

Implementation of the New Curriculum Standards: Empirical Research and Path Exploration of Life-Oriented Teaching in Primary Chinese Language Education

Xiaoran Yang*, Xiangtong Liu

College of Education Sciences, Chongqing Normal University, Chongqing 401331, China

**Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.*

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Abstract: The 2022 edition of the “Chinese Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education” emphasizes that Chinese language teaching should be “based on life”, with life-oriented teaching emerging as a crucial pathway for enhancing students’ core competencies in Chinese. However, practical implementation faces challenges such as superficial understanding among teachers, poor compatibility of teaching models, and a disconnect between theory and practice. Supported by theories such as Tao Xingzhi’s life education theory, this study employs literature research, questionnaires (administered to 160 teachers from four primary schools in the S district of Chongqing), interviews (with 10 teachers), and case analysis (including texts like “A Mother’s Deep Affection”) to conduct its research. The findings reveal that while teachers recognize and value life-oriented teaching, there are issues such as insufficient innovation in classroom formats, a pronounced tendency towards exam-oriented teaching, low professionalism in training, obstacles posed by the exam-oriented system, and inadequate home-school collaboration. Based on these findings, the study proposes expanding life-oriented teaching materials, constructing a systematic teaching framework, and promoting integration with learning task clusters, providing references for improving teaching quality.

Keywords: Primary Chinese language education; Life-oriented teaching; Life education

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1. The raising of the issue

In the current educational transformation, life-based teaching stands as a pivotal issue in primary school Chinese language education. As technologies like artificial intelligence integrate into social life, education must cultivate students’ ability to adapt to future living environments. The Compulsory Education Chinese Language Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) explicitly advocate a learning approach that “takes life as its

foundation, centers on language practice activities, is guided by learning themes, and utilizes learning tasks as its vehicle”^[1]. This guiding principle positions life-based teaching as a cornerstone of Chinese language education, highlighting its pivotal role in enhancing students’ core literacy competencies and promoting their holistic development. However, the advancement of life-oriented teaching has not been without challenges. On one hand, some teachers possess only a superficial understanding of life-oriented teaching, resulting in a lack of flexibility in their instructional methods, which come across as rigid. They merely incorporate “life-oriented” elements in a formalistic manner, failing to genuinely integrate Chinese language knowledge with students’ lives. This approach not only disrupts classroom order and impedes progress but also solidifies students’ thinking patterns, limiting the development of their innovative and critical thinking abilities. On the other hand, the existing life-oriented teaching models exhibit poor compatibility with other instructional approaches, making it difficult to form a synergistic system. This leads to a monotonous and rigid teaching style with low efficiency, preventing the full realization of the advantages of life-oriented teaching. Furthermore, although the new curriculum standards have provided a clear direction for Chinese language education, their implementation period has been short, with theoretical research remaining shallow and practical exploration still in its initial stages, resulting in a disconnect between theory and practice. Frontline teachers often encounter significant difficulties in translating the requirements of the curriculum standards into teaching practices due to a lack of thorough understanding of their connotations, highlighting an urgent need for systematic research to provide feasible guidance. Life-oriented teaching aligns closely with modern pedagogical concepts, fully respecting the physical and mental development patterns of primary school students, and harmonizes well with the requirements of the 2022 edition of the curriculum standards. Delving into strategies for life-oriented teaching in primary school Chinese under the backdrop of the new curriculum standards holds immense practical significance. From the perspective of refining teaching approaches, it facilitates the deep integration of the new curriculum standards with life-oriented teaching, fostering the construction of a more scientific, efficient, and dynamic Chinese language teaching system. From the standpoint of practical guidance, by comprehensively analyzing existing issues and actively exploring targeted solutions, it can provide frontline educators with a solid theoretical foundation and highly operable practical references, thereby aiding in enhancing the quality of primary school Chinese language teaching, effectively cultivating students’ abilities to apply Chinese language knowledge, and nurturing their core competencies. This, in turn, lays a solid foundation for students’ lifelong learning and future development.

2. Literature review

Research on the connection between education and life abroad continues to deepen, incorporating a new perspective of technological integration on the foundation of traditional theories. Dewey’s theory of “Education is Life” remains a central framework, with scholars in recent years further integrating digital life scenarios to propose that “life-oriented teaching should align with students’ digital native experiences”^[2-3]. Sukhomlinsky’s concept of “learning through real life” has given rise to research on “project-based life practices”, emphasizing the cultivation of comprehensive abilities through community service and interdisciplinary life tasks^[4]. The UNESCO 2022 report “The Future of Education” supplements the “Four Pillars” with “learning to cope with uncertainty”, prompting many countries to integrate life-oriented teaching with the cultivation of future survival skills, exemplified by Finland’s interdisciplinary fusion practice of “life skills courses” with Chinese language teaching in basic education^[5]. Currently, domestic research primarily focuses on the relationship

between Chinese language education and life. Tao Xingzhi's theory of life education remains central, but recent studies have increasingly concentrated on the integration of "task groups in the new curriculum standards with life", such as Wen Rumin's proposal to "activate task group teaching through life scenarios" [6-7]. Scholars have further explored the "application of Chinese language in real-life contexts", emphasizing the deepening of textual understanding through family and community life scenarios. In recent years, domestic research has pointed out new issues in life-oriented teaching, such as "insufficient utilization of digital materials", "imbalance in life materials between urban and rural areas", and "disconnection from the evaluation of core competencies." Additionally, some teachers struggle to balance "life-orientation" and "subject specificity." Scholars generally agree that life-oriented teaching represents a crucial pathway for implementing the "practice-based education" advocated in the 2022 edition of the new curriculum standards. It can facilitate the cultivation of core competencies such as "cultural confidence" and "language proficiency." Moreover, in the context of the "double reduction" policy (reducing the excessive homework load and off-campus tutoring burden), life-oriented teaching can optimize homework design and enhance students' initiative in learning.

3. Research design

This study follows a progressive logical framework of "conceptual clarification — current situation analysis — strategy construction" to conduct the research: Firstly, by integrating the requirements of "contextuality" and "practicality" from the 2022 edition of the "Chinese Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education", along with Tao Xingzhi's theory of life education and Li Jilin's theory of situational education, the study precisely defines the connotation of "life-oriented teaching in primary school Chinese"—that is, a teaching model grounded in the cognitive patterns and life experiences of primary school students, transforming textbook knowledge into real-life scenarios and practical tasks, and clarifying its intrinsic connection with the cultivation of core competencies [1]. The research process employs a variety of methods: The literature review method systematically examines relevant literature and policy documents on life-oriented teaching and the cultivation of core competencies in Chinese language education from both domestic and international sources over the past five years, clarifying research boundaries and theoretical underpinnings to avoid duplication. The questionnaire survey method distributes 160 teacher questionnaires (with a 100% response rate and 91.25% effectiveness rate) to four primary schools in the S district of Chongqing and conducts in-depth interviews with 10 teachers of varying teaching experience to obtain authentic and specific teaching data, providing empirical evidence for problem analysis. The case study method selects classic texts from the Ministry-edited textbooks, such as "A Mother's Deep Affection" and "Brush Li", and analyzes the application paths of life-oriented teaching strategies in classroom introductions, text interpretations, and homework designs, taking into account the characteristics of students at different academic levels, to enhance the practical guidance of the research findings.

4. Research Findings

4.1. The results of the questionnaire survey

4.1.1. Teachers' cognition and attitude: Possessing a basic understanding and showing a high level of importance

All teachers have some understanding of life-oriented teaching, with 25% stating they have a "very good understanding", 66.4% saying they have a "moderate understanding", and 8.6% indicating they have a "limited

understanding” (**Figure 1**). Among those who recognize its importance (accounting for 90% of the total), 70% believe it is “extremely important”, while 20% consider it “moderately important.” Additionally, 10% of the teachers deem it “not very important.”

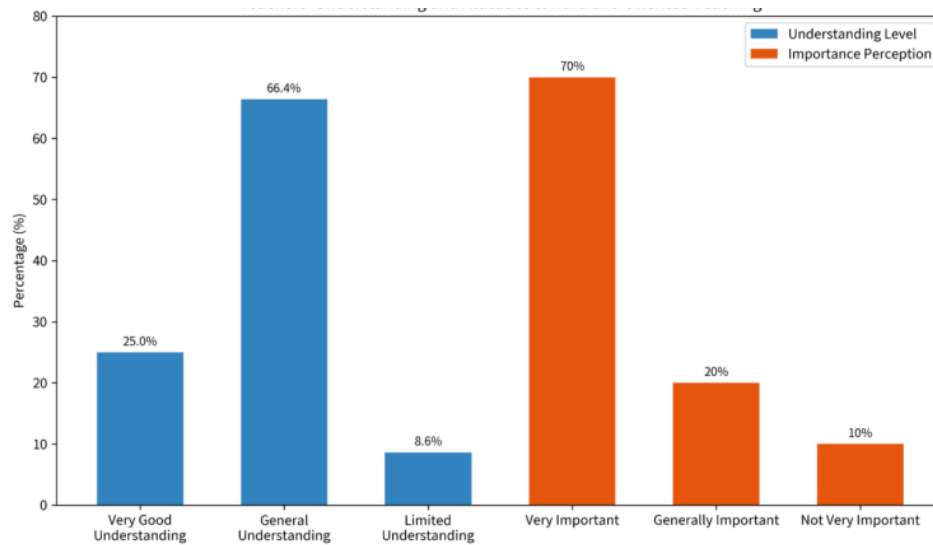


Figure 1. Teachers’ understanding and attitudes toward life-oriented teaching

4.1.2. Teaching implementation orientation: Focus on knowledge application in real life, with improvements in assignment design

71.2% of teachers believe that there is a “very strong” connection between teaching materials and real life, while 21.25% consider it “relatively strong.” Regarding the application of classroom knowledge to real life, 41.3% of teachers “often” pay attention, and 47.5% “sometimes” do. In terms of assigning life-oriented homework, 23.3% of teachers “often” do so, and 56.6% “sometimes” do (**Figure 2**). When it comes to encouraging students to answer questions by relating to real life, 43.3% of teachers “often” do this, and 50% “sometimes” do. It is evident that teachers generally emphasize the connection between teaching materials and real life, pay attention to the practical application of knowledge, and there has been an increase in life-oriented homework assignments under the “double reduction” policy.

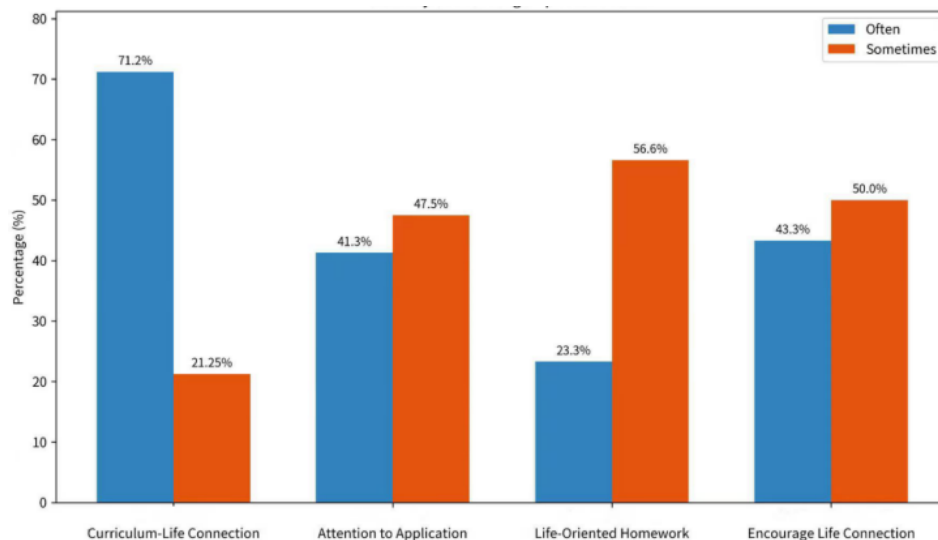


Figure 2. Tendency in teaching implementation

4.1.3. Classroom teaching behaviors: Lack of innovation in forms, with a persistent exam-oriented tendency

45% of teachers employ “group discussion learning”, 28.8% rely on “pure theoretical explanations”, 14% use “situational teaching methods”, and 8.8% incorporate “everyday life knowledge” (Figures 3 and 4). There is a lack of innovation in teaching forms, with situational teaching methods and the integration of everyday life knowledge not being widely adopted. Additionally, 70% of teachers focus their lectures on “key knowledge points for exams”, while only 12.5% emphasize the “application of life knowledge”, and 17.5% pay attention to “emotional attitudes and values.” Teaching remains predominantly exam-oriented. Furthermore, 43.7% of teachers obtain life-related materials from “the News Broadcast”, 27.5% from the “internet”, and only 18.5% through “observing students’ lives.” The teaching materials are distant from students’ lives, making it difficult to stimulate their interest.

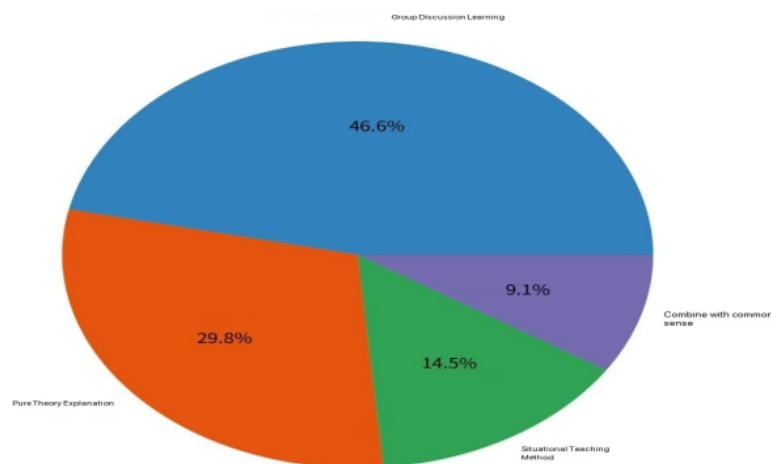


Figure 3. Distribution of teaching methods

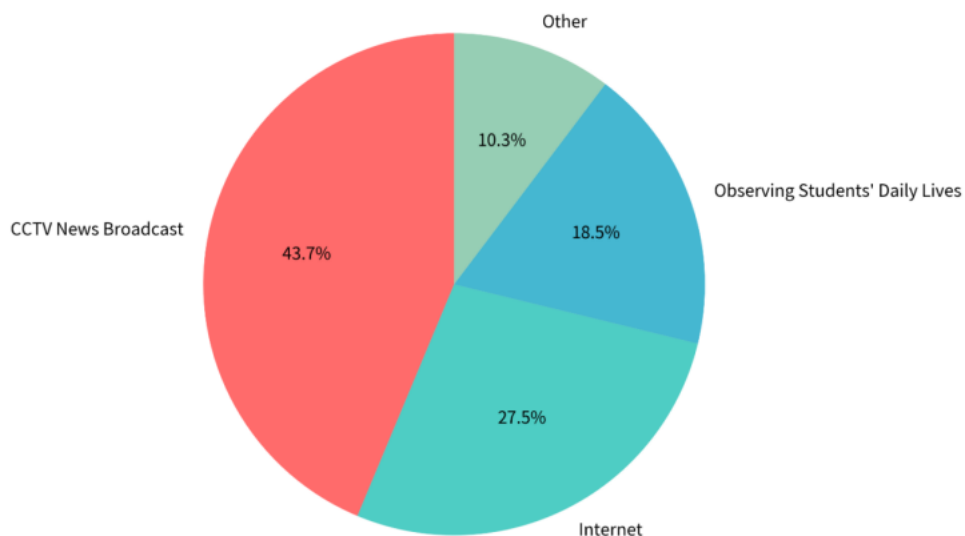


Figure 4. Teachers' sources for obtaining life-related teaching materials

4.1.4. Teacher training status: Training coverage is extensive, but application skills remain underdeveloped

100% of teachers have participated in “teaching observation sessions”, 90% have attended “demonstration classes by renowned teachers”, and 60% have taken part in “expert lectures” (Figures 5 and 6). While the training coverage is extensive, its professionalism is low. Additionally, 40% of teachers lack the “ability to create teaching scenarios”, 37.5% are deficient in “the ability to apply theoretical knowledge”, 20% struggle with “the ability to integrate life materials into teaching materials”, and only 2.5% lack “the ability to organize life-oriented practical activities.” Teachers exhibit insufficient capabilities in the detailed application of teaching methods.

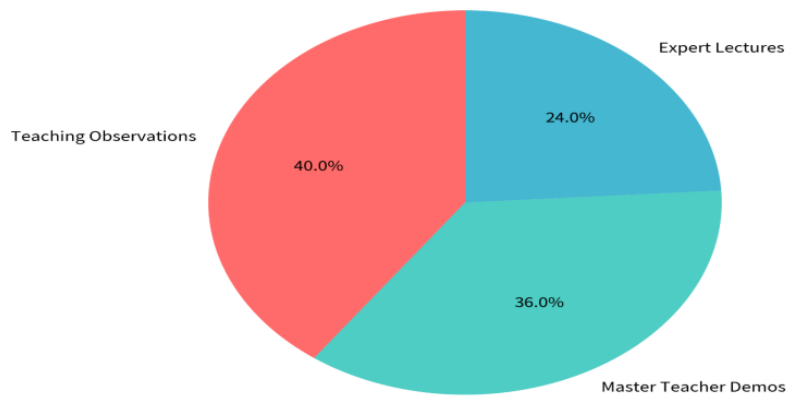


Figure 5. Teacher training participation rates

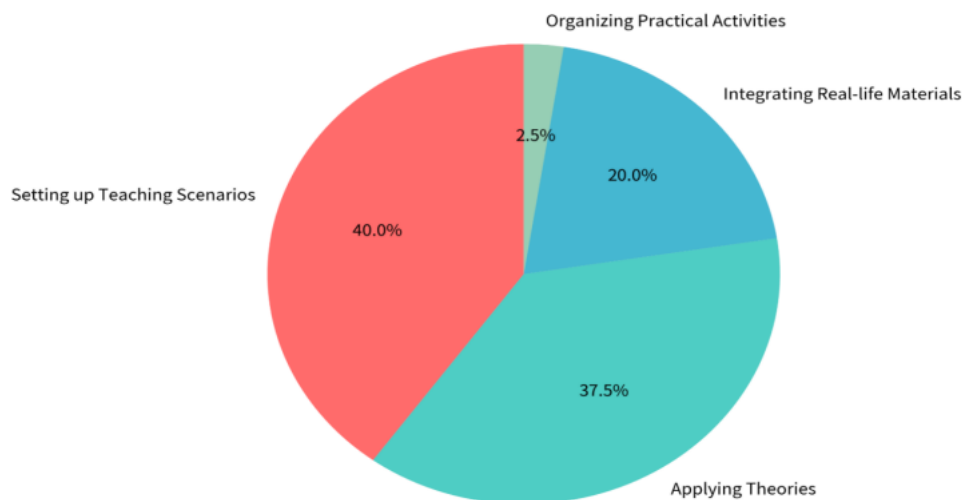


Figure 6. Teachers' skill gaps in life-oriented education

4.1.5. Implementation dilemmas in teaching: The exam-oriented system as the core obstacle, with multiple factors constraining progress

56.7% of teachers believe that the greatest difficulty lies in “the challenge of implementation under the exam-oriented background”, 23.3% attribute it to “students’ limited life experiences”, 16.7% cite “the difficulty

in finding life cases that align with the text”, and 3.3% mention “inadequate teaching facilities” (**Figure 7**). The exam-oriented education system and the performance-driven evaluation system are the primary obstacles.

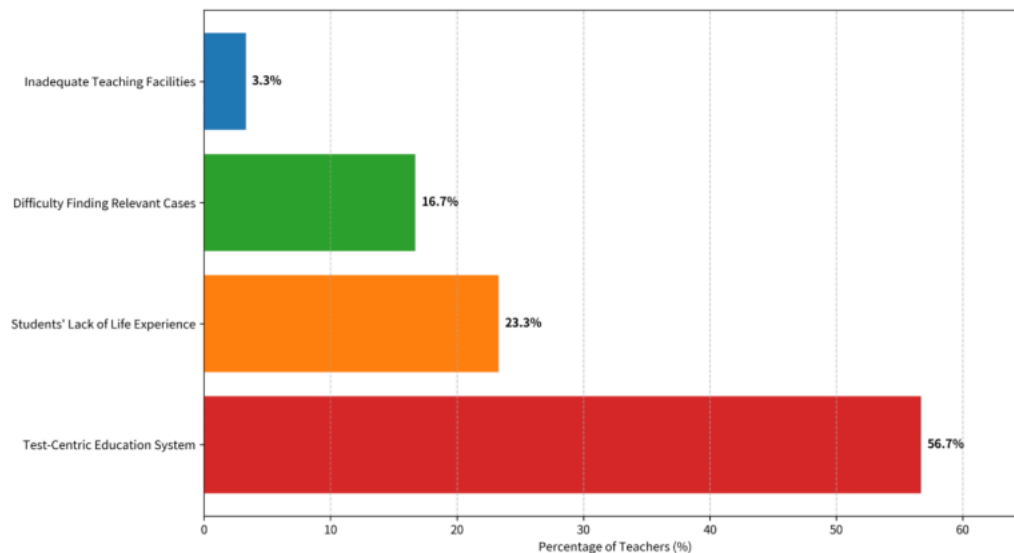


Figure 7. Challenges in implementing life-related teaching approaches

4.2. Findings from the interviews

During the interviews, most teachers endorsed the concept of life-oriented teaching and agreed with the idea that “Chinese language education originates from life.” They believed that teaching could be conducted by integrating life elements, guiding students to accumulate materials from their daily lives, and designing practical tasks. Some teachers had already made initial attempts: When introducing a lesson, they would use popular songs, trending news, or life-related videos to stimulate students’ interest. For example, they would use the scene of a school sports meet to introduce writing instruction for “Recording a Game.” In terms of homework assignments, they designed practical tasks such as “helping family members write a shopping list” or “recording family anecdotes.” However, the effectiveness of these assignments depended on parental cooperation and supervision, and their implementation was influenced by the level of family participation. When interpreting texts, teachers would guide students to empathize by relating to their own life experiences, such as drawing on their experiences of “arguing and then reconciling with friends” to help them understand the emotional changes of characters in the text. However, significant issues persist in practice: Teachers have a superficial understanding of life-based teaching, often limiting themselves to simple extensions of textbook content while lacking innovative designs that integrate students’ daily lives (such as after-school care activities or household chores). Teaching evaluations remain heavily exam-focused, neglecting assessments of students’ practical language skills in real-life contexts (such as oral communication and practical writing); Schools provide insufficient support, lacking targeted training while overloaded schedules and non-instructional tasks leave teachers no time to refine life-based teaching plans; Communication between schools and families is inadequate, with schools failing to fully convey the value of life-based teaching to parents. Some parents undervalue practical assignments, undermining the implementation of teaching outcomes.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1. Expand life-oriented materials to enrich teaching resources

Chinese language teaching should be firmly rooted in real life. Teachers should take the initiative to guide students in discovering the value of the Chinese language in everyday life and establish a bidirectional connection between “life” and “Chinese language.” When it comes to accumulating materials, teachers can instruct students to start from daily scenarios: observe the gestures and language used by traffic police to direct traffic on the way to and from school, the sales pitches of vendors in the wet market, and the conversations of elderly people in the community. These real-life people and scenarios can then be transformed into writing materials, which not only enrich the content of compositions but also enable students to compare and analyze textual characters during reading, thereby enhancing their reading comprehension and transferable skills. After studying descriptive texts such as “Jiuzhaigou Valley” and “Listening to the Springs at Dinghu Mountain”, in addition to having students introduce scenic spots to their parents as “family guides”, teachers can also extend practical tasks. For example, students can be asked to draw a “tourist map of local scenic spots” and write accompanying descriptions, or conduct a “survey of natural landscapes nearby” to document the plant changes and seasonal characteristics in parks and residential areas. In response to the phenomenon of non-standard character usage in society, organize the “Little Defenders of Characters” campaign, where students are grouped to inspect street billboards and shop names, recording and correcting misspelled characters. Regularly hold “Newspaper Reading Sessions”, encouraging students to read news and stories aloud to elderly residents in the community, thereby strengthening their language application skills through practice. Meanwhile, teachers need to screen and guide the materials collected by both teachers and students to prevent them from deviating from teaching objectives, ensuring that every piece of real-life material precisely serves the absorption and internalization of textbook knowledge.

5.2. Building a systematic and life-oriented teaching system

5.2.1. Set real-life teaching objectives

Guided by the core competency cultivation requirements outlined in the 2022 edition of the new curriculum standards, the concept of integrating real-life elements is incorporated into the design of teaching objectives, breaking free from the limitations of traditional “knowledge infusion.” Taking the example of “A Mother’s Deep Affection” from the fifth-grade volume of the Ministry-Edited Textbook, the text conveys profound familial love through descriptions of a mother supporting her child’s education amidst poverty. During teaching, objectives can be set around “appreciating familial love and mastering methods of character depiction”: begin by introducing the lesson with “sharing heartwarming little things family members have done for you”, to evoke students’ life experiences; then guide students to read the text aloud while relating it to their own experiences, enabling them to empathize with the author’s gratitude towards their mother; finally, have students imitate the descriptive techniques of appearance, language, and actions used in the text to write a paragraph about “My Family Member.” Through such objective design, the integration of knowledge instruction with real-life experiences is achieved, while also nurturing students’ emotional expression and humanistic qualities.

5.2.2. Innovative life-based teaching methods

Based on the characteristics of students at different academic levels, diverse teaching methods should be designed. In lower-grade teaching, given that the texts often revolve around everyday events, role-playing can be employed. For instance, when teaching “I Am a Little Bug”, students can assume the roles of a little bug, a

dung beetle, a mantis, and other characters. By integrating their observations of insects in real life, they can act out the content of the text through dialogues and movements, transforming abstract words into vivid scenes and thereby deepening their understanding and memory of the text. For middle and upper grades, scenario-based teaching methods can be utilized. For example, when teaching “Two Children Debate About the Sun” from the sixth-grade volume, a “campus debate competition” scenario can be created, with “the distance of the sun” as the debate topic. Students can be grouped to organize and present the viewpoints and evidence of the two children from the text, simulating the debate process and understanding the main theme of the article through critical thinking. Additionally, practical life-based activities can be conducted. For instance, in the teaching of “Oral Communication: Reporting the News”, students can first be guided to watch “News Broadcast” to learn the tone and structure of news reporting. Then, they can be grouped to collect life news such as interesting campus stories and good deeds in the community for classroom reporting. After the reporting, a “news summarization” session can be arranged, where other groups are required to summarize the core information, enhancing language organization and logical thinking skills through interaction.

5.2.3. Optimizing life-based evaluation methods

Break away from the “score-only” evaluation model and establish a diverse, life-oriented evaluation system. In terms of evaluation content, in addition to classroom performance and homework, practical activities such as speech contests, poetry recitations, and hand-copied newspaper designs should be incorporated, providing platforms for students with different strengths to showcase their abilities and comprehensively assess their overall Chinese language proficiency. Regarding evaluation methods, a combination of “written comments + incentives” should be adopted. For students’ practical achievements, specific comments should be used to highlight strengths and suggest areas for improvement, while boosting their confidence through methods such as awarding small stamps and selecting “Chinese Language Stars.” Peer evaluation and group mutual evaluation should also be introduced, allowing students to identify shortcomings and learn from each other’s strengths through mutual assessment. Furthermore, a home-school joint evaluation system should be implemented through channels such as WeChat groups and parent-teacher meetings. For instance, videos of students’ practical activities like “Family Tour Guide” and “Little Defenders of Characters” can be shared, enabling parents to participate in the evaluation process and form an educational synergy, making the evaluation more scientific and life-oriented.

5.3. Promoting the integration of life-based teaching with learning task clusters

The learning task clusters proposed in the 2022 edition of the new curriculum standards are highly aligned with the concept of life-oriented teaching, using real-life contexts as carriers and tasks as driving forces. Taking the teaching of “Brush Master Li” from the fifth-grade volume of the Ministry-Edited Textbook as an example, instruction can be designed around the thematic task cluster of “Folk Culture”: begin by introducing a real-life story of farmers in Kaihua manually making tofu to spark students’ interest in “folk craftsmanship” and create a life-oriented learning context; then, present the core task of “exploring the superb skills of Brush Master Li”, guiding students to read the text in small groups and underline key phrases describing his craftsmanship; after completing the task, organize students to stage a textbook drama, requiring them to incorporate their life experiences to portray Brush Master Li’s movements and expressions, thereby deepening their understanding of the character; next, propose an advanced task of “analyzing the role of Cao Xiaosan and learning the technique

of indirect description”, encouraging students to compare the text with their experiences of “bystanders” in real life to comprehend writing skills; finally, elevate the theme by urging students to pay attention to folk craftsmanship around them and assign homework on “popularizing folk cultural heritage”, such as interviewing local artisans and creating promotional posters for intangible cultural heritage. Throughout the teaching process, tasks are interconnected through life-oriented contexts, fulfilling the requirements of the task clusters while enabling students to acquire knowledge and enhance their abilities through real-life experiences, achieving “multiple gains from a single lesson.”

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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