

Using WeChat in Teaching L2 Chinese: An Exploratory Study (微信在中文教学中的应用：低年级教学活动初探)

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Abstract: Chinese language teachers and scholars have recently been interested in the potential of using the WeChat app in Chinese language teaching and learning. However, empirical research on the effectiveness of applying WeChat to Chinese language classrooms has been scarce. This study reports on the implementation of a five-component WeChat project in the second-semester first-year and second-year Chinese language courses at a liberal arts college in the U.S. Adopting a mixed-method design, the researchers examined the student feedback on the WeChat project in the form of an end-of-semester questionnaire and interviews. Results showed that the WeChat project was, in general, well received by the students. The participants reported five major benefits of using WeChat in Chinese language teaching: expansion of time in learning, linguistic gains, promotion of cultural learning, enhancement of learning motivation, and establishment of a supportive Chinese language learning community. Drawbacks and suggestions for improvement were also discussed.

摘要：微信应用在中文教学中的潜力已受到中文教师和学者们关注，然而相关的研究却寥寥无几。本研究基于美国一所私立文理学院的一年级和二年级第二学期的中文课设计的微信教学方案，此方案由五个部分组成；此外，通过期末问卷和访谈的方式向参加的学生征求对微信教学的反馈。结果表明，学生总体上认可微信教学，认为微信教学有五大好处：增加中文学习时间、促进语言学习、促进文化学习、提高学习动机和建立良好的中文学习社区。本报告也讨论总结了学生提出的微信教学的不足及改进建议。

Keywords: Mobile-Assisted Language Learning, WeChat, Chinese language, Chinese as a Foreign Language

关键词：移动辅助语言学习，微信，中文，对外汉语

1. Introduction

College-level Chinese language students belong to the cohort of Generation Z, also known as iGeneration. An important characteristic of this generation is the unprecedented amount of exposure to technology they have in their upbringing. Members of Generation Z are typically comfortable with technology and fond of socializing through social media platforms. Technology has strongly influenced this generation's life, communication, and education.

Many studies have shown that a significant majority of university students in the U.S. own a smartphone or another type of mobile device, such as iPad (e.g., Chen, 2013; Simon and Fell, 2012). In a study investigating learner usage patterns of mobile learning, Stockwell (2008) found that over two-thirds of the learners expressed an interest in using mobile phones for language learning. More interestingly, Simon and Fell (2012) reported that 60% of the foreign-language students surveyed in their study already started using smartphones for language-learning purposes, such as using dictionaries or translating sentences.

Since smartphones and mobile social media platforms have become part of life and education among college students in the U.S., it is reasonable to expect that they would welcome WeChat as a part of their Chinese language learning. WeChat, the most popular social media platform in China, is a powerful smart phone application that incorporates the features of Facebook, Instagram, Skype, and Twitter. WeChat is a free messaging and calling app that allows one to easily connect with family and friends across countries. It is an all-in-one communications app for free text (SMS/MMS), voice and video calls, moments (known as "Friends' circle" among Chinese users), photo sharing, and games. In addition to its popularity in China, the unique voice messaging and other functions make it a good supportive tool for teaching Chinese.

Plenty of WeChat-based Chinese languages teaching tips are documented online¹ and considerable anecdotal evidence of the effectiveness of WeChat in teaching Chinese has been shared at several foreign language pedagogy workshops and conferences. However, to date, little empirical research to investigate the effectiveness of implementing WeChat in teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) has been reported. To bridge this research gap, we run an empirical study to examine the effectiveness of integrating WeChat into CFL teaching in a U.S. liberal arts college.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Mobile-Assisted Language Learning

With the rapid development of mobile technology and the growth of mobile

¹ <https://wp.nyu.edu/urbanyouthnyu/2015/10/20/auto-draft-504/>
<http://gaed21.blogspot.com/2014/03/guest-blogger-rebecca-liu-using-wechat.html>
<http://www.mandarinpathways.org/wechat-for-education-chinese-teachers-connecting-globally/>

device ownership, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has attracted the attention of an increasing number of researchers in the past two decades (Burston, 2013, 2015; Chinnery, 2006; Cho, 2009; Kukulska-Hume, 2009; Li & Hegelheimer, 2013; Wu, 2015). Notwithstanding some potential disadvantages (e.g., Chinnery, 2006), many researchers discussed the benefits of MALL at length. The most frequently discussed merits of MALL include the mobility of learning devices, the inexpensiveness of the equipment, the accessibility to extensive learning materials, and the expansion of social inclusion in language learning (e.g., Chinnery, 2006; Kukulska-Hulme, 2009; Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008).

In his annotated bibliography of MALL 1994-2012, Burston (2013) provided a comprehensive historical background of MALL applications and identified 345 articles on project implementation studies. These studies covered a wide range of topics, including technical specifications, mobile device ownership, pedagogical design, learning theory, user attitudes, motivational effects, institutional infrastructure, and instructor training. In another study, Burston (2015) conducted a meta-analysis of learning outcomes of the MALL project implementation studies over the past twenty years. Out of the hundreds of studies on MALL implementation, only 19 can reliably serve as the basis for analyzing the learning outcomes of mobile-based language applications, due to limitations such as the short duration of projects, small numbers of participants, or serious design shortcomings. His analysis showed that 15 out of the 19 studies reported positive learning outcomes on reading, listening, and speaking, evidencing a MALL application advantage.

2.2 MALL Studies among Chinese Language Learners

Along with the emergence of an international interest in learning the Chinese language in the past decade, MALL studies among Chinese language learners have started to catch up. For example, Yang and Xie (2013) reported on an action research study using iPads to facilitate the teaching of Chinese idioms to heritage learners at a private research university in the U.S. Generative learning was adopted as the theoretical framework in designing and implementing the teaching procedures. Through examination of students' short-term and long-term learning, responses to a questionnaire, and artifacts created during the learning process, the researchers found that the textual and visual illustrations created by the heritage learners themselves facilitated their learning of the idioms. The learners in this study were reported to have enjoyed the iPad-assisted process.

Wong, Chin, Tan, and Liu (2010) also focused on teaching Chinese idioms, but the MALL design was implemented through smartphones. Their participants were 40 11-year-old primary school students, and their design was grounded in seamless teaching, which advocates the integration of formal and informal language learning. In the learning process, students were guided to use smartphones to collect real-life photos relevant to the idioms, and to construct sentences with them. Subsequent discussions were facilitated to reinforce the students' understanding of the proper usage of the idioms. Analysis of the student artifacts generated through the process revealed that the learner-created content

and the contextualized meaning making potentially helped learners transform language learning into an authentic learning experience.

Chinese language teachers and scholars have also started to incorporate mobile technology into regular teaching in the Chinese language classroom. For example, Zeng (2012) demonstrated how the Palm Treo smartphone with Chinese input, handwriting and dictionary software was used to assist and complement classroom teaching among high-school Chinese language students. Chen (2013) reported on an experiment with integrating smartphones into a university's introductory Chinese-language classroom. Pedagogical arrangements were made so that students needed to use smartphones to learn Chinese both in class and out of class. In particular, Chen was interested in exploring whether smartphones can be used to assist beginning learners of Chinese with tone acquisition and character learning. Student feedback indicated that many appreciated the convenience and usefulness of smartphones in learning Chinese. However, students were not yet ready to use smartphones for educational purposes, although they seemed to be proficient in personal use. It was suggested that design and development of in-class and out-of-class MALL activities should be based on clearly defined curricular goals. As Chen's experiment shows, students' use of smartphones in learning Chinese should be guided and mobile learning activities should be well integrated into the syllabi of Chinese language courses.

In contrast, Wang and Leland (2012) investigated how eleven university CFL learners voluntarily used mobile technology to study Chinese outside the classroom. Their study used journal entries and interviews for data collection. Results suggested that participants were enthusiastic about using mobile devices to learn Chinese, but they mainly used dictionary and translation applications for quick reference and practice, without fully tapping into the potentials of mobile devices. In order to ensure the effective incorporation of mobile devices to Chinese learning, the researchers argued that the discrepancy between appeal and use of MALL highlighted the necessity of collaboration among learners and scaffolding from the instructor. In other words, students' use of mobile devices outside the Chinese language classroom needed proper pedagogical guidance.

2.3 Using WeChat to Teach Chinese

As mentioned previously, little empirical research has been done to investigate the effectiveness of using WeChat in Chinese language learning. However, Chinese language teachers and scholars have started to speculate on the possibility and experiment with using it in the classroom. For example, Da and Wang (2014) proposed that language teachers use WeChat to engage learners in speaking practice, conduct group activities, enhance learners' interest and motivation, and stay connected with students and share resources. Similarly, Xie (2014) discussed advantages and disadvantages of using WeChat in teaching, and recommended a number of activities, including reading and writing tasks, picture-based discussions and micro-learning strategies such as "a sentence/character a day".

Drawing on insights and resources provided by Chinese language scholars and teachers, the researchers designed a WeChat component for the second-semester first-year and second-year Chinese language classes at a private liberal arts college in the U.S. in Spring 2015. This paper will first provide a description of the WeChat project and then investigate the effectiveness of incorporating WeChat in L2 Chinese teaching by answering the following research questions:

1. To what degree is using WeChat effective in teaching Chinese?
2. What are the benefits of using WeChat in teaching Chinese?
3. What are the disadvantages of using WeChat in teaching Chinese and what possible improvements can be made?

3. Description of the WeChat Project

The WeChat project was built into the course syllabi of CHN102 (i.e., second-semester first-year Chinese) and CHN112 (i.e., second-semester second-year Chinese), accounting for 10% of students' final grades. At the beginning of the Spring 2015 semester, an official WeChat account was created for the Chinese language program at the liberal arts college under discussion. One class meeting was devoted to introducing WeChat and the WeChat project to the students. In this class meeting, every student created their own WeChat account and experimented with using the different functions. Meanwhile, class WeChat groups were created for CHN102 and CHN112.

Students were informed that WeChat would be used to assist classroom instruction in the following five ways, and that their participation in the first four components would be graded in terms of involvement, completion of assignments, quality of comments, and contribution to the WeChat community. Most of these activities were done outside of class by the students, but the instructor allocated a small amount of time at each class meeting to comment or review what they had done. The five components were:

- **Ask/Answer questions:** Each student is expected to ask at least one real-life question that they want to know about their classmates by using the new vocabulary covered in the lesson. Questions asked by others do not count. Students are also expected to answer each other's questions on WeChat. Questions and answers should be typed out rather than spoken out for this component. A prize will be awarded for the most interesting question for each lesson. The instructor collects nominations from the students and the question that receives the most nominations wins the prize.
- **Mini-writing tasks:** For every lesson, the instructor asks students to do a mini-writing project on a topic related to the lesson, and students should post their final product on the class WeChat group. Students are encouraged to read each other's writings and post comments.

- **Mini-oral project** (pair work/small-group work): For every lesson, the instructor assigns at least one pair-work or small-group oral project. Students are expected to post their oral project on the class WeChat group, listen to each other's oral project, and post comments. A prize will be voted for the funniest mini-oral project for each lesson. The oral project that receives the most student nominations wins this prize.
- **Socializing and information sharing:** The instructor encourages students to make use of the class WeChat group to the fullest. They are encouraged to socialize and share information on this platform. Sharing of Chinese language learning resources (e.g., books, websites, videos, events) are particularly welcomed.
- **Non-graded extracurricular input:** The official WeChat account of the Chinese language program is used to update weekly news about China in English, share Chinese-learning resources, publish Chinese Bulletin Board, and post pictures of cultural events organized by the Chinese language program. Students are encouraged to comment on these posts, but their participation is not graded.

4. Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-method design. Data were collected through an end-of-semester questionnaire and follow-up interviews. Participants were 22 Chinese language students enrolled in the second semester first-year and second-year Chinese classes at a private liberal arts college in the U.S. Thirteen students were from CHN102 and nine were from CHN112. All the participants were required to engage in the WeChat project as described above as a part of the course requirement.

At the end of the semester, the participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire (see Appendix A) eliciting their opinions of the use of WeChat in learning Chinese. They were asked to give ratings on a number of items on a 7-point Likert scale and provide reasons for their ratings. Among the 22 questionnaires returned, 21 were valid and used for data analysis.

Ten students participated in the follow-up interviews, five from CHN102 and five from CHN112. The interviews were semi-structured and guided by three general questions: 1) What do you think of the WeChat project this semester? What do you like about it? What do you dislike about it? 2) What benefits or drawbacks does the WeChat project have in terms of learning Chinese? 3) Do you have any suggestions for improvement? However, the interviews were open-ended and the participants were encouraged to pursue whatever topics they chose. Each interview lasted 10-15 minutes. The interviews were then transcribed and each participant was given a pseudonym.

For research question 1, results of the questionnaire were analyzed. For research questions 2 and 3, the interview data were examined. The grounded-theory based strategies (Clarke, 2005) were adapted to code and analyze the transcripts of the

interviews.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Research Question 1: Effectiveness

Overall Experience

In order to see how the students perceived their overall experience with WeChat in the Chinese language courses, the item “Please rate how well you like the WeChat project this semester” was designed. As Table 1 shows, the students, in general, had a fairly positive experience in using WeChat to learn Chinese ($M = 5.29$, $SD = 1.00$). On average, the students enjoyed the WeChat project incorporated into the courses.

Table 1: Overall WeChat Learning Experience

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Overall Experience	3	7	5.29	1.00

The frequency of the students’ ratings for this item was also calculated to examine the distribution of the responses. As can be seen from Table 2, eleven students evaluated the WeChat project highly, providing ratings of “6” and “7”. Nine of the students were positive but not too enthusiastic about WeChat, providing ratings of “5” and “4”. One student really did not like it, providing the rating of “3”.

Table 2: Frequency of Ratings on Overall WeChat Experience

Ratings	Frequency
3	1
4	4
5	5
6	10
7	1

A close examination of the reasons for the ratings showed that they welcomed the WeChat project because it was “fun and interesting”, “simple and informative”, and “a new way of learning.” They also liked it because “it was a nice way to communicate with the class and professors” and “it was interesting using an app well-known in China.” Some students were not extremely satisfied with it because it was “too hard to stay on top”, “too demanding”, or “too overwhelming.” Some students found WeChat “a hard program to use.” One student commented, “Since WeChat could be a bit ‘buggy’, it was a bit difficult to do.”

Usefulness of Different Components

The students were also asked to rate the usefulness of the different components of the WeChat project in meeting their needs in learning Chinese and provide reasons. The components included: weekly news about China in English, asking and answering real-life questions about classmates by incorporating new vocabulary in the lesson, mini-oral tasks (e.g., uploading conversations or dialogues to WeChat), mini-writing tasks (e.g., typing a sentence by using a certain grammatical pattern, writing a paragraph of summer plan), and socializing and information sharing. The summary of the ratings for the five components is listed in Table 3.

Table 3: Usefulness of Different Components of the WeChat Project

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Weekly news related to China	3	7	4.67	1.46
Asking & Answering real-life questions	1	7	4.95	1.53
Mini-oral tasks	1	7	5.14	1.39
Mini-writing tasks	2	7	4.95	1.40
Socializing and information sharing	1	7	4.95	1.66

The results in Table 3 show that the students acknowledged the usefulness of all the five components of the WeChat project, but their opinions were not entirely enthusiastic. In comparison, the students perceived the mini-oral tasks to be the most helpful, followed by asking & answering real-life questions, mini-writing tasks, and socializing and information sharing, with weekly news related to China being the least helpful. However, results of 10 paired sample t-tests showed that the means of these five ratings were not significantly different.

Mini-oral tasks through WeChat were considered the most useful in that it helped “practice communicating in Chinese” and “develop oral skills”. Students also thought “it was an interesting way to do homework.”

Although the component of asking and answering real-life questions about classmates did not receive the highest average rating, students’ comments for this item were mostly positive. Representative comments included: “this was a cute and effective way to practice the new vocabulary”, “it helped increase my understanding of the language”, and “it helped me visualize other people’s sentences rather than just hearing them.” One student mentioned that “I knew more about my classmates though this exercise, really eye-opening.” However, some students “would rather do it face to face than over the internet.”

The WeChat mini-writing tasks “facilitated grammatical practice,” “helped with developing writing skills on relevant topics” and “helped practice character recognition.” However, a number of students mentioned that it might not be necessary to do the writing tasks through phones. For example, “I wish we did that on paper instead of the phone. I want to learn to write the characters and not depend on the internet.”

As for the socializing and information sharing function, the students appreciated the fact that “it helped everyone connect with each other” and “it was a fun way to practice Chinese with friends and classmates.”

Some students enjoyed reading the weekly news related to China because “it helped gain cultural knowledge” and “it kept students aware of Chinese events and cultural issues.” However, a number of students confessed that they did not spend much time on it (e.g., “It was nice, but I didn’t really follow it too much”). This was probably because following weekly Chinese news on WeChat was not graded as stated in the course syllabi.

Recommendation for Future Use

Finally, students were asked whether they would recommend the WeChat project to other students and whether they would like the Chinese language program to continue the WeChat project in the future. On a 7-point Likert scale, students provided ratings indicating to what degree they agree or disagree with the following two statements: “I would recommend this WeChat project to other students interested in taking Chinese” and “I hope the Chinese language program will continue the WeChat project in the future.”

Table 4: Recommendation of WeChat for Future Use

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Recommendation	2	7	5.33	1.53
Future use	2	7	5.48	1.50

As shown in Table 4, the means of the ratings on the two items were fairly high, indicating that the WeChat project was, in general, well received and positively perceived among the students.

5.2 Research Question 2: Benefits

The reasons provided in the questionnaires tended to be simple and short. Thus, follow-up interviews were conducted and the interview data were analyzed. As a result of theme analysis based on grounded-theory strategies (Clarke, 2005), five themes related to benefits emerged from the data: expansion of learning time, linguistic gain, cultural learning, motivation, and Chinese language community.

The WeChat project obviously extended students’ time spent on learning Chinese beyond the classroom. According to the students, the WeChat project “added extra work”, “turned the Chinese class into a 24-hour-a-day course”, and “pushed part of the class to outside-class learning.” As an example to further illustrate this point, one student said, “often times, in the mid of the night, I received messages from someone in the class, reminding me of studying Chinese.”

The WeChat project was also perceived to have helped improve students’ Chinese

language skills in a wide range of areas, including vocabulary, character recognition, grammar, speaking, listening, reading, and writing. A representative comment was, “WeChat provided different ways of exposure, listening, watching, writing, reading, and helped reinforce different skills through different assignments.” Students seemed to have particularly enjoyed the component of asking and answering real-life questions because it “helped practice using new vocabulary and grammar with classmates in a fun and creative way” and “gave students the opportunity to think of words that they really want to learn and say but not covered in the textbook.”

A number of students viewed “cultural learning” as “the best part of the WeChat project” as WeChat “added a space to learn about China and Chinese people” and created opportunities to “look into many aspects of Chinese culture outside of class.” Through “weekly news”, “Chinese articles”, “YouTube videos posted on WeChat” and “discussions with classmates”, students reported to have “gained cultural knowledge about China and Chinese people” and “seen many similarities and differences between cultures.”

Moreover, the WeChat project helped enhance student motivation in learning Chinese in different ways. Students unanimously agreed that WeChat made the class more “fun”, “interesting”, “enjoyable”, and “exciting”, and that they “learned a lot”. When comparing this Chinese class with many of other classes conducted through lectures, one student pointed out that this class was more “engaging” because “it used different ways to teach the materials through WeChat” and “all the different ways made the materials much more fun than it actually did”. In addition to the fun added to the class, frequent peer interaction on WeChat was seen as another motivating factor because “it’s cool to see your classmates’ responses” and “realizing how good your classmates are at using the new vocabulary makes you want to speak better.”

Last but not the least, the WeChat project facilitated a supportive Chinese language learning community as WeChat “encouraged communication”, “helped students connect to each other”, and “created lots of bonding among the class.” The students appreciated the convenience of this community as demonstrated in the following comments: “We can ask questions and everyone else in the group is there to answer us right away”; “We got to know each other better. If I forgot someone’s name, I can just click and see their face”; “If you get stuck at some point with your assignments, you can log on in WeChat and listen to your friends.” More importantly, the students valued the bonding among the class created by this WeChat community. Here is a very interesting anecdote cited by one student: “I once posted a question to our class Wechat group and meant to ask all the boys in class: what are you going to do with your girlfriends during this weekend? But I typed it as: 这个周末你们要和你们的奴朋友去做什么? My classmates quickly checked up the meaning of 奴 in online dictionary and got to know it means “slave”. Then, it became a big joke in our class and a signature mistake of mine. It made all of us laugh hard all though the whole course. It was a lot of fun”.

5.3 Research Question 3: Disadvantages and Improvements

Students who participated in the interviews also identified a number of drawbacks of the WeChat project and proposed a wide variety of suggestion for improvement. Some of the suggestions pertained to the limitations of the WeChat app, some to the management of the course, and some were constructive ideas arising from their experience of using WeChat for Chinese language learning.

The most common complaint of the WeChat project was the heavy workload imposed on learning outside of class, which made the class “hectic”, “overwhelming”, or “too much to handle.” A suggested solution is to make some of the WeChat components optional, “an opportunity for students to obtain extra credit rather than a required component in the syllabus.”

Another frequently mentioned drawback stemmed from “the different components” of the WeChat project and the “randomness” of the WeChat assignments. One student said, “College students have a lot of other courses too. If we have a lot of components for Chinese homework, we should put it in one assignment. Often times, you just mentioned the WeChat assignments at the end of the class. It is very easy to forget those assignments and it is really hard to keep track of the whole thing.” Students, in general, hoped that the WeChat project could be more “systematic” and better organized, as was reflected in another student comment, “The Wechat assignments were unclear and not on the syllabus, so they were hard to follow. It would be useful if everything was laid out on the syllabus, but I felt overwhelmed because it was unclear.”

Students also complained that the WeChat app could be “buggy”. An obvious limitation was the time limit for the voice message. As mentioned by one student, “WeChat has a time limit for the voice function. It’s really annoying. When I had a long conversation with my partner, it was a pain to have to cut off and split into different parts.” However, students in general appreciated the convenience brought by WeChat (e.g., “We can send stuff easier and we can use it to do small oral projects”).

Lack of actual character writing was another concern raised by the students. While students recognized that “typing Chinese characters is a lot easier than writing them” and “WeChat helped character recognition”, many students believed that “writing characters through the right stroke orders can help memorize and internalize the characters.” One student commented, “I really missed writing everything out on a piece of paper. It’s the traditional way of learning, but it works the best for me.”

Based on their experience of using WeChat in the Chinese classes, the students proposed a number of suggestions for improvement.

1. Making more use of YouTube Videos. Students suggested that “the instructor can post more videos on WeChat” and that “students can search for videos related to China and share them over WeChat”. They seemed to especially welcome videos in English (e.g., “if the videos are in English, I will like it better”) probably because

their Chinese proficiency was too limited to understand complicated authentic Chinese videos.

2. Targeting Chinese news that is related to the topics covered in the lesson. Many students viewed the weekly news “a random thing” as it was not graded or relevant to the textbook. If “the news is related to the topics in the textbook” or if they are “tested in a quick quiz”, or followed by “a discussion or response requirement”, students will view it “more applicable to the class” and be willing to spend time on it as “it is incorporated into the curriculum.”
3. Journal writing. A number of students suggested that students could use WeChat to “record their daily life” and “incorporate pictures with annotations in Chinese”. For more advanced students, they can be asked to “enter journal entries with more extended passages”. Here is a representative suggestion along this line: “Use the ‘Moments’ function on WeChat so that we can post stuff about our actual daily lives in Chinese. It makes WeChat just like Facebook in Chinese, which is very practical and fun, and also makes us check WeChat more regularly. In addition, all members of the class should also add one another as WeChat friends to be able to see the news feed in Moments.”
4. Learning beyond the textbook. A number of students thought “what is covered in the textbook is limited” and wanted to “use WeChat as a resource to expand Chinese vocabulary”. For example, a student suggested “setting community vocabulary goals, such as choosing a topic and having the students look up vocabulary outside the textbook to compile a custom vocabulary list.”
5. Using WeChat to review the lessons. For example, students can “read out loud the text or dialogue over WeChat” so that “tutorial time with the TA can focus on the mistakes and the parts students messed up rather than just reading.” The instructor may post “a list of review questions on WeChat for each lesson” for students to “study for tests”; students may discuss and answer these questions to build a learning resource for the class.

6. Conclusion

In general, the first-year and second-year Chinese language students who participated in this study welcomed the WeChat project and they hoped that the instructor would continue to use WeChat to assist Chinese language teaching in the future. Among the different components, students viewed the mini-oral project as the most helpful and the weekly news as the least helpful, with mini-writing tasks, asking and answering questions, and socializing and information sharing receiving the same rating in terms of usefulness. The interview data showed that students perceived the WeChat project to have helped them expand the time of learning Chinese, improve their Chinese linguistic skills, promote Chinese cultural learning, enhance Chinese language learning motivation, and create a supportive Chinese language learning community. The participants also

identified a number of drawbacks and proposed suggestions for improvement.

This study has a few limitations. First, the number of participants ($N = 21$) was small. Second, the participants were all elementary or intermediate Chinese language students. It is worth exploring how WeChat can be incorporated into advanced-level Chinese language curriculum. Third, the evaluation of the WeChat project was completely based on student feedback. Future studies may need to examine student production data as generated in the language learning process to assess the usefulness of the WeChat project more objectively. Finally, as many participants mentioned that the WeChat project was difficult to keep track of, future endeavor in using WeChat in Chinese language teaching needs more monitoring from the instructor. Ideally, every aspect of a WeChat project needs to be planned ahead and spelled out in the syllabus, ensuring that the WeChat project is systematically implemented in language teaching.

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Appendix

WeChat Questionnaire

Instructions: Please give a rating of the following questions and give your reasons.

1. Please rate how well you like the WeChat project this semester.

Very Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very High

Reasons:

2. Please rate the usefulness of the following components of the WeChat project in meeting your needs in learning Chinese and explain your reasons.

Weekly news related to China

Not Useful 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Useful

Reasons:

Asking and answering questions that you really want to know about your classmates.

Not Useful 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Useful

Reasons:

Mini-oral tasks (uploading conversations or dialogues to WeChat)

Not Useful 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Useful

Reasons:

Mini-writing tasks (e.g., typing a sentence by using a certain grammatical pattern, writing a paragraph of your summer plan, etc)

Not Useful 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Useful

Reasons:

Socializing and information sharing

Not Useful 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Useful

Reasons:

3. Please rate to what degree you agree or disagree with the following statements:

I would recommend this WeChat project to other students interested in taking Chinese.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

I hope the Chinese language program will continue the WeChat project in the future.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

Reasons: