DECADES IN REVIEW: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF GLOBAL AND CHINESE RESEARCH ON COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING (2003-2022)

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Article Info	Abstract

College English courses are foundational for nearly all college students in China. The landscape of College English teaching in China has undergone iterative reforms, leading to a persistent debate between academic English and general English. While these reforms have generally enhanced university English teaching, there has been a tendency to overemphasize model constructs in college English teaching research.

In response to the evolving integration of college English cultural teaching models and modern information technology, several scholars have endeavored to create intelligent systems that extend the reach and depth of modern information technology in college English cultural education. These initiatives unlock the vast potential of modern information technology, paving the way for innovative directions in college English cultural teaching.

This paper draws upon the work of Zhang and others who have identified effective methods for teaching English using mobile devices. By synthesizing these advancements, the paper contributes to the ongoing discourse surrounding the optimal blend of technology and pedagogy in college English teaching, while maintaining scientific and efficient approaches.

1.   Introduction

College English courses are essential courses for almost all college students in China [1]. College English teaching in China has undergone reforms almost every ten years since the reform and opening up, and even after several rounds of reforms, there still exists a debate between academic English and general English [8]. In China, university English teaching practices have generally been improved and enhanced by reforms targeting university English [5], but the frequent reforms have led to an overemphasis on model constructs in college English teaching research [23].

In consideration of integrated developing tendency of college English cultural teaching model and modern information technology, there are papers that aimed to design and build up an intelligence-aided system so as to extend the depth and width of the application of modern information technology in college English cultural teaching as well as to exploit the great application potential of modern information technology in college English cultural teaching, thus opening a new way and presenting a direction for college English cultural teaching [16]. Zhang et al [29] identified a method for teaching English via mobile devices that is both scientific and efficient. As College English teaching has faced many opportunities and challenges in the new era due to the booming social economy, theories and practice of English for specific purposes (ESP) can assist in finding solutions and

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meeting the learning needs of college students, particularly those from applicationoriented universities. Wang intended to propose feasible methods to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of ESP teaching in these universities[12]. Based on the self-constructed flipped classroom teaching model, Du developed a teaching process that examines non-English majors' ability to manage their learning, their self-learning psychology, and their self-learning behavior [28]. Huang explored how to apply cooperative learning in college English teaching to stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning, improve students' classroom participation and autonomous learning ability, enhance students' sense of cooperation and competition, and boost students' comprehensive ability to apply English to improve teaching effectiveness and quality [26]. Ning focused on the reform of college English teaching under the modern apprenticeship training mode [10]. Wang [25] examined the online and offline English teaching in colleges and universities in the Internet environment. Other influential work includes Zhou [32], Wang [16], Qin [20].

This essay looks at international and Chinese researches on College English teaching over the past two decades (2003-2022) and attempts to seek the focus of these studies. Through an examination of key international and Chinese journals on College English teaching, it is hoped that this paper will provide insight into how research in this field can complement one another.

2. Methodology

This study uses a bibliometric approach to examine the current status and trends of scholarly research. Bibliometrics is a mathematical and statistical tool used to describe, evaluate, and predict the current status and trends of science and technology using the quantity of various literature features [9].

The data were analyzed and presented with CiteSpace 6.1.R6 visual analytic software. The core collection was retrieved via the Web of Science database, and the data sources were the Chinese Social Science Citation Index (CSSCI) publications from the Chinese Social Science Research and Evaluation Centre. As part of the search for Chinese literature, the publication period was limited to 2003-2022 and the selected type of literature is journal articles. 3337 documents were collected after searching "College English teaching"; 129 were obtained after searching the term "public English teaching"; 425 were identified after searching the term "teaching for non-English majors". Altogether 3891 articles were retrieved in Chinese, and 3416 were examined following the removal of duplicates. 1295 out of 1312 articles after excluding duplicate from the core collection of the Web of Science database for the years 2003-2022 make up the total amount of English-language papers [6].

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 Research Hotspots Analysis

Cluster analysis was used to map the co-occurrence of keywords in the teaching of English at Chinese and international universities. Specifically, the following criteria were established:

a) The publication period is set between "2003-2022";
b) One year is set per slice;
c) The author, keywords and reference were set as node types.

Table 1: List of keywords with a frequency of 20 or more occurrences

Count	Year	Keywords
811	2003	College English
181	2003	teaching mode
141	2003	English teaching
128	2003	teaching reform
112	2004	self-learning
59	2014	flipped classroom
56	2005	English major
52	2010	academic English

51	2003	classroom teaching
50	2003	foreign language teaching
45	2004	constructivism
42	2004	writing teaching
42	2005	curriculum provision
36	2003	teaching
33	2003	English writing
31	2003	teaching method
26	2003	graded teaching
26	2003	cooperative learning
26	2003	multimedia
22	2008	corpus
22	2003	vocabulary teaching
21	2005	Information technology

List of keywords with a frequency of 20 or more occurrences is shown in Table 1. The size of the nodes in Keyword co-occurrences in China's language teaching journals demonstrates the frequency of the keyword; larger and more frequent nodes represent more significant research related to the keyword. The most frequently occurring keywords are "teaching mode" and "foreign language teaching" in addition to "College English," "English major," "teaching," and "foreign language teaching," which denote the research field. Most commonly used terms include "teaching mode", "teaching reform", "selflearning", "flipped classroom", "academic English", and "classroom teaching", and "constructivism". The clustering relationship between these keywords reveals two key characteristics of English teaching research in Chinese universities, which are closely related to this study:

First, macro reform and model construction take precedence over specific teaching processes. The keyword co-occurrence cluster indicates that college English teaching models and College English teaching reforms have occupied the focus of academic publication in past studies and are highly relevant to two China's Chinese programmatic documents, the Teaching Requirements for College English

Courses and the Guidelines for Teaching College English, suggesting that reforms are often policy-driven.

Second, the dearth of empirical analysis in College English Teaching in China is gradually remedied. Although not with the highest centrality, among the key words with a frequency of 20 times or more, the number of words representing research on specific teaching process or results such as "classroom teaching," "teaching methods," "cooperative learning," "multimedia," "multimedia", "vocabulary teaching," and "information technology" increased compared with study results years ago [23], suggesting that empirical research is given more emphasis in recent years although it still falls outside College English's core research area [30]. List of keywords with a frequency of 20 or more occurrences is shown in Table 2.
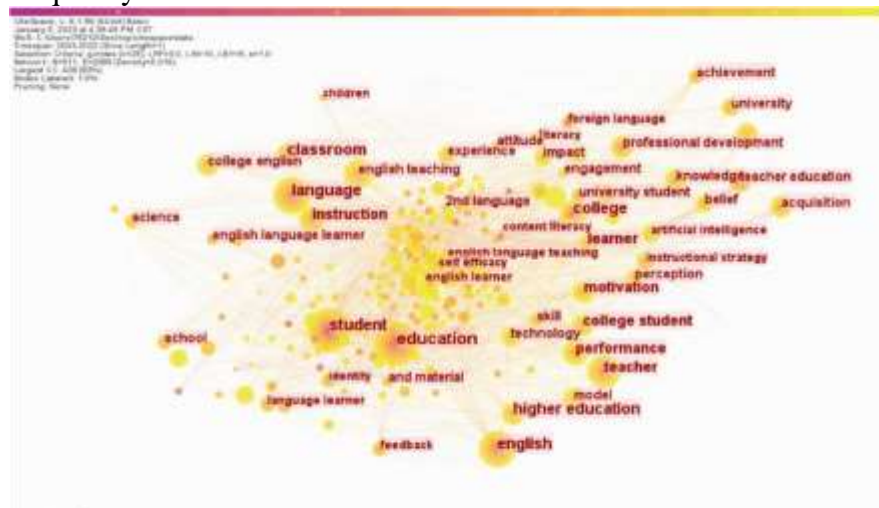
Figure 1: Keyword co-occurrences in international language teaching journals
Table 2: List of keywords with a frequency of 20 or more occurrences

Count	Year	Keywords
87	2009	English
80	2004	student
73	2008	education
69	2011	language
60	2015	college English
50	2017	English teaching
45	2017	higher education
39	2008	teacher
32	2010	college student
30	2018	motivation
29	2016	instruction
28	2004	learner
27	2010	performance
27	2017	model
26	2004	college
25	2009	knowledge
22	2017	college English teaching
22	2007	classroom
22	2018	perception

Figure 1 shows the keyword co-occurrences in international language teaching journals. International study on College English teaching places more emphasis on minute details such as student, teacher, motivation, instruction, learner, performance, knowledge, classroom, and perception. The major participants in teaching, student and teacher, are the two main subjects of interest in international ELT research, despite the word "model" also being a crucial term[11].

Differences between international researches on College English teaching and those in Chinese universities are summarized as follow: international studies focus on the subjects (student and teacher), motivation, situation, and effect of teaching and learning, while studies in China focus on reform and model construction. Researches on international language teaching have developed more empirically rather than based on models due to their focus on learners themselves and micro-level analysis of classroom instruction, aiming to propose and validate effective solutions to specific problems encountered by learners or classroom teachers [13-15].

3.2 *Evolution of research hotspots*

To discover hotspot movements in the study on teaching Chinese and other languages outside of China, the author utilized a sensitive burst item test, which is often used to detect the rise or fall of a certain subject phrase or keyword [21].

Burst items of China's College English teaching research in the past two decades depicts how college English teaching research has developed over the past 20 years in Chinese colleges. It illustrates how many of the cutting-edge topics of college English teaching in China are driven by events or influenced by an external reform or model. For instance, the Ministry of Education formally introduced the Undergraduate Teaching Quality and Teaching Reform Project of Colleges and Universities in 2003. The terms "foreign language teaching," "Ministry of Education," and "teaching mode" were highlighted in reference to the programmatic teaching reform from 2003 to 2007; the keyword "academic English" boasts a strong citation burst during 2013 to 2019, reaching a strength of 12.68, which echoes the debate and reform on academic English that began in 2011; the keyword "teaching guidelines" suggests that the Curriculum and Teaching Requirements for College English publication has a guiding influence on college English instruction in China. The Chinese Ministry of Education released the "Guidelines for the Ideological and Political Construction of Curriculum in Higher Education Institutions" in

2020 to enhance morality cultivation in universities and make full use of each course's nurturing functions, so the keyword "morality cultivation" has recently emerged as a new trend in Chinese College English teaching research. In contrast to China's College English teaching, international teaching research hotspots feature less fluctuations over time, shorter overall burst periods, and lower burst strength. The burst strength of keywords in international journals over the past 20 years has been below 5.0, indicating that international journals tend to focus on a certain topic less consistently than Chinese journals and may concentrate on a given topic at a particular shorter period. For instance, the items "teacher training," "teaching model," "identification," and "teaching reform" are underlined for just one year. International journals also place a greater emphasis on the two major participants of educational activities, and the research trend gradually shifts from teachers to students. For instance, the keywords of strongest citation bursts from 2012 to 2015 were "teacher education", "language learner" from 2018 to 2019, and "university student" from 2019 to 2020 respectively. The burst item for 2015 is "teaching strategy," indicating that intentional researchers have begun to concentrate on teaching strategies since that year. The burst item for 2016 is "achievement", and the that for 2019 is "self-efficacy", indicating that international researchers have begun to concentrate on the psychological elements of language teaching. When comparing the shifting hotspots in China's College English teaching research with those in international language teaching research, it becomes clear that the majority of international language teaching research is more endogenously driven with the development of research trends primarily being triggered by research on learners, research on teaching itself, or changes in research methods.

3.3 *Analysis of highly cited literature*

The frequency with which an article is cited increases its relevance to the academic research direction and importance in the pertinent field of research. Three of the ten publications in China's College English teaching research with the greatest cumulative citation frequency are directly related to teaching, while the other seven are associated with College English reform or curriculum development. Four of them [7] dealt with the direction of development of College English, two [4,24] explored the integration of technology with teaching, and two [27] dealt with curriculum construction. One looked at an empirical study of writers' motivation and skill on online writing platforms [18][31].

Similar to this, the ten articles or monographs that receive the most citations in international journals [2,3,17,19,22,26] are primarily related to innovations in teaching theory or research methods such as learner motivation, learning ability, learner feedback, meta-analytic research methods and learner's psychological elements.

4. Discussion and Reflections

Statistical analysis reveals that international attention has largely been focused on learners, teachers and classroom instruction. Comparatively, teaching reform and teaching model development, which have dominated College English teaching research in China, are the two most popular research topics over the past two decades.

The rising standard of English proficiency among university students and their changing learning requirements, making it difficult for the original teaching models and methodologies to keep up with the changes in students' ability to improve their overall application. The focus of tertiary students' English learning has also changed more towards the ability to utilize the language to get professional information and to communicate internationally in order to meet the needs of professional learning and transnational communication. Students' learning requirements have evolved from knowledge acquisition to competence enhancement, particularly in academic English and intercultural communication skills, affecting the demands on College English courses. In addition, as part of a national policy, national education authorities have given special attention to foreign language instruction.

Model building has both benefits and drawbacks in research. According to Zhu, positively, teaching models help summarize the various components of teaching and learning[23]. A teaching model provides a fairly comprehensive overview of the various components of teaching and learning such as students, teachers, teaching resources, and teaching methods. From a theoretical perspective to a practical perspective, it is a reasonably complete picture of the varying elements of teaching including students, teachers, resources, and methods. As a bridge between theory and practice, it connects the two parts of education. Moreover, a good teaching model is one that encapsulates effective teaching techniques. Good teaching models summarize, systematize, and enhance

effective teaching practices on a theoretical level. Furthermore, it is theoretically improved, which lessens the arbitrariness of instruction. As a final note, instructional models feature distinctive components that are easy to duplicate and support reform. On the down side, a boom in the development of teaching models necessitates consideration of their quality and efficacy at the same time. Quality and effectiveness of these models need to be considered. The drawback of the top-down focus is that there is a lot of administrative interference, some of which is appropriate and aids in university reform, but some of which is not in accordance with the standards of teaching and learning and must be remedied over time through new reforms.

Whereas empirical research is emphasized in studies on English teaching internationally, theoretical research is prioritized in studies on English teaching in Chinese universities. A significant amount of international research is conducted on language acquisition, learner characteristics, language learning process, and classroom teaching, all of which are factual propositions. Research in China focuses on teaching reform and model construction, both of which serve as value propositions, and theoretical research is the primary way in which such value propositions are argued. It is noteworthy, however, that empirical research on English language instruction in Chinese colleges has been on the rise.

College English instruction is ultimately about educating students. In a sense, the focus on bringing English teaching research back into the classroom is a return to the foundations of college English teaching [23]. College English teaching research should return to classroom research in order to better understand the students' learning needs. Additionally, returning to classroom teaching research is a crucial change from the standpoint of research methodologies. Theoretical and critical thinking, supported by empirical research, has long been the dominant paradigm in educational research in China. The study of college English teaching is not an exception [23]. It is certainly true that theoretical and critical thinking has contributed to the advancement of college English teaching research over the past twenty years. In college English teaching research, critical thinking facilitates clarifying some conceptual connotations, building an appropriate College English teaching model, and determining value orientations in College English teaching. However, it falls under the category of value-based reasoning and lacks a structured method for data collection and analysis. Due to its heavy reliance on logical arguments for discussion and introspection, it does not provide much normative guidance. A significant portion of the findings of the critical thinking are based on the opinions of the author. The conclusions drawn from the research are largely subjective, making them neither verifiable nor falsifiable. Empirical research focuses on fact-based observations of phenomena in College English teaching practice, develops an in-depth analysis based on facts and identifies the properties of those facts by employing quantitative or qualitative methods, providing more normative guidance. Thus, an effective strategy to synthesize the merits of studies on International and China's college English teaching can be appropriately conducting empirical research and using data from actual classroom instruction to demonstrate the validity of the model construct while utilizing teaching model as a tool for learning and teaching to calm the overanticipation of role models for once-for-all solutions to all issues in teaching and learning and the outright opposition as well as criticism, and to bridge theory and practice as well as teaching and learning in college English teaching and provide a complete picture of education activities.

5.   Conclusion

This study uses CiteSpace 6.1.R6 for bibliometric analysis of literatures on college English teaching from Chinese and international journals in the past twenty years, and knowledge graph is used to assess the differences between the two in terms of research hotspots and research methods. It is found that College English teaching research in China tends to focus more on model building and reform. In the majority of cases, theory-based research utilizes value judgments and critical thinking strategies; however, most international English language teaching and learning research is geared toward the teaching and learning process itself, and the majority of research utilizes empirical methodology. As appropriate, it is suggested that empirical research approach using data from actual classroom instruction may help studies in China to demonstrate the validity of the model construct, quell the over-anticipation of teaching models for universal fixes to all problems in teaching and learning as well as the outright opposition towards model building while the prominence given to teaching model and critical thinking in Chinese studies can provide logic clues for international studies to balance micro observation and macro construction in college English teaching.

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