bias. Third, the study did not include direct courtroom observation or analysis of judicial decisions, which could provide additional evidence about how cultural diversity appears in actual legal reasoning. Fourth, litigants' perspectives were not included, although their experiences are essential for evaluating procedural justice. Finally, because cultural diversity is a broad concept, the study could not examine every relevant dimension, such as ethnicity, religion, migration status, gender, class, language, disability, and nationality, with equal depth.

Future research should expand the study to other cities and compare different court types, such as family courts, criminal courts, labor courts, and migration-related legal settings. Comparative studies between metropolitan and non-metropolitan courts could show how cultural diversity is managed in different institutional environments. Future researchers should also include litigants, interpreters, expert witnesses, and community mediators to develop a more complete understanding of courtroom communication and perceived fairness. Observational studies inside courtrooms would be especially valuable for examining how judges respond to cultural claims in real time. In addition, future studies could analyze written judgments to identify whether and how cultural context appears in legal reasoning. Mixed-method research may also help examine the relationship between cultural competence, judicial training, perceived fairness, and trust in courts.

Courts should develop structured guidelines for evaluating cultural evidence so that judges can distinguish relevant context from stereotype, excuse, or prejudice. Judicial training programs should include cultural competence, implicit bias awareness, communication with culturally diverse litigants, and ethical use of interpreters and expert evidence. Courts should strengthen access to qualified interpreters and avoid reliance on family members or informal translators in legally sensitive proceedings. Judges should provide clear explanations of procedures and decisions, especially when litigants have limited legal literacy. Court administrators should create mechanisms for identifying cases where cultural or linguistic barriers may affect participation. Legal education should also prepare future lawyers and judges to understand cultural diversity as part of procedural fairness and professional responsibility.

Conclusion

This study explored how cultural diversity is perceived and managed in judicial decision-making among legal professionals in Tehran. The findings show that cultural diversity influences courts mainly through interpretive, communicative, and institutional pathways. Culture may help judges understand facts, motives, vulnerabilities, and social relationships, but it must be used carefully to avoid stereotyping or unequal treatment. Procedural fairness in culturally diverse courts requires more than formal access; it requires meaningful communication, reliable interpretation, respectful treatment, and awareness of how courtroom behavior may be culturally misread. Judicial impartiality should therefore be understood as an active and reflexive practice rather than simple cultural blindness.

The study concludes that contemporary courts need a balanced model of culturally informed adjudication. Such a model should preserve equality before the law while recognizing that litigants do not enter court with identical cultural resources, linguistic capacities, or institutional familiarity. Courts should not allow cultural claims to justify harm or undermine rights, but they should also avoid interpreting all conduct through dominant cultural assumptions. By developing clearer guidelines, judicial training, interpreter systems, and culturally sensitive procedural practices, courts can strengthen legitimacy and fairness in increasingly diverse societies.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adheried in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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