

Developing Physical Education Culture in Vietnamese Schools: An Approach Based on School Culture Governance and Holistic Education

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Abstract
In the context of educational reform oriented toward holistic human development, physical education culture is increasingly recognized as an important component of school culture, contributing to the development of healthy lifestyles, discipline, and responsibility among learners. This study examines the theoretical and practical foundations of physical education culture development in Vietnamese schools through the perspectives of school culture governance and holistic education. It employs document analysis and synthesis, policy analysis, comparative methods, and descriptive statistics, together with a survey of 155 administrators, lecturers, and students at five universities in Ho Chi Minh City. The findings indicate that most respondents positively assess the role of physical education culture in learners' holistic development. However, the integration of physical education activities into school culture remains uneven. The most prominent influencing factors include institutional leadership commitment, development policies, faculty competencies, learning environments, and learner participation. Accordingly, the study proposes cultural governance as the central mechanism for integrating physical education into institutional development strategies, creating school environments that encourage physical activity, and fostering sustainable cultural values. The findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of physical education culture and provide a scholarly basis for policymaking, governance, and the organization of physical education activities in Vietnamese educational institutions.

Keywords: physical education culture, school culture, school governance, holistic education, physical education

1. Introduction

In the context of fundamental and comprehensive reform of education and training, the development of Vietnamese people is no longer assessed primarily through learning outcomes or academic achievements. Increasing emphasis is placed on the harmonious development of intellectual abilities, physical capacities, personal qualities, and adaptability to social change. This perspective is consistently reflected in the policies of the Communist Party and the State concerning the development of Vietnamese people capable of meeting the requirements of sustainable development. Within these orientations, culture and education are regarded as two mutually reinforcing pillars that contribute to cultivating the qualities and competencies of younger generations (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2014; Ho Chi Minh, 2011) [1, 5]. From this perspective, physical education does more than promote health or develop motor competencies. It directly contributes to shaping school culture by cultivating discipline, cooperation, healthy lifestyles, personal responsibility, and positive behavioral attitudes.

In recent years, alongside general education reform and international integration, physical education in Vietnam has undergone significant changes in both policy and implementation. Resolution No. 08-NQ/TW of the Politburo (2011) [12] identified the development of school physical training and sports as an important task for improving physical fitness, physical stature, and the quality of national human resources. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education and Training introduced the physical education curriculum within the 2018 General Education Curriculum and issued various guidelines on school safety, accident and injury

prevention, and the promotion of school sports activities (Ministry of Education and Training, 2016, 2018) [10, 11]. Sectoral reports also indicate substantial improvements in physical education following more than a decade of implementing the Sports Development Strategy, including diversification of learning content, expansion of extracurricular activities, and increased awareness of the importance of physical activity for students' health (V. D., 2021).

Nevertheless, these changes have primarily focused on curricula, teaching methods, and the organizational conditions of physical activities. Comparatively little attention has been given to developing a cultural environment that encourages students to establish regular exercise habits, cultivate sportsmanship, maintain active lifestyles, and regard physical activity as a cultural value within the school community. In practice, physical education classes in many educational institutions are still perceived as compulsory subjects rather than environments for values education. Extracurricular sports activities have not become fully integrated into school life, while cooperation among schools, families, and communities in developing environments conducive to physical activity remains insufficiently systematic. These circumstances reveal a considerable gap between implementing physical education programmes and establishing a culture of physical education.

This gap reflects a governance issue rather than merely a matter of teaching practice. Research on educational management indicates that educational quality depends not only on curriculum content but also on organizational culture, leadership approaches, and the learning environments created by educational institutions (Vu Hong, 2022; Van, 2022) [17, 20]. Educational values can produce lasting changes in learners only when they become embedded in behavioral norms, coordination mechanisms, and school traditions. From this perspective, developing physical education culture should be approached as part of school culture governance, whereby physical activities are integrated into institutional core values, behavioral standards, educational environments, and students' experiential activities rather than remaining confined to physical education classes.

This approach is also consistent with educational reforms oriented toward developing learners' qualities and competencies. Numerous studies emphasize that educational innovation becomes genuinely effective only when learners participate in environments that stimulate motivation, initiative, and creativity (Le Thuy Hang & Vu Hong Van, 2020; Hong Van, 2020) [14]. In physical education, this entails developing a school ecosystem in which students not only acquire motor skills but also cultivate self-discipline in physical training, cooperation, respect for rules, perseverance in overcoming challenges, and responsibility for their own health and that of the community. These constitute the core values of physical education culture and contribute to realizing the objectives of holistic education pursued by the 2018 General Education Curriculum.

Furthermore, developing physical education culture is significant for preserving and promoting Vietnamese cultural values amid international integration. Studies on cultural values education and Vietnamese cultural identity suggest that schools provide an important environment for transmitting, reproducing, and developing traditional cultural values through educational activities (Trung & Van, 2020a, 2020b; Van, 2020) [14, 15]. In physical education, this is reflected not only in the organization of modern sports but also in the integration of traditional folk games, martial arts, martial spirit, community awareness, and appropriate conduct in sporting activities. When systematically organized, physical education can serve as a bridge between physical development and the cultivation of cultural values, morality, and national identity.

Although considerable research has examined educational management, education policies, and innovations in school-based educational activities, existing studies have primarily addressed physical education from the perspectives of curricula, activity management, or school sports development. The concept of "physical education culture" has yet to be adequately clarified in terms of its meaning, structure, and formation mechanisms. Moreover, the issue has not been examined through the relationship between school culture governance and the objectives of holistic education. This gap calls for a new analytical framework that recognizes physical education as a component of school culture and a driving force for the sustainable development of educational environments.

Drawing on these theoretical and practical foundations, this study examines the theoretical basis of physical education culture in schools, clarifies its constituent elements and the relationship between school culture governance and physical education culture development, and proposes development directions aligned with the requirements of educational reform and the establishment of holistic education in Vietnam.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Assessment of Previous Research Findings

Research on physical education in schools has been approached from various perspectives, reflecting a shift from viewing physical education primarily as physical training toward recognizing it as an integral component of holistic education. However, an examination of the relevant literature indicates that existing studies have largely concentrated on three main areas: (i) cultural education and human development; (ii) educational governance and policy; and (iii) the organization of physical education activities in schools. Each area has made significant contributions, yet each also reveals certain limitations when considered from the perspective of physical education culture development.

The first group of studies focuses on clarifying the role of culture in education and the formation of learners' character. Studies by Trung and Van (2020a, 2020b) [14, 15] affirm that education involves not only the transmission of knowledge but also the transmission and reproduction of national cultural values in the context of international integration. According to these authors, Vietnamese cultural identity should be nurtured through educational environments where learners develop community awareness, social responsibility, and the capacity to adapt to contemporary changes. This approach broadens the understanding of the school's functions, emphasizing that culture does not exist as an isolated component but is manifested throughout educational activities.

From historical and educational philosophical perspectives, Van (2020) [14] points out that Vietnamese educational traditions have consistently valued the harmonious development of morality, intellect, and physical well-being. Values such as discipline, community spirit, perseverance, and commitment to self-cultivation have become cultural

norms established over successive historical periods. Together with Ho Chi Minh's thought on developing well-rounded individuals (Ho Chi Minh, 2011) [5] and the orientations of Resolution No. 33-NQ/TW on the development of Vietnamese culture (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2014) [1], these studies provide a theoretical foundation for understanding physical education not merely as physical activity but also as an environment for cultivating values, attitudes, and lifestyles.

Nevertheless, these studies primarily examine culture from the perspectives of values education or national identity without clarifying how such values are realized through physical education activities. The relationship between school culture and the physical education environment has been suggested but has not yet become an independent subject of investigation.

The second group of studies focuses on educational governance and policy reform. Van (2022) [17] and Hoduc, Vothanh, and Vuhong (2022) [20] argue that educational reform in Vietnam is moving from an administrative management model toward governance based on quality, accountability, and learner competency development. In this context, schools need to establish flexible educational environments that encourage stakeholder participation and create conditions for learners' holistic development. Similarly, Vu Hong (2022) [20] emphasizes that managing educational activities through a competency-based approach involves more than curriculum adjustment; it also requires developing learning environments, organizational culture, and coordination mechanisms among educational stakeholders.

Research on teaching innovation also indicates that positive educational environments directly influence learners' motivation, creativity, and initiative (Ho Duc Hiep *et al*., 2020; Le Thuy Hang & Vu Hong Van, 2020; Hong Van, 2020) [14]. These findings demonstrate that educational quality is simultaneously influenced by curriculum content, organizational methods, and school culture. This provides an important basis for extending research into physical education, since the effectiveness of physical activities depends not only on instructional hours or physical facilities but also on the perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral norms developed within educational environments.

Nevertheless, existing studies on educational governance have not considered physical education as a component of school culture. The concept of physical education culture governance has received virtually no attention, despite its potential to connect educational management, cultural development, and holistic education.

The third group of studies directly addresses physical education and school sports. From a policy perspective, Resolution No. 08-NQ/TW of the Politburo (2011) [12], Circular No. 25/2015/TT-BGDDT concerning higher education, the 2018 General Education Curriculum (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018) [11], and guidelines on school safety (Ministry of Education and Training, 2016) [10] have established a relatively comprehensive legal framework for developing physical education within the national education system. These documents consistently recognize physical education as a compulsory component of holistic education while emphasizing the development of physical fitness, motor skills, and healthy lifestyles among students.

From a disciplinary perspective, Toan and Ton (2018) [13] systematized the theoretical foundations, content, and methods of physical education, clarifying the contribution of physical activity to learners' physical development and character formation. A report by V. D. (2021) also documented numerous innovations in physical education and school sports following more than ten years of implementing the Sports Development Strategy, particularly the diversification of extracurricular activities, improvements in physical facilities, and increased awareness of school health.

Furthermore, studies on the management of specialized educational activities, such as traffic safety education (VuHong, 2021; Vuhong, 2022) [19, 20], indicate that educational effectiveness improves only when learning activities take place within a coherent cultural environment supported by cooperation among schools, families, and society. Although these studies do not directly address physical education, their approach suggests that developing physical education culture should likewise be regarded as a comprehensive governance process rather than merely the organization of physical education classes.

Overall, existing studies have established important foundations concerning educational culture, school governance, education policy, and physical education. However, these research areas have remained relatively independent. The relationships among school culture, educational governance, and physical education have not been examined within a unified theoretical framework, limiting explanations of the role of culture in the sustainable development of physical education.

2.2. Research Gaps and Directions

A synthesis and analysis of the relevant literature identifies three principal research gaps.First, although numerous studies affirm the role of culture in education and the importance of physical education for human development, the concept of physical education culture has not yet been established as an independent subject of research. Existing studies primarily approach physical education through curricula, teaching methods, or activity management, while the values, norms, beliefs, behaviors, and cultural environments associated with physical activities in schools have not been systematically conceptualized.

Second, existing research has not clarified the mechanisms through which school culture governance influences the formation and development of physical education culture. Most educational governance studies focus on management effectiveness, methodological innovation, or learner competency development without examining how school leadership, educational environments, and the participation of teachers, students, and families collectively create a cultural ecosystem that promotes sustainable physical activity.

Third, no study has proposed a model for developing physical education culture through a holistic education approach appropriate to the context of educational reform in Vietnam. Although national policies emphasize holistic human development and the creation of culturally enriched school environments, translating these orientations into a governance model capable of practical implementation remains a significant research gap.

To address these gaps, the present study approaches physical

education culture as a component of school culture while regarding cultural governance as the central mechanism connecting education policy, school environments, and learners' holistic development. Accordingly, the study seeks to clarify the meaning of physical education culture, identify its constituent elements, examine the role of school culture governance in its formation, and propose a development framework aligned with educational reform requirements in Vietnam. This approach not only contributes to addressing the theoretical gap concerning physical education culture but also provides a scholarly foundation for developing policies and governance models that promote school environments oriented toward holistic education and sustainable development.

3. Research Findings

To assess the current state of physical education culture development in universities, the study surveyed 155 administrators, lecturers, and students at five universities in Ho Chi Minh City. The findings were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, to clarify the prominent manifestations of physical education culture within educational institutions.

3.1. Awareness of the Role of Physical Education Culture

The survey findings indicate that most respondents highly valued the role of physical education culture in learners' holistic development.

Table 1: Respondents' Perceptions of the Role of Physical Education Culture in Learners' Holistic Development

Assessment item	Agree and strongly agree	Mean	SD
Contributing to learners' holistic development	139 (89.68%)	4.42	0.63
Promoting healthy lifestyles	143 (92.26%)	4.48	0.58
Fostering cooperation and discipline	136 (87.74%)	4.36	0.66
Strengthening school cultural identity	129 (83.23%)	4.24	0.71
Contributing to character education	134 (86.45%)	4.31	0.67

The findings indicate a relatively consistent pattern of awareness across respondent groups. As many as 92.26% believed that physical education culture contributes to the development of healthy lifestyles, while 89.68% regarded it as a foundation for holistic education.

This reflects a shift from the traditional understanding of physical education as primarily a means of improving physical fitness toward a broader approach in which physical activities are regarded as an environment for cultivating cultural values, responsibility, and social skills. This finding is consistent with the orientations toward holistic human development established in Resolution No. 33-NQ/TW (2014), Resolution No. 08-NQ/TW (2011), and the 2018 General Education Curriculum.

Nevertheless, the proportion of respondents agreeing that physical education culture "contributes to strengthening school cultural identity" (83.23%) was lower than for the other items. This suggests that awareness of the relationship between physical education and school culture remains insufficiently developed. Physical activities continue to be perceived primarily as part of an academic subject rather than as a component of organizational culture.

3.2. Current State of Developing a Cultural Environment for Physical Education

The survey findings indicate that the physical education environment at universities has undergone considerable changes, although development remains uneven across its components.

Table 2: Current State of the Physical Education Cultural Environment in Universities

Assessment item	Mean	SD
Facilities supporting physical activities	3.98	0.77
Spaces that encourage physical activity	3.91	0.75
Extracurricular sports activities	3.84	0.81
Student participation	3.88	0.79
Communication promoting health and physical activity	3.73	0.82
Integration of physical education into school culture	3.69	0.85

Among the assessment criteria, physical facilities received the most positive rating (Mean = 3.98), reflecting the attention that many universities have given to investing in sports grounds and equipment. However, the mean score for "integration of physical education into school culture" was only 3.69, the lowest among the surveyed criteria.

This finding indicates that the development of physical education currently places greater emphasis on physical resources and the organization of activities, while the transformation of these activities into sustainable cultural values remains limited. Many universities organize sports competitions or physical education classes relatively frequently but have yet to establish the norms, traditions, and environments needed to encourage students to maintain long-term exercise habits.

This trend is consistent with V. D. (2021), who argues that school physical education has undergone numerous innovations in scale and organizational forms but still requires improvements in the quality of educational environments to produce lasting effects on learners' behavior.

3.3. Factors Influencing the Development of Physical Education Culture

The survey findings identify six groups of factors influencing the development of physical education culture.

Table 3: Factors Influencing the Development of Physical Education Culture in Universities

Factor	Agree	Mean	SD
Leadership commitment	141 (90.97%)	4.47	0.59
Faculty competencies	137 (88.39%)	4.35	0.64
Institutional policies	133 (85.81%)	4.28	0.68
Physical facilities	130 (83.87%)	4.19	0.72
Student participation	126 (81.29%)	4.12	0.74
Family–society collaboration	118 (76.13%)	3.98	0.80

Institutional leadership commitment was perceived as the most influential factor (Mean = 4.47). This indicates that developing physical education culture depends not only on physical education teachers but also on governance orientations, internal policies, and resource allocation.

Faculty competencies and physical education development policies also received high ratings. This is consistent with the views of Vu Hong (2022) [20] and Van (2022) [17], who argue that modern educational governance must establish learning environments capable of fostering motivation and encouraging learners' active participation.

Notably, family–society collaboration received a mean score of only 3.98. This suggests that the development of physical education culture remains largely confined to educational institutions, while support from external stakeholders is not yet sufficiently strong.

3.4. Directions for Developing Physical Education Culture Through School Culture Governance

Survey respondents were asked to assess the necessity of proposed development directions for the coming period.

Table 4: Respondents' Assessment of Proposed Directions for Developing Physical Education Culture in Universities

Development direction	Agree	Mean	SD
Establishing a strategy for physical education culture development	145 (93.55%)	4.58	0.54
Expanding experiential sports activities	143 (92.26%)	4.53	0.56
Developing school environments that encourage physical activity	140 (90.32%)	4.46	0.60
Strengthening faculty professional development	138 (89.03%)	4.41	0.63
Promoting communication on healthy lifestyles	136 (87.74%)	4.34	0.66
Strengthening collaboration among schools, families, and society	132 (85.16%)	4.27	0.69

The survey findings reveal a particularly high level of agreement regarding the need to establish an institutional strategy for developing physical education culture (93.55%). Respondents were concerned not only with improving the quality of physical education classes but also with creating a school environment in which physical activity becomes a cultural value sustained through regular practice.

These findings imply that developing physical education culture should be understood as a comprehensive governance process. Educational institutions need to integrate physical education into their organizational culture development strategies, connecting formal curricular activities, extracurricular programmes, and life values education. At the same time, strengthening faculty development, enhancing internal communication, and expanding family and community participation would contribute to establishing positive learning environments aligned with the objectives of holistic human development articulated in Vietnam's educational policies and orientations.

5. Discussion

The findings indicate that developing physical education culture in schools should not be confined to improving the teaching quality of Physical Education or expanding extracurricular sports activities. Rather, it should be understood as a process of cultivating school culture. This represents an important departure from traditional approaches that assess physical education primarily through instructional hours, physical facilities, or sporting achievements. Survey findings indicate that learners and lecturers highly value the role of physical education in fostering healthy lifestyles, cooperation, and discipline. This suggests that the significance of physical education lies not only in improving health but also in its capacity to establish behavioral norms and cultural values sustained throughout school life. This interpretation is consistent with Trung and Van (2020a, 2020b) [14, 15], who regard schools as environments in which cultural values are transmitted and reproduced through all educational activities rather than solely through subjects concerned with morality or culture.

However, the findings also reveal a notable gap between awareness and implementation. Although most respondents recognized the importance of physical education culture, the integration of physical activities into school culture remained insufficient. This indicates that physical education in many institutions continues to be organized according to subject-management principles rather than an approach centered on organizational culture development. Sports activities are often organized as individual events or semester-based programmes without becoming integral to institutional identity and traditions. Consequently, values such as fair play, responsibility, commitment to independent exercise, and cooperation have not been fully translated into stable behavioral norms among learners. This finding extends previous research on values education by demonstrating that value transmission becomes meaningful only when embedded in a coherent cultural environment and sustained through regular educational activities.

Another significant finding concerns the central role of school culture governance in developing physical education culture. The survey results indicate that institutional leadership commitment, internal policies, and faculty competencies were perceived as the strongest influences on physical education culture development. This suggests that physical education culture does not emerge spontaneously from physical activities but depends substantially on how educational institutions design their learning environments, allocate resources, and establish shared values. This finding aligns with Vu Hong (2022) [20], who argues that competency-based educational governance should extend beyond managing activities to creating learning environments and organizational culture. From this perspective, school leaders serve not merely as administrators but as key actors in establishing the conditions through which physical activity becomes part of school culture.

From a governance perspective, the study also indicates that developing physical education culture is an interdisciplinary process requiring coordination among multiple stakeholders. Physical education teachers provide specialized expertise, but educational effectiveness also depends on the participation of teachers from other disciplines, school organizations, families, and communities. When these stakeholders share common values concerning health, physical activity, and active lifestyles, physical education can extend beyond formal curricula to become part of everyday educational environments. This is consistent with research on educational innovation emphasizing that positive learning environments and stakeholder participation are essential conditions for developing learners' qualities and competencies (Le Thuy Hang & Vu Hong Van, 2020; Hong Van, 2020; Ho Duc Hiep *et al*., 2020) [14].

Another important dimension is the relationship between physical education culture and the objectives of holistic education. For many years, physical education was commonly regarded as a field supporting academic objectives. However, the findings indicate that respondents increasingly recognize physical education as a direct contributor to learners' character formation, lifestyles, and social competencies. This is consistent with the orientations for Vietnamese human development established in Resolution No. 33-NQ/TW (2014), Ho Chi Minh's thought on educating well-rounded individuals (Ho Chi Minh, 2011) [5], and Vietnam's education policy reform orientations (Van, 2022; Hoduc *et al*., 2022) [17]. Accordingly, physical development cannot be separated from cultural development, morality, and civic responsibility. When organized within a positive educational environment, physical activities not only improve health but also cultivate perseverance, cooperation, respect for rules, and adaptability, qualities increasingly valued in modern education.

The findings further suggest that although investment in physical facilities is necessary, it is insufficient to establish physical education culture. Some universities have substantially improved sports grounds, gymnasiums, and equipment, yet students' regular participation and ability to maintain exercise habits have not improved correspondingly. This indicates that the decisive factors extend beyond physical conditions to include motivational mechanisms, organizational approaches, and the capacity to foster learners' sense of connection with physical activities. Developing physical education culture should therefore be understood as a transition from "providing sports activities" to "cultivating physically active lifestyles," in which values are sustained through voluntary participation and the commitment of school community members.

These analyses indicate that physical education culture development requires a comprehensive governance model rather than an approach focused on individual activities. Such a model should position physical education culture in an integral relationship with institutional development strategies, education policies, learning environments, and cooperation among educational stakeholders. This constitutes an additional contribution of the study to existing scholarship by conceptualizing physical education culture as a component of school culture and a mechanism for realizing the objectives of holistic education. This approach is relevant not only to improving physical education quality but also to establishing healthy educational environments in which physical activity becomes a cultural value shared, practiced, and sustainably maintained throughout the educational community.

6. Conclusion

This study approached the development of physical education culture from the perspectives of school culture governance and holistic education, demonstrating that physical education not only improves physical fitness but also contributes to establishing cultural values, norms, and behaviors within educational environments. Drawing on theoretical analysis and survey findings, the study indicates that administrators, lecturers, and students generally hold positive perceptions of the role of physical education culture. Nevertheless, limitations remain in translating these perceptions into sustainable cultural practices and mechanisms within educational institutions. The findings also affirm the central role of school culture governance, particularly leadership commitment, development policies, faculty competencies, and learning environments, in promoting the formation of physical education culture.

The study's contribution lies in proposing an approach that regards physical education culture as a component of school culture while emphasizing the connections among educational governance, school environments, and the objectives of holistic human development. The findings provide a scholarly foundation for educational institutions to formulate physical education development strategies that integrate curricula, experiential activities, and institutional cultural values.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations because the survey was conducted at only five universities in Ho Chi Minh City and relied primarily on cross-sectional data. Future research could expand its scope to different educational levels and geographical areas while employing advanced quantitative analytical methods or longitudinal designs to assess changes in physical education culture over time and test the proposed governance model.

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