Investigating the Factors Affecting the Implementation of 2018 Primary Education Curriculum in the Mekong Delta

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Abstract
This study explores key factors affecting the implementation of 2018 Primary Education Curriculum (PEC 2018) using a large-scale quantitative approach. Data were collected from 1,058 educational stakeholders, including teachers and school leaders in Can Tho city in the Mekong Delta. The analysis focused on 12 factor groups encompassing 61 items. The instrument demonstrated excellent internal reliability (Cronbach's Alpha=.981), confirming the consistency of the measurement. Among the findings, "Confidence and Trust in Implementation" emerged as the strongest factor, while "Income and Welfare" ranked lowest, indicating concerns about teacher support and motivation. Interestingly, significant differences were observed across geographical locations, professional roles, ethnic groups, and levels of experience. These variations highlight the contextual challenges of curriculum reform and emphasize the need for targeted policies to support equitable and sustainable implementation of PEC 2018 in diverse local contexts.

1. Introduction
1.1 The study background
Vietnam's 2018 General Education Curriculum (PEC 2018) represents a transformative shift toward a competency-based, learner-centered model in primary education. It aims to foster holistic student development by integrating knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes in a coherent framework aligned with 21st-century competencies. Unlike prior content-heavy curricula, PEC 2018 promotes teacher autonomy, interdisciplinary learning, and formative assessment to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. Despite these ambitions, the actual implementation has proven complex. National policy provides a unified vision, yet the on-the-ground realization of PEC 2018 is deeply influenced by contextual conditions. "Implementation" in this study refers to how policies, curriculum content, teaching practices, and support mechanisms are enacted at the school and classroom levels (Fields & Kafai, 2023).

The factors influencing implementation of educational directives encompass a broad range of elements that shape these processes, including structural, institutional, pedagogical, personal, and socio-cultural dimensions (Mabunda, 2023). These factors are critical to explore for several reasons. First, Vietnam's education system is geographically and demographically diverse. Regions like the Mekong Delta, with significant ethnic minority populations, rural and semi-urban schooling environments, and varying levels of teacher capacity, face unique barriers and enablers (Tran, 2020). Second, implementation quality directly affects equity in students' learning outcomes and overall development (Soicher, Becker-Blease, & Bostwick, 2020). As Zakszeski, Thomas and Erdy (2020) argue, identifying which elements, possibly including teacher farewell and training, leadership support, infrastructure, community engagement, or trust in the curriculum, could contribute to or hinder effective reform helps policymakers refine resource allocation and support mechanisms. Globally, educational research affirms that top-down reforms rarely succeed without grassroots buy-in and contextual responsiveness (Proctor, Gerrard, & Goodwin, 2023).

In this respect, the current study investigates the factors shaping the implementation of PEC 2018 in the Mekong Delta. It adopts a quantitative lens to map perceptions across a large sample of teachers and school leaders. By identifying which domains are perceived as strengths or obstacles, and examining differences by region, role, and identity, the research offers evidence-based insights for improving curriculum enactment and educational equity in Vietnam. Based on the purpose and scope of the study, the following research questions were formulated:
1. Which factors affecting the implementation of PEC 2018 are identified as most and least influential by educational stakeholders in the Mekong Delta?
2. Do stakeholders' demographic characteristics significantly affect their perceptions of the factors influencing PEC 2018 implementation?

2. Materials/Methods

2.1 Research design and participants

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to examine multiple contextual and personal factors influencing the implementation of PEC 2018. The research utilized a structured, self-report questionnaire distributed to educational stakeholders, allowing for large-scale data collection and comparative analysis across demographic variables. As shown in Table 2 below, 1,058 participants were drawn from Can Tho city. The sample consisted of homeroom teachers (teachers responsible for overall classroom management and student affairs), subject teachers (those specializing in specific subjects such as English, Math, or Science), and school leaders (principals, vice principals, and department heads), together with gender and ethnicities

Table 2. A summary of participants' demographic information (N=1,058)

Category	Subgroup	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	401	37.9%
	Female	657	62.1%
Ethnicity	Kinh	918	86.8%
	Khmer	140	13.2%
Professional role	Homeroom teacher	423	40.0%
	Subject teacher	410	38.8%
	School leader	225	21.3%
School location	Urban center	209	19.8%
	Semi-urban / surrounding area	849	80.2%

2.2 Research instrument

A structured questionnaire consisting of 61 items was developed to assess perceived influences on PEC 2018 implementation. The development of the instrument was grounded in a comprehensive review of official PEC 2018 documentation, including policy guidelines, curricular frameworks, and implementation criteria issued by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), particularly Thông tư 32/2018/TT-BGDĐT (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 2018). The items were grouped into 12 thematic domains: (I) Education Policies, (II) Human Resources, (III) Managerial Support, (IV) Community and Parental Involvement, (V) Student Factors, (VI) Educational Infrastructure, (VII) Textbooks and Resources, (VIII) Income and Welfare, (IX) Technology Use, (X) Teacher Training, (XI) Local Socioeconomic Conditions, and (XII) Confidence and Trust in Implementation. Respondents rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree).

2.3 Data analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics were calculated to determine mean scores and standard deviations across the 12 factor groups. The internal consistency of the entire instrument was excellent, as indicated by a Cronbach's Alpha of .991 across all 61 items. Independent Samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA with Tukey post hoc tests were then conducted to examine differences across gender, location, province, ethnic group, professional role, and experience level. A significance level of $p < .05$ was used throughout.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Most and least influential factors

To address Research Question 1, this section identifies which factors were perceived as most and least influential in shaping the implementation of the 2018 General Education Curriculum (PEC 2018), based on the mean scores across 12 factor groups presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the questionnaire

Factor group	M	SD	Summary of related items
I. Education Policies	3.87	.818	Guidelines, enabling autonomy, support for resources, encouragement of innovation, policy and practice alignment
II. Human Resources	3.98	.781	Teacher qualifications, pedagogical skills, staff sufficiency, leadership competence and implementation capacity
III. Managerial Support	3.93	.761	Support from district departments, local authority policies, school-level leadership and consultation
IV. Community & Parental Involvement	3.89	.749	Parental coordination, colleague cooperation in planning and implementation, community interest in education
V. Student Factors	3.84	.782	Interest in learning, engagement with methods, ease of comprehension, self-study habits
VI. Educational Infrastructure	3.87	.793	Infrastructure sufficiency, safe learning environment, facilities, resources, teacher workload

Factor group	M	SD	Summary of related items
VII. Textbooks & Supporting Materials	3.74	.823	Content relevance, adaptability to local contexts, cost and print quality, availability of supplementary materials
VIII. Income and Welfare	3.59	.856	Salary adequacy, financial support, cost of living, income opportunities, bonus/incentive access
IX. Technology Use in Education	3.91	.765	Enhancing teaching quality, support policies, digital lesson design, student access, connection challenges
X. Teacher Training & Development	3.93	.741	Regular training, practical content, access to materials, teacher input, qualified trainers
XI. Local Socioeconomic Conditions	3.82	.760	Economic context, regional disparities, support policies for teachers in disadvantaged areas
XII. Confidence & Trust in Implementation	4.01	.688	Curriculum understanding, goal clarity, lesson planning, assessment accuracy, recognition from stakeholders

Among the twelve domains, the most influential factor was Confidence and Trust in Implementation (Factor Group XII), which received the highest mean score (M=4.01, SD=0.688). This factor encompasses elements such as curriculum understanding, clarity of instructional goals, effective lesson planning, accurate assessment practices, and recognition from stakeholders. The high rating indicates that both teachers and school leaders expressed strong belief in and commitment to the PEC 2018. Furthermore, the relatively low standard deviation reflects consistent agreement among respondents, suggesting a shared professional confidence in enacting the curriculum. This finding aligns with previous findings about broader educational change, which accentuated the importance of teacher buy-in and clarity of reform objectives (Hübner et al., 2021). When educators trust the curriculum and feel confident in its delivery, they are more likely to engage meaningfully with its implementation and sustain its intended changes (Menzies et al., 2023).

In contrast, the least influential factor was Income and Welfare (Factor Group VIII), which received the lowest mean score (M=3.59, SD=0.856). This domain includes considerations such as salary adequacy, access to financial support, cost of living pressures, alternative income opportunities, and availability of bonuses or incentives. The lower mean score, coupled with the relatively high standard deviation, points to widespread concern and uneven experiences among respondents regarding economic conditions. As Charity, Eguonor and Ndidiamaka (2024) discuss, while financial factors may not directly shape day-to-day instructional practices, insufficient income can indirectly hinder motivation, job satisfaction, and long-term teacher retention. In contexts where teachers face economic hardship, even a well-designed curriculum may not yield its full potential if the workforce is demoralized or distracted by financial insecurity (Doyle, Easterbrook, & Tropp, 2024).

3.2 Demographic effect on identified influential factors
3.2.1 Gender
To investigate whether male and female participants differed significantly in their perceptions of the factors influencing the implementation of the 2018 General Education Curriculum (PEC 2018), independent samples t-tests were conducted across the twelve factor groups. As shown in Table 4, the results revealed that gender differences were largely insignificant across most factors, suggesting that male and female educators shared broadly similar views regarding the conditions and influences shaping curriculum implementation.

Table 4. The effect of stakeholders' gender

Factor group	t-test Sig.	Significant difference
I. Education Policies	0.212	No
II. Human Resources	0.903	No
III. Managerial Support	0.475	No
IV. Community & Parental Involvement	0.226	No
V. Student Factors	0.042	Female (MF=3.88) > Male (MM=3.81)
VI. Educational Infrastructure	0.753	No
VII. Textbooks & Supporting Materials	0.199	No
VIII. Income and Welfare	0.712	No
IX. Technology Use in Education	0.282	No
X. Teacher Training & Development	0.386	No
XI. Local Socioeconomic Conditions	0.511	No
XII. Confidence & Trust in Implementation	0.322	No

A statistically significant difference was found in the factor group "Student Factors" (p=0.042), where female respondents rated this domain more highly than their male counterparts. This group includes learners' interest in learning, engagement with instructional methods, ease of comprehension, and self-study habits. The elevated rating by female participants may reflect their greater attentiveness to or concern with student behavior and

learning engagement, aspects often emphasized in gendered patterns of pedagogical sensitivity or classroom interaction styles (Karakus et al., 2024).

For all other factor groups, including key areas such as education policy, human resources, managerial support, and teacher training, the p-values exceeded the significance threshold (p ≥ .05), indicating no statistically meaningful differences between genders. This general consistency suggests that both male and female educators are aligned in their perceptions of structural and pedagogical dimensions of PEC 2018 implementation.

3.2.2 Ethnicities

An independent T-test was conducted to examine whether perceptions of PEC 2018 implementation varied across ethnic groups, including Kinh (n=918) and Khmer (n=140). Among the twelve factor groups, only "Student Factors" showed a statistically significant difference (See Table 5).

Table 5. The effect of stakeholders' ethnicities

Factor Group	t-test Sig.	Tukey Post-hoc significant pairs
I. Education Policies	No	—
II. Human Resources	No	—
III. Managerial Support	No	—
IV. Community & Parental Involvement	No	—
V. Student Factors	Yes (.028)	Kinh (MK=3.82) < Khmer (MKh=4.00)
VI. Educational Infrastructure	No	—
VII. Textbooks & Supporting Materials	No	—
VIII. Income and Welfare	No	—
IX. Technology Use in Education	No	—
X. Teacher Training & Development	No	—
XI. Local Socioeconomic Conditions	No	—
XII. Confidence & Trust in Implementation	No	—

Khmer respondents (MKh=4.00) rated student-related factors significantly higher than Kinh respondents (MK=3.82), indicating a stronger perception of improvement in student engagement, participation, and adaptability under PEC 2018. This suggests that the curriculum reform may have introduced more visible changes in learner-centered approaches for Khmer communities, where such pedagogical opportunities were previously limited (Pham & Kim, 2022). These findings revealed PEC 2018's potentially greater perceived impact among ethnic minority communities, particularly Khmer. This reinforces the role of national curriculum reforms in addressing long-standing educational disparities and fostering more inclusive learning environments in ethnolinguistically diverse contexts.

3.2.3 Division of labors

To examine whether stakeholders' roles influenced their perceptions of PEC 2018 implementation, a one-way ANOVA was conducted across three role groups: Homeroom Teachers (HT), Subject Teachers (ST), and School Managers (SM). Where significant differences were detected (p < 0.05), Tukey's HSD post-hoc test was applied. Results revealed that school managers consistently rated several implementation factors more positively than teaching staff, especially in areas tied to systemic or organizational change (see Table 6).

Table 6. The effect of stakeholders' gender

Factor Group	ANOVA	Tukey Post-hoc significant pairs
I. Education Policies	Yes (.036)	SM (MSM=4.00) > HT (MHT=3.87) SM (MSM=4.00) > ST (MHT=3.84)
II. Human Resources	No	—
III. Managerial Support	Yes (.001)	SM (MSM=4.08) > HT (MHT=3.89) SM (MSM=4.08) > ST (MHT=3.89)
IV. Community & Parental Involvement	No	—
V. Student Factors	Yes	SM (MSM=3.82) < HT (MHT=3.96)
VI. Educational Infrastructure	No	—
VII. Textbooks & Supporting Materials	No	—
VIII. Income and Welfare	No	—
IX. Technology Use in Education	No	—
X. Teacher Training & Development	Yes (.032)	SM (MSM=4.06) > HT (MHT=3.93) SM (MSM=4.06) > ST (MHT=3.92)
XI. Local Socioeconomic Conditions	Yes (.026)	SM (MSM=3.93) > HT (MHT=3.80)
XII. Confidence & Trust in Implementation	No	—

Notably, school managers rated Education Policies (MSM=4.00) more favorably than both homeroom (MHT=3.87) and subject teachers (MST=3.84), suggesting that they may have had more direct access to policy documents, decision-making processes, or clearer understanding of the reform's intent. A similar pattern emerged

in Managerial Support, where managers (MSM= 4.08) perceived stronger support structures than teachers (MHT & MST=3.89), possibly reflecting their dual role as both beneficiaries and implementers of management practices. Further, managers reported more positive perceptions regarding Teacher Training and Development (MSM=4.06) than homeroom teachers (MHT=3.93) and subject teachers (MST=3.92), possibly due to their involvement in organizing or monitoring such activities. Similarly, in the domain of Local Socioeconomic Conditions, SMs (MSM=3.93) reported greater perceived transformation than HTs (MHT=3.80), which may stem from their stance as proactive facilitator for the learner-parent and school–community relations (De Jesus, 2025).

Interestingly, although Student Factors category also yielded differences between managers and homeroom teachers, this time, homeroom teachers (MHT=3.96) perceiving greater changes in student engagement and learning than the school managers (MSM=3.82). Aligning with findings from Pierce et al. (2024), this could be explained that while managers observe systemic impacts, homeroom teachers are the ones facing day-to-day learner-based implementation directly and regularly. No significant differences were observed in other areas such as Human Resources, Technology Use, or Confidence and Trust, indicating a shared perception across roles in these domains.

On a whole, the findings reflect a role-based divergence, where school managers tend to view PEC 2018 more positively, particularly in structural and support-related dimensions. This may highlight the need for deeper dialogue and alignment between managerial and teaching roles to ensure that top-down policies resonate effectively with on-the-ground classroom realities.

3.2.4 School location

This section analyzes whether stakeholders from central (urban) and peripheral (suburban) areas perceive differences in the factors affecting the implementation of the PEC 2018. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to analyze differences across the twelve factor groups. Findings indicate that most factors show no statistically significant difference between these two groups. However, two factors, Teacher Training and Development, and Confidence and Trust in Implementation, show significant differences, suggesting that perceptions may vary by geographic location (Table 7).

Table 7. The effect of stakeholders' school location

Factor group	Levene's Sig.	t-test Sig.	Significant Difference
I. Education Policies	0.290	0.446	No
II. Human Resources	0.036	0.168	No
III. Managerial Support	0.076	0.615	No
IV. Community & Parental Involvement	0.004	0.322	No
V. Student Factors	0.000	0.051	No
VI. Educational Infrastructure	0.367	0.986	No
VII. Textbooks & Supporting Materials	0.005	0.102	No
VIII. Income and Welfare	0.027	0.106	No
IX. Technology Use in Education	0.067	0.170	No
X. Teacher Training & Development	0.028	0.043	Urban (M_U=3.9) < Suburban (M_S=3.98)
XI. Local Socioeconomic Conditions	0.137	0.365	No
XII. Confidence & Trust in Implementation	0.005	0.027	Urban (M_U=3.92) < Suburban (M_S=4.00)

For Teacher Training and Development (p=0.043), suburban participants rated this domain more highly (MS=3.98) than those in urban areas (MU=3.90). Likewise, for Confidence and Trust in Implementation (p=0.027), suburban stakeholders again reported a higher score (MS=4.00) compared to urban respondents (MU=3.92). These higher ratings suggest that participants from suburban areas perceived these factors as more influential in shaping PEC 2018 implementation.

This pattern may reflect the fact that many suburban schools had not previously benefited from exposure to modern education reforms or consistent professional development support. As a result, the introduction of PEC 2018 represented a more significant shift in teaching practice, training access, and curriculum clarity for suburban educators. This finding echoes an observation by Luckett and Shay (2020) that the curriculum reform appears to have had a greater transformative impact in remote contexts, leading to increased appreciation for newly available opportunities and clearer implementation guidance. In the mean time, educators in urban settings, who may have already had access to professional networks, reform initiatives, and resource-rich environments, perceived the changes brought by PEC 2018 as less dramatic. Last but not least, the lack of significant differences in the remaining ten factors, such as education policies, student-related issues, infrastructure, and socioeconomic conditions, suggests a shared baseline understanding of implementation across both urban and suburban schools.

4. Implications and Conclusion

This study examined the key factors influencing the implementation of Vietnam's 2018 Primary Education Curriculum (PEC 2018) from the perspectives of 1,058 stakeholders across Can Tho city. Using a quantitative approach, the findings revealed that "Confidence and Trust in Implementation" was perceived as the most influential factor, suggesting a strong collective belief in the goals and clarity of PEC 2018. In contrast, "Income and Welfare" received the lowest score, highlighting ongoing concerns over teacher motivation and financial support. Significant differences emerged across several demographic variables, with school managers rating systemic factors more positively than teachers, while female educators and Khmer participants showed higher appreciation for student-related changes.

These results point to several actionable implications for education leaders and policymakers. The perceptual gap between managers and teachers suggests the need for structured, two-way communication channels, possibly through regular consultative meetings and joint planning workshops, or via digital platforms and anonymous feedback surveys that enable teachers to voice concerns without fear of reprisal. Such mechanisms should be paired with clear follow-up actions so that teachers see their input translated into tangible changes. Addressing the low ratings for "Income and Welfare" could involve multi-pronged support measures, including advocating for targeted financial incentives linked to workload and performance, introducing allowances for rural or disadvantaged areas, providing professional growth stipends for training, and expanding access to health and wellbeing programs. Recognition initiatives, including annual excellence awards or career advancement fast-tracks, could further enhance teacher motivation and retention.

The higher appreciation among female educators and Khmer participants for student-related changes highlights an untapped resource for peer-led professional development. Leaders could formalize mentorship networks where these groups share culturally responsive and gender-inclusive teaching strategies, design collaborative lesson studies to showcase best practices, and lead community engagement projects that strengthen home–school partnerships. By embedding transparent dialogue, equitable resource allocation, and structured peer-to-peer capacity building into policy implementation, leaders can bridge perception divides, thereby foster a shared sense of purpose and sustained commitment to PEC 2018's success.

Despite these insights, the study has several limitations that need to be noticed. First, the reliance on self-report data may introduce biases in perception. Second, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to assess changes over time or capture the longitudinal effects of curriculum implementation. Third, the lack of qualitative may further hinder meaningful interpretations. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews or classroom observations to deepen understanding of how implementation unfolds in practice. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to track the evolving impact of PEC 2018 across different educational settings. Furthermore, comparative studies between regions or between primary and secondary education levels could offer broader insights into the systemic dynamics of curriculum reform in Vietnam.

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