Exam Culture and Formative Assessment in China: The Gaokao Reform and Its Sociocultural Hindrance

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Abstract. When high-stakes examinations are utilised to sort students into different tracks, and determine who is eligible to pursue higher education, teachers typically respond by ensuring incentivised success with the policy hand they are dealt with, that is, by ensuring that the students are incentivised to succeed. Formative assessments provide an opportunity to identify areas where students need additional support and adjust instruction accordingly. They also allow students to develop and demonstrate the skills required to succeed in higher education. Reform efforts are primarily commendable. However, these are merely preliminary steps towards achieving authentic holistic assessment forms. This article reviews the literature on formative assessment in China and the gaokao reform policies, intending to add sociocultural factors to discussions relating to the implementation barriers and gaps. This article seeks to provide insights into formative assessment practices in the Chinese educational context and contribute to the international literature on learning-oriented assessment. The article argues that the 'top-down' system is ineffective in shifting the exam culture and result-oriented mindset and understanding the role of feedback and formative assessment more deeply. Much effort should be made to assist teachers-in-service in developing assessment literacy and grant teachers' greater autonomy to transform teacher-centred pedagogy into a student-centred one.

Keywords: Learning-oriented assessment, education policy reform, gaokao reform, student-centred pedagogical approach, cultural scripts, policy implementation.

1. Introduction

In the context of globalisation, Chinese educators have expressed concern that the current emphasis on high-stakes assessments, especially the gaokao, could negatively impact students' psychological well-being and higher-order cognitive skills. Rather than developing a deeper understanding of the material, such assessments emphasise rote memorisation and test-taking skills. As a result of the growing recognition of the importance of understanding the learning process, a more holistic approach to learning is becoming increasingly popular; by 2014, formative, authentic, and school-based assessments have become viable alternatives to gaokao assessment reform [1, 2]. The development and conceptualisation of 'General Education' and holistic development in China can be traced back to the 90s. In the 1990s, the Chinese government introduced the concept of 'suzhi' (quality) and tailored this ideology into the education system, later called quality education, aiming to develop students holistically, profoundly impacting the whole country [3]. In 2014, the government took a radical initiative to overcome the most challenging obstacle, exam-oriented learning, and teaching. A student-centred approach informs the initiative. This approach focuses on the development of the whole child instead of just academic performance. In parallel with the change in the teaching and learning approach from exam-oriented to proficiency-oriented, the assessment modes also undergo significant changes due to the reform. This article critically analyses the 2014 round of education reform in China, focusing on efforts to reform assessment procedures in the ongoing debate over the role of summative and formative assessments. When put into practice, the reform initiative is not without its flaws, having been changed from a 'summative only' approach to accepting formative assessments as an alternative assessment mode. Formative assessments allow teachers to collect data to inform their instructional decisions and adjust their teaching strategies accordingly. They provide a more holistic picture of a student's understanding and mastery of a topic

or skill. This helps teachers identify areas of strength and weakness, enabling them to tailor their instruction and better support student learning. This shift towards formative assessment has allowed for more flexibility in the assessment process, leading to more accurate and detailed feedback on students' performance. It has also enabled teachers to focus more on teaching than testing, resulting in a more holistic approach to education. However, researchers have criticised the implementation of the newly informed formative assessment system in China, noting the difficulty of assessing students' proficiency accurately and the need for more reliable criteria for evaluation [1,2]. Despite these issues, formative assessments remain an essential part of the reformed education system, providing a more comprehensive assessment of student learning outcomes.

1.1. Background

The Gaokao (the National College Entrance Examination, NCEE) is regarded in China as a social ladder that determines an individual's social status [3]. A high-stakes, rigid, and meritocratic assessment, and admission (college) system has long been criticised as score-oriented and 'one-shot' since gaokao significantly determines students' access to higher educational institutions. This has allegedly hindered the development of talented individuals able to contribute to China's future development by cultivating all-round talents. Suzhi education (quality education), a newly coined concept that refers to a well-rounded educational practice designed to reduce the adverse effects of deeply ingrained exam cultures and 'teach-to-the-test' pedagogical approaches, is meant to reduce these negative effects. In addition to cultivating students' comprehensive abilities, it stimulates their imaginations and curiosity and nurtures their intellectual, moral, aesthetic, and athletic development [4]. The Chinese government and researchers have stressed the importance of measuring students' holistic development as an indicator of the effectiveness of suzhi education [2]. To ensure that the suzhi education system is successful, the Chinese government has implemented assessment schemes to measure students' holistic development. These reform attempts rolled out in 2014 have been continuously improved in various provinces. Throughout 2014, two core principles guided the implementation of assessment reforms in Shanghai, which were firmly implemented in 2017: First, a holistic approach to education has become increasingly popular due to the concept that assessment should cover more complex aspects of student achievement rather than fragments of knowledge [5]. Second, it emphasises the importance of social and participatory learning and recommends incorporating a student-centred assessment approach, generating what is known as the learning-oriented assessment, as an alternative to the widely used practice of collecting seeming detached achievement results as an alternative to educational assessment.

1.2. Significance of the Study

Despite the substantial amount of literature addressing educational reform in China and tensions between the system and higher educational institutions regarding accountability and autonomy in college admissions, there are relatively few studies that investigate the ideological obstacles associated with the introduction of a new rounded assessment mode in China--the 'suzhi assessment' [1, 4, 6, 7]. Regarding the college admission process, the reform featured a shift towards perceiving a comprehensive view of students' profiles. Prior to the 2014 policy initiative, Chinese higher education institutions heavily relied on gaokao test scores to determine admissions. A notice was made by the Chinese Ministry of Education in 2014 announcing changes to assessment content and procedures in the country. This announcement highlighted the growing use of formative assessment [8]. A holistic suzhi portfolio is required for formative and summative (admission) purposes for all secondary school students, as the Notice specifically identified 5-6 dimensions of holistic development on which students will be assessed in the suzhi assessment [8, 9].

Furthermore, universities are encouraged and instructed to formulate their own admission policies to take advantage of the results of the holistic suzhi assessment [4]. This allows universities to select students who have the needed academic achievements and the necessary personal qualities and skills to succeed in their studies. Generally, it gives universities more autonomy over the admission process.

However, this new assessment mode was accused of several implementation issues pointing to its ineffectiveness.

Since China has a long history of meritocratic admissions and a deeply ingrained cultural heritage of Confucian values, there is a shortage of literature on using formative assessments for basic education and college admissions. Despite the numerous studies exploring the drawbacks and hindrances of the reform policies, the sociocultural factors, and students' and teachers' role and autonomy in assessments (whether it is test takers or organisers), as a group that most directly experiences the reforms, in influencing reform outcomes, has always been overlooked. However, recent studies have begun to examine how sociocultural factors influence the use and implementation of formative assessment. The value and impact of cultures and cultural scripts in teaching and learning, in facilitating or hindering the internalisation of imported practices, has been highlighted in several studies. This study aims to contribute to the literature by synthesising empirical evidence examining the challenges of integrating formative assessment into practice in China and providing tentative solutions and suggestions for future potential policy borrowing initiatives. Future research should focus on ways to effectively use formative assessment to measure student learning outcomes in China, as well as the factors that influence teacher and student acceptance of formative assessment. Additionally, research should investigate how formative assessment can inform and improve teaching practices and curriculum design.

1.3. Method

The literature review was conducted through Google Scholar. A preliminary search was conducted using the terms 'assessment reform in China' and 'Gaokao reform in China'. Having noted the importance of reforming assessment modes in the first round of review, I carried out a second search with the term 'formative assessment in China'. The search is limited to empirical studies written in English since 2014 to investigate how Chinese stakeholders perceive formative assessment within a Chinese social, historical, and cultural context. The results are expected to provide implications for educational policy, practice, and reform in China. It could also be beneficial for other countries with similar contexts. The findings of this research could be used to inform the design of more effective assessment practices. Secondary data are used instead of primary data in this study. To ensure the validity of the data, the literature search focuses only on articles published in international peer-reviewed journals.

Additionally, external resources such as government reports were consulted to strengthen the study's findings further. The articles were evaluated through a systematic review process in which only those with high levels of confidentiality were considered. This method was used because it allows for more comprehensive coverage of the topic in a shorter time than possible if primary data was collected. Additionally, secondary data reduces the risk of bias since it is extracted from existing sources. Furthermore, using sources which have been peer-reviewed and published in international journals lends credibility to the data and ensures its accuracy. Results have been sorted according to various criteria based on their relevance to sociocultural perspectives, learner-centred educational policies and teaching pedagogies, assessment modes geared toward learning, education policy reform in China, and their relevance to proficiency-oriented learning and teaching models. The articles were analysed and discussed in detail before being synthesised to form conclusions. The findings from the review were used to inform a series of recommendations for educational reform in China. Ultimately, the study aims to offer a broad understanding of the issues surrounding proficiency-based education and formative assessment in contemporary China.

2. Conceptual Framework

Through adopting a more learning-oriented approach, holistic suzhi education became a significant focus of the Chinese education reform, with formative assessment as a major component of this shift. Because the impetus for introducing formative assessment is informed by the 2014 Notice that

features a turn to holistic education, it is necessary to explore the reforms' rationales briefly. The Notice presents four main rationales for the shift to formative assessment.

It emphasises the importance of focusing on the learning process rather than evaluation for its own sake.

It encourages assessment to be used as a means, not an end, to guide teaching and learning. The reflection includes examining the impact of the cultural context on the employment of formative assessment, such as the role of Confucianism in the Chinese education system.

It is essential to consider the dynamics between teachers and students and the effect of this relationship on implementing formative assessment. Understanding the complexities of formative assessment in different cultural contexts can help teachers, faculty, and administrators develop better implementation methods.

It can help create a more effective and equitable learning environment.

As such, it is crucial to understand the sociocultural influences that have enabled or hindered the process.

2.1. Education Reform in China

Over the past few years, China's rigid meritocratic education system has been subject to growing dissatisfaction, leading to a series of reform initiatives to address the problem [10]. In response to rising public discontent, the Chinese government has committed to significant lengths to modernise the education system with innovative initiatives such as transnational educational borrowing and reforms to the gaokao system. China issued a series of Implementation Opinions in early 2014 on deepening the reform of its higher education enrolment system, marking the beginning of a series of reforms aimed at improving educational assessment. The reforms were focused on addressing issues such as the over-reliance on the gaokao system, the lack of student autonomy, and overly restrictive admission policies [1, 2]. These reforms have since seen a significant shift towards 'comprehensive admission and assessment', allowing for selecting eligible students who can demonstrate a more rounded set of abilities and skills. The reform stipulates that college admissions consider the integrated quality appraisal of students as part of the reference. The 2014 educational assessment reform attempts were preliminarily informed by the concept of 'general education', which was characterised by the student-centred approach to holistic development and adopting alternative assessment modes to direct higher educational institutions to review each applicant more comprehensively rather than taking the gaokao grades as the sole criterion when making admission decisions. Ultimately, these reforms aim to assist China in moving away from knowledge transmission and repetitive rote memorisation, which are considered detrimental to the nation at large. By focusing on student-centred learning and cognitive development, stakeholders will be informed that the days of sole focus on test scores are no longer relevant [11]. School administrators and teachers are advised to document the student's development and achievements in holistic education objectively and to reflect thoughtfully and comprehensively on the student's overall suzhi, to ensure the reliability and validity of the suzhi assessment [5]. The integrated quality appraisal is not a summative assessment but rather a formative assessment, as it condenses students' all-around development and accumulative achievement across their educational pathways. Aside from using quantitative and qualitative measures to assess students' strengths and areas for improvement, the feedback from this appraisal enables students to evaluate themselves in a different light, aside from the traditional viewpoint of academic achievement [3].

2.2. Policy Translation and the Cultural Scripts

2.2.1. Policy translation

In interpreting policy transfer and implementation, policy translation is a critical component. The translation of policy is accomplished through the process of reconstructing 'foreign' meanings based on the worldview and resources of those at the receiving end, such an exploration of the Chinese perspectives, assumptions and expectations on education and the cultural traditions associated with it

is essential [11, 12]. According to Stone, policy translation involves the emergence of exciting or even sometimes unexpected disturbances between policy formulation, transmission, interpretation, and reception [13]. Therefore, how a group interprets and applies concepts such as 'truth', 'evidence', 'critical thinking', 'teaching', and 'learning' affects its cultural values, attitudes, and behaviours related to education. Consequently, the values and norms within a particular culture shape how its members understand and employ educational concepts, ultimately influencing the implementation of educational policies.

2.2.2. Teaching and learning: cultural scripts and the control beliefs

Stigler and Hiebert define a cultural script as a mental picture of general knowledge widely shared within a cultural community [11]. Apart from providing information, it also guides the individual's behaviour and what to expect [12]. Cultural scripts are not static but constantly evolving in response to changing cultural norms and values. They are also influential in shaping the behaviour of individuals, as well as the collective behaviour of a group. Among the three scripts that are paramount in constituting the teaching and learning approach in China, Tan points to students' respect for their teachers, their attention in class, and the importance of practice, all of which are rooted in Confucian tradition and values [10, 12]. Cultural beliefs and assumptions are central to understanding how people perceive and comprehend the world around them and determining what goes into their belief systems. These beliefs and assumptions are based on shared experiences and values that shape people's attitudes and behaviours. They also influence how individuals interact with each other and the environment. As a result, understanding cultural beliefs and assumptions is essential for successful cross-cultural policy borrowing. Control beliefs perform two functions: the conditioning function and the acceptability function. The conditioning function provides a precondition for a person to accept specific ideas, while the acceptability function serves as an aid in determining the acceptability of other beliefs. Confucian values, cultural norms, and sociocultural factors construct China's teaching and learning practices, further developing into a widely believed 'norm', resulting in exam culture and rote-like learning [14]. Upon internalising the assessment reform, there is a conflict between long-established cultural scripts and the newly coined student-centred approach, resulting in teachers in China experiencing difficulty implementing and integrating formative assessment and pedagogical approaches according to it into their classroom practices [10]. This difficulty is further compounded by the need for more professional development opportunities and resources for teachers to become familiar with the new student-centred approach. Consequently, the assessment reform presents a paradoxical and challenging situation for teachers trying to implement the student-centred approach and its corresponding pedagogical approaches.

3. Formative Suzhi Assessment in China

As evidenced by the 2014 Notice, the Chinese government has strongly emphasised the use of alternative assessment modes and student-centred teaching approaches as a means of pursuing a holistic education, as well as downplaying the high stakes of gaokao examinations which are regarded as detrimental to students' mental health and hinder the development of higher-order skills [15, 4, 16, 5].

3.1. Formative Assessment and the Integrated Quality Appraisal

How teachers implement, interpret, and respond to evaluative practices depends on their beliefs about assessment [17]. A common understanding is that assessment serves two primary purposes: certification (or summative) purposes and learning (or formative) purposes [18]. The educational assessment process in China is dominated by high-stakes examinations, such as the gaokao examination system, which significantly affects one's social status, academic pursuits, and career choices. Therefore, the common classroom practices are designed to serve the same purpose: teaching or preparing for the test. In other words, most classroom practices teachers and students are familiar with are intended to serve summative purposes. An educational system or society with a deep-rooted

meritocracy culture will likely result in people valuing only what is being measured [19]. Many problems have resulted from this method, such as rote learning, teacher-centred approaches, and an overemphasis on memorising and test preparation. In light of this, the 2014 round of gaokao reform (assessment) attempts to mitigate the detrimental effects of exam-oriented assessment.

The potential for changing these seemingly reductive practices has been well-demonstrated because Chinese teachers do not believe they constitute excellent teaching [17]. Based on the 2014 Notice, the MOE and the government attempted to enhance summative assessment through formative assessment modes. Rather than only content knowledge, which comprises discrete and decontextualised elements, Tan and Ng argue that students also require procedural and conceptual (or advanced) knowledge [16]. Following Yin & Buck, formative assessment involves:

Eliciting students' thinking.

Identifying difficulties with their understanding of concepts and processes.

Assessing students' responses, comparing them with learning objectives, providing substantive feedback to improve students' understanding of concepts and processes, and adapting subsequent instruction accordingly [20].

Formative assessment can be conceptualised as constructing shared meanings between teacher and student based on sociocultural learning perspectives.

The 2014 education reform piloted in Shanghai introduced an alternative assessment (formative assessment) to complement the long-existing, meritocratic, traditional mode of assessment, which in this regard, refers to summative assessments specifically. Traditional assessment methods typically involve paper-and-pencil tasks and have historically been used to assess students' knowledge of factual and procedural information [16]. Assessment items are designed to measure, recall, and apply information presented as discrete facts, routine computations, or procedures. Assessment items can also measure the ability to think critically, synthesise information, and draw conclusions. They are often used to evaluate student understanding of course material or to measure their knowledge and skills. In high-stakes decision-making processes such as evaluating and ranking students for certification and college admission purposes, evaluating the accountability and performance of teachers, and assessing schools according to their standards, conventional assessment is often the method of choice. However, traditional assessment methods are only sometimes reliable or accurate in gauging a student's knowledge construction and understanding.

Additionally, administering these tests can be time-consuming and expensive. The prevailing traditional summative assessment method, confined to a single moment in a controlled setting, has been criticised for not comprehensively assessing students' abilities [21]. To promote holistic education and comprehensive development, one of the critical initiatives of the reform is the design and implementation of a formative evaluation system. Integrated quality appraisal, intended to measure students' holistic development, was well-intentionally designed and implemented to promote suzhi education. While summative exams are intended to assess a student's performance on a particular task, integrated quality appraisals are intended to be formative in accumulating students' daily and all-around progress and achievement throughout their educational path. Under their teachers' guidance, students can identify their strengths and areas for improvement using quantitative and qualitative measurements [22]. Following that, teachers are responsible for tracking students' development and learning process via the appraisal system, which considers the student's moral quality, citizenship qualities, learning abilities, interpersonal and cooperative skills, sports participation, mental and physical health, and aesthetic interests.

3.2. Barriers to Implementation: a 'Mismatch' between the Policy and the Reality

As demonstrated by empirical research, formative assessment has been ineffective for many reasons, including discrepancies between well-intentioned government policies and classroom realities, which is the 'nitty gritty' of classroom routines, as Gu describes them, such as large class sizes and high examination pressures [6, 10]. China's centralised education system and top-down approach to policy implementation are largely responsible for these discrepancies. Top-down

approaches have advantages and disadvantages [4]. It has contributed to the expedited implementation of the reform.

Despite the increased use of formative assessment and alternative assessment modes in middle and secondary schools, a number of barriers hinder the application of these assessment practices in China, both at the macro level of implementation and the micro level of internalisation. Among these barriers are an inadequate understanding of the purpose and value of such assessment modes, a lack of professional development for teachers in service, and a need for more resources and support to successfully implement these modes [10, 23, 24]. A key reason for the ineffectiveness of these student-centred assessment reform attempts lies in the 'discrepancy' between the policies and the realities of teaching and implementing them [4]. These discrepancies include inadequate facilities, teachers' instructions, and exam pressure [10]. A loosely defined formative assessment involves any pedagogical strategy that can elicit conceptual development from students and then use the information obtained to guide the development of future teaching and learning practices [20, 10, 25].

Moreover, formative assessment is emphasised by Yin and Buck as a means of informing the next steps in teaching. This indicates that the formative assessment should provide feedback to students and teachers to help improve the learning process. The feedback should be timely, relevant, and actionable. It should also be used to inform further teaching strategies and plans.

However, the MOE defines formative assessment as the method of observing, evaluating, and monitoring the learning process by teachers and school administrators to improve the effectiveness of the learning process [24]. That is, the role and function of assessment and feedback are seen primarily concerning teachers' and schools' accountability, emphasising students' performance. This suggests that the roles of teachers and students are limited to the assessment process, focusing primarily on student performance rather than the learning process itself. This approach can be problematic, as it only sometimes allows for meaningful learning. A 'clash of assessment cultures', a biased understanding of the role of assessment, and an under-valued value of feedback from formative assessment constitute the barrier to the internalisation of assessment reform and the deeply rooted cultural traditions that impede the assessment reform process.

The constructivist theory of learning heavily influences formative assessment, which emphasises student autonomy as a dynamic and fluid process. Nevertheless, the literature suggests that summative assessment practices and teaching practices such as memorisation and repetition of information strongly influence assessments in China. In combination, these approaches differ based on culture and epistemology, creating a clash. According to Jian and Luo, the ineffectiveness of formative assessment in Chinese education can be attributed to the tension between formative and summative assessment [10]. Formative assessment is designed to provide feedback that can be used to improve learning, while summative assessment is designed to evaluate learning. This tension has led to a focus on summative assessment at the expense of formative assessment, leading to low effectiveness in the 2014 assessment reform. Chen et al. have characterised this situation as a competing regime of formative and summative assessment, both simultaneously emphasised through policy and that which continue to be influenced by summative assessment in the social setting [11, 24]. The tension between formative and summative assessment is also reflected in the tension between learning-oriented instruction and accountability expectations. Finding a balance between the two approaches is necessary to ensure effective and meaningful assessment reform. It explains why teachers are more likely to teach to the test despite being expected to implement reforms. Considering that formative assessment is being introduced into schools and universities, the question arises about how it will be integrated with the prevalent culture of summative assessment.

3.3. Discussion

As a whole, China still needs to improve when implementing and internalising formative assessment. In policy-making processes, policymakers and school administrators should consider the impact of culture and cultures of learning [10]. Therefore, policy documents must address localisation more clearly to allow teachers to play a fundamental role in transforming a school's learning and

teaching culture. It takes a long-term commitment to change the learning culture of a school as it requires consideration of values, beliefs, and norms related to education as a subject, teaching, and learning [23]. To gain a grassroots perspective on implementing reform initiatives, reformers and school leaders need to understand where teachers are coming from and how they perceive and assume that teaching and learning occur. This understanding can be obtained by engaging teachers in meaningful dialogue, gathering input, and listening to their needs. Teachers must be seen as active partners in the reform process and be allowed to provide feedback and ideas. Motivation is inextricably linked to these perceptions and assumptions, which are imperative to the success of reform initiatives. This understanding allows reformers and school leaders to identify areas for improvement and create more effective strategies to enact change. It can also create a more collaborative and supportive school environment where teachers feel empowered to enact change.

3.3.1. Teacher's dilemma in the reform

Tan & Ng discovered that students are still trapped in the exam-oriented mindset, even with the reform explicitly designed for alternative assessment that assists students in locating their areas of interest [16]. It is partly because the integrated quality appraisal still serves the purpose of meritocratic admissions, thereby fostering or reinforcing the result-oriented mindset since stakeholders with more significant resources, or a higher socioeconomic background would strive to improve their appraisals to excel in the gaokao competition. The over-emphasis on the 'end product' would presumably result in the insufficient understanding teachers and students have for the functions and the process of feedback. That is, according to Bond and Molloy, the understanding of feedback is restricted to instructing students of the next steps in achieving a certain goal, and no necessary mechanisms is integrated in the feedback process to ensure these insights are effectively utilised [26]. In other words, in a context that lacks relating practices and understandings on formative feedbacks, teachers are more familiar with providing 'teacher-centred' feedbacks, that functions more like strict guidance or instructions, and that the feedback process ends when students get them.

Moreover, instead of being viewed merely as an acquisition and accumulation task, the learning process now requires students to actively participate in knowledge construction [27]. 'Student-centred' implies that the student's role in learning is no longer passive, as the process is no longer regarded as a singular process transmitting knowledge but rather interactive, fostering conversations that both parties are involved. In the Chinese educational context, the Confucian values that stress the ultimate respect for teachers and many other practical obstacles, such as large class sizes, together create a power relation between teachers and students that gradually evolved into the commonly accepted 'norms' that teachers take a dominating role in the classroom, as well as the learning process.

Tentative solutions and suggestions are presented here to help teachers implement student-centred and learning-oriented teaching practices. This article argues that the teachers' dilemma in performing student-centred teaching practices and pedagogies in their classroom is mainly constituted by the following two components: first, the insufficient understanding of student-centred and learning-oriented feedback; second, the Confucian values embedded in teaching and learning construct the power-relationship between teachers and students that hinders the construction of a fluid learning environment that is suitable for holistic development taking place.

3.3.2. Tentative solutions

Regardless of how well a policy is written, its practical implementation depends on many bottom-up factors [20]. The 'bottom-up factors' refers to those who work on the front lines to assess holistic development, such as teachers, administrators, students, and parents. Local factors, actors, and conditions are integral to and ultimately determine the success of assessment reform in a locality [16, 28]. Although top-down policies define the primary objectives for the future, a bottom-up commitment is also necessary to achieve these objectives [2]. Despite emphasising a learning-centred approach, the teacher is not rendered redundant in providing feedback. Instead, the teacher provides guidance and direction to make the learning experience meaningful.

Furthermore, the teacher is responsible for fostering an environment that encourages students to take ownership of and be responsible for their learning and to be engaged in knowledge construction and reflection [26]. Teacher needs a different set of competencies to accomplish this repositioning [3, 27]. The teacher becomes a designer and sustainer of the educational milieu, facilitating students' autonomy by creating a conducive learning environment. As part of sustainable feedback, the focus is shifted from solely providing one-shot feedback to designing learning environments, seeding generative tasks, and encouraging interaction between school authorities and students [29]. Teachers in the early years of their career path are both facilitators of identity shifts and creators of appealing learning opportunities [28]. Furthermore, by providing regular feedback and encouraging dialogue between students and teachers, teachers can help foster an environment of trust and understanding between the two parties, fostering a more profound learning experience. Toward this end, teachers should receive more professional training, including introductions to the different assessment purposes and support in providing meaningful feedback to enhance students' holistic development.

4. Conclusion

The Chinese NCEE, the gaokao, is regarded as a social ladder that determines an individual's social position. As the system evolved, it became more and more score driven. This has caused immense pressure on students to achieve the highest scores possible. As a result, many students are struggling with the mental and physical stress of the gaokao. It has become a source of great anxiety for many students and their families. A great deal of pressure is placed on students to achieve higher scores to gain admission to higher-ranked schools.

Moreover, teachers' performance is based mainly on students' test scores and university admission rates. This has created a situation where the teachers are more focused on teaching to the test rather than teaching a more holistic approach to education. This has led to a decrease in the quality of education in China, as teachers are more concerned with preparing students for the gaokao than providing students with the knowledge and skills to be successful in higher education. Teachers are expected to prepare students for exams, and their teaching performance is partly evaluated based on those results. This has led to a focus on rote learning and memorisation at the expense of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. It has also placed a tremendous burden on students, who are expected to compete in an increasingly intense academic environment. Although the gaokao assessment reform initiative is a positive step towards providing students with options, more changes are needed to develop an effective teaching and learning system and transform the Chinese 'score-oriented' educational philosophy. This should include investing in teacher training, constructing creative learning environments, and encouraging independent thinking.

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