



Educational quality in developing quality culture: The students' perspectives in Vietnamese public secondary schools

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Abstract

This study examined the perception of educational quality among grade 8 and grade 9 students in Vietnamese public secondary schools. The researchers employed a quantitative approach to examine the students' perceptions of educational quality. Convenience sampling was utilized to select participants with 1644 grade 8 students and 2602 grade 9 students. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to identify significant differences. The findings revealed significant differences in the perception of educational quality between grade 8 students (learning from the new 2018 national educational curriculum) and grade 9 students (learning from the old 2006 national educational curriculum). Additionally, variations were observed among students from three distinct provinces notwithstanding the application of a standardized secondary educational curriculum. The study recommended that educational policymakers at various levels should develop and standardize instruments and guidelines to embed a quality culture within educational setting practices. Such initiatives were essential for enhancing the awareness and competencies of individuals and collectives engaged in the educational process. This research served as an informative channel for schools to reference in enhancing quality and contributing to developing a quality culture within the school.

Keywords: 2018 national educational curriculum, Education quality, Quality assurance, Quality culture, Secondary school, Southeast region.

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Contribution of this paper to the literature

This study provides an informative channel for schools to reference in enhancing quality and contributing to developing a quality culture. It also provides a reference for school administrators and policymakers in devising plans and strategies for developing teaching-learning organizations and student support activities aligned with local and regional socioeconomic development.

1. Introduction

Currently, quality assurance and quality culture are linked and support each other to develop educational quality in every educational setting. This connection depended on the socio-economic development and socio-cultural awareness of each country and region. Quality assurance and quality accreditation activities have a close relationship with the development of quality culture as quality accreditation is just an impact tool to build quality culture (De Paor, 2016; Hanh, 2020; Quyen, 2019). According to Elassy (2015) quality assurance is a matter of awareness and commitment called quality culture. The role of the quality assurance unit is to consult, implement and supervise in building a quality culture. Quality culture is an important factor in ensuring the quality of higher education (Bendermacher, Oude Egbrink, Wolfhagen, & Dolmans, 2017; Ehlers, 2009). Quality culture is the development and compliance with internal quality assurance processes that form the quality culture and quality system of educational institutions through the internal assessment process deploying simultaneously the building of a Total Quality Management (TQM) system and quality culture to achieve the desired results (Sallis, 2014). Quality culture is understood as a practice reflecting the application of a quality assurance framework to educational institutions (Cameron & Sine, 1999). In an educational setting, when the implementation of quality assurance activities has a positive meaning, quality cultural values will be formed (Durana, Kral, Stehel, Lazaroiu, & Sroka, 2019). In this study, quality culture (QC) is defined as a system of values, standards, beliefs and ways of working with quality and efficiency that are shaped by each member of the schools or educational institutions (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008). Educational institutions are responsible for meeting these stakeholders' expectations and striving for optimal efficiency and effectiveness based on the proposed conceptual framework of QC. The concept of a QC is both theoretical and practical in advancing the quality of activities within educational institutions. It serves as a tool and methodology to assist educational institutions in developing a TQM framework for continuous quality enhancement.

In recent years, the focus on studies of quality culture within Vietnamese educational settings has primarily been on higher education as evidenced by academic articles, conferences, and scientific symposiums since the introduction of quality assurance in Vietnam (Do, Le, & Giang, 2020; Panuwatwanich & Nguyen, 2017; Pham & Starkey, 2016). Quality assurance initiatives began in secondary education in 2012 and have been widely promoted nationwide (Do & Treve, 2024). However, the urgency of cultivating a QC within secondary educational institutions maintained a research gap. It is essential that the stakeholders in the field of education should take immediate action to implement the initial study in this field to solve the problems of QC in the context of reforming the old 2006-national educational curriculum into the new 2018 national curriculum since the 2019 academic year in Vietnam (Nguyen, Pham, & Pham, 2022). This should be done with quality assurance activities to ensure that these efforts yield significant and positive outcomes.

1.1. The Significance of the Study

This study was carried out to explore the students' satisfaction with educational quality by assessing their perceptions of QC, including the instructional activities, academic support services, and the school environment. The significance of this study is to gather sufficient persuasive evidence to explore the quality perception of the students and identify issues arising from the questionnaire related to the development of quality culture in the developing country of Vietnam.

2. Literature Review

Quality is a developmental process involving progressive change (Jidamva, 2012), a transformation from one state to another (Harvey & Green, 1993) and encompasses effectiveness, efficiency, equity, relevance, and sustainability with these elements being interrelated (Barrett, Chawla-Duggan, Lowe, Nickel, & Ukpo, 2006). It is also defined by the degree to which customer satisfaction is met with the product or service at any given time (Ojo & Adu, 2017). Education is the cornerstone of a nation's development and a key indicator of its progress. Through education, individuals acquire knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that enable them to contribute meaningfully to society. Consequently, quality has become a crucial factor in many countries as it is perceived as the foundation for all developmental efforts providing a vision for a better future (Gindo, Anagaw, & Sapo, 2020). There are various perspectives on educational quality. It is often viewed as comprising inputs, processes, and outputs (Bîrzea, Cecchini, Harrison, Krek, & Spajic-Vrkaš, 2005; Carlson, 2000; Chandra, 2021) sometimes only as inputs and processes (Kousainow, 2016) or exclusively as outputs (Aladejana, 2011; Chonjo, 2018; Jidamva, 2012). Outputs are mainly considered a standard for measuring and evaluating the current state of educational quality within the system through students' academic results which are outcomes of the quality of inputs and processes (Kelkay,

2023). Additionally, the processes within school operations and their interactions with stakeholders play a crucial role (Khadjieva & Ismailov, 2022). According to Bedi and Sharma (2010) it is essential to distinguish between educational outcomes and the processes leading to those outcomes when contemplating educational quality. Educational quality is influenced by various factors (Ama, 2003; Bokayev, 2016; Hatzidimitriadou, 2011; UNICEF, 2000) and necessitates a precise description of these factors (Garira, 2020).

Improving the quality of education demands significant commitment from all stakeholders, especially teachers (Ama, 2003). Kousainow's (2016) research on enhancing the quality of secondary education in Kazakhstan highlighted the importance of mobilizing and ensuring the effective functioning of a comprehensive team. This collective encompassed researchers, teachers, parents, academic institutions, scholarly authors and publishers, instructional staff, professionals and the wider community. Their collective efforts were essential to elevating standards and curricula, improving textbook quality, enhancing staff professional development, refining educational supervision, fostering personal education in ethics and patriotism, advancing educational and scientific research, improving the management system, and upgrading technical facilities.

Chandra (2021) identified several key quality indicators, including curriculum, classroom processes, teachers and pedagogy, school principals and management, and continuous comprehensive evaluation. Specific quality indicators for a secondary school encompassed infrastructure, other resources, and teaching-learning materials. Chandra (2021) underscored the significance of prioritizing secondary education, highlighting its crucial role as an intermediary link between primary schooling and tertiary academic pursuits, which was indispensable for the development of human resources. This stage was crucial for building human capital through skill development and vocational training. The quality of education at this level must foster a spirit of lifelong learning and cultivate critical and analytical thinking.

Qurat-ul-ain, Zai, and Shaheen (2022) delineated the essential components of educational quality, including the learning environment, teachers and pedagogical methodologies, curriculum design, and assessment practices. These elements were intended to converge and facilitate the provision of superior learning encounters, with the efficacy of an educational framework commonly evaluated based on students' academic performance. Papanthymou and Darra (2023) proposed a framework for educational quality consisting of five components with 21 specific elements: the learning environment (4 elements), learning content (5 elements), processes (4 elements), students (4 elements), and teachers (4 elements).

The concept of quality culture is mentioned as a tool to enhance and standardize quality within organizations. It is a cultural element that promotes organizational development in quality-related activities. It is intricately linked and systematically connected with other organizational cultural elements presenting itself as a high moral and social value arena (Kinesti, 2019). Therefore, there is a need to foster a quality culture that enables individuals to improve their educational activities continuously (Wani, 2014).

Effectively implementing and executing educational quality assurance activities embodied a quality culture in educational institutions (De Jager & Nieuwenhuis, 2005; Spruit & Adriana, 2015). Ensuring the quality of teaching and learning activities and academic support activities were core factors that instill confidence and create a positive image of the school for students. In secondary education, teaching and learning activities were fundamental to student education and the implementation of the secondary education program. Ojo and Adu (2017) argued that the quality of teaching was imperative for national development, driving economic growth and enhancing teacher productivity. A competent teacher consistently engages students, does not confine them, and demonstrates how they create a foundation for student affection (Ololube, 2005). High student achievement is directly related to teachers who exhibit a positive attitude, work diligently and stimulate students' learning motivation (Willis & Varner, 2010).

Pervez, Dahar, and Maryam (2017) studied the impact of school culture on the academic performance of secondary school students and considered five variables related to the school culture environment. Among these, teacher quality was associated with academic qualifications and experience; student quality was linked to academic performance and students' commitment and effectiveness in extracurricular activities and homework assignments. Mamun-ur-Rashid (2023) applied the SERVQUAL model to investigate service quality in public secondary schools in Bangladesh. The study identified the following five dimensions: Tangible (physical facilities and learning equipment), responsiveness (providing services and student support), reliability (efficient and accurate service delivery), assurance (trust and confidence in students), and empathy (school concern for students). The findings suggested limited teacher capacity, inadequate attention to students outside formal hours, and failure to meet students' needs in improving academic performance.

In Vietnam, several studies conducted in secondary schools focus on teaching (Ho & Le, 2019; Nguyen, 2018) learning (Dang & Phan, 2018; Pham, Nguyen, & Doan, 2018) spiritual quality (Hoang, 2017; Vu, 2018) and school culture (Nguyen, 2011). These authors have shown and are currently concerned with enhancing quality and raising awareness of educational quality in their respective fields. Therefore, fostering a quality culture in educational institutions in Vietnam specifically public secondary schools in the Southeast region posed a significant challenge in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution in line with Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW dated November 4, 2013, on fundamental and comprehensive innovation in education and training, meeting the requirements of Industrialization, modernization in the context of socialist-oriented market economies and international integration, and the implementation of Decision No. 2161/QĐ-BGDĐT dated June 26, 2017 on the issuance of the Plan for Sustainable Development of Education and Training until 2025 and orientation towards 2030. This plan aimed to have 88% of students complete secondary school by 2025 and 93% by 2030.

Various authors may hold different perspectives on educational quality. They generally encompass the three factors of inputs, processes and outputs of the educational process, differing in selecting one or more factors leading to educational quality. Educational quality is measured based on indices of identified factors closely correlated with the perception of quality by stakeholders involved in the educational process. Research suggests that the quality of students shaped by their educational experiences profoundly influences the effectiveness of the educational process. Therefore, the role of teachers who directly guide students is of utmost importance. Thus, the quality of educational outcomes asserts the existence of a quality culture and the effectiveness of educational activities affirms the existence of measures of quality culture.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study aimed to assess the perceptions of educational quality among grade 8 and grade 9 students in public secondary schools within the Southeast region of Vietnam including Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong Province, and Tay Ninh Province. A cross-sectional study with quantitative methods was employed to explore the quality perception of the surveyed participants and identify issues arising from survey items related to the development of quality culture and the relationship between grade 8 and grade 9 students and public secondary schools in the Southeast region of Vietnam to achieve the research objectives.

Data were collected through questionnaires that served as the basis for analysis, synthesizing issues related to educational quality and quality culture through the perception of students in building a quality culture in public secondary schools in the Southeast region of Vietnam based on this quantitative design.

The Ethics Committee under the People's Committee, Vietnam Ho Chi Minh City Department of Education and Training, Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development approved this study on 14th December, 2022 in the decision number 69/QD-HDQL-NAFOSTED. The project code is 503.01-2021.04.

3.2. Participants

The convenience sampling method was used to select three provinces and cities, specifically Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong Province, and Tay Ninh Province, all located within the Southeast region of Vietnam. This region comprises one city and five provinces in total. The study collected information through questionnaires from 4,246 students in public secondary schools in Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong Province, and Tay Ninh Province. The results selected for analysis in this study are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of student participants answering the questionnaires.

Surveyed areas	Grade 8		Grade 9		Total	
	N	Percentage	N	Percentage	N	Percentage
Ho Chi Minh city	469	40.6%	687	59.4%	1,156	100.0%
Binh Duong province	581	42.7%	779	57.3%	1,360	100.0%
Tay Ninh province	594	34.3%	1,136	65.7%	1,730	100.0%
Total	1,644	38.7%	2,602	61.3%	4,246	100.0%

3.3. Instrument

The questionnaire was designed concerning Sallis (2014) and comprised three questions with 14 items: (1) Teaching and learning (5 items), (2) learning supportive activities for students (5 items), and (3) student satisfaction with their school environment (4 items). The items in the questionnaire utilized a 5-point Likert scale: 1) Strongly disagree, 2) disagree, 3) neither agree nor disagree, 4) agree, 5) strongly agree.

The interview protocol was formulated based on the research objectives and the questionnaire to collect and validate the gathered information and serve as a framework for refining the survey questionnaire during its development and finalization.

Following the questionnaire's development, it was distributed to two experienced education experts in educational quality, 20 teachers and 50 students from secondary schools to gather feedback on its content. The authors synthesized the feedback and made necessary adjustments, evaluating the scale's reliability. Notably, the items "Creating pressure for students" within the question "Organization of teaching and learning" exhibited a corrected item-total correlation of $0.204 < 0.3$ leading to its exclusion. Subsequently, a pilot survey involving 50 students was conducted resulting in a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.895. The questionnaire ensured the reliability of the study's data collection.

3.4. Validity and Reliability Test

The Cronbach's alpha reliability calculation resulted in a coefficient ranging from 0.882 to 0.953 for the scale variable suggesting solid internal consistency. Detailed item-total statistics were provided in Table 2, offering a thorough analysis of the performance of each item within the scale.

Table 2. Item-total statistics (Total correlation coefficient).

Items	Corrected item-total correlation
Cronbach's alpha of the teaching and learning is carried out (0.882).	
Avoiding cramming.	0.535
Developing self-study skills for students.	0.835
Enhancing students' responsibility for their studies.	0.838
Academic results aligned with students' abilities.	0.794
Cronbach's alpha of the supportive activities for secondary school students.	0.953
Teachers always create favourable conditions for learning and educational activities.	0.875
The school regularly organizes guidance on life skills for students.	0.865
Teachers' courteous and enthusiastic demeanour.	0.877
Providing complete learning resources (Books, reference materials, internet support, etc.).	0.862
Being involved in the opinions in some educational activities of the school.	0.864
Cronbach's alpha of the level of satisfaction with the school students are currently attending.	0.942
Be proud of the school.	0.865
Be willing to participate in activities for the school's development.	0.867
Going to school every day is a joy.	0.841
Recommending other people about my school.	0.869

3.5. Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 26.0 software. A descriptive analysis was used to analyze the data collected. Mean (M), standard deviation (SD), independent sample T-test and ANOVA test were implemented to find out the significant difference between the variables related to the difference in students' evaluation of educational quality within a quality culture framework. The Likert-5 scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was regenerated to calculate the descriptive analysis in this study.

4. Results

The tables below presented the results regarding educational quality involving 4,246 students (1,644 eighth graders and 2,602 ninth graders) from public secondary schools in Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong Province, and Tay Ninh Province.

4.1. Teaching and Learning

The independent sample T-test assessing the difference in students' evaluations of teaching and learning organization provided by the school between grades 8 and 9 revealed significant findings (see Table 3).

Table 3. The students' opinions on teaching and learning by grade level.

Items	Participants	M	SD	Sig. Levene's test	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference
(1) Avoiding cramming.	Grade 8	3.09	1.439	0.008	0.001	-0.148
	Grade 9	3.23	1.474			
(2) Developing self-study skills for students.	Grade 8	3.64	1.327	0.000	0.133	0.064
	Grade 9	3.58	1.401			
(3) Enhancing students' responsibility for their studies.	Grade 8	3.73	1.297	0.000	0.049	0.083
	Grade 9	3.65	1.392			
(4) Academic results aligned with students' abilities.	Grade 8	3.69	1.345	0.001	0.047	0.086
	Grade 9	3.61	1.409			

Levene's test of equality of variances for all four items was lower than 0.05. Specifically, for item (2), the significance level was 0.133 (> 0.05). Therefore, item (2) did not exhibit a statistically significant difference in evaluations between grade 8 and 9 students. However, the remaining items showed statistically significant differences in evaluations between grade 8 and grade 9 students.

Figure 1 illustrates no significant differences in the mean values of the evaluated criteria between grade 8 and grade 9 students. Specifically, for item 1, grade 9 students rated higher than grade 8 students while for the remaining items, grade 8 students rated higher than grade 9 students.

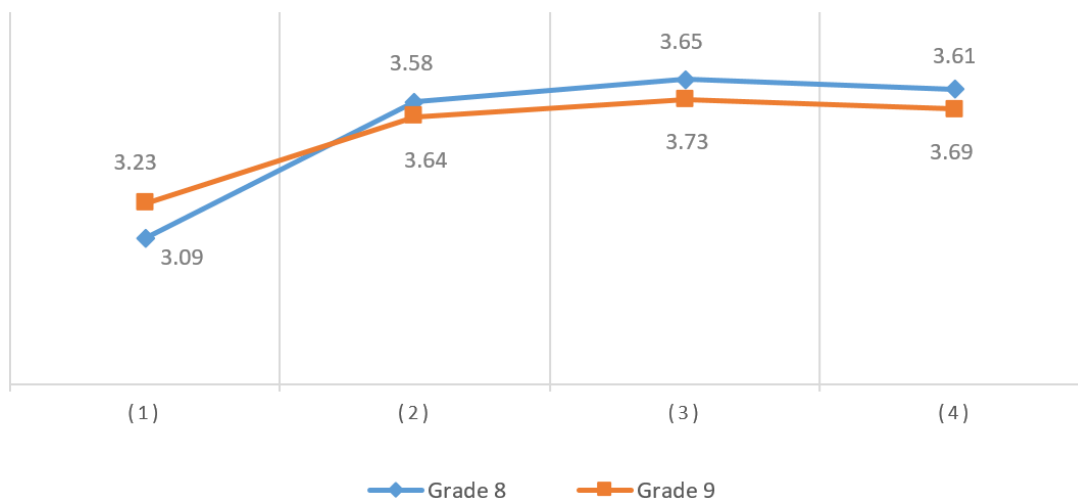


Figure 1. The mean of students' opinions on the teaching and learning by grade level.

The ANOVA test for the difference among three independent samples, evaluating students' perceptions of teaching and learning across three provinces: Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong Province, and Tay Ninh Province revealed that the Levene's test significance level for all four surveyed items was lower than 0.05 as well as the Welch's significance level for all four items indicating that there was a statistically significant difference in the evaluation perceptions among the three provinces (see Table 4).

Table 4. The students' opinions on the teaching and learning by province.

Items	Provinces	M	SD	Sig. Levene statistic	Sig. welch
(1) Avoiding cramming.	HCM	3.41	1.393	0.003	0.000
	BD	3.27	1.484		
	TN	2.95	1.458		
(2) Developing self-study skills for students.	HCM	3.73	1.260	0.000	0.000
	BD	3.68	1.360		
	TN	3.46	1.443		
(3) Enhancing students' responsibility for their studies.	HCM	3.87	1.203	0.000	0.000
	BD	3.72	1.362		
	TN	3.53	1.430		
(4) Academic results aligned with students' abilities.	HCM	3.82	1.253	0.000	0.000
	BD	3.69	1.367		
	TN	3.49	1.464		

Figure 2 illustrates the mean values of the four items across the three provinces, showing disparities among them. Ho Chi Minh City had the highest mean value while Tay Ninh Province had the lowest indicating a significant difference in mean values among the three provinces. Overall, the majority of items were rated by both grade 8 and grade 9 students at the "agree" level (with mean values ranging from 3.4 to 4.2). However, for item 1, students in Binh Duong Province and Tay Ninh Province rated it at the "neither agree nor disagree" level (ranging from 2.6 to 3.4).

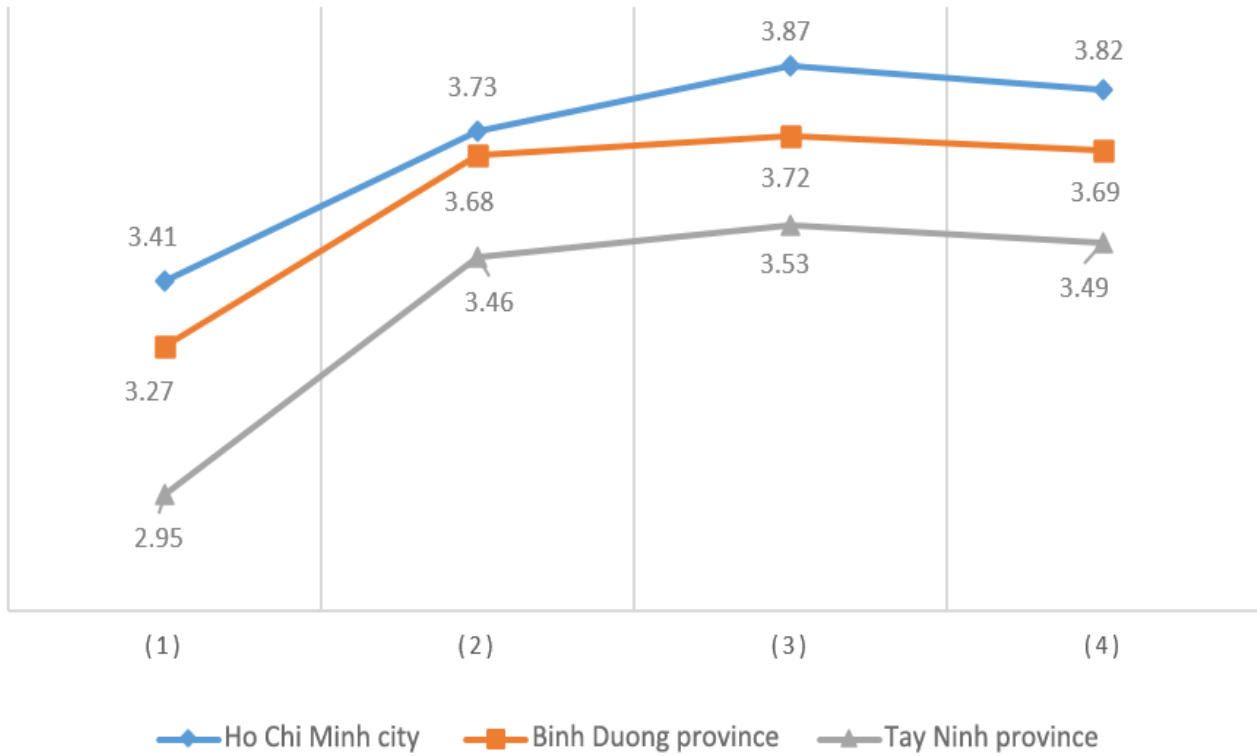


Figure 2. The mean of students' opinions regarding teaching and learning by province.

4.2. Learning Supportive Activities

The independent sample t-test which assessed the difference in the evaluation of learning support activities between grade 8 and grade 9 students showed that the significance level of Levene's test for the five items was less than 0.05 (see Table 5).

Table 5. The students' opinions on learning supportive activities for students by grade level.

Items	Participants	M	SD	Sig. Levene's test	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference
(1) Teachers always create favourable conditions for learning and educational activities.	Grade 8	3.72	1.377	0.003	0.043	0.089
	Grade 9	3.63	1.440			
(2) The school regularly organizes guidance on life skills for students.	Grade 8	3.64	1.338	0.000	0.002	0.135
	Grade 9	3.51	1.410			
(3) Teachers' courteous and enthusiastic demeanour.	Grade 8	3.65	1.335	0.028	0.155	0.061
	Grade 9	3.59	1.384			
(4) Providing complete learning resources (Books, reference materials, internet support, etc.).	Grade 8	3.69	1.336	0.001	0.001	0.137
	Grade 9	3.55	1.410			
(5) Being involved in the opinions of some educational activities of the school.	Grade 8	3.60	1.381	0.043	0.291	0.047
	Grade 9	3.56	1.428			

Specifically, for items (3) (p=0.155) and (5) (p=0.291), the significance level (2-tailed) was more significant than 0.05, indicating that these two items did not exhibit statistically significant differences in evaluation between grade 8 and grade 9 students. However, for items (1), (2), and (4), the significance level (2-tailed) was less than 0.05 (ranging from 0.001 to 0.043) indicating statistically significant differences in evaluation between grade 8 and grade 9 students for these three items.

Figure 3 illustrated the mean values of the five survey items from grade 8 and 9 students, showing discrepancies between the two groups. Grade 8 students rated higher than grade 9 students across all five items. The survey items had mean values ranging from 3.51 to 3.72 indicating an overall agreement level ("agree") with mean values ranging from 3.4 to 4.2.

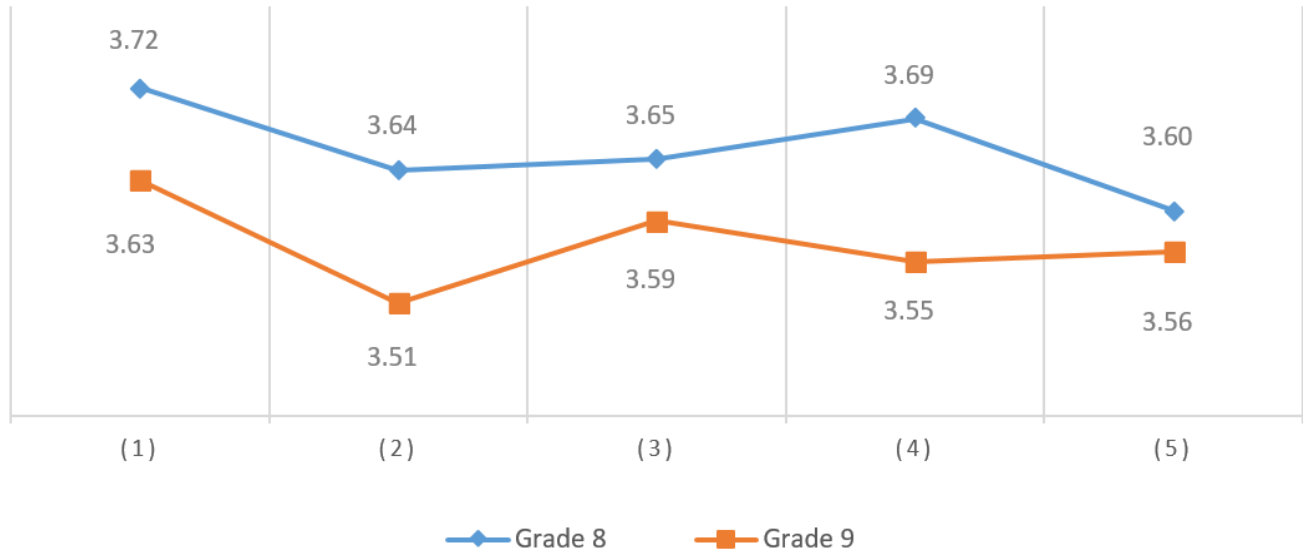


Figure 3. The mean of students' opinions regarding learning supportive activities by grade level.

The ANOVA testing was conducted to examine the differences among three independent samples regarding grade 8 and grade 9 students' perceptions of learning support activities across three provinces: Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong, and Tay Ninh. Levene's test yielded significance ($p < 0.05$) for all five survey items, while Welch's test also indicated significance ($p < 0.05$) for all five items (see Table 6). Consequently, there were statistically significant differences in the evaluation opinions of students among the three provinces for the surveyed items.

Table 6. The students' opinions on learning supportive activities by province.

Items	Provinces	M	SD	Sig. Levene statistic	Sig. welch
(1) Teachers always create favourable conditions for learning and educational activities.	HCM	3.92	1.245	0.000	0.000
	BD	3.67	1.395		
	TN	3.49	1.512		
(2) The school regularly organizes guidance on life skills for students.	HCM	3.79	1.253	0.000	0.000
	BD	3.55	1.377		
	TN	3.41	1.452		
(3) Teachers' courteous and enthusiastic demeanour.	HCM	3.83	1.204	0.000	0.000
	BD	3.63	1.357		
	TN	3.45	1.450		
(4) Providing complete learning resources (Books, reference materials, internet support, etc.).	HCM	3.85	1.265	0.000	0.000
	BD	3.59	1.369		
	TN	3.44	1.446		
(5) Being involved in the opinions of some educational activities of the school.	HCM	3.79	1.289	0.000	0.000
	BD	3.58	1.385		
	TN	3.42	1.487		

Figure 4 illustrates significant differences in the mean values among the three provinces across all five items, with Ho Chi Minh City having the highest mean values and Tay Ninh Province having the lowest. Overall, the mean values of the items rated by grade 8 and grade 9 students were within the "agree" range (ranging from 3.4 to 4.2).

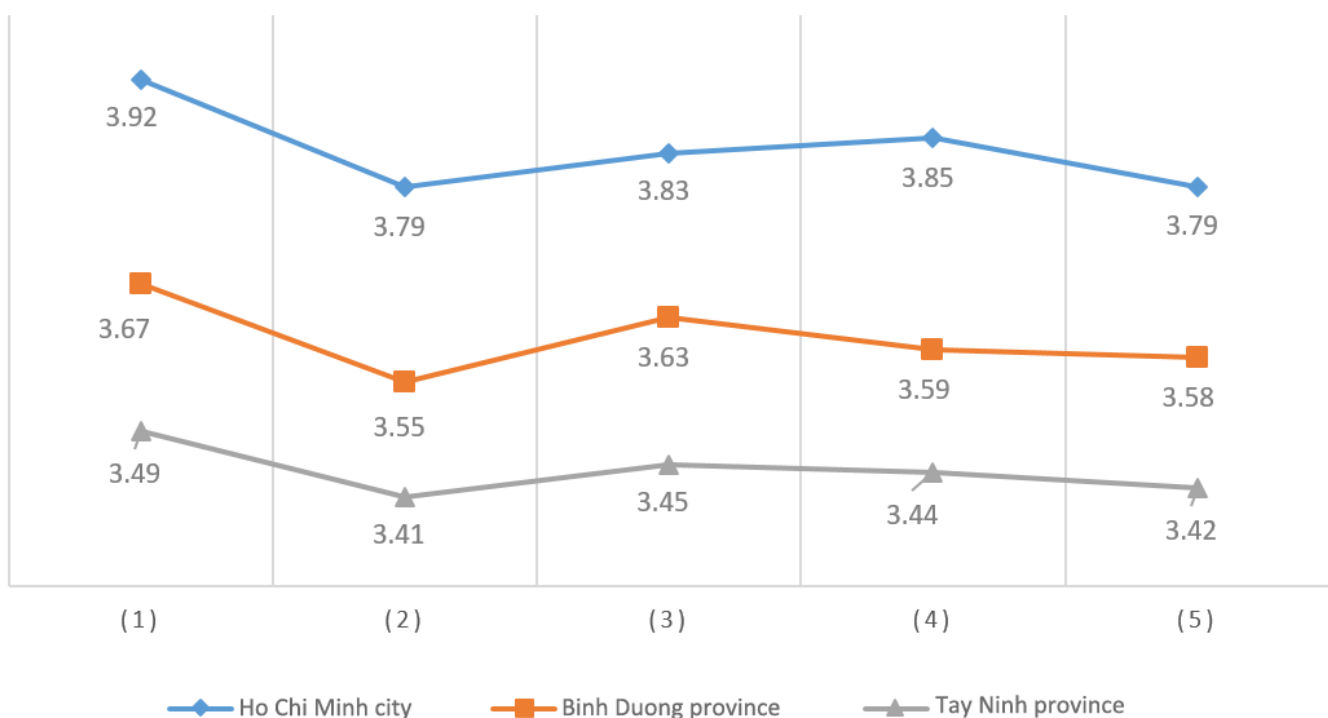


Figure 4. The mean of students' opinions on learning supportive activities by province.

4.3. Students' Satisfaction towards the School

The independent sample t-test assessing the differences in students' satisfaction with the school revealed significant findings (see Table 7). Levene's test for equality of variances for all survey items (with significance levels ranging from 0.000 to 0.002) was less than 0.05. The significance levels (2-tailed) for all survey items (ranging from 0.001 to 0.008) were also less than 0.05. Therefore, these survey items exhibited statistically significant differences in the evaluation opinions between grade 8 and 9 students.

Table 7. The students' opinions on student satisfaction with the school environment by grade level.

Items	Participants	M	SD	Sig. Levene's test	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference
(1) Be proud of the school.	Grade 8	3.80	1.382	0.000	0.008	0.117
	Grade 9	3.68	1.446			
(2) Be willing to participate in activities for the school's development.	Grade 8	3.70	1.350	0.000	0.001	0.149
	Grade 9	3.55	1.408			
(3) Going to school every day is a joy.	Grade 8	3.66	1.386	0.002	0.006	0.122
	Grade 9	3.53	1.445			
(4) Recommending other people about my school.	Grade 8	3.73	1.383	0.000	0.004	0.127
	Grade 9	3.60	1.450			

The difference in mean values indicated that the evaluations of grade 8 students were higher (more satisfied) than those of grade 9 students (see Figure 5). The survey items were rated by students at the "agree" level (ranging from > 3.4 to 4.2).

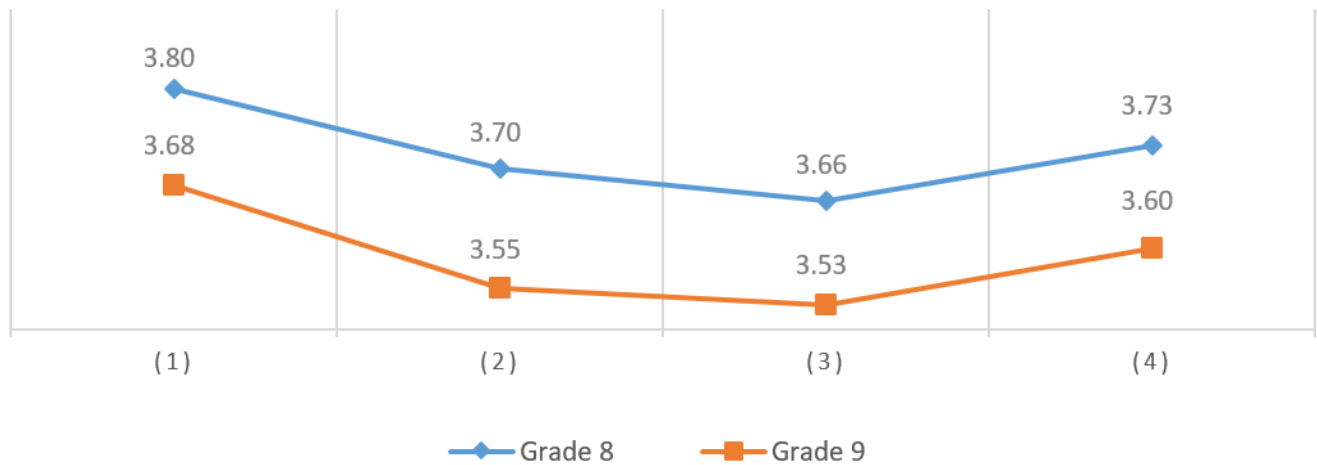


Figure 5. The mean of students' opinions regarding student satisfaction with the school environment by grade level.

ANOVA test of the differences among three independent samples of grade 8 and grade 9 students regarding satisfaction with their respective schools across three provinces, Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong Province, and Tay Ninh Province revealed that the Levene's test significance level for all four survey items was less than 0.05 (see Table 8). The Welch's test significance level for all four survey items was less than 0.05. Therefore, statistically significant differences existed among the three provinces' evaluations of students' opinions.

Table 8. The students' opinions on student satisfaction with the school environment by province.

Items	Province	M	SD	Sig. Levene statistic	Sig. welch
(1) Be proud of the school.	HCM	3.92	1.230	0.000	0.000
	BD	3.73	1.403		
	TN	3.59	1.538		
(2) Be willing to participate in activities for the school's development.	HCM	3.77	1.244	0.000	0.000
	BD	3.63	1.394		
	TN	3.50	1.461		
(3) Going to school every day is a joy.	HCM	3.60	1.357	0.000	0.030
	BD	3.65	1.401		
	TN	3.51	1.481		
(4) Recommending other people about my school.	HCM	3.73	1.326	0.000	0.003
	BD	3.70	1.401		
	TN	3.56	1.503		

Figure 6 illustrated the mean values of the four survey items across the three provinces showing discrepancies. The evaluations were predominantly at the "agree" level (ranging from 3.4 to 4.2). Specifically, Ho Chi Minh City had the highest mean values for items (1), (2), and (4) while item (3) was lower than Binh Duong Province but higher than Tay Ninh Province. Tay Ninh Province exhibited the lowest mean values across all items.

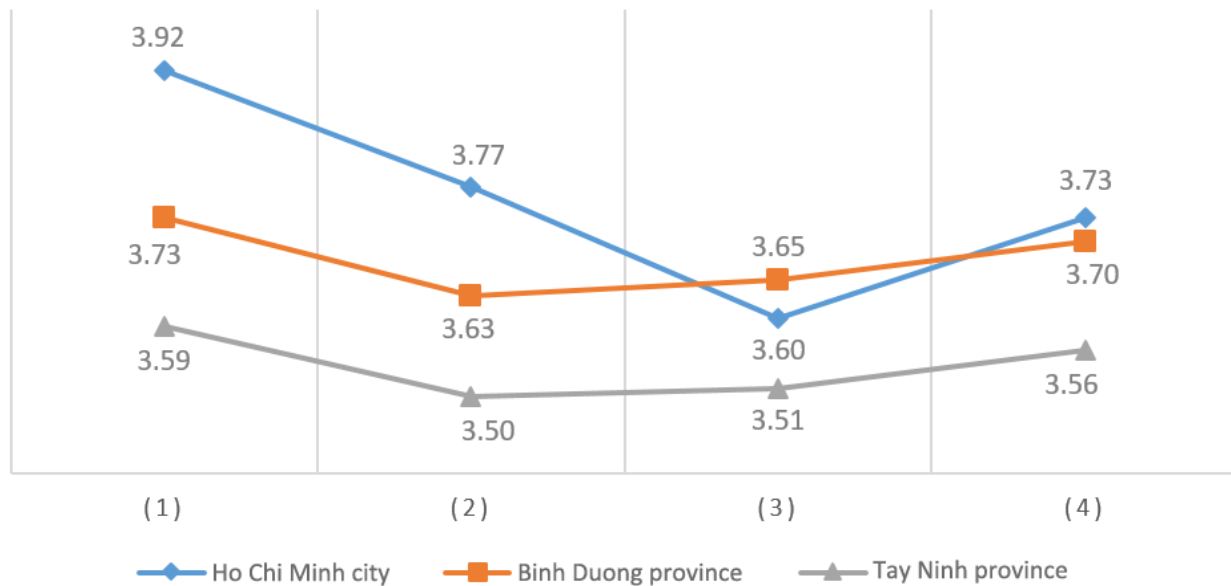


Figure 6. The mean of students' opinions regarding student satisfaction with the school environment by province.

5. Discussion

The findings comparing the perspectives on teaching and learning of grade 8 and grade 9 students revealed significant disparities. Three of the four items assessed demonstrated statistically significant differences between the two groups. Similarly, all four items displayed statistically significant distinctions across the three provinces. Noteworthy distinctions were observed in learning supportive activities for grade 8 and grade 9 students. Three out of the five items evaluated exhibited statistically significant disparities between the groups. Likewise, all five items presented statistically significant differences across the three provinces. Substantial differences were evident between grade 8 and grade 9 students concerning student satisfaction with their current school. All four items assessed revealed statistically significant differences between the two groups. Similarly, all four items exhibited statistically significant disparities across the three provinces. As a result, students' perceptions of the quality of education in secondary schools varied significantly between grade 8 and grade 9 students and among students from the three provinces illustrating these perceptions' complex and diverse nature. Our results were different when proving that Vietnamese students appreciated the quality culture in public schools more than public students in those regions compared to countries with similar quality cultures in Southeast Asia such as Cambodia, Laos or Myanmar (Nguyen et al., 2022). However, when compared to countries with more developed education such as Singapore or Thailand, the assessment of the quality of culture in education in Vietnam is lower in terms of awareness and support (Chong, 2014; Shwairef, Abdulrahim, & Sukoharsono, 2021). This is an important basis for continuing comparative studies on the quality of culture in public schools in Southeast Asia.

Regarding student satisfaction with their current schools, grade 8 students rated higher than grade 9 students, mainly at the "agree" level. The mean values from students across the three provinces were mainly at the "agree" level, with Ho Chi Minh City exhibiting higher average values than the other two provinces. In contrast, Tay Ninh Province had the lowest values. Overall, the survey results showed that most survey items are rated at the "agree" level with grade 8 students rating higher than grade 9 students and students in Ho Chi Minh City rating higher than students in the other two provinces, while students in Tay Ninh Province rate the lowest. While there were differences in average values as confirmed by statistical tests, most mean values for the surveyed items were rated at the "agree" level, and the statistical data for each Likert scale level as a percentage for each item did not show significant differences. Therefore, it can be confirmed that the difference between the two grade levels depends on age, the time of receiving information, the level of knowledge acquisition, and changes in the educational environment over each academic year for grade 8 students who spent three years at school, and grade 9 students who spent four years at school with the most significant difference coming from the general education program. grade 8 students followed the 2018 general education program from grade 6 to grade 8 which emphasized interdisciplinary integration, developing learner competencies, fostering autonomy, self-study, enhancing experiential and creative learning activities, creating a dynamic educational environment both inside and outside the school, enabling students to self-improve and develop effective career awareness compared to the previous general education program. Therefore, the higher evaluation of educational quality from grade 8 students compared to grade 9 students implied the effectiveness of the 2018 general education program. This difference in satisfaction with school and the educational quality culture in Vietnam was also demonstrated through studies on learning satisfaction in the studies of Dinh, Nguyen, Phan, Nguyen, and Nguyen (2021); Hai (2022) and Do and Treve (2024). The change in the overall educational curriculum in Vietnam has created a reform in the culture of educational quality in public secondary schools creating more positive experiences for learners. This finding is similar to Singapore (Heng, Fulmer, Blau, & Pereira, 2020) or Japan (Filus, 2017) even the US (Björk, Browne-Ferrigno, & Potterton, 2020) when the educational reform focuses on the experience and happiness of learners. The quality of culture in Vietnamese secondary schools has improved focusing on student satisfaction and well-being since the reform of the national educational curriculum.

A study by Mamun-ur-Rashid (2023) applying the SERVQUAL model to explore service quality in public secondary schools in 3 districts A, B, and C in Bangladesh revealed survey findings from the opinions of 601 students (from grade 6 to grade 7: 35.3%, from grade 8 to grade 10: 64.7%). Regarding tangible aspects (physical facilities and equipment for learning), the mean values ranged from 2.57 to 3.62 (on a 5-point Likert scale). For responsiveness (providing services and supporting students), the mean values ranged from 2.09 to 3.33; for reliability (efficient and accurate service delivery), the mean values ranged from 3.17 to 3.70; for assurance (trust and confidence in students), the mean values ranged from 2.55 to 3.41, and for empathy (school's concern for

students), the mean values ranged from 2.43 to 3.29. This study's results indicated significant differences in survey outcomes across the three districts suggesting that almost all schools lacked teacher capacity, insufficient time was allocated to students outside regular hours, and student needs for academic improvement were not adequately met.

Kelkay 's(2023) research findings in secondary schools in Bahir Dar City, Ethiopia based on the opinions of 401 students (193 males and 208 females) indicated that input factors had average values ranging from 2.85 to 4.03, process factors had average values ranging from 2.80 to 3.91 and output factors ranged from 3.55 to 3.78. Specifically, student-centered teaching methods and the adequacy of equipment and laboratory facilities were not highly rated by students with average values of 2.80 and 2.89, respectively. Teaching and learning had average values ranging from 3.18 to 3.68. Support activities for students had mean values ranging from 3.56 to 3.66 which were process factors; student satisfaction with their current school had average values ranging from 3.58 to 3.72, an output factor. The results showed no significant difference between the average values of the items within each factor and between factors. The results of our study combined with other relevant studies highlighted the researchers' and educational leaders' attention to improving the quality culture of secondary education. This focus aimed to not only elevate the standard of secondary education but also contribute to overall educational advancement laying the groundwork for fostering a culture of excellence within schools.

6. Conclusion

This study contributed to elucidating the perspectives of grade 8 and grade 9 students attending public secondary schools in the Southeast region of Vietnam regarding cultivating a quality culture within educational institutions. The study focused on evaluating the quality of education encompassing aspects such as teaching and learning organization, student support initiatives, and student satisfaction with their respective schools. The findings unveiled statistically significant differences in the perceptions of education quality between students in grade 8 and grade 9, as well as among students from the three provinces under study. Primarily, these results underscored variations in the quality of public secondary education across provinces concerning teaching and learning arrangements, student support programs and overall student satisfaction, notwithstanding the uniform implementation of the standard secondary education program. Additionally, the findings shed light on discrepancies in teaching and learning structures, student support mechanisms, and student contentment with their educational environment between grade 8 students enrolled in the 2018 general educational curriculum and their grade 9 counterparts following the 2006 general educational curriculum. Our study provided empirical evidence from a major educational curriculum reform in a developing country to develop and recommend educational policies for developing a school culture of quality that could promote student well-being and achievement.

6.1. Recommendations and Policy Implications

Based on the findings, public secondary schools must develop a systematic quality improvement plan by cultivating a quality culture while implementing teaching, learning, and learning-supportive activities. This aims to enhance quality awareness among administrative staff and teachers, students, and other stakeholders from the inception of educational activities to achieve educational goals and optimize student and stakeholder satisfaction with the school. Secondary schools must establish a set of tools and principles for forming and developing a quality culture integrated into educational activities. This is essential for enhancing quality awareness and capacity building for individuals and groups participating in educational activities. Additionally, schools should publicly disclose educational activities for stakeholders to monitor, supervise and evaluate the quality of education. This serves as a mechanism to promote a quality-oriented mindset and strengthen the commitment of individuals and groups within and beyond the school environment to quality.

This research serves as an informative channel for schools to reference in enhancing quality and contributing to developing a quality culture within the school. It also provides a reference for school administrators and policymakers in devising plans and strategies for developing teaching and learning organizations and student support activities aligned with local and regional socioeconomic development. Moreover, it contributes to harmonizing the quality of education across different localities within the region. Future research could include public secondary schools, non-public secondary schools and other educational institutions to analyze and compare various types of schools, regions, and countries.

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