

A Literature Review of English Learning Strategies in China

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Abstract: This paper makes a statistical analysis of the research on English learning strategies in 13 core journals of foreign languages in China from 2003 to 2018, mainly from the perspective of research trends, research objects, and so on. The present situation of English learning strategies is reviewed in four aspects: the content and methods of the study. It is found that the research on English learning strategies in China generally shows a dynamic upward trend, and the subjects of the study are from undergraduates to graduate students, college students and middle school students, and from non-English majors to English majors. The content of the study extends from the microscopic perspective of English learning strategies to other relevance studies, and the research methods are mainly empirical research, but less argumentative research methods. In the end, some suggestions are put forward for the research of English learning strategies in China.

Keywords: English Learning Strategies; Literature Review

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1 Introduction

Language learning strategies are one of the most active areas of second language acquisition^[1] (Skehan 1991). Scholars have defined learning strategies in different ways and classified them in different ways^[2-5] (O'Malley & Chamot 1990; Oxford 1990; Ellis 1999; Cohen 1998; Wen Qiufang 1996b). Foreign researches of learning

strategies mainly focus on the following four aspects^[6] (Anderson 2005: 759): firstly, it is about the differences between language use strategies and language learning strategies; secondly, it is about the relationship between strategies and second language achievement or level; thirdly, it is the transfer from mother tongue strategies to second language learning; finally, it is about the training of language strategies. However, because foreign strategies may not be suitable for teaching and learning in China, so it is necessary to review the domestic research with a view to summarizing achievements and insufficient analysis. (Zheng Yurong, 2011)

2 A Review of the Research on English Learning Strategies at Home

Although the study of learning strategies started late in the 1980s, the research on learning strategies in China has developed rapidly. More and more attention has been paid to them and preliminary results have been achieved. The more influential strategic research from the early 1980s to the end of the 1990s is Professor Wen Qiufang's series of studies on learning and learning strategies (1995,1996a,1996b) since the late 1990s of 1996c. More and more achievements have been made in the study of strategies, and the perspective of the research has become wider and wider (Wei Hongjun, Cai Lifang, 2018). Wen Qiufang and Wang Lifei (2004a) summarized the empirical study of English learning strategies in China from 1984 to 2003 and pointed out the shortcomings and problems, which worth studying in the future. Zheng Yurong (2011) reviewed the study of English learning strategies in China from 2000 to 2009, and summarized its achievements and shortcomings. Wei Hongjun and Cai Lifang (2018)

analyzed 96 articles on English learning strategies published in 24 foreign language journals in China from 2003 to 2017 by using quantitative and qualitative methods. The research direction of learning strategy is pointed out.

This paper aims to summarize the research and development of English learning strategies in China in the past 15 years. Based on the web-based search platform of China academic Journals Network, this paper goes into advanced retrieval and enters “English Learning Strategies” into the subject and keyword respectively. Thirteen foreign language core journals, including Foreign language Teaching and Research, Foreign language, Modern Foreign language, and

Foreign language Audio-visual Teaching, were inputted in turn from January 1st, 2003 to December 31st, 2018. A total of 78 articles on English learning strategies from 2003 to 2018 were retrieved. This paper makes a statistical analysis of the research from four aspects, they are research trends, research subjects, research contents and research methods.

2.1 Research Trends

From 2003 to 2018, the number of literature on English learning strategies is fluctuating as shown. Research trends from 2003 to 2018 show that the number of documents on English learning strategies is as follows.

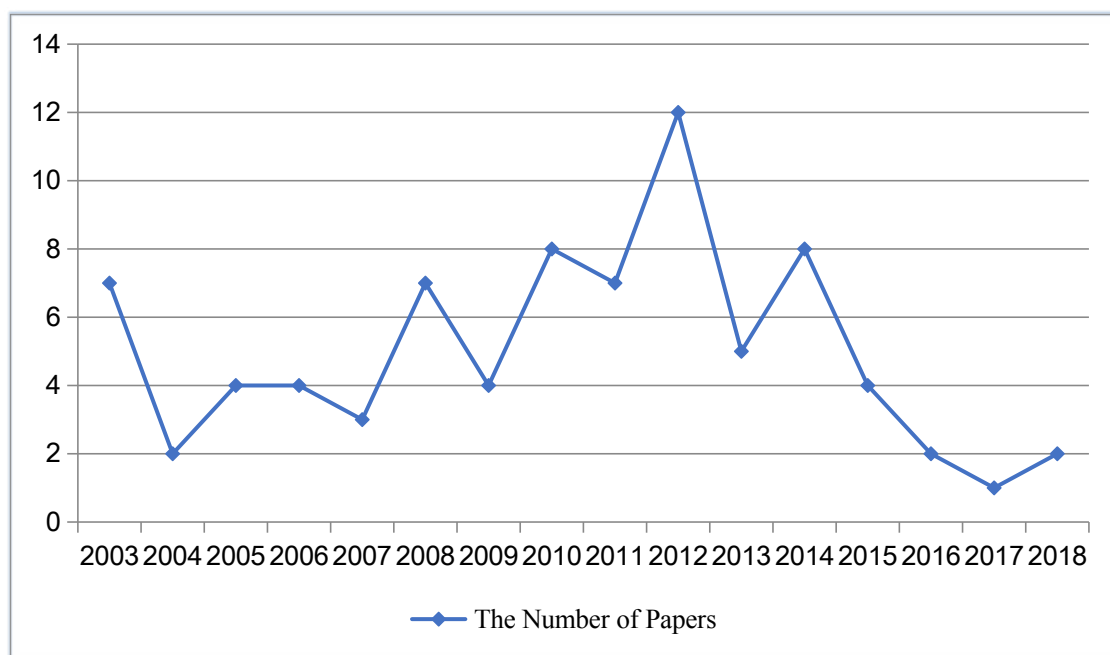


Figure 1. 2003-2018 Distribution Trends of English Learning Strategies in China.

Figure 1 shows that, with the exception of individual years (2007, 2009), research on English learning strategies in China from 2004 to 2012 is basically developing steadily, there are two peaks in 2012 and 2014. It shows that the research in this area has been paid more and more attention and the research shows a decreasing trend after 2014. This also reflects that it is necessary to sort out, review and reflect on the research results of English learning strategies.

2.1.1 Research Subjects

From 2003 to 2018, English learning strategies in China covered different stages of education, including middle school students, higher vocational students, undergraduates and graduate students. Among these subjects, there were 50 research papers on English learning strategies of undergraduate students, accounting for 52.2% of the total, the papers involving higher vocational students are 2.6%, the details can be seen from Table 1.

Table 1. The Study Object Distribution of English Learning Strategies in China

Research subjects	Senior high school students	Higher vocational students	Undergraduates	Postgraduates	Others	Total
Number of papers	7	2	43	2	25	79
Percentage	8.9%	2.6%	54.4%	2.6%	31.5%	100%

It can be seen that the study of English learning strategies in China mainly focuses on the group English learning strategies of undergraduate students. Table 1 is about the distribution of subjects of English learning strategies in China from 2003 to 2018. The percentage of English learning strategies of middle school students and higher vocational students account for 11.5% and 2.6% respectively, 54.4% of undergraduate English learning strategies account for 2.6%, graduate students English learning strategies, and 31.5% is other English learning strategies. It can be concluded that future research

on English learning strategies in China should pay attention to these academic blind areas and pay more attention to the English learning strategies of junior college students and primary school students.

2.1.2 Research Contents

The contents of the 78 documents reviewed are divided into summary, micro-perspective study, influence factors study, training research, and comprehensive research, theoretical and case studies. Content distribution of English learning strategies from 2003 to 2018, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Research Contents Distribution of English Learning Strategies in China

Research Contents	Number of Papers	Percentage
Summaries	2	2.6%
Microcosmic	20	25.3%
relativity	22	27.9%
Comparison	4	5%
Influencing factor	5	6.3%
Training class	4	5%
Comprehensiveness	18	22.7%
Theories	2	2.6%
Individual cases	2	2.6%

Among them, the study of the relevance of English learning strategies and the study of micro-perspective account for the largest proportion, 42 articles account for 48% of the total; In addition, there are 4 papers, 2 papers are about English learning strategy training and 2 papers are about individual cases, which account for 2.6% of the total respectively. Furthermore, it can be found that there are some limitations in the research content of English learning strategies in China and the research contents in the future should be expanded to

such aspects as differences, cases and so on.

2.1.3 Research Methods

From 2003 to 2018, in China, the empirical and theoretical research on English learning strategies were being analyzing. Statistical analysis of the research methods of English learning strategies is conducive to the macro-understanding of the overall situation of the study. Table 3 shows the distribution of research methods of English learning strategies from 2003 to 2018.

Table 3. The Distribution of Research Methods of English Learning Strategies in China

Research Methods	Number of Papers	Percentage
Descriptive studies (including reviews, theoretical studies, etc.)	27	21.5%
Empirical study	67	78.5%
Total	79	100%

As can be seen from Table 3, there are 62 empirical papers (78.5%) and 27 research papers (21.5%) on English learning strategies. Empirical research has strong ability, mainly through questionnaire

survey, assisted by interviews and observations, and through statistical analysis software to analyze the data, the results of the study are instructive to English teaching.

2.1.4 Types and Fields of Research

The empirical research on the combination of qualitative and quantitative research has become the mainstream method of learning strategy research, strategy investigation and strategy

training. There are 68 articles among them, strategy investigation, strategy training effect analysis and correlation research rank in the top three in the empirical study, the research areas covered by these articles are detailed in Table 4 - 6.

Table 4. Research Types and Domain Distribution

Strategy investigation	Number of Papers	Percentage
Overall strategy research	10	23.2%
Influencing strategic factors	5	11.6%
Vocabulary	5	11.6%
Communication Strategies	5	11.6%
Autonomous learning Strategies	4	9.3%
Reading Comprehension	3	6.9%
Others	43	64.2%
Total	67	100%

Table 5. Table of Research Types and Domain Distribution

Strategic Training	Number of Papers	Percentage
Listening Comprehension	1	25%
Communication Strategies	1	25%
Overall strategy study	1	25%
Reading strategies	1	25%
Total	4	100%

Table 6. Table of Research Types and Domain Distribution

Relative Study	Number of Papers	Percentage
Listening comprehension	5	22.7%
Writing	5	22.7%
Reading comprehension	4	18.2%
Vocabulary	3	18.2%
Influencing strategic factors	3	18.3%
Others	2	9.1%
Total	22	100%

Ding Yi (2006) found that poor scholars use multiple strategies more frequently than good scholars, but the key to success in learning depends on the proper use of vocabulary learning strategies, not on the frequency of strategies used.

2.2 Existing Deficiencies

2.2.1 Non-uniform Criteria for the Classification of Empirical Research Strategies

The results and conclusions of empirical research are

not comparable and universal because of different criteria of questionnaire design and sample size difference in the classification of empirical research strategies. The biggest difference in the study came from the size of the sample. The largest sample was ten thousand (Xu Yulong ,2003) followed by 1280 (Cheng Yuefang,2003) and less than 10 (Ding Yi 2006; Wang Li Mei 2008). In the strategy training report, the training method and time are different. These differences are bound to affect the comparability and extensibility of the research results.

2.2.2 Lack of Theoretical Support and Lack of Breakthrough

At present, many studies involve a wide range of fields, there are more comprehensive types, but single strategies or skills still account for the vast majority of studies, integration research is not much. It is worth noting that Professor Wen Qiufang and others put forward the systematic view of strategy theory (Wen Qiufang,2004), pointing out that learning strategies are influenced by external factors such as language learning activities, environment and other external factors as well as cognitive styles, learning motivation and other internal factors. Under such circumstances, it is worth mentioning that the study by Yu Yuanfang and Liu Yongbing (2009) examined whether Oxford[5] (1990) theoretical model of second language learning strategies can explain the choice and use of foreign language learning strategies by Chinese college English learning groups. The results show that her "quartile" learning strategy model is more applicable and it is necessary to construct a suitable foreign language learning strategy theory according to the characteristics of Chinese learners. This research has strong theoretical innovation, and shows the new direction of strategy research.

3 Conclusion

In summary, this paper uses quantitative and qualitative methods, which analyzes the research literature on English learning strategies published in Chinese foreign language journals from 2003 to 2018. The results show that the research contents of English learning strategies in China continue to expand. The research field is also more and more extensive, and constantly emerging new research angles and methods. However, there are still some deficiencies. In order to study the English learning strategies in China, researchers should pay more attention to the following aspects: a comparative study of learners English learning strategies at different levels of education and a study about the combination of teaching and research, which is closely related to the research frontiers of foreign countries. English learning strategies are related to the success or failure of English learning, so English learning strategies are of great significance to English teaching.

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