

Chapter 1

Chinese Language Learning and Mobile Technologies: A Critical Review

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ABSTRACT

China's global influence has increased with its spectacular economic development. With the growing trade and cultural exchange between China and other countries, there is a rapid rising need for Chinese language learning. Although Chinese language is challenging to learn due to its different intonations, complicated shapes, and considerable significance, it still attracts more individuals, organizations, and companies. Advances in mobile technologies provide new opportunities for language learning anytime and anywhere. To meet the diverse demands of students of language learning, many scholars have studied Chinese mobile language learning and developed many mobile applications to improve language learners' skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing by leveraging the emerging mobile technologies. This chapter reviews earlier studies on mobile technologies employed in Chinese language learning and provides recommendations for future research.

INTRODUCTION

China has increased its political, economic, and cultural influence worldwide after it has made its spectacular economic development. As a powerful tool for economic modernisation, trade has played an important role in China's overall economy (*Chinese Foreign Trade in Figure*, 2021). Despite a worldwide slump in shipment in 2020,

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China's total imports and exports of goods expanded 1.9 per cent to 4.97 trillion dollars, hitting a high record (*Facts & Figures: China's foreign trade in 2020*, 2021). Moreover, to enhance intercultural communication, China has cooperated with many foreign countries to implement its cultural exchange plan (Bartosch, 2020). In 2018, cities like Beijing and Berlin had developed several joint programmes in cultural exchange (ibid.). Due to frequent trade and intercultural communication between China and foreign countries, there is an increasing demand for the Chinese language learning among foreigners. As an essential communication tool to understand China for foreigners, Chinese language attracts more and more individuals at educational institutions and corporations to learn for practical purposes (Ming & Miao, 2008).

It is reported that 100 million foreigners in 162 countries are learning the Chinese language (Emewu, 2019). To meet the different needs of students from diverse backgrounds and improve teaching effectiveness, scholars have conducted much research about the methods and tools of Chinese language learning. There are several available methods in Chinese language learning for international students, including face-to-face Chinese learning setting in the classroom with display technology, and distance Chinese language learning, and mobile Chinese language learning (Al-Mekhlafi et al., 2009). While face-to-face Chinese learning plays a valuable role and provides sufficient face-to-face interaction when learning Chinese (ibid.), wireless technology and mobile devices have provided new opportunities for Chinese language learning without any constraints of both place and time (Tseng et al., 2007; Al-Mekhlafi et al., 2009; Lu et al., 2014).

Mobile technology is defined as the pervasive technology that follows the users, consisting of portable two-way communication devices, computing devices and networking technology (*Mobile technology*, n.d.). As part of mobile technology, smartphones and tablet have been widely applied in mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). Mobile technology has a remarkable effect on education, especially in learning a foreign language (Chang et al., 2010; Tian et al., 2010; Niu et al., 2014) due to its mobility and connectivity, large screen size, easy-to-go multimedia production and sharing tool, and tangible user interface (Churchill et al., 2012).

To locate research gaps for further studies, this chapter aims to review earlier studies on how mobile technologies have been applied to Chinese language learning. Moreover, it is designed to provide some feasible and practical suggestions for designers and practitioners of mobile Chinese language learning. After introducing Chinese language learning as a backgrounder, followed by mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) and related theories applied in previous studies, this chapter focuses its reviews of previous studies on specific Chinese language learning applications and mobile technologies applied in enhancing Chinese language learning.

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