

Cultivating Aesthetic Literacy through AI and Design Thinking: Exploring the Digital Culture Course

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Abstract

Amid the rapid development of global artificial intelligence (AI) and its integration with culture, aesthetic education is evolving from traditional skills-based instruction into a cross-disciplinary practice that emphasizes creativity, narrative thinking, and cultural interpretation. This study evaluates a digital creative teaching module that integrates design thinking, narrative transportation theory, and generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Midjourney), focusing on its effectiveness in enhancing university students' aesthetic thinking and narrative immersion. Using an Instructional Design-Based Research (IDBR) approach, the module was implemented in a university "Digital Culture" course structured around the five stages of design thinking. Though design thinking theory was not explicitly taught, students demonstrated its core principles through task-oriented learning. Narrative transportation theory further supported students in creating works with cultural and emotional depth. Data sources included student projects, classroom observations, process documentation, reflective writing, and interviews. Thematic analysis and triangulation were applied to interpret this diverse data. Findings reveal that AI tools lowered creative barriers, enriched visual expression, and enhanced students' narrative engagement and cultural awareness. Students linked personal experiences with broader social themes, demonstrating originality and cross-cultural insight. This research confirms the potential of integrating AI and narrative theory into aesthetic education and presents a practical instructional model for interdisciplinary learning at the intersection of technology and the humanities.

Keywords: aesthetic education; design thinking; narrative transportation; generative AI