

# *The Enlightenment of the core literacy embodied in the curriculum standards of South Korea and Singapore to China*

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**Abstract:** Core literacy was first proposed by the organization for economic cooperation and development (OECD). He pointed out that countries should cultivate the core knowledge, problem-solving ability and correct emotional attitude of students in the 21st century. As a result, countries have set off a frenzy of discussion on core literacy. Core literacy is the key to curriculum reform and the source of formulating curriculum standards. Recently, researchers continue to study the core literacy in domestic curriculum, but there is little discussion on the core literacy in foreign curriculum reform. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to study the core literacy in the curriculum standards of South Korea and Singapore, and to provide some concrete and feasible development directions for the future curriculum reform in China.

## **1. Introduction**

Due to the accelerated development of society, people are worried that they will not be able to learn the "core literacy" required by life. Therefore, core literacy has become the most popular topic. Core literacy was originally proposed by the organization for economic cooperation and development (OECD), which means that core literacy is the knowledge, ability and emotional attitude that people have to adapt to today's life. On March 30, 2014, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China issued the "Opinions on Deepening Curriculum Reform and Implementing the Fundamental Task of Building Virtue and Cultivating People", placing "core quality" in the educational goal of deepening curriculum reform to implement the educational goal of building virtue and cultivating people. This is the word "core quality", which first appeared in the official archives of China; On September 13, 2016, Professor Lin Chongde of Beijing Normal University released the overall framework of the core literacy of Chinese students' development in the form of subject composition results, including six literacy in three aspects: Cultural Foundation (Humanistic Heritage and scientific spirit), independent development (learning to learn and live a healthy life), and social participation (responsibility and practical innovation). The core quality of "three aspects and six items" has become the key to our curriculum reform and the source of formulating curriculum standards. Although the word "literacy" is not used in the Eighth National Curriculum Reform and curriculum standards, the basic concept of its curriculum reform also implies the spirit of literacy, including knowledge, ability and attitude. However, when it is really implemented at the level of curriculum, textbooks, teaching and learning, there are layers of gaps. Understanding the

embodiment of core literacy in the curriculum standards of some neighboring countries will provide a better way for our future curriculum reform and the formulation of curriculum standards.

## **2. Core literacy implications**

In the current complex and uncertain situation, there are many international debates about the qualities that people must have. Chinese scholars such as cuiyunyu and caiqingtian have understood English competence as the Chinese word of literacy, so as to integrate with OECD plans and most academic research results, and understand literacy as the ability to use knowledge, cognition and skills, as well as attitude, emotion, value and motivation. In addition, Pellegrino pointed out that the category definition of literacy includes three important areas: 1. Cognitive field: it includes three parts: cognitive process and strategy, knowledge and creativity. These three parts contain the skills of critical thinking, reasoning, reasoning and innovation; 2. individual domain: it includes three parts: intellectual openness, work ethics and responsibility, and self adjustment. These three parts include flexibility, initiative and appreciation of differences and meta cognition; 3. inter individual field: including team work, collaboration and leadership. These three fields contain different aspects of human thinking, and also establish three important aspects of dividing and organizing human behavior. Literacy includes such aspects as information, understanding, skills, values and attitudes. It refers to the ability to find problems, create and appropriately use knowledge in a specific context, and establish new connections in different things. The introduction of core literacy in China mainly refers to the essential character and key ability that students should have and can adapt to the needs of lifelong development and social development. Research on students' development of core literacy is an important measure to implement the fundamental task of Building Morality and cultivating people. It is also an urgent need to adapt to the development trend of world education reform and enhance the international competitiveness of China's education. The core here has a common and important meaning: the core quality is an indispensable and important quality for a person to live in the world, and it is a common quality that every citizen must have. From this point of view, the core quality in the national education stage refers to the common and important quality that every student must have.

## **3. Core literacy in curriculum standards of South Korea and Singapore**

Nowadays, the curriculum reform in many countries in the world, such as China, South Korea, Singapore and Finland, all use the word "core literacy" in the curriculum standards. Finland uses the word "cross domain literacy", while Japan and Singapore use the word "21st century literacy". Although the words are different, they cultivate students' common and important literacy. There is no difference in the concept of cross domain universal literacy and the literacy required for life in the 21st century. Although some countries do not use the word "quality" or "core quality", the concept of emphasizing the cultivation of students' basic and common knowledge, ability and attitude in the new century remains the same. As South Korea and Singapore are close to China in terms of geographical location and cultural context, there are still some measures in the course of curriculum reform and its implementation in these two countries that we can use for reference.

### **3.1. Core literacy in Korean curriculum standards**

From the formulation of educational curriculum standards and contents in 1954 to 2015, South Korea has revised the curriculum standards eight times, and the latest revision was completed in 2015. The revision of Korean curriculum standards in 2015 was implemented in 2017. It was initially implemented from grade 1 and grade 2 of primary school. In 2018, it will be implemented

in grade 3 and grade 4 of primary school, junior middle school and senior high school. It is expected to be fully implemented in 2020. The curriculum standard puts forward the general structure of primary and secondary school curriculum, and describes in detail the characteristics, objectives, content organization and other parts of each subject as the basis for teaching, learning and evaluation. In the revised edition in 2015, the concept and objectives of education emphasize the concept of Hongyi human world, which aims to benefit all mankind and is the founding spirit of the first Kingdom in Korean history. Therefore, the educational goal of Korea is to help all students improve their own personality, develop the ability to live independently, cultivate democratic citizenship, participate in various affairs in a democratic society, and promote the well-being of all mankind. The 2015 revision of Korea presents the imagination of cultivating creative and integrated learners, which has the following three characteristics :1. A curriculum plan that emphasizes the development of basic literacy in humanities, society, science and technology; 2. emphasize the curriculum of the student center; 3. courses that emphasize the development of students' core qualities. In the revised version of the new curriculum standard in 2015, South Korea paid more attention to the cultivation of students' six core qualities, emphasizing the communication between teachers and students and the student-centered education concept. Compared with the revised curriculum standard of South Korea in 2009, the revised curriculum standard in 2015 emphasizes the cultivation of students' six core qualities: 1. Self management literacy: to enable a person to have the necessary basic abilities and qualities in life and career, so as to obtain self-confidence and self-identity in life; 2. knowledge or information processing literacy: be able to process and flexibly use knowledge and information in different fields, and solve problems in a reasonable way; 3. creative thinking quality: be able to discover some new things through the integration of knowledge, skills and experience from different professional fields on the basis of extensive basic knowledge; 4. aesthetic emotion accomplishment: to discover and appreciate the meaning and value of life on the basis of empathic understanding of others and cultural sensitivity; 5. communication literacy: listen to others' opinions with respect in different situations, and effectively express personal thoughts and feelings; 6. Citizenship: become a member of local, national and global communities, and have the attitude and values of active participation and commitment to community improvement. The change of teaching and learning methods in school education is the key to the implementation of literacy oriented education. But up to now, Korean school education still emphasizes the indoctrination teaching method. However, due to social changes and the new curriculum standard revision issued in 2015, the state must respond more to the new needs. Kang and Lee pointed out that school education in South Korea needs to cultivate students to have the above six core qualities. The teaching and learning of the school will change in the following directions: 1.The student-centered classroom emphasizes on promoting students' in-depth understanding of the fields and subjects they learn and creating their own meaning through multiple learning activities; 2. teaching activities mainly focus on core literacy and in-depth understanding. Teachers should put forward the core key problems of each subject, and students should also experience learning through the process of practice and problem solving; 3. teaching activities should consider the development stage of each student in the class, and teachers should teach according to the needs and characteristics of each student; 4. teaching activities should provide students with integrated learning experience. With the emphasis on creativity and interdisciplinary thinking, teachers should plan class activities that help students integrate knowledge and skills and link the relationship between different disciplines and units; 5. strengthen the development of students' core literacy through participatory and experiential learning activities; 6. teaching activities should provide students with the opportunity to apply knowledge to real life situations, so as to promote students' in-depth understanding; 7. the revised version of the new curriculum standard advocates that learners should be regarded as agents. South Korea increasingly emphasizes the importance of developing students' meta cognition and

mastering self-directed skills. The teaching mode has gradually changed from teacher centered and knowledge centered to student-centered. The transfer of education mode has changed the form of teaching and learning in schools, such as inquiry learning, experiential learning, participatory learning, interdisciplinary topics and other teaching and learning strategies, which will change the classroom landscape of Korean schools.

### **3.2. Core competencies in Singapore curriculum standards**

The concept of 21st century literacy has been considered, linked and practiced in the discourse, policy and practice of public education in Singapore. The Singapore government emphasizes a special promotion mechanism, which exists in the strong triangle of key educational interests of policy, research and practice. Based on the common vision and task, and with the consensus of all, Singapore has continued to carry out educational innovation and achieved success in recent years. In 2004, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong of Singapore first put forward the idea of teaching less and learning more. Then in 2005, it was promoted by Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Minister of education. The main purpose is to reduce the content of the syllabus, so that students can have more space to study and explore, so as to improve the quality of education. The idea of "teaching less and learning more" further promoted the change of teaching in Singapore schools at that time. Quality education in the 21st century needs the support of new teaching methods such as inquiry oriented learning, and also needs more teaching time. To practice the idea of "teaching less and learning more" in the classroom, a complete set of curriculum structure, learning resources and practical principles are needed to cooperate with each other, so as to help school teachers put the idea of "teaching less and learning more" into practice. The 21st century literacy and student achievement framework was completed in 2010, which is an important result of Singapore's efforts to develop 21st century literacy education in recent years. Singapore paid more attention to the part of thinking skills in the early stage, but later extended to the concept of 21st century literacy, including value, emotion, interpersonal interaction skills and the rising 21st century literacy. Singapore uses the term "21st century literacy" because the cultivation of these qualities will help young Singaporeans thrive in the 21st century. Therefore, it is considered more and more important to cultivate students' 21st century literacy. This framework mainly aims to train students to become self-directed learners, active devotees, caring citizens and confident people. This represents the specific goal that Singapore believes literacy in the 21st century should implement. The core layer of Singapore includes six core values: respect, responsibility, integrity, care, flexibility and harmony; The middle layer contains five social and emotional qualities: 1. Self awareness, 2. Self management, 3. Social awareness, 4. Relationship management, 5. Responsibility for making decisions; The outer part contains three broad areas of emerging 21st century literacy: 1. Citizenship, global awareness and cross-cultural skills, 2. Critical and innovative thinking, 3. Communication, collaboration and information skills. The core value lies in cultivating a person's fundamental value; Social and emotional literacy mainly focuses on cultivating students' self understanding, self-management and interpersonal relationship management; The rising 21st century literacy emphasizes the cultivation of high-level skills needed to connect the life world. Singapore's 21st century literacy and student achievement framework shows a framework based on core values and supplemented by the basic ideas of using the skills required in the new century.

### **4. The Enlightenment of the core literacy in the curriculum standards of South Korea and Singapore to China**

The core quality in the curriculum standards of our country emphasizes the cultivation of lifelong learners who are people-oriented. Through the reform and development of our curriculum, students

have the ability to solve the problems faced in the life situation, and can keep pace with the times in response to the rapid changes of the life situation, and finally become a lifelong learner.

#### **4.1. The practice of interdisciplinary courses should be based on the cultivation of basic literacy**

The course definition has been changed from the past subjects to the present experience, so the course learning should strengthen the interdisciplinary learning, learn the basic knowledge and experience, and constantly improve their own course literacy. The facilities of interdisciplinary courses are not only specific measures for students to better master basic literacy, but also the key to master core literacy. Basic literacy represents how students use core skills in daily life. These skills are the basis for students to have excellent abilities and high-quality personality traits. It is not only a global literacy and numeracy assessment, but also includes scientific literacy, information and communication technology literacy, financial literacy, culture and civic literacy. South Korea pays more attention to the cultivation of basic literacy such as reading, writing, computing and information, which provides suggestions for the implementation of interdisciplinary courses in China. In the practice of interdisciplinary courses, China should be based on the cultivation of students' basic literacy, and continue to strengthen the curriculum development of high-level interdisciplinary and thematic competence, so that students can continuously improve their ability to think and solve problems, and make students happy to learn, participate, talk and continuously improve their core literacy.

#### **4.2. Students' metacognitive skills should be continuously improved**

The core idea of China's curriculum reform is to do everything for the development of students and pay more attention to the dominant position of students in learning. The change of the way of teaching and learning in the new curriculum reform, from attaching importance to subject knowledge in the past to inquiry learning and project-based learning, all reflect the improvement of students' status. This measure has changed the way students learn and is conducive to improving students' ability to think and solve problems, but at the same time, students' meta cognition also needs to be improved. China mainly focuses on cultivating students' learning enthusiasm and knowledge, skills and friendship, while South Korea increasingly emphasizes the importance of developing students' meta cognition and mastering self-directed skills. The mastery of meta knowledge and skills can help students know why they want to learn this way and why they use this method to solve problems, so as to make students' own literacy orientation more clear.

#### **4.3. The development of teachers' profession needs the guidance of curriculum policy**

In the context of continuous development in China, interdisciplinary curriculum is an important curriculum to achieve core literacy. Therefore, interdisciplinary teaching also puts forward higher requirements for teachers. Teachers are required to have not only the professional knowledge of the subject, but also the basic knowledge of other related subjects. Singapore pays more and more attention to interdisciplinary teaching and the training of interdisciplinary teachers, so it provides some feasible paths for China. The training of interdisciplinary teachers' professionalization needs the strong support of national policies. The state can intensify efforts to cultivate teachers across different fields. The goal of interdisciplinary teacher training is that teachers must have interdisciplinary research subject content knowledge and subject teaching knowledge to develop teaching methods in teaching work. They must also have independent problem-solving ability and use the latest research results and topics in the field of education for teaching research, and be able

to independently engage in teacher professional development and cooperate with other teachers in teaching. The teacher training system should be research-based. In order to cooperate with the comprehensive school on-site from interdisciplinary and interdisciplinary learning, thematic learning to phenomenon based learning, peer or cross grade cooperative learning, teachers' professional level should be continuously improved. Core literacy was originally proposed by the organization for economic cooperation and development (OECD), which means that core literacy is the knowledge, ability and emotional attitude that people have to adapt to today's life. As a result, countries have set off research on core literacy. China's three facets and six events are similar to those of Korea's Hongyi, and Singapore's 21st century literacy. However, the core qualities of South Korea and Singapore in the curriculum reform are reflected in practice, which can be used for reference for the development of China's future curriculum reform, so that China's curriculum reform pays more attention to the status of students and teachers.

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