



Meaningful Platforms for Student Voice in Vietnamese Schools: The Role of Student Media and School Communication

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Abstract

Student voice is increasingly regarded as an important element in education at all levels. In the process of school governance, responding to this need and establishing multiple channels for students to express their opinions has become a strategic approach. However, beyond that, building forums through which students can have a genuinely meaningful voice is more important than ever at the present stage. This study examines whether the quality of communication and media platforms in schools promotes meaningful student voice in the Vietnamese context. The measurement model and structural model are analyzed using SmartPLS structural equation modeling. The empirical results concern the prevalence of the platforms, the extent to which students are heard and have influence, as well as the impact of Platform Quality on Meaningful Student Voice. The study contributes to student voice theory by shifting the focus from the presence to the quality of participation platforms, while emphasizing that students are able to express themselves and that their voices are heard, considered, and capable of bringing about change. Accordingly, the study suggests solutions to improve educational quality and enhance students' lives and quality of learning.

Keywords:

Student voice, platform quality, school communication, being heard.

1. Introduction

Recently, student voice has increasingly been recognized as an important component of participatory education, children's rights, and strategic school governance. This shift reflects a fundamental change in how the position of students is perceived: from passive beneficiaries of education to actors with their own knowledge, experiences, and perspectives on the learning process and school life; student voice is built on the recognition that learners have unique perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling (Cook-Sather, 2006). Therefore, student voice is not simply a technique for collecting opinions but also concerns how power, relationships, and decision-making processes are organized within schools.

Research evidence shows that substantive student participation in forums for expressing views and voice can generate significant benefits. Positive effects of student participation in decision-making have been found for life skills, self-esteem, democratic and

civic competence, and student-adult relationships (Mager & Nowak, 2012). Student voice has the potential to support improvements in classroom practice and promote deeper change in schools, but the effectiveness of these initiatives depends considerably on how power between students and adults is structured (Mitra, 2018). If students are invited to participate only within frameworks in which the goals, content, and final decisions are all determined by adults, student voice risks being reduced to a formalistic consultation activity (Laura, 2007).

The development of technology and new forms of school governance has also significantly increased the channels through which students can express their views (Ahmed & Opoku, 2022). In addition to traditional mechanisms such as class meetings, student councils, surveys, suggestion boxes, and dialogue with teachers or school leaders, many schools now use websites, social media, student newspapers or magazines, and forms of communication in which students participate in content creation. However, the increase in the number of channels raises an important question: does having more mechanisms for students to speak mean that students have more voice in school life, in other words, does it reflect the quality of this activity? This question indicates the need to clearly distinguish between platform availability and platform quality. A school may provide many communication channels, yet those channels may still have little meaning if students do not know how to access them, do not feel safe expressing their views, believe that their opinions will not be considered, or perceive that opportunities to speak are mainly reserved for class officers and a small number of active students. Therefore, the number of channels is not a sufficient indicator of the level of student participation (Mitra, 2018). Student feedback can encourage teachers to reflect and change their practices, but this process requires support from school leadership and appropriate collaborative structures.

In relation to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Lundy proposes four interrelated elements: Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence. Accordingly, children need a safe and inclusive space in which to form their views (Space), the ability and support to express those views (Voice), responsible people who genuinely listen to those views (Audience), and their views must be taken seriously and have the potential to affect outcomes (Influence). This theoretical framework highlights a particularly important point for research on schools: creating a place for students to speak is not the same as creating a mechanism through which student voice has quality.

From this perspective, meaningful student voice needs to be distinguished from merely allowing students to speak. Meaningful voice requires at least two further conditions: students feel that they are heard (Being Heard) and perceive that their views have the capacity to exert influence (Student Influence). This distinction is particularly important because a school may be relatively successful in encouraging students to speak while still failing to close the feedback loop.

In Vietnam, this issue is particularly meaningful but has not yet been adequately studied at the level of school organization (Conner et al., 2024; Triệu et al., 2024). Children's perspectives provide an important source of information so that educational policies and services can better reflect their needs. Student passivity and limited willingness to speak remain matters of concern in the Vietnamese educational context (Chien Thang & Thi Nguyet Trang, 2024). Thus, existing studies have mainly focused on learning experiences, children's voice/agency, or students' motivation to speak, while empirical evidence is still lacking on a school-level question: whether the communication and media platforms provided by schools

actually create conditions for students to be heard and to have the capacity to influence school life (Nhật et al., 2025).

This study proposes a model and an empirical investigation of the effect of Student Voice Platform Quality (Platform Quality - PQ) on Meaningful Student Voice. Platform Quality reflects the extent to which the channels provided by schools are accessible and create substantive, safe, and inclusive opportunities; Meaningful Student Voice is constructed from Being Heard (BH) and Student Influence (SI). The article consists of a literature review, research model, results, and several implications and proposed solutions.

2. Literature Review

In recent decades, student voice has become an important line of research in education, associated with a shift from viewing students as passive beneficiaries to viewing them as actors capable of participating in shaping their learning experiences and school life. The core idea of student voice is based on the recognition that students possess their own knowledge about learning, teaching, and the school environment (Cook-Sather, 2006). These perspectives should not only receive adults' attention but also receive responses, while students need opportunities to participate actively in shaping their own education. Under this approach, student voice should not be understood simply as students being allowed to speak. The concept encompasses a broad spectrum of participation, from teachers collecting student feedback and consulting students about teaching and learning activities to students participating in decision-making related to school improvement. Student voice is described as the role of students in decision-making and school-change processes, and meaningful participation opportunities are shown to support student development, particularly for students who otherwise find little meaning in their school experiences (Conner et al., 2024).

Subsequent studies have continued to expand the understanding of student voice from the individual level to the organizational level. (Mitra, 2018) shows that student voice can be associated with changes in classroom practice, reform processes, and organizational change in schools, but its effectiveness depends considerably on the power relationship between adults and students. (Mager & Nowak, 2012) also points to student participation in school decision-making, where participation means that students must have a certain degree of influence over the decisions or actions that are taken. Thus, at least three levels can be distinguished: having an opportunity to speak, being heard, and having the capacity to exert influence. This distinction provides an important basis for the present study to shift its focus from the concept of student voice to meaningful student voice.

One of the most important theoretical contributions to research on children's and students' voice proposes four closely related elements: Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence. Space refers to the need to create a safe and inclusive space for children to form and present their views; Voice concerns supporting them in expressing their views; Audience requires that those views reach people who have a responsibility to listen; and Influence requires that children's views be taken seriously and have the capacity to affect outcomes (Laura, 2007).

Space and Voice are reflected through the quality of student voice platforms (Platform Quality), while Audience and Influence are reflected respectively through Being Heard and Student Influence. This approach makes it possible to test an important question: whether

schools' provision of high-quality platforms actually translates into students' experiences of being heard and having influence. This becomes part of the culture within the educational environment (Xie & Chao, 2022).

Studies of student voice show that creating a participation mechanism does not automatically ensure that students will use that mechanism or perceive it as valuable. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish platform availability from platform quality. The study by (Conner et al., 2024) at two high schools shows that although teachers and administrators increasingly support student voice in principle, deeper practices such as actively seeking feedback, obtaining student input, and making decisions jointly with students remain relatively uncommon. The study also indicates that positive teacher-student relationships, choice, and supportive pedagogical practices are important foundations for student voice. Similarly, the study by Geurts et al. (2024) shows that students can take on multiple roles, from advisers during the planning stage to co-researchers or reviewers. However, effective implementation depends on many factors such as knowledge and skills, beliefs about capability, emotions, social roles, and social influences. If Platform Quality describes the conditions that create opportunities for student voice, Meaningful Student Voice reflects the outcomes produced by those opportunities. The present study proposes Meaningful Student Voice as a construct consisting of two related but distinct components: Being Heard and Student Influence.

Being Heard does not simply mean that teachers or school leaders physically 'hear' what students say. It reflects students' perception that their views receive attention, are respected, are taken seriously, and receive a response. (Cook-Sather, 2006) particularly emphasizes the role of listening in student voice. If students are invited to share but adults do not genuinely change their understanding or actions, listening may be merely formalistic. Therefore, the right to speak must be accompanied by adults' willingness to recognize students' knowledge and experience. Some studies also indicate that student feedback can encourage teachers to reflect and change their practices. However, for this process to occur, supportive school structures and a leadership role in establishing collaborative mechanisms between teachers and students are needed. This result shows that the value of student voice depends considerably on whether the school system is capable of receiving and responding to information from students (Deep et al., 2025).

Student Influence: While Being Heard focuses on the process of receiving student voice, Student Influence concerns the consequences of that voice. Influence occurs when students perceive that their views are considered in decision-making processes or can contribute to changes in school activities, policies, or practices.

Based on the arguments above, the quality of student voice platforms can be expected to be an important antecedent of Meaningful Student Voice. When students know that participation mechanisms exist, can access them easily, have genuine opportunities to express their views, feel safe when speaking, and perceive that these opportunities are available to different groups of students, the likelihood that student voice will be incorporated into school communication and decision-making processes will be higher. In this study, Platform Quality is not understood simply as the functional characteristics of a communication tool, but as the quality of the environment and mechanisms that enable student participation (Kazamia, 2024).

On this basis, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: The quality of student voice platforms has a positive effect on meaningful student voice.

3. Research Methodology

The study applies covariance-based structural equation modeling (Structural Equation Modeling - SEM) as the main analytical method. The research model treats Platform Quality as the explanatory variable and Meaningful Student Voice as a second-order outcome variable reflected by two first-order components: Being Heard (BH) and Student Influence (SI).

The research subjects are secondary-school students studying at selected schools in Vietnam. A total of 355 responses were obtained from students in Grades 10 to 12. To increase generalizability, the study should collect data from multiple schools rather than only one school, while seeking to ensure the inclusion of both public and non-public schools. The schools were selected from multiple localities to limit the possibility that the results reflect only the characteristics of a single school or a particular area. However, the final sample size should not be justified solely by rules of thumb such as the number of observations per variable. In SEM, sample-size requirements depend on model complexity, data characteristics, indicator reliability, and the effect size that needs to be detected (Hair et al., 2022).

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The main measurement section uses a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 - Strongly disagree to 5 - Strongly agree.

The measurement model consists of 16 observed variables belonging to three groups of scales. Student Voice Platform Quality - Platform Quality (PQ) is measured by 6 observed variables from PQ1 to PQ6, reflecting students' perceptions of the quality of the mechanisms provided by the school for them to express their opinions. Being Heard (BH) is measured by 5 observed variables, from BH1 to BH5. Student Influence (SI) is measured by 5 observed variables, from SI1 to SI5, reflecting students' perceptions. Meaningful Student Voice (MSV).

4. Results

4.1 Results of the Measurement Model Assessment

- Assessment of internal consistency reliability

The results of the measurement model analysis are presented in Table 1. Internal consistency reliability is assessed through Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient and composite reliability. The alpha reliability coefficient ranges from 0.842 to 0.888, while composite reliability ranges from 0.888 to 0.922; in summary, both indicators are greater than the threshold of 0.7. Thus, the measurement model meets the requirements for internal consistency reliability.

Table 1. Results for selected indicators of the measurement model

	Items	Outer loading	Cronbach's alpha	CR	Average variance extracted (AVE)	Outer VIF
BH	BH1	0.737	0.842	0.888	0.614	1.664
	BH2	0.785				1.985
	BH3	0.857				2.410
	BH4	0.743				1.669
	BH5	0.792				1.762

	Items	Outer loading	Cronbach's alpha	CR	Average variance extracted (AVE)	Outer VIF
PQ	PQ1	0.778	0.848	0.898	0.690	1.734
	PQ3	0.936				3.904
	PQ4	0.807				2.291
	PQ5	0.792				1.947
SI	SI2	0.849	0.888	0.922	0.748	2.056
	SI3	0.843				2.152
	SI4	0.902				2.913
	SI5	0.865				2.648

Source: SmartPLS 4 analysis results

- Assessment of convergent validity

The convergent validity indicators (represented by the AVE values of the latent constructs) are all greater than 0.5. Specifically, the results in Table 1 show that the values of this indicator range from 0.614 to 0.748, all greater than 0.5. Thus, the scales in the model satisfy the requirements for convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019).

- Assessment of discriminant validity

Both the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT ratio) method are used to determine the discriminant validity of the latent variables (Hair et al., 2019). Table 2 shows that discriminant validity of the latent variables is satisfied when the square root of AVE for each latent variable is higher than the other correlation values among the other constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Table 2. Fornell-Larcker criterion for assessing discriminant validity

	BH	PQ	SI
BH			
PQ	0.574		
SI	0.764	0.674	

Source: SmartPLS 4 analysis results

On the other hand, Table 3 shows that the HTMT coefficient of each construct is below 0.90 (the acceptable level) and is ideally below 0.90, which Henseler et al. (2015) consider the ideal level. Table 3 shows that the highest value of this indicator is only $0.865 < 0.90$. Therefore, all latent constructs in the research model satisfy the requirements for discriminant validity.

Table 3. Assessment of discriminant validity using the HTMT index

	BH	PQ	SI
BH	0.784		
PQ	0.490	0.831	
SI	0.671	0.587	0.865

Source: SmartPLS 4 analysis results

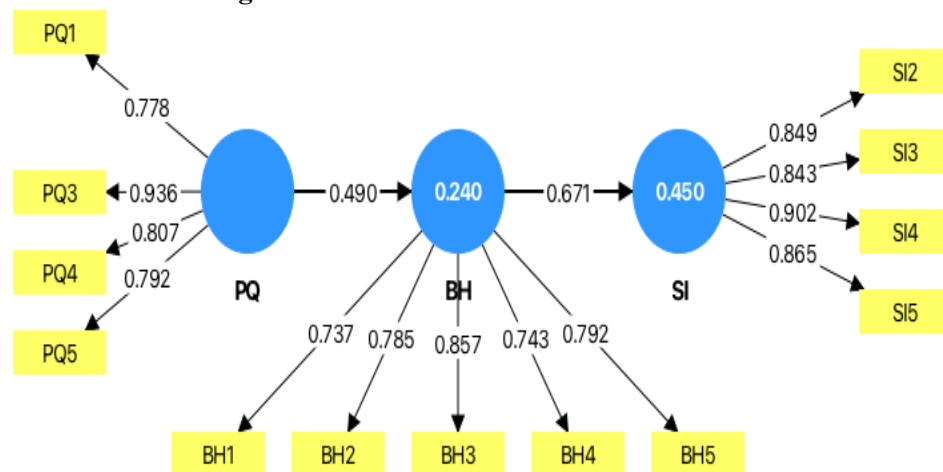
In summary, both criteria for assessing the accuracy of discrimination, namely the criterion proposed by Fornell & Larcker (1981) and the HTMT index, confirm that the model meets the requirements for discriminant validity. Thus, the scales used in the research model

satisfy the requirements for reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Therefore, all scales will be used to assess the SEM structural model.

4.2 Results of the Structural Model Assessment

The results of testing the relationships among the latent constructs are presented in Table 5. The structural model is tested using Bootstrap with resampling $N = 5,000$ to specifically estimate the relationships among the latent variables. Table 4 shows the direct relationships in which the source variables (on the left) affect the target variables (on the right) at a 95% confidence interval; P-values are compared to confirm the stated statistical hypotheses.

Figure 1. SEM structural model estimation results



Source: SmartPLS 4 analysis results

Table 5. Results of estimating the direct relationships

s	Original sample (O)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Inner VIF	Result
BH -> SI	0.671	0.032	20.762	0.000	1	Supported
PQ -> BH	0.490	0.042	11.643	0.000	1	Supported
PQ -> SI	0.329	0.037	8.811	0.000	1	Supported

Source: SmartPLS 4 analysis results

Both hypotheses are statistically significant, specifically the effects of BH on SI and PQ on BH; these are positive effects and are statistically significant. The results in Table 5 also show that all variance inflation factor (VIF) values are below 5; therefore, perfect multicollinearity does not occur in the SEM structural equation model (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 6. Results of estimating the mediating relationships

	Original Sample (O)	STDAV	P - value	Mediation conclusion
PQ -> BH -> SI	0.329	0.037	0.000	Mediation exists

Source: SmartPLS 4 analysis results

The results from Table 6 indicate that the SEM structural model involves full mediation (this is a type of mediation in which the direct effect is not statistically significant whereas the indirect effect is statistically significant) and complementary partial mediation (a type of mediation in which both the direct effect and the indirect effect are statistically significant).

Goodness of fit of the SEM model

Table 7. Results of assessing the goodness of fit of the component SEM models

	R-square	Adjusted R-square	Fit interpretation
BH model	0.540	0.538	Moderately good
SI model	0.550	0.648	Moderately good

Source: SmartPLS analysis results

The results show that 64.8% of the variation in SI is explained by the factors PQ1, PQ2, PQ3, and PQ4; the BH model is slightly lower, at 53.8%.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Student voice is increasingly viewed not only as an expression of the right to participate but also as an important source of information that helps schools better understand learners' experiences, needs, and expectations. The right to express views becomes complete only when children's voices have an Audience that genuinely listens and the capacity to create Influence over matters concerning them. Based on this argument, the study proposes shifting the focus from the presence of student voice platforms (platform availability) to the quality of those platforms (platform quality). This approach is consistent with evidence showing that deeper student voice practices, particularly actively receiving feedback and involving students in decision-making, remain uncommon even in environments where teachers generally support student voice. (Conner et al., 2024) shows that the quality of teacher-student relationships, choice, and supportive pedagogical practices play important roles in facilitating student voice. Another important contribution of the study is the conceptualization of Meaningful Student Voice through two related but non-identical components: Being Heard and Student Influence. Being Heard reflects students' perception that teachers and schools listen seriously to, respect, and respond to their views. Student Influence goes further, reflecting students' perception that their opinions are considered and can lead to changes in school activities, policies, or decisions. This distinction is necessary because listening does not necessarily lead to influence. A school may regularly conduct surveys and receive opinions, but if students do not know how those opinions are processed or do not observe any consequences, the participation process may still stop at the level of consultation.

- Theoretical implications

First, the study proposes shifting the unit of analysis from platform availability to platform quality. This approach addresses the limitation of evaluating student voice through the number of participation mechanisms. A space for participation has real value only when students are able to use it. Second, in the proposed model, Space and Voice are reflected through Platform Quality; Audience is transformed into Being Heard; and Influence is reflected by Student Influence. This approach brings a children's-rights-based framework into a model that can be empirically tested. Third, distinguishing Being Heard from Student Influence helps clarify the boundary between consultation and meaningful participation. The important

distinction is not merely whether the school asks for students' opinions, but whether students see that their opinions are considered and have the capacity to create real impact.

- *Management implications and solutions for schools*

+ Shift from creating additional channels to improving channel quality. Continue increasing the number of surveys, applications, suggestion boxes, or social media pages. The opportunity is believed to be available to students in general, not only to those holding positions. This confirms that relational conditions, choice, and a supportive pedagogical environment are the foundations of substantive student voice practices. A common limitation of feedback mechanisms is that the process ends immediately after the school collects opinions.

+ *Create safe feedback mechanisms*

If students are concerned that they will be negatively judged when expressing views that differ from those of teachers or leaders, the existence of a platform will not create meaningful voice. Safety is not only about protecting identity but also about psychological safety: students believe that raising an issue that is not going well will not harm their status or relationships within the school.

+ *Expand voice beyond the group of student leaders*

An important risk is that schools may equate the voice of class officers, youth-union officers, or a number of active students with the voice of the entire student body. Schools should actively engage students who speak less often, students who do not hold positions, students from different grade levels, and students with different levels of academic achievement. This helps avoid student voice becoming elite voice, in which a small group of students has greater access to school leaders and greater influence than the rest.

+ *Integrate student voice into the school improvement cycle*

Student voice should not exist as a peripheral program or a campaign-style activity. It needs to be integrated into the school's governance cycle, including: Identify issue - Gather student voice - Analyse - Decide - Implement - Report - Evaluate.

*** *Limitations and directions for future research***

PQ, BH, and SI are all based on students' self-reported perceptions; therefore, future studies should combine data from teachers and administrators while also observing schools' actual mechanisms. Future research could compare different types of platforms, such as student-led media, student councils, anonymous surveys, and direct dialogue, which may differ in their capacity to create Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence, in order to obtain more complete results from multiple perspectives.

The meaning of student voice does not lie in the number of times schools ask students what they think, but in what happens after students speak. Therefore, the next challenge for schools is not simply to open more communication channels. The more important challenge is to design a feedback ecosystem in which student voice can be accessed safely and inclusively, is listened to seriously, receives transparent responses, and, where appropriate, is translated into action. This is the decisive step for school communication and media platforms to become mechanisms for meaningful participation.

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