

Professional Development of Kindergarten Teachers in China from 2012 to 2022

—A Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract: This present study is based on a sample of 308 research papers on the professional development of kindergarten teachers (PDKT) collected by China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) from 2012 to 2022. CiteSpace software is used to conduct bibliometric and visualization analysis on the PDKT in China. The research results show that the number of literatures on the PDKT in China presents an uneven overall growth trend. However, the research subjects have not yet formed a close academic team, and the degree of academic consensus in the field is still low. The high-frequency keywords in the research on the PDKT are rural areas, kindergarten-based teaching and research, and narrative research. Case studies, key event studies, novice teacher and teacher learning communities on kindergarten teachers will be the focus of future research. On this basis, the present study makes five recommendations for future research: future research needs to strengthen the cooperation between researchers and institutions; strengthen the research on kindergarten teachers' professional development strategies, evaluation systems and teacher growth path; pay attention to rural areas and novice teachers; increase micro research and empirical research on teachers in education and teaching activities; and unify and deepen the details of future chart analysis using CiteSpace.

Keywords: professional development of kindergarten teachers, CiteSpace, bibliometric analysis

1. Introduction

Early childhood education not only lays the foundation for an individual's lifelong growth, but also has a sustainable and far-reaching impact on an individual's lifelong development. At present, the professional development of kindergarten teachers (PDKT) is not only an urgent need for the individuals' growth of teachers or the internal development of education, but also the appeal of the times for the reform of preschool education. Emphasis on the PDKT has gradually become the basic consensus of all sectors of society. In addition, the researcher found that the current research on the application of bibliometric methods in the PDKT is relatively lacking. The function of bibliometric research is that the growth of scientific literature can reflect the emergence, development and future trends of a certain subject or technical field. Bibliometric research provides decision-making basis

for the selection of scientific research topics. Therefore, based on the professional background of the researcher and the hot issues of preschool education, this study attempts to analyze the PDKT through the method of bibliometrics.

Researchers have different explanations for the PDKT, mainly emphasizing the dynamic process of teachers' professional growth and professional skills improvement, focusing on teachers' professional development stages and professional ability training. Some scholars believed that professional development was also affected by the development background, including policy systems, social environment, kindergarten culture, and other factors [1]. In connection with China's relevant policies, the "Professional Standards for Kindergarten Teachers", officially promulgated in 2012, is the national basic requirement for the professional quality of qualified kindergarten teachers. The basic content of the "Professional Standards" includes three dimensions: professional philosophy and teacher ethics, professional knowledge, and professional ability. Combining the above definitions and contexts, in this study, the PDKT is defined as a dynamic process of enhancing professional emotions, knowledge, and skills for teachers who develop education and teaching for young children aged 3-6 years under the dimension of their own acquisition and the dimension of external developmental contexts.

In terms of research content, the researchers pointed out the factors that affect teachers' professional development and the limitations of current research. For example, Yang and Rao believed that professional development and in-service teacher training were closely related, while the quality of preschool teachers in rural China was relatively low compared to urban areas [2]. Moreover, professional training ignored the real needs of rural early childhood teachers. Wan, Gu, and McLachlan argued that the traditional Chinese "stage theory" had its limitations in explaining the PDKT [3]. Therefore, it is imperative to explore the professional development of teachers in depth. The current research has pointed out that the existing research on teacher professional development is insufficient, and transformation is urgently needed.

In this study, the subject of "PDKT" was accurately searched for papers in the CNKI full-text database, and a total of 1072 related papers were found. Among them, after 2012, related research showed a substantial growth trend, and most of the research on teachers' professional development was concentrated during this period. Most of the current research focuses on the professional development strategies and directions of kindergarten teachers. For example, Wang investigated the current situation of kindergarten teachers' post-service training and found that kindergarten-based teaching and research was important mean for teachers' professional development [4]. However, no system has yet been formed in China. Guo, Cao and He proposed to create a concrete context-based approach that was consistent with the concept of gamification learning and was connected with children's development and teacher support, offering new ideas on how to reform existing kindergartens teacher training [5].

Through categorizing, the researchers found that there was still a large research space in PDKT study. Since 2012, the research content and research methods of kindergarten teachers' professional development have been greatly enriched and changed in more than ten years, but the current research lacks a systematic review and summary of decades of research changes. The innovation of this paper is that there are very few precedents of bibliometric research on the PDKT. Therefore, this study attempts to use bibliometric analysis methods to reveal the development and changes of kindergarten teacher professional development research since 2012.

2. Research Method

2.1. Sample

Using the standard search method, the researcher searched the databases in China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) with the theme of "kindergarten teachers' professional development" and the three source journals of CSSCI (Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index), Peking University Core and AMI (Chinese Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences) from 2012 to 2022. The selected literatures were excluded from non-academic literature such as advertisements, conferences, and reports, so retrieved 105 academic journals and 203 relevant documents. Finally, 308 research samples were obtained.

2.2. Research Tools

This study used CiteSpace software to sort out the above-mentioned relevant literatures, and analyzed the current situation of kindergarten teachers' professional development research in the past ten years. Through the visual analysis method, drew a scientific knowledge map, and depicted the hot spots and development trends of the PDKT research. On this basis, this study analyzed the deficiencies in the research on the PDKT, and accordingly proposed directions for further research in the future.

2.3. Research Tools and Data Processing

In this study, the above-retrieved documents were imported from CNKI into CiteSpace software in the format of Refworks, and a data processing project with the theme of "PDKT" was established. The key content of this article was to analyze the following aspects: (1) Annual publication volume and distribution of changes; (2) Distribution of authors of documents; (3) Sources and cooperation of publication institutions; (4) Research hotspot analysis based on keyword co-occurrence; (5) Research trend analysis.

3. Results and Analysis

3.1. Annual Publication Volume and Change Distribution

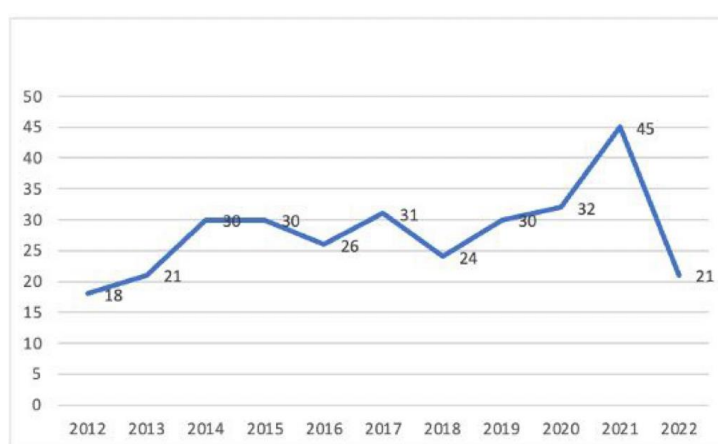


Figure 1: Trend chart of the number of literature related to the PDKT from 2012 to 2022.

Combined with the statistical chart of the annual publication volume (Figure 1), the number of research papers on the PDKT in China has shown an uneven overall growth trend, especially during 2012-2014 and 2018-2021. The volume of publications on kindergarten teacher professional

development research has shown a trend of substantial growth. In 2021, the number of research results increased the most, 13 more than the previous year, reaching the highest number of research results each year (45 articles). Combined with the top-ranked documents cited by China National Knowledge Network since 2012, it is found that most of papers referred to the "Professional Standards for Kindergarten Teachers (Trial)" promulgated in 2012. The increase in the number of research on the PDKT in China is deeply affected by relevant policies.

Then, between 2021 and 2022, the number of published papers dropped rapidly by 24, perhaps due to the lack of new research perspectives to advance subsequent studies. From 2014 to 2018, the number of published articles fluctuated within the range of 24-31 articles. Since 2012, the number of research papers on the PDKT in China has risen rapidly and declined slightly, and then fluctuated within a relatively high range. This development trend is mainly due to the correlation between the research attention on PDKT and the policy orientation. On the one hand, it shows the policy particularity of the main body of teacher professional development research, which involves the issue of educational equity. On the other hand, it also prompts follow-up research need to further enhance the comprehensiveness and depth of research in this field.

3.2. Author Distribution of Documents

It is also very important to scientifically evaluate the characteristics of academic exchanges and development in this field by paying attention to the authors who are at the core of this research field and further analyzing information such as cooperation and mutual citation relations among scholars in this field. Enter the periodical literature into the database, set the node type in CiteSpace as author, and obtain an author cooperation network with 166 nodes, 99 connections, and a density of 0.0072. This data is at a low level, indicating that the cooperation between authors is relatively scattered. Figure 2 only shows authors who have published more than 2 articles on this topic and authors who have cooperative relationships. According to figure 2, Yan Zhou, Pingzhi Ye and Mo Wang are the most influential scholars. However, the cooperation relationship of several core researchers is also not close. In the entire kindergarten teacher professional development researcher network, there are many single node or paired nodes, indicating that the frequency of teamwork of the relevant authors is low. It can be seen that the research on the PDKT in China still lacks strong and cohesive leaders and closely cooperating research teams. There are too few academic connections between researchers, the rate of mutual citation of literature is low, and the degree of academic recognition between them is low. There is no broad academic consensus in this field. In the future, attention should be paid to creating opportunities to strengthen exchanges and communication among scholars, and to promote the consensus on the core theories of kindergarten teachers' professional development.



Figure 2: Collaboration network of authors with high publication volume of professional development studies of kindergarten teachers in China.

3.3. Sources and Cooperation of Issuing Institutions

The source distribution of issuing institutions is shown in Table 1. The data in the table shows that there are a total of 9 research institutions that have published more than 6 papers (the tenth one has too many ties so it is not listed). Among them, the top three institutions that published the most papers all published more than 10 papers. They paid more attention to the research on the PDKT and contributed to the development of research on this topic to a certain extent. From the perspective of institutional nature, these research institutions are all institutions of higher learning, and the above nine research institutions are teacher-training institutions, mainly the six comprehensive teacher-training institutions directly under the Ministry of Education. Judging from the institutions that issued papers on the research on the PDKT, non-teaching colleges and universities and other research institutions except universities need to pay more attention to the PDKT.

Table 1: Distribution of sources of major publishing organizations.

Institutions	Number of publications
Southwestern University	16
Central China Normal University	12
East China Normal University	10
Yunnan Normal University	9
Northeast Normal University	8
Shaanxi Normal University	8
Northwest Normal University	8
Nanjing Normal University	7
Faculty of Education, Beijing Normal University	6

In order to clearly present the cooperation between different institutions, CiteSpace was used to generate a visual knowledge map of cooperation between research institutions in the field of PDKT.

It can be seen from Table 2 that the Faculty of Education of Beijing Normal University, the College of Preschool Education of Capital Normal University, and the China Institute of Educational Finance Science of Peking University are the three institutions that cooperate most with other institutions, while there are not many cooperative institutions, only 3-4. There is little cooperation between universities and other research institutions (e.g., educational research institutions, educational practice institutions, and government departments). Most of the literature has been done collaboratively by faculty members within universities, and less frequently by inter-university or other research institutions other than universities. Cooperation and exchange between different research institutions is a process of mutual learning and mutual progress. Therefore, the cooperation between universities and other research institutions should attract the attention of various universities.

Table 2: Collaboration of research institutions for PDKT in China during 2012-2022.

Institutions	Cooperating institutions
Faculty of Education, Beijing Normal University	Chaoyang Branch, Beijing Institute of Education College of Preschool Education, Capital Normal University College of Educational Science, Daqing Normal University China Public Administration Research Center, Sun Yat-sen University
College of Education Science, Chongqing Normal University	College of Preschool Education, Chongqing College of Humanities and Science
Xiamen Academy of Education Science, Fujian Province	Xiamen City, Fujian Province Siming District Teachers Training School
China Institute of Educational Finance Science, Peking University	College of Preschool Education, Capital Normal University Xiamen City, Fujian Province Siming District Teachers Training School Xiamen Academy of Education Science, Fujian Province
College of Preschool Education, Capital Normal University	Kindergarten affiliated with Capital Normal University Department of Education, Beijing Normal University China Institute of Educational Finance Research, Peking University

3.4. Analysis of Research Hotspots Based on Keyword Co-occurrence

This study uses CiteSpace to process the exported literature, sets the network nodes as keywords, and draws a network knowledge map of the co-occurrence of keywords in the research of Chinese preschool teachers in the past ten years. According to Wang et al., keywords with high centrality and

frequency represent the common concern of researchers over a period of time, that is, research hotspots [6]. The higher the frequency and centrality of keywords, the more times the keyword appears, the more obvious the intermediary effect, and the greater the degree of influence on other keywords [6]. Based on the data obtained from the keyword co-occurrence network knowledge map, this study counted the keyword frequency and centrality, and sorted the keyword frequency from high to low, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Frequency and centrality distribution of high-frequency keywords.

Keywords	Frequency	Centrality	Year
Professional development	134	0.65	2012
Kindergarten teachers	54	0.33	2012
Kindergarten	18	0.07	2012
Rural areas	13	0.03	2012
Professional standards	11	0.02	2012
Kindergarten-based teaching and research	8	0.04	2012
Professional competence	7	0.02	2012
Narrative research	6	0.07	2013
Teachers	6	0.03	2012
Core teachers	6	0.02	2012
Teacher training	6	0.01	2012
Status survey	6	0.01	2013
Beginning teachers	5	0.00	2016
Preschool education	5	0.03	2015
Case study	5	0.02	2015
Community	5	0.00	2018
Status	4	0.01	2012
Strategy	4	0.01	2012
Key event	4	0.01	2013
Professional quality	4	0.03	2014
Transferred teachers	4	0.00	2013
Teacher education	4	0.03	2013

Table 3 shows that the frequency and centrality of the three keywords "kindergarten", "Kindergarten teachers" and "preschool education" are relatively high. However, since these topics are relatively macro concepts in the field of preschool education, they cannot represent a certain research topic; and "teachers" and "professional development" are the topics of this research, so it is impossible to present the specific content of the research in detail. Therefore, such data need to be screened out during the analysis process. Based on the above principles, the analysis of the keywords in Table 3 shows that there are obvious crossover phenomena among the main keywords. According to the principle of frequency greater than or equal to 6 and centrality greater than or equal to 0.03, the high-frequency keywords obtained include "rural areas", "kindergarten-based teaching and research", and "narrative research". The next section provides a detailed explanation of these three high-frequency keywords.

3.4.1. Rural Areas

With the increased investment in preschool education in China, the overall development of preschool education in China is improving. However, due to various factors, rural preschool education is still among the weak links in the development of preschool education in China. For example, teacher training in rural areas is considered too difficult, too abstract, and disconnected from the daily practice of rural teachers [1]. Secondly, due to geographical isolation and limited teacher training resources, rural teachers have less access to professional training and lower quality of teacher training compared to urban teachers [7]. Hong also adds that in the context of the "Internet +" era, new challenges are posed to the structure of teachers' competencies and professional development approaches [8]. It can be seen that facing the problems of weak rural development and single-teacher training, leading teachers to actively respond to the challenges of the new era and achieve independent professional development is an inevitable path and active choice in the modernization process of preschool education.

3.4.2. Kindergarten-based Teaching and Research

Since kindergarten-based teaching and research was introduced as an independent concept in 2006, the construction and learning of kindergarten-based teaching and research have gradually received attention from all sectors of society. This high-frequency keyword is considered to be an important way for teachers' professional development. Enhancing the professional capacity of kindergarten teachers through kindergarten-based teaching and learning not only benefits teacher team building, but also ensures the quality of kindergarten teaching and learning. Current research has found that kindergarten teachers have problems mainly in teaching skills, teaching reflection, and teaching research [9]. As a result, researchers have generally proposed strategies to address these problems in terms of both teachers' own motivation and "significant others," such as improving teachers' own motivation and reflective skills, and strengthening the integration of resources and good cooperation between kindergarten and parents [10, 11]. In general, kindergarten-based teaching and research focuses on combining theory and practice, reflecting the concern of early childhood teachers' professional development for their subject status and promoting their professional autonomy.

3.4.3. Narrative Research

Narrative research on the PDKT conducts research on kindergarten teachers with different identities, such as male teachers, rural teachers, transferred teachers, and teachers who are not majors in preschool education. These studies focus on describing and analyzing subtle events such as kindergarten teachers' understanding of professional development and the process of education and teaching. The findings of the current study show that kindergarten teachers have the following problems in narrative research: kindergarten teachers have a rather one-sided understanding of the connotation and role of educational narrative research; there are deviations in the rational understanding of the process and methods of research; there are deficiencies in the quality of the results; and the frequency of educational narrative research conducted by skilled teachers is low [12]. The researchers also made suggestions for improvement: for example, kindergartens should provide effective professional leadership, establish a sound evaluation and reward mechanism, and provide a diverse platform for communication and display; kindergarten teachers should improve their understanding of the significance of educational research, enhance their educational theoretical literacy, strengthen their knowledge related to educational narrative research, and exercise their writing skills [12]. This study argues that teacher narrative research is conducive to shifting the research perspective on PDKT from the macro to the micro level, and to more purposefully identify problems in current practice and propose strategies for improvement.

In summary, the above three high-frequency keywords are developed from three different perspectives: the issue of educational equity at the national macro level, the professional improvement strategies of teacher groups, and the research methods of researchers, which show that the research on the current situation of PDKT is becoming increasingly rich. These studies, through in-depth investigation and analysis with different focuses, can provide research directions for subsequent multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary research on related topics, and provide a strong push for kindergarten teachers' professional development.

3.5. Development Trend Analysis

Use the CiteSpace visual analysis tool software to check "keyword", analyze the keyword movement analysis on the data retrieved from CNKI, and click "Burstness" to get the burst keyword distribution map (Figure 3). Burst keywords represent the focus and attention on a research hotspot within a certain period of time, and the analysis of burst keywords can, to a certain extent, analyze the evolution of research themes and hotspots. As shown in Figure 3, there were 11 emergent keywords from 2012 to 2022. Among them, the keyword with the highest emergence intensity is "community", with a strength value of 2.14, and the starting emergence time is in 2018.

In addition, there are three phases of transformation in this time period. During 2012-2015, "core teachers", "teacher management", and "pre-service development" were the hot spots of this phase. From 2015 to 2016, "professional knowledge", "curriculum structure" and "preschool education" became the focus of research during this period. This shift in focus reflects a gradual shift from a holistic approach to teacher management and development to a more specific approach to curriculum and teachers themselves. After 2016, the focus shifted to "beginning teachers", "community", and "case studies". Research on PDKT in this period focused on teachers' micro-performance in educational activities, and a large number of studies on strategies to support kindergarten teachers' professional development, such as "forming a learning community of kindergarten teachers", emerged. The emergence of the keywords "teachers" and "key events" has continued to the present day, and they are progressively stronger keywords. This indicates that the academic community is gradually paying more attention to the related topics. In addition, the hot topics of "core teachers" and "beginning teachers" have been studied for a longer period of time. It can be seen that the PDKT in China is at a critical stage from "quantitative change" to "qualitative change", and future research should pay more attention to combining theory and practice. Research on early childhood teachers' case studies, critical incident studies, novice teacher, and teacher learning communities will continue to be hot in the future.

Top 11 Keywords with the Strongest Citation Bursts

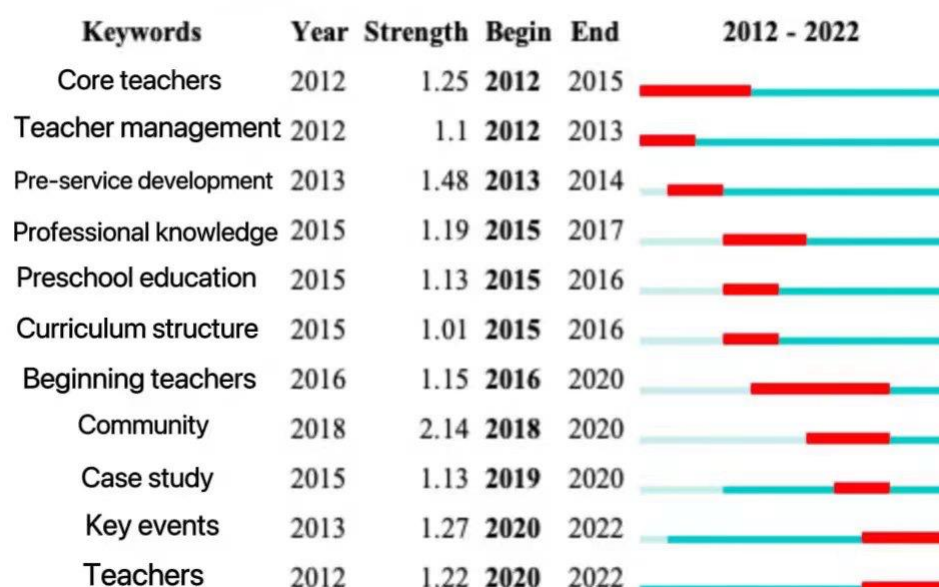


Figure 3: Distribution of emergent keywords for kindergarten teachers' professional development research from 2012-2022.

4. Discussion

According to the results, the following conclusions were drawn. First, from the perspective of the number of published papers and the age distribution, the number of research papers on the PDKT in China shown an unbalanced overall growth trend. With the promulgation of important policy documents, the volume of related issuances showed a substantial increase. The fluctuations between other adjacent years are relatively small, and the overall situation is relatively stable.

Second, from the perspective of the authors, a small number of core researchers have made great contributions to the research on the PDKT. Although there is still a certain gap between the research team and the ideal level, and the cooperation between researchers needs to be increased.

Third, from the perspective of research institutions, normal colleges and universities are the main positions for research on the PDKT in China, but there is little cooperation between universities and other research institutions except universities. Future research should strengthen the cooperation between researchers and between universities and institutions. More cooperation could promote the consensus on core theories of kindergarten teachers' professional development.

Fourth, the high-frequency keywords in the field of the PDKT from 2012 to 2022 include "rural areas", "kindergarten-based teaching and research", and "narrative research". The three high-frequency keywords are developed from three different perspectives: the national macro-level educational equity issues, the professional improvement strategies of teacher groups, and the research methods of researchers, which show that the relevant research is increasingly rich and diverse. Those results can provide research directions for in-depth studies.

Fifth, a total of 11 sudden keywords appeared in 2012-2022. The focus of the research has gradually shifted from the overall research on the management and training of teachers to the specific research on the curriculum and the teachers themselves. At the same time, the focus of research has shifted to the micro-performance of teachers in educational activities. A large number of strategic research that support the PDKT have emerged, such as "forming a kindergarten teacher learning

community". Therefore, the future research should pay more attention to the combination of theory and practice. Case studies, key event studies, novice teacher, and teacher learning communities of preschool teachers will continue to be popular in the future.

The research outlook of this article is mainly carried out from five aspects. First of all, in terms of the distribution of research power, in the follow-up research, the interaction and cooperation between researchers from different institutions and between researchers and front-line educators should be strengthened to form a stable and diverse research team. Second, in terms of research content, it is necessary to strengthen the research on kindergarten teachers' professional development strategies, evaluation systems and teacher growth paths. Multi-angle research is conducive to promoting the construction of the core theoretical system of kindergarten teachers' professional development. Thirdly, in terms of research objects, particular regions and special groups should be paid more attention. At present, the PDKT in rural areas, remote areas and ethnic areas in China is facing many difficulties. Also, the professional development of male teachers and novice teachers still needs to be focused on in future research. Fourth, in terms of research methods, it is necessary to increase micro-research and empirical research on teachers' teaching activities in education, and minimize purely theoretical research in general terms. Finally, different researchers have different interpretations and processing of nodes when using CiteSpace for research, and there is currently no unified and authoritative explanation. For example, for the processing of sporadic nodes, due to the low frequency, the lowest parameters should be set before the data operation, or these nodes should be excluded when the results are displayed, resulting in some data and features easily ignored. Therefore, future research methods using CiteSpace need to be further standardized and deepened.

5. Conclusion

In this study, the relevant literatures in CNKI with CSSCI, AMI, and Peking University core journals as sources were used as samples to sort out the basic situation, hotspots, and development trends of the research on the PDKT in China from 2012 to 2022. The number of related studies in 2012-2022 has generally grown unevenly and is affected by educational policies. Related research has shifted from macro and theoretical research to specific content of teachers' teaching process and strategies for improving teachers' professional competence. This change is conducive to the combination of educational theory and practice, the promotion of individual education and teaching ability, and also provides research direction for future research. However, this research finds that the current collaborative relationship among researchers is not strong, which is not conducive to the establishment of a unified core theory and the formation of a strong cooperative research relationship. Based on that, some suggestions were made. In terms of future research content, research on promotion strategies, teachers in rural areas and micro research should be strengthened. In terms of research methods, the internal cooperation among researchers should be strengthened. Moreover, the use of CiteSpace to deal with sporadic nodes should be deepened in a unified way in the future.

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