

Citespace-based Research on English Writing Instruction as a Foreign Language in China from 1995 to 2025

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Abstract

In recent years, the teaching of writing in English as a foreign language (EFL) has become a prominent and recurring research theme in education. Despite this growing interest, previous studies have not provided an overview of the current state of research on EFL writing instruction from a bibliometric perspective. This paper presents a comprehensive review of writing instruction in China, encompassing the period from 1995 to 2025. The study is grounded in a systematic analysis of extant literature and data, drawing upon the insights of leading experts in the field, and provides valuable insights for the visual analysis of research on EFL writing instruction. The study found that: 1) Academic interest in and research on the teaching of English writing has increased significantly over the past three decades as the status of English as an international language has improved, and it is expected that the number of publications will continue to grow in the future. 2) Research on the teaching of English writing is highly concentrated in the hands of a small number of high-producing researchers and institutions, and these core members dominate the direction of the field, with relatively little related research activity in China. 3) Despite the existence of some close-knit groups, collaboration among high-producing authors in Chinese research on the teaching of English writing is still limited, with most research activities confined within institutions and little cross-regional collaboration. 4) Keyword analyses demonstrate that the focus of research on the teaching of English writing has gradually shifted from foundational issues to students at different stages of their education, and has begun to focus on the application of emerging pedagogical methodologies and technologies, with an emphasis on the new curriculum standards and modern educational themes such as core literacy.

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language (EFL), writing instruction, research review, China

Suggested citation: Han, N. (2025). A Citespace-based Research on English Writing Instruction as a Foreign Language in China from 1995 to 2025. *Journal of Modern Social Sciences*, 2(2), 161-169. <https://doi.org/10.71113/JMSS.v2i2.191>

Introduction

The teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) writing plays a crucial role in promoting learner development and has been a prominent and recurring research topic in education (Cortazzi & Jin, 2002; Zhang & Shi, 2023). It is widely recognised that English reading teachers face considerable challenges in their pedagogical practice of writing (Wang & Gao, 2008; Atkinson, 2003; Yang, 2018).

These challenges stem from the need to understand not only the intricacies of writing and teaching methods, but also the need to have a deep understanding of students' characteristics and educational backgrounds (Silva, 1993). Overall, the field of English writing instruction has been extensively explored through a variety of approaches, and a number of studies have attempted to assess previous research in the field from different perspectives. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that bibliometric analyses have not yet been employed to investigate this specific domain.

In the context of the advancement of international bilingual writing research, China has also demonstrated an increased focus on the innovation and development of English writing teaching models. In an effort to integrate language transmission and output, researchers have devised the "listening, speaking and writing as one writing teaching model" (Chen & Xiao, 2012). In order to explore and implement the English teaching mode in a digital environment, researchers have developed the "experiencing English as a writing teaching resource platform" (Wang, 2014). In order to cultivate students' creative thinking ability and enliven the classroom atmosphere, the researchers applied the "brainstorming

method" in English writing teaching (Zhang et al., 2015). In order to stimulate students' awareness of learning language knowledge independently and solve the problems of English writing, the researcher constructed a "writing teaching corpus" (Wang, 2014). In order to cultivate students' critical thinking, the researcher has constructed a teaching model of "Writing Critical Thinking Integration" (Yu, 2014). The "process genre teaching method" (Xu, 2014) has been proposed to ensure the positive influence of formative assessment on the teaching of English writing, despite the existence of a variety of effective methods to improve students' writing skills and language proficiency. The recently published English Curriculum Standards for Senior Secondary Schools call for the English curriculum to be adapted to align with the cognitive development of senior secondary school students and their academic needs. The new standards emphasise the advancement of students' comprehensive language skills, with a focus on enhancing their ability to acquire, process, analyse, and solve problems in English. Additionally, the standards underscore the necessity of fostering students' capacity to think and express themselves in English. Consequently, the utilisation of scientific, effective and diversified assessment programmes to enhance students' writing ability emerges as a pivotal concern in high school English instruction under the revised curriculum standards, thereby presenting a substantial challenge to English educators.

Bibliometric analyses are recognised for their advantages over meta-analyses (Suseelan et al., 2022) and have significant value as a tool for researchers to identify research priorities and gain new perspectives (Singh, 2022). The use of such analyses is critical to gaining a deeper understanding of the research landscape regarding the teaching of English writing. Despite the attention given to

certain aspects of English writing instruction, limited efforts have been made to quantitatively describe the national research landscape in this area through a bibliometric lens. In order to comprehend the trajectory of this field of research, it is imperative to consider collaborative networks, influential authors and journals, and keyword structure, as these elements are considered integral indicators of understanding the overall research landscape (Singh, 2022). The present study aims to provide comprehensive insights into the current state of research on the teaching of English writing. This objective is twofold: firstly, to facilitate knowledge dissemination, and secondly, to guide future research efforts. In order to achieve this, the study addressed five key research questions, as outlined below.

RQ1:What trajectory can be identified in the field of EFL writing instruction over the past thirty years?

RQ2:Which authors have demonstrated the highest productivity in their contributions to research on the teaching of EFL writing?

RQ3:Which organisations have demonstrated the highest productivity in their contributions to research on the teaching of EFL writing?

RQ4:What is the most popular topic focus in research on teaching EFL writing?

Methodology

This study employed a bibliometric analysis to explore the historical advancements in the domain of English writing instruction. The analysis is predicated on data retrieved from CNKI, which serves as the primary publication repository for this study. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of this trend, a 30-year timeframe was selected, taking into account the well-established history of English writing instruction. Bibliometric analysis, also known as scientific mapping, is a quantitative and graphical method for examining a wide range of literature within a specific scientific field (Singh, 2022; Archambault, 2006). This analytical technique offers the advantage of describing research trends and foci, thus providing new knowledge for the respective fields and disciplines. It is noteworthy that bibliometric analyses contribute to a more systematic, transparent and reproducible assessment, as highlighted by Behl et al. (2022). In the field of education, an increasing number of researchers have recognised bibliometric analysis as a scientific tool to statistically assess research performance and gain valuable insights into the academic progress made by the research community (Chen, 2023; Lei, 2019; San, 2024; Baker, 2020).

Furthermore, China Knowledge was selected on account of its comprehensive collection of peer-reviewed scientific literature. Comprising almost 8,000 academic journals from a range of disciplines, the database offers a substantial repository of scholarly resources. As of November 2024, the database contains more than 60.6 million documents in Chinese academic journals and 120 million documents in foreign academic journals. It is noteworthy that this database is widely regarded as a high-quality data source within China, frequently relied upon as a reliable repository for conducting review studies. Consequently, the utilisation of data from the CNKI is regarded as both appropriate and reliable for conducting rigorous bibliometric analyses.

Search criteria

The present study conducted a detailed search using the specified search terms: “title (‘teaching’ or ‘teacher’) and (‘writing’) (‘English as a foreign language’ or ‘EFL’) and (‘primary and secondary’)”. This search retrieved 1325 documents, all of which were extracted on 6 January 2025. Of these, 566 were from Journals, including 1,606 Authors and 1,229 Institutions.

Data analysis methods

The bibliometric data retrieved from the CNKI database were exported to generate TXT files for Citespace analysis. These files contained the author name, article title, year of publication, source title, affiliation, abstract and author keywords. This extensive dataset was then utilised to address the five research questions posed in this study. For the purpose of data analysis, a computer software program that is recognised for its ability to analyse the potential knowledge contained within the scientific literature was utilised. This software is capable of presenting the structure, patterns and distribution of scientific knowledge through visualisations, which are also known as “scientific knowledge maps”. At present, CiteSpace is widely used in the writing of review papers, and the search results of China Knowledge Information Network (CNKI) show that the number of papers published by CiteSpace has been growing rapidly every year, and will be close to 3,000 in 2022.

By mapping the collaboration between authors, institutions, and countries, it facilitates analysis of the core researchers and geographical distribution of the field, and can reveal the research collaboration groups through cluster analysis. The citation relationship between journals is utilised to derive journal co-citation mapping, thereby facilitating the identification of significant journals within the field based on their citation frequency. The utilisation of keywords enables the reflection of the thematic content of papers. The co-occurrence analysis of high-frequency keywords is employed by CiteSpace to reveal the core themes of the field, thereby enabling a swift overview of the research to be provided. The application of the word frequency burst detection function facilitates the identification of emergent keywords across diverse years, thereby enabling the comprehension of the evolution of prominent subjects. The identification of key documents, such as those with high citation rates, those which are emerging, and those with high centrality in the literature network, facilitates a rapid understanding of the development of research themes. The presence of highly cited literature in a field is indicative of the focus of scholars’ attention. CiteSpace employs co-citation analysis of highly cited literature to identify cutting-edge directions, and combines this with timeline views to gain insights into the development of the field.

In order to visualise the results of the study, the use of Microsoft Excel and tables was also employed. The utilisation of these tools enabled a comprehensive examination and interpretation of the data. Specifically, the study first employed publication number data from the dataset to indicate publication trajectories in the field of EFL writing instruction research. Subsequently, the data were graphically depicted using Microsoft Excel to provide a visual representation of the annual publication frequency in the field.

Results

Publication trajectories in the teaching of English writing

As illustrated in Figure 1, the publication trajectory in the field of teaching EFL writing from 1994 to 2025 can be summarised as follows. It is noteworthy that 2023 has the highest number of publications, with 139 research articles. It is closely followed by 2022 with 130 publications and 2021 with 120. In contrast, the number of publications remained relatively low until 2004, with fewer than 10 publications. However, from 2005 onwards, there was a marked and substantial increase in the number of publications, with some fluctuations during this period and a gradual decline after reaching a peak in 2023. The trajectory of research output in this area has shown a positive trend in recent years.

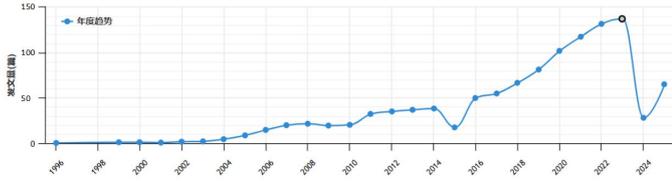


Fig.1. Publication trajectory of EFL reading instruction from 1996 to 2024.

Specifically, from 1996 to 2014, the number of publications exhibited a consistent year-on-year increase, but in 2015, the number of papers declined. Thereafter, the number of publications began to demonstrate a significant increase until it peaked in 2023, after which the overall number declined again in 2024, with the number of papers expected to rise in 2025, though not to exceed the number of papers in 2023. Consequently, the investigation of writing instruction has emerged as a prevalent research trajectory in recent years. Within primary and secondary education, teachers allocate greater emphasis to reading instruction, while writing instruction is comparatively neglected. Despite the extensive research conducted on writing instruction, it remains a challenging aspect in the classroom. Consequently, there is an imperative for sustained research in this domain, although the translation of research findings into practical teaching applications remains a challenge.

Authors of highest productivity and impact

Table 1 provides a concise overview of the ten most prolific authors in the domain of English writing, who have made substantial contributions to the field. This analysis encompasses a total of 1,606 authors. The author co-occurrence mapping analysis reveals that the most prolific researchers in this field are Tang Jinlan, Yue Peng, and Wang Na, who have each published four research papers. They are closely followed by Yan Wang, Danyan Lin, Wuwei Pan, Xiaoying Fa, Ying Wang, Shibao Zhou, Jinfen Xu, and Zhijing He, who have published three papers each, and the rest have a large number of authors who have published two research papers. Domestic studies on English writing teaching are comparatively rare, with a small number of members assuming a pivotal role.

The Citespace software was utilised to select NodeTypes for the author of the visual mapping analysis, as illustrated in Figure 2. The text in the upper left corner of the figure shows the relevant data, of which “N=191, E=52” two data. The “N” represents the node, that is, the position of the author appears node author’s name, the larger the font size, indicating that the author appears in the 1325 data in the higher frequency, “E” represents the link, the link between the node represents the link between the authors, the thicker the line, indicating that the more frequently they appear in the same document, which shows the co-operation between authors. The author cooperation map comprises 191 nodes and 52 lines, with some authors demonstrating a greater degree of interconnectedness, as illustrated in the figure. As illustrated in Figure 3, the authors who collaborate closely can be divided into four distinct groups: Yang Luxin, Zhang Lintao, Li Chen, and others; Tmurry Nathaniel, Deng Lin, and others; Wu siyuan, Ding Yonghua, and others; and Jiang Minhao, Chen Shuting, and others.

Table 1 Effective authors in the study of English writing instruction.

| Count | Centrality | Year | Authors |
|-------|------------|------|---------|
| 4 | 0.00 | 2011 | 唐锦兰 |

| | | | |
|---|------|------|-----|
| 4 | 0.00 | 2010 | 岳鹏 |
| 4 | 0.00 | 2010 | 王娜 |
| 3 | 0.00 | 2012 | 徐锦芬 |
| 3 | 0.00 | 2010 | 林丹燕 |
| 3 | 0.00 | 2018 | 潘鸣威 |
| 3 | 0.00 | 2010 | 法小鹰 |
| 3 | 0.00 | 2015 | 王莹 |
| 3 | 0.00 | 2002 | 周仕宝 |
| 3 | 0.00 | 2022 | 王焱 |
| 3 | 0.00 | 2005 | 何智 |

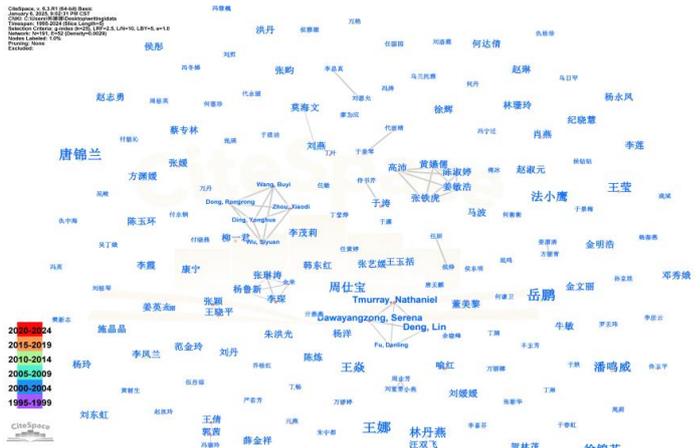


Fig.2. The network visualization map of authors



Fig.3. The network visualization map of authors in detail

Institutions with the highest productivity and impact

As demonstrated in Table 2, of the 1,229 institutions analysed, those with a minimum of three articles published demonstrate notably high productivity in the domain of English writing instruction. The larger the font size of the institution's name in the institution collaboration graph, the more frequently the institution appears in the 1325 data, as illustrated in Figure 4. The letter "E" in the graph denotes a connecting line, and the thickness of this line indicates the frequency with which the institutions appear in common literature. According to the description in the upper left corner, "N=214, E=28", it can be seen that the cooperation between institutions is still relatively close. The analysis of the table produced by the institutional cooperation mapping reveals that the main research institutions (i.e. those with a high number of publications) in this field are Beijing Foreign Studies University, Shanghai International Studies University, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, and Beijing Jiaotong University. It is noteworthy that Beijing Foreign Studies University has the distinction of having published eight articles in this research area, which is the highest number of publications. Shanghai International Studies University followed closely behind, with a total of five publications in this field.

Table 2 Top 10 most prolific organisations in research on the teaching of English writing.

| Count | Centrality | Year | Institutions |
|-------|------------|------|--------------|
| 8 | 0.00 | 2009 | 北京外国语大学 |
| 5 | 0.00 | 2011 | 上海外国语大学 |
| 4 | 0.00 | 2005 | 华中科技大学 |
| 3 | 0.00 | 2006 | 北京交通大学 |
| 2 | 0.00 | 2009 | 华中师范大学 |
| 2 | 0.00 | 2007 | 重庆大学 |
| 2 | 0.00 | 2011 | 广东外语外贸大学 |
| 2 | 0.00 | 2012 | 对外经济贸易大学 |
| 2 | 0.00 | 2007 | 北京师范大学 |
| 2 | 0.00 | 2010 | 安徽科技学院 |

Furthermore, with regard to institutional collaboration, it is evident that only a number of institutions engage in cooperation with authors, with the majority collaborating exclusively with authors from their own institution. The institutions that have established cooperation with foreign institutions, as demonstrated in Figure 4, include the University of Michigan-Shanghai Jiao Tong University Joint Institute, the University of Florida, the Southern University of Science and Technology, Beijing Normal University, and others. Within the domestic university sector, collaboration has been observed between authors from Beijing Foreign Studies University, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, and University of International Business and Economics. Additionally, there has been cooperation between authors from Shanghai International Studies University and Nanjing Normal University in the publication of academic papers. However, it is evident that there is a greater degree of collaboration

between research institutes operating within the same geographical region, as opposed to collaboration across different regions.



Fig.4. Institutional collaboration mapping

Topical Foci

The utilisation of keywords is of paramount importance in the identification of research priorities and trends within a specific field. Visual analyses through Citespace successfully identified hotspots in the field of research on teaching English writing. A total of 85 keywords were identified as appearing more than five times, thus representing the prominent research areas in the field (see Figure 5). In the visualisation, each node represents a different keyword, with larger nodes indicating a higher frequency of occurrence in the dataset. Of particular note is the node labeled "English writing", which occurs 529 times. This is followed by the nodes representing "reading followed by writing" and "negative transfer", respectively, which also show a high frequency of occurrence in the dataset. In addition, smaller nodes, denoting concepts such as "error analysis", "mother tongue", "response", and so forth, demonstrate a frequency of more than 70 occurrences.

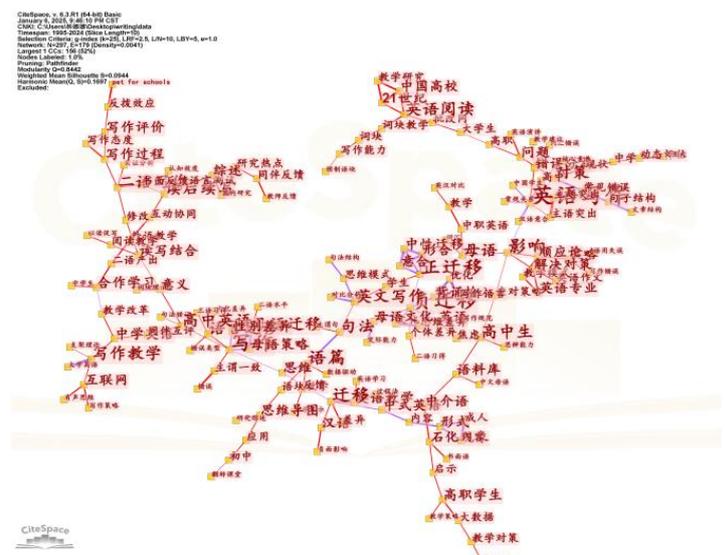


Fig.5. Network visualisation of keyword co-occurrence (occurrence threshold ≥ 5)

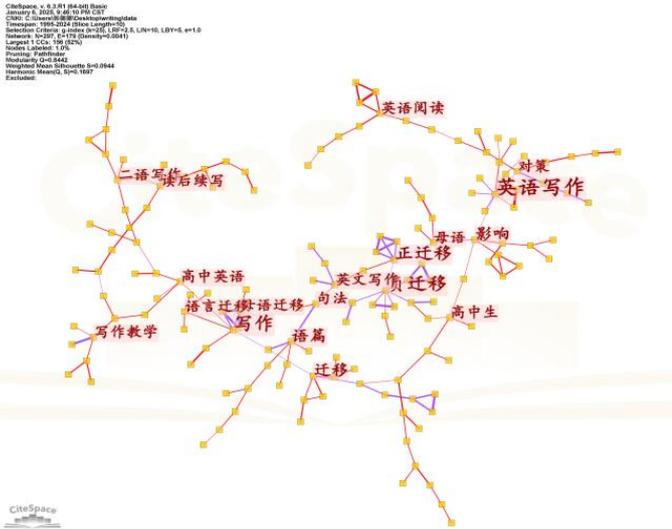


Fig.6. Network visualisation of keyword co-occurrence (occurrence threshold ≥ 10)

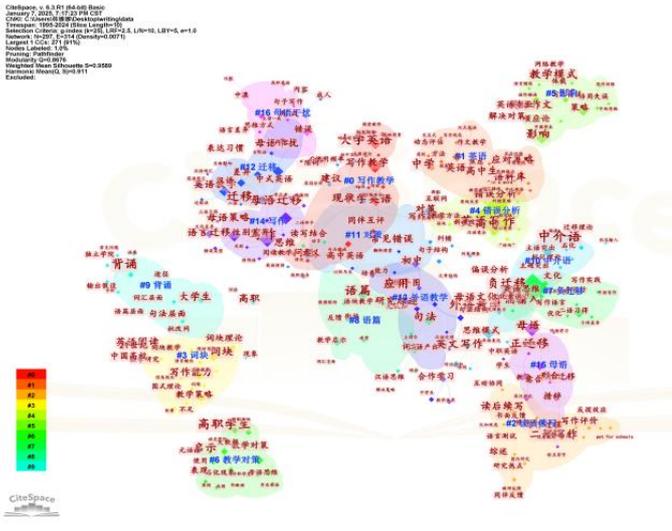


Fig.7. Keyword clustering mapping

As demonstrated in Figure 7, the keyword co-occurrence network, which has been segmented into 16 irregular regions, is clearly evident. Each region corresponds to a specific label, with the numerical value assigned to the front of each label denoting the number of keywords contained within the respective item. Each

cluster within the network consists of multiple closely related words. Within this network, two values, Q value and S value, require particular attention. It is generally accepted that: Modularity clustering module value (Q value), it is generally accepted that $Q > 0.3$ means that the clustering structure is significant, Silhouette clustering average profile value (S value), it is generally accepted that $S > 0.5$ clustering is reasonable, $S > 0.7$ means that the clustering is convincing. In the present keyword clustering profile, $Q = 0.8676$ and $S = 0.9589$, indicating that the clustering structure is significant and the results are convincing. Each cluster contains a decreasing amount of literature from small to large values. The initial 10 clusters, as indicated by the relevant data, facilitate the identification of the research domains of the primary research circle on writing instruction in China. Through integrated analysis, the research on writing instruction in China can be categorised into The first area is the perspective of teaching and learning strategies (teaching writing, reading and writing, word blocks, discourse); the second area is language acquisition and transfer as a perspective. The second perspective is that of language acquisition and transfer, encompassing the notions of negative transfer and mother tongue interference. The third perspective pertains to language analysis and assessment, including error analysis, influence, rote learning, and English. The final perspective focuses on strategies and countermeasures, such as the use of a mediator language, countermeasures to teaching, foreign language teaching, and writing.

The largest cluster, indicated by the colour red, encompasses 21 items, including “peer assessment”, “reading and writing integration”, “suggestions”, “questions”, “meaning”, and others. The term “meaning” is indicative of the research theme of focusing on reading for writing and writing assessment in writing instruction. The second group, represented by the colour orange, showed larger nodes, such as “reading followed by writing”, “writing attitude”, “peer feedback” and “interactive collaboration”, indicating an emphasis on peer collaboration. This finding suggests that collaborative peer learning has a significant impact on improving learning outcomes. The yellow cluster, which is characterised by prominent nodes such as “writing skills”, “instructional strategies”, and “word block theory”, signifies an area of focus on the literacy competencies of English learners. The green cluster consists of nodes on “error analysis”, “vocabulary errors”, “error correction strategies”, and “core literacy”. These nodes thus represent areas of research on error correction strategies. The light green cluster, which consists of 17 items, features significantly larger node sizes for the concepts of “influence”, “conformism” and “instructional model”, thereby reflecting the research focus on student-centred pedagogical research priorities. Conversely, the dark green clusters are characterised by nodes for “revelation”, “performance”, “thinking in the mother tongue” and “petrified phenomenon”. The latter are characterised by nodes indicating that the study focuses on teaching strategies chosen to cope with the difficulties that students have in writing. Finally, the smallest cluster, indicated in pink, is characterised by the nodes “language differences”, “thinking styles” and “target language”, which suggests that the focus of the study is on improving writing proficiency and language authenticity.

As demonstrated in Figure 8, the timing of the emergence of keywords in the field of English writing instruction can be traced over the years. The interpretation of keyword emergence can be approached from multiple perspectives. Firstly, the keywords that emerged earlier include discourse, negative transfer, thinking mode, etc., indicating that researchers have started to pay attention to the students’ thinking process in the process of writing earlier. Secondly, the words that emerged for the longest time, including discourse, college English, negative transfer, etc., This finding suggests that researchers have been focusing on the study of writing instruction for a longer period of time on the students of English majors. Thirdly, some words with a high emergence

intensity appear in the middle, including high school, junior high school, reading and subsequent writing, etc. This finding indicates that the focus of the research has gradually shifted to junior high and high school students. Fourthly, the words with a more recent emergence time, including reading and subsequent writing, corpus, and second-language writing, etc., are the ones that have attracted more attention from researchers in recent years.

Top 12 Keywords with the Strongest Citation Bursts

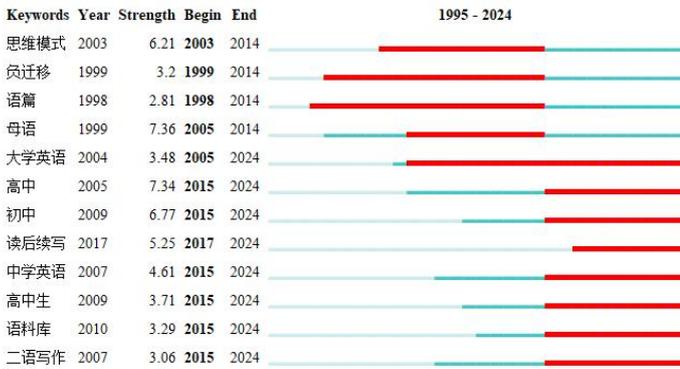


Fig.8. keyword bursting map

Table 3 Keywords in the field of English writing (threshold of occurrence ≥ 20)

| Count | Centrality | Year | Keywords |
|-------|------------|------|----------|
| 529 | 0.19 | 1999 | 英语写作 |
| 273 | 0.13 | 1999 | 负迁移 |
| 83 | 0.25 | 1998 | 写作 |
| 77 | 0.01 | 2005 | 错误分析 |
| 71 | 0.15 | 1999 | 母语 |
| 61 | 0.13 | 2003 | 对策 |
| 59 | 0.03 | 2004 | 写作教学 |
| 50 | 0.01 | 2002 | 母语迁移 |
| 44 | 0.01 | 2005 | 高中 |
| 41 | 0.02 | 2005 | 语言迁移 |
| 40 | 0.23 | 1999 | 影响 |
| 36 | 0.01 | 2007 | 策略 |
| 34 | 0.01 | 2003 | 思维模式 |
| 32 | 0.01 | 2005 | 英语教学 |
| 32 | 0.20 | 1998 | 语篇 |

| | | | |
|----|------|------|------|
| 31 | 0.12 | 1999 | 中式英语 |
| 29 | 0.00 | 2007 | 二语习得 |
| 28 | 0.00 | 2004 | 大学英语 |
| 27 | 0.01 | 2007 | 写作能力 |
| 26 | 0.13 | 2007 | 中介语 |
| 25 | 0.02 | 1999 | 英语 |
| 25 | 0.13 | 1998 | 迁移 |
| 24 | 0.18 | 2003 | 句法 |
| 23 | 0.01 | 2005 | 教学对策 |
| 22 | 0.00 | 2006 | 教学策略 |

Discussion

Firstly, the findings suggest that over the past three decades, there has been a growing academic interest in the area of research on the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. This growing interest in English can be attributed to its widespread acceptance as an “international language” or lingua franca (McKay, 2008; Mauranen, 2009), with many non-English-speaking countries requiring their citizens to be proficient in English (Drape, 2012; Lee, 2022). Moreover, the acknowledgement of writing as a pivotal skill for overall success in life has stimulated further research into the pedagogy of English writing. A significant number of scholars have underscored the importance of exploring various aspects of this field. Given the sustained upward trend observed over the past three decades, it is reasonable to anticipate a continuation of this upward trend in the coming years, with a projected increase in publications beyond the levels observed in 2025.

A further significant finding indicates that the domain of research on the pedagogy of English writing is predominantly shaped by a select group of researchers who have exerted a substantial influence on the scholarly evolution of the field through their prolific publication output. These prolific researchers, however, are in limited numbers, and their work reflects the core concerns and trends in the field. Conversely, the research conducted within China on the pedagogy of English writing appears to be limited in scope, which may be indicative of the fact that this particular subject has received comparatively scant attention or investment in resources in China. It is further suggested by these findings that research activities have been focused on a small number of active researchers.

Furthermore, the findings suggest a paucity of collaboration between the most productive and influential authors in China. The utilisation of visual analytical tools in the examination of authors’ collaboration patterns has facilitated the identification of collaborative networks within the research community. While the overall level of collaboration among researchers varies, the mapping reveals the presence of some closely collaborating groups, underscoring the significance of collaboration in advancing scholarship. The analysis indicates a notable concentration of research activity, accompanied by a certain diversity in collaboration patterns. This provides a valuable perspective on the

current academic landscape and potential future directions for collaboration and research.

In the context of influential institutions, a number of institutions have demonstrated significant academic productivity in the field of English writing instruction research. A cursory analysis reveals that, while numerous institutions are involved in this field of study, only a limited number have published extensively, thereby suggesting that academic productivity in this domain is predominantly concentrated among a select group of highly productive institutions. These institutions not only enjoy a high level of visibility within the country, but also exhibit a notable degree of interconnectedness, particularly within the same geographic region. The analysis of institutional collaboration mapping reveals that the representation of different institutions as nodes and the connections between them reflect inter-institutional collaborative relationships. The thickness of the connecting lines indicates a higher frequency of co-publication of literature. However, despite the existence of inter-institutional cooperation, the majority of research activities remain primarily confined within the institutions. However, a select few institutions have initiated more active collaborations with other domestic and international institutions, including author co-authorship of publications between prominent universities and with international partners. However, there remains a paucity of cross-regional collaboration, which may reflect current patterns and trends in research collaboration on the teaching and learning of English writing. This suggests potential directions for promoting wider collaboration in the future.

The utilisation of keywords is of paramount importance in the identification of research priorities and trends within a specific domain. Utilising a visual analysis instrument, this study successfully identified the subjects of current interest in research on English writing instruction. The analysis revealed that high-frequency keywords such as “teaching writing”, “reading and writing”, and “negative transfer” underscore the prevailing research directions in this domain. The size of the nodes in the visualisation map is proportional to the frequency of occurrence of the keywords, with the largest nodes representing the most frequently discussed topics in the field, such as “English writing”. This is followed by several other high-frequency terms that also reveal important topics of interest to researchers, such as “error analysis” and “native language influence”. The construction of the keyword co-occurrence network has resulted in the formation of multiple irregular regions, with each region corresponding to a distinct research cluster comprising terms that exhibit a high degree of semantic relatedness. Cluster analyses demonstrate significant structural features and a high degree of plausibility, suggesting that the research topics are strongly related to each other and can be clearly categorised. The clustering results indicate that research on writing instruction in China can be broadly classified into four main areas: “teaching and learning strategies”, “language acquisition and transfer”, “language analysis and assessment”, “language acquisition and transfer”, “language analysis and assessment”, and “strategies and countermeasures”. Each of these areas encompasses a range of perspectives and focuses, ranging from “teaching methods” to “analysing language errors” to “improving students” “writing skills” and solving problems encountered in the learning process. The keywords are also distributed chronologically to demonstrate the enhancement of students’ writing abilities. Furthermore, the temporal distribution of keywords demonstrates the trajectory of research interests. Initial studies concentrated on fundamental issues, such as students’ “thinking patterns” during the writing process. Over time, the focus of research has expanded to encompass student groups at diverse educational levels, including “junior and senior high school students”. In recent years, there has been an increased emphasis on the application of emerging pedagogical methods and technologies, as well as on the development of new and emerging technologies. In recent years, there has been an increased focus on the application

of emerging pedagogical methods and technologies, such as “reading and writing” and “corpus-assisted instruction”. The evolution of keywords is indicative of the development of the research field of English writing teaching and possible future research directions.

Moreover, research in the domain of writing and reading instruction has underscored significant interconnections among emergent themes, including “new standards”, “core literacy”, “reading followed by writing”, “corpus”, and “second language writing”. “corpus”, and “second language writing”. It is indisputable that the establishment of these new standards has exerted a substantial influence on the English language teaching and learning environment, concomitantly presenting heightened challenges to teachers and learners (Cao, 2024).

Conclusion

Utilising scientific mapping techniques, this study provides a comprehensive survey of research in the field of English writing instruction. It investigates the trajectory of publications, contributions and collaborations of influential authors and institutions in terms of productivity, as well as the research priorities identified over the past three decades. The study’s key findings are as follows: 1) Academic interest in and research on the teaching of English writing has increased significantly over the past three decades in response to the rise in the status of English as an international language, and the number of publications is expected to continue to grow in the future. 2) Research on the teaching of English writing is highly concentrated in the hands of a small number of high-productivity researchers and organisations, and these core members dominate the direction of the field, with comparatively little relevant research activity taking place in the country. 3) Despite the existence of some close-knit groups, collaboration among high-producing authors in Chinese research on the teaching of English writing is still limited, with most research activities confined to within institutions and little cross-regional collaboration. 4) Keyword analyses show that the focus of research on the teaching of English writing has gradually shifted from foundational issues to students at different stages of their education, and has begun to focus on the application of emerging pedagogical methodologies and technologies, with an emphasis on the new curriculum standards and modern educational themes such as core literacy.

In addition to providing valuable insights into the growing body of literature in the field of English writing instruction, the present study seeks to guide new researchers by identifying areas of research that merit attention in future studies. The following recommendations are made on the basis of the identified gaps in existing research: 1) It is recommended that future research continue to utilise multiple databases to conduct comprehensive bibliometric analyses. 2) researchers are encouraged to explore other aspects of bibliometric analyses, such as bibliographic coupling and knowledge structures, to gain more in-depth insights. 3) Researchers are encouraged to explore other aspects of bibliometric analyses, such as bibliographic coupling and knowledge structures, in order to gain more in-depth insights.

Limitation

This study offers valuable quantitative insights into the knowledge base of English writing instruction; however, it is necessary to recognise its inherent limitations. A salient limitation pertains to the utilisation of a solitary database for data accumulation, a practice that has the potential to result in the exclusion of pertinent information derived from alternative sources. Furthermore, the study employed Chinese journal articles as the selection criteria, excluding

data journals from other countries, which may have introduced bias.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the editor and anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and valuable suggestions.

Funding

Not applicable.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Statements and Declarations

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No funding was received for conducting this study. The present study has no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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Author Contributions

Not applicable.

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