

# **Research on the Applicability of Production-oriented Approach to Chinese Secondary Education**

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## **Abstract**

In recent ten years, “Production-oriented approach”(POA) has emerged in the foreign language teaching as a new teaching method. And now there has been a relatively mature theoretical system and implementation path after the continuously exploration and grope of the former experts. Most of the researches on POA were to explore its application to higher education. Only a small part of them discussed the application to secondary education for exploration. But what about the applicability of POA in Chinese secondary education? Therefore, this essay will have a discussion about it and get a conclusion that POA is suitable for being used in secondary education in the end.

**Key words:** Production-oriented approach (POA); secondary education; applicability

## 摘要

近十年来，“产出导向法”作为一种新的教学方法在外语教学中应运而生。经过前专家们不断地探索和摸索，现在它已经有了比较成熟的理论体系和实施路径，但大多数关于 POA 的研究都是在探索其在高等教育中的应用，而其中只有一小部分研究讨论了产出导向法在中学教育中的应用。然而，产出导向法在中国中学教育中的适用性如何呢？本文将对此进行讨论，并在文章末尾得出产出导向法适合用于中学教育的结论。

**关键词：**产出导向法；中学教育；适用性

### 1. Introduction

In the past few decades, the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) method (Long 2015) has been highly praised by most scholars since it was introduced to China. It is undeniable that the TBLT is more suitable for modern English teaching than the traditional teaching methods because it can promote the motivation of students to learn efficiently. The TBLT bridges the gap between the learner's native language and the target language, providing learners with an interactive opportunity to explore the potential of learners to use language and inspire their creative use of language (Yue Shouguo 2002). However, the TBLT has also been questioned by some experts: 1) the task teaching method does not pay enough attention to grammar teaching; 2) the peer-to-peer interaction of the task teaching method provides the learner with a new form of language that is insufficient and limited and it has some grammatical errors as well, etc. (Ma Zheng 2017). After all, this is a teaching concept introduced from abroad, and it is inevitable that there will be inapplicabilities when it is implemented in China. While the Production-oriented approach (POA) as a new type of teaching philosophy has emerged in recent years. It is based on the characteristics of Chinese teaching and is proposed by Chinese experts which aims to be a teaching method suitable for China itself. However, is the POA applicable to secondary education in China? This will be the core of this essay.

The POA was proposed by Wen Qiufang in 2007 at the first National Senior English Forum of Directors of English Majors (Wen Qiufang 2007) and was extended to university education in 2013 (Wen Qiufang 2013). In October 2014, it was officially named as Production-oriented approach (Wen 2014). It is a new teaching concept proposed by Professor Wen Qiufang based on China's current situation, aiming to further promote Chinese teaching. Since the emergence of the POA, it has attracted the attention of many scholars who has carried out a lot of research on it. Most of the researches on POA is exploring its application in higher education, and there are only a handful of studies on the application of POA in secondary education. Judging from the number of journal articles included in cnknet, as of August 1, 2019, only 19 related essays can be obtained by searching for terms such as "POA in middle school" and "POA in high school", and 90% of them are master's thesis (such as Yang Jianguo, Zhong Cailan 2018; Zhang Kaijun 2019). This undoubtedly shows that the researches about the applications of POA in Chinese middle schools are very weak. Therefore, this essay will discuss whether the POA is applicable to secondary education in China from the perspective of the teaching objectives, teaching principles and teaching process of POA.

## **2. Teaching Objectives**

Professor Wen Qiufang proposed two explanations on POA in 2015. One of them is that POA mainly aimed at middle- and high-level foreign language learners. If measured by the Common Reference Frame of European Languages (hereinafter referred to as European frame), the target must be at least A2 or above (Wen Qiufang 2015). The European Frame divides the practical use of language into three grades and a total of six levels: first-class (A) is the primary user (Basic User), including entry-level (A1) and basic level (A2); second-class (B) that is, Independent User, including the advanced class (B1) and the high class (B2); third class (C) is the Proficient User, including the fluent use level (C1) and the proficient level (C2). The A2 language proficiency level is described as being able to understand the expressions or statements that are often used in the environment closest to oneself, such as very basic personal and family data, shopping, regional geography and employment, and the ability to communicate with people with simple and routine work, which usually requires only simple and direct daily information. In addition, learners of this level can use superficial words to describe their own background and the things that are closest to them (Jiang Yun 2015).

The China's Standards of English Language Ability (CSE), which was officially issued by the Ministry of Education of China and the State Language Working Committee since June 1, 2018, divides the English proficiency of English learners and users from low to high into three stages of "foundation, improvement and proficiency", with a total of nine grades. Among them, the third level corresponds to the junior high school, and the fourth level corresponds to the high school. According to language ability scales of the CSE: Grade 3 refers to the ability of students to understand the simple language materials in daily life, to obtain specific or key information, to grasp the key points, and to infer the intentions of others. The students should be able to communicate with others in daily life or in general social situations by using simple language, be able to describe their personal experience, ambition, etc., and be able to explain reasons and express their views with basic accuracy, coherency and smoothness. While grade 4 refers that students can understand the language materials of common topics in general social situations, grasp the theme and main content, grasp the main facts and views, and understand the intentions and attitudes of others. Also, they can talk about familiar topics on familiar occasions, describe the development and situation of events, introduce related activities, explain the main points of things, and briefly discuss their personal views, etc.. And the expression should be more accurate, clear and coherent. Thus it can be seen that grade3 and grade4 in the CSE corresponds to the A2 level in the European frame (figure 1). So from this aspect we can draw the conclusion that POA is suitable for the secondary education.



Figure 1

### 3. Teaching Principles of POA

There are three teaching principles of POA: Learning-centered Principle, Learning-using Integrated Principle and Whole-person Education Principle. In the following they will be explained separately to see whether the POA is suitable for middle school education from the aspect of its teaching principles.

#### a. Learning-centered Principle

The “Learning-centered Principle” advocated by POA advocates that all activities of classroom teaching should aim to make the effective learning happen. Professor Wen Qiufang believes that “learning” must be an independent behavior of students and can not be replaced by teachers working. Contrary to the Learning-centered Principle, the Student-centered Principle, which is introduced from abroad, thinks that students are the main body of the classroom. However, the expression of “student-centered concept” is easy to make some misleading. On the one hand, it is easy to marginalize the role of teachers in the classroom, on the other hand, it improperly expands the role of students (Wen Qiufang 2015). In the past 20 years, the role of teachers has been marginalized. The teacher is only seen as facilitator, consultant and helper. POA holds that teachers should not only provide support and help to students, but also play a leading role in the whole teaching process. The teacher should be the designer of classroom teaching, organizer, leader and director (Wen Qiufang 2017). Students are the main body of learning activities that teachers can not replace students in learning. Nevertheless, teachers play a leading role in the classroom on how to enable students to participate in learning actively and learn effectively.

The students in Middle school stage is experiencing a period when their mind is in a sensitive period, which refers to that the students are more vulnerable to the interference of external behavior and external environment in the process of daily life and learning at that time. Zhang Lingcong has proved in some experiments that the learning self-control ability of junior high school students is not stable and their consciousness of learning is not high enough too. Both of them depend on the external driving

force (Zhang Lingcong 2001). After that, it is concluded that the learning self-control of middle school students shows an overall downward trend from the first year of junior high school to the third year of senior high school (Zhang Lingcong 2009). Therefore, the self-control of middle school students is unstable. Teachers should play an important leading role in learning, instead of letting students lead the teaching. Therefore, POA is suitable for middle school education from this point of view.

### **b. Learning-using Integrated Principle**

The “Learning-using Integrated Principle” advocated by POA advocates that all language teaching activities are closely linked with the use of “learning” and “using”, so that there is no boundary between “learning” and “using” because they are integrated (Wen Qiufang 2015). If we adopt the theory of “Learning-using Integrated Principle”, students with high or low English proficiency will be able use English. The difference lies not in whether they can do it or not, but in the complexity of doing things. POA emphasizes the use of language and implements the language learned by allowing students to complete a series of tasks. Language learning should aim to make the students be able to use the language. After combining the learning and using, the phenomenon of “high scores and low energy” or “dumb English” in the language can be reduced efficiently. Of course, TBLT also advocates “learning by doing”. in fact, the essence of the two is the same (Deng Hailong 2018), and the idea of combining learning and using is also highly praised by a great number of scholars. Therefore, in this regard, POA is applicable to secondary education in China.

### **c. Whole-person Education Principle**

The purpose of whole-person education is to train students to become "whole-person" with morality, knowledge, ability and harmonious development. From the point of view of whole-person education, education is not only to train workers for enterprises, to train talents for the country, but also to fully explore the potential of human beings and promote the complete development of human beings, that is, full development in terms of body, knowledge, skills, moral intelligence, spirit, soul, creativity, etc. (Tang Shaoqing 2014). The students in middle school are in the stage of developing their morality, intelligence, sports, beauty and so on. Thus the teaching idea of the whole person is quite in line with the teaching requirements of middle school. Adhering to the whole person education, POA believes that language education is faced with human beings. And in order to serve the whole development, it is necessary to take all aspects of human intelligence, emotion and morality into account. POA insists that the realization of the humanistic goal does not mean it needs to take up additional classroom teaching time, it can achieve the humanistic goal through the following three means: 1) carefully select the topic of output task; 2) carefully select the input materials to serve the output task; 3) skillfully design the organization form of teaching activities (Wen Qiufang 2015). POA does not affect students' learning, but can realize the whole-person education. Therefore, POA is applicable to secondary education in China.

#### **4. Teaching Process**

The teaching process of POA covers three stages: motivating; enabling; assessing. There must be a teacher in these three stages as a intermediary. Whose intermediary role here is guider, designer and scaffolder, etc. Among the three process, motivating includes three steps: a. the teacher presents a communication scene; b. the student tries to produce; c. the teacher illustrates the teaching objective and the output tasks (types and contents of the tasks). The enabling contains three main steps: a. the teacher describes the the output tasks (steps and specific requirements for each step); b. students carry out selective learning, at the same time, teachers give guidance and do inspections; c. students produce output productions, and teachers give guidance and do inspections (Wen Qiufang 2015). The evaluation stage adopts the method of Teacher-Student Collaborative Assessment (TSCA) (Wen Qiufang 2015). Compared with the existing teaching method, POA has two different characteristics, one is its motivating process, the second is its evaluation method. These two characteristics will be discussed in the following to see if POA is suitable for secondary education.

##### **a. Motivating**

In the motivating process, teachers will design suitable communicative situations and tasks, which have potential communication value, for motivating students' enthusiasm to complete tasks and enhancing their learning motivation. It has been mentioned that the motivating process includes three steps: a. the teacher presents a communication scene; b. the student tries to produce; c. the teacher illustrates the teaching objective and the output tasks (types and contents of the tasks). It is obvious that the motivating is an output process for students, which is the most special part in POA. Because it is different from other teaching ideas in that it makes students to do some tasks first and understand their own shortcomings, so as to study hard with full inspiration. It can motivate and encourage the students a lot. In the teaching process of POA, the output in the first to find the "gap" of learning, and then the accurate input is used to deal with the problems found in the former output process. After that, another output is used to test the efficiency of the input. In this way, the learning and use are closely combined to connect seamlessly. The hypothesis of POA "output driven" and "input enabled" not only clearly highlights the motivating effect of output, but also attaches importance to the catalytic effect of language input. POA organically unifies the two in teaching practice with a cycle iteration of each stage beginning with the output and ending with output (Deng Hailong 2018). Middle school children's initiative in learning is not high. But through the use of POA, students' motivation and interest in learning can be greatly improved. From this point of view, POA is quite suitable for middle school education.

##### **b. Teacher-Student Collaborative Assessment**

The last step of POA classroom teaching process, assessing, adopts Teacher-Student Collaborative Assessment (TSCA), in which the object of evaluation is the output completed by students after class. It's evaluator is composed of students, teachers and automatic scoring system. And it's evaluation forms in class are the cooperative evaluation between students and students, teachers and students. While after class there are other supplementary evaluation forms, such as self-evaluation, mutual evaluation,

machine automatic scoring and so on. The evaluation content takes the unit teaching goal as the reference that it not only pays attention to the realization quality of the communicative goal, but also examine the application of the language form and discourse structure that students learn during the enabling stage. The specific steps of TSCA are as follows: First the teacher looks over the typical samples in advance. Then the samples are evaluated by the cooperation between teachers and students, and between the students and students when under the teachers professional guidance. After class students do self-evaluation or evaluate products one another, and then use automatic scoring system to evaluate again. Finally, the teacher takes a combination of census and spot checks to understand the performance of students and the achievement of teaching goals. Compared with other evaluation methods, TSCA has three significant features (Wen Qiufang 2016):

1) For the subject, TSCA is not a simple superposition of teachers and other subjects. Under the guidance of teachers' specialty, it breaks the boundary between “learning” and “evaluation” to make evaluation a strengthening and deepening stage of learning.

2) For the content, TSCA is not limited to the quality of the product itself, but also covers achievement of teaching goals.

3) For the method, TSCA is not only the cooperative evaluation between teachers and students in class. But on the basis of learning how to carry out effective evaluation in cooperative learning, students also carry out other supplementary evaluation forms, like self-evaluation, mutual evaluation, machine automatic scoring and so on.

In this way, if POA is applied to secondary education, first of all, from the view of evaluation subject, through such immediate and diverse evaluation methods, students' comprehensive learning ability and cooperative ability can be greatly improved. With the implementation of the new curriculum standards, students' ability improvement has got much attention. Secondly, in the view of evaluation content, because the teaching objectives of POA include both language knowledge and communicative abilities, TSCA takes these two kinds of presupposition goals as the reference, so that students' language ability goals will not be diluted or ignored. Due to middle school teaching is still in the basic stage, English as a foreign language that students should learn whose knowledge content can not be weakened at all. Finally, about evaluation methods, there are a variety of evaluation methods combined together to complement each other. It can grasp the psychology of middle school students that they like to explore, so as to make the evaluation results more persuasive. At last, the learning effect and teaching efficiency will be both improved. Therefore, from these respect, POA is quite suitable for middle school education.

## **5. Conclusion**

To sum up, POA is suitable for secondary education in China from the perspective of its teaching objectives, teaching principles and teaching process. Deng Hailong has mentioned that compared with TBLT, applying POA to university education in China has three advantages: 1) POA is more in line with the reality of foreign language teaching in Chinese universities; 2) There is no need to do needs analysis in POA; 3) In POA, there combines the second language acquisition theory and the practice of foreign language teaching. (Deng Hailong 2018) However, if POA is used in secondary education, these are still

the advantages of POA. In addition, POA will also reflect the following advantages in secondary teaching:

(1) The functions of teachers has been properly realized. The self-control abilities of middle school students are not strong, and their learning enthusiasm is not enough. Besides, their reserved knowledge is not enough. If teachers completely let students become the master of learning, what students can gain will be very limited, and even they will be misled by their classmates.

(2) The combination of language teaching and practice. In the classroom, the students will carry on the language practice in the way of the tasks. let the students apply the learned knowledge to the practice by speaking English loudly. So as to make the “dumb in English” really the past.

(3) The improvement of the students’ motivation to learn. The motivating of POA in the teaching process has a great effect on the student's study, because the middle school students are full of strong curiosity and are willing to do explorations. Thus the POA is more suitable for them.

(4) The TSCA is used to improve the teaching efficiency. The misunderstanding of teaching is that teachers often pays much attention on the teaching stage, but not enough in the evaluation stage, which leads to the learning efficiency far beyond teachers’ expectations. POA combines a variety of evaluation methods, which will greatly improve the teaching efficiency and quality.

In addition, this essay only expounds the teaching objectives, teaching principles and teaching process, but not other details. This paper only makes theoretical reasoning and lacks empirical research. It is hoped that experts and scholars in the future can pay more attention to the use of POA in middle school, and jointly enrich the theoretical research of foreign language teaching in our country.

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