

Attitudes toward ethnic minorities among Thai students in Chiang Mai, Thailand

Thai középiskolások etnikai kisebbségek iránti attitűdjei a thaiföldi Chiang Mai-ban

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Abstract

The increase of cultural diversity in Chiang Mai society has generated the need for introducing intercultural education in the educational system. It is crucial to prepare the young generation to interact with those perceived as “different.” The aim of the current study is to examine the majority attitude of Gen Z school students toward ethnic minority groups in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The study was based on an online survey with 14- to 19-year-old adolescents from the members of the majority group (Khon Muang). Data was collected from 265 students across two schools, a multicultural school (MS) and a predominantly Thai school (PTS). The study gathered demographic information, attitudes toward minorities, and intergroup contact experiences. Our results show generally positive attitudes toward ethnic minorities among the participants, with a significant proportion supporting social inclusion. However, students from the predominantly Thai school (PTS) demonstrated statistically significant, more negative attitudes regarding realistic threat, compared to the students from the multicultural school (MS). Gender differences in attitudes were contrast to our expectation, showing that the acceptance of intergroup marriage was positively higher in male groups. The study showed an expected association between the number of outgroup friendships and more positive outgroup attitudes. Lastly, factors such as gender and maternal education were explored by regression analysis on the perceptions of realistic threat, but these did not significantly predict attitudes toward ethnic minorities among Thai students. The findings point to the importance of supporting cultural diversity in schools and promoting multicultural education in the classroom.

Keywords: attitudes, adolescence, contact hypothesis, school, multi-education

Absztrakt

A Chiang Mai-i társadalom kulturális sokszínűségének növekedése szükségessé tette az interkulturális oktatás bevezetését az oktatási rendszerbe. Kulcsfontosságú, hogy felkészítsük a fiatal nemzedéket az eltérő kultúrákból érkezőkkel való interakcióra. A jelenlegi tanulmány célja, hogy megvizsgálja a Z generációs iskola diákjainak többségi attitűdjét a thaiföldi Chiang Mai-ban az etnikai kisebbségi csoportokhoz. A tanulmány egy online kérdőíves felmérésen alapul, amelyben a többségi csoport (Khon Muang) tagjai közül 14-19 éves serdülők vettek részt. Az adatokat két iskola, egy multikulturális iskola (MS) és egy túlnyomórészt thai iskola (PTS) 265 diákjától gyűjtöttük össze. A kérdőív a demográfiai információkat, a kisebbségekkel kapcsolatos attitűdöket és a csoportközi érintkezési tapasztalatokat gyűjtötte össze. Eredményeink azt mutatják, hogy a résztvevők általában pozitív attitűdöt mutatnak az etnikai kisebbségekkel szemben, jelentős arányban támogatva a társadalmi befogadást. A túlnyomórészt thai iskola (PTS) tanulói azonban szignifikánsan negatívabb attitűdöt mutattak a reális fenyegetettséghez kapcsolódóan, mint a multikulturális iskola (MS) tanulói. A nemek közötti attitűdbeli különbségek ellentétben álltak várakozásainkkal. A csoportközi házasság elfogadottsága jellemzőbb a férfi csoportokban. A tanulmány összefüggést mutatott ki a csoporton kívüli barátságok száma és a kisebbségi csoportokkal kapcsolatos pozitívabb attitűdök között. Végül regressziós elemzést végeztünk a csoportok közötti demográfiai tényezőkben tapasztalt különbségek kontrollálására, hogy melyek jelzik előre a reális fenyegetettséget. A vizsgált demográfiai tényezők (nem, anyai iskolai végzettség) nem jelezték előre a kisebbségekkel kapcsolatos reális félelmet, az etnikai kisebbségekkel kapcsolatos negatívabb attitűdöket a thaiföldi diákok körében. Az eredmények rámutatnak a kulturális sokszínűség támogatásának és a multikulturális oktatás előmozdításának fontosságára az iskolákban.

Kulcsszavak: attitűdök, serdülőkor, kontakthipotézis, iskola, multikulturális oktatás

Introduction

Chiang Mai is a multicultural province in Thailand where there are at least thirteen different ethnic minorities. These groups of people are identified as ethnic minorities due to their race, language, religion, tradition, and/or culture being different from the majority of native Thai people.

The cultural assimilation process occurred through the national curriculum in basic education system. Along with cultural assimilation implemented in the school system, the process of “othering” at the nation-state level can also be seen in the labeling of certain ethnic minority groups. Beginning in the 1950s, the Thais differentiated lowlander ‘Thais’ from upland minorities by labelling them as ‘Hill tribes’ (*Chow Khao*), implying as “other” as distinct from ‘us’. Additionally, not only Hill tribes have been perceived as “others” but also newcomers like ‘Shan’ (*Tai Yai*). Chiang Mai has experienced a massive influx of Shan, the ethnic minority group coming from Myanmar as migrant labor for two decades (Jirattikorn, 2012).

Many hill tribes have lived below the poverty line, leading to a number of illegal activities such as participation in drug trafficking, human trafficking, and deforestation. They were often represented in the media as the ‘other’ who were different from Thais in term of race, language, customs, and culture. The stereotypes are expressed in parent talk during socialization, children’s books, school textbooks, news, and advertising in the press and on TV, parliamentary debates, and

other forms of public discourse (Van Dijk et al,1997). Front page news about hill tribe people have been dominated by issues concern for the well-being of the nation, such as deforestation, drug trafficking, border unrest, and national security (Hongladarom, 2000).

Even though Chiang Mai has had diverse cultures, the ethnic minority inhabitants in the eyes of Chiang Mai people remains negative till nowadays, often unfairly connected with poverty, drug trafficking or accusations of deforestation resulting from the development of the government on ethnic minorities. They encounter severe disadvantages in society when seeking to access the basic rights to health care, land ownership, education, and political participation (Sakboon, 2009). According to the government policy and legal framework, there is no direct discrimination against ethnic minorities; but there are, however, several forms of indirect discrimination. Prejudice and discrimination against ethnic minorities are hidden under Thai's dominant culture.

As societies grow more culturally varied, concerns about intolerant views toward ethnic minorities arise, especially when these attitudes affect young individuals. Adolescence is a crucial stage for shaping social and political beliefs (Neundorf & Smets, 2017). Alongside developing a deeper understanding of their own social identities, adolescents' attitudes towards different social groups become more stable during this time (Crocetti et al., 2021).

Many factors affect how adolescents feel about the different groups of people. School experiences are important as young people spend most of their time there. Schools aim to teach students to be good citizens and to fight against unfair treatment of others (Neundorf & Smets, 2017). Schools are seen as a small version of society that brings together individuals from diverse backgrounds and facilitates learning about social interactions and group dynamics (Dessel, 2010). Consequently, research have indicated that school experiences relate to youth's intergroup attitudes (Barber et al., 2013). Moreover, studies on contact between the different ethnic groups have indicated that positive intergroup contacts and friendships are linked to more positive attitudes toward those outgroups (Allport, 1954). Intergroup contact increases understanding about outgroup members, reduces intergroup anxiety, and increasing empathy (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008).

The young generation in school are generally seen to be more globally aware citizens than the previous generation because of the easy access to the Internet and the multiculturalism in each area. The educational setting should be the place to share the common goal of teaching students to become informed citizens and to fight against prejudice. However, the country's school curriculums do not provide Thai students with the views of global citizenship, and how beautiful diversity is, resulting from the culture assimilation policy mentioned above. It was found that the Thai school's curriculum did not respond to the diversity among the learners (Wathanawara et al., 2020).

These factors have motivated us to investigate the attitudes of the younger generation - who are generally seen to be global citizens who understand more about diversity despite not being taught these matters in the current Thai school curriculum - has toward people who are different from them.

Purpose of the study and research questions

The International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) General Assembly defined social work as an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social

integration, and the enhanced liberation of people. One of the key social work principles is to respect diversities by aiming to strengthen inclusive communities that respect the ethnic and cultural diversity of societies. This thesis aims to better understand Thai students' perceptions and opinions of ethnic groups within the Chiang Mai province. It aims to explore the attitudes of students toward ethnic groups and determine if it is based on school context, gender, socioeconomic status (SES), and having intergroup close friends. In Thailand's diverse society, it is crucial to prepare young people to interact with those perceived as "different." More specifically, this study focuses on examining the majority (Khon Muang) attitudes of Gen Z school students toward ethnic minority groups. Since it represents an unexplored issue in my country, it is a contribution to the efforts of better pedagogical understanding and improvement. The research questions are as follows:

- What are Thai students' attitudes toward ethnic minorities in Chiang Mai, Thailand?
- How do the attitudes toward ethnic minorities differ between students in multiculturally diverse school (MS) and students who study in a predominantly Thai school (PTS)?
- Does having close friends who are members of different ethnic groups lead to more positive attitudes towards the outgroup?
- Are there any significant differences in the attitudes towards minority groups in relation to gender and socio-economic?

Significance of the study

The data collected from this study can shed light on students' existing perceptions and biases. Addressing any negative attitudes can contribute to enhancing a more inclusive and welcoming environment for the ethnic minority community in Chiang Mai. This inclusivity is important for social cohesion and creating a sense of belonging among all members of society. The study will allow Thai schools to play a more pivotal role in promoting social change and cultural inclusivity among its diverse population. By addressing any biases or stereotypes present among Thai students, schools can implement an inclusive curriculum, create opportunities for cross-cultural exchange, and promote intergroup interactions. Results from this research will provide the Thai school system with a more appropriate methodology as well to celebrate the successful integration of ethnic minority groups within its various types of education formats.

Previous research

The contact theory

Theory shows that prejudice and conflicts can diminish when members of the group have contact with one another through personal contact (Allport, 1954). It suggests that communication with a person leads to changes in the perception of that person, fostering individualization, where the person is more and more seen as an individual with their own unique characteristics. This process of individualization leads to a decrease in stereotypes and discrimination and to a more positive evaluation of one another and each other's social groups (Brewer & Miller, 1984). In Allport's

theory, four conditions must be met for contact to be effective: intergroup cooperation, shared goals, equal status, and support from institutional and social authorities (Allport, 1954). The contact hypothesis has been a theoretical framework for studies on ethnic relations, suggesting a change in attitudes through interactions among different ethnic groups (Amir, 1969).

In education, the Intergroup contact theory is commonly applied, highlighting schools as a key aspect for diverse interaction. To further develop the contact hypothesis, Pettigrew (1998) specifically proposed that forming friendships across the ethnic groups increases the likelihood of reductions in prejudices, as friendship implies a shared level of status and interests, overcoming the potential barriers present in other types of relationships (Pettigrew, 1998; Berg, 2015). This idea reconnects to Allport's hypothesis that regular and meaningful interactions, rather than brief superficial contacts, are the type of contact required for positive change (Frølund, 2012).

One of the first explorations of the perception and prejudices of Thais toward immigrants reported that those who lived near the refugee camps and had contact with migrants and refugees, generally had more positive views of them than those living in urban areas located farther from the camps (Sunpuwan & Niyomsilpa, 2012). Moreover, previous research by Verkuyten and Martinovic (2006) in the Netherlands demonstrates that the majority of adolescents with more ethnic minority friends tend to have a more favorable view toward multiculturalism. However, forming friendships across ethnic groups are relatively uncommon, as adolescents prefer to make friends within their own ethnic group (Giodano, 2003). The study indicates that ethnic diversity in the classroom is correlated with increasing interethnic friendliness (Stearns et al., 2009). Even if the adolescents do not form close relationship, casual contact within the classroom, or positive experiences when working together on group assignments may be enough to improve adolescents' attitudes toward minority groups.

Minority Threat Theory

Minority threat hypothesis, as originally proposed by Blalock (1967), suggests that when a minority group grows, it can be seen as a threat to the majority group. This perception affects the majority group's attitudes and opinions and raise concerns whether the minority groups use up limited resources, creating financial or social strain (Berg, 2015; Blalock, 1967). Further, some researchers claim that there are two types of threats: realistic and symbolic threats. Realistic threats involve a change in resources and power, and symbolic threats involve differences in cultural values and lifestyles (Stephan et al., 2015).

This theory of majority and minority groups closely links to and further clarifies the concept of the "ingroup" versus the "outgroup." In the specific context of this research, Thai Gen Z students comprise the "ingroup" while ethnic minorities, hill tribes and Shan comprise the "out-group." Despite the presence of hill tribes and Shan in Thailand for centuries, hill tribes and Shan remain a small ethnic and cultural minority of the population. From this perspective, the idea of Northern Thai as the "host society" creates a deeper split between these groups.

In the 2012 study by the Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University found that Thai citizens perceived that the migrants posed a threat to their physical and economic well-being. It is vital to note that mass media plays a crucial role in distributing information on immigrants. The portrayal of Myanmar migrants in Thai media often shows them as a threat to

personal safety, social order, and public health, characterizing them as troublemakers and a burden to Thailand (Jirattikorn, 2008). Despite evidence showing that Myanmar immigrants significantly contribute to the local Thai economy in terms of purchasing local products and other materials, and through the establishment of development projects in Thai communities, this positive information is largely absent in the Thai media. (Sunpuwan & Niyomsilpa, 2012).

Generational Influence Hypothesis

Generation theory demonstrated that individuals born within the same timeframe are united by shared experiences and conditions that give rise to social cohorts called generations (Hernandez-de-Menendez et al., 2020). As a result, different generations exhibit varying priorities, values, and preferences due to the diverse external influences they encounter (Rickes, 2016). Gen Z are those born between the years 1998 and 2010, representing a generation that emerged during rapid technological advances. Their comfort with technology and access to online information has promoted independent learning and a global perspective. Gen Z has grown up immersed in a world that is evolving at a speed never known before (Maloni et al., 2019).

Despite being surrounded by the internet and social media, Gen Z individuals have also been exposed to the negative aspects of the world, leading to a high awareness of global issues and a belief in their ability to effect positive change (Rothman, 2016). This generation, characterized by their connectivity to a borderless world influenced by cultural diversity and globalization (McCrindle, 2021), approaches inter-ethnic interactions and social situations with a greater sense of agency and individualism.

Additional Influence on Intergroup attitudes: Individual Attribute

Two additional factors that relate to intergroup attitudes were included in the study: SES and gender.

Ethnicity is often confounded with other demographic variables, particularly SES. Differences in SES might translate to status differences in a school setting. Therefore, SES is clearly a variable that needs to be considered (Phinney et al., 1997)

Regarding gender, while there is insufficient evidence to confidently predict its impact on intergroup attitudes, gender was a consistent factor included in several analyses. A previous study from Kudrnáč (2017) in the Czech Republic showed that gender plays an important role in expressing prejudice where females express less negative attitudes toward the Roma, black African, gay people and those with mental disability. Women might be more tolerant.

Method

Participants

The study was based on a single survey involving adolescents generation Z (aged between 14 and 19 years old, mean age = 16.6, SD = 0.981). The sample consisted of 265 majority Thai students (Kon Muang) grade 9th to and 11th in Doisaket and Sankhampaeng district, Chiang Mai.

The majority (Khon Muang) from both schools were used as a final sample consisted of 118 students from multicultural school (MS) and 147 students from the predominantly Thai school (PTS). Both institutions are public schools which the pupils attending a specific school lived in the areas nearby. The selected schools do not provide multicultural lessons to their students.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of students from MS compared to PTS

	Students from Multicultural School (MS) (N= 118) N (%) or M±SD	Students from Predominantly Thai School (PTS) (N=147) N (%) or M±SD	T or X ²
Student's age (year)	16.07 (1.115)	17.01(0.591)	T-8.79***
Student's gender			4.35*
Male	41 (34.7)	34 (23.2)	
Female	77 (65.3)	113 (76.3)	
Maternal Education			12.3*
Lower than primary	30 (25.5)	22 (14.9)	
Primary school	28 (23.5)	25 (16.9)	
Secondary school	37 (31.3)	48 (32.6)	
Bachelor's degree	20 (16.9)	48 (32.6)	
Master's degree	3 (2.5)	3 (2.4)	
Doctoral degree	0 (0)	1 (0.6)	

Note: *P < 0 05; **P < 0 01; ***P < 0 001.

Data collection

The respondents completed the online survey at school at the second semester of the academic year 2024. Participants were informed about the goal of the study and the method of filling out the questionnaire. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. Students completed a survey about demographic information about students (gender, age, parental educational background). The breakdown of the demographic data by each group can be found in Table 1. The second part focused on the attitudes toward ethnic minority groups and the third part of the questionnaire consisted of three items of student's intergroup contact information. Participants completed the tasks in three sessions within 10 minutes

Measure

An online survey consisting of three sections was designed. The first part gathered demographic information about students (gender, age, parental educational background, and race). The mother's highest level of education (classified by college or university, high school, primary school or below) was used as an indicator of SES.

The second part focused on the attitudes toward ethnic minority groups. Items were formulated through a process of determination and personal reflection, with some inspired by the

European Social Survey 2014 regarding attitudes toward minority groups. Due to the limitations in resources, only the items exploring the treatment of minority groups broadly were selected. The items related to symbolic threat, realistic threat, social distance, and social inclusion were included. Students responded to a five-point scale, where 1 meant strongly disagree, and 5 I strongly agree. Higher scores showed a more positive attitude toward national minorities.

The final section of the questionnaire consisted of three items regarding student's intergroup contact information. The participants were asked to give information about their neighborhood, their ethnically diverse close friends, their casual contact, and to rate the experience with these interactions.

To test the reliability of the questionnaire we used the alpha coefficient method. A coefficient value close to 1 indicates high reliability. The criterion for acceptance is a value greater than 0.70, indicating sufficient reliability. In this study, the Cronbach-alfa coefficient was 0.713.

Results

Table 2. *Students's attitude toward minority groups*

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	α
Attitude toward minority groups	3.76	0.64	1	5	0.814

Majority students' attitudes toward minority groups

As shown in Table 2, the average score achieved by students on the scale is 3.76, with a standard deviation of 0.64. Since the possible range of scores goes from 1 as an extremely negative attitude to 5 as an extremely positive attitude, the obtained mean is larger than 3. In other words, this indicates that high school students reported a positive attitude toward minority groups.

To gain more comprehensive understanding of the students' perspectives on minority groups, an analysis was conducted on the individual questions comprising the scale. The results presented here are based on the mean values and standard deviations for each scale item, along with the frequency (%) of the responses falling into three categories: "Negative" (joining the first and the second assessment points), "Neutral" and, "Positive" (joining the fourth and fifth assessment points).

The data presented in Table3 indicates a trend among the participants regarding their view on supporting social inclusion concept. A majority, comprising 79.4% agreed that ethnic minority children deserve the equal right for education. Additionally, three-fourths of the participants expressed agreement that ethnic groups should have the same rights as Thai citizens. Moreover, two-thirds of the respondents agreed on the importance of ethnic groups preserving their cultural heritage. This finding suggests the existence of relatively positive attitudes toward minority groups.

Furthermore, more than half of the students (59.4%) showed openness towards interethnic relationships. However, it is notable that around one-third of the students expressed ambivalence on this matter. Similarly, a little less than half of participants (46.3%) indicated their acceptance of an ethnic minority individual as their boss with one-thirds of students (33.2%) remaining neutral.

Table 3. Response to statement on the scale of attitudes toward minority group (%)

Questions / Statements	Concept	Negative	Neutral	Positive	M	SD
Would you say that Thailand's cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by ethnic minority groups?	Symbolic Threat	11.6	31.9	56.5	3.71	1.057
Is Thailand made a worse or a better place to live with ethnic minority groups?	Symbolic Threat	10	45.7	44.3	3.51	0.962
Are Thailand's crime problems made worse or better with ethnic minority groups?	Realistic Threat	27	48.9	24,1	2.99	0.943
Would you mind if someone from ethnic minorities was appointed as your boss?	Social Distance (Boss)	20.8	33.2	46.3	3.43	1.201
Would you mind if someone from ethnic minorities married a close relationship of yours?	Social Distance (Marriage)	11.1	29.5	59.4	3.79	1.098
How bad or good is your experience with ethnic minorities.	Contact Experience	4.4	38.2	57.4	3.77	0.887
Ethnic minority children should have the same opportunities for education that other children in the country have.	Supporting social Inclusion (Education)	4.8	15.1	79.4	4.37	0.925
Ethnic minority group should have the same rights as everyone in the country have.	Supporting Social Inclusion (Right)	5.2	21.5	73.3	4.22	0.977
Ethnic minority group should have the opportunity to continue their own customs and lifestyle in Thailand.	Supporting Social Inclusion (Culture)	6.3	27.9	65.8	4.02	0.979

Additionally, the data indicates that while the majority held a positive assessment, there was a slightly greater proportion of students who took a neutral position on whether Thailand is a better place to live with ethnic minorities. Moreover, more than half agreed that Thailand's cultural life is generally enriched by ethnic minority groups, and they have positive experiences with the outgroups. However, a contrasting aspect appear regarding the impact of ethnic minority groups on Thailand's crime problems, where the proportion of negative responses (27%) outweighs the positive ones (21.1%). This divergence underscores the complexity of perceptions surrounding ethnic minority issues within Thai society, indicating the necessity for further investigation into underlying factors contributing to this discrepancy.

The relationship between the number of friendships and the attitudes of students

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was employed to assess the relationship between the number of friendships and the attitudes of students. The results suggest that five correlations were statistically significant, ($p < 0.05$). As shown in Table 4, there was a positive significant correlation between friendship and symbolic threat, realistic threat, contact experience, and supporting social inclusion (education and rights). Positive correlations were identified

between the number of friendships and the perceptions of both symbolic threat ($r = 0.123$, $p = 0.045$) and realistic threat ($r = 0.124$, $p = 0.043$), indicating that a greater number of friendships tend to lower the perceptions of threats related to ethnic minorities. Furthermore, a statistically significant positive correlation was identified between the number of friendships and contact experience ($r = 0.179$, $p = 0.003$), suggesting that individuals who report more positive intergroup contact experiences also tend to have a larger number of friendships. Additionally, positive correlations are observed between the number of friendships and supporting social inclusion in educational settings ($r = 0.122$, $p = 0.047$) and regarding rights ($r = 0.145$, $p = 0.018$). These findings suggest that individuals who have more friends are more likely to support greater social inclusion in school and the recognition of rights for ethnic minorities.

Table 4. Correlation matrix of the number of friends (N=265)

		Contact: Friendship	Symbolic Threat	Symbolic threat	Realistic Threat	Social Distance	Social Distance (2)	Contact Experience	Support Education	Support Right	Social Inclusion
Friendship	Pearson's r	—									
	p-value	—									
Symbolic Threat	Pearson's r	0.085	—								
	p-value	0.168	—								
Symbolic threat	Pearson's r	0.123 *	0.522 ***	—							
	p-value	0.045	<.001	—							
Realistic Threat	Pearson's r	0.124 *	0.308 ***	0.487 ***	—						
	p-value	0.043	<.001	<.001	—						
Social Distance	Pearson's r	0.043	0.289 ***	0.380 ***	0.235 ***	—					
	p-value	0.485	<.001	<.001	<.001	—					
Social Distance (2)	Pearson's r	0.023	0.201 **	0.254 ***	0.085	0.679 ***	—				
	p-value	0.713	0.001	<.001	0.165	<.001	—				
Contact	Pearson's r	0.179 *	0.306 ***	0.368 ***	0.173 **	0.206 ***	0.292 ***	—			
	p-value	0.003	<.001	<.001	0.005	<.001	<.001	—			
Support Education	Pearson's r	0.122 *	0.272 ***	0.363 ***	0.152 *	0.211 ***	0.253 ***	0.412 ***	—		
	p-value	0.047	<.001	<.001	0.013	<.001	<.001	<.001	—		
Support Right	Pearson's r	0.145 *	0.357 ***	0.426 ***	0.221 ***	0.363 ***	0.330 ***	0.476 ***	0.750 ***	—	
	p-value	0.018	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	—
Social Inclusion	Pearson's r	0.094	0.320 ***	0.344 ***	0.205 ***	0.276 ***	0.222 ***	0.245 ***	0.431 ***	0.483	* —
	p-value	0.125	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Differences in attitudes toward minority groups

Multicultural school (MS) VS Predominantly Thai school (PTS)

Table 5. Differences between students from the multicultural school (MS) and students from the predominantly Thai school (PTS)

	MS(N=118)	PTS (N=147)	Mann-Whitney	p
	M(SD)	M(SD)	U (df =263)	
Symbolic Threat (culture)	3.71(1.110)	3.70 (1.016)	8461	0.721
Symbolic Threat (society)	3.60(0.935)	3.44(0.980)	7828	0.146
Realistic Threat	3.14(0.936)	2.86(0.934)	7375	0.024
Social Distance (Boss)	3.51(1.252)	3.37(1.160)	8123	0.359
Social Distance (Marriage)	3.67(1.234)	3.88(1.160)	8019	0.271
Contact Experience	3.85(0.921)	3.70(0.855)	7761	0.119
Social Inclusion (Education)	4.51(0.803)	4.27(1.002)	7702	0.071
Social Inclusion (Right)	4.31(0.940)	4.15(1.002)	7902	0.170
Social Inclusion (Culture)	4.08(0.948)	3.97 (1.003)	8142	0.364

Note. $H_a \mu_1 \neq \mu_2, P < 0.05$

Schools: In line with our hypothesis, students in the PTS group scored significantly lower than those in the MS group ($p = 0.024$) on the concept of realistic threat. On the other hand, we did not find any significant differences in the symbolic threat regarding culture and society, social distance, contact experiences, and social inclusion (education, rights, and culture). (See Table 5.)

Differences in attitudes toward minority groups between gender

Table 6. Gender differences

	Male (N=75)	Female (N=190)	Mann-Whitney U	p
	M(SD)	M(SD)	(df=263)	
Symbolic Threat (culture)	3.57(1.029)	3.76(1.066)	6401	0.179
Symbolic Threat (society)	3.47(0.890)	3.53(0.990)	6763	0.493
Realistic Threat	3.16(0.823)	2.92(0.981)	6159	0.064
Social Distance (Boss)	3.47(1.107)	3.42(1.239)	7100	0.963
Social Distance (Marriage)	3.56(1.142)	3.88(1.070)	5979	0.033
Contact Experience	3.69(0.885)	3.79(0.888)	6606	0.328
Social Inclusion (Education)	4.37(0.866)	4.37(0.950)	6980	0.766
Social Inclusion (Right)	4.29(0.897)	4.19(1.007)	6853	0.594
Social Inclusion (Culture)	4.08(0.955)	3.99(0.989)	6872	0.574

Note. $H_a \mu_1 \neq \mu_2, P < 0.05$

Gender: Contrary to what was expected, there were no significant differences between male students compared to female students on symbolic threat regarding culture and society, realistic threat, social distance regarding boss, contact experience, and social inclusion (education, right, and culture). However, the social distance regarding marriage was significantly higher in male groups compared to the female students.

Table 7. Regression coefficients predicting “Realistic threat”

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Overall Model Test			
				F	df1	df2	p
1	0.177	0.0312	0.0201	2.80	3	261	0.040

Model Coefficients - Realistic Threat				
Predictor	SE	t	p	
Intercept ^a	0.1713	18.992	< .001	
School:				
2 – 1	0.1184	-2.200	0.029	
Gender:				
2 – 1	0.1287	-1.587	0.114	
Mother's background	0.0516	0.181	0.856	

In the regression model (see Table 7), we used the individual predictors school, gender, and mother’s background. The overall model for realistic threat was significant ($F(3,261) = 2.80, P = 0.040$) and presented an adequate adjustment value $R^2 = .0201$. Result indicated that perceptions of realistic threat and the type of school attended were associated with significant changes in attitudes. Furthermore, while the coefficient for gender (female-male) suggested a negative impact on attitudes, it was not statistically significant. Interestingly, the mother's background did not significantly predict attitudes toward ethnic minorities. However, this model's overall predictive power was relatively low. Further exploration is needed to identify additional factors contributing to attitudes toward ethnic minorities among adolescents.

Discussions and recommendations

Previous studies that investigated the attitudes of Thai students toward ethnic minority groups has been scarcely conducted. In this study, the relationship between intergroup contact opportunities among the students and attitudes toward minority groups were examined.

First, it was found that high school students showed a positive attitude toward minority groups and their members. The participants expressed a positive response to most items, although there was a considerable proportion of participants who stood neutral. As expected, this could be due to generation influence, stating that Gen Z have a high awareness of global issues and a belief in their ability to effect positive change (Rothman, 2016). This generation, characterized by their

connectivity to a borderless world, influenced by cultural diversity and globalization (McCrinkle, 2021), approaches inter-ethnic interactions and social situations with a greater sense of agency and individualism. In the context of a diversity culture in Thailand, Thai Generation Z individuals may exhibit a more open-minded understanding of minority groups compared to previous generations. However, this could be due to the one of the limitations of this study, that the complexity of societal norms or social desirability bias in self-reporting might not reflect the real attitude, as respondents might prefer to give a socially desirable answer.

As the setting for the present study is a school, we would recommend that emphasis should be placed on an educational activity aimed at a clearer and more positive orientation towards cultural diversity of the society. Schools are known as a place where young people from many social and cultural backgrounds come together. Previous studies showed that at the classroom level a democratic classroom climate, supportive peer relations in class, and multicultural education relates to youth's attitudes toward ethnic groups (Eckstein et al., 2021). Therefore, schools should integrate and develop a multicultural curriculum that reflects the diversity in Chiang Mai involving, the designing of lesson, activities that promote understanding, respect, and appreciation for cultural diversity. Moreover, it is crucial that schools create a classroom environment that promote open dialogue and respect toward each other's opinions, where teachers encourage discussions about cultural diversity.

Second, the major finding of this study is that the expression of attitudes toward ethnic minority groups in terms of realistic threat are significantly more positive in the school where there are more students with ethnic backgrounds (MS). Realistic threat is the only aspect where the students show low mean score on positive attitude, with a significant difference between the two schools. Possibly, certain students still perceive ethnic minorities as a threat to their safety and property. Previous research reported that mass media played a crucial role in portraying the ethnic minorities negatively – depicting them as a threat to personal safety and as a troublemaker (Jirattikorn, 2008). The other important finding indicates a positive correlation between the number of friendships with ethnic minority individuals and more positive attitudes toward ethnic minorities among Thai students. It can be concluded that students with a greater number of friendships tend to perceive lower threats related to ethnic minorities, and are more supportive of social inclusion in educational settings and the recognition of rights for ethnic minorities.

These findings are in accordance with the literature claiming that contact reduces negative prejudice. In the schools where students from diverse backgrounds interact more, positive attitudes toward ethnic groups were more common. Past research supports this idea, indicating that the interaction between the different groups is more likely in a diverse environment (Stephan & Stephan, 2000).

As predominantly Thai school students perceive ethnic minorities as a threat more than students in the multicultural school, several recommendations can be made based on the findings from this research. First, promoting multicultural education should be prioritized in school curricular and extracurricular activities. Integrating multicultural aspects into the lessons provides students with more opportunity to learn about the advantages of a multicultural society (Aboud & Levy, 2013). This can help create a more inclusive and accepting school environment. Moreover, the school should organize activities that open the door for positive intergroup contact experiences among students, such as cultural exchange events, collaborative projects, or group work.

Motivating collaboration on school projects and promoting opportunities for cross-cultural interaction can help reduce stereotypes and improve empathy and understanding (Tropp & Prenovost, 2008). The school should create safe space where students from different backgrounds can participate in sharing their experiences and building relationships. Lastly, the Thai authorities, media and scholars should therefore produce more positive information on the economic contribution of migrants and ethnic groups. Thailand should also strive to prevent a xenophobic environment in the country. A multiculturalism policy should be promoted by the Thai government, aimed at creating a more inclusive society where people of different ethnic origins can live and work together.

Lastly, gender and socioeconomic status do not significantly predict attitudes toward ethnic minorities among Thai students in the study. There are no significant differences between male and female students in the attitudes toward most aspects of the ethnic minority groups, except for the social distance regarding marriage, with more openness among the male students. Maternal education level does not significantly predict attitudes either. This finding does not align with the previous research from Kudrnáč (2017) in the Czech Republic indicating that females express fewer negative attitudes toward ethnic minorities. This could be due to the small sample size, where the majority of the sample were female students in both groups, constituting 71.7% of the total sample. Moreover, another possible explanation lies in the different cultural background. Thailand is a country where indirect communication with the predominance of nonverbal cues is present. This could lead to hiding their true attitude, especially on sensitive topics such as ethnicity and prejudice, and this cultural influence is present in both genders, male and female. However, it is unclear why there is not any statistically significant differences concerning gender and maternal education. Further explorations are necessary to identify additional factors contributing to attitudes toward ethnic minorities.

Limitations and future research

As Chiang Mai is a diverse city, understanding and promoting positive attitudes toward ethnic groups among the young generation are crucial. Some limitations of this research, however, must be mentioned. The present study is not all-encompassing, and future research needs to examine adolescents' attitudes involving a larger sample. A larger sample size would allow the researchers to differentiate more between the subgroups in the sample in terms of school, gender, and SES.

Several characteristics of the data set need to be pointed out. The study was conducted in Chiang Mai, which is a rather heterogeneous region culturally, with one-sixth of the population belonging to diverse ethnic groups. Studies propose that the presence of individual from other-race in the neighborhood could help counter negative stereotypes and serve as a platform for cross-race friendships outside of school (DuBois & Hirsch, 1990). It can cause the positive result observed in the study. Therefore, research from other regions is needed to test the generalizability of our findings. Another limitation is small sample size, with special regard to gender and SES. The gender imbalance could have influenced the responses. Maternal education level was used as an indicator of socioeconomic status, which may not fully capture the socioeconomic diversity within the sample. To better understand if gender and SES affect the attitudes toward ethnic groups, future studies could rely on a larger and more representative sample, eliminating gender imbalance. Other

indicators of SES could be included, such as household income or parental education. Further, in this study only the impact of school, gender, and parents education background was explored. The influence of other factors such as family income, media representation, religion, or the personality of the participants should be explored.

Several limitations concern the measure. The present study measures attitudes toward ethnic groups using online an survey adapted from the European Survey 2014. Social desirability is a major concern here as the students may not wish to appear as prejudiced individuals. Implicit attitudes operate at a subconscious level and may not be captured through an explicit measure level. By using implicit attitude investigation, researchers could discover more realistic perceptions. Further research building on the findings and limitations identified in this area is necessary. Second, rating agreement may be subject to response style bias. Respondents might tend to agree with all items; some respondents may have a 'mild' response style, with a tendency to opt for the middle option. By employing diverse response scales can help mitigate the impact of response style bias. Moreover, interviews or focus groups as a complementary qualitative study could be used for researchers to gain a deeper understanding into the key reasons behind students' attitudes toward ethnic minority groups.

Finally, this present research focusses solely on students' attitudes. Teachers' attitudes toward ethnic minorities is a key to inclusive education. Teachers' attitudes can impact their interaction with the students, the grades, their expectations, and the support they provide. Moreover, in the classes where the benefits of multiculturalism are taught could be explored to assess the effectiveness of the tools and interventions aimed at promoting positive attitudes toward the ethnic minority groups among the students. A longitudinal evaluation of multicultural education on students' attitudes toward ethnic minorities could be implemented. This could involve the longitudinal studies tracking students' attitudes across an expanded period to investigate the change of perceptions.

By addressing these research gaps, researchers can contribute to a deeper understanding of attitudes toward ethnic minority groups and inform the development of evidence-based interventions and policies aimed at promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in educational settings and society at large.

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