

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Maintaining Cultural Identity in Multicultural Campuses: Perspectives of Ethnic Minority Students in Northern Vietnam

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This study investigates the challenges faced by ethnic minority students in preserving traditional cultural values within the multicultural environment of universities in Vietnam's northern mountainous regions. Using a mixed-methods approach that combines surveys and in-depth interviews, the research identifies significant barriers, including language erosion, economic constraints, cultural assimilation pressures, and limited institutional support. The findings highlight that the degree of difficulty in cultural preservation varies by ethnic group and academic year. Students prioritize preserving elements such as language, traditional attire, and folklore, but often lack opportunities and resources to actively engage in cultural activities. The study emphasizes the need for universities to integrate multicultural education into their curricula, establish cultural clubs, and create inclusive policies to support ethnic minority students. Key recommendations include fostering connections with local communities, promoting awareness of minority challenges among faculty and students, and providing psychological support to alleviate feelings of inferiority. Despite its contributions, the research acknowledges limitations, such as a small sample size and the exclusion of perspectives from the majority ethnic group (Kinh). Future research will explore the impact of multicultural environments on cultural preservation and develop education models to better support ethnic minority students, contributing to sustainable cultural diversity in higher education.

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

In the context of globalization and modernization, the preservation of traditional cultural values has become a significant challenge for ethnic minority communities worldwide (Esteban-Guitart et al., 2019). Culture is not only a defining factor of national identity but also a crucial resource for sustainable social development (Hofstede, 2010). In Vietnam, ethnic minorities comprise approximately 14.2% of the population, possessing a rich and diverse cultural heritage (Anh, 2024). However, these cultural values are increasingly under threat due to the profound impacts of cultural assimilation and integration (Baulch et al., 2002). The northern mountainous region of Vietnam is home to numerous ethnic minority groups, such as the Tay, Nung, Thai, Hmong, Dao, San Diu, and many others, each with unique and diverse cultural values. However, urbanization, cultural exchange, and external pressures have posed significant challenges to preserving the cultural identity of these communities (Park, 2013). Within university settings, particularly in institutions located in the northern mountainous areas, ethnic minority students face not only economic, linguistic, and societal expectation barriers but also difficulties in safeguarding their traditional cultural values (Guido, 2010). While the multicultural environment in universities offers opportunities for interaction and learning, it also carries the risk of diminishing or assimilating the cultural values of ethnic minority groups (Michelle Gu et al., 2017; Nasir & Saxe, 2003).

Universities in the northern mountainous region of Vietnam serve as hubs for a significant number of ethnic minority students, functioning as unique multicultural environments where traditional ethnic cultures intersect with modern cultural influences. In this setting, ethnic minority students face challenges not only in terms of language barriers, customs, and beliefs but also in navigating the considerable pressure to integrate into the mainstream culture while preserving their distinct identities (Nguyen et al., 2023; Trang et al., 2022).

Several studies have addressed these challenges. Baumert et al. (2024) emphasized that ethnic minority students often struggle to balance cultural integration with cultural preservation. The lack of appropriate multicultural education programs and insufficient institutional support further exacerbates the risk of losing their cultural identity (Zhang, 2019). This study focuses on analyzing the difficulties and challenges faced by ethnic minority students in multicultural environments at universities in the northern mountainous region of Vietnam. Additionally, it highlights the role of multicultural education in supporting students to preserve their traditional cultural values. The objective of this paper is not only to clarify the current situation and its underlying causes but also to propose practical solutions to enhance the effectiveness of multicultural education in this specific context. The study contributes to the theoretical and practical foundation for developing appropriate educational policies that help preserve and promote ethnic cultural identity while fostering the sustainable development of the region (Meissner, 2021).

The research questions posed are:

- What challenges do ethnic minority students face in preserving traditional cultural values within multicultural environments at universities in the northern mountainous region of Vietnam?
- Are the challenges faced by students related to the number of years spent in academic programs or their ethnic group composition?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional culture encompasses the collective values, customs, beliefs, and practices passed down through generations within a community (Hofstede, 2010). For ethnic minorities, cultural identity is not only a symbol of existence but also a means to foster community cohesion and assert their position within a multicultural society (Baumert et al., 2024). Traditional culture often faces significant pressures from globalization, leading to the risk of cultural assimilation (Tuyen, 2023). This is particularly evident in ethnic minority communities, where indigenous cultural elements are highly susceptible to erosion under the strong influence of dominant cultures (Smith et al., 2020).

Traditional culture encompasses the entirety of material and spiritual values that have been formed and passed down through generations within a specific community. These elements, which include customs, traditions, festivals, arts, language, and indigenous knowledge, are distinctive features that reflect a nation's identity (Smith et al., 2020; Tuyen, 2023; Zhang, 2019). Traditional culture not only serves as the core foundation of each ethnic group but also plays a vital role in maintaining and strengthening community cohesion. Among ethnic minorities, traditional culture is often preserved through activities such as folk festivals, traditional handicrafts, and unique songs and dances. However, in the context of globalization, these values face significant pressures and the risk of being diminished (Hiswara et al., 2023).

Multiculturalism refers to the coexistence and interaction of various cultural groups within a community or society, where each group has the opportunity to preserve and promote its unique cultural identity. Multiculturalism goes beyond the mere presence of multiple cultures; it encompasses respect, acceptance, and the encouragement of cultural diversity within the community (Banks, 2015). In the northern mountainous region of Vietnam, the intermingling of ethnic minorities, each with distinct languages, customs, and beliefs, serves as a vivid example of the region's multicultural character (McElwee, 2022; Son & Kingsbury, 2020).

In educational settings, particularly in universities, cultural diversity is reflected through the presence of students from various ethnicities, nations, and religions. Multicultural environments offer numerous benefits, such as enhancing intercultural communication skills and fostering creativity, but they also pose significant challenges related to integration and cultural preservation (Banks, 2015). Ethnic minority students at universities in the northern mountainous region of

Vietnam play a dual role: serving as bridges to convey traditional cultural values while also adapting and integrating into a multicultural environment. While this setting provides opportunities, it also presents substantial challenges in preserving ethnic cultural identity, a core element of both individual and community identity (Banks, 2015).

Factors such as differences in language, customs, and social perceptions often create barriers to maintaining and promoting traditional cultural values. In the context of higher education, students face pressures from both internal environments (classrooms) and external settings (social communities), making it challenging to balance cultural preservation and integration (Nga et al., 2022; Zhang, 2019). Strong cultural integration in university environments, particularly in multicultural regions, often leads to the dilution of traditional cultural values. Students tend to adopt prevalent cultural norms while gradually distancing themselves from their ethnic customs and traditions (Baumert et al., 2024; Zhang, 2019). This phenomenon is attributed to a lack of support and guidance from families, communities, and educational institutions.

Language plays a crucial role in preserving cultural identity. However, in universities where Vietnamese is the primary medium of instruction, opportunities to practice and use ethnic minority languages are significantly limited. Nguyen and Tran (2024) revealed that many ethnic minority students struggle to use their native languages in environments that do not support or promote them. Furthermore, ethnic minority students often encounter prejudice and discrimination from other cultural groups. This not only creates psychological barriers but also diminishes their confidence in expressing their cultural identity (Banks, 2015).

Multicultural education programs at universities in the northern mountainous regions remain limited in both content and approach. This inadequacy has resulted in a lack of activities to support ethnic minority students in preserving and promoting their cultural values (Zhang, 2019). In multicultural university environments, ethnic minority students face social integration pressures to avoid isolation. These pressures often conflict with their desire to maintain their cultural identity, leading to internal conflicts and difficulties in balancing values (Zhang, 2019). The influx of global cultural values is also diminishing the appeal of traditional cultural values (Tretiakov et al., 2020). A significant barrier lies in the lack of resources and support for educational and research activities focused on ethnic culture. Additionally, in some localities, insufficient training for educators and faculty with deep knowledge of ethnic cultures further undermines the effectiveness of preservation efforts (Tuyen, 2023).

Understanding the challenges and difficulties faced by ethnic minority students is a critical step in developing effective educational policies and programs. This not only aids in preserving traditional cultural values but also fosters harmony and development within multicultural communities (Banks, 2015).

### **3. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

#### **3.1 Research design**

This study employs an interdisciplinary approach and a combination of quantitative (survey) and qualitative (in-depth interviews) research methods (Mardia et al., 2024). In addition to presenting the theoretical framework, the study conducted a survey using a questionnaire to assess ethnic minority students' perceptions of the difficulties and challenges they face in a multicultural environment. Ten statements were proposed for evaluation, with responses measured on a 5-point Likert scale: 5/Strongly Agree, 4/Agree, 3/Neutral, 2/Disagree, and 1/Strongly Disagree.

The survey was conducted with a randomly selected sample of 435 ethnic minority students from three universities in the northern mountainous region of Vietnam (Table 1). The sample was designed to ensure representation across different ethnic groups, genders, and academic years (from first-year to fourth-year students). Faculty members (colleagues at these universities) assisted in contacting and guiding students to complete the survey online via Google Forms.

Additionally, the study employed semi-structured in-depth interviews with 25 students, prioritizing those from less represented ethnic groups. These participants were selected from the survey sample across the three universities to ensure diversity in perspectives regarding gender, ethnicity,

academic year, and institution (Table 2). This number of participants was deemed sufficient to achieve data saturation for a highly diverse sample (Guest et al., 2006)

The semi-structured interview process followed these steps:

**Step 1:** Introduce the research objectives, ensure confidentiality, and create a comfortable environment for the interviewees.

**Step 2:** Pose guiding interview questions that encourage participants to freely share their thoughts on traditional cultural values, activities they have engaged in to preserve these values, and the most significant challenges they have encountered in this regard.

**Step 3:** Monitor responses to pose follow-up questions for deeper insights and take detailed notes for analysis.

**Step 4:** Ask broader questions, inviting participants to share their aspirations for preserving their traditional cultural values.

### 3.2 Data analysis

All survey data were processed and analyzed using SPSS version 20.0. Additionally, data from the interviews were coded and analyzed using content analysis methods to extract key themes and prominent phenomena related to the difficulties and challenges faced by ethnic minority students in preserving traditional cultural values in the multicultural educational environment. The semi-structured interview method provided a basis for comparison and contrast, helping to identify similarities and differences in students' perceptions and experiences.

### 3.3 Data description

Table 1 below presents the demographic characteristics of the 435 surveyed students, categorized by gender, academic year, and ethnicity. The sample includes both male and female students, with a higher proportion of female students (56.55%). This gender distribution is incidental, as all three surveyed universities predominantly offer teacher education programs, which typically attract more female students.

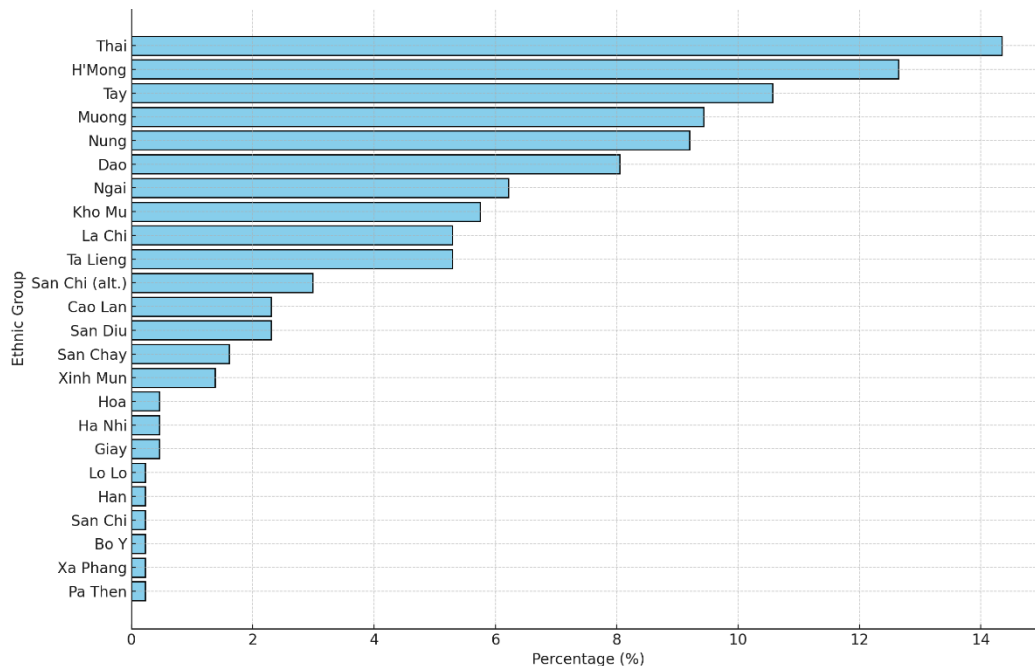
Among the surveyed participants, 34.94% were fourth-year students, 25.29% were third-year students, 20.69% were second-year students, and 19.08% were first-year students. This distribution ensures representation across all academic levels.

**Table 1: Description of survey participants by gender and academic year**

Item	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	189	43.45
Female	246	56.55
<b>Academic Year</b>		
First Year	83	19.08
Second Year	90	20.69
Third Year	110	25.29
Fourth Year	152	34.94
<b>Total</b>	<b>435</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Figure 1** illustrates the distribution of ethnic minority groups among the 435 surveyed students across 24 ethnicities. The Thai group accounts for the highest proportion at 14.35%, followed by the H'Mong at 12.64% and the Tay at 10.57%. The remaining ethnic groups each constitute less than 10%, with some groups such as Bo Y, Lo Lo, Giay, Pa Then, and San Chi representing only 0.23%–0.46%. These smaller percentages highlight the limited number of students from these ethnic groups

enrolled in the surveyed universities, all of whom were included in the study to ensure comprehensive representation.



**Figure 1: Distribution of ethnic minority groups among surveyed students**

Table 2 provides further details about the 25 students selected for in-depth interviews. These students represent 19 different ethnic minority groups, accounting for a very small proportion of the total student population at the universities. All participants are from the northern mountainous provinces of Vietnam.

**Table 2: Description of in-depth interview participants**

No.	Ethnic Group	Count	Academic Year	Gender	Hometown	Date	Mode
1	San Chi	2	2nd year	Male	Dien Bien	5/2024	In-person
2	Xinh Mun	1	1st year	Female	Lai Chau	5/2024	Phone call
3	San Chi (alt.)	1	2nd year	Female	Lao Cai	5/2024	Phone call
4	San Diu	1	1st year	Male	Thai Nguyen	5/2024	Phone call
5	San Chay	1	4th year	Female	Lang Son	5/2024	Phone call
6	Ta Lieng	1	2nd year	Female	Lao Cai	5/2024	Phone call
7	Xa Phang	1	2nd year	Female	Lai Chau	5/2024	Phone call
8	Bo Y	1	3rd year	Female	Ha Giang	5/2024	Phone call
9	Lo Lo	1	3rd year	Male	Cao Bang	5/2024	In-person
10	Han	1	2nd year	Female	Cao Bang	5/2024	Phone call
11	Giay	2	2nd year	Female	Lao Cai	5/2024	Phone call
12	Pa Then	1	1st year	Female	Ha Giang	5/2024	In-person
13	H'Mong	2	3rd year	Male	Lao Cai	5/2024	Phone call
14	La Chi	2	4th year	Female	Ha Giang	5/2024	In-person
15	Hoa	1	4th year	Female	Lang Son	5/2024	In-person
16	Kho Mu	1	3rd year	Female	Son La	5/2024	Phone call
17	Cao Lan	1	4th year	Male	Thai Nguyen	5/2024	In-person
18	Ngai	2	3rd year	Female	Tuyen Quang	5/2024	Phone call
19	Ha Nhi	2	3rd year	Female	Dien Bien	5/2024	Phone call

#### 4. RESULTS

The survey results in **Table 3** reveal that ethnic minority students face numerous difficulties and challenges in preserving traditional cultural values within a multicultural environment. The factors were evaluated using a Likert scale, with their mean values and standard deviations (SD) calculated to rank the impact level of each challenge.

**Table 3: Difficulties and challenges faced by ethnic minority students in preserving traditional cultural values**

No.	Difficulties and Challenges	Mean	SD	Agreement Rate (%)	Rank
1	Susceptibility to cultural assimilation due to common values and norms	4.76	0.51	86.1	6
2	Gradual decline of ethnic minority languages	4.74	0.52	95.8	7
3	Lack of deep understanding of traditional cultural values within their own ethnic group	4.51	0.61	94.0	10
4	Social integration pressure leading to concealing or underrepresenting one's unique culture	4.84	0.42	97.9	4
5	Facing prejudice and discrimination from other students	4.61	0.61	93.1	9
6	Feelings of inferiority (due to economic status, knowledge, lifestyle differences, etc.)	4.91	0.32	98.9	3
7	Lack of multicultural education content in university curricula	4.79	0.49	96.3	5
8	Lack of cultural activities and practices to maintain traditional ethnic culture	4.97	0.16	100	1
9	Limited time to participate in traditional cultural activities of their ethnic group or hometown	4.71	0.55	94.9	8
10	Lack of support from universities and faculty in preserving traditional cultural values	4.95	0.21	100	2

Overall, all the challenges identified by the researchers received a high level of agreement, as indicated by the average scores of  $M \geq 4.51$ . Among the 10 listed difficulties, two factors were rated exceptionally high by the students: (8) "Lack of cultural activities and practices to maintain traditional ethnic culture" ( $M = 4.97$ ,  $SD = 0.16$ ) and (10) "Lack of support from universities and faculty in preserving traditional cultural values" ( $M = 4.95$ ,  $SD = 0.21$ ). Additionally, (6) "Feelings of inferiority" ( $M = 4.91$ ,  $SD = 0.32$ ) was also highly rated by the students. Ethnic minority students often experience a sense of inferiority due to differences in economic status, knowledge, and lifestyle, which significantly affects their confidence in expressing their cultural identity in the university environment.

The low dispersion among survey data ( $SD \leq 0.61$ ) indicates no significant differences in the evaluations. For items (8) and (10), the agreement rate for the researchers' identified challenges reached 100% (rated as 4 - Agree or 5 - Strongly Agree). For the other items, the agreement rate ranged from 86.1% to 98.9%, with the lowest level being 3 - Neutral.

The results in **Table 4** reveal that smaller ethnic groups, such as La Chi, Kho Mu, Cao Lan, Ngai, Ha Nhi, and others, consistently reported a mean score of 5.00 with a standard deviation of 0.00, indicating unanimous agreement regarding the challenges they face. Larger ethnic groups, including Thai ( $N=62$ ), Dao ( $N=35$ ), Muong ( $N=41$ ), Nung ( $N=40$ ), and H'Mong ( $N=55$ ), exhibit slightly more variability in their responses, with mean scores ranging from 4.34 to 4.92. The Hoa ethnic group ( $N=2$ ) recorded the lowest mean score of 4.05, reflecting less agreement or perceived severity of the challenges compared to other groups.

**Table 4: Evaluation of difficulties and challenges by ethnic minority groups**

Ethnic Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Thai	62	4.56	0.44

Dao	35	4.92	0.25
Muong	41	4.62	0.45
Nung	40	4.74	0.38
Tay	46	4.34	0.39
H'Mong	55	4.89	0.28
La Chi	23	5.00	0.00
Hoa	2	4.05	0.49
Kho Mu	25	5.00	0.00
Cao Lan	10	5.00	0.00
Ngai	27	5.00	0.00
Ha Nhi	2	5.00	0.00
San Chi	1	5.00	0.00
Xinh	6	5.00	0.00
San Chi (alt.)	13	5.00	0.00
San Diu	10	5.00	0.00
San Chay	7	5.00	0.00
Ta Lieng	23	5.00	0.00
Xa Phang	1	5.00	0.00
Bo Y	1	5.00	0.00
Lo Lo	1	5.00	0.00
Han	1	5.00	0.00
Giay	2	5.00	0.00
Pa Then	1	5.00	0.00

The study also conducted a One-way ANOVA test to examine whether there were significant differences in the mean scores among various ethnic minority groups and among first-year, second-year, third-year, and fourth-year students regarding the difficulties and challenges they face.

The Levene's test for homogeneity of variances resulted in a Sig. value of 0.000 ( $< 0.05$ ), confirming a significant variance difference among different ethnic minority groups.

**Table 5: Test of homogeneity of variances**

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
10.458	17	411	0.000

The ANOVA test for differences in mean values yielded a Sig. value of 0.000 ( $< 0.05$ ), indicating a significant difference in mean scores among ethnic minority groups.

**Table 6: ANOVA test of mean differences among ethnic groups**

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	22.532	23	0.980	10.315	0.000
Within Groups	39.035	411	0.095		
Total	61.567	434			

For differences based on the academic year of ethnic minority students, the results in **Table 7** show variation in challenges faced. First-year students had a Mean score of 5.00 (SD = 0.00), reflecting unanimous agreement on challenges, while the scores decreased slightly for second-year (M = 4.97, SD = 0.15), third-year (M = 4.66, SD = 0.41), and fourth-year students (M = 4.64, SD = 0.44), indicating a trend of declining perception of challenges over time.

**Table 7: Evaluation of difficulties and challenges by academic year**

Academic Year	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
First-year students	83	5.00	0.00
Second-year students	90	4.97	0.15
Third-year students	110	4.66	0.41
Fourth-year students	152	4.64	0.44

The results indicate that the Levene's test for homogeneity of variances yields a significant value of 0.000 ( $< 0.05$ ), confirming differences in variance among student groups across different academic years as in **Table 8**.

**Table 8: Test of homogeneity of variances for students across academic years**

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
73.132	3	431	0.000

The ANOVA test reveals a significant F-test Sig. value of 0.000 ( $< 0.05$ ), indicating that there are significant differences in mean scores among student groups across different academic years.

**Table 9: ANOVA test of mean differences for students across academic years**

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	12.031	3	4.010	34.892	0.000
Within Groups	49.536	431	0.115		
Total	61.567	434			

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1. Implications

The challenges faced by ethnic minority students in preserving traditional cultural values within a multicultural environment can be categorized into key aspects:



**Key finding 1: Lack of environment and opportunities to practice traditional culture**

Survey results indicate that the lack of traditional cultural activities ( $M = 4.98$ ) and the lack of support from universities and faculty ( $M = 4.95$ ) are the most significant challenges. These findings highlight that the current educational environment does not adequately meet the needs of students to preserve and promote their cultural identity.

In-depth interviews with third- and fourth-year students revealed that many had never participated in or rarely engaged in traditional cultural activities. This is largely because universities do not frequently organize such events, or the activities they do organize are not aligned with the local cultural identity. Additionally, students have limited opportunities to attend local cultural festivals due to schedule conflicts with academic commitments.

It is clear that universities need to create spaces where local cultural values can be expressed and celebrated (Banks, 2015). To sustain customs and traditions passed down from their hometowns, it is essential to establish connections between ethnic minority communities and the university environment, incorporating distinctive cultural practices into the students' daily lives.

**Key finding 2: Community integration pressure and feelings of inferiority among ethnic minority students**

The social pressure to integrate into a multicultural environment ( $M = 4.87$ ) and feelings of inferiority ( $M = 4.89$ ) are significant barriers for ethnic minority students. Many students shared that they often feel out of place within the shared cultural framework of their peers and rarely express their unique cultural traits, instead striving to avoid standing out. This may stem from unequal access to resources and opportunities within minority groups (Verhoeven, 2011). First-year ( $M = 5.00$ ) and second-year ( $M = 4.97$ ) students reported experiencing these challenges more acutely.

Additionally, feelings of inferiority are often linked to economic hardships, which play a critical role in the preservation of cultural heritage among ethnic minority groups, particularly in educational contexts. Families facing economic difficulties tend to prioritize basic needs and educational expenses over resources for cultural activities (Tuyen, 2023). Most ethnic minority students come from economically disadvantaged families, limiting their ability to participate in cultural activities or contribute to preserving traditions (Mendoza et al., 2023).

This dual challenge of community integration pressure and economic constraints underscores the need for more inclusive and equitable support systems within universities to empower ethnic minority students to embrace their cultural identity confidently.

**Key finding 3: Erosion of ethnic minority languages and traditional cultural knowledge**

The gradual decline of ethnic minority languages (Mean = 4.34) and the lack of deep understanding of traditional culture (Mean = 4.02) are alarming issues. In ethnic minority regions of Vietnam, languages and traditional cultures are at risk of erosion due to insufficient support from the education system and the pressures of cultural integration. This problem is particularly acute among younger generations, where native languages are not frequently used, and there is a lack of appropriate educational programs (Nguyen & Tran, 2024).

In in-depth interviews, students admitted knowing very little about their own ethnic group's history, customs, and language. They attributed this to the influence of modern living environments and the lack of connection with their local communities. Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions, including integrating ethnic language and cultural education into the curriculum, and fostering stronger ties between students and their communities to preserve their cultural heritage.

**Key finding 4: Lack of support from the community**

Surveyed students agreed on the difficulty faced by ethnic minority students in multicultural environments, particularly regarding the persistence of prejudice from peers and the surrounding environment (Mean = 4.14). These prejudices not only diminish students' confidence but also create a sense of isolation within the multicultural community, hindering their adjustment and integration (Karacsony et al., 2022). Social integration and community support play a crucial role in fostering a positive sense of identity within diverse environments (Brazill, 2020). Addressing these issues

requires creating inclusive spaces and promoting awareness to break down stereotypes, enabling ethnic minority students to feel valued and empowered in their academic and social settings.

### **Key finding 5: Lack of multicultural education content in university curricula**

The absence of multicultural education in university curricula (Mean = 4.76) highlights a significant gap in designing programs that enhance cultural awareness and appreciation. Multicultural education should be an integral part of academic programs to foster understanding and respect for diversity (Hamutoglu, 2023). In ethnic minority communities, the representation of cultural identity tends to be more pronounced in groups with larger populations, resulting in fewer challenges for students in multicultural environments. Students from these groups often feel more confident in expressing their cultural identity, actively participating in cultural preservation activities, or even creating their own cultural communities in their academic and living environments. Addressing this gap requires integrating multicultural content into university curricula and creating inclusive platforms for all ethnic groups to express their cultural identities equally and confidently.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

Based on the challenges faced by ethnic minority students, several recommendations have been proposed to enhance student support and uphold the responsibility of universities in preserving and promoting traditional cultural values:

**Integrate multicultural education into university curricula:** Incorporate multicultural education into academic programs to foster awareness and respect for diverse cultural values. This could include elective courses or specialized modules on ethnic languages and cultures to support the preservation of traditional knowledge and language.

**Enhance cultural activities and support systems:** Establish cultural clubs or student organizations dedicated to preserving and promoting ethnic minority cultures. These clubs, supported by youth and student unions, can organize small-scale events on campus or in dormitories, such as traditional music performances, ethnic attire showcases, or art exhibitions. Additionally, facilitating cultural exchange programs with local communities would deepen students' understanding of their own and others' cultural values.

**Regular institutional support and policies:** Develop clear policies to protect and promote cultural diversity on campus, ensuring ethnic minority students feel respected and supported. Provide platforms for students to share their cultural experiences, such as forums, Facebook pages, or Zalo groups. Special attention should be given to ethnic groups with fewer students to ensure inclusivity.

**Raise awareness among faculty and students:** Implement activities to increase awareness of the challenges faced by ethnic minority students, fostering a friendly and inclusive learning environment. Encourage student research on traditional cultures of ethnic minorities, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods to propose evidence-based solutions. Additionally, provide psychological support to alleviate feelings of inferiority and integration pressure, particularly for first-year students.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This study explored the challenges faced by ethnic minority students in preserving traditional cultural values within the multicultural environment of universities in northern mountainous regions. Through surveys and in-depth interviews, the research revealed that these difficulties stem from the interplay of individual, community, and educational factors. Key challenges include language barriers, economic constraints, the conflict between traditional and modern lifestyles, and pressures from multicultural integration. Students expressed a strong interest in preserving cultural elements such as language, traditional attire, and folklore. However, the degree of difficulty varies by ethnic group and academic year. The findings underscore the need for targeted policies and institutional support to enable ethnic minority students to maintain and promote their cultural heritage.

Despite its contributions, the study had limitations, including a relatively small sample size compared to the total number of ethnic minority students, the lack of perspectives from the majority ethnic group (Kinh), and time constraints. Future research should focus on assessing the influence of

multicultural environments on cultural preservation and developing educational models that integrate multicultural education into university curricula in northern regions. Such studies could provide actionable strategies for reducing challenges and enhancing cultural preservation efforts among ethnic minority students, further supporting the long-term goal of fostering cultural diversity and inclusion in higher education.

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