

## *Original Paper*

# The Effectiveness of English Writing Teaching in Junior Middle School Based on Production-Oriented Approach

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### **Abstract**

*Production-oriented Approach (POA) proposed by Chinese scholar Wen Qiufang has been widely used in English teaching in recent years, but there are few studies on its application in junior middle school English teaching. This study analyzed the impact of the application of Production-oriented Approach on junior middle school students' English learning attitude and English writing performance. In the experimental design, both quantitative and qualitative methods were adopted. Writing tests, questionnaire, interview were used as instruments. A total of 116 Chinese students from Year 8 of Yangzhou Shiyan Junior Middle School, Jiangsu Province in China were invited to participate in an 8-week pre- and post-test experiment. By comparing the writing scores before and after the test, it is found that the English writing scores of the students in the experimental class are higher than those of the students in the control class. Through the analysis of the results of questionnaires and interview, it is found that the students' attitude towards English writing teaching in the experimental class has improved significantly. The implications and suggestions for dissemination and implementation of POA for junior middle school students are discussed.*

### **Keywords**

*english writing teaching, production-oriented Approach, junior middle school*

## **1. Introduction**

With rapid progress of economic globalization, English, as an international language, plays an increasingly important role and a bridge among different countries in cross-cultural communication. English writing is especially essential no matter in international trade or academic exchanges. Therefore, it's necessary to attach great importance to the cultivation of English writing ability at the

primary stage of education. However, in reality, teachers pay little attention to English writing teaching in China but teach students vocabulary and grammar in reading parts, considering students will naturally be able to write after accepting a large number of language inputs. However, students generally fail to timely practise their English writing skills and they further come across a lot of difficulties in writing, which leads to students' low motivation in writing as well as poor English learning efficiency.

POA is an English teaching approach with Chinese characteristics put forward by Chinese scholar Wen Qiufang, aiming at helping solve the problem of “separation of learning and application and low efficiency” in Chinese foreign language teaching (Wen, 2017). It suggests the integration of learning and doing. Starting with the outputs, POA subverts the traditional English teaching method of “inputs first and then outputs” and it is mainly designed for those intermediate and advanced foreign language learners distinguishing the concept of “output” and that of “input” which strengthens not only the process of output but also the results of output.

POA has provided theoretical supports for English language teaching in China and teachers have made achievements after applying it to English teaching. Many researchers find that the application of Production-oriented Approach is effective for English writing teaching. Since the construction of the theory of POA, it has received much attention from domestic and foreign experts, scholars and teachers. For example, Matsuda from Arizona State University in the United States affirmed the importance of “output” as the driving force and pointed out input was significantly important to the language resource development, but insufficient for language output (Matsuda, 2017). Polio from Michigan State University reflected on POA from perspective of a teacher. Professor Cumming from University of Toronto in Canada, famous international English teaching, testing and writing expert made assessment on the research design and direction of POA and put forward three suggestions on the development of POA (Polio, 2017). Professor Widdowson from British University of London and Professor Seidlhofer of applied linguistics in University of Vienna gave their views on the pedagogic principles of POA (Widdowson & Seidlhofer, 2018). Compared with foreign relevant research, domestic research on POA involves a relatively wide range. There is a lot of research on POA in theory, textbook complication, teaching materials usage and practices, etc.

However, at present most theories and studies on POA are at the college level and few are for English teaching in junior middle schools. This thesis tries to apply POA in junior middle school English writing teaching and verify the effectiveness of POA, hoping to provide supports for English writing teaching in junior middle school both in theory and practice.

In this thesis, POA is applied in junior middle school English writing teaching aiming to explore the following questions: (1) How does POA influence junior middle school students' English writing performance? (2) How does POA influence junior middle school students' English writing attitudes?

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Research Design

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were adopted. Writing tests, questionnaire, interview were used as instruments. The experiment was carried out in the first semester of 2022 from the second week to the ninth week. The writing tests were given in order to study the changes of writing ability of the two classes before and after the experiment. The purpose of the questionnaire was to study the changes of students' attitude towards writing teaching before and after the experiment. Interview were used for four students in the experimental class after the experiment. The average scores of the pre- and post-test of the two classes were calculated through Excel statistics, then the results were analyzed to compare the difference of the average values.

### 2.2 Participants

In this study, a total of 116 Chinese students from Year 8 of Yangzhou Shiyan Junior Middle School in southern China were invited to participate in an 8-week pre- and post-test experiment. Class 1 was the experimental class and POA was adopted in English teaching in this class. Class 2 was the control class and the traditional teaching method was used in English teaching in this class. The experiment was carried out in the first semester of 2022 for 8 weeks, from February 21st to April 15th. There were respectively 58 students in the two classes. The average scores of the writing part of the two classes in the previous final exam were similar, and both classes had the same English teacher in the last semester. Considering most of the objective conditions were almost the same, the experiment could be conducted with reliability and persuasiveness.

As students just entered the second year of junior middle school, they were not mature in psychological development. They can't fully understand themselves, sometimes they can't or don't want to find solutions to problems when they come across difficulties. In English learning, students in junior middle school need to remember a large number of phrases and various sentence patterns in order to write a good English composition. They should also remember all kinds of excellent articles and expressions. Thus many students tend to find more difficulty in learning English than in primary school. Meanwhile, English learning in junior middle school in China is very important because it is the foundation of English learning at higher stage.

### 2.3 Procedures

#### 2.3.1 Pre-Experiment

In the second week of the first semester of 2022, a same writing topic was selected in both the experimental class and the control class for a writing test. The writing test was conducted on February 16th. Then the author collected the testing results and corrected them. In order to learn students' attitude towards English writing, the author distributed printed questionnaires to the students in the experimental class after the test. Here is the detailed teaching plan:

**Table 1. The Teaching Plan and Writing Topic**

Week	Teaching Content	Writing Topic
II	How to make a turkey sandwich	Invitation letter
III	I'm more outgoing than my sister.	Talk about personal traits
IV	What's the best movie theater?	My favorite movie
V	Do you want to watch a game show?	Introduce TV program preferences
VI	I'm going to study computer science.	Talk about future intentions
VII	Will people have robots?	Life in the future
VIII	How do you make a banana milk shake?	Describe a cooking process
IX	What is DIY	Do it yourself

### 2.3.2 In the Middle of Experiment

In the experiment, the two classes adopted different teaching methods. Class 1 used POA teaching method and class 2 used traditional teaching method for 8 weeks. The same teaching hours and teaching materials were used in the two classes. Take the teaching content *How to make a turkey sandwich* for example, there are three main stages of the POA-based procedures: motivating, enabling and assessing. The teacher presented a communicative scene to motivate the students to catch the new words and sentences about making a turkey sandwich first. Then the teacher led the students to review the text and let students study selectively, which aimed to exercise students' writing skills and enhance their writing ability. At last, the teacher let the students do mutual evaluation based on the given score standards to exercise their ability of evaluation.

Teaching procedures of the experimental class:

Language goals:

- (1). Students can master the structures and expressions of writing a letter.
- (2). Students can master the new words and sentences of making a turkey sandwich.

Ability goals:

- (1). Students will be able to express the way of making a sandwich.
- (2). Students' writing ability will be improved by the end of the class.

#### Step 1 Motivating

Teacher Activities: Firstly, the teacher presented a communicative scene of making turkey sandwich and showed the teaching goals of this lesson; Secondly, the teacher played a video of making sandwich and asked students questions about the video; At last, the teacher offered students a writing task by showing them a picture and let them do a discussion before writing.

Student Activities: Firstly, students tried to produce and understood the language goals of this lesson; Secondly, students watched the video then clarified the content of writing before the picture showed.

Activity Intention: Challenging students' productivity and stimulating students' desire for output

thereby enhancing their enthusiasm in writing.

#### Step 2 Enabling

Teacher Activities: Firstly, the teacher led the students to review the text, then the teacher displayed model composition related to the text. At last, the teacher organized students to do exercises such as filling in the blanks and translating then let the students do a composition about making a turkey sandwich.

Student Activities: Firstly, students reviewed the knowledge they have learned before, then they studied the material offered selectively. At last, relevant content was put in.

Activity Intention: Firstly, the teacher let students study selectively, then the teacher trained students' writing skills to enhance their writing ability.

#### Step 3 Assessing

Teacher Activities: Firstly, the teacher showed the composition scoring standards, then the teacher evaluated an example composition. The teacher organized mutual evaluation among students. After that, the teacher did an evaluation again and let the students do a discussion later.

Student Activities: Firstly, students perfected their composition, then learned the composition evaluation criteria. At last, students did the mutual evaluation.

Activity Intention: Firstly, the teacher let students clarify the writing scoring standards, then the teacher trained students' ability of evaluation by themselves.

Teaching procedures of the control class:

Language goals:

- (1). Students will be able to master the new words and sentences about making turkey sandwich.
- (2). Students can learn the structures and expressions of writing a letter.

Emotional goal: Students can understand more about western food culture.

#### Step 1: Lead in

Teacher Activities: The teacher firstly played a video before starting the lesson, then asked students how to write about the turkey sandwich making process.

Student Activities: Students firstly watched the video then thought about the topic of writing.

Activity Intention: Students' interest is aroused and the teacher let students clarify the learning goals.

#### Step 2: Discussion

Teacher Activities: The teacher firstly provided students vocabulary that may be used in this lesson then showed students relevant sentence patterns.

Student Activities: Students firstly remembered the words and sentence patterns may be used in the later writing then wrote after a group discussion.

Activity Intention: Let students do a group discussion to improve their writing enthusiasm.

#### Step 3: Production

Teacher Activities: The teacher firstly presented students the composition standards then showed typical errors as examples and evaluated the examples.

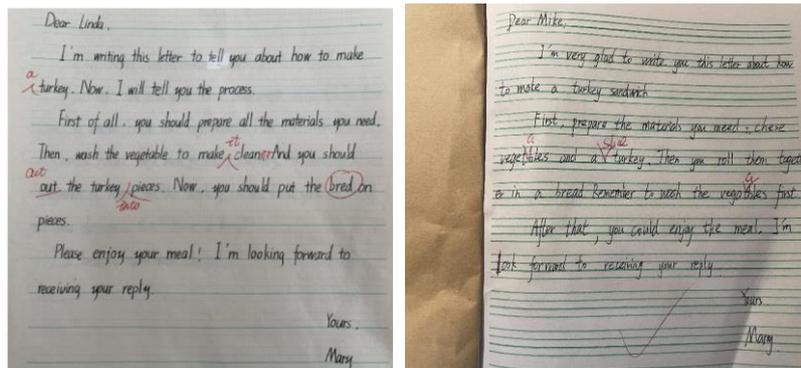
Student Activities: By referring to the composition criterion, students summarized the error points through mutual review of writing among students.

Activity Intention: Let students clarify the writing standards and thereby enhancing their writing skills through summarizing the error points.

From these two procedures, we can see that POA takes the outputting activities as the driving means. The teaching goals and the inputting activities are enabling means. In POA group, students were given the composition evaluation criteria and they were asked to work together with the teacher to evaluate an example composition first, then the teacher let students do the mutual evaluation. After that, the teacher did an evaluation again and let students do a discussion later. However, in traditional teaching method, the author let students summarize the error points through mutual review of writing by referring to the composition criterion.

### 2.3.3 Post-Experiment

In the last week of the experiment, another writing test was given to the two classes in order to compare students' performance in two writing tests. In addition, the author also conducted a same questionnaire survey for the second time and an interview in the experimental class to find out whether there was any change in students' attitude towards English writing.



**Picture 1. A composition from CC Picture 2. A Composition from EC**

## 2.4 Data Collection and Analysis

There are three kinds of data obtained respectively from the pre-experiment and the post-experiment of the two classes. The data includes results of two questionnaire surveys and two writing tests conducted before and after the experiment, and the results of an interview conducted after the experiment. Data were collected at the last week of the experiment. The average scores of the writing tests were calculated by Excel. 58 questionnaires were handed out to the students in the experimental class, valid questionnaires are 58. There 11 questions in the questionnaire and all of the questions are objective. There are three questions in the interview. After the experiment, four students with different English levels were interviewed. The interview is carried out as a supplement to the questionnaire data to ensure the authenticity of experimental results. All of the results of the interview are valid.

### 3. Results

Results of the experiment were collected at the last week of the experiment. Excel software was used to analyze the results of the writing tests.

#### 3.1 Results of Students' English Writing Tests

The effect of the application of POA in English writing teaching of junior middle school can be verified through the changes of students' English writing ability. Here are the specific results of the writing tests conducted before and after the experiment. The data is the average value of the writing tests.

**Table 2. Group Statistics of Experimental Class and Control Class in the Pre-Test**

Class	N	Mean
EC	58	12.85
CC	58	12.525

According to the data in the Table above, the average value of the writing test before the experiment of the experimental class is 12.85, which is just slightly higher than the control class. The result can reflect that the two classes are of similarities in English writing before the experiment, so it is scientific to select them for the experiment.

**Table 3. Group Statistics of Experimental Class and Control Class in the Post-Test**

Class	N	Mean
EC	58	13.85
CC	58	12.575

From the data, we can see that the average value of the writing test of the experimental class is 13.85 after the experiment, which is obviously higher than that before the experiment. While for the control class there is just small difference in the average value of the writing test before and after the experiment. Therefore, the application of POA is of importance to improve students' English writing performance.

#### 3.2 Results of Questionnaires

To some extent, comparison of the pre- and post-test data obtained from questionnaires in the experimental class can also reflect the effect of POA in junior middle school English writing teaching. The interview carried out after the experiment in the experimental class serves as a supplement for the research results.

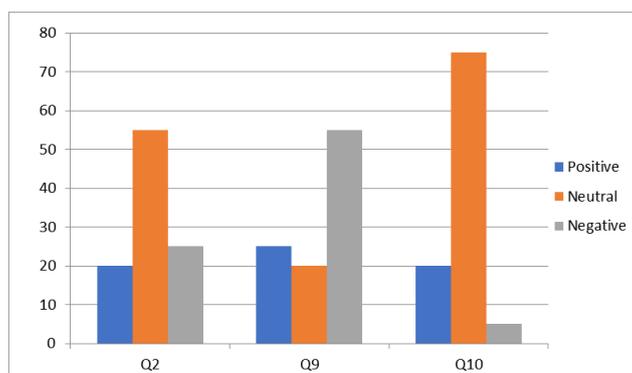
Here are the questions in the questionnaire:

- (1). Do you think English writing is difficult?
- (2). Are you interested in English Writing?

- (3). What motivates you to do English writing?
- (4). Do you think the teaching method your teacher used is helpful?
- (5). How often do you write an English composition?
- (6). How do you often practise your English writing after class? .
- (7). What are your own ways of correcting your composition? .
- (8). What are the main problems in your English writing?
- (9). Are you satisfied with your English writing?
- (10). Do you have confidence in English writing?
- (11). Do you actively interact with the teacher during the writing process?

**Table 4. Results of the Questionnaire before the Experiment**

Questions	Items		
	A (Positive)	B (Neutral)	C (Negative)
1	10%	60%	30%
2	20%	55%	25%
3	5%	90%	5%
4	25%	30%	45%
5	1%	30%	69%
6	30%	60%	10%
7	20%	10%	70%
8	33%	53%	14%
9	25%	20%	55%
10	20%	75%	5%
11	10%	70%	20%



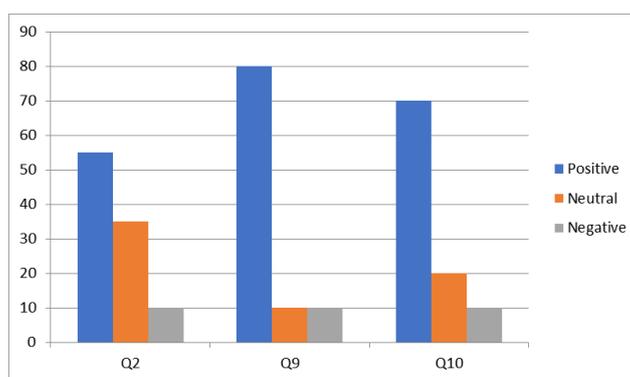
**Figure 1. Percentages of the Answers of Q2, Q9 and Q10 before the Experiment**

From the data in Table 4 and Figure 1, we can see that only 20% of the students in the experimental

class are interested in English writing before the experiment while 80% of the students have no interests in English writing. Considering writing motivation, most of the students have low motivation for English writing. Considering writing confidence, 80% of the students like the confidence in English writing and 90% consider English writing is difficult. On the whole, we can figure out that the current situation of junior middle school students' English writing is not optimistic and students are unwilling to do English writing.

**Table 5. Results of the Questionnaire after the Experiment**

Questions	Items		
	A (Positive)	B (Neutral)	C (Negative)
1	60%	20%	20%
2	55%	35%	10%
3	80%	10%	10%
4	70%	20%	10%
5	10%	80%	10%
6	60%	35%	5%
7	60%	30%	10%
8	60%	20%	20%
9	80%	10%	10%
10	70%	20%	10%
11	75%	20%	5%



**Figure 2. Percentages of the Answers of Q2, Q9 and Q10 after the Experiment**

According to Table 5 and Figure 2 above, 55% of the students in the experimental class are interested in English writing class and 75% of them express that they are willing to interact actively with their teacher in class after the experiment. 80% of the students are satisfied with their English writing and 70% of them consider that POA-based English writing teaching method are useful. 70% of the students

have confidence in English writing. The result can reflect the effect of POA on improving students' attitudes towards English writing in junior middle school.

### 3.3 Results of Interview

In order to further explore students' attitude in English writing after the experiment, an interview with four students with different English levels from the experimental class was conducted. Interview questions are as follows:

1. Do you think POA is useful to your English writing?
2. Do you have interest in English writing now?
3. Do you think POA is more effective than traditional teaching method in English writing?

Student A: *I think it could help me with my English writing. It used to take me a long time to think before writing, but now, I have a clear mind in doing English writing. I hope teacher could teach English writing in this way.*

Student B: *I think POA is useful in English writing study. I could better understand writing English letter, such as the sentences we use and the structure of the text.*

Student C: *I could hardly write a sentence before in English writing. However, after these weeks, I find that English writing is interesting. I think POA improved my English writing ability.*

Student D: *I think I am good at English, but I used to ignore the importance of English writing. After these weeks, I learned how to write a good composition and POA is useful. I am more interested in English. I hope my teacher could continue to use POA to teach English writing.*

According to the interview, we can see the students' attitude towards English writing are mostly positive because of the application of POA in the English writing class. From the remarks of Student C we can see that student C who was not so good at English writing before is interested in English writing now. Student A and B thought the application of POA in English writing class has improved their English writing levels a lot. The interview results may show that the application of POA is effective in English writing class in junior middle school.

## 4. Discussion

Experimental studies on POA have gained momentum since 2015 (Wang, 2021). However, most studies have examined the effects of POA on specific foundational language skills on university or college level. Few studies have been conducted for junior middle school English teaching. To verify the effectiveness of the junior middle school English writing teaching based on POA, this thesis conducts a contrast experiment of class 1 and class 2 in Year 8 in Yangzhou Shiyan Junior Middle School in Jiangsu Province in China. The main instrument used are English writing test paper, English questionnaires and interviews of writing attitudes. The analysis results in this study indicates that students in the POA group achieved higher scores in English writing test than their peers in the traditional teaching method group. Findings in this study can be summarized as follows.

Firstly, POA can effectively improve students' English writing performance in junior middle school.

Before the experiment, it is found that the scores of English writing are similar between the control class and the experimental class. After the experiment, students' writing scores in the control class and the experimental class are calculated by Excel and it is found that students' writing scores are obviously higher in the experimental class, which indicates that the application of POA can help improve students' English writing performance in junior middle school.

Secondly, POA can effectively improve students' attitudes toward English writing. The pre- and post-test data obtained in the questionnaire survey is calculated and through analysis, it is found that students' attitudes toward English writing have been improved in the experimental class so that the application of POA in English writing class can improve students' attitudes toward English writing.

From the research in this paper, the enlightenment of the application of POA on junior middle school English writing teaching can be summarized from the perspective of theory and practice. In theory, teachers should insist on the principle of the application of POA, paying attention to students' ability of language output, guiding them to combine English learning with the use of English language as to shorten the distance between language input and output. In practice, teachers should actively create communication context to enable students closely relate their studies with their daily life at the "motivating" stage. At the "enabling" stage, teachers should select appropriate contents to teach and exercises for students in a gradual way so as to help them overcome their fear in English writing learning. At the "assessing" stage, teachers should guide students to learn the English writing evaluation criterion so as to make students learn English writing skills with purpose.

Although some positive results have been achieved in this research, there are also some limitations on account of subjective and objective factors. The research duration is limited and samples in this research are not large enough. Future researchers are suggested to extend the research time to get more accurate experimental results and the coverage of the subjects is encouraged to be expanded to get more data so that the result of the experiment will be more objective and persuasive.

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