

Progressive Design and Evaluation of Primary School Chinese Homework Based on Core Competencies

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Abstract: In the context of educational reform oriented towards core competencies, primary school Chinese homework, as a key carrier connecting classroom teaching and after-school practice, needs to break through the limitations of traditional fragmentation and mechanization in its design and evaluation, and move towards a transformation towards progression and competency-based learning. Based on the requirements of core competencies in the “Compulsory Education Chinese Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)” and combined with the theory of learning progression, this article constructs a three-in-one primary school Chinese homework progression system of “goal - task - evaluation”: in terms of goal positioning, it anchors the four core competencies of cultural confidence, language application, thinking ability, and aesthetic creation, and refines the progression gradient for different learning stages; in task design, it takes “basic consolidation - practical application - migration and innovation” as the logical main line, combines five major areas of literacy, writing, reading, writing exercises, oral communication, and comprehensive learning, and develops a contextualized and structured homework chain; in evaluation implementation, it integrates process evaluation and performance evaluation, adopts evaluation tools with multiple subjects and multi-dimensional indicators, and realizes “promoting learning and teaching through evaluation”. The research aims to provide an operable homework design framework for primary school Chinese teachers and promote the implementation of core competencies in after-school learning.

Keywords: Core competencies, Primary school Chinese, Progressive homework design, Homework evaluation, Learning progression.

1. Introduction

The “Compulsory Education Chinese Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)” clearly states that the Chinese curriculum needs to cultivate students’ cultural confidence, language use, thinking ability, and aesthetic creation, emphasizing the importance of “focusing on language use in real situations and guiding students to develop their skills through practice.” Homework, as an extension and expansion of Chinese language teaching, is not only an important way for students to consolidate knowledge and develop abilities, but also a key basis for teachers to diagnose teaching effectiveness and adjust teaching strategies. However, there are still many problems in the current design of primary school Chinese homework: first, the goals are vague, focusing mostly on shallow knowledge such as word recognition and text recitation, neglecting the comprehensive cultivation of core competencies; second, there is a lack of progression, with homework of the same or even different educational stages having similar difficulty levels and types, failing to reflect the continuity of students’ cognitive development; third, evaluation is single, with most using “right or wrong” and “completion degree” as criteria, neglecting to pay attention to the process of homework, thinking quality, and performance of competencies.

The theory of learning progression provides an important approach to addressing the aforementioned issues. This theory emphasizes that “students’ understanding and application of a core concept or ability demonstrate a coherent and gradually deepening development path over a longer time span.” By integrating learning progression with the design of Chinese language homework, homework can become a ladder for the development of literacy, rather than repetitive training of knowledge. Based on this, this article, grounded in the orientation of core competencies, systematically constructs a

primary school Chinese language homework progression system from three dimensions: goal positioning, task design, and evaluation implementation, providing theoretical support and practical reference for frontline teaching.

2. Theoretical Basis for the Progressive Design of Primary School Chinese Homework Oriented towards Core Competencies

2.1 The Connotation of Core Competencies and the Value Reconstruction of Chinese Homework

The core competencies in Chinese language education refer to the “correct values, essential character traits, and key abilities” that students gradually develop through their language learning journey. These four dimensions are interconnected and form an organic whole: language application serves as the foundation, thinking ability is the core, aesthetic creation represents a sublimation, and cultural confidence is the soul. Traditional assignments often oversimplify “language application” into mechanical exercises like memorizing words and sentences, but assignments aligned with core competencies aim to reshape values. They use language application as a medium to integrate thinking training, aesthetic experiences, and cultural heritage. For instance, in literacy assignments, “drawing a map of the evolution of Chinese characters” not only reinforces character recognition (language application) but also cultivates logical thinking (thinking ability) and allows students to appreciate the culture of Chinese characters (cultural confidence).

2.2 Learning Advanced Theories and Designing Graded Chinese Homework

The theory of learning progression originated in the field of

science education and has been widely applied in subjects such as Chinese and mathematics. Its core elements include “starting point of progression, end point of progression, progression variable, key nodes, and performance expectations” [5]. In primary school Chinese homework, the “starting point of progression” refers to the current cognitive level and existing experience of students; the “end point of progression” refers to the core competency goals of the learning stage; the “progression variable” can be set as “language proficiency”, “depth of thinking”, “degree of cultural understanding”, etc.; the “key nodes” are the “ladders” connecting different levels, which need to be reflected through specific homework tasks. For example, the progression of reading homework can be divided into three levels: basic level (extracting explicit information from text), development level (analyzing text structure and emotion), and advanced level (evaluating text value and applying it in a transferable way). The tasks at each level form a gradient, gradually promoting the improvement of students’ reading literacy [6].

2.3 The Principle of “consistency in teaching, learning, and assessment” and the Guiding Role of Homework Evaluation

“Consistency in teaching, learning, and evaluation” emphasizes the unity of teaching objectives, learning tasks, and evaluation criteria [7]. Homework evaluation oriented towards core competencies needs to break through the “results-oriented” approach and shift towards “emphasizing both process and results”. It should not only focus on the results of homework (such as essays and posters), but also on the process of students completing homework (such as collaborative discussion and information gathering). It should not only be based on preset standards (such as curriculum requirements), but also respect students’ individualized performance (such as unique expression perspectives). The ultimate goal of evaluation is not to “distinguish between good and bad”, but to “diagnose problems and promote development”. Through feedback, it helps students clarify their direction for improvement and helps teachers optimize homework design.

3. Framework for the Progressive Design of Primary School Chinese Homework Based on Core Competencies

Based on the content of primary school Chinese curriculum (character recognition and writing, reading, writing, oral communication, and comprehensive learning), a “three-dimensional four-level” progressive homework design framework is constructed: “three-dimensional” refers to the three key dimensions of core competencies (language use, thinking ability, and cultural understanding), and “four-level” refers to the four progressive levels of homework (basic consolidation level, practical application level, transfer innovation level, and competency integration level), each level corresponding to different task types and competency manifestations.

3.1 Literacy and Writing Homework: from “Memorization” to “Cultural Understanding”

Learning to read and write is the focus of the first learning stage. The progression of homework should follow the logic of “recognizing the shape of characters - understanding the meaning of characters - perceiving culture”, avoiding mechanical copying.

The foundation consolidation stage (grades 1-2) focuses on “accurate recognition and memorization of character forms”, and task design needs to be fun and contextualized. For example, “Pinyin literacy challenge game” (circle the new words in the text based on their pinyin), “family literacy detective” (find and record the learned Chinese characters on food packaging and road signs). The evaluation focus of this stage is “accuracy of literacy” and “standardization of writing”, and a “star rating evaluation form” can be used (accurate recognition and reading gets ★, standardized writing gets ★★).

The practical application level (grades 2-3) focuses on “flexible use of word meanings”, and task design needs to be related to daily life. For example, “Fill in the blanks with polyphonic context” (the different pronunciations and meanings of “row” in “bank” and “walking”), “Distinguish synonyms and make cards” (compare the differences between “look”, “look”, and “stare” and give examples). The focus of evaluation at this stage is on “accuracy in understanding word meanings” and “appropriateness of word usage”. This can be achieved through “peer evaluation+teacher feedback”, such as “being able to accurately distinguish synonyms and provide examples to illustrate ★★★”.

The migration innovation stage (grades 3-4) focuses on “Chinese character thinking training”, and task design needs to incorporate logic and aesthetics. For example, “Exploring the rules of pictophonetic characters” (organizing words such as “qing, qing, qing”, analyzing the characteristics of the shape side representing meaning and the sound side representing sound), “Creating Chinese character calligraphy works” (selecting favorite poems, writing in a standardized font and decorating). The evaluation focus of this stage is “ability to summarize rules” and “aesthetic expression”, which can be achieved through “work display + self-explanation”, such as “being able to discover the rules of pictophonetic characters gets ★★★, and the calligraphy work is beautiful and creative gets ★★★★”.

The integration level of literacy (grades 4-6) focuses on “cultural inheritance and understanding”, and task design requires interdisciplinary integration. For example, “Special Research on Chinese Character Culture” (exploring the evolution and meaning of the character “fu”, and making handwritten reports based on Spring Festival customs), “Surname Culture Investigation Report” (investigating the origin of one’s own surname, celebrity stories, and writing a brief report). At this stage, the focus of evaluation is on “cultural understanding depth” and “research ability”, which can be evaluated through “outcome defense+portfolio evaluation”, such as “investigation report with detailed content ★★★, able to interpret in combination with cultural background ★★★” [8].

3.2 Reading Assignment: Advancing from “Information

Extraction” to “Critical Evaluation”

Reading is the core area for cultivating thinking ability and aesthetic creativity. The progression of homework should follow the logic of “text comprehension - analysis and appreciation - transfer application”, avoiding the single mode of “content repetition”.

The foundation consolidation stage (grades 1-2) focuses on “explicit information extraction”, and task design needs to be intuitive. For example, “text illustration matching” (writing corresponding text sentences for the illustrations of “Little Tadpoles Looking for Their Mother”), “story character card making” (recording the characteristics of the characters in “The Fox and the Crow”). The evaluation focus of this stage is “information extraction completeness”, which can be assessed using “teacher inspection + parent feedback”, such as “accurately matching illustrations and sentences gets ★★”.

The practical application stage (grades 2-3) focuses on “text structure and sentiment analysis,” with task design requiring structuralization. For example, “fairy tale flowchart drawing” (combing the plot development of “The Little Match Girl”), “character emotion change record table” (recording the psychological changes of Sanna in “The Poor”). The evaluation focus of this stage is “structural analysis ability” and “sentiment understanding accuracy”, which can be evaluated using “chart evaluation + classroom sharing”, such as “flowchart logic clarity gets ★★★, able to explain the reasons for emotional changes gets ★★★”.

The migration innovation stage (grades 3-5) focuses on “text appreciation and association”, and task design needs to be open-ended. For example, “poetry rewriting and recitation” (rewriting “Looking at the Waterfall of Mount Lu” into modern poetry and reciting it), “continuation of the novel ending” (continuing the story of Vanka in “Vanka”). The evaluation focus of this stage is “aesthetic appreciation ability” and “imagination ability”, and can be evaluated using “work evaluation + recitation scoring”, such as “rewriting conforms to the original poem’s artistic conception, gets ★★★★, recitation has emotion, gets ★★★★”.

The literacy integration stage (grades 5-6) focuses on “critical evaluation and transfer application”, and task design needs to be life-oriented. For example, “news commentary writing” (reading news about “school bullying”, expressing your own views and making suggestions), “cross-text comparative study” (comparing the differences between the original novel and TV series of “Journey to the West”, analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of the adaptation). The evaluation focus of this stage is “critical thinking” and “transfer application ability”, which can be evaluated using “comment scoring + group debate”, such as “clear viewpoints, sufficient arguments get ★★★★★, able to connect with real life get ★★★★★”[9].

3.3 The Progression of Writing Assignments from “Smooth Sentences” to “Personal Expression”

Exercises are a comprehensive reflection of language use and thinking ability. The progression of homework should follow

the logic of “fragment practice - chapter writing - individual creation”, avoiding the rigid pattern of “formulaic writing”.

The foundation consolidation stage (grades 1-2) focuses on “standard expression of sentences”, and task design needs to be interesting. For example, “writing sentences based on pictures” (describing pictures using the sentence pattern of “who is doing what where”), “diary fragment recording” (recording interesting events of the day in one or two sentences). The evaluation focus of this stage is “sentence fluency” and “punctuation correctness”, which can be evaluated using “teacher’s correction + star evaluation”, such as “sentence fluency gets ★, punctuation correctness gets ★”.

The practical application stage (grades 2-3) focuses on “complete text structure” and task design needs to be contextualized. For example, “letter writing” (write a letter to a pen pal in the distance, introducing your school), “observation diary” (observe plant growth for a week and record changes). The evaluation focus at this stage is “structural integrity” and “content authenticity”, and can be evaluated using “model essay comparison + modification suggestions”, such as “letter format is correct, get ★★, content is specific, get ★★★”.

The migration innovation stage (grades 3-5) focuses on “expressing individuality” and requires open task design. For example, “imaginary composition” (writing a unique experience based on the topic of “If I were a bird”) and “expository writing creation” (selecting a favorite toy and introducing its functions and gameplay). The evaluation focus of this stage is “creativity” and “accuracy of explanation”, and can be achieved through “peer evaluation + self-correction”, such as “unique imagination gets ★★★★, clear explanation gets ★★★★”.

Literacy integration stage (grades 5-6): Focus on “depth of thought and cultural connotation”, and task design needs to be themed. For example, “cultural prose writing” (with the topic of “hometown traditional festivals”, incorporating custom descriptions and personal feelings), “argumentative writing” (discussing around the “meaning of reading”, citing famous quotes as evidence). The evaluation focus of this stage is “depth of thought” and “cultural connotation”, and can adopt “excellent work commentary + publication display”, such as “profound viewpoints get ★★★★★, rich cultural elements get ★★★★★” [10].

4. An Advanced Evaluation System for Primary School Chinese Homework Based on Core Competencies

Homework evaluation is an important part of advanced design, and it is necessary to build an evaluation system with “multiple subjects, multi-dimensional indicators, and various methods” to ensure the scientific and developmental nature of the evaluation.

4.1 Diversified Evaluation Subjects: From “Teacher-led” to “Multi-party Participation”

Break through the traditional “teacher-only evaluation” mode,

introduce student self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and parent evaluation, and form a “three-dimensional evaluation community”:

Self-assessment by students. Guide students to reflect on the process of completing assignments against the advanced standards. For example, after completing a reading assignment, they can fill out a “self-assessment form” (“I can extract text information: completely achieved basically achieved not achieved” and “I can put forward my own viewpoints: completely achieved basically achieved not achieved”), to cultivate self-monitoring skills.

Peer review. Organize group discussions and focus on “strengths + suggestions”. For example, in peer review of writing, peers need to point out “the strength of this essay is the vivid description of details, and the suggestion is to add psychological activity descriptions”, cultivating cooperation and critical thinking.

Parent evaluation: Invite parents to participate in the evaluation of practical assignments, such as recording “whether the child actively shares reading feelings” and “whether they can relate their experiences to life” after a “family reading sharing session”, to achieve home-school collaboration [11].

4.2 Multi-dimensional Evaluation Indicators: from “result-oriented” to “literacy-oriented”

Based on the four dimensions of core competencies, we have developed a multi-dimensional evaluation index for “language use, thinking ability, aesthetic creation, and cultural understanding”, and refined it into operable scoring points. Taking the homework assignment of “hometown customs survey report” for fifth grade as an example, the evaluation index is as follows:

Evaluation dimension	Key points for scoring	Excellent (4-5 points)	Good (2-3 points)	To be improved (0-1 point)
Language use	The report language is standardized and clear	The language is fluent, the structure is complete, and there are no grammatical errors	The language is basically fluent, the structure is relatively complete, and there are occasional grammatical errors	The language is not fluent, the structure is chaotic, and there are many grammatical errors
Thinking ability	The survey method is scientific and the analysis is in-depth	Use various survey methods (interviews, questionnaires, etc.) to analyze the cultural reasons behind customs	Adopt a survey method to analyze the content of customs in a simple way	The survey method is not specified, and only the customary phenomena are listed
Aesthetic creation	The report is presented in a Creative format	Use a combination of text and images, handmade Posters, and other forms to create an aesthetically pleasing design	Use text + simple images, with a clean Design	It is only a text record without design sense
Cultural Understanding	Understand the cultural connotation of customs	Be able to explain the significance of customs in combination with historical background and express cultural identity	Be able to explain the basic meaning of customs	Only describing the customary process without cultural understanding

4.3 Multiple Evaluation Methods: From “Paper and Pencil Evaluation” to “Performance Evaluation”

Choose appropriate evaluation methods based on the type of homework to achieve the combination of “quantification and quality, process and result”. Process evaluation uses “homework portfolios” to collect students’ homework achievements at different stages (such as literacy cards, essay drafts, survey reports), recording the trajectory of progress; through “classroom observation record forms” to record students’ performance in completing homework (such as participation in group discussions, initiative in data collection). Performance evaluation focuses on practical and creative homework, using the method of “achievement display + on-site performance”. For example, in oral communication homework, evaluate students’ expression ability through “theme speech competition”; in comprehensive learning homework, evaluate students’ research ability and cooperation ability through “project defense” [12]. Incremental evaluation focuses on students’ “progress amplitude” rather than “absolute level”. For example, comparing students’ early and end-of-term exercises, if they improve from “unclear sentences” to “clear sentences with detailed descriptions”, even if they do not achieve “excellent”, they should be given recognition to stimulate motivation for progress.

5. Practical Reflection and Outlook

The following issues should be considered in the progressive design and evaluation of primary school Chinese homework oriented towards core competencies: First, “appropriate progression” is essential to avoid students becoming discouraged due to overly rapid progression or losing interest due to overly slow progression. Dynamic adjustments should be made based on students’ learning situations. Second, “individual differences” should be taken into account by allowing students to choose the difficulty of their homework based on their own levels. For example, the same reading homework can be set as “basic questions (required) + improvement questions (optional)” to achieve “a minimum guarantee and no upper limit”. Third, “home-school collaboration” is important to guide parents to understand the value of progressive homework through parent meetings, homework guides, and other methods, avoiding excessive intervention or neglect.

Future research can further explore three aspects: first, the advanced design of interdisciplinary homework, such as “natural observation diary” for “Chinese + Science” and “poetry with painting” for “Chinese + Art”, to promote the integrated development of literacy; second, the development of digital homework, using information technology (such as online collaboration platforms, AI grading tools) to improve the efficiency of homework design and evaluation; third, the connection between homework advancement and academic quality standards, making homework an important supplement to academic quality monitoring.

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