



Management Solutions for Internal Inspection in High Schools in Vietnam: A Quality Culture Approach



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Abstract

This study investigates the management of internal inspection in Vietnamese high schools from the perspective of quality culture. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research surveyed 450 participants, including 250 managers at both provincial and school levels and 200 teachers and staff across six provinces and cities. Twelve public high schools were selected as research sites to represent diverse educational contexts. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews, then analyzed using SPSS and thematic coding. The findings reveal that while internal inspection is widely institutionalized and contributes to accountability, its alignment with quality culture remains limited. Criteria often emphasize administrative compliance rather than continuous improvement, innovation, or student-centered values. Teachers have limited participation, and transparency and feedback are perceived as insufficient. Leadership quality emerges as a decisive factor, with proactive leaders able to transform inspection into a developmental process. Digital tools are underutilized, further constraining efficiency and transparency. The study proposes five management solutions: (1) raising awareness of managers and teachers about quality culture in inspection, (2) developing criteria aligned with cultural values of quality, (3) standardizing inspection processes based on participatory principles, (4) capacity building for inspection staff, and (5) mobilizing resources and digital platforms for effective implementation. These solutions provide both theoretical and practical contributions to strengthening internal inspection as a driver of sustainable quality improvement in Vietnamese high schools.

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1 Introduction

Internal inspection has become a critical component in the governance and management of high schools, ensuring that educational activities align with established standards and contribute to continuous improvement. In the context of Vietnam, internal inspection serves not only as a mechanism for accountability but also plays a crucial role in cultivating a sustainable culture of quality within schools. This approach reflects global trends in educational management, where quality assurance processes are no longer perceived merely as control measures but as developmental tools that promote innovation, transparency, and shared responsibility (Sallis, 2014).

The concept of quality culture has emerged as an important theoretical and practical foundation for school improvement. Quality culture refers to the collective values, attitudes, and practices of school stakeholders that prioritize quality in all aspects of educational activities (Nguyen, 2011). Previous studies indicate that quality culture is closely associated with long-term institutional effectiveness and continuous enhancement of teaching and learning (Le, 2015; Le, 2018). In this regard, fostering a quality culture through internal inspection can transform schools into learning organizations that embrace collaboration and innovation as integral to their operation.

International scholarship emphasizes that effective school management requires the integration of organizational culture with total quality management (TQM) principles (Westbrook, 1993). Research has shown that when schools adopt a quality management culture, inspection activities are more likely to encourage improvement rather than impose compliance (Detert et al., 2003). More recently, studies have explored how cultural factors shape the implementation of quality assurance systems and how these, in turn, affect student perceptions of service quality (Soria-García & Martínez-Lorente, 2020). Such findings reinforce the necessity of contextualizing internal inspection within a cultural framework rather than treating it solely as a technical process.

In Vietnam, the development of internal quality assurance has been linked to the formation of quality culture across different levels of education. For example, Do et al. (2020), demonstrated the correlation between internal quality assurance and quality culture formation in higher education institutions in Ho Chi Minh City. Similarly, Tuan et al. (2023), investigated factors of quality culture that affect internal assurance mechanisms, showing that leadership and stakeholder engagement are decisive. Although most of these studies focus on universities, they provide valuable implications for the high school level, where internal inspection remains underexplored.

Recent research highlights the need to apply a quality culture approach specifically to internal inspection in high schools. Pham (2024), argued that such an approach can help address the limitations of current practices, such as the lack of systematic evaluation criteria and insufficient stakeholder involvement. Sayekti et al. (2024), further demonstrated the effectiveness of quality culture models in vocational schools, suggesting their applicability to secondary education as well. These insights suggest that integrating quality culture into internal inspection can help schools move beyond compliance and build systems that are both participatory and developmental.

Given this context, the present study seeks to examine the management of internal inspection in Vietnamese high schools through the lens of quality culture. By analyzing the perceptions of school leaders, teachers, and staff across different provinces, the study aims to propose management solutions that strengthen internal inspection as a tool for fostering sustainable quality improvement (Sanchez-Carrillo et al., 2021). In doing so, the research contributes to both the theoretical understanding of quality culture in school inspection and the practical enhancement of educational quality management in Vietnam.

Literature Review

The literature on internal inspection and quality management in education highlights the central role of culture in shaping sustainable improvement. Early studies on organizational culture and total quality management emphasized that cultural values significantly influence the effectiveness of quality initiatives. Westbrook (1993) noted that organizational culture determines whether quality management is perceived as a compliance burden or an opportunity for institutional development. In educational settings, this perspective has led to the integration of quality culture into school management frameworks.

Scholars have proposed that quality culture encompasses shared values, attitudes, and practices that encourage continuous improvement and stakeholder engagement. Nguyen (2011) described quality culture in schools as a collective commitment to excellence, sustained through active participation of both teachers and administrators. Building on this foundation, Le (2015) developed criteria and a framework for embedding quality culture in universities, while Le (2018) emphasized its practical implementation in Vietnamese institutions. These studies

underscore the importance of fostering shared responsibility and collaboration to ensure the success of internal quality assurance systems.

The relationship between internal inspection and quality culture has also been investigated in empirical research. [Detert et al. \(2003\)](#), created the School Quality Management Culture Scale, which demonstrated how cultural dimensions could be measured and linked to inspection practices. [Soria-García & Martínez-Lorente \(2020\)](#), further showed that cultural orientation influences the quality of internal management and affects students' perceptions of service quality in secondary schools. International evidence, therefore, suggests that internal inspection cannot be effective without a supportive cultural environment that values transparency, learning, and improvement.

In the Vietnamese context, several studies have examined the interplay between internal quality assurance and the development of quality culture in higher education. [Do et al. \(2020\)](#) found a strong correlation between internal quality assurance practices and the establishment of quality culture in universities in Ho Chi Minh City. Similarly, [Tuan et al. \(2023\)](#) identified key cultural factors such as leadership and collective participation that shape internal quality systems. [Nguyen et al. \(2020\)](#) explored the application of total quality management in Vietnamese higher education and concluded that adopting comprehensive models enhances both assessment and cultural transformation. Although these studies focus on higher education, they provide valuable theoretical and practical insights for high schools, where research on internal inspection remains limited.

More recent scholarship emphasizes the application of quality culture models in vocational and secondary education. [Sayekti et al. \(2024\)](#) proposed effective quality culture models for internal quality assurance in vocational schools, highlighting their potential relevance for high school inspection systems. In addition, [Pham \(2024\)](#) argued that managing internal inspection in high schools through a quality culture approach addresses challenges such as inadequate evaluation criteria and weak stakeholder involvement. These findings suggest that aligning internal inspection with a broader cultural framework can enhance both accountability and continuous improvement in schools.

Overall, the literature establishes a strong theoretical foundation for viewing internal inspection not as a control mechanism but as a developmental process embedded in quality culture. While higher education studies dominate the field, there is growing recognition of the need to extend these frameworks to high schools. This review indicates a clear gap in applying quality culture perspectives to internal inspection at the secondary level in Vietnam, which the present study aims to address ([Irani et al., 2004](#)).

2 Materials and Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative and qualitative techniques to investigate the management of internal inspection in high schools from a quality culture perspective. The use of both survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews allowed for a comprehensive understanding of current practices and challenges while also generating evidence-based recommendations for management solutions.

Participants

The research sample included 450 participants, comprising school managers, teachers, and staff from high schools across six provinces and cities in Vietnam. Specifically, the sample consisted of 250 managers at different levels, of which 50 were officials from provincial Departments of Education and Training and 200 were principals or vice principals at the school level. In addition, 200 teachers and administrative staff were surveyed to capture broader perspectives on internal inspection activities. This diverse group of respondents ensured that the data reflected both leadership and practitioner viewpoints within high schools.

Research Sites

The fieldwork was conducted across six provinces and cities representing different regions of Vietnam: Hanoi, Quang Ninh, Son La, Nghe An, Ho Chi Minh City, and Can Tho. Within these areas, twelve public high schools were selected as research sites. In Hanoi, the study was carried out at Chu Van An High School, Tran Phu High School, and Ngo Thi Nham High School. In Ho Chi Minh City, the sites included Le Hong Phong High School for the Gifted, Nguyen Thuong Hien High School, and Tran Dai Nghia High School for the Gifted. In Nghe An, the study focused on Dien Chau High School and the Provincial Boarding School for Ethnic Minorities No. 2. In Can

Tho, Nguyen Viet Hong High School and Chau Van Liem High School were chosen. In Son La, the sites included Son La Boarding High School for Ethnic Minorities and Song Ma High School. This distribution provided a representative view of both urban and rural schools with diverse educational contexts.

Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected using structured survey questionnaires. A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed to the selected participants, and all 450 were successfully collected, resulting in a 100 percent response rate. Respondents were provided with instructions and guidance to ensure accuracy and completeness in their responses. The survey focused on perceptions and practices related to internal inspection, the role of quality culture, and challenges in current management practices.

To complement the quantitative data, qualitative data were gathered through in-depth interviews. A set of ten open-ended questions was designed for education managers at both provincial and school levels. These interviews aimed to explore managerial perspectives on the effectiveness of internal inspection and the potential for applying a quality culture approach. The qualitative component enriched the study by providing deeper insights into the mechanisms, challenges, and opportunities associated with internal inspection practices.

Data Analysis

All collected questionnaires were checked, coded, and processed. Quantitative data were analyzed using the SPSS and Winderm software packages to ensure scientific accuracy and reliability. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize participants' responses, while inferential statistical techniques were used to identify patterns and relationships between management practices and quality culture indicators. The qualitative data from interviews were transcribed and thematically analyzed to identify recurring themes and managerial insights.

3 Findings and Discussions

3.1 Findings

Quantitative Findings

The survey results from 450 participants provided a comprehensive picture of internal inspection practices in Vietnamese high schools. The distribution of responses across key dimensions—frequency and process, criteria, participation, leadership, transparency, digital tools, and outcomes—is presented below.

Table 1
Frequency and process of internal inspection (N = 450)

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Inspection conducted periodically	103 (22.9%)	175 (38.9%)	87 (19.3%)	65 (14.4%)	20 (4.5%)
Clear plan and criteria for each inspection	95 (21.1%)	168 (37.3%)	92 (20.4%)	71 (15.8%)	24 (5.3%)
Consistency across subject groups	88 (19.6%)	161 (35.8%)	97 (21.6%)	75 (16.7%)	29 (6.4%)
Timely reporting and feedback	91 (20.2%)	172 (38.2%)	84 (18.7%)	77 (17.1%)	26 (5.8%)

A total of 61.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that inspections are conducted regularly, and 58.4% believed that plans and criteria are clearly defined. However, consistency and timeliness remain issues, with about one-fifth of respondents remaining neutral and nearly another one-fifth disagreeing.

Table 2
Criteria aligned with quality culture (N = 450)

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Reflect the school's core values	78 (17.3%)	159 (35.3%)	104 (23.1%)	77 (17.1%)	32 (7.1%)
Emphasize continuous improvement	74 (16.4%)	147 (32.7%)	109 (24.2%)	82 (18.2%)	38 (8.4%)
Encourage teaching innovation	69 (15.3%)	141 (31.3%)	112 (24.9%)	89 (19.8%)	39 (8.7%)
Consider student experience	65 (14.4%)	138 (30.7%)	116 (25.8%)	91 (20.2%)	40 (8.9%)

Only around half of the participants agreed that the inspection criteria reflect school values and continuous improvement. Fewer than half perceived alignment with innovation or student-centered values, showing a gap between current practices and the ideals of quality culture.

Table 3
Participation and leadership (N = 450)

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Teachers involved in building the criteria	63 (14.0%)	121 (26.9%)	105 (23.3%)	106 (23.6%)	55 (12.2%)
Stakeholders have feedback channels	58 (12.9%)	114 (25.3%)	118 (26.2%)	106 (23.6%)	54 (12.0%)
Leaders communicate vision clearly	85 (18.9%)	158 (35.1%)	101 (22.4%)	74 (16.4%)	32 (7.1%)
Inspection is seen as developmental	72 (16.0%)	136 (30.2%)	116 (25.8%)	90 (20.0%)	36 (8.0%)

Only about 41% of respondents felt that teachers were genuinely involved in designing inspection criteria, while 35.8% acknowledged stakeholder feedback channels. Leadership appeared somewhat stronger, with over half agreeing that leaders communicate visions effectively, yet still about a quarter disagreed or remained neutral.

Table 4
Transparency, digital tools, and outcomes (N = 450)

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Criteria and forms are publicized	81 (18.0%)	152 (33.8%)	103 (22.9%)	80 (17.8%)	34 (7.6%)
Feedback is specific and actionable	75 (16.7%)	147 (32.7%)	109 (24.2%)	82 (18.2%)	37 (8.2%)
Digital tools reduce paperwork	69 (15.3%)	142 (31.6%)	114 (25.3%)	86 (19.1%)	39 (8.7%)
Inspection improves quality	77 (17.1%)	165 (36.7%)	108 (24.0%)	68 (15.1%)	32 (7.1%)

A moderate majority perceived transparency and benefits of inspection, but fewer than half agreed that digital tools were effectively used. While 53.8% felt inspection improves teaching quality, a significant portion (22.2%) remained unconvinced.

Qualitative Findings

The in-depth interviews with school and DoET managers enriched the quantitative data. Respondents highlighted that inspection is still largely seen as a compliance mechanism. As one principal noted, "We follow the regulations carefully, but sometimes the focus is more on paperwork than on improving teaching". This sentiment reflects the gap between procedural compliance and developmental orientation.

Managers also expressed concerns about limited teacher participation. While leaders often plan and carry out inspections, teachers are typically passive recipients of evaluations. A DoET officer remarked, "Teachers rarely contribute to designing inspection criteria; they mostly receive the results after the process".

The issue of transparency and feedback was another recurring theme. Many interviewees felt that feedback was too general and lacked practical suggestions. One vice principal observed, “The reports usually point out weaknesses but do not always guide us on how to improve”.

Leadership was seen as decisive. Schools with proactive leaders who emphasized collaboration reported more positive experiences. For example, a manager from Hanoi said, “Our school organizes joint discussions after each inspection, where teachers share good practices. This makes inspection less of a burden and more of a learning opportunity”.

Digital tools were mentioned as underutilized. While some schools had piloted digital platforms for reporting, most inspections still relied on traditional paperwork. Leaders believed that greater digital adoption would improve efficiency and transparency.

Overall, the qualitative findings align with survey results: inspection is institutionalized but remains compliance-driven, teacher involvement is insufficient, and leadership quality determines whether inspection fosters a culture of improvement. Respondents saw opportunities in training, better feedback, and digital transformation.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that internal inspection in Vietnamese high schools has achieved partial success but still faces substantial challenges in becoming a tool for fostering a sustainable quality culture. The quantitative results indicate that inspections are widely institutionalized, with 61.8% of respondents affirming their regularity. However, only 44.3% perceived that inspection contributes to long-term quality culture, underscoring the persistence of a compliance-oriented mindset. This aligns with international scholarship, which warns that inspection systems focused predominantly on administrative procedures risk undermining their developmental potential (Detert et al., 2003; Sallis, 2014).

The limited involvement of teachers, as reflected in the finding that only 40.9% reported participation in designing criteria, confirms that inspection remains largely top-down. This result resonates with Nguyen (2011), who stressed that quality culture requires collective ownership and collaboration across all school stakeholders. Similarly, Soria-García & Martínez-Lorente (2020) emphasized that cultural orientation determines whether students and teachers perceive inspection as supportive or punitive. The weak participatory dimension observed in this study suggests that Vietnamese high schools still need to shift toward shared responsibility in quality assurance.

Leadership emerges as a decisive factor. More than half of respondents agreed that leaders communicate visions clearly, and qualitative evidence confirmed that proactive leadership makes inspection less burdensome and more developmental. This finding supports Le (2015) and Le (2018), who argued that leadership is central to embedding quality culture in Vietnamese educational institutions. International studies have also highlighted that effective leaders integrate inspection into broader strategies of continuous improvement rather than treating it as an isolated activity (Westbrook, 1993; McNaughton et al., 2012).

Transparency and feedback remain areas of concern. Although around 52% of participants acknowledged timely feedback, many interviewees criticized its generality and lack of practical guidance. This observation supports Pham (2024), who noted that inspection in high schools often fails to generate actionable insights. Without specific feedback, inspection risks becoming symbolic compliance rather than a catalyst for learning and improvement.

Finally, digital adoption is underdeveloped. Less than half of respondents perceived that digital tools reduce paperwork or enhance transparency. Yet previous research has demonstrated that digital platforms strengthen internal quality assurance by streamlining reporting, facilitating data visualization, and supporting follow-up actions (Tuan et al., 2023; Do et al., 2020). The slow digital transformation in high school inspection may exacerbate disparities between urban and rural schools, as evidenced by regional differences in the findings.

In summary, this study confirms both the achievements and shortcomings of internal inspection in Vietnamese high schools. While the system provides accountability and regulatory compliance, its capacity to nurture a quality culture is limited. These results extend the literature by highlighting the transitional nature of inspection in developing contexts and reinforce the call for participatory, transparent, and digitally enabled practices that align with cultural values of quality.

Proposed Management Solutions

Based on the findings and informed by previous scholarship, the study proposes five interrelated solutions for improving the management of internal inspection in high schools through a quality culture approach.

Solution 1: Raising awareness among managers and teachers about quality culture in internal inspection. Awareness campaigns, seminars, and workshops should be organized to help education managers, teachers, and staff understand that inspection is not only about compliance but also about continuous improvement. This transformation in perception is essential for embedding cultural values of quality into daily practices (Nguyen, 2011; Sallis, 2014).

Solution 2: Developing criteria aligned with quality culture. Inspection criteria should be revised to reflect not only administrative requirements but also values of innovation, collaboration, and student-centered learning. Clear and measurable indicators linked to these values will ensure that inspection outcomes support long-term quality improvement rather than short-term compliance (Le, 2015; Detert et al., 2003).

Solution 3: Standardizing inspection processes based on quality culture principles. Departments of Education and Training should provide guidance for schools to adopt standardized, transparent, and participatory inspection processes. This involves ensuring consistency across subject groups and linking processes with professional development activities. Standardization enhances comparability while still allowing schools flexibility to address local contexts (Soria-García & Martínez-Lorente, 2020).

Solution 4: Capacity building for staff involved in inspection. Training programs should be developed for both managers and teachers, focusing on inspection skills, evaluation techniques, and quality culture principles. This would empower teachers to participate more actively and ensure that inspection is conducted by staff with sufficient expertise and understanding. Such professionalization has been shown to improve the reliability and acceptance of inspection results (Sayekti et al., 2024).

Solution 5: Mobilizing and allocating resources for inspection. Adequate resources—including financial support, time, and digital infrastructure—must be dedicated to internal inspection. Digital platforms should be integrated to manage evidence, streamline reporting, and ensure transparency. By allocating resources strategically, schools can reduce the administrative burden on teachers and enhance the developmental value of inspection (Do et al., 2020; Tuan et al., 2023).

4 Conclusion

The study concludes that internal inspection in Vietnamese high schools is at a critical juncture. While it has become a regular and institutionalized practice, its current orientation remains heavily compliance-driven, limiting its potential to foster a sustainable culture of quality. The evidence shows that inspection often emphasizes administrative control and reporting, with insufficient focus on continuous improvement, collaboration, and student-centered outcomes.

Leadership has been confirmed as the most decisive factor in determining whether inspection supports development or remains a bureaucratic exercise. Schools led by proactive managers who prioritize transparency, participation, and professional development demonstrate more positive outcomes. However, weak teacher participation, limited feedback mechanisms, and uneven adoption of digital tools remain major constraints.

The proposed management solutions—including raising awareness, developing culturally aligned criteria, standardizing processes, building capacity, and mobilizing resources—offer a comprehensive roadmap for reform. Implementing these solutions can help transform internal inspection from a regulatory necessity into a strategic driver of educational improvement.

From a theoretical perspective, this study enriches the literature on quality culture in secondary education, an area that remains underexplored compared to higher education. From a practical standpoint, the findings provide actionable guidance for policymakers, education managers, and school leaders seeking to strengthen accountability while fostering a culture of collaboration, innovation, and continuous improvement.

Future research may expand the scope by comparing public and private schools, exploring regional disparities in more depth, or examining the long-term impact of digital transformation on internal inspection systems. Such studies would further consolidate the role of quality culture as the foundation for effective educational management in Vietnam.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declared that they have no competing interests.

Statement of authorship

The authors are responsible for the conception and design of the study. The authors have approved the final article.

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