



Applying the Production-Oriented Approach to Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language: A Literature Review

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Abstract. The Production-Oriented Approach (POA) is a newly developed theory for second language teaching. The application of POA to TESL in China has been proven effective, hence the researchers put forward that POA should be used in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Several experiments on CFL teaching have been conducted to test the significance of POA. This essay collected several cases of POA application in CFL teaching, and the results of these teaching experiments show the practicality and operability of using the POA in teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

Keywords: Production-oriented approach (POA), Teaching Chinese as a foreign language

1 Introduction

The production-oriented approach (POA) has evolved over the past ten years to overcome the deficiency in English instruction in tertiary education in Mainland China, the POA tries to combine the advantages of western teaching methods with the characteristics of the Chinese context. The teaching principles include “learning-centered”, “learning-using integration”, and “whole-person education”, the teaching hypotheses are “output-driven”, “input-enabled”, and “selective learning”. The teaching processes contain three phases, each mediated by the teacher: motivating, enabling, and assessing. The three principles set guidelines for the other two components; the three hypotheses serve as a theoretical basis for the teaching process; the three-phase teaching process reflects and illustrates the principles while testing the hypotheses (Wen, 2018)¹. Based on the teaching practice and results, WEN refined the POA theoretical system and made it preferable for CFL teaching.

¹ Wen, Q. F. (2018). Production-Oriented Approach in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language.

2 The POA theory

The formulation of the POA theory has gone through five phases. The first is 2007 to 2013 warm-up period, in which the “output-driven hypothesis” was promoted. The second stage is the 2013 to 2014 prototype phase, and the “output-driven and input-enabled hypothesis” was stated. The third stage is the formative phase from 2015-2016, in which Wen first formulated the “production-oriented approach”. The fourth step is the revision era (2016 to 2017). And the fifth phase is the re-revision stage from 2017 to 2018 (Wen, 2018)².

The POA incorporates the curriculum theory and the theory of second language acquisition, emphasizing a teacher's leading position and overcoming the drawbacks of these two theories in conjunction with the situation of foreign language education in China. It can address the problems of research and application separation and low productivity in the teaching of foreign languages. POA consists of 3 components: (1) teaching principles; (2) Teaching hypotheses; And (3) teacher-mediated teaching processes. The theoretical system of POA is shown in Figure 1.

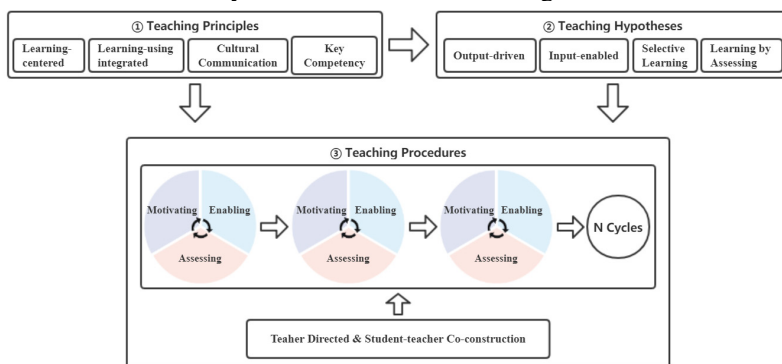


Fig. 1. The re-revised POA system

Note: Cited from Wen, 2018.

2.1 Teaching Principles

There are four teaching principles to the POA theory.

Learning-Centered Principle (LCP).

The learning-centered principle promotes the accomplishment of teaching goals and the development of successful learning. Hence, in expressing the nature of education, POA is more succinct and more detailed than the other teaching concepts. In classroom instruction, LCP focuses on what learners should understand. Several activities in the

² Wen, Q. F. (2018). Production-Oriented Approach in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language.

classroom can be selected to fulfill various teaching purposes, such as group discussions, individual presentations, etc. The main point is that teachers select the proper way to achieve the teaching objectives.

Learning-Using Integrated Principle (LUIP).

“Learning” refers to input learning, including listening and reading, in the theoretical framework of POA. The word “use” means “output” including speaking, writing, and translation (Wen, 2016)³. POA claims that input learning and output implementation are closely related together. The drawbacks of “textbook-centered”, “text first” and “separation between input and output” can be avoided in teaching.

In POA theory, the concept of 'learning-using integrated' promotes that all language teaching practices are closely related to the application of language. Thus, “learning” and “using” have no limits and are incorporated into teaching.

Cultural Communication Principle (CCP).

The cultural communication principle is to cultivate learners' abilities to correctly manage the relationship between the cultures of the target language and the native language of the learner. Language and culture are closely related, so in language teaching, it is difficult to ignore the question of cultural education. The purpose of teaching Chinese as a foreign language lies not in requiring the learners to recognize or embrace the Chinese culture, but in expecting them to know and understand China through the Chinese language, at the same time introducing their own culture and traditions by using Chinese, thus enhancing the communications between different cultures.

Key Competency Principle (KCP).

“Transferability” in POA requires students to complete pre-practiced output tasks and transfer the solution to new problems. Learning capacity refers to a student's ability to independently learn new knowledge and skills, which is an important ability for lifelong learning and the individual's sustainable growth. Wen⁴ emphasized that, while the POA requires teachers to create scaffolding for students to help them overcome learning disabilities, scaffolding needs to be phased out to allow students to perform their tasks independently (Wen, 2018).

This requires students not only to acquire new language skills and finish new output tasks but also to learn and improve meta-cognitive “how to learn” skills, such as how to pick and process input materials and how to incorporate input into new output tasks. “Cooperation ability” refers to a teamwork spirit of mutual respect, finding common grounds while reserving disagreements, and being good at compromising, and working together. Teachers should incorporate learning skills and cooperation skills in the

³ Wen, Q. F. (2016). The Production-Oriented Approach to Teaching University Students English in China.

⁴ Wen, Q. F. (2018). Production-Oriented Approach in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language.

selection of POA learning material and the design of the learning activity mode so that students can develop these skills gradually in the language learning process.

2.2 Teaching Hypotheses

The POA brings forward four teaching hypotheses: (1) output-driven, (2) input-enabled, (3) selective learning, and (4) learning by assessing.

Output-Driven Hypothesis (ODH).

Output-driven is a second language teaching hypothesis, encouraging learners to try to output first, to make themselves aware of the complexity of output. The instructor then provides direct information targeted at the output goals and students' feedback, helping them successfully absorb, digest, and apply the following-up input. The goal of reversing the order of "input" and "output" is to build a student's motivation and desire to learn by giving the initial "output" for the student to realize the difficulty. The ODH claims that once students understand the value of a productive task and become aware of what they lack for fulfilling the task, they will become more active and more engaged in studying the enabling materials (Wen 2014c)⁵.

Input-Enabled Hypothesis (IEH).

"Input-Enabled Hypothesis" implies that the input should fulfill the explicit output purpose. In classroom instruction, after being driven by output, the teacher must provide some subsequent input that accurately links to the output tasks so that the student can effectively complete the task.

Selective Learning Hypothesis (SLH).

"Selective learning means that the learner chooses to learn only what is useful for the productive activity assigned" (Wen, 2016)⁶. This means that goal-oriented learning is more effective than holistic learning. There are a wide variety of common learning materials in the information age. When faced with insufficient time, students need to select learning resources according to their individual needs and circumstances. In the POA class, the teacher is advised not to devote a large amount of time to a close analysis of input or to make a great effort to prompt students to understand every bit of input. Instead, the input should be dealt with selectively according to what it contains that is needed for productive activities.

Learning by Assessing Hypothesis (LAH).

The learning-by-assessing hypothesis is that a combination of assessing, and learning will have a greater teaching impact than a split. The POA theory assumes that as-

⁵ Wen, Q. F. (2014). Output-Driven, Input-Enabled Hypothesis: A Tentative Theory of Foreign Language Classroom Instruction for University Students.

⁶ Wen, Q. F. (2016). The Production-Oriented Approach to Teaching University Students English in China.

assessment, learning, and instruction should be integrated. And the evaluation is the gateway to language acquisition and an integral part of the teaching cycle chain. Some argue that the assessment requires less time than the planning and instruction of a class. However, POA suggests that assessment and learning or assessment and instruction can be combined organically.

3 The Application of the POA Approach in CFL Teaching

The POA was used at the very beginning only in English teaching in mainland China, Wen (2018) pointed out that there were parallels between teaching Chinese as a foreign language and teaching English so the POA could also be extended to CFL teaching. To date, the following teaching experiments have demonstrated the operability and effectiveness of POA in CFL teaching.

3.1 Productive Objective Attainment Experiment

Zhu & Bai⁷(2019) conducted a teaching experiment with 50 Malaysian students from Beijing Foreign Studies University. The fifty students were divided into three parallel classes, two of which were the POA experimental class with 33 students (7 boys and 26 girls) in total, and the other was a control class with 17 students (2 boys and 15 girls). The teaching content is the same text, with the two experimental classes using POA materials and the control class using the original textbook. The POA experimental classes were conducted by the teaching process of “Motivating→Enabling→Assessing”, while the control class still used the traditional teaching process of “Introducing→Explaining new words→Explaining the text→Practice”. Through this teaching experiment, the achievement of the three indicators of “Degree of Engagement”, “Sense of Fulfillment” and “Quality of Students’ Production” were investigated.

During this experiment, 14 students demonstrated that they had more talking opportunities in POA class. Ten students said that they were more willing to do exercises and express themselves, and they would also look up extracurricular materials to expand their knowledge when writing compositions. 13 students thought POA classes were more interesting and let them think more. 22 students said they were more easily to speak or write than before.

The results of the experiment and the interviews show that compared with the control class, students can pay more attention to the output practice and text content in the POA class, and their participation in the class is greatly enhanced. At the same time, students have a stronger sense of harvest, also the quality of their writing productions is significantly higher than the control class.

⁷ Yong, Z., & Xue, B.. (2019). Evaluating the Attainment of Productive Objectives through the Use of POA Teaching Materials.

3.2 POA in Oral Business Chinese Teaching

Wang Ting⁸ (2019) took 24 foreign students with a major in Business Chinese as experimental subjects. The 24 participants were divided into two parallel classes, one with 12 students adopting POA teaching as an experimental class and the other with another instructor as a control class.

To evaluate the oral proficiency of the experiment class and the control class, Wang completed a pre-test before the experiment and the test results revealed that there was no significant difference in the oral Chinese proficiency of the two classes.

Table 1. The average score of the pre-test

Class	Samples	Average Score
Experiment Class	12	79.9
Control Class	12	79.3

Note: Cited from Wang, 2020.

At the end of the nine-week teaching experiment, the experimental class and the control class were tested again. The test results showed that there were significant differences between the two classes in oral performance.

Table 2. The average score after the teaching experiment (data from Wang, 2020)

Class	Samples	Average Score
Experiment Class	12	87.9
Control Class	12	80.7

Note: Cited from Wang, 2020.

After the end of the experiment, both the experimental class and the control class have made some progress in oral Chinese, but the improvement amplitude of the experimental class using the production-oriented method is higher than that of the control class, and there is a significant difference between them. At the same time, the oral output speed of the experimental class was significantly higher than that of the control class, indicating that the oral output content of the experimental class was more within the same time. The average number of pauses in the experimental class was also lower than that in the control class, indicating that learners in the experimental class had fewer pauses and more coherent sentences when expressing the same topic. In terms of the expression content, the experimental class made fewer errors in the whole oral expression than the control class, and the accuracy was higher.

⁸ Wang, T. (2020). The Effectiveness Study of Production-Oriented Approach in Oral Business Chinese Teaching.

3.3 POA in Chinese Writing Teaching

Song Yang⁹ (2019) did action research on the application of POA to Chinese writing teaching at a School in the UK. Two Year 10 parallel classes were divided into an experimental group and a control group to take a 12-week action study to test the effects of POA in Chinese writing teaching. Before the experiment, a preliminary survey was conducted and showed that the current learning effect and students' participation were poor.

The whole experiment has 2 rounds, for each round last 6 weeks. The first round was to explore the applicability and practicability of POA and the second round was to improve the POA teaching design and solve the problems that occurred in the first-round experiment. The results showed that writing performance, participation, and motivation were improved compared with the control group.

Table 3. The average score after first-round POA teaching

Group	Preliminary Average Score	Average Score after POA
Experimental Group	5.5833	6.9167
Control Group	5.6000	5.7000

Note: Cited from Wang, 2019.

However, Song stated the challenges at the very beginning of the POA experiment: a. Lacking the matched textbooks, he needed to reorganize the teaching materials by himself, which spent too much time; b. Students complained about the big change in teaching mode; c. Some students felt so hard to follow him.

4 Discussion

These experiments of applying POA to teaching Chinese as a foreign language show that POA can effectively improve the overall Chinese proficiency of learners, especially in writing. This shows that task-based Chinese teaching is suitable for both formal processing and meaning processing. Since Chinese writing emphasizes more on Chinese learners' discourse analysis ability and pragmatic capacity, the POA teaching concept, which emphasizes output-driven practice and input-enabling, can effectively improve Chinese learners' discourse awareness, syntactic ability, discourse analysis ability, and pragmatic capacity.

POA can achieve a good balance between comprehensible input and comprehensible output so that the two can be effectively connected. This is because POA creates a communicative and consultative learning environment for Chinese learners, which not only ensures that task participants receive more comprehensible input, but also promotes learners to produce more comprehensible output. As POA is driven by output, this leads to a generation of information gaps for the learners, which improves the

⁹ Song, Y. (2019). An Action Research on the Application of Production-Oriented Approach to Chinese Writing Teaching in Secondary School in the UK.

learning motivation and class participation of CFL learners. Meanwhile, the unique teaching process of POA also greatly improves Chinese learners' attention, observation, imagination, and memory, and has a significant effect on the improvement of CFL learners' overall cognitive skills.

In conclusion, these research results support the effectiveness of POA in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Nevertheless, some aspects still need to pay attention to a. because of the close connection between each step of POA, teachers need to strictly manage the time so that the POA teaching could smoothly carry on; b. teachers should take care of students' emotional change in case of some student would feel uncomfortable.

5 Conclusion

The existing studies of POA have proved its effectiveness and operability. However, the application of POA in teaching Chinese as a foreign language still needs to be improved, especially in teacher training and textbook compilation. Meanwhile, more POA teaching practices should be conducted to supplement the theory.

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