

Research on AI Empowerment in Integrating Local Cultural Stories into Foreign Language Teaching

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Abstract

This study focuses on the practical exploration of using AI to enhance the integration of local cultural stories into foreign language teaching. By reviewing current research and identifying existing challenges, it proposes practical pathways for AI-assisted understanding and narration of local cultural stories. Using Unit 5 of College English I as a case study, the paper elaborates on how human-AI collaboration can enhance students' ability to express local culture. It also discusses reflective teaching practices and strategies for maintaining cultural subjectivity, aiming to provide innovative ideas and practical references for effectively incorporating local stories into foreign language instruction.

Keywords

Artificial Intelligence; Local Cultural Stories; Foreign Language Teaching; Human AI Interaction

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization and digital integration, foreign language teaching bears the dual responsibility of language skill acquisition and cultural communication. Local cultural stories, as a crystallization of regional characteristics and national wisdom, are rich in cultural connotations and charm. Integrating these stories into language instruction helps develop students' intercultural communication skills and cultural confidence (Chang, 2021). Recently, AI technology has developed rapidly, injecting new vitality into language teaching. With its intelligence, personalization, and interactivity, AI offers diverse approaches to discovering, presenting, and narrating local culture. This supports students' deeper understanding and expression of cultural elements and promotes the development of language instruction. However, how to effectively leverage AI to empower the telling of local cultural stories remains a question requiring deeper exploration.

2. Research Status and Problems of AI Empowerment in Integrating Local Cultural Stories into Foreign Language Teaching

2.1. Current Research

Research on AI in foreign language education is growing rapidly. Scholars have discussed its application in language learning tool development, personalized learning paths, and intelligent tutoring. AI companions can answer learners' questions in real-time and recommend personalized resources based on learning trajectories (Dong & Kim, 2024). It also supports pronunciation training and speaking through technologies like speech recognition, synthesis, and chatbots (Kuddus, 2022).

In terms of integrating local cultural stories, international research on storytelling in education dates back over two decades (Jiao, 2023). Barrett (2005) emphasized the role of storytelling in deep learning, suggesting its application in narrating national stories. Kim (2014) found that digital storytelling enhances oral proficiency and learner autonomy.

In China, Sun Youzhong (2016) advocated embedding intercultural education across the foreign language curriculum to improve students' storytelling abilities. Chang (2021) proposed strengthening textbook construction and incorporating ideological-political elements into evaluations. Ma Jie (2023) revealed challenges such as superficial cultural understanding and insufficient intercultural competence, suggesting interdisciplinary approaches and curriculum-led strategies for improvement.

2.2. Existing Problems

First, AI applications are not deep or broad enough. In most language classrooms, AI is limited to tools for translation or basic information retrieval, without leveraging its full capabilities in data analysis, scenario simulation, or intelligent interaction—thus failing to present cultural stories vividly and in depth (Ma, 2023).

Second, cultural misunderstandings and misrepresentations occur. AI-generated content may oversimplify or stereotype local cultures, misleading learners. For instance, complex traditions might be reduced to clichés (Dodigovic, 2005). Additionally, learners may become overly dependent on AI, neglecting personal cultural reflection and expression. Teachers sometimes lack clarity on their role in AI-assisted environments, and fail to guide students in critically using AI, impeding effective integration into instruction.

3. Practical Pathways for AI Empowerment in Integrating Local Cultural Stories

3.1. AI-Assisted Understanding of Local Cultural Stories

3.1.1. Identifying and Analyzing Implicit Cultural Elements

Culture consists of explicit and implicit dimensions, and the latter often determines

the core of cultural differences. Understanding these is crucial to intercultural competence. In College English I Unit 5: Bridge Cultural Gaps, the DMIS model (Denial – Defense – Minimization – Acceptance – Adaptation – Integration) helps explore cultural sensitivity. AI can assist in identifying implicit elements, such as how greetings vary across cultures, revealing norms of etiquette and social hierarchy.

3.1.2. Cross-Cultural Mapping and Comparison

Cultural mapping is vital to intercultural awareness. Large language models can systematize how cultural concepts appear across different contexts. For example, during a discussion on "integration," AI could compare Chinese and Western views—highlighting how Chinese culture emphasizes “harmony in diversity,” whereas Western cultures stress individual expression and mutual influence.

3.2. AI-Assisted Narration of Local Cultural Stories

3.2.1. Human-AI Collaboration Pathways

(1) Speaking: Dialogue with AI to Narrate Local Stories

Unit 5’s theme of intercultural communication allows students to practice cultural expression with AI. Mimicking the analysis of *Bride and Prejudice*, AI might ask: “How does the Dragon Boat Festival in your hometown reflect Chinese values?” Students could discuss Qu Yuan’s patriotism and teamwork, linking it to the “drive” component of cultural intelligence. If students oversimplify, saying “Zongzi is just food,” AI might suggest deeper meaning—like commemorating ancestors—prompting them to add personal experiences, e.g., “elders explaining customs during races,” naturally blending ideological and cultural themes.

(2) Listening: Immersive AI Interaction Enhancing Cultural Perception

Using cross-cultural listening materials from Unit 5 (like film festivals or Silk Road exhibits), AI can generate immersive audio experiences. For instance, a bilingual tour of a Pu’er tea exhibit could include environmental sounds from tea transport. Students would retell the “Taoist philosophy in tea cake shapes,” practicing cultural interpretation. AI can also simulate tasks like analyzing the rhythm of a Shanxi drum performance to infer its cultural meaning and comparing it to Indian greeting customs, thereby building a listening-understanding-expression loop.

3.2.2. Sample Human-AI Dialogue: The Terracotta Army

Then let's use the topic of "the Terracotta Army" from Unit 5 to elaborate on human-AI interaction in different scenarios.

(1) In the Cultural Element Mining stage of the dialogue, AI first asks, “What cultural values does the Terracotta Army reflect in ancient China?” The student responds, “The Terracotta Army shows the power of the emperor.” Then, AI adds, “Yes, but also the ancient Chinese concept of 'life after death' and the craftsmanship ethics. For example, each warrior has unique facial features—what

does this detail imply?” After that, the student revises, “It reflects the respect for individuality even in imperial tomb architecture.” This process demonstrates the progress of human-AI collaboration in exploring the cultural elements of the Terracotta Army.

(2) In the Logical Structuring stage, AI prompts, “Please outline a 2-minute speech about the Terracotta Army for international tourists.” The student’s initial outline is simple: “- Introduction: The Terracotta Army is a famous attraction. - Body: It was built by Qin Shi Huang. - Conclusion: Welcome to visit.” Then AI suggests, “Use the DMIS model from Unit 5—start by acknowledging tourists’ possible assumption that it’s ‘just an army’, then move to explaining the cultural meaning (minimization stage), and end with inviting them to appreciate its artistic value (acceptance stage).” Drawing on this advice, the student restructured the framework: “Compare the Terracotta Army to Egyptian pyramids, highlight the unique Chinese craftsmanship philosophy.” This exchange reflects how human-AI collaboration refines the logical structure of the speech outline.

(3) In the Cross-Cultural Deepening stage, AI asks, “How does the design of the Terracotta Army differ from ancient Greek sculptures?” The student responds, “Greek sculptures are more realistic.” AI then provides data support: “Actually, the Terracotta Army has higher uniformity in body structure, while Greek sculptures emphasize individual muscle dynamics. This reflects different aesthetic orientations—Chinese collectivism vs. Western individualism.” Building on this, the student elaborates: “The Terracotta Army’s standardized production also shows the Qin Dynasty’s emphasis on order, which is similar to the ‘harmony’ concept in Confucian culture.” This interaction illustrates how human-AI collaboration deepens the understanding of cross-cultural differences in artistic design.

(4) In the Detail Polishing stage, AI prompts, “Correct the cultural errors in this sentence: ‘The Terracotta Army was discovered in 1974, and all warriors are the same size.’” The student revises it as: “The Terracotta Army was discovered in 1974, and warriors have different sizes according to their roles.” AI then confirms the revision and adds cultural context: “Yes, officers are taller than soldiers, which reflects the ancient Chinese hierarchical system. You can add: ‘This is similar to the ‘rituals and music’ system in the Zhou Dynasty, where status was shown through physical space.’” This process showcases how human-AI collaboration polishes details while enriching cultural connotations.

(5) In the Scenario Simulation stage, AI instructs, “Act as a tour guide, respond to a tourist’s question: ‘Why didn’t the Terracotta Army have colorful paintings?’” The student replies, “Because the paint faded over time.” AI then demonstrates a professional response: “Actually, the warriors were originally painted vividly—pigments like cinnabar and azurite were used. But due to oxidation after excavation, most colors faded within 15 seconds. This highlights the challenge of cultural heritage protection, which is a global issue.” The student proceeds to practice by add-

ing, “Uses the CQ 'action' component from Unit 5 to add: 'Now, Chinese archaeologists use special technologies to preserve colors, showing our responsibility for cultural inheritance.'” This interaction reflects how human-AI collaboration enhances the professionalism and depth of responses in simulated scenarios.

These scenarios outline a progressive multi-round collaboration model where AI not only supplements knowledge but also scaffolds logic, inspires thinking, and polishes expression. With topics like the Terracotta Army, AI guides students through five stages—from basic facts to value interpretation, and from static knowledge to dynamic thinking. This student-centered, task-driven approach enhances both linguistic and cultural expression.

4. Reflective Teaching and Maintaining Cultural Subjectivity

4.1. Addressing AI Limitations

Teachers must understand AI’s limitations and verify AI-generated content. Textbooks emphasize avoiding cultural stereotypes, so teachers should critically assess AI outputs for oversimplifications. For example, describing the Terracotta Army merely as “funerary objects” misses deeper ideas like dualism, hierarchy, and craftsmanship. Teachers should provide corrections and encourage student discussions to cultivate critical thinking and accurate understanding.

4.2. Fostering Student Subjectivity

Using the “Cultural Intelligence (CQ)” framework, teachers can assign tasks like “AI content critique.” For instance, after using AI to learn about the Terracotta Army, students from Shaanxi can share personal stories or local guide narratives. They often highlight emotional connections, traditions, and pride—contrasting AI’s emphasis on archaeological data. Such tasks deepen students’ cultural expression and ensure their identity isn’t overshadowed by technology.

5. Conclusion

AI presents both opportunities and challenges for integrating local cultural stories into foreign language education. Through AI-assisted understanding and storytelling, a collaborative teaching model can enhance students’ abilities to interpret and express local culture. However, teachers must remain vigilant to AI’s limitations and prioritize cultural subjectivity. Future research should explore deeper AI integration, develop practical applications, and cultivate foreign language learners who are both interculturally competent and culturally confident.

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