

## Policy Shaping and Capacity Building for Sustainable Community-Based Tourism in Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor

Chayapoj Lee-Anant<sup>1</sup> and Piyatida Kungwansith<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Tourism and Hospitality Industry, Faculty of Humanities, Kasetsart University, Thailand

<sup>2</sup>Hospitality Industry Management Program, Faculty of Management Sciences, Kasetsart University, Thailand

### ABSTRACT

**Background and Objectives:** Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has emerged as a sustainable strategy for economic empowerment and workforce development, especially in rural and emerging tourism markets. In Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC), CBT offers a means to balance economic growth with cultural preservation. However, skill gaps, financial inaccessibility, and policy misalignment continue to constrain its long-term potential. This study aims to: (1) examine the effects of CBT participation on economic outcomes and human capital development through training effectiveness and government support; (2) explore stakeholder perspectives on capacity-building challenges and opportunities; and (3) propose policy recommendations for strengthening human capital and capacity-building mechanisms that support sustainable CBT.

**Methodology:** A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with qualitative thematic analysis using NVivo. A survey of 400 CBT practitioners across the EEC assessed the direct and mediated effects of CBT participation on income stability, workforce readiness, training effectiveness, and policy support. Additionally, semi-structured interviews with 33 stakeholders—including entrepreneurs, tourism workers, and policymakers—offered deeper insights into training gaps, operational constraints, and governance inefficiencies. Thematic analysis identified recurrent economic, educational, and institutional barriers, contributing to a holistic understanding of CBT's structural limitations.

**Main Results:** The SEM results confirmed that CBT participation positively influences workforce development ( $\beta = 0.37, p < 0.01$ ) and economic outcomes ( $\beta = 0.41, p < 0.001$ ), with training effectiveness as a key mediator ( $\beta = 0.52, p < 0.001$ ). Government support positively moderates training effectiveness ( $\beta = 0.28, p < 0.05$ ), yet access to funding remains limited due to bureaucratic inefficiencies and centralized policy structures. Qualitative findings revealed critical challenges including seasonal income instability, outdated training content, and a lack of community-managed financial mechanisms.

**Discussions:** The findings support global literature on CBT's socio-economic benefits while underscoring persistent institutional barriers. Although integration with commercial tourism has been proposed, this study emphasizes that cultural and operational autonomy is essential for sustainability. A shift toward experiential, skills-based training—emphasizing digital marketing, financial literacy, and multilingual

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services—is recommended. Additionally, a transition to decentralized, community-managed funding models could enhance financial accessibility and local ownership.

**Conclusions:** CBT holds strong potential to advance economic resilience and workforce development in the EEC. However, structural constraints related to training and governance must be addressed. A transformative policy approach—centered on localized training, inclusive governance, and decentralized financial support—is essential to ensure CBT's long-term competitiveness and sustainability in Thailand's evolving tourism sector.

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\*Corresponding author

E-mail address: [Piyatida.kun@ku.th](mailto:Piyatida.kun@ku.th), [Chayapoj.l@ku.th](mailto:Chayapoj.l@ku.th)

## Introduction

### *Background of the Study*

Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) is a cornerstone of the Thailand 4.0 strategy, which aims to transform the provinces of Chonburi, Rayong, and Chachoengsao into a hub of advanced technology and innovation. While the region's development is primarily driven by industrial expansion and foreign direct investment (FDI), tourism plays an increasingly important role in fostering inclusive growth, especially in rural and coastal communities rich in natural and cultural resources.

However, mainstream mass tourism in Thailand has often led to environmental degradation, economic leakage, and uneven wealth distribution. In response, Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has emerged as a viable alternative for regions like the EEC. CBT promotes community ownership, local entrepreneurship, and ecological sustainability, offering a bottom-up model aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) (Bennich et al., 2020; Horan, 2019; Mtapuri et al., 2022).

Despite its promise, the long-term success of CBT initiatives in the EEC hinges on human capital development (HCD). Local communities must be equipped with digital literacy, entrepreneurial competencies, and service quality awareness to manage tourism enterprises effectively and respond to shifting market demands. Prior research highlights that insufficient skills training and fragmented policy implementation have hindered the sustainability of CBT efforts (Dangi & Petrick, 2021; Ditta-Apichai et al., 2024; Kallmuenzer et al., 2021).

Although the Thai government has introduced various CBT-supportive policies, their effectiveness in enhancing local capacity and enabling entrepreneurial resilience remains uncertain, particularly within the rapidly evolving socio-economic landscape of the EEC.

### *Problem Statement*

Despite government initiatives and policy support to promote CBT in the EEC, its long-term sustainability remains uncertain due to persistent HCD challenges. While CBT offers opportunities for local communities to engage in tourism-based economic activities, a lack of adequate training, vocational education, and entrepreneurship development programs has limited their ability to fully participate and benefit from these initiatives. Many local tourism entrepreneurs and community members face difficulties in acquiring essential skills, including hospitality management, digital marketing, financial literacy, and language proficiency, which are crucial for running competitive and sustainable CBT enterprises.

In addition to training limitations, policy fragmentation and weak institutional coordination have further hindered CBT growth in the EEC. Despite the Thai government's

emphasis on local economic development through tourism, gaps exist in funding accessibility, technical support, and policy implementation mechanisms. Local communities often lack access to financial assistance, government-backed tourism promotion programs, and effective collaboration with private-sector stakeholders, making it challenging to scale up and sustain CBT operations.

Furthermore, while existing research such as Mtapuri et al. (2022), Dolezal and Novelli (2022), and Zielinski et al. (2021) have explored the socio-economic benefits of CBT, empirical studies integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to assess the link between CBT, human capital development, and economic sustainability are still lacking. Most existing studies focus on case studies or theoretical frameworks, leaving a critical gap in data-driven insights that examine the causal relationships between government policies, training effectiveness, skill development, and the long-term economic viability of CBT in the EEC.

To address this gap, a comprehensive investigation using both Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and qualitative thematic analysis is necessary to understand the complex interactions between CBT, human capital, and economic outcomes. Without such an approach, policymakers and stakeholders risk implementing fragmented tourism strategies that fail to equip local communities with the necessary skills to drive sustainable CBT initiatives. Therefore, this study aims to bridge this gap by providing empirical evidence and policy recommendations that can enhance CBT-driven economic growth in Thailand's EEC.

### ***Research Objectives***

1. To examine the effects of CBT participation on economic outcomes and human capital development through training effectiveness and government support among tourism practitioners in Thailand's EEC
2. To explore tourism stakeholder perspectives on capacity-building challenges and opportunities
3. To propose policy recommendations for strengthening human capital and capacity-building mechanisms that support sustainable CBT

### **Literature Review**

This section reviews relevant literature on CBT, HCD, and SEM applications in tourism research. It also includes a review of the EEC and its role in tourism-led development, followed by discussions on qualitative insights from CBT initiatives.

### ***The Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) and Tourism Development***

EEC is Thailand's flagship economic development zone, covering the provinces of Chonburi, Rayong, and Chachoengsao. The EEC was established under the Thailand 4.0 strategy, aiming to position the country as a regional hub for innovation, advanced industries, and digital transformation. The initiative seeks to attract FDI, upgrade infrastructure, and boost global trade connectivity, particularly in automotive, aviation, biotechnology, and digital industries (Jaiprasert & Maluleem, 2023).

While industrial expansion is the core focus of the EEC, tourism is recognized as a complementary sector that can promote economic diversification and local community participation. Given the EEC's coastal location, cultural heritage, and proximity to Bangkok, the region has strong potential for sustainable tourism initiatives, including CBT (Fakfare et al., 2022). However, existing tourism development in the EEC tends to favor large-scale, corporate-led investments, leading to concerns about economic exclusion, environmental degradation, and cultural displacement. In this context, CBT presents an opportunity to promote grassroots-driven, sustainable economic models that ensure inclusive growth.

### ***The Role of Community-Based Tourism in Economic Development***

Widely recognized in tourism and development literature, CBT is a sustainable alternative to mass tourism, with the capacity to stimulate inclusive local economic growth. Unlike conventional tourism models that are capital-intensive and externally driven, CBT prioritizes local participation, decentralized governance, and the retention of tourism benefits within host communities (Mtapuri et al., 2022). By allowing communities to design, manage, and profit from tourism-related activities, CBT promotes grassroots economic development while preserving ecological and cultural assets (Ditta-Apichai et al., 2024).

Theoretically, CBT is situated within frameworks of inclusive development and sustainable livelihoods (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2022). It is considered a vehicle for empowering marginalized communities by enhancing their agency, social capital, and income security. CBT initiatives such as homestays, eco-tourism, artisanal production, and cultural exchange are often credited with improving household incomes, revitalizing traditional practices, and strengthening local infrastructure (Fan et al., 2023; Krittayaruangroj et al., 2023). Studies in Chiang Mai and Bali, for example, have shown that well-managed CBT programs contribute not only to economic diversification but also to the resilience of local identities (Chinawat, 2024; Dolezal & Novelli, 2022).

Nonetheless, empirical evidence also highlights the structural and operational limitations of CBT. Common challenges include skill gaps, financial constraints, fragmented policy support, and insufficient marketing capacity, factors that reduce competitiveness vis-à-vis commercial tourism (Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2023). Thailand, though considered a regional leader in CBT promotion, with initiatives led by agencies such as the Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA), continues to face issues with uneven policy implementation, centralized decision-making, and limited cross-agency coordination (Pattano & Chelliah, 2022).

An enduring dilemma in CBT policy is the trade-off between cultural authenticity and commercial scalability. While deep community engagement often enhances the authenticity of experiences, it may lead to managerial inefficiencies and low standardization. Research indicates that addressing this requires integrated approaches, including digital upskilling, participatory governance, and long-term capacity-building strategies (Dłużewska & Giampiccoli, 2021; Freitag & Camargo-Borges, 2024).

### ***Human Capital Development in the Tourism Sector***

HCD is critical for ensuring CBT's long-term viability (Kallmuenzer et al., 2021). Skilled human resources are essential for delivering high-quality tourism experiences, managing local enterprises, and adapting to changing market dynamics. Several studies have emphasized the importance of vocational training, digital skills, and language proficiency in improving workforce readiness in the tourism industry (Freitag & Camargo-Borges, 2024; Krittayaruangroj et al., 2023; Li & Qamruzzaman, 2022; Sermsook et al., 2021).

In developing economies, including Thailand and other Southeast Asian nations, gaps in human capital investment have been identified as major barriers to sustainable tourism development (Aceleleanu & Stoian, 2023; Ditta-Apichai et al., 2024). Common issues include: (1) Limited access to professional training programs for tourism-related occupations, (2) Insufficient digital literacy among community members, restricting their ability to market CBT services effectively; (3) Language barriers preventing locals from effectively engaging with international tourists, and (4) Weak entrepreneurship and business management skills, limiting financial sustainability.

In the EEC, despite government efforts to promote tourism-led growth, many local communities lack adequate training and education in hospitality management, eco-tourism, and digital marketing (Tontisirin & Anantsuksomsri, 2021; Niyomsilp et al., 2020). Without proper

capacity-building initiatives, CBT enterprises in the EEC risk facing operational inefficiencies and failing to meet visitor expectations.

Thus, there is a pressing need to examine the impact of HCD on CBT sustainability in the EEC and identify effective policy interventions that can bridge skill gaps and strengthen tourism workforce development.

### ***Qualitative Studies on CBT and Human Capital***

While quantitative models like SEM provide statistical validation, qualitative research offers deeper insights into real-world challenges faced by CBT stakeholders. Previous qualitative studies have shown that local narratives provide a richer understanding of CBT sustainability, revealing barriers such as financial struggles, lack of market exposure, and policy constraints (Sann et al., 2022).

In Thailand, case studies on CBT implementation indicate that government funding gaps, weak training support, and lack of digital infrastructure limit CBT's potential (Chulaphan & Barahona, 2021; Khaenamkhaew et al., 2023; Somnuek, 2022; Vongvisitsin et al., 2024; Witchayakawin et al., 2022). Key qualitative insights from prior research include: (1) Financial accessibility, where many CBT operators struggle to access loans or grants to invest in better tourism facilities; (2) Training gaps, where existing government-backed tourism training programs often lack specialization in digital marketing, financial literacy, and eco-tourism management; and (3) Policy fragmentation, where despite having policy frameworks supporting CBT, implementation challenges remain, particularly in integrating public-private sector collaboration.

## **Method**

### ***Research Design***

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative SEM with qualitative semi-structured interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of how CBT contributes to HCD in Thailand's EEC. This approach ensured that the research captures both measurable impacts and contextual insights by combining statistical validation with in-depth stakeholder perspectives. The quantitative component assessed the relationships between CBT participation, training effectiveness, government support, and economic outcomes, while the qualitative component explored the lived experiences of CBT entrepreneurs, tourism workers, and policymakers in the region.

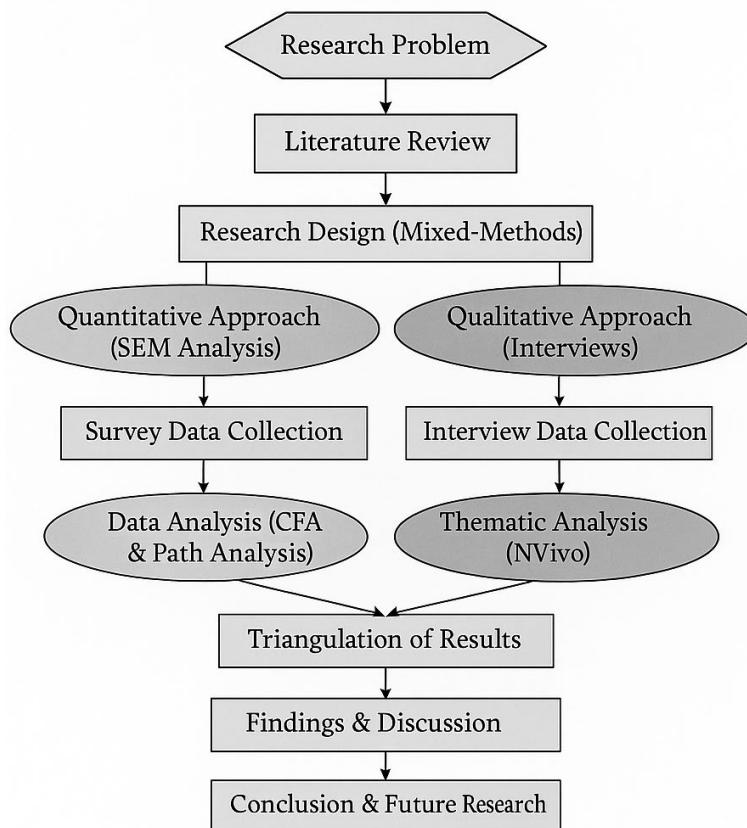
The quantitative analysis utilized SEM to test the causal relationships between key variables such as CBT participation, skill development, economic benefits, and policy interventions. The survey targeted 400 local community-based tourism workers using a structured questionnaire. The selection of 400 respondents follows SEM sample size guidelines, ensuring statistical power and reliable model estimation (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2023). A power analysis confirms that this sample size is sufficient to detect medium effect sizes (0.3–0.5) at 80% power (Kline, 2023).

The questionnaire development process incorporated feedback from local experts and practitioners with direct experience in community-based tourism within Chonburi, Rayong, and Chachoengsao provinces. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire underwent Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) analysis, with a panel of five tourism and policy experts rating each item for relevance, clarity, and appropriateness. Items scoring below 0.75 were revised or removed to improve construct validity. A pilot study ( $n=50$ ) was conducted, followed by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to establish measurement reliability and validity. The model demonstrated strong construct validity ( $CFI = 0.94$ ,  $TLI = 0.92$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.05$ ,  $SRMR = 0.06$ ), and internal consistency was confirmed through Cronbach's Alpha ( $>0.80$  across

constructs). Additionally, semi-structured interviews provided qualitative insights into economic barriers, training gaps, and policy effectiveness.

To complement the statistical findings, the qualitative component consisted of semi-structured interviews with 33 participants, including 9 CBT entrepreneurs, 13 tourism workers, and 11 policymakers. These interviews explored stakeholder experiences, challenges, and opportunities in managing and sustaining CBT enterprises in the EEC. The interviews focused on key themes such as economic impacts, training and skills development, policy effectiveness, and long-term sustainability prospects. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis with NVivo software, allowing for the identification of key patterns and insights. To further improve the trustworthiness of the overall methodology, the study employed data triangulation by integrating insights from three sources: (1) quantitative SEM results, (2) stakeholder interviews, and (3) documentary reviews of national tourism policies and CBT program reports. This triangulated design increases methodological rigor and supports the internal validity of the findings.

The justification for employing a mixed-methods approach lies in its ability to enhance research validity by integrating both empirical data and real-world perspectives. While SEM provides statistical rigor in testing relationships between variables, interviews offer depth by capturing the contextual nuances that numbers alone cannot reveal. This integration bridges critical knowledge gaps by identifying causal relationships while also shedding light on real-world policy challenges, skill development issues, and local perceptions of CBT sustainability.



**Figure 1** Displays the research processes of this study.

By synthesizing qualitative insights with SEM findings, this study provides a holistic understanding of the barriers and enablers of CBT-driven workforce development in Thailand's EEC. The triangulation of results will allow for the formulation of evidence-based policy recommendations aimed at enhancing CBT sustainability and human capital investment.

## ***Data Collection and Analysis***

### ***Quantitative Method***

The quantitative component of this study utilizes survey data collected from 400 local tourism workers. A structured questionnaire was developed based on existing scales from CBT and tourism workforce research such as Fan et al. (2023), Zielinski et al. (2021), Dolezal Novelli (2022) and Mtapuri et al. (2022), adapted to the EEC context. The questionnaire consists of the following five key constructs, measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree): (1) CBT Participation (CBT-P): Measures the extent of local community involvement in CBT activities; (2) Training Effectiveness (TRN-E): Assesses the availability, quality, and impact of vocational training programs; (3) Government Support (GOV-S): Evaluates the effectiveness of policies and funding mechanisms supporting CBT; (4) Economic Benefits (ECO-B): Captures the financial and employment-related outcomes of CBT participation; and (5) Tourism Skills Development (SKL-D): Measures improvements in workforce competencies, including language proficiency, hospitality management, and digital literacy. Respondents had to meet specific inclusion criteria, including: (1) Be employed in either hospitality, guiding, transport services, or local tourism-related activities within the CBT ecosystem; (2) Be actively involved in CBT activities within Chonburi, Rayong, or Chachoengsao—three key provinces in the EEC; (3) Be a minimum of 18 years old, ensuring legal consent and informed participation; and (4) Have a willingness to participate voluntarily. Researchers conducted on-site data collection in Thailand's EEC CBT communities, while online distribution targeted tourism workers with digital access.

A structural model was developed to test the following hypotheses:

- H1: Higher levels of CBT participation will lead to improved economic benefits, including income stability, employment creation, and financial sustainability.
- H2: Increased engagement in CBT will contribute to human capital development by improving workforce skills, tourism knowledge, and business competencies.
- H3: The positive relationship between CBT participation and human capital development is mediated by the effectiveness of vocational training programs.
- H4: Government interventions, including policy frameworks and financial support, will strengthen the relationship between training effectiveness and human capital development.

To validate the measurement model, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed, ensuring that the constructs exhibit acceptable reliability and validity. The structural model was then be analyzed using Path Analysis, testing direct, indirect, and moderating effects. Model fit will be assessed using the following fit indices:  $\chi^2/df$ , Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR).

### ***Qualitative Method***

The qualitative component of this study consists of semi-structured interviews with 33 participants, including 9 CBT entrepreneurs, 13 tourism workers, and 11 policymakers involved in tourism development within the EEC. These interviews aim to explore stakeholder experiences, perceptions, and challenges in implementing CBT and fostering workforce skills development.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) Direct involvement in CBT activities as entrepreneurs, tourism workers, or policymakers to ensure relevance of insights; (2) Have at least one year of experience in CBT to allow for informed reflection, (3) Constitute representation across all three EEC provinces,

Chonburi, Rayong, and Chachoengsao, to capture regional variation; and (4) Voluntarily consent to participate in semi-structured interviews.

The sample composition was intentionally structured to capture both strategic and operational dimensions of CBT. CBT entrepreneurs were selected for their role in business leadership, decision-making, and strategic partnerships. Tourism workers, who perform a variety of roles such as guest services, cultural interpretation, and event coordination, provided grounded perspectives on day-to-day challenges and workforce needs. A slightly higher number of workers were included to reflect their diversity of responsibilities and frontline exposure across community sites. This balance was intended to ensure maximum variation and reflect a broader range of experiential narratives within a manageable sample size.

Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was reached, that is, no substantially new themes were emerging during subsequent interviews, thus validating the adequacy of the sample (Guest et al., 2006).

Interviews were conducted in person and via online platforms, each lasting between 30–60 minutes. The interview protocol included open-ended questions covering key areas such as economic outcomes, training effectiveness, government support, and long-term sustainability of CBT in the EEC. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using NVivo software. The thematic coding process followed an inductive approach. An initial codebook was generated from a pilot set of transcripts using open coding in NVivo. Two coders independently reviewed and categorized the content, with discrepancies resolved through discussion. Intercoder reliability was tested on 20% of the dataset, with a resulting agreement level of 85%, indicating acceptable consistency. The finalized code structure was then applied across the full set of interviews.

Key themes included: (1) Economic Benefits – CBT was found to generate local income and employment, though seasonal fluctuations posed challenges to income stability and long-term job retention, (2) Skills Development – Respondents highlighted gaps in digital skills, hospitality management, and language proficiency, calling for more formalized vocational training aligned with international standards, (3) Government Support – Although supportive policies exist at the national level, respondents described barriers related to funding access, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and weak local implementation, which hinder the growth of CBT enterprises.

## Findings and Discussion

### *Research Findings*

#### *Demographic profile of respondents*

Based on quantitative data, Table 1, the demographic profile of respondents in this study provides a comprehensive overview of individuals engaged in CBT in Thailand's EEC.

**Table 1. Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents**

Demographic Factors	Categories	Count (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	162	40.5
	Female	238	59.5
Age Group	18-25	57	14.2
	26-35	138	34.5
	36-45	103	25.7
	46-55	66	16.5
	Above 55	36	9.0

**Table 1. (Cont.)**

Demographic Factors	Categories	Count (N)	Percentage (%)
Marital Status	Single	120	30.0
	Married	130	32.5
	Divorced	78	19.5
	Widowed	72	18.0
Education Level	Below Primary School	5	1.25
	Primary school	20	5.0
	Secondary school	62	15.5
	Diploma/Vocational	85	21.2
	Bachelor's degree	180	45.0
	Postgraduate	48	12.0
Income Level (Monthly in THB)	Less than 15,000	45	11.2
	15,000 - 30,000	155	38.7
	30,000 - 50,000	135	33.7
	Above 50,000	65	16.2
Work Location	Chonburi	210	52.5
	Rayong	110	27.5
	Chachoengsao	80	20.0
Years in CBT	Less than 1 year	175	43.7
	1-3 years	92	23.0
	4-6 years	105	26.2
	More than 6 years	28	7.0
Primary Tourism Involvement	Accommodation	70	17.5
	Guide	95	23.7
	Food & Beverage	77	19.2
	Souvenirs & Handicrafts	58	14.5
	Transportation	100	25.0

Source: Research findings.

The demographic profile of respondents reflected a diverse and dynamic workforce within Thailand's EEC, showcasing a mix of experience levels, educational backgrounds, and economic participation. The majority of respondents were female (59.5%), reinforcing findings that women play a crucial role in community-based tourism, particularly in hospitality and service-oriented roles. The 26-35 age group was the most prominent (34.5%), followed by those aged 36-45 (25.75%), indicating that CBT primarily attracts young and middle-aged individuals seeking economic opportunities in sustainable tourism. A particularly notable finding was the high educational attainment among respondents, with bachelor's degree holders making up the largest group (45%), followed by vocational education graduates (21.25%). The number of individuals with only primary education or below was extremely low (6.25% in total), highlighting that CBT in the EEC is increasingly professionalized, attracting individuals with formal qualifications. This suggests that CBT is no longer solely an informal

or subsistence-driven sector but rather a structured industry that demands skill development and strategic business operations. In terms of income distribution, most respondents earned between THB 15,000 - 50,000 per month (72.5%), reinforcing that CBT provides stable mid-range earnings, making it a viable economic opportunity. The geographical representation was dominated by Chonburi (52.5%), which aligns with its stronger tourism infrastructure, while Rayong (27.5%) and Chachoengsao (20%) are emerging CBT destinations. Additionally, 43.75% of respondents were newcomers (less than one year in CBT), suggesting that the sector is experiencing growth and attracting new entrants. The most common tourism involvement areas were guides (23.75%) and transportation services (25%), underscoring the importance of logistics and visitor experience management in CBT operations.

Overall, these findings highlight CBT's evolution into a structured, economically viable sector with increasing professionalization, while also emphasizing the need for enhanced training, policy interventions, and financial support to sustain its long-term growth.

### *Quantitative Findings*

The survey results revealed important insights into various aspects of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC), covering factors such as CBT participation, training effectiveness, government support, economic benefits, tourism skills development, and challenges in CBT development. Table 2 describes important insights on each factor.

**Table 2. Respondents' Important Insights**

Survey Factors	Survey Questions	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Standard Deviation	Important Insights ( $SD$ )
CBT Participation (CBT-P)	1. I actively participate in CBT.	3.87	0.80	High
	2. CBT is well-organized.	4.45	0.59	Very High
	3. CBT benefits my household.	4.23	0.53	Very High
	4. I feel empowered by CBT.	4.10	0.97	High
	5. CBT preserves culture.	3.66	0.98	Moderate
	<b>Average for CBT Participation (CBT-P)</b>	<b>4.06</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>High</b>
Training Effectiveness (TRN-E)	6. I have attended tourism training.	3.66	0.90	Moderate
	7. Training improved my service skills.	3.56	0.65	Moderate
	8. Covers hospitality and tourism topics.	4.37	0.55	Very High
	9. Sufficient training opportunities.	4.10	0.84	High
	10. Training improved my income.	4.21	0.72	Very High
	<b>Average for Training Effectiveness (TRN-E)</b>	<b>3.98</b>	<b>0.73</b>	<b>High</b>
Government Support (GOV-S)	11. Government provides financial support.	3.52	0.56	Moderate
	12. Local authorities promote CBT.	4.47	0.75	Very High
	13. Policies ensure long-term CBT success.	4.33	0.52	Very High
	14. Grants or loans are available.	3.71	0.95	Moderate
	15. Technical assistance is provided.	3.68	0.63	Moderate
	<b>Average for Government Support (GOV-S)</b>	<b>3.94</b>	<b>0.68</b>	<b>High</b>

**Table 2.** (Cont.)

Survey Factors	Survey Questions	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Standard Deviation	Important ( $SD$ ) Insights
(ECO-B)	16. CBT improved financial well-being.	3.68	0.83	Moderate
	17. Created more job opportunities.	3.80	0.66	High
	18. Demand for local products increased.	4.02	0.76	High
	19. Stable income from CBT.	3.93	0.77	High
	20. Encouraged new investments.	3.79	0.59	Moderate
	<b>Average for Economic Benefits (ECO-B)</b>	<b>3.84</b>	<b>0.72</b>	<b>High</b>
Tourism	21. Improved communication skills.	4.11	0.98	High
Skills Development	22. Better business and financial management.	3.64	0.89	Moderate
(SKL-D)	23. Enhanced digital marketing skills.	3.79	0.97	Moderate
	24. Learned hospitality service skills.	3.87	0.95	High
	25. Gained knowledge of sustainable tourism.	3.96	0.80	High
	<b>Average for Tourism Skills Development (SKL-D)</b>	<b>3.87</b>	<b>0.92</b>	<b>High</b>
Challenges in CBT Development	26. Lack of funding and financial support.	4.29	0.96	Very High
	27. Need more structured training.	3.70	0.54	Moderate
	28. Seasonal tourism limits income.	4.01	0.60	High
	29. Government should promote CBT more.	4.09	0.52	High
	30. Language skills attract more tourists.	3.55	0.66	Moderate
	<b>Average for Challenges in CBT Development</b>	<b>3.93</b>	<b>0.66</b>	<b>High</b>

Respondents generally agreed that CBT is well-organized and provides household benefits, with high ratings for empowerment and community engagement. The mean scores suggest that CBT participation is strong (4.06, High Level), although perceptions of cultural preservation are more moderate. While participation levels are high, there are mixed views regarding the direct economic impact on individual households.

Training effectiveness received an overall High rating (3.98), with strong agreement that tourism training covers necessary hospitality and tourism topics. However, responses indicate moderate perceptions regarding the sufficiency of training opportunities and its impact on income generation. This suggests that while training exists, there may be gaps in accessibility, practical implementation, or follow-up support to enhance its effectiveness in directly improving financial outcomes.

Perceptions of government support for CBT development were mixed, with an overall High rating (3.94). While respondents agreed that local authorities promote CBT, there were concerns regarding financial support, grants, and technical assistance availability, which received moderate scores. This indicates a need for stronger financial policies and increased government backing to enhance the sustainability of CBT initiatives.

The economic impact of CBT was rated High (3.84) overall, with respondents acknowledging job creation and increased demand for local products. However, opinions on stable income generation and investment encouragement were more divided, reflecting concerns about the seasonal nature of CBT and fluctuations in earnings. While CBT is seen as beneficial for local economies, the lack of long-term financial security remains a key challenge.

The lack of consistent financial resources during off-peak periods reduces the ability of both entrepreneurs and workers to invest in long-term skill development. Moreover, the uncertainty surrounding tourism demand undermines the motivation to participate in training programs, particularly when the returns on such investments are delayed or unclear.

Respondents reported a positive impact from CBT on tourism skills development (3.87, High), particularly in areas such as communication, hospitality, and financial management. However, digital marketing and business management skills received moderate ratings, suggesting a gap in modern tourism skills training that could better support entrepreneurs and tourism professionals.

The biggest challenges identified were financial limitations, seasonal income variations, and the need for structured training programs, with an overall High rating (3.93). Respondents strongly agreed that government promotion of CBT should be enhanced, and that improving language skills could attract more tourists. However, limited access to funding and inadequate structured training programs were seen as major barriers to CBT success.

### 1.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Below, Table 3 presents the model fit indices for the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). These indices evaluate how well the hypothesized measurement model fits the observed data.

**Table 3.** CFA Results

Fit Index	Value	Threshold for Good Fit	Model Fit Evaluation
Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ )	285.12	$p > 0.05$ (Ideally)	Acceptable
CFI	0.94	$> 0.90$ (Preferably $> 0.95$ )	Good
TLI	0.92	$> 0.90$	Good
RMSEA	0.05	$< 0.08$ (Preferably $< 0.06$ )	Excellent
SRMR	0.06	$< 0.08$	Excellent

The CFA results confirm that the measurement model demonstrates good to excellent fit, supporting the reliability and validity of the constructs used in the study. The strong model fit indices (CFI, TLI, RMSEA, SRMR) indicate that the latent variables are well-represented by the observed indicators, ensuring that SEM analysis can proceed with confidence. These findings reinforce that the measurement model appropriately captures the key dimensions of CBT participation, training effectiveness, government support, economic benefits, and tourism skills development, validating their use in subsequent hypothesis testing.

### 1.2 Model Results

The SEM analysis in this study examines the relationships between CBT, training effectiveness, government support, skills development, and economic benefits. The model as shown in Table 4 indicates statistically significant relationships between these key factors, confirming the hypotheses and reinforcing the theoretical framework. The findings suggest that CBT participation, training programs, and government support all play crucial roles in enhancing tourism-related skills and improving economic conditions for local communities.

Thus, while the research began with a primary focus on human capital development, the final model incorporates a broader understanding of how CBT influences both workforce skills and economic outcomes in Thailand's EEC.

**Table 4.** Path Analysis

Hypothesis	Path	$\beta$	p-value	Hypothesis Supported?
H1	CBT Participation → Economic Benefits	0.41	$p < 0.001$	Yes
H2	CBT Participation → Skills Development	0.37	$p < 0.01$	Yes
H3	Training Effectiveness → Skills Development	0.52	$p < 0.001$	Yes
H4	Government Support × Training Effectiveness → Skills	0.28	$p < 0.05$	Yes

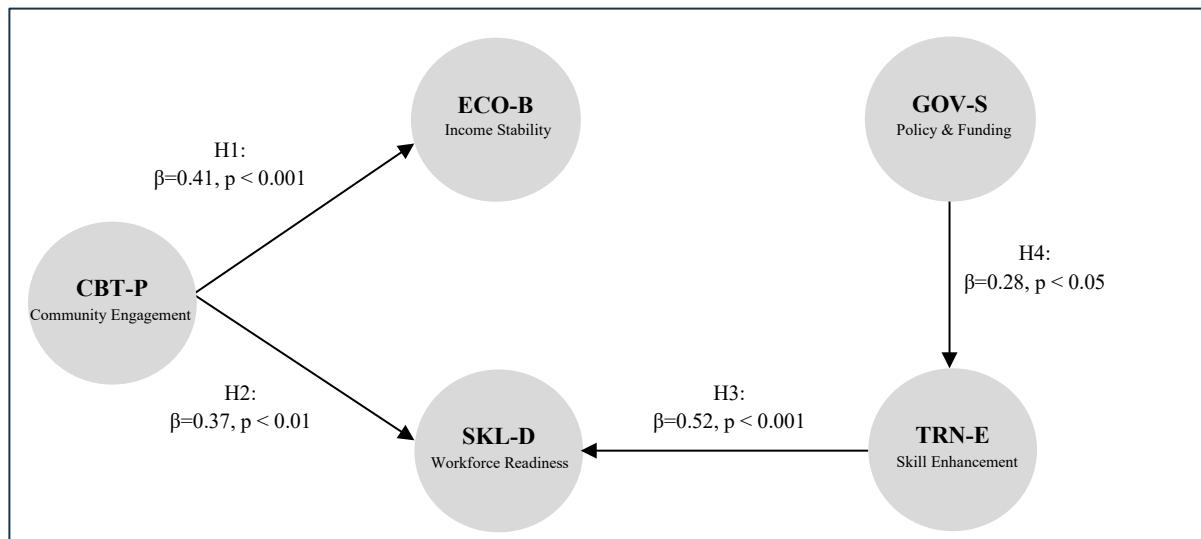
The first key finding is the impact of CBT on economic benefits, with a positive path coefficient ( $\beta = 0.41, p < 0.001$ ). This result suggests that increased participation in CBT leads to significant economic improvements for individuals and their communities. When local residents engage in tourism-related activities—such as managing homestays, guiding visitors, or selling local products—they experience higher financial gains, greater employment opportunities, and stronger local economies. The highly significant p-value (less than 0.001) ensures that this relationship is not due to chance, confirming that CBT serves as an effective mechanism for driving economic growth at the community level.

In addition to financial benefits, CBT also plays an important role in skills development. The positive path coefficient ( $\beta = 0.37, p < 0.01$ ) demonstrates that individuals involved in CBT improve their hospitality, management, and customer service skills over time. Through hands-on experience, tourism workers and entrepreneurs develop better communication abilities, cultural awareness, and business acumen. The statistical significance of this result highlights CBT's role as a learning platform that enhances workforce readiness. This means that beyond just providing economic benefits, CBT contributes to long-term human capital development, making individuals more competitive in the tourism industry.

Another important finding from the SEM analysis is the impact of training on skills development, which has the strongest effect on the model ( $\beta = 0.52, p < 0.001$ ). This suggests that structured training programs in tourism services, digital marketing, hospitality, and sustainable tourism management significantly enhance individual competencies. Training provides participants with technical knowledge and professional expertise, which helps them deliver better tourism experiences and operate their businesses more efficiently. The strong positive effect of training on skills development suggests that expanding and improving access to professional training programs can further strengthen the CBT sector.

Finally, the analysis reveals that government support moderates the relationship between training and skills development, with a positive interaction effect ( $\beta = 0.28, p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that when government support—such as financial assistance, policy frameworks, and technical training—is available, the positive impact of training on skill development becomes even stronger. In other words, the effectiveness of tourism training programs depends partly on how well they are supported by government initiatives. The statistical significance of this effect underscores the need for greater collaboration between policymakers and tourism stakeholders to enhance training opportunities and ensure long-term sustainability in CBT.

In summary, the path diagram as shown in Figure 2 confirms that CBT participation contributes significantly to both economic benefits and skills development. Training programs play a crucial role in enhancing workforce skills, and government support helps amplify the positive effects of training. These findings suggest that policy interventions should focus on expanding tourism training, increasing financial support, and integrating CBT into broader economic development strategies. By strengthening these areas, CBT can continue to serve as a powerful tool for sustainable tourism and community development in Thailand's EEC.

**Figure 2** Path Diagram

Source: Research findings.

### 1.3 Qualitative Findings

Table 5 depicts the selected NVivo thematic analysis, indicating the distribution of respondent codes and quotes. Each theme captures the perspectives of CBT Entrepreneurs (E01-E09), Tourism Workers (T01-T13), and Policymakers (P01-11).

**Table 5.** Selected Thematic Data Analyses

Theme	Sub-Theme	Code Frequency	Example Quotes
Economic Impact	Seasonal Fluctuations	45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“During low seasons, income drops significantly.” (E-01)</li> <li>“Tourists only come during festivals; we struggle the rest of the year.” (T-13)</li> <li>“We can’t rely on tourism income alone.” (E-05)</li> </ul>
	Diversification Strategies	35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“We try to offer different tourism activities, but demand is unpredictable.” (E-03)</li> <li>“We introduced craft workshops, but they only attract occasional visitors.” (E-06)</li> <li>“If we had more online exposure, we could diversify better.” (E-09)</li> </ul>
	Local Product Demand	28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Selling local products is difficult when tourist numbers decline.” (E-02)</li> <li>“Most visitors only buy souvenirs on weekends.” (T-10)</li> <li>“We have to lower prices when tourism slows down.” (E-07)</li> </ul>
	Local Product Demand	28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Selling local products is difficult when tourist numbers decline.” (E-02)</li> <li>“Most visitors only buy souvenirs on weekends.” (T-10)</li> <li>“We have to lower prices when tourism slows down.” (E-07)</li> </ul>

**Table 5. (Cont.)**

Theme	Sub-Theme	Code Frequency	Example Quotes
Training Challenges	Cost of Operations	30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “The cost of running a CBT business keeps increasing.” (E-04)</li> <li>- “Rent, materials, and wages all add up, making it hard to survive.” (E-08)</li> <li>- “We need financial aid to keep businesses sustainable.” (E-11)</li> </ul>
	Need for Digital Skills	50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “We need more than just guiding skills; digital marketing is crucial.” (E-01)</li> <li>- “Without social media, we have no way to attract visitors.” (T-02)</li> <li>- “Most of us don’t know how to use online booking platforms.” (E-05)</li> </ul>
	Language Barriers	40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Speaking another language would help us communicate with tourists better.” (T-05)</li> <li>- “Many foreign tourists struggle to understand us.” (T-09)</li> <li>- “If we knew English or Chinese, we could offer better services.” (T-12)</li> </ul>
	Financial Management Training	38	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Most CBT members struggle to manage finances for long-term business growth.” (E-06)</li> <li>- “We don’t know how to track expenses and profits.” (E-08)</li> <li>- “A financial literacy program would help us.” (E-09)</li> </ul>
	Practical Tourism Training	42	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Training programs need to focus on practical tourism skills, not just theory.” (T-03)</li> <li>- “We need hands-on workshops, not just lectures.” (T-11)</li> <li>- “Learning through real practice would be more useful.” (T-12)</li> </ul>
	Access to Funding	47	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “It’s hard to get funding for our CBT projects.” (E-03)</li> <li>- “Grants are available, but the process is too complicated.” (P-01)</li> <li>- “Only big organizations seem to qualify for funding.” (E-06)</li> </ul>
Government Support	Policy Implementation Gaps	36	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “There are policies, but we don’t see direct financial support.” (P-02)</li> <li>- “The government talks about supporting CBT, but the funds don’t reach us.” (P-03)</li> <li>- “Most funds go to large tourism projects, not small businesses.” (P-11)</li> </ul>
	Community-Level Support	32	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “We need more hands-on government support, not just guidelines.” (T-06)</li> <li>- “Officials should visit CBT sites more often to understand our struggles.” (T-09)</li> <li>- “Policies should be made with community input, not just top-down decisions.” (P-05)</li> </ul>
	Bureaucratic Barriers	34	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “The application process for financial aid is too complicated.” (E-02)</li> <li>- “It takes months to get approval, even for small funding.” (P-09)</li> <li>- “We often don’t qualify because of minor technical issues.” (E-03)</li> </ul>

The qualitative findings provide rich insights into the experiences, perspectives, and challenges of different stakeholders involved in CBT in Thailand's EEC. The themes analyzed include economic impact, training challenges, and government support, with inputs from CBT entrepreneurs, tourism workers, and policymakers. These findings reveal both shared concerns and unique perspectives among the different stakeholder groups.

The results highlight that economic sustainability remains a major challenge for CBT initiatives, with seasonal fluctuations, diversification strategies, and financial constraints affecting local businesses. CBT entrepreneurs and tourism workers commonly reported that tourism-based income is unstable, as the number of visitors drops significantly during the low season. Some CBT operators have attempted to diversify their tourism offerings by introducing craft workshops and eco-tourism activities, but the effectiveness of these strategies remains uncertain due to fluctuating demand and limited online exposure.

Policymakers acknowledged these concerns but emphasized that government efforts are in place to encourage investment and improve financial stability. However, entrepreneurs expressed frustration, arguing that these policies often favor large-scale tourism projects rather than small, community-based initiatives.

*“During low seasons, income drops significantly. We try to offer different tourism experiences, but there are just fewer visitors.” (E-07)*

*“We can’t rely on tourism income alone; we need other businesses to sustain us.” (T-02)*

*“The government has investment incentives, but accessing them is not easy for small businesses.” (P-03)*

Overall, the economic challenges faced by CBT participants require a more structured approach, such as long-term investment incentives, off-season marketing campaigns, and access to financial assistance tailored to small-scale tourism operators. Seasonal income volatility weakens the incentives, resources, and continuity necessary for effective capacity building in CBT.

A major theme emerging from the qualitative analysis is the insufficiency of current training programs, particularly in digital skills, language proficiency, and financial management. Many CBT entrepreneurs and tourism workers stated that while basic hospitality and guiding skills are taught, they lack practical training in online marketing and digital platforms, which are crucial for attracting visitors.

*“We need more than just guiding skills; digital marketing is crucial for promoting our business.” (E-04)*

*“Many of us struggle with online platforms, and we’re losing customers because we don’t know how to use them.” (T-01)*

Policymakers recognize this gap but argue that there are government-supported training programs available, though their accessibility and effectiveness remain questionable. Some respondents noted that language barriers continue to be a significant challenge, as many tourism workers lack proficiency in English and Chinese, making it difficult to engage with foreign tourists.

*“Speaking another language would help us communicate with tourists better.” (T-12)*

*“Language training exists, but it’s not widely promoted, and participation is low.” (P-10)*

The findings suggest that training programs should be updated to include modern skills such as digital tourism promotion, financial literacy, and language proficiency, ensuring that CBT operators can remain competitive in the evolving tourism industry.

Government support is a highly debated issue among respondents. CBT entrepreneurs and tourism workers frequently report difficulty in accessing funding and grants, despite policies promoting financial assistance. The application process for funding was described as complex and bureaucratic, making it difficult for small-scale operators to secure financial aid.

*“It’s hard to get funding for our CBT projects. Even when we apply, there are so many requirements that we can’t meet.” (E-06)*

*“Only large projects seem to receive government grants; we feel left out.” (T-11)*

Policymakers acknowledged the concerns but explained that the funding allocation process must follow strict guidelines to ensure accountability. However, they agreed that simplifying access to financial support could improve engagement with small businesses.

*“We understand the concerns, and we are working to improve access to financial support for smaller CBT projects.” (P-06)*

Another major concern is the lack of direct government involvement in CBT initiatives. Many respondents emphasized the need for more on-the-ground support from government officials, rather than just broad policy directives.

*“We need more hands-on government support, not just guidelines.” (T-07)*

*“Officials should visit CBT sites more often to understand our struggles.” (E-02)*

These findings suggest that government efforts should focus on streamlining funding processes, improving transparency, and increasing direct engagement with CBT communities.

### ***Discussions***

This study contributes to the growing discourse on CBT and human capital development in Thailand’s EEC by providing an integrated quantitative (SEM) and qualitative (NVivo) analysis. The findings offer strong empirical evidence of CBT’s economic and social impact while highlighting critical limitations in training effectiveness, financial accessibility, and policy execution. These insights are not only locally relevant but also resonate with global tourism research, further reinforcing the importance of addressing institutional weaknesses and skill development gaps in CBT frameworks.

#### ***Revisiting the Findings in Light of Global CBT Research***

#### ***CBT as a Mechanism for Economic and Human Capital Development: Strengths and Limitations***

The results indicate that CBT significantly enhances both economic growth and skill development but remains hindered by systemic gaps in training quality and financial sustainability. This finding is consistent with research by Ditta-Apichai et al. (2024), Krittayaruangroj et al. (2023), and Saan et al. (2022), who argue that CBT in Thailand has the potential to become a key driver of local economic growth but faces challenges in integrating with national and global tourism economies.

The economic instability observed in this study primarily driven by seasonal fluctuations in tourist arrivals is reinforced by both SEM and NVivo findings. The SEM model shows a

statistically significant relationship between CBT participation and economic benefits, while interviewees reported income instability due to uneven tourist inflow. As one entrepreneur commented, “Tourists only come during festivals; we struggle the rest of the year” (T-13). These patterns echo findings by Chulaphan and Barahona (2021), who emphasized that the lack of financial resilience strategies and limited diversification of tourism services contribute to vulnerability in CBT economies.

Moreover, while some studies suggest that integrating CBT with mainstream tourism supply chains could stabilize revenue, our study challenges this assumption. Many respondents emphasized the importance of preserving autonomy in operations, citing that collaboration with large-scale tourism operators may undermine community values. This is supported by both qualitative themes and stakeholder reluctance expressed during interviews. Therefore, our data reveal a crucial tension: Should CBT remain independent to protect cultural authenticity, or integrate for financial stability?

#### *The Training Dilemma: Policy Inconsistencies and Workforce Preparedness*

One of the most striking findings of this study is that training programs available to CBT operators and tourism workers remain outdated, poorly structured, and disconnected from real industry needs. This is evident in both the SEM model and NVivo data, which show consistent dissatisfaction among respondents regarding current training approaches. The lack of digital literacy, multilingual training, and financial management skills significantly limits CBT operators' competitiveness in the modern tourism market. This issue has also been identified in studies by Dolezal and Novelli (2022), Witchayakawin et al. (2022), and Dlużewska and Giampiccoli (2022), which argue that many developing countries struggle to update their CBT workforce training due to bureaucratic inertia and fragmented tourism policies.

The current study's findings suggest that while government-supported training programs exist, they are often theoretically driven rather than practically applicable, making them ineffective in equipping CBT participants with the necessary business acumen. Respondents highlighted this misalignment in their own words: “We attend trainings but they don't teach what we actually need to run a CBT business” (T-08). This aligns with Mtapuri (2022), who highlights the need for experiential, mentorship-based, and skill-oriented learning models to improve community tourism workforce competency.

A major policy implication of this finding is that government agencies and tourism institutions need to revise their CBT training frameworks to: (1) emphasize digital skills, e-commerce platforms, and online engagement to align with global travel trends; (2) introduce multilingual training in English, Chinese, and regional dialects to enhance communication with international visitors; and (3) adopt real-world learning approaches such as apprenticeship models, industry collaborations, and on-site CBT development programs.

#### *Government Support: Structural Barriers and the Policy-Implementation Gap*

Government support for CBT is found to have a positive moderating effect on training effectiveness, reinforcing the importance of public sector engagement in tourism workforce development. However, qualitative findings from NVivo expose the structural and implementation-related challenges that dilute this impact. Respondents repeatedly cited bureaucratic inefficiencies, unclear funding procedures, and policy fragmentation. One community leader expressed frustration: “There are funds available, but the process is so complicated that most of us give up” (P-07). Another noted: “Funds tend to go to urban areas, we rarely see any real support here” (T-09).

This aligns with Zielinski et al. (2021), who asserts that while CBT policies exist in national tourism plans, they are frequently rendered ineffective by centralized governance structures and lack of coordination between ministries. The SEM result alone cannot explain

why training programs fail to reach rural communities. Only when combined with the qualitative narratives does the full policy-implementation gap become evident.

The disproportionate allocation of grants to high-tourism-density areas further exacerbates inequality. Participants in low-traffic EEC communities reported receiving little or no support despite repeated applications. This mirrors global trends observed by Dangi and Petrick (2021) and Saan et al. (2022), who found that in many developing nations, rural CBT groups receive minimal funding due to bureaucratic bottlenecks.

As a practical solution, both SEM and NVivo data suggest that decentralizing funding mechanisms and establishing community-managed tourism funds could enhance financial accessibility. Participants advocated for “localized microfinance structures” that would allow CBT groups to bypass administrative red tape and allocate resources according to their needs. As one respondent put it: “If we had our own community fund, we wouldn’t need to wait for government approval all the time” (E-10).

## **Conclusions**

This study makes a multi-dimensional contribution to both academic discourse and policy implementation concerning CBT sustainability. By integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the research provides empirical validation of CBT’s impact on economic and human capital development while also highlighting structural inefficiencies in training accessibility, financial inclusion, and policy execution. These findings not only contribute to the growing body of CBT literature but also offer practical insights for policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and local communities seeking to enhance the sustainability and competitiveness of CBT enterprises in Thailand’s EEC.

### ***Empirical Contribution to CBT Literature***

This study confirms that CBT has a significant impact on economic growth and skill development, reinforcing previous research that recognizes CBT as a sustainable model for community-based economic empowerment. However, unlike prior studies that focus primarily on CBT’s economic benefits, this research uncovers hidden structural weaknesses in training effectiveness, financial accessibility, and government intervention. The results reveal that current CBT policies, while well-intentioned, lack proper execution at the local level, limiting their overall effectiveness.

Additionally, this study challenges existing perspectives on CBT’s integration with mainstream tourism. While some researchers advocate for CBT enterprises to be linked with large-scale tourism operators for greater economic stability, the findings suggest that cultural and operational independence is vital for preserving authenticity, community control, and long-term sustainability. CBT entrepreneurs and tourism workers overwhelmingly prefer community-driven tourism models over direct integration with mass tourism, suggesting that CBT should remain distinct yet supported through structured policy frameworks.

By employing a mixed-methods approach, this study enhances methodological rigor in CBT research. The SEM results provide statistical validation of CBT’s economic and human capital benefits, while the NVivo findings offer deeper insights into the lived experiences of CBT stakeholders. This methodological integration sets a precedent for future studies, encouraging multi-dimensional approaches that combine statistical robustness with qualitative depth to capture the complexity of CBT sustainability.

### ***Policy Recommendations for Sustainable CBT Development***

The study’s findings point to several critical areas for policy improvement, emphasizing the need for a transformative approach to CBT development. The following policy

recommendations emerge from the research, focusing on training, financial access, and governance reform.

The first recommendation calls for a fundamental overhaul of CBT training programs. The study finds that existing training initiatives are outdated, overly theoretical, and disconnected from real-world industry demands. To address this, trainings should transition from passive classroom-based instruction to experiential and mentorship-based learning models. Digital literacy, financial skills, and multilingual communication should be prioritized, equipping CBT operators with the tools necessary to thrive in a competitive global tourism environment.

The second recommendation involves the improvement of imperative funding accessibility. The findings highlight that CBT entrepreneurs struggle to obtain financial support due to bureaucratic red tape and centralized funding mechanisms. Establishing community-managed microfinance schemes and alternative financing mechanisms would reduce dependency on rigid government grant systems, allowing CBT businesses to self-sustain and grow more effectively. Decentralized funding pools and public-private partnerships should be encouraged to facilitate local investment in community-driven tourism enterprises.

The final recommendation concerns the enhancement of government engagement. While policy frameworks exist, there is a clear gap between policy design and implementation. The study suggests that decision-making power should be decentralized, allowing CBT entrepreneurs, tourism workers, and local community leaders to participate in policy formulation and execution. This participatory governance model would ensure that CBT policies align more closely with on-the-ground realities, fostering a more inclusive and effective policy environment.

### ***Future Research Directions***

While this study provides valuable insights into CBT's role in economic and human capital development, several areas warrant further investigation. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to assess how CBT participation influences workforce development and financial stability over time. This would provide a clearer picture of skill retention, career mobility, and the long-term economic impact on CBT entrepreneurs and tourism workers.

Comparative studies across different CBT models could enhance understanding of how various governance structures, cultural contexts, and policy approaches affect CBT success. Examining Thailand's EEC alongside CBT initiatives in other Southeast Asian countries could help identify best practices and scalable strategies for improving tourism sustainability and community empowerment.

With digital transformation reshaping global tourism, future research should explore how digital marketing, e-commerce, and AI-driven tools impact CBT visibility and business sustainability. Many CBT operators struggle with online engagement, limiting their ability to attract international tourists. Investigating effective digital training programs and technology adoption could enhance CBT's competitiveness in the global tourism market.

Decentralized policy frameworks should also be explored. This study found that bureaucratic inefficiencies hinder financial access and policy execution. Future research could examine alternative governance models such as community-led tourism boards, local tourism cooperatives, and participatory decision-making structures to enhance CBT governance and funding distribution.

The financial sustainability of CBT enterprises remains a challenge. Future studies could investigate alternative financing mechanisms such as community-managed microfinance, crowdfunding, and performance-based grants. Understanding how these financial models impact CBT business resilience would help policymakers design more effective funding strategies.

Beyond economic outcomes, future research should examine the psychological and social dimensions of CBT participation. Exploring factors such as worker motivation, job satisfaction, generational skill transfer, and community well-being would provide a more holistic understanding of CBT's long-term sustainability. Addressing these gaps will strengthen tourism policies, refine training programs, and support the resilience of CBT communities.

### ***Final Thoughts: A Call for a Transformative CBT Policy Model***

This study provides strong empirical evidence that while CBT has immense potential to drive economic and social development, it remains trapped in systemic barriers, including policy inertia, skill deficits, and financial exclusion. These limitations restrict CBT's ability to fully realize its impact, making structural reform essential for long-term sustainability.

Addressing these challenges requires a radical shift from passive tourism governance to active, stakeholder-driven policymaking. Instead of top-down policy structures, a multi-level governance approach—wherein local CBT stakeholders have a direct say in decision-making and resource allocation—would enhance policy effectiveness and community ownership of tourism development.

Future research should explore the long-term impact of policy interventions on CBT enterprises, ensuring that governmental and non-governmental support mechanisms evolve in alignment with community needs. Additionally, further studies should investigate alternative funding models, technology-driven tourism training, and policy decentralization to refine Thailand's approach to CBT governance.

Ultimately, for CBT in Thailand's EEC to evolve into a globally competitive, self-sustaining tourism model, it is imperative to rethink current policies, modernize training structures, and create a more inclusive financial ecosystem for local tourism entrepreneurs. The findings of this study provide a roadmap for tourism policymakers, CBT operators, and development agencies to drive transformational change in sustainable community tourism.

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