



The Practice and Exploration of Digital Storytelling in College English Teaching

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Abstract. Telling Chinese stories holds significant importance in shaping the national image and facilitating the world's comprehension of China. Therefore, nurturing students' digital narrative capabilities constitutes a novel domain worthy of exploration within college English courses. Based on the traits of digital narratives, a digital narrative teaching framework is established from three aspects: narrative structure, narrative language, and narrative evaluation. Ideological-political education is subtly incorporated, exerting an imperceptible and beneficial influence. Students convey real Chinese stories about themselves and those around them in English via short-video platforms and directly engage in authentic foreign exchange practices. Consequently, this urges students to enhance their application skills of the English language in the unity of knowledge and action, concurrently elevating their critical thinking ability and cultural self-confidence, and fostering a sense of patriotism and a global mindset.

Keywords: digital narratives; China's story; ideological-political education.

1 Introduction

In October 2022, the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China emphasized the need to "enhance the dissemination and influence of Chinese civilization...accelerate the construction of a Chinese narrative system, and tell China's stories well to present a credible, lovable and respectable image of China" (Xi Jinping, 2022)¹. The College English Teaching Guidelines (2020 Edition)² clearly require the integration of cross-cultural communication skills into college English teaching, highlighting the combination of knowledge impartation, skill cultivation and value guidance. In an environment where everyone is a storyteller of China, college students who speak foreign languages, due to their strong linguistic advantages, should undertake the historical mission and responsibility of telling China's stories well (Sun Shuguang, 2021)³.

Digital storytelling has been regarded as a project-based, technology-assisted, student-centered teaching strategy (Robin, 2008)⁴. In teaching practice, digital storytelling often revolves around a specific theme, using multimedia means such as text, pictures, animation, music or narration to present the story. These stories generally last 3-10 minutes and are presented in the form of short videos (Shelton et al., 2017)⁵. Foreign

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language digital storytelling refers to real personal stories are told cross-culturally in a foreign language (Yang Hua, 2021)⁶. In college English teaching, the application of digital storytelling not only improves their foreign language application skills in practice but also fosters a sense of patriotism and a global mindset.

2 Constructing a Teaching Framework for Foreign Language Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling refers to the narrative method of telling personal life stories through short videos, while foreign language digital storytelling involves using a foreign language to narrate personal real-life stories in a cross-cultural context (Yang Hua, 2021). Gérard Genette (1990)⁷ divided narrative into story and discourse. The interaction between the story and discourse largely determines the meaning of the narrative work (Shen Dan et al., 2005)⁸. It encompasses not only vocabulary, grammar and syntactic structures but also the realization of discourse functions, temporality and causality (Aksu-Koç & Aktan-Erciyas, 2018)⁹.

Yang Hua (2021) proposed a path for shaping college students' values through foreign language digital storytelling. On the first level of the emotional continuum, college students perceive the international community's and foreign people's lack of knowledge about China, showing great interest in this. On the second level, college students sign up for activities and actively search for real and touching events in their lives, writing stories in English, demonstrating sustained attention and interest in telling personal real-life stories to foreign audiences. On the third level, during the story-writing process, students use themes and evaluative language to assign value significance to certain plots and behaviors in the stories. On the fourth level, through the development of the story plot and the establishment of conflicts, different values are contrasted and compared, forming an initial value system by the end of the story. In the process of writing and presenting narrative conflicts, students compare different values and generalize emotions, achieving the internalization of values.

Based on the above research, this paper aims to establish a teaching framework for digital storytelling in foreign languages from narrative structure, narrative discourse, and narrative evaluation aspects, with the goal of empowering students with the essential skills for crafting compelling digital narratives in foreign languages. College students' foreign language digital storytelling follows the basic structure of narrative, which is to recount events with temporal sequence characteristics while providing explicit or implicit value evaluations.

3 The Practice of Integrating Foreign Language Digital Storytelling into Ideological-Political Education

3.1 Teaching Design

Based on the above digital storytelling teaching frameworks, this study aims to cultivate students' English digital storytelling abilities. The teaching unit is guided by POA and utilizes smart technologies, conducting blended teaching that combines online self-study with classroom instruction through platforms. The teaching process is shown in figure 1.

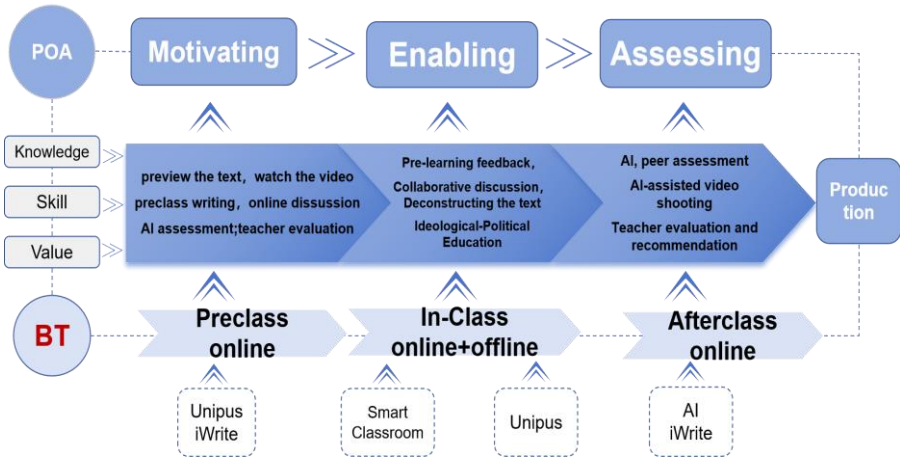


Fig. 1. The teaching concept

3.2 Teaching Subjects

The author's teaching subjects are 227 first-year students from eight classes in a railway transit university who are non-English majors. As members of Generation Z, they are keen on using digital tools in their learning. They are less competent in cross-cultural comprehension, communication, and cooperation. Based on the college entrance examination and school-based English examination, their English proficiency corresponds to CSE levels 4-5. They have higher confidence in reading and listening, while their confidence in speaking and writing is intermediate. A pre-teaching survey showed that 92% of students had never attempted to tell the stories of Chinese role models in English, indicating that they face significant challenges in narrating Chinese stories.

3.3 Teaching Implementation

Digital storytelling instruction requires students to develop a storytelling mindset, promoting positive values, inspiring emotions, and resonating with the audience through their stories. Each stage of the teaching process is designed with targeted activities and

tasks centered around the requirements of digital storytelling skills. Students complete digital storytelling projects through group collaboration.

This paper adopts a project-oriented approach (POA)¹⁰ to facilitate effective classroom interaction. The teaching procedures can be divided into three teaching stages: Enabling, Motivating and Assessing. During the entire teaching process, teachers act as scaffolds, guiding students to complete the tasks and produce outputs. At the same time, the morality education has been integrated into the teaching process. The teaching procedures based on POA is as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The teaching process

| Activities and Tasks | |
|----------------------|--|
| <u>Motivating</u> | |
| Pre-class | Scenario: Make a 5-minute short video to introduce a Chinese role model. Trial Output: Write an essay-the scripts for the short video (online platform) |
| <u>Enabling</u> | |
| Pre-class | Preview : ① watch the video; ② learn the new words and expressions. (online platform) |
| In-class | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Assessing</u> the first draft with the students. • Text A: A strategic scientist-Huang Danian <i>How to write a profile to introduce a person?</i> • <i>Preparation stages</i> • Establish a theme • Gather information • Identify milestones (Principles: theme-oriented; impact-focused) • Organize a timeline Time+Milestones+Qualities (TMQ structure) • <i>Writing:</i> • Structure: lead-body-closure • Language-polishing: Figurative language-metaphor, simile, personification. Collocations News; quotes; anecdotes • Moral education Personal dream vs. Chinese Dream |
| After-class | Assignments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise the first draft • Draw a mind-map of the structure of the text. • Complete peer-assessment. |

3.4 Teaching Outcomes and Evaluation

After completing this unit, we received a total of 227 profile writings and 42 short videos about the "Most Beautiful Railway Worker" published on public video platforms.

99% of the students reported having a deeper understanding of Chinese role models. 92% of the students felt they had mastered the steps of creating short videos to tell stories, and 95% found the digital storytelling to be very meaningful to language study. However, 7% of the students found it challenging to use voice intonation, gestures, and body posture to complement their storytelling. We collected 203 pieces of effective feedback from the students. All students used multiple modalities and adopted the TMQ model to tell their stories in diverse ways.

Post-class tests also showed that students' vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension levels improved to some extent, indicating that the practice of English digital storytelling helped students use language in story contexts, enhancing their vocabulary usage and logical thinking abilities. Students were able to choose different modality combinations to complete the digital storytelling tasks. Sharing short videos on new media platforms broke through the traditional single-reading and one-way reception mode of paper texts, making the stories interactive, dynamic, and experiential. This indicates that students have initially developed an awareness of English digital storytelling and possess a certain level of digital storytelling competence.

4 Conclusion

Telling Chinese stories plays an important role in shaping the national image and facilitating the world's comprehension of China. The cultivation of English digital storytelling skills is a beneficial attempt to integrate learning and application. In college English teaching, the application of digital storytelling not only improves their foreign language application skills in practice but also fosters a sense of patriotism and a global mindset. College students' digital narrative in foreign languages is a new phenomenon in Chinese foreign language education, with research still in its early stages, awaiting further theoretical and empirical exploration to uncover its value in foreign language education and in fostering students' moral character. This study aims to construct a teaching framework for digital narrative in foreign languages and integrate it into curriculum-based ideological-political education to further explore the potential of using foreign language digital storytelling in foreign languages to provide insights for ideological-political education.

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