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Artificial intelligence-assisted training of college students' English cultural narrative competence: a classroom exploration

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Abstract: Contemporary college English teaching balances the instrumental and humanistic nature of language, undertaking the mission of cultural education and international communication. Fostering students' cultural narrative competence to tell Chinese stories in English has become a key direction for curriculum reform. In current cultural narrative practices, college students commonly struggle with stiff expressions, superficial cultural interpretations and inadequate adaptation to cross-cultural contexts. Restricted by large-class teaching and limited class hours, conventional classrooms can hardly deliver regular and personalized narrative training. The application of artificial intelligence offers feasible solutions to such teaching bottlenecks. Based on real college English teaching practices, this paper sorts out existing challenges in cultural narrative instruction, analyzes the strengths of AI-integrated teaching, explores classroom implementation pathways under human-AI collaboration, and constructs a multi-dimensional formative assessment framework. It aims to improve students' cross-cultural narrative literacy and fulfill the moral education goals of college English courses.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; college English; cultural narrative competence; classroom teaching; cultural communication

1 Introduction

Amid the continuous advancement of digital education, the connotation of foreign language teaching in higher education keeps expanding. Guidelines for College English Teaching (2020 Edition) stipulates that teaching shall enhance students' cultural confidence and cross-cultural communicative competence, and guide them to disseminate fine traditional Chinese culture to international audiences [1]. English cultural narrative competence refers to learners' comprehensive ability to interpret the connotations of Chinese culture and contemporary Chinese development stories clearly and appropriately for overseas audiences by integrating English linguistic knowledge, cultural awareness and cross-cultural thinking. It constitutes one of the essential competencies for university students under the new liberal arts framework [2].

In many universities, college English classes still prioritize the instruction of linguistic knowledge. Cultural content is mostly inserted as supplementary materials for textbook reading, lacking independent and coherent specialized training in narrative practices. Quite a number of students possess basic English reading and writing skills, yet when attempting to narrate Chinese stories, they often produce loosely organized materials and discourses inconsistent with overseas audiences' habits [3]. In large-class settings, teachers can hardly provide detailed feedback on every student's narrative

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drafts or oral presentations. After-class practices lack ongoing guidance, forming a noticeable disconnect between students' cultural reception and English output of cultural content. The popularization of AI teaching tools helps bridge this teaching gap and shifts cultural narrative instruction from knowledge input to practical language output [4].

2 Practical dilemmas in cultivating college students' English cultural narrative competence

2.1 Lack of systematic design for cultural narrative teaching

Within the current college English curriculum, cultural teaching is mostly confined to text interpretation without forming thematic and progressive modules for cultural narrative training. Classroom instruction centers on vocabulary, syntax and text comprehension, with little targeted training on English narrative frameworks, discourse strategies and cross-cultural communicative skills for Chinese-themed content [5]. Teachers tend to introduce cultural knowledge rather than engage students in active English narrative creation. Students receive fragmented cultural information and fail to build sound narrative logic. When telling Chinese stories, they merely list cultural symbols instead of interpreting the spiritual essence behind cultural phenomena.

2.2 Multiple deficiencies in students' cross-cultural narrative expression

Classroom observations reveal three major weaknesses in students' cultural narratives. First, their language carries traces of Chinese thinking patterns, with limited lexical and syntactic choices and unnatural English expressions. Second, narratives remain superficial: students mostly describe superficial features of traditional culture without interpreting cultural values from contemporary perspectives. Third, Students demonstrate weak cross-cultural awareness. They apply native narrative logic without considering cognitive differences between Chinese and foreign audiences, which may trigger cultural misunderstanding and undermine communicative effects [6]. Many students can recite ready-made English introductions yet cannot adjust narrative content flexibly according to communicative scenarios.

2.3 Insufficient personalized guidance in large classrooms

College English courses generally adopt large-group teaching. Within limited class time, teachers cannot attend to each learner's individual problems. After students finish narrative writing or oral demonstrations, teachers can only comment on common weaknesses instead of addressing logical flaws and expressive deviations for each person. After-class exercises suffer from delayed feedback. Students submit written drafts or oral recordings and wait for batch grading, which lengthens the response cycle. Such a model fails to form a closed loop of "practice-feedback-revision", slowing the improvement of narrative competence [7].

2.4 Assessment prioritizes linguistic outcomes

Evaluation methods mainly rely on final written examinations, attendance and written assignments, focusing on linguistic accuracy while neglecting assessment of narrative content, cultural interpretation and communicative effects. Formative assessment mechanisms remain incomplete. Pre-class material collection, in-class narrative drills and after-class extended creation are rarely incorporated into grading. Misaligned assessment priorities cause students to focus more on grammatical correctness rather than narrative appeal and cross-cultural appropriateness, hindering sustainable development of cultural narrative competence.

3 Advantages of artificial intelligence in empowering cultural narrative instruction

3.1 Integrating diversified resources to build thematic cultural material banks

AI tools can quickly collect bilingual resources covering folk customs, intangible cultural heritage and contemporary social development. Teachers may select materials matching learners' proficiency and establish hierarchical resource banks for Chinese cultural narratives. Supported by intelligent platforms, teaching resources are no longer confined to textbooks. Teachers can assign reading materials and case texts of varying difficulty by theme, helping students accumulate narrative

materials and learn English expression patterns on different topics, turning scattered cultural information into systematic learning resources.

3.2 Simulating communicative contexts for immersive narrative practice

With AI-based context simulation, teachers can recreate cross-cultural communicative scenarios such as international salons, cultural sharing sessions and short-video presentations. Unlike conventional oral reports in class, contextualized tasks motivate students to move beyond rote memorization and reflect on audience awareness, communicative purposes and expressive strategies. Students conduct repeated narrative drills in simulated environments to gradually adapt to international communicative contexts and strengthen their capacity for on-site expression and adaptive narration.

3.3 Delivering instant learning feedback to fill gaps in personalized guidance

Artificial intelligence can conduct multi-dimensional analysis of students' written narratives and oral recordings, identifying grammatical errors, improper collocations, logical gaps and biased cultural expressions, and offering preliminary revision suggestions. Intelligent platforms aggregate class-wide learning data to identify common weaknesses, supporting teachers to adjust teaching priorities. Teachers can then save time spent on basic linguistic correction and devote more energy to high-level instruction, including interpretation of cultural connotations, optimization of narrative logic and cross-cultural communicative strategies.

3.4 Supporting full learning tracking to improve multi-dimensional assessment frameworks

AI records learning trajectories including pre-class preparation, in-class tasks and after-class exercises to facilitate formative assessment. Assessment dimensions expand beyond linguistic accuracy to narrative logic, cultural depth, audience awareness and creative expression. Combining automated quantitative evaluation, teachers' qualitative comments and peer review, the system can assess students' comprehensive cultural narrative competence more holistically and exert diagnostic and motivational functions of assessment.

4 Classroom implementation paths for AI-assisted cultural narrative competence development

This research carried out one-semester teaching practice in college English courses. Two parallel classes adopted human-AI collaborative teaching with teaching activities designed across pre-class, in-class and after-class stages.

4.1 Hierarchical curriculum design to construct progressive narrative training

Instruction was divided into three stages: basic knowledge accumulation, thematic training and innovative narration. At the basic stage, the intelligent platform assigned thematic vocabulary, short sentences and simple samples about Chinese culture to help students master standard English expressions of cultural terms and remove fundamental linguistic barriers. At the thematic stage, short narrative writing and oral storytelling were arranged around topics such as traditional festivals, intangible heritage, ecological civilization and rural revitalization, focusing on training the construction of narrative structures. At the innovation stage, students selected Chinese story topics based on personal observations and created English speeches or short-video scripts, considering ways to adapt narratives for overseas audiences [8].

4.2 Building human-AI collaborative classroom covering pre-class, in-class and after-class stages

Before class, teachers released preview tasks on the intelligent platform, distributed cultural reading materials and narrative samples. Subsequently, students collected materials independently and drafted narrative outlines. Meanwhile, the platform recorded preview performance for teachers to grasp learners' baseline proficiency in advance.

During class, student-centered narrative practices served as the core. AI was used to create cross-cultural communicative scenarios for group presentations, theme speeches and role-play performances. Intelligent tools displayed common problems in real time, while teachers explained narrative strategies and organized discussions on typical cases.

Teachers maintained the leading role and guided students to analyze cultural expressions and avoid cross-cultural misinterpretation.

After class, students finalized their narrative drafts or oral recordings. AI generated preliminary suggestions on linguistic revision for students to revise autonomously. Teachers selected representative assignments for in-depth comments and guided students to reflect on narrative content and communicative effects, forming a complete teaching loop.

4.3 Specialized training in cross-cultural awareness and narrative discourse

Teaching activities aimed to correct students' habit of literal translation in narration. To this end, AI was adopted to compare differences between Chinese and foreign discourse patterns, helping students understand how narratives varied across cultural contexts. Furthermore, students learned to interpret Chinese culture in language easily understood by overseas audiences and avoid rigid preaching. Meanwhile, with AI-assisted analysis of high-quality English narrative samples, learners could examine narrative entry points, logical layers and emotional strategies. Accordingly, diversified practical tasks were arranged. Students were then encouraged to start with personal micro-stories to tell China's development with relatable perspectives and enhance narrative affinity.

4.4 Establishing a three-dimensional assessment mechanism for formative evaluation

A three-dimensional assessment system was constructed: automated evaluation, teacher assessment and peer review. The intelligent platform quantified linguistic performance; teachers evaluated the depth of cultural interpretation, cross-cultural effects and originality of narratives; peer review was then organized within groups, where students read each other's works and exchanged revision advice. Personal learning portfolios were built to store all drafts and revision records, tracking dynamic competence growth. Assessment results counted towards regular grades, encouraging consistent practice rather than one-off final examinations.

5 Reflections on teaching practice

The practice above shows that AI enriches classroom training modes and alleviates the shortage of personalized feedback in large-class teaching. Students become more active in cultural narrative practices. Learners can independently complete coherent English works on Chinese themes with relatively fluent expressions. Nevertheless, boundaries of technology application must be maintained, with education as the priority and technology as an auxiliary tool.

The practice reveals that some students rely excessively on AI-generated texts and copy outputs directly, weakening independent thinking and original expression. To address this problem, teaching design emphasizes process management. Students are required to submit initial drafts and revised versions together with writing notes. AI is positioned as a tool for material reference and language polishing rather than direct composition. Meanwhile, teachers need continuous improvement of digital literacy to identify cultural biases in AI-generated content, design human-AI tasks rationally and prevent superficial use of technology.

Future teaching may further diversify narrative assignments and add multi-modal practices such as short videos and English posters. It integrates linguistic competence, cultural understanding and international communicative awareness. The ultimate teaching goal lies not merely in improving students' English proficiency, but helping them grasp the core of Chinese culture, build cultural confidence and develop real capacity to narrate Chinese stories for global audiences.

6 Conclusion

Cultivating college students' English cultural narrative competence constitutes a vital component of curriculum-based ideological and political education in college English. The integration of artificial intelligence and classroom teaching offers viable solutions to existing difficulties in cultural output instruction. By hierarchically arranging teaching content, constructing human-AI classroom workflows, strengthening cross-cultural narrative training and optimizing multi-

dimensional formative assessment, college English instruction can shift from linguistic knowledge transmission to comprehensive cultural literacy cultivation. As frontline educators, teachers shall apply digital tools rationally, adhere to the fundamental purpose of education, and keep refining teaching design. Students will be guided to convey authentic and vivid Chinese voices through English, which nurtures new talents equipped with cross-cultural communicative capabilities.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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