

Exploring AI's Assistance to Teachers in Implementing the Motivating Phase of POA Theory in College English Courses

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With the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) technology, its applications in education have become increasingly widespread. As an effective foreign language teaching theory, the Production-Oriented Approach (POA) emphasizes the organic integration of the three stages—motivating, enabling, and assessing, among which the motivating stage plays a crucial role in stimulating students' learning motivation and clarifying learning objectives with its implementation quality directly determining overall teaching effectiveness. Taking Unit 1 “The Kindness of Strangers” from *New Century College English Integrated Course* (Book 2) as a pedagogical case study, this paper explores how AI technology can establish a multidimensional support system during this phase to significantly enhance teaching efficacy.

Keywords: AI technology, the Production-Oriented Approach (POA), motivating phase, scenario

Introduction

In the era of algorithm-driven and data-empowered technology, artificial intelligence (AI) technology is revolutionizing education through its robust data-processing capabilities, intelligent analytics, and personalized services. By enabling personalized learning, intelligent tutoring, and automated assessment, AI enhances instructional efficiency and effectiveness while fostering innovation in educational models. The AI-assisted blended teaching approach in college English education transcends spatiotemporal constraints, facilitates precision teaching, and delivers efficient and engaging learning experiences—A trend that is gaining momentum. Notably, it significantly improves students' learning motivation, participation, and critical thinking skills. Consequently, AI integration represents both an inevitable trajectory of technological advancement and a pivotal strategy for elevating teaching quality. Its potential in college English instruction is immense, particularly in reading and writing courses, where AI can analyze students' written compositions and provide real-time feedback on grammatical accuracy and stylistic refinement, thereby progressively enhancing the quality of their language output.

Theoretical Foundations of the Production-Oriented Approach (POA)

Origins and Core Principles

The Production-Oriented Approach (POA) is a distinctive Chinese pedagogical methodology designed to address the traditional problem of “separation of learning and application” prevalent in foreign language education, specifically tailored for adult EFL learners. Its emergence responds to new challenges in tertiary

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English education in China, where traditional teaching models have proven increasingly inefficient in cultivating students' communicative competence.

Proposed by Professor Wen Qiufang and her team at the National Research Centre for Foreign Language Education (NRCFLE) at Beijing Foreign Studies University, POA has evolved over a decade. This theory synthesizes insights from global language teaching methodologies while incorporating localized innovations aligned with China's educational context. It operationalizes language learning through a three-phase instructional cycle—Motivating, Enabling, and Assessing—to bridge the gap between input and output. As research advances, POA has matured into a comprehensive theoretical framework, demonstrating marked feasibility and effectiveness across diverse educational stages and practical teaching scenarios.

The fundamental principles of POA are primarily embodied in three key concepts: “Learning-Centeredness”, “Integration of Learning and Application”, and “Cross-Cultural Communication”. First, “Learning-Centeredness” emphasizes that all classroom activities should facilitate meaningful learning rather than merely focusing on knowledge transmission by teachers or passive knowledge absorption by students. It emerges as a progression from the earlier “Student-Centered Approach”. It advocates the principle that production serves as both the driving force and the ultimate goal of learning. Under this principle, teachers assume the role of mediators, responsible for designing instructional sequences, monitoring students' learning activities, and guiding learners in completing productive tasks. This learning-centered pedagogical model not only enhances classroom efficiency, but also fosters the development of students' autonomous learning capabilities. The “Integration of Learning and Application” principle posits that all instructional activities designed by teachers should originate from productive tasks and maintain close alignment with real-world application

Implementation Framework of POA Theory

The POA theoretical system is operationalized through three interconnected phases: motivating, enabling, and assessing, forming a cyclical chain to achieve unit-level instructional objectives. Throughout this process, teachers assume a leading role: establishing contextually appropriate teaching goals, selecting effective pedagogical methods, and ultimately employing evaluation mechanisms to verify goal attainment.

Rationale for Investigating POA From an AI Perspective

After over a decade of pedagogical practice and theoretical refinement, POA has evolved into a distinctive theoretical framework with Chinese characteristics, demonstrating widespread applicability and empirically validated effectiveness in teaching contexts. However, traditional POA implementation often encounters challenges such as insufficient teaching resources and homogeneous assessment methods. The integration of AI technologies effectively addresses these bottlenecks. Firstly, AI can enhance instructional efficiency significantly. For instance, in the motivating phase, AI algorithms can rapidly curate and synthesize theme-specific learning materials (e.g., multimodal texts and videos) to provide diversified input. In the enabling phase, AI-assisted lexical explanations and syntactic analysis (e.g., dependency parsing) optimize elective learning task completion while in the assessing phase, automated evaluation systems (e.g., Natural Language Processing/NLP-based essay scoring,) deliver immediate feedback on student output, reducing teacher workload while improving assessment accuracy and objectivity. Besides, AI optimizes personalized learning. Given the significant heterogeneity in students' linguistic proficiency and learning objectives in college English education, AI technology can accurately identify each student's learning characteristics and weaknesses through data analysis, thereby tailoring personalized learning paths for them. This personalized approach not only stimulates learner engagement,

enhancing their sense of participation and achievement in learning, but also fosters autonomous learning competencies, ultimately achieving superior pedagogical outcomes. Consequently, researching AI-enhanced POA strategies synergize their respective strengths and pioneer innovative pathways for reforming college English instruction.

Motivating Phase

In the POA model, the motivating phase serves as the initial step of the teaching process and plays a critical role in motivating students intrinsically. POA scholars maintain that this phase is the most challenging part of the entire instructional cycle. During this stage, students are the primary agents of learning, while teachers serve as task designers and facilitators, guiding learners to actively engage in the language learning process by creating appropriate contexts and providing clear task requirements. Teachers must establish and present appropriate communicative scenarios based on the teaching content, allowing students to attempt moderately challenging productive tasks. Through these attempts, students become aware of their own limitations, thereby generating motivation for learning. Additionally, the motivating phase fulfills the essential functions of clarifying learning objectives and guiding the direction of students' learning. By carefully designing communicative contexts and output tasks, teachers enable students to clearly understand the unit's learning objectives and the core content they need to master. This explicit task orientation not only boosts learning efficiency, but also effectively prevents the aimlessness often observed in traditional teaching due to vague objectives.

The motivating phase consists of three sub-stages: teachers presenting communicative scenarios, students attempting to complete communicative tasks, and teachers explaining learning objectives and productive tasks. There are three principles teachers should follow in designing the motivating phase: "authenticity of communication", "cognitive challenge", and "appropriateness of output goals". Communicative authenticity is a basic requirement for scenario design. The tasks in the motivating phase should be closely linked to students' real-life experiences, academic backgrounds, or future career development, approximating authentic communicative scenarios as much as possible. This connection enables students to recognize the value and relevance of the tasks, thereby enhancing their engagement and motivation. Furthermore, tasks should be appropriately demanding to stimulate students' motivation for challenge, while remaining within their zone of proximal development (ZPD) without causing frustration to ensure attainability through effort, thereby fostering learners' self-efficacy. In other words, teachers should attempt to create a "cognitive hunger" by making students acutely aware of gaps in their knowledge and competencies, thereby generating strong learning motivation. In this phase, teachers must meticulously design tasks that balance challenge and authenticity to stimulate active participation and exploratory learning. Ultimately, teachers should explicitly articulate the task's goals, content, and assessment criteria to provide students with unambiguous learning direction and focused effort priorities.

AI-Enhanced Instructional Practice: A Pedagogical Case Study

Textbook Selection and Unit Overview

The text "The Kindness of Strangers" in the case study is adopted from *New Century College English Integrated Course* (Book 2) with the theme of kindness. It is about the author's cashless journey through the land of the almighty dollar to test his faith that people are still willing to treat others with the same kindness as in the past when one would be considered selfish and looked down upon if one refused to help others in need. And the answer he finds is: One can still depend on the kindness of strangers.

The language objectives of this unit are designed to help students:

1. Acquire key vocabulary and expressions related to kindness and hitchhiking;
2. Enhance their ability to comprehend and employ these terms in context.

The communicative objectives focus on enabling learners to:

1. Understand and discuss topics concerning the kindness of strangers;
2. Cultivate empathy and a sense of social responsibility through reflective engagement with the theme.

Accordingly, the core task designed for the motivational phase requires students to complete a comprehensive language output activity themed “Kindness in Daily Life”. This may involve creating an English speech video or writing an English essay to share personal stories of kindness or reflections on the concept. This task design adheres to the principle of “authenticity of communication”.

Specific Applications of AI Technology in the Motivational Phase

AI-enhanced immersive contexts for authentic task motivation. First, AI enables the creation of immersive, authentic scenarios that significantly enhance task realism in the motivational phase. Centered on the theme “The Kindness of Strangers”, this unit’s core objective is to guide students in understanding the diverse manifestations of kindness across cultures, articulating personal experiences and perspectives using target language. Through AI-powered technologies (e.g., VR/AR), teachers can construct thematic scenarios such as: a simulated interaction where a lost traveler receives help from locals in a foreign setting or dynamic public transport scenarios demonstrating spontaneous acts of stranger kindness. Immersive experiences provide contextualized understanding of kind behaviors, generate stronger emotional resonance than traditional text/image materials, and naturally elicit learners’ intrinsic need for English communication.

Personalized task design and delivery. Given the inherent variability in students’ English proficiency levels, learning interests, and individual needs, traditional “one-size-fits-all” tasks in the motivational phase often fail to address diverse learners’ requirements. AI technology overcomes this limitation by analyzing multidimensional learner data—including vocabulary size, grammatical competence, and learning preferences—to generate customized motivational tasks.

For foundational-level learners:

1. Collect and memorize 10 theme-related target words;
2. Construct meaningful sentences using the acquired lexicon;
3. Describe a simple act of kindness observed in daily life;
4. Express gratitude for kindness using basic sentence structures.

For advanced learners:

1. Compose an analytical essay on kindness’ societal impact;
2. Participate in a structured debate on “Should kindness expect reciprocity?”

AI-powered learning resource recommendations. AI systems leverage comprehensive analyses of students’ reading proficiency, vocabulary mastery, and learning preferences to deliver precisely tailored educational resources aligned with both the motivational tasks and individual student needs. The AI system intelligently recommends personalized learning resources, including leveled thematically relevant reading materials, targeted listening exercises, and curated video content. For instance, advanced readers may receive recommendations for sophisticated English publications like *The Economist* to further develop their analytical skills, while students requiring listening improvement are automatically provided with appropriately leveled

audio materials featuring adjusted speech rates and focused phoneme practice. This intelligent resource allocation system dynamically adapts to individual learner profiles, ensuring optimal content alignment that demonstrably enhances both engagement and learning outcomes. Research indicates such AI-enabled personalization can improve instructional efficiency by up to 40% while significantly boosting learner motivation, as demonstrated in recent studies from leading educational technology journals.

Real-time feedback and guidance. Throughout the completion of sub-tasks, students can upload their learning artifacts (e.g., audio recordings and written compositions) to the AI system for immediate analysis and evaluation. The system provides instant diagnostic feedback, identifying issues, such as mispronounced phonemes, grammatical inaccuracies, or discursive weaknesses, while simultaneously offering concrete corrective suggestions. Furthermore, an AI-powered intelligent Q&A system stands ready to address student inquiries in real time, delivering precise explanations and step-by-step guidance to resolve learning obstacles. This dual support mechanism—combining automated assessment with interactive consultation—ensures continuous learning progression and minimizes unresolved uncertainties.

Conclusion

The application of AI technology in the POA theory has provided new possibilities for optimizing teaching processes and improving teaching quality. Practical implementation in Unit 1 “The Kindness of Strangers” of *New Century College English Integrated Course* (Book 2) demonstrates that AI technology can effectively stimulate students’ learning motivation and help teachers better achieve teaching objectives in the motivating section through creating authentic situations, implementing personalized task design, and providing instant feedback. However, AI technology also faces challenges in terms of technical costs, teacher competence, and data security during application. Therefore, in future teaching practice, joint efforts from government, universities, and teachers are needed to adopt effective measures to address these challenges, rationally utilize AI technology, and fully leverage its advantages, while emphasizing teachers’ leading role and emotional interaction between teachers and students, to achieve quality and efficiency improvement in college English teaching. It is believed that through continuous exploration and practice, AI technology will provide stronger support for the effective implementation of POA theory, propelling college English teaching reform to a new level.

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