

# A Systematic Review of the Production-Oriented Approach in Vocational English Education: Applications, Effectiveness, and Challenges

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## Abstract

The Production-Oriented Approach (POA) has gained increasing attention in English language teaching as an innovative pedagogy that integrates language learning and use. However, research on its application in vocational English education remains fragmented and lacks systematic synthesis. This study provides a systematic literature review of existing literature on POA, with particular emphasis on its implementation in vocational contexts. A structured review method was adopted, drawing on studies published between 2016 and 2024 from Google Scholar and Scopus databases. The review synthesizes the theoretical foundations of POA, its pedagogical applications, and its effectiveness and challenges in practice. The findings indicate that POA enhances learners' language output, engagement, and communicative competence, particularly in vocational settings. Nevertheless, several challenges remain, including learners' limited proficiency, teachers' instructional competence, and difficulties in implementing assessment practices such as teacher–student collaborative assessment. In addition, existing studies are constrained by limited methodological diversity and a lack of longitudinal research. This review identifies key research gaps and offers pedagogical implications for improving POA implementation in vocational English education.

**Keywords:** Production-Oriented Approach (POA), Vocational English Education, English Language Teaching, Learner Engagement, Language Output, Systematic Literature Review

## Introduction

In recent decades, English language teaching (ELT) has undergone a significant shift from traditional knowledge transmission to approaches that emphasize communicative competence and meaningful language use. Pedagogical frameworks such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) have highlighted the importance of learner-centered instruction and authentic interaction in promoting effective language learning. Previous studies have demonstrated that these approaches contribute positively to learners' engagement and communicative ability (Qasserras, 2023; Mudinillah et al., 2024). However, challenges remain in many instructional contexts, particularly in relation to learners' limited ability to produce language and apply their knowledge in real-life situations, which is especially evident in vocational education settings.

In response to these challenges, the Production-Oriented Approach (POA) has been proposed as an innovative pedagogical framework that aims to bridge the gap between language learning and language use. Developed within the Chinese educational context, POA integrates learning and application through its core principles of learning-centeredness, learning-using integration, and whole-person education, as well as its three-stage teaching procedure of motivating, enabling, and assessing (Wen, 2018). Central to this approach is the output-driven hypothesis, which emphasizes the role of language production as a driving force for learning. This perspective aligns with established views in second language acquisition, suggesting that language production facilitates deeper cognitive processing and promotes language learning. By foregrounding meaningful output tasks, POA encourages learners to actively engage in the learning process and develop communicative competence more effectively.

With the increasing application of POA in English language teaching, a growing number of studies have explored its effectiveness across different instructional contexts, including general college English, business English, and vocational education. These studies have reported positive outcomes, such as improvements in learners' language output, writing performance, and learning motivation (Zhang, 2020; Xie, 2021). In particular, POA has demonstrated strong potential in vocational education, where the emphasis on practical language use aligns closely with learners' needs (Deng, 2018, 2021; Yu et al., 2020). Nevertheless, despite these promising findings, existing research remains fragmented, often focusing on specific skills or isolated classroom practices, without providing a comprehensive synthesis of the overall research landscape. In addition, several challenges have been identified in the implementation of POA, including learners' limited proficiency, teachers' pedagogical competence, and difficulties in applying assessment practices such as teacher-student collaborative assessment (TSCA), which plays a central role in the POA framework. Moreover, current studies are constrained by methodological limitations, such as a lack of longitudinal research and limited diversity in research design (Xing & Puteh, 2023).

Given the growing importance of vocational English education in preparing learners for real-world communication demands, it is essential to identify effective pedagogical approaches that can bridge the gap between language learning and practical application. The Production-Oriented Approach (POA), with its emphasis on integrating learning and use, offers a promising framework for addressing this need. However, despite increasing scholarly attention, existing research on POA remains fragmented and lacks a systematic synthesis, particularly in vocational education contexts. This limitation makes it difficult for educators and researchers to fully understand its pedagogical value and practical implications.

To enhance the transparency and rigor of the review, this study follows key procedures of systematic literature review, including identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion of relevant studies. Under this background, this study aims to provide a comprehensive review of the Production-Oriented Approach in English language teaching, with particular emphasis on its application in vocational college contexts. Specifically, this study seeks to examine the theoretical foundations of POA, analyze its pedagogical applications across different instructional settings, evaluate its effectiveness and challenges in practice, and identify research gaps and future directions. By synthesizing existing studies in a structured manner, this review contributes to a more systematic understanding of POA and offers pedagogical insights for improving English language teaching in vocational education.

## Methodology

This study adopts a systematic literature review design, guided by key procedures of systematic review, including identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion of relevant studies.

Relevant literature was retrieved from Google Scholar and Scopus databases using a combination of keywords such as "Production-Oriented Approach," "English language teaching," and "EFL." The search was conducted in multiple stages to ensure both breadth and quality of the selected studies. In the initial stage, a broad search in Google Scholar using the keywords "Production-Oriented Approach" and "English teaching" yielded approximately 1,300 studies. In the second stage, a more refined search using "Production-Oriented Approach" and "EFL" resulted in approximately 400 studies. To enhance the reliability and academic quality of the sources, an additional search was conducted in the Scopus database using the query TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Production-Oriented Approach" AND English), which yielded 70 studies within the selected time range (2016–2024).

After removing duplicate records and screening titles and abstracts for relevance, approximately 40 studies were retained for further review. These studies were then subjected to full-text assessment, of which 32 articles met the eligibility criteria. During this stage, several studies were excluded due to lack of empirical relevance or misalignment with the research focus. Ultimately, a final sample of 25 studies was included in this review. The overall study selection process is illustrated in **Figure 1**.

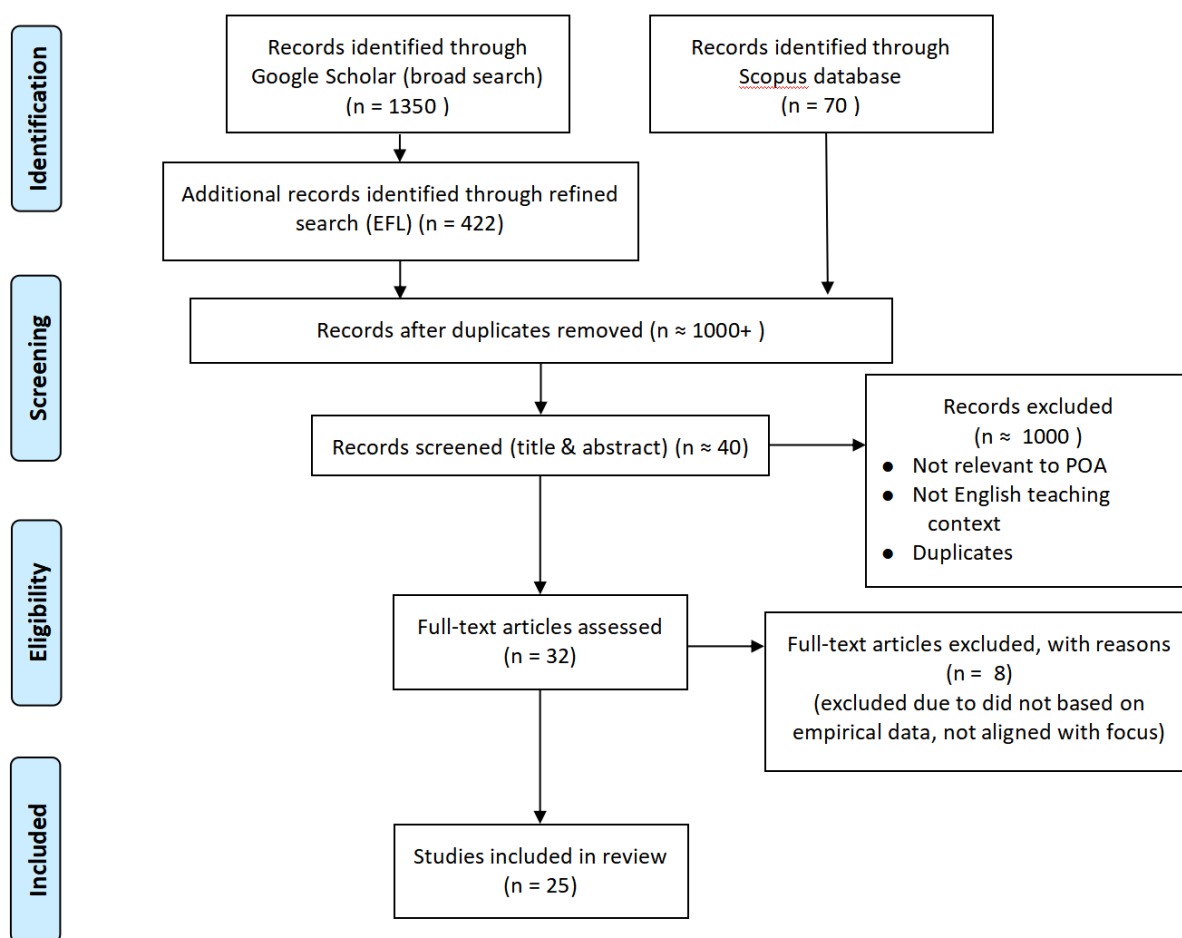


Figure 1

To ensure the relevance and quality of the selected studies, predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Studies were included if they (1) focused on the Production-Oriented Approach, (2) were related to English language teaching or learning, (3) provided empirical evidence or review-based insights into the application, effectiveness, or challenges of POA, and (4) were published in peer-reviewed journals or reputable conference proceedings. Studies were excluded if they were not directly related to POA, lacked pedagogical relevance, were duplicate publications, or did not meet acceptable academic standards in terms of accessibility and credibility.

For analytical purposes, the selected studies were categorized according to their primary research focus, as summarized in **Table 1**.

Table 1  
Classification of Reviewed Studies

Category	Focus	Studies
<b>Theoretical Foundations of POA</b>	Core principles, hypotheses, and theoretical basis of POA and language learning	Wen (2018)
<b>POA Application in General English Teaching</b>	Application of POA in college English, business English, and academic English contexts	Chen & Zhang (2020); Zhang, H. (2020); Xie (2021); Liu, Z. (2024)
<b>POA in Vocational Education Context</b>	Application of POA in higher vocational and technical education settings	Deng (2018, 2021); Yu et al. (2020); Zhao & Li (2021); Jin (2021)
<b>POA and Language Skills Development</b>	Effects of POA on writing, speaking, reading, and critical thinking skills	Zhang, W. (2020); Sun & Asmawi (2022); Asmawi & Sun (2023); Li et al. (2022); Lei & Mokhtar (2023); Xuan et al. (2024)
<b>Technology-enhanced POA Teaching</b>	Integration of POA with blended learning, online teaching, and digital tools	Yu et al. (2020); Jin (2021)
<b>Review and Synthesis Studies on POA</b>	Literature reviews and research trend analyses of POA	Xing & Puteh (2023); Liu et al. (2024); Sun et al. (2024)
<b>Related Pedagogical Frameworks and Supporting Theories</b>	Supporting theories such as CLT, TBLT, feedback, and critical thinking	Philp & Duchesne (2016); Qasserras (2023); Yuan et al. (2022); Mudinillah et al. (2024); Carless (2022); Kim & Namkung (2024)

The included studies were then analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Specifically, the literature was systematically examined and organized into key themes, including theoretical foundations, pedagogical applications, effectiveness, and implementation challenges of POA. This thematic synthesis facilitated a structured interpretation of existing findings and enabled the identification of research gaps and future research directions. Overall, the multi-stage review process enhanced the comprehensiveness, transparency, and reliability of the study.

#### *Theoretical Foundations of the Production-Oriented Approach*

The Production-Oriented Approach (POA), proposed by Wen (2018), is a pedagogical framework developed to address the long-standing gap between language learning and language use in English education, particularly in the Chinese context. Unlike traditional input-oriented approaches, POA emphasizes the integration of learning and application by

positioning output as the driving force of language acquisition. This approach seeks to enhance learners' ability to use English in meaningful communicative contexts by aligning instructional design with authentic output tasks, thereby promoting both linguistic competence and communicative effectiveness.

POA is underpinned by a systematic theoretical framework consisting of three core components: teaching principles, teaching hypotheses, and teaching procedures. The teaching principles emphasize learning-centeredness, learning-using integration, and whole-person education. These principles advocate that teaching should prioritize learners' active engagement, ensure that language knowledge is directly linked to real-world use, and support the holistic development of learners beyond mere language proficiency. In this sense, POA moves beyond traditional knowledge transmission models and promotes a more dynamic and learner-oriented instructional paradigm.

Closely related to these principles are the teaching hypotheses, which include the output-driven hypothesis, input-enabled hypothesis, and selective learning hypothesis. The output-driven hypothesis posits that language production serves as a catalyst for learning by creating a need for expression, thereby motivating learners to acquire relevant linguistic resources. The input-enabled hypothesis suggests that appropriately designed input facilitates effective output by providing necessary linguistic and contextual support. Meanwhile, the selective learning hypothesis highlights the importance of focusing on language forms that are most relevant to learners' communicative needs, thus improving learning efficiency and effectiveness (Wen, 2018). Together, these hypotheses provide a theoretical explanation for how learning and use can be effectively integrated in classroom settings.

In terms of pedagogical implementation, POA is operationalized through a three-stage teaching procedure: motivating, enabling, and assessing. The motivating stage introduces authentic communicative tasks to stimulate learners' desire to produce language, thereby creating a clear purpose for learning. The enabling stage provides targeted input, structured practice, and scaffolding to support learners in completing the output tasks. The assessing stage emphasizes teacher-student collaborative assessment, which not only evaluates learning outcomes but also promotes further learning through reflection and feedback. This cyclical process reflects a dynamic interaction between input and output, aligning with broader perspectives in second language acquisition that highlight the importance of engagement and active participation in language learning (Philp & Duchesne, 2016).

Overall, POA offers a theoretically grounded and pedagogically coherent framework that is particularly suitable for English language teaching contexts where learners often face difficulties in transferring learned knowledge to actual language use. Its emphasis on output-driven learning, integration of learning and application, and structured instructional procedures provides a strong foundation for understanding how POA has been implemented across different educational contexts. This theoretical grounding also serves as the basis for examining the application, effectiveness, and challenges of POA in the subsequent sections of this review.

### *Application of the Production-Oriented Approach in English Language Teaching*

In addition to general English education, POA has been extensively applied in vocational and technical education contexts, where practical language use is particularly emphasized. This is particularly significant for the present review, as vocational English education requires a strong emphasis on functional language use and task-based communication, which closely aligns with the core principles of POA. Studies in this area indicate that POA is well-suited to vocational English teaching because it prioritizes task-based output that reflects workplace communication needs. For instance, research conducted in higher vocational colleges has demonstrated that POA can enhance students' ability to perform job-related communicative tasks by integrating language learning with professional scenarios (Deng, 2018, 2021; Yu et al., 2020; Zhao & Li, 2021; Jin, 2021).

Furthermore, a growing body of research has examined the integration of POA with technology-enhanced learning environments, particularly in response to the increasing use of digital tools and online teaching platforms. Studies suggest that POA can be effectively combined with blended learning and computer-assisted instruction to create more interactive and flexible learning experiences. For example, online POA-based instruction has been found to support students' language production through digital scaffolding and collaborative tasks, thereby extending learning beyond traditional classroom settings (Yu et al., 2020; Jin, 2021; Asmawi & Sun, 2023; Kim & Namkung, 2024). This trend reflects the evolving nature of POA implementation in contemporary educational environments.

Moreover, the application of POA has also been examined across different language skill domains, including writing, speaking, reading, and higher-order thinking skills. Research indicates that POA-based teaching can facilitate improvements in learners' writing performance, oral communication abilities, and critical thinking by emphasizing purposeful language use and structured output tasks (Zhang, W., 2020; Sun & Asmawi, 2022; Li et al., 2022; Lei & Mokhtar, 2023). These findings suggest that POA is not limited to a single skill area but can be flexibly adapted to support comprehensive language development.

Overall, the reviewed studies demonstrate that POA has been applied across a wide range of educational contexts and instructional formats, reflecting its versatility and pedagogical relevance (Xing & Puteh, 2023; Liu et al., 2024; Sun et al., 2024). Despite variations in implementation, a common feature across these studies is the emphasis on output-driven learning and the integration of language use into the learning process. This widespread application provides a foundation for further examining the effectiveness of POA in improving learning outcomes, which will be discussed in the next section.

### *Effectiveness of the Production-Oriented Approach*

The effectiveness of the Production-Oriented Approach (POA) has been widely examined in recent studies, with a general consensus that POA contributes positively to various aspects of English language learning. A substantial body of empirical research indicates that POA enhances students' overall language proficiency by promoting active language use and increasing engagement in classroom activities. Compared with traditional input-based instruction, POA encourages learners to participate in meaningful output tasks, which in turn facilitates deeper processing of linguistic knowledge and improves communicative competence (Chen & Zhang, 2020; Zhang, H., 2020; Xie, 2021; Liu, Z., 2024; Xuan et al., 2024),

including recent comparative evidence supporting its effectiveness across different instructional approaches.

One of the most consistently reported outcomes of POA implementation is its positive impact on specific language skills, particularly writing and speaking. Studies focusing on writing instruction have demonstrated that POA-based teaching can significantly improve learners' ability to organize ideas, use appropriate linguistic forms, and produce coherent texts (Zhang, W., 2020; Li et al., 2022). Similarly, research on oral communication suggests that POA can enhance students' speaking fluency, accuracy, and confidence by providing structured opportunities for authentic language production (Sun & Asmawi, 2022; Asmawi & Sun, 2023). These findings support the argument that output-driven learning plays a crucial role in developing productive language skills.

In addition to linguistic outcomes, POA has also been found to positively influence learners' cognitive and affective development. Several studies report that POA-based instruction can foster higher-order thinking skills, such as critical thinking and problem-solving, by engaging students in task-based activities that require analysis, evaluation, and reflection (Lei & Mokhtar, 2023). Furthermore, the integration of meaningful output tasks and collaborative assessment has been shown to increase learners' motivation, participation, and sense of responsibility for learning. This is particularly evident in contexts where traditional teaching approaches often fail to stimulate active engagement.

The effectiveness of POA is also evident in vocational and practice-oriented educational settings, where the alignment between language learning and real-world application is especially important. Research conducted in higher vocational colleges indicates that POA can significantly improve students' ability to perform task-based communicative activities relevant to workplace contexts (Deng, 2018, 2021; Yu et al., 2020; Zhao & Li, 2021; Jin, 2021). By integrating professional scenarios into language instruction, POA enables learners to develop both linguistic competence and practical communication skills, thereby enhancing the overall relevance of English education.

Despite these positive findings, it is important to note that the effectiveness of POA may vary depending on contextual factors such as teaching design, learner characteristics, and instructional conditions. While most studies report favorable outcomes, some also suggest that the successful implementation of POA requires careful task design, sufficient scaffolding, and active teacher involvement. Overall, the existing literature provides strong evidence supporting the effectiveness of POA in improving language proficiency, developing higher-order skills, and enhancing learner engagement, thereby reinforcing its value as an innovative approach in English language teaching.

#### *Challenges in Implementing the Production-Oriented Approach*

Despite the growing body of evidence supporting the effectiveness of the Production-Oriented Approach (POA), the existing literature also highlights several challenges that may hinder its successful implementation in English language teaching contexts. One of the most frequently reported issues concerns the complexity of instructional design. POA requires teachers to carefully construct output-driven tasks that are both pedagogically meaningful and appropriately aligned with learners' proficiency levels. However, designing such tasks can

be demanding, particularly for teachers who are accustomed to traditional input-oriented teaching methods. Studies have indicated that insufficient training or limited understanding of POA principles may result in superficial implementation, where output activities are included but not effectively integrated into the overall teaching process (Xie, 2021; Deng, 2021).

Another significant challenge relates to the role of teachers in facilitating POA-based instruction. Unlike conventional approaches, POA places higher demands on teachers' pedagogical competence, as they are expected to function not only as knowledge transmitters but also as task designers, facilitators, and evaluators. This shift in role requires teachers to possess strong classroom management skills, the ability to provide effective scaffolding, and the capacity to conduct collaborative assessment. In practice, some teachers may struggle to balance these multiple responsibilities, which can affect the quality of implementation and limit the potential benefits of POA (Zhang, H., 2020; Zhao & Li, 2021).

In addition to teacher-related factors, learner-related challenges have also been identified in the literature. POA emphasizes active participation and output production, which may pose difficulties for students who lack sufficient language proficiency or confidence. In contexts where learners are accustomed to passive learning styles, the transition to an output-driven approach can lead to anxiety, reluctance to participate, or uneven engagement among students. Furthermore, differences in individual learning abilities may result in varied learning outcomes, highlighting the need for differentiated instruction and adaptive task design (Sun & Asmawi, 2022; Asmawi & Sun, 2023).

Institutional and contextual constraints also play a critical role in shaping the implementation of POA. Factors such as large class sizes, limited instructional time, rigid curricula, and examination-oriented education systems can restrict the extent to which POA can be effectively applied. In particular, the emphasis on standardized testing in many educational settings may discourage teachers from adopting innovative teaching approaches that prioritize communicative competence over test performance. As a result, the full potential of POA may not be realized in practice, despite its theoretical advantages.

Overall, while POA offers a promising framework for enhancing English language teaching, its successful implementation depends on a range of interrelated factors, including teacher expertise, learner readiness, and institutional support. These challenges suggest that further research is needed to explore effective strategies for adapting POA to diverse educational contexts and for supporting both teachers and learners in the implementation process. Addressing these issues will be essential for maximizing the pedagogical value of POA and supporting its more effective and context-sensitive implementation in language education.

### **Research Gaps in Existing Studies**

Despite the increasing number of studies on the Production-Oriented Approach (POA), several significant research gaps can be identified in the existing literature. First, although many studies have examined the effectiveness of POA, most are limited to small-scale empirical investigations within specific classroom contexts, particularly in Chinese tertiary education, which restricts the generalizability of findings across different educational systems and cultural settings. Second, current research tends to focus predominantly on short-term

instructional outcomes, with relatively limited attention paid to the long-term impact of POA on language development, learner autonomy, and sustained communicative competence. Third, while POA emphasizes the integration of learning and use, there is insufficient exploration of how different components of the approach—such as motivating, enabling, and assessing—interact dynamically in real classroom environments, especially under varying teaching conditions. In addition, existing studies often prioritize measurable language outcomes, such as writing and speaking performance, while underrepresenting other important dimensions, including assessment practices, learner differences, and teacher cognition. Furthermore, although recent studies have begun to explore technology-enhanced POA, research in this area remains fragmented and lacks systematic investigation into how digital tools can effectively support output-driven learning. Finally, there is a notable lack of comparative studies examining POA alongside other established pedagogical approaches, such as communicative language teaching and task-based language teaching, which limits a deeper understanding of its relative advantages and potential limitations. These gaps highlight the need for more diversified, longitudinal, and context-sensitive research to further validate and refine the theoretical and pedagogical value of POA in English language teaching.

### **Implications and Conclusion**

This review has important implications for both English language teaching practice and future research on the Production-Oriented Approach (POA). From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that POA provides an effective framework for addressing the gap between language learning and language use by promoting output-driven learning and integrating communicative tasks into classroom instruction. Teachers are encouraged to adopt POA principles in designing meaningful output tasks, providing appropriate scaffolding, and implementing collaborative assessment strategies to enhance learner engagement and language development. In particular, the application of POA in vocational and technology-enhanced contexts highlights its potential to align language instruction with real-world communicative needs, thereby increasing the practical relevance of English education. However, successful implementation requires sufficient teacher training, careful instructional design, and institutional support to overcome the challenges identified in previous sections.

From a research perspective, the identified gaps indicate several directions for future investigation. There is a need for more large-scale and longitudinal studies to examine the sustained impact of POA on learners' language development and communicative competence. Future research should also explore the dynamic interaction among different components of POA in diverse educational contexts, as well as the role of individual differences, teacher cognition, and assessment practices in shaping learning outcomes. In addition, further studies are needed to investigate how digital technologies can be effectively integrated with POA to support output-driven learning, and to conduct comparative analyses between POA and other established pedagogical approaches in order to better understand its relative strengths and limitations.

In conclusion, this review provides a comprehensive synthesis of existing research on the theoretical foundations, applications, effectiveness, challenges, and research gaps of POA in English language teaching. The findings confirm that POA is a promising and innovative pedagogical approach that can enhance learners' language proficiency, promote active engagement, and support the integration of learning and use. At the same time, its

implementation remains context-dependent and requires careful consideration of various pedagogical and institutional factors. By addressing the identified challenges and research gaps, future studies can further contribute to the development and refinement of POA, thereby strengthening its role in contemporary English language education.

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