

# A Case Study of College English Teaching in Reading & Writing Based on “Output-Driven, Input-Enabled Hypothesis”

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**Abstract.** The “Output-Driven, Input-Enabled Hypothesis” emphasizes not only the driving force of output, but also values output as the goal of language learning. This paper aims to discuss the teaching experiment in College English Reading & Writing conducted by the researcher under the guidance of the “Output-Driven, Input-Enabled Hypothesis”. The purpose is to let the students be as active as possible in the class under the guidance and assistance of the teacher, along with the preparation of students themselves through enough and effective input before class, increasing students’ language output, stimulating students to take the initiative to conduct metalinguistic reflection and enhancing the effectiveness of input. The experiment results show that teaching of reading and writing under the guidance of “Output-Driven, Input-Enabled Hypothesis” is more effective and students’ writing skill is improving significantly.

**Keywords:** Output-Driven; Input-Enabled hypothesis; College English reading and Writing; Classroom teaching

## 1. Introduction

The cultivation mode of college English talents should be open. We should change our teaching philosophy and methods by further understanding the current foreign language teaching ideology, and shift from teacher-centered teaching mode that only imparts language knowledge and skills to student-centered teaching mode that focuses on cultivating language application and autonomous learning abilities. At the same time, it is necessary to fully and widely utilize modern educational technology, actively encourage personalized teaching and learning, strive to create an autonomous learning environment, and stimulate learning enthusiasm.

The current reform of college English teaching is in full swing, actively exploring models, textbooks and methods. However, it focused on input in the early stage [1], and in the later period, it turned to output. There are few examples of combining output and input, especially in college English reading and writing classrooms. This article attempts to use the “Output-Driven, Input-Enabled Hypothesis” as a theoretical guidance. Based on the predesigned teaching activities in the teaching practice of college English reading and writing, the researcher explores how to effectively apply this theoretical model to guide reading and writing course teaching, stimulate students’ learning interest, mobilize the internal factors of learning, achieve the goal of learner-centered concept, and improve the effectiveness of input and output.

## 2. Output-Driven, Input-Enabled Hypothesis

**2.1 Output-Driven Hypothesis.** Wen Qiufang proposed the “Output Driven Hypothesis” in 2008 [2]. This hypothesis differs from Swain’s Output Hypothesis [3] in both the learning population and learning environment: Output Driven Hypothesis is only applicable to intermediate and high-level learners and to formal classroom language teaching and learning. “Output Driven Hypothesis” [4] includes three sub hypotheses: Firstly, from psycho-linguistic perspective, this hypothesis suggests that output has a greater driving force on the development of foreign language abilities than input. The motivation for foreign language learning comes from output. The chances of learners’ acquiring input are relatively low if the input is not driven by output, regardless of the quality of input.

Secondly, involving the needs of workplace, this hypothesis proposes that cultivating students' abilities in speaking, writing and translating is more important than in listening and reading, especially their interpretation and translation skills. The development of abilities in speaking, writing and translating is not only a teaching goal, but also a driving force for the development of listening and reading skills. Thirdly, from the perspective of foreign language teaching, this hypothesis suggests that the output-oriented comprehensive teaching method is more effective than the single skill training method, and it is more in line with the needs of students' future employment.

**2.2 Output-Driven, Input-Enabled Hypothesis.** In March 2014, Professor Wen Qiufang revised the previous "Output Driven Hypothesis" to the "Output-Driven, Input-Enabled Hypothesis" [5]. In the new hypothesis, output is recognized as both the driving force and the goal of language acquisition; Input is a means of facilitating the completion of current output tasks rather than the foundation for cultivating students' understanding ability and increasing their receptive knowledge for future output. In other words, students are well aware that in order to successfully complete the output task assigned by the teacher, they need to carefully study the input materials and obtain necessary assistance from them. Teachers and students can selectively process inputs based on the needs of output tasks. Any input that is not related to the output tasks or not important can be shelved. In this way, teachers and students can focus on learning and understanding the language forms and related encyclopedia knowledge required for output tasks within the limited classroom teaching time [6].

### 3. The Experiment of Teaching College English Reading and Writing

The core of the "Output-Driven, Input-Enabled Hypothesis" lies in the output. This hypothesis can not only activate students' existing passive knowledge, but also enable them to discover that their knowledge is insufficient to complete existing given tasks, so as to promote their active learning of new knowledge [7]. Students' learning initiative and state will be improved through the interconnection between output and input, and the learning effect will be further improved.

**3.1 The Experiment Subjects.** The subjects are non English major freshmen who entered the university in the year of 2021 in Xi'an. To reduce the influence of variables such as teachers, two classes assigned to the researcher were randomly selected, and the experiment lasts for one semester.

**3.2 The Experiment Objectives.** College English is a compulsory course, in which reading and writing aims to organically integrate reading and writing. That is, to effectively pair input with output, then to improve students' language ability. Therefore, the experiment involves language objectives and communicative ability objectives. The language objectives are to attach importance to the input. Each unit provides some exercises related to the corresponding language understanding and vocabulary expressions on the same theme. The communicative ability objectives are on the output, which are the abilities to express oneself effectively on the basis of previous input.

**3.3 The Experiment Design and Procedure.** For the teacher, the first step is to determine teaching objectives and output objectives specifically, including the objectives for this semester and each unit. The principle is primarily based on culture and expression (output). The output tasks are then designed according to the specific teaching objectives, including discussions, classroom presentations, oral reports and writing. The second step is to assign tasks and implement hierarchical management [8]: The teacher assigns the assignment to the class representative 2 weeks in advance, and then to dormitory or small group respectively. The assignment includes individual tasks and group tasks. Group tasks require cooperation. During this period, students digest, analyze, discuss, and prepare for tasks. When encountering problems, the group member can consult each other or their classmates and teachers. They exchange their opinions through various methods such as face-to-face communication during breaks, QQ, email, etc.. The third step is the task implementation stage. After repeated discussions, each group or individual will present their part in the class. During the presentation, there will be questions from speakers or from classmates, as well

as teachers' questions, supplements and feedback, etc. [9]. Then assessment and unit summary will be made.

In the first class, students are given an overview of various aspects of university life and learning, allowing them to experience the differences between high school and university learning for a month. Then they are required to select one organizer and one reporter in terms of dormitory. They can interview their roommates in English after class or prepare for self-introduction, and to report or present the next class. Due to being freshmen, the first and second units belong to the transition period, mainly consisting of teacher demonstrations, which are conducted in the form of teacher explanations, student listening, or partial student participation [10]. Additionally, PowerPoint for each section of the classroom are created and distributed to students for both review and learning imitation.

The textbook is *New Horizon College English-Reading and Writing (3rd edition)* published by Foreign Language Education and Research Press. The following is the whole procedure of the experiment, using Unit 1 Book 1 as an example. The author specifically discusses how to use the "Output-Driven, Input-Enabled Hypothesis" to design tasks and conduct teaching practices.

Table 1. Teaching Practice in Reading & Writing Unit 1 Book 1

| Items                         | Contents   | Teaching Activities                        | Student Activities                           | Teacher's Role                       |
|-------------------------------|--|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| Extra Text Reading            | Speech from President of Yale in Sep. 2021<br>Speech from President of XATU in Sep. 2021 | Reading                                    | Taking notes & Discussion                    | Guidance/<br>Partially participation |
| Text Reading                  | Toward a brighter future for all   | Raising questions/Disco<br>course analysis | Answering the questions                      | Assistance & Assessment              |
| Words & Phrases Learning      | 6-8 important ones   | Consultation & Presentation                | Feedback & Asking questions                  | Assessment /Supplementation          |
| Sentence & Structure Learning | Long & difficult sentences (including sentence patterns)                                 | Discussion & Analysis                      | Interaction (listen, asking questions, etc.) | Assessment /Supplementation          |
| Expansion                     | Writing structures/patterns (the combination of reading & writing)                       | Lecture, Discussion & Presentation         | Discussion, Consultation & Making sentences  | Supplementation                      |
| Gist                          | Text summary within 100 words (words learned in the text)                                | Sharing                                    | Listening & Learning from each other         | Assessment                           |
| Writing                       | Paragraph writing  | Writing of topic sentence & outline        | Writing practice                             | Grading & Assessment                 |
| Unit Summary                  | U1   | Discussion                                 | Group discussion                             | Assessment & Summary                 |

**3.4 The Experiment Instruments.** The instruments for this experiment mainly include submitted essays and interviews. A total of 5 writing tasks are arranged in the first semester. According to *the Structure Analysis and Writing* part of the textbooks in Section A in each unit, paragraph writing will be the main focus, and the key examination points will be vocabulary application, topic sentences, good sentence structures and sometimes figurative language. In the later period of the semester, 4 students will be selected for interviews to learn about the assistance and effective application of input for output.

**3.5 Results and Analysis.** The writing tasks are designed according to the text reading, text-based learning and understanding, and each time there will be specific lexical and syntactic requirements, as well as requirements for topic sentences and structures.

Through essay correction, it was found that the application of morphology and syntax in the first

two essays was slightly immature, mainly consisting of simple sentences, active sentences, etc. The use of words was manifested as hypernym or mixing, with obvious traces of imitation and mechanical application of structures. Secondly, students with better foundation may have an innovative mindset, but due to insufficient input or incomplete activation of the existing knowledge, their writing is sometimes good and sometimes bad. Students with weaker foundation are basically reducing the errors in grammar and sentence structure. Thirdly, at the end of the semester, the overall progress is more significant. Students who learn well can not only proficiently use vocabulary and syntax, but also creatively use the expressions learned in the text. There are some excellent sentence patterns, passive sentences, and occasionally some students may also use figurative language. Finally, regardless of the students' English level, students as a whole can effectively integrate input into their existing knowledge, consciously construct their knowledge system, and be able to express it through output in appropriate places, although this awareness is just emerging and has individual differences.

As the purpose of the interview is to understand the correlation between input and output, it was conducted in week 12. The interviewees include both male and female, outstanding students and the ones who need improvement.

It was found that all four students interviewed expressed that task-based input was very effective. On the one hand, it can help them restore and activate their existing knowledge system, which makes their knowledge full of vitality, active in their brains, and be able to emerge timely during output. On the other hand, when it comes to communication, the knowledge associates with each other and can provide hints so that they can use them purposefully and properly. Secondly, students with good language foundation have better input-enabled effects. Their knowledge systems are self-contained and increasingly powerful, which makes them more efficient in output; whereas students whose basic language skills need to be improved put forward the feedback: Input helps them establish and consolidate basic knowledge, enriches their vocabulary, and makes their writing less difficult than before. With corresponding knowledge assistance, they have ability to output meaningful content. They also provided feedback that output and input interact with and promote each other, enhancing their interest in learning and confidence in participating in communicative activities.

The findings from writing assignments and interview indicate that the "Output-Driven, Input-Enabled Hypothesis" not only stimulates students' learning interest and thirst for knowledge, but also improves their comprehensive language application ability, thus effectively improving teaching effectiveness. The construction of multiple identities between teachers and students in this new model has made them both deeply realize the importance of "empathy thinking". "The hard work of teachers and the difficulties of students" have made them both understand how the other is feeling, so a more harmonious teacher-student relationship and a more harmonious classroom atmosphere are created. At the same time, by observing students' presentations or lectures, the teacher has also gained a better understanding of their problems in teaching. For students, they saw the weaknesses in their English knowledge and speaking abilities, and also discover their potential and creativity. Driven by output, teachers and students participate, collaborate, and evaluate together, effectively utilizing input to cultivate students' autonomous learning and exploratory abilities. Teaching efficiency has been improved, and students' communication skills are significantly bettered.

The experiment has also brought some implications to college English teaching. According to the teaching objectives, in order to achieve the desired effect of the "Output-Driven, Input-Enabled Hypothesis", efforts need to be made from the following aspects, especially in engineering colleges. Firstly, teachers should design output tasks purposefully and encourage students to try to output. Secondly, teachers can assist in inputting information as needed and motivate students to process and absorb it. Thirdly, students should cooperate and evaluate each other to prepare for output, and teachers should assist in guiding active output. Finally, students' achievements are presented and communicated with each other, and teachers' evaluations, feedback, and reflection are provided.

In the whole process, the role of the teacher as a designer and a guider is particularly important.

When designing output tasks, it is important to pay attention to the correlation between input materials and output tasks. The better the alignment between the two, the higher the enthusiasm of the students and the better the effectiveness of absorbing new knowledge. In addition, it is necessary to guide students in the concept of green evaluation, in order to truly encourage students to actively participate in output tasks, recognize themselves, and establish confidence.

#### 4. Conclusions

The experiment has to some extent addressed the widespread imbalance in the proportion of class hours between input and output in universities, and increased students' opportunities to output. More importantly, it can stimulate students to actively engage in meta language reflection, engage in active and systematic input under the guidance of teachers, and greatly enhance their enthusiasm for self-taught. Though classroom reporting or writing is only a kind of simple output, it can promote students to enter a gradual, continuous process of discovering problems, reflecting on problems, and solving problems through a large amount of input, thereby cultivating their learning awareness. So the effect of "Output-Driven" will radiate to all aspects of English learning.

It is true that it is a long-term process to verify whether a teaching method or learning method is effective for a teaching group. Due to the short period of one semester and the small number of participating students, some issues cannot be fully concluded, and some practices still need further implementation and verification. In the following practical process, we will focus on: ① exploration of large class teaching; ② Teaching design and student management. I hope to play a positive role in cultivating students' autonomous learning ability, improving their language ability, expression ability, and communication ability.

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