

# A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF EFL TEACHERS' CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT PRACTICE IN CHINA'S HIGHER VOCATIONAL COLLEGES

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**ABSTRACT** – In recent years, the gaining importance of classroom assessment in the teaching and learning process has aroused wide concern among scholars and practitioners. However, systematic reviews of EFL teachers' classroom assessment in China's higher vocational colleges are scarce. The purpose of this study is to explore the characteristics and major emerging themes of the previous studies on EFL teachers' classroom assessment practice in China's higher vocational colleges by reviewing the literature published between 2012 and 2022. Systematic research on the literature was conducted using the database of China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). A total of 27 studies were included in this review. Results indicated that empirical studies on EFL teacher's classroom assessment practice feature a small number in quantity, a heavy lack of high-impact journals and extensively applicable research designs and diversified emerging themes. Six major emerging themes were identified from the content analysis of the identified studies. They are (1) formative assessment; (2) multiple assessments; (3) teachers' assessment speech; (4) teaching quality assessment; (5) the construction of assessment system; and (6) the construction of assessment models.

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## INTRODUCTION

With the gaining importance of English in the globalised economy and international communications, the development of use-oriented English competence has become the top priority of educational reform in China. Accordingly, educational assessment, as a pivotal part of the process of teaching and learning, influences the improvement of the teaching effect, the development of students' English competence, and the implementation of educational standards to a great extent (Durga & Kumar, 2020). Given its growing importance in talent training, China has launched into the construction of foreign language standards and the reform of traditional assessment practice since 2014 with the issue of many officially programmatic documents such as "General Plan for Deepening the Reform of Educational Evaluation in the New Era" (CPC Central Committee and State Council of China, 2020) and "Implementation plan on National Vocational Education Reform" (State Council of China, 2019). These documents attach importance to the fact that the ultimate goal of educational assessment is to promote the all-round development of students with diversified competencies rather than get high marks at different examinations of school subjects. Against this background, educational reform and teaching practice based on classroom assessment began to flourish in China and the world.

It should be admitted that with the rising awareness of innovative classroom assessment at different levels and vigorous reformation on the part of researchers and teachers, some progress in classroom assessment has been made in China. Yet, effective classroom assessment is still a great challenge for many EFL teachers in China's higher vocational colleges. According to Zhang (2021), the typical problem existing in classroom assessment practice is teachers' heavy dependence on summative assessment to assess their students' performance and academic achievement. Such a way of assessment resulted in a frenzied pursuit of test results and neglect of students' competence development in a long run (Tao, 2019; Yuan, 2021). Moreover, teachers' assessment methods are too simple and general without a unified standard, so the assessment results are not fair and convincing for students. What's more, teachers are the major assessors of classroom assessment in China's higher vocational colleges,

which reduces students' chances of active involvement in classroom assessment. This will definitely reduce students' learning interests and undermine the development of students' comprehensive abilities (Du, 2021; Tao, 2019). As is shown in a survey and analysis of teachers' classroom speech behaviour, Zhang (2019) concluded that most EFL teachers in China's higher vocational colleges lack assessment awareness and qualified assessment literacy. They conducted their classroom assessment contingently according to their teaching experience and tried very hard to catch students' attention with diversified types of feedback. This kind of assessment method may produce a short period of "lively classroom", but it will never promote learning in a real sense.

Although literature attests that these problems have gained substantial attention from a growing number of researchers in recent years, systematic reviews on EFL teachers' classroom assessment in China's higher vocational colleges are scarce. This systematic review aims to fill in this gap and contribute to the in-depth understanding of the characteristics of previous studies on EFL teachers' classroom assessment practice. Additionally, this systematic review also provides empirical evidence for researchers and practitioners to conduct further studies in the related field.

The purpose of this study is to review the characteristics and major emerging themes of the selected studies on EFL teachers' classroom assessment practice in China's higher vocational colleges published from 2012 to 2022. Specifically, the following Research Questions (RQ) will guide this study:

RQ1: What are the characteristics of the selected studies on EFL teachers' classroom assessment in China's higher vocational colleges?

RQ2: What are the major emerging themes of the selected studies on classroom assessment practice in China's higher vocational colleges?

The current paper is a review of the recent studies of classroom assessment practice in China's higher vocational colleges, which is structured as follows. The review first introduces the necessity of conducting educational assessment reform, pointing out the existing problems and gaps pertaining to classroom assessment practice in China's higher vocational colleges. Research questions were put forward subsequently. The second part of this review provided a brief overview of previous systematic reviews on classroom assessment practices in China's higher vocational colleges. Part three describes the methodology used in the present review. Part four presents the descriptive result of the published articles used in the present study. Part five is the discussion of the research finding pertaining to the characteristics and emerging themes of the identified studies. The last part goes to the conclusion and implications of the present study.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Definition of Classroom Assessment**

Classroom assessment is defined as a process designed for collecting evidence about students' learning and using it to identify learning gaps, adjust instruction and improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning. (Brookhart & McMillan, 2020). According to Kane & Wools (2019), classroom assessment is important in the sense that it is conducive to evaluating students' performance on learning tasks and the achievement level of the class as a whole. Still, it provides helpful feedback for teaching and learning and helps teachers to direct students' effort toward desirable goals. In the classroom, teachers will make various decisions and take diversified actions to check students' understanding and cognitive development (Russell, 2020). As such, it is very crucial for teachers to choose and adopt appropriate assessment methods in their classrooms. Based on different purposes of assessment, classroom assessment is classified into summative assessment and formative assessment in a broad sense (Durga & Kumar, 2020; Luo et al., 2014). Summative assessment, as its name implied, refers to summarising the learning outcome at the end of a learning program or a teaching circle. Its primary purpose is to evaluate students learning outcomes at a particular time by assigning grades (Gu, 2021; Dolin et al., 2018; Luo et al., 2021). Formative assessment is a process during which teachers adopt, adjust and design various class activities to collect, analyse and interpret information about students' learning to monitor students' progress in learning (Luo et al., 2014). The primary purpose of formative

assessment is to identify students' learning needs, adjust instruction and improve teaching and learning (Gu, 2021, p8).

### **Previous Reviews on Classroom Assessment in China's Higher Vocational Colleges**

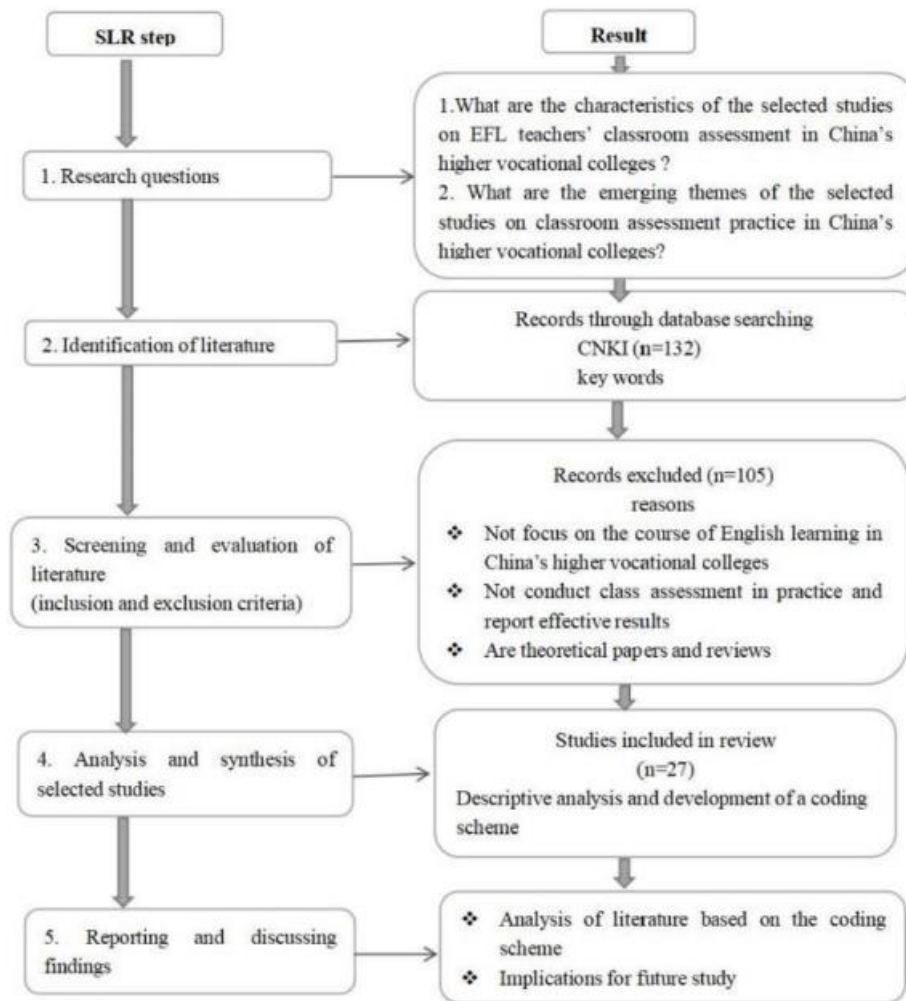
Extant literature indicated that research on classroom assessment has been gaining popularity in China in recent years (Jin & Sun, 2020). Previous reviews on classroom assessment in China mainly centred around the methods, content, and process of classroom assessment, research trends, and implications for future study in China. For example, Jin Yan & Sun Hang (2020) studied the research trend, subjects, foci, and methods in 14 CSSCI and SSCI journals published between 2007 and 2018. The result indicated studies on foreign language classroom assessment are on a rising trend on the whole and domestic studies mainly focus on undergraduate students in which the study foci include the effectiveness of classroom-based assessment and teachers' role, validation, and process of classroom-based assessment.

What's more, previous reviews attach more importance to formative assessment and dynamic assessment than other types of classroom assessment. For example, with a mixed method, Yuan & Shu (2017) conducted a systematic review of the studies of formative assessment in foreign language teaching in China published in 18 Chinese foreign language journals from 2002 to 2016. They analyse the research on formative assessment in foreign language teaching from the perspectives of research trends, subjects, areas, contents, and methodologies. Yan (2018) reviewed 41 core journals of foreign language on formative assessment in the Chinese database CNKI from 2000 to 2014, pointing out problems and putting forward suggestions and future research directions. Liu & Qu (2020) explored research orientation, research methods, content, and features of dynamic assessment by analysing research papers on dynamic assessment in the foreign language teaching field from 2000 to 2020 in China. His finding indicated a growing interest in dynamic assessment in China over the past twenty years.

In conclusion, previous reviews provide a holistic view of the understanding of classroom assessment in China on the whole (Jin & Sun, 2020) or just focus on one type of assessment, such as formative assessment (Yuan & Shu, 2017; Yan, 2018) and dynamic assessment (Liu & Qu, 2020). Such reviews cover the studies on students at all levels: college, senior high school, junior high school, and elementary school. However, their findings are too general to better understand the current situation of classroom assessment in China's higher vocational colleges.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The present study is designed to systematically review the characteristics and major emerging themes of the previous research on EFL teachers' classroom assessment practice in China's higher vocational colleges. According to Petticrew & Roberts (2006), a systematic review aims to answer a particular question by comprehensively examining and synthesising all the relevant studies and coming to reliable conclusions. A systematic review is not only advantageous in better understanding past studies but also provides insightful guidance for researchers to design future studies (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). The method of conducting a systematic literature review in social sciences by Petticrew & Roberts (2006) was employed in the present study. It generally followed the steps of formulating research questions, identifying literature, screening and evaluating literature, analysing and synthesising selected studies, and reporting and discussing findings. In this study, significant research on EFL teachers' classroom assessment practice was identified through the database of China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI).



**Figure 1.** Research Procedure

### Article Selection

As is shown in Figure 1, to select relevant published articles that are qualified to answer the research questions, the database of China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) was utilised. Since few research papers on classroom assessment practice in China’s higher vocational colleges are found in the popularly used databases such as Google Scholar, Science Direct and Eric, and the dominant studies on classroom assessment in China’s higher vocational colleges are primarily undertaken by Chinese researchers. Therefore, exhaustive literature research was conducted in the databases of China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) (one of the most authoritative and widely used databases in China) to find research articles and conference papers published from January 2012 to November 2022. The following keywords were used: ‘classroom assessment practice’, ‘China’s higher vocational colleges’ and ‘English as a foreign language’. A total of 132 articles were found in the first round of research. To acquire desirable literature, the following inclusion criteria are employed to screen the identified studies. First, the studies must focus on the course of English learning in China’s higher vocational colleges. Second, the studies must conduct classroom assessment in practice and report effective results, excluding theoretical papers and reviews. All the studies are read in full, and those that are not qualified according to the inclusion criteria are excluded. Eventually, 27 articles were selected for the present systematic analysis.

### Data Analysis

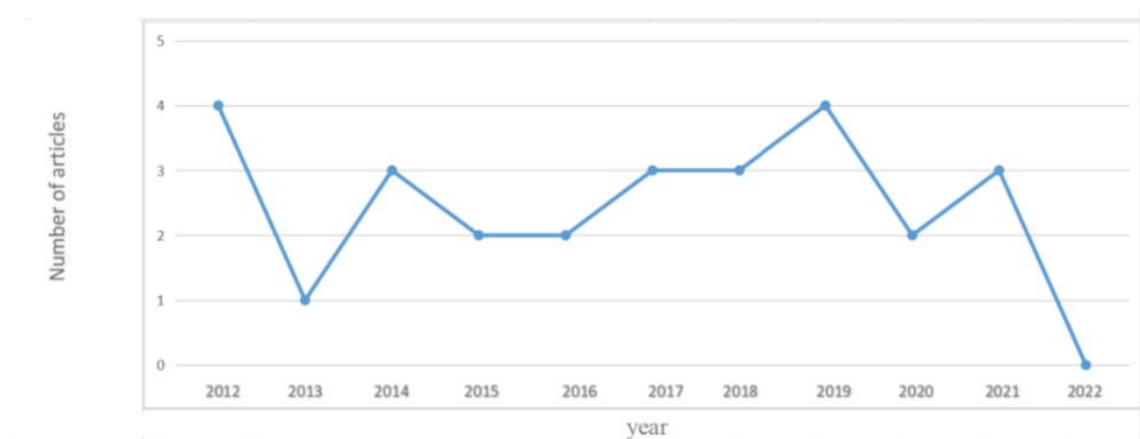
As Petticrew & Roberts (2006) pointed out, tabulating the included studies according to a certain category is one of the most important steps of data analysis and overall synthesis (165). Besides, a

narrative synthesis is singularly necessary to provide a description of what these tables mean. The narrative synthesis process includes three steps. First, creating data extraction forms based on different themes or categories. Second, analyse the key information of each selected study. Third, synthesizing all the findings of the included studies (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006, 170).

The identified 27 studies were read thoroughly, and relevant data were extracted according to different themes, such as the title, year of publication, journal of publication, the purpose of the study, research method, methods of assessment and results were screened with a self-created data extraction form. The information extracted from the included studies was analyzed to ascertain the status quo and characteristics of the past studies on classroom assessment practice in China’s higher vocational colleges. In short, initially, the number of yearly publications was counted, and a line chart was used to show the overall research tendency of recent research on classroom assessment practice in China’s higher vocational colleges. Further analysis was subsequently conducted based on the selected information on the data extraction form to address the research questions.

## RESULTS

Figure 2 shows the yearly distribution of the identified articles from 2012 to 2022. The total number of journal articles on classroom assessment practice from 2012 to 2022 is 27, which indicates the great deficiency of empirical studies in this domain (Jian, 2018).



**Figure 2.** Yearly Distribution of Journal Articles

Overall, the total number of publications on classroom assessment practice in China’s higher vocational colleges fluctuated dramatically every year between 2012 and 2022, with a maximum of 4 articles in 2012 and 2019 and a minimum of 0 articles in 2022. Specifically, the number of publications on classroom assessment practice in China’s higher vocational colleges decreases dramatically from 2012 to 2013 but shows an overall upward tendency from 2014 to 2019. It falls from 4 articles in 2019 to 0 in 2022, except an increase to 3 articles in 2020.

In conclusion, the selected 27 studies provided an overview of the characteristics of EFL teachers’ classroom assessment in China’s higher vocational colleges. The fluctuation in the number of yearly publications on classroom assessment supports Jian’s (2018) assertion that there are few studies which take students in China’s higher vocational colleges as research subjects. What’s more, it also indicated that teachers’ poor research ability resulted from a lack of professional training (Yuan, 2021).

**Table 1.** Journal Distribution of Selected Articles

Journal Grade	Number of Journals	Journal	Number of Articles
Chinese Core Journals	2	<i>Journal of Guangxi Normal University for Nationalities</i>	1

		<i>China Adult Education</i>	1	
		<i>Journal of Heilongjiang College of Education</i>	1	
University Journals	3	<i>Journal of Hunan University of Science and Engineering</i>	1	
		<i>Journal of Guizhou Radio &amp; Television University</i>	1	
		<i>Journal of Kunming Metallurgy College</i>	2	
College Journals	3	<i>Journal of Anhui Vocational College of Police Officers</i>	1	
		<i>Journal of Wuhan Polytechnic</i>	2	
		<i>English on Campus</i>	4	
		<i>Asia Pacific Education</i>	1	
		<i>Course Education Research</i>	1	
		<i>Industrial &amp; Science Tribune</i>	2	
		<i>New Curriculum (Educational Academic)</i>	1	
Other Ordinary Journals of Provincial Level	13	<i>A Comparative Study of Cultural Innovation</i>	1	
		<i>Teacher</i>	1	
		<i>Xueyuan</i>	1	
		<i>Science, Education and Literature (Mid Term Journal)</i>	1	
		<i>The World of Writers</i>	1	
		<i>Overseas English</i>	1	
		<i>Vocational Education Research</i>	1	
		<i>Collection of Scientific Research Achievements of "Research on Teacher Education Capacity" (Volume VIII)</i>	1	
		Conference Proceedings	1	

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of journals where the selected articles were published. A total of articles was published in 21 academic journals. The scattered distribution indicated the wide concern of classroom assessment in China's higher vocational colleges. Among the 21 academic journals, there are two Chinese core journals, three university journals, three higher vocational college journals, thirteen other ordinary journals of provincial level and one conference proceeding. These statistics exposed the fact of the insufficiency of high-impact articles on classroom assessment practice in China's higher vocational colleges. The top 4 journals by journal counts were English on Campus (4), Journal of Kunming Metallurgy College (2), Industrial & Science Tribune (2) and Journal of Wuhan Polytechnic (2). The other journals listed in Table 1 published one article each.

The selected articles were read in full and were divided into six categories according to the themes of formative assessment, multiple assessments, teachers' assessment speech, teaching quality assessment, the construction of assessment system and the construction of assessment models. Among the 27 empirical studies, eight articles (Chen, 2018; Li et al., 2020; Feng & Wang, 2018; Pei, 2014; Yu, 2017; Wang et al., 2017; Chen, 2016a; Cheng, 2015) discussed the application of formative assessment in English classrooms of China's higher vocational colleges. Four studies (Tang et al., 2019; Jin, 2019; Chen, 2016b; Zhu, 2019) explored multiple assessment in the context of China's higher vocational colleges. Two studies (Ma, 2015; Zhang, 2019) relate to teachers' assessment speech in China's higher vocational colleges. Only one article (Li, 2012) elaborated on teaching quality assessment in China's higher vocational colleges. Six studies (Wu, 2017; Wu et al., 2021; Bai, 2012; Yang, 2018; Man, 2021; Wang, 2019) delved into the construction of assessment systems in China's higher vocational colleges. The rest six articles (An, 2012; Shen, 2020; Zhang, 2013; Qin, 2014; Yin, 2014; Zhang, 2021) inquired into the construction of assessment mode in China's higher vocational colleges. The result indicates that the studies on classroom assessment mainly focus on the application of formative assessment (N=8), followed by the construction of an assessment system (N=6) and the construction of assessment mode (N=6) in China's higher vocational colleges.

**Table 2.** Distribution of Emerging Themes

Themes	Total number	References
Formative assessment	8	(Chen, 2018; Li et al. 2020; Feng & Wang, 2018; Pei, 2014; Yu, 2017; Wang et al., 2017; Chen, 2016a; Cheng, 2015)
Multiple assessment	4	(Tang et al., 2019; Jin, 2019; Chen, 2016b; Zhu, 2019)
Teachers' assessment speech	2	(Ma, 2015; Zhang, 2019)
Teaching quality assessment	1	(Li, 2012)
Construction of evaluation system	6	(Wu, 2017; Wu et al., 2021; Bai, 2012; Yang, 2018; Man, 2021; Wang, 2019)
Construction of assessment mode	6	(An, 2012; Shen, 2020; Zhang, 2013; Qin, 2014; Yin, 2014; Zhang, 2021)

In terms of methodologies, as is shown in Table 3, quantitative research methods (n=15) took a dominant position in the selected 27 studies, followed by mixed methods (n=11) and qualitative research methods (n=1). Questionnaires and test results are widely used as important instruments to collect quantitative data on classroom assessment in China's higher vocational colleges. Classroom observation, interviews, and expert consultation are used to collect qualitative data on classroom assessment in China's higher vocational colleges. As for the characteristics of the samples, most of the identified studies were conducted within one college, usually the researchers' workplace. Only four studies (Shen, 2020; Tang et al., 2019; Yin (2014; Zhang, 2013) were implemented under the context of various higher vocational colleges in China. However, there are still some studies (n=4) that did not provide information about the context of the study. Additionally, the sample size ranges substantially in mixed methods design from 3 to 200. While the largest number of participants for the quantitative research method is 500, the number of participants for the qualitative research design is unknown.

**Table 3.** Overview of Methodologies

Reference	Context	Research Design	Data Collection Method	Sample Size
An (2012)	WOC	QT	2 self-made questionnaires	196 and 88 students
Bai (2012)	NA	MM	Literature search, questionnaire; expert consultation	NA
Chen (2018)	WOC	MM	Self-made questionnaire; Classroom observation interview	109 students and 3 English teachers
Chen (2016a)	WOC	QT	Self-made questionnaire	125 students
Chen (2016b)	WOC	QT	Test result and performance result	125 students
Cheng (2015)	WOC	QT	Performance result	NA
Feng (2018)	WOC	MM	Questionnaire; interview	102 students
Jin (2019)	WOC	QT	Teacher's questionnaire; Students' questionnaire; Follow-up interview	40 teachers 500 students
Li (2012)	WOC	QT	Questionnaire	150 students
Li & Pan (2020).	WOC	QT	Performance result	63 students
Ma (2015)	WOC	QL	Classroom observation	NA
Man (2021)	WOC	QT	Questionnaire	NA

Pei (2014)	WOC	MM	Questionnaire; interview	40 students for the questionnaire; NA for interview
Qin (2014)	WOC	MM	Questionnaire with open questions	134 students
Shen (2020)	CC	MM	Questionnaire; interview	55 teachers and supervisors
Tang et al. (2019).	CC	QT	Questionnaire; test result	113 students
Wang et al. (2017).	WOC	QT	Questionnaire; test result	57 students
Wang (2019)	NA	MM	Assessment rubrics; classroom observation; interview; expert consultation	NA
Wu (2017)	NA	QT	Questionnaire	8 experts and 12 English teachers, 367 students
Wu et. al (2021)	NA	QT	Questionnaire	NA 1 professor, 8 associate professors and 10 English lectures; students for questionnaire NA
Yang (2018)	WOC	MM	Questionnaire; expert consultation	20 teachers 169 students for the questionnaire, 20 for the interview
Yin (2014)	CC	QT	Questionnaire	NA
Yu (2017)	WOC	MM	Questionnaire, interview	200 students for the questionnaire, 10 students and 10 teachers for the interview
Zhang (2021)	WOC	QT	Test results questionnaire	NA
Zhang (2019)	WOC	MM	Classroom observation interview	52 schools
Zhang (2013)	CC	QT	Questionnaire	NA
Zhu (2019)	WOC	MM	Questionnaire; portfolio; interview	NA

Note: WOC=Within one college; CC=Cross colleges; QT=Quantitative research design; QL=Qualitative research design; MM=Mixed methods; NA=Information not available

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present review is to explore the characteristics and emerging themes of the identified studies on EFL teachers' classroom assessment practice in China's higher vocational colleges. The following section first discusses the characteristics of the included studies and then elaborates on the emerging themes of classroom assessment practice in China's higher vocational colleges.

### The Characteristics of the Included Studies

The identified studies provide a holistic view of the characteristics of the selected studies on EFL teachers' classroom assessment in China's higher vocational colleges. In general, although research on classroom assessment is singularly prevalent in recent years, studies on classroom assessment practice in China's higher vocational colleges are not as fruitful as at other educational levels.



Among the identified 132 studies in the first round of search into the database of CNKI, there are only 27 empirical studies. The other excluded studies mainly discussed the assessment practice in theory without the support of empirical evidence. The proposed assessment methods are derived from teachers' experience and are unconvincing. This reflects the poor research ability of teachers in China's higher vocational colleges and teachers' lack of professional knowledge of assessment (Jin, 2020; Jin, 2019). This finding is also supported by the deficiency of high-impact journals the identified studies published. As far as a research design is concerned, quantitative research design (n=15) and mixed method research design (n=11) are widely used. However, some of the research designs (Bai, 2012; Cheng, 2015; Ma, 2015; Man, 2021; Wang, 2019; Zhu, 2019) are not clearly stated. For example, in Man's (2021) study on the construction of an evaluation system, the research design is overlooked. Without a detailed description of the research design and process, the researcher showed the research results directly. Most of the researchers (n=19) limited their research scope to one college. This results in the small size of the sample (Feng & Wang, 2018). Experimental studies (Li & Pan, 2020; Yu, 2017; Wang et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2019; Zhang, 2021) is widely utilised to learn the effect of formative assessment in EFL classrooms of China's higher vocational colleges.

In conclusion, the included studies on EFL teachers' classroom assessment showed an unstable development and deficiency in quantity. Besides, the included journals and overview of the adopted methodologies indicated that the research depth and width need to be further expanded to enhance the applicability of the research results.

### **The Major Emerging Themes of Classroom Assessment Practices**

After a detailed content analysis, six themes of the included studies on EFL classroom assessment practice are identified. They are (1) formative assessment, (2) multiple assessments, (3) teachers' assessment speech, (4) teaching quality assessment, (5) the construction of an assessment system, and (6) the construction of assessment models. Formative assessment, also regarded as process-oriented assessment, appears to be a topic of wide concern (Tang et al., 2019). That's because of the positive effect of promoting students' learning. Especially, formative assessment can improve students' learning motivation and interest (Li & Pan, 2020; Feng & Wang, 2018; Wang, 2017; Chen, 2016a; Cheng, 2015), self-reflective ability, and autonomous learning (Pei, 2014; Yu, 2017). However, formative assessment is not extensively applicable in teaching practice in China's higher vocational colleges (Chen, 2018). According to Chen (2018), this is because of teachers' lack of related knowledge on formative assessment and teachers' assessment content mainly centred around language knowledge, neglecting English learning strategies, affection and cross-cultural awareness. To address such problems in applying formative assessment, different theories and tools were tried. For example, Li & Pan (2020) explored the application of teacher-student collaborative assessment to spoken English classes in China's higher vocational colleges based on a production-oriented approach. Yu (2017) discusses the application of formative assessment from the perspective of constructivism. Technology-assisted formative assessment also interests a lot of researchers, such as flipped classrooms (Chen, 2016a) and MOOC (Cheng, 2015).

Multiple assessments are another important theme of the included study. The typical feature of multiple assessments is the combination of process-oriented assessment with result-oriented assessment (Zhu, 2019). Researchers also explored the implementation of various ways of assessment such as self-assessment (Jin, 2019; Tang et al., 2019; Chen, 2016b), portfolio assessment (Zhu, 2019), peer assessment (Chen, 2016b) and teacher assessment (Tang et al., 2019). It is proved that multiple assessments can better achieve teaching objectives, enhance students' application ability, and positively promote students' ability in higher vocational colleges (Tang et al., 2019; Jin, 2019). More importantly, the application of multiple assessments in flipped classrooms is conducive to monitoring students' learning process and improving the learning effect (Chen, 2016b).

Although there are few studies (Ma, 2015; Zhang, 2019) on teachers' assessment speech, its importance in teaching effect should not be underestimated. Ma (2015) indicated that teachers' assessment of speech does affect students' classroom participation to some extent. Students in China's higher vocational colleges have weak English foundations and poor learning interests. Therefore, the encouragement and appropriate assessment of students and teachers have a great effect on student's

participation in class activities. However, after a questionnaire survey and classroom observations, Zhang (2019) concluded that the problems regarding teachers' assessment of speech are unclear learning objectives, too general assessment tasks, and teachers' poor ability with feedback skills. Accordingly, assessments in class are quite accidental and are based only on teachers' teaching experiences. In view of these problems, innovating teachers' teaching concepts and improving teachers' professional knowledge of assessment in China's higher vocational colleges are essential.

The teaching quality of EFL teaching in China's higher vocational colleges has been a rarely touched upon area since Li's (2012) study. Teaching quality assessment refers to the evaluation of various elements of teaching activities according to some assessment standards. It includes the evaluation of the teaching process and teaching effect (Li, 2012). In Li's (2012) study, she constructed a teaching quality assessment questionnaire with 10 first-level indicators and tested its validity with SPSS 17.0. Results indicated that the self-made teaching quality assessment questionnaire is valid and reliable. However, this study has its limitations. First, the items of the questionnaire are quite subjective, and the second-level indicators are not clear. Second, without experts' checks and suggestions, the result is not very convincing. Thus, further studies on this topic should avoid such limitations.

The construction of assessment systems has been on a rising trend in recent years, especially the construction of assessment systems in flipped classrooms (Wu, 2017; Yang, 2018; Wu et al., 2021) and mixed teaching mode classrooms (Man, 2021). Studies concerning the construction of assessment systems stress the diversity of assessment objects such as teachers, students, supervisors and teaching administrators (Wu et al., 2021), the development of assessment indicators and instruments (Bai, 2012; Yang, 2018; Man, 2021), and propose easy-to-operate assessment models such as the whole process "3+2" evaluation system (Man, 2021) and the evaluation system under the BOPPPS teaching mode (Wang, 2019). Their findings are very insightful in promoting assessment reform in China's higher vocational colleges. Yet, the construct of various assessment indicators is a long and complex process, requiring repeated discussion and practice. So, their applicability needs to be further attested.

The last identified theme, the construction of assessment models, is quite integrated, for different ways assessment is listed in this theme. An's (2012) differential assessment divided students into different groups according to their abilities. The result indicates that differential assessment can promote learning by increasing students' confidence and improving their spoken English. However, the differential assessment may fail if team members can not cooperate well or dare not demonstrate themselves due to poor language proficiency. Zhang's (2013) learning guide mode was also built on the basis of respecting students' individual differences. Likewise, Shen's (2020) multi-model classroom assessment based on AHP highlights the integration of teacher, students, and the medium of multi-model. Yin's (2014) proposal of performance-based English authentic assessment lays primary emphasis on students' real experience of learning. While learning English in a real situation can motivate students to put learning into practice, it also increases students' learning anxiety, especially for those who are incompetent at English. The study by Zhang (2021) reveals that online apps such as "Blue Ink Cloud Class" satisfy learning needs and activate their learning interest, which is worth wide application among higher vocational colleges in China. In short, the above-mentioned models are process-driven and student-centred assessments that emphasise students' learning experience and effect. Yet, related studies with more supporting evidence are quite inefficient in China's higher vocational colleges. However, their propositions are in line with that of more greatly advocated formative assessment.

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The present review examines the characteristics of EFL teachers' classroom assessment practice in China's higher vocational colleges from the perspective of the total number of yearly publications, journal distribution, major themes, and overview of methodologies. Besides, six major emerging themes are identified and discussed to provide an insightful picture of development and gaps in this field. We found that the concerning topic actually didn't catch enough attention from the researchers in China. The total number of empirical studies in this field is quite small, and high-quality journals that publish related studies are also scarce. The identified themes illustrate that related studies on this topic focus on students' daily performance and development of various abilities rather than the result of the test (Qin, 2014; Man, 2021). This trend is progressive in promoting both students' learning achievement and

teachers' teaching effect. However, previous studies indicated that the successful implementation of classroom assessment practices put higher requirements on teachers in China's higher vocational colleges (Chen, 2018). To popularise the use of technology-facilitated assessment practice and enhance teachers' professional training in assessment knowledge should attach great importance in the future. Additionally, research findings also reveal that most of the studies utilised quantitative or mixed-method research design. However, some research designs are not clearly stated or well-designed (Zhu, 2019; Man, 2021). Some self-made questionnaires were not validated. The size of the samples is too small to generalise research results. These problems point to the necessity to strengthen teachers' and researchers' research abilities.

Overall, the findings of this research have significant practical implications. Firstly, formative assessment is advantageous in promoting students' learning, and thus, new attempts should be made to expand its application in China's higher vocational colleges. Future studies can be devoted to the cultivation of teachers' theoretical literacy of formative assessment and practical training in classroom assessment skills (Jin, 2020). Apart from the training program for in-service teachers in China's higher vocational colleges, educational and school administrators should greatly promote the integration of formative assessment into the curriculum construction of pre-service teachers' education (Andersson & Palm, 2017). Secondly, technology-supported classroom assessment is on the trend. However, the improvement of teachers' digital literacy and the wide application of mobile APPS or online platforms need school administrators' support. Besides, effective supervision of students' online learning achievement and feedback on student's learning process is worth our attention in future studies. Third, the exploration of new assessment models and assessment methods requires to be generalised with more empirical evidence.

The study has several limitations that need to be addressed in future studies. First, the selection of the articles solely in one database of China poses some limits to the present review. Future studies can expand the scope of the literature search to other databases. Secondly, the present study excluded articles without providing empirical evidence, which limits its examination of the theories of classroom assessment employed in China's higher vocational colleges. Future studies can fill this gap by organising related information to provide insightful insight into the theoretical development in this field.

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