Content Analysis on Research Trends of English as Public Speaking Skills in China

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English public speech skills have become a new area for linguistic researchers and language lecturers in recent years in China where related studies also have begun to attract more attention. However, rare content analysis has been conducted so far. This study aims to fill this gap by systematically reviewing the relevant literature from 2010- 2019, aiming to identify the major themes and trends in this field with a hope that the findings can contribute to provide a picture of studies on public speaking conducted in China for past ten years and offer some insights for Chinese practitioners. Themes' analysis reports that the current levels of EPS for college students have seldom been measured. Thus, the public speaking level of ordinary college students is still a black box to the outsiders.

Key words: *Content analysis, English public speaking skills, Themes, Trend.*

INTRODUCTION

Public speaking has a long history in the West, dating back to rhetoric 2,500 years ago (Lucas, S. E., 2007). To date, it has become a required course for numerous universities in many countries (Van Ginkel, 2019). Presenting is seen as one of the higher-educated professional's core competencies (Kerby & Romine, 2009). Furthermore, the oral presentation skill is considered a key and required qualification for college graduates by educational decision makers (e.g. Rubin, Rubin, & Jordan, 1997).

In China, the history of the course of English Public Speaking (EPS) is relatively short, namely, only no more than 20 years (Tian, Z.2013; Wang 2014). It was not until 1993 that the *English Public Speaking* (EPS) course was introduced to Chinese university English majors by Su Xunwu in 1991, a U.S. returned scholar (Tian, Z.2013; Wang 2014). Then a boom appeared since a high-ranking National English-Speaking Contest was initiated in 2005, which attracted participation of thousands English public speech leaners at all levels of universities and colleges in China. After that, English public speaking (ESP) has received more and more attention from practitioners and researchers (Tian, 2013). "Speech course practice and speech research have become a new focus of current English language teaching research in China" (Wang, 2014).

Therefore, specific attention is required to shed light on this area; literature review is undoubtedly considered to be a new effort. In term of EPS, CNKI (China national knowledge Infrastructure), the largest and most well-recognised publication database in China, reports that there are only two articles related to content analysis on EPS. One is Wang (2014)'s article which reviewed the literature of EPS with the time span from 2004 to 2013. Another is Su, Y. (2015) who reviewed the development of Public Speaking course in the world from 2004 to 2013. They indicate that content analysis has been conducted rarely in China in this aspect. By now, seven (7) years have passed, and what research progress have been achieved in this area in China? This is still underexplored.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by systematically reviewing the relevant literature from 2010- 2019, aiming to identify the major themes and trends in this field. It is hoped that the findings can contribute to provide a picture of studies on public speaking conducted in China for past ten years and offer some insights for Chinese practitioners. So, the research aims at answering the following questions, as;*(1) What is the research trend of EPS in China in the past 10 years?(2)What are the themes in the field of EPS in China in the past 10 years? (3): Regarding EPS, what research methods have been adopted in empirical studies in the past 10 years?(4): Regarding EPS, what are the sampling size and level in the empirical research of the past 10 years? (5): How many projects of EPS have received financial supports from Chinese government institutions in the past 10 years?*

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public speaking is "the act, art, or process of making effective speeches before an audience" (Nunberg , G. et al. 2000). It involves one person or a small group of people speaking to a wide number of listeners (Morreale, 2010. p.27). Public speaking competence involves the delivery

of a message from the sender to the recipient in a certain context (Haber &Lingard, 2001). It is viewed as one of the core competencies of the higher educated professional (Campbell, Mothersbaugh, Brammer, & Taylor, 2001; Kerby & Romine, 2009). The oral presentation skill is considered a key and required qualification for college graduates by educational decision makers (e.g. Rubin, Rubin, & Jordan, 1997). For example, in America, public speaking is an integral part of higher education. At UW-Madison university, public speaking is a mandatory course for first year students from several different disciplines. Annually, around 1,500 students sign up at UW-Madison for the course (Suya, 2005).

In China, giving speeches has a long history, dating back to a war mobilisation speech given by Xia Qi and a persuasive speech on moving the capital by Pan Geng in the 21st century BC (Lu Xing, 2009). After that, in the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, Confucius, Zhuangzi, and Han Feizi made some statements about speeches; comparatively speaking, the history of speeches in English is relatively short. The integration of public speaking into the English curriculum should be considered a major breakthrough of the ongoing English educational reform in China (Yin, 2015). Some scattered literature reviews embedded in the journal articles indicate that Chinese scholars' researches on EPS mainly highlight on three themes: English competition; English course design; and English teaching strategies.

English competition. There is no doubt that in China, the annual national level English speech contest has always played a very important role in promoting the development of English speech classes. Winning national titles at these events has not only brought honour to the contestants, it has also become an effective way to advertise the winners' universities. Therefore, it has always attracted the attention of many researchers like a magnet, which constitutes the characteristics of Chinese English speech: The performance of the contestants (Fan Lei et al., 2016), the characteristics of the winners' manuscript (Wang Lifei, 2009), and the scoring criteria of the judges (Wen Qiufang et al., 2005).

Course design. Driven by the competition, English speaking courses are now a very popular course. It is estimated that English speaking courses have become elective or compulsory courses over 200 college in China (Wang S, 2014). The Role of Public Speaking in China is also a hot topic of concern for scholars. For example, Tian Xiaoxia (2013; 2018), Wang Shu (2014), and Wan Jiangbo (2014) discussed how to introduce Western English public speaking courses into the Chinese English curriculum system and how to localise speech courses based on the background of Chinese higher education. Ren Wen (2007, 2013), Jia Guodong (2015),   Fang Hui et al. (2017) discussed the necessity and feasibility of providing English public speaking courses to Chinese college students from the perspective of curriculum design.

Teaching strategies. The teaching strategy in English public speaking class is also a focus of attention of scholars. Chen Lang (2010) discussed the course content selection and arrangement in an English public speaking textbook. Wan Jiangbo (2013) explored the implementation of formative evaluation to improve the effectiveness of EPS skills. Feng Pengpeng (2019) explores how to improve students' argumentation ability in English speech class. Ye Ping (2014) adopted peer feedback to improve the effectiveness of English speech skills' learning

Conclusively, China's research on English public speaking started relatively late, and it is still in the preliminary stage, with the characteristics of fragmentation, unsystematic, and non-sustainability. In addition, the extant EPS literature content have rarely been analysed in China. CNKI (China national knowledge Infrastructure), the largest and most well-recognised publication database in China, reports that there are only two articles related to content analysis on EPS. One is Wang (2014)'s article which reviewed the literature of EPS with the time span from 2004 to 2013. Another is Su, Y. (2015) who reviewed the development of Public Speaking course in the world from 2004 to 2013. It indicates that content analysis has been conducted rarely in China in this aspect. By now, seven (7) years have passed; what research progress have been achieved in this area in China? This is still underexplored. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by systematically reviewing the relevant literature from 2010- 2019, aiming to identify the major themes and trends in this field. It is hoped that the findings can contribute to provide a picture of studies on public speaking conducted in China for past ten years and offer some insights for Chinese practitioners.

MATERIALS AND METHOD:

The data collection was the first step of literature review. In this study, the researcher started with entering key terms into the China largest database, CNKI. As per given in the table 1, the key searching terms included "oral presentation", "oral report", "public speaking", "and English speech". The search time span was restricted to from 2010 through 2019 (ten years). Due to the huge publications in China, to ascertain the high-quality of the publication, this study merely focused on those published on the Chinese national key journals, namely, CSSCI (Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index) journals of China (2019). In consistence with the keywords used, a total of 32 theses were obtained. After they were downloaded, all articles met requirements from the CNKI database, and the researcher together with a PhD candidate identified the relevance by reading carefully through the article abstracts. Ultimately, this collection yielded 29 articles which were deemed to meet the criteria for selection and were analysed. Three (3) were excluded. These 29 articles were target data of content analysis in this

study. These articles are expected to help us to understand the trend of the recent studies of EPS in China.

Firstly, simply, two categories can be classified: empirical studies and non-empirical studies. Of the 29 studies, 12 articles (41.4%) are non-empirical studies whereas 17 are empirical (58.6%). It can be seen non-empirical studies also play an important part in the EPS studies. They highlight curriculum design, introduction of western curriculum theory, and summary of practical experience. For 17 empirical studies, a single method including qualitative (13.8%) and quantitative (20.7%) has been adopted in researches as opposed to using a mixed method (24.1%).

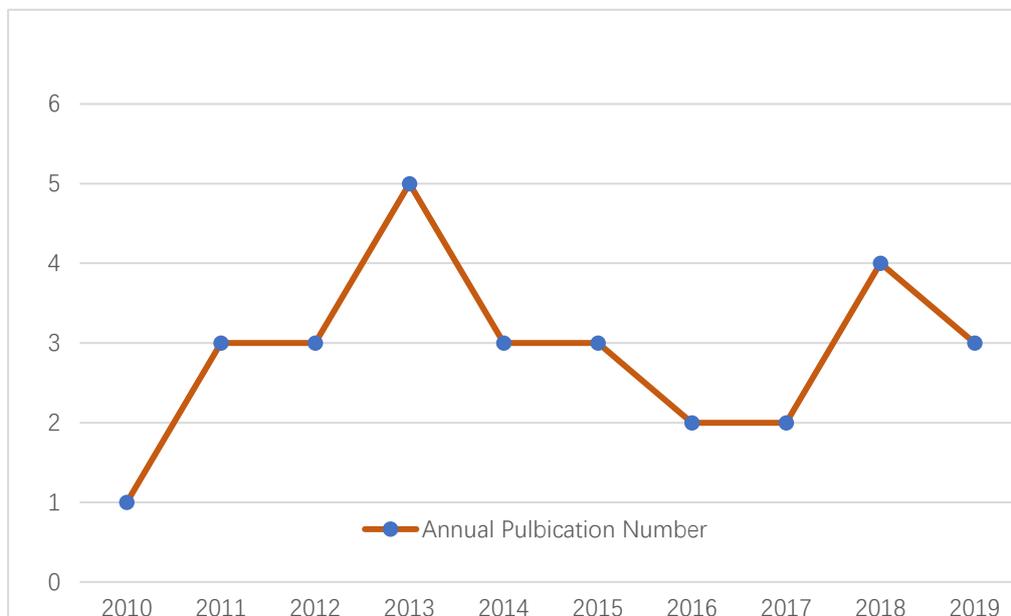| Table1: Research Method Distribution of Publications							
Method	Curriculum Design (7)	learning Strategies	Assess ment	Students Traits	Speech Contest	N	%
Non empirical	7	3			2	12	41.40%
quantitative empirical			2		4	6	20.70%
quantitative empirical		1	1		2	4	13.80%
Mixed-method		5	1	1		7	24.10%
Total	**7**	**9**	**4**	**1**	**8**	**29**	**100%**

RESULTS

To find answers to the research questions, with the selected 29 articles, content analysis was performed to explore the themes and trends and descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequencies were analysed.

The Trend of publications: The change in the amount of literature within a period can roughly reveal some trends of the studies (Chen Ting, 2013). The statistical results in Figure-1 show that EPS research in China shows three overall characteristics: (1) the number of high-quality studies has been small and fluctuated, with an average of less than three (3) papers year by year. It to some extent reflects the fact of relatively under explored area and limited achievements in EPS in China. From 2010 to 2019, there was a steady increase in number from 2010 to 2013, then declined slowly to the level of two (2) in 2016, then re-bounced in 2017, publication

number rose from two (2) to four, and eventually stayed at level of three (3) in 2019.

This indicates that OPS has received some attention, but the number for each year is not large, and basically maintained at the level of 1-5. It may relate to the provision and popularisation of EPS in current China. Wang (2014) stated that there are over 200 universities that have provided an ESP course as a selective course or general education course to students, yet the number is not large enough, opposed to nearly 3000 universities and colleges in China. In the context of English learning as a foreign language, the researchers mainly are the instructors of the spoken English language. The population for this group is small. This is different from western English-speaking countries where ESP are considered to be 'a required communicative art'.

Figure 1:   Annual distribution of publications

Publications' Themes: According to the research topics, the themes of the selected 29 papers could be classified into five (5) categories (Table2): The most attractive theme was teaching and learning strategies (n = 9, 31 %), speech competition (n = 8, 27.7%), curriculum design (n = 7, 24.1%), oral presentation assessment (n= 4, 13.8%) and students' psychological traits (n=1, 3.4%). From the reported percentage, three (3) points can be elicited: Firstly, English speech teaching strategies have been the focus of attention of Chinese scholars in the recent ten years. This reflects that many Chinese researchers pay more concern about how to improve the effectiveness of teaching in the classroom due to the novelty of this course in China. Secondly, the English speech contest is the second focus.

This shows that the annual National English Speech Contest has been a biggest impetus and motivation for college EPS learners. Researchers are very concerned about how to improve the performance of contestants and how obtain a better ranking position in the contest. Thirdly, by contrast, students' psychological factors impacting public speaking performance, for instance, self-efficacy, motivation, confidence, and communication apprehension has received little attention in China. Interestingly, these factors are often highly valued in English-speaking countries and ESL (English spoken as a second language) countries. One of the main reasons for this difference may be related to the single discipline knowledge of the current front-line researchers in China. One fact has been easily ignored.

In the context of English as a foreign language teaching in China, most of the researchers in this field in China are English language teachers in colleges and universities, and there are very few interdisciplinary researchers involved, such as psychology and communication. This is very different from the situation in Western countries, where public speaking is considered as a communication subject. Perhaps due to the fact that the researcher's single discipline background inhibits them from adopting multiple perspectives in this field, consequently, affection factors tended to be neglected in current studies.

Table2: Themes of 2010-2019 publications on EPS in China on the national key journals												
theme	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	**N**	Percentage
Learning Strategies		1	2	1	1	2		1		1	**9**	31%
Speech Competition		1		2		1	2	1		1	**8**	27.70%
Design of Curriculum											**0**	24.10%
Assessment	1			2	2				2		**7**	13.80%
Students' Traits		1	1					1	1	1	**5**	3.40%
Total	**1**	**3**	**3**	**5**	**3**	**3**	**2**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**29**	**100%**

Journal Distribution: In terms of journal distribution, statistics (Table 3) show that from 2010 to 2019, 29 ESP papers in China were distributed in 19 journals. Put in detail, are - *Foreign Language world* (4), *Foreign Language Research* (2), *Chinese Foreign Language*, *Chinese Foreign Language Education* (2) *Foreign Language Teaching* (2) and *Chinese Applied Linguistics*. Obviously, these journals are well-recognised in their field and their publications basically reflect the highest research level in China; the journals published 29 articles and mainly involve three fields, namely, English pedagogy, linguistics, and EFL education.

Table 3: Publication Distribution		
Field	**Number**	**Journal and Number**
English Language Teaching Journals	9	Foreign Language World (4); Foreign Language Research (3); Chinese Foreign Languages (2); Chinese Foreign Language Education (2); Foreign Language Teaching (2); Foreign Languages and Foreign Language Teaching (1);Foreign Language Teaching(1); Foreign Language World(1); Journal of Xi'an International Studies University(1).
Education journals	5	Education Exploration (1) Teaching Research (1) Chinese Educational Journal (1) Contemporary Education Theory and Practice (1) Chinese University Teaching (1)
Comprehensive Journals	4	Journal of Central South Forestry University (1);
		Journal of Xi'an University of Arts and Science (1)
		Journal of Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications (1)
		Journal of North China University of Technology (1)
Linguistics	2	Chinese Applied Linguistics (2)

The distribution of journals (Figure-2) shows that there are 9 articles distributed in English Language Teaching Journals, followed by education journals (5) and comprehensive Journals (4), finally linguistics (2). Obviously, foreign language teaching journals are predominant. The studies tend to highlight English teaching and competition. By contrast, there is less attention drawn from other disciplines, such as linguistics, communication, business, and psychology. Besides, the finding also reveals that an embarrassing reality that ESP doesn't have its own journal in China.
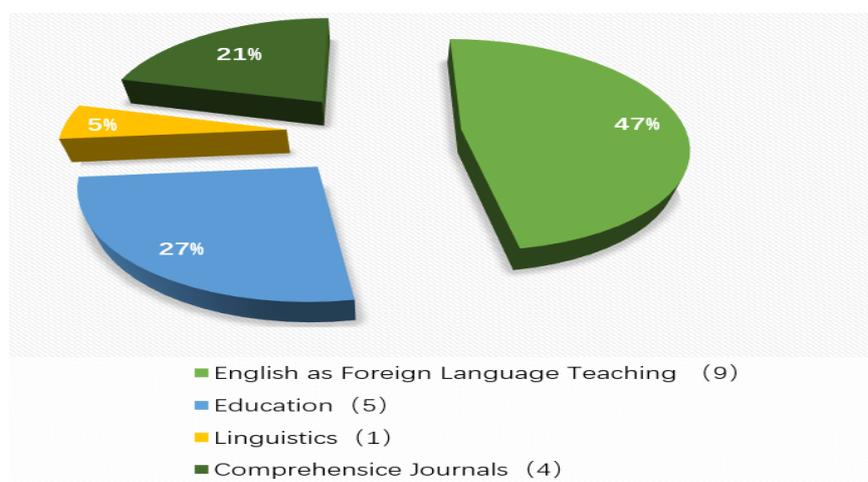
Figure 2: Journal Percentage Distribution

Sampling Intervals and Level: As mentioned above, of the 29 studies, there are 17 empirical studies, all of which were sampled. Regarding the size of the sample, it can be divided into 6 intervals: 1-10; 11-30; 31-100; 101-300; 301—1000; >1000 (Göksu, et al., 2017). Findings are presented in Table 4, which shows the most preferred interval as 31 to 100 participants (n=7), followed by 1 to 10 (n=4), 101to 1000 (n=3), 11 to 3 (n=2). One study did not provide a specified sampling number. The table1.4 reveals that the current sample is relatively small, and a considerable part of studies researchers employed convenient sampling techniques. Besides, some samples are the contestants in the English speech competition. Conclusively, it can be seen that the large-scale random sampling technique is rarely adopted.

Table 4: Sample Number Intervals		
Sampling Size	**N=17**	**%**
01-Oct	4	23.50%
Nov-30	2	11.80%
31-100	7	41.20%
101-300	3	17.60%
301-1000	0	0%
>1000	0	0%
No specified	1	5.90%

Apart from sample number intervals, the sample educational level is another concern, the statistics (Table 5) reports that the sampling education level distribution is badly uneven. Undergraduate students (n=15) become the most preferred sample; the proportion is as high as 88.2% whist only one study shed light on judge experts in the competition. Besides, vocational school students, high school students and post-graduate learners have been seemingly excluded out of the scope.

| Table 5: Sample Educational Level		
Sampling Level	**N**	**%**
Post graduate	0	0
Undergraduate	15	88.20%
Higher Vocational students	0	0
Middle school students	0	0
Teacher or experts	1	5.90%
No specified	1	5.90%

Furthermore, within the undergraduate segment, the sample distribution is still uneven. As shown in Figure-3, more scholars paid attention to the performance of excellent contestants

(41%), followed the public speaking course taker (23%) and English language majors (18%). In comparison, less attention is paid to non-English-related students (12%) which actually account for the majority of university student population.
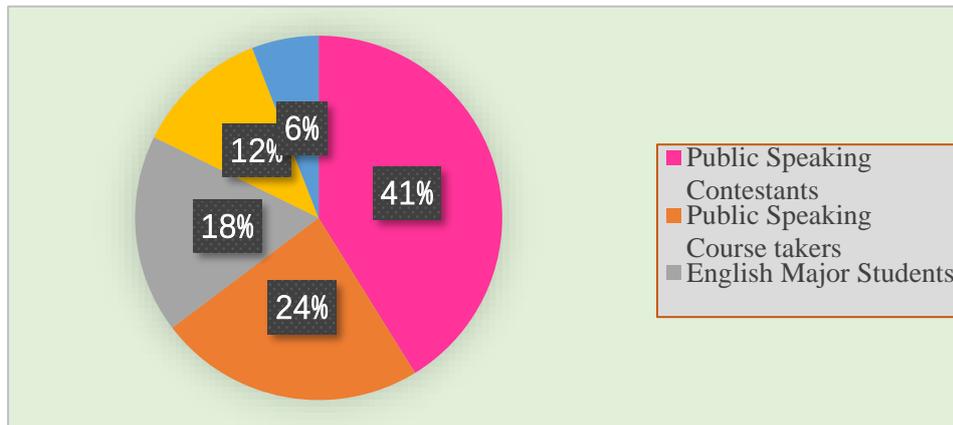

Figure 3: Student components

Supports Received from Government Institutions: The level of funding for research projects to a certain extent reflects the importance attached to it by government institutions; meanwhile, it can also indicate the recognised level of government institutions research on the studies (Chen Ting, 2013). In China, the research project supports levels from government from high to low can be generally classified into four levels, namely, national level, provincial level, department level and college level. Generally speaking, the higher supporting level the researcher can get, the more widely recognised by the peer-review experts. As for the corpus of 29 studies, the government supports levels have been tabulated in Figure-4. The results show that there are 4 papers funded by national projects, accounting for 13.8%. There are 11 papers supported by provincial government, accounting for 37.9%, ranking the highest proportion among 29 articles. There are five (5) papers (17.2%) that are awarded as city level projects and two (2) papers at the college level, (6.9%). The rest seven (7) articles didn't receive any financial support from any institutions, accounting for 24.1%. It can be seen that in the past 10 years (2010-2019), the total support proportion from all levels in the area of public speech reached 75.9%. It also shows that the researchers have achieved preliminary results. But a major breakthrough at the national-level is relatively low. Researchers still need to make greater efforts to achieve greater achievements in this field.
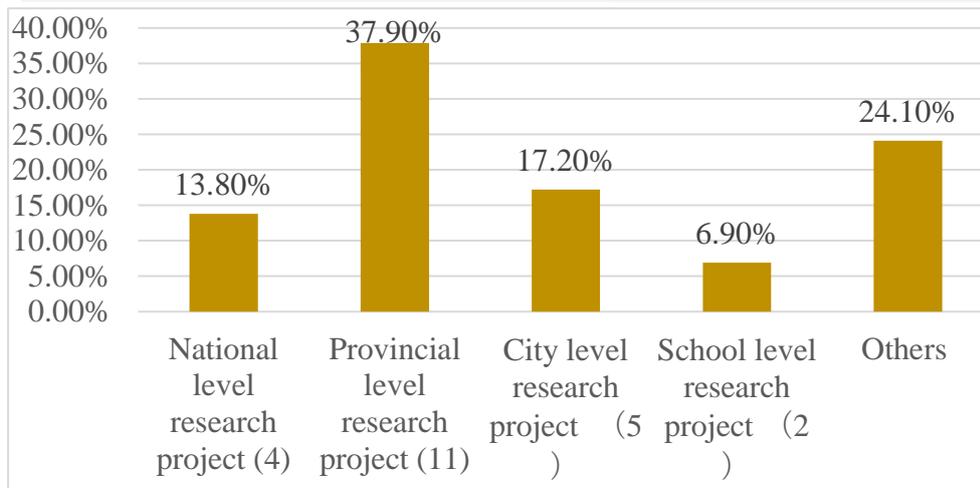
Figure 4: Support Level from Government Institutions in ESP

Besides, the publication number of authors is an interesting topic to be discussed. Generally speaking, the longer a scholar or a team continues to focus on a topic, the more achievements he/she may make. Statistics show that among 29 papers in the 10 years from 2010 to 2019, 24 authors were involved, among them, only three (3) scholars published more than 2 papers. They were Tian X (2018). from Nanjing Normal University (3 papers) and Chen L. from Xi'an International Studies University (3), and Huang Tao from Dalian University of Foreign Languages (2); the remaining 21 scholars only published one (1) paper in the span of ten year in this area (Figure 5). This indicates that part of the reason why there are few high-quality papers published in this field in current China is that there are rare researchers who continue conducting studies in the ESP field. The majority of researchers shifted their attention to other topics.
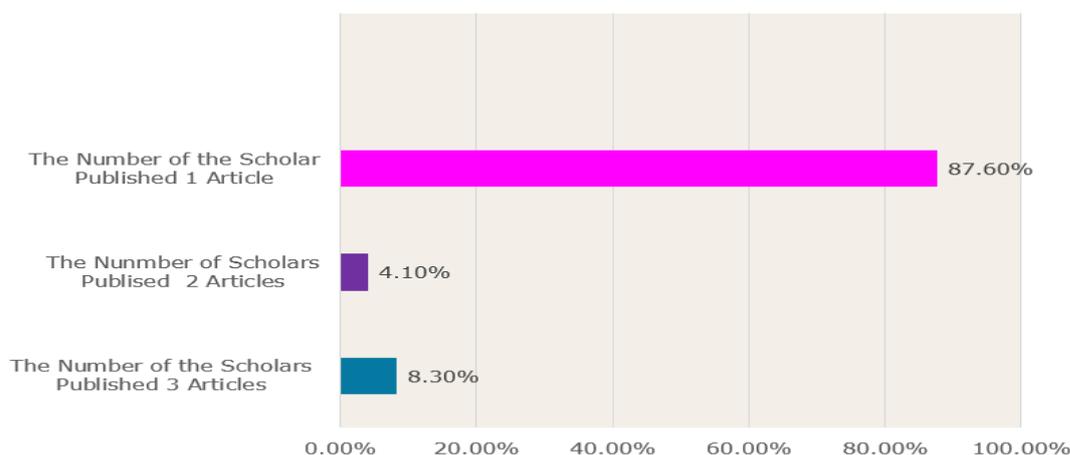
Figure 5: The Number Analysis of Scholar Published Papers

Discussion and Implications

Based on the findings, this article provides discussion from three (3) aspects: themes, the research samples and research method.

Students' needs should be emphasised: In term of themes in the EPS area, even though five (5) categories have been covered in the recent 10 years, however, it is also notable that two fundamental problems have been ignored: Firstly, the needs of students on OPS attracted rare attention, for example, what are their attitudes towards EPS and what skills of EPS do students need most and feel most difficult? The reason behind this phenomenon might be that English has been a basic compulsory course in China for a long history, which is a typical top-down course without full consideration of students' needs. Chinese language teachers have embedded these ideas in their mind, when it comes to the case of an English public speaking course, they might easily transplant the top-down idea to the new course, and naturally holding the opinion that EPS is a required course for students, therefore there is no need to cater to the needs of students. However, needs analysis is the starting point of curriculum design. For example, in the well -recognised seven-step curriculum design model of Taba, H. (1962), she suggested the first stage for course design is "diagnosis of the learners' needs". She explained that "students are at the forefront to the curriculum" (p.12).

All educational levels should be concerned: The finding above reveals that the sampling education level distribution is badly uneven. Most of the scholars pay attention to the undergraduate students; the proportion is as high as 88.2%. Furthermore, within the undergraduate sample, more attention has been paid to the national public speaking contestants (41%). In the China context, "EPS studies were always associated with the best contestants due to the influence of the speech contest from the beginning." (Tian, 2018. P.35). It is undeniable that these contestants are representatives of the best English speakers in China. Studying their characteristics will bring a lot of inspiration, but it is also undeniable that they only account for a very small part of the entire university student population. According to the rules released by the National Competition Organising Committee, only 6 players from each province are eligible to participate in the final round. By contrast, other levels of students seemingly have been ignored, even though they also play an important part in Chinese tertiary education. For example, no study has been conducted with the higher vocational college students; however this group population has reached as high as 49% in the total tertiary education population according to statistics from the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2017. Likewise, the performance differences in EPS among students with different nationalities, genders and education levels have yet to be explored.

Actual performance of average college students on EPS should be diagnosed: Themes' analysis reports that the current levels of EPS for college students have seldom been measured. Although the national English public speaking competition is held in China every year, however, at some colleges, public speaking training has become a privilege available only to speech competitors, who represent far less than one percent of the whole college student population (Su,Y, 2015). There is no doubt that the contestants merely reflect the highest level of each school, rather than the actual level of the average student. If we only fixed on the top contestants, the actual level of the ordinary students might be ignored. After all, the ultimate goal of public speaking education targets at the overall college student population in China. Literature indicated that there is a rare actual performance of ordinary that has been reported. Thus, the public speaking level of ordinary college students is still a black box to the outsiders. As Tian (2013) pointed out "the biggest problem faced by the lecturer is that the average student's English level cannot meet the requirements of the speaking competition." (p.66).

Krashen, S. (1985), an American linguist, suggested that one requisite condition for the learner to acquire a second language is to obtain sufficient comprehensible input of the target language. Krashen used a formula to express his philosophy, namely, "i +1", where "i" represents the current level of language learners, and "+1" represents target language knowledge, which should be slightly higher than the current level of language learners. He emphasised that if the language input far exceeds the learner's current level namely, "i +2", or is close to or even lower than the learner's current level, namely, "i +0", the learner would not be able to obtain comprehensible input, because they are too difficult or too easy. Therefore, accurately diagnosing the current level of learners is a prerequisite for all successful teaching and learning. It seems that Chinese practitioners still need to make greater efforts in this regard.

FUTURE DIMENSIONS

"English public speaking has a typical interdisciplinary nature, involving linguistics, rhetoric, psychology, communication and other subjects" (Tian, 2013; Wang, 2014). In Western countries, public speaking and its research are carried out in a cross-disciplinary perspective which includes communications, rhetoric, psychology, sociology, linguistics, etc. However, themes of publications and journal distribution reveal that a number of Chinese researchers conduct their research on EPS only from the perspective of language teaching, and rarely from an interdisciplinary perspective (e.g. psychology, communication). This may be related to the fact that EPS is only offered as an English course in China. In China, the English Public Speaking course is basically an EFL course, which "builds upon and extends other courses in

the EFL curriculum" (Lucas, S. E., 2007, p. 18). The English Public Speaking course is usually offered by the Department of Foreign Languages, which is different from that fact that public speaking is usually offered by the department of communications, rhetoric, or performing arts, etc. (Wan, J., 2013).

As Tian (2013) pointed out, "The current reality in China is: (1) EPS is an English course taught by English teachers in China; (2) Language is still the core of EPS teaching." (p.35) She further emphasised that "EPS teachers must pay main attention to the cultivation of English skills (writing, speaking, reading, listening). This is the center of this course." as far as research is concerned; this reality inevitably leads to scholars confining themselves to the perspective of linguistics instead of multi-disciplines. Consequently, with regard to the themes of studies, the psychological factors, cross-culture, rhetoric and communication prospective are ignored. Therefore, it may be necessary for Chinese scholars in this field to establish a team with multiple discipline members. This may be a research development trend in the future China.

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