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# Exploring Educational Advocacy Based on Paulo Freire's Principles Teaching Transformation and Emerging Educational Trends in the Context of the New Curriculum Standards

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## Abstract

*In the context of the new curriculum standards, achieving high-quality development in schools requires a multidimensional approach. It encompasses defining educational objectives, restructuring pedagogical paradigms, curriculum ideologies, and empowering educators. This study investigates issues in 'enhancing school quality' in Xiaoshan's southern region through focused areas:*

### *1. School Management Planning:*

- Clarifying educational visions aligned with the new standards.*
- Building adaptable curriculum frameworks to cultivate core competencies.*

### *2. Faculty Development:*

- Prioritizing continuous professional growth and training.*
- Encouraging collaborative learning communities for educators.*

### *3. Enhancing School Quality:*

- Strengthening subject proficiency through improved teaching methods.*
- Embracing innovative teaching practices to stimulate student engagement.*

### *4. Elevating Educational Quality:*

- Implementing diverse teaching approaches centered on student engagement.*
- Constructing a comprehensive evaluation system beyond academic metrics.*

*By integrating these strategies, schools can systematically reform educational ideologies, curriculum design, and teaching methodologies. This comprehensive approach aims to elevate educational standards and fulfill the objectives of 'enhancing school quality.'*

**Keywords:** *Curriculum Development, Teacher Professional Growth, Subject Proficiency Enhancement, Educational Quality Assessment, Innovative Pedagogical Practices*

## I. Introduction

In the era of globalization, educational reform and transformation have become focal points in the field of education (McGinn, 1997). Zajda's (2020) research indicates that educational reform is a relatively complex process, requiring appropriate adjustments and adaptations based on different eras' backgrounds and educational environments. With the continuous deepening of economic globalization, the demands for talent and quality in the labor market have increased significantly (Zhong & Jiang, 2004). To meet the needs of societal development, many countries worldwide have

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initiated new curriculum reforms, one significant direction being the shift from emphasizing knowledge transmission to emphasizing skill development (Luo, 2017).

Taking China as an example, the new curriculum reform emphasizes the transformation of educational concepts and the implementation of quality education, enabling students to acquire the necessary knowledge, abilities, and qualities essential for survival and development (Hu, 2017). In this context, education must undergo an overhaul to meet the requirements of competency-oriented new curricula. Traditional teaching tends to overly emphasize knowledge transmission, while the new curriculum standards emphasize the cultivation of abilities (Zhu, 2006). Across various countries, education reforms emphasize nurturing students' core competencies, and China is currently in a historical period transitioning from traditional education to competency-based education (Zheng, 2013). Hence, there's a strong emphasis on cultivating students as lifelong learners, focusing on learning interests, methods, and social responsibility (Yu, 2006). Paulo Freire advocates for education as a dialogical process, known as Dialogical Education. He emphasizes the vital importance of equal communication between teachers and students. He highlights that teachers should not be authorities imparting knowledge but should engage in equal dialogue with students, respecting their experiences and perspectives, assisting in their development of critical thinking. Additionally, attention should be given to students' cultural and social backgrounds. Education should not strip students of their cultural identities; rather, it should integrate cultural elements to establish a positive learning environment and encourage practical learning, enabling a deeper understanding of knowledge and skills through theoretical applications (Torres, 2014; Ebrahimi et al, 2022).

The Ministry of Education issued the 'Compulsory Education Curriculum Scheme and Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)' in April 2022 (hereafter referred to as the 'New Curriculum Standards'), which clearly defines the new objectives for compulsory education, namely, 'putting nurturing people first, implementing the fundamental task of moral education' (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2022). Therefore, according to Paulo Freire's educational advocacy, achieving competency-based education requires a transformation in teaching concepts and methods. To realize the transformation of teaching in the context of the New Curriculum Standards from knowledge transmission to skill cultivation, reforms and innovations are necessary in teaching content, methods, and evaluation, in order to truly achieve the goals of quality education.

To support the balanced and high-quality development of education in the southern region of Xiaoshan District and to boost the confidence, cohesion, and leadership of education management officials in the southern region, enhance the leadership of principals, and invigorate the vitality of school operation, comprehensive improvements in school management are needed to identify the bottlenecks and challenges in the development of schools in the southern region. This initiative is termed the 'Xiaoshan District Southern Region Education Improvement and Strengthening Project.' Hence, this study will be conducted in the education system of the southern region of Xiaoshan District, Hangzhou, China, focusing on discussions related to the school's educational philosophies, planning, and development bottlenecks; the challenges and strategies for team building and school improvement; issues and guiding strategies for enhancing the quality of education; as well as strategies and reflections on cultivating students' core competencies in the context of the New Curriculum Standards.

## **II. The New Curriculum Standards and Education in the Southern Region**

The 'New Curriculum Standards' emphasize the cultivation of three dimensions—'having ideals, capabilities, and responsibilities'—with a strong emphasis on a 'competency-oriented'

approach. It stresses the cultivation of core competencies necessary for lifelong and societal adaptation, particularly the ability to solve real-world problems; it highlights 'educating through practice,' emphasizing the integration of curriculum with productive labor and social practices, encouraging student engagement in subject exploration activities and interdisciplinary practices. The optimization of curriculum content is geared toward goal-oriented organizational forms, presenting content in accordance with students' learning logic, enhancing connections with students' experiences, real-life situations, and social practices. The emphasis on 'educational orientation' and the insistence on 'nurturing individuals' are the core focus, distinctly defining the 'nurturing individuals' theme based on the objectives of compulsory education, aiming to cultivate core competencies in the curriculum. This marks a powerful resurgence of the intrinsic value of the curriculum (Zhang & Zuo, 2022). Thus, 'educational nurturing' and 'core competencies' have been incorporated into national curriculum plans and various subject curriculum standards, becoming the most distinctive and central direction of curriculum and teaching reforms in the new era (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2022).

In the context of the New Curriculum Standards, education in the southern region of Xiaoshan District aims to promote balanced local educational development and enhance the quality of school management, creating a new ecology of 'quality education.' Schools are expected to transition from traditional education to modern education to achieve the goal of 'strengthening schools with excellent teachers and enhancing the quality of courses.' During this transformation, emphasis is placed on humanizing education, personalizing education, diversifying education, informationizing education, and internationalizing education, actively promoting the overall improvement of education quality in the southern region (Xiaoshan District Education Bureau, Hangzhou City, 2023).

The educational reforms in the southern region, aiming to eliminate impoverished teaching resources and develop balanced and high-quality teaching standards, align with the core of Paulo Freire's educational ideology. Both aim for the liberation of education, cultural identity through education, and global awareness in education. Education should uphold fairness and necessitate resource redistribution to ensure equitable distribution among communities and schools, reducing social disparities. Moreover, every region possesses unique cultural and social backgrounds, and education should merge global consciousness with local cultural identities to achieve liberation and social transformation through education.

### **III. Current Status of the New Curriculum Standards Reform**

Amidst the sweeping reforms of the New Curriculum Standards, educational researchers have conducted in-depth analyses of the teaching status across various disciplines, actively exploring ways to further improve and innovate. Across subject educations, there have been proactive explorations in deepening conceptual shifts, innovating teaching methods, refining curriculum structures, and strengthening formative assessment, all aimed at fostering comprehensive and personalized student development (Mula & Shawu, 2021; Dai et al., 2023; Wu, 2023; Rahmanian et al, 2020).

In Chinese language teaching, Mula & Shawu(2021)note that traditional approaches tend to overly emphasize knowledge impartation, neglecting the cultivation of students' subjective positions and interests, which doesn't align with the requirements of the New Curriculum Standards. Hence, a shift towards student-centered teaching is essential, focusing on students' interests, characteristics, and needs, igniting their engagement through various methods such as situational and interactive teaching. In the realm of physics education, Wu(2023)from the perspective of core competencies, conducted comparative analyses between the New Curriculum Standards in compulsory

education and high school levels, elucidating the alignment of teaching objectives and content. Diverse learning assessments are used to gauge students' competency levels, with real-world teaching scenarios and practical activities employed to foster students' core competencies. These cases provide valuable theoretical resources and practical experiences to further deepen the reforms of the New Curriculum Standards. However, for the New Curriculum Standards to advance comprehensively, there's a need to elevate teaching philosophies among educators, diversify the application of teaching methods, establish curriculum structures that align with subject norms and students' cognitive development, and place greater emphasis on the critical role of formative assessment in guiding and diagnosing teaching. Only through such measures can the New Curriculum Standards genuinely be implemented and contribute to the holistic enhancement of the quality of basic education in our country.

In summary, educational researchers emphasize the necessity to transform educational philosophies, improve teaching methodologies, and optimize curriculum designs, aligning teaching content and methods with the inherent requirements of the New Curriculum Standards. This alignment is crucial in effectively enhancing teaching quality and nurturing core competencies centered around student growth.

#### **IV. Research Methods**

I have had the privilege to participate in the 'Xiaoshan District South Area Education Enhancement Project' and have since been reflecting deeply. Within the context of adapting to the new curriculum standards, how can schools differentially meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds and with various requirements? Additionally, how can they balance the impartation of disciplinary knowledge with the cultivation of students' core competencies?

As a result, we have selected three public junior high schools in the South Area of Xiaoshan District (referred to as DCZZ, HSZZ, LTZZ for anonymity). Each school's representative team, including the principal and 3-5 members, has focused on the theme of 'strengthening schools through excellent teachers and enhancing quality through great lessons.' Through diverse methods such as observation, interviews, and dialogues with experts, we are committed to achieving the balanced and high-quality development goals of education in the South Area of Xiaoshan District. Our aim is to enable campuses in the southern region of Xiaoshan to address existing issues proactively based on identifying strengths and weaknesses, thereby formulating corresponding strategies.

#### **V. Research Findings and Discussion**

Certainly, here are the findings regarding the balanced development of education in the southern region of Xiaoshan District, focusing on schools' regional advantages, disadvantages, and existing issues:

##### **DCZZ**

##### **1. Strengths and Highlights**

- (1) School's distinctive features encompass four areas: 'Dai Village History Curriculum,' 'Dai Village Cultural Curriculum,' 'Dai Village Ecology Curriculum,' and 'Dai Village Intangible Cultural Heritage Curriculum.' It serves as a demonstration school for practical labor projects.
- (2) Emphasis on aesthetic education.

## 2. Weaknesses and Issues

- (1) High turnover of teaching staff, limited development opportunities for young teachers.
- (2) Overall weaker academic foundation among students.
- (3) Lack of innovation in moral education carriers.
- (4) Insufficient research capabilities among teachers.
- (5) Teachers' professional development undergoing a transition phase, currently in a phase requiring strenuous efforts. Requires external support to enhance efficiency.

### **HSZZ**

#### 1. Strengths and Highlights

- (1) Overall high-quality education, selected as one of the first batch of schools in Hangzhou for enhancing school quality. An article authored by Principal Zhong related to the practice of 'enhancing school quality' was published in the provincial core journal 'Teaching Monthly.'
- (2) The school developed the 'Big Festival of Hands-on Activities' course, recognized as a superior labor course, and promoted through lectures by Principal Zhong in the district's labor education research activities.

#### 2. Weaknesses and Issues

- (1) Policy constraints: Some teachers are not in positions for which they are qualified, leading to a lack of capabilities among qualified teachers.
- (2) Insufficient professional capabilities among teachers; poor communication and student management skills, particularly among young teachers.
- (3) The overall competency of the teaching team needs improvement in the face of educational reforms.

### **LTZZ**

#### 1. Strengths and Highlights

- (1) The school focuses on promoting quality education and has a student population of 505 with 46 teachers. Notably, the school excels in basketball sports, consistently achieving district championships (11 titles for women's basketball and nine for men's basketball over the years), forming a prominent school feature.

#### 2. Weaknesses and Issues

- (1) Lack of parental involvement in education due to low cultural literacy among parents, some working away from home, leaving children in the care of elderly family members, resulting in minimal parental concern for students' learning at school.
- (2) Aging teaching staff with an average age of 43, facing challenges in recruiting young and talented teachers. Staff motivation is low despite implementing a financial incentive mechanism.
- (3) Infrastructure issues: Pending construction may impact teaching buildings, playgrounds, dining areas, and accommodation facilities, significantly affecting the specialized basketball course.
- (4) Teacher development: Presently, a three-year cycle is allocated for young teacher training. Attendance at district-level research activities is limited due to distance, with teachers showing limited interest in attending.

These findings provide a comprehensive overview of the strengths, weaknesses, and issues observed across the selected schools within the southern region of Xiaoshan District, shedding

light on their unique educational landscapes and challenges.

## **VI. Research Conclusion**

In exploring the teaching reforms and new trends in education under the context of the new curriculum standards, Paulo Freire advocates for "dialogical teaching methods" and "cultivation of critical thinking." These hold profound significance for the current educational domain's renewal. This "problem-posing education" offers a fresh pedagogical perspective where teachers cease to be unidirectional knowledge transmitters, evolving into guides and collaborators in students' learning processes. This model encourages active student engagement, constructing knowledge through inquiry and dialogue, fostering the development of students' critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Additionally, emphasizing the liberating nature of education, as highlighted by Freire, in the context of the new curriculum standards, encourages a reevaluation of students' roles, shifting them from passive information receivers to active knowledge creators. This not only aids in individual student development but also lays the groundwork for cultivating innovative talents crucial for future societal needs.

Under the backdrop of the new curriculum standards, the high-quality development of schools is a multifaceted task that encompasses educational goals, ideologies, pedagogical approaches, curriculum concepts, textbook designs, core competencies, subject proficiency, classroom teaching objectives, and teacher empowerment and assessment, among other aspects. Hence, addressing the issues present in the 'enhancing school quality' initiative in the southern region of Xiaoshan involves development in the following areas, along with providing strategies and methodologies:

### **1. School Operation Planning**

- (1) **Educational Objectives and Positioning:** Clearly define the school's educational vision and mission, ensuring alignment with the core values of the new curriculum standards. Establish long-term and short-term goals emphasizing the importance of holistic development and lifelong learning.
- (2) **Curriculum System Development:** Construct a curriculum system adaptable to the new standards, emphasizing the cultivation of subject core competencies while integrating innovative education and interdisciplinary learning.

### **2. School Team Building**

- (1) **Teacher Professional Development:** Emphasize continuous education and professional growth for teachers, providing training and seminar opportunities to equip them with teaching methods and assessment skills aligned with the new standards.
- (2) **Team Collaboration and Communication:** Encourage internal and external collaboration and communication, fostering a community of learning to share resources and experiences, thereby promoting the growth of both individual teachers and the collective team.

### **3. Enhancement of School Quality Paths**

- (1) **Strengthening Subject Construction:** Improve the quality and effectiveness of subject teaching through optimizing curriculum content, teaching methods, and assessment systems.

- (2) Innovative Educational Practices: Encourage the implementation of innovative teaching models such as project-based learning and inquiry-based learning, fostering students' interest and innovative spirit.

#### 4. Improvement in Educational Quality

- (1) Classroom Teaching Innovation: Employ diverse teaching methods like flipped classrooms and collaborative learning, centering on students to enhance classroom engagement and learning efficiency.
- (2) Comprehensive Evaluation System: Develop a comprehensive evaluation system focusing not only on academic achievements but also on students' personal development, social skills, and innovation capabilities.

In summary, achieving high-quality development requires schools to undertake systemic reforms across various domains, including clarifying and implementing new educational goals and teaching ideologies, innovating curriculum design and teaching methods, enhancing the professional development of teaching teams, and constructing a comprehensive student evaluation system. These measures can effectively elevate the quality of education and achieve the objective of 'enhancing school quality.'

## VII. Research Recommendations

This study focuses on the issues of differentiated education and the cultivation of subject core literacy in schools under the context of the new curriculum standards. Three secondary schools in the area were selected for in-depth research. Recommendations include the adoption of diversified teaching methods and the establishment of a comprehensive assessment system. Emphasis is placed on student engagement, learning outcomes, individual development, social skills, and innovation potential. Proposed strategies encompass:

- (1) Clearly defining educational objectives in alignment with the core values of the new curriculum standards;
- (2) Establishing a curriculum system adaptable to the new standards, emphasizing the cultivation of subject core literacy integrated with interdisciplinary learning;
- (3) Prioritizing professional development for teachers through training and collaborative opportunities to enhance their teaching capabilities;
- (4) Implementing innovative educational practices to stimulate students' interest in learning and foster innovative thinking;
- (5) Innovating classroom teaching by employing diverse teaching methodologies and focusing on the establishment of a comprehensive assessment system that ensures a balance between academic achievements and individual development.

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