

# **An Interpretation of the *Revised Compulsory Education Curriculum Program and Standards*: A Revolution in China's Compulsory Education**

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**Abstract:** *The Compulsory Education Curriculum Program and the Compulsory Education Course Standards make up the Compulsory Education Curriculum Program and Standards 2022, which was released by the Chinese Ministry of Education. The statement emphasizes the development of students' key competencies while optimizing the objectives for compulsory education and outlining new demands for a more intense reform of the educational system in order to fulfill the needs of the current era. In order to better support student autonomous learning and overall development, it is imperative to raise reform awareness among the educational community, enhance teachers' professionalism and instructional skills, and create student-centered learning environments before implementing the revised curriculum program and course standards. In order to add new perspectives to the literature on the new curriculum program and standards and provide implications for teachers and administrators in educational reform, we have focused our interpretation of the document on three dimensions: training objectives, student key competencies, and curriculum and teaching reform. We have also offered some recommendations for its successful implementation.*

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**T**HE *Experimental Plan for Compulsory Education Curriculum Setting 2001 and the Compulsory Education Course Standards 2011* represented cutting-edge educational ideas of the era, were crucial in directing and promoting the reform of education and teaching, and, as a result, significantly increased the standard of basic education. However, their implementation during the previous 20 years has exposed their fundamental flaws, including a lack of precise course descriptions and requirements and systematic connections between various learning phases (the curriculum program divides compulsory education into 4 phases). Since all children are now required to go to school, the demand for education has changed from “going to school” to “getting a good education.” This means that the curriculum needs to be changed more deeply and the curriculum for compulsory education needs to be improved.

In addition, as a result of the constant development of science and technology and the rapid spread of mobile media, people’s learning and working methods, as well as their lifestyles have been radically transformed; the growth environment of children has undergone profound changes; and basic education and training face new challenges. The curriculum for compulsory education needs to change along with the times and get better as a result.

In this scenario, the *Compulsory Education Curriculum Program and Standards 2022 (which include the Compulsory Education Curriculum Program and the Compulsory Education Course Standards)* is a sign of the times. With the *Compulsory Education Curriculum Program 2022*, the goal of compulsory education has been made clearer, the course plan has been improved, and there are clear rules for how the curriculum should be used. The *Compulsory Education Course Standards 2022* have improved the organization and structure of the 16 courses taught in China’s primary and junior secondary schools as part of compulsory education, which has also set academic quality standards and made it easier for students to move from one learning phase to the next (Ministry of Education, 2022).

## **A Revised Goal for Compulsory Education**

The *Compulsory Education Curriculum Program 2022* underlines that the overarching objective of the nation’s compulsory education is to educate adolescents with “aspiration,” “competence,” and “commitment.” In this text, “aspirations” refers to the key principles to be instilled in students, who are supposed to align their own goals with the nation’s interests and prosperity. “Competence” refers to all abilities and skills essential to a student’s holistic development, such as the ability to learn, explore, communicate, engage in physical activity, engage in aesthetic pursuits, and execute manual labor. “Commitment” refers to the positive character traits of students, notably their desire to accept challenges, participate in life and studies, protect the ecological environment, uphold national dignity in cultural exchanges, etc.

Most crucially, the redesigned curriculum program establishes the development of students’ key competencies as the primary training goal. Following the publication of the framework for the definition and selection of key competencies by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2003 (Rychen & Salganik, 2003), numerous nations and academic institutions conducted research on the subject and developed their own frameworks based on their unique circumstances and educational objectives. In a similar way, China did a number of studies, such as fundamental theoretical research, international comparative research, research on education policies, analyses of traditional cultures, empirical studies, and interviews with academics and

experts, and then made the General Framework for the Development of Key Competencies of Chinese Students in 2016 (Lin, 2016).

As defined in the statement, the key competences of Chinese students consist of vital talents and attributes that students should cultivate via education in order to create the groundwork for their lifelong development and meet the demands of societal development. They are divided into six categories: humanistic literacy; scientific spirit; learning ability; awareness of healthy living; sense of responsibility; and creativity and innovation, which include more specific characteristics such as humanistic feelings; aesthetic ability; rational thinking; critical thinking; autonomous inquiry; and interest in learning; self-examination; use of information; respect for life; sound character; self-regulation; social responsibility; and national identity. A competence-oriented education, which is what the revised curriculum program is all about, is more than just learning facts and skills. It is also about helping students develop their core competence, essential character traits, and values, which will help them be successful in the future and help society as a whole.

## **The Knowledge Foundation for Key Competencies**

The primary principle adhered to by the compulsory education curriculum is the cultivation of key competencies and the all-around development of students (Ministry of Education, 2022). The acquisition of essential competencies is inseparable from a solid knowledge base. Rather, it calls for more complex learning processes and paradigms (Yu & Wang, 2017).

### ***The Internalization of Knowledge***

In this debate, competence refers to a person's problem-solving abilities in complex situations, which is a synthesis of information, skills, emotions, attitudes, and values, etc. Key abilities cannot be produced with fragmented or inapplicable knowledge; rather, they are founded on potent and transferable knowledge. To get this kind of knowledge, students must internalize what they have learned. To do this, they must first understand and organize the new information, then combine it with what they already know, and finally come up with their own ideas about what it all means.

The traditional view of knowledge, on the other hand, views knowledge as a ready-made, totally objective existence that can be transmitted to students in discrete chunks. Under this philosophy, curriculum specialists classify the most important knowledge into subjects and present it to teachers and students in the form of textbooks; the goal of classroom instruction is to ensure that students acquire reliable and determined knowledge; and the teacher-student relationship becomes one of knowledge transmitter and receiver. The teaching process consists primarily of lecturing, listening, memory, and assessment. The static and fractured knowledge acquired through this mode of education is only applicable during examinations, when students rely on memory and elementary logical thinking to reconstruct the established content. In this instance, knowledge has not been absorbed to bear personal significance; therefore, it is useless for problem-solving in difficult situations and has no positive impact on the development of students' key competencies.

The cultivation of competence necessitates dynamic, transferable knowledge that not only comprises objective components but also, after being digested and restructured by individuals, is awarded with subjective elements and so has individual signifi-

cance (Zhong, 2005). In other words, both objectivity and subjectivity are vital to knowledge; it can only become a powerful, living agent when combined with human experiences, values, and beliefs. So, it doesn't matter how much information a person knows as long as they don't internalize it. Without internalization, their knowledge is useless and can't be used to solve real problems.

## ***The Contextuality and Practicality of Knowledge***

Knowledge's application and contextuality are crucial to its internalization, which is important for the growth of key competencies. The Compulsory Education Curriculum Program 2022 emphasizes the value of developing students' proficiency in using knowledge to recognize and resolve issues in situational contexts (Ministry of Education, 2022). Students cannot develop links between their experience and the outside world and produce the personal meaning of knowledge on their own; only through learning in specific contexts and through interaction with situations can they do this. The integration of knowledge mastery, application, and transfer is highlighted by the practicality of knowledge. Knowledge is produced by practice, and practice in turn aids in problem solving.

According to Dewey (2005), every typical experience is the consequence of the interaction of external and internal factors. What we refer to as a context is created by the interaction of these two factors. Learning in the context entails gaining information through engagement, which enables students to incorporate their own experiences into the production of knowledge and assimilate what they have learned. In this case, "context" means anything that relates to what you know and helps you understand it. This is more than just historical or geographical context.

According to the conventional view, knowledge is preexisting and does not involve any student construction. Competence-oriented learning, on the other hand, actively involves students in interacting with circumstances through practice; students actively participate with their minds, behaviors, emotions, and attitudes throughout this process. In order to emphasize the usefulness of knowledge, it should not be presented to students as static, unchanging symbols but rather as a tool for problem-solving, a channel for interpersonal interaction and teamwork, and a source of meaning creation with additional value (Zhang, 2019). Students are given the chance to take in what they have learned and make the change from knowledge to knowing.

## ***Learning through Practice***

The updated course standards give a lot of weight to practical instruction across the board. According to the Compulsory Education Course Standards for 2022, teachers should encourage students to take part in exploration activities so that they can learn the basics and methods of each subject by experiencing the problem-finding, problem-solving, knowledge-gathering, and knowledge-applying processes for themselves (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Students are given the tools and processes necessary to develop core competences based on discipline knowledge through practical instruction. According to Dewey (2001), education should aim to improve students' learning through varied and focused practical exercises. Two points need further consideration in this discussion: (i) Is there any definition of "various and specific practical activities"? (ii) What does "improving individuals' learning experiences" mean? Other research contains the answers

to the first query. Bruner (1960), a proponent of the disciplinary structure movement, argued that students should learn as scientists do scientific inquiry; Schwab (2013) recognized practical education as a language for the curriculum to address the problem of incoherence; and Cui et al. (2021) claimed that subject-based practice enables students to use disciplinary knowledge and methodology to solve pertinent problems in each discipline, which goes beyond superficial inquiry. Regarding the second query, the acquisition of individual learning experiences indicates that the learner has created a personal understanding of the knowledge. The knowledge is then internalized and given a personal meaning. It can then be used to solve hard problems in the real world and help develop key competencies.

## **Intensified Reforms in Curriculum Design and Instruction**

### ***Optimizing the Curriculum Structure***

The Compulsory Education Curriculum Program 2022 introduced significant revisions to the organization of the curriculum. All moral education-related first-through-ninth-grade courses are combined into a single subject titled “Ethics and the Rule of Law.” Art classes are reorganized, with those for grades 1 through 7 emphasizing music and drawing, complemented with dance, theater, film appreciation, etc., and those for grades 8 and 9 emphasizing a variety of arts lessons. Science and comprehensive practice must be taught as early as the first grade. Labor and computer technology are removed from comprehensive practice to become stand-alone courses, and so they occupy increasingly prominent roles in the overall curriculum structure (Zhu, 2022).

Additionally, the course design has been modified in a number of ways: selecting major concepts, themes, basic knowledge, and skills for each course and improving its organization in accordance with the strategy for developing students’ key competencies; planning theme-based interdisciplinary activities to establish strong connections between different subjects; and making overall coordination to ensure that each subject serves its unique function when a particular content or topic involves syllabi that cross subject boundaries.

### ***Establishing Academic Quality Requirements for Each Subject***

The incorporation of comprehensive academic criteria is a prominent component of the new course standards. The *Compulsory Education Course Standards 2022* introduced quality requirements for student academic results in each subject at different learning phases and defined the depth and breadth of all subject knowledge, as well as guidelines for textbook compilation, classroom instruction, testing and evaluation, and so on. Teachers must have a strong understanding of the academic quality requirements and use them as references in lesson preparation, teaching organization, and learning assessment in order to successfully execute the new course standards. It is important to note that the academic quality requirements are more than just knowledge-or intellectual education-based standards; they are presented as a holistic framework of requirements for knowledge achievement, character development, and key competency devel-

opment. Furthermore, determining academic quality requirements involves a shift in emphasis from lecture-centered to learning-centered training. Teachers should not only help students comprehend the quality criteria for their academic performance, but they should also foster self-directed learning, autonomous inquiry, and self-regulated progress. Furthermore, the revised course standards provided detailed instructions pertinent to course contents and academic quality requirements, as well as concrete suggestions for learning assessment and test question design, to ensure consistency of teaching, learning, and testing and to provide exemplary teaching and evaluation cases.

## ***Highlighting Balanced and Holistic Development of Students***

The *Compulsory Education Curriculum Program and Standards 2022* underline that the ultimate goal of compulsory education is student overall development. It establishes the necessity of the “five educations” (moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor education). Teachers in present education tend to place an undue emphasis on intellectual education while ignoring the other “four educations,” because students’ future educational chances are mostly determined by the senior secondary school entrance examination and the college entrance examination (Yu, 2022). It is now well acknowledged that an overemphasis on intellectual education is harmful to children’s entire development. Labor education, which was previously absent from school education, is now established as an integral part of the curriculum and a long-term course over the entire nine-year compulsory education process in the updated curriculum program. Simultaneously, more emphasis must be placed on the link between theoretical learning and students’ life experiences and social practice, as well as the development of more scenarios for classroom teaching in order to improve students’ ability to apply knowledge to solve practical problems. Non-cognitive skills such as teamwork, collaboration, communication, adaptation, and self-efficacy are required to solve practical problems, as are cognitive talents such as analysis, deduction, induction, and judgement. Students get many skills in addition to disciplinary information during this procedure.

The *Compulsory Education Course Standards (2022)* advocate theme-based and project-based learning as viable methods for fostering the holistic development of students. In theme-based learning, teachers use instructional resources from several disciplines to construct tough assignments revolving around a particular theme and students acquire knowledge relevant to this theme in a variety of subject areas through cooperative learning. In project-based learning, students are tasked with addressing a real-world issue. To do this, they collect data, make plans, do the project, and evaluate it with the help of their teachers, which helps them develop a wide range of skills.

## ***Encouraging Personalized Education***

Revisions to the curricular program and course standards included proposals for personalizing education. First, create a student-centered learning environment and emphasize students’ roles in education. A personalized education involves educating students in accordance with their talents, personalities, and interests. Individualized education requires a learning environment in which students’ inherent tendencies are fully acknowledged. Respecting the autonomy of students in learning and inquiry is a good method for promoting their individualized study. Second, differentiate instruction for students

of varying intellectual levels. More elective courses will be added, and individualized tutoring will be made available, in order to fulfill the different educational needs of students. Third, educational technology should be utilized to the fullest extent to popularize personalized instruction. Educational data mining and analytics systems can collect student learning behavior data for intelligent analysis and provide relevant learning recommendations for the learner. Blended education, which combines online and offline learning, facilitates individual assistance.

## **Tips for Implementing the Compulsory Education Curriculum Program and Standards 2022**

### ***Understand the Document's Implications for the Curricular Reform***

The redesigned curriculum program and course standards are meant to accelerate the curriculum reform in order to assure the achievement of the new era's training objective and the development of high-quality compulsory education. To maximize the efficacy of the reform, it is vital to analyze prior curricula and identify their fundamental flaws. On the basis of scientific investigation, solutions must be discovered for these serious problems. Also, cutting-edge teaching methods from other countries can be used to help China's curriculum reform.

### ***Enhance Teachers' Professional Competencies***

The implementation of the new curriculum program and course standards imposes stricter and more extensive requirements on instructors' professional competencies. First, training sessions should be held across the nation to ensure that teachers comprehend the significance of the training objective of compulsory education, the necessity of adjusting curriculum structure and course categories, and the specific requirements for course objectives, course contents at different learning phases, academic quality, classroom procedure, etc. Second, it is vital to broaden the professional horizons of teachers so that they can comprehend the richness and diversity of disciplinary material and teaching duties, as well as the significance and interconnectedness of disciplines. At the same time, it is essential for instructors to be aware of the importance of consistently enhancing their professional expertise and disciplinary knowledge. Third, the adoption of the redesigned program might also give teachers an opportunity to improve their teaching techniques. Teachers will get better at teaching if they take part in practical education, individualized instruction, and holistic education.

### ***Guide Students to Improve their Learning Methods***

Revisions to the curriculum program and course standards are intended to enhance the growth and development of students. To apply the new program, the students' learning strategies must be modified accordingly. To emphasize the predominance of students in classroom instruction, schools should provide a student-centered learning environment and promote student autonomy. In addition, they should strive to establish a closer connection between school education and students' life experiences, as well as a deeper



integration of disciplinary knowledge with labor education and social practice; interdisciplinary learning and project-based learning should be increased to a suitable degree. All of these initiatives emphasize the overall development of students.

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