

Developing a Contextualized Knowledge Framework for Primary School English Teachers' Assessment Competence in China

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Abstract

Amid China's competency-oriented education reform and the implementation of the 2022 Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards, primary school English teachers are increasingly required to demonstrate comprehensive assessment competence encompassing knowledge, skills, and attitude. As the cognitive foundation of this competence, assessment knowledge determines teachers' capacity to interpret policy requirements, design curriculum-aligned assessments, and implement principles effectively in practice. Yet existing international assessment competence frameworks remain insufficiently aligned with China's policy environment and young learners' developmental characteristics, leaving a theoretical and practical gap. Drawing on Spencer and Spencer's Iceberg Competence Model and Xu and Brown's Teacher Assessment Literacy in Practice (TALiP) framework, this article proposes a contextualized knowledge framework tailored to Chinese primary school English education. Through theoretical synthesis, policy text analysis, and integration of empirical findings, the article identifies seven interrelated knowledge elements—disciplinary and pedagogical content knowledge; assessment purposes, content, and methods; grading; feedback; result interpretation and communication; student involvement; and ethics—each localized to reflect national mandates and classroom realities. The article contributes a novel, systematically localized framework that bridges international theory with China's educational context, offering conceptual clarification and practical guidance for teacher education, curriculum implementation, and policy development.

Keywords: Assessment Competence, Knowledge Dimension, Primary School English Teachers, Localization, Teacher Professional Development

Introduction

Educational assessment has evolved from a tool for measuring academic achievement to a key driver of curriculum implementation and student development (Ministry of Education of China [CMOE], 2022). In China, *the Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)* (hereafter “2022 Curriculum Standards”) explicitly require that primary school English assessment focus on four core competencies—language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability—marking a paradigm shift from knowledge-oriented to competency-oriented assessment (CMOE, 2022, p. 4). This reform places unprecedented demands on primary school English teachers (PSET), who must not only master English subject knowledge but also possess systematic assessment competence to design and implement valid, multidimensional, and development-focused assessment practices.

Within the tripartite structure of assessment competence—knowledge, skills, and attitude—the knowledge dimension serves as the cognitive foundation underpinning the other two. It enables teachers to interpret curriculum standards accurately, select appropriate assessment methods, and make informed pedagogical decisions. Without solid assessment knowledge, teachers may misinterpret policy intentions, design tasks that fail to measure students’ core competencies, or rely on outdated, exam-oriented practices—thus undermining the aims of competency-based reform (Liu & Li, 2020; You & Li, 2025).

Empirical research has revealed persistent gaps in teachers’ assessment knowledge. For instance, You, & Li, (2025) found that primary school English teachers struggle with designing accurate assessment scales and applying results to improve teaching (echoing the “inability to distinguish formative/summative assessment” gap), while Wang (2025) reported that 82% struggled to operationalize the 2022 Standards’ core competency descriptors into measurable assessment indicators. These findings indicate that many teachers lack the conceptual and procedural knowledge necessary for implementing assessment practices consistent with the reform agenda.

Two major factors contribute to this deficiency. First, international assessment frameworks (e.g., Xu & Brown, 2016; Giraldo, 2018) are insufficiently localized for China’s primary English context, overlooking policy-specific requirements and young learners’ developmental characteristics. Second, domestic research tends to emphasize general assessment literacy rather than English-specific, primary-oriented assessment knowledge (Lin, 2019; Shao & Chen, 2021; Lin, 2022). Consequently, there remains an urgent need for a contextually grounded knowledge framework that integrates international theory, national policy, and local practice.

In response to these gaps, the present study develops a contextualized knowledge framework for PSET’s assessment competence in China, grounded in Spencer and Spencer’s Iceberg Competence Model and Xu and Brown’s Teacher Assessment Literacy in Practice (TALiP) framework. Specifically, this research addresses three interrelated questions: (1) What theoretical and policy foundations inform the construction of PSET’s assessment knowledge dimension? (2) What are the core elements of PSET’s assessment knowledge, and how do they align with the 2022 Curriculum Standards and the realities of primary English teaching?

(3) What strategies can effectively enhance PSET's assessment knowledge and bridge the gap between theory, policy, and practice?

This study contributes to the field in three ways. First, it refines international assessment competence frameworks to better fit the Chinese primary English education context. Second, it operationalizes abstract policy requirements into concrete, pedagogically relevant knowledge elements. Third, it proposes evidence-based strategies to strengthen teachers' assessment knowledge through professional learning and school-based collaboration. Together, these contributions aim to advance both theoretical understanding and practical improvement in primary school English teachers' assessment competence.

Theoretical and Policy Foundations

The construction of primary school English teachers' (PSET) assessment knowledge dimension is grounded in two interrelated foundations: competence theories that conceptualize the structural nature of professional knowledge, and national education policies that specify the contextual requirements for assessment practice. These foundations ensure that the proposed framework is both theoretically robust and contextually relevant.

Theoretical Foundations

Two theoretical perspectives inform the conceptualization of PSET's assessment knowledge: Spencer and Spencer's Iceberg Competence Model and Xu and Brown's Teacher Assessment Literacy in Practice (TALiP) framework.

Spencer and Spencer's Iceberg Competence Model (1993)

Spencer and Spencer (1993) conceptualize competence as an iceberg structure comprising both visible and underlying components. The surface level includes knowledge and skills, while deeper levels encompass values, attitudes, and motives (see figure 1). Knowledge, as a surface-level yet essential element, refers to the factual and procedural information required to perform professional tasks effectively (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 23).

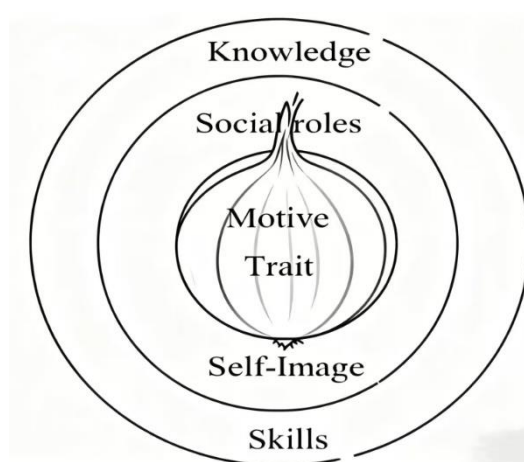


Figure 1: the Iceberg Competence Model (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, visualized in a layered format inspired by Boyatzis, 1982)

Applied to primary English teaching, assessment knowledge represents not abstract theory but context-specific understanding that enables teachers to interpret curriculum standards, design age-appropriate assessment tasks, and communicate results to students and parents. The Iceberg Model also emphasizes the interdependence among competence components: knowledge interacts with skills and attitudes to produce effective practice. For instance, a teacher's knowledge of developmentally appropriate feedback guides their use of practical skills (e.g., visual cues for young learners), while an attitude of student-centeredness ensures that feedback remains constructive rather than evaluative. This perspective underscores that assessment knowledge must be internalized and applied in practice, not memorized as static information.

Xu and Brown's Teacher Assessment Literacy in Practice (TALiP) Framework (2016)

Xu and Brown's (2016) TALiP framework provides a comprehensive model of teacher assessment competence grounded in three decades of research (1985–2015) and established standards (e.g., AFT/NCME/NEA, 1990; Brookhart, 2011). It delineates seven interrelated dimensions of assessment knowledge: (1) subject and pedagogical content knowledge; (2) knowledge of assessment purposes/content/methods; (3) knowledge of grading; (4) knowledge of feedback; (5) knowledge of assessment interpretation and communication; (6) knowledge of Student Involvement in assessment, and (7) knowledge of assessment ethics.

The TALiP framework is particularly relevant for PSET because it emphasizes classroom-based assessment and the integration of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), both essential for aligning assessment with English language learning goals. Furthermore, it foregrounds ethical and equitable assessment practices, which resonate with China's policy emphasis on inclusive education (CMOE, 2022). However, the TALiP framework requires contextual adaptation: it does not explicitly address China's competency-oriented curriculum reforms or the developmental characteristics of primary learners. This study, therefore, extends TALiP by localizing its knowledge dimensions to fit China's educational context and policy environment.

Policy Foundations

China's education policies have progressively refined the requirements for PSET's assessment competence, evolving from general professional expectations to subject-specific standards. Three key policy documents provide the contextual foundation for constructing the assessment knowledge framework.

Professional Standards for Primary School Teachers (2012)

The Professional Standards for Primary School Teachers (CMOE, 2012) was the first official document to explicitly include "assessment knowledge" within teachers' professional requirements. It stipulates that teachers should "understand basic methods of primary education assessment," "apply diversified methods to promote student development," and "use assessment results to inform instruction" (CMOE, 2012, p. 8). For PSET, this entails mastering English-specific assessment techniques (e.g., oral proficiency tasks) and aligning them with the cognitive and affective development of young learners. This policy thus laid the groundwork for subsequent refinements in assessment expectations.

Overall Plan for Deepening the Reform of Education Assessment in the New Era (2020)

The Overall Plan for Deepening the Reform of Education Assessment in the New Era (CMOE, 2020) marked a critical transition from exam-oriented to development-oriented assessment. It called for the establishment of “scientific assessment concepts” and the mastery of “process-based assessment knowledge” (CMOE, 2020, p. 5). For PSET, this entails understanding how to integrate formative assessment—such as classroom observation, peer assessment, and portfolio evaluation—into daily teaching rather than relying solely on summative tests. The plan also promotes data-informed assessment, urging teachers to interpret student performance data to diagnose learning gaps (e.g., weaknesses in listening comprehension). These shifts reflect a broader movement toward evidence-based and learner-centered assessment practices.

Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)

The Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) (CMOE, 2022) provides the most direct policy guidance for PSET’s assessment knowledge. It requires assessment to be competency-oriented, integrative, and age-appropriate. Specifically, teachers are expected to understand how to evaluate each core competency—language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability—through a combination of formative and summative approaches. They must also adapt assessment content and methods to learners’ developmental levels, such as using visual or game-based tasks for lower grades and communicative projects for upper grades.

Collectively, these policy documents define the evolving expectations for PSET’s assessment knowledge: from general understanding (CMOE, 2012), to developmental assessment competency (CMOE, 2020), and finally to competency-oriented, subject-specific application (CMOE, 2022). Together with the theoretical foundations, they inform the construction of a localized, coherent framework that integrates theory, policy, and practice to advance teachers’ assessment competence in China’s primary English education context.

Core Elements of PSET’s Assessment Knowledge Dimension

Drawing upon theoretical models and policy directives, this study identifies seven interrelated elements that constitute the knowledge dimension of primary school English teachers’ (PSET) assessment competence. Each element integrates theoretical underpinnings, policy alignment, and classroom applicability to ensure contextual coherence and practical relevance.

(1) Primary English Disciplinary and Pedagogical Content Knowledge

This element integrates two interdependent components—disciplinary knowledge (what to assess) and pedagogical content knowledge (how to assess)—adapted from Xu and Brown’s (2016) dimension of “subject and pedagogical content knowledge.” It reflects the 2022 Curriculum Standards’ call to evaluate students’ core competencies through curriculum-aligned content and age-appropriate methods.

Disciplinary knowledge requires teachers to master the linguistic content prescribed by the 2022 Standards, including vocabulary, grammar, and communicative competence associated with the four core competencies: language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability (Wang, 2025). Pedagogical content knowledge, in contrast, entails understanding how to design assessment tasks that correspond to students’ cognitive development. For instance, a teacher assessing vocabulary mastery for Grades 3–4 may employ visual or sensory tasks, while oral communication tasks may better suit upper-grade learners. This element ensures that assessment knowledge remains tightly connected to both curricular content and learner characteristics.

(2) Knowledge of English Assessment Purposes, Content, and Methods

This element concerns teachers’ understanding of the rationale (why), focus (what), and procedures (how) of English assessment. Building on Xu and Brown’s (2016) framework, it underscores the necessity for PSET to differentiate formative assessment—intended to support learning—from summative assessment—used to evaluate achievement.

In the competency-oriented context of the 2022 Standards, assessment content must correspond to students’ development in the four core competencies. Teachers must also master diversified assessment methods suitable for primary learners, including observation, performance assessment, and portfolio-based evaluation (Gao & Shen, 2023; Qin et al, 2023). For example, a teacher assessing cultural awareness in Grade 5 might design a project in which students create posters comparing Chinese and Western festivals. This task simultaneously targets assessment purposes, content, and methods, embodying the integration principle advocated by national policy.

(3) Knowledge of English Assessment Grading

This element relates to teachers’ understanding of how to establish and apply fair, transparent, and criterion-referenced grading systems in English assessment. It refines Xu and Brown’s (2016) notion of “grading knowledge” to address English-specific practices, such as oral proficiency scoring.

Effective grading requires the development of rubrics aligned with core competencies (Wang, 2023)—for example, evaluating oral performance through dimensions such as pronunciation accuracy, fluency, and cultural appropriateness. Grading should emphasize students’ developmental progress rather than comparison, as emphasized by the 2022 Standards (CMOE, 2022, p. 43). A practical example is the use of a four-criterion writing rubric for Grade 6—content, grammar, vocabulary, and coherence—accompanied by descriptive feedback that guides improvement. This approach fosters fairness, transparency, and formative value in assessment.

(4) Knowledge of Developmentally Appropriate English Feedback

Feedback knowledge refers to teachers' ability to provide responses suited to learners' cognitive and emotional characteristics, a critical factor in promoting motivation and continuous learning. Building on Xu and Brown's (2016) framework and aligning with the 2022 Standards' emphasis on student-centeredness, this element requires teachers to use feedback that is positive, timely, and age-appropriate.

For younger learners (Grades 3–4), feedback may take visual or symbolic forms, such as stickers or illustrated praise notes. For older students (Grades 5–6), written or oral comments can focus on specific linguistic improvements (Liu & Li, 2020). The effectiveness of feedback depends not only on accuracy but also on delivery—phrasing suggestions constructively (e.g., “Let’s practice this sound together”) rather than judgmentally strengthens students’ confidence and learning engagement (Li et al, 2024).

(5) Knowledge of English Assessment Result Interpretation and Communication

This element addresses teachers' capacity to analyze, interpret, and communicate assessment results to support student learning and stakeholder understanding. It adapts Xu and Brown's (2016) “result interpretation and communication knowledge” to English-specific contexts and China's strong emphasis on home–school collaboration.

Effective result interpretation requires analyzing task-specific data to identify learning gaps (Brookhart, 2011)—for example, diagnosing students' difficulties with connected speech in listening tests and adjusting subsequent lessons accordingly. Communication should be tailored to different audiences: simplified visual charts for younger learners, goal-based discussions for older students, and non-technical explanations with actionable suggestions for parents. Such communication ensures assessment results are used as feedback for improvement rather than as static judgments of ability.

(6) Knowledge of Student Involvement in English Assessment

Student involvement knowledge refers to teachers' understanding of how to engage learners in self- and peer-assessment to promote autonomy and metacognitive awareness. This aligns with the 2022 Standards' goal of cultivating reflective and independent learners (CMOE, 2022, p. 37).

For younger students, self-assessment tools such as smiley-face checklists or pictorial rubrics make reflection accessible. For older students, goal-setting sheets and peer-assessment activities (e.g., evaluating a partner's clarity and fluency in dialogues) encourage active participation. Teachers must scaffold these activities carefully to ensure feedback remains positive and constructive, fostering a supportive classroom climate (Sheng, 2024).

(7) Knowledge of English Assessment Ethics

Ethical knowledge encompasses teachers' understanding of fairness, privacy, and inclusivity in assessment, reflecting both international assessment principles and China's commitment to equitable education. This element expands Xu and Brown's (2016) "assessment ethics knowledge" by situating it within the Chinese context.

Ethical assessment requires avoiding bias based on students' background or prior performance, protecting student privacy by not publicizing individual scores, and adapting assessment procedures to meet the needs of diverse learners (Jin, 2018; Pan & Sun, 2025). For example, providing oral assessment alternatives for students with reading difficulties ensures that tasks measure intended competencies rather than unrelated constraints. This element reinforces the principle that fairness and inclusivity are integral components of professional assessment knowledge (Wang, 2023; Li & Li, 2025; Wang & Lin, 2022).

Collectively, these seven elements form a coherent and context-sensitive framework for understanding the knowledge dimension of PSET's assessment competence. The framework operationalizes international competence theories within China's educational context, providing a theoretical foundation and practical direction for enhancing teachers' professional capacity to conduct valid and meaningful English assessment.

Practical Challenges in PSET's Assessment Knowledge Application

Although the seven-element framework provides a theoretically coherent foundation for understanding primary school English teachers' (PSET) assessment knowledge, significant challenges remain in translating this knowledge into effective classroom practice. These challenges highlight the gap between policy expectations and teachers' existing assessment literacy, emphasizing the need for targeted professional development and institutional support.

Confusion between General and English-Specific Assessment Knowledge

A persistent challenge lies in teachers' tendency to conflate general educational assessment knowledge with English-specific assessment knowledge. Many PSET apply generic test formats or strategies across subjects, which undermines the communicative and developmental purposes of English language assessment. For instance, some teachers use multiple-choice tests—commonly used in mathematics or science—to assess speaking ability, resulting in misalignment with the 2022 Curriculum Standards' focus on communicative competence (You & Li, 2025).

This confusion largely stems from teacher education programs that emphasize general assessment theory while neglecting subject-specific application, as well as the scarcity of English-focused assessment resources in schools. A survey by Zhao (2020) reported that more than half of rural PSET rely on non-specialized assessment tools due to a lack of English-specific materials. Such reliance not only limits teachers' ability to assess higher-order language use but also illustrates the disjunction between policy ideals and classroom realities.

Difficulty Aligning Knowledge with Primary Learners' Developmental Characteristics

Another challenge concerns teachers' limited ability to adapt assessment knowledge to the cognitive and emotional characteristics of young learners (Liu & Li, 2020). Although the 2022 Curriculum Standards emphasize age-appropriateness and learner-centeredness, many PSET continue to employ assessment forms that are cognitively demanding or emotionally discouraging for children (Wang, 2025). For example, a teacher might use written feedback forms for Grade 3 students who are still developing basic reading proficiency, or administer oral tests under high-pressure conditions that diminish students' confidence.

This problem is compounded by insufficient training in child development and educational psychology. Liu and Li (2020) found that only a small portion of surveyed teachers had received training on age-appropriate assessment design. Additionally, external pressures to prepare students for summative examinations often drive teachers toward test-oriented methods that conflict with the developmental intent of competency-based education (Vogt & Tsagari, 2014; Chen, 2024; Wu & Zhang, 2025).

Insufficient Knowledge of Core Competency Assessment

Teachers also demonstrate limited understanding of how to operationalize the "core competencies" stipulated in the 2022 Curriculum Standards—particularly in assessing thinking quality and cultural awareness. You and Li (2025) found that a substantial majority of PSET were unable to design assessment tasks that capture students' higher-order thinking in English, defaulting instead to measuring vocabulary and grammar accuracy. This narrow focus reflects a gap between curriculum policy and teachers' conceptual grasp of assessment knowledge.

The root of this problem lies in vague policy guidance and limited exemplars. While the Standards define the four core competencies, they provide few concrete illustrations of how these competencies should be assessed in practice. Consequently, teachers struggle to transform abstract policy discourse into pedagogically actionable assessment tasks (Li & Zhang, 2024; Xia, 2024). Without explicit training and exemplars, the core competency framework remains aspirational rather than operational in primary classrooms.

Limited Knowledge and Utilization of Digital Assessment Tools

The growing emphasis on technology-enhanced assessment introduces a new layer of complexity. Both the 2020 Overall Plan and the 2022 Curriculum Standards advocate the use of digital tools—such as AI-based oral testing platforms and online formative assessment systems—to improve efficiency and feedback quality. However, many PSET lack the knowledge and skills to integrate these tools meaningfully into assessment practice.

For example, some teachers use automated oral scoring software merely to obtain numerical results, without interpreting diagnostic data to address specific pronunciation or fluency issues (Zhao et al., 2023; Pan et al., 2024; Wang, 2025). This demonstrates a superficial engagement with technology rather than pedagogically informed integration. Limited access to digital infrastructure—especially in rural schools—further restricts teachers' opportunities for practice and experimentation. Chen (2024) reported that fewer than half of PSET had received formal training in digital assessment, with even lower participation in resource-constrained regions.

Collectively, these challenges underscore the disjunction between theoretical and policy frameworks and the lived realities of classroom practice. They reveal that strengthening teachers' assessment knowledge requires not only conceptual understanding but also structural support through contextualized training, resource provision, and policy implementation. Addressing these barriers is therefore essential to achieving the goals of China's competency-oriented English education reform.

Strategies for Developing PSET's Assessment Knowledge

To bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and classroom practice, this section proposes four interrelated strategies for enhancing primary school English teachers' (PSET) assessment knowledge. These strategies are derived from empirical findings, grounded in the seven-element framework, and aligned with national policy priorities. Together, they aim to ensure that assessment knowledge is internalized, applied, and sustained within diverse educational contexts.

Scenario-Based Teacher Training

Conventional training programs in China often emphasize theoretical lectures rather than contextualized practice, resulting in a disconnect between assessment knowledge and actual classroom application (Chu, 2023). Scenario-based teacher training can address this limitation by immersing teachers in authentic, English-specific assessment contexts.

Workshops can incorporate situational cases drawn from the 2022 Curriculum Standards, such as "assessing cultural awareness in the Festivals unit" or "designing formative feedback for young learners." Through role-play and microteaching activities, teachers can practice interpreting assessment criteria, providing age-appropriate feedback, and aligning assessment tasks with learning objectives. Such experiential learning strengthens teachers' ability to translate theoretical knowledge into classroom actions. Additionally, incorporating digital components—such as using AI oral testing platforms for simulated evaluation—can enhance teachers' confidence in integrating technology into assessment practices (Zhao et al., 2023; Pan et al., 2024).

School-Based Lesson Study Focused on Assessment

School-based lesson study provides an effective collaborative platform for developing and sharing assessment knowledge. Within this model, teachers work collectively to design, implement, and reflect on English assessment tasks aligned with the 2022 Curriculum Standards.

Collaborative planning enables teachers to exchange perspectives on assessment purposes, content, and methods, leading to the creation of contextually relevant and diversified tasks (Shao & Chen, 2021). Post-lesson reflection sessions allow teachers to analyze student performance data and discuss how assessment evidence can inform instructional adjustments (Tan, 2017; Hull, & Vigh, 2024). Such continuous professional dialogue cultivates collective expertise and transforms assessment from an individual responsibility into a shared pedagogical practice (Gan & Lam, 2020). Moreover, schools can institutionalize assessment-focused lesson study as part of ongoing professional development to sustain long-term capacity building.

Development and Dissemination of English-Specific Assessment Resources

Another critical strategy is the systematic development of English-specific assessment resources tailored to the needs of primary education. Many PSET lack access to practical tools such as rubrics, self-assessment checklists, and exemplars of core competency tasks. Education authorities and research institutions should therefore collaborate to produce and disseminate standardized, high-quality resources.

Resource toolkits may include sample rubrics for oral and writing assessments, self-assessment templates for different grade levels, and model tasks that operationalize the four core competencies. For example, a toolkit for Grade 5 could include a rubric for assessing “thinking quality” in story-writing and a corresponding exemplar task requiring students to write an alternative ending (CMOE, 2022). Digital versions of these materials can facilitate broader accessibility, particularly for rural schools with limited resources (Chen, 2024). By making these materials available, teachers are empowered to apply theoretical knowledge more confidently and consistently across classrooms.

Policy Refinement and Institutional Support

Sustainable improvement in teachers’ assessment knowledge also requires systemic and policy-level support. Policymakers should refine existing curriculum standards and teacher evaluation systems to provide clearer expectations, stronger incentives, and equitable resource allocation.

Supplementary guidelines to the 2022 Curriculum Standards could offer concrete illustrations of how to assess each core competency—for example, suggesting observable indicators for assessing “learning ability” through students’ use of vocabulary strategies. Furthermore, integrating assessment competence into teacher evaluation and promotion criteria would incentivize teachers to engage in continuous professional learning (Zhou & Lin, 2025). Institutional support should also target rural schools, where teachers often face resource constraints. Targeted funding for digital tools, online assessment platforms, and localized training programs would help reduce the urban–rural disparity in assessment literacy development.

Collectively, these four strategies—scenario-based training, school-based collaboration, resource development, and policy refinement—form a coherent pathway for strengthening PSET’s assessment knowledge. They ensure that theoretical frameworks are transformed into actionable pedagogical practices and that teachers are supported both professionally and institutionally. By embedding assessment knowledge development into teacher education, school culture, and policy structures, China can advance toward realizing the goals of competency-oriented English education reform.

Conclusions and Implications

This study constructs a contextualized knowledge framework for primary school English teachers' (PSET) assessment competence, grounded in Spencer and Spencer's Iceberg Competence Model, Xu and Brown's Teacher Assessment Literacy in Practice (TALiP) framework, and China's national education policies. The proposed framework encompasses seven interrelated knowledge elements—disciplinary and pedagogical content knowledge, assessment purposes/content/methods, grading, feedback, result interpretation and communication, student involvement, and assessment ethics—each adapted to the specific policy and classroom context of China's primary English education.

Conclusions

The study makes three major contributions.

(1) Theoretical contribution: By localizing and extending international competence theories, this study conceptualizes assessment knowledge as a dynamic, context-sensitive construct that integrates professional understanding, pedagogical application, and value orientation. It advances theoretical discourse by clarifying the interdependence among knowledge, skills, and attitudes within teachers' assessment competence, emphasizing that knowledge is the cognitive foundation upon which effective assessment practice is built.

(2) Policy alignment: The framework directly corresponds to *the Professional Standards for Primary School Teachers (2012)*, *the Overall Plan for Deepening the Reform of Education Assessment in the New Era (2020)*, and *the Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022)*. By translating policy expectations into operationalized knowledge elements, the study bridges the gap between national reforms and classroom practice, supporting the implementation of competency-oriented assessment at the primary level.

(3) Practical relevance: Through the identification of existing challenges—such as confusion between general and subject-specific knowledge, difficulty in assessing core competencies, and limited digital literacy—the study proposes four feasible strategies: scenario-based training, school-based lesson study, English-specific resource development, and policy refinement. These strategies provide concrete pathways for developing teachers' assessment knowledge in both urban and rural contexts, ensuring that reform goals are achievable in practice.

Implications

For teacher education and professional development: Teacher training institutions should embed assessment competence—particularly the knowledge dimension—into preservice and in-service curricula. Training should emphasize scenario-based and collaborative approaches that enable teachers to integrate theoretical knowledge with real classroom assessment tasks.

For schools: School leaders should foster a culture of collaborative inquiry by institutionalizing assessment-focused lesson study and providing structured opportunities for teachers to co-design assessment tools. Schools should also ensure equitable access to digital and linguistic resources, particularly for rural educators.

For policymakers: The Ministry of Education should further clarify assessment guidelines within the 2022 Standards, illustrating specific methods for evaluating each core competency. Policymakers should also establish supportive systems—such as funding mechanisms, teacher recognition schemes, and digital infrastructure—that facilitate the sustainable development of assessment knowledge across regions.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While the present study provides a theoretically grounded and policy-aligned framework, it is primarily conceptual in nature and lacks empirical validation. Future research should employ methods such as the Delphi technique to verify the relevance and weighting of the seven knowledge elements through expert consensus. Large-scale quantitative surveys and qualitative case studies could further explore variations in teachers' assessment knowledge across regions, school types, and teaching experiences. Moreover, action research examining the implementation of scenario-based training or school-based assessment initiatives would yield valuable evidence on the effectiveness of proposed strategies.

In conclusion, the knowledge dimension of assessment competence serves as the cornerstone of China's competency-oriented English education reform. By developing teachers' assessment knowledge through theoretically informed, policy-aligned, and practice-based approaches, the education system can foster more valid, developmental, and equitable assessment practices. This not only strengthens the quality of primary English education but also contributes to the broader objective of cultivating students' core competencies for lifelong learning.

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