

**A Multifaceted Perspective on Decentralisation:
Analysis of the Chinese National Curriculum Reform
at the General Upper-Secondary Education (2017)**

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ABSTRACT

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The debate on whether China's education governance is moving towards 'recentralization' or 'decentralisation' has started in the 1980s. Most of the prior studies have discussed related topics at the higher education level and the general pre-collegial level, but few at the upper-secondary level. This thesis aims to contribute to education decentralisation research via an in-depth investigation of the Chinese National Curriculum Reform at the general upper-secondary education (2017).

Considering China's complicated situation, the theoretical framework of the Multifaceted Decentralisation is proposed by the author and applied to analyse and compare the 2017 Curriculum documents (the Scheme, the Standards, and a training quiz) with the school teachers' perceptions of the curriculum reform (based on 50 responses to a schoolteacher questionnaire).

Based on comparing the document content analysis and the qualitative survey analysis, three related findings confirmed the trend of educational decentralisation in China. They also found its multifaceted pattern with multi-layer, trans-scalar mixed-degree features. Finally, the relation between that pattern and its context was further explored by the author.

The curriculum reform history study in this thesis presented the evolution of China's educational governance from centralisation to multifaceted decentralisation with the changing political and socio-economic context. Besides, the Multifaceted Decentralisation analytic framework enriched the theory of decentralisation. Furthermore, based on these results, it was possible to argue that China's educational decentralisation's motive was its proactive strategy to meet the socio-economic and educational development needs.

Finally, this thesis suggests that education governance, including decentralisation, is context-dependent when discussing a country's policy.

Keywords: decentralisation, multifaceted decentralisation, education governance, China, curriculum reform, upper-secondary level

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1. INTRODUCTION

Educational governance research studies how the educational system functions. On the one hand, since education is part of the societal system, its governance interacts with the socio-economic context. On the other hand, educational governance provides the operational environment for all educational activities. It is well-known that educational decentralisation is widespread in many countries as it provides a new approach to educational governance. Transferring educational authority from the centre to the local levels, it assumes to stimulate resource-allocation, optimisation, innovation, and diversity, which will promote the development of the educational system (Qi, 2011). Studies of Qi (2011), Feng (2013), and Qi (2017) have sensed a strong trend of decentralisation in education reforms in China during the last 70 years. The reforms have been closely related to the transformation of the national and international socio-economic context.

The current literature on Chinese educational decentralisation has tilted towards the higher educational level studies or towards the overall pre-collegiate level, while just a few studies partially have discussed the topic at the upper secondary level. Therefore, this thesis aims to contribute to the educational decentralisation research by conducting an in-depth investigation of the 2017 Chinese national curriculum reform at the upper secondary level (CNCRUSL), especially at general upper-secondary education. The upper-secondary education or level discussed in this thesis refers to general upper-secondary education. Besides, most researchers are 'outsiders' of Chinese secondary education, while the author, as an 'insider', an upper-secondary school teacher in China, will discuss this topic from the policy implementor perspective.

Research questions:

Under the context of socio-economic, political, and educational policy shiftings in history, CNCRUSL (2017) 's decentralisation is to explore:

- 1) According to the 2017 Curriculum documents, in what decision-making areas and to what degree were authority decentralised to various decision-makers?
- 2) According to school teachers' perceptions, in what decision-making areas and to what degree were authority decentralised to various decision-makers in the 2017 Curriculum Reform?

3) According to the documents and teachers' perceptions, what was the educational decentralisation pattern in the 2017 Curriculum Reform?

This thesis applied the Multifaceted Decentralisation as the theoretical framework not only to observe whether the Chinese educational governance is moving towards decentralisation by asking 'to whom', 'in what areas', and 'to what degree', but also to explore further if so, what its decentralisation pattern is. This thesis will also combine the document analysis and qualitative survey analysis to validate the findings.

This thesis is structured in eight chapters. All the education governance, decentralisation, curriculum reforms discussed in this thesis refer to upper-secondary education. Chapter 1 starts with the introduction of the background and the reasons for choosing this topic. Then, CNCRUSL from 1949 to 2003 and their contexts are explored in Chapter 2 to understand why decentralisation occurred at those particular moments. Chapter 3 conceptualises the Multifaceted Decentralisation and reviews different views on the Chinese educational decentralisation in literature. In the remainder, the Multifaceted Decentralisation as a conceptual framework is applied to examine (Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7) the decentralisation in the 2017 CNCRUSL. Finally, Chapter 8 concludes the multifaceted decentralisation of the 2017 CNCRUSL and reminds its context-based feature.

2. CHINESE CURRICULUM REFORMS IN HISTORY AND THEIR CONTEXTS

2.1 The Contexts of Educational Reforms

Most of the earlier literature on Chinese education discussed the latest changes in the current policy document compared with the old ones. Only a few studies linked the Chinese education reform to governance shifts, which usually include finance, administration, and academy (Qi, 2011). However, Qi (2011) and Qi (2017) found that the socio-economic context shaping the reform and its governance transformation was missing. Therefore, Qi (2011) introduced the education reform environment based on a series of socio-economic reforms in Chinese history and helped to understand why education decentralisation in China occurred at those moments. Moreover, he mentioned that decentralisation in education resulted from decentralised relation changes in the economy and social policies.

When the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, China was a highly centralised country to meet its socialised needs at its incipient stage. The State planned the national economy and unified social sector management. In other words, the State made all the decisions on all major sectors, while the locals implemented the decisions concretely, and they were just responsive agents of the State (Qi, 2017). Therefore, at that moment, the central-location relationship was merely administrative 'top and down' (Qi, 2011). On the one hand, it resulted from the efficiency need to transform the old system at the beginning of a new country (Yun, 2010). On the other hand, China's authoritarian political structure determined it (Mok, 2017). Nevertheless, centralised governance was efficient in power control and economic recovery at the beginning.

With the growing economy and complex society, highly centralised governance problems became obvious (Qi, 2017). The State provided funding for all the sectors and managed them on the macro and micro level from the top's perspective. Considering China's vast territory and large population, it was a con-

siderable burden to the State. Besides, local needs were difficult to be satisfied with a uniform plan due to the unbalanced area development in China. It was also challenging for the locals to implement the strict-to-the letter instructions from the top in local situations. In other words, the inefficiency of highly centralised governance hindered China's development (Qi, 2017). Therefore, decentralisation reforms were called for in China.

China undertook a series of reforms to solve the problems of a highly centralised system. The market mechanism was adopted to complement the state-planned economic structure progressively (Lv, 1999). The State started to share the fiscal authority and accountability with the locals to ease its financial burden, which began the economic decentralisation in China (Qi, 2011). Following that, social decentralisation began to devolve responsibility to the locals in social sectors to substitute the unified social policy paradigm (Qi, 2011). Decentralisation in China's economic and social reforms was the reactive response of globalisation and a proactive approach to its development. More importantly, the devolution in the economic and social sectors provided the socio-economic environment for China's education decentralisation.

The educational reforms came with the transferred authority in economic and social reforms in China. It started with education decentralisation in finance (Qi, 2017). In 1985, A Decision to Reform the Educational System by the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee encouraged multiple education finance channels (Qi, 2017). In other words, the locals were granted the authority to get involved in funding education to reduce the State's fiscal burden.

After financial decentralisation in education, the 1995 Education law of the People's Republic of China proposed the authority transferring in administrative management. It claimed the Ministry of Education formulated a broad framework, overall plans, the national curriculum, and regulated the system in a macro way. Simultaneously, the locals enacted the national decisions flexibly and creatively in the local situations and managed the local schools (Qi, 2011). The decentralisation in education finance and administration came along with the curriculum reforms.

2.2 Curriculum Reforms in History

As a crucial part of education, a curriculum is the representative of education objectives, and its compilation and enactment are the tools to implement those objectives (Lv, 1999). Thus, curriculum reform is often a significant step to the educational reform's success because teaching and learning activities are guided by curriculums (Lv, 1999). Therefore, the study of curriculum reforms is crucial for the development of education. Besides, Yun (2010) thought the curriculums had a transformational history, and they were inherently connected. Therefore, the curriculum research based on the previous ones would help understand the whole process and the current one better.

However, the Chinese curriculum reform study in education governance has been scarce at the upper-secondary level because upper-secondary education related closely to the high-stake College Entrance Examination (Gaokao), which was treated as the access to good universities and decent jobs. Therefore, education decentralisation at this level was most challenging in China compared with the other levels.

Nevertheless, referring to Da Lv's *Chinese Curriculum History* (1999) and Zhongxue Yun's *China's Curriculum Reform Development History at Upper-Secondary Level* (2010), this thesis finds an upper-secondary education decentralisation development line in China. The 'two dimensions' (decision-makers, decision-making areas) will be applied to the observation, which will be introduced in detail concerning the theory chapter's Multifaceted Decentralisation.

In general, eighteen Chinese national curriculum reforms at the upper secondary level were launched officially within sixty years (1949-2016) (Yun, 2010). They could be divided into five main stages, as presented in the table for key curriculum reforms and their contexts in Appendix 1.

2.2.1 (1949 – 1957) The Socialized Social Paradigm and First Five-Year Plan Period

After the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, China's educational governance was highly centralised to systematically socialise the old education system, education content, and pedagogics. In the same year, the procedure and the methodology of the first education reform were stipulated at the first national educational meeting. In 1950, according to Lv (1999), the Temporary Teaching Plan for Secondary Schools was written. First, to change the nature of the old curriculum, Party Tenet, and Citizenship and Military training were replaced with Politics. Second, fourteen courses were set: Politics, Chinese, Maths, Nature, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, History, Geography, Foreign Language, Physical Education, Music, Art, and Charting. At the same time, each course was allocated with appropriate teaching hours. Fourth, minority languages were also designated for some hours. Fifth, all the courses were mandatory. That Teaching Plan established the preliminary framework of China's secondary curriculum. At that moment, under the context of the State-planned economy and the unified social policy paradigm, all teaching and learning were standardised by a uniform national curriculum, and all courses were mandatory, which were centralised by the State.

Then the 1952 Teaching Plan proposed one-hour music activities in the extracurricular activity time (Yun, 2010). After that, to meet economic development needs, secondary curriculums frequently changed in the first national five-year plan period (1953-1957). During this period, the secondary curriculum's basic system was built. The first curriculum reforms positively impacted the teaching order and promoted the teaching quality at the incipient stage of the new China's education. More importantly, autonomy in the extracurricular time was given to schools, though limited.

2.2.2 (1958 – 1976) China's Comprehensive Socialism Building and 'The Great Cultural Revolution' Period

1958-1962 experienced China's second five-year plan and adjusted the national economy. Under the influence of the Agricultural and Industrial Great Leap Forward, Labour education was added, and local teaching materials were used in the 1958 Teaching Plan (Yun, 2010). After that, the 1963 Teaching Plan pro-

posed Electives at the secondary education to choose from to produce a quality workforce for the national economic adjustment (Yun, 2010; Lv, 1999). During this period, local teaching materials and Electives' proposal broke the single textbook pool and the unified mandatory curriculum since the 1950s.

Following that, 'the Great Cultural Revolution' in politics swept China from 1966 to 1976, aiming to unify the people's socialist value (Lv, 1999). The unified textbooks were abandoned, and the locals wrote provincial textbooks with full devolution (Yun, 2010). Besides, teachers and students were granted complete autonomy to formulate curriculums, plan to teach and study, and write their textbooks (Yun, 2011). For the first time, textbook writing and curriculum design autonomy were transferred entirely to the local level, teachers, and students, which could be treated as the incipient stage of education decentralisation in China.

However, the complete decentralisation in that period was treated untimely because it did not accord with China's economic and social development level then, thus damaging the regular education order. At the same time, the Politics and Labour education that dominated the curriculum resulted in the inappropriate curriculum structure and low comprehensive education quality (Lv, 1999).

2.2.3 (1977–1998) The 'Back to Track' and 'Opening Up to the World' Period

To bring the teaching order back to normal after the Great Cultural Revolution's damage, the 1978 Teaching Plan claimed to retake fourteen courses to break the Politics and Labour centred situation (Yun, 2010). Besides, the fifth national textbooks must be used uniformly, and the authority of textbook writing went back to the State again (Yun, 2010).

At the same time, in the late 1970s, to serve China's opening-up to the global economy, President Deng Xiaoping proposed that education would face modernisation, face the world, and face the future (Qi, 2017). Under the guidance of the three Faces, another round of curriculum reforms started. Electives were stipulated for upper-secondary education in Science and Arts categories

separately in 1981 (Yun, 2010). Based on the unified framework, individualised teaching was encouraged, considering various students' development diversity (Yun, 2010). Besides, class teaching combined with extracurricular activities and laboratory practice was promoted (Yun, 2010). In short, electives, individualised teaching, and extracurricular activities provided some space and schooling hours for teachers and students' autonomy to achieve quality education.

In 1986, upper-secondary education was separated from the lower secondary and became an independent level (Qi, 2011). The school courses were divided into Subject courses and Activity courses in 1990 (Yun, 2010). Subject included all academic instructions in class, while Activity covered after-class courses (Yun, 2010). Schools were granted the autonomy to develop activity courses to supplement subject courses with the national curriculum's unified guidance. Though the 1990 Teaching Plan transferred limited decision-making authority to schools, activity courses became the prologue of the further diversifying school curriculums to satisfy the diversity of local conditions and needs.

After that, the 1996 Curriculum Scheme witnessed the first independent upper-secondary curriculum. It further categorised the subject courses into Required Courses, Controlled Electives, and Free Electives by various centre-controlling degrees (Lv, 1999). By then, the courses at upper-secondary education transformed from fully controlled Mandatories (in 1950) to after-class Activity courses (in 1986), and to various Elective courses in class (in 1996), in which authority was decentralised more and more from the centre. Besides, a three-levelled curriculum management system was introduced, including the State, the local, and schools, which officially devolved the national curriculum's authority (Qi, 2011). On the one hand, locals and schools were granted the authority to participate in curriculum development. On the other hand, the above changes in subject courses and curriculum management suggested that Chinese-style curriculum reforms sought step-by-step transition and various management forms in one system, as Multifaceted Decentralisation mentioned in the theory chapter.

2.2.4 (1999–2009) The Adjustment and Development Period

The twenty-first-century Chinese education started with the rapid development in economy, science and technology, and social life (MOE, 2020). Besides, China's principal social contradictions had transformed into the one between unbalanced insufficient development and people's increasing need for a good life (MOE, 2020). To face that challenge, innovative and comprehensive talents were needed, primarily through education (MOE, 2020). In this period, curriculum reforms in China went more profoundly under the national context of the market-influenced economy and the global education decentralisation trend (Qi, 2011). In 1999, A Decision on Promoting the Quality Education to Deepen Education Reforms proposed experimenting with the national curriculum, the local curriculum, and the school curriculum, which suggested the curriculum designing authority was transferred officially to the local, even to schools (Qi, 2017). Besides, multi-principles of college admission and student assessment at the upper secondary level were called to shift accordingly to change the situation where one College Entrance Examination determined all (Qi, 2017). China began to transfer the educational power comprehensively in the system.

After that, required courses and elective courses were set again. Required courses covered Politics, Chinese, Maths, Foreign Language, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, History, Geography, Information Technology, Physical Education, Health, Art, and Comprehensive Practical Activity, fourteen courses in total (Yun, 2010). Electives included Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, History, Geography, and IT, seven courses in total to choose from (Yun, 2010). Besides, local and school curriculums could also be selected as elective courses (Yun, 2010). Following that, electives developed further and could be chosen without the boundary of Science and Arts, which granted more autonomy to the students.

In summary, Table 1 presents what was done locally, though the government decreed everything else. As indicated in Table 1, in the first four periods of education, the authority was decentralised to different decision-makers, including the local, schools, teachers, or students in diverse areas. Chinese educational decentralisation is not an emerging phenomenon but experiencing a long evolvement since the 1950s.

TABLE 1 China's decentralization history before 2017.

Time	Decision makers	Decision-making areas
1952	Schools	Extracurricular time
1958	Local	Local teaching materials
1966 - 1976	Provinces Teachers Students	Curriculum design, textbook writing, teaching and studying plan
1981	Students Teachers Schools Local	Elective in categories of Science and Arts, individualized teaching, class teaching + extra curricular activities; Activity courses; Subject courses: mandatories, controlled electives, free electives; Three-level curriculum management system: state, province, school
1999	Local Schools	National curriculums, local curriculums, school curriculums
2002	Students	Elective: no boundary of Science and Arts
2003	Students	Subject courses: study field, subjects, module; Mobile class when taking electives
	Schools	School curriculums: co-develop and share with other schools, colleges and research institutions
2010	Students	Small size class: individualized study

2.2.5 (2010-) The New Era

China took a proactive strategy for its new education era and made a long and cautious preparation. Figure 1 indicated nine milestones in a fifty-year timeline. It started in the 1970s with the economical preparation of China's Opening-up to the world. Chinese educational new era experienced A Decision from the government, A Plan, A Pilot, An Outline, A Pilot Revision, A Curriculum, An Instruction, and A Curriculum Revision.

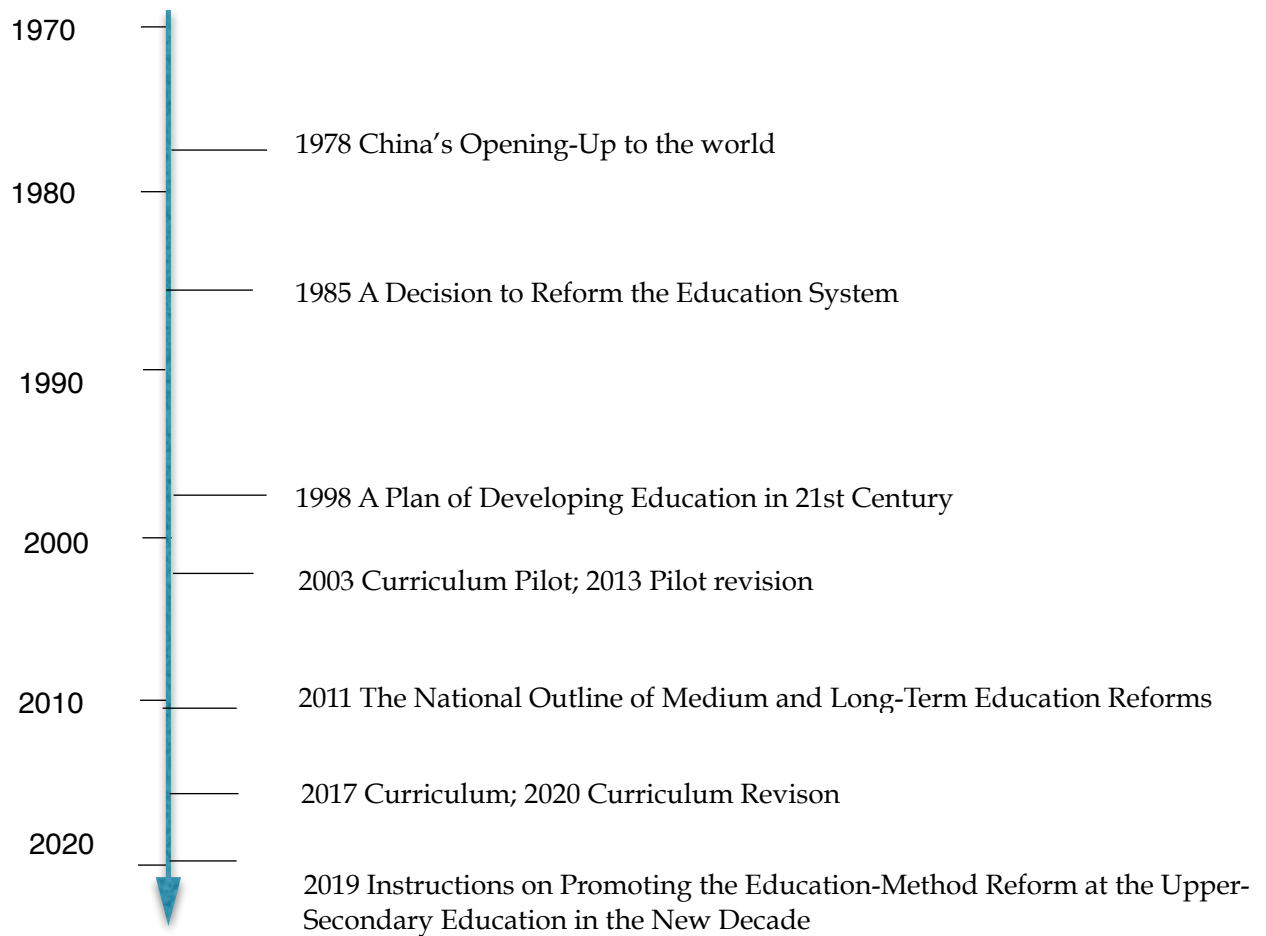


FIGURE 1: Timeline of the 2017 Curriculum Reform at the upper-secondary level.

In 2003, MOE piloted the Curriculum Scheme and the Standards as the educational policy framework documents (Qi, 2011; Qi, 2017). Before 2003, Two Basics were the main education objectives, which focused on basic knowledge and basic skills (Lv, 1999). However, the 2003 Pilot changed them to Three Goals into contemporary Chinese education objectives: knowledge and skill goal, procedure and methodology goal, wellbeing, attitude, and value goal (Yun, 2010). Under Three Goals, there were Three Layers for teaching and learning: study fields, subjects, and modules. Eight study fields guided the integration of subject curriculum development and teachers' teaching, including Linguistics and literature, Mathematics, Humanity and social science, Science, Technology, Art, PE and Health, and Comprehensive Practice (Yun, 2010). Then, each field consisted of subjects with relative curriculum values (Yun, 2010). Lastly, each sub-

ject covered some independent but logically connected modules for the teachers and students to combine. (Yun, 2010). Modules further built the capacity of the students' individualised study plan.

Besides, to prepare for breaking the rigid and unified class management form, students were administered in fixed classes when taking required courses, but they studied in mobile classes when taking elective courses, which brought more autonomous space to the students. What is more, school curriculums were encouraged to develop and share with other schools, colleges, or research institutions (Qi, 2017). In all, the 2003 Pilot built more autonomy capacity for students and suggested promoting a more open education system. Following that, the National Outline of Medium and Long-Term Education Reforms and Development (2011) and Instructions on Promoting the Education-Method Reform (2019) announced the latest round of education reform guideline (see Figure 1).

Big-size classes were gradually called downsize to provide the facility and environment for students' comprehensive and individualised development. Besides, multi-stakeholders from all fields were encouraged to fund upper secondary schools, which further decentralised the local's financial autonomy. In short, the changes in student management and school funding built more capacity for further decentralisation in curriculum reforms. Finally, learned from the 2003 Pilot experimentation and the international curriculum reforms, the Chinese General Upper-Secondary Curriculum Scheme and the Curriculum Standards were issued officially in 2017 and revised in 2020 (see Figure 1). It is interesting to investigate further changes in education governance in the 2017 Curriculum Reform.

3. TOWARDS THE MULTIFACETED DECENTRALISATION

According to Mok, education decentralisation was context-dependent (2017). China's case was complicated due to its vast territory, large population, and political structure. Therefore, there were hot debates among scholars on the nature of Chinese-style educational decentralisation and its motive. This chapter will discuss decentralisation definitions and introduce how the Multifaceted Decentralisation theory was developed to measure Chinese education decentralisation.

3.1 Different Views on the Chinese Education Decentralization

In general, there are three groups of voices on Chinese education decentralisation. As one of the negative voices, Qi (2011) sensed the discernible trend of authority transferring in Chinese education reforms. However, he argued that since the Chinese central government did not allow a significant change in the power relation between the State and locality, the decentralisation in Chinese education reforms was just a strategic move to compensate for highly centralised governance. Qi believed that this authority-shifting surface's sincere motive was just 'reactive responses to the changed national and international context' (Qi, 2011, p.37), but not for education development. He concluded that at this stage, it was 'centralised decentralisation' and even moving towards re-centralization (Qi, 2011).

As a representative of positive voices, Qi (2017) agreed that more devolution of educational authority had been decentralised to the locals, even to schools, both of which were historically controlled by the Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE). Besides, private schools even enjoyed more school autonomy. However, Qi used 'controlled decentralisation' to describe the relationship between centralisation and decentralisation in Chinese education reforms, and he admitted MOE was still playing a guiding and monitoring role.

Qi argued that 'controlled decentralisation' was necessary to accomplish the policy and the education system's efficient performance. Besides, he suggested that education decentralisation in China was a mixture of a reactive response to globalisation and a proactive approach to improving the system's performance.

Adding to the positive voices, Chinese scholar Feng (2013) thought the fundamental purpose of recent education reforms was to search for a harmonious relation of authority and accountability between the centre, the local, and schools to solve the high-centralisation problems. This 'Chinese-styled decentralisation' asked for the centre's function to shift from micro-control to steering (Feng, 2013).

Concisely, compared with the past, five new features of this shifting process were summarised by Feng:

- 1) Decentralisation from the State to the locals became more explicit and systematic.
- 2) Decentralisation from the local to schools became more specific and institutionalised.
- 3) The educational participation of other actors in society became more extensive and normalised.
- 4) Leading and guiding from the Chinese Communist Party and the government became more scientific than before.
- 5) Educational policies and laws became sound.

Besides the above features, he stressed that the motive behind Chinese education decentralisation was the proactive approach to improving Chinese education, contributing to Chinese educational decentralisation's positive perception. Compared with the above two groups, the third group of scholar realised the complexity of decentralisation, especially in the Chinese case, which was not a simple centralisation or decentralisation. Mok (2017) sensed the "dual decentralisation" in transnational higher education (TNHE) cooperation in China, with centralised decentralisation and decentralised centralisation. This phenomenon resulted from the interaction between the State power and market principles to ease the tension between the call for efficiency and intense pressure to improve education quality. The central government selectively adopted

market principles, but all the autonomy granted to the locality was subject to the central government's policy. He reminded that authoritarian political characteristics were a significant factor in the Chinese setting.

To reply to the above views, I will first ask in the 2017 CNCRUSL whether Chinese educational governance moves towards recentralization or decentralisation. If decentralisation, what is the Chinese-styled educational pattern and what is the relation between that pattern and its contextual reasons?

3.2 Discussion on the definitions of decentralisation

In the past decades, there has been a trend of education decentralisation in the world. An assumption behind that is that decentralised education governance would improve education quality due to resource allocation, innovation inspiration, and diversity promotion (Qi, 2011). Though policymakers and scholars widely use the term decentralisation, it is not well conceptualised.

Govinda (1997) discussed that decentralisation was defined as transferring governing from a higher level to a lower level within the organisation or between organisations. This definition provided a general description of decentralisation, but it was too blurry.

After Govinda, Schneider (2003) proposed a preliminary principle to study decentralisation. He thought decentralisation should be observed from multiple dimensions, and different dimensions appertained to specific causes and effects. Besides, it was a dynamic process that one dimension could interact or mix with another. Due to the complexity of decentralisation, Schneider thought it was likely that the scholars simplified the definition of decentralisation or misinterpreted the relations between different dimensions.

Compared with the above two, Hanson (1989a, 1989b) provided a clear and coherent definition of decentralisation. It was categorised into three forms according to the degree to which the authority was transferred: deconcentration, delegation, and devolution.

First, deconcentration means there is no transferring of decision-making power, only distributing tasks and assignments. For example, the curriculum

compilation is distributed to the locals via suggestions and consultations, but decision-making authority is still in the State's hand.

Second, delegation signifies a shifting of decision-making authority, but the upper-level decision-makers can withdraw it depending on their needs. For example, when easing the fiscal burden, decision-making authority can transfer between organisations, but it can be withdrawn when claiming an organisation's property.

Third, devolution denotes there is a decentralised decision-making authority. In other words, the lower level has the autonomy to decide without asking for the upper level's permission. For example, schools and teachers are granted autonomy to choose courses offered, teaching content, student assessment, and discipline without the State's approval.

Based on Hanson's definition, decentralisation was argued further in Xi-ang Qi's article. He assumed all the education decentralisation in his research data was in the third form – devolution (Qi, 2017); in other words, the locals could wield the authority without asking for the upper level's permission (Hanson, 2006).

In such a situation, with the help of Ho's (2006) theory, Qi came to measure decentralisation from two dimensions, decision-makers and decision-making areas. Decision-makers explored who had the decision making authority, while decision-making areas asked in which area the power was wielded. According to Bray's (1999) 'territorial decentralisation', Qi categorised decision-makers into provincial/municipal decentralisation, county/district decentralisation, school autonomy, and teacher participation. As to the decision-making areas, he discussed eleven areas: firing and hiring teachers, starting and increasing salaries of the teachers, funding and budget allocation, admission, discipline and assessment of the students, courses offered, teaching content, and teaching materials.

Many scholars (Qi, 2011; Feng, 2013; Mok, 2017; Qi, 2017) have sensed the phenomenon of changing governance in Chinese education policy reforms since 1985. Nevertheless, China's case is more complicated than Western countries' due to its large population, vast territory, political structure, and the situa-

tion of being in its transitional time. Thus, multifaceted decentralisation will be observed in this thesis.

3.3 Multifaceted decentralisation

Mok (2017) recognised the multifaceted feature of China's case at higher education as "dual decentralisation", which means two decentralisations – centralised decentralisation and decentralised centralisation – coincided. However, in this thesis, multifaceted decentralisation at upper-secondary education will be investigated from two theoretical perspectives. First, '2 dimensions' perspective based on Ho's theory (2006) is applied to explore decentralisation concretely. Two dimensions of decision-makers and decision-making areas will be discussed to analyse decentralisation by asking 'in which area' the authority is transferred 'to whom'.

However, even if some authority is transferred to someone somewhere, not 'adequate' decentralisation involved still makes no sense. Therefore, second, '3 forms' perspective based on Hanson's theory (1989) will be used when analysing decentralisation further by asking 'to what degree the authority is transferred (see Figure 2).

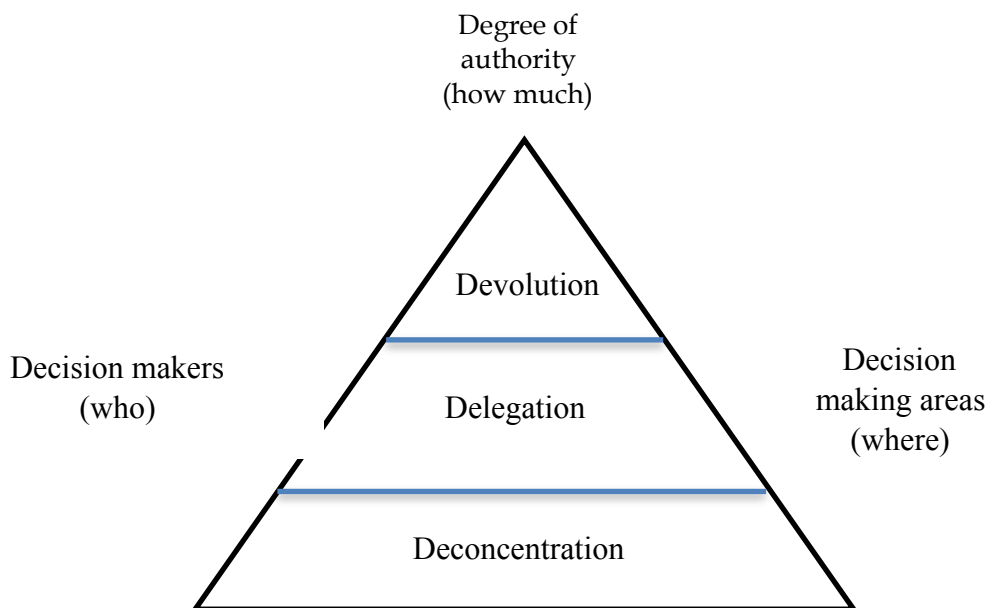


FIGURE 2. Multifaceted Decentralization

According to the degree, three-forms are distinguished as the practical tools to evaluate decentralisation: deconcentration, delegation, and devolution. Deconcentration is the first level, at which only tasks and assignments are distributed, but no decision making authority is transferred. Delegation is the middle level, where lower levels, for example, locals, are granted the authority to implement the policy based on their local situations, but their implementation has to be under the State's approval or supervision. Then devolution is a complete decentralisation level, where the authority is transferred fully for the lower levels to make an autonomous decision without asking for the upper level's, for example, the State's permission.

In this thesis, Multifaceted Decentralisation not only means multiple observation dimensions, including '2 dimensions' and '3 forms', but also indicates its various features. In China's upper-secondary education case, one feature denotes that the authority was transferred from the State to different layered decision-makers to make decisions in various decision-making areas. Another feature referred to the decision-making authority can be shared between different scales rather than limited within one scales. Besides, it also suggests multiple forms of decentralisation existing at the same time. Multifaceted Decentralisation will be applied as the theoretical framework to collect and analyse data and reach results.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Questions

This research aimed to contribute to the educational decentralisation research by conducting an in-depth investigation of the 2017 Chinese national curriculum reform at the upper secondary level. The research intended to answer three research questions:

- 1) According to the 2017 Curriculum documents, in what decision-making areas and to what degree were authority decentralised to various decision-makers?
- 2) According to school teachers' perceptions, in what decision-making areas and to what degree were authority decentralised to various decision-makers in the 2017 Curriculum Reform?
- 3) According to the documents and teachers' perceptions, what was the educational decentralisation pattern in the 2017 Curriculum Reform?

The first research question will be answered by analysing policy documents: the Chinese national curriculum documents (2017). The second research question will be answered by sending out a survey to school teachers in China. Based on the analysis of the documents and the questionnaire responses, the Chinese educational decentralisation pattern was identified and explained to answer research question three. During the data collection and analysis, '2 dimensions' (decision-makers and decision-making areas) and '3 forms' (deconcentration, delegation, devolution) in the Multifaceted Decentralisation theoretical framework were applied.

4.2 The Methodological Approaches

This thesis applied a document analysis and a qualitative survey analysis to get a holistic view of the Chinese educational decentralisation in the curriculum reform (2017). Triangulation was used by combining different methods when studying one single topic (Bowen, 2009). To decrease the implicit biases in one

study, I gathered and analysed the collaborative sources of data for confluence and validation (Bowen, 2009).

Documents, for example, legislation, policy documents, research publications, are some of the primary qualitative materials. They are treated as structured 'social facts' to describe and synthesise social decisions (Bowen, 2009, p. 47). Document analysis is to study and interpret document data methodically (Bowen, 2009). The data can be collected from newspapers, libraries, organisational or institutional files, or websites. Under the coronavirus pandemic situation in 2020, document analysis is one of the most efficient methods for this research, taking advantage of the documents' availability, exactness, stability, and cost-effectiveness.

According to Bowen (2009), the list of analysed documents here usually refers to the raw materials, but the previous studies are not included. As for the decentralisation topic in Chinese education, most of the prior research, for example, Qi (2011), did not apply document analysis but a literature review, which covered previous studies besides the documents. However, this thesis utilised document analysis for an in-depth investigation of the first-hand materials – 2017 Curriculum documents, while the previous studies were reviewed as the background. Lv (1999) said that curriculum documents are the crucial concrete enactment of educational objectives. Therefore, curriculum analysis can identify the strategies, the policies, and the plans of education. In this thesis, the document analysis was used as a qualitative method by selecting, finding, and understanding the curriculum sample – the 2017 Curriculum documents, to study the trends, the insights, and the motives behind the decentralisation in Chinese education.

To get a holistic view of a phenomenon, I used a combination of different research methods. Document analysis can be applied either together with quantitative methods or complementary with other qualitative methods. This thesis applied the latter by combining with a qualitative survey to diminish biases by validating findings across data sets. I aimed to study what the policy said through documents and the people's perception of the reality in the policy compilation and implementation process. Therefore, besides documents as the first data set, I collected the survey as the second data set.

In sociology, a survey generally denotes population characteristics study by observing their members (Jansen, 2010). As the common quantitative method, the statistic survey aims to examine the 'numeric distribution of variables in the population' by stressing 'the samples' statistical representativeness' (Jansen, 2010, p. 3). As for the decentralisation topic in Chinese education, Qi (2017) applied this method to examine 155 secondary schools in Shanghai, China.

However, Jansen (2010) defined a qualitative survey that rather than counting the number of people with the same attributes, the sampling focused on population diversity coverage. Based on the in-depth information about the given samples, diversity was identified by purpose as suggestive variations to investigate the underlying reasoning (Jansen, 2010). Considering China's vast territory, various local developments, and especially the pandemic situation, the qualitative online survey was a feasible option to get the people's perception of education decentralisation in China and investigate the reasons behind it. Therefore, according to Jansen (2010), this survey's knowledge is specified as the following:

Material Object: Educational decentralisation in multifaceted perspectives

Formal Object: Chinese national curriculum at the upper-secondary level (2017)

Empirical domain: Four provinces in China

Unit to be observed: School teachers

I will also discuss them in detail in the later section, for example, the rationale of the empirical domain and the selection of the observed in this survey.

4.3 Data Collection

Two data sets were collected in this thesis. The 2017 Curriculum documents as the first data set included the Scheme, the Standards, and a training quiz, while the second data set was based on the responses to a schoolteacher questionnaire asking their perceptions of the curriculum reform.

The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China is responsible for formulating strategies, policies, and educational reforms and develop-

ment plans. Its government portal website (<http://www.moe.gov.cn/>) is intended for the public for information disclosure and news propaganda. As the first data set, the 2017 national curriculum documents, the Curriculum Scheme and the Standards were downloaded from the website's specific 'Literature' section.

Besides, among the first data set, the Quiz of the 2017 Curriculum Standard Training for English Subject Teachers by a municipal bureau was also analysed as the complementary document after the author took part in the open teacher training test in 2020 August. The other policy statements, statistical reports, consultation papers, legislations, and news related were also downloaded from the official Chinese government website (<http://www.gov.cn/>) as the essential references of the first data set.

In a successful policy reform, policymaking is one crucial end, while policy implementation is the other. Therefore, as the actual implementors, school teachers are significant to the success of the policy enactment. Hence, it is vital to explore local school teachers' perceptions. Via a survey, the second data set was collected from the school teachers in China by conducting a questionnaire to explore their perception of the 2017 CNCRUSL (see Appendix 2). The first half of the questionnaire included six background questions (location, gender, school type, teacher type, teaching years), while the second half starting from Question Seven included eleven questions about education governance (in learning materials, offered courses, course content, teaching pedagogy, student discipline and assessment, tension). Among the second half, Question Seven was for the compilation process observation, while Question Eight to Seventeen asked about the enactment process.

Nine closed-ended questions referred to Questions 20 in the Principal Questionnaire from the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) in 2018. Though the questionnaire from TALIS asked school leaders about working conditions and the learning environment at their schools, the adapted questions in this thesis could be used for school teachers. The decision-makers and decision-making areas (2 dimensions) in the Multifaceted Decentralisation theoretical framework were especially stressed here. For example, from Question Eight to Question Sixteen (except Question Ten), the options were categorised

into three decision-makers: School, Local, MOE, based on the three levels of the Chinese curriculum management system. According to China's reality, the school was subcategorised into School and Teacher, while Local was subcategorised into Provincial Education Bureau, Municipal Education Bureau, and District Education Bureau. At the same time, in the questions, six decision-making areas were discussed, including course offered, learning materials, course content, teaching pedagogy, student discipline, and student assessment, which referred to the contents of the Scheme and the Standards.

Two open-ended questions referred to the questionnaire in Tian and Risku's article (2017), which related the 2014 Finnish curriculum reform to distributed leadership. The inspired and adapted questions in this thesis were more suitable for governance topics in China's setting. More free space was provided for the participants' voices in the open-ended questions, besides the closed-ended part's given options.

To ensure the participants' availability and the questionnaire's validity, I experimented with some voluntary Chinese 'mock participants'. The criteria of the trial evaluation were as followed: Are these questions easy to understand? Are they suitable for China's situation? Do they cover all the aspects of the decentralisation topic to answer research question two in this thesis?

With the intention above, two trials were conducted. First, thirty-four teachers from two upper-secondary schools were contacted by email in 2020 August via the author's network of once being a teacher in China. Gender distribution was considered in the respondents. Within one week, thirty-four responses were collected for the first trial. To get a full reflection of what we intended to do, we began to follow the first evaluation criteria to test the questionnaire's validity: Are these questions easy to understand? After the first trial, I conducted the second one to test the participants' availability with evaluation criteria two in the following week: Are they suitable for China's situation?

I chose to cooperate with Survey Star – a professional survey platform ranking the top list in China. In its two million six thousand sample database, I sent out the questionnaire to random upper-secondary teachers in thirty-one provinces, which I intended to cover all the provinces where the New Curriculum was being implemented or to implement. However, according to the fifty

participants' feedback and the Instructions from MOE on the Implementation of the New Curriculum and New Textbooks (2018a), I confirmed some information and adjusted the plan.

The New Curriculum Scheme and the Standards will be implemented in four groups, considering China's extensive territory and unbalanced local development. Group One enacted them in 2019 autumn, including Shanghai and Zhejiang, while Group Two in 2019 or 2020 autumn, including Beijing, Tianjin, Shandong, and Hainan. Moreover, Group Three and Four, including the other twenty-five provinces, may choose to enact them from 2019 to 2022. In other words, six provinces have taken the 2017 Curriculum by 2020 autumn, and the others will implement it by 2022. Therefore, considering the incomplete implementation by the survey conduction, the questionnaire's participants were selected from four provinces with full implementation (Beijing, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Shandong) for the available and valid observation of both the compilation and the implementation process.

Referencing the first trial to test the questionnaire's validity, I asked the third evaluation question to finalise the version: Do the questions cover all the aspects of the decentralisation topic to answer Research Question Two? After this enquiry, no further changes were made.

4.4 Description of the Data

There were two data sets in this thesis. The first data set included three documents:

- 1) the Chinese National Comprehensive Upper-Secondary Curriculum Scheme (the Scheme) (2017 edition revised in 2020);
- 2) the Chinese Comprehensive Upper-Secondary English Subject Curriculum Standards (the Standards) (2017 edition revised in 2020);
- 3) the Quiz of the New Curriculum Standard training for English Teachers by a municipal bureau.

The second data set surveyed the school teachers' responses to a questionnaire asking about their perceptions of the educational decentralisation in the 2017 Curriculum Reform.

As crucial parts of the first data set, the Scheme and the Standards were two fundamental policy documents of the national curriculum, which stipulated the basic norms and quality requirements for upper-secondary education (MOE, 2020a, 2020b). They were also the core guidelines of school teaching and learning, textbook writing, graduation examination, and college entrance examination (MOE, 2020a, 2020b). Besides, the standards by subjects set the basic standards of the students in three aspects: knowledge and skills, procedure and method, and emotion, attitude and value (MOE, 2020b). At the same time, it stipulated the framework of the subject curriculum in nature, objectives, and content, providing suggestions on teaching and assessment (MOE, 2020b).

In the first data set, the Scheme and the English subject curriculum Standards as sample standards were explored via document analysis because Chinese curriculum standards for upper-secondary education were written by the subject. Besides, as an essential part of the official curriculum training to the teachers, the Quiz of the New Curriculum Standard Training for English Teachers at a municipal level was also analysed as the sample to observe the official training focus.

The second data set was collected from the school teachers. Within two weeks, via the platform Survey Star, I received 226 responses from Beijing, Shanghai, Shandong, and Zhejiang, where the New Curriculum had been implemented fully. Then, I began to launch the response selection procedure manually. First, anyone whose time to answer the questionnaire was less than 250 seconds, were automatically filtered out of the survey by the platform, and the single IP could answer once only. Second, the remaining unusable survey responses were removed manually from this research for various reasons, including answering all the open-ended questions with N/A, the careless response to a trap question 'What textbook are you using?' However, survey responses with minor feedback issues were not removed from this research and included in the findings. Finally, the second data set was made up of fifty responses selected

purposely by the place, gender, school type, teacher type, and teaching years (see Table 2).

TABLE 2 The Respondent Composition for the 2017 Curriculum Reform Survey (N = 50)

Criteria	Composition	Number
Place	Beijing	13
	Shanghai	12
	Zhejiang	12
	Shandong	13
Gender	Female	25
	Male	25
School type	Public school	26
	Private school	24
Teacher type	Class teacher	25
	Subject teacher	25

In general, a balanced composition is a crucial principle to follow. Besides, I selected valid responses from the teachers of different teaching years to ensure diversity.

4.5 Data Analysis

Document analysis often consists of two methods: content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis codifies the information in the data content into categories pertinent to the research questions, while thematic analysis identifies the pattern of the themes in the data, which become the categories for analysis (Bowen, 2009). Both of them are conducted repetitively by skimming and scanning for the first and second reviews and then interpretation (Bowen, 2009).

I applied content analysis to explore the first data set in-depth, that is, the 2017 Curriculum documents. According to the Multifaceted Decentralisa-

tion theoretical framework, first, they were studied from '2 dimensions' (decision-makers and decision-making areas) to answer Research Question One. They were then assessed with '3 forms' and classified by deconcentration, delegation, and devolution to answer Research Question Three.

Concerning the '2 dimensions' perspective, there were two steps, including categorisation and analysis. The categorisation was made first. According to Bray's (1999) 'territory decentralisation', the decision-makers of China's education governance could be categorised into State, Local and School in reference to the three-levelled national curriculum management system in the Scheme. The subcategories of Local were Province, Municipality, and District in general based on China's empirical reality.

The decision-making areas could be classified into Education objectives, Subject objectives, Core curriculum structure, Subject curriculum structure, Principle for determining course content, Central subject content, and Learning outcomes. Among them, the Core curriculum structure consisted of Length of schooling and lesson hours, Curriculum types, School subjects and Credits, Subject arrangement, and Credit requirement for graduation. In contrast, the subject curriculum structure's subcategories included Design basis, Structure, and Credit and course selection. All the categories and subcategories were based on the contents of the Scheme and the Standards.

After the above categorisation, the analysis procedure was conducted. First, all the words concerning decision-makers were found and circled with different colours in the documents, for example, yellow for the State, green for the local, and purple for schools. Then, the decision-making areas related to the above decision-makers were highlighted with the corresponding colours. Following that, the data from documents was exported and sorted by excel under the categories of Education objectives, Subject objectives, Core curriculum structure, Subject curriculum structure, Principle for determining course content, Central subject content, and Learning outcomes.

Survey responses as the second data set were analysed via a qualitative survey analysis. Jansen (2010) classified that method into three levels: a unidimensional description, a multidimensional description, and an explanation, which led to a process from a 'superficial description' to a 'theoretical interpreta-

tion' (p. 9). A unidimensional description involved three logic levels: objects, dimensions of objects, and categories of dimensions (Jansen, 2010). It could be conducted upward (to a higher level of abstraction) or downward (to a lower level of abstraction) (Jansen, 2010). I conducted it downward to describe the educational decentralisation in CNCRUSL (2017), as in Table 3. Besides, '2 dimensions' of that object (decision-makers, decision-making areas) from Multifaceted Decentralisation introduced in the theory chapter was applied.

TABLE 3 A unidimensional description of decentralization in the Chinese curriculum

Object		Decentralization									
Dimension	Decision makers					Decision-making areas					
Categories	State	Local	School	course offered	textbook	course content	teaching pedagogy	students' disciplinary	College entrance exam	Academic proficiency test	Daily/periodical assessment
Code	1	2	3	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H

Furthermore, this thesis applied a pre-structured qualitative survey method. The categories for observation were defined beforehand to explore which would appear in the population (Jansen, 2010). In the categories of dimensions, decision-makers consisted of State, Local, and School according to the Chinese 3-level curriculum management system (MOE, 2020), coded as 1, 2, 3 separately.

At the same time, in reference to the headings in the 2017 Curriculum documents, decision-making areas were categorised into Course offered, Textbooks, Course content, Teaching pedagogy, Student disciplinary, College Entrance Examination (to represent the student assessment at the national level), Academic Proficiency Test (to represent the student assessment at the provincial level), and Daily and periodical assessment (to represent the student assessment at the school level). These were coded by the letters from A to H.

After the unidimensional description, I applied concept-oriented and unit-oriented synthesis for a multidimensional description. Concept-Oriented synthesis identified all possible combinations of characteristics, while unit-ori-

ented one grouped similar units into categorical classes (Jansen, 2010). First, in the concept-oriented synthesis, I found all logically possible combinations of 'decision-makers' as in Table 7 (see p. 46): 1, 12, 123, 13, 2, 23, 3. In general, this coding list's two directions suggested the degree to which the authority was centralised or decentralised, as in Figure 3.

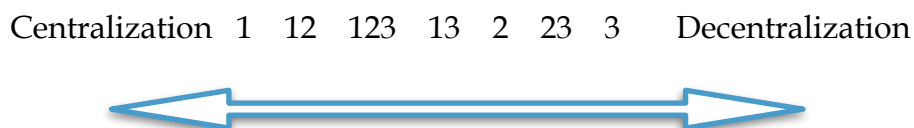


FIGURE 3: The Main Coding List of Decision Makers

Second, by unit-oriented synthesis, I grouped similar units in 'decision-making areas' into categorical types (Jansen, 2010) in different colours (Type Purple, Type Orange, Type Blue, Type Green) (see Table 7, p.30) to identify the authority distribution pattern in the 2017 Curriculum Reform.

At this level, I analysed the relations between types (from the multidimensional description) and selected contextual conditions (Jansen, 2010, p. 16). In this section, the educational decentralisation pattern in the 2017 Curriculum Reform was identified and explained under its context. Besides, in practice, the multidimensional description and the explanation were two dependent processes that usually overlay each other, and they repeated this probing pattern back and forth to get the best explanation (Jansen, 2010). Finally, the open-ended question about the decentralisation tension was defended in the report by citations from the questionnaire responses (Jansen, 2010).

Regarding the contextual conditions, I observed the essential factors influencing decentralisation practices because of China's complicated situation, including the economic and social factors, the driving force behind it, the goals, local specific circumstances, and political reasons.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical consideration was treated as a proactive research strategy to avoid or minimise problems (Israel & Hay, 2006). Therefore, ethics were stressed in the research, especially considering that governance is a sensitive topic related to the government. When designing the questionnaire, any question concerning personal identifiers was avoided, such as the participant's names, the school names, and the contact information (Ahokas, 2020). Therefore, the name of the specific province for the quiz was not presented, too. Besides, a notice was put in the front of the questionnaire to inform the participants' right to withdraw from the research at any time.

Furthermore, during and after the research, the data was coded as numbers and kept anonymous for privacy consideration. More importantly, when reporting the results, I critically discussed the work from an ethical perspective (Ahokas, 2020). Finally, the data will be destroyed after the thesis is accepted.

5. FINDINGS ON DECENTRALISATION IN THE 2017 CURRICULUM DOCUMENTS

This chapter will discuss the findings of document analysis to answer Research Question One: according to the 2017 CNCRUSL documents, in what decision-making areas and to what degree were authority decentralised to various decision-makers?

5.1. The Management and Supervision Levels of the National Curriculum System

The national curriculum system is one of the most crucial curriculum systems in China by far. At the upper-secondary level, it dominates more than half of the percentage of teaching and learning activities.

The 2017 Scheme polished the three-level curriculum management system first introduced in 1996, including the State, the local, and schools (MOE, 2020a). The Ministry of Education (MOE), as the representative of the State, was the decision-maker of formulating the national curriculum (MOE, 2020a). Besides, the local provided the instructions on the national curriculum implementation according to its local situation. Furthermore, schools were the national curriculum's final implementors under all-upper levels' superintendence (MOE, 2020a).

The supervision system of the national curriculum involved the State and provinces. The State formulated the supervision scheme that covered curriculum implementation and textbooks (MOE, 2020a). At the same time, it guided the provincial supervision work (MOE, 2020a). In comparison, provinces managed their local implementation and provided feedback to the State (MOE, 2020a).

When observing the national curriculum system vertically, it is a hierarchical multi-layered system (see Figure 4). The State is the top decision-maker to compile the framework of the curriculum and supervise its implementation. In contrast, the local is the first level implementor to formulate the instructions on local implementation, while schools are the final implementors to enact the na-

tional curriculum under their situations. Besides, all local implementations are administered by the State.



FIGURE 4: The curriculum management and supervision system.

However, horizontally, MOE cooperated with other levels in the system when compiling the national curriculum. It asked for suggestions from the personnel working in related fields and consulted authoritative departments, professional institutes, experts, and scholars (MOE, 2020b). Because lower levels could impose their influence in this procedure, the curriculum compilation authority was not entirely centralised by the State but decentralised to the other actors. However, though consultation and suggestions were distributed, the decision making authority was not transferred. Therefore, the curriculum compilation procedure was in the form of deconcentration.

When implementing the national curriculum, though the State formulated the guidelines, it transferred the authority to provinces to write instructions and supervised the local enactment under their local situations. However, at the same time, provinces had to report their implementation plan and enactment progress to the State and be supervised by the State. Though the decision-making authority was transferred to the local to implement the curriculum, it was delegated.

Besides the national curriculum, it has to be noted that there were also local curriculums and school curriculums. As decision-makers, the locals could write local curriculums such as provincial curriculums (MOE, 2020a), while schools were granted the autonomy to write school-based curriculums. Regarding local and school-based curriculums, the local and schools were responsible for developing and conducting the curriculums based on their local situations. However, provincial curriculums were supervised by the State, while school-based curriculums were under the supervision of their upper-levels (MOE, 2014 & 2018b). Therefore, the authority transferred to the local and schools in local curriculums and school-based curriculums was in delegation.

In sum, China's curriculum system was generally managed and supervised by the State, especially in the national curriculum. However, in practice, multifaceted decentralisation could be found, including deconcentration in national curriculum compilation, delegation in national curriculum implementation and the development and conduction of provincial and school-based curriculums.

5.2 Content Analysis of the Curriculum Scheme and Standards (2017)

In this section, the 2017 Curriculum Scheme and Standards will be analysed according to various decision-makers (including the State, the local, schools) and trans-scalar decision-makers (see Tables 4 and 5). First, the decision-making areas where the State controlled were marked yellow under the 'State' column, while the ones where the authority was transferred to the local were marked blue under the 'Local' column, and the ones to schools were coloured purple under the 'School' column. Besides, if one decision-making area was marked at the same time by more than one colours, the authority was not limited to one layer of decision-makers, but multiple decision-makers made co-decisions, which was named 'trans-scalar decision-makers' in this thesis. Furthermore, the percentages of different course types in the overall credits were calculated based on the documents' original numbers and presented in related boxes.

5.2.1 The State as the Decision Maker and Decision-Making Areas

At this stage, the State was still the most important actor in the system to make decisions in some areas, such as general objectives and the framework, required courses, and academic proficiency standards. MOE formulated education objectives, length of schooling and lesson hours, school subjects and credits, and principles for determining the course content in the curriculum Scheme (see Table 4). It composed the subject objectives and subject curriculum design references in subject curriculum Standards (see Table 5). The data in Table 4 and 5 suggested that the general direction, objectives, the basic framework, guiding principles, and design references were decided by the State to realise the macro steering from the centre.

TABLE 4 Content Analysis of the 2017 Curriculum Scheme.

Decision - making areas		Main decision makers		
		State	Local	School
Education objectives		X	-	-
Length of schooling & lesson hours		X	-	-
Core curriculum structure	Required courses	61.1%	-	-
	Type (100%) Optional required courses	29.2%	-	-
	Elective courses	-	-	9.7%
	School subjects & credits	X	-	-
Principles for determining the course contents		X	-	-
Student assessment	National level	X	X	-
	Provincial level	-	X	-
	Daily/ Periodical level	-	-	X

TABLE 5 Content Analysis of the 2017 English Subject Curriculum Standards.

Decision - making areas		Main decision makers		
		State	Local	School
English Subject objectives		x	-	-
Design references		x	-	-
English subject curriculum structure	Required courses	x	-	-
	Type			
	Optional required courses	x	-	-
	Elective courses	-	-	x
Learning materials		-	x	-
Learning contents		x	x	x
Teaching pedagogy		-	-	x
Academic proficiency standards		x	-	-

The 2017 Curriculum consisted of three-course types: required courses, optional required courses, and elective courses designed according to the degree of the central control (see Table 4 & 5) (MOE, 2020a). Among them, required courses as an essential part of the national curriculum were mandatory to all schools and all students, and the State was the decision-maker of the required courses (MOE, 2020a). More importantly, they occupied 88 in 144 overall credits, 61.1% of the total (MOE, 2020a). In all, the State's required courses were centralised, and they took the dominant position compared with the other course types at this stage.

When assessing the students' academic proficiency quality, the State formulated the standards for all-levelled assessments to follow. For example, three English academic proficiency levels were set in the Standards. It stated that when listening to the daily life topics (in 1-1 for Level One), familiar topics (in 2-1 for Level Two), or complex, unfamiliar topics (in 3-1 for Level Three), the students could grasp the main idea, the key facts, the viewpoint, and the cultural

background (MOE, 2020b, pp. 47 - 48). English academic proficiency standards guided teachers' daily teaching, periodic assessment, the English Academic Proficiency Test (xueye shuiping kaoshi), and the College Entrance Examination (gaokao) (MOE, 2020b). In all, the State made decisions in setting the academic proficiency standards.

In summary, the State stipulated education objectives, the framework, academic proficiency standards to realise macro steering to education. Besides, required courses by the State covered 61.1% with 88 credits out of the overall 144, suggesting its dominant position. However, that percentage in the 2017 Curriculum was less than 80.6% with 116 credits in the 2003 Pilot (MOE, 2003), indicating the decreasing trend of the State's control.

5.2.2 The Local as the Decision Maker and Decision-Making Areas

The local, as the middle level, was a significant actor in the curriculum system. Moreover, it was the primary decision-maker in textbook writing and provincial-levelled student assessment.

The Standards by the State provided general suggestions on textbook writing (MOE, 2020b). Nevertheless, the actual writing was conducted by different local textbook compilation teams (MOE, 2019). The local teams submitted the textbooks and other learning materials to the National Textbook Committee (NTC) of MOE for reviewing. Based on NTC's auditing results, MOE conducted an administrative licensing procedure and put the approving ones on the national textbook list (MOE, 2019b). In 2020, there were sixty-two textbooks for seventeen subjects on the list, such as six textbooks for the English subject, four for mathematics (MOE, 2020c). The locals had to choose the textbooks from the national list for their national curriculum teaching and learning, including all required courses and some elective courses. Therefore, the State transferred the authority of textbook writing to the local teams, but since the authority could be withdrawn depending on the State's needs, it was in the form of delegation, not a full decentralisation.

In the provincial-levelled student assessment, the province was the decision-maker who composed the test paper, conducted the examination, and as-

sessed the students (MOE, 2020b). Therefore, authority was decentralised from the State to the local in this level of student assessment. However, if students wanted to take the Academic Proficiency Test (a provincial-levelled student assessment needed for graduation from the upper-secondary education), they had to finish the study in required courses and optional required courses belonging to the national curriculum (MOE, 2020b). Therefore, the Academic Proficiency Test was part of the State's national curriculum, and the State supervised the implementation procedure. It notified that though provinces were given ample space to exert their autonomy at provincial-levelled student assessment, the authority decentralised to them was still a delegation.

In short, both textbook writing and provincial-levelled student assessment by the local were in the form of delegation since their autonomy had to be under the State's approval or supervision.

5.2.3 Schools as the Decision Makers and Decision-Making Areas

As the last level of the curriculum system, schools were granted autonomy in elective courses, teaching pedagogy, and daily or periodic student assessment. Elective courses were flexible for the schools to choose courses as school curriculums either from the national curriculum, provincial curriculums, or school-based curriculums, which took up 9.7% with 14 credits out of the overall 144 (MOE, 2020a). The selection could base on various principles, such as students' needs, school features, and regional development needs. The national curriculum was set by the State, while provincial curriculums and school-based curriculums were developed by the local and schools independently (MOE, 2020a). Therefore, the course option authority in elective courses was transferred to schools, but it was still in the form of delegation since it was under the upper levels' supervision.

Besides, in school-based curriculums, the development and conduction authority was significantly transferred to schools. Though the percentage of school-based courses was only about 5.6% with eight credits of the overall 144 in the 2017 Curriculum, increasing decentralisation could be seen when compared with 4.2% with six credits in the 2003 Pilot (MOE, 2020a). However, the

authority granted to schools was still under the upper levels' macro supervision. Therefore, the decentralisation in the elective courses was still a delegation.

School teachers were the final decision-maker to choose appropriate teaching pedagogy based on their students' actual situation (MOE, 2020a). However, though school teachers had the right to decide teaching pedagogy without asking upper levels' approval, all the options were greatly influenced by the teaching tips in the Scheme by the State and suggestions in the textbooks by the local. Therefore, it was an authority delegation in teaching pedagogy to teachers, not a complete devolution.

Schools and teachers were the decision-makers to assess students daily or periodically (MOE, 2020a). Schools, especially teachers, were responsible for validating the credits, wrote the comprehensive quality assessment for the students, and conducted school-based examinations. However, since all the assessments were based on the Academic Proficiency Standards, the guideline, and related national policies by the State, the authority was delegated to schools in daily or periodic student assessment.

In short, the authority was transferred to schools in elective courses, teaching pedagogy, and daily or periodic student assessment. However, the decentralisation was in the form of delegation since it had to be under the influence of upper levels or the State somehow.

5.2.4 Trans-Scalar Decision Makers and Decision-Making Areas

Though a single actor made some decisions, other decisions were co-made by multiple actors. Trans-scalar cooperation happened in, for example, optional required courses, learning content, and national-level student assessment.

Optional required courses were set mainly by the State, but schools were given some space to choose from the State's offerings. Therefore, in general, the State and schools co-decided optional required courses. Nevertheless, in practice, provinces might also impose their influence on the course offered in this course type. For example, a province required all schools in the province at least one - credit Snow and Ice Sports course as an optional required course due to

the snow and ice feature in this province (A provincial education bureau, 2019). Hence, although the State provided most of the optional required courses, the locals might influence the offered courses, too, though limited. In all, the authority in optional required courses was shared among the State, provinces, and schools.

Learning contents for teaching and learning were decided by the State, the local, and schools. The State set the basic principles of determining curriculum content in the Scheme and formulated the Standards' core contents and requirements (MOE, 2020a & 2020b). Under those guidelines, local textbook compilation teams chose the learning contents and wrote textbooks for required courses. Moreover, school teachers were granted the authority to complement and develop other contents according to their guidelines' needs, especially in elective courses and after-class activities, though they had to use suggested textbooks for required courses. Therefore, the State, the local, and schools decided the learning contents together.

In general, the State made the core decision in the national-levelled student assessment, such as the College Entrance Examination (Gaokao) (MOE, 2020b). MOE's Examination Center formed a national test paper compilation team made up of professors from universities, teachers from upper-secondary schools, and researchers (MOE, 2020b). The team wrote four national test papers for twenty-six Chinese provinces to choose from, including National I, II, III, and New Gaokao (MOE, 2020). Thus, for these provinces, the College Entrance Examination test paper's compilation was almost centralised by the State, though the local, even school teachers could influence it as team members. However, the other five provinces were granted the right to write their test papers, including Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang (MOE, 2020). In other words, due to advanced development, those provinces were given the opportunities to conduct an independent college entrance examination. Therefore, the national-levelled assessment authority was shared mainly between the State and the local.

5.3 Content Analysis of the Teachers' Professional Training Quiz 2020

A quiz for the 2017 Curriculum training was intended for all teachers in a municipal region by a municipal education bureau in 2020 August after the teachers' self-study, school-based professional learning, and municipality-based and province-based professional learning. It aimed to assess how the school teachers understood the Scheme and the Standards.

There were thirty-six questions in total, including ten 'True or False' questions and thirty multiple choices. To study the official education bureau's training focus, I analysed the quiz questions from the perspective of '2 dimensions' (who, where) (as introduced in the Multifaceted Decentralisation theory). In Table 6, the distributed question quantity related to some areas in the quiz was illustrated by numbers. For example, the box marked with '0' meant no questions set in that area, while a number meant how many questions were set in the quiz in that area.

TABLE 6 Content Analysis of the 2020 Professional Teacher Training Quiz on the Standards.

Decision - making areas		Main decision makers		
		State	Local	School
Education objectives		1	-	-
Subject objectives and theory		17	-	-
Design reference		3	-	-
Subject curriculum structure	Required course	-	-	-
	Optional required course	-	-	-
	Elective course	-	-	-
Learning materials		-	-	-
Learning contents		15	-	-
Teaching pedagogy		-	-	-
Academic proficiency standards		-	-	-

58% of the questions were related to the areas designed by the State, including 1 in general education objectives, 17 in subject objectives, and 3 in subject curriculum design references. Simultaneously, the other fifteen questions were about core subject learning contents and requirements stipulated by the State. It suggested that the official local training stressed theoretical training and understanding what the State required the local to do. However, nothing was mentioned about the parts related to the local and schools' autonomy. For example, no question was about elective courses related to school-based curriculums by schools, learning contents related to provincial curriculums and school curriculums by the local and schools, teaching pedagogy by teachers, or academic proficiency standards related to daily or periodic student assessment by teachers.

Besides, all the quiz questions were standardised, which implied that the quiz focused on whether the school teachers understand 'correctly' what the Scheme and the Standard said, rather than their understanding of the policies based on their working environments or working experiences.

The data suggested that the analysed local curriculum training focused on the State's authority, but not on the local or schools' autonomy, not to mention on teachers' autonomous capacity building. Though there may be complementary curriculum training with other focuses in the future, teachers' responsibility in this training was stressed by the municipal education bureau more in the national curriculum's implementors, but not in the researchers of provincial curriculums and school curriculums or the students' assessors. However, the analysed curriculum training in that province could not be generalised to others, not the whole country. It could illustrate only the focus of the specific curriculum training in that single province.

In summary, according to the 2017 Curriculum documents, the percentage of mandatory required courses centralised by the State began to lessen, while more and more authority was decentralised to or shared with the local and schools. Besides, mix-degreed decentralisation functioned in the system with deconcentration in curriculum compilation and delegation in others, both of which had to be under the State's guidance or supervision somehow. Furthermore, according to the teacher training quiz findings, autonomous capacity building was not adequate in some local places.

6 FINDINGS ON TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE DECENTRALISATION IN THE 2017 CURRICULUM REFORM

This chapter will discuss the questionnaire's findings to answer Research Question Two: In the school teachers' eyes, in which decision-making areas were authority decentralised to various decision-makers in the 2017 CNCRUSL process?

6.1 Teachers' Perceptions of Authority Distribution

Table 7 was the true table of authority distribution based on the questionnaire's multiple-choice responses, which asked the teachers' perceptions of the 2017 Curriculum Reform's decentralisation reality.

TABLE 7 A true table of authority distribution in the 2017 Curriculum Reform.

Decision-making areas	Coding	Decision makers						
		1	12	123	13	2	23	3
Compilation	A	A	-	-	-	-	-	x
Course offered	B	A	x	x	x	A	x	A
Teaching materials	C	A	x	x	x	A	x	A
Teaching content	D	A	x	x	-	A	x	A
National-leveled student assessment	E	A	x	x	-	A	x	x
Teaching pedagogy	F	x	x	x	x	x	x	A
Provincial-leveled student assessment	G	-	x	x	-	A	x	x
Daily/Periodic student assessment	H	-	x	x	-	-	x	A
Student disciplinary	I	-	x	x	x	x	x	A

Note. A= a key decision-maker x = who are influential

As indicated in Figure 3 (p.33), this coding list's two directions (left and right) suggested the degree to which the authority was centralised or decentralised. In other words, they are not in random order. The codings with '1' (related to the State) suggest more centralisation than the others, while the ones with '2' or '3' (related to the local and schools) indicate a more decentralisation trend.

In the table, the leading decision-maker was marked with 'A', while the influential actor with 'x'. There were at least two blocks marked in all the decision-making areas. It suggested that, in general, the Chinese education system's decisions were determined by more than one decision-makers. The colours in the table grouped six decentralisation patterns. For example, in general, Group Orange represented the pattern where the State was the most important decision-maker. Group Green represented the pattern where the others worked as the most critical determinants instead of the State, and the State was just an influencer. Group Purple generally presented another situation where the State was not an independent influencer but one of the co-decision makers. Also, an exceptional group was coloured in blue. Lastly, the grey blocks in Group Orange and Group Purple (in the rows coded as categories D, E, G, H separately) explain especially the situation of the category '13'.

6.1.1 The State as the Most Important Decision Maker and Decision-Making Areas

Vertically, in the coding column '1' (related to the State as an independent actor), six out of nine decision-making areas were marked. It notified that the State, as a critical decision-maker, influenced the curriculum independently in more than sixty per cent of the educational decision-making areas.

Horizontally, in five blocks in blue and in orange, the State was marked with 'A'. It suggested that the State worked as the key decision-maker in these areas, including the curriculum's compilation, the offered courses, teaching materials, teaching contents, and national-levelled student assessment. However, it had to be noted that also other decision-makers were marked with 'A' in the orange blocks, implying the State and the other actors made co-decisions in these areas. For example, in national-levelled student assessment, both the State and

provinces worked as the most influential decision-makers, as discussed in 5.2.4 Trans-Scalar Decision Makers section. Taking other examples, in the areas of course offered, teaching materials, and teaching contents, the State, the local, and schools all were the most influential decision-makers. Therefore, as the most critical decision-maker, the State shared the decision-making authority with the local, even schools in National Leveled Student Assessment, Course Offered, Teaching Materials, and Teaching Content.

However, in the blue block, only the State marked with 'A'. It hinted that when compiling the curriculum, the State centralised the authority, especially in determining the education objectives, length of schooling and lesson hours, school subjects and credits, principles for determining course contents, subject objectives, and subject academic proficiency standards. Therefore, the State controlled the curriculum compiling framework to ensure the macro steering of the education direction.

However, according to the questionnaire responses to the question 'Have you taken part in the 2017 Curriculum compilation?', two teachers participated in the Subject Curriculum Standards compilation in the Chinese subject. It indicated that teachers were given the opportunities to involve in the compilation in some way, especially in subject curriculum standards. In this sense, though China's curriculum compilation authority was centralised, some tasks and assignments were distributed to the teachers. Therefore, in the teachers' perception, decentralisation happened in curriculum compilation, but it was in the form of deconcentration, where no decision-making authority was transferred.

6.1.2 The Others as the Most Important Decision Makers and Decision-Making Areas

In green and purple blocks, the others rather than the State were marked with 'A', suggesting that in these areas, the others (locals or schools) were the most influential decision-makers, not the State. For example, in provincial levelled student assessment, the authority was transferred to provinces, while in teaching pedagogy, student disciplinary, and daily or periodic student assessment, the authority was transferred even to schools.

Furthermore, in purple blocks, the State was not marked as an independent decision-maker (the column '1' related block was blank), but at most part of co-decision makers (the columns '12', '123' or '23' related blocks) in student disciplinary, provincial-levelled student assessment, and daily or periodic student assessment. It implied that the central control was looser in these areas than in the others in the table. In all, not centralised by the State, authority in green and purple areas was delegated to the others. Nevertheless, since the State still influenced the decision making in these areas, it was in the form of delegation.

6.1.3 Trans-Scalar Decentralisation and Decision-Making Areas

From the table, we could see that multiple decision-maker combinations were marked in most of the blocks under the coding columns of '12', '123', '13', '23'. It indicated that shared authority and the trans-scalar decentralisation patterns could be '12' (between State and Local), '13' (between State and School), '23' (between Local and School), or '123' (among State, Local, and School) in most of the curriculum areas. However, the blocks in grey meant the category '13' was blank in those areas. It indicated that though the other trans-scalar decentralisation pattern happened in these areas, the one '13' (between State and School) did not, including teaching contents, national-levelled student assessment, provincial student assessment, and daily or periodic student assessment.

However, in this related discussion, it is important to mention the blue block row, in which all the trans-scalar categories were blank. Since the related question intended to ask the teachers, 'Have you taken part in the compilation of the 2017 Curriculum?' Therefore, from their perception, it is not possible to know whether others were involved or not. Therefore, only two blocks under the columns of '1' and '3' concerning the State and the teachers were marked in the table, but it did not mean there were no other governance types.

6.2 Teachers' Perceptions of the Tensions in the Educational Decentralization

There were two open-ended questions in the questionnaire. The first one about curriculum compilation was discussed in the Multiple Choice section. Thus, in this section, we will discuss the other.

Question 17 asked the teachers, 'What kind of educational decentralisation tensions between various actors in this reform have you noticed?' Since it was set as a required question, fifty related responses were received and analysed. In them, all three levels of decision-makers were mentioned. Concerning the State, almost all the teachers in the survey perceived 'not enough degree to which the authority was decentralised' 'not enough supervision' 'hard to measure decentralisation'. Concerning the local level, the participants said 'not enough accountability with the autonomy' 'local capacity differences, especially in resources and teaching' 'not enough trans-scalar cooperation'. Lastly, as to the school level, 'poor school-based curriculum development and usage' 'poor capacity to exert the autonomy' and 'poor teaching quality' were mentioned.

The above tension suggested the following expectations from the teachers. First, they expected a greater degree of decentralisation transferred to the local and schools to adapt to the complicated local situations. At the same time, trans-scalar cooperation was encouraged. Then they anticipated the curriculum implementation could be supervised more effectively and adequately to ensure the enacting quality. More importantly, the locals' capacity building, schools', even teachers', was badly needed to exert their autonomy.

In summary, in the school teachers' eyes, the authority was shared between the State and the others, which indicated multi-layered and trans-scalar governance. It was even decentralised from the State to the others in provincial-levelled student assessment, teaching pedagogy, student disciplinary, daily or periodic student assessment. Nevertheless, since the State still influenced the decision making in most areas, delegation and deconcentration existed in one system, suggesting the mixed-degree decentralisation pattern. What is more, school teachers noticed the tension concerned about all levelled decision-makers.

7 FINDINGS ON THE DECENTRALIZATION PATTERN IN THE 2017 CURRICULUM REFORM

To get a holistic view of a phenomenon, I applied the combination of document analysis and qualitative survey analysis in this thesis. At the same time, the influence of biases was expected to diminish by validating findings across data sets. Therefore, in this chapter, the former findings in Chapter Five and Chapter Six are compared to answer Research Question Three: What was the educational decentralization pattern in the 2017 CNCRUSL? Besides, the relations between the pattern and contextual conditions are explained.

Decentralization was defined as the authority transferred from an upper level to a lower level within the organization or between organizations (Govinda, 1997). In both document analysis and qualitative survey analysis, a robust educational decentralization trend was sensed in the 2017 CNCRUSL in broad decision-making areas, though the State was still one of the most influential decision-makers in most of them. The authority was shared between the State and the other actors, even decentralized to the local and schools. However, educational governance in the 2017 CNCRUSL was not a simple matter of centralization or decentralization, but a multifaceted decentralization.

7.1 MultiFaceted Decentralization

Multifaceted decentralization referred to the authority transferred from an upper level to lower levels with multiple attributes. Based on the earlier two findings, the multiple characteristics of Chinese decentralization can be summarized as multi-layers, trans-scales, and mixed-degrees.

7.1.1 Multi-Layered Decentralization

As it literally said, Multi-Layered Decentralization meant that the authority was transferred not to a single level but to different layers in the system based on their different roles or functions. In document analysis, three levels, including the State, the local, and schools, were involved in the national curriculum man-

agement, and two levels of the State and provinces participated in the curriculum supervision. Besides the multi-layered governance, multi-layered decentralization was validated in survey analysis by marked blocks related to the categories '1' (coding of the State in Table 7), '2' (coding of the local), and '3' (coding of schools). Marking '2' and '3' indicated that the authority was transferred to different layers, including the local (coded as '2') or schools (coded as '3'). For example, in provincial-levelled student assessment, the authority was transferred to provinces, while in teaching pedagogy, student disciplinary, and daily or periodic student assessment, the authority was transferred to schools. Furthermore, even the category '2' itself could suggest multi-layered decentralization because it covered the three-layers of provinces, municipalities, and districts.

7.1.2 Trans-Scalar Decentralization

Trans-scalar decentralization meant the decentralized authority was not limited within a single scale but shared across different scales. Document analysis indicated two main trans-scalar decentralizations, in which co-decision makers existed. One shared authority among the State, the local, and schools in learning contents, while the other shared power between the State and provinces in the national-levelled student assessment.

These two main trans-scalar decentralization types were confirmed by survey analysis, but more than two were found in the survey. In the survey analysis, the categories of '13', '23' indicated the trans-scalar decentralization types of the State and schools, and the local and schools separately. The category '2' was another trans-scalar decentralization in China's situation since it could mean multi-scalar local levels, including province, municipality, and district, as in the multiple-choice options in the questionnaire.

7.1.3 Mixed-degreed Decentralization

As Mark Hanson (1989a, 1989b) stated, there were three-forms of decentralization according to the degree to which the authority was decentralized. They were 'deconcentration', 'delegation', and 'devolution'. Mixed-degreed Decentral-

ization meant more than one degrees exist in one system to which the authority was transferred. In the 2017 CNCRUSL, two common degrees of decentralization were deconcentration and delegation. When compiling the national curriculum, the State distributed tasks and assignments to the local and schools, but no decision-making power was transferred. Therefore, national curriculum compilation was in the form of 'deconcentration'.

Compared with 'deconcentration', more 'delegation' related to the national curriculum in the 2017 CNCRUSL. For example, when implementing the national curriculum, the State formulated the guidelines and delegated the authority to provinces to write instructions on enactment under their local situations. In other words, provinces had to report their implementation plan and enactment reality to the State and be supervised by the State. Therefore, the implementation authority transferred to the local was in the form of delegation, in which decision-making authority was decentralized, but the State could withdraw it depending on its supervision. Besides, the State transferred the authority of textbook writing to the local teams, but since the authority could be withdrawn depending on the State's needs, it was also in the form of delegation, not a full decentralization. Furthermore, the provincial-levelled student assessment contents were based on the national curriculum, and the State supervised the implementation procedure. In other words, though provinces were given generous space to exert their autonomy at provincial-levelled student assessment, the authority decentralized to them was still a delegation.

What is more, the locals were granted the autonomy to write local curriculums, for example, provincial curriculums, while schools could compose the school-based curriculum (MOE, 2020a). Though the local and schools could exert their autonomy based on local situations in these areas, their work was still under upper levels' supervision (MOE, 2014 & 2018b). In other words, in provincial and school-based curriculums, the local and schools were not granted a complete decentralization but still a delegation. Therefore, both deconcentration and delegation existed in the 2017 Curriculum Reform.

In summary, the educational decentralization pattern in the 2017 CNCRUSL is multifaceted, with multi-layered, trans-scalar, and mixed-degreed features.

7.2 Contextual Conditions in the Educational Decentralization

Education decentralization in China was under the context of its specific economy. The 2017 Curriculum Reform actually could date back to China's economic Opening-Up in 1978.

To promote the national economy and meet the local needs, China began to shift its economic paradigm from centralization to a market-influenced economy. China's economic paradigm shift lay the economic foundation for later education decentralization and could be seen as the prelude of decentralization in other fields. Therefore, the 2017 Curriculum Reform timeline indicated that China took a proactive strategy and cautious preparations for the 2017 Curriculum Reform and education decentralization (see Figure 2). Especially in recent decades, the Chinese economy has integrated with the world and developed rapidly, especially after China joined the WTO (State Council, 2020). This economic development provided a solid education base and asked for access to education and education quality. By the end of 2018, upper-secondary schools' access percentage increased to 88.8% (MOE, 2019a). At the same time, Chinese upper-secondary education had developed dramatically, and it was ready for the economy's quality requirement (MOE, 2019a). It suggested it was the right time for decentralization, aiming at a quality education.

Besides, Chinese education decentralization was motivated by the need for education development. The 2017 Scheme positioned the general upper-secondary education as part of basic education intended for the mass, aiming at quality education based on students' comprehensive and individualized development (MOE, 2020a). Three key points were highlighted, including 'the mass', 'quality education', and 'individualized development'. Since general upper-secondary education in China was for 'quality education' of 'the mass', it required decentralizing the authority to individuals to adapt to various local situations to achieve quality education. Besides, the students' 'individualized development' asked for school autonomy. Therefore, education decentralization was a must to realize the upper-secondary education objectives, echoing with the MOE officials' statement 'to decentralize the authority' (2019a).

Furthermore, the multifaceted decentralization pattern was influenced by China's specific economic and social development. Because of China's vast territory, the large population, unbalanced regional development, and not full development in economy and society, the State chose to take a cautious attitude and gradual transitioning steps from centralization to multifaceted decentralization (see Figure 2). 'Multi-layered' and 'trans-scalar decentralization' types were based on complex local specific circumstances to ensure education quality. Besides, to avoid extreme centralization or extreme decentralization, mixed-degreed decentralization in one system was motivated by the stable development of education, which was in line with the stable development of economy and society proposed in the 2020 government report. Therefore, Chinese educational decentralization aiming at quality education was driven by China's economic and societal development.

However, it had to be noticed that the State was still a dominant decision-maker in the curriculum system, especially in determining educational objectives, essential standards, and required courses, though the authority was transferred in vast areas in education. That echoed with the Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China's statement that 'basic education was guided by the education policies and theories of the Communist Party of China and it reflected the State's will directly' (MOE, 2020a, p. 1). Therefore, macro steering from the State in the curriculum reform was influenced by political reasons.

8 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This research aimed to contribute to the educational decentralization research by conducting an in-depth investigation of the 2017 Chinese national curriculum reform at the upper secondary level. The research intended to answer three research questions:

- 1) According to the 2017 Curriculum documents, in what decision-making areas and to what degree were authority decentralized to various decision-makers?
- 2) According to school teachers' perceptions, in what decision-making areas and to what degree were authority decentralized to various decision-makers in the 2017 Curriculum Reform?
- 3) According to the documents and teachers' perceptions, what was the educational decentralization pattern in the 2017 Curriculum Reform?

The author proposed the theoretical framework of the Multifaceted Decentralization and applied it to analyze and compare the 2017 Curriculum documents (the Scheme, the Standards, and a training quiz) with the school teachers' perceptions of the curriculum reform (based on 50 responses to a school-teacher questionnaire).

According to the 2017 Curriculum documents' content analysis, the local was the primary decision-maker in textbook writing and the provincial-levelled student assessment. Schools were granted autonomy in the elective courses, the teaching pedagogy, and the daily or periodic student assessment. Besides, mixed-degree decentralization functioned in the system with deconcentration in curriculum compilation and delegation in others, both of which had to be under the State's guidance or supervision somehow.

According to the qualitative survey analysis on schoolteachers' questionnaire responses, the others rather than the State were the most influential decision-makers in some areas. For example, in the provincial-levelled student assessment, the authority was transferred to provinces, while in the teaching pedagogy, the student discipline, and the daily or periodic student assessment, the authority was transferred to schools. Furthermore, even in some areas, the State was perceived not as an independent decision-maker but as co-decision makers,

such as in student disciplinary, provincial-levelled student assessment, and daily or periodic student assessment. Nevertheless, since the State still influenced the decision making in most areas, delegation and deconcentration existed in one system, suggesting the mixed-degree decentralization pattern.

Therefore, the findings of both the 2017 Curriculum documents and the school teachers' perceptions showed a strong decentralization trend in broad curriculum areas. Compared with the earlier ones, the latest reform's decentralization was more explicit, specific, extensive, and systematic than before. It was aligned to what Feng (2013) described in his 'Chinese-styled decentralization', but contrary to Qi's (2011) recentralization view.

However, educational decentralization is context-dependent. It should be discussed following its national conditions and individual characteristics, and its patterns should be differentiated due to diversified domestic conditions and individual capabilities. The Chinese-style pattern is different from the West's and much more complicated than what some researchers described, such as Qi's controlled decentralization (2017), Mok's dual decentralization (2017). The observed multifaceted decentralization pattern in the 2017 Curriculum Reform presents multi-layered, trans-scalar, and mixed-degreed. It means the authority was transferred from the State to different layers, including the local and schools. At the same time, co-decision makers made trans-scalar decisions, in which decision-making authority was shared across different scales among the State, the local, and schools. Besides, mixed-degreed decentralization existed in China's system, including deconcentration and delegation. Therefore, when discussing decentralization in a country, there is no single normative correct answer to it. Furthermore, countries should be encouraged to conceive their educational development strategies, adapting to their own socio-economic and educational conditions and features.

As discussed in the thesis, the curriculum reform history witnessed China's educational governance's evolution from centralization to multifaceted decentralization with the changing political and socio-economic context. China took a proactive decentralization strategy to meet the socio-economic and educational development needs, as illustrated in the 2017 Curriculum reform timeline (in Chapter 2, p.16).

With the influence of neoliberalism, China adopted decentralization for better efficiency, resource allocation, and innovation. However, Mok said that new neoliberalism was 'a new regulation or form of governmentality' other than sharing the feature of free-market mechanism with classic neoliberalism (2017, p. 34). Moreover, he highlighted the State's ruling function, which provided the market conditions, laws, and institutions. In China's case, though the centralization in the 2017 Curriculum Reform was becoming less and looser than before, especially in mandatory required courses, most of the decentralization was still in the form of deconcentration or delegation, which suggested the State's crucial regulating influence.

Under the State's ruling, complete decentralization was expected from school teachers with the reform deepening and educational development according to the survey's decentralization tension analysis. At the same time, teachers' capacity building was highly stressed and badly needed to exert their autonomy, for example, to apply innovative teaching pedagogy to curriculum implementation, develop school-based curriculums, or conduct daily student assessment according to the actual circumstances. However, the teacher training quiz's document analysis suggested that the official training focused on understanding and enacting the required sections by the State, but not on building the local or schools' autonomy. To some extent, that focus in teachers' curriculum training could result in the possible gap between policy intent and policy effect in that city.

Based on the observation of the decentralization evolvement in Chinese education curriculum reforms, it is possible to estimate that more autonomy will be transferred from the State to the local, even to schools in more extensive areas. Besides, complete decentralization (i.e. devolution) will appear in the future. Furthermore, mixed-degreed decentralization will last for some time to adapt to the Chinese development at the transitional stage. Nevertheless, it has to be noted that all the autonomy to the lower levels will be subject to the State's overall development objectives, which is determined by China's political feature.

This thesis gives information on the various voices on Chinese educational decentralization. It not only confirmed the decentralization trend but fur-

ther illustrated its complexity. Besides, it enriches the dimensions to explore decentralization by proposing the MultiFaceted Decentralization theory, observing it from the perspectives of decision-makers (who), decision-making areas (where), and the decentralization degree (how much). Considering the complexity in China's case and the generalization in multifaceted perspective analysis on decentralization issues, this thesis even expects to be a reference beyond curriculum reforms and beyond China. In all, it added to educational governance research, especially in decentralization, which provided a basis or environment for other studies, such as the gap between policy intent and policy effect, localization of policy borrowing, distributed leadership.

However, though this thesis's methodology sought triangulation by combining document analysis and the survey, China's decentralization's qualitative hypothesis needs further quantitative research to validate the findings (Jansen, 2010). Besides, since the survey data just came from four provinces where the 2017 Curriculum has been in effect, the trend inference cannot be simply generalized to other provinces or areas of China because of China's complicated local situations and unbalanced area development. Furthermore, the teaching training quiz analysis in a municipality represented the focus observation of that specific training, resulting in the possible gap between policy intent and policy effect. However, it did not suggest that there would be no other possible complementary training in the future in that city. At the same time, it could not be generalized to other areas.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Key Chinese National Curriculum Reforms At the Upper Secondary Level (1949- 2020)

	Socio-economic-political background	Year	National curriculum	B Foci, results and notes	Decentralization
1	1949 The Common Program: starting to transform the old education system, the education content and pedagogics systematically; The first national education conference: proposing the procedure and the methodology of the education reforms	1950	The Temporary Teaching Plan for Secondary Schools (Draft)	M The preliminary framework of China's national secondary curriculum: fourteen courses were set.	All the schools used unified textbooks based on the national curriculum. All the courses were mandatory.
2	1958 – 1965 The Second Five-Year Plan and national economic adjustment period	1963	The Full-Time Primary and Secondary Teaching Plan	M Electives at secondary education.	Electives broke the unified curriculum system by Mandatories.
3	1977 – 1998 The 'Back to track' and 'Opening-Up' to the world period; 1985 A Decision to Reform the Education System; 1993 An Outline of Chinese Education Reform and Development;	1990	The Current General Upper-Secondary Teaching Plan Adjustment	M Subject courses and activity courses	The prologue of the further diversifying school curriculums: granting schools the autonomy to develop activity courses as the supplement to subject courses under the unified guidance of the national curriculum.
	1995 The Education Law of the People's Republic of China;	1996	The Full-time General Upper-Secondary Curriculum Scheme (Pilot)	M The first independent upper-secondary curriculum	Subject courses were categorized into mandatories, controlled electives and free electives; a three-level curriculum management system was announced: the State, the local, and schools.
	1998 A Plan of Developing Education in the Twenty-First Century				

4	<p>1999 A Decision on Promoting Quality Education to Deepen Education Reforms: experimenting with national curricular, local curricular and school curricular; transforming College admission principles and student assessment accordingly;</p>	2000	<p>The Full-time General Upper-Secondary Curriculum Scheme (Pilot Revision)</p>	<p>M Adjusted O fourteen E subjects</p>	<p>Electives were chosen without the boundary of Science subjects and Arts subjects; Local curriculums and school curriculums could be chosen from besides the national curriculum.</p>
	<p>2001 The Outline of the Basic Education Curriculum Reform (Pilot)</p>	2003	<p>The General Upper-Secondary Curriculum Scheme (Pilot)</p>	<p>M Three Goals: O knowledge and skill goal, procedure and methodology goal, and wellbeing, attitude and value goal</p>	<p>Three Layers: study fields, subjects and modules; Mobile classes when taking Electives; Co-development of school curriculums and sharing curriculum resources</p>
5	<p>2011 The National Outline of Medium and Long-Term Education Reforms and Development: encouraging multi-stakeholders participation in founding upper secondary schools;</p>	2017	<p>The Comprehensive Upper-Secondary Curriculum Scheme</p>	<p>M O E</p>	
	<p>2019 Instructions on Promoting the Education-Method Reform at the Upper-Secondary Education in the New Decade</p>				

Appendix 2 Questionnaire of the Upper-Secondary Curriculum Reform in China (2017)

Notice: This questionnaire will be used in educational governance research anonymously after your consent. You can withdraw from this research at any time for any reason.

Part 1 Background and qualification

1. Where are you living? _____(Province/City)
2. You are_____. A. female B. male
3. Are you working in a _____.
public school B. private school
4. What is your position? _____
A. Principal B. Vice-principal C. Assistant staff D. Teacher E. Others
5. If you are a teacher, you are a _____.
A. class teacher B. subject teacher
6. How many years of working experience have you been in the current position? _____.

Part 2 Education governance

7. Have you taken part in the 2017 CRUSE compilation? If so, when and how?
8. Who has a significant responsibility in deciding which courses are offered? Tick as many appropriate answers as possible. Besides, mark the most important decision-maker with 'A'.
A. Teachers B. Principals C. District Education Bureau
D. Municipal Education Bureau E. Provincial Education Bureau F. MOE
9. Who has a significant responsibility in choosing which learning materials are used, including textbooks? Tick as many appropriate answers as possible. Besides, mark the most important decision-maker with 'A'.
A. Teachers B. Principals C. District Education Bureau

D. Municipal Education Bureau E. Provincial Education Bureau F. MOE

10. Which textbooks are being used / to be used in this reform in your province? _____

11. Who has a significant responsibility in determining course content, including national/regional curricula? Tick as many appropriate answers as possible. Besides, mark the most important decision-maker with 'A'.

A. Teachers B. Principals C. District Education Bureau

D. Municipal Education Bureau E. Provincial Education Bureau F. MOE

12. Who has a significant responsibility in determining teaching pedagogy? Tick as many appropriate answers as possible. Besides, mark the most important decision-maker with 'A'.

A. Teachers B. Principals C. District Education Bureau

D. Municipal Education Bureau E. Provincial Education Bureau F. MOE

13. Who has a significant responsibility in establishing student disciplinary policies and procedures? Tick as many appropriate answers as possible. Besides, mark the most important decision-maker with 'A'.

A. Teachers B. Principals C. District Education Bureau

D. Municipal Education Bureau E. Provincial Education Bureau F. MOE

14. Who has a significant responsibility in establishing student assessment policies at the national level, for example, in the national college entrance examination? Tick as many appropriate answers as possible. Besides, mark the most important decision-maker with 'A'.

A. Teachers B. Principals C. District Education Bureau

D. Municipal Education Bureau E. Provincial Education Bureau F. MOE

15. Who has a significant responsibility in establishing student assessment policies at the municipal level, for example, in the academic proficiency test? Tick as many appropriate answers as possible. Besides, mark the most important decision-maker with 'A'.

A. Teachers B. Principals C. District Education Bureau

D. Municipal Education Bureau E. Provincial Education Bureau F. MOE

16. Who has a significant responsibility in establishing student assessment policies at the school level, for example, in the daily assessment and the periodical

assessment? Tick as many appropriate answers as possible. Besides, mark the most important decision-maker with 'A'.

A. Teachers B. Principals C. District Education Bureau

D. Municipal Education Bureau E. Provincial Education Bureau F. MOE

17. What kind of authority tensions between various actors in the education decentralization in this reform have you noticed?