

Teaching Research under the “Internet plus” Initiative: Driving Teacher Professional Development in the Digital Era

Longjun Zhou

Division of Education and Economy, China Center, International Education Communication Agency, the BASE, USA

*“Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.”
—Zora Neale Hurston*

INFORMATION technology permeates every facet of human society in the internet age. The internet has fundamentally transformed human interactions by providing unprecedented support for interpersonal and inter-organizational communication and information sharing. As the paramount technological tool in the contemporary world, it is instigating social reconstruction (Li, 2017). Currently, the comprehensive impact of the internet on education is intensifying, bringing about digital transformation of education across the globe (Zhong, 2019).

In the “Internet plus” era, information technology has tremendously changed the educational behavior of teachers. The OECD published a report titled “Innovating Teachers’ Professional Learning through Digital Technologies” in 2020 that outlines the requirements for improving teacher learning through new technologies. These requirements include ensuring that teachers have access to high-quality ICT, enhancing teachers’ digital competence, and encouraging teachers to participate in technology-based learning activities (Mineá-Pic, 2020). To sustain and optimize their professional development, it is important for teachers to leverage digital technologies in teaching research. Teachers in the information era are expected to be digital instruction designers and executors, digital education resource developers, digital teaching evaluators, internet-based teaching researchers, and knowledge management experts (Zheng & Zhang, 2023). Hence, internet-based teaching research, as a powerful driver for teachers’ professionalism, has become a key factor in a nation’s digital transformation of education.

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In recent years, digitally supported education and teaching research is perceived as a strategic effort for education development in China. The Chinese government has issued a series of papers to promote online education and teaching research. The State Council's (2018) "Opinions on Comprehensively Intensifying the Reform of Teacher Staffing in the New Era" emphasize the needs for transforming teacher education and training methods, promoting the integration of information technology into teacher training, and implementing a hybrid system that combines online and offline research and training. The Ministry of Education of China (2019) released the "Opinion on Strengthening and Improving Educational Research for the New Era's Basic Education", stressing that education and teaching research institutions must actively explore innovative research paradigms in the context of the popularization of information technology. The "Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Construction of New-Generation Educational Infrastructure and Building a High-Quality Supportive System for Education," issued by the Ministry of Education and five other departments in 2021, affirm the necessity of harnessing artificial intelligence to promote teacher professional development and popularizing adaptive learning and online teaching research based on intelligent diagnostics and analytics (Ministry of Education of China, 2021). In its 2023's "Action Plans for Intensifying the Reform of Basic Education Curricula and Instruction," the Ministry of Education of China (2023) proposed to strengthen the provision of professional guidance for teaching research, promote innovation in teaching research methods, and support collaborative teaching research against the backdrop of digital transformation in education.

In the context of the accelerated development of internet technologies, how to realize more open, coordinated, and efficacious teaching research is a challenge faced by teacher researchers as well as a key issue in the building of a novel system of teacher professional development (Li et al., 2023). *Online Teaching Research in China in the Context of Educational Digitization in this issue* gives an overview of the history of online teaching research among Chinese teachers, delves into the promotive factors underlying its development, and pinpoints inadequacies in its current practices (Zhou, 2024). It provides implications for developing high-quality education and teaching research based on internet and information technologies.

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Correspondence to:

Longjun Zhou
 Division of Education and Economy
 China Center
 International Education Communication Agency
 The BASE
 USA
 E-mail: 294437034@qq.com

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