

Original Research Article

## Some Solutions to Build the Preschool's Culture Following the Model of a Happy School

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**Abstract:** Constructing the preschool school culture based on the happy school model is a study focusing on a new educational approach, emphasizing the creation of a friendly, safe, green learning environment. It aims to engage students in enjoyable learning hours, free from pressure, stress, and fatigue, enabling them to freely play, interact harmoniously with peers. Constructing the preschool school culture following the happy school model emphasizes the importance of creating a positive educational environment, encouraging curiosity and creativity, while supporting the holistic development of children, encompassing cultural, mental, and physical aspects. This research proposes several solutions for building the school culture based on the happy school model, highlighting the role of the principal in shaping the school's culture; Establishing a safe and proactive learning environment; Encouraging curiosity and creativity; Fostering a positive social learning environment; Supporting the multidimensional development of children; Encouraging close cooperation among teachers, parents, and the community.

**Keywords:** Preschool; Culture; Happiness; School Culture.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of early childhood education is to foster holistic development among children aged 3 to 6 years in cognitive, linguistic, physical, aesthetic, emotional, and social skills, preparing them for the transition to elementary school. Therefore, preschools need to create an educational environment that not only focuses on imparting knowledge but also emphasizes comprehensive development for students. The concept of a happy school environment has garnered attention from educators and researchers in the field of education. The happy school model is not just a place for learning; it is also an environment that promotes mental and social development, providing the best opportunities for students.

However, constructing a school culture based on the happy school model is not a straightforward process. It poses significant challenges, ranging from changing educational perspectives and teaching methods to creating a friendly learning environment and encouraging active student and teacher community involvement.

In the rapidly changing societal landscape where academic pressures are escalating, researching and implementing the happy school model has become more crucial than ever. This study distinctly focuses on the advantages, challenges, and implementation strategies for cultivating a school culture based on this happy school model. It encompasses creating a diverse and friendly learning environment and developing psychological support programs, laying the groundwork for success in both education and the lives of students.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

School culture is a form of organizational culture. However, due to its distinctive administrative and pedagogical nature as a specific type of organization where social experiences are exchanged and received, where characteristics are formed and comprehensive human personality development occurs, school culture possesses the attributes of organizational culture, yet it holds its unique characteristics. Kent D. Peterson and Terrence E. Deal (1999) suggest that school culture is "an underground stream of standards, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals formed over time by people working together, addressing problems, and facing challenges... shaping the thoughts, emotions, and actions of individuals within the school... creating uniqueness for

the school." According to Edgar H. Schein (1999), school culture is an amalgamation of many tangible and intangible elements, but fundamentally, these elements revolve around two factors: the material values and the spiritual values of the school. It primarily manifests in vision, mission, philosophy, goals, values, leadership styles, management, psychological atmosphere, and is realized as a system of standards, values, beliefs, behavioral norms deemed as positive and accepted by everyone within the school. Anthony Muhammad (2009) focuses on resolving conflicts and promoting cultural change within educational environments, particularly overcoming divisions within the teaching staff to create a more positive learning environment and foster student development. Bui Minh Hien, Nguyen Vu Bich Hien (2015) emphasize that school culture involves "sharing experiences both within and outside the school, generating feelings of community, family, and group members." Steve Gruenert and Todd Whitaker (2015) provide specific strategies to define, assess, and transform the culture within a school environment. Their research concentrates on understanding and altering school culture to create a positive learning environment, support student development, and enhance teacher performance.

Hence, school culture comprises standards, values, beliefs, and behaviors unique to a school, influencing both the physical and mental aspects of the school's entire life. From the aforementioned concept, several fundamental characteristics of school culture can be derived:

- + School culture encompasses standards, values, beliefs, and behavioral norms.
- + School culture embodies distinctive characteristics, creating differences among organizations and between schools.
- + It relates to both material and spiritual values within the school.
- + These values are built and accumulated by generations of educators and students over time, being educated to preserve and develop them in new circumstances.
- + A positive school culture aims for high-quality standards.

Preschool school culture is a collection of standards, beliefs, values, and behaviors specific to the preschool institution, impacting the entirety of its physical and mental life. The school community includes administrative staff, teachers, employees, and students. While each faction within the preschool aims towards the goals of early childhood education, they perform distinct duties yet maintain close interrelations. This dialectical relationship forms a system of beliefs, values, standards, habits, and traditions within the preschool.

### **The role of school culture within the pedagogical community significantly elevates the quality of education**

Evidence demonstrates that institutions excelling in educational quality typically possess a positive cultural environment. A positive school culture generates motivation, enthusiasm for work, and enhanced efficiency among the school's staff. It engenders pride and a sense of belonging for both educators and learners, fostering a continuous endeavor towards the school's lofty objectives and consistently improving the quality of education. Moreover, a positive school culture underscores professionalism, emphasizing lifelong learning for teachers and staff, fostering a lifelong learning environment for students, encouraging cooperative relationships, shared experiences, and mutual learning among all school members. Establishing a positive school culture is a crucial measure in enhancing educational quality and laying the foundation for a "Happy School" (UNESCO). School culture acts as a driving force, propelling educators' efforts. It helps pedagogical leaders, teachers, staff, and students understand the goals, directions, and essence of their work and learning activities. A harmonious and positive school culture cultivates good relationships among administrators, teachers, staff, between teachers and students, among school members, families, and the wider community. This positive culture instills pride and a sense of achievement among educators, learners, and society at large, being an implicit "hidden curriculum" of the school. Through organized school activities and disseminated educational materials, schools can purposefully shape core cultural values for students, creating a positive environment for students to experience and develop their personalities, forming the distinctive cultural traits of the school.

School culture regulates behavior. A positive school culture reminds all members daily that their work revolves around the students, ensuring that all activities within the school are student-centric, contributing to students' progress. It encourages everyone to strive together to continuously enhance the quality of education. Moreover, it limits negativity and conflicts. It unifies members' perceptions, evaluations, choices, directions, and actions, akin to an adhesive binding members together, creating positive sentiments and restricting negative behaviors that contradict the typical norms and standards of the institution. Furthermore, school culture limits potential conflicts. If conflicts arise, the school culture establishes ethical and legal avenues to resolve and manage these conflicts without disrupting the school's organizational integrity. School culture aids in coordination and control. It assists in coordinating and regulating individual behaviors through standards, procedures, processes, rules, as well as by the opinions and traditions constructed by successive generations within the school organization. When the school confronts complex issues, the organizational culture serves as a spiritual anchor, enabling school managers

and teachers to collaborate and leverage intellect to make appropriate decisions and choices.

### **The role of school culture outside the institution is pivotal:**

School culture forms the foundation enabling schools to adapt to their environment and context. It stands as the representative image of the school, serving as a channel for external communication. It holds exceptional significance, aiding schools in adapting to continually changing environments and contexts. Schools serve as repositories preserving and transmitting cultural values of humanity. They are places where new generations are trained, fostering individuals who preserve and create culture for the future. Hence, school culture becomes the cornerstone for schools to adapt to their environment and context.

Furthermore, cultivating a positive school culture enhances the school's brand value. It is evident that a robust and positive school culture is advantageous for healthy competition. A robust, positive culture promotes consistency, coordination, and control, reduces anomalies, and boosts motivation to improve educational activities, meeting the needs of learners. Consequently, school culture encourages the effectiveness of the organization and heightens the success opportunities for both the school and its members. It serves as the foundation for enhancing the school's reputation and brand, paving the way for better developmental strides.

Identification of positive and negative expressions within school culture is imperative. Positive, healthy expressions of school culture include fostering an open, democratic, cooperative, trusting, and respectful atmosphere. Every administrative staff and teacher clearly understands their responsibilities, actively shares responsibilities, and contributes positively to decision-making in teaching and learning. Valuing individuals, encouraging effort, recognizing each person's success, setting standards for continuous improvement and innovation, encouraging teachers to enhance teaching methods and educational quality, actively involving teachers in all school activities, promoting dialogue, collaboration, teamwork, sharing experiences and professional exchanges, sharing power, granting authority, encouraging responsibility, sharing visions, demonstrating care, fostering close collaborative relationships, and engaging the community to address educational issues.

Negative, unhealthy (non-cultural) expressions within the school include blame, accusations, overly stringent control eroding personal freedom and autonomy, bureaucratic principles, scolding students for lack of progress, insufficient encouragement, lack of openness and trust, absence of collaboration, failure to share and learn from one another, internal conflicts and disputes left unresolved in a timely manner.

### **The Happy School:**

A happy school is a novel educational model that focuses on creating a friendly, safe, green space for students, fostering their interest in learning hours, without pressure, stress, or fatigue, allowing them to play, interact harmoniously with friends. For parents, a happy school is a place where they want to entrust their children, enabling them to develop to the fullest extent and trust in handing over their children's future. A happy school is not just a place to impart knowledge but an optimal environment for students' comprehensive development. Below are some essential criteria necessary for a school to be considered "happy":

#### **Why there is a need to build a happy school model:**

Building a happy school is a crucial priority in providing a positive learning environment and holistic development for students. Here are some significant reasons why building a happy school is essential:

**Positive impact on student development:** A happy environment facilitates favorable conditions for students to develop mentally, emotionally, and physically. Happiness, joy, and safety in the learning environment encourage students to be more confident, focused, and explore their potential to the fullest.

**Enhances integration and social relationships:** A happy school encourages positive relationships among students, teachers, and the school community. Social integration fosters better communication environments, helping students develop communication skills, teamwork, and comprehensive social skills.

**Creates conducive conditions for effective learning:** A happy environment usually involves positive interactions between students and teachers. This creates a positive learning environment, encouraging curiosity, creativity, and a desire for learning among students.

**Supports mental and intellectual health:** A positive learning environment helps reduce stress, anxiety, and pressure for both students and teachers. Good mental health positively impacts the learning process and students' intellectual development.

**Lays the groundwork for future success:** A happy school not only aids students in better learning during their academic years but also instills values, qualities, and essential skills required for their success in future life endeavors.

## **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research was conducted at Dong Ky 2 Preschool, in Tu Son City, Bac Ninh Province. The sample included 43 teachers, 3 managerial staff members of the preschool, and 198 parents with children attending Dong Ky 2 Preschool.

The study surveyed the satisfaction levels of parents and teachers, evaluating the degree of implementation of the 22 criteria published by UNESCO in 2018. The implementation levels were assessed across four categories: Not Implemented, Average, Good, and Excellent.

#### 4. RESEARCH RESULT

##### 4.1. The Status of Establishing a Preschool's School Culture according to the Happy School Model at Dong Ky 2 Preschool, Tu Son City, Bac Ninh Province.

No	Criteria	Level of Compliance							
		Not Implemented		Average		Good		Excellent	
		No	Percentage	No	Percentage	No	Percentage	No	Percentage
1	Safe and friendly environment	0		23	9.4	178	72.9	43	17.7
2	Clear vision and mission	5	2	47	19.2	151	61.8	42	17
3	Learning appropriate to individual capacities and interests	57	23.4	87	35.7	95	38.9	5	2
4	Support and personal development	44	18.1	86	35.2	99	40.6	15	6.1
5	Positive relationships and respect	34	13.9	132	54.1	57	23.4	21	8.6
6	Competent and passionate teachers	0	0	13	5.3	145	59.4	86	35.3
7	Psychological support	97	39.7	123	50.4	21	8.6	3	1.3
8	Time and space for creative freedom	78	31.9	132	54.2	34	13.9	0	0
9	Communication and community linkage	18	7.3	89	36.4	79	32.4	58	23.9
10	Emphasis on health and physical education	0	0	54	22.1	78	31.9	112	46.0
11	Fair and diverse evaluation system	17	6.9	77	31.5	85	34.4	65	27.2
12	Integration of technology in education	49	20.1	96	39.3	84	34.4	15	6.2
13	Community spirit and support	32	13.1	102	41.8	89	36.4	21	8.7
14	Opportunities for participation and self-management	78	31.9	134	54.9	27	9.8	5	3.4
15	Career guidance	153	62.7	49	20.1	42	17.2	0	0
16	Encouragement of creativity and innovation	34	13.9	176	72.1	29	11.9	4	2.1
17	Lifelong learning opportunities	0	0	12	4.9	185	75.9	47	19.2
18	Integration with local and multicultural cultures	48	19.7	78	31.9	93	38.1	25	10.3
19	Innovation in teaching methods	0	0	54	22.1	137	56.1	53	21.8
20	Comprehensive education program	0	0	11	4.5	169	69.2	64	26.3
21	Transparency and information sharing	48	19.7	76	31.1	87	35.7	33	13.5
22	Environmental awareness development	0	0	45	18.4	157	64.3	42	17.3

#### Causes of the Current Situation

Those surveyed believe that factors contributing to an unhappy school environment might be related to human interaction among the involved parties within the school. The most frequently mentioned factor is an unsafe environment prone to bullying, school violence, and a lack of respect among students. This aspect is considered linked to issues such as students' fears, anxieties, loneliness, and low self-esteem.

Another unanimously agreed-upon factor among students, teachers, and school leaders involved in the research is the high volume of student assignments, stress from exams, and grades. Such demands lead to extended study hours, an imbalance between studying and leisure, as well as a lack of pause for reflection. Instead of learning to understand, students study solely to achieve high scores in exams. According to a teacher from Indonesia, the high workload and stress stem from our focus on "standards, grades, and academic outcomes rather than the individuals themselves."

The next prominently cited factor contributing to an unhappy school environment is the negative learning atmosphere and school culture, mainly in terms of perception and behavior. This includes feelings of stress, indifference, silence, a lack of smiles, absence of trust, and discordant behavior.

Lastly, negative attitudes and characteristics of teachers are highlighted, such as being strict, unkind, unfair, unsupportive, and lacking sincerity. This also involves teaching methods that are conservative and traditional.

This aligns with another factor influencing unhappiness in schools pointed out by participating groups in the study: negative relationships within the school, whether among students, among teachers, or between students and teachers. Those surveyed believe that lack of care, selfishness, and competition are hallmarks of these negative relationships.

#### **4.2. Some Solutions for Establishing a Preschool School Culture Following the Happy School Model**

**Solution 1:** Enhancing awareness of the Principal's role in building a happy preschool school culture.

The Principal plays a crucial role in shaping the school culture. As the school's leader, they set the direction for the school culture, serving as the focal point for unifying values within the institution. The Principal significantly influences the establishment of standards, core values, and beliefs within the school. Their attention and focus on issues greatly influence the school culture. They define, gather, and establish the core values of the school, as well as determine and share the vision with the staff, teachers, staff, and students. The Principal is instrumental in proposing ideas and perspectives to construct the school culture, organizing the implementation of directives and resolutions from higher authorities regarding building the school culture, and executing the school's plans for establishing the school culture.

The specific roles of leadership, in general, and the Principal, in particular, are evident in various aspects: proposing and organizing the implementation of plans to build the school culture. The Principal conceptualizes plans for constructing the school culture or decides on which plan to implement based on suggestions from relevant departments. Once a plan is agreed upon within the branch and the school's leadership, it is then rolled out to departments and teachers/students. An important aspect of managing the construction of the school culture is that the Principal must mobilize, persuade, and bring together staff, teachers, and students in the development of the school's culture. Ways in which the Principal influences the school culture: The Principal serves as a role model for teachers, staff, and students in lifelong learning; The Principal shapes the school culture through daily interactions with staff, teachers, students, parents, and the community; Paying attention to the needs of both

teachers and students; Establishing an assessment mechanism, recognizing and rewarding (appropriately) based on performance; Adopting a democratic leadership style, enhancing dialogue, participating together, and clearly assigning responsibilities; The Principal's ability to listen fosters an open, trusting, and mutually respectful work environment; The Principal nurtures the school culture by sharing the vision and mission of the school with staff/teachers; Maintaining a leadership role by providing direction, strategies, and goals, thereby establishing credibility; Encouraging and actively supporting innovation and creativity among teachers to maximize their potential; Valuing continuous professional development through training and skill enhancement for the staff; Encouraging teachers to collaborate actively with colleagues within and outside the school; Creating opportunities for each student to showcase their abilities/capabilities; Encouraging professional dialogue, exchanging expertise, and sharing experiences; Creating an open, democratic, and humane atmosphere; Promoting a cooperative spirit and teamwork skills.

**Solution 2:** Diverse and Flexible Curriculum  
Creating a diverse curriculum that not only focuses on academic subjects but also integrates artistic, physical, social, and soft skill development activities.

**Solution 3:** Establishing a Friendly Learning Environment  
Constructing a safe, friendly learning environment that encourages positive communication, allowing students to feel comfortable to learn and express themselves.

**Solution 4:** Psychological and Social Support for Students  
Providing psychological and social support services to help students overcome stress, anxiety, build confidence, and foster positive relationships.

**Solution 5:** Fostering Positive Interaction Between Students and Teachers  
Encouraging interaction and open communication between students and teachers, providing an environment where students feel cared for and supported by teachers.

**Solution 6:** Diverse and Fair Assessment Using flexible and diverse assessment methods to measure students' progress not solely based on academic achievements but also considering various other aspects. Promoting an environment friendly to the surroundings, educating and encouraging students about environmental protection, fostering practical activities, and improving awareness of the environment.

**Solution 7:** Personal Development Support  
Creating opportunities for students to develop soft skills, creative thinking, exploration, and self-development. Community Engagement: Building

strong relationships with the community, providing opportunities for students to engage in social activities, volunteering, and learning from the surrounding community.

**Solution 8:** Integrating Technology into Education Utilizing technology to enhance the learning experience, providing rich learning resources, and expanding access to knowledge for students. Innovative Teaching Methods: Encouraging teachers to apply creative, flexible teaching methods, enabling students to actively engage in the learning process.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The aforementioned solutions contribute to fostering a positive learning environment, supporting comprehensive development for students, and laying the foundation for a school culture following the happy school model. Moreover, support and commitment from the school, teachers, and the community are crucial factors in successfully implementing these solutions. Creating a positive and happy educational environment not only enhances learning but also influences the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of children. By applying the principles of a happy school, preschools can create a stimulating learning environment while focusing on the individual development of each child. Emphasizing children's satisfaction, providing opportunities for self-expression, and exploring the world around them helps in developing social skills, creative thinking, and confidence.

Through an emphasis on children's satisfaction and the creation of conditions for self-expression and exploration of the world around them, schools can nurture an environment that stimulates learning and concentrates on the personal development of each child. Prioritizing a child's contentment and providing avenues for them to express themselves and explore their surroundings will aid in developing social skills,

fostering creative thinking, and instilling confidence in them.

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