

Study on Strategies for Improving Students' Literacy from the Perspective of Head Teachers in the Basic Education Stage in China — Based on Lower-Grade Class Management Practice

Fan Yang^{1,2,a*}, Jinbao Li¹, Yutong Zhong¹

¹School of Mathematics and Physics, Suqian University, Suqian, Jiangsu, 223800, China

²School of Mathematics and Statistics, Qinghai Normal University, Xining, Qinghai, 810008, China

^a18754481983@163.com

* Corresponding Author

Abstract: Enhancing students' literacy from the perspective of head teachers in the basic education stage is a crucial step in implementing the fundamental task of fostering virtue and cultivating talents, as well as an essential path for promoting the innovative development of basic education. As China's basic education enters a phase of deep reform guided by core competencies, the focus of cultivating student literacy is shifting from curriculum design to daily educational practice. As the primary organizers and guides of students' school lives, the work purview of head teachers has a decisive impact on the effective implementation of literacy goals. This study focuses on the critical period of literacy foundation in the lower grades, aiming to systematically explore effective pathways for head teachers to enhance student literacy through class management practices. The article first analyzes the necessity and contemporary mission for head teachers to strengthen literacy cultivation within the core competencies framework, and subsequently identifies the main aspects of student literacy that should be prioritized in the lower grades. The research thoroughly examines four key dilemmas currently faced in practice. Based on this analysis, a set of effective and positive countermeasures is proposed. This study aims to provide a theory-informed and practice-oriented reference framework for frontline head teachers, demonstrating that effective class management itself serves as a powerful engine for enhancing student literacy.

Keywords: Head teacher's work, Student literacy, Class management, Lower grades, Strategy study

1. Introduction

A nation's strength derives from its people, and the cultivation of talent stems from education. In March 2014, the Ministry of Education of China issued the Opinions on Comprehensively Deepening Curriculum Reform to Fulfill the Fundamental Task of Fostering Virtue through Education, emphasizing that basic education should help students develop the essential character, problem-solving literacy, and key competencies necessary for their lifelong development and societal needs, thereby fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education. The National Education Congress further explicitly identified "fostering virtue through education as the fundamental task of education," focusing on cultivating a new generation capable of undertaking the mission of national rejuvenation. Guided by this overarching objective, developing students' core competencies has become a central issue in China's basic education reform. As the fundamental unit of educational instruction, the class serves as the primary front for implementing the task of "fostering virtue through education." Head teachers, positioned at the forefront of student development, act as organizers, leaders, and implementers of class education. Their management practices directly determine the breadth, depth, and effectiveness of competency cultivation. This role is particularly critical in the lower primary school grades, a key period for shaping behavioral habits and values. Traditional class management, if merely focused on maintaining order and handling routine affairs, falls short of bearing the significant responsibility of competency-oriented education in the new era. A pressing practical challenge for basic education practitioners, therefore, is how to translate the broad goals of core competencies into specific, perceptible, practicable, and assessable daily educational practices, and integrate them throughout the entire class management process. Given this context, this study, grounded in the unique perspective of

head teachers in basic education and focusing on lower-grade class management practices, aims to thoroughly investigate strategies for enhancing student literacy.

2. The Necessity of Enhancing Students' Literacy from the Perspective of Head Teachers in Basic Education

2.1. Responding to the Call of the Times: An Imperative Requirement for Implementing Core Competencies

Global education is undergoing a profound transformation from knowledge transmission to the cultivation of abilities and literacy. Developing students' core competencies has consequently become the strategic priority of basic education in China. This shift demands that education move beyond singular academic scores and transition towards fostering students' comprehensive qualities. As the primary guides for students' growth within schools, head teachers must elevate their class management from mere administrative tasks to the level of literacy cultivation. This necessitates that head teachers possess a conscious educational awareness, systematically integrating literacy goals into the holistic design of the class environment, systems, and activities. Doing so ensures that core competencies transition from high-level conceptual ideals into tangible daily growth experiences for students, providing a concrete implementation pathway.

2.2. Leveraging Positional Strengths: Fulfilling the Key Responsibility of Fostering Virtue through Education

The unique nature of the head teacher role makes them irreplaceable key figures in implementing the fundamental task of "fostering virtue through education." Compared to subject teachers, head teachers spend more time with students and interact across a broader range of domains. Their personal conduct, management style, and value orientation constitute the most direct and vivid model for moral education^[1]. Therefore, head teachers must possess a heightened awareness of exemplary leadership. This requires them to proactively internalize the requirements of fostering virtue through education into every management decision, thereby effectively permeating it through to the final step of their educational work.

2.3. Laying the Foundation for Lifelong Development: Addressing the Special Needs of Lower-Grade Students

The lower primary school years represent a critical period for the formation of students' behavioral habits, emotional attitudes, and social competencies. Educational guidance during this phase holds strategic significance for laying the foundation for students' lifelong development. Lower-grade students exhibit high plasticity. Through purposeful and planned class management, head teachers can effectively help students establish a sense of order and security, and initially cultivate positive habits^[2]. The outcomes of cultivation during this stage demonstrate a significant window of opportunity; corrective efforts made after poor habits have solidified will yield half the result with twice the effort. Therefore, strengthening literacy cultivation through class management in the lower grades is not only necessary but also urgent, as it directly impacts each child's ability to steadily navigate the crucial first steps of their life journey.

3. Analysis of Dilemmas in Enhancing Students' Literacy from the Perspective of Head Teachers in Basic Education

3.1. The Dilemma of Goal Transformation: Ineffective Translation of Specific Core Competency Targets

Core competencies, as macro-level educational goals, are expressed with a high degree of abstraction. However, the cognitive development of lower-grade students is situated in the concrete operational stage, where their thinking relies on concrete objects and direct experiences. The core challenge faced by head teachers lies in how to delineate these abstract concepts into observable, imitable, and reinforceable behaviors, and to break down comprehensive abilities into clear, explicit manifestations. This process of decomposing overarching concepts into subordinate behavioral indicators is fraught with ambiguity due to the lack of standardized guidelines, thereby hindering the

effective integration of literacy cultivation into daily classroom practice.

3.2. The Dilemma of Management Paradigm: The Contradiction between the Complexity of Educational Work and the Limited Time and Energy of Head Teachers

Cultivating student literacy is a complex process requiring systematic planning and sustained investment. However, in lower-grade class management practice, head teachers struggle to balance their professional roles with practical duties, manifesting a dual contradiction. First, the burden of administrative tasks impedes the exercise of their professional functions. While head teachers are meant to assume the core roles of guiding student development and shaping character, their actual work is often dominated by a multitude of non-instructional tasks. Administrative duties such as data collection and preparation for inspections consume the cognitive resources and time investment necessary for fulfilling their core responsibilities. Second, there exists a contradiction between developmental educational objectives and a reactive work mode. The establishment of behaviors in lower-grade students is characterized by repetition and long-term nature, requiring continuous guidance and individualized attention from the head teacher. Yet, the high frequency of immediate issues in daily class management—such as discipline control, conflict mediation, and life guidance—forces head teachers into a cycle of passive response^[3]. This reactive state compresses the professional space required for substantive literacy cultivation, ultimately confining it to superficial behavior management and hindering the achievement of deeper educational impact. These dual dilemmas starkly reveal the formidable challenges head teachers face under the existing work paradigm.

3.3. The Dilemma of Methodological Strategy: The Imbalance between Educational Uniformity and Developmental Diversity

The formation of student literacy possesses distinct individual characteristics, demanding considerable precision and adaptability in educational interventions. However, within the unified framework of the class teaching system, head teachers face a profound contradiction between the diversity of student development and the limited repertoire of educational strategies. Lower-grade students exhibit significant differences in cognitive readiness, emotion regulation ability, and level of social development. This developmental landscape, shaped by both innate predispositions and acquired experiences, requires head teachers to move beyond the limitations of homogeneous educational design. At the practical level, however, head teachers often lack systematic diagnostic tools and differentiated guidance strategies, making it difficult to accurately identify the developmental needs of different students and implement targeted interventions. Furthermore, objective constraints such as class size and teaching schedules lead to a structural misalignment between educational provision and individual needs. The root of this dilemma lies in the current head teacher work system's insufficient capacity for grasping individual differences and providing corresponding professional support, consequently impeding the paradigm shift in literacy cultivation from large-scale management to refined, individualized guidance in practice.

3.4. The Dilemma of Synergistic Integration: Lack of Synchronized Coordination between Home and School

The cultivation of student literacy is a systemic task requiring collaborative participation from multiple educational stakeholders, and its effectiveness largely depends on the consistency across different educational environments. However, in practice, head teachers face the dilemma of ineffective connection between school education and family education. Lower-grade students are in a critical period for establishing values and behavioral habits, and their cognition and behavior exhibit significant context-dependent characteristics. This necessitates a high degree of consistency between families and schools regarding educational philosophies and behavioral expectations. The reality, however, is that the sense of rules and behavioral habits cultivated by head teachers in class management often fail to be effectively continued and consolidated in the home environment due to a lack of consensus between home and school. The essence of this dilemma is the absence of a symbiotic mechanism among the various educational entities characterized by shared goals and coordinated actions, thereby constraining the stability and sustainability of student literacy development.

4. Positive Strategies for Enhancing Students' Literacy from the Perspective of Head Teachers in Basic Education

4.1. Creating an Immersive Classroom Culture to Resolve the Dilemma of Goal Transformation

In lower-grade class management within basic education, the primary obstacle to literacy cultivation is the significant disparity between the abstract nature of core competencies and the concrete cognitive level of students. The formation of student literacy is essentially a process of value internalization, requiring a complete transformation path from cognitive understanding to emotional identification, and finally to behavioral consciousness. Creating an immersive classroom culture is the fundamental approach to resolving the dilemma of goal transformation. Its core lies in constructing a comprehensive, multi-dimensional, and sustained educational ecology that concretizes abstract literacy goals within the details of classroom life.

First, building an explicit educational system within the material environment is the foundation for achieving cultural immersion. The classroom's physical environment is not merely the space for instructional activities but also a tacit curriculum for literacy cultivation. Head teachers need to transform core competencies such as "integrity," "friendliness," and "cooperation" into visual environmental elements. For instance, establishing a "Honesty Book Corner" with a self-service borrowing model allows students to experience the value of integrity in practice; creating a "Collaborative Achievement Display Wall" to showcase group work enables students to intuitively perceive the power of teamwork. These environmental arrangements should emphasize not only educational value but also interactivity, allowing students to naturally absorb literacy influences through daily exposure. According to Bandura's social learning theory, such sustained environmental stimuli can effectively guide students in forming corresponding behavioral patterns.

Second, establishing a normative guidance mechanism through institutional systems is a crucial link for deepening cultural immersion. The institutional culture of the classroom translates abstract literacy requirements into specific behavioral standards, providing clear guidance for students' character development. Head teachers should formulate class conventions covering various areas of learning and life together with students, and secure their emotional identification with the content through democratic discussion. For example, the "responsibility" competency can be concretized into behavioral expectations such as managing personal belongings independently and proactively undertaking class duties. Similarly, the "respect" competency can be specified as classroom norms including listening without interrupting and raising hands to speak. Such specific regulations make abstract competencies tangible and easy to implement in daily class management. The implementation of these institutional norms must emphasize fairness, allowing students to experience the value of rules in practice and internalize external standards into intrinsic beliefs. Crucially, the construction of institutional culture should avoid rigid lecturing; instead, methods like scenario simulation and role modeling should be employed to help students accept normative guidance through emotional resonance.

Third, creating an emotional inspiration system through spiritual culture is the safeguard for enhancing the effectiveness of cultural immersion. Classroom spiritual culture is the core of immersive education, promoting the internalization of literacy through value guidance and emotional resonance^[4]. Head teachers need to focus on cultivating a positive classroom atmosphere and establishing harmonious teacher-student and peer relationships. For example, regularly conducting "Strength Spotting" activities guides students to learn to appreciate others; setting up a "Mood Tree hole" provides students with channels for emotional expression. These activities can foster a warm, accepting, and supportive classroom psychological climate, giving students a sense of belonging and security, which provides the necessary emotional foundation for literacy internalization. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, only when safety needs are met can students better pursue higher-level growth needs.

The construction of this cultural system effectively resolves the challenge of transforming literacy goals. Through the explicit education of the material environment, abstract literacy becomes observable and tangible; through the normative guidance of the institutional environment, literacy requirements become actionable and followable; through the emotional inspiration of the spiritual environment, the connotations of literacy become relatable and accessible. This multi-level, comprehensive immersion model transforms literacy cultivation from deliberate educational acts into a natural growth process, and from intermittent educational activities into a continuous environmental influence^[5].

4.2. Constructing a Student Self-Management System to Overcome the Management Paradigm Dilemma

In lower-grade classroom management within basic education, head teachers commonly confront a contradiction between their expected professional role and the substantial burden of practical administrative duties. A deeper analysis reveals this tension stems from the inherent conflict between the comprehensive, long-term nature of cultivating student competencies and the immediate, transactional demands of daily classroom management. Enhancing student literacy represents a gradual internalization process requiring sustained investment of professional expertise and educational commitment from head teachers. However, in practice, numerous and sundry managerial tasks consistently encroach upon this essential professional space. Establishing a student self-management system emerges as the pivotal strategy for resolving this management paradigm dilemma. Its core principle involves transforming the management process itself into an active platform for competency development.

First, creating a systematic classroom job allocation framework forms the foundation for implementing self-management. Based on the cognitive and behavioral characteristics of lower-grade students, head teachers should design a comprehensive duty system encompassing all aspects of classroom life. Specifically, classroom responsibilities can be categorized into four dimensions: academic support, environmental maintenance, cultural development, and life services^[6]. Within academic support, roles such as “Pre-class Preparation Supervisor” and “Lead Reader” can be established to foster task awareness and responsibility. For environmental maintenance, positions including “Sanitation Monitor” and “Materials Manager” help develop work ethic and organizational awareness. In cultural development, roles like “Library Coordinator” and “Bulletin Board Designer” cultivate cultural literacy and creative thinking. Regarding life services, assignments such as “Dining Assistant” and “Plant Caretaker” instill service awareness. Each position requires detailed responsibility descriptions and visualized workflow charts to translate abstract competency goals into concrete, understandable, and executable behaviors for students.

Second, implementing a phased student empowerment strategy constitutes the core of effective self-management. Grounded in Vygotsky’s “Zone of Proximal Development” theory, this process should advance progressively through three stages. During the initial guidance phase, the head teacher establishes fundamental norms through personal demonstration and detailed explanation, while simultaneously embedding competency development principles. In the intermediate transition phase, the head teacher gradually reduces direct involvement, primarily serving as a guide and facilitator, enabling students to autonomously solve problems through practical experience, with emphasis on developing problem-solving skills and collaborative spirit. In the advanced autonomy phase, the head teacher’s role evolves into that of supervisor and motivator, focusing on cultivating students’ capacity for independent work and innovative thinking, thereby promoting the internalization of external norms into intrinsic behavioral qualities. This spiral, ascending empowerment model aligns with lower-grade students’ cognitive development patterns while ensuring continuous deepening of competency cultivation.

Third, establishing robust support mechanisms is crucial for maintaining the self-management system’s sustainable operation. This framework comprises three key components: The first is the visualization of operational content. Through illustrated workflow diagrams and concise operational guides, students can accurately fulfill their responsibilities, transforming competency requirements into actionable behavioral indicators. The second element is a diversified incentive and evaluation system. Integrating outcome-based and process-oriented assessments focuses both on task completion quality and the development of responsibility awareness and cooperative spirit, making competency development visible and measurable. The third component is a regular rotation system. This ensures all students gain comprehensive experience across different positions, promoting holistic competency development for every student.

This management system’s implementation effectively alleviates the dual challenges head teachers face. Through systematic job allocation, the burden of routine administrative tasks is significantly reduced, freeing up professional space for designing competency-building activities and providing individualized guidance. More importantly, this system transforms the management process itself into a practical vehicle for competency development. While performing specific duties, students not only acquire management skills but also achieve deeper internalization of core competencies including responsibility, rule awareness, and cooperation. As Erikson’s psychosocial development theory emphasizes, school-age children are in a critical period for developing a sense of industry. The

self-management system establishment provides students with an effective pathway to gain accomplishment and build self-confidence.

It is particularly important to emphasize that the system's construction must maintain strict alignment with competency development objectives. Every position establishment should target specific competency development goals. Through this immersive practical experience, students can translate abstract competency requirements into stable behavioral patterns within authentic contexts, ultimately achieving a virtuous cycle where management effectiveness and educational quality are simultaneously enhanced.

4.3. Implementing Thematic Educational Activities to Address the Methodological Strategy Dilemma

In lower-grade classroom management within basic education, head teachers face the contradiction between the uniformity of educational methods and the diversity of student development. This dilemma directly constrains the targeting and effectiveness of student literacy cultivation. The construction of a thematic educational activity system provides a systematic solution to this challenge. This system, guided by student development needs, facilitates the transition from standardized education to personalized cultivation through multidimensional educational practices.

The core of thematic educational activities lies in the systematic sequencing of their content design. Head teachers must construct a progressive sequence of thematic activities based on the cognitive development patterns of lower-grade students. In the moral literacy domain, a series focusing on rule awareness cultivation can be designed, progressing from recognizing the importance of rules to understanding their underlying principles, and finally to conscious compliance. In the learning literacy domain, a series for study method guidance can be planned, advancing from cultivating concentration to mastering memory strategies, and subsequently to developing reflective habits. Each theme should incorporate three dimensions: core concept comprehension, key competency training, and essential character shaping, ensuring both comprehensiveness and depth in literacy cultivation. This sequenced design not only adheres to the principles of student psychological development but also aligns with the progressive nature of competency formation, thereby establishing a fundamental framework for differentiated education.

Precise implementation strategies tailored to individual student differences represent a crucial characteristic of thematic educational activities. Head teachers need to establish comprehensive student development profiles to accurately identify each student's characteristics and needs. During activity implementation, tiered task designs and multiple participation pathways should be provided. For instance, in teamwork activities, different roles can be assigned based on students' social skills; in inquiry-based practical activities, differentiated research tasks can be offered according to students' cognitive levels. This personalized support should manifest not only in task difficulty but also in addressing students' interests, strengths, and developmental gaps. Through customized activity plans, it ensures that every student can achieve maximum development from their individual starting points.

The evaluation and feedback mechanism for thematic educational activities serves as vital support for their continuous optimization. Head teachers need to establish a scientific observation and recording system to promptly track student performance and progress during activities. Through various methods including process documentation and reflective discussions, a comprehensive assessment of student literacy development should be conducted. Simultaneously, emphasis should be placed on student self-assessment and peer evaluation to cultivate metacognitive skills and collaborative spirit. This evaluation data not only informs teachers' adjustments to activity design but also enables students to clearly recognize their own development, thereby enhancing their consciousness in literacy cultivation.

The in-depth development of thematic educational activities requires head teachers to possess systematic educational design capabilities and keen observational and analytical skills. During practice, head teachers should emphasize empirical research on activity effectiveness, continuously accumulating effective educational strategies through methods such as educational narratives and case analysis. Furthermore, they should strengthen professional learning and peer collaboration, draw upon advanced educational concepts and methods, and persistently refine the thematic activity system, ultimately making it a truly effective vehicle for promoting student literacy development.

4.4. Deepening Home-School Collaborative Education to Break Through the Synergy and Integration Dilemma

In the process of cultivating lower-grade students' literacy within basic education, the disparities in educational philosophies and disconnections in practices between school and family constitute a significant collaborative dilemma. This challenge manifests specifically as multiple issues: inconsistent understanding of educational goals, uncoordinated application of educational methods, and asynchronous implementation of educational requirements. Deepening the home-school collaborative education mechanism aims to build an educational community with shared philosophies and co-assumed responsibilities, providing consistent support for student literacy development.

The foundation of home-school collaboration lies in establishing a platform for conceptual consensus. Head teachers need to proactively construct systematic parent communication mechanisms. Through various formats such as regular parent meetings and educational philosophy sharing sessions, they should help parents understand the connotation and value of core competencies^[7]. Abstract literacy goals must be translated into specific, understandable behaviors for parents. This conceptual transmission should not only explain what should be done but, crucially, why it is done, thereby transforming parents from passive cooperators into active participants. Simultaneously, attention should be paid to gathering parents' educational concerns and experiential wisdom, thereby enhancing mutual understanding and trust through this two-way interaction.

Innovating home-school communication mechanisms is a key measure for enhancing collaborative effectiveness. Head teachers must move beyond the limitations of traditional communication methods by establishing diversified and immediate home-school contact channels. Beyond conventional home-school contact books and class groups, a shared platform for student growth records can be established, allowing parents to stay informed about their children's progress and challenges at school in a timely manner^[8]. Regarding communication content, it should transcend simple transaction notifications to include more sharing of educational observations and professional advice. This professionalized communication can resolve information asymmetry and enhance the scientific nature of family education.

The in-depth development of home-school collaboration requires building a resource-sharing system. Head teachers should be adept at discovering and integrating the professional resources and social capital within the parent community, transforming them into educational forces that promote student literacy development. This can involve forming a parent volunteer team, inviting parents with specific expertise to participate in classroom curriculum development, and establishing parent mutual aid groups for sharing successful educational experiences and methods. Concurrently, head teachers must also provide professional support to parents. This resource sharing not only enriches educational content but also strengthens the emotional connection and sense of shared responsibility between home and school.

The effective operation of the home-school collaborative education mechanism requires establishing a scientific evaluation and feedback system. Head teachers should regularly collect parents' opinions and suggestions regarding the collaborative work through methods like questionnaires and discussion forums to understand their needs and expectations. Furthermore, evaluation indicators for the effectiveness of collaboration should be established, examining outcomes from multiple dimensions such as student behavioral performance, degree of parent participation, and achievement of educational goals. This evaluation data provides a basis for improving practice and helps parents recognize the tangible value of collaborative education, thereby enhancing their motivation and sustained participation.

The establishment of this collaborative mechanism significantly improves the consistency of educational outcomes. Through systematic conceptual transmission, families and schools reach consensus on educational goals; through innovative communication mechanisms, both parties maintain synchronization during the educational process; through deep integration of resources, an educational synergy with complementary advantages is formed. This comprehensive collaboration not only prevents the mutual cancellation of educational effects but also generates a "1+1 > 2" educational effect.

The refinement of the home-school collaborative education mechanism is a process of continuous optimization. Head teachers need to maintain professional sensitivity, promptly attending to new trends and issues in family education, and constantly adjust and optimize collaborative strategies. Simultaneously, they should focus on enhancing their own communication and coordination skills,

acquiring professional knowledge in family education, and strengthening their professional authority in guiding parents. Through persistent effort, the home-school collaborative education mechanism will evolve into a powerful driving force for promoting student literacy development, providing a solid guarantee for students' holistic growth.

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