

An Empirical Study on Text Summary Writing Within the Framework of the Production-Oriented Approach: A Case Study of *Integrated English II*, Unit Four

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Supported by the Sichuan Provincial Education Science Planning Project (SCJG24B048), the Talent Introduction Project of Xihua University (w2420103), the Key Research Base of Philosophy and Social Sciences of Sichuan Province — Center for Cultural Industry Studies (WHCY2024B34), and the Xihua University Translation (Provincial First-Class Major) Project (FLTRP “Teaching Star” Competition, 2025).

Received 15 September 2025; accepted 25 November 2025
Published online 26 December 2025

Abstract

In response to China’s recent foreign language education reform emphasizing language output and discourse construction, this study explores the effectiveness of the Production-Oriented Approach in teaching English text summary writing. Guided by the “motivating–enabling–assessing” pedagogical framework, *The Man in the Water* (Unit Four of *Integrated English II*) was used as the instructional material for first-year English majors, who completed a 150-word summary writing task simulating a university WeChat post. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted on students’ written summaries and teacher’s feedback, focusing on information completeness, linguistic accuracy, and discourse coherence. The results indicate that POA-based instruction significantly improved students’ ability to integrate information and express ideas in written English, though challenges remained in grammatical accuracy and cognitive depth. Teacher evaluations mainly addressed grammatical structure, logical organization, and exemplification, reflecting the POA principle of “learning and improving through assessment.” The findings confirm the applicability and pedagogical value of the POA in summary writing instruction and provide implications for optimizing task design, scaffolding, and formative assessment to enhance English writing instruction in higher education.

Key words: Production-oriented approach; EFL writing; Summary writing task; Task-based language teaching (TBLT); Formative assessment; Higher education

Feng, Z. J. (2025). An Empirical Study on Text Summary Writing Within the Framework of the Production-Oriented Approach: A Case Study of *Integrated English II*, Unit Four. *Higher Education of Social Science*, 29(2), 6-12. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/hess/article/view/13932>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/13932>

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, China’s foreign language education reform has undergone a steady shift toward improving learners’ capacity for language use rather than mere knowledge accumulation. The long-dominant input-oriented instructional model has shown clear limitations in fostering students’ communicative competence and classroom engagement. To address these issues, Wen Qiufang proposed the Production-Oriented Approach (POA), a comprehensive pedagogical theory that emphasizes “learning through output and motivating input by output.” POA places output tasks at the core of the teaching process to achieve seamless integration between language learning and practical use.

Against this theoretical backdrop, the present study adopts the text *The Man in the Water* from *Integrated English II* as a teaching unit and focuses on developing first-year English majors’ ability to write English text summaries. By designing a task embedded in an authentic communicative context, the study guides students to conduct in-depth reading, reconstruct information, and summarize texts with a clear production goal. This study therefore not only serves as an empirical examination of the POA’s effectiveness in foundational English-major courses but also explores feasible instructional pathways

to improve students' academic discourse processing and written expression abilities.

Based on this rationale, the study aims to address three research questions:

(1) Can a POA-based instructional intervention effectively enhance students' text summary writing competence?

(2) How are the three instructional stages of POA—motivating, enabling, and assessing—reflected in the implementation of summary writing instruction?

(3) What major challenges do teachers and students encounter during the production and evaluation processes, and what pedagogical improvements can be made?

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Core Concepts of the Production-Oriented Approach

The Production-Oriented Approach (POA) was formally articulated by Wen (2015) as a response to several persistent challenges in China's foreign language education, including the learning–using gap and the insufficient integration of linguistic, cultural, and intellectual development. POA is grounded in three philosophical principles—learning-centeredness, learning–application integration, and whole-person education—and operationalized through three pedagogical hypotheses: the output-driven, input-enabled, and selective-learning hypotheses. Together, these hypotheses construct a coherent mechanism in which production needs activate learning, scaffolded input promotes task completion, and selective learning enhances efficiency (Wen, 2015; Wen, 2020).

Pedagogically, POA follows a three-phase instructional cycle—motivating, enabling, and assessing—designed to stimulate authentic communicative intention, provide targeted scaffolding, and promote reflection through teacher, peer, and self-assessment. Unlike traditional product- or skill-based approaches, POA views input not as the teaching starting point but as a purposeful facilitator of output, thereby emphasizing the transformation of knowledge into usable ability. Its localized, learning-centered orientation aligns well with constructivist “learning by doing” principles and has contributed to ongoing innovation in Chinese EFL pedagogy (Qiu, 2017).

To situate POA within the broader landscape of writing pedagogy, scholars highlight its differences from other mainstream approaches. Compared with the product approach, which emphasizes textual imitation and correctness, POA foregrounds communicative purpose and learning needs. Relative to reading-to-write models, POA places stronger emphasis on output-driven task design. More importantly, research comparing POA with task-

based language teaching (TBLT) shows that POA differs in core assumptions, the sequencing of input and output, and the role of assessment. Specifically, whereas TBLT prioritizes meaning-focused communication and task completion, POA emphasizes learning–using integration, teacher-guided enabling, and the pedagogical value of delayed assessment (Wen & Bi, 2020; Deng, 2018). These distinctions underscore the unique theoretical positioning of POA as both a language pedagogy and a cognitive-development framework.

2.2 Research on POA-Based Instructional Practices

Since its proposal, POA has been widely implemented across diverse educational contexts, with research demonstrating its pedagogical effectiveness in multiple skill domains. Early studies primarily validated POA's value in promoting language output, accuracy, and task engagement. More recent research has expanded the scope of investigation.

First, application domains have broadened substantially. POA has been applied to instruction in vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Chen, Jia, & Xu, 2023), and extended to the development of higher-order academic skills such as paraphrasing, academic presentation, and research writing (Li, 2021; Liang, 2023; Wang & Wang, 2025). Beyond English, POA has been adopted in German, Chinese as a foreign language, translation training, business negotiation, and even aesthetic education, illustrating its cross-disciplinary adaptability (Liu et al., 2020; Lu, 2025; Nie et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024; Zhang & Zhang, 2025).

Second, empirical classroom research has deepened, shifting from conceptual discussion to fine-grained instructional design. Studies have examined diagnostic assessment in motivating tasks, multimodal enabling activities, and structured assessment mechanisms that integrate peer review and reflective learning (Huang, 2023; Zhang, 2020). Additionally, the integration of artificial intelligence—such as ChatGPT-mediated enabling tasks—has opened new directions for human–AI collaborative learning (Li, 2024). Parallel research highlights POA's capacity to foster critical thinking, intercultural awareness, and ideological–political literacy when tasks are designed to align language learning with value formation (Wang & Lu, 2024; Wang, 2022).

Collectively, current scholarship indicates that POA has transitioned from a theoretical construct to a widely adopted pedagogical paradigm characterized by output-driven learning, scaffolded cognitive engagement, and multilayered assessment. The existing literature, however, notes limited empirical research on the integration of POA with value-laden literary texts or on its role in supporting logical reasoning and evaluative writing—a gap the present study aims to address.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Participants

This study was conducted with a class of 26 first-year English majors from a key university in Sichuan Province, China. The participants included 19 females and 7 males. All had previously completed *Integrated English I* using the *Modern College English (Book 1)* textbook and were continuing with *Integrated English II* during the study period. The overall English proficiency of the class was relatively balanced, roughly equivalent to an intermediate CET-4 level, making them suitable participants for a summary-writing experiment emphasizing information synthesis and linguistic accuracy.

The instructional intervention lasted for two weeks (eight class hours in total, four hours per week). Teaching strictly followed the three-stage POA cycle of motivating, enabling, and assessing. All students completed the same tasks and writing assessments under identical conditions, with no absences or withdrawals. To ensure internal validity, the researcher also served as the course instructor, maintaining consistency in instructional objectives, teaching materials, and evaluation criteria across all sessions.

3.2 Teaching Content and Output Task Design

3.2.1 Teaching Material

The text *The Man in the Water* by Roger Rosenblatt, included in Unit Four of *Integrated English II*, was selected as the core instructional material. This nonfiction narrative recounts acts of heroism during a tragic airplane crash, revealing the moral strength and altruism of ordinary individuals. The text's clear narrative structure and emotional depth make it an ideal choice for cultivating students' abilities in information integration, abstraction, and thematic summarization.

3.2.2 Output Task Design

In alignment with the POA principle of "output-driven learning," the study designed an authentic and communicative English summary-writing task. Students were asked to assume the role of editors for a university WeChat account and to write a concise English summary of no more than 150 words to accompany a potential post about *The Man in the Water*.

This task was characterized by three key features. The first is authenticity. It simulated a real-world professional scenario in which students must condense and adapt content for digital media publication, enhancing situational engagement and relevance. Communicativeness comes next. The writing task had a clearly defined audience (university students and faculty) and communicative purpose (to convey the text's humanistic message), encouraging students to consider audience awareness and pragmatic appropriateness. The third one is cognitive challenge. Students were required

to extract key information, reorganize it, and express it concisely and accurately in a limited word count, demanding both linguistic precision and conceptual synthesis.

3.3 Instructional Procedures

The instructional process was designed to cultivate students' discourse construction and summarization skills through task-driven learning, scaffolded support, and multi-dimensional feedback. The three POA stages were implemented as follows.

3.3.1 Motivating Phase

The primary goal of this phase was to stimulate students' motivation and clarify learning objectives. Activities were organized around situational creation, task activation, and difficulty diagnosis.

Before class, students previewed Unit Four and watched a short video clip of a real airplane accident to build contextual understanding. During class, the instructor presented high-quality English summary samples and clearly defined the production task: "As a WeChat editor, summarize *The Man in the Water* in no more than 150 words, focusing on its theme of humanity in the face of disaster." This stage emphasized pragmatic awareness—who writes, for whom, and for what purpose—and aimed to activate students' schema for authentic communicative writing.

After drafting, students conducted self-assessment and peer review using provided rubrics, followed by initial teacher feedback. This diagnostic feedback helped students identify weaknesses in information selection, language clarity, and logical organization, laying the groundwork for targeted learning in the next stage.

3.3.2 Enabling Phase

Building upon the difficulties identified in the motivating phase, the enabling phase provided systematic scaffolding in three dimensions: text comprehension, information reorganization, and linguistic expression.

First, it is the textual analysis. Students analyzed the text's macro-structure—introduction (paras. 1–2: background and theme), body (paras. 3–6: heroic actions and altruism), and conclusion (paras. 7–8: philosophical reflection on humanity and nature). This helped them form a holistic understanding of the narrative framework.

The second is information reconstruction. Under teacher's guidance, students practiced identifying topic sentences, summarizing main ideas, and detecting key thematic expressions. For example, they analyzed paragraph one's depiction of the disaster scene and paragraph two's thematic statement—"the brightness of human spirit amid catastrophe." These exercises trained students to avoid mechanical paraphrasing and to emphasize conceptual coherence.

The last step is about language scaffolding. To address weaknesses in expression, targeted language

exercises were designed, including verb identification and completion (e.g., *cling to*, *plunge into*), synonym discrimination (*fight against* vs. *go at*), and cohesive device reinforcement. Students also practiced rewriting key sentence structures (e.g., “Man in nature. The man in the water.”) to strengthen syntactic compression and cohesion. Group collaboration on story timelines and oral summaries supported the transition from knowledge internalization to fluent written production.

3.3.3 Assessing Phase

The assessing phase aimed to develop reflective learning and self-regulation through a multi-source evaluation system. Three interrelated activities were implemented. The first one is formative assessment. Students completed self- and peer-assessment using rubrics and revised their drafts based on feedback, forming a feedback–reflection–revision cycle. The second step is diagnostic feedback. The teacher conducted focused evaluations of representative student texts, addressing issues in content coverage, grammatical accuracy, and coherence, and provided targeted in-class explanations. The third one is reflective output. After final submission, students wrote reflective journals in English to articulate their learning challenges and progress, thus enhancing metacognitive awareness and learner autonomy.

This stage not only assessed learning outcomes from multiple perspectives but also encouraged continuous improvement through reflection and revision, embodying POA’s central principle of “learning and improvement through assessment.”

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

To evaluate the impact of POA-based instruction on students’ summary-writing performance, both quantitative and qualitative methods were adopted.

3.4.1 Students’ Texts

A total of 26 final summaries (both handwritten and electronic versions) were collected. Each summary was rated according to a rubric assessing three dimensions—information completeness, linguistic accuracy, and discourse coherence—on a 0–2 scale (with fractional scores permitted).

3.4.2 Teacher’s Comments

All written teacher’s feedback on each student’s text was analyzed to identify patterns in evaluative focus. Key terms related to content, language, and organization were extracted, categorized, and counted to determine frequency distribution and diagnostic tendencies.

Cross-validation between quantitative scores and qualitative feedback enabled a comprehensive understanding of the instructional impact and provided empirical evidence for subsequent discussion and reflection.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

To comprehensively evaluate the effectiveness of the Production-Oriented Approach in English summary writing instruction, both quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted. This section first reports the results of students’ written performance based on three evaluative dimensions—information completeness, linguistic accuracy, and discourse coherence—followed by a content analysis of teacher’s comments to uncover key patterns in instructional feedback.

4.1 Quantitative Analysis of Students’ Writing Performance

Using a three-dimensional rubric (0 = not acceptable, 1 = adequate, 2 = proficient; fractional scores allowed), all 26 student summaries were evaluated in terms of information coverage, linguistic accuracy, and discourse coherence. As shown in Table 1, the mean scores ranged from 1.38 to 1.54, with standard deviations between 0.36 and 0.41, indicating moderate dispersion across students’ performance. The relatively larger SD values in linguistic accuracy and discourse coherence suggest wider variability in these two dimensions.

Table 1
Summary-Writing Performance across Three Dimensions (N = 26)

Evaluation Dimension	Mean Score	SD	Percentage of Proficient Students
Information completeness	1.54	0.36	61.5%
Linguistic accuracy	1.42	0.41	50.0%
Discourse coherence	1.38	0.40	46.2%

(1) Information Completeness — Mean Score: 1.54, SD = 0.36

A majority of students (61.5%) demonstrated a reasonably complete understanding of the text by identifying the protagonist’s main actions and summarizing key events (e.g., repeatedly offering safety equipment and showing self-sacrifice). The comparatively lower SD indicates more consistent performance in this dimension. However, 30.8% of students displayed partial omissions, and 7.7% showed misunderstanding of details, suggesting weaker skills in distinguishing key information from minor details.

(2) Linguistic Accuracy — Mean Score: 1.42, SD = 0.41

Half of the students (50.0%) produced grammatically acceptable summaries, but errors such as subject–verb disagreement, tense inconsistency, and incomplete structures persisted in many texts. The relatively high SD (0.41) indicates noticeable variation among learners, with two students (7.7%) exhibiting serious grammatical problems that impeded meaning. These results suggest that linguistic accuracy remains the weakest of the three dimensions despite overall improvement after instruction.

(3) Discourse Coherence — Mean Score: 1.38, SD = 0.40

Twelve students (46.2%) produced summaries with generally logical flow and appropriate cohesive devices. Another 46.2% displayed occasional breakdowns in coherence, and two students (7.7%) produced fragmented or poorly connected summaries. The moderate SD (0.40) reflects varied levels of discourse control under the 150-word constraint. This dimension shows the most difficulty for learners, particularly in transitioning between ideas.

Overall, students performed strongest in information completeness, followed by linguistic accuracy, with coherence being the most challenging. The SD values across dimensions indicate moderate variability, highlighting that while POA-based instruction improved students' ability to identify and summarize key ideas, many still struggled with grammatical precision and maintaining coherent discourse—an indication of the “transfer gap” commonly observed in production-oriented learning.

4.2 Qualitative Analysis of Teacher's Feedback

To identify instructional priorities and common learner difficulties, all 26 sets of teacher comments were subjected to keyword extraction and frequency analysis. Table 2 summarizes the distribution of major feedback categories.

Table 2
Frequency Distribution of Teacher Feedback Categories (N = 26)

Feedback Category	Frequency	Percentage of Students Involved
Grammatical errors	11	42.3%
Poor coherence	10	38.5%
Lack of supporting details	9	34.6%
Need for exemplification	8	30.8%
Content accuracy	8	30.8%
Thematic elevation / reflection	4	15.4%

Note: Frequencies indicate the number of times each keyword appeared across all teacher comments. Percentages represent the proportion of students whose writing reflected each issue.

4.2.1 Emphasis on linguistic form and accuracy

Grammatical errors constituted the most frequent feedback category (42.3%), indicating that accurate linguistic form remained a major challenge for many students. Typical problems included subject–verb disagreement, tense inconsistency, and incomplete sentence structures. For example:

“The man give his life jacket to others.” (S11 – subject–verb disagreement)

“He was try to save people.” (S07 – incorrect verb phrase)

These errors suggest that although students could extract key information from the text, some lacked the linguistic control necessary to transform comprehension

into accurate written production. Such findings echo the POA assumption that successful output requires both conceptual understanding and sufficient linguistic resources.

4.2.2 Focus on content completeness and rhetorical organization

Comments relating to coherence (38.5%), insufficient supporting details (34.6%), and lack of exemplification (30.8%) reveal that many students struggled with organizing ideas and constructing logically developed summaries. Common issues included abrupt transitions and missing narrative links. For instance:

“He helped others. He is brave. Many people were saved.” (S14 – fragmented statements lacking cohesion)

Although the meaning is understandable, the writing lacks logical progression and suppresses the causal connection between events. Teacher feedback often encouraged the use of cohesive devices (e.g., *however*, *therefore*, *as a result*) and more explicit detail selection to strengthen narrative flow.

4.2.3 Limited thematic depth and humanistic interpretation

Only 15.4% of students received comments related to thematic elevation, indicating that higher-order interpretive ability was less common. Many students summarized events accurately but did not articulate the deeper humanistic significance of heroism:

“He did this because he wanted to save others.” (S14 – accurate but overly simplistic explanation)

While the sentence itself is grammatically correct, it reflects minimal engagement with the text's moral or philosophical dimension. Teacher comments therefore encouraged students to move beyond literal recounting and incorporate brief reflections on humanity, altruism, or moral courage—an expectation consistent with POA's whole-person education rationale.

4.2.4 Integrated interpretation

Overall, teacher feedback demonstrates a clear pattern: learners' primary challenges lay in grammatical accuracy and coherence, followed by rhetorical elaboration and thematic interpretation. These findings complement the quantitative results reported in Section 4.1 and provide further evidence that POA-based instruction effectively guided learners toward task completion but that additional scaffolding in linguistic precision and deeper value-oriented interpretation remains necessary.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

Building on the integrated quantitative and qualitative findings, this study confirms the effectiveness of the

Production-Oriented Approach (POA) in enhancing first-year English majors' ability to produce concise and coherent text summaries. POA-based instruction successfully motivated students' language output, strengthened their discourse awareness, and improved their ability to transform reading comprehension into written production.

Nevertheless, several limitations were identified. During the motivating phase, some students showed insufficient cognitive engagement with the task context; in the enabling phase, weaknesses in verb usage, syntactic compression, and cohesion revealed the need for more systematic scaffolding; and in the assessing phase, evaluation remained largely teacher-centered, constraining learners' autonomy and reflective growth. Moreover, students' limited engagement with the moral and humanistic dimensions of the text suggests that the integration of language learning and value cultivation within the POA framework requires further refinement.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

Based on these findings, several pedagogical implications can be drawn to optimize POA-based writing instruction in tertiary English education.

First, teachers should **enhance task authenticity and cognitive engagement** in the motivating phase by designing cognitively demanding and contextually meaningful tasks that clarify the communicative purpose, audience, and discourse expectations of summary writing. Structured guiding questions, scenario-based prompts, and multimodal materials can help activate learners' prior knowledge and promote meaningful engagement.

Second, instruction should **refine scaffolding and linguistic support** in the enabling phase by providing tiered scaffolds aligned with learners' linguistic proficiency and cognitive development. Activities such as lexical chunk extraction, logical connector training, syntactic compression practice, and model-based imitation can systematically enhance discourse organization and linguistic precision.

Finally, to **develop a transparent and participatory assessment system**, assessment should integrate teacher, peer, and self-evaluation through clear rubrics and reflective tools. Task checklists, peer-review templates, and self-revision reports can make assessment more formative and process-oriented, encouraging continuous improvement and critical reflection.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that help contextualize the findings. First, the researcher also served as the course instructor, which—though common in classroom-based action research—may have introduced bias in instructional delivery and evaluation despite efforts at data triangulation. Second, the sample was small and drawn from a single intact

class, limiting the generalizability of the results. Third, the two-week intervention provides only short-term evidence; whether the observed gains can be sustained or transferred requires longitudinal research. Finally, although a rubric was used to assess student writing, interrater reliability was not calculated. Incorporating multiple raters and reliability measures in future studies would strengthen assessment rigor. These limitations do not diminish the study's value; rather, they point to productive directions for future research on POA-based writing instruction.

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