

# An Overview of College English Writing Teaching Studies in China Between 2002 and 2022: Visualization Analysis Based on CiteSpace

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**Abstract:** This paper employs CiteSpace to conduct a visualization analysis of literature on college English writing teaching researches published in core journals from the CNKI database and CSSCI journals between 2002 and 2022. It aims to explore the characteristics of researches and future directions on college English writing teaching. The present study yielded the following major findings: the field primarily focuses on innovative writing teaching models and methods, the integration of traditional classroom teaching and information technology, and instructional strategies to enhance students' writing skills. The future research is anticipated to involve a hybrid writing teaching approach combining online and offline teaching methods, leveraging the "Internet+" digital platform, aiming to elevate students' writing proficiency. This paper also presents a prospective outlook for college English writing teaching research in China.

**Keywords:** CiteSpace, College English, Writing Teaching, Visualization Analysis.

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## 1. Introduction

Writing ability reflects one's cognitive and linguistic skills. Proficiency in English writing is at the core of comprehensive English competence, and the cultivation of writing skills is an indispensable component of college English education[1]. However, English writing still remains a weak point for non-English major students in colleges and universities. Researches on teaching methods and contents for English writing in our country is insufficient to address practical issues in education[2]. Thus, enhancing college students' English writing proficiency and skills at both macro and micro levels is a pressing problem for college English instructors to address. Especially in recent years, with the rapid development of the Internet and the emergence of various domestic and foreign large-scale language models, opportunities and challenges have arisen in English teaching, urging the exploration of teaching modes, methods, and curriculum adaptations that align with the evolving eras[3]. This paper employs a visualization analysis software, CiteSpace, to analyze the literature from the CNKI database over the past two decades regarding college English writing instruction, focusing on papers from core journals as well as CSSCI journal. The analysis covers aspects such as literature quantity, author co-occurrence networks, and keywords, aiming to elucidate the current research status, trends, and existing issues in the researches on college English writing teaching. The paper concludes by offering insights and prospects for the field.

## 2. Source of Data and Research Instrument

### 2.1. Source of Data

The data for this study was sourced from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), a network-based database of academic journals. The search was conducted using the keyword "college English writing teaching," with a time range spanning from 2002 to 2022. The selected journals

were classified under the categories of Core Journals and CSSCI journals. The initial search yielded a total of 342 documents. To ensure the reliability of the research subjects, a manual screening process was employed to filter out conference reports, monographs or textbook evaluations, competition regulations, and other redundantly published documents from the initial search results. As a result, a total of 284 relevant and valid documents were obtained. These 284 documents were stored in Refworks format as TXT files and processed using CiteSpace software for subsequent visualization analysis.

### 2.2. Research Instrument

This paper intends to utilize the CiteSpace visualization software, employing bibliometric analysis and content analysis methods, to analyze the current state and trends of college English writing teaching researches in China over the past two decades. The study aims to reveal hot topics, key scholars, and research institutions within this field. The paper employs visual representations such as graphs and tables to illustrate the changing trends of research hotspots and the collaborative networks of the authors. Additionally, the paper conducts an analysis of key viewpoints and trends present in the literature, in order to comprehensively understand the current status and future prospects of domestic university English writing teaching researches. The content analysis method delves into the literature, systematically categorizing and comparing documents to uncover the evolution of teaching methods and strategies. By combining these two research methods, this paper aims to gain insights into the research landscape of domestic college English writing teaching, with the goal of providing valuable insights for the further studies of this field.

## 3. Data Analysis

### 3.1. Publications

The annual publications over the years reflects to a certain extent the development in the field of college English writing

teaching researches, and it also reveals the research hotspots. Using the CiteSpace visualization software and Excel, the research data of 284 articles were processed, yielding a trend chart (Figure 1) depicting the changes in the quantity of domestic university English writing teaching studies from 2002 to 2022. The publications shown in Figure 1 fluctuates. Based on the figure, the studies on college English writing teaching can be roughly divided into three stages: the exploratory stage (2002-2009), the stable stage (2010-2016), and the slow stage (2017-2022).

During the exploratory stage, the number of average annual publications is 16, showing a gradual upward trend, indicating a burgeoning interest in academic circles in the researches on college English writing teaching. Upon consulting the CNKI database, it is known that the first relevant article published in a core journal dates back to 1992, establishing a certain foundation for research during this stage, which peaked in 2009. In the stable stage, the number of average annual publications is 20, signifying progress compared to the exploratory development stage, and indicating rapid development. From 2017 to 2022, the publications in this research field showed a cooling trend compared to the previous stage. However, in the analysis of keyword hotspots (as discussed below), this trend reflects the relative maturity of college English writing teaching studies and the characteristics of entering a stage of reform and innovation.

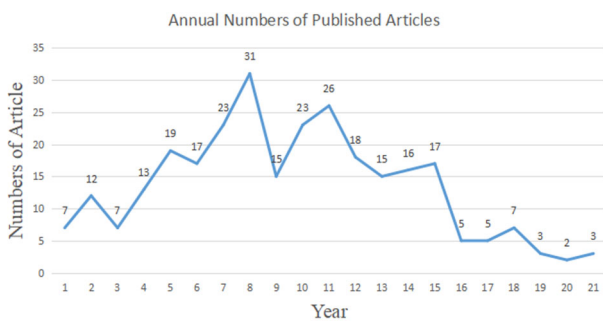


Figure 1. Annual Publications Between 2002 And 2022

### 3.2. Collaboration Network of Authors



Figure 2. The Collaboration Network

Using the CiteSpace software, a visualization analysis of the data set involving 284 literature entries with the node type set to "Author" yielded the visualization graph presented in Figure 2. The nodes and connections of this data set are discernible from the text in the upper left corner of Figure 2. In this graph, "N" represents nodes, and the font size of

authors in the graph corresponds to the proportion of their publications within the data set. "E" represents edges, indicating collaborative networks among authors. Thicker edges denote higher frequencies of collaboration[4]. The notation "N=340, E=139" in the above figure signifies the existence of 340 nodes, while the edges comprise only 139 connections, indicating a relatively sparse level of collaboration among authors. Prominent scholars within this research domain include Yang Yonglin, Wang Na, Ding Tao, with a relatively frequent level of collaboration among them. However, on a broader scale, there remains room for strengthening collaboration among scholars.

### 3.3. The Distribution of Journals

To ensure the authority and professionalism of the research findings, the author selected 10 foreign language core journals as samples, as shown in Table 1. Among them, "Technology Enhanced Foreign Language Education" had the highest number of publications which has published 22 articles.

Table 1. The Number of Articles on FL Core Journals

Num.	Journal	Numbers of Articles
1	Technology Enhanced Foreign Language Education	22
2	Foreign Language World	10
3	Foreign Languages and Literature	9
4	Shandong Foreign Language Teaching	9
5	Foreign Language Research	8
6	Foreign Language Education	8
7	Foreign Languages and Their Teaching	7
8	Foreign Languages Research	2
9	Modern Foreign Languages	2
10	Foreign Language Education in China	1

### 3.4. The Major Topics of the Field

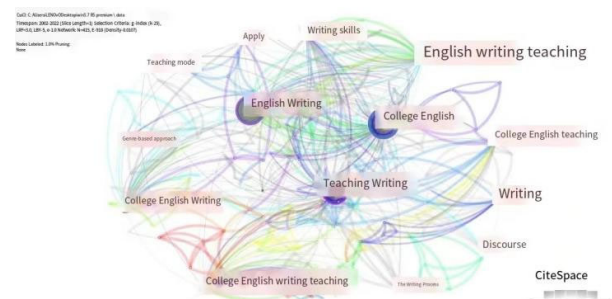


Figure 3. The Keywords in the Studies

To ensure the authoritative and specialized nature of the research outcomes, the author conducted a visual analysis using the CiteSpace software, selecting "Keyword" as the "Node Type." The resulting knowledge map is presented in Figure 3, with an N value of 415 and an E value of 918. Larger circles on the nodes indicate higher frequency of occurrence for the corresponding keywords. From Figure 3, it can be observed that keywords such as "English writing," "writing

teaching," "college English," and "writing ability" are prominent, indicating their high relevance. The connections between keywords are represented by the lines in the graph, and by observing Figure 3, it is apparent that there are numerous connections between keywords, reflecting a high frequency of co-occurrence among them.

Due to the extensive number of keywords in Figure 3, and in order to enhance the precision of research in the core domain, this paper utilized the CiteSpace software to cluster the keywords, resulting in a clustered knowledge map as shown in Figure 4. The Modularity Q value for clustering is 0.6667, and the Weighted Mean Silhouette, an internal similarity indicator, is 0.912. A Q value exceeding 0.3 and an S value reaching 0.7 indicate a convincing cluster structure. Hence, the cluster figure demonstrates high connectivity among cluster members and holds significant reference value.

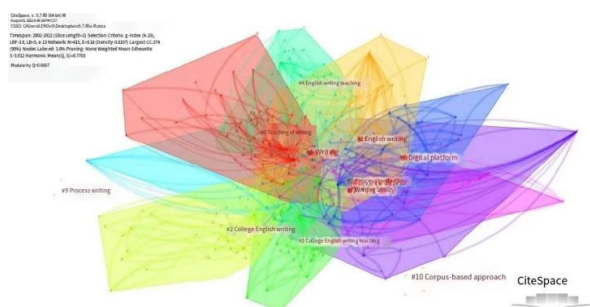


Figure 4. Keywords Clusters

Arranging the clusters in Figure 4 in descending order of publications, the data for the top 10 clusters are summarized in Table 2. In Table 2, the column "Representative Keywords within Clusters" denotes the top three most frequently occurring keywords in each cluster. Utilizing these keywords aids in analyzing the core research areas of domestic college English writing teaching.

By combining the keyword clustering map in Figure 4 with the summarized keyword clusters in Table 2, we can categorize the core research domains in the field of college English writing teaching in China over the past two decades as follows:

#### 1. Research on Teaching Strategies to Enhance English Writing Proficiency

With the introduction of foreign writing pedagogies such as process-oriented approach, new model-based approach, and genre-based approach into China, scholars in the domestic field have undertaken extensive researches on English writing teaching methods. Despite these efforts, there remains room for improvement in actual college English writing teaching in China, urging the search for teaching methods and strategies that align with the pace of contemporary development. One prominent role of writing is its ability to tangibly reflect one's language application skills. In college English courses, proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation is crucial. However, over the past few decades, a significant portion of classroom hours has been devoted to nurturing "reading comprehension" skills, causing students' writing skills to become relatively weak[5].

On the other hand, the examination-oriented system to some extent hinders students' innovative abilities and writing proficiency. Students often focus on memorizing "writing templates" and formulaic essay structures in order to pass English final exams or obtain English proficiency certificates. This emphasis on rote memorization neglects the

enhancement of logical thinking and language organization skills, resulting in subpar actual writing abilities[6]. In recent years, with the development of the internet and the acceleration of globalization, the cultivation of English writing proficiency has garnered increasing attention from educators and scholars.

Table 2. The Summary of Clusters

cluster	Amount of literature	S value	Starting year	Representative keywords within the cluster
#0 Teaching writing	72	0.954	2010	Teaching writing (40.45, 1.0E-4); College English (22.51, 1.0E-4); English writing (10.43, 0.005);
#1 English writing	56	0.9	2009	English writing (52.17, 1.0E-4); Self-directed learning (7.04, 0.01); Peer feedback (7.04, 0.01)
#2 College English writing	48	0.943	2012	College English Writing (37.52, 1.0E-1); Blended teaching mode (9.08, 0.005); Writing teaching (5.77, (,05) College English Writing teaching (14.87, 0.001);
#3 College English writing teaching	45	0.943	2011	Students (8.25, 0.005); English writing ability (8.25, 0.005)
#4 English writing teaching	11	0.877	2010	English Writing Teaching (34.33, 1.0B 4); Big data (9.75, 0.005); Teaching writing (4.86, 0.05)
#5 Writing	29	0.82	2009	Writing (26.94, 1.0E-4); Instructional design (10.55, 0.005); Fuzzy language (5.24, 0.05);
#6 digital platform	28	0.918	2011	Digital platforms (11.96, 0.001); Technology platform (11.96, 0.001); Technology and model (11.96, 0.001);
#7 Writing ability	27	0.824	2008	Writing ability (22.74, 1.0E-4); Digital writing platform (11.2, 0.001); The writing process (11.2, 0.001);
#8 Process teaching method	16	0.917	2006	Process pedagogy (12.91, 0.001); English teaching (12.91, 0.001); Globalization, informatization and digitization (6.39, 0.05);
#9 Process writing	7	0.987	2006	Process writing (9.37, 0.005); Formative assessment (9.37, 0.005); Learning and growth record bag (9.37, 0.005);

In response to the challenges within college English writing teaching strategies, experts, scholars, and educators have taken targeted measures to address these issues. They have actively explored innovative teaching models and improved the assessment methods for English writing. Yang Yonglin and Dong Yuzhen proposed an experiential teaching approach known as "Reading Promotes Writing, Writing Promotes Reading." This method employs a three-level evaluation process involving reading, writing, and assessment, enabling students to learn writing through reading. It alleviates students' anxiety during the writing process and enhances their English writing abilities[7]. Cooperative learning, originating in the United States, was introduced to Chinese English classrooms in the early 1990s. When students engage in cooperative learning, they effectively utilize various resources to gather writing materials, master outlining techniques, carefully organize writing content, and articulate themes clearly. Consequently, their writing proficiency is significantly improved[8]. Leveraging the advantages of autonomous writing and timely feedback through an English writing website named "Pigai Wang", and incorporating both teacher and peer feedback, can enhance students' English writing proficiency while simultaneously improving the quality of teaching provided by instructors[9].

#### 2. Exploring Diverse Teaching Models and Methods for College English Writing Teaching

In response to the challenges present in college English writing teaching, numerous scholars have proposed effective teaching models and methods. Specific teaching models and methods include:

(1) Task-based Teaching Method: By creating authentic contexts, students master language skills and knowledge in a student-centered approach. Timely feedback on students' compositions enables effective language input and output[10].

(2) Process Approach: Writing is a communicative process, akin to interacting with others. From initial drafting, peer assessment, revision, to finalizing drafts, teachers guide the



interest in "results-oriented teaching methods" and the "writing process" persisted for three years, while "peer assessment" remained prominent for four years, showcasing scholars' relentless exploration of teaching mode reforms. In addition to results-oriented teaching methods, genre-based instruction also garnered academic attention. In 2003, Zhong Min introduced genre-based instruction from abroad into college English writing instruction. By guiding students in comprehending the discourse structures inherent to different genres, students developed an awareness of discourse schemata, subsequently enhancing their writing skills[20].

#### 2. Steady Phase (2010-2016)

During this phase, there was an increase in the annual publication volume, and academic research progressed significantly. Research during this stage was in line with the era's development. The emergence of "Internet+" education, multimedia, and big data provided abundant teaching resources, efficient tools, and advanced classroom interaction methods for university English writing research and instruction. The amalgamation of teaching methods, approaches, and information technology innovation in teaching evaluation imparted a contemporary touch to this phase of teaching research. Notably, in 2012, Wang Na conducted empirical research on the usage of digital writing platforms in college English writing instruction. The findings substantiated the platform's efficacy in enhancing writing abilities and motivation, facilitating efficient writing instruction and assessment, inspiring students' writing potential, and boosting their confidence in writing[21].

#### 3. Gradual Phase (2017-2022)

Although the quantity of published literature during this phase experienced a slight decline compared to the preceding period, the overall trend remained positive. From Figure 5 and Figure 6, it is discernible that the research emphasis shifted to innovative and reformative English writing instruction models based on information technology platforms. Keywords such as "blended teaching model," "technological platform," and "lexical complexity" epitomize the latest research focal points and represent future research trends. Overall, this phase is characterized by leveraging digital information technology platforms to enhance theoretical and practical aspects of university English writing instruction, aiming to elevate students' English writing proficiency and cater to the demands of producing high-quality talent in the modern era. Yang Yang and Feng Zhiwei, utilizing Small Private Online Course (SPOC) hybrid writing courses, employed flipped classroom methods, combining online lectures with offline writing exercises and feedback provision, thereby alleviating students' writing apprehension, enhancing their self-efficacy, and elevating language complexity[22].

### 4. Conclusion

This study employed CiteSpace visualization software to construct a knowledge map, conducting an analysis of 284 relevant literature on Chinese college English writing teaching research from 2002 to 2022 within the CNKI database. The research explored the current status and trends in domestic college English writing instruction, revealing that the focal areas of study centered around innovative reforms in writing instruction models and methods, the integration of traditional classroom approaches with information technology, and the investigation of pedagogical strategies to enhance student writing abilities. The findings indicated that future research trends involve leveraging the "Internet+"

digital platform to facilitate a blended approach to writing instruction, combining online and offline methods to stimulate students' writing interests and elevate their comprehensive language application abilities.

Given the existing landscape of university English writing instruction research, future inquiries can be undertaken from the following perspectives, aiming to enrich research content, enhance methodological rigor, and provide robust support for the development of university English writing instruction.

Firstly, a comprehensive exploration of distinct students' writing needs is warranted. In further researches, diverse student cohorts, such as ethnic minority students, could be selected to investigate their English writing requirements and challenges. Utilizing methods like field surveys and questionnaires, this approach can shed light on the current writing landscape, the unique characteristics of various student groups, and areas necessitating improvement. This, in turn, can facilitate the design of more targeted teaching materials and methodologies.

Secondly, an emphasis on teacher training and professional development is imperative. In the context of university English writing instruction, educators play a pivotal role. Future research can appropriately focus on teacher education and professional growth, delving into ways to enhance teachers' writing proficiency and instructional abilities. Designing training programs, facilitating case-sharing, and encouraging reflective practice research could contribute to the advancement of higher education English writing instructors' professional development.

Thirdly, interdisciplinary research and collaboration are crucial. Future inquiries can transcend disciplinary boundaries and collaborate with fields like psychology, education, sociology, and more. For instance, investigating the relationship between writing anxiety and psychological factors could be pursued. Interdisciplinary collaboration offers a broader and more comprehensive perspective for university English writing instruction. By deeply exploring the needs of different students, attending to teacher training and professional advancement, and leveraging interdisciplinary efforts, future researches on university English writing teaching will undoubtedly extend more comprehensively, providing valuable guidance and support for educational practice.

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