



Enhancing Intercultural Competence through Integrated English Teaching with Ethnic Narratives for Chinese Vocational Students in a Digital Context

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Abstract: In view of the increasingly intertwined and international situation, it is particularly important to cultivate students' cross-cultural skills. The study primarily focused on innovative strategies to cultivate these capabilities in the Chinese vocational context. Within vocational training, learners will receive a high level of ESL support, including a curriculum enriched with ethnic stories, and digital resources and platforms.

Stories of all ethnic groups, their narratives, traditions, and the manifestations of their cultures, have an important role to play in the realm of English language education; teachers can and should use these stories to deepen the students' understanding of cultural issues, thus promoting a diverse context to nurture the feelings of empathy, respect, and the ability to communicate across cultures. Digital tools such as multimedia tools, e-platforms, and storytelling tools can provide students with authentic opportunities to interact with ethnic narratives to respond to their cultural exploration and communication in the digital environment.

Results of case studies conducted at Chinese vocational universities illustrate the effective teaching methodologies, including project-based learning, integration of competitive tasks with class work, and cooperation that integrates students into groups to study various cultural perspectives presented in ethnic stories. The present study also explores implications for pedagogical practices, advocating improved teacher preparation in cross-cultural communication and digital literacy, as well as cross-disciplinary collaborations among language teachers and cultural studies scholars, and language and cultural policies for including and accommodating diverse languages and cultures in education contexts.

Educators, through the incorporation of ethnic stories into English language instruction and digital assistance, enable vocational learners to excel in a globalized environment where skills in intercultural communication are becoming crucial.

Keywords: Intercultural competence, English language teaching, ethnic narratives, digital tools, vocational education, cultural awareness

1. Introduction and the research questions

It is now widely recognized that with the increase in global interconnectivity and integration, the highly nuanced and valued skill of efficiently communicating across cultural disparities is essential. This study explores the role of English as an international language, employing ethnic narratives to develop intercultural skills of Chinese vocational learners in an online learning environment.

“Intercultural competence” refers to the ability to understand, communicate with, and relate effectively to people from different cultures. These include capacities such as empathetic understanding, appreciation of cultural diversity, and the ability to modify communication styles within varied cultural contexts. The necessity for Chinese vocational students to develop intercultural competencies through English language education is of relevance since having proficiency in English and intercultural communication is crucial for career opportunities and international ties.

This research primarily seeks to explore the role of incorporating ethnic stories into English language instruction in fostering intercultural skills among vocational learners. This study will concentrate on multiple crucial aspects inquiries:

(1) What role do ethnic stories play in deepening students' comprehension of cultural variety and cross-cultural communication abilities within the realm of English language learning?



(2) How can one efficiently incorporate ethnic stories into the instruction of the English language at Chinese vocational colleges?

(3) What role do digital resources and platforms play in incorporating ethnic stories into English language learning, and how do they influence students' educational experiences and results?

The purpose of this research is to investigate the theoretical insights and real-life effects of incorporating interracial narratives into English language education by addressing these research inquiries. The findings are planned to direct pedagogic methods, intersect into, and expand upon broader conversations engaging in the broader conversation of enhancing intercultural capabilities through imaginative, professional and educational environments.

3. Literature Review

The researcher examines recent literature regarding the integration of ethnic narratives in English teaching, and the promotion of intercultural competence among vocational students in China. Topics were divided into: intercultural competence, utilizing ethnic narratives in educational contexts, the role of digital tools in language learning, and how to integrate cultural elements into English teaching.

3.1 Intercultural Competence in Language Education

Numerous research has registered the importance of developing cross-cultural competence in language learning, highlighting the continuing significance of researching intercultural communication. Klyukanov (2020) underscores the practicality of studying intercultural communication, which plays an important role in successfully communicating with people of different backgrounds^[18]. Klyukanov (2020) envisions the intercultural communication competencies as three significant components: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral, all of which underlie the primary "imperatives" according to Klyukanov (2020) for better intercultural communication. de Hei et al. (2020) proposed that intercultural competence may be fostered through reciprocal learning processes often occurring in higher education contexts globally^[9]. The results provided evidence for a significant relationship between improved intercultural competence and greater perceived learning benefits from collaboration. The author discusses the implications of the results for the international education context, highlighting the significance of the results for designing group learning in international higher education contexts. Amara (2019) stresses the importance of language learning to improve students' cross cultural competencies, especially in the context of European international education communities^[4]. For example, Zhang's study (2020) involved developing intercultural competencies of Chinese students through authentic online video, which resulted in students' increased intercultural competence, affective measures including heightened sensitivity, empathy, and tolerance^[30]. Namaziandost et al. (2022) highlighted that in an EFL context where direct exposure to the foreign culture is unlikely, that intercultural competence development can still occur through culture-simulated audio-visual authentic resources, paired with scaffolded discussions^[19]. Schat et al. (2021) also provided the development and validation of an instrument that can be used to evaluate intercultural competence in foreign language literature education, which underlines the need to evaluate and support students' intercultural competence^[24]. Collectively, these research works highlight the significance of cross-cultural skill in teaching languages, demonstrating diverse methods and tactics to improve students' communication competence across different cultural settings.

3.2 Role of Ethnic Narratives in Education

Ethnic narratives in education have received much attention across various contexts. Researchers, such as Joseph et al. (2021), conducted a comprehensive review of the racial biases in healthcare education^[15]. They highlighted the dynamics, sources of bias, and potential solutions and noted the importance of understanding and addressing racial bias in educational environments. Additionally, Anna De Fina (2021) is a supporter of a narrative-as-practice approach, focusing on the elements of mobility, connectivity, the anchoring of time and space, and believes that this approach promotes a deeper understanding of the integration of narratives into social practices^[8]. De Fina's analysis of the most recent research on this narrative turn, the limitations of the existing research, and an appendage calling for the need to further investigate the nature of narrative genres and their involvement.

3.3 Digital Tools and Platforms in Language Learning

Over recent years, the utilization of digital technologies and platforms in language learning has been proven to be a common occurrence. Rwodzi et al. (2020) examined how social media is creatively applied in teaching ESL in local schools, focusing on how teachers use social media in language teaching^[23]. Nenakhova (2021) looked at remote language acquisition during COVID-19 focusing on the experience of learners in NRU South Ural State University^[20]. Rezak et al. (2021) emphasized the use of digital technologies in ongoing language education^[10]. Furthermore, Zhang (2021) proposed an SPOC educational framework for language course at

tertiary level of education in tertiary institutions targeting improvement and enhancement of language acquisition through deep learning approaches^[29]. The pandemic had profound effects on language education, prompting a switch to online learning methods. Aysu et al. (2021) pointed out the shifts in language teaching and learning due to the pandemic^[7]. Alawajee (2021) looked at how COVID-19 has affected students' learning of sign language in an educator preparation program in Saudi Arabia, focusing on the switch to e-learning platforms for sign language teaching^[1]. Khairunnisa et al. (2022) found that students in SMAN Kapuas have struggles with accurate speaking while in class, but have a grasp of digital English literacy that is beyond the classroom setting^[16]. This means that if a variety of ways of speaking and tools that are using technology beyond the classroom for speaking are present then their ability to speak will increase. Alakrash and Abdul Razak (2021) found from their study that digital technologies are used a lot in the ESL classroom for learning general and vocabulary but not reading^[10]. High digital literacies among both students and educators show the potential for policies to maximize technology to support marginalized language learners. Equally expedient is the claim by Iskandar et al. (2022) that whilst digital educational resources are being used in English instruction, the dominant focus is on "teaching English skills through these sources and not teaching the digital literacy skills" for engaging with these resources^[14]. It offers a solution of a five-step process to integrate digital literacy into English courses, with an emphasis on revealing digital literacy in course outcomes and evaluating it as a cross-curricular skill. Ermolova et al. (2021) dealt with the task of selecting universal technologies to teach language under the changing educational models, giving attention to the developing independent nature of language learners and digital leverages in language instruction. In the age of smart and digital learning, bespoke and adjustable learning environments have emerged as potent ways to engage students and simplify learning^[11]. Kem (2022) highlighted the idea of utilizing personalized learning solutions and adaptive learning technologies to cater for individual students and their unique learning needs^[17]. Overall, the literature reviewed underscores the growing importance of digital tools and platforms in language learning, highlighting their potential to enhance teaching and learning experiences in diverse educational settings.

3.4 Pedagogical Strategies for Integrating Cultural Content

The embedding of cultural content in teaching methods has been the focus of recent academic research in education. If we look at Ayu (2020) as she highlights the importance of integrating cultural components in EFL textbooks to promote students' language development^[5]. Ayu (2020) emphasizes the significance of cultural literacy in teaching EFL and the push towards a congruent method of informing students in source, target, and global settings. Furthermore, as we look at the teachers' perspective on the competition of the object of diverse cultures, and the limited amount of focus on cultural pedagogy in schools. Rose et al. (2021) further elaborates on significant research as the field of English language instruction begins to react to the morphing global linguistic environment, specifically considering longitudinal research studies, in-classroom interventions, and teacher education programs^[22]. Furthermore, if we consider Aljuaid's (2021) text, the focus is on incorporating pedagogy in global citizenship through language arts courses that work to promote global citizens who are informed and intentionally aware of global matters via the lenses of culture and international scholarship^[3]. Pentury et al. (2021) also contributed academic dialogues as she showcased and demonstrated progress in utilizing digital newspapers as a creative learning resort to help students' develop their analytical thinking and creative outputs in English language learning^[21]. As discussed in various dialogues it is evident that integration of cultural components to induce teaching strategies is crucial to advance teachers' knowledge and skills, promote instruction in global citizenship, including promoting students' thinking and creative setup, educators can implement varied cultural perspectives and modern instructional strategies to foster a diverse and engaging multi-perspective, educational environment for students.

3.5 English Language Teaching in Chinese Vocational Education

English Language Teaching in Chinese Vocational Education has been a topic of interest in recent literature. Hu et al. (2019) executed a limited-scale study with English majors and vocational college educators, underscoring the significance of synthesizing language input to improve communicative abilities and comprehension of writing objectives^[13]. Gao (2020) investigated the ways in which learners of the Chinese English language manage their linguistic beliefs and cultural identities in the course of learning English, uncovering a conflict between ideological conflicts and complex identity formation^[12]. Sun et al. (2022) introduced the implicit association test as an innovative method for assessing the perspectives of Chinese EFL educators on communicative language instruction, offering understanding into their cognitive processes and decision-making methods^[25]. Wang (2021) highlights highlighted the urgency for ongoing enhancements in the English instruction framework at advanced vocational institutions to tackle the subpar quality of English instruction and student involvement^[26]. Wu (2021) advocated for integrating Chinese cultural elements into English education to promote cultural self-confidence and improve cross-cultural communication abilities among students^[27]. Generally, scholarly works indicate an increasing focus on augmenting English language instruction in Chinese

vocational training via novel teaching techniques, cultural assimilation, and concentrating on elevating teacher’s perspectives and student involvement. Additional studies are required to investigate how these methods enhance English language skills in vocational college learners.

3.6 Conclusion

Critically evaluated articles emphasize the significance of cross-cultural competence within English language instruction and highlight the use of ethnic narratives and digital tools to positively impact learning outcomes. Implementing effective instructional strategies, particularly in language instruction of English for specific purposes, in China, where cross-cultural issues cannot be ignored. One striking gap in current literature is the lack of research on how digital tools are used to develop both intercultural competence and language proficiency in ESL. We argue that the existing literature limits the potential for students to use digital tools as enabling social strategies to broaden their understandings of culture. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to integrate digital tools with ethnic narratives to provoke critical engagements with culture in English language teaching. Our hope is to offer a holistic approach to fostering cross-cultural competence in ESP students.

4. Theories

The theory underpinning this study is based on Byram’s Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Byram’s ICC framework emphasizes the development of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness that are essential for successful cross-cultural communication. CLT emphasizes the importance of meaningful interactions and practical communication in language acquisition and development. The present study aims to enhance intercultural competence and language proficiency by using ethnic narratives and digital tools.

5. Research methods and processes

The research idea of this topic is systematic and empirical, and unfolds through a clear logical structure. Firstly, an in-depth analysis of the targeted digital platform is conducted to explore its potential for application in integrated English blended teaching. Then, based on the results of the analyses, the integrated English blended teaching method is designed and implemented, and the teaching effect is comprehensively assessed using quantitative and qualitative methods. Finally, based on the assessment results, improvement suggestions are made to optimize the teaching mode and form research results with practical guidance.

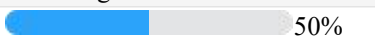
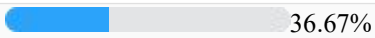
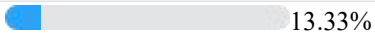
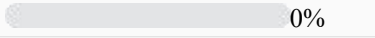
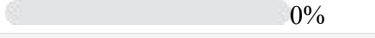
6. Research results and summary

6.1 Research Results

6.1.1 Intercultural Competence Enhancement:

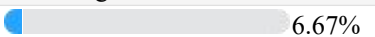
Tables present the survey responses respectively. For each question, the response figures include the percentage for each of the categories and the number of responses.

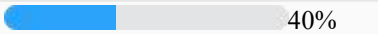
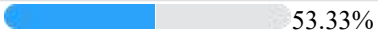
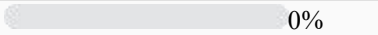
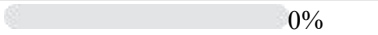
Table 1 The Response to question6 : categories , Numbers And Percentages

Options	Total No.	Percentage
A.Strongly Agree	15	 50%
B.Agree	11	 36.67%
C.Neutral	4	 13.33%
D.Disagree	0	 0%
E.Strongly Disagree	0	 0%
The number of valid people	30	

(1) Pre- and Post-Intervention Surveys: Statistical analysis of survey data indicates a significant improvement in students’ intercultural competence post-intervention. Students demonstrated a greater understanding and appreciation of diverse Chinese ethnic cultures.

Table 2 The Response to question8 : categories , Numbers And Percentages

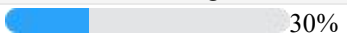
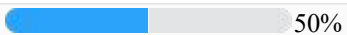
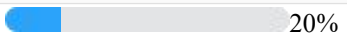
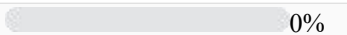
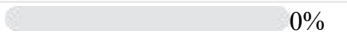
Options	Total No.	Percentage
A.Very High	2	 6.67%

B.High	12		40%
C.Moderate	16		53.33%
D.Low	0		0%
E.Very Low	0		0%
The number of valid people	30		

(2) Qualitative Feedback: Student reflections and teacher observations reveal increased cultural awareness and sensitivity. Many students reported that learning about ethnic narratives helped them connect more deeply with their cultural heritage and recognize the value of cultural diversity.

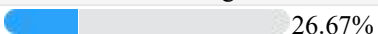
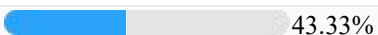
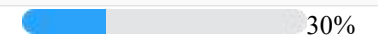
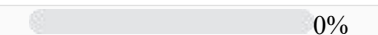
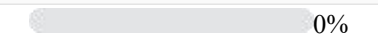
6.1.2 English Proficiency Improvement:

Table 3 The Response to question9 : categories , Numbers And Percentages

Options	Total No.	Percentage
A.Strongly Agree	9	 30%
B.Agree	15	 50%
C.Neutral	6	 20%
D.Disagree	0	 0%
E.Strongly Disagree	0	 0%
The number of valid people	30	

(1) **Language Skills Development:** Assessment of students' English proficiency shows notable progress in speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. The integration of ethnic narratives provided contextually rich material that engaged students and facilitated meaningful language use.

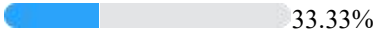
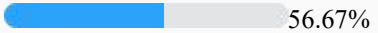
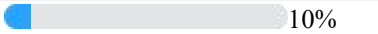
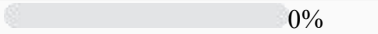
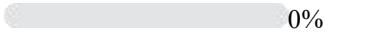
Table 4 The Response to question12 : categories , Numbers And Percentages

Options	Total No.	Percentage
A.Strongly Agree	8	 26.67%
B.Agree	13	 43.33%
C.Neutral	9	 30%
D.Disagree	0	 0%
E.Strongly Disagree	0	 0%
The number of valid people	30	

(2) **Digital Literacy:** The use of digital tools in the curriculum also enhanced students' digital literacy skills. Students became more adept at using multimedia tools for presentations and online platforms for discussions, which contributed to their overall language development.

6.1.3 Engagement and Motivation:

Table 5 The Response to question14 : categories , Numbers And Percentages

Options	Total No.	Percentage
A.Strongly Agree	10	 33.33%
B.Agree	17	 56.67%
C.Neutral	3	 10%
D.Disagree	0	 0%
E.Strongly Disagree	0	 0%
The number of valid people	30	

(1) **Enhanced Student Involvement:** In the research, students' participation and motivation were encouraged by the curriculum that combined digital resources and ethnic narratives. It can be seen that interactive and multimedia components offset the dull and tedious limits of rote learning and adversely affected on learner's interest during the learning.

(2) Teacher Response: Teachers observed students' interaction improvements alongside enhanced student engagement. Both classroom interaction and student engagement improved in the research.

6.1.4 Challenges and Areas for Improvement:

(1) Technical Challenges: Challenges faced included restricted access to digital resources and sporadic technical issues with digital tools. Such matters underscore the necessity for improved infrastructure and technical assistance.

(2) Adaptation of the Curriculum: Despite a generally favorable reaction, certain students and educators proposed additional tailoring of the curriculum to more closely match particular vocational areas and student preferences.

6.2 Summary

The results demonstrated that a combined approach that includes English language, and digital and ethnic storytelling can enhance Chinese vocational students' cross-cultural skills. The holistic approach developed the students' familiarity with and sensitivity to culture, and increased their English and digital literacy skills.

Educative design and the integration of culture were seen as more relevant and engaging, leading participating teachers to describe an increased respect of cultural diversity. Teachers noted increases in classroom dynamics and student engagement as well.

These methods of learning can enhance the efficacy of the integrated approach to English and demonstrate the importance of these approaches in professional educational situations, even if in addition to these increased facets of cross-cultural skills, the research highlighted places for future improvement. Particularly focused around the idea of ensuring that the digital resources are applied appropriately and the curriculum is tailored suitably.

In conclusion, the findings from this research project offer the instruction of English a roadmap in terms of how to engage the theme of cross-cultural skills, offering practical applications for educators and professional curriculum designers.

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APPENDIX

A simple questionnaire survey on the Enhancing Intercultural Competence through Integrated English Teaching with Ethnic Narratives for Chinese Vocational Students in a Digital Context, for reference:

Part 1: Demographic Information

1. Age:

- A. Under 18
- B. 18-20
- C. 21-23
- D. 24 and above

2. Gender:

- A. Male
 - B. Female
 - C. Prefer not to say
3. Level of English Proficiency:

- A. Beginner
- B. Intermediate
- C. Advanced

4. Access to Digital Tools (e.g., computer, smartphone, internet):

- A. Always
- B. Sometimes
- C. Rarely
- D. Never

Part 2: Intercultural Competence

5.How often did you engage in discussions about cultural diversity in the course?

- A.Very Often
- B.Often
- C.Sometimes
- D.Rarely
- E.Never

6.Do you feel more appreciative of cultural diversity after taking this course?

- A.Strongly Agree
- B.Agree
- C.Neutral
- D.Disagree
- E.Strongly Disagree

Part 3: English Proficiency

7.Rate your confidence in speaking English before participating in this course:

- A.Very High
- B.High
- C.Moderate
- D.Low
- E.Very Low

8.Rate your confidence in speaking English after participating in this course:

- A.Very High
- B.High
- C.Moderate
- D.Low
- E.Very Low

9.Did the use of ethnic narratives help you understand and use English better?

- A.Strongly Agree
- B.Agree
- C.Neutral
- D.Disagree
- E.Strongly Disagree

10.Which language skills do you feel improved the most? (Select all that apply):

- A.Speaking
- B.Listening
- C.Reading
- D.Writing

Part 4: Digital Literacy

11.How comfortable are you using digital tools for learning?

- A.Very Comfortable

Thank you for your participation! Your feedback is valuable and will help improve future courses.

- B.Comfortable

- C.Neutral

- D.Uncomfortable

- E.Very Uncomfortable

12.Did the digital tools used in the course enhance your learning experience?

- A.Strongly Agree

- B.Agree

- C.Neutral

- D.Disagree

- E.Strongly Disagree

13.Which digital tools did you find most useful in this course? (Select all that apply):

- A.Online discussion forums

- B.Multimedia presentations

- C.Virtual reality experiences

- D.Educational apps

- E.Other (please specify): _____

Part 5: Overall Course Experience

14.Rate your overall satisfaction with the course:

- A.Very Satisfied

- B.Satisfied

- C.Neutral

- D.Dissatisfied

- E.Very Dissatisfied

15.What did you like most about the course? (Open-ended)

16.What did you like least about the course? (Open-ended)

17.Do you have any suggestions for improving the course? (Open-ended)

Part 6: Future Recommendations

18.Would you recommend this course to other students?

- A.Yes

- B.No

19.Do you think incorporating more ethnic narratives into other subjects would be beneficial?

- A.Strongly Agree

- B.Agree

- C.Neutral

- D.Disagree

- E.Strongly Disagree

20.Any additional comments or suggestions? (Open-ended)

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