





Examining Cultural Heritage Awareness in a Local Context: A Study of Middle School Students in Ulubey

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the cultural heritage awareness levels of middle school students studying in the Ulubey district of Uşak province within a local context. The study addresses students' general levels of awareness regarding cultural heritage, whether these levels differ according to grade level and gender, the relationships between students' knowledge of and interest in local culture and their cultural heritage awareness, and the relationship between participation in cultural heritage-related activities and awareness levels. Conducted according to the survey model, one of the quantitative research methods, the study group consisted of 286 students enrolled in middle schools in the Ulubey district during the 2025–2026 academic year. Data were collected through the Cultural Heritage Awareness Scale and a nine-item closed-ended questionnaire designed to determine students' grade level, gender, knowledge of and interest in local culture, and participation in cultural heritage activities. The data were analyzed using SPSS 21. Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis, one-sample t-test, independent samples t-test, one-way analysis of variance, Pearson correlation analysis, and simple linear regression analysis were performed. The findings showed that students'

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cultural heritage awareness levels were significantly above the theoretical midpoint of the scale. Cultural heritage awareness did not differ significantly according to grade level, gender, or participation in cultural heritage activities. However, strong and positive relationships were found between students' knowledge of and interest in local culture and their cultural heritage awareness. The results indicate that cultural heritage awareness is closely related to students' processes of recognizing, making sense of, and developing sensitivity toward the local environment in which they live. In this respect, the study suggests that cultural heritage education should be understood not merely as the transmission of knowledge, but as an ethical and pedagogical process that supports students in establishing a relationship with the place in which they live, historical memory, and cultural responsibility.

1. Introduction

Cultural heritage refers to the totality of the tangible and intangible values that societies inherit from the past and transmit to future generations. Reflecting the tangible and intangible assets, events, knowledge, works, and life practices of societies, cultural heritage is one of the fundamental resources through which culture is transmitted across generations. The Turkish Language Association defines the concept of heritage as “that which one generation leaves to the generation that comes after it” (TDK, 2024). Based on this definition, heritage can be understood as the body of values that has reached the present from the past and is expected to be transmitted to future generations (Mutlu Öztürk et al., 2021). Cultural heritage, in turn, encompasses buildings, historical sites, monuments, human-made physical assets, and the broader set of values inherited from the past and intended to be passed on to the future (Can, 2009).

The scope of cultural heritage has expanded over time and has acquired a multidimensional meaning that is not limited solely to historical structures or physical assets. Tangible and intangible values related to the past include a wide range of elements such as historic cities and urban fabrics, cultural landscapes, monumental structures, archaeological sites, language, traditions, dance, music, and rituals (Kuşçuoğlu & Taş, 2017). Within this framework, cultural heritage is generally addressed under two main categories: tangible cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage. Tangible cultural heritage includes physical assets such as historical structures, monuments, archaeological sites, urban fabrics, museums, and cultural landscapes, whereas intangible cultural heritage encompasses language, oral narratives, folk literature, traditions, rituals, music, dance, culinary culture, and everyday life practices. In Article 1 of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by UNESCO in 1972, cultural heritage is defined in terms of architectural works, sculptures, paintings, archaeological works, inscriptions, groups of buildings, and works of human beings or combined works of nature and human beings that are of outstanding universal value from the perspectives of history, art, science, aesthetics, ethnology, or anthropology (UNESCO, 2023).

Cultural heritage is not merely the sum of objects, structures, or traditions remaining from the past; it is also a dynamic field of meaning that carries societies' collective memory, sense of identity, and cultural continuity. Heritage is regarded as an important resource that enables us to understand the ways of life, values, and forms of interaction among different groups in the past, as well as a fundamental component of social identity (Barghi et al., 2017). In this context, culture and cultural heritage elements are considered important for individuals' sense of identity, self-esteem, dignity, and the continuity of societies (Kafadar, 2021). Cultural heritage is also characterized as a body of values that expresses a society's shared past, strengthens feelings of solidarity and unity, ensures the continuity of experiences and traditions

accumulated throughout history, and shapes future cultural formations (Kuşçuoğlu & Taş, 2017).

The preservation of cultural heritage is not limited to the physical conservation of historical artifacts. The sustainability of cultural values is closely related to individuals' ability to recognize the environment in which they live, grasp the meaning of these values, and develop a sense of responsibility for transmitting them to future generations. Therefore, in the process of transmitting cultural richness from one generation to the next, it is important to raise awareness of cultural heritage and to introduce this heritage meaningfully through education.

From an educational perspective, cultural heritage is not merely a content area through which students acquire historical knowledge. It is also a pedagogical opportunity that contributes to students' development of identity, belonging, responsibility, and awareness of social continuity. The middle school period, in particular, is an important developmental stage in which students begin to make sense of the environment in which they live, develop awareness of social values, and position themselves within a broader historical and cultural context. For this reason, it is educationally important for students to recognize cultural heritage elements, develop positive attitudes toward their preservation, and establish connections with local culture.

Cultural heritage awareness is not limited to students' knowledge of particular historical artifacts, traditions, or cultural elements. This awareness is closely related to students' ability to make sense of the cultural values in their immediate environment, establish connections with these values, and develop sensitivity toward their preservation. Therefore, examining cultural heritage within a local context can contribute to understanding how students perceive cultural heritage not merely as an abstract subject matter, but as a field of value connected to their own living environment.

Uşak province, and particularly the Ulubey district, provides a meaningful research context for examining cultural heritage awareness within a local context. Located in Inner Western

Anatolia, Uşak has carried the traces of different civilizations throughout history, including the Phrygians, Lydians, Persians, Romans, Byzantines, Seljuks, and Ottomans. It is a region notable for its historical structures, ancient settlements, traditional cultural elements, and natural beauty. The Ulubey district, with the ancient city of Blaundus, Ulubey Canyon, the surroundings of Pepouza, rock tombs, local oral culture, traditional ways of life, and regional culinary elements, constitutes a rich local environment in which students may establish direct or indirect relationships with cultural heritage.

In this context, determining the cultural heritage awareness levels of middle school students studying in Ulubey is important for understanding the extent to which local cultural values are recognized and interpreted by students. Examining students' knowledge, interest, and attitudes regarding cultural heritage may provide insights into how in-school and out-of-school learning processes can be connected with the local cultural environment. Addressing elements such as museums, ancient cities, canyons, local narratives, traditional foods, and life-cycle rituals more consciously within educational processes may support students in developing a more sensitive and responsible relationship with the environment in which they live.

1.1. Purpose, Research Questions, and Significance of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the cultural heritage awareness levels of middle school students studying in the Ulubey district of Uşak province within a local context. The study addresses the extent to which students recognize the historical, natural, and cultural heritage elements in the environment in which they live; their attitudes toward the preservation of these elements; and the relationships between their knowledge of and interest in local culture and their cultural heritage awareness.

The main research problem of the study is formulated as follows: “What is the level of cultural heritage awareness among middle school students in the Ulubey district of Uşak province?” In line with this main problem, the following sub-problems were addressed:

1. What is the general level of middle school students’ cultural heritage awareness?
2. What variables are associated with middle school students’ cultural heritage awareness?
3. What are middle school students’ levels of interest in and knowledge of local culture?

The significance of the study is closely related to the role of education in preserving cultural heritage and transmitting it to future generations. The sustainability of cultural heritage depends on individuals’ understanding of its meaning, developing awareness of it, and assuming responsibility for its preservation. Examining middle school students’ cultural heritage awareness levels within a local context may contribute to understanding how students establish relationships with the historical and cultural values of the environment in which they live.

The findings are expected to provide guidance for teachers, school administrators, curriculum developers, and local cultural institutions in planning cultural heritage education. In particular, they may contribute to the more conscious structuring of processes such as museum visits, historical site visits, local oral culture studies, activities based on family and community memory, and interdisciplinary learning practices. In this respect, the study aims to contribute to conceptualizing cultural heritage education as a learning area that supports students in establishing a meaningful relationship with the environment in which they live.

2. Uşak Province and Ulubey District in the Context of Culture

This section addresses the local context in which the study was conducted. In order to examine cultural heritage awareness within a local context, it is important to take into account the historical, natural, and cultural characteristics of the environment in which students live. For this reason, the historical and cultural background of Uşak province and the tangible and

intangible cultural heritage elements of Ulubey district are considered as the key contextual elements of the study.

2.1. The Historical and Cultural Background of Uşak

Uşak is an important settlement located in the Inner Western Anatolia section of Türkiye's Aegean Region, bearing the traces of different civilizations throughout history. Bordering Afyonkarahisar to the east, Manisa to the west, Kütahya to the north, and Denizli to the south, Uşak has a transitional character between Western Anatolia and Central Anatolia due to its geographical location. This location has contributed to the region's significance throughout history not only as a settlement area but also as a transitional zone where cultural and economic interactions have taken place.

It is known that traces of settlement in and around Uşak date back to very early periods. Throughout history, the region came under the influence of various civilizations, including the Phrygians, Lydians, Persians, Romans, and Byzantines. Following the Battle of Manzikert, with the settlement of Turks in Anatolia, it also became part of the Seljuk and Ottoman cultural spheres. After gaining provincial status in the Republican period, Uşak became one of the local centers that combined its historical heritage with a modern urban identity. This multi-layered historical background has enabled the cultural fabric of Uşak to diversify and allowed tangible and intangible heritage elements from different periods to coexist.

The historical and cultural heritage of Uşak becomes visible through ancient settlements, archaeological remains, museums, traditional handicrafts, folk dances, and local life practices. One of the important historical sites in the region, the ancient city of Blaundus, is located near the Ulubey district of Uşak and reveals the historical depth of the region through its remains from the Roman period. In addition, the Uşak Archaeology Museum, as an important cultural

institution where artifacts obtained from excavations in the region are exhibited, contributes to the recognition of Uşak's historical past.

The cultural identity of Uşak is not limited to historical structures and archaeological sites. Folk dances, traditional weddings, local dishes, handicrafts, and especially the tradition of carpet weaving are also among the important components of the province's cultural heritage. Uşak carpets, which have been renowned since the Ottoman period, hold a special place in the region's economic and cultural history. Similarly, local flavors such as tarhana, keşkek, and various pastries can be considered cultural expressions of everyday life and social togetherness.

With these characteristics, Uşak offers a meaningful framework for examining cultural heritage awareness within a local context. The historical depth, natural environment, traditional cultural elements, and intangible heritage practices of the province constitute a rich local cultural field that can support students in establishing historical and cultural connections with the environment in which they live. Therefore, the cultural background of Uşak provides an important context for understanding the issue of cultural heritage awareness addressed in this study with specific reference to Ulubey.

2.2. The Local Cultural Context of Ulubey

Ulubey is a district of Uşak province, located in a geographical area within the Inner Aegean Region that has a transitional character between Western Anatolia and Central Anatolia. Situated to the south of Uşak city center, the district is one of the settlements that stands out with its natural, historical, and cultural characteristics. In this respect, Ulubey is not only a place where students carry out their everyday lives, but also a local environment in which they may encounter historical and cultural values.

One of the most distinctive natural and cultural elements of Ulubey is Ulubey Canyon. Located within the district boundaries, the canyon stands out as one of the region's important natural heritage areas with its natural landscape, geological structure, and ecotourism potential.

Considering the canyon not only as a natural formation but also together with the historical remains, rock tombs, caves, and traces of antiquity in its surroundings shows that the natural and cultural heritage elements of Ulubey are intertwined.

The historical background of Ulubey is also important in terms of cultural heritage awareness. The region came under the influence of different civilizations throughout history, including the Phrygians, Lydians, Persians, Romans, and Byzantines, and this historical diversity contributed to the enrichment of the district's cultural fabric. The archaeological remains, examples of traditional architecture, and traces of historical settlements found in the district enable students to relate the environment in which they live not only to its present appearance but also to its multi-layered structure inherited from the past.

The economic and socio-cultural structure of Ulubey is also noteworthy for understanding the local cultural context. The district's economy is largely based on agriculture and animal husbandry. Agricultural products such as wheat, barley, chickpeas, poppy, and grapes shape the district's production culture and everyday life practices. In addition, the preservation of traditional ways of life to a considerable extent and the continued existence of cultural elements such as folk dances, local dishes, handicrafts, and local festivals make Ulubey an important context in terms of intangible cultural heritage.

With these characteristics, Ulubey provides a strong research setting for examining cultural heritage awareness within a local context. Students' recognition of the natural areas, historical places, forms of production, oral culture elements, and traditional life practices in the district where they live may be closely related to their levels of knowledge of and interest in local culture. Therefore, Ulubey is not merely the geographical area in which the research was conducted, but also the local cultural context within which students' cultural heritage awareness can be interpreted.

2.3. Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage Elements in Ulubey

With its natural, historical, and cultural characteristics, the district of Ulubey contains both tangible and intangible cultural heritage elements. The district's cultural heritage structure is not limited to historical remains and natural areas; elements intertwined with everyday life, such as oral culture, local narratives, traditional life practices, life-cycle rituals, and regional cuisine, also constitute important parts of this heritage. This diversity creates a local environment in which students studying in Ulubey may encounter cultural heritage at different levels.

Among the tangible cultural heritage elements in Ulubey, the ancient city of Blaundus stands out. Located within the boundaries of Ulubey district, Blaundus is an important ancient settlement believed to have been founded during the Hellenistic Period and is notable for its remains from the Roman period. Established on a naturally defensible area surrounded by deep valleys on three sides, the city contains remains of temples, city walls, rock tombs, and ancient roads that have survived to the present day. In this respect, Blaundus is an important cultural heritage site that makes visible Ulubey's historical continuity and its relationship with different civilizations.

Ulubey Canyon is also one of the district's most striking natural heritage elements. With its geological structure, natural landscape, and ecotourism potential, the canyon holds significant value for the region. However, the canyon should not be considered merely as a natural formation; it should also be evaluated together with the rock tombs, caves, ancient water channels, and traces of historical settlements located in its surroundings. In addition, the fact that the ancient city of Pepouza, regarded as one of the important centers of the Montanist movement in Christianity, is located within this canyon system further increases the historical and cultural significance of the region. With these characteristics, Ulubey Canyon is an

important local heritage area that brings together nature, history, culture, and religious geography.

Ulubey's cultural heritage does not consist solely of tangible historical and natural sites. Oral culture traditions, local dialect features, and folk literature products also hold an important place in the district. The language spoken in Ulubey can be evaluated within the Western Anatolian dialects of Türkiye Turkish. Certain phonetic and lexical differences observed in everyday speech, local idioms, and region-specific expressions are among the linguistic elements that reflect the area's cultural identity. These dialect features can be considered not only as forms of communication, but also as carriers of local memory and cultural continuity.

The oral literary tradition in Ulubey is also strong. Tales, legends, folk stories, manis, folk songs, proverbs, and idioms are important carriers of cultural memory, transmitting it from the past to the present. Local stories and legends, especially those narrated by older generations in villages, contribute to the preservation of the region's historical and cultural memory. Manis and folk songs performed during weddings, festivals, and various social events function both as forms of entertainment and as means of social communication. Narratives associated with Ulubey Canyon, Blaundus, and old settlements in the surrounding area may help students understand the environment in which they live not merely as a physical space, but as a cultural field woven with stories, memories, and meanings.

Traditions related to life's turning points in Ulubey are also important components of intangible cultural heritage. Rituals shaped around life stages such as birth, military service, marriage, and death are cultural processes in which an individual's position within society changes and social solidarity becomes visible. Practices such as postnatal visits, the "*kırk çıkarma*" ritual, beliefs related to protection from the evil eye, military send-off ceremonies, asking for a girl's hand in marriage, engagement, henna nights, weddings, bridal procession rituals, and dowry displays

are among the elements of local culture transmitted from one generation to the next. Similarly, death and mourning traditions strengthen social solidarity through funeral ceremonies, condolence visits, recitation of mevlit, and communal meals offered in memory of the deceased. Regional culinary culture also holds an important place in Ulubey's cultural heritage structure. Local dishes such as *tarhana* (soup), *keşkek*, *cendere* (dessert), *alacatene*, *katmer*, poppy-seed pastries, and *Ulubey döndürmesi* are closely related to the region's agricultural production patterns, rural life practices, and sense of social togetherness. In particular, the place of wheat, poppy, and animal products in culinary culture shows how the region's economic and cultural structure is reflected in everyday life. Prepared during weddings, festivals, communal work gatherings, and occasions of hosting guests, these dishes are not merely products that meet nutritional needs; they can also be regarded as practices of sharing, solidarity, and cultural continuity.

Ulubey döndürmesi can be considered a special example in this context. Made by rolling thinly prepared dough with butter, poppy paste, or various fillings and then shaping it by turning it around itself, this dish takes its name from its method of preparation. Prepared in villages, on family occasions, at breakfasts, weddings, and when hosting guests, *döndürme* is one of the intangible cultural heritage elements that reflects the region's culinary culture and tradition of collective production. The collective preparation of such foods shows that culinary culture is also a cultural practice that strengthens social solidarity.

When these tangible and intangible cultural heritage elements are considered together, Ulubey appears to be a suitable research setting for examining cultural heritage awareness within a local context. While historical and natural sites such as the ancient city of Blaundus and Ulubey Canyon offer tangible heritage examples that students may encounter in their surroundings, oral narratives, local dialect, life-cycle rituals, and regional culinary elements make visible students' relationships with family, environment, and community memory. Therefore, examining the

cultural heritage awareness levels of middle school students in Ulubey is important for evaluating the extent to which students recognize and make sense of the cultural values of the place in which they live.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study employed the survey model, one of the quantitative research methods. The survey model is commonly preferred in studies that aim to describe the existing situation, views, attitudes, or awareness levels of a particular study group regarding a specific topic. Since this study aimed to determine the cultural heritage awareness levels of middle school students studying in the Ulubey district of Uşak province, the survey model was considered appropriate.

A questionnaire form was used as the data collection tool in the study. Through this form, students' cultural heritage awareness levels, their knowledge of and interest in local culture, their participation in museum or historical site visits, and their participation in activities related to the preservation of cultural heritage were determined. Thus, the study focused on describing students' existing levels of awareness regarding cultural heritage and certain variables associated with this awareness.

3.2. Population and Study Group

The population of the study consists of students studying at the middle school level in the Ulubey district of Uşak province. These students were considered appropriate participants for determining cultural heritage awareness levels, as they were enrolled at the middle school level during the period in which the study was conducted.

The study group consisted of 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students studying in middle schools in the Ulubey district of Uşak province during the 2025–2026 academic year. A total of 286

students participated in the study. When the distribution of participants by grade level was examined, it was found that 63 students were in the 5th grade, 60 students were in the 6th grade, 79 students were in the 7th grade, and 84 students were in the 8th grade. In terms of gender, the study group included 143 female and 143 male students.

The study group is considered capable of providing a general overview of the cultural heritage awareness levels of middle school students in the Ulubey district. However, the findings of the study should be evaluated as limited to the students who participated in the study and to the time period in which the data were collected.

3.3. Data Collection Tools

The Cultural Heritage Awareness Scale was used to collect data in the study (Demir, 2023). The scale was developed to determine the cultural heritage awareness levels of middle school students. The scale used in this study consists of 36 items. The total score obtainable from the scale ranges from 36 to 108. The theoretical midpoint of the scale was accepted as 72. Accordingly, whether students' total scores were below, above, or close to the theoretical midpoint was taken into consideration in interpreting their cultural heritage awareness levels.

The necessary permission was obtained from the scale developer for the use of the scale in the study. In addition to the Cultural Heritage Awareness Scale, a nine-item closed-ended questionnaire form was used to determine students' grade level, gender, knowledge of and interest in local culture, and participation in activities related to cultural heritage.

Students' level of interest in local culture and level of knowledge about local culture were evaluated based on the total scores obtained from the relevant closed-ended items in the data collection form. In this context, the variables *ilgi_skor* and *bilgi_skor* were included in the analysis process to examine their relationships with students' total cultural heritage awareness scores. In addition, students' participation in museum or historical site visits and their

participation in activities related to the preservation of cultural heritage were evaluated as separate variables.

3.4. Data Collection Process and Ethical Principles

During the data collection process, participants were asked to complete the questionnaire form in a single session lasting approximately 15–20 minutes. The questionnaire was administered either online or in physical form, depending on school conditions and implementation possibilities. In online applications, school computers or access links were used, whereas in physical applications, data were collected through paper forms.

Ethical principles were followed throughout the research process. No personally identifiable information was collected from the participants, and the data obtained were used solely for scientific research purposes. Within the scope of the study, only basic demographic information such as grade level and gender was collected from students for use in the analysis process. Participation in the study was based on voluntariness, and the data were evaluated in accordance with the principle of confidentiality.

Since the study was conducted with middle school students, particular attention was paid to protecting student privacy and ensuring that participants were not directed in any way during the data collection process. During the administration, necessary explanations were provided to ensure that students understood the questionnaire items and responded carefully. Care was taken to conduct the implementation process in the school setting in accordance with the relevant institutional permissions and ethical principles.

3.5. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the study were analyzed using SPSS 21. First, descriptive statistics related to the study group were calculated; the total number of participants, distributions by

grade level and gender, and the mean, standard deviation, and median values of the total scores obtained from the scale were determined.

Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis was conducted to determine the internal consistency of the scale within the scope of this study. A one-sample t-test was used to determine whether students' cultural heritage awareness levels differed significantly from the theoretical midpoint of the scale. An independent samples t-test was used to compare awareness scores according to gender, while one-way analysis of variance was used for comparisons according to grade level and participation in museum or historical site visits.

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationships between students' levels of interest in and knowledge of local culture and their cultural heritage awareness scores. In addition, simple linear regression analyses were performed to examine the relationships between the variables *ilgi_skor* and *bilgi_skor* and the total cultural heritage awareness score. In interpreting these analyses, the results were evaluated not as causal effects, but as statistical relationships between the variables.

The assumption of homogeneity of variance was examined using Levene's test. In cases where the homogeneity of variance assumption was met, the relevant parametric test results were taken as the basis; in cases where this assumption was not met, appropriate alternative test results were considered. The significance level was set at .05.

3.6. Assumptions and Limitations

In the study, it was assumed that the participating students answered the questionnaire honestly and accurately. It was also assumed that the students understood the questionnaire items and responded carefully. The Cultural Heritage Awareness Scale used in the study was assumed to be a valid and reliable instrument for measuring students' levels of cultural heritage awareness (Demir, 2023). It was further assumed that the data obtained from the participating students

provided a general overview of the cultural heritage awareness levels of middle school students in the Ulubey district.

The study has several limitations. First, it is limited to the students who were studying in middle schools in the Ulubey district of Uşak province and who participated in the study. Therefore, the findings should not be directly generalized to students in different provinces, districts, or educational levels. Second, the research data are based on self-reports obtained through the Cultural Heritage Awareness Scale and a nine-item closed-ended questionnaire form. This may not fully reflect students' actual behaviors or their practical relationships with cultural heritage in everyday life.

Third, the study is limited to the variables addressed in the research, namely grade level, gender, knowledge of and interest in local culture, and participation in cultural heritage activities. Variables that may influence cultural heritage awareness, such as family structure, socioeconomic level, the environment in which the school is located, teachers' approaches to cultural heritage education, or students' previous out-of-school learning experiences, were not included within the scope of this study. Finally, the study is limited to the time period in which the data were collected; students' cultural heritage awareness levels may change over time.

4. Findings

This section presents the descriptive findings regarding middle school students' cultural heritage awareness levels, the reliability analysis of the scale, and the results of the statistical analyses conducted in line with the sub-problems of the study. The findings are addressed within the framework of general awareness level, grade level, gender, students' interest in and knowledge of local culture, and participation in cultural heritage activities.

4.1. Descriptive Findings on Cultural Heritage Awareness

A total of 286 middle school students participated in the study. The Cultural Heritage Awareness Scale consists of 36 items. The total score range obtainable from the scale varies between 36 and 108, and the theoretical midpoint was accepted as 72. Descriptive information regarding the study group and scale scores is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Descriptive Information Regarding the Study Group and Scale Scores

Variable	Value
Total participants	286
Number of items	36
Total score range	36–108
Theoretical midpoint	72
Overall mean	85.43
Standard deviation	15.69
Median	86.00

As shown in Table 1, the mean total cultural heritage awareness score of the students was calculated as 85.43, with a standard deviation of 15.69 and a median value of 86.00. These findings indicate that students' cultural heritage awareness scores were above the theoretical midpoint of the scale, which was 72. This suggests that the general level of cultural heritage awareness among the students in the study group was above the moderate level.

4.2. Findings Regarding the Reliability of the Scale

In order to evaluate the internal consistency of the scale, Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis was applied to all 36 items. This analysis was conducted to assess whether the scale items consistently measured the same construct.

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was calculated as $\alpha = .945$. This value indicates that the scale had a very high level of internal consistency within the scope of this study. The standardized alpha value was also .945, suggesting that the items yielded consistent results regardless of differences in variance structure.

When item-total correlations were examined, all corrected item-total correlations were found to be above .30. The highest correlation was observed for item kf14 ($r = .685$), while the lowest correlation was observed for item kf7 ($r = .397$). The fact that the overall alpha value did not increase significantly when any item was deleted indicates that all items contributed to the scale and that there was no need to remove any item.

4.3. Students' Level of Cultural Heritage Awareness

First, the study examined whether middle school students' cultural heritage awareness levels were above the theoretical midpoint of the scale. For this purpose, a one-sample t-test was conducted. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 2.

H₁: Middle school students' cultural heritage awareness levels are above the moderate level.

H₀: Middle school students' cultural heritage awareness levels are not above the moderate level.

Table 2.
One-Sample t-Test Results (Test Value = 72)

Variable	N	M	SD	t	df	p	Mean Difference	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Total score	286	85.43	15.69	14.477	285	< .001	13.43	11.61	15.26

As shown in Table 2, the students' mean total cultural heritage awareness score ($M = 85.43$, $SD = 15.69$) was statistically significantly above the theoretical midpoint of the scale, which was 72, $t(285) = 14.477$, $p < .001$. The mean difference was 13.43, with a 95% confidence interval of [11.61, 15.26]. The mean score per item was approximately 2.37. This value is clearly above the midpoint of 2.00 on the three-point scale. Based on this finding, H₁ was supported.

4.4. Cultural Heritage Awareness by Grade Level

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to determine whether students' cultural heritage awareness levels differed significantly according to grade level. Descriptive statistics by grade level are presented in Table 3, and the ANOVA results are presented in Table 4.

H₂: Middle school students' cultural heritage awareness levels differ significantly according to grade level.

H₀: Cultural heritage awareness levels do not differ significantly according to grade level.

Table 3.
Descriptive Statistics by Grade Level

Grade Level	N	M	SD	Std. Error	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	Max.
5th grade	63	83.14	18.13	2.28	78.58	87.71	108
6th grade	60	82.78	14.59	1.88	79.01	86.55	108
7th grade	79	87.96	16.32	1.84	84.31	91.62	108
8th grade	84	86.67	13.49	1.47	83.74	89.59	108
Total	286	85.43	15.69	0.93	83.61	87.26	108

According to Table 3, the mean cultural heritage awareness scores were calculated as 83.14 for 5th grade students, 82.78 for 6th grade students, 87.96 for 7th grade students, and 86.67 for 8th grade students. Although some differences were observed among the mean scores, ANOVA was conducted to determine whether these differences were statistically significant.

Table 4.
ANOVA Results by Grade Level

Source of Variance	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	1384.787	3	461.596	1.892	.131
Within groups	68801.450	282	243.977	—	—
Total	70186.238	285	—	—	—

The Levene's test result indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met, $p = .066$. Therefore, Tukey's HSD post hoc test was applied for comparisons between grade levels. As shown in Table 4, students' cultural heritage awareness scores did not differ significantly according to grade level, $F(3, 282) = 1.892$, $p = .131$. Tukey's HSD post hoc comparisons also revealed no significant difference between any pair of grade levels. Accordingly, H₂ was not supported.

4.5. Cultural Heritage Awareness by Gender

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether students' cultural heritage awareness levels differed significantly according to gender. Descriptive statistics by gender are presented in Table 5, and the independent samples t-test results are presented in Table 6.

H₃: Middle school students' cultural heritage awareness levels differ significantly according to gender.

H₀: Cultural heritage awareness levels do not differ significantly according to gender.

Table 5.
Descriptive Statistics by Gender

Gender	N	M	SD	Std. Error
Female	143	86.94	15.56	1.30
Male	143	83.92	15.73	1.32

According to Table 5, the mean cultural heritage awareness score was calculated as 86.94 for female students and 83.92 for male students. An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether this difference was statistically significant.

Table 6.
Independent Samples t-Test Results by Gender

Variance Assumption	Levene's F	Levene's p	t	df	p	Mean Difference	CI Lower	CI Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.384	.240	1.633	284	.104	3.021	-.621	6.663

The Levene's test result indicated that the assumption of equal variances was met, $p = .240$. Therefore, the equal variances assumed row in Table 6 was taken as the basis. According to the analysis results, there was no statistically significant difference between female and male students' cultural heritage awareness scores, $t(284) = 1.633$, $p = .104$. Accordingly, H₃ was not supported.

4.6. The Relationship Between Interest in Local Culture and Cultural Heritage Awareness

Pearson correlation analysis and simple linear regression analysis were conducted to examine the relationship between students' levels of interest in local culture and their total cultural heritage awareness scores. The Pearson correlation results are presented in Table 7, the regression model in Table 8, and the regression coefficients in Table 9.

H₄: There is a positive and significant relationship between middle school students' levels of interest in local culture and their cultural heritage awareness levels.

H₀: There is no significant relationship between middle school students' levels of interest in local culture and their cultural heritage awareness levels.

Table 7.

Pearson Correlation Results for the Relationship Between Interest in Local Culture and Cultural Heritage Awareness

Variable Pair	N	r	p	Strength of Relationship
ilgi_skor ↔ total_skor	286	.814	< .001	Strong, positive

As shown in Table 7, a statistically significant, strong, and positive relationship was found between students' interest scores regarding local culture and their total cultural heritage awareness scores, $r = .814$, $p < .001$. This finding indicates that students with higher levels of interest in local culture also tend to have higher cultural heritage awareness scores.

Table 8.

Regression Model for the Relationship Between Interest in Local Culture and Cultural Heritage Awareness

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	F	p	df
ilgi_skor → total_skor	.814	.663	.661	9.132	557.631	< .001	1 / 284

According to Table 8, there was a strong linear relationship between students' interest scores regarding local culture and their total cultural heritage awareness scores, $R = .814$. The proportion of variance explained by the model was calculated as $R^2 = .663$. This result indicates that the *ilgi_skor* variable was associated with a substantial proportion of the variance in cultural heritage awareness scores, $F(1, 284) = 557.631$, $p < .001$.

Table 9.
Regression Coefficients

Variable	B	Std. Error	β	t	p
Constant	26.502	2.553	—	10.380	< .001
ilgi_skor	1.642	.070	.814	23.614	< .001

As shown in Table 9, according to the unstandardized regression coefficient, each one-point increase in the *ilgi_skor* variable was associated with an average increase of 1.642 points in the cultural heritage awareness score. This result should be interpreted not as a causal effect, but as the strength of the statistical relationship between the variables. Based on these findings, H₄ was supported.

4.7. The Relationship Between Knowledge of Local Culture and Cultural Heritage Awareness

Pearson correlation analysis and simple linear regression analysis were conducted to examine the relationship between students' levels of knowledge of local culture and their total cultural heritage awareness scores. The Pearson correlation results are presented in Table 10, the regression model in Table 11, and the regression coefficients in Table 12.

H₅: There is a positive and significant relationship between middle school students' levels of knowledge of local culture and their cultural heritage awareness levels.

H₀: There is no significant relationship between middle school students' levels of knowledge of local culture and their cultural heritage awareness levels.

Table 10.
Pearson Correlation Results for the Relationship Between Knowledge of Local Culture and Cultural Heritage Awareness

Variable Pair	N	r	p	Strength of Relationship
bilgi_skor ↔ total_skor	286	.900	< .001	Very strong, positive

As shown in Table 10, a statistically significant, very strong, and positive relationship was found between students' knowledge scores regarding local culture and their total cultural

heritage awareness scores, $r = .900$, $p < .001$. This finding indicates that students with higher levels of knowledge of local culture also tend to have higher cultural heritage awareness scores.

Table 11.

Regression Model for the Relationship Between Knowledge of Local Culture and Cultural Heritage Awareness

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	F	p	Df
bilgi_skor → total_skor	.900	.811	.810	6.837	1217.584	< .001	1 / 284

According to Table 11, there was a very strong linear relationship between students' knowledge scores regarding local culture and their total cultural heritage awareness scores, $R = .900$. The proportion of variance explained by the model was calculated as $R^2 = .811$. This result indicates that the *bilgi_skor* variable was associated with a substantial proportion of the variance in cultural heritage awareness scores, $F(1, 284) = 1217.584$, $p < .001$.

Table 12.

Regression Coefficients

Variable	B	Std. Error	β	t	p
Constant	18.085	1.972	—	9.171	< .001
bilgi_skor	1.360	.039	.900	34.894	< .001

As shown in Table 12, according to the unstandardized regression coefficient, each one-point increase in the *bilgi_skor* variable was associated with an average increase of 1.360 points in the cultural heritage awareness score. The relationship between the *bilgi_skor* variable and the total awareness score appears to be stronger than the relationship involving the *ilgi_skor* variable. These results should be interpreted not as causal effects, but as the strength of the statistical relationship between the variables. Based on these findings, H_5 was supported.

4.8. Awareness According to Participation in Cultural Heritage Activities

Whether students' cultural heritage awareness levels differed significantly according to their participation in activities related to cultural heritage was examined through two different

variables. These variables were participation in activities aimed at the preservation of cultural heritage and participation in museum or historical site visits.

H₆: Cultural heritage awareness differs significantly according to students' participation in cultural heritage activities.

H₀: Cultural heritage awareness does not differ significantly according to students' participation in cultural heritage activities.

4.8.1. Awareness According to Participation in Preservation Activities

Descriptive statistics regarding students' cultural heritage awareness scores according to participation in preservation activities are presented in Table 13, and the t-test results are presented in Table 14.

Table 13.
Descriptive Statistics According to Participation in Preservation Activities

Participation Status	N	M	SD	Std. Error
Yes	53	87.17	19.26	2.65
No	233	85.04	14.78	.97

According to Table 13, the mean cultural heritage awareness score was calculated as 87.17 for students who participated in preservation activities and 85.04 for students who did not participate. An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether this difference was statistically significant.

Table 14.
t-Test Results According to Participation in Preservation Activities

Variance Assumption	Levene's F	Levene's p	t	df	p	Mean Difference	CI Lower	CI Upper
Equal variances assumed	8.884	.003	.892	284	.373	2.131	-2.571	6.834
Equal variances not assumed	—	—	.757	66.607	.452	2.131	-3.492	7.755

As shown in Table 14, the Levene's test result indicated that the assumption of equal variances was not met, $p = .003$. Therefore, the equal variances not assumed row was taken as the basis.

According to the analysis results, there was no statistically significant difference in students'

cultural heritage awareness scores according to participation in preservation activities, $t(66.607) = .757, p = .452$.

4.8.2. Awareness According to Participation in Museum or Historical Site Visits

Descriptive statistics regarding students' cultural heritage awareness scores according to participation in museum or historical site visits are presented in Table 15, and the ANOVA results are presented in Table 16.

Table 15.

Descriptive Statistics According to Participation in Museum or Historical Site Visits

Visit Status	N	M	SD	Std. Error	CI Lower	CI Upper	Max.
Yes	95	85.96	18.31	1.88	82.23	89.69	108
No	71	82.38	15.59	1.85	78.69	86.07	108
Sometimes	120	86.83	13.20	1.21	84.44	89.21	108
Total	286	85.43	15.69	.93	83.61	87.26	108

According to Table 15, the highest mean score according to participation in museum or historical site visits was observed among students who responded "sometimes" ($M = 86.83$). The mean score of students who responded "yes" was calculated as 85.96, while the mean score of students who responded "no" was 82.38. A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference among these mean scores.

Table 16.

ANOVA Results According to Participation in Museum or Historical Site Visits

Source of Variance	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	920.349	2	460.174	1.880	.154
Within groups	69265.889	283	244.756	—	—
Total	70186.238	285	—	—	—

The Levene's test result indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not met, $p = .021$. However, according to the ANOVA results presented in Table 16, there was no statistically significant difference in students' cultural heritage awareness scores according to participation in museum or historical site visits, $F(2, 283) = 1.880, p = .154$. This finding indicates that participation in museum or historical site visits did not create a significant difference in cultural heritage awareness scores within the study group. When the findings

related to participation in preservation activities and participation in museum or historical site visits are considered together, H₆ was not supported.

4.9. General Summary of the Findings

The overall results regarding the hypotheses tested in the study are presented in Table 17.

Table 17.
Summary Table of Hypothesis Tests

Hypothesis	Decision
H ₁ — Students' cultural heritage awareness levels are above the moderate level.	Supported
H ₂ — Cultural heritage awareness differs significantly according to grade level.	Not supported
H ₃ — Cultural heritage awareness differs significantly according to gender.	Not supported
H ₄ — There is a positive and significant relationship between interest in local culture and cultural heritage awareness.	Supported
H ₅ — There is a positive and significant relationship between knowledge of local culture and cultural heritage awareness.	Supported
H ₆ — There is a significant difference according to participation in cultural heritage activities.	Not supported

As summarized in Table 17, H₁, H₄, and H₅ were supported in the study, whereas H₂, H₃, and H₆ were not supported. Overall, the findings indicate that the cultural heritage awareness levels of middle school students in the Ulubey district were above the theoretical midpoint of the scale. Cultural heritage awareness did not differ significantly according to grade level or gender. However, strong and positive relationships were found between students' interest in and knowledge of local culture and their cultural heritage awareness. Participation in activities related to cultural heritage did not create a statistically significant difference in students' awareness scores. These results suggest that students' cultural heritage awareness is more

closely related to their levels of knowledge of and interest in local culture than merely to participation in activities.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, the cultural heritage awareness levels of middle school students studying in the Ulubey district of Uşak province were examined within a local context. The main finding of the study is that students' cultural heritage awareness levels were significantly above the theoretical midpoint of the scale. However, cultural heritage awareness did not differ significantly according to grade level, gender, or participation in cultural heritage activities; instead, it showed strong and positive relationships with students' knowledge of and interest in local culture.

The Cultural Heritage Awareness Scale used in the study was found to have a very high level of internal consistency within the scope of this research. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of $\alpha = .945$ indicates that the scale yielded consistent results for the study group. The fact that item-total correlations were above .30 and that the alpha value did not increase significantly when any item was deleted also shows that the scale items contributed to the overall structure. This suggests that the findings obtained in the study were based on a reliable foundation in terms of the internal consistency of the measurement tool.

The students' mean total cultural heritage awareness score was 85.43, and this value was significantly above the theoretical midpoint of the scale, which was 72. This indicates that the cultural heritage awareness of middle school students in Ulubey was above the moderate level. The mean score per item was approximately 2.37, showing that students generally responded positively to the scale items. This finding is important because it indicates that students were not completely distant from the historical, natural, and cultural heritage elements in their living

environment; on the contrary, they had developed a certain level of awareness regarding these elements.

The local cultural context of Ulubey may have played a role in the emergence of this result. Elements such as Ulubey Canyon, the ancient city of Blaundus, local oral culture, traditional life practices, regional cuisine, and social rituals are cultural heritage resources that students may encounter within their everyday living environment. Therefore, the fact that students' awareness levels were above the midpoint may be related not only to knowledge acquired at school, but also to the cultural density of the environment in which they live and the local cultural practices they encounter within family and community settings. However, this interpretation should not be understood as a causal explanation, but as an evaluation aimed at making sense of the findings within the local context.

This evaluation is also consistent with recent studies emphasizing that cultural heritage awareness should be understood through students' relationships with their local environment. Cernicova-Buca et al. (2022) show that young people's awareness of local cultural and historical heritage can be evaluated through how they remember, value, and relate historical and cultural places in their city to their everyday life practices. Similarly, in the present study, students' cultural heritage awareness can be said to be connected not only with abstract historical knowledge, but also with their relationship to the natural, historical, and cultural environment of Ulubey.

The analyses conducted according to grade level revealed no significant difference among students' cultural heritage awareness scores. The fact that the awareness scores of 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students were close to one another suggests that cultural heritage awareness is not a characteristic that increases linearly only as grade level progresses. This finding indicates that cultural heritage awareness may be related not only to age or grade level, but also to

students' relationships with the environment in which they live, their contact with family and community memory, their out-of-school experiences, and their interest in local culture. In addition, the generally high scale scores and the fact that some students obtained full scores may have limited the visibility of differences between grade levels.

No significant difference was found in students' cultural heritage awareness levels according to gender. Although the mean score of female students was slightly higher than that of male students, this difference was not statistically significant. This indicates that cultural heritage awareness did not clearly differ by gender in the study group. The fact that cultural heritage awareness was observed at similar levels among both female and male students may suggest that local cultural values are perceived by students as a shared environmental and social field of experience.

One of the most notable findings of the study is the strong and positive relationships found between students' levels of interest in and knowledge of local culture and their cultural heritage awareness scores. While a strong relationship was found between students' interest in local culture and their total cultural heritage awareness scores, the relationship between knowledge of local culture and total awareness scores was found to be even stronger. This result indicates that students' cultural heritage awareness is closely related not only to affective interest, but also to concrete knowledge of local culture.

This finding suggests that cultural heritage education should not be considered merely in terms of knowledge transmission or isolated activities, but through students' processes of recognizing, making sense of, and establishing relationships with local culture. Studies in the field of cultural heritage education also emphasize the importance of addressing cognitive, affective, and experiential dimensions together in students' meaning-making processes regarding heritage. Fontal et al. (2023) show that cultural heritage education has recently emerged as a distinct field within heritage management and educational research, while Valencia Arnica et al. (2023) state

that cultural heritage education requires a holistic and interdisciplinary approach. In this respect, the findings of the present study are consistent with the relevant literature in showing that students' knowledge of and interest in local culture are important components of cultural heritage awareness.

However, these results should not be interpreted as causal effects. The strong relationships between students' knowledge of and interest in local culture and their total cultural heritage awareness scores do not mean that these variables directly increase one another. A more accurate interpretation is that students with higher levels of knowledge of and interest in local culture also tend to have higher cultural heritage awareness scores. In addition, the fact that the *bilgi_skor* and *ilgi_skor* variables were obtained from the same data collection form requires caution in interpreting the strong relationships between these variables and the total awareness score.

The findings regarding participation in cultural heritage activities point to a different issue. No significant difference was found in students' cultural heritage awareness scores according to participation in preservation activities. Similarly, awareness scores did not differ significantly according to participation in museum or historical site visits. This result indicates that participation in activities related to cultural heritage alone may not create a significant difference in students' awareness levels.

In interpreting this finding, the uneven distribution of participation groups and the fact that the quality of the activities was not examined in detail in this study should be taken into consideration. The number of students who stated that they had participated in preservation activities was considerably lower than the number of those who had not participated. Similarly, there was an uneven distribution among the "yes," "no," and "sometimes" groups regarding participation in museum or historical site visits. In addition, the duration, content, pedagogical

context, and students' meaning-making processes regarding these activities remained outside the scope of this study. Therefore, the absence of a significant difference according to participation in activities should not be interpreted as meaning that cultural heritage activities are ineffective.

On the contrary, this result shows the importance of how cultural heritage activities are pedagogically structured. Islamoğlu et al. (2022) state that cultural heritage education programs designed for middle school students can support students in learning cultural heritage by living, seeing, and experiencing it. Trabajo-Rite and Cuenca-López (2020) also show that cultural heritage education can be associated with pedagogical experiences that may transform students' understandings of cultural heritage. Therefore, visits to museums, historical sites, ancient cities, canyons, or local cultural settings should be designed not merely as visits, but as structured learning experiences planned before and after the activity, in which students participate in observation, discussion, reflection, and production processes.

These results show that the cultural heritage potential of Uşak and Ulubey should be evaluated more systematically from an educational perspective. Uşak has an important cultural heritage accumulation with its historical background, natural beauty, ancient cities, museums, canyons, and traditional cultural elements. However, this accumulation should be considered not only in terms of promotion and tourism, but also in terms of supporting students' development of local identity, belonging, cultural continuity, and conservation awareness. In the literature on cultural heritage education, heritage sites are emphasized not merely as objects to be preserved or as touristic values, but as pedagogical resources that support learning, participation, and identity development processes (Fontal et al., 2023; Valencia Arnica et al., 2023). In this context, Ulubey Canyon, the ancient city of Blaundus, local oral culture, life-cycle rituals, and regional culinary elements can be considered important local learning resources that may support

students in establishing historical and cultural connections with the environment in which they live.

The findings of the study indicate that knowledge, interest, and meaning-making dimensions should be considered together in educational practices aimed at increasing cultural heritage awareness. Local history narratives, oral history studies, interviews with family elders, local culinary culture, traditional rituals, examinations of historical places, museum-based learning activities, and interdisciplinary projects may contribute to students' deeper understanding of cultural heritage. Such an approach may enable cultural heritage education to build a bridge between in-school learning and students' everyday lifeworlds.

From a broader philosophy of education perspective, cultural heritage awareness should not be regarded merely as a learning outcome limited to students' recognition of particular historical sites, traditions, or cultural elements. Cultural heritage education is a process through which students establish relationships with the place in which they live, historical memory, and cultural responsibility. In this sense, education is not merely an activity of transmitting knowledge, but an ethical and cultural field of praxis that enables students to position themselves within a particular place, past, and community. Therefore, the local cultural environment should not be viewed as a passive context outside the school, but as a meaningful pedagogical resource through which students can develop identity, belonging, continuity, and responsibility for preservation.

At this point, it is important to think more actively about the position of young people and students in cultural heritage processes. Zhang et al. (2024) argue that youth participation in cultural heritage management should be considered not merely as a representative process, but within a broader participatory framework that includes dimensions such as purpose, positioning, perspective, and power relations. This approach shows that cultural heritage

education should view students not as passive recipients, but as subjects who interpret the local cultural environment, develop responsibility for preservation, and can participate in cultural continuity. Therefore, in rich local heritage contexts such as Ulubey, students should be supported not only in recognizing cultural heritage, but also in participating in processes of meaning-making, interpretation, sharing, and preservation related to this heritage.

In conclusion, the cultural heritage awareness levels of middle school students in the Ulubey district are generally above the moderate level. This awareness does not differ significantly according to grade level, gender, or participation in cultural heritage activities. However, strong and positive relationships exist between students' knowledge of and interest in local culture and their cultural heritage awareness. These results indicate that cultural heritage awareness is closely related to students' processes of recognizing, making sense of, and developing sensitivity toward the local environment in which they live.

Accordingly, it is recommended that cultural heritage education in schools be more strongly connected with the local environment. The historical, natural, and cultural heritage elements of Ulubey can be given greater place in courses such as social studies, history, geography, Turkish, visual arts, and values education. Museum and historical site visits should be planned not merely as visits, but as structured learning processes with preparatory and follow-up stages. Oral history studies, local culture projects, documentation activities, and cultural heritage-based student products that enable students to connect with family and community memory should be supported.

Future studies may examine variables that may influence cultural heritage awareness, such as socioeconomic level, family interest, the environment in which the school is located, teachers' approaches to cultural heritage education, and students' previous out-of-school learning experiences. In addition, qualitative or mixed-methods studies that examine in depth how students make sense of cultural heritage may be conducted. In particular, studies examining the

quality of museum and historical site visits, their effects on students, and the pedagogical conditions under which these experiences turn into awareness would contribute to the more effective structuring of cultural heritage education. Furthermore, studies investigating how students can participate more actively in the preservation, promotion, and transmission of local cultural memory may contribute to developing the participatory, local, and ethical dimensions of cultural heritage education.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles for research involving human participants and the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical approval was obtained from the Uşak University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee. The study was approved by the committee decision dated January 15, 2026, with decision number 2026-23. Since the participants were middle school students, the study was conducted on the condition that permission was obtained from the students' parents/guardians. Participation was voluntary, and the data were collected and analyzed anonymously.

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