

From Text to Task: The Transformation of Primary School Chinese Language Classroom Teaching under China's 2022 Curriculum Standards

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Abstract: In 2022, China's Ministry of Education issued new curriculum standards for the Chinese language subject, redefining its goal as four core competencies and reorganizing content into six learning task groups. Reviewing Chinese-language journal articles published between 2022 and 2025, this paper argues that the standards require a paradigm shift in primary school Chinese classroom teaching — from text-centered instruction to task-driven, competency-oriented learning — visible along four connected dimensions: objectives, content organization, the learning process, and evaluation. It synthesizes reported implementation pathways and discusses persistent challenges, including superficial task design, uneven teacher capacity, and the tension between integrated assessment and examination culture. The study is literature-based and reports no empirical data.

Keywords: primary Chinese language teaching; learning task groups; curriculum standards; classroom transformation; core competencies

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1. Introduction

The classroom is where curriculum reform either takes root or dissolves into paperwork. China's 2022 edition of the Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards for the Chinese language subject launched the most consequential attempt in two decades to change how the subject is taught^[1]. The document redefines the subject's goal as four core competencies — cultural confidence, language use, thinking ability, and aesthetic creativity — and replaces the old organization of content around knowledge points and text types with a framework of six learning task groups, and instructs teachers to create authentic situations, organize instruction around students' language practice, and integrate teaching, learning and assessment^[1].

Whether the document can change classrooms is another question. Post-2022 studies describe the ordinary primary Chinese classroom as still teacher-dominated: lessons move from one text to the next, students answer closed questions, and evaluation is carried out mainly through tests^[2]. Practice has not caught up with the competency-oriented language of the standards; the deeper problem is the persistence of an old teaching logic^[2, 3]. This paper reviews recent Chinese-language research, asking what teaching logic the learning task groups imply, along which dimensions the transformation becomes visible, and what obstacles stand in the way. Using a literature research method, it synthesizes CNKI-indexed journal articles published between 2022 and 2025; no empirical data are reported. Section 2 outlines the policy context, Section 3 reviews the literature, Section 4 develops an analytical framework, Section 5 discusses pathways and challenges, and Section 6 concludes.

2. Policy Context and Theoretical Foundations

2.1 The new curriculum standards and the learning task groups

The 2022 standards differ from their predecessors in three structural ways: the subject goal is expressed as four core competencies rather than lists of knowledge and skills; content is organized mainly through six learning task groups across the four school stages^[1]; and the standards explicitly require the integration of teaching, learning and assessment^[1]. Table 1 presents the six task groups. The three changes are connected: because the goal is competency, content must be organized as tasks; because tasks unfold over time, evaluation must be embedded in the process. The standards thus describe a coherent alternative to the traditional lesson.

Table 1. The six learning task groups in the 2022 Chinese curriculum standards

Task group	Central concern
Language accumulation and organization	Recognizing characters, building vocabulary and organizing language materials; the foundational task running through all school stages.
Practical reading and communication	Reading practical texts and communicating for real-life purposes.
Literary reading and creative expression	Reading literary works, experiencing emotion and beauty, and expressing oneself creatively.
Critical reading and expression	Reading to compare, infer and evaluate, and expressing reasoned views.
Whole-book reading	Reading complete books, and developing reading plans, strategies and habits.
Cross-disciplinary learning	Drawing on other subjects to solve language-related problems in real situations.

2.2 Theoretical foundations invoked in the literature

Researchers commonly interpret the task groups through constructivism, situated cognition and task-based language teaching, arguing that language ability develops through activities serving a real communicative purpose^[4, 5]. Text knowledge remains important but becomes usable knowledge exercised while solving problems and producing something of one's own^[4, 6]. A second strand links the task groups to learning progression: each group should be a sequence of tasks deepening from simpler to more demanding cognitive work^[7]; in the critical reading and expression group, students move from comparing information to evaluating arguments to expressing reasoned judgments^[6, 7]. These foundations, however, are sometimes invoked loosely, without specifying how they translate into classroom moves^[8, 9].

3. Literature Review

3.1 Learning task groups and the reconstruction of the classroom

One cluster of post-2022 articles argues that the classroom should be reorganized around task sequences spanning several class periods and cutting across reading, writing and oral communication^[2, 10]. Wang Qin describes unit-level designs connected to a shared theme^[10]; Chen Xuehong turns a whole unit into a chain of interrelated tasks^[4]; Li Yi links reading, retelling, performing and rewriting in one continuous fairy-tale sequence^[6]. A second cluster concerns evaluation: Gao Wu argues that classroom evaluation should shift from judging answers to observing task performance, combining teacher, peer and self-evaluation^[2]. A further disagreement concerns single-text teaching: some warn that tasks should not dissolve the careful reading of texts^[3, 4], while others welcome the reduced dominance of text explanation^[6, 10].

3.2 Big-unit teaching as the main implementation vehicle

The fastest-growing strand concerns big-unit teaching, the natural vehicle for task groups because both demand content organized as coherent wholes^[11, 12]. Shen Ming plans the unit backward from competency goals^[12]; Wang Wei aligns unit goals, language elements, tasks and assessments^[13]; Xue Rufang, Liu Xiaoxi and Xu Feng, and Li Jiali explore unit development more broadly^[14, 15, 8]. A related line argues that unit-level planning is key to implementing the textbook's language elements^[3]. The evidentiary base is weak, however: most contributions are design proposals or single-case reflections that rarely compare outcomes or follow students over time^[12, 14, 8], and teachers receive little tested guidance for translating between the textbook's unit-and-element structure and the standards' task-group structure^[3, 11].

3.3 Teaching, learning and assessment integration

The third strand concerns the integration of teaching, learning and assessment, required explicitly by the

standards^[1] and widely regarded as the hardest part of the reform, attacking evaluation as a terminal event. Feng Jiejue designs assessment tasks alongside learning tasks^[16]; Duan Benru defines evidence of unit goals before tasks and criteria^[17]; Hong Ruimei and Yao Caixia report implementation in specific task groups and big units^[18, 19]; Yao Yao makes criteria visible to students before tasks begin^[20]. Three problems recur: teachers lack training in writing quality criteria^[16, 18]; process evaluation is hard to manage in large classes^[2, 19]; and school accountability rests on standardized tests, pulling teachers between integrated assessment and examination preparation^[19, 20].

3.4 Whole-book reading and cross-disciplinary learning

Whole-book reading requires complete books rather than excerpts; researchers propose strategies of interest stimulation, guided sustained reading and sharing^[21, 22]. Li Yan arranges tasks so that reading leads to thinking and thinking to expression^[23], and Wu Lianhui judges whole-book reading by its contribution to core competencies^[9]. Cross-disciplinary learning asks students to solve problems drawing on several subjects, with Chinese as the home base^[5, 24]; Yuan Li and Zou Xi keep reading and writing at its center^[24, 25]. This literature is younger and thinner than the big-unit strand^[5, 21].

3.5 Critical assessment of the literature and the research gap

Three observations summarize this work: it is rich in design ideas but thin in evidence; it is teacher-facing, rarely examining what students experience; and it leaves workload and teacher evaluation outside the frame^[2, 12, 16, 19, 20], silent on whether the new arrangements serve struggling students. The gap most relevant here is conceptual: the strands — task groups, big units, assessment integration, whole-book reading, cross-disciplinary learning — are usually discussed separately, yet they express a single shift in teaching logic, made explicit in the next section.

4. The Paradigm Shift of Classroom Teaching: An Analytical Framework

4.1 Objectives: from knowledge mastery to core competencies

Under the old logic, the goal of a lesson was formulated as knowledge and skill targets: mastering characters, grasping the meaning of a text, learning a technique. The new standards displace these targets with competencies that are not accumulated but exercised^[1]. Objectives should therefore be expressed as what students can do with language^[3, 12]: the goal of a descriptive writing unit is not to learn the technique of capturing details but to produce a vivid description for a real audience, which requires a task, a situation and an audience^[12, 13]. This is why the literatures converge on backward planning — goals first, then evidence, then tasks^[12, 17] — and why language elements become resources for building competencies rather than endpoints of instruction^[3, 13].

4.2 Content organization: from single texts to task sequences and units

The second dimension concerns content. The traditional classroom follows the textbook, one text per lesson; the new logic groups texts under a theme or language element and cuts tasks across them^[4, 10, 11]. The single text does not disappear but becomes one resource within a larger task^[3, 4]. Two mechanisms make this work: the unit as the planning unit, with goals, elements and the task chain planned before any lesson^[11, 12, 13]; and the task as the connecting device, linking reading to writing and class work to outside reading^[6, 10]. The most successful designs give the task sequence a cumulative logic — each task produces what the next needs — so students experience the unit as a journey rather than a series of stops^[6, 17].

4.3 Learning process: from listening to authentic situated practice

The third dimension is the learning process. The traditional classroom is largely receptive: students listen and answer questions with known answers. The new logic inverts this: students learn by doing — reading whole books, discussing, performing, writing for real purposes — inside situations that give language activity meaning^[2, 4, 21]. Authenticity matters in a psychological sense: the situation must be real for students and give them a reason to speak and write^[5, 25]. The teacher's role changes accordingly: authority shifts from explaining texts to designing tasks, scaffolding activity and observing performance^[2, 16]. Because the design work moves before and around the lesson, a

teacher who no longer lectures may appear to do less when the work has changed in kind^[2, 14].

4.4 Evaluation: from terminal tests to integrated, process-oriented assessment

The fourth dimension concerns evaluation. The old logic treats it as an event after learning — unit tests, final examinations, scores that sort students. The new standards call for evaluation embedded in the learning process, so that teaching, learning and assessment form one system^[1, 16, 18]; criteria are set before tasks begin, evidence is collected while observing task performance, and feedback adjusts the next round of teaching^[16, 17, 20]. This dimension is the least developed in practice^[18, 19]: formative assessment of language tasks requires judgments harder to standardize than a multiple-choice score, and teachers get little training in making them consistently^[16, 20]. The reform also collides with the examination system: integrated classroom assessment will often yield to test preparation^[2, 19], implying that assessment and examination reform cannot be separated^[19, 20].

5. Implementation Pathways and Persistent Challenges

5.1 Pathways reported in the literature

Across the studies, recommended pathways form five moves. Task design: units should be planned as chains of interconnected tasks, each specifying a situation, an audience, a product and the competence it exercises^[4, 6, 17]. Situation creation: situations should be psychologically authentic and connected to the text^[5, 24, 25]. Unit integration: teachers should align language elements with unit goals and organize texts, activities and evaluation around the unit^[3, 11, 13]. Assessment design: criteria should be shared before tasks begin, with evidence collected through observation, products and reflection^[16, 17, 20]. Professional development: the new logic changes the teacher's core competence, so schools need sustained, practice-based training rather than one-off lectures^[12, 14, 19].

5.2 Persistent challenges

Four challenges persist. Formalism: the new vocabulary is adopted without the new practice — classrooms labeled task groups in which students still answer closed questions, decorative situations, integrated assessment that is one more score^[2, 4, 19]. Teacher capacity: task-driven teaching requires deeper curriculum knowledge, stronger classroom management and quicker judgment of student work^[2, 14]; frontline teachers, especially in rural and under-resourced schools, often lack support, and the reform may widen gaps between schools^[8, 12, 19]. Structure: as long as evaluation of teachers and students depends on test scores, classroom assessment remains subordinate to test preparation^[2, 19, 20]. Subject-specific tension: Chinese language education has traditionally valued slow, attentive reading of model texts, and several scholars caution that activities should serve the text rather than replace it^[3, 4, 9]. How to keep the literary text at the center while reorganizing the classroom around tasks is a question the literature has posed but not answered.

6. Conclusion

This paper reviewed recent Chinese-language research on primary school Chinese teaching under the 2022 standards and argued that the reform is a paradigm shift in teaching logic — from text instruction and knowledge transmission to task-driven, competency-oriented learning. The shift is visible along four connected dimensions: objectives move from knowledge mastery to core competencies; content moves from single texts to task sequences and units; the learning process moves from listening to situated practice; and evaluation moves from terminal tests to integrated assessment. These are one reform seen from four angles.

The review also identified the main obstacles — superficial adoption of the new vocabulary, uneven teacher capacity, the weight of examination culture, and the unresolved tension between tasks and close reading. These are not arguments against the reform but warnings that implementation is a long, institutional process. Future research should move from proposals to evidence through longitudinal classroom studies. For teachers, the message is consistent: the reform asks them not to abandon the text or the subject, but to reorganize both around tasks in which students use language for real purposes, and its success depends on the coherence of goals, tasks and assessment

within the unit.

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