



Research on Student Assessment and Education Reform Based on Singapore's Excellent School Model

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ABSTRACT

The Chinese education system has been a subject of global interest, known for its emphasis on rigorous assessment practices and the ongoing pursuit of educational reform. The study delves into the landscape of educational reform and student evaluation practices within the Chinese education system, using the Singaporean Excellent School Model as a prism for evaluation. With a focus on nine quality criteria from the Singaporean model, the research aims to understand and enhance student evaluation processes in China. Assessing the impact of these practices on the overall education standard, the study gathers perspectives from educational leaders, teachers, students, and administrators regarding the role of leadership in fostering educational reform. Through a qualitative research approach, involving semi-structured interviews with 16 individuals in China's educational sphere, the study reveals a nuanced picture of evaluation processes. Traditional assessment methods, particularly standardized testing, persist, but formative assessment is gaining ground. Policymakers primarily drive education reform, emphasizing creativity and critical thinking, aligning with aspects of the Singaporean model. Leadership in the reform process manifests as distributed and visionary. This research significantly contributes to the discourse on education in China, offering a comprehensive understanding of assessment techniques, reform dynamics, leadership roles, and stakeholder perspectives. Building on prior research, it provides fresh insights into the diverse landscape of education reform in China, with implications for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders shaping the direction of Chinese education.

Keywords: Student Assessment Practices, Education Reform Singapore's Excellent School Model, Leadership in Education, Stakeholder Perspectives.

INTRODUCTION

Student assessment techniques have been deeply established in the Chinese education system for many years. These methods differ in that they primarily evaluate students' academic proficiency through high-stakes tests. This examination is critical in determining university admission and is widely regarded as one of the most important events in a student's life. Standardized testing is also a widely used form of evaluation at different educational levels, from elementary school to higher education. These standardized tests have a significant impact on students' educational paths, influencing their decision about which institutions and majors to pursue (Xu & Luo, 2022). Additionally, Chinese assessment systems have a history of emphasizing the knowledge of curriculum content that is mandated, frequently by rote repetition. Concerns regarding stress and mental health problems within the student population have been raised because of the intense competitiveness among students, which is

partly spurred by the high-stakes nature of these examinations (Luo & Song, 2022). The pressure on students is increased by the prevalent perception that passing these tests is a necessary first step toward a wealthy future.

Education reform has emerged as a critical agenda item in China, owing to an awareness of the need to address several issues and flaws in the existing education system. As China has grown into a worldwide economic superpower, there is a growing recognition that the conventional educational approach, which strongly emphasizes memorization and rote learning, may not effectively prepare pupils for the needs of a modern, dynamic economy (Xia & Creaser, 2018). Addressing educational inequality and disparities becomes critical in this environment, as there are major disparities in educational resources and opportunities between urban and rural communities. Urban schools are typically more funded and equipped, but rural schools frequently lack access to superior resources (Fung & Lo, 2023). Education reform aims to close the urban-rural divide and minimize educational disparities. Additionally, China's education reform places a strong emphasis on teaching students 21st-century abilities like creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving (Yao et al., 2023). The objective is to create a workforce that can innovate and adapt to the demands of a world that is changing quickly. This change in emphasis promotes a more all-encompassing approach to education that goes beyond instruction that is exam-focused.

Curriculum variety is another critical component of China's education reform. The standard curriculum is being broadened to include more courses and interdisciplinary approaches. Furthermore, there is an increasing emphasis on student-centred learning strategies to promote increased engagement and critical thinking abilities (W. Li, Huang, Liu, Tseng, & Wang, 2023). Another crucial component of China's education reform is the professional development of teachers. The government is funding ongoing training and assistance initiatives to improve teaching standards and modify pedagogical approaches to suit shifting educational reform objectives.

The education system in Singapore is well-known across the world for its outstanding results, which originate from a special combination of academic brilliance, equity, and adaptability. A demanding curriculum, cutting-edge teaching strategies, and thorough assessment procedures are credited with the accomplishment, which consistently yields top scores in international exams (Huang et al., 2022). The country's educational achievements, which place a strong emphasis on producing a workforce that is both highly competent and flexible, are intimately associated with its economic revolution. A dedication to diversity and equity, an emphasis on teacher professionalism with continual training, and the thoughtful application of technology to improve educational quality are important components (Low, 2023). The holistic approach, which combines demanding academics, creative instruction, thorough evaluations, and a dedication to equity, promotes both academic achievement and overall economic growth (John Vijayakumar & Karthikeyan, 2019). Students are motivated by the educational system's emphasis on teacher professionalism, supportive learning environments, and excellent instruction. Diversification in education is acknowledged as being essential for addressing individual differences. This can be accomplished through a variety of evaluation strategies and inclusive teaching methods (Fekih Zguir, Dubis, & Koç, 2021). Technology is used to improve assessment efficiency and engagement through interactive tools and online testing platforms (Baildon & Ong, 2022). Academic achievement, economic growth connected to educational results, commitment to equity, professionalism of teachers, and flexibility in response to shifting circumstances are all examples of success indicators.

Despite its academic prowess, China's educational system has serious problems with its methods for assessing students. A curriculum that emphasizes rote memory might result from the extensive use of high-stakes assessments like Gaokao, which can impede the educational process and limit creative thinking, critical thinking, and holistic growth (Xu & Huang, 2021). Evaluation procedures in China are frequently criticized for not placing enough focus on skills that are relevant to the twenty-first century, like creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving (Nikolopoulou Akriotou, & Gialamas, 2019). Due to unequal access to effective evaluation techniques and high-quality instruction in urban and rural locations, there are gaps in education (Rao & Ye, 2016). Concerns over the mental health of pupils have escalated as a result of the stress of high-stakes tests. Students' mental health is at risk due to the relentless pursuit of academic success, which emphasizes the need for a more helpful and equitable evaluation system (Ge & Zhang, 2019). In order to create a more just and efficient educational system in China, these problems must be resolved. Both students and educators are impacted by China's lack of emphasis on formative assessment, which limits students' potential to learn and teachers' ability to customize instruction (McAreavey, 2022). Even with the heavy emphasis on teacher professionalism, educators still struggle with consistent assessment literacy (C. Yang, 2023). China's student assessment deficiencies can be effectively addressed with the help of Singapore's educational system. Stress-related to high-stakes exams can be reduced by using formative assessment procedures (Connolly et al., 2022). Singapore's approach, which is in line with market expectations, is to cultivate 21st-century abilities. China can adjust its requirements to incorporate a broader range of skills in its assessment processes, guaranteeing that students will be more prepared for problems outside of the classroom in the future. This strategy might assist China in establishing a more impartial method of

evaluating students.

Singapore's comprehensive education systems serve as a model for China in addressing educational inequality. China may move toward a fairer assessment system that guarantees all kids have access to quality education by investing in educational resources and opportunities for neglected regions (Chia & Hruschka, 2023). China can learn from Singapore's holistic approach to education, which emphasizes character-building and overall well-being (Datu & Jose Mateo, 2020). The stress brought on by high-stakes tests can be reduced by incorporating wellness initiatives and support services, which will also benefit students' general well-being.

The purpose of this research is to look into how Singapore's nine quality criteria for Excellent Schools might be used to assess and modify student assessment methods in Chinese schools. This study intends to obtain insights into the possible benefits and obstacles of applying components of Singapore's educational model in China through a thorough exploration of research issues. It also intends to give insight into educational leaders' attitudes, obstacles, best practices, and stakeholder perspectives on student evaluation in Chinese schools. **Table 1** shows the research questions and objective of the study.

Table 1. Research Questions and Objectives

Research Questions	Objectives of the Study
1. To what extent can the nine quality criteria of Singapore's Excellent School Model be applied to assess and reform student assessment practices in the context of Chinese schools?	1. Determine the adaptability of Singapore's Excellent School Model criteria to assess and reform student assessment practices in China.
2. How do educational leaders in China perceive the role of leadership in driving education reform, particularly in the domain of student assessment?	2. Investigate the perceptions and experiences of educational leaders in China regarding leadership's role in initiating and sustaining education reform, with a focus on student assessment.
3. What are the current challenges and best practices in student assessment in Chinese schools, and how do they compare to the principles outlined in Singapore's Excellent School Model?	3. Identify current challenges and best practices related to student assessment in Chinese schools and compare them with the principles in Singapore's Model.
4. How do different stakeholders, including teachers, students, and administrators, perceive the impact of student assessment practices on the overall quality of education in China?	4. Gain insights into how various stakeholders (teachers, students, administrators) perceive the influence of student assessment practices on the overall quality of education in China.

This research study holds significant importance within the educational landscape, particularly in the context of both Singapore and China, while also contributing to the broader field of education reform. Its significance can be articulated through several key dimensions. Firstly, the study explores the transferability of educational models across diverse cultural contexts. Assessing the potential applicability of Singapore's Excellent School Model in Chinese schools offers valuable insights into cross-cultural knowledge transfer in education. This not only informs educational reforms in China but also provides a case study for other nations looking to adapt successful models from different cultural settings, enhancing the global dialogue on effective educational practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Student Assessment Practices in Chinese Schools

The history and current characteristics of student evaluation techniques in Chinese schools have a considerable impact on students' educational outcomes and experiences. China's educational system has historically been impacted by imperial examination schemes designed to choose civil workers based on their familiarity with the Confucian classics. Modern education was transformed by the Gaokao, which was adopted in the 1950s and gave all students access to higher education and equal educational opportunities (Duan, Jia, & Chen, 2022). But it also brought a culture of high-stakes examination, which continues to put a lot of pressure on children. Standardized testing dominates assessment systems, which frequently emphasize rote memorizing of mandated curricular information. Written tests, oral exams, and quizzes are common evaluation forms (C. Li, Ma, & Xi, 2021). While content mastery is emphasized, there is a growing acknowledgement of the need to incorporate

more diverse assessment methodologies that examine not only information acquisition but also crucial 21st-century abilities such as problem-solving and critical thinking (González-López, Machin-Mastromatteo, & Tarango, 2020). The persistent legacy of imperial examinations is a key component of the historical framework of student evaluation procedures in China. These long-standing assessments selected civil servants based on Confucian knowledge (Tadesse, Gao, Sun, Khalid, & Lianyu, 2022). The modern Gaokao aspires to equalize educational opportunities by offering all students access to higher education. However, the move from imperial exams to the Gaokao brought tremendous competition and stress from crucial tests. This pressure is still a hallmark of Chinese education.

Singapore's Excellent School Model: Quality Criteria

Singapore's Excellent School Model inspires educational creativity and innovation. This great approach is built on nine carefully designed quality standards that support a complete, student-centred, and high-achieving educational system. It shows Singapore's commitment to talent development, leadership, and academic excellence. This program, known worldwide for its high standards, drove Singapore to the top of global educational rankings and has since become a model for educators, decision-makers, and nations seeking to emulate its success (Huang et al., 2022). This study examines Singapore's Excellent School Model's nine quality criteria, success stories, and revolutionary potential, focusing on its global educational impact.

Leadership: Leadership is at the heart of Singapore's Excellent School Model. Visionary leadership is required at all levels of education, from school administrators to educational authorities. Leaders must establish clear educational objectives, express values, and demonstrate a commitment to ongoing improvement. This criterion emphasizes the role of leadership in fostering an environment conducive to educational excellence.

Strategic Planning: Strategic planning based on careful consideration of facts is the cause of Singapore's educational achievement. This criterion ensures that educational objectives match up with national priorities, fostering system cohesion and efficiency. To accomplish educational goals, strategic planning entails long-term visioning, goal-setting, and resource allocation.

Staff Management: Educators are at the centre of Singapore's educational system. Staff management criteria emphasize the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers and school administrators. Professional development opportunities, mentoring programs, and continual learning incentives are critical parts of staff management that ensure a motivated and highly trained teaching workforce.

Resources: For a quality education to be delivered, adequate financial and non-financial resources are required. This criterion covers giving schools access to physical infrastructure, instructional resources, technology, and financial support. Fundamental to fostering good teaching and learning is ensuring that schools have the resources and tools required.

Student-Focused Processes: Singapore's educational concept prioritizes pupils over anything else. This criterion stresses student-centred methods of teaching and learning. It encourages holistic development by emphasizing not only academic accomplishment but also character education, social-emotional learning, and the development of life skills.

Administrative and Operational Results: For schools to run smoothly, efficient administrative and operational procedures are crucial. This criterion promotes the simplification of administrative processes to lessen the administrative constraints placed on educators. Making the most of operational effectiveness guarantees that resources are put to good use in support of educational objectives.

Staff Results: Teacher development and well-being are essential components of Singapore's educational system. This criterion assesses educators' professional development and job satisfaction. Key components include continual learning support, opportunity for growth, and a positive work atmosphere.

Partnership and Society Results: Collaboration between parents, communities, schools, and the general public is highly regarded. This criterion emphasizes how crucial it is to create solid partnerships to support education. This criterion is dependent on community participation in school events, parental involvement in their children's education, and developing societal support for education.

Key Performance Results: Finally, the success of the educational system is determined by key performance indicators. Academic successes are included, as are other significant objectives such as students' critical thinking ability, problem-solving skills, workforce preparedness, and civic involvement. This criterion ensures that the educational system produces measurable outcomes that benefit both students and society.

The Excellent School Model, the cornerstone of Singapore's educational system, has received praise and

recognition from all around the world. In international tests like the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), the country consistently ranks among the top scorers (Boman, 2022). Singaporean students perform exceptionally well in foundational disciplines like arithmetic, science, and reading, proving the value of the model's concentration on high academic standards.

Educational Leadership in Reform

To drive revolutionary change in education, educational leadership in the context of reform is influenced by a wide range of leadership theories, each of which offers helpful insights into the delicate opportunities and obstacles involved. Notably, transformational leadership serves as a paradigm, with leaders inspiring and motivating stakeholders through a compelling vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualized support (Chan & Luk, 2022). Transformational leaders may unite stakeholders behind educational reform projects and forge a shared commitment to change. Dispersed leadership, which understands that leadership is disseminated throughout an organization, is also important. This paradigm emphasizes collaboration, shared accountability, and diverse perspectives in reform (Qian & Walker, 2023). Adaptive leadership theory emphasizes learning and adaptability in complex and unexpected situations, making it useful in educational reform. Because these leadership theories are situational, leaders must be flexible in choosing the best method based on their goals and situations (Soni et al., 2023). Another critical aspect of leadership in pushing reform is strategic resource allocation. Leaders expertly allocate resources, whether financial, human, or material, to ensure the successful implementation of reform programs. Furthermore, they foster a culture of continual improvement, fostering an environment in which experimentation and innovation are not just tolerated but actively encouraged (Aubrey, 2019). Leaders use adaptive tactics in the face of opposition, scepticism, or hurdles, demonstrating resilience, a dedication to learning, and the capacity to negotiate the complexity that accompanies educational transformation. Their ability to communicate effectively, generate consensus, and harmonize the varied perspectives of stakeholders is crucial in the pursuit of successful change projects (Y. Liu & Werblow, 2019). In essence, educational leaders wield tremendous power as the architects of transformation in bringing about good change that improves the quality of teaching and learning inside educational institutions.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Student Assessment

Insights from teachers, who are on the front lines of student assessment, offer a crucial viewpoint on the effectiveness and ramifications of assessment techniques. A more balanced approach to assessment, one that incorporates formative and summative techniques, is one that many educators support. They emphasize the significance of continual evaluations conducted in the classroom that provide students with rapid feedback, allowing teachers to modify their lesson plans to meet the needs of each student (Laguna-Sánchez, Segovia-Pérez, Fuente-Cabrero, & Vargas-Pérez, 2021). Teachers regularly voice their concerns about the excessive focus on high-stakes standardized exams, which can unintentionally result in "teaching to the test" and overshadow other important aspects of education. They demand tests that cover a wider range of abilities and competencies, such as creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking (Cross, Mosley, Newton, Edvardsson, & Miller, 2022). Teachers also stress the importance of ongoing professional development in assessment literacy to guarantee that assessments are accurate, reliable, and fair reflections of student learning.

Understanding students' assessment experiences and views is critical for determining the influence of exams on their educational journey. Many students openly acknowledge fear and tension linked with high-stakes exams, notably college admission exams like China's Gaokao. They frequently express the pressure to memorize large volumes of information, which can stifle the development of deeper comprehension and critical thinking skills. Some kids value exams that allow them to express their originality and unique talents outside of the constraints of standardized testing (Xu & Huang, 2021). Formative assessments, such as class projects and presentations, are frequently preferred by students due to their ability to provide a more comprehensive assessment of their talents (Yuan, Engelhard, Raczynski, & Wang, 2022). Student perspectives highlight the need to develop a positive assessment culture that creates intrinsic motivation, fosters a growth attitude, and empowers students to take ownership of their learning.

Assessment policies and methods are greatly influenced by administrators, including school principals and district executives. Their viewpoints shed light on the assessment's wider implications for educational institutions. To make sure that assessments are used to improve instruction, administrators must make sure assessment processes are in line with educational objectives and standards. They aim to strike a balance between the need for evaluations that foster significant learning experiences and the need for accountability. Administrators often emphasize the need to use assessment data to guide decisions about curriculum, teacher professional development, and resource allocation. Administrators are becoming more interested in utilizing technology to improve assessment procedures and collect real-time data to promote student success. respective viewpoints

highlight the significance of an analytical, data-driven approach to evaluation, thereby enhancing the level of instruction provided by respective institutions.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to provide a more nuanced knowledge of student assessment methods and education reform in Chinese schools. Qualitative research is well-suited to investigating complicated and context-specific issues because it allows for an in-depth examination of stakeholders' perspectives, experiences, and attitudes. Given the complexities of the research topics and the requirement to capture the breadth of stakeholder perspectives, a qualitative technique is ideal for creating rich, contextually grounded data. The principal data gathering technique is decided to be semi-structured interviews. These interviews provide an open-ended yet focused format that allows participants to freely express their thoughts, experiences, and opinions. The study strikes a balance between guided inquiry and the possibility for participants to present distinctive and surprising insights by using semi-structured interviews. The overarching objective of the qualitative approach is to elucidate the depth and breadth of stakeholder viewpoints on student assessment and educational change, and this methodological decision is consistent with that objective.

Participants

The study encompasses a diverse group of participants:

Educational leaders hold pivotal roles in shaping the educational landscape in China. This participant group includes school principals responsible for the day-to-day administration of educational institutions and policymakers who influence education policies and reforms. Their perspectives are indispensable in understanding the dynamics of education reform, policy implementation, and the impact of assessment practices. Teachers and students represent the core stakeholders within the education system. Teachers' experiences with classroom assessment and instruction are invaluable, as are students' perceptions of being assessed. Their views contribute significantly to comprehending the real-world implications of assessment practices on teaching and learning experiences. A larger perspective on the study is provided by administrators, such as school district officials, and education specialists. Their responsibilities in policy formation, resource allocation, and strategic decision-making give critical background for comprehending the complexities of education reform. Specialized knowledge of the theoretical and practical facets of assessment and reform within the Chinese educational landscape is provided by education experts.

Participant Selection

According to the rules of qualitative research, which prioritizes depth over breadth, 16 people were purposefully chosen. The role or position and year of experience are represented in the demographic profile of respondents shown in **Table 2**. This method was created to provide a thorough assessment of opinions while maintaining the practicality of data collection and analysis. Based on inclusion criteria pertinent to the goals of the study, participants were chosen. Educational leaders were school principals and politicians with deep knowledge of the Chinese educational system. To ensure a varied spectrum of viewpoints, teachers were picked for their involvement in several grade levels and subjects. Students ranged in age and intellectual ability. The expertise in educational policy, evaluation, and administration that administrators and education professionals have was a criterion for selection.

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Participant ID	Role/Position	Years of Experience in Education
P1	School Principal	15
P2	Policymaker	20
P3	Teacher (Primary)	8
P4	Teacher (Secondary)	12
P5	Student (High School)	3
P6	Student (University)	2
P7	School Administrator	18
P8	Education Expert	25
P9	School Principal	10
P10	Policymaker	15

Participant ID	Role/Position	Years of Experience in Education
P11	Teacher (Primary)	6
P12	Teacher (Secondary)	14
P13	Student (High School)	4
P14	Student (University)	3
P15	School Administrator	20
P16	Education Expert	28

Sampling Strategies

The study employed purposeful sampling, a non-probability sampling method. Participants in each stakeholder group were carefully selected to represent a diverse spectrum of perspectives and experiences. This technique attempted to capture a variety of opinions while maintaining a reasonable sample size that would be useful for in-depth research. Due to the importance of depth and detail in qualitative research, the study's enrollment cap of 16 participants was chosen. Researchers can become fully immersed in the data using this method to find complex insights. By emphasizing depth over breadth, qualitative research enables thorough, context-rich assessments that shed light on the topic's many facets. To ensure data quality and research rigour, the sample size of 16 individuals was assessed as sufficient to reach data saturation, the point at which no new meaningful information or patterns emerged from the data.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection processes were distinguished by a methodical approach to conducting semi-structured interviews with the 16 participants. Before each interview, all participants provided informed consent, emphasizing the voluntary nature of their involvement and assuring the confidentiality of their responses. Interviews were conducted in a confidential and suitable atmosphere, either in person or through digital communication platforms, with participant preferences and logistical factors taken into account. To ensure proper data gathering, the interviews were rigorously audio-recorded with participants' agreement. Researchers employed a reflexive approach throughout the interview process, being open to emerging themes and changing the interview protocol as necessary to go further into certain areas of interest. This iterative method made the data collection procedure dynamic and flexible. Field notes and memos were used to supplement the data obtained through interviews, capturing additional contextual data and researcher reflections both during and after the interviews. The study team kept an eye on data saturation throughout the process to maintain data quality, identifying the moment when no fresh, important insights were emerging, signifying the end of data collecting.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process employed a multifaceted approach, with coding serving as a central technique. Three types of coding were applied to the qualitative data:

Open Coding: The data was initially divided into more manageable, understandable chunks using open code. This entailed recognizing and classifying concepts, themes, and patterns in interview transcripts. Each piece of data was scrutinized and given a descriptive code, enabling the study of various viewpoints and the development of fresh ideas. As shown in **Figure 1**:

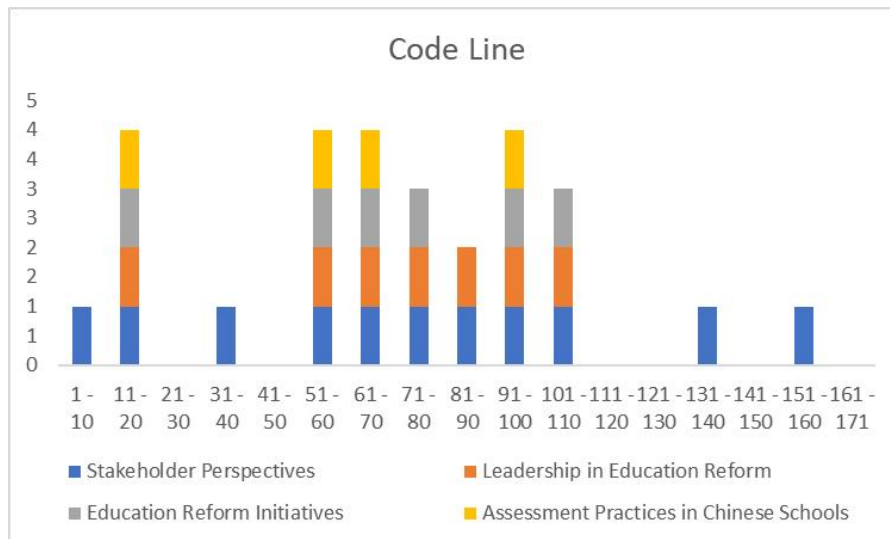


Figure 1. Code Line

Axial Coding: Axial coding was used to link the original codes after open coding. This entailed organizing codes into topics to show how student evaluation and school reform are related. The research topics' key themes were identified using axial coding. As shown in **Figure 2**:

Selective Coding: Selective coding was used in the latter stage of coding to polish and combine the developing themes. This entailed identifying fundamental ideas that were most relevant to the study topics and integrating them into a coherent narrative. A focused analysis that emphasized the main findings and gave a thorough grasp of the stakeholder views was made possible via selective coding. As shown in **Figure 2**:

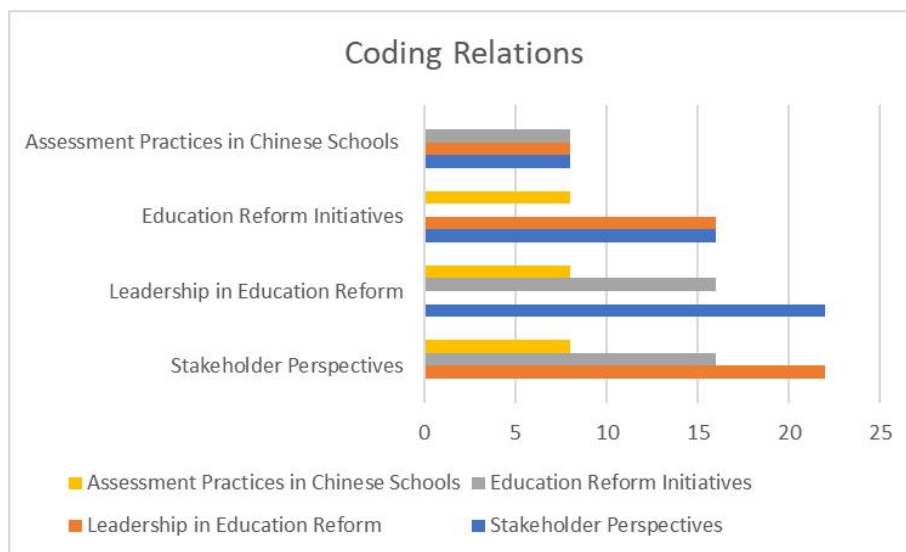


Figure 2. Coding Relation

The data analysis procedure relied heavily on triangulation. Cross-verification of findings from numerous sources and participant groups was required for triangulation. The study attempted to ensure the reliability and validity of the results by reviewing data from educational leaders, instructors, students, administrators, and specialists. Triangulation aided in identifying regions of agreement and disagreement, increasing the depth and reliability of the analysis. As shown in **Figure 3**:

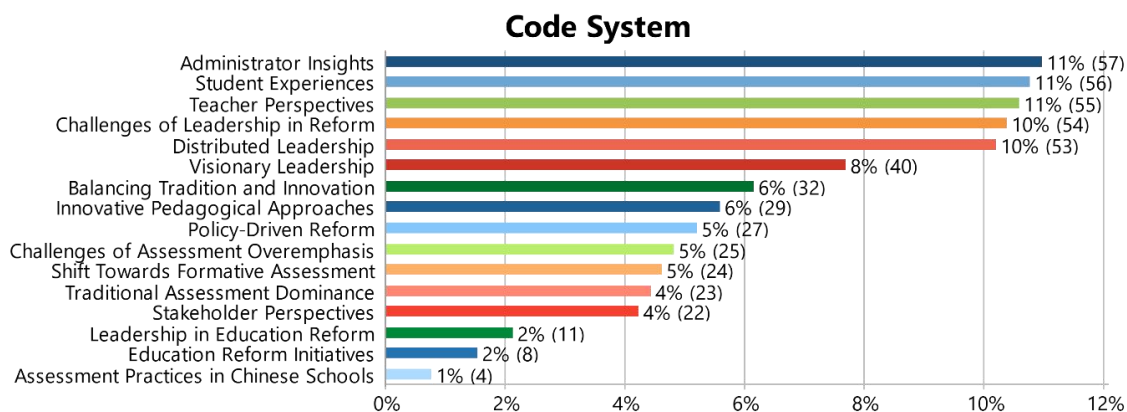


Figure 3. Code System

Thematic Analysis

The rich qualitative data set was reduced to cohesive themes and patterns using thematic analysis. This required methodically locating, examining, and summarizing data patterns (themes) that were relevant to the research topics. A nuanced examination of stakeholder perspectives on student assessment and educational change was made possible by the analysis's focus on both explicit and implicit themes. The thematic analysis started with data familiarization, in which researchers immersed themselves in interview transcripts to get a comprehensive comprehension of the topic. The codes created during the coding process were then categorized into possible themes. Iterative discussions among the research team developed the themes, ensuring that they appropriately represented the data and addressed the study goals. The final theme analysis gave a detailed and organized summary of stakeholder perspectives and experiences.

RESULTS

Assessment Practices in Chinese Schools

Traditional Assessment Dominance

Traditional assessment methods continue to dominate in Chinese schools, according to interviewees, with standardized testing playing a prominent role. P1, a school administrator, underlined the historical significance of standardized testing as the major mechanism of evaluation. This finding is consistent with recent research by Qu, (2022), which revealed the ubiquity of standardized tests in the Chinese education system. Traditional assessment has not only persevered but has become profoundly established in Chinese educational culture. According to P4, a secondary school teacher, the emphasis on standardized testing frequently drives the entire educational process, impacting curriculum creation and teaching approaches.

Shift towards Formative Assessment

Although traditional evaluations still predominate, there is growing agreement among the respondents that formative assessment approaches have gradually taken over in recent years. This change was recognized by P3, a primary school teacher, who claimed that formative evaluation and classroom interactions are now given more importance. This change is considered a reaction to the shortcomings of conventional evaluations, which frequently fail to give students timely and helpful feedback. This remark is in line with research by Xiong, (2021), who found that formative assessment is becoming more and more important in Chinese educational reforms. Formative assessment is viewed as a method of actively engaging students in the learning process and providing them with quick feedback, thus creating a deeper comprehension of the content. P11, a teacher, remarked that it stimulates pupils' critical thinking and active involvement.

Challenges of Assessment Overemphasis

Although several interviewees, including P5 and P13, acknowledged the change toward formative assessment, they expressed worries about the pressure and rote memorization involved with high-stakes testing. Both students described how intense exam pressure sometimes results in superficial learning, repetitive memorization, and an emphasis on "testable" subjects rather than comprehensive knowledge. P5, a high school student, emphasized the tremendous competitiveness and academic pressure, claiming that there is little time to pursue other hobbies.

This pressure has been extensively discussed in the prior literature. Sun, Yap, Tung, Bei and Wiley (2023), for example, have highlighted the stress and negative effects of excessive testing on children, including concerns about mental health and student well-being. Assessment Practices in Chinese Schools are shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Assessment Practices in Chinese Schools

Interviewee Response (Quotes)	Literature Support
"Standardized tests remain the primary mode of evaluation." - P1	Previous research by Zhou et al. (2023) highlights the prevalence of standardized tests in Chinese education.
"There is now more emphasis on formative assessment and classroom interactions." - P3	Qu (2022) note an increasing emphasis on formative assessment in Chinese educational reforms.
"The pressure from exams is immense, and it often leads to surface learning." - P13	McKeirnan et al. (2022) have documented the stress and negative effects of excessive testing on students.

Education Reform Initiatives

Policy-Driven Reform

P2, a decision-maker, spoke on current reform attempts driven by policy and focused on improving the Chinese educational system. Policy alterations, in P2's opinion, are pushing education in a more creative direction. Curriculum changes, a renewed focus on creativity and critical thinking, and enhanced support for vocational education are some of the main components of these reforms. Government-led reforms and policies have a significant impact on the direction of education in China. These innovations are part of a larger global movement toward more innovative, student-centred educational systems. In their research, Elwood and Hanna (2022) emphasized government-led programs aimed at educational modernization in China.

Innovative Pedagogical Approaches

The inclusion of cutting-edge pedagogical methods as part of efforts to reform education was stressed by the interviewees. Teachers in P11 and P12 emphasized the use of project-based learning and interactive teaching strategies. They noted that they are urged to use innovative teaching strategies that promote students' critical thinking and active participation. These novel ideas are considered a way to move beyond rote memorization and develop deeper knowledge and creativity. Such efforts are consistent with research by Zhou, Wang and Cheng (2022), which highlights initiatives to bring new ideas into Chinese schools.

Balancing Tradition and Innovation

The problem of striking a balance between history and innovation was acknowledged, though. P9, a principal of a school, emphasized the significance of upholding educational tradition while educating pupils for the future. The preservation of cultural and historical values as well as figuring out how to include cutting-edge educational approaches are all part of this complex task. A frequent theme in educational reform is the challenge of combining tradition with innovation. Yang and Welch (2023) have also investigated this issue in the context of Chinese educational reform, emphasizing the importance of striking a delicate balance between tradition and innovation to provide a well-rounded education. Education Reform Initiatives are shown in **Table 4**:

Table 4. Education Reform Initiatives

Interviewee Response (Quotes)	Literature Support
"Policy changes are steering education towards a more innovative direction." - P2	Government-led reforms focused on educational modernization in China, as discussed by (Li & Xue, 2022).
"We're encouraged to adopt new teaching methods to foster critical thinking." - P11	Efforts to incorporate innovative approaches into Chinese classrooms align with research by (Barak & Yuan, 2021).
"We must respect our heritage while preparing students for the future." - P9	The challenge of balancing tradition and innovation in educational reform is explored by (Flórez-Aristizábal et al., 2019).

Leadership in Education Reform

Visionary Leadership

A recurrent issue was the importance of visionary leaders in advancing educational reform. P7, a school official, focused on the importance of visionary leaders in crafting appealing educational visions. P7 asserts that

visionary leaders enthuse the school community with a feeling of purpose and a clear direction. Leaders with a vision are frequently regarded as stimuli for development and change. This emphasis on visionary leadership is consistent with the findings of Cai, Fan and Wang (2023), who emphasized the importance of visionary leadership in Chinese educational reform. Visionary leaders are critical in developing and communicating a unified vision for educational advancement.

Distributed Leadership

Additionally, the idea of distributed leadership has become crucial in advancing educational reform. P15, a different school administrator, showed confidence in collaborative leadership as a successful strategy for fostering change. By dividing up the leadership duties among educators, distributed leadership encourages a sense of group ownership over the reforming process. In China's educational reform, distributed leadership has gained traction, reflecting a wider worldwide trend in leadership paradigms. The idea of distributed leadership and its use in Chinese educational reform has been examined by J. Zhang, Yuan and Shao (2022). Leadership in Education Reform is shown in **Table 5**:

Challenges of Leadership in Reform

It was understood that leadership has its own set of difficulties in the context of educational reform. P10, a policymaker, brought attention to the challenges faced by educational leaders, such as resistance to change, resource limitations, and the necessity to negotiate a fast-changing educational landscape. Baviera, Baviera-Puig and Escribá-Pérez (2022) addressed these leadership problems during educational reform, emphasizing the necessity for adaptive leadership techniques to overcome the complexities and uncertainties inherent in educational reform programs.

Table 5. Leadership in Education Reform

Interviewee Response (Quotes)	Literature Support
"Visionary leaders inspire our school community with a clear direction." - P7	The significance of visionary leadership in educational reform in China is highlighted by Yin and Zheng (2017).
"We believe in collaborative leadership to drive reform effectively." - P15	The concept of distributed leadership gaining traction in Chinese educational reform, as discussed by Hallinger (2018).
"Leading reform is complex, and resistance can be a significant barrier." - P10	Challenges in leadership during educational reform and the need for adaptive leadership strategies, as emphasized by Cheng and Lam (2016).

Stakeholder Perspectives

Teacher Perspectives

Teachers stated that they prefer using a variety of evaluation techniques to fully measure pupils' abilities. P4, a teacher in a secondary school, emphasized the necessity for various tests other than standard exams. This opinion is in line with Halai, Sarungi and Hopfenbeck, (2023) research, which supports a more comprehensive method of assessment in Chinese schools. Teachers stressed the significance of matching assessment techniques to learning goals, emphasizing that a well-rounded assessment plan should include formative tests, project-based evaluations, and other techniques that offer a comprehensive picture of student achievement.

Student Experiences

Students, on the other hand, reported their stress-related experiences with high-stakes tests. P6, a university student, emphasized the great pressure to succeed in exams, as well as the struggle for restricted university placements. The issue of exam stress in students has been widely studied in previous research, including research by (Xu & Luo, 2022). Students expressed a need for greater flexibility in the assessment process, which would allow them to demonstrate their abilities and potential outside of standardized assessments. They also advocated for a more comprehensive assessment that takes into account their particular abilities and interests.

Administrator Insights

Administrators and education specialists like P16 talked about resource allocation techniques and problems with policy implementation. Effective policy implementation is acknowledged as a complicated process including the balancing of the interests and resources of diverse stakeholders, according to P16. The difficulties and tactics for implementing policies are consistent with the body of work on educational reform. At the school level, administrators are essential in converting policy objectives into workable methods. Understanding the complexities of policy execution and its effects on schools and students requires their input. Stakeholders'

perspectives are shown in **Table 6** and **Figure 4** shows the trends of words during interviews;

Table 6. Stakeholders Perspectives

Interviewee Response (Quotes)	Literature Support
"We need a variety of assessments to capture students' abilities." - P4	Advocacy for a broader approach to assessment in Chinese schools, as proposed by Liu et al. (2019).
"The pressure to perform well in exams is intense." - P6	Student stress due to exams, is a widely discussed issue, as noted in research by Chen and Wang (2018).
"Implementing policies effectively is a complex process." - P16	Challenges and strategies for policy implementation in educational reform, resonating with existing literature.

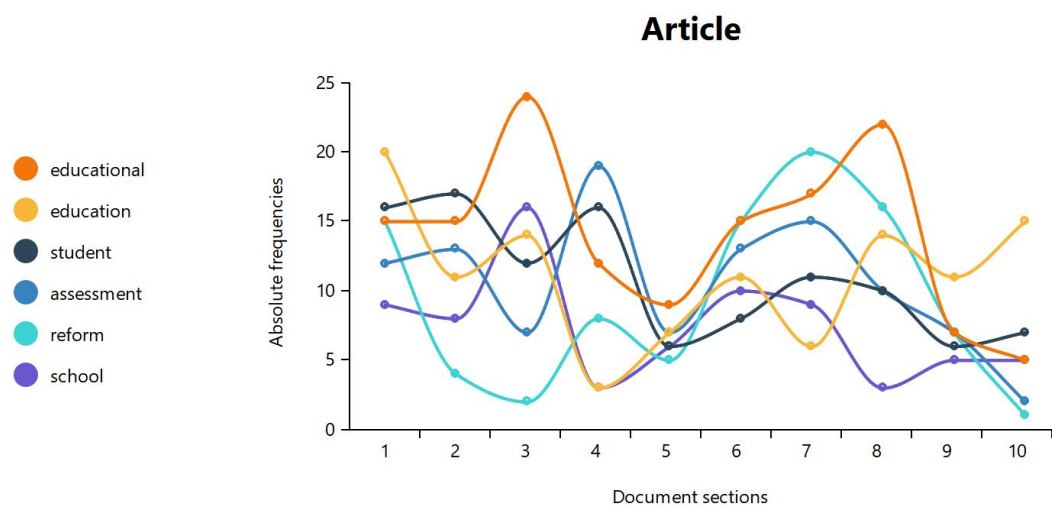


Figure 4. The Trends of Words Used during Interviews

DISCUSSION

Assessment Practices in Chinese Schools

The findings on assessment processes in Chinese schools paint a complex picture. While traditional assessment methods, notably standardized testing, remain important, there is a significant shift toward formative assessment procedures. This shift is consistent with a broader global trend toward more student-centred and comprehensive assessment techniques (C. Li et al., 2021). The emphasis on formative assessment is viewed as a positive step toward providing students with more timely and constructive feedback, encouraging deeper knowledge and active learning. Stress and superficial learning are two problems brought on by the overemphasis on high-stakes testing, which must be taken into consideration. These results support the earlier study by J. Yang, Lawrence and Grøver, (2023) that focuses on the detrimental effects of over-testing, especially on students' mental health and well-being. As a result, the move to formative assessment procedures seems to be a reaction to the acknowledged shortcomings of traditional examinations, in line with the global conversation about the need for more comprehensive and student-friendly evaluation methods.

Education Reform Initiatives

The debate over education reform proposals highlights the importance of policy-driven reforms in transforming the Chinese education environment. Policymakers are taking deliberate initiatives to modernize education by implementing novel pedagogical approaches and encouraging a culture of creative and critical thinking (J. Liu, 2018). These initiatives are compatible with government-led reforms, which stress educational modernization as a strategic goal. A promising development is the adoption of cutting-edge educational strategies like project-based learning. This is consistent with a study by M. Zhang et al., (2021), which promotes the use of cutting-edge teaching strategies in Chinese classrooms to improve students' engagement and critical thinking abilities. The issue of combining tradition with innovation, on the other hand, remains challenging. A recurring

theme in educational reform is the necessity to preserve cultural and historical values while preparing students for the future. Striking this balance will certainly be a never-ending problem, but it highlights the necessity of preserving the richness of Chinese culture while embracing the needs of a fast-changing world.

Leadership in Education Reform

The debate on leadership in school reform emphasizes the vital importance of visionary and distributed leadership styles. To inspire stakeholders, articulate a clear educational vision, and advance reform initiatives, visionary leaders are crucial. This is consistent with a study by Gu, (2023), which emphasizes the value of visionary leadership in China's educational transformation. Another promising area of reform initiatives is the use of distributed leadership. This strategy places a focus on shared accountability and group decision-making among educators, encouraging a sense of ownership in the reform process. The growing importance of distributed leadership is consistent with international trends, as discussed by Qian and Walker (2023). However, leadership in the context of educational reform is fraught with difficulties, such as resistance to change and limited resources. These difficulties are congruent with results, which emphasize the necessity for adaptive leadership methods to successfully manage the intricacies of educational change.

Stakeholder Perspectives

The viewpoints of educators, pupils, and administrators shed light on the complex nature of educational reform. Teachers support a variety of assessment approaches that are in line with learning goals, echoing the request for a more comprehensive assessment strategy in Chinese schools (Talutis et al., 2022). Students' experiences, which are characterized by high pressure to perform well on tests, reflect concerns voiced in prior studies about student stress and the competitive nature of exams (Freeland, O'reilly, Fleury, Adams, & Vostanis, 2022). Students' wishes for greater assessment flexibility accord with the global trend for student-centred education. Administrators and education specialists highlighted the difficulties in converting policy objectives into workable methods as they discussed the difficulties of policy implementation. These issues are prevalent in the literature already available on policy implementation in educational reform..

CONCLUSION

This study examines student evaluation techniques and educational change in Chinese schools, focusing on the complexities and dynamics of the Chinese educational system. The research is based on interviews with educational leaders, teachers, students, and administrators, providing a comprehensive understanding of China's contemporary educational state. Traditional evaluation methods like standardized testing remain dominant, but a shift towards formative assessment strategies is being made. This change is seen as a positive response to the weaknesses of traditional exams and aligns with global education trends. Chinese education is being actively reshaped by education reform initiatives, with policymakers implementing innovative teaching techniques that value creativity and critical thinking. Balancing tradition and innovation remains a challenge in China. The direction of education reform is greatly influenced by leadership, with visionary leaders presenting clear educational visions and distributed leadership models reflecting global trends. However, obstacles such as resource limitations and reluctance to change exist. The study also outlines stakeholder opinions, such as teachers advocating for diverse assessment techniques and students expressing anxiety over high-stakes exams. The research emphasizes the complexity of these attempts and the advancements made in modernizing Chinese education, providing valuable advice for decision-makers, educators, and stakeholders.

IMPLICATIONS

This study makes a significant contribution to the advancement of educational theory, particularly within the Chinese context, by offering nuanced insights into assessment practices and education reform. One key aspect of its contribution is the expansion of the theoretical framework, shedding light on the evolving role of formative assessment and the challenges associated with high-stakes testing. This aligns with global trends in education, providing a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play in the Chinese educational landscape. Furthermore, the results underscore the importance of visionary leadership dispersed throughout an organization, adding depth to the ongoing discourse on leadership theories. These findings have implications not only for China but also for educational systems worldwide. The study's emphasis on visionary leadership contributes valuable

perspectives to the broader discussion of educational reform, emphasizing its relevance in diverse global contexts.

The findings of this study hold practical implications for various stakeholders in the field of education. Policymakers stand to benefit by utilizing the insights to inform the creation and implementation of educational policies. Recognizing the challenges associated with high-stakes testing and the importance of a balanced approach between tradition and innovation, legislators can shape more student-centred and comprehensive assessment processes. Educational administrators and principals can leverage the principles of visionary and distributed leadership elucidated in the study to instigate lasting change within the education sector. By addressing the identified issues, they can develop practical techniques for navigating opposition to change and overcoming resource restrictions. Teachers, on the other hand, can enhance their professional practices with the study's emphasis on diversified assessment methods and innovative pedagogical approaches. The identification of these strategies allows for the design of targeted professional development programs, empowering educators to implement these practices effectively and fostering a more engaging and dynamic classroom environment.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Limitations

One of the primary limitations of this study is the relatively small sample size of 16 participants. While the participants provided valuable insights, a larger and more diverse sample could offer a more comprehensive perspective on student assessment practices and education reform in Chinese schools.

The findings of this study are based on interviews conducted with participants from specific regions and educational backgrounds within China. Generalizing these findings to the entire Chinese education system may be limited. Future research could involve a more extensive and representative sample to enhance generalizability.

As with any qualitative study, data collection and analysis could be vulnerable to subjectivity and prejudice. Although rigorous analysis methods were used to reduce bias, the inherent subjectivity of qualitative research remained a barrier.

Future Directions

Conducting longitudinal studies that track changes in assessment procedures and education reform over time can offer insights into evolving patterns and evaluate the long-term effects of policy changes in the Chinese education system.

Future research employing comparative case studies across different regions or school types in China can provide valuable insights into regional variations in assessment processes and assess the efficacy of reform initiatives, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse educational contexts within the country.

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