Strengthening Community Bonds through Cultural Activities:
A Case Study of Students in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces
การเสริมสร้างความสัมพันธ์ในชุมชนผ่านกิจกรรมทางวัฒนธรรม กรณีศึกษาเกี่ยวกับมุมมอง
ของนักเรียนในจังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้ของไทย

คณาสิน ตันสกุล[1*] อาลียัส แนปิแน[1]

Kanasin Tunsakul[1*], Aleeyas Naepeenae[1]

Abstract

Cultural activities play a vital role in strengthening relationships within communities in the southern border provinces of Thailand. This study aims to explore the role of cultural activities in promoting unity among students in these areas. The objective is to understand the students' perspectives on cultural initiatives through an analysis of narrative essays from 10 participants, ranging from lower to upper secondary school levels, in the provinces of Songkhla, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. In data collection, the researchers selected essays through a screening process based on relevance to the given topic, a narrative writing style, originality of content, appropriate length, and clear examples. Data analysis involved identifying key themes and content from each essay, which demonstrated how cultural activities could foster unity among diverse religious and ethnic groups, promote mutual respect, and support sustainable economic and environmental practices. The findings highlight the positive impacts of cultural participation, which encourages ongoing efforts to promote understanding and connectivity within these communities.

Keywords: Community Bonds, Cultural Activities, Case Study, Students; Southern Border Provinces

[1]คณะศึกษาศาสตร์และสังคมศาสตร์ วิทยาลัยเทคโนโลยีภาคใต้

[1]Faculty of Education and Social Sciences, Southern College of Technology

*Corresponding author. E-mail: kanasin.t@sct.ac.th

บทคัดย่อ

กิจกรรมทางวัฒนธรรมมีบทบาทสำคัญในการเสริมสร้างความสัมพันธ์ในชุมชนในจังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้ของประเทศไทย งานวิจัยนี้มุ่งศึกษาบทบาทของกิจกรรมทางวัฒนธรรมในการส่งเสริมความสามัคคีในกลุ่มนักเรียนในพื้นที่ดังกล่าว โดยมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อทำความเข้าใจความคิดเห็นของนักเรียนต่อการริเริ่มทางวัฒนธรรม ผ่านการวิเคราะห์เรียงความเชิงเล่าเรื่องจากผู้เข้าร่วม 10 คน ตั้งแต่ระดับมัธยมศึกษาตอนต้นถึงตอนปลายในจังหวัดสงขลา ปัตตานี ยะลา และนราธิวาส ในการรวบรวมข้อมูล ผู้วิจัยได้คัดเลือกเรียงความโดยผ่านกระบวนการคัดกรองที่พิจารณาจากความเกี่ยวข้องตามหัวข้อที่กำหนด รูปแบบการเขียนเล่าเรื่องความเป็นต้นฉบับของเนื้อหา ความยาวที่เหมาะสม และตัวอย่างประกอบที่ชัดเจน การวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลใช้วิธีการระบุแก่นสาระและเนื้อหาหลักจากเรียงความแต่ละชิ้นที่แสดงให้เห็นว่ากิจกรรมทางวัฒนธรรมสามารถส่งเสริมความสามัคคีระหว่างกลุ่มศาสนาและเชื้อชาติที่แตกต่างกัน ส่งเสริมการเคารพซึ่งกันและกัน รวมถึงแนวปฏิบัติทางเศรษฐกิจและสิ่งแวดล้อมที่ยั่งยืน ผลการวิจัยชี้ให้เห็นถึงผลดีที่เกิดจากการมีส่วนร่วมทางวัฒนธรรมซึ่งกระตุ้นให้เกิดความพยายามอย่างต่อเนื่องในการส่งเสริมความเข้าใจและความเชื่อมโยงในชุมชนเหล่านี้

คำสำคัญ: ความสัมพันธ์ในชุมชน กิจกรรมทางวัฒนธรรม กรณีศึกษา นักเรียน จังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้

Introduction

The provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and 4 districts of Songkhla (Chana, Thepa, Nathawi, and Saba Yoi) are known for their rich cultural diversity, formed by various ethnic groups and communities. Located along historic trade routes and surrounded by lush landscapes, these provinces serve as cultural melting pots where Malay, Thai, and other indigenous cultures coexist. However, the distinct identities of the region's inhabitants, particularly Malay Muslims and Buddhists, are culturally and religiously distinct. These differences stem from their respective historical backgrounds, traditions, religions, and languages, often leading to misunderstandings and conflicts between the two socio-religious groups (Nookua, 2011). Despite their vibrant cultural landscapes, these communities face challenges due to social and political tensions that sometimes disrupt communal harmony.

Given these complexities, it has become important to provide young students with a sense of belonging and pride; Goodenow and Grady (1993) note that a student's personal sense of belonging to their schools has a significant impact on their academic motivation, engagement, and participation. Involving youth in cultural activities not only helps them

learn about and gain a deeper understanding of their own heritage, but also fosters respect and appreciation for the diverse communities that surround them. Exposure to other cultures helps them learn about and respect the unique customs, traditions, languages, and beliefs of others, which in turn broadens their perspectives and challenges ethnocentrism (Eisenstadt, 2000). Research shows that individuals with cross-cultural experiences often have greater cultural empathy and lower levels of prejudice than those with limited cultural exposure (Ward et al., 2001). Furthermore, a study by Dovidio et al. (2019) shows that as exposure to diversity increases, attitudes toward members of different groups become more positive and prejudicial beliefs diminish. By celebrating and incorporating diverse traditions, languages, and customs, these activities are essential in promoting social cohesion and resilience.

The importance of cultural competence in education, as emphasized by local educational institutions (Eden et al., 2024), underscores the need for inclusive learning environments. This approach focuses on respecting and embracing the diverse cultural backgrounds, experiences, and identities of students, educators, and communities. Implementing strategies such as culturally responsive instructional practices, which are connected students' lived experiences, is essential for fostering inclusion and increasing awareness of diversity.

Narrative analysis is a valuable research method for exploring the experiences, perspectives, and voices of both students and faculty involved in curriculum development. This approach allows researchers to gain deeper insight into the impact of student participation, revealing the complexity and nuances of their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Through narrative essays, students have the opportunity to share their experiences and perspectives. These narratives allow them to explore their cultural identities and reflect on the importance of their communities in a personal way. This practice not only improves their writing skills, but also encourages critical thinking about their role in society. In addition, narrative writing can serve as a therapeutic tool, helping students process the emotions and experiences associated with living in a culturally diverse and often challenging environment. By sharing their stories, students can deepen their

understanding of the southern provinces, challenge stereotypes and provide a more nuanced view of their communities (Riessman, 2008).

In conclusion, Thailand's southern border provinces, often viewed primarily through the lens of conflict, are in fact vibrant centers of culture and community. By participating in cultural activities and engaging in story writing, students are not only preserving their cultural heritage, but also contributing to a more positive narrative of their communities. Sharing of their stories underscores the resilience and richness of their identities and paves the way for a future characterized by understanding, acceptance, and unity. Embracing this cultural diversity is crucial not only for the development of the region, but also fostering a harmonious society that respects multifaceted identities.

Research Objectives

1) To explore student perspectives on cultural activities and their contribution to community unity through narrative essays

2) To evaluate the influence of cultural activities on social cohesion among various groups, drawing from student narratives

3) To pinpoint significant themes in student essays regarding cultural activities and community cohesion through thematic analysis

Literature Review

Cultural activities play a central role in enhancing cohesion within communities, especially multicultural societies in the southern border region of Thailand. This literature review aims to identify the current literature on the impact of cultural participation on social inclusion from the perspective of students in this region.

Children and Youth Perceptions of Livelihoods in the Southern Border Region

Wanishsakpong et al. (2021) investigated the views of 2,669 high school students in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat provinces in Thailand about their lives and involvement in school, home, and community. Data collected through structured questionnaires were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The majority of respondents were female Muslim students from Narathiwat, residing in single or nuclear family households with

at least one parent. Overall, they expressed positive views of the school environment, the effectiveness of education, freedom of expression, and family and community conditions. Students living with their parents tended to have more favorable views than students from different living arrangements. The study confirmed a significant relationship between gender, family characteristics, and perceptions of home and community situation. This study sheds light on how family structure and gender shape youth perspectives and indicate that further research could inform policies aimed at enhancing conditions and participation for children and youth in similar situations.

Multicultural Social Competence among Community College Students in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces

Multicultural social competence is increasingly recognized as essential for effective survival in the 21st century society, especially in the conflict-affected southern border provinces of Thailand. This competence is to engage respectfully with various cultures while avoiding stigma and discrimination. A study conducted by Thongaram et al. (2022) with community college students in these regions identified seven essential components of multicultural social competence: kindness, a multicultural attitude, acceptance of diversity, cultural knowledge, coexistence skills, cultural communication, and social equality. This study of 575 students aimed to develop these competencies to help students better understand and navigate multicultural environments. Such an educational framework can help ease social tensions and foster harmony by creating an environment that positively celebrates diversity.

Analysis of the Strategy for Development of the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center

In her 2019 study, Nutrada Silp-udom examines the Southern Border Provincial Administrative Center (SBPAC) and its conflict reduction strategies from 2015 to 2017. The structure and operations of the SBPAC are evaluated using data from 412 questionnaires and interviews with key personnel. The study identifies six main sources of conflict: economic, social, religious, educational, security, and human rights issues, and points out challenges such as overloading internal departments. Silp-udom embraces His Majesty the King's

sufficiency economy philosophy by strengthening education, promoting true Islamic principles, engaging of religious leaders, and fostering unity and political inclusiveness through improved communication technology.

Social Cohesion in the Southern Border Provinces of Thailand

Anuwong et al. (2023) conducted a study on social cohesion in three southern border provinces of Thailand, focusing on measuring levels of cohesion and identifying factors that influence it amid regional social tensions. They employed a modified version of the questionnaire, originally developed by the European Foundation on Social Quality and adapted by the Asian Consortium of Social Quality, to survey 978 voters aged 18 and older using a multi-stage sampling method. The data analysis included both descriptive and inferential statistics, which revealed that participants generally had low levels of trust and they approached their interpersonal interactions with caution. Nevertheless, a strong sense of Thai national pride was evident. The study identified several significant factors affecting trust, such as age, religion, education, income, and experiences of discrimination. In addition, factors influencing national pride included age, religion, employment status, and experiences of religious discrimination. These findings underscore the complex nature of social cohesion in the region and suggest that individual experiences and socio-economic factors play a vital role in shaping community interactions, providing valuable insights for policy and community development aimed at fostering social harmony.

The Importance of Cultural Narratives in Society

Cultural narratives play a crucial role in shaping the values and identity of a community through the stories, myths, traditions, and symbols passed down through generations (Bruner, 1991). These narratives offer an important framework for individuals to interpret their experiences and help them understand their role in a larger social context (Schechtman, 1996). The importance of cultural narratives goes beyond personal understanding; they are crucial in fostering social cohesion by creating shared meaning and strengthening collective identity (Abu-Lughod, 1991). In an era of globalization, cultural narratives are increasingly influenced by the transnational exchange of ideas and media across borders (Appadurai, 1996). This interaction creates hybrid cultural narratives in which

societies reconstruct their identities and cultural practices, balancing local traditions and global influences (Bhabha, 1994). This ongoing process underscores the adaptability of cultural narratives and their ability to evolve in response to changing circumstances. The implications of cultural narratives are complex. While they can strengthen social cohesion and support identity formation, they also risk reinforcing existing inequalities and power dynamics. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge the diversity of narratives within a society in order to promote inclusivity and understanding. Future research should delve into how cultural narratives evolve in response to changing social, political, and technological conditions, as well as how they impact social justice and collective well-being.

The literature review highlights the role of cultural activities in strengthening social cohesion in Thailand's southern border provinces. Studies indicate that youth perspectives on community life are shaped by various factors including family structure and gender. Wanishsakpong et al. (2021) found that students generally have positive views of their school and community environments, with those living with parents expressing stronger social connections. Additionally, multicultural competence is essential for promoting harmony in diverse communities. Thongaram et al. (2022) identified key skills such as kindness, cultural communication, and acceptance of diversity, which help students engage in multicultural interactions. Governance and administrative strategies also play a role in conflict resolution and social cohesion. Silp-udom (2019) analyzed the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center's effort to reduce conflict through education, religious engagement, and political inclusiveness. Meanwhile, Anuwong et al. (2023) found that while trust levels in the region are low, national pride remains strong, with social cohesion influenced by factors such as age, religion, education, and experiences of discrimination. Cultural narratives further contribute to collective identity by shaping societal values and traditions. Scholars such as Bruner (1991) and Abu-Lughod (1991) emphasize that these narratives promote unity while evolving through globalization, as discussed by Appadurai (1996) and Bhabha (1994).

This study builds on the existing literature by examining students' perspectives on cultural activities and their role in promoting community cohesion through narrative essays.

By analyzing student narratives, the study aims to understand how cultural participation influences social inclusion and unity, expanding on the findings of Wanishsakpong et al. (2021). Furthermore, it contributes to the discussion on multicultural competence by identifying how cultural activities help students develop the skills outlined by Thongaram et al. (2022). Thematic analysis of student essays will also shed light on how cultural narratives shape collective identity, reinforcing the work of Bruner (1991) and Abu-Lughod (1991). Additionally, insights from this research could inform policies and community development initiatives, aligning with recommendations of Silp-udom (2019) and Anuwong et al. (2023).

Conceptual Framework

This study explores the connection between cultural activities, community cohesion, and social capital development in Thailand's southern border provinces. It draws on several key theories to understand how engaging students in cultural activities can lead to personal growth and collective transformation.

Social Identity Theory

According to social identity theory, people define themselves through the groups they belong to (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In Thailand's southern border provinces, students' cultural identities are shaped by their ethnic, religious, and community backgrounds. Cultural activities provide a space for students to engage with peers from different backgrounds, helping them recognize both their own culture and that of others. These interactions foster a sense of belonging, not just within one's own group but in a broader and more inclusive community. This shared experience helps break down cultural divides and builds a positive collective identity.

Cultural Capital

Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital refers to the knowledge, skills, and practices that help people navigate their social world. By participating in cultural activities, students enhance their cultural capital, learning about both their own traditions and those of others. This exposure allows them to develop the social skills needed to thrive in diverse communities, creating a more inclusive environment where different cultural identities are

celebrated. In this way, cultural activities help students connect with their community and each other.

Contact Hypothesis

The contact hypothesis suggests that positive interactions between people from different groups can reduce prejudice and promote understanding (Allport, 1954). In the southern border provinces, where there are often social and religious tensions, cultural activities provide opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds to collaborate and learn about one another. These interactions help dismantle stereotypes and build trust, fostering harmony in a region marked by diversity. When students work together, they build connections that can help bridge cultural divides.

Narrative Identity Theory

Narrative identity theory emphasizes the importance of personal stories in shaping who we are (McAdams, 2001). Through activities like narrative writing, students reflect on their cultural identities and experiences, gaining a deeper understanding of themselves and the multicultural society around them. Sharing these stories allows students to express their feelings and challenges, contributing to a more positive and inclusive view of their community. This process helps students explore their identities in relation to others, strengthening their sense of belonging.

Social Capital Theory

Social capital theory focuses on the importance of relationships, trust, and shared values in creating strong communities (Putnam, 2000). Cultural activities offer students a chance to build these relationships by bringing them together to collaborate and share experiences. As students form bonds with peers from diverse backgrounds, they contribute to the development of social capital in their community. These connections foster a sense of belonging and collective action, essential for building a cohesive society where people work toward common goals.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy encourages students to reflect on and challenge the social structures around them (Freire, 1970). In regions like Thailand's southern border provinces,

where social and political tensions persist, cultural activities and narrative writing offer students an opportunity to explore their identities and the challenges they face. Through this process, students are empowered to think critically and engage in social change, promoting peace and social justice within their communities. By recognizing the value of all students' experiences, critical pedagogy fosters an inclusive learning environment where everyone's voice is heard.

The conceptual framework of this study explores the relationship between cultural activities, community cohesion, and social capital development in Thailand's southern border provinces. It integrates several perspectives to understand how student participation in cultural activities fosters personal growth and collective transformation. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) explains that individuals define themselves through group membership, and cultural activities provide a space for students from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds to interact, promoting a shared sense of belonging and reducing cultural divides. Bourdieu's (1986) concept of Cultural Capital highlights how engaging in cultural activities helps students develop the knowledge, skills, and social awareness needed to engage in a multicultural society, leading to a more inclusive environment. The Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954) suggests that meaningful interactions between different groups can reduce prejudice and build trust, which is particularly relevant in the southern border provinces, where cultural and religious tensions exist. Through cultural activities, students engage with peers from various backgrounds, breaking down stereotypes and promoting social harmony. Narrative Identity Theory (McAdams, 2001) emphasizes the role of personal storytelling in shaping identity. By writing narrative essays about their cultural experiences, students reflect on their identities and those of others, deepening their understanding of multiculturalism and fostering a more inclusive community. Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000) underscores the importance of relationships, trust, and shared values in community building. Cultural activities provide opportunities for students to form meaningful connections across different backgrounds, strengthening the social cohesion of their communities. Finally, Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1970) encourages students to reflect on societal structures and challenges. By engaging in cultural activities and narrative writing,

students gain a deeper understanding of the society around them, which enables them to contribute to positive social change and community cohesion. This study applies these theories by analyzing student narratives to understand how cultural activities influence identity formation, trust-building, and social cohesion. By identifying recurring themes in students essays, the findings may contribute to educational and community development initiatives, promoting cultural understanding and reducing social divisions in Thailand's southern border provinces.

Research Methodology

This qualitative research employs a case study approach, focusing on students from early secondary to upper secondary levels across four provinces in southern border regions of Thailand: Songkhla, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. According to Stake (1995), case studies provide a deep understanding of phenomena within their real-life contexts, offering insights that might be overlooked in more generalized approaches. A total of 10 participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring anonymity of each student.

Participants

Requests for participation were sent to 50 schools in the four southern border provinces. Schools were asked to nominate students who were interested in writing essays on the topic "Promoting Our Community through Cultural Activities." Responses were collected electronically via email over a one-month period, including school names, provinces, and student grade levels.

Data Collection

A total of 20 essays were initially submitted for consideration and underwent a thorough screening process to ensure they aligned with the research focus. The selection criteria included relevance to the topic, a narrative writing style, originality of content, appropriate length, and clarity of examples. Ultimately, only 10 essays were chosen, while the rest were excluded due to a lack of narrative style, insufficient examples, or instances of direct plagiarism from online sources. The final selection featured contributions from a diverse group of students: 2 from Songkhla (1 male and 1 female, both in grade 12, aged 17-18), 5 from Pattani (all female, spanning grades 9-12, aged 14-17), 1 from Yala (female, grade

9, aged 14), and 2 from Narathiwat (both female, in grades 9, aged 15), reflecting a range of perspectives from the targeted regions. Selection was based primarily on qualitative factors rather than a strict provincial quota. The researchers acknowledge the uneven distribution of selected essays, such as Yala having only one, was due to variations in quality rather than an intentional imbalance in representation.

Data Analysis

The researchers pinpointed essential themes and key important content from each essay to organize and analyze the data. Using thematic analysis methods outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), the study aims to reveal the deeper meanings and viewpoints that emerge from the students' narratives. The analysis focused on drawing conclusions based on the participants' perspectives in the case study.

Findings

This study presents findings drawn from narrative essays written by students, reflecting a variety of cultural activities promoted in their communities (refer to table 1). The research highlights how cultural activities play a significant role in fostering community unity and understanding, with events such sports festivals, health check-ups, and visits to religious sites contributing to building relationships among diverse groups.

Objective 1: To explore student perspectives on cultural activities and their contribution to community unity

The findings indicate that cultural activities in the communities play a crucial role in fostering unity and mutual understanding across different groups. Activities such as sports festivals provide a platform for students and community members to collaborate in a friendly and competitive environment that promote teamwork. Health checks-up event offers a space for individuals from different cultural backgrounds to come together with a shared concern for well-being. Additionally, visits to religious sites serve as an educational experience where students gain insight into different traditions, which leads to increased respect and appreciation for diverse cultural practices. Overall, students believe that these activities contribute to the development of a more cohesive and inclusive community.

Objective 2: To evaluate the influence of cultural activities on social cohesion among various groups

The analysis indicates that cultural activities positively influence social cohesion by encouraging interaction and collaboration among different groups. Cultural exchanges such as traditional dance performances and culinary showcases, allow participants to share their heritage, reduce cultural misunderstanding, and foster appreciation for diversity. Festivals celebrate multiple traditions, which provide opportunities for individuals from various backgrounds to participate in shared experiences and reinforce a sense of belonging. Furthermore, interfaith events facilitate dialogue and cooperation, which enable individuals to recognize common values and building trust. Students highlighted that these activities contribute to a peaceful coexistence, strengthening community ties, and promoting an environment where cultural diversity is embraced as a source of strength rather than division.

Objective 3: To pinpoint significant themes in student essays regarding cultural activities and community cohesion

The thematic analysis of student essays reveals key themes related to cultural activities and social cohesion. These themes include respect for diversity, the opportunity to learn from one another, the promotion of peaceful coexistence, and the importance of preserving cultural heritage. Activities like interfaith dialogues, multicultural festivals, and community engagement initiatives are highlighted as effective ways to enhance social cohesion and foster mutual respect.

Table 1 Summary of Research Findings on Cultural Activities and Community Interactions across Diverse Regions

Participant	Location	Key Findings
Participant 1	Pattani	Emphasized community unity across religious backgrounds, participating in events like sports festivals, health check-ups, and cultural visits (e.g., Krue Se Mosque).

Table 1 Summary of Research Findings on Cultural Activities and Community Interactions across Diverse Regions (Cont.)

Participant	Location	Key Findings
Participant 2	Songkhla	Highlighted cultural diversity activities that promote learning and respect through exchanges and training sessions among students.
Participant 3	Pattani	Discussed respectful coexistence of Buddhist Thais and Muslims, engaging in joint community activities and respecting each other's practices.
Participant 4	Pattani	Focused on unique community lifestyles (food, clothing, language, and customs) that attract tourists and are showcased through cultural performances.
Participant 5	Narathiwat	Reflected on multiculturalism's challenges and benefits, advocating for respect and understanding through cultural exchanges and activities.
Participant 6	Narathiwat	Emphasized acceptance of diverse cultures, viewing differences in beliefs and customs as opportunities for mutual learning and community strengthening.
Participant 7	Pattani	Discussed community-led initiatives like reforestation and crab farming aimed at boosting the local economy and preserving natural resources.
Participant 8	Pattani	Shared experiences of harmonious coexistence, participating in cultural festivities (Eid, Ashura) and highlighting shared celebrations and culinary traditions.
Participant 9	Yala	Stressed cultural preservation, noting local schools' respect for various religious practices and the importance of community events like the Yala Municipality Youth Orchestra.
Participant 10	Songkhla	Described a multicultural upbringing in school, acting as a guide for diverse religious communities and emphasizing solidarity during crises.

Table 1 presents a summary of key insights gathered from participants across various regions regarding cultural activities and community interactions. The findings show that cultural activities play a significant role in promoting unity and understanding across different religious and ethnic backgrounds. For example, participants from Pattani emphasized the importance of community unity regardless of religious beliefs, with activities like sports festivals, health check-ups, and visits to cultural sites such as mosques. Similarly, participants from Songkhla emphasized how cultural diversity activities, such as exchanges and training sessions, help students learn to respect and appreciate different cultures. In Narathiwat, participants discussed the value of multiculturalism, noting how cultural exchanges promote mutual understanding and respect, even amidst challenges.

The narratives also illustrate how communities engage in activities that celebrate cultural diversity. For instance, participants in Pattani shared experiences of Buddhist and Muslim communities working together in joint community activities, such as cultural performances and shared religious celebrations like Eid and Ashura. Additionally, community-driven projects like reforestation and crab farming in smaller communities in Pattani were seen as beneficial for local economic development and environmental conservation. The participants' insights reveal how cultural and community activities contribute to stronger, more inclusive, and respectful communities, promoting social harmony through shared experiences and mutual respect.

Table 2 Perspectives on Promoting Cultural Activities in Communities

Participant	Location	Perspective	Activities	Impact
Participant 1	Pattani	Stresses the importance of community unity despite religious or cultural differences.	Engages in regular communal activities such as sports festivals, health check-ups, and visits to cultural sites like mosques.	Promotes understanding among various religious backgrounds and encourages community involvement in cultural events.

Table 2 Perspectives on Promoting Cultural Activities in Communities (Cont.)

Participant	Location	Perspective	Activities	Impact
Participant 2	Songkhla	Believes that diverse cultural activities cultivate mutual respect and understanding.	Facilitates cultural exchanges among students to explore different lifestyles and traditions.	Helps to diminish conflicts and biases among culturally diverse groups through shared experiences.
Participant 3	Pattani	Argues that cultural diversity within a community fosters social harmony.	Organizes joint cultural events that celebrate both Buddhist and Muslim traditions.	Encourages peaceful coexistence and mutual respect among community members.
Participant 4	Pattani	Points out that each community has distinct cultural features that attract tourists.	Promotes culture through media and community events that highlight local traditions.	Enhances tourism and instills community pride in cultural heritage.
Participant 5	Narathiwat	Discusses the challenges and advantages of multiculturalism, especially in a religious context.	Hosts interfaith events such as religious ceremonies and community health initiatives.	Improves understanding and tolerance among different religious groups despite external misconceptions.

Table 2 Perspectives on Promoting Cultural Activities in Communities (Cont.)

Participant	Location	Perspective	Activities	Impact
Participant 6	Narathiwat	Advocates for embracing cultural diversity as a source of enrichment.	Participates in local festivals and community activities.	Fosters cultural exchange and mutual appreciation among diverse community members.
Participant 7	Pattani	Focuses on a small community dedicated to environmental and economic sustainability.	Initiates projects like reforestation and crab farming to enhance the local economy.	Aims to improve livelihoods and promote environmental conservation within the community.
Participant 8	Pattani	Highlights the importance of harmonious coexistence and cultural exchange among various backgrounds.	Actively engages in both Buddhist and Islamic cultural events.	Encourages mutual respect and understanding, helping to build strong interpersonal relationships across different cultures.
Participant 9	Yala	Advocates for the preservation and appreciation of cultural diversity as a vital aspect of social art.	Engages in educational activities that blend Buddhist and Islamic traditions in various settings.	Encourages cultural tolerance and mutual learning, enhancing social cohesion and respect for beliefs.

Table 2 Perspectives on Promoting Cultural Activities in Communities (Cont.)

Participant	Location	Perspective	Activities	Impact
Participant 10	Songkhla	Celebrates the rich cultural diversity of Thailand and encourages inclusivity among various religious communities.	Assists elderly Buddhists in visiting temples, explores important mosques, and enjoys a variety of local cuisines.	Exemplifies peaceful coexistence and mutual support during challenging times, nurturing a community spirit of unity and respect.

Table 2 provides an in-depth look at how participants perceive the promotion of cultural activities in their communities, emphasizing the positive impact these activities have in fostering unity, mutual respect, and understanding among diverse groups. The perspectives gathered reveal that cultural exchanges, community events, and educational activities are effective means of enhancing social cohesion. For instance, in Pattani, participants noted that community events, such as sports festivals and visits to cultural landmarks helped create an inclusive environment where people from different religious backgrounds could engage and build mutual respect. Similarly, in Songkhla, participants discussed how diverse cultural activities in schools encouraged students to learn about each other's traditions and practices, thus reducing bias and promoting solidarity. In Narathiwat, the focus was on embracing cultural diversity, with activities like interfaith events and local festivals contributing to mutual appreciation and respect. Additionally, participants highlighted the importance of cultural preservation, with some community initiatives aimed at showcasing local traditions and attracting tourism, thereby strengthening both local pride and economic development. Overall, the impact of these cultural activities is profound, with participants noting that they not only improve understanding among various religious groups but also enhance local economies and boost community participation.

Discussion

This study highlights the transformative role of cultural activities in promoting social cohesion and inclusivity within the communities of Thailand's southern border provinces. Through the stories shared by participants, several key themes emerged, emphasizing the significance of cultural engagement in fostering understanding, cooperation and community development. These findings are corroborated by existing literature, which underscores the profound impact of cultural participation on social inclusion and community cohesion in multicultural contexts.

Cultural Diversity and Community Cohesion

Participants across the provinces of Songkhla, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat consistently identified cultural activities as key in promoting unity and mutual respect among individuals from different religious and cultural backgrounds. Events such as sports festivals, health check-ups, and cultural tours to sites like the Krue Se Mosque not only celebrate local heritage but also foster a sense of shared identity and encourage collaboration. This aligns with the perspective that engaging in arts and culture can strengthen community ties and social cohesion (Lindström Sol et al., 2022). Similarly, cultural policies aimed at boosting engagement within specific neighborhoods can reinforce social communities (Eriksson & Sørensen, 2021).

In line with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), these interactions allow individuals to define themselves not only through their own cultural group but also through connections with others, which promotes a broader and more inclusive collective identity. Additionally, the emphasis on multicultural social competence in the study by Thongaram et.al. (2022) highlights the importance of respecting and embracing diversity, which aligns with findings on the role of cultural activities in reducing stigma and building community solidarity.

Education and Intercultural Understanding

In Songkhla and Yala, participants emphasized the importance of cultural exchanges in schools for promoting intercultural understanding among students. Activities like visits to religious sites and participation in community events like the Yala Municipality Youth

Orchestra were particularly effective in nurturing tolerance and appreciation for diverse traditions. This supports the notion that intercultural understanding is essential for embracing cultural diversity, fighting racism, and addressing cross-cultural conflicts (Paradies et al., 2009). Furthermore, Ernalsteen (2002) suggests that cooperative learning strategies, which require prior knowledge of one another and teacher facilitation, can significantly improve intercultural education. These activities also align with Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954), which suggests that positive interactions between people from diverse backgrounds help reduce prejudice and promote understanding. Through cultural exchanges, students not only learn about each other's cultures but also dismantle stereotypes and build trust, which promotes social harmony in a diverse region. Moreover, the work of Wanishsakpong et al. (2021) reinforces these findings by demonstrating that favorable family and school environments contribute to students' positive views of their communities, supporting the role of education in fostering a sense of belonging and intercultural competence.

Economic and Environmental Sustainability

In smaller communities like those in Pattani, cultural activities play a vital role in supporting projects aimed at economic sustainability, including reforestation and crab farming. These initiatives contribute to both environmental conservation and the enhancement of local livelihoods, showcasing that cultural engagement can have tangible benefits beyond social cohesion. Participants highlighted the role of cultural practices in these initiatives, which underscore the interconnectedness of cultural vitality, economic health, and environmental sustainability. Hawkes (2001) emphasized the importance of integrating these dimensions into sustainability models, while Kaplan-Hallam & Bennett, (2018) stress the need for dialogue with affected communities to ensure the social impacts of sustainability strategies. This reflects Cultural Capital (Bourdieu, 1986), as participating in these activities provides individuals with the knowledge, skills, and social connections needed to manage complex socio-economic environments. The cultural capital gained through these experiences empowers individuals to contribute meaningfully to both community development and sustainability. Moreover, Silp-udom's (2019) study of the SBPAC's development strategies suggests that addressing local economic and social

concerns through community engagement can reduce conflicts and promote long-term prosperity, aligning with the broader objectives of this study.

Challenges and Benefits of Multiculturalism

Cultural sharing, which involves expressing one's own culture while embracing the traditions of others, emerged as a critical component of community cohesion. In Narathiwat, participants spoke about the challenges and benefits of living in a multicultural environment, stressing the significance of mutual respect and understanding through cultural interactions. Despite some external misconceptions, local initiatives like interfaith events and community health programs have been essential in bridging cultural divides and nurturing a harmonious atmosphere. These findings align with Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000), which emphasizes the role of relationships, trust, and shared values in creating strong communities. Cultural activities provide opportunities for students and community members to form bonds and develop the social capital necessary for collective action. As these bonds grow, they foster a sense of belonging and contribute to the development of a cohesive society, where individuals work together toward common goals. In relation to the findings of Anuwong et al. (2023), the strengthening of social trust and national pride through intercultural activities is a crucial factor in overcoming the region's social challenges.

Promotion of Cultural Heritage and Tourism

Cultural heritage plays a central role in global tourism, and local communities increasingly recognize its value as both an asset and a means of fostering pride in local traditions. Participants in Pattani highlighted the importance of showcasing cultural practices to attract tourists and strengthen community identity. By emphasizing unique cultural elements through local events and media, communities can both celebrate their heritage and utilize it as a driver for economic development through tourism (Timothy & Boyd, 2006). The practice of promoting cultural heritage is consistent with the concept of Narrative Identity Theory (McAdams, 2001), which emphasizes the importance of personal and collective stories in shaping identities. Through the telling of cultural stories, communities create a shared narrative that not only enhances social cohesion but also promotes a collective sense of pride and belonging. The integration of these cultural practices into the

broader economic and social framework can also be seen as part of the SBPAC's strategies for promoting unity and reducing conflicts, as discussed by Silp-udom (2019).

Empowerment and Critical Pedagogy

Cultural activities also offer a platform for students to engage in critical reflection on their identities and societal challenges. In regions like the southern border provinces, where social and political tensions persist, cultural initiatives encourage students to critically analyze their roles within a multicultural society. By engaging in activities like narrative writing, students are empowered to explore their personal and collective identities, contributing to social change and promoting peace and justice in their communities. This aligns with Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1970), which encourages students to reflect on and challenge social structures, promoting a learning environment that is inclusive and supports social transformation. Furthermore, the work of Thongaram et al. (2022) demonstrates that education systems focused on promoting multicultural social competence are key to empowering students and equipping them with the tools to engage meaningfully in their communities, challenge discrimination, and contribute to social cohesion.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes the crucial role of cultural activities in promoting community unity and social cohesion, as seen through the perspectives of students from diverse regions. The research confirms that events like sports festivals, health check-ups, and visits to religious sites provide opportunities for individuals from different backgrounds to connect, share experiences, and strengthen relationships. These activities promote inclusivity, bridging community gaps, and strengthen mutual respect. The study also demonstrates that cultural events like interfaith dialogues and multicultural festivals, are vital for peaceful coexistence and reducing conflicts, and encouraging collaboration across ethnic and religious groups. By providing platforms for interaction, these activities help mitigate biases and cultivate unity. The thematic analysis of student essays reveals several key themes including respect for diversity, mutual learning, peaceful coexistence, and cultural preservation. These activities not only enhance social cohesion but also contribute to cultural heritage preservation and

local economic development. The students' narratives underscore the value of embracing cultural diversity in strengthening both the social bonds and local pride.

Recommendations

The findings from this research can be effectively utilized to inform policies and strategies that address the diverse perspectives from different regions. To ensure the results are comprehensive and reflective of the varied experiences and needs of different groups, it is essential to emphasize the inclusion of samples that represent a wide range of geographical and demographic factors such as age, gender, occupation, and ethnicity.

To enhance the effectiveness of future research, several steps should be taken. Expanding the sample size and ensuring balanced representation across regions are essential for capturing a broader range of perspectives. In addition, diversifying data collection methods such as interviews, focus groups, or community surveys would allow for broader participation, especially from individuals who may not express themselves effectively in writing. Strengthening recruitment strategies by utilizing local networks, schools, and community leaders can also encourage submissions from underrepresented groups. Finally, implementing selection criteria that prioritize both geographic and demographic diversity would further enrich the study's scope, which contributes to a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to data gathering and analysis.

References

Abu-Lughod, L. (1991). Writing against culture. In R. G. Fox (Ed.), *Recapturing anthropology: Working in the present* (pp. 137-162). School of American Research Press.

Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Addison-Wesley.

Anuwong, K., Vajirakachorn, S., & Chaiaksornwet, A. (2023). Social cohesion in southern border provinces of Thailand. *Asia Social Issues, 16*(3), 1-17.

Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgment of taste*. Harvard University Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.

Bruner, J. (1991). The narrative construction of reality. *Critical Inquiry, 18*(1), 1-21.

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. Jossey-Bass.

Dovidio, J. F., Gaertner, S. L., & Saguy, T. (2019). Commonality and the complexity of "we": Social attitudes and social change. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 23*(4), 349-369.

Eden, C. A., Chisom, O. N., & Adeniyi, I. S. (2024). Cultural competence in education: Strategies for fostering inclusivity and diversity awareness. *International Journal of Applied Research in Social Sciences, 6*(3), 383-392.

Eisenstadt, S. N. (2000). Multiple modernities. *Daedalus, 129*(1), 1-29.

Eriksson, B., & Sørensen, A. S. (2021). Public art projects in exposed social housing areas: Dilemmas and potentials. *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture, 13*(1), 1-15.

Ernalsteen, V. (2002). Does complex instruction benefit intercultural education? *Intercultural Education, 13*(1), 69–80.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Herder and Herder.

Goodenow, C., & Grady, K. E. (1993). The relationship of school belonging and friends' values to academic motivation among urban adolescent students. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 62*(1), 60–71.

Hawkes, J. (2001). *The fourth pillar of sustainability: Culture's essential role in public planning*. Common Ground Press.

Kaplan-Hallam, M., & Bennett, N. J. (2018). Adaptive social impact management for conservation and environmental management. *Conservation Biology, 32*(2), 304–314.

Lindström Sol, S., Gustrén, C., Nelhans, G., Eklund, J., Johannisson, J., & Blomgren, R. (2022). Mapping research on the social impact of the arts: What characterizes the field? *Open Research Europe, 1*(124).

McAdams, D. P. (2001). The psychology of life stories. *Review of General Psychology, 5*(2), 100-122.

Nookua, S. (2011). *The patterns of language use in the southernmost provinces of Thailand.* กระแสวัฒนธรรม *(Cultural Approach), 12*(22), 26-35.

Paradies, Y., Chandrakumar, L., Klocker, N., Frere, M., Webster, K., Burrell, M., & McLean, P. (2009). *Building on our strengths: A framework to reduce race-based discrimination and support diversity in Victoria*. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation.

Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.

Riessman, C. J. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Sage Publications.

Silp-udom, N. (2019). *A study of Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre provinces development strategy 2015-2017* [Doctoral's dissertation]. National Institute of Developmant Administration.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage Publications.

Schechtman, M. (1996). *The constitution of selves*. Cornell University Press.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. *In S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.), Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7-24). Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

Thongaram, N., Luangubol, J., & Glangkarn, S. (2022). The exploratory factor analysis: The multicultural social competence of the community college students in the three Southern Border Provinces of Thailand. *Journal of Southwest Jiaotong University, 57*(3), 27-38.

Timothy, D. J., & Boyd, S. W. (2006). Heritage tourism in the 21st century: Valued traditions and new perspectives. *Journal of Heritage Tourism, 1*(1), 1–16.

Wanishsakpong, W., McNeil, R., Chinbuatong, N., & Eso, M. (2021). Opinions of children and youth in the three southern border provinces on their livelihoods in the current situation. *Journal of Mathematical and Computational Science, 11*(4), 4905-4916.

Ward, C., Bochner, S., & Furnham, A. (2001). *The psychology of culture shock*. Routle