

# Production-Oriented Approach Applied in English as SLA Classroom of China

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## ABSTRACT

The “Production Oriented Approach” (POA) proposed by Professor Wen Qiufang separates input from output in Chinese English as SLA (Second Language Acquisition) classrooms. This review paper summarizes the articles published in domestic and foreign journals from 2007 to 2021 and concludes the definition of the POA as an effective localized English teaching approach which draws up the strengths of foreign theories. The article unscrambles the developments of the POA from its prototype “output-driven” hypothesis to its revised form “output-driven input-enabled” hypothesis. Subsequently, its optimization progress is discussed as a system consisting of teaching principles, teaching principles and teaching hypotheses. It points out the research trends of this theoretical fields and the strengths (i.e., learners’ motivation and autonomy, and effectiveness of improving English output) and weaknesses (i.e., individual differences, a lacking in-depth and holistic empirical research, and less scientific ways of assessments). Directions are also given to provide a reference for future research, application, and optimization of the POA.

**Keywords:** *Production-oriented Approach, College English, Strengths and weaknesses, Directions.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Generally, previous western English teaching methods (i.e., top-down and bottom-up text-centered instruction) in China have been criticized as “high investment, low effectiveness”. To address the issue, the “Production-oriented Approach” was proposed by Professor Wen Qiufang to bridge the separation of input from output in English as SLA classrooms of China. Till now, the POA has been developed over a decade, evolving continuously from its prototype “output-driven” hypothesis to its revised “output-driven, input-enabled hypothesis” and finally to an optimized system. The theoretical system includes three parts: teaching principles, teaching hypotheses, and teacher-mediated teaching process. Based on relevant literature research of the POA in China and abroad, this article systematically summarizes the theoretical progress, development trend and strengths and weaknesses of the theory based on literature research method. Then, the paper provides specific directions to further promote the development, research, and application of the POA.

## 2. THE DEFINITION, THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND RESEARCH TRENDS OF POA

On 2021 Global English Education China Assembly, Professor Wen Qiufang from Beijing Foreign Studies University delivered a speech introducing the Production-Oriented Approach (POA). The POA, as an innovative pedagogy in China, aims at solving the problems of traditional Chinese English classes (e.g., separations of input from output) and improving the efficiency in classroom instructions. Through several rounds of experimental teaching, its implementation has been optimized and theoretical system been improved.

### 2.1. THE DEFINITION OF POA

Considering that English teaching in China has been inefficient and time-consuming in the aspect of output, as the pedagogical methods are characterized as being text-centred and input-based, Professor Wen Qiufang proposes an innovative teaching approach called POA [1]. As a systemic teaching approach, the POA consists of three parts: teaching principles, teaching hypotheses and teaching procedures. Unlike other instructional approaches for language learning, the POA starts

teaching with language production and ends with production while input serves as an enabler to help accomplish productive activities [1]. The POA draws on the strengths of the input hypothesis, interaction hypothesis, and output hypothesis, and is localized to fit well with the specific English teaching environment in China [2-4]. The term ‘production’ is used here instead of ‘output’ simply because it includes not only speaking and writing but also translation and interpreting [1].

2.1.1. THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Since the POA was brought out, it has been developed over a decade. Generally, the theoretical development of it can mainly be broken down into three stages: the Rudiment Stage (2007-2014), the Formation Stage (2014-2015), and the Revision and Optimization Stage (2016-2021)

2.1.1.1. The Rudiment Stage (2007-2014)

The POA emerged from the “output-driven hypothesis” proposed by the team of Wen Qiufang in 2007 [5]. It aims at reforming English major curriculum where students received English teaching with less focus on the language output. She mentions pilot projects must be carried out in the first place before organizing to put forward teaching syllabus [5]. In 2009, the perception of applying the “output-driven hypothesis” for reference to non-English major firstly appeared [6]. In 2013, as college students’ general English level advanced in the wake of national high-school curriculum reform, Wen Qiufang expanded the theory target range to learners with intermediate level proficiency in English [7]. She also expounded further the path that the “output-driven hypothesis” can be conducted in terms of the teaching objectives, course structure, teaching procedures and methods, and assessment focuses [7]. In 2014, in order to specify the clear role of input as enabling when output serves as a motivating force, the name of “output-driven hypothesis” was changed to “output-driven, input-enabled hypothesis” [8].

2.1.1.2. The Formation Stage (2014-2015)

In October 2015, the POA theory was first brought out [9]. The connotation of “production” is richer than “output”, as the former one underscores both the process of “producing” and the result of “product” [9]. In the same year, the POA as a whole was elaborated as a system. It contains three teaching principles: Learning-centered principle (LCP), Learning-using integration principle (LUIP), and Whole-person education principle (WPEP); three hypotheses: Output-Driven Hypothesis (ODH), Input-Enabling Hypothesis (IEH), Selective Learning Hypothesis (SLH); and three teaching procedures: Enabling, Motivating, and Assessing, as shown in Figure 1 [10]. Since 2015, the textbook *iEnglish*

has been applied by university students with high levels of English proficiency [11].

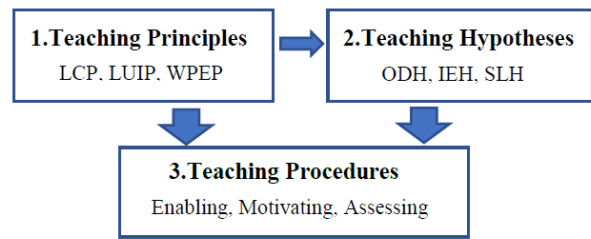


Figure 1 The Early System of the POA

2.1.1.3. The Revision and Optimization Stage (2016-2021)

Since 2016, the POA has been discussed about in international keynote speeches and carried out several rounds of experiments. By receiving positive feedback, constructive suggestions and criticisms, the newly revised system of the POA was launched in 2018 [12]. Compared with the previous system, in terms of teaching principles, it breaks Whole-Person Education Principle (WPEP) down to Cultural Exchange Principle (CEP) and Key Competencies Principle (KCP); in teaching hypotheses, it adds Assessment Being Learning Hypothesis (ABLH); teaching procedures remain the previous three: Enabling, Motivating, and Assessing, as shown in Figure 2 [12].

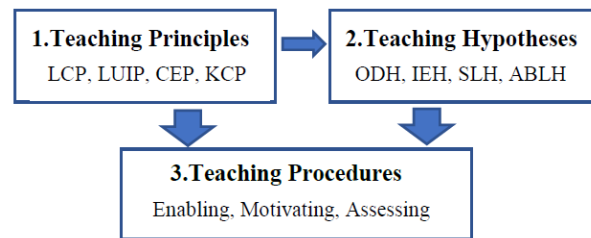


Figure 2 The Newly Revised System of the POA (2018)

2.1.2. RESEARCH TREND

Below are two tables illustrating the research types and applying areas of the POA. The data of the first table are collected from core issues, while the second from all sources available.

Table 1. Research Types of the POA

Types	The Rudiment Stage (2007-2014)	The Formation and Revision and Optimization Stage (2015-2021)
Theoretical	7	37
Research		

Empirical Research	0	30
Total	7	67

According to Table 1, the trend 1 is that both theoretical and empirical research have drastically increased in amount from the Rudiment Stage to the Formation and Revision Stage. However, empirical research was still less than the theoretical one, which was partly because there was no previous relevant research in the field of Rudiment Stage.

**Table 2.** The Implications of the POA

Topics	Number of Related Research	Percentage(%)
POA in College English, Japanese, Romanian, and Chinese Classroom	199	70.5
POA in High School English Classroom	46	16.5
POA in Middle School English Classroom	36	13.0
Total	281	100.0

As listed in Table 2, the trend 2 that the POA is mainly applied in the college English classroom. Moreover, the POA is also applied in college language classroom other than English, including other foreign languages e.g., Japanese, Romanian, etc.

### 3. REPRESENTATIVE PREVIOUS RESEARCH METHODS AND RESULTS OF THE POA

In order to appraise the effectiveness and of the POA, previous experiment in both input and output areas applying the POA in English teaching with their specific methods are analyzed as below:

Zhang set out to examine the effectiveness of the POA in college English teaching [13]. The study adopts qualitative approach and questions in the tests selected from CET-4 (College English Test Band 4) mock tests, which is an English test for university students in China except English majors. It is revealed that there are four results: 1) there is no significant difference between the text-based teaching method and the POA in terms of overall English proficiency; 2) regarding listening and

writing skills, the POA showed significant increase between these two areas; 3) however, there is no significant change in translation skill; 4) but in reading skills, it shows a significant decrease, as compared to the text-based teaching method [13].

In addition, the author also finds the POA is more effective for those students with higher English proficiency, while the textbook-based teaching method has a better effect on students with lower English proficiency [13]. Nevertheless, as the CET is exam-oriented, the accuracy and fairness on assessing students' reading abilities are likely to be affected.

Li and Li examined the effect of the teaching design of college English reading and writing course based on POA theory in 2020, in which applies quantitative approach with contrast data between pretest and post-test results and questionnaires [14]. The reading comprehension passages are selected from CET 4 of December in 2016 and June in 2017; two writing tasks refer to two general essays in no less than 150 words [14]. The study argues that students' interests, motivations and autonomy in reading and writing have been significantly strengthened in experimental class based on POA teaching model [14]. Meanwhile, students in experimental class have made apparent progress in writing and reading abilities [14]. There is significant difference between complexity and accuracy of writing compared with pretest [14]. Students' learning initiatives and enthusiasm both in reading and writing have been greatly improved under the POA teaching model [14]. However, as the CET is exam-oriented, the accuracy and fairness on assessing students' reading abilities maybe affected again.

Li compared spoken English at university level of the traditional PPP (Presentation, Practice, and Production) method and the POA, which uses quantitative approach with contrastive data between pretest and post-test results [15]. Questions in the oral English tests are selected from TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) mock tests, ensuring the validity and reliability of these tests [15]. Based on the results, POA method is better than PPP in boosting students' spoken English for non-English majors [15]. In terms of oral production, the POA teaching method has a better effect on fluency, use of advanced words and expressions than the PPP teaching method [15]. The two foreign language teaching models POA and PPP are basically the same in improving the accuracy of oral English [15]. Nevertheless, as can be observed in the statistics of oral production, the standard deviation of the POA is higher than PPP, which displays learners' individual differences under the method.

Wang carried out an experiment study that aimed to examine the effectiveness of the POA in college English translation teaching, which utilizes quantitative approach [16]. Through the comparisons of students' scores in the pretest and post-test, it is found that student' scores in the

post-test are significantly higher than those in the pretest. Besides, their translation skills and techniques have also progressed greatly [16]. Since the test scores are marked by Artificial Intelligence (AI), the results are relatively objective and fair than human's subjective judgments.

Fei attempted to apply POA theory into interpreting courses and carried out one-semester teaching using qualitative approach with questionnaires and interviews for analysis [17]. Most students felt they have improved a lot in linguistic knowledge, interpreting skills and cross-cultural consciousness. Learning effect has been improved significantly [17]. In addition, the author also noticed that: "all the task designing, material selections, and instant comment of the output links are very challenging, especially in the transition of teaching idea" [17].

Zhu carried out an empirical study of thinking skills teaching in a college English classroom based on the Production-oriented Approach to find out how students value the effects of the approach on their thinking skills developments, using qualitative approach with questionnaires and unstructured interviews [18]. The findings suggest that the approach can not only arouse students' learning interests, but also improve their abilities of critical thinking effectively and their pace to process new information in general, to share their opinions reasonably, to deal with complicated conditions independently and to be more fair-minded particularly [18]. However, as it is hard to appraise the results from the aspect of consciousness while unstructured interviews and interviews add more subjectivity, there are still some doubts about the assessment of its results.

Wang carried out a two-week teaching experiment (two class hours a week) aiming to cultivate students' intercultural communicative competence based on the POA [19]. It applies qualitative approach with feedback and interviews collected from the students. The results demonstrate that students have achieved a lot in language, cultural awareness, and communication skills. This kind of course is very beneficial for both learning English and practicing intercultural communication skills. Besides, students' learning enthusiasm and autonomy are mobilized." [19]. However, due to the shortage of time, the experiment was not mature enough and thus might affect the validity of the results.

#### **4. THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE POA**

Compared with traditional teaching approaches in China, the POA attaches more importance to outputs and individual competences, which is beneficial for students to cultivate communicative skills, especially for speaking and writing, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. As it is a well-localized approach that draws on strengths of foreign pedagogy, it is more effective and valuable to be

applied into Chinese English classroom and preparing students for future communicative works.

Based on previous research, one can be confident to draw the conclusion that the POA could generate positive emotional experience in English learning for students. Students' desire to learn is largely aroused in the motivating procedure for the gap between results of production in their current level and ideal production. Due to the clearer goal of learning, students are more involved in the class, i.e., activating their learning interests and initiatives. In addition, students get a sense of accomplishment in the process of completing tasks.

Moreover, the POA has great flexibility. Although the POA theory has provided the teaching procedures with detailed instructions, it still allows the spaces for teacher agency and professionalism to adjust according to different situations in real class. (e.g., teachers can choose materials everywhere they want).

However, in terms of research, individual differences are not sufficiently taken into considerations in previous research. The above experimental results also indicate that POA may be beneficial for students who have high English proficiency to make further progress. Nevertheless, as for those whose English level relatively low, the course would be too challenging, as it requires outputs at the beginning, which might be difficult for students who do not master lots of vocabulary. Additionally, the POA has posed great challenges for teachers to select suitable material and give appropriate transitions and assessments. For students, they also have to be willing to jump out of their comfort zone to do the extra work, thus the effect of teaching can be maximized.

Moreover, empirical research is still insufficient, despite its trend of growing recently, especially in the fields of listening and reading. In most empirical research, the studies utilized questionnaires, interviews to collect data. Hence, there is a lack of in-depth case studies. Apart from this, the way of assessing the results also need to be more accurate, otherwise the results may be greatly affected (e.g., the results of the effectiveness of applying the POA on reading contradict each other in two studies [13, 14].)

#### **5. FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Firstly, there is a great need of providing matching English teaching materials for teachers to apply the POA into their classrooms more easily.

Secondly, teachers themselves should own a great command of the POA theories and apply the approach more flexibly (e.g., combining their own agency and professionalism). Training courses can be set for teachers to instruct them apply the approach. It is also necessary to give student guidance classes before phasing in the approach into the classroom.

Thirdly, future research should be more detailed and paid attention to individual differences, taking factors such as English level, gender, character into considerations. The attempt to combine the POA with drama teaching can also be made, as drama assembles as many as the production topics.

Finally, in-depth follow-up research, cross-topic research and comparative studies with more advanced approaches home and abroad need to be further carried out to obtain more accurate effectiveness assessments of the POA. The way of assessing the effectiveness of the study also need to be more scientific to ensure the accuracy of the results.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In summary, this paper reviews POA applied in English as SLA classroom of China. According to the analysis, the POA is an effective teaching approach that consists of teaching principles, teaching hypotheses and teaching procedures, which is an approach that combining western and China's teaching styles. Additionally, the development of POA tends to develop from the first version to the other updated versions with more theories and application areas (e.g., from university to secondary schools; from English to other languages). Moreover, its strength is to raise students' interests and motivations, which is also helpful for enhancing students' speaking and writing ability. However, it does not consider a lot about students' different levels of proficiency, which is more beneficial for high-level students. Meanwhile, it does not have enough in-depth and holistic empirical research and textbooks to support. The way of assessing the effectiveness of the POA should also be more scientific. These are future directions to improve the POA. On this basis, this paper delivers clear introductions and constructive suggestions for researchers who are interested to carry out studies on the POA and background information for English as SLA teachers who want to improve students' outputs in their classrooms. As a localized English teaching method in China, the POA, is still in its early stages but has its own strengths. With these results as a guideline, the POA will be implemented more effectively in Chinese English as SLA class by further revisions and ongoing research.

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