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China's 2022 Compulsory Education Curriculum Reform: From Knowledge Transmission to Core Competencies

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ABSTRACT: China's 2022 Compulsory Education Curriculum Reform represents a significant development in the country's continuing efforts to redefine the purposes, content, and practices of basic education. Central to the reform is a stronger emphasis on core competencies, raising important questions about the changing relationship between disciplinary knowledge and competency development. This study critically examines the extent to which the 2022 reform represents a transition from knowledge-oriented education to competency-based learning. Adopting a qualitative policy and document analysis approach, the study draws on China's Compulsory Education Curriculum Plan and Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition), relevant policy documents, and Chinese and international scholarly literature. Guided by a competency-oriented curriculum framework, the analysis focuses on curriculum objectives, knowledge organization, teaching and learning, assessment, and implementation conditions. The findings indicate that the reform represents a substantial reorientation of curriculum policy rather than a complete departure from knowledge-based education. Disciplinary knowledge remains fundamental but is increasingly positioned as a foundation for developing learners' abilities to apply, integrate, interpret, and mobilize knowledge in meaningful contexts. The reform also strengthens interdisciplinary learning, practical activities, academic-quality standards, and the intended alignment of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. Nevertheless, the analysis identifies potential tensions between competency-oriented policy expectations and existing educational practices, particularly regarding examination pressures, teacher preparedness, assessment alignment, and differences in institutional capacity. The study argues that China's reform is best understood as a reconfiguration of the relationship between knowledge and competence rather than a straightforward replacement of one educational orientation with another. It contributes to comparative curriculum scholarship by highlighting the distinction between policy-level transformation and classroom enactment and demonstrating the importance of systemic alignment in competency-oriented educational reform.

KEYWORDS: Curriculum reform, compulsory education, knowledge-oriented education, competency-based learning, curriculum policy

1. INTRODUCTION

Curriculum reform is one of the principal ways through which education systems redefine the purposes of schooling in response to changing social, economic, technological, and educational expectations. Traditionally, formal schooling has placed considerable emphasis on the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge, with curriculum objectives, classroom instruction, and assessment often organized around what students are expected to know and reproduce. Increasingly, however, education systems have adopted competency-oriented approaches that place greater emphasis on what learners can do with knowledge. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019), for example, conceptualizes competencies involving the interaction of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values and emphasizes learners' capacity to use these resources in meaningful and complex situations. Such an orientation does not make knowledge less important. Rather, it changes the purposes for which knowledge is acquired, understood, applied, and evaluated.

The movement toward competency-oriented education has become increasingly influential in international curriculum policy. Nevertheless, competency-based education does not represent a single, universally applicable model. Countries interpret and institutionalize competencies according to their own historical traditions, educational priorities, curriculum structures, and institutional contexts. The OECD (2019) itself presents its Learning Compass as a globally informed framework that requires contextualization rather than direct adoption. Consequently, understanding competency-oriented curriculum reform requires attention not only to international educational discourse but also to the ways in which individual education systems interpret and embed competency within their national curriculum policies.

China provides an important case for examining this development. Curriculum reform has been a continuing feature of Chinese basic education, particularly since the beginning of the twenty-first century. The 2001 curriculum reform represented an important movement away from a narrowly syllabus-oriented approach toward curriculum standards and greater emphasis on student development. However, research indicates that examination-oriented education and established pedagogical practices continue to influence classroom practice. Luo (2023) identifies the 2022 reform as the latest major stage in China's longer trajectory of curriculum reform, emphasizing the increasing importance of curriculum standards, teacher development, curriculum resources, and implementation at regional and school levels. The 2022 reform should therefore be understood not as an isolated policy intervention but as part of an extended process of redefining the purposes and organization of Chinese basic education.

A major development occurred in 2022, when the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China issued the revised Compulsory Education Curriculum Plan and Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition). The revised curriculum covers 16 subject areas and was introduced beginning with the autumn semester of 2022. The reform seeks to strengthen the quality and balanced development of compulsory education while providing clearer requirements for curriculum implementation (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China [MOE], 2022a, 2022b). Among its most significant features are the stronger emphasis on students' core competencies, curriculum integration, practical learning, academic-quality standards, and greater coherence among curriculum objectives, teaching, learning, and assessment.

The concept of core competencies occupies a central position in the revised curriculum. The Ministry requires individual subject curriculum standards to translate the broader objectives of compulsory education into expectations concerning students' values, essential character, and key abilities (MOE, 2022b). Curriculum content is consequently not organized solely around what knowledge students should acquire. Instead, knowledge, concepts, themes, and skills are increasingly positioned in relation to the competencies that students are expected to develop through learning. The revised curriculum also strengthens cross-disciplinary thematic learning, practical learning, and academic-quality standards intended to clarify expected levels of student achievement (MOE, 2022c).

The reform therefore raises an important question about the relationship between knowledge transmission and competency development. At first sight, these orientations may appear to represent competing models of education: one emphasizes what students know and the other emphasizes what students can do. Such a binary interpretation, however, is problematic. Competency depends upon knowledge. Critical thinking requires substantive knowledge, problem-solving requires knowledge that can be mobilized in circumstances, and effective communication requires linguistic and conceptual knowledge. The OECD (2019) similarly treats knowledge as an important component of competence rather than its opposite. The more meaningful question is therefore whether China's reform is replacing knowledge with competencies or, instead, changing the role and function of knowledge within compulsory education.

This question is particularly important in the Chinese context because academic achievement and examination performance have historically exerted considerable influence over teaching and learning. Previous research has identified tensions between curriculum reform objectives and established examination-oriented practices. Yan (2012) and Yan and He (2012), for example, demonstrate how teachers' implementation of earlier curriculum reforms was shaped by examination pressures, professional beliefs, institutional conditions, and teachers' interpretations of policy. More recent research similarly indicates that Chinese teachers may recognize the importance of core competencies while experiencing difficulties in translating competencyoriented expectations into classroom practice (Lu et al., 2022). These findings suggest that changes in formal curriculum objectives do not automatically produce equivalent changes in pedagogy.

The implementation dimension is also recognized within the 2022 policy framework. The Ministry calls for systematic implementation involving teacher and principal training, curriculum resources, implementation measures at different administrative levels, curriculum management, teaching reform, and appropriate institutional support (MOE, 2022a). This demonstrates that curriculum reform is understood as extending beyond the publication of new curriculum standards. Its realization depends on the ability of educational authorities, schools, and teachers to interpret and enact new requirements.

This distinction between policy intention and educational enactment is central to the present paper. Official curriculum documents provide strong evidence concerning what policymakers intend to change, but they cannot independently demonstrate what occurs in every classroom. Existing empirical research can provide evidence concerning teachers' interpretations, curriculum materials, pedagogy, and implementation, but such evidence is often limited to subjects, regions or educational contexts. Because the 2022 reform is relatively recent, it is also too early to make definitive claims about its long-term effects on student outcomes. A critical analysis must therefore distinguish between the transformation of curriculum policy and the transformation of educational practice.

The Chinese case is also significant from a comparative education perspective. The language of core competencies has developed alongside international discussions concerning future-oriented education, but China's interpretation is embedded within its own curriculum governance system and educational objectives. The 2022 curriculum connects competencies with values, character, and abilities and develops them through subject-specific learning (MOE, 2022b). China therefore provides an important case for examining how an internationally influential educational discourse is recontextualized within a particular national education system, rather than assuming that competency-oriented education has the same meaning across countries.

Against this background, this paper examines the nature and extent of the shift represented by China's 2022 compulsory education curriculum reform. It does not assume that China has abandoned knowledge-oriented education, nor does it attempt to measure the causal effects of the reform on student achievement. Instead, it examines how reform changes the relationship among knowledge, core competencies, curriculum content, pedagogy, assessment, and implementation.

The study is guided by the following main research question:

To what extent does China’s 2022 Compulsory Education Curriculum Reform represent a shift from knowledge-oriented education toward competency-based learning?

Three supporting research questions guide the analysis:

1. How does the 2022 Compulsory Education Curriculum Reform conceptualize and operationalize core competencies in comparison with traditional knowledge-oriented approaches to basic education?
2. How are core competencies expected to reshape curriculum content, teaching practices, and assessment under the 2022 reform?
3. What challenges and structural factors may constrain the transition from knowledge transmission to competency-based learning in China’s compulsory education system?

The paper argues that China's 2022 Compulsory Education Curriculum Reform represents a substantial policy-level movement toward competency-oriented education, but not a complete departure from knowledge transmission. The reform does not eliminate disciplinary knowledge. Instead, it seeks to reposition knowledge as a foundation for developing broader capacities to understand, apply, connect, evaluate, and use knowledge in meaningful contexts. At the same time, the extent to which this policy-level reorientation becomes a deeper transformation of classroom practice depends on teacher preparedness, established pedagogical practices, assessment arrangements, examination pressures, professional development and differences in implementation capacity.

The central argument, therefore, is that the reform is better understood as a reconfiguration of the relationship between knowledge and competence rather than a simple movement from one to the other. The key issue is not whether knowledge remains important, but whether the purposes for which knowledge is taught, learned, and assessed are changing. This perspective provides the analytical foundation for examining the 2022 reform as both a significant change in curriculum policy and an ongoing process whose effects depend on implementation.

The remainder of the paper examines this argument through a review of relevant Chinese and international literature, a qualitative analysis of policy and documentary sources, and a critical examination of existing evidence concerning curriculum implementation. The analysis focuses particularly on curriculum purpose, the organization of knowledge and curriculum content, teaching and learning, assessment, teacher professional practice, and the institutional conditions that may enable or constrain the realization of the reform. The paper concludes by assessing the extent of the transformation and considering its implications for Chinese curriculum policy and comparative education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Competency-oriented education and the changing role of knowledge

The shift from knowledge-oriented education toward competency-oriented education has become an important theme in contemporary curriculum reform. Traditional schooling has often emphasized the acquisition, organization, and reproduction of disciplinary knowledge, with curriculum objectives and assessment largely focused on what students are expected to know. Competency-oriented approaches broaden this conception by emphasizing learners' capacity to mobilize knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values in meaningful situations (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2005, 2019).

However, literature does not support a simple opposition between knowledge and competence. Competencies depend upon substantive knowledge because critical thinking, problem-solving, inquiry, and communication require learners to draw on relevant concepts and information. Gervais (2016) similarly conceptualizes competency as involving the integration and application of knowledge and skills rather than their replacement. The central distinction is therefore between knowledge as an endpoint of learning and knowledge as a resource for broader forms of learning and action.

International research also demonstrates that competency is not a universally fixed concept. Tahirsylaj and Sundberg (2020), in their systematic review of competencies in twenty-first-century curricula, identify substantial variation in how competencies are defined and translated into curriculum policy. Differences reflect national educational traditions, policy priorities, curriculum structures, and assumptions about the purposes of schooling. Consequently, the adoption of competency-oriented language does not necessarily produce identical curriculum reforms across countries.

This distinction provides an important conceptual starting point for examining China, rather than if China's adoption of core competencies represents the direct importation of an international model, it is necessary to examine how competency has been interpreted within China's own curriculum history and institutional context. The key question is therefore not whether knowledge remains important, but whether the purposes and uses of knowledge are being redefined.

2.2 The Development of Curriculum Reform in China

China's 2022 curriculum reform is part of a longer process of curriculum development rather than an isolated policy change. Luo (2023) situates the reform within the broader history of Chinese curriculum reform and identifies a continuing movement toward greater attention to student development, curriculum standards, teaching reform, and implementation.

The 2001 basic education curriculum reform was particularly significant because it sought to move beyond a narrowly content-centered conception of education. It introduced stronger emphasis on student development, changes in teaching and learning, and connections among knowledge, processes, attitudes, and values. However, curriculum reform operated within an education system in which examination performance remained highly influential.

Research on the implementation of earlier reforms illustrates this tension. Yan (2012) found that secondary English teachers experienced difficulties reconciling reform objectives with the realities of classroom teaching. Yan and He (2012) similarly demonstrated that curriculum implementation was shaped by teachers' professional beliefs, school contexts, institutional pressures, and interpretations of policy. These findings are important because they show that curriculum policy is not implemented mechanically. Teachers interpret and adapt policy within existing educational structures.

The 2022 reform therefore represents both continuity and change. It continues the longer movement toward broader educational objectives while strengthening the formal mechanisms through which those objectives are connected to subject curriculum, teaching, assessment, and expected student achievement (Luo, 2023). The significance of the reform lies partly in its attempt to make competency-oriented objectives more explicit and operational.

2.3 Core Competencies in the 2022 Curriculum

Core competencies constitute the central organizing concept of the 2022 Compulsory Education Curriculum Reform. The Ministry of Education requires individual subject curriculum standards to translate the broader objectives of compulsory education into subject-specific expectations concerning students' values, essential character, and key abilities (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China [MOE], 2022a, 2022b).

This approach is significant because competencies are not presented simply as generic skills detached from academic subjects. They are developed through subject learning. The revised curriculum retains important concepts, themes, knowledge, and skills while requiring their selection and organization in relation to core-competency development (MOE, 2022c). China's model therefore maintains a strong relationship between disciplinary knowledge and broader student competencies.

The curriculum also introduces academic-quality standards intended to describe expected levels of student achievement. These standards provide a mechanism for translating relatively broad competency objectives into more observable expectations and are intended to inform curriculum materials, teaching, learning, and assessment (MOE, 2022c).

This is particularly important because one challenge of competency-oriented education is that broad concepts such as creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication can be difficult to translate into concrete classroom practices. By connecting core competencies with subject standards and academic-quality requirements, the 2022 reform attempts to make them more operational.

The concept nevertheless remains dependent on interpretation. Teachers must determine what a particular competency means within their subject and how it should appear in classroom learning. Research on Chinese teachers suggests that this translation is not straightforward. Lu et al. (2022), for example, found that teachers recognized the importance of key competencies but encountered challenges in implementing them in practice.

Thus, the literature suggests that the introduction of core competencies represents a significant change in China's curriculum architecture, while also creating new demands for teachers, schools, and assessment systems.

2.4 Curriculum Content and Interdisciplinary Learning

The 2022 reform also seeks to change how curriculum content is organized and connected. Rather than treating subjects as entirely separate bodies of knowledge, the revised curriculum strengthens interdisciplinary thematic learning and practical activities (MOE, 2022c).

This emphasis reflects the broader logic of competency-oriented education. Many problems outside school require individuals to mobilize knowledge from multiple fields. Environmental problems, technological development, social issues, and economic questions, for example, cannot always be understood through a single disciplinary perspective. Interdisciplinary learning can therefore provide opportunities for students to connect knowledge and apply it to more complex problems.

The reform does not, however, abandon subject-based education. Instead, it seeks to establish stronger connections among subjects while maintaining their distinctive educational contributions. This is important because competency development still depends upon disciplinary knowledge and concepts.

The revised curriculum also strengthens the position of practical learning and introduces clearer curricular arrangements for areas such as labor education and information technology (MOE, 2022b). These developments suggest a broader conception of educational outcomes in which academic learning relates to practical capability.

Existing research provides some evidence that competency-oriented objectives are influencing curriculum materials. Xiang et al. (2022), for example, examined activities in Chinese secondary geography textbooks and found relationships between textbook activities and different dimensions of key competencies. Such evidence indicates that competency-oriented reform can influence not only policy statements but also the design of learning materials.

Nevertheless, curriculum materials alone cannot guarantee changes in classroom practice. Teachers determine how activities are interpreted and implemented, while school timetables, subject structures, assessment requirements, and available resources can facilitate or constrain interdisciplinary learning. The literature therefore suggests that changes in curriculum organization need to be considered alongside the conditions of curriculum enactment.

2.5 Teachers and Curriculum Implementation

Teachers occupy a critical position in the implementation of competency-oriented curriculum because they translate policy objectives into classroom learning. The revised curriculum requires teachers to move beyond simply covering content and to create opportunities for students to apply knowledge, investigate problems, make connections, and develop broader competencies.

Research on earlier Chinese curriculum reforms demonstrates that teachers' implementation is influenced by more than the content of official policy. Yan (2012) and Yan and He (2012) found that teachers' practices were shaped by professional beliefs, examination pressures, institutional environments, and their interpretations of reform requirements.

This remains relevant to the 2022 reform because core competencies are more complex than conventional content objectives. It is relatively straightforward to determine whether a particular piece of knowledge has been taught. It is more demanding to design learning that develops students' ability to reason, investigate, communicate, apply knowledge, or solve unfamiliar problems.

Lu et al. (2022) provide evidence of this challenge in their study of Chinese rural junior middle school English teachers. The teachers generally recognized the importance of key competencies, but difficulties remained in translating the concept into classroom practice. This distinction between support for reform and capacity to implement reform is important.

Teacher professional development is therefore central to the implementation process. Teachers need more than an explanation of new curriculum terminology. They require opportunities to develop practical knowledge concerning curriculum interpretation, learning-task design, inquiry, interdisciplinary teaching, formative assessment, and evidence of competency development.

Teacher agency is also important. Teachers are not passive recipients of curriculum policy; they interpret and adapt policy within institutional contexts. Consequently, variation in implementation should not automatically be interpreted as teacher resistance. It may instead reflect differences in professional knowledge, school support, resources, and competing institutional expectations.

2.6 Assessment and Curriculum Alignment

Assessment is one of the most important conditions affecting the implementation of competency-oriented curriculum reform. What is assessed influences what teachers teach, what students study, and what schools recognize as educational success. If curriculum objectives emphasize competencies while assessment continues to reward predominantly conventional forms of knowledge reproduction, teachers may face conflicting incentives.

This issue has been evident in earlier Chinese curriculum reforms. Yan (2012) and Yan and He (2012) demonstrate that examination pressures could constrain teachers' ability to implement new pedagogical approaches. The persistence of such pressures is therefore relevant to the implementation of the 2022 curriculum.

The revised curriculum explicitly attempts to strengthen alignment among curriculum objectives, teaching, learning, and assessment. Academic-quality standards are intended to clarify expected levels of student achievement and provide a basis for curriculum development, teaching, and evaluation (MOE, 2022c).

Competencies, however, can be more difficult to assess than factual knowledge because they often involve multiple dimensions and may be demonstrated differently across contexts. Assessing problem-solving, inquiry, creativity, or the application of knowledge requires evidence of what students can do rather than simply what they can recall.

This does not mean that standardized examinations are inherently incompatible with competency-oriented education. Rather, the central issue is whether assessment captures the kinds of understanding and application that the curriculum values. Assessment can support competency development when it rewards reasoning, interpretation, application, and problem-solving; it can constrain the reform when it disproportionately rewards recall and reproduction.

The literature therefore identifies assessment alignment as a critical condition for translating competency-oriented curriculum policy into classroom practice.

2.7 Recontextualizing Competency in the Chinese Context

The international spread of competency-oriented education does not mean that the concept has the same meaning in every national system. China's approach is shaped by its own curriculum history, educational governance structures, and broader objectives for student development.

The 2022 curriculum connects core competencies with values, character, and abilities and develops them through subject-specific learning (MOE, 2022b). Tian (2024), examining the Chinese language curriculum standard, similarly demonstrates the close relationship between curriculum policy, subject learning, and broader value-oriented educational objectives.

The Chinese case can therefore be understood as a process of policy recontextualization. Internationally influential ideas concerning competencies, active learning, interdisciplinary learning, and broader student development have been incorporated into China's national curriculum framework and interpreted according to domestic educational priorities.

This has implications for comparative education. Similar curriculum terminology does not necessarily indicate identical educational reforms. Countries may use the language of competencies while defining them differently, embedding them within different curriculum structures, and assessing them through different institutional mechanisms.

China's reform should therefore be examined on its own terms while remaining connected to the wider international competency debate. Such an approach avoids both treating China as separate from global curriculum trends and if its reform simply reproduces an international model.

2.8 Research Gap

The literature demonstrates that China's 2022 curriculum reform represents a significant strengthening of competency-oriented curriculum policy. However, several gaps remain.

First, existing research frequently examines individual subjects or dimensions of curriculum reform. Studies have investigated English teachers, geography textbooks, teacher implementation, and specific curriculum-policy issues (Lu et al., 2022; Xiang et al., 2022; Yan, 2012). These studies provide valuable evidence but do not necessarily offer an integrated examination of the 2022 reform across curriculum purpose, content, pedagogy, assessment, and implementation.

Second, discussions of competency-oriented reform can sometimes frame the transformation as a movement from knowledge to competencies. This risks creating a false opposition between the two. The official 2022 curriculum retains disciplinary knowledge while reorganizing it around core-competency development (MOE, 2022c). There is therefore a need to examine whether the reform represents the replacement of knowledge-oriented education or a redefinition of the role knowledge plays within education.

Third, although implementation challenges have received attention, there remains a need to connect policy ambition with the wider conditions of educational enactment. Teachers operate within assessment systems, school structures, professional cultures, and resource conditions that can either reinforce or constrain curriculum objectives.

This paper addresses these gaps by examining China's 2022 Compulsory Education Curriculum Reform through the relationship between knowledge transmission and core competencies. Rather than if the reform has already succeeded or failed, the study examines the nature of the intended transformation and the conditions that may influence its realization.

The paper's contribution is therefore threefold. First, it considers curriculum purpose, content, teaching, and assessment as interconnected dimensions of reform rather than treating them separately. Second, it challenges a simple knowledge-versus-competence interpretation by examining how the reform changes the role of knowledge. Third, it connects policy objectives with the institutional and professional conditions that influence curriculum implementation.

The literature consequently supports the central proposition of this paper: China's 2022 curriculum reform represents a substantial shift in the stated purposes and architecture of compulsory education toward core competencies, but the depth of this transformation depends on whether the new curriculum orientation can be translated into corresponding changes in pedagogy, assessment, teacher professional practice, and school-level implementation.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative policy and document analysis approach, complemented by a critical synthesis of existing academic literature. No primary data were collected through interviews, questionnaires, classroom observations, or other forms of fieldwork. Instead, the study relies on secondary sources, including official Chinese curriculum policy documents, curriculum standards, Chinese and international peer-reviewed studies, and international education reports.

This approach is appropriate because the central object of the study is a national curriculum reform whose objectives, structures, and implementation expectations are formally expressed in policy documents. The study seeks to examine how the 2022 reform conceptualizes core competencies, how it seeks to reshape curriculum, teaching, and assessment, and what conditions may facilitate or constrain implementation. These questions can be addressed effectively through systematic examination of existing documentary and scholarly evidence.

The principal source is China's Compulsory Education Curriculum Plan and Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition), issued by the Ministry of Education. The revised framework establishes requirements concerning curriculum objectives, core competencies, curriculum content, academic quality standards, teaching, learning, and evaluation (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China [MOE], 2022a, 2022b). Existing empirical research is used alongside these policy documents to distinguish between the intended curriculum and evidence concerning its implementation.

The study therefore makes an important methodological distinction between policy design and educational enactment. Official documents provide authoritative evidence concerning what policymakers expect schools and teachers to accomplish, but they cannot independently establish what happens in every classroom. Existing studies provide evidence concerning implementation, but such evidence is generally limited to subjects, regions, or groups of participants. Combining the two forms of evidence allows the study to examine both the intended transformation and the conditions surrounding its implementation.

3.2 Document Analysis

Document analysis constitutes the principal method of the study. Official curriculum documents are treated as policy texts that communicate the government's understanding of the purposes of compulsory education and the changes it expects the education system to implement.

The analysis focuses on five interconnected dimensions:

1. Curriculum purpose →how the reform defines the intended development of students.
2. Core competencies and curriculum content →how competencies relate to disciplinary knowledge, concepts, skills, and themes.
3. Teaching and learning →how the reform expects classroom practice to support competency development.
4. Assessment →how academic-quality standards and evaluation are expected to align with curriculum objectives.
5. Implementation → what responsibilities, professional development, and institutional conditions are identified as necessary for implementation.

The official documents are particularly important for establishing the formal architecture of the reform. The Ministry describes core competencies as central to subject curriculum and links them with curriculum content, academic-quality standards, teaching guidance, and evaluation (MOE, 2022b, 2022c). The documents therefore provide the primary evidence for determining what has changed at the level of curriculum policy.

However, the analysis does not treat policy statements as evidence that intended changes have already occurred. Policy documents are normative: they describe what schools and teachers should do. They do not necessarily demonstrate what schools and teachers do. This distinction is particularly important because the 2022 reform is relatively recent.

3.3 Critical Literature Synthesis

The documentary analysis is complemented by a critical synthesis of relevant Chinese and international scholarship. The purpose is not simply to summarize previous studies but to use existing research to interpret the reform, identify implementation challenges, and situate China's experience within broader curriculum debates.

The literature is organized around four main areas.

First, international scholarship on competency-oriented education provides the conceptual basis for examining the relationship between knowledge and competence. The OECD (2005, 2019), together with Gervais (2016) and Tahirsylaj and Sundberg (2020), provides evidence that competencies generally involve the mobilization and integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values rather than the abandonment of disciplinary knowledge.

Second, research on China's curriculum reform provides historical and contextual understanding. Luo (2023) situates the 2022 reform within China's longer trajectory of curriculum change, while research by Yan (2012) and Yan and He (2012) illustrates the implementation difficulties associated with previous curriculum reforms.

Third, research concerning the development and implementation of core competencies is used to examine the translation of policy objectives into curriculum materials and teaching. Xiang et al. (2022) provide evidence concerning competency-oriented activities in Chinese geography textbooks, while Lu et al. (2022) examine teachers' understanding and implementation of core competencies.

Fourth, literature concerning curriculum alignment and assessment is used to examine whether competency-oriented objectives are supported by corresponding approaches to evaluating student learning. This is particularly important because assessment can reinforce or undermine curriculum reform depending on what forms of learning it rewards.

The literature therefore performs a complementary function to policy analysis. Policy documents establish what the reform intends to accomplish; scholarly and empirical literature helps examine how those intentions relate to educational practice.

3.4 Source Selection and Analysis

Sources were selected purposively according to their relevance to the research questions, authority, and contribution to the argument. Official Chinese policy documents are used to establish the formal content and objectives of the 2022 reform. Peer-reviewed Chinese and international research is used to examine theoretical debates, curriculum implementation, teacher practice, curriculum materials, and competency development. International reports, particularly OECD publications, provide broader conceptual and comparative perspectives.

The study deliberately combines Chinese and international sources. Reliance exclusively on international literature could result in China's reform being interpreted through concepts developed outside its policy context. Conversely, reliance only on official

Chinese documents could reproduce the policy perspective without sufficiently examining implementation challenges or alternative interpretations.

The evidence is therefore considered through a process of source triangulation. Where official policy documents describe intended changes, existing empirical research is examined to determine whether literature identifies conditions that may support or constrain those intentions. This does not assume that different sources will always produce identical conclusions. Differences between policy expectations and empirical findings are themselves analytically important because they can reveal tensions between policy design and implementation.

The analysis is primarily thematic. Evidence is grouped around the major dimensions identified above: the changing purpose of curriculum, the relationship between knowledge and competencies, curriculum content and interdisciplinary learning, pedagogy, assessment, teacher capacity, and implementation conditions.

3.5 What secondary sources reveal and hide

The use of secondary sources provides several advantages. First, it allows the study to examine the reform at multiple levels. National policy documents reveal the formal intentions of policymakers, while academic studies provide evidence concerning teachers, curriculum materials, and implementation. This makes it possible to examine the reform as a system rather than through a single subject or school.

Second, documentary analysis allows the study to examine the internal coherence of the reform. Curriculum objectives, core competencies, curriculum content, academic-quality standards, teaching guidance, and assessment can be considered together rather than as isolated policy components.

Third, secondary sources make it possible to place China's reform within international discussions concerning competency-oriented education. This provides a basis for understanding both the similarities between China's reform and international curriculum trends and the distinctive ways in which China has interpreted those trends.

However, secondary sources also conceal important aspects of educational reality. Most importantly, they provide only an indirect view of everyday classroom practice. Official curriculum documents can establish that teachers are expected to develop core competencies, but they cannot demonstrate how an individual teacher interprets those expectations during an actual lesson.

Similarly, existing empirical studies may reveal implementation difficulties but may focus on a particular subject, geographical area, or group of teachers. Their findings therefore cannot automatically be generalized to China's entire compulsory education system.

The methodology also provides limited access to students' experiences. Students are central to curriculum reform, but the present study cannot directly establish how they experience changes in teaching, learning, assessment, or classroom participation.

A further limitation concerns causality. Because the 2022 reform is recent and student outcomes are influenced by numerous factors, this study cannot establish that the reform has caused changes in student achievement or competencies. Instead, it examines the reform's policy logic, intended mechanisms, and implementation conditions.

These limitations mean that the study makes claims primarily about curriculum policy and the conditions of implementation, rather than claiming to provide a direct measurement of classroom transformation.

3.6 Theoretical and Analytical Framework

This study is guided by a competency-oriented curriculum framework, drawing particularly on the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) conceptualization of competence as the capacity to mobilize and integrate knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values in response to complex demands (OECD, 2005, 2019). This framework is appropriate because the central concern of the study is the changing relationship between knowledge acquisition and the development of broader competencies within China's 2022 Compulsory Education Curriculum Reform.

The framework is used as an analytical lens rather than as a universal benchmark against which China's curriculum is judged. This distinction is important because competency-oriented education does not have a single definition or standardized form across national contexts. Tahirsylaj and Sundberg (2020) demonstrate that competencies have been conceptualized and incorporated into curricula in different ways according to national educational priorities and institutional contexts. Similarly, China's 2022 curriculum embeds core competencies within its own educational objectives and connects them to values, character, abilities, and subject-specific learning (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China [MOE], 2022b). The framework therefore provides concepts for examining the reform without assuming that China's interpretation of competence should be identical to that of the OECD or other education systems.

The framework is particularly useful for challenging a simplistic knowledge-versus-competence dichotomy. Competency-oriented education does not necessarily imply that disciplinary knowledge should be reduced or displaced. Rather, knowledge can function as a foundation that learners mobilize to interpret information, solve problems, communicate, make connections, and respond to unfamiliar situations (Gervais, 2016; OECD, 2019). This perspective allows the study to examine whether China's 2022 reform is genuinely moving away from knowledge-oriented education or is instead changing the purposes and uses of knowledge within compulsory education. The framework is operationalized through four analytical dimensions.

First, curriculum purpose. The study examines whether the 2022 reform broadens the purposes of compulsory education beyond the acquisition and reproduction of disciplinary knowledge toward wider forms of intellectual, practical, social, and personal development. Attention is given to the position of core competencies within the revised curriculum objectives.

Second, curriculum content and organization. The analysis examines how disciplinary knowledge, concepts, skills, interdisciplinary learning, and practical activities are organized in relation to core competencies. This dimension is important for determining whether knowledge remains an isolated educational endpoint or is increasingly positioned as a resource for broader competency development.

Third, teaching and learning. The framework is used to examine the implications of competency-oriented objectives for classroom pedagogy, including student participation, inquiry, application, problem-solving, practical learning, and the changing professional role of teachers. Existing research concerning Chinese teachers is used to consider whether the expectations expressed in policy documents can reasonably be translated into classroom practice (Lu et al., 2022; Yan, 2012; Yan & He, 2012).

Fourth, assessment and implementation. The study examines whether assessment arrangements and institutional conditions support the development of competencies. This dimension considers the relationship between curriculum objectives and assessment, as well as teacher professional development, school capacity, examination pressures, and other conditions that may facilitate or constrain implementation.

These four dimensions provide a direct analytical connection between the theoretical framework and the research questions. They allow the study to move beyond describing the content of the 2022 curriculum and instead assess what kind of educational transformation the reform represents and how far that transformation can reasonably be expected to extend into practice.

The framework also informs the paper's central argument. If the reform merely changes the language used to describe learning while leaving knowledge acquisition, teaching practices, and assessment fundamentally unchanged, the shift toward competencies would be primarily rhetorical. If, however, curriculum content, pedagogy, assessment, and teacher roles are increasingly organized around students' ability to mobilize knowledge and demonstrate broader competencies, then the reform represents a more substantive curricular transformation. The analysis in Section 4 therefore uses the framework to distinguish between changes in policy design and evidence of changes in educational practice.

This framework is particularly appropriate for a study based on secondary sources because it provides a systematic basis for interpreting different types of evidence. Official curriculum documents reveal the intended direction of reform, while existing empirical studies provide evidence concerning implementation and the conditions under which policy is enacted. The framework makes it possible to examine these sources together without assuming that policy intentions necessarily correspond to classroom realities.

3.7 Methodological Limitations

The study has several limitations arising from its reliance on secondary sources. First, the absence of primary data means that it cannot directly establish how teachers and students experience the 2022 curriculum in everyday classroom settings. Second, because the reform is relatively recent, evidence concerning its long-term effects remains limited. Third, existing empirical studies do not cover all subjects, regions, and school contexts equally, which limits the extent to which their findings can be generalized across China. These limitations require caution when interpreting implementation evidence. The study therefore distinguishes between changes evident in curriculum policy and changes that can reasonably be inferred from existing research on implementation. Nevertheless, the combination of policy analysis and critical literature synthesis provides an appropriate basis for examining the reform's objectives, policy architecture, and implementation conditions without making claims that exceed the available evidence.

4. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 The 2022 Reform and the Reorientation of Educational Purpose

The analysis indicates that China's 2022 Compulsory Education Curriculum Reform represents a substantial reorientation of the stated purposes of compulsory education. However, the evidence does not support interpreting the reform as a simple replacement of knowledge transmission with competency development. Instead, the reform seeks to reconfigure the relationship between knowledge and competence by changing what students are expected to do with the knowledge they acquire.

This change is evident in the central position given to core competencies within the revised curriculum. The Ministry of Education requires subject curriculum standards to translate the broader objectives of compulsory education into expectations concerning students' values, character, and abilities (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China [MOE], 2022a, 2022b). The curriculum therefore moves beyond defining learning primarily through content coverage and places greater emphasis on what students should develop through engagement with that content.

The introduction of subject-specific core competencies and academic-quality standards is particularly significant. The revised standards describe expected levels of student achievement and are intended to guide curriculum development, teaching, learning, and assessment (MOE, 2022c). Core competencies are therefore not presented merely as broad educational aspirations; they have been incorporated into the formal architecture of curriculum standards.

Nevertheless, knowledge remains fundamental. The Ministry explicitly retains important concepts, themes, knowledge, and skills while requiring them to be organized in relation to core-competency development (MOE, 2022c). The reform therefore changes the function of knowledge rather than eliminating it. Knowledge is increasingly positioned as a foundation through which students develop broader intellectual, practical, and social capabilities.

This finding is consistent with international competency literature. The OECD (2019) similarly treats knowledge as an essential component of competence rather than its opposite. China's reform can therefore be understood as moving toward an integrated conception of learning in which knowing and doing are more closely connected.

The first major finding is consequently that the 2022 reform constitutes a substantial change in educational purpose at the policy level, but not a rejection of disciplinary knowledge.

4.2 Reorganizing curriculum content around core competencies

The second major finding concerns the organization of curriculum content. The 2022 reform does not simply introduce new terminology concerning competencies; it attempts to reorganize curriculum content around broader objectives for student development.

The revised curriculum requires important concepts, themes, knowledge, and skills to be selected and organized according to core-competency requirements (MOE, 2022c). Content therefore remains central, but its educational purpose is increasingly defined by what students are expected to develop through learning.

The reform also strengthens interdisciplinary thematic learning and practical activities. The Ministry encourages connections among subjects and the development of cross-disciplinary activities intended to promote integrated and practical learning (MOE, 2022c). This reflects the assumption that students need opportunities to connect knowledge across disciplinary boundaries if they are to address complex problems.

At the same time, the reform does not abandon subject-based education. Interdisciplinary learning is expected to build upon the distinctive contributions of individual subjects. This is important because competencies continue to depend upon disciplinary knowledge.

The revised curriculum also gives greater curricular recognition to practical and technological learning, including labor education and information technology (MOE, 2022b). These changes indicate a broader conception of educational development in which academic knowledge relates to practical capability.

Research on Chinese curriculum materials provides some evidence that competency-oriented objectives are influencing learning activities. Xiang et al. (2022), for example, found relationships between activities in secondary geography textbooks and different dimensions of key competencies. This suggests that competency orientation is beginning to influence curriculum materials as well as formal policy language.

However, curriculum design does not automatically produce changes in classroom practice. Teachers must interpret and adapt curriculum materials, while school timetables, subject specialization, resources, and assessment requirements may constrain interdisciplinary learning.

Thus, the second finding is that the 2022 reform represents a substantive attempt to reorganize curriculum content around competency development while retaining disciplinary knowledge, but its practical effects depend on school and teacher capacity.

4.3 Implications for Teaching and Learning

Competency orientation also changes the expectations placed on classroom teaching. If students are expected not merely to acquire knowledge but to apply, connect, interpret, and evaluate it, teaching must provide opportunities for these forms of learning.

The revised curriculum provides greater guidance concerning teaching and learning and emphasizes practical learning, inquiry, interdisciplinary activities, and the development of students' abilities (MOE, 2022c). These expectations imply a more active role for students and a broader role for teachers.

This does not mean that direct instruction becomes unnecessary. Students require substantive disciplinary knowledge before they can reason effectively, solve problems, or apply concepts. The significant change is that direct instruction becomes part of a broader learning process rather than necessarily constituting the entire process.

Teachers consequently face more complex professional demands. They must interpret core competencies within their subjects, design appropriate learning tasks, encourage student participation, and develop forms of assessment that capture more than factual recall.

Research on Chinese curriculum implementation demonstrates why this transition is difficult. Yan (2012) and Yan and He (2012) found that teachers' implementation of earlier curriculum reforms was shaped by examination pressures, professional beliefs, institutional conditions, and policy interpretation. More recent evidence concerning core competencies similarly indicates that teachers may understand the importance of competency development while experiencing difficulties translating the concept into classroom practice (Lu et al., 2022).

This distinction between recognizing reform objectives and possessing the capacity to implement them is important. Teachers may support competency-oriented education while continuing to use established practices because of time constraints, examination expectations, professional habits, or limited resources.

The third finding is therefore that the 2022 reform creates stronger expectations for active, practical, and competency-oriented learning, but translating those expectations into classroom pedagogy depends heavily on teachers' professional capacity and institutional conditions.

4.4 Assessment as a Critical Condition for Reform

Assessment is arguably the most important systemic condition affecting the sustainability of the competency-oriented reform. What is assessed influences what teachers teach, what students study, and what schools regard as educational success.

If curriculum objectives emphasize competencies while assessment continues to reward predominantly conventional forms of knowledge reproduction, teachers face contradictory incentives. Previous research on Chinese curriculum reform has demonstrated how examination pressures can constrain the implementation of reform-oriented pedagogies (Yan, 2012; Yan & He, 2012).

The 2022 reform explicitly recognizes this problem by strengthening academic-quality standards and seeking greater alignment among curriculum objectives, teaching, learning, and examination and evaluation (MOE, 2022c). This is significant because it attempts to ensure that assessment reinforces rather than undermines the new curriculum orientation.

Competencies are nevertheless more difficult to assess than factual knowledge. Demonstrating problem-solving, inquiry, creativity, or the ability to transfer knowledge may require more complex forms of evidence than conventional recall-based testing.

This does not make examinations inherently incompatible with competency-oriented education. Rather, the central issue is what examinations measure. Standardized assessments can incorporate interpretation, reasoning, application, and problem-solving. The challenge is ensuring that these dimensions are sufficiently represented to create meaningful alignment with curriculum objectives.

Assessment therefore constitutes a critical test of the reform. If assessment practices change alongside curriculum objectives, the reform has greater potential to influence classroom teaching. If they remain substantially unchanged, teachers may continue to prioritize conventional academic performance despite the competency-oriented curriculum.

The fourth finding is consequently that assessment alignment is a decisive condition for converting the policy shift toward competencies into sustained changes in classroom practice.

4.5 Teachers as Mediators of Curriculum Reform

The analysis further demonstrates that teachers constitute the critical link between national curriculum policy and classroom practice. The Ministry's implementation framework places considerable emphasis on teacher training and professional development (MOE, 2022a), reflecting the complexity of implementing the revised curriculum.

Teachers are expected to interpret core competencies, connect them with subject content, design appropriate learning activities, and assess students' development. These tasks require more than familiarity with the wording of the curriculum standards. They require professional knowledge concerning curriculum interpretation, pedagogy, assessment, and student learning.

The literature on previous Chinese reforms shows that teachers do not implement policy mechanically. Yan (2012) and Yan and He (2012) demonstrate that implementation is mediated by teachers' professional beliefs and institutional contexts. Lu et al. (2022) similarly show that understanding core competencies does not automatically resolve the practical challenges of implementing them.

Teacher agency is therefore important. Teachers adopt policy to specific classrooms, students, and institutional circumstances. Differences in implementation should not automatically be interpreted as resistance to reform; they may reflect differences in professional preparation, resources, leadership support, or competing institutional demands.

This suggests that professional development should move beyond one-time policy explanation. Teachers need sustained opportunities to experiment with competency-oriented pedagogy, collaborate with colleagues, develop assessment practices, and reflect on student learning.

The fifth finding is therefore that teachers are not simply implementers of the 2022 curriculum but mediators who determine how its objectives are interpreted and enacted in practice.

4.6 Policy Ambition and Implementation Capacity

The 2022 reform is ambitious because it seeks simultaneous changes in curriculum objectives, content, pedagogy, interdisciplinary learning, teacher development, assessment, and school-level implementation. Such changes require institutional capacity as well as policy direction.

The Ministry assigns responsibilities to different levels of the education system, including provincial authorities, schools, teachers, researchers, and administrators (MOE, 2022a). This indicates that implementation is understood as a multilevel process.

However, China's compulsory education system contains substantial differences among schools in terms of location, resources, teacher expertise, leadership capacity, and access to professional development. A national curriculum framework therefore does not automatically produce identical implementation conditions.

This is particularly relevant to competency-oriented teaching because approaches such as inquiry, interdisciplinary learning, practical activities, and formative assessment may require additional planning time, resources, collaboration, and professional expertise. Existing research on Chinese teachers suggests that professional development and contextual conditions influence the ability to implement competency-oriented objectives (Lu et al., 2022).

The reform therefore reveals a potential tension between national policy ambition and local implementation capacity. The issue is not necessarily that the policy is unrealistic, but that ambitious curriculum objectives require corresponding investment in the conditions under which schools and teachers are expected to enact them.

The sixth finding is consequently that the depth of the 2022 reform depends not only on the quality of its curriculum design but also on the capacity of schools, teachers, and assessment systems to support its implementation.

4.7 Recontextualizing Competency in China

The analysis also demonstrates that China's competency-oriented reform should not be understood simply as the adoption of an international educational model.

Competency has become prominent in international education discourse, but the Chinese curriculum embeds core competencies within its own educational objectives and governance structures. The revised curriculum connects competencies with values, character, and abilities and develops them through subject-specific learning (MOE, 2022b).

Tian (2024) demonstrates the relationship between Chinese curriculum policy, subject learning, and broader value-oriented educational objectives. This suggests that core competencies in China have a broader meaning than generic skills for employment or twenty-first-century participation.

The Chinese case can therefore be understood as policy recontextualization. International ideas concerning competencies, active learning, interdisciplinary learning, and broader student development have been incorporated into a national curriculum framework and adapted to China's educational priorities.

This has an important implication for comparative education. Shared terminology does not necessarily mean identical educational reform. Countries may use the concept of competencies while defining, organizing, teaching, and assessing them differently.

China's experience therefore demonstrates the importance of examining not only whether international educational ideas are adopted but also how they are interpreted and institutionalized within national contexts.

4.8 From Policy Transformation to Educational Transformation

The evidence examined above points to a central distinction between policy transformation and educational transformation.

At the policy level, the transformation is substantial. The 2022 curriculum places core competencies more centrally within subject standards, reorganizes content around broader developmental objectives, strengthens interdisciplinary and practical learning, establishes academic-quality standards, and seeks greater alignment among curriculum, teaching, learning, and assessment (MOE, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c).

At the practice level, however, the evidence is more cautious. Teachers must interpret new concepts, schools must create appropriate conditions, and assessment systems must support the new objectives. Previous research demonstrates that these processes can be constrained by examination pressures, professional norms, institutional structures, and implementation capacity (Lu et al., 2022; Yan, 2012; Yan & He, 2012).

The reform should therefore be understood as a process of systemic alignment. For the policy to produce a deep transformation, curriculum objectives, teacher professional learning, pedagogy, student learning, assessment, and educational incentives need to reinforce one another.

The central research question can therefore be answered with some precision:

To what extent does China's 2022 Compulsory Education Curriculum Reform represent a shift from knowledge-oriented education toward competency-based learning?

The evidence indicates a substantial shift at the level of curriculum policy and design, but an incomplete transformation at the level of educational practice.

The policy architecture has changed significantly. Core competencies now provide a stronger organizing principle for curriculum development, while knowledge remains an essential foundation of subject learning. The reform therefore represents neither a simple continuation of traditional knowledge transmission nor a complete replacement of knowledge with competencies.

Instead, the evidence supports a more precise interpretation: China is moving toward an integrated knowledge-and-competency model in which students are increasingly expected to understand, connect, apply, interpret, and mobilize knowledge rather than simply reproduce it.

This is the central finding of the study. The significance of the 2022 reform lies not in making knowledge less important, but in changing what students are expected to do with what they know.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper examined whether China's 2022 Compulsory Education Curriculum Reform represents a shift from knowledge-oriented education toward competency-based learning. The analysis shows that the reform constitutes a substantial shift at the level of curriculum policy and design, but it should not be understood as a complete replacement of knowledge-oriented education.

The central finding is that the reform reconfigures the relationship between knowledge and competence. Disciplinary knowledge remains fundamental to the revised curriculum, but students are increasingly expected to understand, apply, connect, interpret, and mobilize knowledge rather than simply acquire and reproduce it. The introduction of core competencies, academic-quality standards, interdisciplinary learning, practical learning, and stronger connections among curriculum, teaching, learning, and assessment demonstrates a significant change in the intended purposes of compulsory education (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China [MOE], 2022a, 2022b, 2022c).

At the same time, changing curriculum policy does not automatically produce equivalent changes in classroom practice. Teachers must interpret and enact the new requirements within existing institutional conditions, while assessment systems and examination pressures can either support or constrain the intended transformation. Existing research on Chinese curriculum reform indicates that teacher capacity, professional beliefs, institutional conditions, and assessment pressures remain important factors in implementation (Lu et al., 2022; Yan, 2012; Yan & He, 2012).

The reform should therefore be understood as an ongoing process rather than a complete transition. Its policy architecture has moved more clearly toward competency-oriented education, but the extent of transformation in everyday teaching and learning remains dependent on the alignment of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, teacher development, and institutional capacity.

The study is limited by its reliance on secondary sources and the relatively recent implementation of the 2022 curriculum. It cannot directly establish how teachers and students experience the reform across China's diverse educational contexts. Future empirical and longitudinal research will therefore be necessary to determine whether the policy changes identified in this study produce sustained changes in classroom practice and student learning.

Working with secondary sources made it possible to examine China's curriculum reform at the national policy level and to connect official documents with existing scholarly evidence. However, this approach also obscures how teachers and students experience the reform in everyday classrooms. While policy documents reveal intended changes and academic studies provide partial insights into implementation, they cannot fully capture the complexity of curriculum enactment across China's diverse educational settings. Consequently, the study offers a strong understanding of policy transformation but a more limited understanding of lived educational practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Several implications emerge from the analysis. First, teacher professional development should be strengthened as a central component of curriculum implementation. Professional development should move beyond explaining the concept of core competencies and provide teachers with practical opportunities to design competency-oriented learning activities, integrate inquiry and application into subject teaching, and develop appropriate assessment strategies. Continuous professional learning and teacher collaboration are likely to be more effective than one-time training focused primarily on policy explanation.

Second, curriculum and assessment should be more closely aligned. If students and teachers continue to face strong incentives to prioritize factual recall and examination performance, the competency-oriented objectives of the curriculum may be difficult to realize. Assessment should therefore provide greater opportunities for students to demonstrate reasoning, application, interpretation, problem-solving, and other competencies while maintaining appropriate disciplinary knowledge.

Third, implementation support should account for differences among schools and regions. A national curriculum framework establishes common objectives, but schools do not necessarily possess equal levels of resources, teacher expertise, leadership capacity, or access to professional development. Education authorities should therefore provide differentiated implementation support, particularly to schools facing greater constraints in introducing interdisciplinary, practical, and competency-oriented learning.

Fourth, further research should examine the gap between curriculum policy and classroom enactment. Longitudinal studies, classroom observations, teacher interviews, and comparative research across regions and school contexts would provide stronger evidence concerning whether the policy transformation identified in this paper is becoming an educational transformation. Such research could also identify which implementation strategies are most effective.

Overall, China's 2022 curriculum reform provides a significant policy foundation for competency oriented compulsory education. Its long-term significance, however, will depend on whether the reform succeeds in changing not only what the curriculum requires students to learn, but also how teachers teach, how students learn, and what the education system ultimately values and assesses.

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