

## Research Status and Trends of Production-Oriented Approach (POA) Studies in China: A Review of Journal Papers (2008-2024)

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### Abstract

The article employs CiteSpace to map a scientific knowledge network and employs co-word analysis to explore the research hotspots and development trends of production-oriented approach (POA) in China in the past 17 years (2008-2024). The research findings indicate that (1) Since 2008, POA has garnered considerable attention overall; (2) The research hotspots encompass POA, college English, teaching models, teacher-student collaborative assessment, and textbook research; (3) The majority of relevant literature originates from foreign language teaching journals, with four journals dedicating special columns to POA; (4) Research institutions are concentrated in Beijing Foreign Studies University; (5) Authors with a substantial number of publications include Wen and her team members; (6) The development trends reveal a broadening scope of research and specificity in content. Based on these findings, the article further clarifies the direction for future research.

### Keywords

CiteSpace, production-oriented approach (POA), visualization analysis

### Introduction

The Production-oriented Approach (POA) is an innovative teaching theory and practice system constructed by Professor Qiufang Wen in response to the current research status of foreign language education in China (Wen, 2015; Wen, 2018). The educational philosophy of POA encompasses the learning-centered principle, learning-by-doing approach, and holistic education approach (Wen, 2015), aiming to enhance the efficiency of college foreign language teaching and foster students' practical English application skills (Wen, 2018). It broadly integrates the essence of Chinese and Western educational and teaching theories, endowing the Chinese educational theory system with distinctive characteristics (Wen, 2017). In recent years, with the rapid development of foreign educational theory and practice, research on the POA is burgeoning. Therefore, it is imperative to grasp the current research status of POA research in China and predict its development trends. This paper employs the knowledge mapping data visualization tool CiteSpace to visually organize the literature on POA research in China since 2008, in order to explore the core areas and cutting-edge developments in POA research within the country.

### Method

#### Data Source

This study selected literature related to the POA from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) in the field of foreign languages, including CSSCI-indexed journals, Peking University's Core Journals, and other foreign language journals as the data source. The

literature source category in the advanced search was set to Core Journals and CSSCI, and searches were conducted using the topics and keywords *Production-oriented approach*, *POA*, and *Output-driven hypothesis*. The time frame was set from 2008 to 2024. By combining computer-assisted searches with manual exclusion, documents that did not belong to foreign language CSSCI journals, mainstream foreign language journals, and educational journals after 2008, as well as prefaces to special columns, interviews, book reviews, and review articles, were manually excluded. A total of 157 valid documents were obtained.

### Data Collection and Analysis

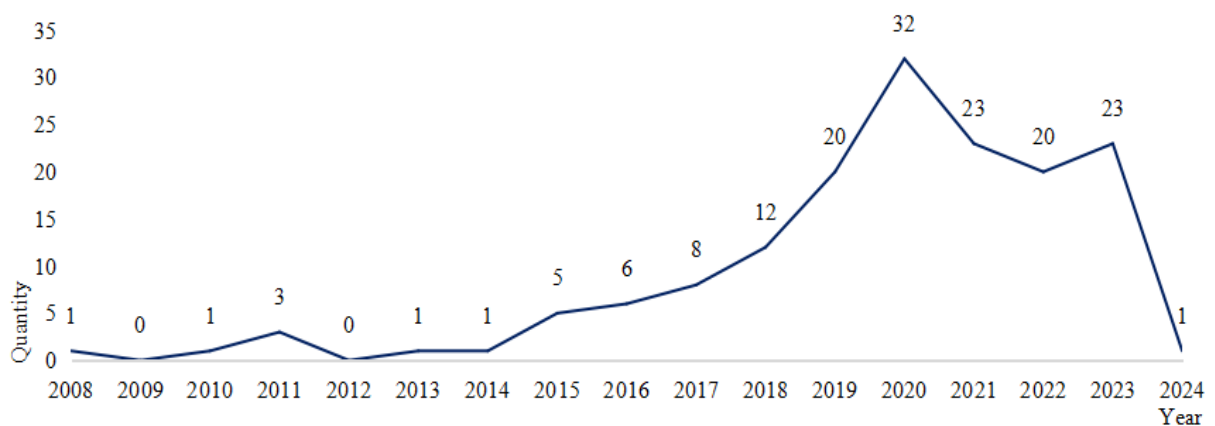
Knowledge mapping can scientifically visualize the research hotspots and development within the field. This study employs the information visualization software CiteSpace for a visual analysis of the 157 selected documents. Initially, the study tallied the annual publication output of POA research in China from 2008 to 2024 to macroscopically grasp the overall state of POA research in the country. Subsequently, co-word analysis was utilized to cluster high-frequency keywords in POA research, analyzing the core domains within the field and further exploring specific research hotspots in Chinese POA by examining the centrality of these high-frequency keywords. The distribution of document sources was then statistically analyzed using EXCEL. Co-occurrences of authors and institutions were visualized with CiteSpace, and finally, a timezone visualization was created with CiteSpace to illustrate the evolution of research hotspots in POA over time.

## Results and Discussion

### The Overall Evolution of Production-oriented Approach Research

As depicted in Figure 1, the research on the POA in China from 2008 to 2024 has generally shown a steady upward trend, albeit with some fluctuations. The total number of POA research documents is 157. Notably, the year 2020 saw the highest number of publications, with 32 articles. This indicates that POA research in China is increasingly gaining widespread attention from domestic scholars.

Figure 1  
*Number of POA Related Journal Papers in CNKI*



Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that the quantity of literature related to the POA is closely tied to the development of the POA theory. This can be broadly divided into two phases, with 2015 as a demarcation point. From 2008 to 2014, POA theoretical research was in its nascent stage, lacking a mature theoretical framework, resulting in a minimal number of studies. During the period from 2015 to 2020, there was a significant increase in the number of

publications, peaking in 2020 with 32 papers. Although there was a decline in the number of documents after 2020, the annual output from 2021 to 2023 remained above 20, indicating sustained high interest in POA within the domestic academic community. As of May 2024, although only one document on POA has been published in core journals, we have reason to believe that further research findings will continue to be released.

### Research Hotspots

Keywords can to some extent reflect the research topics and hotspots within a field. This study employs co-word analysis to generate the knowledge network map of high-frequency keywords in domestic research on the POA using CiteSpace, where each node represents a keyword (as shown in Figure 2). Furthermore, this paper conducts a year-ring analysis of high-frequency keywords. In Figure 2, the color of the ring represents the year the keyword appears, and the larger the ring and the more annual rings it has, the higher the frequency and influence of the keyword. The larger nodes in Figure 2 include production-oriented approach, college English and teaching, output-driven hypothesis, input-enabled hypothesis, flipped classroom, teacher-student collaborative assessment, and textbook use. From this, it can be inferred that the core areas of POA research since 2008 can be summarized into five aspects: research on the theoretical system of the POA, college English and teaching, teaching models, textbooks, and research on teacher-student collaborative assessment.

Figure 2  
Visualization of Keywords in POA Research



CiteSpace is capable not only of tallying keyword frequencies but also of analyzing keyword centrality, with higher centrality indicating greater influence of a keyword within the co-occurrence network. A comprehensive analysis of both keyword frequency and centrality can provide further insights into the core areas of research. Table 1 presents the high-frequency and high-centrality keywords as statistically derived using CiteSpace. By integrating the analysis of Figure 2 and Table 1, it can be concluded that the research on POA over the past 17 years has primarily focused on the following five aspects which are the production-oriented approach, college English and teaching, teaching models, teacher-student collaborative assessment, and textbook research.

Table 1  
*High-Frequency and High-Centrality Keywords*

| N  | Keywords                                 | Frequency | Centrality |
|----|--|-----------|------------|
| 1  | Production-oriented Approach             | 108       | 1.23       |
| 2  | College English                          | 20        | 0.26       |
| 3  | Output-driven Hypothesis                 | 19        | 0.46       |
| 4  | College English and Teaching             | 17        | 0.20       |
| 5  | Enabling                                 | 13        | 0.16       |
| 6  | Teacher-student Collaborative Assessment | 7         | 0.04       |
| 7  | Flipped Classroom                        | 6         | 0.09       |
| 8  | Textbook Use                             | 5         | 0.04       |
| 9  | Textbook Adaptation                      | 4         | 0.05       |
| 10 | Motivating                               | 4         | 0.04       |

### **Production-oriented Approach**

The theme of the POA reflects the construction of its theoretical framework, which has primarily evolved through five stages: the budding period (2007-2013), the embryonic period (2013-2014), the formative period (2015-2016), the revision period (2016-2017), and the re-revision period (2017-2018) (Wen, 2018). The first phase, the budding period (2007-2013), saw the proposal of the output-driven hypothesis (Wen, Wen, 2013). The embryonic period (2013-2014), involved modifications to the output-driven hypothesis, leading to the introduction of the output-driven, input-enabled hypothesis (Wen, 2014). The formative period (2015-2016), established the theoretical system of POA, delving into teaching philosophy, teaching hypothesis, and teaching procedure (Wen, 2015). The revision period (2016-2017), saw the POA teaching model's three teaching procedures in a cyclically closed system. The teaching hypothesis incorporated the concept of learning by evaluation, highlighting the centrality of evaluation in the teaching process, and innovatively introduced the new model of teacher-student collaborative assessment (Wen, 2017). And the last re-revision period (2017-2018), integrated the cultural exchange theory into the POA teaching philosophy. Concurrently, to clarify educational objectives, the holistic education approach was replaced with the critical capacity theory, aiming to make educational goals more concrete, facilitating the implementation in teaching and assessing (Wen, 2018).

In addition to conducting an in-depth exploration of the theoretical framework of the POA, some scholars have also explored the impact of POA on Chinese university students' motivation for English learning from a mixed-methods research perspective as exemplified by Zhao (2024). However, comparative analyses between POA and task-based language teaching (TBLT) were conducted by most of scholars. But these analyses of similarities and differences are primarily theoretical and lack empirical data support. A macro comparison of TBLT and POA was conducted at three levels, which are teaching philosophy, hypotheses, and processes, as noted by Deng (2018). Furthermore, a comparative analysis was performed from the perspective of teaching materials compilation, focusing on the selection of textbook materials and the evaluation subjects during the assessment phase, as discussed by Bi (2019). Additionally, some scholars have integrated POA with dialectical research paradigms, emphasizing the dialectical unity of theory and practice epistemologically (Wen, 2018). Qiu (2019) conducted a dialectical study on promoting enabling effectiveness in POA instruction. Concerning the application of POA teaching materials, a dialectical research paradigm was

implemented, analyzing how teachers utilize POA materials in the classroom while exploring methods to collaboratively enhance students' key competencies through the use of instructional materials (Bi, 2019).

### **College English and Teaching**

Research on college English and teaching within the context of POA primarily encompasses two aspects. Firstly, it concerns the different types of college English courses and their effectiveness. In college English course instruction, POA can be compared with intensive reading methods to substantiate that POA more effectively enhances students' writing quality and aids in the acquisition of new target language items. However, such research lacks longitudinal studies on learning outcomes, as noted by Zhang (2017). Secondly, it involves the application steps and operational procedures of the three key phases of POA—motivating, enabling, and assessing—in college English classrooms. In the teaching of English as a lingua franca, POA is implemented with a focus on pronunciation teaching, emphasizing the concrete implementation of the motivating, enabling, and assessing phase, as observed by Zhang (2020). Currently, domestic research on college English and teaching under the POA is relatively abundant, often employing mixed methods. This involves designing experiments to quantitatively analyze and compare the changes in students' capability levels before and after the experiment between the experiment and control groups. Qualitative data from questionnaires, teacher, and student interviews are also integrated to interpret the experimental results, thereby optimizing the design of each stage.

### **Teaching Models**

The theme of teaching models primarily encompasses the design exploration and the promoting effect of flipped classrooms and blended teaching settings. In terms of the teaching settings design, relevant studies focus on the innovation and practice of college English teaching, discussing the application of various teaching settings or theories in English language teaching such as the production-oriented approach, flipped classrooms, blended teaching, etc. These studies aim to enhance the effectiveness of college English teaching by integrating online and offline resources, integrating the elements of ideological and political education, constructing teaching theory models, and exploring new types of English teaching settings, with discussions or analyses of their practical effects (e.g., Mark, T.F., 2021; Wang & Zhang, 2021; Liu & Ruan, 2021; Zhang, 2021; Guan & Guo, 2021; Zhang & Tian, 2022). These studies not only reflect the pursuit of innovation in teaching methods and theories but also demonstrate an emphasis on improving the quality of English language teaching and students' language proficiency. Research on the promoting effect mainly compares blended teaching settings with traditional teaching settings, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of the promoting effect of these two teaching settings. Duan (2020) selected two college English listening and speaking classes and implemented motivational intervention for students' English learning in both blended and traditional teaching settings. The results indicated that motivational intervention can effectively enhance students' ideal L2 self and strengthen learning effort, with blended teaching also having a certain effect on increasing the learning efforts, and their combined effect play an even bigger part. In practice, there is a scarcity of research on how to use the POA to guide the teaching of flipped classrooms in college English instruction.

### **Teacher-student Collaborative Assessment**

A significant challenge in the implementation of POA is that, compared to traditional teaching methods, POA requires students to complete production tasks more frequently and with greater diversity. However, in college English teaching, due to the large class sizes and the heavy teaching workload of instructors, it is often difficult to provide timely and adequate feedback



to students (Wen, 2016). If students are only asked to produce without receiving effective and immediate responses, this will not only affect their writing motivation to produce but also fail to ensure the quality of their output (Yang & Dai, 2015). Teacher-student collaborative assessment (TSCA) can help POA address this challenge. While Assessment for Learning (AFL) has progressively established itself as the dominant discourse within L2 writing classrooms in the realm of global higher education, it is frequently observed that, in many cases, the quality of AFL implementation in writing classrooms falls short of what is required to effectively foster the students' authentic writing proficiency. (Zhong & Yang, 2021). Consequently, TSCA could be an optimization strategy for various types of assessment.

Wen (2016) established a novel form of assessment in accordance with the production-oriented approach, known as TSCA. This innovative form involves the assessment of output across three phases, which are pre-class, in-class, and post-class. Prior to class, the instructor selects and critiques representative samples aligned with the unit's teaching objectives. During the class, students engage in individual reflection, followed by pair or group discussions, and then participate in whole-class deliberations guided by the instructor, who provides prepared evaluative insights in a timely manner. After class, to refine the TSCA, students can expand upon the instructor's in-class guidance through self-assessment or peer review.

Following the introduction of the TSCA in the POA, numerous scholars have conducted action research to verify the practicality and effectiveness of each step in TSCA. Through continuous iterative refinements, some scholars strive to optimize the implementation of every phase (Huo & Deng, 2023; Liang & Jiang, 2024). Concurrently, this ongoing process of improvement assists students in gradually becoming familiar with and understanding the pedagogical philosophy of TSCA and its specific procedures. Sun and his team, through their exploration and practice of the TSCA model, have not only proposed concrete teaching evaluation principles and implementation methods but have also progressively measured its impact on learning and optimized its application in blended teaching to enhance teaching effectiveness (Sun, 2017, 2020; Yang, 2021).

### **Textbook Research**

In English teaching in China, textbooks play a crucial role, serving as the primary support for most college English teachers in their instructional activities. The use, design, and compilation of foreign language textbooks are core steps in the process of foreign language teaching. Given this, textbook research has become one of the central themes in the study of the POA. Within the theme of textbook research, domestic studies can be categorized into the use and the compilation of teaching materials.

Wen has constructed a theoretical system for the use and evaluation of teaching materials within the POA framework, providing guidance for teaching practice. Researchers have conducted multiple instructional activities based on this theoretical framework, examining the effectiveness of teaching materials against three criteria for material use effectiveness (Zhang, 2017). Utilizing the POA's theory of teaching material use and evaluation, the aim is to validate the effectiveness of this theory and explore its implementation pathways, thereby guiding teachers in the design of POA (Sun, 2017; Bi, 2019). Additionally, to further expand the theoretical framework of POA, an in-depth exploration of the methods, characteristics, and pedagogical promoting effects of teaching materials could be conducted (Bi, 2018).

Textbook compilation based on the POA theory is another focal point of textbook research. The development of POA textbooks includes the compilation of English language materials. In

2015, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press published *New Generation College English*, which includes both student and teacher manuals, based on the principles of the POA. Chang (2017) analyzed the compilation process of *New Generation College English* guided by the POA and proposed the teaching theory-action research dual-driven model for textbook compilation, providing a research example for the theory and practice of foreign language textbook compilation. Relevant studies, grounded in POA theory, have discussed the adaptation of non-English language textbooks. Through the compilation and adaptation practices of different language materials, these studies explored the application of POA theory in teaching materials design, offering theoretical support and practical guidance for the compilation and adaptation of foreign languages and Less Commonly Taught Foreign Languages (LCTLs) textbooks (e.g., Zhan, 2019; Jiang, 2019; Shao, 2019; Gui & Ji, 2018).

### Distribution of Journal Sources

Analyzing the source journals of papers helps researchers understand the spatial distribution of research findings and identifies key journals in the field, thereby providing a basis for collecting and managing literature and offering a reference for relevant researchers. As shown in Table 2, from 2008 to 2024, among the selected 157 papers, the journals with the highest number of publications are *Foreign Language Education in China* (32 papers, 20.4%), *Foreign Languages in China* (10 papers, 6.4%), *Foreign Language World* (10 papers, 6.4%), and *Foreign Language Teaching* (9 papers, 5.7%). This indicates that the proportion of literature related to the study of the POA is significantly represented in journals focused on foreign language education and teaching.

Upon reviewing the aforementioned journals, the author found that in 2020, there was a special column on reinterpretation of the teaching process of the POA with 3 articles; in 2022, a special column on cloud connection theory research with 4 articles. In addition to these, the journal has frequently published literature related to the POA in its foreign language teaching section. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics* dedicated a special column to the study of the POA, with a thematic issue in the third issue of 2020 featuring 6 articles on the topic. *Modern Foreign Languages* published 6 articles related to the POA in the foreign language education section of its third issue in 2017. In the third issue of 2019, under the section on the essential characteristics and applications of dialectical research, 2 articles integrating the POA with dialectical research were published. *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching* featured a special column on the POA and LCTLs teaching which included 5 articles on Romanian language teaching, Korean language teaching, adaptation of Sinhalese, Malay, and German teaching materials. Additionally, one related article was published in the foreign language teaching research section of the second issue in 2016.

Table 2  
*Distribution of Journal Sources*

| Journal                                | Quantity | Journal                               | Quantity | Journal                          | Quantity |
|--|----------|---------------------------------------|----------|----------------------------------|----------|
| Foreign Language Education in China    | 32       | Technology Enhanced Foreign Languages | 11       | Theory and Practice of Education | 3        |
| Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics | 6        | Foreign Language World                | 10       | Chinese Teaching in the World    | 4        |

|                                      |   |                                       |    |                            |    |
|--------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|----|----------------------------|----|
| Modern Foreign Languages             | 8 | Foreign Languages in China            | 10 | Foreign Language Education | 9  |
| Foreign Languages and Their Teaching | 6 | Contemporary Foreign Language Studies | 1  | Other journals             | 57 |

### Authorship Distribution

Table 3 illustrates that the leading author in this research field is Wen from Beijing Foreign Studies University, with a total of 21 publications. Sun from Beijing Sport University and Bi from Beijing Foreign Studies University have published 11 and 10 articles, respectively. Qiu from Beijing University of Chemical Technology, Zhang from China University of Political Science and Law, and Zhang from China University of Geosciences have all published fewer than ten articles, but each has more than five.

Table 3  
*The Top 5 Authors by Publication Output*

| Number | Author       | Quantity |
|--------|--------------|----------|
| 1      | Wen, Q. F.   | 21       |
| 2      | Sun, S. G.   | 11       |
| 3      | Bi, Z.       | 10       |
| 4      | Qiu, L       | 9        |
| 5      | Zhang, W. J. | 8        |

Figure 3 reveals the distribution characteristics of scholars engaged in research on the POA in China. In the CiteSpace map, the larger the node, the greater the number of publications by the scholar, and the connections between nodes indicate co-occurrences and collaborations among scholars. Figure 3 shows that scholars in the field of POA research in China have formed a larger collaboration group centered around Wen and several smaller collaboration groups. Wen's collaboration group is primarily led by herself, along with scholars Sun, Bi, and Chen. Among the smaller collaboration groups, Zhu from the Chinese Language and Literature Department of Beijing Foreign Studies University has co-authored four articles with colleagues within the university. At Dalian University of Technology, Wang, Du, Zhou, and Liu have collaborated on two articles exploring the integration of the POA with English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. Zhang from China University of Geosciences in Wuhan and Zhang from China University of Political Science and Law are among the leading publishers in the field of POA research, but they have published independently. Zhang completed her doctoral dissertation at Beijing Foreign Studies University, with a focus on the application of production-oriented approach as her research topic. This indicates that collaborations among scholars, particularly within the same institution, are already in place.



Figure 3  
Author Collaboration Network



**Research Institution Distribution**

A co-occurrence analysis of the research institutions of the sampled literature, arranged in descending order of publication output, reveals the top five institutions as shown in Table 4, where the size of the nodes is directly proportional to the publication output of the respective institutions.

Table 4  
*The Top 5 Institutions by Publication Output*

| Number | Institution  | Quantity |
|--------|--|----------|
| 1      | Beijing Foreign Studies University (including its colleges, research centers, and press) | 45       |
| 2      | Beijing Sport University   | 10       |
| 3      | School of Foreign Studies, China University of Political Science and Law                 | 8        |
| 4      | The School of Foreign Languages, China University of Geosciences in Wu Han               | 7        |
| 5      | Beijing University of Technology   | 6        |

Overall, the main research institutions for the POA are numerous domestic universities, including foreign language universities and foreign language colleges. These institutions are primarily located in Beijing, with Beijing Foreign Studies University at the forefront. The research capacity is highly uneven. Several colleges of Beijing Foreign Studies University, along with the China Foreign Language Education Research Center and the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, are the leading forces in POA research, having published a total of 45 articles, holding a very strong position in this field of study. The distribution of the top five research institutions by publication output corresponds with the distribution of the top five authors' affiliated universities. Scholars from other institutions also engage in research on the POA. Aside from Zhejiang Financial College, which has published four articles, no single institution has published more than two articles.

Figure 4  
Institutional Collaboration Network

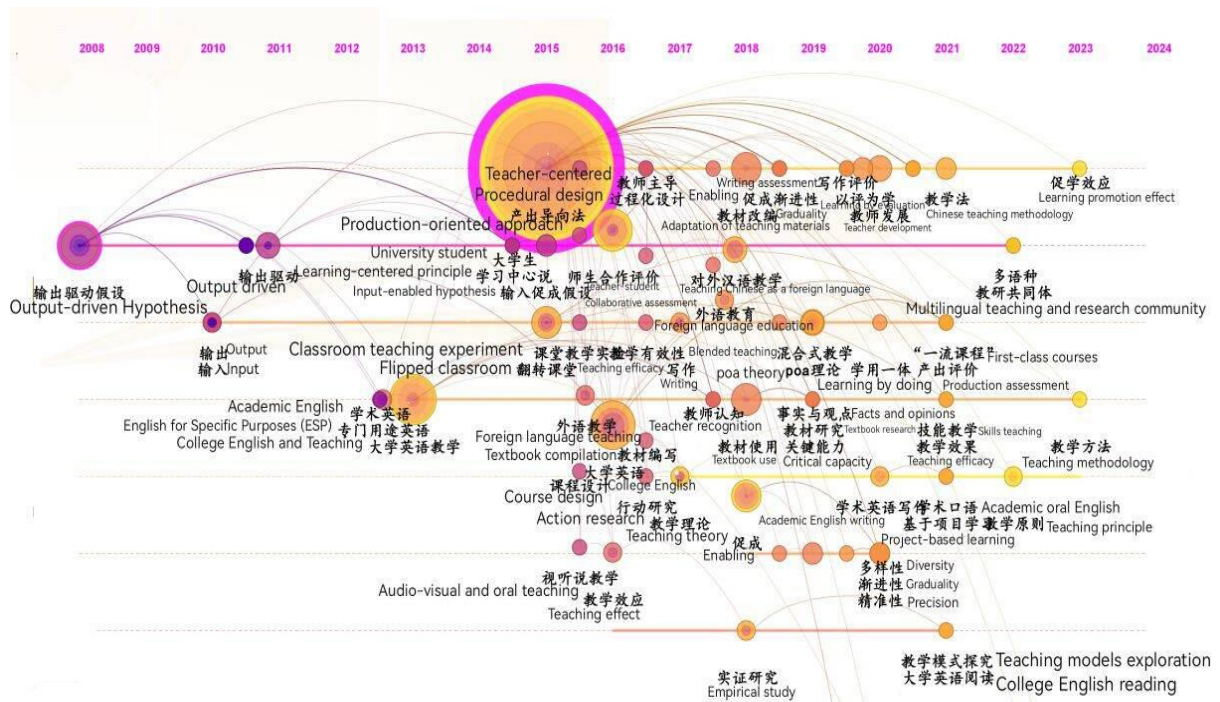


### Development Trends of Research Topics

This study presents a co-occurrence time zone map of keywords associated with the POA in China. The evolution of research foci over the past 17 years is shown in Figure 5. Broadly, research related to POA can be categorized into two segments that are theoretical research and practical application research. On the theoretical level, POA has undergone five phases of development since 2008, with its theoretical framework being progressively refined. To enhance understanding of POA, Wen and her team have conducted comprehensive comparisons of POA with other teaching methodologies following the refinement of its theoretical framework.

In terms of practical application research, the following points are highlighted. First, research on the various components of POA in classroom teaching, particularly the assessment phase, has become increasingly in-depth. Second, studies concerning the use, adaptation, and evaluation of POA-related teaching materials have also gradually intensified and have been sustained over a longer period. Third, research predominantly focuses on English, with some attention given to other languages. The highest number of related documents pertains to college English education, followed by teaching Chinese as a foreign language and other less commonly taught languages such as German. Fourth, with the ongoing integration of Internet + Education, blended teaching settings and flipped classrooms have increasingly become hot topics in academic research, prompting scholars to explore the application of POA in flipped classrooms and blended teaching.

Figure 5  
Time Zone Map of Keywords in POA-Related Literature



## Conclusions and Implications

This paper conducts a visual analysis of the research on the POA in China over the past 17 years using CiteSpace. By exploring the evolution of core research themes and hotspots, it aims to inspire the future development of related domestic research. Overall, from 2008 to 2024, research on POA in China has achieved significant results, demonstrating high sensitivity to research hotspots and a close alignment with the direction of educational reform, thus expanding broad prospects for subsequent research.

Liu et al. (2024) prospect future research by focusing on the application of POA in social education and understanding it from the students' perspective. This study, through a comprehensive analysis of hot research topics and keyword clustering on POA in China from 2008 to 2024, clarifies the most common synchronous distribution in literature related to POA and suggests three main areas for future research in the field of POA in China. To begin with, based on actual teaching situations, integrating ideological, and political education into POA classrooms should be considered. As language is a vehicle of culture, ideological and political education can benefit teachers in guiding students to view various value orientations dialectically and critically understand and evaluate the culture behind the language (Wang, 2021). Following that, in classrooms applying the POA, attention should also be paid to students' emotional learning experiences (Li & Zhou, 2020; Li et al., 2022). Current research generally focuses on the terminal results of students, that is, their academic achievements, but emotional learning experiences also affect student performance. Next, the scope of research subjects should be expanded, not only focusing on college English classrooms but also paying attention to other classrooms applicable to the POA. Future research can explore the learning situations of vocational students, English majors, graduate students, doctoral students, and international students under the guidance of POA, as well as the challenges and breakthroughs faced by frontline language teachers in applying the POA.

Additionally, this study has certain limitations. Initially, the scientific nature of the literature collection method is insufficient, which affects the quantity of the collected data. Subsequently, the data in this study is sourced solely from core journals in foreign language and education categories on the CNKI, and future related research can expand data sources. It is hoped that this study can provide some reference for subsequent related research.

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