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Moving Beyond Formalism in AI-Supported Primary Chinese Language Teaching Through Learning Task Clusters

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Abstract: The development of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) has introduced new technologies that can help reform primary school Chinese-language teaching. Artificial intelligence in schools will not necessarily improve the quality of education. Some applications are still at the display stage, have only shallow learning goals, and focus more on form than on content. In such cases, AI will only be a decoration and will not help students develop the essential qualities of good Chinese language learners. According to the learning-task-cluster approach put forward by the new curriculum standards in China, this paper believes that, to break free from formalism, technological resources should be transformed into learning tasks. Under the leadership of teachers, AI can help students actively participate in reading, expression, communication and inquiry. Based on the research on generative AI in primary school Chinese language teaching, this paper will examine the form of classroom formalism, explore the reasons for dealing with it using AI, and put forward practical measures for instructional goals, learning activities, classroom operations and assessment feedback. It will help to improve the quality of primary Chinese language education in the era of artificial intelligence.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Primary Chinese Language Education; Learning Task Clusters; Classroom Teaching; Formalism.

1. Practical Challenges and the Educational Purpose of Moving Beyond Formalism

With the development of generative AI in recent years, it has gradually been applied to education to create teaching materials, support students' learning, and offer individualised assessments [1]. Artificial intelligence can help teachers make better use of teaching materials, improve the organisation of lessons, create learning environments, and promote the development of new types of classrooms.

However, the introduction of technology does not automatically lead to good teaching. Some applications of AI in primary school Chinese language education have a formalistic tendency. Teachers pay some attention in class to whether there are AI and other digital resources, but they pay less attention to how these applications have actually improved students' learning. Teachers can directly show the AI-generated pictures, videos and texts to the students and make the class seem more high-tech, but the students will remain passive. Some learning tasks are called interactive and collaborative, but they do not offer enough chances for close reading, independent thinking and authentic expression. Wang [2] believes that classroom teaching in light of the new curriculum reform should avoid being a "performance"; without a meaningful problem context and effective learning process, autonomous, collaborative, and inquiry-based activities will be mere formalities. The same problem will happen in AI-assisted Classrooms. If the teachers only focus on the advantages of technology and fail to meet the specific demands of teaching Chinese, artificial intelligence will become another form of classroom formalism.

Primary Chinese language education is highly practical and humane. Students develop language skills by actively participating in spoken and written language. The Chinese Language Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition) [3] organise and present curriculum content in the form of learning task clusters to promote language practice in authentic environments and develop language use, thinking, aesthetic creativity and cultural literacy. Therefore, to move beyond classroom formalism, attention should be paid to whether students are actually learning, rather than just focusing on the form of the activities.

Therefore, in order to move beyond formalism in AI-assisted Chinese classes for young children, we should change how AI is used rather than limiting the range of its application. AI-generated material is not the result of learning. Teachers should use their professional judgment to create problems that fit the students' different stages of development. Technology can only help foster the students' basic abilities through active participation in reading, expressing, communicating and exploring.

2. Theoretical Rationale for Moving Beyond Formalism

The main problem is that the technology cannot serve education well. Generative AI has been used to create materials, organise information and generate prompts. Chinese language teaching is not only concerned with the efficiency of knowledge acquisition but also aims to foster students' language skills, thinking abilities and cultural literacy. Therefore, classroom applications of AI should take a learning-task-cluster approach and be professionally guided by teachers to make good use of technological resources for learning. Li [4] believes that AI-assisted teaching of primary school Chinese should avoid technological alienation and focus on education for all aspects of a person. Therefore, the AI will be used by teachers to help the children. Teachers

should select and adjust the generated content based on the curriculum goals, textbook contents and students' circumstances so that technology supports teaching.

A series of AI generation, teacher review, task adaptation and student practice can promote the integration of generative AI in primary school Chinese classes. Organise Resources and offer support for the Design of Teaching Materials with AI technology. The teacher can adjust the material according to the curriculum and students' abilities. Change the resources into language activities that the students can participate in for the task. The End Goal of the process is student practice. This sequence is in line with the cluster of learning tasks in the new curriculum standards. Zhang [5] thinks that learning task clusters can move teaching away from the old way of teaching individual texts by integrating instructional goals, learning tasks, inquiry activities and assessments to foster organised knowledge and all-round practical abilities. AI will provide the materials, designs and implementation of the learning activities.

The structure will have one core and two spokes, and cover the five areas and six stages. At the foundation is the cultivation of students' general abilities in Chinese language learning. The two strings are technological efficiency and educational effect. The five areas are lesson preparation, reading and appreciation, expression and communication, organisation and inquiry, and homework and assessment. The six steps are: Objective Alignment, Need Identification, AI Generation, Teacher Review, Task Transformation and Assessment and Reflection.

Table 1. Implementation Framework for Moving Beyond Formalism in AI-Supported Primary Chinese Language Teaching.

Core dimension	Main components	Classroom value
One core	Development of students' core competencies in Chinese language learning	Clarifying the purpose of technology use
Two strands	Technological efficiency and educational value	Avoiding a narrowly instrumental view of technology
Five domains	Lesson preparation; reading and appreciation; expression and communication; organization and inquiry; homework and assessment	Integrating AI throughout teaching and learning
Six stages	Objective alignment; needs identification; AI generation; teacher review; task transformation; assessment and reflection	Establishing a complete cycle of application

Based on the above, it can be concluded that a significant reform of teaching methods for the new curriculum should be pursued. AI can help improve the efficiency of teachers, but it cannot replace their value judgments; it can support learning, but it cannot conduct language practice for students. Under the guidance of teachers, students can be given some autonomy in learning and engage in problem-based learning to achieve higher levels of learning.

3. Practical Approaches Based on Learning Task Clusters

Finally, we will build an intelligent support system for students based on the AI we have developed in the auxiliary classroom. In line with the cluster of learning tasks, classroom teaching should be centred on authentic tasks that allow students to participate in reading comprehension, language expression, construction of knowledge and cultural experience. AI can help teachers create more focused problems and offer various kinds of support to motivate students to learn actively and improve their grades.

According to the research results of generative AI in primary school Chinese language teaching, the following four practical problems can be solved: objective design, task construction, classroom application and assessment reform.

Table 2. Practical Ways to Move Beyond Formalism in AI-Assisted Primary Chinese Language Teaching.

Teaching component	Manifestation of formalism	AI support	Intended outcome
Instructional design	Activities disconnected from objectives	Supporting analysis of textbooks and student needs	More precisely aligned objectives
Learning tasks	Lack of authentic contexts	Generating resources and refining task design	Deep learning
Classroom practice	Superficial interaction	Supporting inquiry, communication, and personalized learning	Stronger student agency
Assessment	Attention to outcomes at the expense of processes	Providing ongoing feedback	Continued development

3.1. Aligning Objectives to Make Instructional Design More Systematic

Instructional goals guide the teaching in class and provide a basis for evaluating the results of AI. Some primary Chinese language classrooms have given too much weight to the diversity of lesson activities and interaction, entertainment and opportunities for display, and have paid less attention to what students should learn from studying. If the activities are off-topic, the lively classroom will not be very educational.

The first step in going beyond formalism is an objective

Design. Teachers can use generative AI to analyse textbook contents, identify the themes of a unit, clarify the language-learning priorities in that unit, set goals based on students' actual circumstances, etc. AI can help with the analysis; teachers are still responsible for curriculum evaluation.

Whole-unit teaching can be conducted by having students learn all relevant materials with AI, identify the main problems in these materials, set a common goal, and participate in class activities together. In addition to having teachers lead the activities, students can also practise language through group activities. The goals of the unit on character description should be expanded to help students learn how to use descriptive methods and apply them in their own writing. AI can summarise writing features in various texts to help design tasks, but teachers need to turn this information into activities that students can actually do. Aligning the goals with the requirements of teaching can help avoid using technology for the sake of using it.

3.2. Generating Resources to Turn Superficial Activities into Authentic Practice

The cluster of learning tasks is to learn Chinese in real situations and practice it. Although the traditional classroom has many activities, the tasks are often not directly related to students' actual lives. Students will merely follow the teachers' instructions and have little room for independent problem-solving.

Generative AI can quickly create various materials, such as text, pictures, background information, questions, etc., for task construction. Generated content should not be regarded as the end goal of instruction. Teachers should create tasks with educational value by using AI generation, teacher review and task modification. AI can be used to collect related information about a text, generate additional reading materials and inquiry questions, etc. Teachers should choose generated content in line with the goals of the curriculum and students' cognitive abilities so that there is no information overload and students are not passive recipients of information. For instance, when teaching composition, students may not know what to write or be unable to express themselves freely. AI can help them generate ideas, organise materials and correct language; however, their own lives should still be the basis of their writing. AI can give some expressions, but it cannot replace students' own experiences.

Shen [6] believes that learning task clusters can change the form of teaching from individual exercises to integrated practice and thus enhance students' application of language and creativity in real situations. The main aim of using AI in composition teaching is to have students experience all stages of observation, thinking, expression and revision; it is not about producing a better-rounded work.

3.3. Supporting Active Construction of Understanding Through Human-AI Collaboration

Classroom practice is the focus of the reform. The integration of AI should be evident in how students learn, and not merely an increase in the number of digital resources teachers use.

Traditionally, in classrooms, teaching is often done by having teachers present knowledge and then having students ask and answer questions. A cluster of learning tasks will be organised to find problems together and discuss what has been learned. AI will help people study on their own. Students can use AI to obtain background information and other support materials in the reading lesson. In the integrated learning activity, they can organise the information and compare the opinions. Oral communication can offer some chances for people to try speaking.

AI should not replace student thinking. The purpose of learning Chinese is to allow students to build their own knowledge through reading, speaking, etc. Li and others [7] believe that artificial intelligence can motivate students to study with more enthusiasm, create personalised learning plans, and offer many ways of teaching to build an intelligent Chinese-language primary school. Therefore, more active participation of students will be required. Teachers should be able to judge how much AI can be used and guide students to use AI as a study tool, not as an answer source. Students should be able to obtain information using AI and retain the ability to question, evaluate and create.

3.4. Improving Feedback to Make Assessment Support Development

Assessment should be carried out in class and is also a way to move beyond formalism. Most traditional assessments of Chinese language do not consider how students arrive at the answer or what improvements they have made in expression and other abilities.

The Set of Learning Tasks includes assessment of learning. Evaluation can be about results or about improving work. AI is now being used in this field.

Teachers can use artificial intelligence to analyse students' answers in reading, correct their writing, check whether they have completed the learning tasks, and thus learn about changes in language use, thinking and expression. AI can detect problems in the expression of the composition-writing lesson and offer corrections. Reading the instructions can help teachers find out how well the students understand them and modify their teaching plans. AI Assessment should not replace teacher assessment. Chinese language learning is rich in culture, and judgments about emotional experience, values, aesthetics, etc., need to be made in specific situations.

Therefore, the AI-assisted assessment system should integrate teacher assessment, student self-assessment, peer assessment and AI feedback to promote the all-round development of students. Thus, evaluation will be based on continuous observation of student behaviour and will help improve teaching and learning in tandem.

4. Conclusion

New Choices for Reforming Primary School Chinese-Language Teaching by Generative AI. The teaching goals should focus on cultivating students' essential qualities; the number of intelligent features in a lesson is not the key. With the development of technology, it has moved away from teaching content-focused teaching in displays and classrooms towards aesthetics; thus, a new direction for innovation in the era of artificial intelligence has been proposed by the learning task cluster approach.

AI should be integrated into the Design of instructional objectives and learning tasks, classroom teaching and assessment feedback. After the AI generates content, teachers can review it, modify the tasks and activities, and then students will use the modified materials for reading, writing, speaking, etc.

Moving away from classroom formalism is to pay attention

to students' actual learning. Artificial intelligence can improve teaching efficiency, add teaching materials and assessment, but teachers are still responsible for values, and students need to use their own thinking and expression. Future primary school Chinese classes will integrate teacher leadership, AI assistance and student initiative to address the new requirements of teaching Chinese.

Changes will be made in classroom organisation and learning methods due to the clustering of new learning tasks. By directing technology towards education and the growth of students, primary Chinese language teaching can move from innovation in form to deep learning and bring AI support in line with the all-around development of students.

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