

Review and Prospect of English Family Education Research in China over the Past 20 Years: An Analysis Based on CNKI Academic Journal Literature

Mengyue Zhu^{1, a} and Yuqin Wang^{1, b}

¹Minnan Normal University, Zhangzhou 363000, China

^a2412946186@QQ.com, ^b454809258@QQ.com

Abstract

This study systematically reviews and analyzes research on English family education in China based on academic literature from CNKI (2002-2024). It defines English family education as a long-term, systematic activity centered on parent-child interaction, distinct from short-term tutoring, and explains its mechanism using ecological systems theory and sociocultural theory. Statistical analysis of 35 relevant documents reveals fluctuating growth in research quantity, peaking in 2019 due to policy impetus and market demand. Highly cited studies focus on rural left-behind students and young children, confirming the critical impact of family environment on English learning. However, the current research in China's English family education field has obvious limitations, including insufficient research participation, limited academic background of research teams, and scarce, concentrated funding support. Future efforts should emphasize interdisciplinary research, increase funding, and enhance research quality and influence to advance the theory and practice of English family education.

Keywords

English family education, CNKI literature analysis, research status, development trends, influencing factors.

1. Conceptual Definition of Family Education

As the primary educational field for individual growth, family education is a systematic educational activity in family life that centers on parent-child relationships and aims to cultivate socially adaptable talents. Guan Ying pointed out that the effectiveness of family education not only depends on parents' educational motivation and content design but is also constrained by the scientific nature of educational methods [1]. In terms of connotation, family education has the characteristics of long-termity and systematicness: it includes not only the enlightenment and teaching of academic knowledge, such as English, but also the multi-dimensional cultivation of moral character, life skills, and cross-cultural adaptability. Bronfenbrenner defined the microsystem in "The Ecology of Human Development" as "the pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships experienced by an individual in a specific physical environment" [2]. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provides an important explanation for this characteristic, regarding families as the core of the "microsystem" for children's development, and emphasizing that the family environment (including language atmosphere, resource allocation, parent-child interaction patterns, etc.) is the most direct and continuous factor affecting children's development. Lareau's study on class cultural capital confirms the correlation between family environment and social resources: English interaction in the family is not an isolated event but interacts with "microsystem variables" such as family culture, parent-child relationship quality, and even community resources, jointly forming an ecological environment for language acquisition [3]. This concept is different from tutoring,

which focuses on short-term knowledge reinforcement. The latter relies on the intervention of external educational resources, while family education emphasizes the continuous influence mechanism formed through daily interactions and environment creation within the family. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory further reveals the mechanism of family interaction on language acquisition. In *Thought and Language*, he proposed that "language is a product of social interaction and a core tool for cognitive development". Children's language acquisition is not an isolated accumulation of knowledge but is achieved through "negotiation of meaning" with more capable individuals (such as parents) [4]. Studies in Indonesia have shown that negotiation strategies such as repeated correction and sentence simplification directly affect the effect of second language acquisition [5]. In family English education, this "negotiation of meaning" is manifested explicitly in parents adjusting the difficulty of language input and creating "comprehensible input" to build a learning scaffold within the child's "Zone of Proximal Development". For example, when a child says "I want that" in English, the parent responds "Do you want this apple?" This interaction not only corrects the expression but also provides understandable vocabulary input, which is more conducive to promoting language internalization than the one-way indoctrination of tutoring.

As the logical starting point for the study of English family education, it is crucial to clarify the boundary of this concept. Compared with the fragmented knowledge indoctrination of tutoring, family education constructs an immersive environment for language acquisition through normalized practices such as parent-child co-reading and English interaction in daily scenarios, which forms a theoretical echo with the content to be discussed later, such as family English resource investment and innovation in educational models.

2. Analysis of the Research Status of English Family Education

2.1. Characteristics of Research Quantity and Annual Distribution

This study mainly relies on the academic literature database of CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) for data collection. A search using "English family education" as the keyword yielded 35 documents related to ecological literature from 2002 to 2024. The selection of 2002 as the study's starting point is mainly based on the results presented in the CNKI database. Although other early relevant documents may not be included in CNKI within the broader scope of academic research, 2002 represents the earliest research starting point traceable based on the database resources, as this study takes CNKI data as the core analysis basis. Subsequently, the 35 documents were screened through their titles, abstracts, and keywords to ensure that these studies are related to English family education. During the screening process, seven documents were excluded because their research content was irrelevant to English family education. After screening, 35 journal papers were finally included in this systematic literature review. The selected studies all aim to explore issues related to English family education. The findings of these studies will be listed and discussed in detail below.

Figure 1 shows the annual distribution of the 35 "English family education" documents. From the annual distribution, 2002 can be regarded as the starting point of research on English family education: the article *Scientific Parenting is Like a Magic Aid: A 10-Year-Old Girl Passes CET-4* (Luo Ping, "Origin", Issue 6, 2002) was published. However, it should be noted that the theme of this article is not strictly English family education but is more similar to tutoring, i.e., improving academic performance in specific subjects through the intervention of external educational resources. Family education is a more comprehensive and long-term process, which includes not only the teaching of academic knowledge but also the cultivation of moral education, life skills, social adaptability, and other aspects. Data indicate that research on "English family education" in China has shown noticeable fluctuations over the past two

decades. There were 22 research papers from 2007 to 2018, while the number surged to 10 in 2019 alone. The number of papers was zero in 2003-2006 and 2021-2024. In terms of research content, as of 2024, domestic articles focusing on “rural left-behind students” and “young children” still account for a large proportion, such as the frequently cited documents *Investigation and Analysis of the Current Situation of English Learning of Left-Behind Students in Rural Middle Schools*, *A Case Study on Family English Education Models for Young Children*, and *The Influence of Family Education on Young Children’s English Education and Promotion Strategies*.

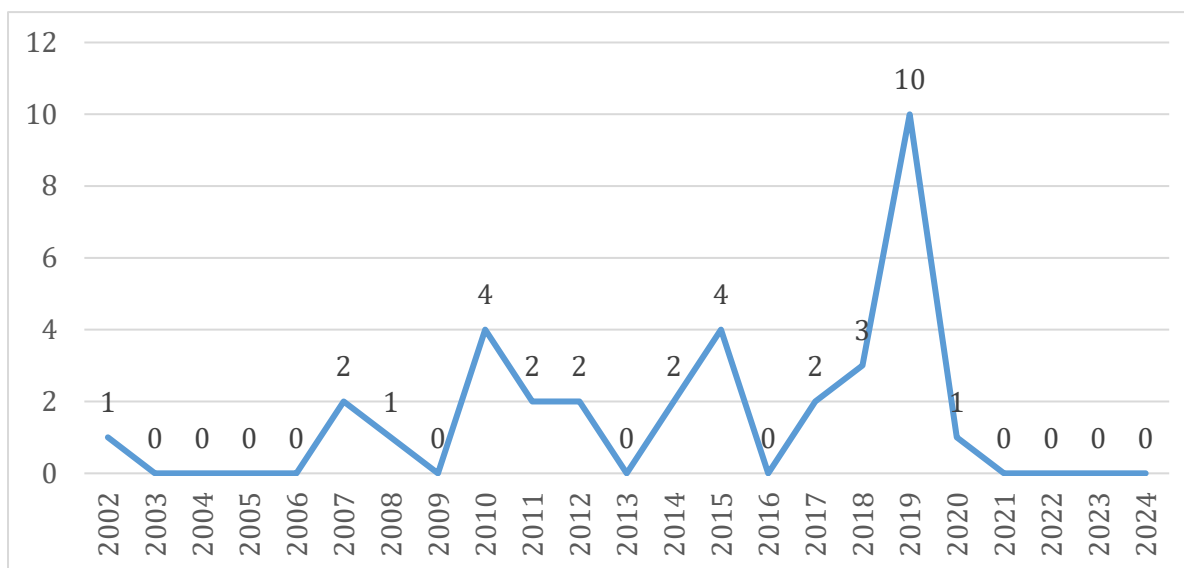


Figure 1. Statistical Count of Literature with the Keyword "English Family Education" from 2002 to 2024

Interestingly, through the data analysis over the past decade, we have noticed a subtle trend: the number of published documents in the field of “English family education” peaked in 2019. In-depth investigations were conducted from multiple aspects to explore the reasons for the recovery of English family education research from the trough. In sorting out academic journals, it was found that around 2019, the English family education field showed a cross-integration trend with rural educational equity, the publishing market, and other fields. Initially focusing solely on ecological literature, some studies gradually incorporated interdisciplinary perspectives and were no longer published independently, purely as English family education research. For example, Gao Yan’s *An Empirical Study on the Micro-Ecology of English Education in Rural Middle Schools* indicates researchers’ attention to issues of educational equity and uneven resource allocation [6]. In 2019, family education models attracted attention from all sectors of society as a research hotspot, especially the “New Curriculum Standards” implementation and the “double reduction” policy, which shifted public attention to family foreign language education models, which suggests that policy changes and updates in educational models may have promoted the increase in related research. The development of the market for children’s English enlightenment education, especially systematic English enlightenment based on family education, is becoming a new growth point in the education field. This growth in market demand may have promoted the increase in related research. Against this background, research on English family education began to recover, and many scholars discussed the significance of family education in contemporary society, leading to a rebound in the number of published documents in the field of English family education.

It is worth noting that Krashen’s Input Hypothesis provides a theoretical explanation for this trend. In *Second Language Acquisition Theory and Practice*, he proposed that the key to language

acquisition lies in “comprehensible input (i+1)” and “low affective filter”—that is, learners achieve the best acquisition effect when receiving language information slightly higher than their level in a relaxed and stress-free environment [7]. The pursuit of “systematic family education” in the children’s English enlightenment market in 2019 essentially conforms to this theoretical logic: as the most familiar field for children, the English input provided by parents through daily conversations, picture book reading, and other methods naturally has the characteristics of “comprehensibility” (parents can adjust the difficulty in real-time according to the child’s reaction) and “low affective filter” (no classroom pressure and full of a sense of security) [8], which is more in line with the laws of language acquisition than standardized courses in institutional training. This theoretical perspective also explains why research on English family education could heat up rapidly under the joint promotion of policies and markets in 2019.

2.2. Analysis of Literature Influence

Table 1 was created based on the “citations per document” data from the “Chinese Academic Journal Literature Evaluation and Statistical Analysis System”. From the data, it is found that Gao Yan et al.’s 2008 study, *Investigation and Analysis of the Current Situation of English Learning of Left-Behind Students in Rural Middle Schools*, leads with 19 citations, highlighting the research value and urgency of issues related to English education for left-behind students in rural areas [9]. Huang Xiaoyuan’s 2010 study on family English education for young children received 18 citations, further confirming the importance of the family environment in young children’s English learning [10]. Bandura’s Social Learning Theory provides theoretical support for this, as the theory holds that children acquire behaviors through “observational learning” and “vicarious reinforcement”, and parents’ language behaviors, attitudes towards English learning, etc., will become “role models” for children to imitate [11]. Just as the research on the search for materials related to home literacy environment (HLE) factors and ESL performance shows, by setting up key terms associated with HLE (like parental language, parental involvement) and second language status, it identifies how family-related language factors interact with second language learning. Similarly, Parents’ active use of English for communication and demonstration of interest in English books in the family will be unconsciously observed by children and internalized into their own learning motivation, which is the deep mechanism by which the family environment affects young children’s English learning. Studies by Lan Yueqiu and Yang Xiaobin also emphasize the positive impact of family education atmosphere on children’s English learning. From the perspective of Social Learning Theory, the “family education atmosphere” is essentially a continuous “role model demonstration environment”. When children continuously observe their parents’ patience, interest, and sense of achievement in English learning, they will positively perceive English learning through “vicarious experience”, thereby enhancing learning initiative [12]. The specific data are as follows:

2.3. Limitations of Research Teams and Fund Support

From 2002 to 2024, a total of 35 research papers on English family education were published, among which 3 papers were funded by research projects, accounting for 8% of the total. Li Huguang’s *On How to Improve Primary School Students’ English Proficiency through Family Education*, published in “Huaxia Teacher” in 2019, was one of the papers funded by the Gansu Provincial Educational Science Planning Project. Chen Zhijuan’s *A Survey on the Current Situation of Young Children’s English Family Education Environment—A Case Study of East Anhui Region*, published in “Journal of Fuyang Vocational and Technical College” in 2019, was funded by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Project of Anhui Provincial Department of Education. The paper *A Study on the Influence of Family Factors on College Students’ English Learning* co-authored by Chang Likun, Liu Yufeng, and Guan Lili, published in the “Journal of

Heihe University” in 2019, was supported by the Heilongjiang Provincial Educational Science Planning Project. Fund projects are often regarded as an important indicator of academic development and cutting-edge trends. From these data, it can be seen that “English family education” as a hot research field in 2019 received attention and funding from educational departments, attracting attention and support from educational science planning projects in different regions.

Table 1. Top Five Highly Cited Individual Documents from 2002 to 2024

Document Title	Authors	Journal Name	Publication Date	Citation Frequency
Investigation and Analysis of Hometown-remained Pupils' English Learning Situation in the Rural Middle Schools	Gao Yan, Ai Guoping, Mei Zhongbo, Luo Aifeng	Journal of East China University of Technology	2008	19
A Case Study on the English Family Education Model for Young Children	Huang Xiaoyuan	Journal of Changsha University	2010	18
The Influence and Promotion Policy of Family Education on Young Children's English Learning	Ma Li	Journal of Guilin Normal College	2010	16
A Case Study Report of Young Children's English Education in Family	Lan Yueqiu	Journal of Jiaying University	2009	8
Creating a Family Education Atmosphere to Promote Children's English Learning	Yang Xiaobin	Fujian Tribune	2007	6

3. Research Trends and Directions

3.1. Limitations of Research Participation

Although English family education plays a key role in promoting students' English proficiency, the research participation in this field shows obvious limitations. Over the period from 2002 to 2024, only 35 relevant research papers were published, which is relatively limited compared to other fields of English education, indicating that research activities in this field are not extensive. In addition, from the annual distribution of documents, research activities fluctuated significantly across years, especially with zero relevant research papers in 2003-2006 and 2021-2024. This discontinuity further highlights the insufficient research participation in this field. The lack of participation may limit the accumulation of knowledge and theoretical development in English family education, affecting the promotion of in-depth understanding and practical application of this field.

3.2. Analysis of the Academic Background and Level of Research Teams

According to Table 2, which shows the background information, educational qualifications, and professional titles of the authors of “English family education” papers, there are certain limitations in the research participation in English family education. In the author team, those with a master's degree and lecturer title account for a relatively high proportion, while researchers with a doctoral degree are relatively scarce. In addition, most researchers are from local colleges and universities, including front-line teachers from educational institutions such as kindergartens and primary schools, rather than all from high-level research universities. Moreover, according to CNKI statistics, only two articles in this field were published in Peking University Core Journals, and only one in CSSCI. This publication record indicates that the

research results in English family education have limited influence and recognition in the academic community.

Table 2. Author Information

Author Name	Academic Degree	Title	Institution
Gao Yan	Master	Associate Professor	East China University of Technology
Huang Xiaoyuan	/	Lecturer	Jiaying University
Ma Li	/	/	Jiexi Kindergarten in Guilin
Lan Yueqiu	Master	Professor	Nanning Normal University
Yang Xiaobin	Master	Associate Professor	Taizhou University
Feng Yalan	/	/	Linhu No.1 Central Primary School in Suzhou
Liu Jia	/	/	Luoding Polytechnic
Cai Qi	Master	Lecturer	Changchun Normal University

3.3. Scarcity and Sustainability Issues of Fund Support

The number of funded projects in English family education is quite limited. Among the 35 relevant research papers published from 2002 to 2024, only 3 received funding support, accounting for 8% of the total published documents. These funded projects were concentrated in 2019, which may be related to changes in educational policies and updates in educational models in that year, which may have promoted the increase in related research. However, this concentration also exposes the sustainability issue of funding support in this field. Except for 2019, fund support in other years was almost zero, and this uneven funding distribution may limit the continuity and in-depth development of research in this field.

4. Research Conclusions and Prospects

In summary, although research on English family education in China has achieved specific results over the past two decades, the current situation is still not optimistic. In terms of research quantity, there are only 35 relevant documents, which is relatively small compared to other fields of English education, with large fluctuations in annual distribution and research gaps, reflecting insufficient research participation in this field. Regarding research teams, those with a master's degree and lecturer title are the mainstay, with few doctors. Most are from local colleges and universities and grass-roots educational institutions, with limited research results published in core journals, and their academic influence needs to be improved. Financial support is also extremely scarce, with only 8% of papers receiving funding, concentrated in 2019, seriously restricting research's in-depth and continuous development.

Faced with this situation, we cannot help but think: Is English family education unimportant? The answer is no. In today's era of accelerating globalization, English, as an international language, is of self-evident importance. The family, as the first environment for children's growth, profoundly impacts their English learning. Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory provides a new perspective on the deep mechanism of this impact. In *Self-Determination Theory: Motivation, Development, and Health*, they proposed that individuals' intrinsic motivation stems from satisfying three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the independent choice of learning behaviors; competence is the perception of one's ability to complete tasks; relatedness is the acquisition of emotional support in interactions [13]. English family education can meet these needs through daily practices. Parents allowing children to choose English picture books they are interested in supports autonomy; enhances competence by encouraging feedback on children's small progress; and

strengthens relatedness by conveying that “English learning is a family activity” in parent-child interactions. Based on psychological needs, this support can better cultivate children's long-term intrinsic motivation for English learning than external rewards and punishments, which also explains why many studies have confirmed that “family English education is crucial to children's long-term language development”—it is not only the transmission of knowledge but also a growth process that promotes self-driven development by meeting psychological needs. A good family English education atmosphere, rich learning resources, and scientific educational methods can lay a solid foundation for children's English learning and help them be more competitive in future study and work. Many studies have also confirmed that family English education is closely related to children's English scores and is crucial to children's early English enlightenment and long-term language learning development: Steinberg et al. found that authoritative parenting style (high support + high demands) improves academic performance through parent-child interaction, with a better effect than simple school intervention [14]; Karnegi & Mulyadi's correlation coefficient table shows that parents' educational level is significantly correlated with their children's English scores ($r = 0.97$), reflecting the direct impact of family resource investment [15]. However, English family education is still fragmented and needs to integrate perspectives from linguistics, psychology, and education [16]. Therefore, we hope that more scholars will pay attention to the field of English family education in the future. On the one hand, researchers with different disciplinary backgrounds are encouraged to participate, broaden research perspectives, carry out interdisciplinary research, and enhance the depth and breadth of research. On the other hand, relevant departments should increase financial support for this field, establish a stable and continuous funding mechanism, and provide guarantees for in-depth research. At the same time, improve the quality and academic influence of research results, promote the joint development of English family education theory and practice, make the family a powerful booster for children's English learning, and contribute to cultivating talents with international perspectives and language abilities.

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