

From Policy to Practice: Implementing Chinese Language Curriculum in UAE Public Schools

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Abstract

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) introduced Chinese into its national public-school system through the Hundred Schools Project in 2019. Although the initiative expanded rapidly, less is known about how its curriculum is interpreted and enacted in multilingual school settings. This research evaluates curriculum implementation in participating public schools in Al Ain using the Context, Input, Process, and Product (CIPP) framework. The qualitative single-case study drew on semi-structured interviews, stimulated recall interviews, and teaching-related documents from six Chinese language teachers. Thematic analysis and cross-source triangulation examined policy context, implementation support, curriculum enactment, monitoring, teaching styles, and evident outcomes. The findings show that the Project provided clear aims, level-based curriculum guidance, common instructional planners, textbooks, digital resources, professional development, and monitoring mechanisms. However, implementation conditions varied across schools. Teachers reported incomplete access to printed, audio, and supplementary resources; uneven practical follow-up after professional development; complex workloads; and limited instructional time. They adapted pacing, tasks, materials, and teaching roles to learner readiness and school conditions. Five overlapping teaching-style orientations were identified, but no single style was used consistently. Students demonstrated foundational language use, cultural and multilingual expression, participation in extracurricular activities, and recognized achievement. The available evidence did not establish uniform or sustained gains in Chinese proficiency. The research argues that the Project has created a meaningful foundation for Chinese language and cultural education, but its sustainability depends on stronger coherence among curriculum progression, resources, professional learning, instructional time, monitoring, and school-level support.

Keywords: Chinese as a Foreign Language, Curriculum Implementation, UAE, Public Schools, Cipp Evaluation, Teacher Agency, Multilingual Education

Introduction

Chinese language education in the UAE has developed from small-scale institutional initiatives into a national public-school program. The country began incorporating Chinese into its national basic education system in 2019, and by 2022 the Hundred Schools Project was

reported to include 158 public schools, approximately 54,000 students, and 172 Chinese teachers (Jin & Charles, 2024). This expansion makes the UAE an important setting for examining how a non-local language curriculum is introduced into an established multilingual education system.

The policy ambition of the Project is broader than language instruction alone. Chinese is positioned alongside Arabic and English in a system where it functions as an elective third language, while curriculum documents connect language learning with cultural awareness, international engagement, global citizenship, and future educational and employment opportunities. This combination of linguistic, cultural, and strategic aims creates a demanding implementation environment. Teachers must translate broad policy goals into classroom tasks for learners who may have little prior exposure to Chinese, within timetables that provide limited contact time.

Research from other contexts shows why policy expansion should not be treated as evidence of successful curriculum implementation. In multilingual Hong Kong schools, differentiated materials, learning objectives, grouping, and targeted resources were used to respond to students with different linguistic backgrounds, but the provision of support remained uneven (Kam & Yan, 2012). A study of Chinese language programs in Czech secondary schools likewise identified stakeholder attitudes, curricular classification, employment, partnerships, and institutional support as important conditions for implementation (Šamajová & Zahradníková, 2022). Research on Chinese curriculum reform in Singapore found that teachers' support for newer approaches was associated with their experience of the reform and emphasized the need for appropriate pacing and pre-service and in-service support (Li et al., 2012). In culturally local Thai schools, curriculum considerations, teacher preparation, knowledge-sharing, cultural events, and school-wide initiatives shaped Chinese language teaching and learning (Duangmanee & Waluyo, 2024). Together, these studies suggest that curriculum implementation depends on the relationship among policy, resources, teachers, school organization, and local context.

The UAE literature has documented the growth and policy significance of Chinese education, but school-level evidence on curriculum enactment remains comparatively limited. The thesis on which this research is based identifies a gap in integrated evidence concerning policy aims, implementation support, classroom adaptation, monitoring, teaching styles, and outcomes within the Hundred Schools Project. The present research addresses that gap through four research questions:

1. How do policy aims, curriculum objectives, and contextual conditions shape implementation?
2. How are support, resources, professional development, and instructional time provided and experienced?
3. How is implementation enacted and monitored, and what teaching-style orientations are evident?
4. What outcomes are evident in student work, participation, achievement records, and teacher practice?

The research makes two contributions. Empirically, it provides a focused account of Chinese curriculum implementation in UAE public schools from the perspective of teachers and

teaching-related records. Conceptually, it shows how the four CIPP dimensions are connected through teacher judgment: policy establishes direction, inputs create possibilities and constraints, teachers mediate the process, and outcomes reflect both the program's provision and the conditions under which it is enacted.

Background of the Study

Curriculum implementation is understood here as the translation of intended curriculum into teaching practice, learning activities, assessment-related work, and school-level arrangements. It is shaped by curriculum aims, materials, assessment expectations, teacher decision-making, institutional support, and classroom conditions. This definition treats implementation as an enacted process rather than as simple fidelity to a written curriculum. The CIPP model provided the organizing framework. Context evaluation examined the policy purposes, curriculum aims, and multilingual and institutional conditions in which the Project operated. Input evaluation examined planning support, resources, professional development, school support, and time allocation. Process evaluation examined curriculum enactment, monitoring, feedback, and teaching styles. Product evaluation examined outcomes evident in student work, LMS records, cultural activities, competition records, teacher accounts, and professional practice. The study evaluated curriculum implementation within participating Al

Ain schools, not the national success of the entire Hundred Schools Project.

The framework was combined with a view of teachers as curriculum mediators. In the Project, instructional planners and shared materials provided common direction, but teachers were encouraged to adjust pacing and delivery to student needs. This arrangement created a productive but potentially unstable balance between coherence and adaptation. Adaptation can make a curriculum more relevant to local learners, but when resources, time, and follow-up are uneven, it can also transfer responsibility for system-level coherence to individual teachers.

The study has four principal limitations. First, it examined one bounded case in participating Al Ain public schools and included six teachers, so the findings are not statistically generalizable to all UAE schools or all stages of the Project. Second, the data were generated from teacher interviews, stimulated recall, and documents; classroom observation was not included, limiting independent verification of reported practice. Third, the Product evidence consisted mainly of artifacts, records, reported experiences, and documented participation rather than longitudinal, standardized measures of student proficiency. Fourth, the study foregrounded teachers' perspectives and did not include systematic interviews with students, parents, school leaders, or program coordinators. These limitations make the research strongest as an implementation study and weaker as an estimate of causal effects or population-level achievement.

Methods

Design and setting

The study used a qualitative single-case design focused on Chinese language curriculum implementation in participating UAE public schools in Al Ain. Chinese was taught as an elective third language in a multilingual environment in which Arabic was the national language and English had an established role in schooling. The empirical focus covered Grades 7 and 8 in Cycle 2 and Grades 9 and 10 in Cycle 3. Students could be placed in comparable

Chinese curriculum levels according to prior exposure rather than school grade alone, which made level-based planning central to implementation.

Participants and data sources

Six Chinese language teachers participated in the formal study. They had between five and twenty-four years of TCSOL experience and worked in boys' or girls' public schools. They were treated as contributors to one bounded case rather than as separate cases for comparison. Data were collected through one semi-structured interview and one stimulated recall interview with each teacher. The stimulated recall interviews used lesson plans, slides, student work, LMS records, assessment materials, and other teaching-related artefacts as prompts. Documentary sources included policy and curriculum documents, instructional planners, teaching materials, professional-development records, observation forms, teacher reports, LMS records, student work, cultural displays, and competition records.

The data represented reported experience, reflection, and documented implementation. Classroom observation was not conducted, so the study does not independently verify every classroom interaction. Its claims concern teachers' accounts and the practices and outcomes represented in the available documents.

Analysis and trustworthiness

Interview and stimulated recall recordings were transcribed in Chinese and checked against the audio before coding. Documentary materials were organized by source and relevance to the research questions. Initial coding was inductive and focused on policy context, support and resources, implementation processes, monitoring, teaching styles, and outcomes. Codes were refined into themes and then organized under the CIPP dimensions. The researcher compared interview, stimulated recall, and documentary evidence for convergence, complementarity, and divergence rather than requiring all sources to produce identical accounts.

Trustworthiness was supported through transcript checking, member checking, cross-source triangulation, peer review, an audit trail, prolonged engagement, and reflexive notes. Data collection with the six participants extended over approximately twelve weeks, from 20 April to 11 July 2024, and included eighteen participant-contact sessions, of which twelve were formal interviews. The study does not claim statistical generalization to all UAE public schools or all Chinese language programs; its value lies in analytic insight into a bounded implementation context.

Findings

The findings are organized according to the four research questions. The CIPP evaluation framework was used to guide the analysis, with Context corresponding to RQ1, Input to RQ2, Process to RQ3, and Product to RQ4. Thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews, stimulated recall interviews, instructional documents, LMS records, student work, teacher reports, and Project-related documents identified recurring themes, sub-themes, and patterns of convergence and divergence across the data sources.

Findings from Research Question 1: How do policy aims, curriculum objectives, and contextual conditions shape implementation?

Three themes emerged from the analysis: (1) policy orientation and strategic purposes, (2) curriculum aims and level-based learning objectives, and (3) contextual conditions shaping implementation. Unlike the subsequent research questions, the evidence for RQ1 was drawn primarily from policy, curriculum, and Project-related documents.

Policy Orientation and Strategic Purposes

The policy documents positioned Chinese language education within the UAE's broader educational priorities rather than as an isolated foreign-language initiative. The Curriculum Framework for Excellence (CFE), Chinese Language Curriculum Framework for Excellence (CCFE), and related Project documents connected Chinese language learning with educational quality, future readiness, global citizenship, intercultural communication, international engagement, further education, and employability. The curriculum consequently incorporated both linguistic and broader educational purposes. Students were expected to develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities while also developing communication, mediation, digital competence, critical thinking, cultural awareness, and the capacity to participate in an increasingly international environment. The policy orientation was therefore strategically broad. Chinese was expected not only to be learned as a language but also to contribute to students' cultural understanding and future-oriented competencies. This broad policy positioning provided a clear rationale for introducing Chinese into UAE public schools, but it also created substantial expectations for classroom implementation.

Curriculum Aims and Level-Based Learning Objectives

The curriculum translated these broad policy aims into progressive language objectives. The level-based structure moved from foundational functions such as introducing oneself, identifying countries and nationalities, and describing daily routines towards more complex communication involving comparison, narration, opinions, future intentions, and hypothetical situations. The instructional planners provided teachers with weekly objectives, vocabulary, grammar, cultural content, sentence patterns, reading passages, and textbook references. This created a common progression across the Project while allowing some flexibility in pacing and delivery. Curriculum localization was also evident. Chinese language content incorporated UAE geography, Emirati culture, Arabic and Islamic references, science, technology, environmental issues, and global topics. Thus, implementation was designed to connect Chinese learning with students' existing cultural and linguistic environment rather than presenting Chinese as a culturally detached subject.

Contextual Conditions Shaping Implementation

The implementation context was characterized by multilingualism, learner diversity, and the relatively new status of Chinese as an elective third language. Arabic and English already occupied established positions in the UAE education system, while Chinese had to be integrated into this existing linguistic environment. The six participating teachers also worked under different teaching conditions. They taught approximately 250–340 students, with workloads ranging from 20 to 28 teaching periods per week and between 10 and 14 classes. They taught across Cycle 2 and Cycle 3, and some worked across different grade levels or schools. The level-based structure further complicated implementation because students' Chinese proficiency did not necessarily correspond directly to their school grade. Teachers

therefore had to reconcile curriculum level, age, grade, prior exposure, and learner readiness. Taken together, the findings indicate that policy aims and curriculum objectives provided a coherent direction, but implementation was strongly conditioned by the multilingual setting, learner readiness, timetable arrangements, and the position of Chinese as an elective third language. The policy framework was therefore clear, while its classroom realization required contextual interpretation.

Findings from Research Question 2: How are support, resources, professional development, and instructional time provided and experienced?

Four themes emerged: (1) implementation support, (2) resource provision, (3) professional development, and (4) instructional time. The evidence indicates that formal inputs were available, but their practical value differed across teachers and school contexts.

Implementation Support

The Project provided common instructional planners containing weekly objectives, vocabulary, grammar, cultural components, sentence patterns, reading materials, textbook links, and assessment-related activities. These planners created a common instructional structure while allowing teachers to modify pacing and delivery. School-level support, however, varied. Mary reported that her school provided approximately 200–300 dirhams for major activities, although she preferred centrally supplied resources to purchasing materials independently. Sara described differences in physical facilities, including access to a dedicated Chinese classroom in one school but not another. The evidence therefore suggests that implementation support existed at both Project and school levels, but teachers experienced this support differently according to their particular school environments.

Resource Provision

Teachers had access to textbooks, PowerPoint courseware, online resources, instructional planners, and cultural materials. These resources were generally viewed positively.

Sara stated:

"The PowerPoint courseware provided by the Project team is very helpful."

Ava similarly reported:

"The PowerPoint courseware and online resources greatly reduce my workload."

However, the data revealed gaps in resource completeness. James reported:

"The lack of sufficient materials limits how much we can diversify our teaching methods."

Robert highlighted the absence of sufficient printed materials:

"Without printed textbooks, students cannot develop the habit of annotating and reviewing the text."

Ava also reported that some electronic materials did not have accompanying audio and video resources. Sara noted that teachers sometimes had to purchase additional small materials themselves. Thus, the finding was not that the Project lacked resources. Rather, resources were available but not always complete, accessible, or sufficient for the range of activities expected.

Professional Development

Professional development was provided through centralized training, Project workshops, peer sharing, observation, and feedback. Training addressed classroom management,

technology, assessment, instructional strategies, and student engagement. Participants generally valued the training but questioned its practical transfer.

Ava explained:

"The topics covered in the training were good. However, without concrete examples to support the content, it felt somewhat abstract and vague."

Other participants preferred face-to-face workshops because they enabled teachers to observe practices and exchange experiences directly. Mason emphasized peer observation and mentoring, particularly for new teachers:

"New teachers need a mentorship system in which an experienced teacher supports them one to one."

James described how some professional learning eventually depended on individual experimentation:

"There's not always someone to tell you what to do, so I just watched what worked and kept improving from there."

Therefore, professional development was available and generally valued, but the transfer of training into classroom practice depended on practical examples, mentoring, peer interaction, delivery format, and follow-up.

Instructional Time

Time emerged as a major implementation issue. The teachers' formal teaching loads ranged from 20 to 28 periods per week. Mary, who taught 26 periods across four grade levels, described the difficulty of continuously shifting between different curriculum levels:

"Teaching several levels is challenging, and a lighter workload would allow me to focus more closely on each level."

She also explained that uneven lesson distribution reduced opportunities for consolidation:

"Students have little opportunity to review and consolidate what they have learned."

Sara reported variation in lesson duration, with classes sometimes lasting 40, 50, or 60 minutes. Teaching across two schools further reduced her preparation and collaboration time.

Instructional time was also consumed by assessment, reporting, cultural activities, competitions, clubs, student tutoring, and other school responsibilities. Mason, for example, used after-school time and Microsoft Teams to conduct Chinese clubs, HSK preparation, and cultural-performance rehearsals. The finding therefore extends beyond the issue of insufficient lesson time. The central problem was the relationship between scheduled instructional time, curriculum breadth, learner readiness, teacher workload, and the additional activities required to sustain the Project.

Findings from Research Question 3: How is implementation enacted and monitored, and what teaching-style orientations are evident?

Three themes emerged: (1) curriculum enactment and programme performance, (2) monitoring and feedback, and (3) teaching-style orientations. The findings show that implementation was characterized by continuous teacher mediation rather than uniform delivery.

Curriculum Enactment and Programme Performance

Teachers continually adjusted curriculum expectations according to learner readiness, classroom conditions, and available instructional time.

Mason explained:

"At first, the objectives were hard to achieve, so I gradually adjusted them. I simplified them and broke them down into step-by-step routines."

He further noted:

"Each lesson is supposed to meet two or three specific goals. That's not realistic for my students."

James similarly reported:

"The completion rate isn't high in my class. I select only the key content from the textbook."

Adaptation was also visible in lesson plans and teaching materials. Teachers simplified content, changed pacing, differentiated tasks, added visual support, introduced vocabulary games, and extended or reduced activities according to student response.

Ava explained:

"I usually tweak the slides a bit. Sometimes I'll throw in a quick vocab battle or class survey."

In contrast, Mary reported that:

"Using the fixed PowerPoint slides helps maintain order and cover the required content."

These contrasting accounts demonstrate that common Project materials did not produce identical classroom practices. Instead, teachers interpreted and adapted the materials according to their students and school conditions.

Monitoring and Feedback

Implementation was monitored through LMS records, professional observation, and teacher reporting. LMS records documented task distribution, student submissions, scores, comments, oral recordings, attendance, and participation. Evidence from Grade 8 classes indicated that LMS engagement was concentrated during scheduled Chinese lessons, although the records could not independently establish whether activities were completed under direct teacher guidance. Professional observation forms captured lesson planning, instructional strategies, assessment, questioning, time and resource use, and student participation. However, the available records provided limited evidence that issues identified during one observation were consistently revisited through later mentoring or follow-up observations. Teacher reports provided another layer of monitoring. Monthly, termly, and yearly reports recorded curriculum completion, assessment, parent communication, training, cultural activities, competitions, school duties, and student support. Robert's yearly report, for example, documented an eight-week instructional cycle with the final two weeks dedicated to review and assessment. The evidence therefore suggests that monitoring mechanisms were well established as documentation systems, but their use as continuous instructional feedback systems was less consistent.

Teaching-Style Orientations

Five overlapping teaching-style orientations were identified. They are (1) authority and lecture, (2) demonstrator and coach, (3) facilitator and activity, (4) delegator and group, and (5) hybrid and blended. The findings showed that these were not fixed teacher characteristics. Teachers shifted between styles according to student responsiveness, classroom management, available time, teaching experience, and school conditions. James

demonstrated a stronger Authority and Lecture orientation when classroom routines and behavioural control were required. Sara and Robert showed stronger Demonstrator and Coach characteristics through modelling, guided practice, and scaffolding. Ava demonstrated Facilitator and Activity practices, while Mary and Robert incorporated group-based learning. Mason particularly demonstrated the flexibility of teaching styles:

"Some days they're distracted, so I rely more on structure and clear goals. But when I see interest, I shift into a coaching role."

Ava similarly explained:

"I give them space, but when they need guidance, I step in, especially with pronunciation or grammar."

Mary emphasized the value of group learning:

"Group work effectively boosts student interaction and mutual support."

The findings therefore suggest that teaching style functioned as a flexible pedagogical resource through which teachers mediated curriculum demands, rather than as a stable characteristic of individual teachers.

Findings from Research Question 4: What outcomes are evident in student work, participation, achievement records, and teacher practice?

Five themes emerged: (1) student learning outcomes, (2) learner initiative and extended participation, (3) cultural and multilingual expression, (4) recognized achievement and future pathways, and (5) teacher professional growth. Importantly, the Product evidence demonstrates outcomes evident in the available qualitative and documentary data. It should not be interpreted as evidence of causal programme effects or standardized gains in Chinese proficiency.

Student Learning Outcomes

Student work demonstrated foundational Chinese language use through character writing, pinyin, vocabulary recognition, sentence construction, oral activities, and LMS tasks. Student artifacts included Chinese handwriting, pinyin-based writing, family trees, vocabulary illustrations, sentence-construction activities, and trilingual storybooks. Some students were able to combine Chinese with English and Arabic in creative written work. Teachers also reported examples of students developing basic communicative abilities after sustained exposure to Chinese. However, the evidence was not uniformly positive.

Sara stated:

"They can copy, but they don't really know what they're writing."

Mary similarly observed:

"They participate when we speak, but once I ask them to write even a short sentence, it becomes very quiet."

Ava reported that some students were unable to recall basic Chinese strokes during assessment even though the curriculum planner indicated that the relevant learning outcome should have been achieved. The evidence therefore indicates foundational language learning but uneven attainment. Student artifacts demonstrate engagement and application, but they cannot by themselves establish sustained proficiency.

Learner Initiative and Extended Participation

The evidence also showed examples of learning extending beyond formal classroom requirements. One student independently created a handwritten poster based on the Tang poem *Jìng Yè Sī*, while another Grade 7 student independently prepared a bilingual PowerPoint using Chinese, English, and pinyin. Mary described a Grade 10 student who independently practised Chinese songs at home for a Chinese Bridge competition, sought feedback on pronunciation, and later demonstrated her guzheng performance. Students also participated in Chinese clubs, HSK preparation, cultural performances, and online activities. In one Grade 7 LMS dataset, submissions for four representative tasks ranged from 14 to 22 of 26 students. These records indicate opportunities for extended participation and learner initiative. However, the data provide stronger evidence of participation and outputs than of sustained independent learning over time.

Cultural and Multilingual Expression

Cultural expression was strongly represented in student work. Evidence included Mid-Autumn Festival posters, Chinese calligraphy, UAE National Day displays, paper dragons, cultural comparison projects, multilingual vocabulary work, and festival-themed classroom displays. Students also produced work combining Chinese with English and Arabic. One project compared Chinese dumplings with Emirati samosas, while other projects incorporated Chinese calligraphy alongside Arabic script and UAE national symbols. Cultural learning extended into interdisciplinary activities involving English, Arabic, Mathematics, Science, Art, Music, Drama, Physical Education, and digital learning. For example, a camel-themed lesson connected Chinese vocabulary with English writing, Mathematics, and Arabic cultural knowledge. Other activities linked Chinese with environmental issues, music, visual art, and UAE National Day celebrations. These findings indicate that the Project generated outcomes beyond language exercises, particularly in cultural awareness, multilingual expression, creativity, and interdisciplinary participation.

Recognized Achievement and Future Pathways

Achievement was recognized through classroom awards, certificates, displays, reward systems, competitions, and external language examinations. The thesis documents substantial participation in YCT and HSK. In November 2024, 402 students registered for YCT, including 335 at Level I and 67 at Level II. In May 2024, 149 students registered for HSK, comprising 107 Level 1 and 42 Level 2 candidates. The 2024 UAE Regional Chinese Bridge competition involved 417 participants and 16 finalists, while UAE students also progressed to the international level. One UAE Grade 6 student reached the Global Top 15 and received the Global Best Talent Award. At classroom level, teachers also described achievement through effort and participation rather than competition alone. Mason emphasized that students' willingness to perform and participate was itself an important form of achievement. The findings also identified perceived future pathways involving further study in China, translation, cultural exchange, and Chinese-related employment. These should, however, be interpreted as potential or anticipated pathways rather than verified long-term outcomes.

Teacher Professional Growth

The final Product theme concerned changes in teachers' own professional practice. Mason described learning from colleagues:

"We often share our teaching experiences during Friday meetings. I have learned so many new ideas, especially in terms of managing mixed-ability groups."

Ava described a shift from focusing primarily on completing instructional materials towards recognizing the importance of student confidence and oral participation. Sara similarly described developing more experiential approaches to cultural teaching. Professional growth was also evident in teachers' use of digital tools, differentiated activities, cultural projects, and peer-sharing practices. These developments appeared to result from the interaction of formal professional development, teaching experience, peer learning, experimentation, and teacher reflection, rather than from professional training alone.

Taken together, the four research questions reveal a consistent pattern across the implementation of the Chinese language curriculum in UAE public schools. RQ1 demonstrates that the policy established a clear and ambitious direction, positioning Chinese not merely as a foreign language but as a linguistic, cultural, and future-oriented educational resource within the UAE's multilingual education system. RQ2 shows that this policy direction was translated into formal implementation inputs, including instructional planners, teaching materials, professional development, school-level support, and scheduled instructional time. However, the presence of these formal inputs did not necessarily mean that they were equally complete, accessible, or practically experienced across schools. RQ3 further demonstrates that teachers were the central mediators between policy expectations and classroom realities. Teachers actively interpreted and adapted the curriculum by simplifying objectives, selecting essential content, differentiating tasks, modifying instructional materials, adjusting pacing, and shifting teaching styles according to students' readiness and classroom conditions. Although monitoring systems generated substantial documentation of implementation, the evidence of a consistent feedback loop through which monitoring findings informed subsequent instructional improvement was less evident. RQ4 indicates that implementation generated visible but uneven outcomes. Students demonstrated foundational Chinese language use, cultural and multilingual expression, learner participation, initiative, and recognized achievement, while teachers reported growth in their pedagogical confidence, adaptability, and capacity to design culturally responsive learning experiences. Nevertheless, contradictory evidence pointed to continuing challenges in writing, retention, self-assessment, feedback, and sustained language proficiency.

Overall, these findings suggest that the Hundred Schools Project cannot be adequately characterized as either simply successful or unsuccessful. Rather, the Project was substantially implemented, but its effectiveness was mediated by the degree of coherence between policy expectations, implementation inputs, teacher adaptation, and school-level conditions. Teacher agency played a critical role in sustaining implementation by enabling teachers to translate ambitious curriculum expectations into workable classroom practices. At the same time, this agency also functioned as a compensatory mechanism when teachers encountered limitations in resources, instructional time, professional-development follow-up, and monitoring processes. The findings therefore position implementation as an active process of negotiation rather than a straightforward transfer of policy into practice.

The central empirical argument emerging from the study is therefore that the implementation of Chinese language curriculum in UAE public schools was a process of teacher-mediated translation, in which clear policy intentions were transformed into

classroom practice through continuous adaptation. However, the quality and sustainability of this translation depended on the consistency of resources, professional support, instructional time, monitoring, and school-level conditions. In this sense, the findings demonstrate that policy coherence alone is insufficient to ensure consistent curriculum outcomes; implementation depends equally on the capacity of teachers and schools to interpret, adapt, support, and sustain the curriculum within the realities of everyday practice.

Discussion

Taken together, the four research questions reveal a consistent pattern across the implementation of the Chinese language curriculum in UAE public schools. RQ1 demonstrates that the policy established a clear and ambitious direction, positioning Chinese not merely as a foreign language but as a linguistic, cultural, and future-oriented educational resource within the UAE's multilingual education system. This positioning is consistent with the broader development of Chinese language education in the UAE, where Chinese has increasingly been incorporated into public-school education and associated with international engagement, cultural exchange, and future-oriented educational and economic opportunities (Jin & Charles, 2024; Barnawi, 2025). At the same time, the UAE's highly multilingual linguistic environment, in which Arabic and English occupy particularly prominent positions, creates a complex context for the introduction and expansion of additional languages (Siemund et al., 2021; Tang & Calafato, 2021). Thus, the policy direction provided a strong foundation for implementation, but its ambitious objectives had to be interpreted within an already complex multilingual and institutional environment.

RQ2 shows that this policy direction was translated into formal implementation inputs, including instructional planners, teaching materials, professional development, school-level support, and scheduled instructional time. Such inputs are important because curriculum implementation depends not only on the quality of the prescribed curriculum but also on the organisational and professional conditions through which teachers enact it. Recent research indicates that curriculum resources can provide important structures for implementation while simultaneously creating constraints when teachers have limited flexibility, insufficient resources, or competing demands (Rich, 2021; Lowell et al., 2024). Similarly, professional development is more likely to influence practice when it is sustained, relevant, and connected to teachers' actual classroom contexts rather than delivered as isolated training events (Kirsten, 2020; Ventista & Brown, 2023). In the present study, therefore, the presence of formal inputs did not necessarily mean that they were equally complete, accessible, or practically experienced across schools. The findings suggest that the value of implementation inputs depended substantially on how well they matched teachers' contextual needs and the realities of classroom practice.

RQ3 further demonstrates that teachers were the central mediators between policy expectations and classroom realities. Teachers interpreted and adapted the curriculum by simplifying objectives, selecting essential content, differentiating tasks, modifying instructional materials, adjusting pacing, and shifting teaching styles according to students' readiness and classroom conditions. This pattern is strongly consistent with recent research conceptualising teacher agency as situated and context-dependent rather than simply an individual teacher characteristic. For example, Wang (2022) found that teachers' agency during curriculum reform was shaped by their prior experiences, reform-oriented beliefs,

school culture, collaboration, and administrative support. Similarly, Tran (2023) reported that language teachers adapted teaching activities, resources, content, and assessment practices according to student needs, curriculum requirements, available resources, and professional development. Research on curriculum adaptation also indicates that teachers' adaptations can become more deliberate and productive when supported through sustained professional development (Nalbantoğlu & Bümen, 2024). Although monitoring systems in the present study generated substantial documentation of implementation, the evidence of a consistent feedback loop through which monitoring findings informed subsequent instructional improvement was less evident. This is particularly important because effective formative feedback depends not simply on the existence of assessment information but on how that information is subsequently used to support learning and instructional decisions (Newman et al., 2021; Morris et al., 2021).

RQ4 indicates that implementation generated visible but uneven outcomes. Students demonstrated foundational Chinese language use, cultural and multilingual expression, learner participation, initiative, and recognised achievement, while teachers reported growth in pedagogical confidence, adaptability, resource use, and reflective practice. The combination of language learning with cultural and interdisciplinary activities is also consistent with recent scholarship on Chinese language education in the UAE, which highlights the integration of language and cultural content within broader educational purposes (Bo, 2022; Jin & Charles, 2024). Nevertheless, the findings also contain important contradictory evidence concerning writing, retention, self-assessment, feedback, and sustained language proficiency. Such evidence is important because participation, task completion, and visible student products should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of durable language mastery. Recent research on formative assessment similarly emphasises that learning outcomes depend on the quality and implementation of feedback and assessment processes rather than simply on the presence of assessment activities (Newman et al., 2021; Cai et al., 2023). The Product dimension therefore provides evidence of meaningful engagement and foundational development, but not sufficient evidence to claim uniform or sustained proficiency gains across students or schools.

Overall, these findings suggest that the Hundred Schools Project cannot be adequately characterised as either simply successful or unsuccessful. Rather, the Project was substantially implemented, but its effectiveness was mediated by the degree of coherence between policy expectations, implementation inputs, teacher adaptation, and school-level conditions. Teacher agency played a critical role in sustaining implementation by enabling teachers to translate ambitious curriculum expectations into workable classroom practices. At the same time, this agency also functioned as a compensatory mechanism when teachers encountered limitations in resources, instructional time, professional-development follow-up, and monitoring processes. This interpretation is consistent with recent curriculum-reform research showing that implementation is shaped by the interaction between prescribed reforms, available resources, organisational conditions, and teachers' capacity to make situated decisions (Pak et al., 2020; Wang, 2022; Lowell et al., 2024). Consequently, the findings position curriculum implementation not as a linear transfer of policy into practice, but as an ongoing process of interpretation, negotiation, and adaptation.

The central empirical argument emerging from the study is therefore that the implementation of Chinese language curriculum in UAE public schools was a process of teacher-mediated translation, in which clear policy intentions were transformed into classroom practice through continuous adaptation. However, the quality and sustainability of this translation depended on the consistency of resources, professional support, instructional time, monitoring, and school-level conditions. This interpretation extends recent understandings of curriculum implementation by highlighting teacher agency as the mechanism through which policy intentions are negotiated with classroom realities. Rather than viewing teachers as passive recipients of curriculum policy, the findings position them as active policy actors whose decisions determine how prescribed curriculum is ultimately experienced by learners (Tran, 2023; Wang, 2022). In the UAE context, where Chinese is being introduced within an already multilingual educational environment, this teacher-mediated process is particularly important for understanding both the achievements and the continuing limitations of the Hundred Schools Project (Tang & Calafato, 2021; Barnawi, 2025).

The findings show that the Hundred Schools Project was actively implemented but unevenly supported. Its policy architecture was coherent: Chinese language learning was connected to multilingual competence, intercultural understanding, local cultural relevance, and future-oriented participation. The implementation challenge arose downstream, where broad aims had to be prioritized within limited instructional time, variable learner readiness, and school conditions that differed in facilities, support, resources, and scheduling. This pattern resembles evidence from other emerging Chinese language programs, where institutional support, partnerships, teacher preparation, and realistic expectations shape whether policy becomes sustainable practice (Duangmanee & Waluyo, 2024; Šamajová & Zahradníková, 2022).

The most important mechanism linking policy to practice was teacher mediation. Teachers interpreted objectives, selected essential content, adapted slides, differentiated tasks, and combined teaching-style orientations. This agency enabled the curriculum to remain workable in multilingual classrooms. It also exposed a structural vulnerability: when the system did not provide complete materials, practical training follow-up, or usable monitoring feedback, individual teachers compensated through additional preparation and self-directed problem-solving. The Project therefore depended on teacher creativity while providing insufficiently consistent conditions for that creativity to be shared, supported, and sustained. The findings also clarify the meaning of localization. Localization was not limited to inserting UAE cultural references into textbooks or activities. It involved adjusting pacing, using Arabic and English as support resources, connecting Chinese to Emirati culture and other subjects, selecting age-appropriate tasks, and responding to the organization of boys' and girls' schools. This is consistent with research showing that Chinese curriculum in non-Chinese-speaking settings becomes more learnable when it is connected to local sociolinguistic practices and learners' existing cultural resources (Kam & Yan, 2012; Zhao, 2020). Localization was therefore a classroom process as much as a curriculum-design feature.

The monitoring findings identify a gap between accountability and improvement. LMS records, observation forms, and teacher reports made implementation visible, but data collection did not consistently produce a documented feedback loop. A monitoring system is educationally useful only when teachers and coordinators can interpret the information,

agree on feasible adjustments, and revisit those adjustments. In this case, teachers often supplied that interpretive function themselves. This preserved flexibility but made improvement dependent on individual initiative and reduced comparability across schools. The outcome pattern is best understood as foundational. The Project created opportunities for students to encounter Chinese, use basic language, participate in cultural activity, and imagine further learning. These are meaningful outcomes for an elective third-language program, particularly in an early stage of national expansion. They should not, however, be conflated with standardized or sustained proficiency gains. The distinction matters for policy evaluation: participation, cultural expression, and early language use are evidence of access and engagement, whereas claims about proficiency growth require longitudinal assessment using comparable measures.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that the Hundred Schools Project has established a substantial institutional foundation for Chinese language and cultural education in UAE public schools. Clear policy aims, level-based curriculum progression, common instructional planners, shared resources, professional development, monitoring systems, and opportunities for cultural participation provided an important framework for implementation. However, the evidence also shows that policy provision alone does not guarantee consistent classroom enactment. Curriculum implementation is shaped by the interaction between prescribed expectations, available resources, organisational conditions, teacher agency, and the realities of learners and classrooms (Pak et al., 2020; Wang, 2022). In the participating Al Ain schools, teachers played a particularly important role in translating policy into practice by adapting materials, pacing, learning activities, assessment practices, and teaching styles according to students' readiness and school-level conditions. This finding reinforces the view that teachers are not passive recipients of curriculum reform but active agents who interpret and reshape policy during enactment (Tran, 2023; Rich, 2021).

The findings further suggest that the next stage of the Project should focus less on expanding policy ambition and more on strengthening implementation coherence. Curriculum progression should be linked to realistic minimum outcomes for each level and available instructional time, with explicit guidance on which outcomes should be prioritised, deferred, or reinforced during review periods. Such guidance would preserve the broad vision of the curriculum while reducing the need for individual teachers to repeatedly make difficult prioritisation decisions. At the same time, the resource system should be completed and better coordinated. Reliable access to student texts, audio and video materials, practice and writing resources, adaptable supplementary activities, and age-appropriate cultural materials would reduce duplicated preparation and promote greater continuity across schools. Importantly, a shared repository should provide not only materials but also concise implementation guidance concerning learner level, expected learning purpose, estimated time, and possible adaptation. The importance of teachers having agency in using curriculum resources, while still requiring sufficient institutional support, has also been highlighted in recent curriculum implementation research (Rich, 2021; Lowell et al., 2024).

Professional development should similarly move from episodic provision towards supported enactment. Although centralised and online training can provide consistency and improve access, the findings suggest that teachers require opportunities to see how recommended

approaches can be applied to actual classroom problems. Practical workshops, peer observation, regional teacher networks, mentoring for new teachers, post-training materials, and follow-up consultations would strengthen the connection between professional learning and classroom practice. This is consistent with evidence that professional development is more likely to influence teaching when it is sustained, contextually relevant, collaborative, and connected to teachers' ongoing work rather than delivered as isolated training sessions (Kirsten, 2020; Ventista & Brown, 2023). A blended professional-learning model would therefore be appropriate for the Project, combining centralised curriculum guidance with local problem-solving, peer learning, mentoring, and documented classroom application.

Instructional time also needs to be reconsidered in relation to the **full** workload of implementation. The findings demonstrate that curriculum time extends beyond scheduled classroom contact to include preparation, differentiation, assessment, reporting, cultural events, clubs, competitions, professional development, student support, and, for some teachers, movement between schools. Consequently, a timetable that appears formally adequate may still provide insufficient time for practice, feedback, review, and consolidation. Curriculum planning should therefore consider the relationship between curriculum breadth, learner readiness, teaching load, and the additional work required to make the curriculum teachable. This is particularly important in language education, where meaningful development requires repeated opportunities for practice, interaction, feedback, and consolidation rather than simple coverage of prescribed content.

Finally, monitoring should be strengthened as a continuous feedback and improvement cycle rather than primarily a documentation mechanism. LMS records, observation forms, and teacher reports already generate substantial information about implementation, but this information needs to lead to specific and feasible instructional actions that can subsequently be revisited. The purpose should not be to impose a single preferred teaching style. Rather, monitoring should establish whether students are receiving sufficient opportunities to develop listening, speaking, reading, writing, cultural understanding, and independent learning, and whether teachers have the time, resources, and professional support required to provide these opportunities. The importance of connecting assessment and feedback information to subsequent instructional action has been emphasised in recent research, particularly where feedback is intended to support meaningful learning rather than merely document performance (Morris et al., 2021; Cai et al., 2023).

Overall, the Hundred Schools Project should therefore be understood as substantially implemented but not uniformly enacted. Its principal strength lies in the combination of a clear policy direction and teachers who were willing and able to adapt the curriculum to local learners and conditions. Its principal challenge lies in ensuring that such adaptation is supported by coherent curriculum expectations, complete resources, sustained professional learning, realistic instructional time, and a functioning monitoring-feedback cycle. In this sense, teacher agency should not be treated as a substitute for system-level support. Rather, it should be recognised as a necessary component of sustainable implementation that becomes more effective when institutional conditions enable teachers to exercise professional judgement. This interpretation is particularly relevant to Chinese language education in the UAE, where the curriculum must operate within a complex multilingual environment and where Chinese is simultaneously positioned as a language of

communication, cultural learning, and international engagement (Siemund et al., 2021; Tang & Calafato, 2021; Jin & Charles, 2024).

The central conclusion is therefore **that** the sustainability of the Hundred Schools Project will depend not on increasing policy ambition alone, but on strengthening the coherence between policy, curriculum progression, resources, professional learning, instructional time, monitoring, and teacher agency. The evidence suggests that teachers have already demonstrated considerable capacity to translate policy intentions into meaningful classroom experiences. The next priority is to ensure that this translation is no longer dependent on individual teachers compensating for systemic gaps. Instead, adaptation should become a deliberately supported feature of implementation, enabling teachers to respond to learner diversity while maintaining essential curriculum expectations. Such an approach would provide a stronger foundation for moving the Project from initial policy implementation towards more consistent, sustainable, and meaningful Chinese language learning outcomes across UAE public schools.

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