Journal of Advanced Academic Research and Studies 高等学术研究期刊
Vol. 3, No.10, 2026 (pp. 36-50)
http://www.nlbaeai.org/
ISSN 3006-4007 (Print)
ISSN 3006-4015 (Online)

Goal–Content–Evaluation Alignment in Chinese Language Curriculum Standards: Comparing China (2022) and Malaysian Chinese Independent High Schools (2016)

Miao Tian[a]

[a] School of Literature and Education, Shaanxi Universityof International Trade & Commerce,China

Received 15 July 2026, Revised 26 September 2026, Accepted 09 October 2026

Abstract

Purpose – This study compares China's Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards for Chinese Language (2022 Edition) and the Chinese Language Curriculum Standards for Malaysian Chinese Independent High Schools (2016), asking how curriculum goals, content, and evaluation are connected within the two policy texts rather than merely whether similar components are present.

Design/Methodology/Approach – Using qualitative document analysis, each standard was first examined independently and then compared through functionally equivalent textual units. Drawing on constructive alignment, the study analyzes goal–content, goal–evaluation, and content–evaluation relationships. Relation-specific decision rules classify textual linkage as Explicit (E), Indirect (I), or Unobserved within scope (U), with representative textual evidence retained for each judgment.

Findings – Both standards extend Chinese language education beyond basic language skills and show explicit goal–content and goal–evaluation alignment. Their clearest divergence lies in content–evaluation alignment. China's standard provides traceable links among content requirements, performance expectations, and evaluation through learning task clusters, Academic Quality Standards, and evaluation guidance. The Malaysian standard states that assessment should respond to curriculum content but does not map assessment provisions back to specific grade-level content requirements; this relationship is therefore classified as Indirect.

Research Implications – The findings show that cross-system curriculum comparison gains explanatory precision by examining relationships among curriculum components, not only their presence.

Keywords: Chinese language curriculum;curriculum standards; China–Malaysia comparison; curriculum evaluation

JEL Classifications: I21, I28, Z13

Financial source: This study was supported by the Regular Research Project of the Shaanxi Provincial Sports Bureau: "Research on the Development and Practice of School-Based Curriculum Integrating Shaanxi Red Sports Resources into Middle School Physical Education—Transformation of Guanzhong Red Sports Resources Based on Local Chronicles and Middle School Physical Education School-Based Curriculum Construction" (20261779).

[a] First Author, Lecturer, School of Literature and Education, Shaanxi University of International Trade & Commerce, China, E-mail: 371519516@qq.com

Ⓒ 2023 The NLBA Eurasian Institute Limited. All rights reserved.

I. Introduction

Chinese language education at the lower-secondary level is organized within markedly different institutional settings in China and Malaysia. In mainland China, the Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards for Chinese Language (2022 Edition) is a national curriculum document for compulsory education and organizes learning around core competencies, learning task clusters, stage requirements, Academic Quality Standards, and evaluation guidance. In Malaysian Chinese Independent High Schools (MICSS), the Chinese Language Curriculum Standards (2016) positions Chinese as a mother-tongue education curriculum and organizes learning through curriculum aims, six ability categories, and grade-specific requirements. Because the two standards differ in institutional positioning and document structure, a meaningful comparison requires more than matching headings or listing similar curriculum terms.

A broader issue in curriculum research concerns coherence and alignment: whether curriculum goals, content expectations, and assessment requirements form interpretable relationships rather than remaining isolated statements. Work on curriculum coherence has emphasized the importance of systematic connections among curriculum elements (Schmidt, Wang and McKnight, 2005), while alignment research has developed procedures for examining relationships among standards, instructional content, and assessments (Porter, 2002; Webb, 2007). These traditions show that the presence of similar components does not by itself demonstrate how those components work together. For cross-system policy comparison, the question is therefore not only what a curriculum contains, but also how major requirements are positioned and linked within the normative text.

Existing scholarship provides a foundation for the present comparison. Research on China's 2022 Chinese language standard has highlighted its competency orientation, cultural dimension, learning task clusters, and reorganization of curriculum requirements (Rong, Tang and Tang, 2022). Comparative research has also examined twenty-first-century competencies across mother-tongue curriculum standards in different national systems (Deng et al., 2023). In the Malaysian context, the historical development of Chinese education has been closely connected with language policy, nation building, mother-tongue education, and community educational development (Sua, 2013). Most directly, Lim and Ng (2023) compared lower-secondary Chinese language curricula in China and Malaysia and identified differences in educational philosophy, structure, and curriculum organization.

These studies clarify important similarities and differences in curriculum aims, competencies, content, and educational context. Less attention, however, has been given to the relationships among these elements within the curriculum-standard documents themselves. A comparison may establish that both standards address thinking, culture, literacy, or diversified assessment, yet still leave unanswered whether curriculum goals are carried into content requirements, whether evaluation is explicitly anchored to those goals, and whether assessment provisions can be traced back to the content that students are expected to learn. This relational gap is especially important when the documents use different organizational units, because similar functions may appear under different headings or at different textual levels.

To address this problem, the study draws on the relational logic of Biggs' (1996) constructive alignment

framework. Constructive alignment was developed for instructional design, where intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and assessment tasks are expected to support one another. The present study does not transfer that framework mechanically to national curriculum policy. Instead, it uses alignment as a text-level analytical lens for examining three relationships within intended curriculum documents: goal–content, goal–evaluation, and content–evaluation. The analysis concerns the visibility and traceability of these relationships in the text; it does not measure classroom quality, curriculum effectiveness, or student outcomes.

Accordingly, the study addresses two research questions:

RQ1. What commonalities and differences exist between the Fourth Learning Stage of China's 2022 Chinese language curriculum standard and the junior-middle-stage MICSS Chinese language standard in curriculum goals, content organization, progression, and evaluation requirements?

RQ2. How are goal–content, goal–evaluation, and content–evaluation relationships represented in the two standards, particularly in terms of explicit, indirect, or unobserved textual linkage?

The study contributes in two ways. Substantively, it identifies the point at which two broadly convergent curriculum systems diverge most clearly: the textual relationship between curriculum content and evaluation. Methodologically, it combines functional-equivalence comparison with relation-specific alignment criteria so that differently organized policy texts can be compared without using one system's headings as the benchmark for the other. The analysis therefore treats textual explicitness as a characteristic of policy architecture, not as a ranking of curriculum quality.

II. Materials and Methods

1. Documents and Analytical Scope

The study examines two authoritative curriculum-standard documents for Chinese language education at the lower-secondary level: China's Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards for Chinese Language (2022 Edition), issued by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, and the Chinese Language Curriculum Standards for Malaysian Chinese Independent High Schools (2016), formulated by the Unified Curriculum Committee of Dong Zong. Document analysis is appropriate because the research questions concern the intended curriculum and the relationships expressed within official curriculum texts rather than classroom implementation (Bowen, 2009).

For China, the analysis focuses on the Fourth Learning Stage (Grades 7–9). The examined material includes the four core competencies, stage-specific learning requirements, curriculum content organized through learning task clusters, Academic Quality Standards, and evaluation and examination guidance in the curriculum implementation section. For MICSS, the analysis focuses on Junior Middle 1–3 and includes the preface, curriculum aims, six category-specific objectives, grade-level content requirements, teaching recommendations, and assessment recommendations.

The unit of analysis was a complete textual unit—such as a clause, bullet point, numbered requirement, or paragraph—that retained the qualifications necessary to interpret its curriculum function. Sections were not treated as equivalent merely because they used similar headings. Instead, comparison was based on the function performed by the relevant textual units.

Table 1. Analytical Scope of the Two Curriculum Standards

Analytical component	China: Fourth Learning Stage (Grades 7–9)	MICSS: Junior Middle 1–3
Curriculum positioning	National compulsory-education curriculum standard	Chinese mother-tongue education curriculum for Chinese Independent High Schools
Curriculum goals	Four core competencies and stage-specific learning requirements	Curriculum aims, general objectives, and six category-specific objectives
Content organization	Themes, cultural carriers, language-practice activities, and learning task clusters	Grade-specific requirements organized by six ability categories
Progression	Integrated Fourth Learning Stage covering Grades 7–9	Year-by-year requirements for Junior Middle 1, 2, and 3
Performance expectations	Academic Quality Standards	Goal-oriented learning and assessment requirements
Evaluation	Process evaluation, summative evaluation, and examination guidance	Diagnostic, formative, summative, diversified, and comprehensive assessment recommendations

Note. The comparison concerns functionally comparable curriculum elements rather than identical section titles.

The study is limited to the intended curriculum represented in the two standards. It does not evaluate textbook implementation, teacher guides, external examinations, classroom teaching, or the actual effectiveness of either curriculum system.

2. Analytical Framework

The analysis combines qualitative document analysis with comparative curriculum analysis. Three dimensions were first identified within each document: curriculum goals, content and organization, and evaluation requirements. Curriculum goals refer to statements describing the knowledge, abilities, dispositions, cultural understanding, values, and other outcomes students are expected to develop. Content and organization

refer to the learning requirements and structural arrangements through which those goals are translated into curriculum content, including progression, themes, cultural carriers, learning activities, and organizational scaffolds. Evaluation requirements refer to provisions concerning assessment purposes, benchmarks, participants, task formats, and expected performance.

Biggs' (1996) constructive alignment provides the relational logic for connecting these dimensions, while curriculum-alignment research provides an important methodological caution: alignment judgments require explicit criteria because apparent similarity may conceal different levels of correspondence (Porter, 2002; Webb, 2007). In this study, the framework is therefore adapted to three text-level relationships: (1) goal–content, (2) goal–evaluation, and (3) content–evaluation. These relationships are descriptive properties of the curriculum-standard text, not measures of instructional quality.

3. Analytical Procedure

3.1. Within-Case Analysis

Each curriculum standard was first examined independently. Relevant textual units were identified and organized according to curriculum goals, content and organization, and evaluation. This within-case stage was completed before cross-case comparison so that the terminology and structure of one curriculum standard would not be imposed on the other.

3.2. Functional-Equivalence Mapping

Functionally comparable textual elements were then mapped across the two standards. Functional equivalence was determined by what a textual unit did within the document rather than by its heading or location. Statements specifying what students should achieve were treated as goal-related elements, while provisions describing learning expectations or the organization of learning were treated as content-related elements. Provisions specifying assessment purposes, evidence, performance expectations, or examination requirements were treated as evaluation-related elements even when they appeared under different section titles.

3.3. Internal Alignment Classification

After functional mapping, the three relationships were examined separately. Each relationship was classified as Explicit (E), Indirect (I), or Unobserved within Current Scope (U). The categories refer to the visibility and traceability of textual linkage and are not ordinal scores of curriculum quality.

Table 2. General Operational Criteria for Internal Alignment

Classification	Operational definition	Decision rule
Explicit (E)	A direct and identifiable textual or structural relationship exists between the two curriculum elements examined.	The source element is explicitly named as a basis for the target element, or the document structurally maps the two elements in a traceable way.
Indirect (I)	A conceptual or functional relationship is identifiable, but the connection is not traceable at the level required for that relationship.	The elements are related in purpose or function, but the connection must be inferred from broader wording, parallel structure, or general guidance.
Unobserved within Current Scope (U)	No sufficiently identifiable relationship is found within the sections included in the analysis.	Neither direct textual/structural evidence nor a sufficiently clear functional connection can be established from the examined text.

Note. E, I, and U describe textual linkage within the curriculum-standard documents. They do not rate curriculum quality, implementation fidelity, or student outcomes.

4. Relation-Specific Decision Protocol and Evidence Trail

A relation-specific decision protocol was used to avoid applying a single vague definition of "alignment" to three structurally different relationships. For goal–content alignment, an Explicit classification required goals to organize, name, or be carried forward into identifiable content domains or requirements. For goal–evaluation alignment, Explicit required evaluation to state curriculum goals or core competencies as an assessment basis or benchmark. For content–evaluation alignment, the threshold was more specific: Explicit required evaluation or performance expectations to be traceable to identifiable content requirements; a general statement that assessment should vary with curriculum content was treated as Indirect unless the document supplied a mapping or integrated performance description. This distinction prevents a general reference to "content" from being treated as equivalent to a content-to-assessment crosswalk.

Representative textual bases were retained for every final classification. Table 3 provides the audit trail for the six relationship judgments. The table deliberately reports the textual basis and the reason for classification rather than converting interpretive judgments into numerical scores. Because the study makes no claim about the frequency or prevalence of categories, textual units are not used as quantitative counts.

Table 3. Representative Evidence and Coding Rationale for Internal Alignment

Relationship	China 2022: textual basis and rationale	MICSS 2016: textual basis and rationale	Classification
Goal–Content	Core competencies are carried through stage requirements and learning task clusters; the content structure is therefore traceable to the overarching competency framework (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2022, pp. 14–19).	The six goal domains are reproduced as the organizing categories for grade-level content requirements, providing a direct structural pathway from objectives to content (Unified Curriculum Committee of Dong Zong, 2016, pp. 1–5).	China: E MICSS: E
Goal–Evaluation	Academic Quality Standards and evaluation guidance connect expected performance and evaluation with the development of core competencies (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2022, pp. 37, 46–47).	The assessment section explicitly states that evaluation should be based on attainment of the junior-middle Chinese curriculum goals (Unified Curriculum Committee of Dong Zong, 2016, p. 7).	China: E MICSS: E
Content–Evaluation	Academic Quality Standards and examination guidance create traceable links among stage learning requirements, curriculum content, expected performance, and assessment (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2022, pp. 37, 46–47).	The standard states that assessment methods may vary according to curriculum content, but it does not map assessment methods or performance expectations back to particular grade-level content requirements (Unified Curriculum Committee of Dong Zong, 2016, p. 7).	China: E MICSS: I

5. Analytical Rigor and Boundary Control

Interpretation was based on complete textual context rather than isolated keywords. Similar terms were not automatically treated as functionally equivalent, and ambiguous cases were checked against the relation-specific decision rules in Section 2.4. Where the document indicated a relationship in general terms but did not provide the level of traceability required by the relevant decision rule, the classification remained Indirect rather than being upgraded to Explicit.

The analysis also separates textual explicitness from curriculum quality. An Indirect relationship indicates that a direct mapping is not provided within the examined standard; it does not demonstrate that the relationship is absent from textbooks, teacher guidance, external examinations, or school practice. Socio-historical and institutional literature is therefore used only to contextualize the textual differences identified in the comparison, not as direct evidence that particular institutional conditions caused specific curriculum provisions.

III. Comparative Findings: Goals and Content Organization

1. Overall Configuration

The two standards cover substantially overlapping educational domains but organize them through different curriculum architectures. Table 4 summarizes the main structural pattern. The central contrast is not simply a difference in labels. China distributes curriculum purposes through a competency-centred hierarchy, whereas MICSS uses a more differentiated ability-category structure with explicit year-by-year requirements.

Table 4. Comparative Configuration of the Two Curriculum Standards

Comparative dimension	China: Fourth Learning Stage	MICSS: Junior Middle 1–3	Comparative finding
Curriculum goals	Four core competencies: cultural confidence, language use, thinking capacity, and aesthetic creation	Curriculum aims plus six ability categories: listening/speaking, reading, writing, thinking, literature/culture, and language knowledge	Broad educational convergence, but different goal architectures
Content organization	Themes, cultural carriers, language-practice activities, and learning task clusters	Grade level × ability category	Different primary units for organizing content
Progression	Integrated stage-level requirements across Grades 7–9	Separate requirements for Junior Middle 1, 2, and 3	China makes stage integration more visible; MICSS makes annual progression more visible
Performance/ evaluation interface	Academic Quality Standards connect curriculum requirements with expected performance	Assessment principles are stated mainly through overall goals and general assessment guidance	Both connect evaluation to curriculum aims, but the specificity of content–evaluation linkage differs

2. Functional Convergence in Educational Goals

At the level of educational scope, the two standards show considerable functional convergence. Both extend Chinese language education beyond mechanical literacy or isolated language knowledge to include language practice, thinking development, literary and aesthetic learning, cultural understanding, values, and broader personal development. In China's Fourth Learning Stage, Character Recognition and Writing, Reading and Appreciation, Expression and Communication, and Systematization and Inquiry operate within the broader framework of cultural confidence, language use, thinking capacity, and aesthetic creation (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2022, pp. 14–17).

MICSS identifies six ability domains—listening and speaking, reading, writing, thinking, literature and culture, and fundamental language knowledge—and connects Chinese language education with cultural continuity, social responsibility, aesthetic development, information use, and respect for cultural diversity (Unified Curriculum Committee of Dong Zong, 2016, pp. 1–2). The comparative result is therefore functional convergence with categorical difference: similar educational purposes are classified and positioned differently within the two standards.

3. Different Pathways from Goals to Content

The stronger difference concerns how high-level goals are translated into content. In the Chinese standard, core competencies operate as an overarching framework and are repeatedly developed through stage requirements, learning task clusters, and later Academic Quality Standards. Goals are therefore distributed across several levels of the document and remain visible as organizing reference points for subsequent provisions.

In MICSS, broader educational and socio-cultural purposes are concentrated in the preface and curriculum aims, after which requirements are organized through six ability categories. Importantly, those same categories structure the grade-specific content for Junior Middle 1, 2, and 3. This produces a direct and easy-to-follow goal–content pathway, but one based on category continuity rather than a competency hierarchy.

The two standards also differ in progression and content granularity. China presents Grades 7–9 as an integrated Fourth Learning Stage and uses learning task clusters to organize content around language practice, themes, cultural carriers, and communicative or inquiry contexts (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2022, pp. 18–19). MICSS specifies separate year-by-year requirements under each ability category, making annual progression more visible. These different content structures become especially important when the analysis turns to evaluation, because they create different opportunities for assessment requirements to be linked back to the content to be taught.

IV. Evaluation Requirements and Internal Alignment

1. Similar Assessment Functions, Different Textual Anchors

Both standards treat evaluation as more than a final examination and recognize multiple purposes and forms of evidence. The Chinese standard combines Academic Quality Standards with process and summative evaluation. Suggested evidence includes classroom observation, dialogue, presentations, learning portfolios, and examination tasks, while examination design is linked with curriculum requirements and task contexts (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2022, pp. 37, 46–47).

MICSS similarly presents assessment as a means of identifying learning progress, providing feedback, and improving teaching. Its assessment recommendations include written examinations, oral assessment, reports, design or production tasks, performance, and interviews (Unified Curriculum Committee of Dong Zong, 2016, p. 7). The difference is therefore not between diversified and non-diversified assessment. The more consequential issue is the textual anchor of evaluation: whether assessment is linked primarily to overarching goals or can also be traced to specific content requirements.

2. Internal Alignment Results

Table 5 summarizes the three internal-alignment relationships. Two relationships converge across the standards, while the third produces the clearest divergence.

Table 5. Internal Alignment of Goals, Content, and Evaluation

Alignment relationship	China 2022	MICSS 2016	Comparative finding
Goal–Content	Explicit (E)	Explicit (E)	Both standards provide identifiable pathways from goals to content, although through different organizational mechanisms.
Goal–Evaluation	Explicit (E)	Explicit (E)	Both standards explicitly make curriculum goals or competencies a basis for evaluation.
Content–Evaluation	Explicit (E)	Indirect (I)	China provides traceable links between content requirements, performance expectations, and evaluation; MICSS provides a general content-related principle without a grade-level content-to-assessment mapping.

2.1. Goal–Content Alignment

Goal–content alignment is Explicit (E) in both standards. In China, core competencies are developed through stage requirements and learning task clusters, creating an identifiable pathway from overarching goals to curriculum content. In MICSS, the six ability categories established in the objectives also organize the grade-specific content requirements. The shared finding is therefore explicit goal–content alignment achieved through different mechanisms: competency distribution in China and category continuity in MICSS.

2.2. Goal–Evaluation Alignment

Goal–evaluation alignment is also Explicit (E) in both standards. In China, Academic Quality Standards and evaluation guidance connect student performance and evaluation with the development of core competencies. MICSS is especially clear at the level of declared assessment purpose: its assessment section states that evaluation should be based on the attainment of junior-middle Chinese curriculum goals (Unified Curriculum Committee of Dong Zong, 2016, p. 7). Both standards therefore make curriculum purposes an explicit reference point for evaluation, even though they operationalize that reference differently.

2.3. Content–Evaluation Alignment

Content–evaluation alignment produces the clearest difference. In China, Academic Quality Standards and evaluation guidance create identifiable links among stage learning requirements, curriculum content, expected performance, and assessment. Under the relation-specific criteria used in this study, these integrated links constitute Explicit (E) content–evaluation alignment.

MICSS is not silent about the relationship between content and assessment. Its assessment guidance states that different assessment methods may be adopted according to differences in curriculum content and student development (Unified Curriculum Committee of Dong Zong, 2016, p. 7). However, the document does not specify which assessment modes, performance expectations, or criteria correspond to particular grade-level content requirements in listening and speaking, reading, writing, thinking, literature and culture, or language knowledge. The relationship is therefore visible in principle but not traceable at the content-requirement level. It is classified as Indirect (I), not Unobserved (U).

This distinction is central to the study. The E/I difference does not claim that MICSS lacks content-sensitive assessment in practice. It describes a difference in policy-text architecture: China embeds content, performance, and evaluation within a more directly connected textual chain, whereas MICSS states the principle of content-responsive assessment without providing the same degree of internal mapping in the 2016 standard.

V. Discussion

1. From Component Similarity to Relational Difference

The comparison shows why a component-by-component approach can understate meaningful differences between curriculum systems. At the level of stated purposes, both standards address language practice, thinking, literature and aesthetics, culture, values, and broader student development. Both also endorse diversified assessment and connect evaluation with curriculum goals. If the comparison stopped at the presence or absence of these elements, the two standards would appear more similar than they do when their internal relationships are examined.

The relational analysis reveals that comparable curriculum functions are embedded in different organizational pathways. China uses a competency-centred hierarchy that is carried through stage requirements, task clusters, Academic Quality Standards, and evaluation guidance. MICSS uses a goal-and-category architecture in which six ability categories structure annual content requirements and provide a clear instructional progression. This finding is consistent with the broader curriculum-coherence literature: coherence depends not only on whether important elements exist, but also on whether users can see how those elements connect across the curriculum system (Schmidt et al., 2005).

2. Content–Evaluation Visibility as the Main Point of Divergence

The most consequential finding is the difference in content–evaluation visibility. Existing alignment research often examines whether assessments match standards in content and cognitive demand (Porter, 2002; Webb, 2007). The present study asks a prior policy-text question: before an external examination or classroom assessment is analyzed, how explicitly does the curriculum standard itself connect what is to be learned with how learning is to be evaluated?

China's 2022 standard provides a relatively direct textual route from content requirements to expected performance and evaluation through Academic Quality Standards and examination guidance. MICSS provides a different configuration. It explicitly anchors evaluation to curriculum goals and acknowledges that assessment methods should respond to curriculum content, but it does not supply a comparable grade-level content-to-assessment mapping. The distinction is therefore not "assessment versus no assessment," nor "diverse versus narrow assessment." It is a distinction in the degree to which content–evaluation relationships are made operationally visible within the standard.

This finding should not be interpreted as evidence that one curriculum is more rigorous or effective. Textual explicitness may support consistency and traceability for curriculum users, but a more open policy text may also leave implementation details to textbooks, examination syllabi, school-level guidance, or teacher professional judgment. Determining whether either architecture produces stronger classroom alignment requires evidence beyond curriculum standards.

3. Contextual Interpretation

The institutional settings of the two standards provide useful context for understanding their textual organization, although the present study does not establish causal relationships between institutional conditions and specific provisions. China's 2022 standard is a national compulsory-education policy document. Its role within a unified curriculum framework provides a plausible context for the relatively explicit articulation among competencies, learning requirements, Academic Quality Standards, and evaluation guidance. The textual analysis itself, however, establishes only that these connections are more directly represented in the document.

MICSS operates within the historically distinctive system of Malaysian Chinese Independent High Schools. Research on Chinese education in Malaysia has emphasized the long relationship among language policy, nation building, mother-tongue education, community educational development, and cultural continuity (Sua, 2013). This context helps explain why mother-tongue education, cultural inheritance, multilingual social responsibility, and broad educational purposes are prominent in the MICSS curriculum aims. It does not, however, prove why the assessment section was written at a particular level of specificity. Such causal explanations would require historical drafting records, interviews with curriculum developers, or implementation evidence.

4. Methodological Contribution

Methodologically, the study extends comparative curriculum analysis in two modest but useful ways. First, functional equivalence allows differently structured documents to be compared according to the role a curriculum element performs rather than its heading. This is important in cross-system research because an objective, content requirement, or performance expectation may occupy different textual locations in different systems. Second, the relation-specific decision protocol distinguishes a general statement of relationship from a traceable mapping. This makes the E/I/U categories more transparent and reduces the risk of treating any thematic similarity as evidence of explicit alignment.

The framework is deliberately conservative. It does not calculate a universal alignment score, and it does not assume that greater textual explicitness is always preferable. Instead, it identifies where relationships are made visible, where they remain general, and where no relationship can be observed within the selected document scope. In this sense, it complements more quantitative alignment approaches (Porter, 2002; Webb, 2007) by addressing the architecture of normative curriculum texts before enacted curriculum or assessment items are introduced.

5. Limitations and Future Research

The study has four limitations. First, it is limited to two lower-secondary curriculum-standard documents. Textbook series, teacher guides, examination syllabi, and school-level assessment documents are outside the present scope. The Indirect content–evaluation relationship identified in MICSS may therefore become more

explicit when implementation documents are included.

Second, the study examines intended curriculum rather than enacted curriculum. Classroom observations, teacher interviews, student work, and school assessment materials would be required to determine how the relationships identified in policy texts are interpreted and implemented in practice.

Third, E/I/U classification remains an interpretive judgment, even with relation-specific criteria and an evidence trail. Independent replication, additional coders, or inter-rater checks would provide a useful test of the transferability of the classifications in future studies. The present study therefore treats the categories as transparent analytical descriptions rather than psychometric measures.

Fourth, the study is cross-sectional and compares the 2022 Chinese standard with the 2016 MICSS standard. Future research could examine subsequent revisions and trace whether goal–content–evaluation relationships become more or less explicit over time. Extending the same framework to textbooks and examination documents would also make it possible to test whether policy-level alignment is reproduced, modified, or compensated for during curriculum implementation.

VI. Conclusion

This study compared China's 2022 Chinese language curriculum standard and the 2016 MICSS Chinese language curriculum standard by examining both their major curriculum components and the relationships among goals, content, and evaluation. The two standards show substantial functional convergence in educational aims but organize those aims through different textual architectures: China uses a competency-centred, stage-level structure, while MICSS uses a grade-level × ability-category structure.

The internal-alignment analysis identifies a more precise pattern than a general statement of similarity or difference. Goal–content alignment is Explicit in both standards, and goal–evaluation alignment is also Explicit in both. Their clearest divergence lies in content–evaluation alignment. China provides traceable links among content requirements, performance expectations, and evaluation, whereas MICSS states a general principle that assessment should respond to curriculum content without mapping evaluation back to specific grade-level content requirements. Within the analytical scope of this study, the relationship is therefore Explicit in China and Indirect in MICSS.

The broader implication is methodological as well as substantive. Comparative curriculum research can gain explanatory precision by asking not only which goals, skills, content categories, or assessment forms are present, but also how those elements are connected within normative curriculum documents. Such analysis should remain cautious: textual alignment describes the visibility of policy relationships, not the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. Used in this way, functional equivalence and relation-specific alignment provide a practical framework for comparing curriculum standards that differ in terminology, institutional setting, and document structure.

References

Biggs, J. (1996) Enhancing Teaching through Constructive Alignment. Higher Education, 32(3), 347–364.

Bowen, G. A. (2009) Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method. Qualitative Research Journal, 9(2), 27–40.

Deng, L., S. Wu, Y. Chen, Y. Wang and Z. Peng. (2023) A Comparative Study of Twenty-First Century Competencies in High School Mother Tongue Curriculum Standards in China, the United States and Finland. Language, Culture and Curriculum, 36(2), 142–160.

Lim, Z. Y. and M. H. Ng. (2023) A Comparative Study of Chinese Language Curricula for Lower Secondary Education in China and Malaysia. Muallim Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, 7(2), 31–47.

Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2022) Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards for Chinese Language (2022 Edition). Beijing: Beijing Normal University Publishing Group.

Porter, A. C. (2002) Measuring the Content of Instruction: Uses in Research and Practice. Educational Researcher, 31(7), 3–14.

Rong, W., J. Tang and X. Tang. (2022) Strengthening Cultural Confidence and Promoting the Innovation of Chinese Curriculum: An Interpretation of Chinese Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition). Journal of Teacher Education, 9(6), 63–71.

Schmidt, W. H., H. C. Wang and C. C. McKnight. (2005) Curriculum Coherence: An Examination of U.S. Mathematics and Science Content Standards from an International Perspective. Journal of Curriculum Studies, 37(5), 525–559.

Sua, T. Y. (2013) Decolonization, Educational Language Policy and Nation Building in Plural Societies: The Development of Chinese Education in Malaysia, 1950–1970. International Journal of Educational Development, 33(1), 25–36.

Unified Curriculum Committee of Dong Zong. (2016) Chinese Language Curriculum Standards for the Junior Middle Level of Malaysian Chinese Independent High Schools. United Chinese School Committees' Association of Malaysia (Dong Zong).

Webb, N. L. (2007) Issues Related to Judging the Alignment of Curriculum Standards and Assessments. Applied Measurement in Education, 20(1), 7–25.