Ethnic cultural identity education activities for ethnic boarding school students: A case study in the Southern region, Vietnam

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Abstract

National cultural identity encompasses the spiritual essence and historical, cultural, and scientific values of a nation. It includes language, writing, folk arts, social customs, beliefs, festivals, and traditional crafts. Educating students about these values fosters understanding of each ethnic group's soul, shaping personal character, social responsibility, and love for the homeland. Despite this importance, research on cultural identity education in ethnic boarding schools—particularly in Southern Vietnam—remains limited. This region is known for its rich history of ethnic integration and diverse cultural expressions. This study examined the implementation of cultural identity education in 36 ethnic boarding schools in Southern Vietnam. Using a quantitative survey approach, data were collected from 920 participants, including 368 teachers and administrators and 552 students. Results revealed that while educational objectives and content were well established, teaching methods and organizational strategies remained underdeveloped. Specifically, educational organization scored an average of 3.32, indicating systemic weaknesses. These shortcomings hinder the progress of national education reform. The study emphasizes the need for more practical, inclusive approaches that actively promote national cultural identity. The study affirms that Vietnamese cultural values are not static relics, but actively lived and expressed across diverse communities, transcending ethnic and geographical boundaries.

Keywords: Boarding ethnic high school students, Educational activities, National cultural identity, Southern region, Vietnam.

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1. Introduction

Cultural heritage, encompassing both tangible and intangible forms, represents the accumulated spiritual, material, historical, and scientific values of human societies, passed down through generations. Intangible heritage includes language, oral traditions, folk performing arts, customs, festivals, and traditional crafts, while tangible heritage refers to artifacts, monuments, and cultural landscapes. Within this framework, national cultural identity emerges as a core component that defines the soul of each ethnic group and anchors personal and collective identity [1, 2]. Educating students about these cultural values is essential in forming a deep understanding of their roots, cultivating character, civic responsibility, and love for the homeland [3]. For students in multi-ethnic societies like Vietnam, this education serves not only as cultural transmission but also as a mechanism for social cohesion, promoting mutual respect and pluralism.

Vietnam, home to 54 recognized ethnic groups, presents a vibrant mosaic of cultural identities, with ethnic minorities making up approximately 13% of the population. These communities often reside in geographically challenging regions characterized by limited infrastructure and educational access [4]. Ethnic minority boarding schools (EMBS) were established to address educational inequity [5] but they face significant challenges in implementing effective cultural identity education. The 2018 General Education Program of Vietnam [6]. calls for innovation in both content and pedagogy, emphasizing local culture and the integration of ethnic knowledge systems [7, 8]. Yet, the practical application of these guidelines remains fragmented and inconsistent. Many schools lack dedicated curricula for cultural identity education, and coordination between educators, parents, and community organizations is weak or absent [9, 10]. Compounding the problem is a lack of understanding among some parents about the purpose and long-term benefits of such educational efforts.

Several studies have emphasized the value of culturally responsive education and the positive impact it has on student engagement and identity development [11, 12]. However, few have focused on the specific context of EMBS in Vietnam's southern provinces, a region marked by the historical coexistence of diverse ethnicities such as the Khmer, Hoa, and Cham. This cultural crossroads requires context-sensitive approaches that honor local traditions while fostering national unity [1, 13, 14]. In this context, the integration of intangible cultural heritage into school activities—such as folk games, storytelling, traditional dance, and language preservation—is critical to maintaining identity [15, 16]. Digital technology is emerging as a valuable tool for delivering and preserving cultural knowledge. Applications, virtual museums, and mobile learning platforms provide flexible and engaging formats for teaching cultural content, especially where physical access to cultural practitioners may be limited [17, 18]. Yet, the digital divide in rural boarding schools remains a structural barrier. Moreover, teachers often lack training in both technology integration and culturally responsive pedagogy, highlighting the need for capacity building and systemic support [19, 20].

Despite policy efforts such as Decision No. 581/QĐ-TTg [21] and the Law on Right to Education of Ethnic Minorities [7] institutional support is not always matched by local implementation. The absence of culturally inclusive assessment standards and curricular frameworks contributes to disparities in how cultural identity education is delivered. Research indicates that students benefit most when cultural education is immersive, community-informed, and experiential [22, 23]. Unfortunately, many schools treat such activities as optional or supplemental rather than integral to the educational experience. The current study responds to these challenges by investigating the perceptions, practices, and influencing factors of cultural identity education in 36 ethnic boarding schools across Southern Vietnam. With a practice-oriented research lens, it seeks to map the system and structure of cultural education activities and gauge the level of awareness among administrators, teachers, and students. The study explores questions such as: How do educators and learners perceive the importance of cultural identity education? What activities are being implemented and how effective are they? What contextual or institutional factors enable or hinder these efforts?

The goals of the research are threefold: (1) to examine perceptions of ethnic cultural identity education's importance among students and educators; (2) to analyze current pedagogical strategies and practices used in ethnic boarding schools; and (3) to identify key factors influencing the success and sustainability of cultural identity education. This research aims to provide empirical foundations to improve policy design, teacher training, and educational programming aligned with Vietnam's national curriculum reform and the broader goals of inclusive, equitable education. The findings are expected to contribute to more effective, context-aware models of cultural education that respect ethnic diversity while fostering national solidarity.

2. Literature Review

2.1. What is Cultural Heritage?

Cultural heritage refers to the legacy of tangible and intangible assets inherited from past generations, preserved in the present, and bestowed to future generations. Tangible heritage includes monuments, artifacts, and sites of historical or cultural significance, while intangible heritage encompasses oral traditions, rituals, knowledge systems, folklore, languages, and performing arts [3, 18]. These cultural expressions embody the values, beliefs, and identities of communities and nations. Cultural heritage not only fosters collective memory and continuity but also serves as a source of creativity and resilience in the face of modern challenges [1, 15]. Preserving heritage enhances intergenerational transmission of knowledge and strengthens cultural diversity, which is essential for social cohesion and sustainability [24]. Moreover, education systems are increasingly integrating cultural heritage into curricula to promote identity formation, ethical awareness, and community engagement among students [16, 17]. Through educational innovation and digital transformation, such as mobile applications and interactive media, intangible and tangible heritage can be preserved and revitalized for younger generations [18]. Thus, cultural heritage is not merely a relic of the past but a living, evolving dimension of human development.

2.2. What is Ethnic Cultural Identity?

Ethnic cultural identity refers to the collective sense of belonging, shared heritage, and culturally distinct practices that define and unify an ethnic group. It embodies tangible elements such as traditional clothing, crafts, and architecture, as well as intangible values including language, folklore, rituals, beliefs, and performing arts. This identity not only fosters continuity across generations but also enhances individuals' self-awareness, cultural pride, and community cohesion [1, 3, 25]. In educational contexts, recognizing and integrating ethnic cultural identity supports holistic student development and counters the marginalization of minority cultures [15]. Culture-based education also affirms indigenous knowledge systems and enriches student engagement by connecting learning to their lived realities [24]. Furthermore, creative strategies like digital storytelling and the use of technology have proven effective in preserving and revitalizing intangible heritage [17, 18]. For instance, performing arts instruction not only teaches skills but also reinforces cultural meaning and identity, especially among youth [16]. Schools thus serve as crucial environments for the transmission of ethnic culture, where pedagogical choices can either sustain or erode cultural memory. Preserving ethnic cultural identity in formal education requires intentional curriculum design, inclusive teaching practices, and collaboration with local communities. Ultimately, cultivating awareness and pride in one's ethnic heritage strengthens not only cultural diversity but also national solidarity and global citizenship.

2.3. Importance of Ethnic Cultural Identity Education among Students in Schools

Ethnic cultural identity education is a vital component of holistic student development, especially in multi-ethnic societies where diversity must be acknowledged, respected, and integrated into educational frameworks. In schools, teaching cultural identity empowers students by fostering pride in their heritage and creating a sense of belonging and respect for diversity. Cultural education serves as a counterbalance to dominant narratives that often marginalize minority voices, helping to shift educational spaces from sites of "othering" to platforms for celebrating cultural assets [3]. Embedding ethnic identity in curricula builds resilience and nurtures positive self-concept, especially among indigenous and ethnic minority youth [1]. Moreover, recognizing both tangible and intangible cultural heritage—such as language, oral traditions, rituals, and traditional crafts—ensures students understand their cultural roots and intergenerational values [15]. In regions where socio-cultural continuity is endangered, such education preserves knowledge systems and aligns learning with sustainable development goals [24]. Through pedagogical strategies like traditional dance instruction, students not only engage kinesthetically but also develop community ties and embodied knowledge [16]. The integration of technology, such as mobile apps and digital archives, enhances accessibility and revitalizes student interest in ancestral practices [17]. It also supports personalized and community-based learning environments. Ethnic cultural identity education therefore plays a transformative role in fostering intercultural understanding, safeguarding cultural diversity, and promoting equity in education. By building bridges between generations and between communities, it cultivates democratic citizenship and cultural sustainability in the long term [18].

2.4. The Ethnic Cultural Identity Education Activities in Schools

Ethnic cultural identity education in schools serves a foundational role in preserving cultural heritage and fostering a sense of belonging among students from diverse backgrounds. The objectives of national cultural identity education are multifaceted: they include cultivating respect for cultural diversity, strengthening students' awareness and pride in their ethnic heritage, and promoting intercultural understanding in pluralistic societies. Such education aims to counteract the risks of cultural erosion and assimilation pressures that minority groups face, particularly in the context of globalization and national integration efforts [1, 3]. It also aligns with the strategic goals outlined in frameworks such as the UNESCO Education 2030 Agenda, which advocates for inclusive education and cultural sustainability [2]. The content of national cultural identity education encompasses a broad spectrum of knowledge and values. This includes language preservation, oral traditions, traditional arts, festivals, historical narratives, and local ecological knowledge [26, 27]. For instance, cultural education in Vietnam integrates ethnic stories, folk dances, and traditional attire into the school curriculum, aiming to enrich students' understanding of their ancestral roots [16, 28]. Moreover, intangible cultural heritage is emphasized in formal and informal curricula to instill an enduring cultural consciousness [15]. Cultural identity education also serves as a tool to address historical injustices by validating marginalized voices in the classroom [3].

In terms of methods, culturally responsive teaching, experiential learning, and project-based approaches are frequently adopted. Experiential learning—through cultural field trips, traditional craft workshops, and community storytelling—facilitates active participation and emotional connection to cultural content [22, 29]. Technology-enhanced strategies, such as mobile apps and virtual museums, have gained traction for making cultural education more accessible and engaging [17, 26]. Teachers play a critical role in this process, requiring training and agency to adapt pedagogy to local cultural contexts [19]. As for the forms of national cultural identity education, schools implement a variety of activities both inside and outside the classroom. These include ethnic festivals, heritage clubs, traditional music and dance classes, and competitions in mother tongue literacy [20, 28]. Interdisciplinary integration allows cultural identity to be woven into subjects such as history, literature, and the arts. Boarding schools for ethnic minorities, such as those in Vietnam's Mekong and northern highlands regions, are instrumental in sustaining daily cultural practices through immersive environments [4, 27]. Moreover, collaboration with local communities and elders—who act as cultural bearers—ensures the authenticity and relevance of educational content [1]. Ultimately, ethnic cultural identity education is not merely about cultural preservation but also empowerment. It fosters social cohesion, builds intercultural competence, and equips learners to navigate complex cultural landscapes. When implemented holistically—through targeted objectives, diverse content, inclusive methods, and engaging formats—schools become transformative spaces that affirm cultural heritage and shape pluralistic identities.

2.5. Factors Affecting Cultural Identity Education Activities for Students in Ethnic Boarding Schools

Cultural identity education in ethnic boarding schools is shaped by a constellation of interrelated factors, spanning policy, pedagogy, environment, and technology. One of the foremost influences is the educational policy framework, which provides the legal and institutional basis for integrating cultural content into the curriculum. In Vietnam, for example, policies such as Decision No. 581/QĐ-TTg [21] and Circular 32/2018/TT-BGDĐT [6] emphasize the inclusion of ethnic identity and cultural heritage in general education, especially in regions with large minority populations [4, 7, 24]. These frameworks guide how schools implement cultural programming and allocate resources.

Teacher capacity and agency also significantly impact the effectiveness of cultural education. In many ethnic boarding schools, teachers are not from the communities they serve, which can lead to cultural disconnects unless they are trained in culturally responsive pedagogy [19]. Educators who possess both pedagogical knowledge and an understanding of indigenous worldviews are more effective in cultivating students' cultural self-awareness [1, 30]. Furthermore, teaching methods grounded in experiential learning—such as traditional music, dance, and storytelling—foster deeper engagement with cultural heritage [16, 22, 31]. Another determinant is technological access and innovation. Digital tools such as mobile apps, augmented reality, and virtual museums are emerging as powerful enablers of cultural identity education. These tools allow students to access, interact with, and preserve intangible cultural elements, especially in contexts where direct community contact is limited [17, 18, 32]. However, the digital divide in rural or under-resourced boarding schools remains a significant barrier, often exacerbating educational inequity [33].

Socio-cultural context and community involvement are equally vital. Boarding schools often isolate students from their native environments, potentially weakening their ties to cultural practices unless educators and administrators intentionally incorporate community knowledge and invite cultural bearers—such as elders or artisans—into the educational process [3]. Community collaboration ensures the authenticity and sustainability of cultural content delivered in schools [34]. Moreover, cultural identity is strongly linked to self-esteem and psychological well-being, especially in marginalized groups [35, 36]. Finally, student perception and motivation play a key role. When cultural identity education is portrayed as relevant to students' daily lives and future aspirations, it can foster pride and a stronger sense of belonging [15, 37]. Thus, multi-level coordination among policy, pedagogy, community, and technology is essential to ensure that ethnic cultural identity education is meaningful, inclusive, and transformative.

The necessity of this study lies in addressing a significant research gap concerning ethnic cultural identity education in ethnic boarding schools in Southern Vietnam. This region, known for its rich cultural diversity resulting from centuries of ethnic interaction and integration, offers a unique context for exploring how national cultural identity is nurtured through education. Despite the recognized value of cultural identity in shaping students' personalities, civic responsibility, and national pride, limited empirical research has examined how such education is perceived and implemented in this setting. By investigating the perceptions, practices, and influencing factors across 36 ethnic boarding schools, this study provides critical insights for policymakers, educators, and communities to preserve cultural heritage and promote inclusive, culturally responsive education tailored to ethnically diverse learners. The present study will examine the following questions:

1. How do students and educators perceive the importance of ethnic cultural identity education in ethnic boarding schools?
2. What types of activities and pedagogical approaches are currently used to implement ethnic cultural identity education in these schools?
3. What contextual, institutional, and sociocultural factors affect the implementation and outcomes of ethnic cultural identity education efforts in ethnic boarding schools?

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative survey design to systematically examine ethnic cultural identity education in ethnic boarding schools, focusing on schools in Vietnam's Southern region. Participants include administrators, teachers, and students, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the educational landscape. The research investigates three core areas: (1) the perception of the importance of ethnic cultural identity education for students in ethnic boarding schools; (2) the implementation of ethnic cultural identity education activities; and (3) the factors influencing such educational efforts. A survey-based approach was chosen to ensure standardized, quantifiable data could be collected across a broad participant base. This allows for assessing not only the perceptions of stakeholders but also the nature and effectiveness of implemented activities, as well as external and internal influences on these initiatives. Structured questionnaires were distributed to both teachers, administrators and students, enabling a comparative analysis between the two groups. This design supports the evaluation of alignment or divergence in perceptions and implementation strategies. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to yield empirical insights into the current practices of ethnic cultural identity education. These results provide a foundation for assessing the scope, quality, and impact of such initiatives within the unique context of ethnic boarding schools in Vietnam. The approach ensures that the findings are grounded in measurable evidence, offering practical implications for educational policy and school-level interventions to enhance cultural identity education in ethnically diverse educational environments.

3.2. Participants

This study employed a convenience sampling method, collecting data from 920 participants across 36 ethnic boarding schools in Vietnam's Southern region during the 2024–2025 school year through an online survey. The sample included

368 managers/teachers and 552 students to assess the implementation status of ethnic cultural identity education activities (920 participants). Regarding demographics, over 60% of the managers/teachers were female, while more than 42% of the student participants were female. Notably, over 98% of the student respondents belonged to ethnic minority groups. In terms of qualifications, nearly 100% of managers, teachers had met professional training standards, with more than 3% holding a Master's degree (approximately 100%). Ethical procedures were strictly followed throughout the study. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time, and confidentiality was assured. The survey design did not require participants to disclose identifiable information such as their names or the names of their schools (all participants were free to withdraw; participants' privacy was guaranteed; no questions or statements required names or schools), ensuring voluntary and anonymous participation.

3.3. Instruments

This study employed a structured set of instruments comprising three distinct Likert-scale-based scales to measure key aspects of ethnic cultural identity education in ethnic boarding schools. The first scale assessed the level of awareness among managers, teachers and students regarding the importance of ethnic cultural identity education activities. It included three items designed to capture depth of understanding and perceived value (e.g., "Making students see that cultural identity is the soul of the nation"). Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important).

The second scale measured the implementation results of ethnic cultural identity education activities through four components. The first component included four items focusing on educational goals (e.g., "Making students improve their understanding of national cultural values; having feelings of respect and love for traditional cultural values, forming a sense of responsibility to preserve and promote national cultural identity"). The second component consisted of six items addressing educational content (e.g., "Incorporating ethnic language teaching into school curriculum as a core subject; educating about cultural beliefs about traditional festivals and religious festivals"). The third component featured five items on educational methods (e.g., "Organizing activities to experience, visit, survey, and learn about reality in villages and hamlets; exploiting students' practical experiences and inherent cultural traditions such as collecting folk songs and folk songs of ethnic minorities"). The fourth component included four items on educational forms (e.g., "Integrated in the subjects of Literature, History, Geography, Civic Education; and integrated in extracurricular educational programs"). All responses were rated from 1 (not implemented at all) to 5 (fully implemented).

The third scale assessed factors influencing implementation, comprising two components. The first included three items related to economic and cultural contextual influences (e.g., "On the intellectual characteristics of the residential area; on customs and practices in ethnic minority areas"). The second component had four items addressing educational coordination (e.g., "Mechanisms and policies for staff working on educating ethnic cultural identity for students; facilities and finances of ethnic boarding schools"), rated from 1 (very unaffected) to 5 (very influential).

3.4. Data Analysis

In this study, all observed variables were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale, carefully designed to capture varying degrees of "awareness, implementation, effectiveness, or influence," aligned with the specific constructs being measured. Responses were numerically coded from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest), reflecting the respondent's level of agreement or perception. To ensure consistent interpretation, the Likert scale range was divided into five equal intervals using the formula: (Maximum–Minimum)/Number of Levels = $(5-1)/5 = 0.8$. As a result, the following interpretation thresholds were established: Level 1: 1.0 to less than 1.8, Level 2: 1.8 to less than 2.6, Level 3: 2.6 to less than 3.4, Level 4: 3.4 to less than 4.2, and Level 5: 4.2 to 5.0. These levels enabled nuanced interpretation of participants' perceptions regarding the importance, extent, and impact of ethnic cultural identity education activities. The study employed descriptive statistical techniques, including mean and standard deviation, to summarize participants' responses. Additionally, the internal consistency of each measurement scale was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.70 or higher was used as the benchmark for reliability, ensuring that the instruments used were sufficiently robust in measuring the constructs of interest (Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70 or higher). These methods together supported the validity and reliability of the study's findings through rigorous statistical analysis.

4. Results

4.1. The Level of Awareness among Managers, Teachers and Students regarding the Importance of Ethnic Cultural Identity Education Activities

The findings indicate a strong and consistent awareness among both students and managers, teachers about the significance of ethnic cultural identity education in ethnic boarding schools in Vietnam's Southern region. Based on survey responses, students reported a high average awareness level (M = 4.09; SD = 0.71; α = 0.79), while managers and teachers reported a slightly higher but comparable mean score (M = 4.16; SD = 0.74; α = 0.86). These scores fall within Level 5 of the Likert scale range, indicating that both groups perceive ethnic cultural identity education as very important. The Cronbach's alpha values confirm the internal consistency and reliability of the responses, with students' assessments showing acceptable reliability (α = 0.79) and those of managers, teachers demonstrating very high reliability (α = 0.86). These results reflect a clear consensus on the critical role that cultural identity education plays in shaping students' personal and social development. The shared perception reinforces the idea that such education is central to building student awareness and respect for cultural values. It also affirms the broader belief that cultural identity is "the soul of the nation," representing "the humanistic values and virtues of the nation," and that "preserving and promoting cultural identity is a

national sustainable development strategy, a common task of the whole society in which education plays the most important role" (M = 4.09; M = 4.16; α = 0.79; α = 0.86). This widespread agreement underlines the relevance and necessity of integrating cultural identity education into the core educational practices in ethnic boarding schools.

4.2. The Implementation Results of Ethnic Cultural Identity Education Activities

Table 1.
The implementation results of ethnic cultural identity education activities.

| Components | Level of implementation | | | | | |
| | Self-assessment of students | | | Assessment of managers and teachers | | |
	M	SD	α	M	SD	α
Objectives of national cultural identity education	4.21	0.73	0.75	4.16	0.73	0.79
Content of national cultural identity education	4.26	0.72	0.71	4.18	0.76	0.73
Methods of national cultural identity education	3.39	0.76	0.72	3.32	0.70	0.71
Forms of national cultural identity education	3.55	0.81	0.76	3.52	0.80	0.75

Note: M: Mean, SD: Standard deviation, α: Cronbach's alpha.

The findings in Table 1 reveal a detailed picture of how ethnic cultural identity education activities are being implemented in ethnic boarding schools in the Southern region of Vietnam. Regarding educational goals, students rated their awareness and perception of the objectives of ethnic cultural identity education with an average score of M = 4.21 (SD = 0.73; α = 0.75), while administrators and teachers provided a slightly lower rating of M = 4.16 (SD = 0.73; α = 0.79). Both groups recognized these goals—such as "making students improve their understanding of ethnic cultural values; having feelings of respect and love for traditional cultural values, forming a sense of responsibility to preserve and promote ethnic cultural identity"—as practical and meaningful (M = 4.21; M = 4.16; α = 0.75; α = 0.79). The consistency of the responses confirms the reliability of the results. Similarly, regarding content, students gave an average score of M = 4.26 (SD = 0.72; α = 0.71), and administrators/teachers rated it at M = 4.18 (SD = 0.76; α = 0.73), suggesting that the curriculum—such as "inclusion of ethnic language teaching in schools as a core subject; cultural and religious education about traditional festivals and religious festivals"—is seen as rich, appropriate, and well-integrated (M = 4.26; M = 4.18; α = 0.71; α = 0.73). However, in terms of methods, both groups gave significantly lower ratings. Students scored M = 3.39 (SD = 0.76; α = 0.72), and administrators/teachers M = 3.32 (SD = 0.70; α = 0.71), reflecting concerns that experiential learning methods—such as "organizing activities to experience, visit, survey, and learn about reality in villages and hamlets; exploiting students' practical experiences and inherent cultural traditions such as collecting folk songs and folk songs of ethnic minorities"—are not yet sufficiently aligned with students' interests, needs, or learning capacities (M = 3.39; M = 3.32; α = 0.72; α = 0.71). Likewise, the forms of delivery received only moderate scores: students gave M = 3.55 (SD = 0.81; α = 0.76) and administrators/teachers M = 3.52 (SD = 0.80; α = 0.75), indicating that while efforts to integrate cultural education into "Literature, History, Geography, Civic Education, and extracurricular educational programs" are underway, they are not yet fully optimized (M = 3.55; M = 3.52; α = 0.76; α = 0.75). These findings point to the need for expanding experiential learning, improving instructional alignment, and diversifying educational formats to enhance effectiveness.

4.3. Factors Affecting Cultural Identity Education Activities for Students in Ethnic Boarding Schools

Table 2.
Factors affecting cultural identity education activities for students in ethnic boarding schools.

| Components | Self-assessment of students | | | Assessment of managers and teachers | | |
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
The influence of economic, social circumstances and customs and practices in ethnic minority areas on the activities of educating ethnic cultural identity for students in boarding schools	4.16	0.76	0.72	4.22	0.77	0.75
The influence of the coordination of educational forces on the activities of educating ethnic cultural identity for students in boarding schools	4.22	0.70	0.71	4.29	0.75	0.77

Note: M: Mean, SD: Standard deviation, α: Cronbach's alpha.

Table 2 outlines the assessment results of various factors influencing the implementation of ethnic cultural identity education for students in ethnic boarding schools in Vietnam's Southern region, based on feedback from both students and managers/teachers. Regarding the influence of economic and social conditions, as well as customs and practices in ethnic minority communities, students reported an average score of M = 4.16 (SD = 0.76; α = 0.72), while managers/teachers provided a comparable evaluation with M = 4.22 (SD = 0.77; α = 0.75). These high ratings reflect the significant role that

"the linguistic and intellectual characteristics of the residential area" and "the customs and practices in ethnic minority areas" play in shaping the personality and learning needs of ethnic minority students. The unique natural and social environments in which these students are raised have a profound impact on how they perceive, receive, and respond to ethnic cultural identity education (M = 4.16; M = 4.22; α = 0.72; α = 0.75). Similarly, in terms of the impact of educational coordination—specifically the interaction among schools, families, and communities—students rated this factor M = 4.22 (SD = 0.70; α = 0.71), while managers/teachers rated it slightly higher at M = 4.29 (SD = 0.75; α = 0.77). These responses suggest that many schools have successfully built a "friendly and positive atmosphere" that "respects the cultural values of ethnic minority students," such as the Khmer and Cham, who actively enjoy "festivals, collective dancing, and singing in the community." In addition, "reasonable mechanisms and policies for staff working in educating ethnic cultural identity for students," alongside improved school infrastructure, have helped create an enabling environment. Together, these contextual and institutional factors foster favorable conditions for effective implementation of ethnic cultural identity education (M = 4.22; M = 4.29; α = 0.71; α = 0.77).

5 Discussion and Implications

5.1. Discussion

The perception of the importance of ethnic cultural identity education among students in ethnic boarding schools is notably strong, as evidenced by findings that show high levels of awareness and appreciation from both students and educators. With mean scores surpassing 4.0 on a 5-point Likert scale, participants consistently affirmed the significance of this educational component. This perception directly addresses Research Question 1 and is consistent with prior scholarship underscoring the role of cultural identity in shaping students' self-concept, sense of belonging, and civic engagement [1, 3, 12]. Such a high level of awareness among stakeholders signals strong potential for the long-term sustainability of cultural identity education. It reflects a shared understanding of the value of integrating ethnic heritage into daily school life, curricula, and institutional policies. This alignment with UNESCO [2] advocacy for inclusive and culturally responsive education indicates that ethnic boarding schools may serve as effective platforms for advancing global educational goals while preserving local identity. Moreover, these findings echo the conclusions of Hu and Md Noor [15] who found that young people exhibit positive attitudes toward the preservation of intangible heritage. In boarding school contexts, where students often live apart from their families and local communities, cultural identity education plays a crucial role in reinforcing ethnic roots and resisting cultural homogenization [11, 38]. By fostering a strong sense of ethnic pride and historical consciousness, this form of education not only supports students' academic and social development but also contributes to the broader aim of cultural preservation in a rapidly globalizing world.

The implementation of ethnic cultural identity education activities reveals both strengths and limitations in current practice. Addressing Research Question 2, the study indicates that while the objectives and content of ethnic cultural education are clearly articulated and well-received by both students and teachers—with mean scores around 4.2—there is a noticeable disparity when it comes to pedagogical methods and forms of educational organization, which scored more moderately (M ≈ 3.3–3.5). This disparity points to a disconnect between curriculum design and classroom execution. Although the curriculum appears culturally rich and relevant, the delivery mechanisms lack the dynamism needed to fully engage students. Experiential learning, frequently endorsed in the literature for its effectiveness in identity education [16, 22] remains underutilized. This underuse may stem from insufficient teacher training or a lack of facilities and resources to support interactive, hands-on learning experiences [9, 19]. Further compounding the issue is the persistence of subtractive schooling practices, which marginalize minority students by failing to affirm their cultural backgrounds [38]. This is evident in the way cultural elements are often treated as supplementary—confined to extracurricular events rather than integrated into the academic core [14]. As a result, ethnic traditions risk being perceived as peripheral rather than central to students' educational journeys. The findings underscore the need for schools to move beyond surface-level inclusion and embrace cultural identity education as a foundational aspect of pedagogy. As Brophy and Alleman [39] argue, authentic integration of culture into classroom practices fosters deeper understanding and engagement, ultimately supporting the holistic development of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

The third research question examined contextual, institutional, and sociocultural factors affecting the success of cultural identity education. High average scores (M > 4.2) across both components—socioeconomic and cultural context, and coordination among educational stakeholders—highlight the systemic impact of both community dynamics and institutional collaboration. These findings align with past research indicating that education thrives when it is contextually grounded and community-informed [34, 40]. For example, inviting cultural bearers—elders, artisans, or musicians—into the school setting can enhance the authenticity and relevance of cultural programming. Likewise, the study corroborates literature suggesting that cultural identity education requires coordinated support among families, educators, and policymakers [4, 7, 15]. The positive results on stakeholder collaboration are encouraging, indicating a foundational infrastructure upon which to build stronger, more culturally grounded practices. Moreover, the results echo international research that affirms the role of cultural identity education in enhancing self-esteem, psychological well-being, and academic engagement among minority students [35, 36]. However, the persistent challenge of underutilized digital tools—due to infrastructural and training gaps—remains an area for development, despite promising innovations like mobile apps, virtual museums, and extended reality experiences [17, 18, 41, 42]. Addressing the digital divide will be essential in leveraging technology as a tool for cultural preservation and education in remote areas.

5.2. Implications

The study provides compelling evidence for reinforcing national cultural identity education policies with practical implementation guidelines. While laws and circulars [6] exist, enforcement and consistency across schools remain uneven. Policymakers must consider allocating specific budget lines, teacher incentives, and resource packages to ethnic boarding schools to foster deeper and sustained integration of cultural content. There is also a need to revise assessment frameworks to include cultural competence and identity development as part of holistic student evaluations. Teacher training and capacity-building programs should prioritize culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers must be equipped not only with technical teaching skills but also with deep cultural awareness, especially if they are not from the same ethnic backgrounds as their students. Experiential teaching strategies such as village visits, cultural storytelling, and craft workshops must be more widely adopted, drawing from successful models highlighted in both the current study and previous literature [16, 31]. Moreover, interdisciplinary curriculum design should ensure that ethnic cultural identity is not confined to specific subjects but infused throughout students' educational journey.

The findings also stress the importance of strengthening partnerships between schools and local communities. Elders, artisans, and cultural bearers should be regularly involved in school programs to ensure the authenticity and vitality of cultural transmission. Communities must be recognized not merely as recipients but as co-creators of the educational process. Awareness programs can help parents and community leaders understand the long-term value of cultural identity education, potentially increasing their engagement and support. This study contributes valuable empirical insights into the perceptions, implementation practices, and challenges surrounding ethnic cultural identity education in Southern Vietnam's ethnic boarding schools. It affirms that while the foundation—awareness and policy—is strong, meaningful progress depends on pedagogical innovation, institutional alignment, and inclusive collaboration. By placing cultural identity at the heart of education, schools can cultivate resilient, grounded, and socially responsible citizens. These findings not only enrich the Vietnamese educational discourse but also offer globally relevant strategies for preserving cultural heritage and promoting equity in multi-ethnic educational contexts.

Furthermore, to sustain ethnic cultural identity education for students, a set of contextually grounded strategic recommendations is essential. First, ethnic boarding schools must integrate active and experiential pedagogies that place students at the center of the educational process. Learning tools such as simulations and real-life games not only encourage active engagement but also foster deeper cultural understanding and identity formation [23, 43]. Second, establishing teacher mentoring networks can enhance professional capacity by fostering collaborative learning, particularly in culturally responsive pedagogy and multilingual instruction [12, 19]. Third, schools should prioritize community participation by actively involving parents, cultural elders, and local organizations in designing both curricular and extracurricular activities. Such collaboration builds educational relevance and strengthens communal ownership [40]. Fourth, integrating digital technologies—such as mobile learning, augmented reality, and blended instruction—can overcome infrastructural challenges in remote areas while promoting innovation in cultural transmission [43, 44]. Finally, it is crucial to amplify student voice in ethnocultural education. By valuing students' lived experiences, schools can foster inclusive learning environments and enact policy changes rooted in actual needs and cultural aspirations [22, 32, 37, 45].

6. Conclusion

This study examined the perceptions, implementation practices, and influencing factors of ethnic cultural identity education in 36 ethnic boarding schools across Southern Vietnam, involving 920 participants including administrators, teachers, and students. The findings underscore a strong shared awareness among stakeholders regarding the importance of ethnic cultural identity education, confirming that cultural values are not only essential for individual character development but also for fostering national cohesion. Both students and educators consistently rated cultural identity education as highly important, suggesting readiness and openness to further integrating this content into mainstream pedagogy. The study also revealed that while the goals and curriculum content of cultural identity education were well articulated and widely implemented, teaching methods and forms of delivery were less developed. Experiential learning approaches and interdisciplinary integration, although recognized as valuable, remain underutilized in practice. Moreover, contextual and institutional factors such as economic conditions, community customs, and school–family–community coordination were found to significantly influence the success of these educational efforts. These insights highlight that ethnic cultural identity education cannot be achieved solely through policy or curriculum design; it requires systemic alignment, professional development, and inclusive engagement with local cultural bearers. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on culturally responsive education by providing context-specific data from a diverse and understudied region in Vietnam. It reinforces the argument that ethnic cultural identity education is not an optional enrichment but a foundational aspect of quality and equity in education, particularly in multicultural societies. It also sheds light on the role of boarding schools as both enablers and challengers of cultural continuity—institutions that can either foster cultural resilience or risk cultural erosion depending on how education is delivered.

However, this study is not without limitations. Its reliance on self-reported survey data may be subject to response bias, and the cross-sectional nature of the study limits the ability to track changes over time. Future research should consider longitudinal approaches and incorporate qualitative methods such as interviews or ethnographic observations to gain deeper insight into how students experience and internalize cultural identity education. Additionally, comparative studies between regions or between ethnic and mainstream schools could offer broader generalizability. Overall, this study offers valuable empirical evidence and practical guidance for policymakers, educators, and communities committed to preserving cultural heritage and advancing inclusive education. It calls for a holistic, community-based, and pedagogically innovative

approach to cultural identity education—one that celebrates Vietnam's ethnic diversity while strengthening its national unity.

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