



From Episodic Events to Enduring Cultural Flows: A Validated Mixed-Methods Framework for Systemic Optimization of School-Based Cultural Programming

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to develop and validate a comprehensive model for streamlining cultural events within the education system, addressing the observed fragmentation between schools and their cultural environments and providing a strategic framework for educational leadership.

Method: This sequential exploratory mixed-methods study was conducted in two phases. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 participants (including students, teachers, and educational managers) selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify the core components of the model. In the quantitative phase, a researcher-developed questionnaire, derived from the qualitative findings, was administered to a sample of 276 managers and 263 teachers selected via cluster random sampling. The proposed model was validated using second-order confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) within a structural equation modeling framework.

Results: The qualitative analysis identified five core components: Cultural Governance, Context and Infrastructure, Design and Content, Participation and Implementation, and Motivation and Enhancement. The quantitative validation confirmed the structural integrity of the model, with all factor loadings being statistically significant. The second-order CFA demonstrated a good fit with the empirical data (RMSEA = 0.07, GFI = 0.98, NFI = 0.98). Notably, the components of 'Participation and Implementation' ($\lambda=0.99$) and 'Design and Content' ($\lambda=0.98$) showed the strongest explanatory power.

Conclusions: This study provides a validated, systemic model that reconceptualizes cultural events not as episodic activities but as continuous, process-oriented cultural flows. The findings underscore that effective cultural programming requires a coherent alignment of governance, institutional capacity, participatory processes, and reinforcing mechanisms. The model offers a practical framework for school leaders and policymakers to enhance student engagement, identity formation, and social cohesion by transforming fragmented cultural events into a sustainable and integrated element of educational practice.

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Introduction

Culture, as a foundational element of both individual and collective identity, plays a pivotal role in shaping social structures and educational systems (Ballantine et al., 2021). Within this framework, education functions not merely as a mechanism for knowledge transmission but as a central cultural institution that both shapes and is shaped by societal values, norms, and belief systems (Patton, 2023). This intertwined and bidirectional relationship is so profound that many scholars conceptualize education as an inherently cultural process—one through which learners internalize, negotiate, and reproduce dominant and emerging cultural meanings over time.

Over the past two decades, the emergence of interdisciplinary perspectives in educational research has generated influential concepts such as “education as culture” (Nieto et al., 2022), “culturally responsive education” (Sawitri et al., 2021), “citizenship education” (Damiani & Fraillon, 2025), and “culture-building education” (Meng et al., 2024). Collectively, these perspectives emphasize the dual role of education systems as both recipients and producers of culture, positioning schools not only as instructional spaces but also as arenas for cultural reproduction, renewal, and transformation. As a result, education is increasingly understood as a dynamic cultural ecosystem rather than a neutral or purely technical enterprise. Critically, the effective stewardship and navigation of this complex cultural ecosystem is a core function of educational leadership and management. School leaders are tasked with creating the conditions for meaningful cultural engagement, which in turn shapes organizational climate, teacher efficacy, and ultimately, student outcomes (Day et al., 2016).

Within this conceptualization, schools occupy a central position as the primary institutional sites of cultural socialization (Muldagaliyeva et al., 2025). Acting as mediators between individuals and society, schools extend beyond the delivery of academic content to transmit shared values, behavioral norms, and social expectations. Through daily interactions, formal curricula, and informal practices, schools foster competencies essential for students’ present engagement and future participation in social, civic, and cultural life (Tintori et al., 2021). Accordingly, the cultural function of schools is inseparable from their educational mission. This mission places unique demands on educational leaders, requiring them to act as cultural architects who strategically align activities with broader educational goals, mobilize resources, and foster collaborative partnerships (Ylimaki, 2012).

In Iran’s national education policy framework, particularly the Fundamental Reform Document of Education, the school is conceptualized as a “center for holistic education” with explicit responsibilities extending beyond academic achievement. This document emphasizes the school’s community-oriented role and its obligation to engage actively with families, local communities, and cultural institutions to promote balanced and multidimensional student development (Namdari Pejman, 2024). Within this policy vision, cultural activities are not peripheral supplements but integral components of educational practice. This policy directive underscores the managerial and leadership challenge of integrating these activities coherently into the school’s core operations, moving from ad-hoc programming to systemic cultural practice.

Among the most influential mechanisms through which schools enact their cultural mission are cultural events. In the social sciences, an event is typically defined as a bounded occurrence with a clear temporal structure that produces symbolic, social, or behavioral change. When such occurrences are intentionally designed to convey cultural meanings, values, or identities, they are referred to as cultural events (e.g., festivals, exhibitions, traditional ceremonies, literary gatherings, artistic workshops, and cultural competitions) (Elsamanoudy, 2024). International research consistently demonstrates that well-designed cultural events can strengthen local identity, foster social cohesion, enhance civic participation, preserve cultural heritage, and counterbalance the homogenizing pressures of globalization (Weber & Ali-Knight, 2012). By generating shared cultural experiences, these events contribute to collective belonging and long-term cultural sustainability. From an educational management perspective, these events are not merely cultural outputs but strategic leadership tools. They can be leveraged to build school community, articulate and reinforce institutional values, and enhance stakeholder engagement—all of which are key indicators of effective school leadership (Hallinger, 2018).

Despite this recognized potential, evidence from the Iranian education system indicates that school-based cultural events are often fragmented, episodic, and weakly integrated into broader educational and cultural objectives. Many cultural, social, and civil institutions that could contribute meaningfully to school culture-building remain marginally involved or structurally disconnected from schools. Moreover, existing policies and regulatory frameworks have not sufficiently enabled systematic collaboration between schools and external cultural actors (Muldagaliyeva et al., 2025). As a result, a noticeable cultural gap has emerged between schools and their surrounding social environments, leading to the underutilization of valuable cultural resources and opportunities. This fragmentation represents a significant leadership and management deficit. It points to a need for models that empower school leaders with frameworks for strategic planning, stakeholder coordination, and the integration of cultural programming into the school improvement process (Bush, 2008).

This challenge has been further intensified by rapid social, cultural, and technological transformations. Processes such as globalization, the expansion of digital media, shifting youth lifestyles, and identity-related tensions have fundamentally altered how young people engage with culture. Consequently, traditional and sporadic cultural programming is increasingly insufficient to respond to students' lived realities and cultural expectations. In this context, schools require innovative, coherent, and adaptive approaches to cultural engagement that move beyond isolated activities toward sustainable cultural processes. This shift necessitates a corresponding evolution in leadership practices, moving from administrative oversight of discrete events to the cultivation of a dynamic, responsive, and coherent cultural environment—a core competency for 21st-century educational leaders (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2020).

Accordingly, the development of a systematic and empirically grounded model for optimizing—or streamlining—cultural events in education emerges as both a theoretical and practical necessity. Rather than treating cultural events as isolated or ceremonial occurrences, such a model conceptualizes them as interconnected processes embedded within the organizational, social, and cultural ecology of schools. By adopting a process-oriented and

participatory perspective, educational systems can transform cultural events into continuous cultural flows that meaningfully contribute to students' identity formation, motivation, and social participation. This transformation has direct implications for educational management and leadership. A streamlined, systemic approach to cultural programming can reduce operational inefficiencies, clarify managerial roles and responsibilities, and provide school leaders with a clear framework for decision-making and evaluation, thereby enhancing overall organizational effectiveness (Leithwood et al., 2020).

The present study responds to this need by developing and validating a comprehensive mixed-methods model designed to optimize cultural events within the education system. By explicitly linking the optimization of cultural flows to the enhancement of strategic leadership and management capabilities within schools, this study aims to contribute directly to the field of educational leadership. It provides a actionable framework that can help leaders transition from managing episodic events to stewarding enduring cultural processes, thereby strengthening their capacity to build cohesive, responsive, and effective school communities.

Theoretical and Research Foundations

Research on culture and education has developed across multiple disciplinary traditions, including sociology of education, cultural management, educational policy, and youth studies. Collectively, these strands emphasize that culture-building within educational systems is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by structural conditions, institutional arrangements, and individual participation. A review of prior studies relevant to the present research reveals three dominant and partially disconnected bodies of literature, each offering important but incomplete insights into the optimization of cultural events in education.

Education as a Cultural and Socializing Institution

A substantial body of scholarship conceptualizes education as a primary mechanism of cultural transmission, socialization, and identity formation. Drawing on sociological theories of education, these studies emphasize the school's role in shaping values, norms, and patterns of civic engagement (Davies, 2024). Within this perspective, culture is not treated as an auxiliary domain but as a foundational dimension of educational practice.

Recent empirical and conceptual works reinforce this view by highlighting the importance of culture-building processes within schools. For example, Muldagaliyeva et al. (2025) demonstrate how cultural-communicative practices contribute to youth socialization, while Meng et al. (2024) emphasize the role of culturally grounded professional identities in educational contexts. Although these studies provide valuable theoretical justification for integrating culture into education, they remain largely descriptive and conceptual, offering limited guidance on how cultural activities—particularly events—can be systematically designed, implemented, and evaluated at the school level.

Macro-Level Cultural Policymaking and Systemic Models in Education

A second stream of research focuses on macro-level cultural policymaking and system-wide models within education systems. These studies aim to articulate comprehensive frameworks for cultural development, often at the national or institutional level. For instance, Ahmadipour

et al. (2022) proposed a multidimensional model for promoting cultural literacy in Iran's education system, incorporating foundational, causal, contextual, strategic, and outcome-oriented dimensions. Similarly, Bazgoli et al. (2021) designed a model for developing cultural capital in education, identifying key influencing components such as social identity, family interactions, media consumption, and lifestyle, along with outcomes including student empowerment and social responsibility.

Likewise, Moeini et al. (2020) introduced a conceptual model of a comprehensive cultural map for Iran's education system, emphasizing contextual factors (organizational culture and climate), strategic participation, and cultural infrastructure development.

While these macro-level models offer valuable strategic insights and policy orientations, they are characterized by a high level of abstraction. Their broad scope limits their operational applicability at the school level, particularly with regard to the concrete processes through which cultural events are planned, executed, and sustained. As such, they provide insufficient guidance for practitioners seeking actionable, school-based mechanisms for cultural engagement.

Micro-Level Studies on Student Participation and Event-Based Learning

A third body of literature examines student participation in cultural, social, and extracurricular activities, often emphasizing motivational, psychological, and behavioral factors. For example, Aidi et al. (2024) investigated strategies for attracting students to cultural and sports programs, highlighting the importance of diversification, incentive systems, and effective resource management. Abuzar et al. (2024) demonstrated that intrinsic motivation and supportive institutional cultures significantly influence students' engagement and well-being. Event-based educational approaches have also gained attention. Nonis et al. (2020) showed that event-centered learning experiences can foster students' global mindset and self-awareness, while Leppik et al. (2019) emphasized the pedagogical value of event-oriented approaches in language education, particularly in multicultural and multilingual contexts. In a related vein, Drajat and Nor (2020) stressed the necessity of personalization and moral education, especially for students with special needs, reinforcing the importance of learner-centered cultural engagement.

Although these studies provide empirically grounded insights into individual-level participation and motivation, they predominantly focus on isolated factors rather than institutional structures or systemic processes. They lack an integrative, model-oriented perspective capable of linking individual engagement with organizational governance, infrastructure, and long-term cultural sustainability.

Toward an Integrated Perspective: Identifying the Research Gap

Taken together, the existing literature reveals a fragmented landscape.

- Theoretical studies emphasize the cultural role of education but remain largely non-operational.
- Macro-level policy models offer strategic visions but lack school-level implementability.

- Micro-level participation studies focus on individual factors without addressing institutional coordination and process integration.

What is notably absent is a comprehensive, empirically grounded model that bridges these levels by conceptualizing cultural events as structured, process-oriented, and systemically embedded phenomena within schools. In particular, prior research has not sufficiently addressed how cultural events can be optimized—rather than merely implemented—through coordinated governance, contextual infrastructure, participatory processes, and evaluative mechanisms.

Synthesizing the Literature: The Pathway to a Five-Component Model

The journey from reviewing these three distinct research streams to formulating the five-component model of this study is a logical and integrative process. The first stream ("Education as a Cultural Institution") establishes the non-negotiable foundation: cultural events are a core function of schools, not an extracurricular luxury. This mandates that any optimization model must be fundamentally embedded within the school's educational mission and organizational identity, forming our first component: "Foundational Principles and Philosophical Alignment." The second stream ("Macro-Level Models") provides the architectural vision, highlighting the necessity of system-wide coordination, policy support, and resource frameworks. However, its abstraction points to the need for a bridge to practice. This informs two critical components: "Macro-Level Governance and Policy Frameworks" (to provide strategic direction and legitimacy) and "Meso-Level School Infrastructure and Contextual Enablers" (to translate policy into tangible school-level capacity, such as budgets, facilities, and trained personnel). The third stream ("Micro-Level Participation") delivers the crucial human-centric engine, emphasizing student motivation, inclusive design, and experiential learning outcomes. This directly shapes the final two components: "Participatory and Process-Oriented Event Design" (ensuring events are engaging and meaningful from the student perspective) and "Monitoring, Evaluation, and Sustainable Feedback Loops" (to assess impact and ensure continuous improvement based on participant response). Thus, the proposed model is a direct synthesis: it takes the theoretical imperative from the first stream, structures it with the strategic and operational layers implied by the second, and animates it with the participatory and evaluative mechanisms demanded by the third. This integration resolves the identified fragmentation by creating a coherent framework where philosophical foundation, systemic support, organizational capacity, participatory design, and cyclical evaluation are interlocked, transforming episodic events into a sustainable cultural flow.

The present study addresses this gap by developing a mixed-methods model that integrates macro-level governance, meso-level school structures, and micro-level student participation into a coherent framework for streamlining cultural events in education. By doing so, it moves beyond fragmented or episodic approaches and reconceptualizes cultural events as continuous cultural flows embedded within the organizational ecology of schools.

Based on this, the following questions were raised, and the study seeks to answer them:

1. What are the main components of streamlining cultural events in the education system?

2. What strategies and policies are associated with the components of streamlining cultural events in education?
3. What is the optimal model for streamlining cultural events in the education system?
4. Does the proposed model for streamlining cultural events possess sufficient validity?

Method

Research Design

This study employed a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), a well-established approach that integrates qualitative exploration with subsequent quantitative validation within a single coherent research framework. The rationale for adopting this design was to first generate an empirically grounded conceptual model and then statistically test its structural validity on a larger sample. In terms of purpose, the study is classified as applied research, as its primary objective was to identify key components for optimizing cultural events in the education system and to propose an evidence-based, actionable model for practice and policymaking.

The qualitative phase utilized grounded theory following Glaser's emergent approach (Glaser, 1978, 1992), which emphasizes theory development directly from data without imposing pre-existing theoretical frameworks. This approach was particularly appropriate given the exploratory nature of the research topic and the lack of an established operational model for cultural events in schools. The quantitative phase adopted a descriptive–correlational design, employing confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) within a structural equation modeling (SEM) framework to validate the model derived from the qualitative findings.

Data Collection Instruments

In the qualitative phase, data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. An interview guide consisting of open-ended questions was developed based on the research objectives and relevant literature and was reviewed by subject-matter experts prior to data collection. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent, and general interview themes were communicated in advance to facilitate reflection and voluntary participation. Participants were allowed to select the timing and setting of the interviews, ensuring comfort and ethical sensitivity. Each interview was transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were repeatedly reviewed alongside the audio recordings to ensure accuracy, immersion, and analytic sensitivity prior to coding.

To establish the trustworthiness of the qualitative data, several rigor-enhancing strategies were employed. Reliability was addressed through both intra-coder agreement (repeated coding by the primary researcher over time) and inter-coder agreement (independent coding by a second researcher). Validity was enhanced through content validation of interview questions, prolonged engagement with the data, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, expert consultation, and member checking (Holloway & Galvin, 2023).

In the quantitative phase, a researcher-developed questionnaire with closed-ended items was constructed directly from the qualitative findings and the finalized conceptual model. Item

wording was informed by interview codes and relevant literature to ensure conceptual alignment between qualitative and quantitative phases.

Population and Sampling

The qualitative sample consisted of three groups, selected through purposive and snowball sampling, with direct experience and expertise in school-based cultural activities:

1. Three planning and policymaking managers, including senior education officials with experience in cultural management;
2. Four school principals and teachers, whose schools had demonstrated notable engagement or recognition in cultural activities (e.g., cultural festivals, “life schools,” or specialized programs);
3. Eight students, including both individuals with documented achievements in cultural events and those with no prior participation.

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure the inclusion of participants possessing rich, relevant, and diverse perspectives on cultural goals, structures, and practices within education. Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, at which point no new conceptual insights emerged. The demographic characteristics of the qualitative sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Participants by Demographic Characteristics.

Code	Role	Grade / Degree	Reason for Selection / Field of Study	Position (for Managers)
K-D-1	Student	Fifth Grade	Top cultural ranking	—
K-D-2	Student	Eleventh Grade	No participation	—
K-D-3	Student	Seventh Grade	Top cultural ranking	—
K-D-4	Student	Ninth Grade	Top cultural ranking	—
K-D-5	Student	Tenth Grade	No participation	—
K-D-6	Student	Twelfth Grade	No participation	—
K-D-7	Student	Eleventh Grade	Top cultural ranking	—
K-D-8	Student	Ninth Grade	No participation	—
K-KH-1	Teacher	PhD	Theology	Educational Counselor
K-KH-2	Teacher	Master's	Educational Management	Educational Counselor
K-KH-3	Teacher	Master's	Arabic Language	Educational Counselor
K-KH-4	Manager	PhD	Educational Management	School Principal
K-KH-5	Manager	PhD	Persian Literature	School Principal
K-KH-6	Faculty Member	PhD	Educational Technology	Cultural Expert
K-KH-7	Faculty Member	PhD	Curriculum Planning	Faculty Member
K-KH-8	Faculty Member	PhD	Educational Management	Faculty Member

As shown in Table 1, eight students (four culturally active and four non-participants) and eight managers actively involved in cultural policymaking or implementation were interviewed, providing balanced perspectives from both policy and practice levels.

The quantitative population included education managers, officials from cultural organizations, school principals, and educational counselors across Iran. Given the geographical dispersion and administrative diversity of educational regions, cluster random sampling was employed. The country was divided into three zones based on population size, variance, and allowable sampling error. Sample sizes were calculated using Cochran’s formula,

resulting in 276 managers and 263 Teachers, with proportional allocation across regions to ensure representativeness.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, facilitated by MAXQDA software, a systematic and iterative process involving open coding, category development, and abstraction into higher-order themes. Coding and analysis proceeded concurrently with data collection, consistent with grounded theory principles, allowing emerging concepts to guide subsequent interviews and analytic refinement.

In the quantitative phase, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using a second-order measurement model within the structural equation modeling software LISREL. This approach assessed whether the identified first-order latent components collectively reflected a higher-order latent construct representing the optimization of cultural events in education. Structural equation modeling techniques were applied to estimate factor loadings, error variances, and model fit indices, enabling a rigorous evaluation of the proposed conceptual framework.

Results

Findings Related to Research Question 1

(What are the main components of streamlining cultural events in the education system?)

Analysis of the qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews resulted in the identification of a set of interrelated categories that collectively explain the process of streamlining cultural events in the education system. Through systematic coding and thematic analysis, participants' experiences, perceptions, and reflections were organized into conceptual categories representing key dimensions of effective cultural event optimization.

Table 2 presents the final categories extracted from the interview data, along with their conceptual descriptions and selected illustrative codes. These categories reflect participants' shared understandings of both enabling factors and structural challenges associated with cultural events in schools.

Table 2. Categories Identified from Focus Group Interviews for Research Question 1

Concepts	Category	Description	Related Codes (Selected Examples)
Cultural Governance	Cultural Strategy Orientation	Without strategy, streamlining is impossible. This category addresses strategic documents, participatory policymaking, and systematization.	Existence of strategic plans for activities (K-D-3), strategic perspective on cultural activities (K-KH-1), bottom-up policymaking (K-KH-2)
	Purposefulness of Events	This dimension addresses the need to redefine event objectives and prevent superficiality.	Shifting objectives in festivals (K-D-1), unclear objectives (K-D-2), purposelessness in festivals (K-D-3), performative nature of activities (K-KH-8, K-KH-2)
	Unity in Decision-Making	Multiple decision-making centers require coordination and coherence. This category covers inter-unit interaction,	Decentralization of cultural activities (K-D-7), multiplicity of cultural centers (K-KH-1), coordination among decision-making units (K-KH-3)

Concepts	Category	Description	Related Codes (Selected Examples)
Context & Infrastructure		role clarification, and smart decentralization.	
	Empowerment of Cultural Actors	Culturally competent human resources serve as the driving force of streamlining. This category addresses the necessity of recruiting, training, retaining, and role-modeling exemplary cultural experts and educational counselors.	Program-oriented cultural experts (K-KH-2), weakness in human resources (K-KH-4), recruitment of competent cultural human resources (K-KH-6), establishment of merit-based system for cultural experts (K-KH-7), merit-based retention system (K-KH-8), role modeling by cultural agents (K-KH-1)
	Cultural Economy	Purposeful allocation of financial resources and facilities is a prerequisite for the sustainability of cultural events. This dimension focuses on the supply, equitable distribution, and optimal utilization of resources.	Absence of cost-benefit analysis for programs (K-D-1), inequitable and non-purposeful distribution of cultural budgets (K-D-6), purposeful budget allocation (K-KH-8), budgeting based on activity volume (K-KH-4), financial and facility support for students in program implementation (K-D-2)
	Student Networking	Student teams and networks form the core of cultural dynamism. This dimension addresses team building, observational learning, and peer influence.	Team formation (K-D-5), networking (K-D-6), peer group attraction (K-KH-8), utilization of active cultural students (K-KH-4)
	School Structure Redesign	School structure must be receptive to culture. This dimension focuses on correcting inefficiencies and designing facilitative structures.	School structure reform (K-KH-1), structural weaknesses (K-KH-2)
Design & Content	Cultural-based Needs Orientation	Cultural events must be designed based on students' real needs and developmental dimensions. This dimension stresses precise needs assessment and avoiding one-dimensional approaches.	Attention to students' needs (K-D-1), needs assessment (K-D-7, K-D-3, K-D-4), needs assessment based on educational dimensions (K-KH-7), mismatch with developmental dimensions (K-D-8)
	Diversification of Events	Broad attraction requires variety in activities. This category covers expanding scope, diversification, and innovation in cultural events.	Limited cultural activities (K-D-1, K-D-2, K-D-3), repetitive cultural activities (K-KH-7), expansion of cultural-artistic competitions (K-KH-3)
	Cultural Personalization	Each student has a unique world. This dimension stresses recognizing personality, interests, and individual contexts for tailored activities.	Alignment with students' tastes and interests (K-KH-2), audience profiling (K-KH-7), personality recognition (K-D-4), situational adaptation (K-D-1)
	Timing of Events	Time is a critical factor in effectiveness. This dimension addresses time management, temporal alignment of	Having appropriate timing (K-D-7), prolonged program processes (K-D-1), time appropriateness in executing activities (K-D-4)

Concepts	Category	Description	Related Codes (Selected Examples)
Motivation & Enhancement	Content Standardization	content, and preventing program fatigue.	
		Low-quality content and activities hinder impact. This category focuses on developing frameworks, raising standards, and designing practical events.	Low quality of festivals (K-D-3), developing frameworks for activities (K-D-7), lack of content (K-D-4), raising standards (K-KH-3), alignment of content (K-D-5)
	Motivation Building	Sustained cultural participation depends on intrinsic motivation. This category focuses on internalizing activities, aligning with interests, and students' innate nature.	Focus on students' intrinsic motivation (K-D-1), creating motivation (K-D-3), alignment with students' interests and nature (K-D-8), internalization of cultural work (K-KH-7)
	Intelligent Reward Systems	Reward systems should be timely, meaningful, and persuasive. This dimension addresses designing effective incentive mechanisms.	Timeliness of rewards (K-D-5), magnitude of rewards (K-D-7), persuasive nature of prizes (K-KH-5)
	Awareness Raising	Active student participation first requires building awareness and motivation. This category covers cultural orientation, persuasion, justification, and introduction at entry and throughout the educational journey.	Explaining the importance of cultural activities (K-D-8), orientation sessions (K-D-7), clarifying objectives of cultural events (K-D-6), persuasion of students (K-KH-6), initial positive impression creation (K-KH-5), cultural awareness raising (K-D-3)
	Sustainable Support	Culture-building requires continuous backing. This category emphasizes creating a supportive environment, honoring students, and maintaining post-event support.	Abandonment after festivals (K-KH-5, K-D-2, K-KH-8), financial support for talented students (K-KH-1), fostering a respectful climate (K-KH-6), honoring student dignity (K-D-6), close interaction between officials and students (K-KH-4)
	Media Coverage	Media are tools for streamlining. This category addresses effective information dissemination, targeted promotion, student gatherings, and vitality creation.	Active engagement in virtual space (K-KH-2), improvement of information systems (K-D-5), effective advertising (K-D-8), student gatherings (K-D-1)
	Event Evaluation	Continuous evaluation ensures cultural dynamism. This dimension covers assessment systems, cultural portfolios, and effective monitoring.	Continuous evaluation of cultural activities (K-D-3), ongoing assessment (K-KH-4), cultural portfolio implementation (K-KH-2)
Participation & Implementation	Cultural Guidance	Teachers can serve as cultural leaders. This category covers the guiding role of teachers, scientific enhancement, and cultural counseling schemes.	Utilization of competent and committed teachers (K-D-6), lack of guidance system (K-D-3, K-D-5), cultural teacher-counselor scheme (K-D-7)

Concepts	Category	Description	Related Codes (Selected Examples)
	Delegation of Responsibility	Streamlining becomes sustainable when students themselves take active roles. This dimension stresses assigning responsibility and authority to students.	Delegation of responsibility to students (K-D-8, K-D-4, K-KH-1), granting authority to students (K-KH-4)
	Alignment with Educational Life	Culture should not be peripheral to education. This category emphasizes integrating cultural events with curricula and real-life experiences.	Integration of cultural activities with education (K-KH-3), alignment with real life (K-D-3), integration with curriculum (K-D-5)
	Cultural Talent Mapping	Identifying and guiding students' cultural talents is the first step in effective streamlining. This dimension emphasizes mechanisms for talent discovery, support, and purposeful guidance of talented students.	Lack of knowledge of students' talents (K-KH-8), neglect of talent identification (K-D-2), talent assessment at entry (K-KH-1), proceeding based on talent (K-KH-7), talent recognition of students (K-KH-6, K-KH-2), welcoming and supporting various student talents (K-KH-3), identification and guidance of top cultural talents (K-KH-5), formation of talent identification working groups (K-KH-4)

As shown in Table 2, the identified categories span a wide range of structural, procedural, motivational, and participatory dimensions, highlighting the multifaceted nature of cultural event streamlining. Categories such as “Cultural Talent Mapping”(K-KH-8, K-D-2, K-KH-1, K-KH-7, K-KH-6, K-KH-2, K-KH-3, K-KH-5, K-KH-4), “Empowerment of Cultural Actors”(K-KH-2, K-KH-4, K-KH-6, K-KH-7, K-KH-8, K-KH-1), and “Cultural Economy”(K-D-1, K-D-6, K-KH-8, K-KH-4, K-D-2) emphasize the importance of human and material infrastructure, while dimensions including “Purposefulness of Events”(K-D-1, K-D-2, K-D-3, K-KH-8, K-KH-2), “Cultural-based Needs Orientation”(K-D-1, K-D-7, K-D-3, K-D-4, K-KH-7, K-D-8), and “Content Standardization”(K-D-3, K-D-7, K-D-4, K-KH-3, K-D-5) underscore the necessity of intentional design and alignment with students’ developmental needs.

In addition, process-oriented categories such as “Delegation of Responsibility”(K-D-8, K-D-4, K-KH-1, K-KH-4), “Student Networking”(K-D-5, K-D-6, K-KH-8, K-KH-4), and “Cultural Guidance”(K-D-6, K-D-3, K-D-5, K-D-7) point to the central role of student agency and peer interaction in sustaining cultural engagement. Motivational and reinforcing mechanisms, including “Motivation Building”(K-D-1, K-D-3, K-D-8, K-KH-7), “Intelligent Reward Systems”(K-D-5, K-D-7, K-KH-5), “Sustainable Support”(K-KH-5, K-D-2, K-KH-8, K-KH-1, K-KH-6, K-D-6, K-KH-4), and “Media Coverage”(K-KH-2, K-D-5, K-D-8, K-D-1), further indicate that effective cultural events require continuous reinforcement beyond the event itself.

Findings Related to Research Question 2

(What strategies and policies are associated with the components of streamlining cultural events in education?)

Following the identification of the core categories, a focused group discussion was conducted to formulate practical strategies and policy orientations corresponding to each component. This session involved a panel consisting of two senior policymakers, two educational counselors, and two school principals, ensuring representation from both decision-making and implementation levels.

During the two-hour structured discussion, participants reviewed the categories presented in Table 2 and collaboratively refined strategies aimed at operationalizing each component within the school context. Consensus was reached through iterative discussion, clarification, and validation of proposed strategies, resulting in a set of context-sensitive and implementable policy directions aligned with the extracted components.

Findings Related to Research Question 3

(What is the optimal model for streamlining cultural events in the education system?)

After identifying the key elements and components associated with streamlining cultural events, these elements were systematically reorganized to construct an integrated conceptual model. The model-building process followed three analytical procedures:

1. Each interview transcript was re-examined to identify both explicit and implicit references to the process of streamlining cultural events.
2. The logical structure of educational systems was conceptualized as comprising inputs, processes, and outputs, a framework commonly employed in organizational and educational analysis.
3. Elements of established organizational excellence models were consulted as guiding reference frameworks to enhance coherence and systemic alignment.

Based on these procedures, the extracted components were organized into four overarching dimensions: contextual factors, processes, outcomes, and support systems. This structuring enabled the integration of diverse components into a coherent and logically ordered model, as illustrated in Figure 1.

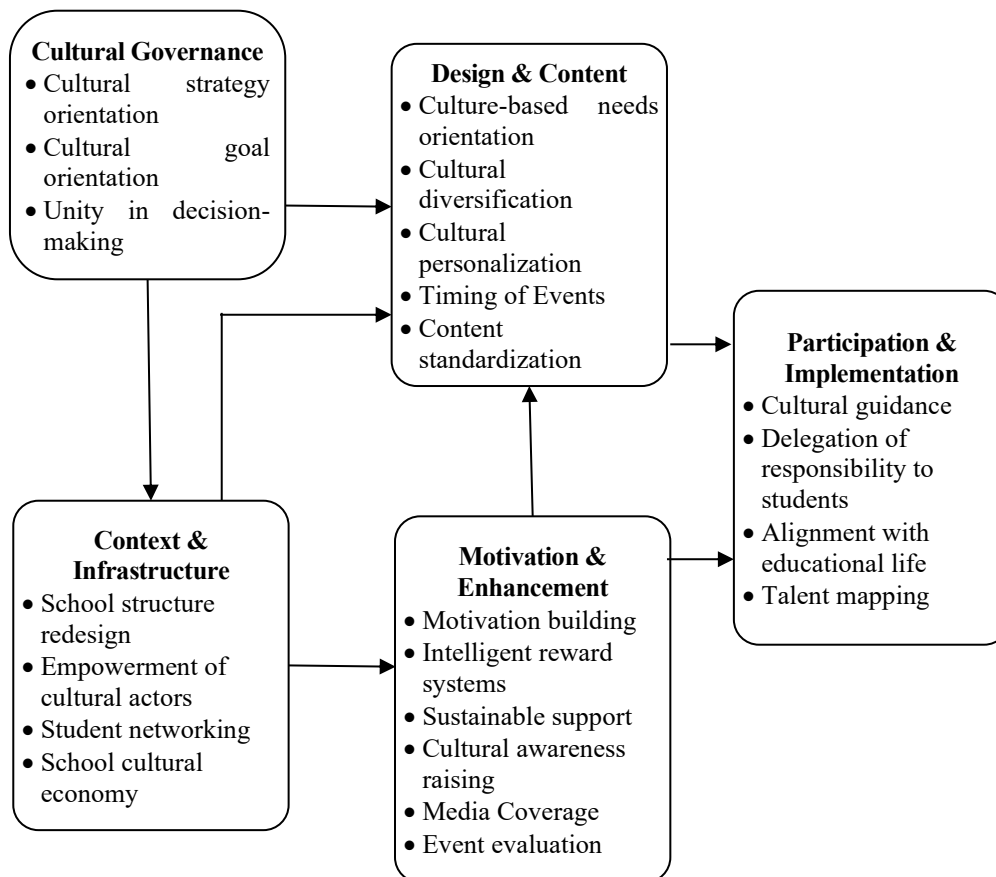


Figure 1. Initial Proposed Model of the Study (Streamlining Cultural Events in the Education System)

Figure 1 presents the initial proposed model of streamlining cultural events in the education system, demonstrating how contextual and infrastructural conditions shape cultural processes, which in turn generate outcomes supported by reinforcing mechanisms.

Findings Related to Research Question 4

(Does the proposed model for streamlining cultural events possess sufficient validity?)

To examine the validity of the proposed conceptual model, a researcher-developed questionnaire was designed based on the qualitative findings and relevant literature. Items were formulated through repeated review of interview transcripts to ensure conceptual consistency between qualitative categories and quantitative indicators. A five-point Likert scale was employed.

Face validity was assessed through expert review, during which specialists confirmed the overall clarity and relevance of the instrument. Several items were revised for linguistic clarity, and conceptually overlapping items were merged to enhance coherence.

Content validity was evaluated using the Content Validity Ratio (CVR). Sixteen experts from the qualitative phase assessed the relevance of each item, resulting in the removal of items

with CVR values below the acceptable threshold of 0.33 (items 6, 12, 29, 34, 41, 46, 60, 66, 77, and 84). Items receiving unanimous expert agreement were retained, further strengthening the instrument's content validity.

Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients exceeding 0.80 for all components, indicating strong reliability. Following these refinements, the final questionnaire consisted of 75 items, which were subsequently administered for quantitative data collection.

The construct of streamlining cultural events was operationalized as comprising five higher-order components: Cultural Governance, Context and Infrastructure, Design and Content, Motivation and Enhancement, and Participation and Implementation. Second-order confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess whether these components were adequately explained by a single higher-order latent construct (Gorsuch, 2014).

Sampling adequacy was confirmed, with a Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) value of 0.95, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity yielding a significant chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 7482.86$, $df = 231$, $p < 0.001$), indicating suitability for factor analysis. Normality assumptions were met, as Kolmogorov–Smirnov test results were non-significant across all components ($p > 0.05$).

Table 3 presents the standardized estimates, standard errors, t-values, and squared multiple correlations (R^2) for the second-order CFA, demonstrating that all factor loadings were statistically significant.

Table 3. Measurement Parameters for the Second-Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Streamlining Cultural Events Construct

Component / Sub-component	Standardized Estimate	Standard Error	t-value	R^2
Cultural Governance	0.39	–	5.08*	0.15
- Cultural strategy orientation	0.50	0.75	4.64*	0.25
- Cultural goal orientation (Purposefulness of events)	0.31	0.90	3.90*	0.10
- Unity in decision-making	0.54	0.71	4.75*	0.29
Context and Infrastructure	0.91	–	16.29**	0.83
- School structure redesign	0.74	0.45	15.06**	0.55
- Empowerment of cultural actors	0.80	0.36	24.48**	0.64
- Student networking	0.68	0.53	17.63**	0.46
- School cultural economy	0.71	0.50	19.61**	0.50
Design and Content	0.98	–	16.42**	0.96
- Culture-based needs orientation	0.63	0.61	16.94**	0.40
- Content standardization	0.79	0.38	20.18**	0.62
- Cultural diversification	0.73	0.47	16.42**	0.53
- Cultural personalization	0.77	0.41	17.37**	0.59
- Timing of events	0.77	0.41	17.22**	0.59
Participation and Implementation	0.99	–	23.49**	0.98
- Cultural guidance	0.77	0.38	17.30**	0.59
- Delegation of responsibility	0.82	0.41	28.35**	0.67

Component / Sub-component	Standardized Estimate	Standard Error	t-value	R ²
- Alignment with educational life	0.67	0.33	17.43**	0.45
- Talent mapping	0.74	0.55	21.63**	0.55
Motivation and Enhancement	0.88	—	17.62**	0.77
- Motivation building	0.76	0.43	25.24**	0.58
- Intelligent reward systems	0.76	0.42	25.22**	0.58
- Sustainable support	0.78	0.39	22.91**	0.61
- Cultural awareness raising	0.80	0.37	21.96**	0.64
- Media coverage	0.77	0.41	23.33**	0.59
- Event evaluation	0.79	0.38	23.34**	0.62

Model fit indices are reported in Table 4. Although the chi-square statistic was significant, this result was expected given the large sample size and model complexity (Mueller & Hancock, 2019). Other fit indices indicated acceptable to strong model fit, including RMSEA = 0.07, RMR = 0.03, GFI = 0.98, AGFI = 0.97, and NFI = 0.98, confirming the adequacy of the measurement model.

Discussion

The present study sought to develop and validate a comprehensive model for optimizing cultural events in the education system by integrating qualitative insights with quantitative validation. The findings indicate that effective cultural event optimization cannot be understood as a linear or event-centered activity but must instead be conceptualized as a systemic, dynamic, and interdependent process embedded within the organizational ecology of schools. This perspective extends existing literature by shifting the analytical focus from isolated cultural activities toward sustained cultural flows.

The quantitative validation phase substantiated the structural integrity and coherence of the model derived from qualitative findings. Confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated that the five higher-order components—Cultural Governance, Context and Infrastructure, Design and Content, Participation and Implementation, and Motivation and Enhancement—collectively form a robust, higher-order latent construct representing the streamlining of cultural events. The strong factor loadings, particularly for 'Participation and Implementation' ($\lambda=0.99$) and 'Design and Content' ($\lambda=0.98$), indicate that these domains are central to the model's explanatory power. Furthermore, the overall model fit indices (RMSEA=0.07, GFI=0.98, NFI=0.98) confirm that the hypothesized structure provides an acceptable fit to the empirical data collected from a broad sample of managers and teachers. This statistical validation is critical, as it moves beyond the rich but localized insights of the qualitative phase to demonstrate that the identified components and their interrelationships hold true across a larger, representative population within the education system.

The final model extracted from this study is organized into four interrelated dimensions—contextual factors, processes, outcomes, and support systems—each of which plays a distinct yet complementary role. This multidimensional configuration underscores that cultural events

derive their effectiveness not from their frequency or visibility alone, but from the coherence and alignment among governance structures, institutional capacities, participatory processes, and reinforcing mechanisms.

From a theoretical standpoint, one of the most significant contributions of this study lies in reconceptualizing cultural events as processual rather than episodic phenomena. Unlike prior models that emphasize cultural activities as discrete interventions or policy outputs, the present framework conceptualizes cultural events as continuous cultural processes that unfold over time and are sustained through feedback, participation, and institutional learning. This reconceptualization contributes to educational sociology and cultural management theory by introducing the notion of “cultural flow” as an analytical lens for understanding school-based cultural practices.

The contextual dimension of the model—encompassing school structure redesign, cultural economy, cultural strategy orientation, and unity in decision-making—functions as the foundational infrastructure upon which cultural processes are built. This finding aligns with macro-level cultural policy models (Moeini et al., 2020; Morovat, 2024) that emphasize governance and structural conditions, yet extends them by demonstrating how such conditions directly shape the feasibility and sustainability of school-level cultural engagement. Without coherent governance, strategic orientation, and resource allocation, cultural events risk becoming symbolic or ceremonial rather than transformative.

The process dimension represents the operational core of the model and includes components such as cultural talent mapping, awareness raising, purposefulness of events, delegation of responsibility, content standardization, diversification, personalization, student networking, and cultural guidance. These components collectively illustrate how cultural intentions are translated into lived experiences for students. This dimension strongly resonates with student-centered and participatory educational theories, particularly those emphasizing agency, ownership, and intrinsic motivation (Nonis et al., 2020; Abuzar et al., 2024). However, the present study advances this literature by embedding participation within an institutionalized process rather than treating it as an individual or optional variable.

Importantly, the model highlights delegation of responsibility and student networking as central mechanisms through which cultural engagement becomes self-sustaining. When students are positioned as active cultural agents rather than passive recipients, cultural events evolve into platforms for identity formation, peer learning, and social capital development. This finding reinforces and extends earlier work on participatory education, suggesting that student agency is most effective when structurally supported rather than informally encouraged.

The outcome dimension—comprising intelligent reward systems, sustainable support, and systematic evaluation—addresses a critical gap in prior research. While many cultural models emphasize participation and implementation, fewer explicitly address how cultural engagement is reinforced, institutionalized, and evaluated over time. The inclusion of evaluation and post-event support ensures that cultural participation leads to internalized motivation and long-term engagement rather than short-lived enthusiasm.

Media engagement, conceptualized as a support system rather than a standalone outcome, further reflects the model's alignment with contemporary educational realities. In an era where students' cultural identities are increasingly shaped within digital and virtual spaces, cultural events that lack mediated visibility risk diminished resonance and sustainability. This finding enhances the international relevance of the model, as education systems worldwide grapple with integrating cultural education into digitally saturated environments.

From a comparative perspective, although the model is empirically grounded in the Iranian education system, its underlying logic is not context-bound. Education systems across both Global North and Global South contexts face similar challenges, including fragmented cultural programming, student disengagement, centralized governance, and misalignment between curricular and extracurricular domains. Accordingly, the model offers a transferable framework that can be adapted to diverse educational settings seeking to integrate culture more systematically into school life.

Conclusions

This study developed and validated a comprehensive, mixed-methods model for optimizing cultural events in the education system. By integrating qualitative insights from key stakeholders with quantitative validation through second-order confirmatory factor analysis, the study offers a theoretically robust and empirically grounded framework for understanding and enhancing school-based cultural engagement.

The central conclusion of the study is that cultural events should be conceptualized not as isolated or ceremonial activities, but as continuous cultural flows embedded within the structural, social, and organizational fabric of schools. This represents a paradigm shift from passive, centralized, and event-focused approaches toward active, decentralized, and process-oriented cultural governance. In this paradigm, students emerge as cultural producers and agents of social capital rather than mere consumers of cultural content.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the literature on education and culture by bridging macro-level governance models, meso-level institutional structures, and micro-level participation dynamics into a unified analytical framework. By introducing a process-oriented perspective, the model advances existing theories of cultural capital, participation, and educational management.

Practically, the findings offer actionable guidance for policymakers, school administrators, and cultural educators. Effective cultural programming requires coherent governance, strategic planning, systematic talent identification, meaningful student participation, and continuous evaluation. Isolated investments—such as media promotion or one-time festivals—are insufficient in the absence of alignment across these dimensions.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, although the sample size for the quantitative phase was adequate for structural equation modeling, the data were collected within a single national context. Second, the model was validated at a structural level; future research should examine its behavioral and longitudinal outcomes.

Based on these limitations, several directions for future research are recommended. Comparative international studies could assess the model's adaptability across diverse

educational systems. More specific longitudinal research is needed to trace the impact of optimized cultural programming on student outcomes over critical educational transitions, such as from middle to high school. Future studies could also implement action-research designs to pilot and refine specific components of the model, such as student-led event committees or digital portfolios for tracking cultural engagement, within individual school contexts. Additionally, future studies may explore the integration of emerging educational technologies—such as artificial intelligence, gamification, or immersive media—to enhance cultural personalization and participation.

In conclusion, this study provides a holistic, system-oriented framework that reconceptualizes cultural events as a central mechanism for educational and social development. By aligning cultural programming with governance, participation, and evaluation, education systems can transform cultural events from fragmented activities into enduring sources of identity formation, social cohesion, and cultural vitality.

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CRedit authorship contribution statement

Conceptualization, Mahdi Namdari Pejman; methodology, Mahdi Namdari Pejman; investigation, Mahdi Namdari Pejman; data curation, Mahdi Namdari Pejman; formal analysis, Mahdi Namdari Pejman and Alireza Badeleh; writing—original draft preparation, Mahdi Namdari Pejman and Alireza Badeleh; writing—review and editing, Alireza Badeleh and Mahdi Namdari Pejman. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

This article has benefited from the use of artificial intelligence for grammatical correction and editorial editing.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical considerations

The authors avoided data fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism, and any form of misconduct.

Data availability statement

Not applicable

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