

A Bibliometric Analysis of Intercultural Communication Research from 2019 to 2021

Kai Chen^{1*}

¹ School of Foreign Studies, Nanjing University of Science and Technology, Nanjing, China

Email Address

kaichen_for_work98@163.com (Chen Kai)

*Correspondence: kaichen_for_work98@163.com

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Abstract:

The advancement of economic globalization promotes the development of intercultural communication research. To elucidate cutting-edge topics in this field, the current study conducted a bibliometric analysis on the word frequencies within the titles, abstracts and keywords of the research articles sourced from the CNKI foreign journal database spanning from 2019 to 2021. The results show that intercultural communication has formed four research hotspots in this period: (1) intercultural communication in the process of social group interaction; (2) intercultural communication teaching; (3) cultural differences between China and the West; and (4) intercultural communication competence. These identified findings contribute to a better understanding of the current trends and advancements in the field of intercultural communication.

Keywords:

Intercultural Communication, Bibliometric Analysis, Research Hotspots

1. Introduction

With the advancement of economic globalization, intercultural contact has emerged as an irresistible trend. As a result, possessing intercultural communication skills has become a crucial requirement for individuals aspiring to be high-quality international talents [1].

Following this trend, the study of intercultural communication emerged from the realm of social psychology. Initially, intercultural communication research focused primarily on pragmatic approaches to address issues related to intercultural conflicts and the cultural adaptation of social groups such as immigrants and foreign students. However, as the scope of research within this field continues to intersect with other disciplines such as linguistics and language teaching, its research domain has become increasingly broad, with new topics continuously emerging in response to societal changes and development. Summarizing the research hotspots of intercultural communication is of great significance in helping researchers grasp the latest trends of

research and ultimately promoting its development. Conducting bibliometric analyses proves to be an effective method for identifying these research hotspots.

While some studies have conducted bibliometric analyses of cross-cultural communication in recent years [1,2], their data timeframes were too extensive, making it challenging to capture the most cutting-edge topics. Therefore, the current study systematically analyzed research articles on intercultural communication published specifically between 2019 and 2021. To achieve this, VOSviewer [3], a software tool for constructing and visualizing bibliometric networks, was utilized. This approach aims to provide an up-to-date understanding of the most relevant and current research areas within the field of intercultural communication.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Questions

The present study aims to address the following two questions:

- (1) What are the research hotspots in the field of intercultural communication from 2019 to 2021?
- (2) What are the main contents of these research hotspots?

2.2. Data Collection

The data for this study were collected from the CNKI foreign journal full-text database, specifically focusing on articles published in the English language. To ensure relevance to the research topic of “intercultural communication”, the study employed “intercultural communication” as the index word in both the theme and keyword search boxes, with the logical relationship set as “AND” between the search boxes. To ensure that the chosen articles reflected recent developments and perspectives in the field of intercultural communication, the data timeframe was restricted to the period between 2019 and 2021. Following the screening process, a total of 188 valid articles meeting the predetermined criteria were identified. The titles, keywords, and abstracts of these articles were selected for further analysis.

2.3. Data Analysis

Using VOSviewer, the present study analyzed the word frequencies of the titles, keywords and abstracts of the 188 articles, and generated the keyword map visualization based on the results (see Figure 1).

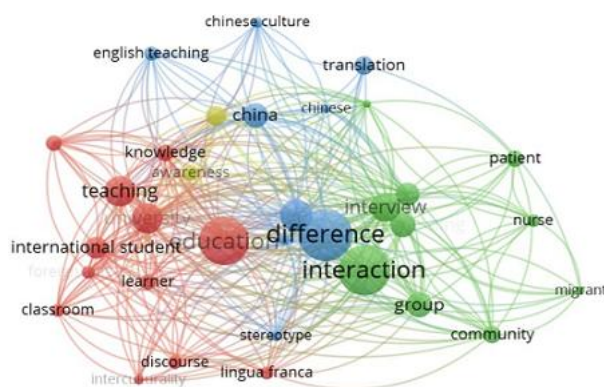


Figure 1. VOSviewer keyword map visualization.

The visualization represented nodes in varying sizes, with larger nodes indicating more frequent occurrences of the corresponding keyword. As the search term “Intercultural Communication” was utilized to collect the articles, its node in the visualization was the largest. However, to ensure clarity and minimize visual interference, the node representing “Intercultural Communication” was hidden from the display.

3. Findings

3.1. Research Hotspots

The basic principle of word frequency analysis is to identify the hot issues in the research field through the statistical analysis of the occurrence times of keywords and the relationship between words. The high-frequency keywords in the literature in a certain field can be regarded as the research hotspots in this field [4].

Table 1. Word frequency statistics.

Theme	Keyword	Frequency
Intercultural Communication in the Process of Social Group Interaction	interaction	70
	interview	41
	group	35
	relationship	33
	international student	31
	community	25
	patient	24
	nurse	18
	lingua franca	18
	migrant	12
Intercultural Communication Teaching	education	67
	university	42
	teaching	42
	learner	22
	English teaching	20
	discourse	19
	foreign language	18
	classroom	18
Cultural Differences between China and the West	difference	73
	theory	44
	China	34
	understanding	34
	translation	26
	Chinese culture	15
	cultural background	15
	stereotype	15
Intercultural Communication Competence	intercultural competence	28
	knowledge	24
	intercultural communicative competence	22
	awareness	22
	interculturality	13
	intercultural communication competence	11

As can be seen from Figure 1, the three keywords with the largest nodes were “interaction”, “education and “difference”. However, after further classifying the keywords manually, it was found that in addition to the above three keywords, there were three synonyms “intercultural competence”, “intercultural communicative competence” and “intercultural communication competence”, which collectively formed the fourth keyword “intercultural communication competence”. Therefore, “difference”, “interaction”, “education” and “intercultural communication competence” are the hottest four words in the field of intercultural communication.

Based on the four keywords, four keyword clusters were constructed by VOSviewer, which correspond to four cutting-edge hotspots in intercultural communication research: 1) research on intercultural communication in the process of social group interaction; 2) research on intercultural communication teaching; 3) research on cultural differences between China and the West; 4) research on intercultural communication competence. Table 1 summarizes the keywords with frequencies greater than 10 in the four keyword clusters.

3.2. Main Contents

3.2.1 Intercultural Communication in the Process of Social Group Interaction

Social groups from different cultures inevitably produce a series of intercultural communication problems in the process of interaction. At present, the research on intercultural communication mainly focuses on three social groups: doctors and patients from different cultures, immigrants and international students. Research on intercultural communication between doctors and patients mainly aims to help clinicians screen for culture-related issues in patient explanatory models of illness and to enhance the clinical processes of engagement, diagnosis, and treatment planning [5]. Studies on immigrant groups mainly explore the difficulties immigrants encounter in the new cultural environment and seek ways to help them integrate into the new society as soon as possible [6]. The research on international students mainly involves how to help these students better adapt to their academic life [7,8].

3.2.2 Intercultural Communication Teaching

The research on intercultural communication teaching mainly focuses on foreign language teaching, including two aspects: intercultural foreign language teaching strategies and intercultural foreign language teaching factors. As for intercultural foreign language teaching strategies, scholars mainly explore new ideas and approaches of foreign language teaching, such as using social networking sites to assist foreign language teaching or simulating intercultural environments for teaching [9]. The research on the factors of intercultural foreign language teaching mainly involves the study of curriculum, teachers and textbooks, such as how to arrange courses reasonably, how to write appropriate textbooks and how to train foreign language teachers [10].

3.2.3 Cultural Differences between China and the West

With the increasing prominence of China on the global stage, the concept of “China” has emerged as a prominent topic in intercultural communication research. Scholars have shown a growing interest in exploring the differences between Chinese culture and Western culture from an intercultural communication perspective. Some researchers have conducted comparative analyses of Chinese and English names based on Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory [11]. They examine how cultural values and norms influence naming practices in these two cultures. Other scholars

focus on social customs and investigate the contrasting taboo customs [12] and social communication customs [13] between Chinese and Western cultures. These studies shed light on the divergences in behavior and expectations within interpersonal interactions. Additionally, there are studies that approach intercultural communication from a national level. Researchers explore the cultural barriers between China and the United States and analyze the reasons behind the challenges faced in dialogues between these two countries [14].

3.2.4 Intercultural Communication Competence

Undoubtedly, intercultural communication competence stands as one of the most prominent and widely researched topics in the field. Scholars have undertaken investigations to understand the acquisition and improvement of intercultural communication competence. For instance, Matthews Blair proposes that “reflexive thought”, which refers to individuals’ ability to comprehend the cultural system and effectively navigate their position within it, is a crucial pathway toward acquiring intercultural communication competence [15]. Regarding tools for enhancing intercultural communication competence, researchers have explored various avenues. [16] suggests that folklore serves as a valuable tool for improving intercultural communication competence, while [17] emphasizes the role of analogy in fostering the development of intercultural communication competence. Furthermore, some scholars employ comparative analysis methods to examine the components of intercultural competence among contemporary students [18]. Additionally, researchers explore the role of intercultural communication competence in promoting intercultural understanding and tolerance, even in inter-religious contexts [19].

4. Conclusions

By analyzing the clustering of subject words in intercultural communication literature, this paper finds that studies of intercultural communication mainly focus on the four hotspots “interaction”, “difference”, “education” and “intercultural communication competence”. The research topics corresponding to these four hotspots are (1) research on intercultural communication in the process of social group interaction; (2) research on intercultural communication teaching; (3) research on cultural differences between China and the West; (4) research on intercultural communication competence. These identified hotspots represent the primary areas of interest and inquiry within the field of intercultural communication, highlighting the multifaceted nature of this discipline. By summarizing these key themes, the current study deepens our understanding of intercultural communication and contributes to the research on communication across cultural boundaries.

Indeed, there are certain limitations in the present study. Firstly, the data used in this study were sourced solely from the CNKI foreign journal database, which may impose some restrictions on the comprehensiveness and representativeness of the findings. It is important to acknowledge that intercultural communication research extends beyond the boundaries of a single database, and incorporating literature from other sources would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the field. Secondly, the current study did not consider the main body of the articles in the analysis. By solely relying on titles, abstracts as well as keywords, the study might overlook valuable insights and nuances present within the articles themselves. Future research should incorporate a more in-depth analysis that takes into account the main

body of the articles, allowing for a deeper exploration of the research themes and findings.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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