

Cultivating Military Cadets' Digital Storytelling for China's Narratives

Yitian Zhou *, Lanjie Li, Yuxuan Zhang

Xi'an, Research Institute of Hi-Tech, Xi'an Shaanxi, 710025, China

* Corresponding author: Yitian Zhou

Abstract. This study enhances military cadets' English digital storytelling in the digital-intelligent era through a three-dimensional framework: developing military-themed narrative resources, implementing an AI-enhanced dual-loop classroom model, and establishing a mixed-methods assessment system. Addressing gaps in theory-practice integration and military-specific pedagogy, the research cultivates cultural decoding, technical storytelling, and defense discourse competencies. Results demonstrate efficacy in enabling cadets to accurately convey China's narratives internationally, offering a replicable paradigm for global defense education innovation.

Keywords: Digital Storytelling Competency; Cross-cultural Communication; AI-enhanced Pedagogy.

1. Terminology

The Digital-Intelligent Era refers to a stage of social development driven primarily by technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence. It is characterized by hyper-connectivity of information, deep integration of intelligent technologies, and the rapid proliferation of digitalization and smart technologies. Technological advancements during this period provide diverse avenues for international communication of "telling China's stories well," thereby enhancing the vitality and creativity of Chinese cultural outreach.

Under the Digital-Intelligent Era, the English digital storytelling competency of military academy cadets denotes a comprehensive ability to appropriately use foreign languages—empowered by digital-intelligent technologies beyond traditional teaching models—and leverage multimedia digital tools such as short videos to achieve cross-cultural dissemination of "China's stories." Based on Yang Hua's (2021) definition of English digital storytelling at Beijing Foreign Studies University, this competency differs from written narratives and is not purely oral[9]; rather, it resembles prepared speeches delivered to audiences within a shared virtual community.

Accordingly, the core dimensions of military cadets' English digital storytelling competency encompass the following three aspects:

- (1) Cultural Decoding Capacity: The ability to accurately grasp the spiritual essence of Chinese stories through semantic analysis and cross-cultural comparison.
- (2) Technical Storytelling Proficiency: The skill to digitally present narratives using multimedia platforms such as short videos and novel material processing tools.
- (3) Defense Discourse Competence: Cultivation of this competency centers on the value-oriented goal of "telling China's stories well," emphasizing precision in China's narrative system and quantifiable improvement in international communication efficacy under digital empowerment.

2. Background and Significance

Current digital-intelligent technologies are driving a paradigm shift in the international communication landscape, where narrative competence has become a core element of soft power in great-power competition. *China's National Defense in the New Era* (White Paper) explicitly calls for "innovating the international communication discourse system," while the Ministry of Education's *Guidelines on Strengthening Ideological and Political Work in Higher Education Under New Circumstances* emphasizes "integrating traditional strengths of ideological education with

information technology through new media." As future guardians of national security, military academy cadets urgently require systematic training in English narrative competency. This will enable them to accurately convey China's perspectives via digital storytelling in contexts such as international military exchanges and multilateral security dialogues. This research responds to national strategic imperatives by exploring how digital-intelligent technologies can enhance cross-cultural communication capabilities among defense professionals.

Amid accelerated international talent cultivation in military institutions, cadets face competency gaps—manifested as inaccuracies in cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese narratives and underutilization of multimedia narrative tools. Traditional foreign language teaching, focused on linguistic skills through conventional methods, falls short in preparing cadets to construct China's discourse system in intelligent media environments. This project addresses these gaps by developing a military-themed Chinese story repository, designing an output-oriented instructional framework for English digital storytelling, and conducting empirical research on pedagogical outcomes. Ultimately, it aims to cultivate cadets' core competency in communicating China's voice across cultural contexts.

3. Literature Review

In recent years, research on English digital storytelling competency has expanded from traditional linguistics to interdisciplinary domains. Early international scholarship focused on the relationship between narrative structure and cross-cultural communication. Hull & Nelson (2005) employed social semiotics theory and empirical cases to demonstrate how multimodality—through synergistic integration of symbolic systems (language, imagery, sound)—enhances meaning-making and cross-cultural narrative impact[1]. However, their work primarily cataloged technical tools and applications without systematic instructional design. Lambert (2013) advanced the concept of Digital Storytelling, defining it as crafting meaningful narratives by blending personal stories, multimedia (images/audio/video), and emotional resonance[2]. Yet this research lacked quantitative evaluation metrics, relying heavily on subjective feedback. With the proliferation of digital-intelligent technologies, Robin (2016) advocated integrating AI and big data into narrative pedagogy[3] but prioritized technical logic over discipline-specific teaching objectives and cultural communication needs.

Domestic research has deepened within the "telling China's stories well" paradigm. As Wen Yingxi (2022) emphasized, from a college English teaching perspective, how this narrative approach enables comprehensive global understanding of China and strengthens its cultural image[7]. Yi Bin (2019) framed English informatized narrative teaching as "deep integration of IT and foreign language education" to foster learner autonomy[10] but omitted practical pathways for digital-intelligent tools in competency development. Recent studies explore technology-empowered narrative pedagogy innovations. Guo Xingrong (2023) applied VR to maritime English classrooms, constructing immersive scenarios for spatiotemporal learning experiences[4] but neglected outcome-driven instructional workflows and efficacy validation. Liu Jia (2023) leveraged VR for intangible cultural heritage dissemination, creating virtual platforms for cross-cultural communication where learners customize roles/scenarios[5]. Xi Rui (2023) deconstructed multimodal political discourse using a self-built Community of Shared Future for Mankind corpus[8] yet remained confined to static resource curation without dynamic, tiered assessment frameworks.

The current research in this field reveals three persistent challenges: a disconnect persists between theoretical frameworks and practical applications, with the synergistic mechanisms linking technology, culture, and education in the digital-intelligent era remaining inadequately explored; resource development and assessment systems exhibit fragmentation, lacking integrated approaches that bridge repository construction, classroom implementation, and outcome evaluation; while domestic studies acknowledge the strategic importance of effectively communicating China's narratives, empirical research specifically addressing the cultivation of military cadets' English

digital storytelling competency—particularly regarding the integration of digital narrative techniques and cross-cultural translation skills—remains notably scarce.

This study's three-dimensional framework (resource integration → classroom implementation → outcome assessment) is specifically designed to address these interconnected limitations, advancing pedagogical innovation for global dissemination of military-themed Chinese narratives.

4. Cross-Cultural Digital Storytelling Teaching Resources

For decades, college foreign language education in China has prioritized general English courses centered on Anglo-American language and culture, resulting in insufficient coverage of China's defense discourse system and military case studies. To enhance military academy cadets' interdisciplinary and cross-cultural communication competencies, it is imperative to systematically guide them in studying China's defense history, military strategic thought, international security frameworks, defense technology advancements, military diplomatic practices. This approach deepens their understanding of the path to building a world-class military with Chinese characteristics and cultivates their core ability to *accurately articulate China's defense narratives and engage in international security dialogues* in foreign languages.

Guided by the *Education Power Strategy Outline and the Curriculum Ideology Construction Guidelines for Higher Education*—which emphasize "innovating ideological carriers in foreign language courses"—this research addresses prevalent issues in military English narrative pedagogy. Investigations reveal that existing teaching materials suffer from fragmented presentation of Chinese military culture and inadequate cultural transadaptation, hindering effective cross-cultural education. To resolve these challenges, we construct a tripartite historical-cultural-defense framework based on multimodal discourse analysis theory, enhancing material coherence, cultural relevance, and pedagogical efficacy.

Our multidisciplinary team (applied linguistics, U.S. cultural studies, translation theory/practice) conducted targeted curation of authoritative sources, including: Strategic treatises (*On War, The Art of War*); Historical documentaries (*Resisting U.S. Aggression and Aiding Korea, Sino-Japanese War of 1894*); Hero biographies (*Yue Fei, Zheng Chenggong's Recovery of Taiwan*) and Peace philosophy (e.g., *Analects*' "harmony as virtue" concept).

Materials were indexed using a three-dimensional taxonomy which includes historical significance, cultural symbol recognizability, and universal value compatibility, ensuring balance in authenticity, representativeness, and ideological orientation.

5. Output-Oriented Implementation Framework

Guided by the *Curriculum Ideology Construction Guidelines for Higher Education* and the *College English Teaching Guide*, this study addresses chronic issues in traditional English instruction—such as ambiguous narrative objectives, formulaic procedures, and perfunctory assessments—by constructing a closed-loop pedagogical model ("Objective Anchoring → Process Intervention → Outcome Feedback") based on the Production-Oriented Approach (POA) framework^[6]. The competency goal of "telling China's stories well" is deconstructed into three interconnected dimensions: cultural decoding competence, narrative logic structuring, and cross-cultural expression, thereby informing an inverse instructional design pathway.

Central to this framework is a dual-loop classroom structure. The inner loop progresses systematically through three developmental stages: initial deconstruction of cultural imagery, followed by modeling of narrative frameworks, culminating in scenario-based task simulations. Concurrently, the outer loop employs AI-driven real-time speech transcription, peer assessment analytics, and error pattern clustering to dynamically generate personalized skill enhancement strategies. This integrated approach forms a cohesive instructional continuum, beginning with pre-class intelligent diagnostics for tailored objective setting, advancing through in-class scaffolded

training with AI-guided refinement, and concluding with post-class reflective narrative production evaluated through multidimensional assessment protocols.

6. Multidimensional Assessment System

This study systematically evaluates the efficacy of cross-cultural narrative teaching resources and output-oriented English storytelling classrooms in enhancing military academy cadets' capacity to tell China's stories well, employing multidimensional assessment and dynamic feedback mechanisms. Appropriate course sections were selected as samples through classroom observations, with data triangulation achieved via pre-/post-test comparisons, corpus analysis of narrative artifacts, classroom observations, and reflective journals. Quantitatively, improvements were measured through longitudinal evaluation of narrative works; qualitatively, thematic coding of cadets' reflective journals identified developmental patterns. Synthesizing these findings, the research ultimately establishes a trinity paradigm—*resource development*, *instructional implementation*, and *outcome validation*—for cultivating digital storytelling competency in military English pedagogy, offering a replicable framework for cultivating military talents adept at international communication in the new era.

7. Conclusion

This study presents a comprehensive framework for integrating AI technologies into ideological and political education within college English curricula, establishing a teacher-led human-machine collaborative teaching model. By leveraging AI capabilities in thematic alignment, resource curation, and case generation, the proposed approach significantly enhances the efficiency and depth of curriculum preparation while maintaining ideological fidelity. The three-phase workflow—pre-class resource development, in-class adaptive delivery, and post-class intelligent evaluation—demonstrates how AI augments pedagogical practices without displacing educators' critical role in ethical oversight and instructional design. Key innovations include AI-driven multimodal resource aggregation, context-aware case prototyping, and real-time feedback systems that collectively foster immersive learning experiences.

However, the framework's effectiveness relies on balanced human-AI synergy, requiring educators to master new digital competencies and guard against over-reliance on algorithmic outputs. Limitations include the need for broader empirical validation across diverse institutional contexts and potential challenges in scaling AI infrastructure. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts on students' ideological development, refine AI ethical governance mechanisms, and investigate cross-cultural adaptability. This work contributes to the growing discourse on educational digitalization by offering a replicable model that harmonizes technological empowerment with value-based education, paving the way for intelligent, ethically grounded pedagogical innovation in higher education.

References

- [1] Hull, G. A., & Nelson, M. E. (2005). Locating the semiotic power of multimodality. *Written Communication*, 22(2), 224–261.
- [2] Lambert, J. (2013). *Digital storytelling: Capturing lives, creating community*. Routledge.
- [3] Robin, B. R. (2016). The power of digital storytelling to support teaching and learning. *Digital Education Review*, 30, 17–29.
- [4] GUO Xingrong. (2023). Empowering maritime English teaching through VR technology: A blended online-offline instructional model. *Foreign Language Research*, 1, 97–104.
- [5] LIU Jia. (2023). Digital empowerment in constructing a multimodal corpus platform for international communication of intangible cultural heritage. *Shanghai Journal of Translators*, 6, 34–39.

- [6] WEN Qiufang. (2020). Production-Oriented Approach: Theoretical innovation in China's foreign language education. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- [7] WEN Yingxi. (2022). Theoretical logic and pedagogical practice of "telling China's stories well" in college English teaching. *Social Scientist*, 8, 148–154.
- [8] XI Rui. (2023). Multimodal visual narrative construction of "a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind" based on corpus analysis. *Journal of Shanghai Jiao Tong University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, 31(12), 96–112.
- [9] YANG Hua. (2021). Theoretical and practical research on college students' digital narrative competence in foreign languages: A new exploration of curriculum-based ideological and political education. *Foreign Language Education in China*, 4(4), 10–17, 91.
- [10] YI Bin. (2019). Constructing an ICT-based narrative teaching strategy for cultivating autonomous learning competence in English education. *Heilongjiang Researches on Higher Education*, 6, 148–151.