

# Exploration and Application of a Blended English Teaching Mode in Military University Based on Production-Oriented Approach

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**Abstract:** Aiming at solving the problems of outdated mode and single method of English teaching for sergeant students, as well as the separation of learning and applying in traditional English classes, this paper proposes a blended teaching mode guided by the production-oriented approach, carries out feasibility analysis, designs teaching activities according to the output-driven hypothesis, and tests the effectiveness of this teaching mode in Sergeant English class through practice. It has proved that this teaching mode can effectively stimulate students' motivation and interest in learning English, improve their English output and enhance their learning confidence, and significantly improve the teaching effectiveness.

**Keywords:** Production-oriented approach; Blended English teaching; Teaching effectiveness; Sergeant students

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## 1. Introduction

Over the years, traditional English teaching has been criticized because of the outdated teaching mode, and students have been questioned that they learn English without knowing how to use it. At present, the English study hours of sergeants in military universities have been greatly reduced, and students have always had the mindset that English has nothing to do with combat effectiveness. They think the boring English class has nothing to do with their duties and missions, and thus they lack enthusiasm and interest in it. However, in order to meet the strategic requirements of military forces, our army urgently needs a large number of talents who know military and can communicate in English. This puts forward higher requirements for the quality of English teaching at present.

In 2015, the teaching team led by Professor Wen Qiufang of Beijing Foreign Studies University creatively proposed the Production-Oriented Approach (POA) on the basis of fully analyzing the situation of Chinese students. As soon as the theory was put forward, it caused a great response in the English teaching community in China. The research and practice of POA teaching theory have increased rapidly, and the effectiveness of POA has been widely recognized. In recent years, the application scope of this teaching theory has expanded

to professional English and minor languages teaching. Aiming at solving the problems in current English teaching for sergeant students, this paper studies the English teaching practice based on POA of a sergeant class in a college. With full feasibility analysis, it explores the construction of a blended English teaching mode for sergeant students that can improve the teaching effectiveness.

## **2. Problems in English teaching for sergeant students**

### **2.1. Outdated mode and single method of English teaching**

Due to the requirements of confidentiality, the application of information methods in teaching is seriously lagging. Over the years, English teaching for sergeant students has always been following traditional mode with the teacher teaching and the student listening. Due to the network restriction in the army and the limited time for students to use mobile phones, information teaching methods such as flipped classroom, Rain Classroom and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are rarely applied in the classroom.

### **2.2. Too much content in limited teaching hours**

At present, the English course for sergeant student uses local textbook involving 16 different topics. According to the guide of the textbook, this book will be taught for one academic year. However, according to the syllabus, English is only open for one semester at present. At the same time, the students' level is limited, so a large amount of time is needed to explain vocabulary and grammar in class. Hence, there is no time for extended study of the subject.

### **2.3. Lack of participation and learning enthusiasm in class**

For most sergeant students, it has been a long time since they learned English. Due to a weak foundation, most of the students lack confidence in English learning. In traditional English class, the teacher plays the main role, and the participation of the students is very low. In addition, students generally do not realize the importance of English learning because they think the content in local textbooks has nothing to do with their duties. Thus, their motivation for English learning is weak. Over time, they will form the mindset that English is useless.

## **3. Feasibility analysis of a blended English teaching mode for sergeant students based on POA**

In recent years, with the popularization of information-based teaching methods and the needs of teaching transformation in military universities, blended teaching, micro classes, and Rain Classrooms have been gradually promoted in non-secret-related subjects such as basic courses and public courses. The teaching conditions and design have been optimized accordingly, and the teaching effectiveness has been significantly improved.

POA is a modern teaching theory proposed by Professor Wen Qiufang to overcome the English learning difficulties of Chinese students. According to the hypothesis of "output driven," the teacher carefully designs the output tasks, and the students find the gap in the output process with the output as the driving force. Based on the process of students' output, teachers carry out targeted theoretical input, build a tripod, and promote the secondary output of students. In the whole process, teachers should give students immediate and adequate assessment and inspiration, and the students can compare and self-feedback on their two output processes. At the same time, students conduct mutual assessment throughout the process, which will help them to master the knowledge and cultivate critical thinking in the discussion process. The teaching concepts of "learning-

centered,” “learning-application integrated,” and “whole-person education” put forward by this theory can solve the shortcoming of separating learning and applying in English teaching. By designing the output tasks related to students’ work and life, students’ learning enthusiasm and participation can be effectively stimulated.

## **4. A blended teaching design based on POA**

The English course for sergeant students in some military universities adopts College English (Preparatory Level) as the basic textbook. In order to form a bridge between the classroom and battlefield, teachers in this school compiled handouts as auxiliary textbooks, including modules such as secrecy, military culture, and military exercises. Taking “Keeping Secret” in the handout as an example, this paper proposes the teaching process of a blended class according to the teaching concept of POA and the process of “motivating-enabling-evaluating,” so as to provide guidelines for exploring the construction of blended English teaching mode for sergeant students.

### **4.1. Design of driving process**

The primary task of the driving process is to present authentic communication scenarios, and only such scenarios with potential communication value can drive students’ output desire <sup>[1]</sup>. The authenticity of a scene depends on four elements: topic, purpose, identity, and setting. The importance of each element in different scenarios is different, but only the four elements are authentic to the students, the scenario will have driving effect for them.

According to the theme of the unit, which is confidentiality, taking the practical life and study of students, and the characteristics of blended teaching into consideration, the driving process of this unit is designed as follows:

(1) Teacher creates authentic communication scenario

The teacher first put some news online about the death of the officers and soldiers killed by the Ukrainian army due to the illegal use of mobile phones by Russian side in the conflict before class, and then tasks are assigned. The task involves that if students are going to perform such overseas tasks, how should they conduct confidential education for the officers and soldiers to prevent leaks in the process of performing tasks, and the confidential thematic education is simulated in English. In recent years, more and more officers and soldiers can participate in military tasks overseas, and such education will be conducted before and after the tasks. Students are familiar with the topic and setting, and can have a certain sense of identity which can trigger the enthusiasm for learning. At the same time, this scene can make students realize the importance of confidentiality and strengthen the awareness of keeping secrets in the army.

(2) Students perform the first output

After assigning tasks, teachers send relevant materials through the Rain Classroom, including leakage cases, professional vocabulary, etc. Students work in groups to complete the first output and submit the output work online. Teachers and students interact in the comment area and communicate on the difficulties during the process and on the output effects. Due to limited oral skills, uncertainty about meeting process, unfamiliarity with professional expression of confidentiality, and other reasons, students will encounter certain difficulties in the output process. When students realize the gap between their existing knowledge and skills and those required to complete the output task, they will be interested in the following activities to help them to finish the task.

## 4.2. Design of enabling activities

According to the students' performance and the difficulties raised, the teacher further clarified the output tasks and objectives, and redesigned the teaching content. At the same time, the teacher carries out theoretical input around the needs of the students and provides support for the students to complete the output tasks. According to the three criteria of enabling activities, namely precision, gradualness, and diversity<sup>[2]</sup>, the task of simulating confidential education in English can be divided into several related sub-tasks, and the secondary output is completed step by step. Accordingly, the teacher can design this part into several related activities, including: describing the case, exploring the process, and simulating the scene.

(1) Activity 1: Memorizing vocabulary and describing leakage cases

In this step, the teacher asks students to summarize common leakage behaviors through military secrecy publicity materials and to describe these behaviors in English. For the professional vocabulary that is hard to understand, the teacher should explain through word formation, association, and other methods. By sentence translation and other activities, the student will further understand the usage of those words. In the process of describing the case, the teacher should give necessary guidance and feedback, such as oral expression, sentence pattern, etc. This task is the starting point of the output task, and provides the necessary language input to achieve the final output goal.

(2) Activity 2: Exploring and discussing the meeting process

According to the actual situation, the students independently explore the process of confidential thematic meeting, which is a common scene in their life and study. They can roughly tell the process of the meeting according to the actual situation. After a short discussion, some students are selected to answer, and other students are invited to supplement and improve the answer. The teacher then further guides the students to explore the focus of each process, the person that should organize it, and the roles involved. For example, the opening is usually organized by the instructor or the class monitor to clarify the purpose of the meeting. Students should play the main role during the process of reflecting and exploring the problem with the purpose of self-reflection and timely correction. Through this activity, students can understand the main procedures and roles of the scene simulation, and roles can be assigned accordingly.

(3) Activity 3: Simulating the scenario in groups

After the first two sessions, the students are more familiar with the language materials and procedures. The teacher encourages the students to work in groups, and based on the first output, simulate the scenario of the theme meeting on stage according to the role. Due to the limited class time, one group can be randomly selected for presentation, and the other groups will submit the output work in video after class. Through these activities, the teacher prompts the students to clarify all kinds of leakage behaviors and analyze the harm that may be caused by these behaviors, so as to subtly strengthen the students' awareness of confidentiality.

## 4.3. Design of assessment

For the assessment in this class, the method of teacher-student cooperative assessment (TSCA) is adopted. TSCA is a new method created for POA, which provides a new idea for the combination of assessment and teaching, and of assessment and learning<sup>[3]</sup>. In this class, teachers' comments, students' mutual assessment and self-assessment are combined to give instant and delayed assessment of students' performance. Before class, teachers conduct online assessment of students' first output according to the goal-oriented and focus-highlighted principle. In this process, teachers select typical samples for demonstration assessment, and students complete

self-assessment and mutual assessment through online interaction. In the class, teachers explain common problems and difficulties, and students complete various sub-tasks with instant assessment given by teachers. In this process, it can not only examine the output effect of students, but also consolidate and absorb knowledge in the process of teacher-student cooperation. After the simulation, the students compare the two output effects and at the same time the teacher and other classmates evaluate their performance. In this process, the voting and bullet screen of Rain Classroom can be used. After class, each group submits a video of the scene simulation, and conducts a comparative assessment of the two output tasks according to the teacher's demonstration in class. Assessment runs through all the parts before, during, and after class to achieve the effect of promoting learning and teaching by assessment.

## **5. Teaching effectiveness of blended English teaching based on POA**

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether blended English teaching based on POA can improve the teaching quality. The subjects of the study were 70 students from the same major, who were divided into two classes, and the average English level of the two classes was not significantly different. Among them, 35 people in class 1 were the experimental group using POA based blended teaching mode, and 35 people in class 2 were the control group using traditional English teaching mode.

Since POA focused on output skills, and the conventional final assessment does not involve listening and speaking tests, it is difficult to detect the differences using this approach. It is proved that there is no significant difference between the experimental class and the control class in the final exam. At the end of the course, we designed an assignment to record a video. Compared with the control class, the students of the experimental class can carry out continuous oral output around a given topic, and their expression is more fluent and accurate. At the beginning of the semester, these students generally lack confidence, dare not open their mouths, and find it difficult to carry on a continuous conversation in English. Both the teacher and the students felt that the English listening and speaking skills of the students in the experimental class improved significantly compared with the beginning of the semester, whether it was in the output tasks in the class or the speaking test at the end of the course.

Through interview, most of the students in this class hold positive attitude towards the blended English class based on POA. They think that this teaching mode breaks traditional cognition of English classroom, and feel that this kind of English learning is more interesting. At the same time, they get a sense of achievement in the process of completing the tasks, and gradually build confidence in learning English. At the same time, through the teachers' targeted design of various output tasks, the traditional drawback of separation between learning and applying has been overcome.

## **6. Conclusion**

In the practice of blended English teaching based on POA, the students have adapted to the POA's task-driven teaching model, which is facilitated by classroom activities and integrated with the whole process of assessment and teaching. Practice has shown that this teaching mode can effectively stimulate students' learning interest and motivation. Through various activities, students can complete the relevant output tasks, thus enhancing their confidence in learning English. Through assessment, students can critically view their own output effects, further strengthen theoretical input, and improve output based on feedback. After a semester of blended English teaching based on POA, the students' English output skill has improved significantly. However, it should be noted that if the teaching mode is to be applied in a wide range, the school needs to provide sufficient information teaching supply. In addition, the traditional English testing system cannot comprehensively

and objectively evaluate the effectiveness of teaching <sup>[4]</sup>, thus it is necessary to further develop a teaching assessment system matching POA.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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