

Creating Core Cultural Values for Building Excellent Schools: Current Situation and Solutions for Schools in Vietnam

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In the world, building excellent schools often relies on a certain school model. For example, models such as “Happy School”, “Amazing School”, “Cultural School”, “Brand School”, and “Student-Centered Schools” have been implemented quite successfully. The common purpose of these models is to create an excellent school; the core of these models is the core cultural values. Through studying the models, the article draws out the core cultural values to create an excellent school. Community culture, religious doctrines, laws, state management policies, and knowledge management are factors that influence school culture and are also mentioned. Based on that, a survey was conducted with 1,517 subjects including school managers, teachers, and parents of students at preschool, primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary levels representing four different regions of Vietnam. The results show that school managers can express very well the school's vision and mission but have a vague perception of the essence of school culture and the specific approach to building school culture. In management, school principals lack creative measures in both approaching general culture and in creating core cultural values for the school; the influence of the impacting factors has not been effectively utilized; therefore, the results of building excellent schools are very limited. Solutions to build excellent schools by creating core cultural values are proposed in the context of Vietnam and can be referenced for countries with similar conditions.

Keywords: culture, values, core, excellent school, building, Vietnam.

Today, when it comes to a good school, there are many approaches to defining it. One notable example is “happy schools” (UNESCO, 2016). This educational model proposed by UNESCO aims to create a positive, safe, and friendly learning environment for students, teachers, and parents. The model revolves around three main elements (the three Ps): 1) People, which is the most important element, involving relationships and interactions among members of the school community. A happy school is a place of friendliness, respect, cooperation, and mutual support; 2) Process, which relates to the processes, policies, activities, and curriculum of the school. A happy school has an effective education system tailored to students' needs and abilities; and 3) Place, which concerns the physical and cultural environment of the school. A happy school has a clean, safe, well-equipped, and green environment free from violence, discrimination, or bullying.

The term “Amazing School” has gained recent prominence. Catherine O’Farrell, one of the co-founders of an organization that provides professional support services for child development in the UAE, notes that many schools in the UK have lost their rankings as “Amazing Schools,” while only a few schools in the UAE have achieved this desirable title (O’Farrell, 2022). She believes that achieving this requires a system based on three elements: inputs (students who have not yet attended), processes (educational organization), and outputs (students with higher academic achievements). For this system to function effectively, schools must establish five elements: 1) Great Leadership: key to promoting excellence in education; the most important aspect being defining the school's vision and mission; 2) Inclusion: encompassing and welcoming all students regardless of their backgrounds and abilities; 3) Teachers: crucial for schools aiming for excellence; 4) Student behavior and Engagement: essential for making a school outstanding; and 5) Wellbeing: schools' prioritized support for the well-being of teachers, students, and staff.

Speaking of "Happy school" and "Amazing school," we can associate them with the elements that make up a school's brand. According to Godin (2018), a brand is a collection of expectations, memories, stories, and relationships, combined to explain a consumer's decision to choose one product over another. Developing from Godin's ideas, Tigchelaar (2022) presents seven elements of a brand for an institute: 1) Brand promise, which involves letting people know your purpose and ensuring that your promise is genuine; 2) Position Statements, which are concise and memorable phrases summarizing your brand promise; 3) Visual identity, including the organization's logo, one of the first things customers notice; 4) Creating distinctiveness for the organization by visually conveying its unique points; 5) Discovering the organization's voice, allowing your personality to shine through; 6) Brand-building communication that is consistent and never neglectful; 7) Establishing trust with your customers.

Following the approach to a brand in general, some researchers have also defined the branding of schools with specific elements. DiMartino and Jessen (2016) examine school branding by exploring how schools market themselves and the target audience they aim to reach, as well as the nature and type of information provided to students and parents. This is done through two typical studies conducted in New York City. This research indicates that marketing and branding activities for public education hold significant importance. According to Hidayatun (2017), building a school brand is closely tied to establishing the brand of the school culture, and this model is an effective marketing strategy in the present era. Krueger and Perez (2017) point out that the focus of school design is campus identity. The physical campus factor was studied by the authors in three exemplary schools in the US, and they drew conclusions about each case as follows: 1) At Small Learning Communities, changes to the campus were effectively communicated to the community, generating interest and awareness. This attracted new students to the school, connected students to the institution, and helped students understand that their school would also have a brand; 2) At Portola High School, the new campus was open for only one semester for 9th-grade students, yet it provided them with a unique identity and brand to develop. It nurtured a sense of community consciousness and pride in the school; 3) At Double Peak K-8 School, the school assessed the brand-building process through variations in logo, usage guidelines, branding, typography, mascot imagery, colors, etc. This was found to be an exceptional experience, creating an incredible sense of school spirit, unity, and ownership.

Inheriting from the above models, in Vietnam today, preschool education is implementing the construction of a nurturing and caring environment for children based on core cultural factors with the model of "student-centered School" (MOET, 2020). The goal of this model is to ensure closeness, friendliness, physical and mental safety for children; the behavior, gestures, words, and attitudes of teachers towards children and others are always exemplary; the physical environment in and out of the classroom minimizes the risk factors that cause unsafe, injurious situations for children, meets the needs and interests in play, eating, sleeping, personal hygiene activities of children; the areas in the school are planned to take advantage of the spaces for children to engage in appropriate, flexible, diverse, and rich activities; create conditions and opportunities for children to act, experience, explore in various forms; ensure the conditions for organizing meals for children that meet the requirements of food safety, balance and rationality in nutrition, friendliness, suitability with individual children; and ensure the basic conditions for clean water, sanitation that suit the needs and abilities of children according to each age group and meet the requirements of education.

Thus, "Happy school", "Amazing school", "school brand" and "child-centered School" are all formed from factors related to image, reputation, values and identity of an educational institution, such as: vision, mission, core values; leadership style, communication approach, delegation, encouragement, conflict resolution, and trust-building within the school; the teaching and staff team; students and parents; the learning and working environment. At this point, we would like to address another aspect, which is "school culture." Together with core teaching quality, school culture contributes to the depth of the school's brand (Le, 2023). So what is school culture? There are various approaches to this concept, but overall, they all converge on the idea that school culture is a complex system of values and norms surrounding the function of human education. It is voluntarily accepted and respected, guiding the collaborative implementation of the school's mission by its members (Nguyen, 2021; Pham, 2021; Thai, 2021; Huynh, 2021). In 1976, Edward T. Hall developed the 'Iceberg Model of Culture' and explained that organizational culture is like an iceberg floating in the sea. What you see is just the tip of the iceberg, underneath which is a huge, invisible mass that holds everything together (Singanamalli, 2022). Accordingly, the school culture is concertized and described as shown in Figure 1.

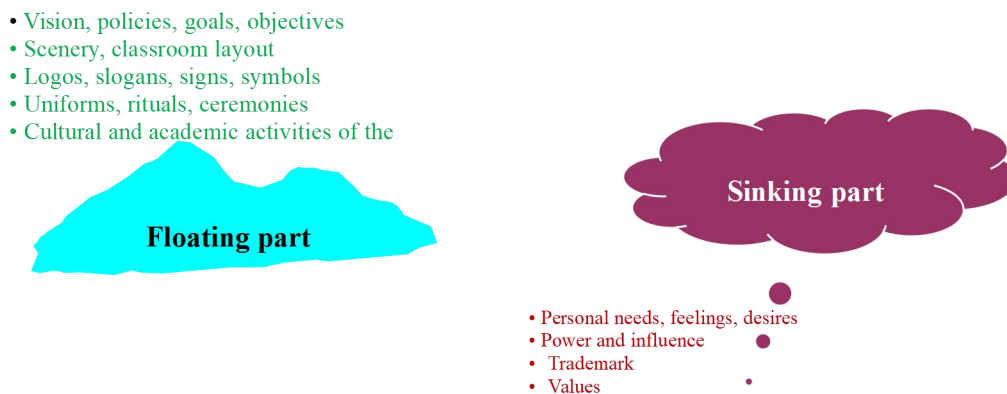


Figure 1: Iceberg model of school culture

Source: Singanamalli, 2022

From the iceberg model of school culture, we can infer that school culture is a complex entity, an aggregate of features encompassing spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional aspects that depict the identity of a school community. School culture encompasses tangible and intangible cultural elements such as vision, mission, core values of the school, which serve as guiding principles for all educational and managerial activities; leadership style of the principal and administrative team, including communication methods, delegation, encouragement, conflict resolution, and trust-building within the school, when leadership is shared and emergent, it will be the main motivation for the performance of an agile team (Gohar et al, 2023); the faculty and staff, who play crucial roles in implementing the educational program, caring for and developing students, as well as maintaining collaborative relationships and sharing experiences within the school; students and parents, who directly benefit from the quality of education and school culture, and also contribute opinions and participate in school activities; the learning and working environment, including the physical and psychological space of the school, encompassing infrastructure, equipment, facilities, symbols, banners, slogans, rituals, events, and extracurricular activities. It should be noted that the influence of the external environment on school culture is extremely powerful, especially the value system of the religions that dominate the community where the school is located. A study by Shafiq et al., (2021) showed that Islamic philosophy focuses on the virtues of kindness, love and compassion when dealing with children, while also supporting physical punishment according to specific guidelines. In that environment, schools that want to become excellent must have appropriate training for teachers on alternative behavior methods, modifications in dealing with students to suit the supervision and accountability mechanism, comply with the law and follow the true meaning of Islamic doctrine. Similarly, the policies, laws of the state, the regulatory role of the management agencies also have a positive impact on the risk management of the related organizations (Rehman & Ishak, 2022).

This commonality between "Happy School," "Amazing School," "school culture", "student-centered School" and "school branding" lies in the fact that these titles are all shaped by specific core elements. While their essence is similar, they differ in their approaches to making a school exceptional. Among these elements, both educational quality and cultural factors contribute to building a school's reputation and excellence.

In summary, school culture and the creation of core cultural values to build excellent schools have existed for many years with innovative models; however, research on them is always a timely issue. Especially for countries that start later, the meaning of these studies is still very valuable. A study in Indonesia showed that economic prosperity and the educational needs of the people are increasing, creating a change in their views on education and its necessity. Therefore, promoting a conceptual model of building cultural brands in schools and revealing why this model becomes an effective marketing strategy in this era is very important (Hidayatun, 2017). One thing that schools always care about is the relationship between cooperative culture in schools, teacher quality has a positive impact on students' liking to go to school. Matthew Ohlson, Swanson, Adams-Manning and Byrd (2016) conducted a study based on data collected from 50 public schools across the Southeastern United States to analyze the input characteristics of teachers such as certificates, years of teaching, teaching rate... the findings show: When teacher collaboration increases, the predictive model of student dropout rate will decrease; this finding provides a valuable insight into the characteristics of teaching quality and school culture that have a great impact on students' attendance and suspension of study and

may affect education policy, teacher training, education leadership and school reform initiatives. Currently, the research on building school brands from culture is also of interest, even in developed countries. Recently in Turkey, the authors Bayar and Karaduman (2021) conducted a study to examine in detail the school culture and its effects on students' academic achievement; by answering the questions "What is school culture?", "What is the effect of school culture on learning?" and "What needs to be done at school to create a strong and positive culture?", the analysis showed that creating a strong cultural environment at school has a positive and strong impact on students' academic achievement; therefore, the proposals to improve school culture should be applied in practice. Moreover, when it comes to schools, one must mention effective knowledge management. A study by Ahmed et al., (2015) showed that, even in banking activities, the impact of knowledge management practices also contributed to improving the performance and reputation of the organization.

Schools in Vietnam have absorbed and built school culture slower than its appearance in the world for several decades. The reality is that school leaders often do not fully understand, and are confused in approaching school culture and school branding. Schools at all levels have set out a very comprehensive and progressive vision and mission; however, they lack specific measures to turn the vision and mission into reality. School principals are quite vague about school culture and very confused about the approach to creating core values for the school to become excellent (Nguyen, 2017; Nguyen, 2020; Do, 2021; Le, 2023). In addition, the insightful perception and appropriate application of the external context and environment to the construction of school culture is quite biased; the factors of community culture, values of religions, laws, and policies of the State have not been paid attention by schools properly, making schools like an island, not deeply penetrating the social life outside the school gate (National Assembly, 2021; Huynh, 2021; Nguyen, 2021; Pham 2021; Thai, 2021). Therefore, the research to connect, systematize the problem, and orient the approach to create core cultural values to build excellent schools is very necessary and has high practical value. This study can also be a valuable reference for countries with similar conditions.

Method

As mentioned earlier, an excellent school is formed by excellent educational quality and an excellent school culture. Educational quality arises from a system that transforms inputs into outputs through the education process:

Input → Education Process → Output (O'Farrell, 2022). Alternatively, through a different approach, the quality of education is synthesized from eight elements of a school, namely input, output, educational methods, educational environment, school's purpose, school's behaviors and operation processes, school culture, and school's organizational structure (Le, 2018). The quality of education in schools is a broad issue that will be discussed in another topic. In this article, we attempt to identify only the cultural factors that make up an excellent school as a basis for assessing the current situation at preschool and general education schools in Vietnam and building solutions to improve the situation.

Core cultural values that contribute to creating an excellent school

The iceberg model (Singanamalli, 2022) presents a group of tangible and intangible factors of school culture. Referring to the studies by Deal and Peterson (2009, 2016), we identified the core cultural values that need to be established to build an excellent school as follows: 1) Values formed from intangible elements: Open atmosphere, democracy, collaboration, trust and mutual respect; valuing individuals, encouraging efforts to complete tasks and recognizing the success of individuals and organizations within the school; progressive standards for continuous improvement, advancement in teaching, learning, and scientific research; an atmosphere of creativity and innovation in activities; motivation to encourage administrators, teachers, and students to improve methods and enhance quality; participation in providing opinions in all school activities; promoting dialogue, collaboration, teamwork, sharing experiences, and professional exchange; sharing visions, supporting each other's development; care, cooperative relationships, attracting involvement in solving teaching and educational issues within the school; 2) Values formed from tangible elements: Each person in each position in the school knows their responsibilities, understands responsibilities, shares consciously, actively participates in making decisions; physical environment stimulates creativity and innovation; assignment and decentralization ensures power sharing, empowerment, and personal responsibility for tasks; green, clean, beautiful, and friendly campus and landscape values from symbols, banners, slogans, rituals, events, and extracurricular activities of the school.

Survey method and assessment of the current situation

From the identification of the above core cultural values, we conducted a survey to assess the current situation of establishing these core values in preschool and general education schools in Vietnam. Survey questions were posed

for two groups of factors: 1) Group of tangible factors including the school's mission, school vision, school development goals and landscape, campus, logo, signboard, clothing, uniforms, rituals, ceremonies; 2) Group of intangible factors including Individual needs, emotions, desires; respect for different ideas; relationships and sharing of work vision; personal abilities and values; sharing opinions and reinforcing work relationships; friendly, comfortable, genuine, and trusting atmosphere; sharing power and influencing.

The survey form asked respondents to assess the level of achievement for each factor on a 4-point scale: excellent, good, fair, and poor. The survey was conducted at four educational levels: The preschool, primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary, in four different regions of Vietnam with 1,517 participants. Among them, preschool level with 265 people who are managers and preschool teachers in Hoc Mon district, Ho Chi Minh City; the primary level involves 280 individuals (180 administrators, teachers, and 100 parents from 5 primary schools in Hoai Nhon District, Binh Dinh Province); the lower secondary level involves 476 individuals (136 administrators and teachers, 240 students, and 100 parents from 4 lower secondary schools in Duong Minh Chau District, Tay Ninh Province); and the upper secondary level involves 496 individuals (164 administrators, teachers, and 332 students from 4 upper secondary schools in Cao Lanh District, Dong Thap province). To make the research results widely applicable, the sample selection was conducted according to the representatives of 4 levels of education (Preschools, Primary School, Lower Secondary School, and Upper Secondary School) and the representatives of the favorable region (Ho Chi Minh City), the difficult region in the mountainous area (Tay Ninh province), the less difficult region in the plain (Dong Thap and Binh Dinh provinces), including both urban and rural areas.

The assessment results were converted into scores: 4, 3, 2, and 1, corresponding to the levels of excellent, good, fair, and poor, respectively. To consolidate the evaluation of the current situation, we utilize the average score. The formula for calculating the average score based on frequency is as follows:

$$\overline{inx} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^k x_i f_i}{\sum_{i=1}^k f_i}$$

Where:

- x is the average score.
- xi is the i-th data point in the dataset.
- fi is the frequency of the i-th data point in the dataset.
- k is the number of distinct data points in the dataset.

Based on the average scores obtained from the survey results and selected evaluation opinions from practical school management and local management levels, the article draws conclusions about the current situation of establishing core cultural values to build an excellent school and proposes solutions to leverage strengths, address existing issues, and make the school outstanding.

Results

Table 1

Evaluation results of the level of achievement of cultural factors

Factors	Level of achievement (average score)			
	Preschools	Primary School	Lower Secondary School	Upper Secondary School
Tangible factors				
1 School's mission	3.80	3.10	3.10	3.00
2 School's vision	3.77	3.00	3.00	3.00
3 School development goals	3.70	2.50	2.80	3.00
4 Landscape, campus, logo, signboard; clothing, uniforms, rituals, ceremonies	3.82	3.00	3.10	3.25
Intangible factors				
5 Individual needs, emotions, and desires	3.68	3.00	2.90	3.80
6 Respect for different ideas	3.70	2.90	2.70	3.20
7 Relationships and sharing of work vision	3.76	2.60	3.00	3.85
8 Personal abilities and values	3.75	2.80	3.10	3.80
9 Sharing of opinions and reinforcement of work	3.73	2.80	3.00	3.65

	relationships				
10	Friendly, comfortable, genuine, and trusting atmosphere	3.77	2.70	3.10	2.85
11	The sharing of power and ways of influencing each other	3.69	2.80	3.00	3.30

Source: Authors's survey data

Table 1 shows the assessment results of 1,517 participants including school administrators, teachers, students, and parents of students regarding the level of achievement of core cultural values in preschool, primary schools, lower secondary schools, and upper secondary schools in Binh Dinh, Tay Ninh, Dong Thap Provinces, and Ho Chi Minh City of Vietnam. The assessment level was converted into an average score (Conventions: 1.0 - 1.75 is poor, 1.76 - 2.5 is average, 2.51 - 3.25 is good, and 3.26 - 4.00 is excellent). Based on the data obtained and the conclusions drawn from school reports or related scientific documents (Nguyen 2017, Nguyen 2020, & Do 2021), the assessments were found as follows.

In general, it can be seen that: According to the scale from 1 to 4, the level of achievement of the core cultural factors at different levels of education varies quite a lot. In general, preschool has the highest level of achievement, while primary and lower secondary schools have the lowest level of achievement. Tangible factors such as mission, vision, development goals and landscape, campus, logo, signboard; clothing, uniform, ritual, ceremony have a higher level of achievement than intangible factors such as needs, emotions, personal desires; respect for different ideas; relationships and sharing of work vision; capacity and personal values; sharing opinions and strengthening work relationships; friendly, comfortable, honest and trusting atmosphere; sharing of power and ways of influencing each other. This shows that schools tend to focus more on external factors than internal factors of school culture. Among the intangible factors, the friendly, comfortable, honest, and trusting atmosphere has the lowest level of achievement at the upper secondary school level (2.85 points), while the needs, emotions, personal desires have the highest level of achievement at the same level (3.80 points). This may reflect the difference between the needs and desires of individuals with the atmosphere and relationships of the collective. Among the tangible factors, the school's mission has the highest level of achievement at the preschool level (3.80 points), while the school's development goals have the lowest level of achievement at the primary level (2.50 points). This result shows some serious contradictions: 1) Most schools set very high mission and vision while the solutions to achieve that vision are not as expected; 2) Schools focus more on realizing tangible factors while the core values that create excellence for schools achieve lower results (as shown in Figure 2). These are critical weaknesses that need to be improved.

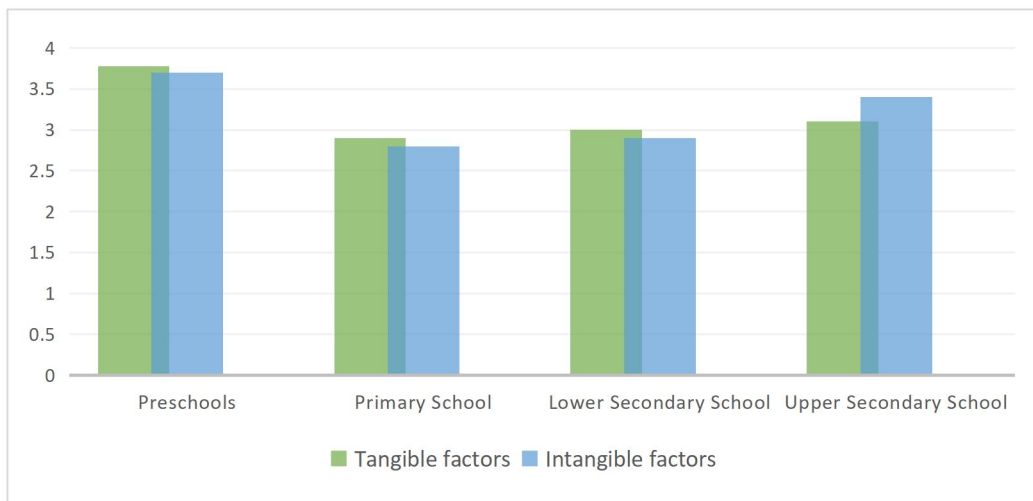


Figure 2. Comparison of average values between tangible and intangible factors

Source: Analysis from survey data

For preschool level: This is the level that has achieved good results in building a friendly school for many years with a team of managers and teachers who are very dedicated to their profession; the survey was conducted in Ho Chi Minh City, where the living standard is high, so the results are the highest. However, the common weakness is still revealed:

The tangible factors are high such as “landscape, campus...” (average score 3.82) showing the external appearance, the construction of “school mission (average score 3.8) mainly shows high determination. Meanwhile, the factors “Needs, emotions, personal desires”, “sharing of power and ways of influencing each other” and “respect for different opinions” are all low (average score below 3.7). This situation shows that the creation of core factors to build excellent schools has not really focused on the right focus (the dispersion of the results is shown in Figure 3).

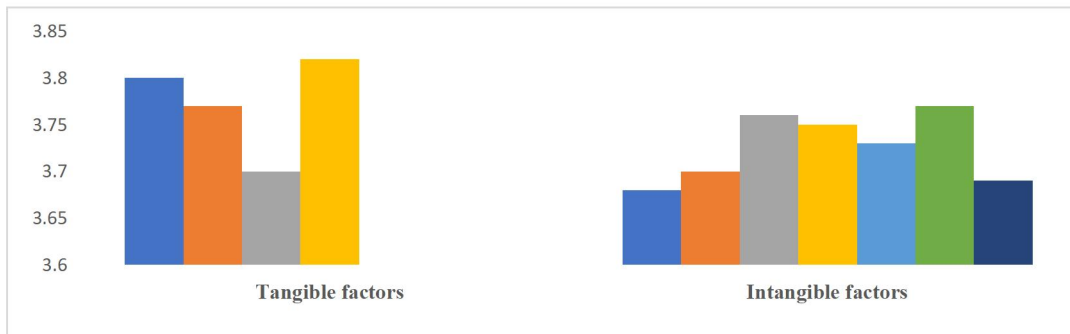


Figure 3. Degree of dispersion of factors in preschools

Source: Analysis from survey data

For primary schools: Among the tangible factors, the establishment of school development goals received the lowest assessment (average score of 2.5), with 55% of participants rating it as average or poor. The factor defining the school's vision and environmental features was rated highest (average score of 3.1) while defining the school's mission and visions were rated equally (average score of 3.0). Primary schools have defined good missions and visions but have not fully realized them. This is evident in other assessments as well: the missions and visions are defined correctly, but there is room for improvement in translating them into actual school development goals. Among the intangible factors, individual needs and emotions are rated highest (average score of 3.0), likely due to the movement towards creating a friendly school environment and the positive behavior of students in previous years.

However, the elements of building a comfortable and reliable atmosphere, recognizing capabilities and personal values, and sharing expertise and sharing power are evaluated as low. These are the points that need to be recognized for improvement, as they are factors influencing self-learning, mutual development, respecting differences, etc. which are essential and important in creating the school's brand (although the degree of differentiation is not high, it can be seen in Figure 4).



Figure 4. Degree of dispersion of factors in primary schools

Source: Analysis from survey data

At the lower secondary level: Interestingly, the evaluation opinions are quite similar to those at the primary level. For tangible factors, the actualization of the school's goals reaches the lowest level (average score 2.8); factors

related to vision, mission, and aesthetics are at a satisfactory level. Lower secondary schools lack specific measures to implement the set mission and vision and achieve the school's development goals. The determination of mission and vision mostly remains on paper, not truly becoming the determination and specific actions of administrators and teachers. In the intangible factor group, factors like capabilities and personal values, psychological atmosphere are highly rated (average score 3.1), with over 70% rated as excellent and good. This is followed by the group of factors regarding relationships and sharing of vision, the sharing of power and influence, effective competition, and cooperation. However, there are two factors that are rated low: respecting different ideas with 40.5% of respondents rating it as average and poor (average score 2.7); personal needs, emotions, and desires with 32.3% rated as average and poor (average score 2.9). The lack of acceptance of differences means that the implementation of the pillar of learning-to-be is facing difficulties; "authoritarian teaching," training according to models, lack of multidimensional thinking on different value systems, etc. are expressions of the school, influencing the school's brand considerably (the degree of differentiation between factors is clearly seen in Figure 5).

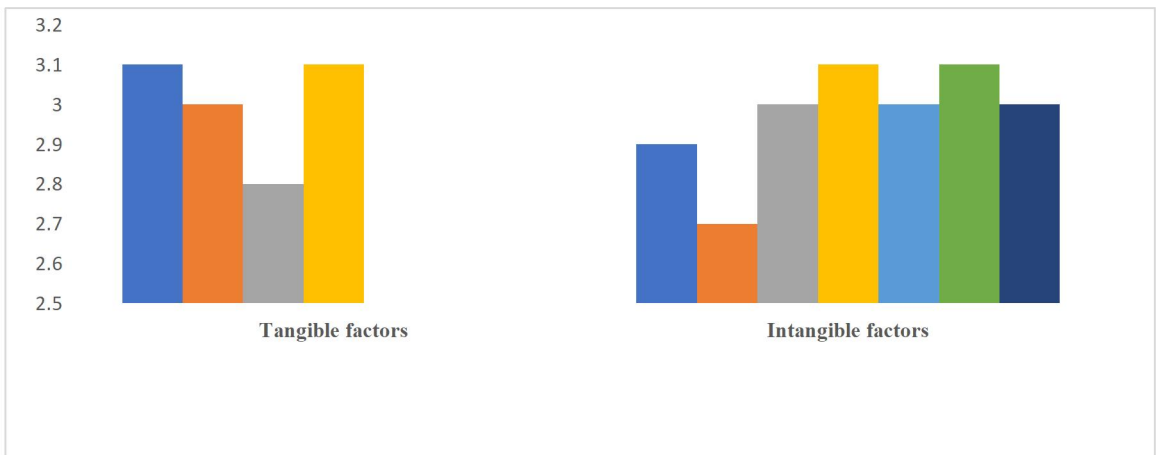


Figure 5. Degree of dispersion of factors in lower secondary schools

Source: Analysis from survey data

At the upper secondary level, the perception and evaluation of participants are more optimistic, but the general reality of creating core cultural values for schools is fairly consistent. The group of tangible factors has an average score of 3.0 and above, and in the lowest group, the realization of school development goals is still an issue. Factors like landscape, campus, logo, signboards; uniforms, rituals, and ceremonies are highly rated, aligning with the reality of educational activities. In the intangible factor group, the affirmation of competence, personal values, and mutual sharing are well-rated. However, the creation of a friendly, authentic, trusting atmosphere and respect for differences are still in the lowest group with average scores of 2.85 and 3.2. These are worrying weaknesses; they are clearly shown in Figure 6.

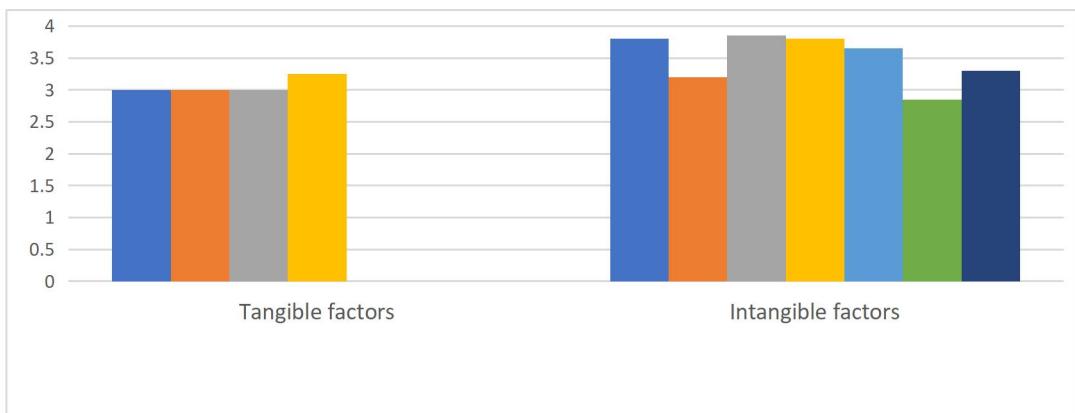


Figure 6. Degree of dispersion of factors in upper secondary schools

Source: Analysis from survey data

Discussion

Advantages and Disadvantages draw

The assessment results of the current situation in surveys in four different regions, while not representative of all regions show that the establishment of core cultural values to make schools excellent in Vietnamese basic education has been relatively consistent at the preschool, primary, and lower and upper secondary school levels. Some forms of school culture building, such as "building a friendly, active student school," and "building a happy school," and "building a student-centered school" have had effects on promoting cultural factors like relationships in school, sharing work vision, improving psychological atmosphere... developing in the right direction; as a result, consensus and unity in basic education schools are gradually improving. However, there are still many difficulties and shortcomings drawn from the evaluation results by scores, as analyzed above, including:

- The perception of school culture is incomplete, schools often tend to show off tangible factors, while the intangible core cultural values are less cared for. Measures to realize the vision and mission of the school are lacking.
- The strategy to create strong cultural nuclei to make the school excellent only stops at the general orientation and the realization of the objectives of the strategy depends on the determination of the management staff and teachers. At the preschool level, the management staff and teachers have more enthusiasm and determination, so the preschools have a better approach, and the scores are evaluated as high. The general trend is that the higher the level of education, the lower the evaluation results.
- The comfortable atmosphere, trust in each other; the recognition of abilities and personal values; the sharing of expertise, sharing of power; the respect for different opinions ... have not been highly evaluated (average score mostly below 3) and lack specific actions to form, maintain, and develop these core values.
- The prerequisites for building and developing the school into a learning community and protecting and promoting professional ethical values are not strong enough. The evidence is the evaluation results of the self-learning environment, everyone learns; the respect for different ideas; the sharing of work vision; the respect, correct evaluation of abilities and personal values; the sharing of power and the way of influencing each other ... receive low scores. This is also consistent with the reports and evaluations of the management levels.

Cause of the problem

The causes of existing shortcomings in establishing core cultural values for schools focus on problem groups (National Assembly, 2021): 1) Awareness of stakeholders in schools is not sufficient, leading to insufficient participation, consensus, and commitment of members, especially school leaders lacking a holistic view and practical management skills; 2) Identifying, disseminating, and maintaining the core values of school culture, as well as resolving conflicts and contradictions, is not effective; 3) Flexibility, adaptation, and continuous improvement to fit the external environment and internal needs of the school are not being addressed; 3) The uniqueness and differences of school culture are still being copied, losing their uniqueness; 4) Lack of democracy, disrespect for different opinions, leading to underestimating the role of teachers and staff in building school culture.

Proposed solutions

Based on promoting advantages, overcoming the disadvantages, and the causes of the problems drawn from reality, we propose five solutions to create core cultural values to build excellent schools in the context of Vietnam.

Solution 1. Raising awareness among school management staff about the role of core cultural values in building an excellent school and forming an overall, comprehensive, and accurate vision of school culture

Having accurate awareness and determining a strategy to establish core cultural values for the school are crucial. In the strategy, each school needs to build a specific orientation on the beliefs, values, and norms that need to be formed, the strong cultural nuclei that need to be prioritized to create... placed by the context and cultural environment of the community and society; from there, build measures to make managers, teachers, staff, students voluntarily accept those good beliefs and norms and express them into specific cultural behaviors and together determined to create and preserve tangible and intangible cultural elements. With the right strategy, the principal, teachers, and other members of the school will have a complete understanding of activities, determine priorities accurately, and proactively prepare supporting conditions.

To establish a strong cultural environment, schools need to develop core cultural values that members willingly accept and commit to; then, form cultural behaviors so that the school becomes a place where adults set an example for learning, with a good learning environment and effective management of changes (Saphier & King, 1985). All of these factors will create conditions for students to study better and the school to excel.

Solution 2. Creating the core elements of a strong cultural environment for the school

A strong cultural environment is one with consistency and creativity, reflects the identity, mission, and vision of the school, as well as aligns with the demands of educational innovation and societal development. Therefore, the focus should be on creating an environment that fosters learning and improvement; promotes a sense of ownership, safety, and enjoyment; encourages dedication and hard work; and instills responsibility and commitment to the work. According to Saphier & King (1985), the core elements of a strong culture include 1) Team spirit, experiential learning, an approach to knowledge improvement to support continuous learning and teaching enhancement; 2) Evaluation and recognition, care and satisfaction, traditional values to create a sense of ownership, safety, and enjoyment for all members of the school; 3) High expectations, value protection, direct support to build trust and confidence, fostering commitment and hard work; and 4) Involvement in decision-making; providing accurate information, openness to help members believe they can make a difference, encouraging responsibility and investment in work.

To establish the core elements of a strong cultural environment for the school, it is necessary to clearly define the core values of the school, based on national cultural traditions and social ethics. These core values must be publicized, promoted, and adhered to by all members of the school. It is advisable to develop cultural behavioral guidelines for staff, teachers, and students to reflect the core values in the educational and managerial activities of the school. These cultural behavioral guidelines should be monitored, evaluated, and adjusted over time to align with practical situations. The organization of extracurricular activities for students should also be focused on enhancing bonding, enthusiasm, and creativity in teaching and learning. Additionally, it is suggested that a clean, beautiful, airy, safe, and friendly cultural space for the school be created, by taking care of the environmental landscape, decorating banners, posters, logos, slogans, songs, etc. related to the core values of the school. Cultural spaces must be protected and maintained by all members of the school. At the same time, it is necessary to expand exchanges and learning with domestic and foreign schools to broaden knowledge and experience, as well as absorbing the positive points of other cultures. These exchanges and learning opportunities should be collaborative, dialogue-driven, and respectful of cultural differences.

Solution 3. Creating, maintaining, and developing progressive beliefs and value orientations for the school

Based on the school's development strategy and rooted in the core elements of a strong cultural environment, the content of this solution involves shaping beliefs and standards that dictate interactions and communications among students, between students and teachers, among teachers, and vice versa. It involves establishing value orientations regarding learning and knowledge acquisition, as well as forming the educational philosophy of the school through communication behaviors, attire, and interactions with the physical environment. This approach considers these aspects as pivotal in nurturing character and educating the younger generation into individuals with aspirations and positive ideals.

The objectives of this solution focus on two groups of cultural values: 1) Promoting and preserving positive values within the school, nurturing an atmosphere of openness, democracy, cooperation, trust, and mutual respect; each person knowing their tasks, understanding their responsibilities, sharing awareness, actively participating in decision-making, valuing individuals, encouraging effort, and recognizing success; having standards for continuous improvement, innovation, and progress. The school's leadership should encourage teachers to improve methods to enhance quality; participate in contributing opinions to all school activities; encourage dialogue, cooperation, and teamwork; and share experiences and exchange professional knowledge. Through assignment mechanisms, job assignments should be shared, granting authority and responsibility, sharing visions, showing care, cooperative relationships, and attracting managerial, teaching, administrative, and student involvement in problem-solving. 2) Overcoming and minimizing uncultured behaviors, such as blaming and accusing each other (blame culture); in management, overly tight control, loss of freedom, autonomy; autocratic leadership, mechanical principles; frequent reprimands, lack of encouragement; lack of openness, lack of trust; lack of cooperation, sharing, mutual learning; internal conflicts and contradictions.

It is essential to understand that the school's culture is shaped by multiple factors, with the most significant being the school itself, the teachers, and families. Based on this: i) Organize discussions, consultations, and surveys involving stakeholders within the school, including the school's management board, staff, teachers, students, parents, the community, and businesses, to propose and agree on core values for the school. These core values should align with the school's identity, mission, and vision, as well as with the demands of educational innovation and societal development; ii) Announce and promote core values to the entire school community through public information

mediums, banners, posters, logos, slogans, songs, etc. The values should also be memorized and well understood by all members within the school; iii) Implement and maintain core values in the educational and managerial activities of the school. They should be reflected through behavioral guidelines, quality standards, reward and disciplinary policies, teaching and learning programs, extracurricular activities, students' activities, etc. They should also be monitored, evaluated, and adjusted over time to suit real-world situations.

To achieve this, it is necessary to enhance ethical education, lifestyles, aesthetics, and cultural behavior for staff, teachers, and students. This can be accomplished through teaching activities, learning experiences, volunteering, and student movements. Serious implementation of cultural behavior rules within the school should be established, publicly displayed, and monitored for compliance by all members of the school community, while promptly and transparently handling cultural behavior violations within the school, alongside appropriate measures of reward and discipline, should be applied. Creating a clean, pleasant, safe, and friendly cultural environment for the school can be achieved through environmental landscaping, decorating banners, posters, logos, slogans, songs, etc., all of which are linked to the core values of the school.

Solution 4. Establishing and safeguarding professional ethics standards

The content involves establishing ethical teaching standards based on regulations regarding professional standards and other provisions related to educators. This ensures unanimous and voluntary adherence by the administrative staff and faculty, setting a positive example for students.

The approach entails effectively executing the following principles: i) The school - assuming the role of guiding and emphasizing the importance of moral education and cultivating refined and courteous behavior; ii) Teachers - acting as guides, thereby integrating guidance and setting examples for students in cultural greetings, queuing, reading, thriftiness, environmental protection, online behavior, phone etiquette, etc.; iii) Principals - comprehensively managing and focusing on developing vision, mission, and plans; enhancing awareness; organizing, directing, supervising; concentrating on safeguarding core standards of tradition and modernity, such as continuous learning, good perception, diligence, and confidence to make a difference; and iv) Families - cooperating, preserving, and advancing.

Solution 5. Building the school as a learning community

The school leadership should make every member of the school understand that a learning institution can alter thinking and actions flexibly. If they can do things previously unaccomplished, they will continue expanding the capability to create a better and more sustainable future by fostering an environment of continuous shared learning (Senge, 1990). A school is a community of learners where everyone is a student; the school's potential for change depends on their learning. Among them, teachers are mature learners, and principals are learners who lead. Especially in the current context, schools must learn to balance the knowledge of their team with outside experiences by integrating theory into practice, connecting learning with the creation of tangible societal values for students.

To build the school into a learning community, the school leadership needs to foster the participation of stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, local communities, and other partners, in defining and pursuing common learning goals. They should create opportunities for teachers and students to learn from each other, share experiences, knowledge, and skills, as well as provide constructive feedback and assessment. Encouraging creativity, research, and exploration in the learning process while respecting the diversity and differences among individuals and groups is essential. Utilizing tools and learning resources such as information technology, libraries, laboratories, playgrounds, and extracurricular activities is crucial. Establishing connections with organizations and individuals with expertise and experience in relevant fields can expand the scope of learning for administrators, teachers, and students, continuously enhancing the quality of education.

Conclusion

Creating a "Happy School," an "Amazing School," a "friendly, active student school," or a "school brand" all fundamentally entail establishing progressive values regarding administrative personnel, teachers, students, teaching processes, and the environmental landscape, allowing the school to achieve the management goal of further development, meeting the expectations of learners and society. Among the values that constitute the school's brand, core cultural values play a profound and crucial role in making the school outstanding. Therefore, devising solutions to form core cultural values for the school is one of the paths toward constructing an exceptional school. The solutions proposed in this article are derived from analysis and evaluation of the current state of schools and are in line with

regulations at various management levels in Vietnam (Communist Party, 2014; MOET, 2020a; MOET, 2020b; Government, 2014). It is hoped that they will meet the management requirements posed in the context of educational innovation and training today./.

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