

Multicultural Leadership Models for Facilitating Participatory Administration in Local Government: Evidence from Maha Sarakham Province, Thailand *

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Abstract

Local government administration in Mueang District, Maha Sarakham Province, faces increasing challenges arising from growing cultural diversity. Although previous studies suggest that multicultural leadership can enhance decision-making quality and reduce conflict, its application within the northeastern Thai local government context remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by developing and testing a multicultural leadership model designed to promote participatory administration among local administrators. The objectives of this research were to: (1) analyze the components of multicultural leadership among local administrators; (2) develop a leadership model that facilitates participatory administration; and (3) evaluate the suitability and effectiveness of the proposed model. A mixed-methods research design was employed. The study population consisted of 45 local governance stakeholders, including administrators, community leaders, and public representatives, selected through purposive sampling. Quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale, while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews. Research instruments were validated for content validity and reliability by experts. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings identified four key components of multicultural leadership: multicultural vision, cross-cultural communication, acceptance of diversity, and conflict resolution. Local administrators demonstrated high levels across all components. The developed leadership model was rated as highly effective in facilitating participatory administration, particularly in terms of trust-building, organizational commitment, shared goal setting, and administrative autonomy. The model also received high evaluations for feasibility and practical utility within the local context. The study concludes that multicultural leadership plays a critical role in promoting effective participatory administration in culturally diverse local governments such as Mueang

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District, Maha Sarakham Province. The proposed model offers a practical and empirically grounded framework with strong potential to enhance transparency, public trust, and citizen participation. The findings contribute to local administrator development and provide policy-relevant insights applicable to similar multicultural governance contexts.

Keywords: Multicultural Leadership; Participatory Administration; Local Administrators; Local Government Organizations; Maha Sarakham

Introduction

Local government administration in Thailand is increasingly shaped by cultural, economic, and social diversity, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas with high population mobility. Mueang District, Maha Sarakham Province, serves as a major administrative, economic, and educational center in the northeastern region of the country (Chantarasombat, 2021). The district is characterized by a culturally diverse population, including Thai Isan, Lao, Khmer, migrant hill tribes, and labor migrants from other provinces and neighboring countries (Dongling & Worapongpat, 2023). This diversity presents both opportunities and challenges for local government organizations, including Provincial Administrative Organizations, municipalities, and sub-district administrative organizations.

Local administrators in such contexts must manage differences in language, cultural values, social norms, and public expectations while delivering public services and promoting inclusive development. (Worapongpat, 2025). Previous studies have demonstrated that multicultural leadership can enhance collaborative decision-making, strengthen social cohesion, and reduce community conflict (Gqamane & Taylor, 2013; Zhou et al., 2024). However, empirical research focusing specifically on multicultural leadership among local administrators in Thailand's northeastern region particularly in Maha Sarakham Province remains limited. (Worapongpat, 2025m). This gap constrains understanding of the leadership characteristics and strategies required to effectively leverage cultural diversity in support of sustainable participatory administration.

Mueang District's administrative structure includes a Provincial Administrative Organization, municipal authorities, and multiple sub-district administrative organizations (Jianfeng & Worapongpat, 2024). These institutions are responsible for delivering public services, urban and rural development planning, local economic promotion, and cultural preservation (Yasuttamathada & Worapongpat, 2025). Administrators must respond to diverse public needs related to infrastructure, education, public health, and environmental management (Khaenamkhaew et al., 2023). Based on the researcher's professional experience as a local development consultant and involvement in community development initiatives, the ability of leaders to foster cooperation among culturally diverse groups is critical to successful governance (Kitanant et al., 2025).

Supporting evidence from studies conducted in nearby regions indicates that local leaders who lack cross-cultural communication skills often face difficulties in building consensus and encouraging citizen participation (Lim et al., 2023; Nua-amnat et al., 2021). These findings highlight the importance of developing leadership models that integrate multicultural competencies with participatory administrative practices.

Accordingly, this study aims to develop a multicultural leadership model that facilitates participatory administration among local administrators in Mueang District, Maha Sarakham Province. A mixed-methods approach is employed, integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative insights from in-depth interviews and focus groups. This approach enables a comprehensive analysis of leadership characteristics, strategies, and enabling factors that support participatory administration in a multicultural local governance context. The article presents the local administrative context and cultural diversity of Mueang District, reviews relevant theories of multicultural leadership and participatory administration, outlines the research methodology, reports empirical findings, and discusses policy and practical implications. The study seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge on multicultural local governance and provide practical guidance for policymakers and local administrators in developing inclusive and sustainable administrative strategies.

Objectives

1.To analyze the components of multicultural leadership among local administrators in local government organizations within Mueang District, Maha Sarakham Province.

2.To develop a multicultural leadership model that facilitates participatory administration among local administrators in Mueang District, Maha Sarakham Province.

3.To test the suitability and effectiveness of the developed multicultural leadership model by evaluating its feasibility, applicability, and utility for participatory administration.

Literature Review

1. Multicultural Leadership

Multicultural leadership has become an increasingly important concept in contemporary organizational management, particularly in contexts characterized by workforce diversity and culturally heterogeneous stakeholder groups. (Worapongpat, 2025n).Scholars have defined multicultural leadership as the ability to effectively lead, influence, and coordinate individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds by recognizing, respecting, and leveraging cultural differences to achieve organizational objectives (Namwong & Chansirisira, 2020; Worapongpat & Kangpheng, 2025; Xunan & Worapongpat, 2023). Rather than minimizing differences, multicultural leadership emphasizes cultural awareness, adaptability, and inclusivity as core leadership capacities.

Existing literature identifies several key components of multicultural leadership, including multicultural vision, cross-cultural communication, acceptance of diversity, and conflict management. Empirical evidence suggests that leaders who demonstrate strong multicultural competencies are more successful in building consensus, fostering mutual understanding, and reducing ethnic or cultural tensions within diverse communities (Phimkoh et al., 2015; Worapongpat & Kanokon, 2025). These competencies enable leaders to navigate complex social dynamics and promote cooperation among culturally distinct groups.

However, despite its growing prominence, much of the existing research on multicultural leadership has focused on corporate, national, or international

organizational settings. Studies examining its application in local government contexts particularly within Thailand's northeastern region, which is characterized by a unique cultural mosaic remain limited (Pintong & Worapongpat, 2024). This gap highlights the need for context-specific research that examines how multicultural leadership operates within decentralized governance structures and community-based administrative environments.

2. Participatory Administration

Participatory administration refers to a governance approach that actively involves citizens, community leaders, and civil society organizations in both decision-making and implementation processes (Worapongpat & Arunyakanon, 2025). Rooted in democratic and participatory governance theory, this approach aims to enhance transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and public trust in government institutions (Worapongpat & Song, 2025).

Key principles of participatory administration include collaborative engagement, shared responsibility, open communication, and inclusiveness. Research on participatory local governance in Thailand, particularly in the central region, emphasizes the importance of strong relationships between administrators and citizens in shaping effective participation outcomes (Worapongpat, 2025f; Sirisawat & Chaiya, 2025). When administrative leaders facilitate dialogue and create accessible participation mechanisms, public involvement tends to be more meaningful and sustained.

Despite these recognized benefits, participatory administration faces persistent challenges, especially in multicultural contexts. (Worapongpat, 2025o). Differences in cultural values, communication styles, power relations, and social expectations often hinder consensus-building and equitable participation (Worapongpat, 2025e). These challenges suggest that participatory mechanisms alone are insufficient without leadership capacities capable of managing cultural complexity.

3. The Nexus of Multicultural Leadership and Participatory Administration

Although multicultural leadership and participatory administration are well-established concepts in governance and leadership literature, their integration within local government contexts characterized by cultural diversity remains underexplored. (Worapongpat, 2025p). Existing studies often treat these constructs as separate analytical domains. (Worapongpat, 2025q). For instance, research examining communication barriers and public participation in Thai local governance acknowledges cultural complexity but does not explicitly situate these challenges within a formal multicultural leadership framework (Sinjindawong et al., 2023; Saman Siri Charoensuk, 2022).

This study builds on emerging scholarship that conceptualizes multicultural leadership as a foundational prerequisite for effective participatory administration in culturally diverse local contexts (Worapongpat, 2025d). It argues that participatory administration must move beyond procedural or symbolic participation toward genuinely empowering diverse community groups. (Worapongpat, 2025r). Achieving this requires local administrators to develop specific multicultural leadership competencies, including trust-building, cross-cultural communication, inclusivity, and conflict resolution (Worapongpat, 2025c).

These competencies function as critical mechanisms through which equitable and meaningful citizen participation can be facilitated. (Worapongpat, 2025s). By

integrating multicultural leadership with participatory administration, local governments are better positioned to manage diversity constructively, (Worapongpat, et.al., 2025). enhance social cohesion, and strengthen democratic governance outcomes (Worapongpat, 2025b). This conceptual linkage provides the theoretical foundation for the development of the multicultural leadership model examined in this study.

Methodology

1. Population and Sample

The population for this study comprised local administrators and key stakeholders involved in local government organizations (LGOs) in Mueang District, Maha Sarakham Province. The population included mayors, municipal permanent secretaries, deputy permanent secretaries, division directors or section heads, public representatives, community leaders, religious leaders, and civil society representatives.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure the inclusion of participants who were directly engaged in local administration and who possessed relevant experience and knowledge related to multicultural leadership and participatory administration. The final sample consisted of 45 participants, including 15 local administrators, 10 public representatives, 10 community leaders, 5 religious leaders, and 5 civil society representatives. This sampling strategy was designed to capture diverse perspectives across multiple stakeholder groups involved in participatory local governance.

2. Research Instruments

Two primary research instruments were utilized in this study: a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Part 1 collected general demographic information about the respondents, including gender, age, educational background, work experience, and organizational affiliation. Part 2 consisted of items measuring the components of multicultural leadership and participatory administration within the local governance context. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 5 = Strongly Agree to 1 = Strongly Disagree.

The semi-structured interview guide was designed to collect in-depth qualitative data related to multicultural leadership characteristics, challenges, obstacles, and strategies for promoting participatory administration among local administrators. The open-ended nature of the interviews allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives.

Instrument Quality Assurance

Content Validity:

The questionnaire and interview guide were reviewed by three experts in public administration and social sciences. Content validity was assessed using the Item–Objective Congruence (IOC) Index, with all items achieving values of 0.50 or higher, indicating acceptable content validity.

Reliability:

A pilot test was conducted with 30 individuals who shared similar characteristics with the target population but were not included in the main study. Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient, with all scales meeting or exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70.

3. Data Collection

The data collection process was conducted in several systematic steps. First, a comprehensive review of relevant literature, theories, and prior research was undertaken to inform variable definition and instrument development. Second, the research instruments were constructed and validated. Third, formal permission to collect data was obtained from the relevant local government organizations.

Subsequently, questionnaires were distributed to the selected participants, and semi-structured interviews were scheduled and conducted with representatives from each stakeholder group. All completed questionnaires and interview data were carefully checked for completeness and accuracy prior to analysis.

4. Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was employed to identify the underlying components of multicultural leadership. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was then used to test the consistency and goodness-of-fit of the proposed leadership model.

Qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns related to multicultural leadership practices and participatory administration.

Results

Table 1: Levels of Opinion on the Components of Multicultural Leadership

Components	Mean	S.D.	Level of Opinion
Multicultural Vision and Awareness	4.68	0.42	Highest
Cross-Cultural Communication	4.55	0.48	High
Acceptance of Diversity and Promotion of Equality	4.62	0.39	Highest
Ability to Resolve and Mediate Conflict	4.57	0.45	High
Overall Mean	4.61	0.44	Highest

Local Context Note: Local administrators in Maha Sarakham must work with multiple ethnic communities, including Thai-Lao, Thai-Chinese, and Thai-Cambodian groups. This requires a high level of multicultural vision and cross-cultural

communication skills. Therefore, the ability to build equality and resolve conflict are crucial factors for success.

Table 2: Levels of Opinion on Leadership Components that Facilitate Participatory Administration

Components	Mean	S.D.	Level of Opinion
Trust	4.64	0.38	Highest
Organizational Commitment	4.66	0.47	Highest
Goals and Objectives	4.61	0.48	Highest
Autonomy	4.59	0.55	High
Overall Mean	4.63	0.47	Highest

Local Context Note: Local administrators place great importance on building trust between officials and the public. Setting clear goals and delegating decision-making authority were found to significantly increase community participation.

Table 3: Levels of Perceived Utility of the Multicultural Leadership Model for Participatory Administration

Components	Mean	S.D.	Level of Utility
Trust	4.61	0.57	High
Multicultural Competence	4.58	0.40	High
Visionary Leadership	4.41	0.63	High
Diversity Management	4.61	0.48	High
Overall Mean	4.55	0.52	High

This model helps local administrators reduce conflicts between different groups and effectively build cooperation between agencies and communities.

Table 4: Evaluation of the Feasibility and Utility of the Leadership Model

Components	Feasibility Mean	S.D.	Feasibility Level	Utility Mean	S.D.	Utility Level
Trust	4.72	0.09	Highest	4.38	0.99	High
Multicultural Competence	4.61	0.36	Highest	4.44	0.24	High
Visionary Leadership	4.61	0.30	High	3.83	0.42	High
Diversity Management	4.77	0.23	Highest	4.53	0.66	High
Overall Mean	4.68	0.30	Highest	4.45	0.58	High

Local administrators evaluated the model as having high feasibility for implementation and being highly useful for building cooperation and reducing community conflict. The model is deemed suitable for use in municipal council meetings, community activities, and communicating with various ethnic groups.

Discussion

Objective 1: Components of Multicultural Leadership. The findings related to the first objective indicate that multicultural leadership among local administrators in Mueang District, Maha Sarakham Province, comprises four interrelated components: multicultural vision and awareness, cross-cultural communication, acceptance of diversity and promotion of equality, and the ability to resolve and mediate cultural conflicts. Local administrators demonstrated a clear understanding of the ethnic diversity, languages, values, and ways of life present within their communities. This awareness enables them to respond appropriately to culturally diverse needs and expectations. In terms of cross-cultural communication, administrators were found to employ local dialects and culturally appropriate communication channels tailored to different community groups. Such practices enhance mutual understanding and reduce barriers to participation. Moreover, administrators actively promoted inclusivity by organizing joint activities such as community traditions, local markets, and municipal council meetings that provide opportunities for participation across diverse cultural groups. These activities not only strengthen social cohesion but also create shared spaces for dialogue and collaboration. The ability of administrators to coordinate diverse viewpoints and mediate conflicts among multiple stakeholder groups further underscores their multicultural leadership capacity. By managing disagreements constructively, administrators were able to reduce tensions and foster cooperation within culturally heterogeneous communities. (Niyomthanawat, Worapongpat, 2025). And (Worapongpat, 2025g). These findings suggest that local administrators in Maha Sarakham, operating within a highly diverse cultural environment, have developed advanced competencies in communication, trust-building, and conflict management. This aligns with the principles of diversity management and the importance of multicultural leadership in organizational administration, as emphasized by Butsara Phon Phuangpanya (2024).

Objective 2: Development of a Multicultural Leadership Model for Participatory Administration. In addressing the second objective, this study developed a multicultural leadership model designed to facilitate participatory administration in local government organizations. The model integrates four key components of participatory administration: trust-building, organizational commitment, goal setting, and autonomy. Together, these elements provide a structured approach through which administrators can enhance citizen participation and collaborative governance. Trust-building is emphasized by creating opportunities for public involvement in administrative activities and decision-making processes. By engaging citizens directly, administrators strengthen mutual confidence and legitimacy. Organizational commitment is fostered through strategies that motivate staff, encourage cooperation, and align individual responsibilities with collective goals. The model also highlights the importance of collaborative goal setting, ensuring that administrative objectives reflect community needs and priorities. Autonomy represents a critical dimension of the model, as it encourages administrators to delegate decision-making authority to section heads

and staff. This delegation enables more responsive and context-sensitive governance, particularly in culturally diverse settings. (Worapongpat, 2025h). and Worapongpat, 2025i). The incorporation of participatory management principles within the model supports increased cooperation, shared responsibility, and public engagement. These findings are consistent with Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation and Putnam's (2000) work on social capital, both of which emphasize meaningful engagement and trust as foundations for effective participatory governance.

Objective 3: Suitability and Effectiveness of the Model. The evaluation of the developed multicultural leadership model demonstrates a high level of suitability and effectiveness within the local governance context of Mueang District, Maha Sarakham Province. The model was rated at the highest level of feasibility (Mean = 4.59), indicating that local administrators perceive it as practical and readily applicable in their daily administrative operations. This suggests that the model aligns well with existing organizational structures and administrative capacities. In terms of utility, the model received a high rating (Mean = 4.46), reflecting its effectiveness in promoting participatory administration. Respondents indicated that the model supports increased public participation, reduces conflict, and strengthens cooperation between local government agencies and community groups. The success of the model can be attributed to its context-sensitive design, (Worapongpat, 2025j). and (Worapongpat, 2025k). which reflects local cultural dynamics, administrative realities, and community engagement practices. Additionally, the model's flexibility and its integration of digital media and community-based activities as participation mechanisms are consistent with contemporary perspectives on multicultural leadership and the influence of cultural context on management practices (Chompotjananan & Vichit-Vadakan, 2022). These features enhance the model's adaptability and sustainability in diverse local governance environments.

Knowledge Contribution

This study contributes new empirical and conceptual knowledge by demonstrating that the components of multicultural leadership among local administrators can be systematically integrated into an effective participatory administration model tailored to the specific context of Mueang District, Maha Sarakham Province. Unlike previous studies that examine multicultural leadership or participatory administration separately, this research empirically links the two constructs within a localized governance setting.

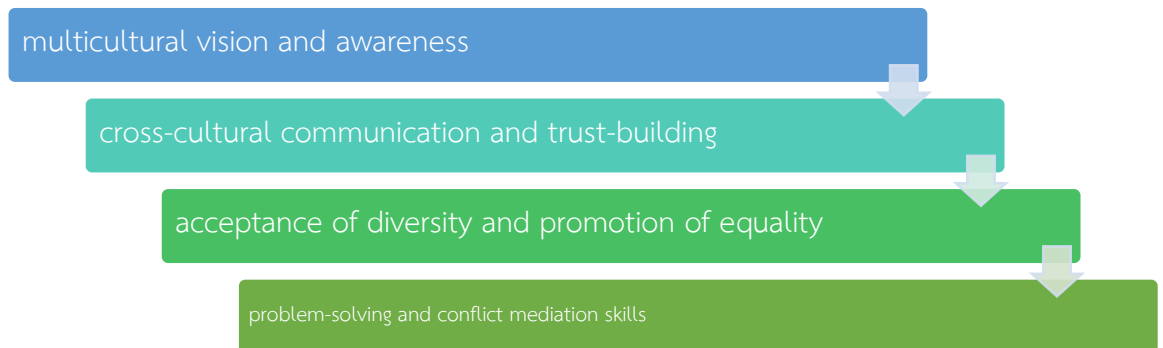


Figure 1 Knowledge Contribution

The new knowledge generated by this study is structured around four interrelated dimensions of multicultural leadership that directly influence participatory administration. First, multicultural vision and awareness enables administrators to recognize and strategically respond to ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity within local communities. Second, cross-cultural communication and trust-building facilitate mutual understanding and strengthen relationships between local government organizations and culturally diverse stakeholders. Third, acceptance of diversity and promotion of equality ensures that administrative processes are inclusive and provide equitable opportunities for participation across all cultural groups. Fourth, problem-solving and conflict mediation skills allow administrators to manage disagreements constructively and coordinate effectively among diverse community groups and government agencies.

Together, these dimensions form a coherent leadership mechanism that enhances trust, cooperation, and meaningful public participation in local governance. The conceptual model developed in this study illustrates how multicultural leadership functions as a foundational driver of participatory administration, ultimately contributing to social cohesion and effective local governance in culturally diverse settings.

By grounding the model in empirical evidence from Maha Sarakham Province, this study extends existing leadership and governance theories to a previously under-researched local government context in Thailand's northeastern region. The findings provide both theoretical enrichment and practical guidance for policymakers and local administrators seeking to strengthen participatory administration through culturally responsive leadership.

Conclusions

This study confirms that local administrators in Mueang District, Maha Sarakham Province, demonstrate a high level of multicultural leadership competence, particularly in terms of strategic vision, cross-cultural communication, and trust-building. The findings show that administrators are capable of managing cultural diversity effectively and fostering cooperation among diverse stakeholder groups. The multicultural leadership model developed in this research is both practical and effective in facilitating

participatory administration, as evidenced by its high levels of feasibility and utility.

The implementation of the model contributes to strengthened cooperation between local government organizations and communities, increased transparency in administrative processes, and enhanced public trust. Importantly, the findings indicate positive social outcomes, including reduced ethnic and cultural conflict, greater community engagement, and more meaningful public participation in local governance. These outcomes highlight the critical role of multicultural leadership as a key enabler of participatory administration, particularly in ethnically and culturally diverse local contexts such as Maha Sarakham Province.

Recommendations

1. Recommendations for Applying the Research Findings

1.1 Recommendations Based on Objective 1. The analysis of multicultural leadership components revealed that local administrators possess strong capabilities in multicultural vision, cross-cultural communication, acceptance of diversity, and conflict resolution. Recommendation: Local authorities should implement continuous training and professional development programs focused on multicultural leadership competencies for administrators and staff. In addition, platforms for ongoing learning and knowledge exchange between local government organizations and communities should be established to strengthen mutual understanding and sustain participatory administration practices.

1.2 Recommendations Based on Objective 2. The developed multicultural leadership model was found to enhance cooperation, public participation, and transparency in decision-making processes. Recommendation: Municipalities and sub-district administrative organizations should pilot the multicultural leadership model and adapt it to their specific local contexts. The model may also be used as a guideline for developing local strategic plans, participatory governance mechanisms, and integrated administrative systems.

1.3 Recommendations Based on Objective 3. The model was evaluated as highly feasible and beneficial for participatory administration. Recommendation: Local authorities should apply the model as an assessment tool for evaluating leadership potential among administrators and for monitoring the effectiveness of participatory administration initiatives. Furthermore, the model can be integrated into the planning and implementation of community development projects and multicultural activities.

2. Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study indicate that multicultural leadership is a crucial factor in strengthening participatory administration. Future research may extend this work in several directions. First, comparative studies between areas with high and low levels of cultural diversity could provide deeper insight into the impact of multicultural leadership on participatory administration outcomes. Second, longitudinal research examining the long-term effects of implementing the multicultural leadership model in community development projects and public participation initiatives would be valuable. Finally, future studies may consider additional influencing factors, such as the role of

digital technology and social media platforms, in enhancing public participation and inclusive governance.

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