

A Literature Review of Research on the Role of Social Media in Enhancing English Language Expression Skills in China (2013-2023)

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Keywords: Social Media-Assisted Teaching, English Language Expression, English Speaking, English Writing

Abstract: This paper is a review of 82 papers on the role of social media in enhancing English language expression skills in the past decade. Based on the conceptual framework and analytical framework, it summarizes the development lineage, theoretical basis, fundamental features and teaching models. The deficiencies of existing research include: (1) with extensive research on the macro-level teaching models, yet without enough in-depth discussion of micro-influencing factors; (2) lack of attention given to the role of parents; (3) lack of a structured evaluation system and a supervisory framework. Future research hot spots are the influencing factors and mechanisms affecting social media-assisted English language expression teaching, the latent value of parental involvement, and how to improve teachers' capability of instruction with the help of social media.

1. Introduction

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is a language learning mode based on computer technology [1], and in recent years, it has witnessed rapid development. With the popularity of mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets, and the advancement of mobile technology, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has gradually emerged as an important branch in the field of CALL. MALL refers to language learning facilitated through mobile technology [2]. Liu first proposed the use of social software on mobile phones as an auxiliary tool for language learning, thereby introducing the concept of social media-assisted teaching [3]. This concept involves applying applications that allow users to produce and interact with content through internet technology to teaching [4]. Domestically, the definition of social media-assisted teaching is generally consistent, but there are also some subtle differences. For example, Xueyang Ding considers social media teaching as a teaching method based on social media functions [5], while Feng Lu believes that any teaching mode that utilizes media supporting interpersonal communication can be considered as social media-assisted teaching [6].

Social media in China mostly began in the early 21st century and has undergone nearly 20 years of development. Platforms such as WeChat, QQ, and Weibo are particularly popular among mainstream users. Research on social media-assisted teaching in China started as early as 2012 [7], with WeChat being the main research tool [8]. The software used in the research includes WeChat,

QQ, Sina Weibo, and TikTok short videos, covering English language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The methods used include questionnaire surveys, tests, interviews, controlled experiments, and literature research.

As the importance of social media use continues to grow [9], its advantages in promoting interactivity and personalized learning, providing diverse learning resources, and expanding learning space also bring more possibilities and opportunities. Social media-assisted teaching can serve as an important breakthrough. Most current EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners are "digital natives", for whom using social media has become an integral part of life. Therefore, social media-assisted teaching is particularly suitable for "digital natives" [10]. Moreover, as a new communication technology widely used by EFL learners, social media can provide valuable resources for teachers and schools to collaborate and disseminate education [11].

Currently, research in the field of social media-assisted teaching still has some limitations, with more empirical studies than theoretical ones, and a lack of systematic summarization and clarification. This study aims to summarize how social media-assisted teaching promotes English expression ability by summarizing domestic empirical and theoretical research from the perspectives of participant characteristics, application software, research methods, relevant theories, etc. The "China English Proficiency Scales" defines "language expression ability" as the ability of language learners to express meaning using language, which is divided into oral and written expression abilities. Therefore, through a review study, the author will address the following research questions:

- 1) Under what theoretical guidance is social media-assisted teaching conducted?
- 2) Upon which teaching models does social media-assisted teaching rely?
- 3) Can social media-assisted teaching promote oral and written English expression?
- 4) What are the advantages and relative shortcomings of social media-assisted teaching?

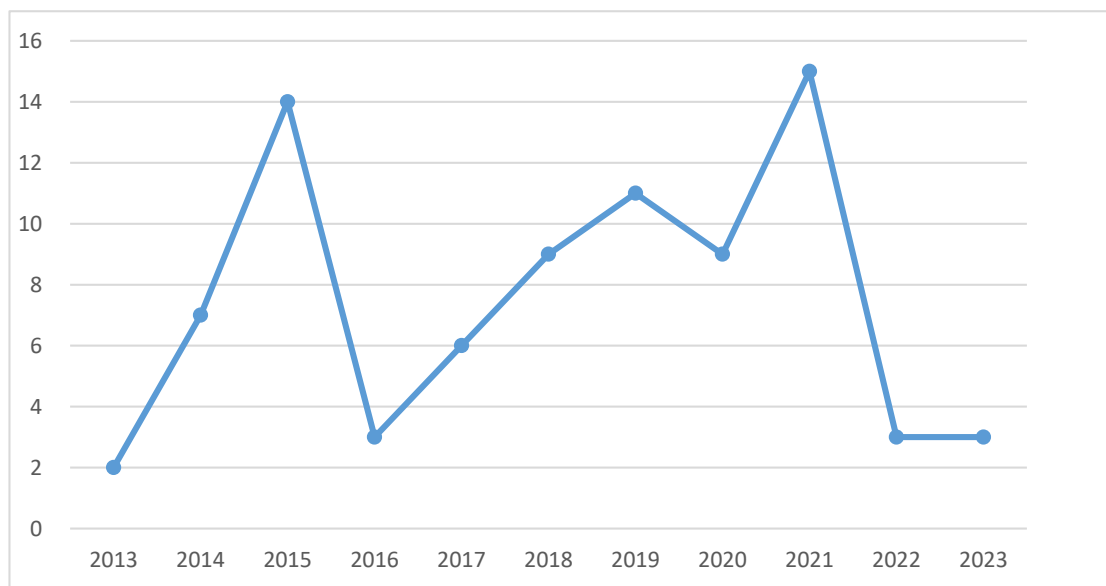
2. Data Source Analysis

The author used advanced searching function in the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) Journal Full-text Database. The search fields included keywords such as "social media/QQ/WeChat," "English oral communication/oral expression/English writing," "teaching/students," and "social media-assisted teaching." The search covered literature published from August 2013 to August 2023. A total of 127 articles were retrieved, of which 52 irrelevant articles were excluded. Further literature collection and search were conducted using a "snowballing" approach, resulting in an additional 82 articles, including 67 academic journals and 15 dissertations.

The table 1 shows the quantity of published articles has significant fluctuations overall, which can be divided into three phases: ① Initial Stage (2013-2015): During this period, there was a rapid increase in the number of related publications, with the prevalent use of software such as WeChat, QQ, and Weibo. This trend closely correlates with the significant increase in the scale of China's internet users and the rise in internet penetration rate. By 2015, China's internet users reached 688.26 million, with an internet penetration rate of 50.3%, marking a 4.5 percentage point increase from the end of 2013, and maintaining a steady growth trend. Moreover, according to the "2015 China APP Ranking Top 500" released by the Internet Weekly, WeChat, QQ, and Weibo were all ranked in the top 20. English oral and writing teaching possesses traits such as process interaction, content creativity, practical application, and timely feedback. The online discussion, multimedia, and real-time communication functions of social software are highly compatible with these traits, providing innovative tools and methods for teaching English expression skills. Chapter 19 of the "National Medium- and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)" also emphasizes "strengthening the application of information technology, improving teachers' proficiency in information technology... encouraging students to actively learn and study independently using

information technology means." ② Development Stage (2016-2021): During this stage, there were significant fluctuations, but overall, there was an upward trend in the number of publications, ranging from 3 to 15 articles per year. The peak was reached in 2021 (15 articles). According to the 49th "Statistical Report on Internet Development in China," as of December 2021, China's internet users reached 1.032 billion, with an internet penetration rate of 73%. The usage rate of instant messaging applications was 97.5%. The widespread popularity of social media has made social media-assisted teaching a highly regarded educational method. Moreover, during the epidemic, the flexible and versatile terminal choices of social media successfully realized the mobility of learners' learning media, promoted the sharing of a large number of high-quality learning resources, and achieved true 4A (Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime, Anything) learning. ③ Stagnation Stage (2022-2023): During this stage, the number of publications decreased slightly, possibly due to the impact of the epidemic, delays or interruptions in field research activities, limitations on data collection, and delays in publication processes. Additionally, some researchers shifted their focus to the study and impact assessment of the "double reduction" policy, which attracted a large amount of research resources due to the policy's urgency and widespread discussion.

Table 1: Research Trends in How Social Media-Assisted Teaching Enhances English Expressive Abilities in China



Research related to how social media-assisted teaching promotes language expression ability in China shows that WeChat is the most commonly used software, with 46 articles. Following WeChat, QQ and Weibo have been utilized in 16 and 13 articles, respectively. Other software platforms, including Douban and Douyin, account for a total of 10 articles.

Research on social media-assisted teaching in China primarily focuses on higher education, with a total of 50 articles. Secondary education follows, with 18 articles, while studies covering all educational stages amount to 13 articles. There is only one article focused on primary education.

3. Research Findings

3.1 Theoretical Basis and Basic Characteristics

In the aspect of literature review, social media-assisted teaching in China exhibits three basic characteristics in promoting English expression abilities, including emphasis on subjective experience, environmental influence, and highlighting social collaboration. Firstly, concerning the

importance of subjective experience, constructivist theory and second language acquisition theory provide theoretical basis for this feature, emphasizing the active role of learners in the learning process, as well as the influence of their individual cognition and emotional experiences on language acquisition. Secondly, these studies emphasize the importance of the environment, particularly the learning environment. Blended learning theory, mobile learning theory, and situated learning theory all emphasize the critical role of the learning environment in knowledge acquisition and skill development. Through social media-assisted teaching, learners can engage in learning in diversified environments, thereby better adapting to the English expression needs in different contexts. Lastly, social media-assisted teaching emphasizes the importance of social collaboration. Cooperative learning theory, connectivism learning theory, and interactive learning theory provide theoretical support for this feature, emphasizing the interaction and cooperation among learners in knowledge construction and improvement of English expression abilities. Social media provides learners with a platform for interacting with peers, promoting their cooperation and communication in language learning.

3.1.1 Active Construction of Connections, Attention to Identity Characteristics - Emphasis on Subjective Experience

Research on the English expression abilities through social media-assisted teaching has been developed under the guidance of constructivist theory and second language acquisition theory. Constructivism is considered the theoretical basis for implementing network-based English teaching models. This theory emphasizes that "When engaged in networked multimedia learning, learners attempt to construct relevant mental representations based on materials and gain knowledge by interacting with society" [14]. The constructivist ideology emphasizes both the cognitive role of learners and the guiding role of teachers. Social media provides students with a real language learning environment for learning oral expression and writing, mobilizing students' initiative as knowledge constructors, and enhancing English expression abilities. Additionally, the identity characteristics of EFL learners also pose higher requirements for English expression-related courses. Second language acquisition theory posits three hypotheses at different stages, namely the input hypothesis, the interaction hypothesis, and the output hypothesis, emphasizing that: (1) Comprehensible input is a necessary condition for language learning [15]. (2) Single language input cannot satisfy language acquisition; attention must be paid to the interaction between native speakers and learners [16]. (3) Language acquisition is only completed through processing, thinking, and organizing the learned language in the language output stage [17]. Against this theoretical background, social media-assisted teaching pays more attention to language input, interaction, and output. For example, by improving real-time communication and language buddy functions, students are allowed to chat with native speakers in real-time for high-quality language input and interaction. Moreover, students are encouraged to join specialized language learning communities to discuss language issues and engage in long-term language output.

3.1.2 Creating Learning Environments, Immersing Oneself in Real Situations - Emphasizing Environmental Influence

The blended learning theory emphasizes the integration of different learning environments, methods, participants, and resources [18]. By comprehensively adopting "teacher-led collective teaching, cooperative group teaching based on cooperation concepts, and teaching methods dominated by autonomous learning" [19], it leverages the complementary advantages of traditional classroom learning and online network learning. The intention is to "fully embody the initiative, enthusiasm, and creativity of students as the subjects of the learning process, while also playing the

leading role of teachers in guiding, inspiring, and monitoring the teaching process"[20]. While integrating with traditional teaching methods, social media-assisted teaching provides resources for students to learn independently and platforms for group discussions. At the same time, various forms encourage students to fully exert their subjective initiative, and online grading functions are introduced for teachers to supervise. Mobile learning theory, as part of ubiquitous learning theory, also plays a role. Learners can access knowledge anytime, anywhere through mobile devices and use social media platforms to share opinions and resources, gaining extensive learning opportunities. Situated learning theory refers to teachers creating situations related to teaching content to help students understand and experience knowledge [21]. The educator Shiyi Zhang once said that in English teaching, the most important thing is to "use English situations to evoke English responses". Teachers can initiate English language learning interest by researching students' learning situations and objectives, utilizing social media resources to design classroom activities, thereby stimulating positive student emotions. When students perceive new knowledge, teachers should create contexts to facilitate English feedback, enabling students to actively engage in the classroom. During oral and written practice, students should leverage contexts to comprehend teaching content, connect with real-life scenarios, and overcome language output barriers.

3.1.3 Emphasizing Social Interaction, Close Cultural Connections - Highlighting Social Collaboration

The development of mobile internet technology has greatly changed people's lifestyles and social interaction forms. The concept of "social + learning" promotes continuous innovation in learning methods. For example, users could use "checking in" to record, quantify, and display their learning achievements[22], which is in line with cooperative learning theory- learners promote learning through collaboration, discussion, and collaborative knowledge construction, forming deep understanding and thinking modes, and thus understanding and applying vocabulary and sentence patterns for language expression. The high requirements of expression for accuracy, richness, coherence, and appropriateness also make it necessary to understand the social and cultural background of the language being learned. As emphasized by connectivism learning theory, learning is not only an internal process of individuals but also closely related to external environments and interpersonal relationships [23]. The global and diverse nature of social media provides learners with opportunities to contact different countries and cultures. For example, WeChat's video accounts and QQ's small world feature allow students to browse content posted by users from different countries and cultures, including articles, photos, and videos, enabling them to understand the characteristics, customs, and values of different cultures better. This understanding helps them better understand the cultural background behind cross-cultural expressions.

3.2 Construction of Teaching Models

Social media-assisted English oral and writing course teaching models continuously innovate with changes in teaching subjects, objectives, etc. Through analyzing 82 pieces of literature, the following three typical teaching models are identified:

3.2.1 Hybrid Teaching Model Based on Social Media Platforms

This model, with abundant research, totals 30 pieces. It was initially practiced by Yun Zhou [24]. The model consists of online and offline tasks divided into pre-class, in-class, and post-class segments. Before class, students utilize social media platforms such as WeChat Official Accounts [25-26], WeChat Mini Programs, Weibo Super Topics[27], etc., to independently search for oral practice topics, accumulate vocabulary and phrases, or teachers post teaching content on social platforms to assist

students in previewing learning materials, recording writing ideas, oral expression logic, cultural differences, to stimulate learning interest. During class, teachers impart new knowledge while addressing unresolved issues from pre-class tasks, and can review post-class task completion, selecting outstanding works for display. After class, teachers publish online English "input-output" tasks via social media platforms, and interact with students through one-on-one messaging and comments, to provide guidance and evaluation on students' pronunciation, intonation, and language usage, effectively extending oral and writing class activities. The software used in this model mainly includes WeChat, QQ, and Weibo.

3.2.2 Online Teaching Model Based on WeChat Mini Programs, Official Accounts, QQ Classrooms, etc.

Research on this model emerged in China from 2014 onwards. For example, Manman Xiao explored the practical application of WeChat Official Account "Oral 100 Teacher Assistant" in assisting junior high school English listening and speaking teaching in Yinchuan's Xixia District[28]. Juanjuan Hou discussed specific strategies for using QQ network platforms to assist college English writing teaching[29]. Jiayu Cong conducted experiments on an English interpreting skill training model based on "WeChat Mini Programs"[30]. With the continuous improvement of social media platform functions, some oral and writing courses have begun to adopt WeChat Mini Programs, Official Accounts, and other platform functions to conduct flipped or semi-flipped online teaching[31]. This model can be summarized as students engaging in autonomous learning using these functions, collaborating in groups, discovering and solving problems through online discussions, completing exercises, tests, etc., while teachers supervise learning and answer questions online. This model not only fosters students' abilities in autonomous and cooperative learning and motivates learning but also facilitates teachers' online supervision, statisticization of student learning outcomes, and improves teaching efficiency.

3.2.3 Community-Based Teaching Model Utilizing Mobile Interactive Technology

The development of social media platforms has expanded the application of peer feedback from physical spaces to online spaces, offering advantages such as transcending time and space, reducing anxiety [32], high participation[33], easy storage, and easy traceability[34]. Additionally, online peer feedback possesses the visual, reflective, timely, and interactive characteristics of written feedback and the effectiveness of oral feedback [35]. The community-based teaching model utilizing mobile interactive technology leverages these advantages, encouraging students to enhance English expression abilities by connecting with others and society. There are a total of 12 research papers on this model, mainly utilizing platforms such as QQ and WeChat.

3.3 Effectiveness Evaluation

The literature review results indicate that research on how social media-assisted teaching promotes English expression abilities in China primarily evaluates effectiveness from the perspectives of both teachers and students. Students are mainly assessed in terms of learning interest, learning abilities, and expression capabilities, while teachers are assessed based on teaching awareness, teaching abilities, and teaching satisfaction.

3.3.1 Effectiveness Research from the Student Perspective

In terms of learning interest, most studies employ questionnaire surveys supplemented by interviews to evaluate the effectiveness of social media-assisted teaching in English expression

abilities. Descriptive statistical results show that students' interest in learning English speaking and writing increases after using social media for learning, and their subjective experiences become richer.

Regarding learning abilities, studies mainly use questionnaires, scales, and interviews combined with post-tests to compare differences in students' learning motivation, ability to formulate learning plans, use of learning strategies, monitoring and evaluation, and self-regulation. Research proves that social media-assisted teaching can help students adjust their attitudes toward learning English speaking and writing, change their learning motivation, and have a positive impact on students' autonomous learning and self-monitoring abilities [36].

Concerning expression capabilities, oral expression abilities are evaluated from dimensions like coherence, interactivity, appropriateness, and complexity, while written expression abilities are measured based on accuracy, richness, coherence, and appropriateness. Social media-assisted English expression teaching addresses traditional problems such as lack of vocabulary, sentence structure deficiencies, and inability to express ideas in oral expression classes. Significant improvements are observed in students' fluency of oral expression [37], word accuracy[38] and appropriateness, coherence [39]and consistency of context, content enrichment, and criticality of viewpoints[40].

Regarding writing, social media effectively combines traditional face-to-face classrooms with virtual classrooms, providing platforms for teachers to conduct writing training, testing, and evaluation [41]. This approach contributes to the improvement of English writing and grammar[42], with the most significant improvement seen in coherence, followed by language accuracy, writing norms, and language complexity[43].

3.3.2 Effectiveness Research from the Teacher Perspective

Relevant studies indicate that social media-assisted teaching facilitates teachers in timely and accurately grasping students' learning dynamics, promoting teachers' reflection on teaching issues, enhancing teaching reflection awareness and research consciousness, prompting teachers to actively learn and draw on relevant theories, innovate teaching methods, and improve teaching abilities. The expansive features provided by social media platforms enable teachers to effectively monitor students' learning processes. All online records can serve as important bases for final student evaluations and teaching effectiveness evaluations, contributing to enhanced teaching efficiency. Classroom extension also frees teachers from the constraints of large-class teaching, significantly improving teacher satisfaction with teaching. Additionally, social media-assisted teaching features decentralization and moderate interaction, shifting the focus from relationship building to the dissemination of teaching content, facilitating autonomous interaction between teachers and students, fostering good teacher-student relationships, and enhancing professional satisfaction and happiness.

However, some studies found that social media-assisted teaching increases teachers' workload, requiring teachers to sacrifice rest time and invest more energy in providing timely feedback to students. Moreover, the introduction of social media platforms demands that teachers possess certain network information technology capabilities and higher requirements for updating teaching concepts and methods [45]. Overall, in the context of "Internet +," social media-assisted teaching is a trend. Still, the teaching capabilities of some teachers in this regard need improvement.

4. Division of Teaching Content

Among the existing literature, only 36 articles specify the specific teaching content, with textbooks as the main focus, totaling 20 articles, such as "Extensive English Reading Course" [46], "Listening and Speaking Course" Volume One [47], and "People's Education Press English Eighth Grade Volume One" [48-50]. Four articles discuss the specific application of social media in teaching the writing module of English proficiency exams, including the Test for English Majors Band 4[TEM-4] [51]

and the College English Test Band 4 (CET-4) [52-54]. The remaining 12 articles, with English expression ability expansion as the core, extend the teaching content beyond the curriculum, such as conducting extracurricular oral exercises on topics related to unit themes, close to life, or current hot topics [40], TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design Conference) speech learning tasks [26], and extracurricular reading "The Penguins are Going on Vacation" (from the book Sight Words Tales) [55].

The overall teaching process promotes improvements in oral accuracy [39, 45], breadth [40], fluency [46], coherence [40], and appropriateness [40]. Additionally, it also enhances the accuracy [43], richness [42], coherence [43], and appropriateness [56] of written expression language.

5. Conclusion and Outlook

Based on 82 journal articles, this paper has reviewed the development status of social media-assisted English expression teaching research in China from August 2013 to August 2023. It has been found that there are abundant achievements in relevant theories and practices, with more research on teaching models, insufficient research on parental roles, and lacking scientific feedback evaluation systems and supervision systems. Building on these findings, the author provides future research trends for reference by relevant researchers.

5.1 Deepening the Promotion of Social Media-Assisted English Expression Teaching and Improving the Research on Influencing Mechanisms

Out of the 82 studies, 69 have conducted macro-level research on teaching models. These models are classified into "hybrid teaching models based on social media platforms," "online teaching models based on WeChat mini-programs, official accounts, QQ classrooms, and other functions," and "community-based teaching models based on mobile interactive technology." These three models have examined the impact of social media-assisted teaching on students' English oral expression and writing through methods such as interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations, including improvements in vocabulary accuracy, fluency of oral expression, syntactic complexity, and logical thinking. In the future, it is necessary to deepen the practice-oriented research on social media-assisted English expression teaching, optimize online social media application methods, and integrate online interaction designs into offline activities.

Moreover, there is a lack of research at the micro level. Only six articles have examined the influencing factors and mechanisms of social media-assisted English expression teaching, involving meta-cognitive levels, critical thinking abilities, task motivation, and autonomous learning abilities. By understanding the influencing factors and mechanisms at the micro level, personalized educational needs of students can be better met and more targeted feedback can be provided. In this process, teachers can understand students' learning motivations and interests, then optimize teaching strategies and resource allocation. Related theoretical construction can also gain more empirical support, promoting the development of social media-assisted teaching in this field. Therefore, future research should strengthen the study of influencing factors and mechanisms at the micro level in social media-assisted teaching.

5.2 Expanding Research Targets and Paying Attention to the Potential Value of Parents' Practices

Existing research mainly focuses on students and teachers, mostly exploring the impact of social media-assisted English expression teaching on students and teachers through testing, surveys, interviews, classroom observations, etc. However, there is scarce research on the potential value of

parents in the teaching process. Some students may not have the conditions to use social media at any time, and some parents may hold outdated views and prejudices against the use of mobile devices[57]. Vygotsky metaphorically likened schools and families to educators, emphasizing the necessity of collaboration between the two, with consistent goals, orientations, and beliefs. Effective parental involvement in English teaching not only enhances students' autonomy in learning but also cultivates their interest, confidence, and good habits in learning English, thereby improving their English learning abilities [58]. Therefore, research targets should be expanded, particularly focusing on the role of parents in social media-assisted English expression teaching, including the motivation of family environment for oral and written English practice, the interaction between parents and students on social media, parents' perception and feedback on students' learning progress.

5.3 Enriching Research Methods, Improving Feedback Evaluation Systems and Supervision Systems

Existing research is predominantly empirical, with a focus on mixed methods. Many studies simply use domestic and foreign scales to create questionnaires, supplemented by interviews and classroom observations, with relatively simple research methods. Quantitative research typically employs experimental and survey methods to compare aspects such as pre- and post-test oral expression or writing scores, learning satisfaction, pragmatic abilities, and autonomous learning abilities, with fewer advanced statistical techniques (such as structural equation modeling and regression analysis) being used. Additionally, there are many cases where the research period is not long enough and the sample size is insufficient, leading to issues of result rigidity. In the future, social media-assisted English expression teaching needs to utilize various analytical methods and research tools to explore the relationships between various elements of social media-assisted English expression teaching.

Furthermore, oral English assessment differs from single-standard written assessment, and there are also difficulties in evaluating oral assignments, especially homework or extracurricular activities, where teachers may find it challenging to confirm whether learning tasks have been completed[58], and even cases of students chatting or playing games during experiments have been observed[59]. There is an urgent need to explore diversified evaluation methods, including automated assessment tools, peer assessment among students, parental evaluation, etc. Establishing a scientific supervision system, including teacher training, regular assessment, and clear ethical standards, is essential to ensure effective supervision and support for students' learning.

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