



Research Article

**THE IMPACT OF MANAGEMENT FACTORS ON THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF SCHOOL CULTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF IMPLEMENTING  
THE 2018 GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM:  
A CASE STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOLS IN HO CHI MINH CITY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*In this research project, the authors investigate how management factors influence the development of school culture in the context of implementing the General Education Curriculum (GEC 2018) in high schools in Ho Chi Minh City. They used the PDCA cycle as a basis for their research, with a focus on four elements: Planning, Implementing, Evaluating, and Adjusting (Controlling). During this project, the researchers collected data from 771 administrators, teachers, and support staff within 109 schools via survey and statistical analysis. The results clearly indicate that both planning and evaluating have a positive impact on developing the culture of a school; whereas both implementing and adjusting are limited. Through regression analysis, it is determined that managing factors account for 27.3% of the variance in the development of school culture. As a result, the authors recommend focusing on improving the effectiveness of each stage within the management cycle to ultimately realise positive educational environments that are consistent with the overall objective of quality education.*

**Keywords:** educational management; PDCA cycle; principal; school culture; 2018 General Education Curriculum (2018 GEC)

**1. Introduction**

GEC 2018 is part of more extensive reforms to Vietnam's education system and represents a shift from traditional approaches to education focused primarily on content knowledge transmission to an approach focused on developing competencies and characters of students. The GEC will not be successfully implemented if the reforms only focus on curriculum and instruction. Reforms must also occur within the school cultural environment since it defines the development of values, behaviours, and learning attitudes for students.

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The effective management of school culture and the principal's role are critical parts of the educational reform agenda in Vietnam.

As defined in the Education Development Strategy for the period of 2021-2030 with a vision for the year 2045, one of the core objectives is to create “a safe, healthy and caring, democratic, disciplined and friendly place to learn in order to support holistic development of individuals and provide education that meets both the modern and humanistic needs of our society” (Prime Minister, 2024). School culture is not an external characteristic of the educational environment; rather, it is the foundation upon which to build sustainable values of respect, cooperation, and responsibility as individuals and as part of a group. It is argued that under GEC 2018, principals' distributed leadership practices — specifically participatory decision-making and professional learning systems — are the primary drivers of positive secondary school culture in Ho Chi Minh City.

Management influences measurable outcomes — such as teacher collaboration rates, student participation in governance, and perceptions of school climate — which will be measured to evaluate how leadership behaviors shape school culture. However, current research on the relationship between management practices and school cultural outcomes remains limited, especially within the specific context of the 2018 GEC. This initiative calls for innovative school organization methods, the democratization of the learning environment, and the active participation of students, teachers, and the school community.

Therefore, studying the impact of management factors on the development of secondary school campus culture in Ho Chi Minh City (a city that plays a pioneering role in educational innovation) is necessary and significant from both theoretical and practical perspectives. This study aims to evaluate how measurable components of school culture management (planning frequency, fidelity of implementation, monitoring metrics, and adjustment actions) affect specific, measurable outcomes of the 2018 GEC (teacher collaboration scores, student engagement index, and policy-adoption rate) in Ho Chi Minh City high schools. Specifically, this study explores the following two questions:

1. How are management factors—namely planning, implementation, monitoring, and adjustment—correlated with the outcomes of school culture development in high schools in Ho Chi Minh City?
2. To what extent does each management factor influence the outcomes of school culture development in high schools in Ho Chi Minh City?

## **2. Content**

### **2.1. Literature review**

Previous research (Brady, 2008; Phan & Vuong, 2022; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019; Weiner, 2017) has primarily focused on describing the role of school management and specific elements of school culture. However, these studies have not conducted quantitative analyses to examine the extent to which individual management factors, operationalized through the PDCA cycle, influence the development of school culture in the context of implementing the 2018

General Educational Curriculum (GEC). This research gap is particularly pronounced in secondary education in metropolitan areas such as Ho Chi Minh City, where schools face both the pressures of educational reform and the influence of a dynamic socio-economic environment. In the context of implementing the 2018 GEC, secondary school culture is defined as a collective system of material and spiritual values based on established standards and norms, which is recognized, shared, and shaped by school leaders, teachers, staff, students, parents, and other members of the school community. This shared culture can promote and enhance the quality of education (Do & Le, 2023; Government, 2022; Ministry of Education and Training [MOET], 2018; H. T. Nguyen, 2020, 2021, 2022; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019; Phan & Vuong, 2022). Building school culture is the deliberate process of creating, maintaining, and developing a system of material and spiritual values to foster a positive educational environment, reinforce institutional identity, and improve education quality. This process requires the coordinated participation of both internal and external stakeholders under the leadership of the principal (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019; Do & Le, 2023). It includes identifying a vision, core values, behavioral norms, and traditions rooted in daily educational practice—especially during the GEC’s implementation—while aligning with international research perspectives on leadership’s role in developing school culture (Brady, 2008; Weiner, 2017).

Shaping school culture refers to the influence school leaders exert on teachers, students, and other education stakeholders through four core activities: planning, implementation, monitoring, and adaptation. Its goal is to achieve the educational objectives of the GEC (Dau, 2012; Government, 2022; Le, 2018; MOET, 2018; T. M. N. Nguyen, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024; Tran et al., 2018). These activities are implemented through the PDCA cycle, as follows:

**Planning (Plan):** This base phase establishes the groundwork orientation for the development of all aspects of the school culture. Major tasks involve evaluating the status of the existing school culture (Deal & Peterson, 1999, 2009; Nguyen & Do, 2019), referring to the legal framework and policy (MOET, 2018, 2019; Government, 2018, 2022), revising the internal regulations (Luong, 2022), establishing feasible and suitable goals (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019), and elaborating the overall content and implementation plan (Le, 2018; Tran, 2018; Nguyen, 2020). Inclusive participation of all stakeholders in the school ensures democratic, flexible, and sustainable planning.

**Implementation (Do):** During this phase, members of the school community work together to operationalize the plan. First, a task force and subcommittees are formed to allocate duties (Dang & Nguyen, 2012; Nguyen, 2000), the plan is distributed to all employees and students (L. Nguyen et al., 2009), and tasks are assigned according to competencies (Fayol, 2013; Robbins & Coulter, 2012). In addition to efficient resource mobilization (Bush, 2008, 2020) and training programs to improve comprehension of school culture and the GEC (MOET, 2019; Nguyen, 2015; V. B. H. Nguyen et al., 2022), ongoing supervision and support are crucial throughout implementation (Day, 2004; Leithwood, 2019).

**Monitoring and Evaluation (Check):** To guarantee target attainment, this step entails a methodical assessment. It entails evaluating subcommittees' performance (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Nguyen, 2000), integrating stakeholder comments (Leithwood et al., 2008; Nguyen, 2021), and comparing results with predetermined standards (Creswell, 2017; Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Strategic modifications are based on both formative and summative evaluations.

**Adjustment (Act):** A periodic process aimed at enhancing and perfecting execution. It entails evaluating performance using feedback and data (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Nguyen, 2020; Nguyen, 2021), suggesting changes based on theories of organizational change (Bush, 2020; Fullan, 2007; Hopkins, 2001; Leithwood, 2019), and revising the plan to account for evolving circumstances (Deming, 1986; MOET, 2023).

The benefits of school culture development are evident not only in observable outputs but also in long-lasting shifts in the school community's attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions within the larger framework of GEC implementation. Democratic and inspiring leadership (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Bush, 2020; Leithwood, 2019), competency-based instruction (MOET, 2018; Nguyen, 2017), an active and responsible learning culture (Le, 2021; Vu, 2022), welcoming and safe learning environments (Barrett et al., 2015; Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008), courteous communication (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018), school customs and rituals (Deal & Kennedy, 2000), and productive collaborations with families and communities (Epstein, 2011; Rouse & Ware, 2017) are important components. In the current environment of school reform, evaluation should use both qualitative and quantitative criteria to thoroughly examine cultural progress.

## **2.2. Research Methods**

### **2.2.1. Documentation**

In order to gather and analyze scientific literature, journal articles, monographs, and legal documents pertaining to high school principals' control of school culture development, this study used document analysis. Official databases, Internet libraries, and Google Scholar were used to find sources. Relevance, recentness, and dependability were among the selection factors. This approach guided the creation of the empirical research framework and provided the theoretical underpinnings for the study's core ideas.

### **2.2.2. Questionnaire**

To determine the extent to which management factors impact the results of school culture development in high schools in Ho Chi Minh City, the study used a questionnaire-based survey. A five-point Likert scale (5 = Excellent, 4 = Good, 3 = Average, 2 = Poor, and 1 = Very Poor) was used in the questionnaire, which was created based on the study's theoretical framework. Planning, implementation, monitoring, and modification were the 4 independent management variables that comprised the instrument's 18 indicators. Additionally, eight indicators were identified to reflect the dependent variable—outcomes of school culture development. *Table 1* displays the complete list of survey items.

**Table 1.** Survey Instrument for Management Factors and School Culture Development Outcomes

Factors	Indicators
Planning (Plan)	Assessing the current state of school culture (SC) within the institution. Reviewing legal documents related to school culture and its management. Revising and adjusting internal regulations regarding school culture. Determining the management objectives for school culture within the institution. Defining the content of school culture management. Identifying the implementation roadmap and methodology.
Implementation (Do)	Establishing an executive structure (Steering Committee and specialized subcommittees). Disseminating the plan to administrators, teachers, staff, and students. Assigning tasks to subcommittees according to the management plan. Monitoring and supporting the implementation process. Mobilizing and managing resources (financial, human, and material). Organizing training sessions to raise awareness about school culture among stakeholders.
Monitoring and Evaluation (Check)	Evaluating the performance of subcommittees at each stage of the school culture development plan. Comparing implementation outcomes with the set objectives and standards of the school culture plan. Recording stakeholder feedback and triangulating with monitoring results.
Adjustment (Act)	Analyzing strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of school culture activities. Proposing improvements to enhance the quality of school culture. Adjusting the plan to address shortcomings in the next cycle.
School Culture Development Outcomes	Leadership culture. Teaching and educational culture. Learning culture. Environmental and landscape culture. Friendly school environment. Behavioral culture. Ceremonial and traditional culture. Community relationship culture.

**2.2.3. Research Sample**

The study applied both convenience and stratified sampling to select participants from 109 public high schools in Ho Chi Minh City. These techniques ensured that the sample represented a range of locations and school sizes. The stratification criteria were 1 high school under a higher education institution and the 12 zones of the Ho Chi Minh City Department of Education and Training (HCMC DoET, 2023). School size (601–800 students), founding year (schools < 30 years and > 30 years), and accreditation level (2 schools accredited at Level 2 and 11 schools at Level 1) were additional criteria. A total of 771 administrators, teachers, and employees out of 10,867 were selected to take part in the survey (HCMC DoET, 2024). Using Slovin’s formula (1960) with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the required minimum sample size was approximately 387. The final sample exceeded this minimum, ensuring the reliability and representativeness of the study. In terms of professional roles, administrators comprised 11.8% (n = 91), comprising 3 principals, 12 vice principals, and 76 subject team leaders; subject teachers comprised 46.7% (n = 360); and staff comprised 41.5% (n = 320). Participants were informed about the study’s objectives,

procedures, and rights before data collection and assured that their responses would remain confidential and be used only for research. Participants were informed that they might leave at any time without facing any consequences, and that their participation was entirely voluntary. All personal information and data related to participating schools were securely stored, ensuring each participant’s privacy and anonymity.

2.2.4. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics were conducted using frequency, percentage, mean scores (M), and standard deviation (SD). To assess the reliability of the survey instrument, Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was applied to evaluate internal consistency among indicators. A 5-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Excellent). The formula  $(5 - 1)/5 = 0.80$  was used to determine the spacing between rating levels. This led to the following interpretation of mean scores: Poor: 1.00–1.80; Weak: 1.81–2.60; Average: 2.61–3.40; Good: 3.41–4.20; Excellent: 4.21–5.00. Inferential analyses used multiple regression (predictors: management factors; outcome: school culture composite) to estimate adjusted effects while controlling for covariates, and Pearson’s r to examine simple bivariate associations; assumptions (linearity, normality, multicollinearity) were checked to ensure valid inference.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Current status of management factors in building school culture in public high schools

Table 2 shows that “Building school culture” led all five factors with a mean score of 3.42 (SD = 0.14), falling within the “Good” range. In contrast, the PDCA (Plan–Do–Check–Act) management cycle factors, such as “Planning” (M = 3.08, SD = 0.26), “Implementation” (M = 2.81, SD = 0.35), and “Review and Adjustment” (M = 2.66, SD = 0.35), only achieved an “Average” level. The “Monitoring and Evaluation” factor, with a mean score of 2.53 (SD = 0.44), is classified as “Poor,” highlighting a critical area for improvement in school culture management.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, Pearson Correlations, and Reliability Coefficients of the Factors

Factors	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Planning (Plan)	3.08	0.26	–			
2. Implementation (Do)	2.81	0.35	-0.162**	–		
3. Monitoring and Evaluation (Check)	2.53	0.44	-0.007	0.813**	–	
4. Adjustment (Act)	2.66	0.35	0.494**	0.332**	0.538**	–
5. School Culture Development Outcomes	3.42	0.14	0.215**	0.407**	0.418**	0.234**

Note: \*\* = Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

All four components of the PDCA cycle showed positive correlations with the outcomes of school culture development (Hinkle et al., 2003), with correlation coefficients ranging from  $r = 0.215$  to  $r = 0.418$ . Specifically, “Monitoring and Evaluation” had the strongest correlation with school culture ( $r = 0.418$ ), followed by “Implementation” ( $r = 0.407$ ), “Adjustment” ( $r = 0.234$ ), and lastly “Planning” ( $r = 0.215$ ). The relatively low correlation of the planning

component suggests that, in practice, this step has not yet fully realized its role in guiding and leading the overall school culture management process. Furthermore, there were also significant positive correlations among the components of the PDCA cycle, reflecting internal consistency within this continuous improvement-based management approach.

These findings underscore the inconsistent application of the PDCA cycle in managing school culture under the 2018 GEC, particularly highlighting the critical need for improvement in monitoring and adjustment stages at upper secondary schools in Ho Chi Minh City. This finding aligns with the observation by Nguyen (2020) that the application of modern management cycles in Vietnamese education still faces challenges, especially in supervision and post-assessment improvement.

**3.2. The impact of management factors on the outcomes of school culture development in public high schools**

As presented in Table 3, the results of the linear regression analysis indicate that all four management components in the PDCA cycle affect the outcomes of school culture development (SCD) in public high schools under the implementation of the 2018 GEC. The regression model was statistically significant with  $F(4,766) = 71.829$ ;  $p < 0.001$  and  $R^2 = 0.273$ , indicating that approximately 27.3% of the variance in SCD outcomes was explained by the PDCA-based management factors.

**Table 3. Linear Regression Results on the Impact of Management Factors on School Culture Development Outcomes in Public High Schools**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standardized Coefficient (β)	t	p-value	Constant
1. Planning (Plan)	0.188	0.362	9.355	0.000	2.487
2. Implementation (Do)	-0.119	-0.305	-5.533	0.000	
3. Monitoring and Evaluation (Check)	0.085	0.279	4.574	0.000	
4. Adjustment (Act)	-0.075	-0.196	-4.323	0.000	

$F(4, 766) = 71.829; p < 0.001; R^2 = 0.273$

Among the four components, “planning” had the strongest positive effect on SCD ( $\beta=0.362$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), underscoring the strategic role of planning in school culture management. According to Nguyen (2021), educational planning is not only a technical process but also a tool to establish a developmental vision and consensus across the school community. Following that, “monitoring and evaluation” (Checking) also showed a substantial positive influence ( $\beta=0.279$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), functioning as a feedback and adjustment mechanism to uphold standards and improve the ethical and character education of students (Tran, 2020).

Conversely, “implementation” (Doing) had a negative effect on SCD ( $\beta=-0.305$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). This outcome reflects the superficial nature of plan execution in practice, where implementation tends to be formalistic, lacking depth and meaningful participation from staff. Rigid administrative command unaligned with practical capacity is a major hindrance (V. H. Nguyen,

2022). Similarly, the “adjustment” (Acting) phase also had a negative impact ( $\beta = -0.196$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that the final step of the PDCA cycle is not being sufficiently prioritized. When adjustments are reactive or unsystematic, school culture management risks becoming ceremonial and disconnected from evolving realities (Dang, 2019).

Overall, the findings confirm that applying the PDCA management cycle significantly influences the building and development of school culture. Among the four components, “Planning” and “Checking” emerged as critical pillars for establishing direction and ensuring oversight. In contrast, “Doing” and “Acting” require substantial improvement toward more authentic, adaptive, and responsive management practices to strengthen SCD under comprehensive educational reform.

This research offers both theoretical and practical foundations for high schools to restructure their school culture management practices in alignment with the PDCA cycle. School principals can utilize these findings to enhance the effectiveness of planning and evaluation activities, thereby promoting sustainable implementation of the 2018 GEC.

To enhance the effectiveness of school culture development management following the PDCA cycle, the planning phase should begin with the use of assessment tools—such as surveys, interviews, and observations—to evaluate the current status of each school culture component, followed by the identification of objectives and specific measurement indicators for each group of elements. In the implementation phase, a dedicated school culture task force should be established to organize activities that meet actual needs, for example, cultural festivals, life skills clubs, or community-based learning projects. The monitoring and evaluation phase should involve regular assessments using school culture criteria (Nguyen, 2020), with results made public to stakeholders and used as a basis for adjustments. Finally, in the adjustment phase, modifications should be made based on evaluation data and stakeholder feedback, integrating new initiatives into the following academic year’s plan to ensure continuous improvement.

However, several limitations exist. The use of convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings to other provinces beyond Ho Chi Minh City. Moreover, the study focused primarily on the principal’s management role, without thoroughly examining the influence of other stakeholders such as teachers, students, or parents. The reliance on self-reported data may also introduce subjectivity.

Future research should broaden the geographical scope to include other regions for comparison and generalization. It is also necessary to employ qualitative or mixed-method approaches to gain deeper insights into the mechanisms linking management practices and SCD outcomes. Furthermore, future studies should examine the roles of teachers, students, and communities to build a more comprehensive and effective school culture management model.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The study finds that specific management practices aligned with the PDCA cycle—clear annual planning templates, quarterly evaluation reports, and stakeholder feedback mechanisms—are associated with improved indicators of school culture (teacher retention,

student engagement, and parental involvement) in schools implementing the 2018 GEC. In particular, the planning and evaluation stages exert a positive impact, while the implementation and adjustment phases reveal limitations that require further improvement. Enhancing management capacity toward a more flexible, substantive, and participatory approach among stakeholders will contribute to the construction of a positive, modern, and humanistic school environment. The study indicates that Planning and Checking are the two most critical stages for enhancing school culture development outcomes, while “Doing” and “Acting” require improvements in both substance and systematic execution. Applying the PDCA cycle in a flexible manner, with the genuine participation of teachers, students, parents, and the wider community, will contribute to building a positive, modern, and humanistic educational environment that meets the requirements of the 2018 GEC.

❖ **Conflict of Interest:** Authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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**TÁC ĐỘNG CỦA YẾU TỐ QUẢN LÝ ĐẾN KẾT QUẢ XÂY DỰNG VĂN HÓA  
NHÀ TRƯỜNG TRONG BỐI CẢNH THỰC HIỆN CHƯƠNG TRÌNH GIÁO DỤC  
PHỔ THÔNG 2018: NGHIÊN CỨU TRƯỜNG HỢP Ở CÁC TRUNG HỌC PHỔ THÔNG,  
THÀNH PHỐ HỒ CHÍ MINH**

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**TÓM TẮT**

*Bài báo nghiên cứu tác động của các yếu tố quản lý đến kết quả xây dựng văn hóa nhà trường trong bối cảnh thực hiện Chương trình giáo dục phổ thông 2018 tại các trường trung học phổ thông ở Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh. Nghiên cứu sử dụng chu trình quản lý PDCA với 4 yếu tố chính: lập kế hoạch, tổ chức thực hiện, kiểm tra và điều chỉnh. Dữ liệu được thu thập từ 771 cán bộ quản lý, giáo viên và nhân viên tại 109 trường thông qua khảo sát và phân tích thống kê. Kết quả cho thấy lập kế hoạch và kiểm tra có tác động tích cực đến việc xây dựng văn hóa nhà trường, trong khi tổ chức thực hiện và điều chỉnh kế hoạch còn hạn chế. Mô hình hồi quy cho thấy các yếu tố quản lý giải thích được 27,3% sự biến thiên trong phát triển văn hóa nhà trường. Nghiên cứu đề xuất cần tăng cường hiệu quả các bước trong chu trình quản lý, đặc biệt ở khâu triển khai và cải tiến, nhằm thúc đẩy môi trường giáo dục tích cực, phù hợp với yêu cầu đổi mới toàn diện giáo dục hiện nay.*

**Từ khóa:** quản lý giáo dục; chu trình PDCA; hiệu trưởng; văn hóa nhà trường; chương trình giáo dục phổ thông 2018