

# Promoting Primary School Chinese Teachers Teaching Competence: A Case Study From China

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## ABSTRACT

Chinese primary school teachers' teaching competency encompasses a range of components, including the values, abilities, and information needed to advance their teaching in the classroom. However, there is currently a dearth of study in this area, particularly with regard to educational digitalization, which presents Chinese primary school teachers with new demands and difficulties. In order to address this research gap, 179 Chinese primary school teachers in China were surveyed for this study. Scales were used to collect quantitative data, and interviews were used to gather qualitative data for in-depth analysis. The findings show that Chinese primary school teachers have an upper-middle level of overall teaching competency. Notably, professional knowledge in the digital context and the characteristics of digital learning and innovation showed lower ratings. The five categories of professional knowledge, teaching skills, digital learning and innovation, professional character, and personal attributes also showed notable disparities between groups of Chinese primary school teachers.

## KEYWORDS

Primary School Chinese Teachers, Competence, Teaching Competence, Digital Transformation

## INTRODUCTION

The utilization of digital technology and its widespread adoption across various industries has garnered significant attention since the beginning of the 21st century (Barakina et al., 2021). Humanity is experiencing a profound digital revolution due to the rapid advancement of digital technology, which has catalyzed innovation across numerous areas of society (Damsa, 2019). The successful integration of digital transformation into education has emerged as a prominent theme in both domestic and international educational progress (Selwyn, 2024). Nevertheless, amid this digital transition, educators must continuously enhance their teaching proficiency as they play a crucial role in both the teaching and learning processes (Antonietti et al., 2022; Maksimovic & Lazic, 2023). To support the creative integration of digital transformation in education, educators must actively implement effective teaching practices, proactively adapt to new technological developments, and focus on enhancing their digital teaching skills. A major issue with digitalization in education is that digital technology has not been fully incorporated into classroom settings or used to enhance instruction. Therefore, the focus should be on improving teaching methods and raising the quality of instruction.

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Currently, teachers are often uncertain about how to effectively integrate digital technology into their lessons, and this lack of proficiency has become an obstacle to the quality of their instruction (Antonietti et al., 2022). Improving the teaching competence of Chinese primary school teachers is crucial. Teaching competence among Chinese teachers is characterized as a combination of professional knowledge, teaching skills, professional attributes, and personal traits that are essential for successfully achieving teaching objectives and distinguishing exceptional teachers from mediocre ones (Reuker & Kuenzell, 2021). However, despite recent growth in research on this topic in China, the teaching competence of Chinese primary school teachers has received comparatively less attention (Zhang et al., 2024). Research on the impact of digital transformation on the teaching competencies of Chinese primary school teachers is currently limited, especially within the Chinese context. This encompasses evaluations of teachers' actual abilities to employ digital tools in classroom instruction and the professional development support they need in this rapidly evolving environment. Moreover, disparities in resources and digitalization levels across different regions and schools have not been thoroughly explored. Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by providing empirical evidence to support policymakers and educators in fostering the professional development of Chinese primary school teachers in the digital age.

Elementary education in China is a fundamental component of the country's basic education system and plays a crucial role in children's development. This study employed a mixed-method, incorporating both interviews and questionnaires, to assess the current level of teaching competency among Chinese primary school teachers. Therefore, in the context of digital transformation, this study aims to investigate the teaching competencies of Chinese primary school language teachers, focusing on the challenges and opportunities they encounter in adapting to and utilizing digital technologies. By evaluating teachers' abilities, attitudes, and knowledge within digital teaching environments, the research seeks to identify key factors that influence effective teaching. This exploration aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape and its influencing factors, thereby providing theoretical support and practical recommendations to enhance teachers' capabilities. Ultimately, the study aims to deliver data-driven insights and practical guidance to improve teachers' skills in digital instruction.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Competence**

McClelland (1973) describes competence as the information, skills, motives, or characteristics directly linked to job performance or other significant life outcomes. He views competence as a unique set of character attributes that manifest in specific situations. Similarly, Boyatzis (1982) defines competence as an inherent quality of a person, encompassing their motivation, characteristics, abilities, self-perception, social roles, or body of knowledge. Sandberg (2000) further emphasizes the contextual nature of competence, defining job competence as the knowledge and abilities applied in the workplace.

The competency structural model, drawing from the Iceberg Model (Spencer et al., 1993) and the Onion Model (Sandberg, 2000), outlines a range of components necessary to achieve a specific performance goal. The Iceberg Model includes elements such as knowledge, skills, social roles, motivation, personality, and self-concept. The visible portion of the iceberg, above the waterline, represents the explicit, easily observable, and identifiable aspects—namely, knowledge and skills. Meanwhile, the submerged, invisible portion of the iceberg symbolizes the less obvious and implicit elements: social roles, motivation, self-concept, and personal characteristics. Similar to the Iceberg Model, the Onion Model offers an alternative perspective by dividing competencies into outer and inner layers. The innermost layer comprises a person's fundamental traits, while the outermost layer consists of their core abilities and knowledge. Teachers' teaching competence is grounded in their understanding of these competency structural models.

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