

# *Constructing a Production-Oriented Teaching Model for Chinese College English Instruction*

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**Abstract:** College English, as an important public basic course in China's higher education, plays an important role in talent cultivation because of its wide audience and great influence. However, in recent years, college English instruction in China has been confronted with constant doubts and facing greater crises and challenges due to its time consuming with low efficiency caused by the ambiguity and alienation of teaching goals, which have led to many problems, such as deviation in teaching methods, lack of practical use of language and unscientific assessment. Thus, it is urgent to reform college English instruction. This paper, guided by China's localized teaching theory -- Production-Oriented Approach, attempts to construct a production-oriented teaching model from three aspects: the design of teaching processes, the establishment of teachers' mediating role and the development of a comprehensive assessment system, in order to improve students' language application ability and the quality of college English instruction.

## 1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, China needs to communicate with the world, so it constantly attaches great importance to English education. In China, College English is a compulsory basic course for almost every college student, which is directly related to whether the national strategy can be effectively realized and whether college students with international communication ability can be cultivated.[1] In order to improve the quality of college English instruction, Chinese education authorities have implemented a series of measures since 2003, and a vast number of English experts, scholars, and front-line teachers have also actively responded to the call to continuously carry out research on teaching theory and practice.

Looking back on the reform process over the past few decades, we can definitely say that some significant achievements have been made. However, there still exist problems.[2] With the trend of economic globalization and internationalization of higher education, the college English education in China still fails to meet the national talent training strategy and social needs. The English level of most college graduates can neither meet the needs of their practical work nor meet the requirements of the society. Their learning and application are seriously divorced. Although they have mastered some English knowledge, they seldom have the opportunity to practice and apply it. English

learning is limited to the reception of theoretical knowledge, which seriously violates the law of language learning and is not conducive to the improvement of their English practical application ability. For this reason, college English education has been widely criticized by the society, from previously being accused of being “time-consuming and inefficient” to the current reduction of class hours, credit compression, and even the call for canceling the course. The crisis and challenges faced by college English instruction are becoming increasingly serious. [3]

Therefore, it is imperative to deepen the reform of college English instruction. It is of great practical significance to scientifically analyze the existing problems, carry out constructive reform, change the traditional teaching mode, and explore a mode that is production-oriented and seamlessly connects “learning” with “using” to effectively improve the quality of college English teaching.

## **2. Problems in Present College English Instruction in China**

There are many problems in college English instruction in China, but the fundamental problem lies in the ambiguity and alienation of its goals. It is not clear what kind of goals should the specific practical teaching serve, which leads to the fact that although the teaching reform has been in full swing, the teaching quality has not been significantly improved. [4] Generally speaking, the unclear use of teaching goals mainly produce the following problems.

### **2.1. Deviation in Teaching Methods**

Cai (2017) pointed out that all college English teaching syllabuses issued in China since 1999 had not clearly put forward the application goals of teaching, and he regarded it as the biggest defect of college English education.[5] A common phenomenon caused by vague teaching goals is that many teachers take the content of teaching materials as their target, and even mistakenly believe that the teaching goals will be achieved after explaining the texts and after-class exercises. They don't know that teaching materials are just one of the teaching resources, which serve the teaching goals but are far from the goals themselves. This cognitive deviation leads to monotonous teaching content and inflexible teaching methods. Besides, teachers overemphasize the teaching of language knowledge and language skills, generally adopting the “text-centered” teaching mode with the main teaching goal of understanding words, sentences, and paragraphs in the text, and the limited class hours push them to catch up with the progress. Thus, the language output activities in the classroom are very limited, and these limited activities are often divorced from the real scene. At the same time, the language knowledge input from the text can not be effectively used and practiced in the activities. Thus, there exists a gap between input and output. Students' language use ability can not be cultivated, and their interest in learning is decreasing day by day.[6]

In addition, the alienation of teaching application goals leads teachers to be obedient to textbooks and lack of innovative design of teaching materials. In fact, the existing textbooks are outdated or fail to effectively help students achieve relevant learning goals, so teachers should supplement or adapt the relevant materials. Although there have been a series of innovative reforms in college English teaching modes and means since the beginning of the new century, such as teaching based on network and mobile technology, the application of microcourses and flip classrooms, on the one hand, due to the inadequate construction of software and hardware facilities in most universities, the heavy class hours of college English teachers, the complicated teaching content and students' poor autonomous learning ability, they are not universal and often become a mere formality; On the other hand, these measures are still not divorced from the current “text-centered” and “text-oriented” mode in classroom teaching, and the input and output are not really seamlessly connected, so they cannot fundamentally solve the shortcomings of the students' lack of application ability.

At the same time, with the introduction of the communicative concepts into language teaching in China, there is another teaching tendency: teachers overemphasize “student-centered”, mistakenly interpret this concept as allowing students to do more activities in class, completely letting them learn independently, and neglecting their own supervision, guidance and other scaffolding functions. Thus, the teaching and learning effects are naturally greatly reduced.

## **2.2. Separation of Learning and Using**

The dissimilation of teaching application goals leads teachers to attach importance to the teaching of language knowledge itself and ignore the application-oriented teaching. On the one hand, students’ autonomous learning ability can not be improved, and they still follow the passive mode of accepting knowledge since middle and high school. On the other hand, knowledge (input) is out of touch with practice (output). Students just learn by learning, and they don’t know what is the use of learning, so their language use ability is still weak. [7]

The absence of the current application goal of learning English not only makes students lose interest in learning, but also leads to the deviation of the foothold of learning. Students often take immediate real goals such as CET-4 and CET-6, final exam and postgraduate entrance exam as their own learning goals. Once they achieve their goals, they lose their motivation to learn, and language learning without interest and motivation is doomed to be inefficient.

## **2.3. Unscientific Assessment**

Teaching assessment is a process of judging the value of teaching processes and results under the guidance of teaching goals and serving for teaching decision-making. It is also a process of studying the value of teachers’ teaching and students’ learning. Comprehensive and objective assessment can not only test the teaching effect, but also help diagnose teaching problems, provide feedback information, and timely control teaching activities, to ensure that teaching activities move towards the predetermined goals. However, due to the absence of the current teaching application goals, the actual teaching assessment is biased, which leads to the failure to diagnose teaching problems in time, thus affecting the teaching effectiveness and quality. At present, classroom teaching assessment focuses on teachers, highlighting teachers’ basic language skills, teaching content and teaching design, blackboard writing and courseware making, etc., ignoring students’ considerations, and paying insufficient attention to whether classroom application objectives are reflected and meet students’ needs, whether language knowledge and practice are reasonably distributed, and whether classroom activities are conducive to cultivating students’ autonomous learning ability and language application ability.

Moreover, there are some imperfections in the assessment of students’ learning, no matter in the assessment subject, assessment function, or assessment type: teachers’ assessment is the main thing, and students’ self-assessment, peer assessment and teacher-student cooperation assessment are not enough; the application of assessment in promoting learning is not in place; formative assessment is not paid enough attention to and used irregularly, and often becomes a mere formality. It can be seen that the current college English instruction still lacks a diversified scientific assessment system, which undoubtedly has a great negative effect on improving the quality of practical teaching.

## **3. Interpretation on Production-Oriented Approach (POA)**

Production-oriented approach (POA), targeted for middle and advanced foreign language learners, is a set of localized foreign language teaching theories and methods with China characteristics, which was proposed by Professor Wen Qiufang on the basis of absorbing the

essence of domestic traditional teaching ideas and foreign curriculum theory and second language acquisition theory. It aims to overcome the disadvantages of separation of learning and using in college foreign language teaching in China and enable students to promote learning by using, facilitate using with learning, learn to use, and achieve success in learning. [8] The birth of this approach conforms to the call of China's foreign language teaching reform. POA devotes itself to solving the wrong tendency of emphasizing learning over using in foreign language teaching, opening up the long-standing gap between input and output in teaching, helping to solve the dilemma of "dumb English" and "much investment but low efficiency" in college English teaching, and providing good theoretical guidance for foreign language teachers to carry out teaching reform practice.

POA consists of three parts: teaching principles, teaching hypotheses, and teaching processes. Among them, teaching principles are the guiding ideology of the other two parts; teaching hypotheses are the theoretical support of teaching processes; teaching processes are the way to realize teaching principles and teaching hypotheses. The teaching principles contain learning-centered, learning-using integration and whole-person education. Learning-centered principle advocates that all activities in classroom teaching should serve the occurrence of effective learning. From this perspective, when they design each teaching link or task, teachers' primary concern should be what students can learn, rather than simply examining who is speaking in the class and who is playing a leading role. Learning-using integrated principles, under the background of the disadvantages of "separation of learning and application" in teaching practice, and advocates learning while using, using in learning, learning by using, and combining learning with using. In this aspect, POA advocates the close combination of input learning and productive application, and there is no obvious time interval between them. The whole-person education principle holds, that education, to serve their all-round development, needs to take into account students' intelligence, emotions and morality due to the fact that language education is about human beings and they are advanced animal with emotion and thought. That is, a college English courses should not only achieve the instrumental goal of improving students' comprehensive English ability, but also achieve the humanistic goals of higher education, such as improving students' critical thinking ability, autonomous learning ability and comprehensive cultural literacy. The teaching hypotheses include output-driven, input-enabled, selective learning, and evaluation-being-learning; the teaching processes are composed of three phases: motivating, enabling, and evaluating, each mediated by the teacher.[9] (see Figure 1).

POA, having been developed as an effective remedy to the situation and weakness in Chinese English instruction, has provided prominent insight into Chinese foreign language teaching, and it can facilitate college and university students to perform genuine communicative tasks in English. [10]

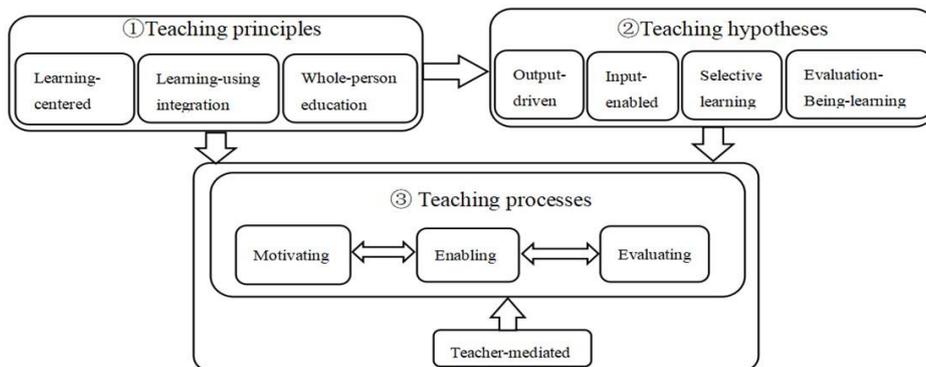


Figure 1: POA system [8]

## 4. Construction of College English Teaching Model Based on Poa

This study, based on an in-depth analysis of the current problems in college English instruction, is committed to constructing a production-oriented teaching model under the guidance of POA, which mainly consists of the following three contents:

### 4.1. Designing Teaching Processes

Teaching processes are the core element of the POA system. And it is the key point of the reform of college English teaching mode to design operational and effective teaching processes to apply to teaching practice. This study designs authentic and challenging output tasks according to the theme of the textbook unit and the students' professional background, provides matching input materials by using texts and various media in the era of big data for students to effectively complete the tasks, and conducts teacher-student cooperation evaluation after students complete the tasks (see Figure 2).

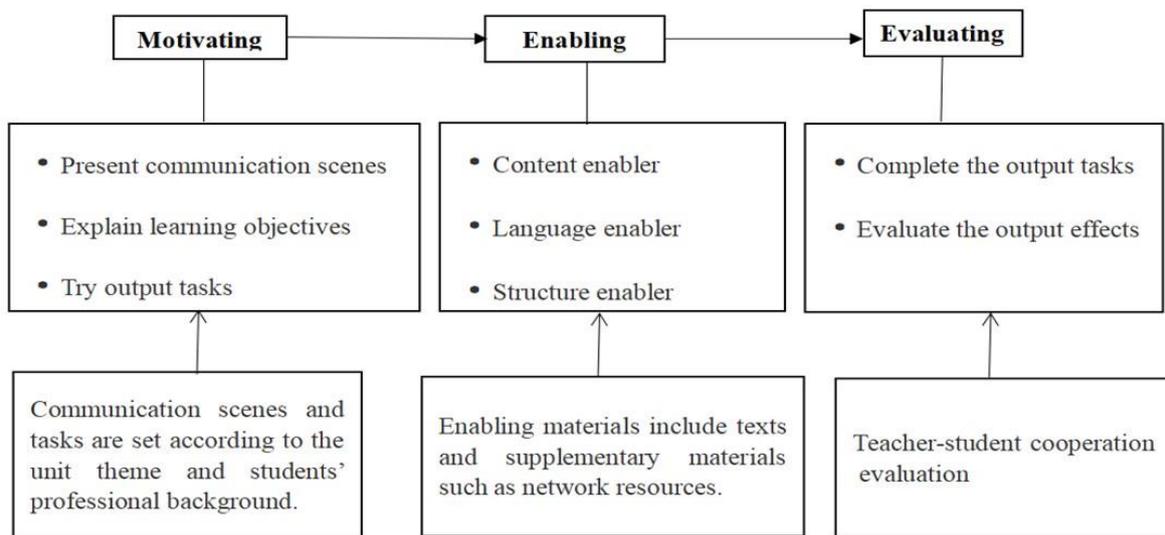


Figure 2: Teaching processes.

Specifically, in motivating the setting of communication, scenes and output tasks should be fully combined with students' professional background, so that students can apply what they have learned in their future work. In the meantime, the designed output tasks need to have a certain degree of challenge, making students aware of their cognitive and language limitations, to stimulate their attention in the subsequent enabling.[11] In enabling, teachers should pay attention to the diversification and multimodal of enabling contents and methods, and make full use of information technology to present rich and diverse auxiliary materials, avoiding the singleness of materials, to help students complete the output task efficiently.

The last process (Evaluating) is to evaluate students' output results. In China, the class size is large, and College English teachers have a heavy workload. However, under the POA model, students have many output tasks, so it is very difficult for teachers to evaluate each task in time. Therefore, the teacher-student cooperation evaluation is a very effective and feasible way, which means that the teacher chooses the typical task samples before class, corrects them in detail, then during class, students cooperate to evaluate the samples under the guidance of teachers, and after class, students conduct self-evaluation, and then peer evaluation or computer evaluation is followed. This method integrates evaluation with teaching and learning, and truly achieves "learning by evaluating". It is also a necessity that in the later teaching practice, teachers need to implement

several rounds of action research, constantly reflect and carry out remedial teaching in order to maximize the teaching effect.

#### **4.2. Establishing Teachers' Mediating Role**

There is a tendency during these years that foreign language instruction in China, affected by foreign teaching theories, has marginalized the role of teachers. In view of this, the POA advocates that teachers, who are designers, organizers, leaders, and directors of classroom teaching, play a guiding role in the whole teaching processes and help students learn effectively. Therefore, it adheres to student-centered and teacher-mediated coexistence, which echoes the requirements of the College English Teaching Guide issued by the Ministry of Education of China in 2016. This guide points out that college English teaching should embody the teaching concept of taking teachers as the guiding factor and students as the main body, and form a teaching norm characterized by teachers' guidance and inspiration and students' active participation. It is apparent that the role of teachers directly affects the teaching effect, and it is also the most direct and powerful guarantee to realize students' subjectivity in classroom teaching and give full play to students' learning initiatives. However, in practical teaching, it is difficult to grasp how to balance the teacher's mediating role and students' autonomy. Therefore, this study analyzes the role of teachers and positions mediating the role of teachers according to POA.

First of all, teachers need to clearly aim at improving students' output ability and change the traditional teaching thinking and methods aiming at text learning. The core task of POA teaching is to enable students to effectively complete the output tasks, and in this process, to achieve "learning to use", which requires teachers to design output tasks that fit the theme of the unit and students' professional background, provide effective input materials, answer questions during students' preparation of output tasks, and give timely feedback after students submit output tasks. These are the concrete manifestations of teachers' mediating role, and they are also necessary to help students successfully complete output tasks. Secondly, teachers need to make it clear that students are the main body of learning and must not overstep the bubble. When students have difficulty in doing tasks, teachers should not facilitate them immediately, instead letting them enter the learning of input materials with hunger. In the process of students' autonomous learning and task preparation, in addition to offering the necessary answers to their questions and doubts, teachers shouldn't answer everything, but should encourage and promote their own inquiry or group cooperation. And in the feedback link, teachers should mobilize students' participation enthusiasm and let them join the evaluation to improve the evaluation efficiency and learning effect.

In short, in the POA teaching, teachers should not only have solid professional knowledge, but also have the initiative to accept new technologies and new ideas, aiming at the effective occurrence of learning, and do a good job of "scaffolding". Only by strengthening the transformation of traditional teachers' roles, deeply understanding and practicing teachers' guiding role, and giving full play to their lighthouse spirit as much as possible can we achieve better teaching results.

#### **4.3. Development of Comprehensive Teaching Assessment System**

Assessment is the key point that all teaching processes revolve around, [12] which can facilitate teachers accurately grasping the completion of teaching objectives, to revise teaching content in time, and improve teaching methods and teaching effects. Wiggins & McTighe (2005) state that "assessment is the umbrella term for the deliberate use of many methods of gathering evidence of meeting desired results, whether that results are state content standards or local curricular objectives. The collected evidence we seek may well include observations and dialogue, traditional quizzes and

tests, performance tasks and projects, as well as students' self-assessments gathered over time". [13] And thus assessment is a different term from evaluation.

Because the POA teaching focuses on cultivating students' language output ability, the current assessment system based on English proficiency test does not match the POA model, and the formative assessment is insufficient, so it is impossible to objectively and comprehensively test the effectiveness of the POA teaching. Therefore, new assessment criteria need to be formulated urgently. Therefore, this study is committed to developing a diversified comprehensive assessment system.

Specifically, College English teaching under the guidance of POA adopts summative assessment as the supplement and formative evaluation as the main method. Compared with the traditional assessment, in this new assessment system, the proportion of summative assessment has decreased, accounting for only 40%, and the assessment content has also changed. In addition to examining students' listening, reading, writing, and translation skills in the form of test papers, an oral test were added to examine oral production ability. In view of the significant role of formative assessment, which can not only provide feedback to enable students to make progress, but also encourage students to self-regulate learning, affect students' self-efficacy, help them acquire metacognitive skills, develop their autonomous learning abilities and lifelong learning abilities, [14] its proportion is increased to 60%, including teacher assessment, peer assessment and self-assessment, accounting for 40%, 10% and 10% respectively. Teacher assessment refers to students' performance in the classroom, students' autonomous learning on the network platform, students' modification and improvement of output tasks after class, and regular tests at ordinary times. The tests mainly examine the output ability of oral English and writing. Because most output tasks are reported in groups, peer assessment is also essential.

In addition, students' self-assessment can not be ignored. Teachers collect students' learning logs and design detailed self-assessment means. Learning logs include learning experience, class notes, collection and arrangement of output task materials, etc. The self-assessment is divided into three major items: before class, during class, and after class. Each item focuses on the learning situation of output tasks and specifically examines students' cooperative spirit, language mastery and application, autonomous learning ability, and other performances.

In a word, production-oriented teaching needs to innovate the assessment, increasing the proportion of formative assessment and enriching its content, to track students' learning process in time, help teachers adjust and control teaching activities in time, and urge students to improve their learning methods and strategies according to their own conditions, enhance their learning effect, and truly achieve "learning by assessing". The research and development of a comprehensive assessment systems can not be underestimated in improving the quality of college English teaching. [15]

## 5. Conclusion

Under the guidance of POA, this study explores a college English teaching mode featured by the integration of learning and using, and makes positive ideas in the design of teaching processes, the establishment of teachers' mediating roles and the development of a comprehensive assessment systems, with a view to reforming the traditional mode of "text-centered" and the disadvantages of "separation of learning and using", and aiming at the effective occurrence of learning and the improvement of students' output ability. However, in the practical application of this model, due to the existing factors such as large number of college English classes, uneven students' foundation, and weak students' autonomous learning ability, many problems may occur in all aspects. Therefore, the authors will carry out follow-up research, test the feasibility of this model in teaching practice,

and demonstrate its effects, hoping to sum up effective methods and strategies to help improve students' language use ability and meet the training goal of compound and applied talents in colleges and universities.

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