

A Literature Review of Studies on Students' Intercultural Communicative Competence in College English Teaching in China

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Abstract. As globalization and cultural pluralism accelerate in the 21st century, China plays an increasingly significant role on the international stage with more frequent cooperation with other foreign countries. Therefore, high-quality as well as internationalized talents are in great demand and it is indispensable for them to have excellent intercultural communicative competence. College English Curriculum Requirements, published in 2010, clearly points out the necessity of cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence in the objectives as well as contents of college English teaching.

This research is a literature review which summarizes and analyzes researches which study students' intercultural communicative competence in college English teaching. With the databases of Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index Journals (CSSCI) and Core Journals (Chinese Core Journals of Beijing University), this paper collected all relevant journal papers and academic degree's dissertations published on China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) from 2010 to 2022. All collected research papers were summarized and analyzed in terms of three aspects, which were research trend, research methods and research contents.

According to the research, three results were found as follows: first, the overall trend of research quantities experienced a downward trend; second, in terms of research methods, the number of empirical researches and that of non-empirical researches were similar and speculative researches accounted for the most compared to researches of other methods; third, research contents were diversified and discussed from various perspectives.

Finally, two limitations existed in this research including limited number of both databases and research questions. There were only two databases and three research questions. Therefore, it is expected that future researches can have more explorations in these two aspects.

Keywords: Intercultural Communicative Competence; College English Teaching; Literature Review; Research Situations

1 Introduction

With globalization and cultural pluralism in the 21st century, the world has become a unity and China has increasing communication and more frequent relation with foreign countries. Consequently, we are closely interconnected with the outer world and are also required to communicate effectively with people of diverse cultural backgrounds. On this international

stage, intercultural communicative competence plays an increasingly significant role, which becomes a requisite for the internationalization of high-quality talents.

Since the study of intercultural communication was first introduced into China in the 1980s, it has been widely accepted in the field of foreign language education in the past decades. The main attention to foreign language teaching has been gradually altered from linguistic skills of foreign language learners to cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence.

Although the stress on cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence can be seen obviously in the curriculum requirements of college English and its importance has also received increasingly attention, the actual work of cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence still remains a great challenge. What is the actual effect of current intercultural communication education in colleges as well as universities in China? And do present English teaching practices realize their objectives of cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence?

As is well-known, traditional English teaching in Chinese colleges as well as universities is exam-oriented to a large extent and pays more attention to students' control of linguistic knowledge rather than grasp of related cultural knowledge. Thus, most non-English major students attach much importance to College English Test Band 4 (CET-4) as well as College English Test Band 6 (CET-6) which are regarded as standards of English ability. This greatly ignores the cultivation of students' intercultural communicative competence and consequently results in students' incapability of communicating with foreigners effectively. In this case, students don't actually master English or use English flexibly in its own cultural context.

Therefore, it is essential and necessary to integrate cultural teaching into English teaching in colleges as well as universities in China and find effective methods to cultivate students' intercultural communicative competence so as to meet the need of globalization as well as world development trend.

This paper endeavors to make a systematic generalization and analysis of all relevant research papers published on China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) from 2010 to 2022 which study the status-quo of students' intercultural communicative competence in English teaching in Chinese colleges as well as universities. In terms of research trend, research methods and research contents respectively, this paper summarizes and analyzes those collected research papers so as to provide reference for future related studies and contribute to the development of studies which focus on the cultivation of college students' intercultural communicative competence in English teaching.

2 Intercultural Communication and College English Teaching

Since Hymes, a famous American sociologist, proposes the conception of communicative competence in his book *On Communicative Competence* published in 1972 and was concerned with four sectors including possibility, feasibility, appropriateness as well as performance, scholars and researchers both abroad and at home have always been discussing intercultural communicative competence with great enthusiasm^[1]. Based on Hymes' definition, Canale and Swain (1980) make a reinterpretation and then put forward four dimensions of intercultural communicative competence: grammatical competence,

sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence and discourse competence.^[2]Kim(1991:259) notes that intercultural communicative competence is “the overall internal capability to manage key challenging features of intercultural communication”^[3]which helps to deal with cultural differences for effective communication. And from the intercultural perspective, Spitzberg (2000) views the intercultural communicative competence as a behavior that is appropriate as well as effective in a given context which encompasses skills, motivation and knowledge.^[4]

In China, based on Gudykunst’s notion (1993) of three components namely cognitive, affective and behavioral in intercultural communicative competence^[5], Jia Yuxin (1997) makes further explanation that effective intercultural communicative competence should contain four components including the system of basic communication competence, the system of affective and relational competence, the system of episodic competence as well as the system of strategic competence.^[6] Wen Qiufang (1999) proposes that intercultural communicative competence should comprise communicative competence and intercultural competence which have equal positions. According to Wen Qiufang (1999), communicative competence refers to language skills, pragmatic competence and strategic competence while intercultural competence encompasses sensitivity, tolerance and flexibility.^[7] However, Yang Ying and Zhuang Enping (2010) point out that intercultural communicative competence is equal to intercultural competence which contributes to developing language skills, intercultural awareness, strategy of communication and nonverbal communication at the same time.^[8]

Intercultural communication is closely related to college English teaching. The purpose of college English teaching is not only just to impart basic linguistic knowledge of English itself to students, but also to cultivate students’ ability to use English as a tool for better communication and interaction. With the rapid development of globalization, China has increasing communications with the rest of world, which requires a great number of internationalized as well as high-quality talents that master English.

However, it is not hard to find that many college students have great difficulty in communicating with English speakers. One of the main reasons is that present college English teaching is still exam-oriented to large extent and thus students spend a great deal of time memorizing English words and practicing grammar. Although it is fundamental for English learners to master linguistic knowledge, it actually fails to reach the final goal of using English as a tool for better communication. When we learn a language, we need to understand the culture behind the language on basis of ability for listening, reading, writing and speaking.

Therefore, college English teaching should serve intercultural communication purpose and it is essential to cultivate student’s ability for intercultural communication in college English education.

Yang Ying and Zhuang Enping (2010) made statistics and analysis of 2833 papers published in Chinese academic journals from 1997 to 2005 including papers about intercultural communicative competence and about ways of cultivation on intercultural communication as well as papers which are on ontology of intercultural communicative competence. They introduce the achievements of domestic scholars on intercultural communicative competence.

Kong Deliang and Luan Shuwen (2012) reviewed and analyzed 84 academic degree's dissertations and 33 monographs from 2001 to 2010 on China Academic Journal Network Publishing Database (CAJD) with the source of 12 foreign language core journals and online libraries of 8 top universities in China. With key words of culture, cross-culture and teaching methods, they make an attempt to build a structure mode and a practice mode of intercultural college English teaching.^[9]

With the focus on foreign language teachers in China, Wang Xiaoyu and Pan Yaling (2019) gave a bibliometric analysis of 506 papers published in the Chinese core journals and CSSCI journals from 2000 to 2018 with the focus on cross-culture and foreign language teaching.^[10] They investigated the development of the domestic research on intercultural language teaching in terms of quantity, distribution in journals, research methods, research focuses and research contents.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Subjects

In this paper, the research subjects are relevant research papers published on China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) which study Chinese students' intercultural communicative competence in college English teaching. The types of target research papers include both journal papers and academic degree's dissertations.

3.2 Research Questions

In this paper, the questions to be solved are as follows:

1. What is the research trend of collected research papers?
2. What are the research methods of collected research papers?
3. What are the research contents of collected research papers?

3.3 Research Procedures

3.3.1 Literature Retrieval

The resource of all target research papers including journal papers and academic degree's dissertations was China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) with classification catalogues confined to Social Science Series I and II as well as philosophy and humanities. Moreover, journal papers were limited to Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index Journals (CSSCI) and Core Journals (Chinese Core Journals of Beijing University) on CNKI. As College English Curriculum Requirements was published in 2010 which clearly points out the significance of cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence in college English teaching, this paper set the time span from 2010 to 2022.

In order to search articles as accurately as possible, this paper chose both "intercultural communicative competence" and "college English teaching" as topics with keywords of "intercultural communication", "intercultural communicative competence" or "college English teaching". After carefully reading abstracts of articles which were results of the first retrieval,

a total of 148 research papers were finally collected including 82 academic degree's dissertations and 66 journal papers.

3.3.2 Classification of Collected Research Papers

All collected research papers will be classified in accordance with following standards:

In terms of research trend, this paper will classify collected research papers according to different periods and types including journal papers and academic degree's dissertations in order to find and summarize the general trend of research on students' intercultural communicative competence in English teaching in Chinese colleges and universities.

In terms of research methods, this paper will divide collected research papers into two categories including non-empirical research and empirical research. Non-empirical research is comprised of speculative research and literature review while empirical research is divided into quantitative research, qualitative research, and the combination of quantitative and qualitative research.

In terms of research contents, this paper will divide collected research papers into seven categories including cultural teaching, analysis and cultivation measures of intercultural communicative competence, teaching strategies of intercultural English education, teaching factors of intercultural English education, relevant evaluation research, interpretation of relevant policy, and literature review.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Research Trend

The quantities of collected research papers have been classified in accordance with the years of their publication. The overall picture of the research trend of all collected articles, which study Chinese students' intercultural communicative competence in college English teaching published from 2010 to 2022, is presented in **Figure 1**. as follow:

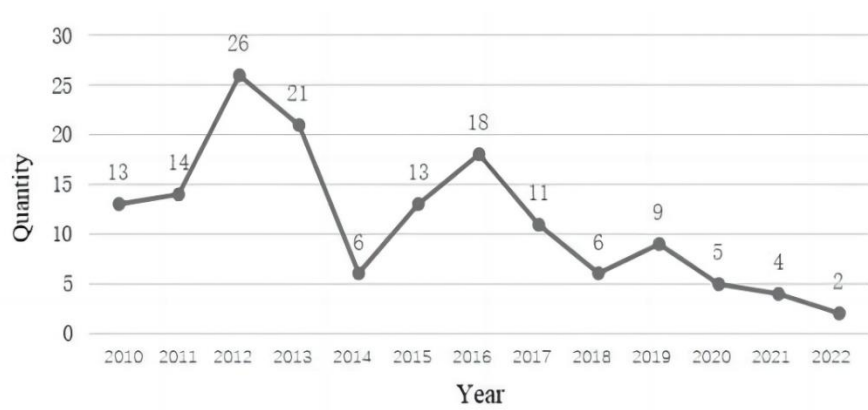


Fig. 1. Overall Trend of Research Quantities from 2010 to 2022

As is shown in **Figure 1.**, the quantities of research papers experienced a downward trend as a whole in recent 13 years. Although it was optimistic for the development of studies concerning Chinese students' intercultural communicative competence in college English teaching from 2010 to 2009 as well as from 2014 to 2017 together with a peak of 26 in 2012, quantities of research papers remained around or less than 10 in almost 8 years, which were more than half of total years. What is more remarkable is that quantities of research papers continued to decrease almost every year since 2013 and there were only two articles published in 2022. Based on the data above, we can find that scholars as well as researchers are paying declining attention to studying students' intercultural communicative competence in college English teaching in China. In conclusion, research quantities undergo a pessimistic overall trend.

When it comes to the comparison between quantity trends of journal papers and academic degree's dissertations, we can see a more detailed as well as all-round trend and distribution of these two types of collected research papers from 2010 to 2022, which is shown in **Figure 2.** and **Table 1.:**

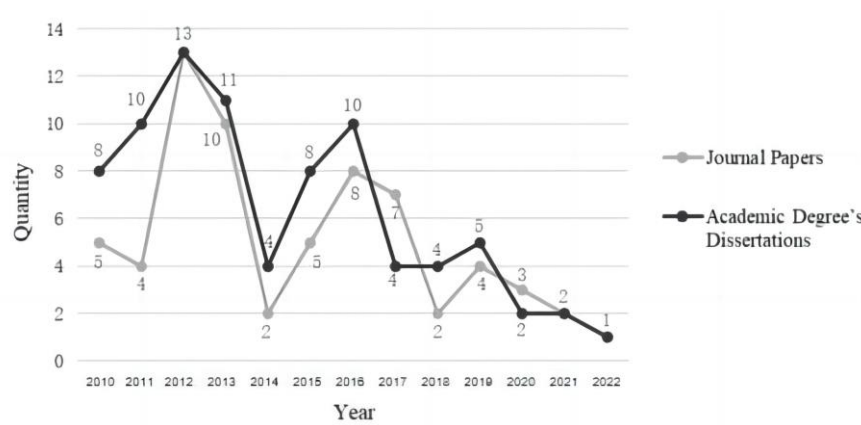


Fig. 2 Comparison of Research Trends between Journal Papers and Academic Degree's Dissertations from 2010 to 2022.

Table 1. Distributions of Research Papers from 2010 to 2022

Year	Journal Papers	Academic degree's Dissertations	Total Quantities	
2010	5	8	13	8.8%
2011	4	10	14	9.5%
2012	13	13	26	17.6%
2013	10	11	21	14.2%
2014	2	4	6	4.1%
2015	5	8	13	8.8%
2016	8	10	18	12.2%
2017	7	4	11	7.4%
2018	2	4	6	4.1%
2019	4	5	9	6.1%
2020	3	2	5	3.4%
2021	2	2	4	2.7%

2022	1	1	2	1.4%
Total	66	82	148	100%
Percentage	44.6%	55.4%	100%	

According to **Figure2.**, we can find that quantities of journal papers and quantities of academic degree's dissertations shared the same trend which both fluctuated dramatically from 2010 to 2016 with the same peak of 13 in 2012. However, since 2016, both of these two types of research papers experienced a continuous downward trend except for a small increase in one year. The separate trend of each type from 2010 to 2022 in **Figure 2.** also strengthens the pessimistic development trend that is presented by overall trend of research quantities in **Figure1.** Therefore, it is proved that studies concerning students' intercultural communicative competence in college English teaching in China attract fewer scholars and researchers now.

In terms of distributions of research papers in **Table 1.**, we can see that quantities of journal papers in 13 years account for more than half of the total quantities which means that studies in this field has good foundation and contributes to future relevant researches. From 2010 to 2022, the number of both types' research papers takes up 92.8% of the total quantities. During the same period, quantities of academic degree's dissertations comprise 93.9% of all collected academic degree's dissertations and quantities of journal papers account for 90.9% of all relevant journals. All these data above show that studies concerning students' intercultural communicative competence in college English teaching in China boomed from 2010 to 2019. However, after this promising 10 years, the development of relevant studies became extremely slow.

To conclude, from the perspective of research trend, quantities of research papers of both journal papers and academic degree's dissertations which study students' intercultural communicative competence in college English teaching in China experience a downward trend in general and scholars as well as researchers are not as interested in relevant studies as before.

4.2 Research Contents

In order to present an overall view of all collected research papers and their research main lines, these 148 research papers concerning students' intercultural communicative competence in college English teaching in China are roughly classified into 7 categories in terms of their research content, the classification of which refers to Wang Xiaoyu and Pan Yaling^[10]. They are cultural teaching, analysis and cultivation measures of intercultural communicative competence, teaching strategies of intercultural English education, teaching factors of intercultural English education, relevant evaluation research, interpretation of relevant policy, and literature review. If a study contains more than one topic, it will be classified into only one category based on one more important topic.

To be more specific, researches of cultural teaching are studies about the introduction, necessity, content, application and other detailed aspects related to cultural teaching; researches of analysis and cultivation measures of intercultural communicative competence refer to studies that first give definitions, detailed introduction, relevant frame or model of the term of intercultural communicative competence from various perspectives and then put forward some effective strategies of cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence; researches of teaching strategies of intercultural English education are about

researches which explore some new teaching methods or models in English teaching, or focus on cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence in specific courses like listening class, speaking class and reading class; researches of teaching factors of intercultural English education are studies which pay attention to discussing about students, teachers, and teaching materials in English teaching; relevant evaluation researches mainly evaluate the cultivation of students' intercultural communicative competence or some current cultivation situations with empirical methods; researches of interpretation of relevant policy tend to make some detailed explanation of relevant policies; and the last category, literature review is to analyze and summarize the development or status-quo of relevant studies.

The detailed distributions of all collected research papers in these 7 categories from 2010 to 2022 are shown in **Table 2.** as follow:

Table 2. Distributions of Research Papers in terms of Research Contents from 2010 to 2022

	CT	ACMICC	TSIEE	TFIEE	RER	IRP	LR	Total
2010	8	1	2	1	1			13
2011	4	1	4	3	2			14
2012	14	1	6	2	3			26
2013	11	4	5		1			21
2014	2		4					6
2015	7	1	1		4			13
2016	12	2	2	1	1			18
2014	6	2		1	2			11
2018	3		2		1			6
2019	5	1	3					9
2020	4					1		5
2021			3	1				4
2022			1				1	2
Total	76	13	33	9	15	1	1	148
Percentage	51.4%	8.8%	22.3%	6.1%	10.1%	0.7%	0.7%	100%
CT represents Cultural Teaching								
ACMICC represents Analysis and Cultivation Measures of Intercultural Communicative Competence								
TSIEE represents Teaching Strategies of Intercultural English Education								
TFIEE represents Teaching Factors of Intercultural English Education								
RER represents Relevant Evaluation Research								
IRP represents Interpretation of Relevant Policy								
LR represents Literature Review								

As is shown in **Table 2.**, researches of cultural teaching account for the most, 51.4% (76 research papers) while there is only one research paper in the category of both relevant evaluation researches and literature review. More detailed discussions of these 7 categories will be in order on the basis of their quantities.

5 Conclusion

This paper has collected research papers published on CNKI from 2010 to 2022 which are summarized and analyzed in terms of three aspects including research trend, research methods and research contents. According to the results and discussion, three aspects of major findings, implications, and limitations and suggestions for further study can be drawn which will provide an overview of research situations of studies concerning students' intercultural communicative competence in college English teaching in China.

5.1 Major Findings

First, in terms of research trend, although the quantities of research papers had several fluctuations between 2010 and 2022, the overall trend of research quantities actually experienced a downward trend, especially in the last seven years since 2016. To be more specific, quantity trends of both journal papers and academic degree's dissertations also shared a similar pessimistic trend. Since College English Curriculum Requirements was published in 2010, a large number of research papers were published from 2010 to 2013 which showed the increasing enthusiasm of Chinese scholars and researchers to study students' intercultural communicative competence in college English teaching. However, the continuing declining quantities of researches from 2017 to 2022 indicated that scholars paid less attention to relevant studies. Moreover, there were little literature reviews (only two articles) among all research papers which means that there is still large room for development of studies focusing on summarizing as well as analyzing relevant researches.

Second, in terms of research methods, non-empirical researches and empirical researches shared similar proportion among all collected research papers. According to distributions of empirical methods in 77 relevant empirical research papers, we can find that scholars as well as researchers preferred to employ quantitative analysis methods or the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. However, none of scholars used qualitative analysis methods alone in their studies. Furthermore, journal papers and academic degree's dissertations had totally opposite compositions from the perspective of research methods which indicates that journal papers should pay more attention to conduct relevant researches with empirical methods while academic degree's dissertation need to focus more on speculative research.

Third, in terms of research contents, all collected research papers were classified into seven categories including cultural teaching, analysis and cultivation measures of intercultural communicative competence, teaching strategies of intercultural English education, teaching factors of intercultural English education, relevant evaluation research, interpretation of relevant policy, and literature review. Apart from generally discussing about the role of culture in English teaching, an increasing number of studies paid more attention to discuss about detailed elements in English education like role of students and teachers, teaching materials, teaching methods, and design of curriculums as well as extracurricular activities. Therefore, they provided rich theoretical and practical basis for application of intercultural teaching in English education. Although many scholars and researchers had gradually realized the importance of integrating Chinese culture into English teaching and discussed about some

effective strategies, relevant systematic theories and practical teaching models need further development.

5.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Study

There were some limitations in this paper related to size of resources and classification of research papers.

First, the resources which this paper could access to were limited and incomplete because this research was conducted based on the data only collected from Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index Journals (CSSCI) and Core Journals (Chinese Core Journals of Beijing University) and the classification catalogues were also confined to Social Science Series I and II as well as philosophy and humanities. Therefore, the results of this research are suggested being tested by further research with more complete databases and data collection. Moreover, the time span was set from 2010 to 2022 because of researcher's personal limited efforts. It is possible to extend the time span if more efforts can be made.

Second, this paper only analyzed collected research papers according to three research questions including research trend, research methods and research contents. In terms of research methods, questionnaire was only regarded as a quantitative analysis method in this research without more detailed analysis of its theoretical basis. And in terms of research contents, this paper classified collected research papers into seven categories in accordance with their research topics. More detailed classifications of research contents like research focuses can be studied in further researches so as to provide a more comprehensive overview of relevant studies.

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