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VLOGGING AND MEMES AS TOOLS FOR ENHANCING THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE IN ONLINE CHINESE LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION IN TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

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Abstract: This study examines the fundamental role of vlogging and memes in enhancing the online learning experience for adult Mandarin Chinese learners in Trinidad and Tobago. As digital tools become increasingly central to foreign language education, more innovative and technologically driven strategies like vlogging in the target language and meme creation offer dynamic opportunities to engage L2 learners, make the language acquisition process more enjoyable, and address common challenges in learning Mandarin Chinese. Through a mixed-methods approach, this research combines questionnaires and the analysis of student-created vlogs and memes to explore learners' experiences, challenges, and perceived benefits of these activities. Data collected from the questionnaires will shed light on improvements in pronunciation, vocabulary retention, fluency, and confidence, while also identifying challenges such as pronunciation difficulties, vocabulary selection, and technical issues. Preliminary findings indicate that vlogging fosters increased speaking confidence and fluency, while meme creation enhances vocabulary retention and cultural understanding. By integrating creative and interactive digital strategies, this study highlights the potential to enrich online Mandarin instruction, making it more engaging, learner-centered, and effective in addressing language acquisition challenges.

Keywords: vlogging, memes, Mandarin Chinese, online education, language acquisition

1. Introduction

Recently, the integration of digital media in language teaching and learning has transformed the ways in which learners and teachers engage with new languages and cultures. Among these tools, vlogging and memes have emerged as exceptionally innovative methods that not only help to stimulate creativity but also foster authentic communication in the target language and cultural exchange. According to Combre and Cordreanu (2016), "Vlogs offer the possibility to practice spoken production skills as recommended by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. This skill is often difficult to implement in an authentic context of communication outside the classroom" (p. 122). Their statement clearly highlights the considerable potential of vlogging as an effective digital tool for enhancing learners' speaking proficiency and promoting authentic language use beyond the traditional classroom settings. Similarly, the 2021 study by Kayali and Atuntaş demonstrates that memes can serve as creative and culturally relevant tools to foster student engagement and motivation in the foreign language classroom (p. 158). Therefore, if digital media is carefully implemented into teaching

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methodologies, an educator can create a more engaging, creative and authentic learning environment for their students.

Within the context of teaching and learning Mandarin Chinese, a language that is often considered to be challenging for native English speakers due to its tonal nature and logographic writing system, digital media tools can play a pivotal role in enhancing learner motivation and performance. This study explores how vlogging and meme creation can be effectively used to support adult learners of Mandarin Chinese in Trinidad and Tobago, particularly in online learning environments where engagement and interactivity are key to overall success. By encouraging learners to produce vlogs in Mandarin, they have the opportunity to practice pronunciation, intonation, and fluency in real communicative contexts, while meme creation allows them to apply vocabulary and cultural knowledge in humorous and creative ways.

This study seeks to address two main research questions:

1. How do vlogging and meme creation activities impact learners' motivation to study Mandarin Chinese online?

2. What are the challenges of using vlogs and memes as instructional tools in an online Chinese language course?

Through a mixed-methods approach that combines questionnaires and analysis of student-generated content, this study will address the research questions, investigating learners' perceptions, challenges, and outcomes associated with these digital tasks.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Perspective - Constructivist Learning Theory

The primary objective of this study is to explore the use of vlogging and meme creation activities in enhancing the overall learning experience in online Mandarin Chinese language classes. This aim aligns with the principles of the Constructivist Learning theory. Chand (2023) explains that "Constructivism views that new knowledge is created by learners based on their prior experiences. The teacher's role is that of a facilitator who helps students actively construct new knowledge" (p.277). This suggests that learning is most effective when teachers adopt a student-focus approach, or rather when students are placed at the centre of the process and allowed to create meaning through more authentic, self-directed tasks. In this study's context, vlogging and meme creation tasks serve as potentially powerful constructivist learning tools, as they require learners to create personalised content in the target language. Learners must draw on their existing cultural and linguistic knowledge, and then actively produce language and apply it in a real-world context rather than passively consume it.

2.2 The Role of Vlogging in Enhancing Language Learning

In recent times, vlogging has grown increasingly popular with the rise of authentic, user-generated, content on social media platforms such as YouTube and TikTok. Given this more widespread exposure

to vlogs, it is not surprising that vlogging has begun to influence various sectors, including the field of education. Many studies have explored the effectiveness of vlogs as tools to improve the quality of foreign language teaching and learning. Afrilliani et al. (2018) conducted a study on vlog use among English language learners in Indonesia and reported very promising results. The study's findings showed that students experienced significant improvement in their speaking skills, felt more comfortable to express themselves in their target language and showed some improvement in expanding their vocabulary range and overall pronunciation (p. 538). Similarly, Mudifah & Roifah (2020) found that the use of vlogs as a teaching and learning tool positively impacted students' fluency and public speaking capabilities, particularly through repeated practice. Their study emphasised that vlogging provided learners with more opportunities to practice speaking outside the classroom, thus promoting greater confidence, autonomy, and engagement in the students' target language (p. 55). In addition to this, vlogging created a space for teamwork, allowing for the exchange of knowledge and opinions among classmates through their videos (p. 51). These studies provide promising evidence and valuable insight to inform the present study's investigation of vlogging use among Mandarin Chinese learners and how it can potentially impact their learning experience.

Nevertheless, the use of vlogs in learning a language is not without its challenges. Like many forms of digital media, vlogging requires a certain degree of technical proficiency and familiarity with specific video editing software or mobile applications. Anrasiyana et al. (2022) identified this as a major obstacle reported by students studying English (p. 3060). Their study also highlighted additional barriers that complicated the process of creating a vlog including limited access to appropriate digital tools and platforms, self-esteem and confidence-related issues (p. 3062), as well as difficulties related to creativity and generating content ideas (p. 3061). This raises the question of whether Mandarin Chinese language learners in Trinidad and Tobago experience similar challenges when engaging in vlogging activities.

2.3 Meme creation in Language Education

Internet culture continues to influence global education trends. One such impact is the introduction of memes as a viable teaching tool. For example, Dong (2025) highlights that memes can be used to facilitate intercultural understanding and competence among students, specifically those who are studying Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language:

"Memes can help students compare and analyze cultural differences between China and the West. Teachers can select representative memes, guiding students to analyze cultural differences and explore the historical, social, and psychological factors behind them. For example, by comparing the usage scenarios and cultural connotations of Chinese and Western internet slang, students can better understand the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western cultures. This method not only improves students' cross-cultural communication skills but also fosters their critical cultural awareness" (p. 100)

This is particularly important for foreign language learners since developing an understanding of a language's cultural use in context is essential for achieving a deeper, more advanced communicative competence. In the case of Mandarin Chinese, memes can offer an accessible and authentic medium

through which students can engage with contemporary Chinese culture in real time and better understand the cultural nuances of the language.

In addition to allowing students to become more culturally aware, memes directly enable students across disciplines to openly express their creativity and humour, a perspective also supported by Xie et. al (2020). Furthermore, studies have shown that memes can be used as effective teaching tools to reinforce grammatical points (Kalyuzhna et al., 2023, pp. 75-77), strengthen vocabulary acquisition (Dong, 2025, p. 101) and provide an exciting learning environment that is more conducive to learning (Kayali and Atuntaş, 2021, p. 158). Retention of classroom content, as well as the opportunity for students' voices to feel "heard" in the classroom, were also highlighted as key benefits in studies such as Bhagowati (2022). These findings present a very strong rationale for examining how meme creation may similarly support adult Mandarin Chinese learners in an online learning environment in this present study.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

This study was conducted from January - April 2025 at the Centre for Language Learning, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus in Trinidad and Tobago. A total of 30 adult Mandarin Chinese learners participated. Their first language is English and their ages range from 18 to over 46 years as seen in Table 1 below. Most of the participants are aged 26-35, revealing a possible trend among this age group for foreign language study while also suggesting a growing interest in Mandarin Chinese learning among local young professionals. This trend may reflect shifting global priorities and career aspirations as well as Trinidad and Tobago's strengthening of ties with the People's Republic of China.

Table 1: Table showing the age range of participants in the study.

Age Range	Number of participants	Percentage
18-25	5	16.7%
26-35	16	53.3%
36-45	6	20%
46+	3	10%

All participants had formally studied Mandarin Chinese online for at least 52 contact hours. Among them, 93.3% were female and 6.7% male, reflecting a gender imbalance commonly observed in adult language-learning contexts. This aligns with studies such as the one by Kheder and Rouabhia (2023), who noted that women are more prominently represented in language-learning activities and related professions than men (p. 58). In addition to their demographic data, 80% of the participants expressed that they had never produced vlogs and/or memes as part of assignments or classroom activities in their previous foreign language classes, making them an ideal group for testing.

3.2 Data collection methods and process

Data was collected largely from two methods. The first was an online questionnaire containing both closed and open-ended questions administered at the end of the semester. The questions focused on participants' overall opinions on the integration of vlogging and meme creation learning activities into the Mandarin Chinese course, the challenges they encountered while doing these activities, and their personal perceptions of the progress they made because of these activities. The second method consisted of an evaluation of the work produced by the students for both vlogging and creating a meme through a rubric developed by the researcher shown in Figures 1 & 2.

CRITERIA	EXCELLENT (3)	GOOD (2)	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT (1)
Humour & creativity	Meme is very original, clever, and culturally appropriate. Meme is very engaging and humorous.	Meme shows creativity and some humour to engage the viewer.	Meme lacks creativity and humour. It is unclear.
Task completion	Fully meets all task requirements; topic relevance, appropriate image and text and correct format.	Mostly complete. Does not meet all requirements (e.g. is slightly off-topic or a minor element is missing.	Task not completed and/or consists of mostly irrelevant content.
Language & expression	Language is accurate and natural. Vocabulary choice and grammar are appropriate and error-free.	Generally appropriate language use but contains minor errors that do not affect clarity.	Frequent errors that make the meaning difficult to understand.

Figure 1: Rubric for evaluating the meme creation exercises.

CRITERIA	EXCELLENT (3)	GOOD (2)	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT (1)
Pronunciation	Pronunciation and tones are consistently accurate. Student's speech is clear and can be easily understood.	Mostly accurate pronunciation and tones. Student commits minor errors, but they do not interfere with comprehension.	Frequent errors in pronunciation and tones. Student's speech is often unclear and difficult to understand.
Fluency & delivery	Speech flows smoothly with natural pacing and rhythm. A very confident delivery.	Generally smooth delivery with occasional hesitations or unnatural pauses.	Noticeable hesitations and pauses that interrupt flow of speech. The student's delivery lacks confidence.
Task completion	Submission completes all task requirements includes the correct topic, appropriate vocabulary and grammar structures, and video is a suitable length.	Task is mostly complete with some minor omissions or the video is slightly shorter than required.	Task is not completed and the content is largely off-topic.

Figure 2: Rubric for evaluating the vlogging exercises.

The rubric included key performance criteria considered essential when creating both a vlog and a meme in a foreign language. Rubrics are widely recognised as very effective tools for assessing student performance on specific tasks. Furthermore, they offer several benefits to the learner, the teacher and the overall classroom environment, as demonstrated in Wolf and Stevens' (2017) study. They found that rubrics not only support guided student self-assessment, but they also help in designing effective learning environments by aligning with lesson objectives and promote greater consistency in teachers' evaluation of student work (p. 12). Data gathered from both collection methods was then analysed using thematic analysis for the qualitative data and descriptive statistics for the quantitative data. This allowed for identifying key statistical insights and observable patterns and themes emerging from the participants' responses.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Student Opinion on Vlogging and Meme Creation Activities

Participants were asked to share their thoughts on the vlogging and meme creation activities done during the semester on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the highest, most favourable response and 1 being the lowest. A total of 96.7% of respondents rated the vlogging activities either 4 or 5. Participants generally described vlogging as a fun and innovative way to apply the language in practical scenarios and noted that it allowed them to be more creative with their language use. One participant stated, "*I enjoyed the assignments that required us to record videos and work with others as well as be able to speak in the language and teach others about cultural aspects. It has really enhanced my appreciation for Chinese*".

This suggests that the vlogging tasks promoted both language engagement and cultural appreciation among the participants. Another participant pointed out vlogging's multidimensional benefits, stating, "*It is an excellent tool for practice in writing (scripting), reading out loud, and of course, speaking skills.*" As such, vlogging is perceived to be improving not only their speaking skills but also reading and writing in Mandarin Chinese. Another participant remarked, "*Because our teacher made it fun and interactive,*" highlighting the importance of teacher's ability to integrate these activities in their lessons. This observation aligns with the findings of Anrasiyana et al. and Afrilliani et al., both of which underscore the teacher's role in ensuring the effective integration of vlogging into the language classroom. Only 3.3% of respondents gave a neutral rating of 3, and notably, no one rated the activity 2 or 1.

Similar positive responses were reported for the meme creation activities, however, with slightly more variation than the responses for vlogging activities. Most participants (73.3%) gave the meme creation activities a rating of 4 or 5. In general, participants believed that creating memes were enjoyable and motivating. One participant noted "*Memes are super relatable, funny or both & so it's easy to remember them & by extension the vocabulary they contain*". Findings also indicated that memes allowed learners to freely express humour and creativity while engaging with Mandarin Chinese vocabulary and cultural references. This aligns with the findings in Dong's 2025 study, which highlighted memes as being a gateway to better understand Chinese culture.

However, not all participants had wholly positive experiences with the meme generation activities. A few respondents (23.3%) gave a neutral rating of 3 and 3.3% a rating of 2. One participant explained that "*some of the memes I had to look up each character which so by the time I translated it I was already overwhelmed and some of the memes I just did not understand*". This suggests that while meme-based activities can be engaging and fun, they may also lead to cognitive overload for learners, especially those who may not feel so confident in their abilities to read and write in Mandarin Chinese.

4.2 Impact of Vlogging and Meme Creation on Learners' Motivation

With respect to vlogging, the most widely reported benefits were increased fluency and confidence (73.3%) and a greater motivation to speak Mandarin (73.3%). This suggests that vlogging can be a powerful tool for affective engagement as it helps students feel more willing and encouraged to use the language in a practical setting. Additionally, 60% of the participants indicated improved vocabulary retention, while 56.7% reported better pronunciation, showing that vlogging not only enhances motivation but also noticeably contributes to the development of one's core language skills.

When asked about their confidence in speaking Mandarin Chinese after completing the vlogging tasks, a combined 80% of participants ("strongly agree" and "agree") reported increased confidence, reflecting the findings of previous studies that highlight vlogging's positive impact on speaking proficiency and overall confidence level. Only one respondent (3.3%) disagreed, while the remaining 16.7% were neutral, possibly due to factors such as prior exposure, personality, or learning preferences. Notably, all participants (100%) expressed willingness to continue engaging in vlogging exercises

within the Mandarin Chinese programme, underscoring the activity's motivational appeal and the overall perceived value in language learning.

Participants completed vlogging tasks, such as ordering bubble tea and describing their daily routines (see sample screenshots in Figure 3 below), and on average, achieved scores ranging from 7 to 9 (9 being the maximum score on the rubric). This strong overall performance suggests that students were able to successfully apply their Mandarin skills in authentic, communicative contexts, demonstrating not their overall competence in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar.

Figure 3: Screenshots from vlogging activity on one's daily routine in Mandarin Chinese.

Memes yielded similar results. Participants identified many benefits from creating memes which can be divided into three main benefits: increased understanding of Mandarin humour and culture (90%), greater engagement with learning materials (76.7%) and improved vocabulary retention (56.7%). These findings suggest that meme creation not only enhanced participants' cultural and linguistic knowledge but also promoted active engagement with the course content. The high percentage of students noting cultural and humour-related benefits underscores the value of memes as tools for integrating language learning with cultural insight.

When asked how they found the process of creating memes in Mandarin, most participants reported positive experiences with 53.3% describing it as very enjoyable and 36.7% as somewhat enjoyable. These results indicate that meme creation is largely perceived as a fun and engaging activity. However, approximately 10% of participants found the creation process somewhat difficult. One such participant found memes to be "*less effective for retention*" and another stated "*I'm not a meme person. It's hit or miss with me*". Despite these minor reservations, 80% of the participants indicated that they would continue to participate actively in meme creation exercises. This further demonstrates the activity's overall motivational appeal and acceptance within the Mandarin Chinese programme.

The memes produced by participants were generally of high quality (see samples in Figure 4 below), although scores varied more than those for the vlogging exercises, ranging from 5 to 9 (with 9 being the highest score). Some memes were slightly harder to interpret, which may reflect individual differences in humour or the challenges of understanding and creating humour in a foreign language. These results suggest that while meme creation is an engaging and creative activity, it also introduces additional a dimension of cognitive and cultural complexity compared to more structured tasks such as vlogging.
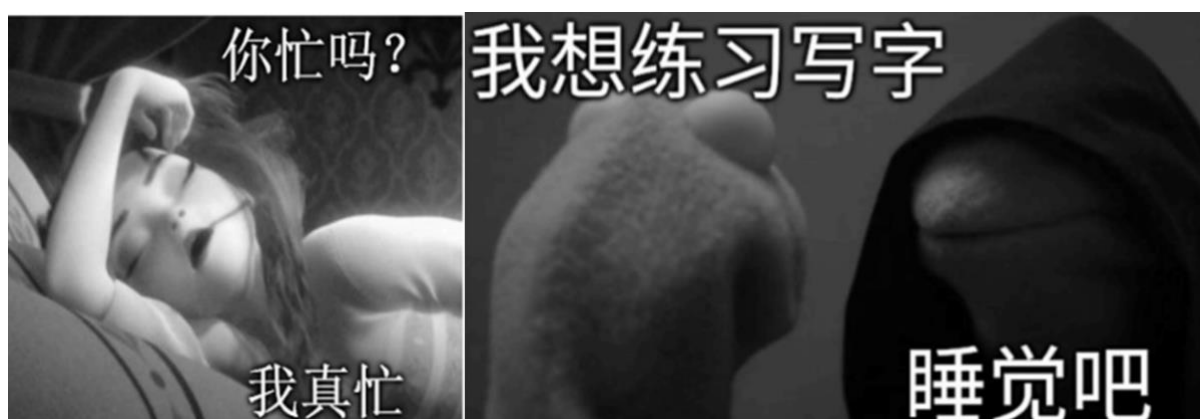
Figure 4: Top memes produced by participants in Mandarin Chinese class.

4.3 Challenges Experienced when Vlogging and Creating Memes

Participants reported some challenges when completing vlogging and meme exercises (See Tables 2 & 3). When asked how they felt about creating vlogs in Mandarin Chinese, many participants expressed positive or moderately positive feelings toward the activity. A combined 60% of participants (15 "somewhat confident" and 3 "very confident") reported feeling confident, while 33.3% experienced some degree of nervousness, and 6.7% felt neutral about the experience. This indicates that although there was some anxiety towards the activity, most learners were still comfortable or willing to engage with and complete vlogging tasks.

Of the difficulties listed, most participants cited being self-conscious about speaking as their biggest challenge (66.7%). This suggests that affective barriers such as critical self-judgement and possibly anxiety were more prominent than linguistic or technical barriers when participants engaged in the vlog exercises. This is similar to the findings in Anrasiyana et al. (2022)'s study, which cited the students' confidence level and by extension their low motivation being a hindrance when creating a vlog in their target language. Pronunciation difficulties followed closely behind as it was cited by 56.7% of participants. This is unsurprising given the tonal system in Mandarin Chinese language, a feature which differs vastly from the participants' native tongue (English).

Table 2: Table showing the difficulties experienced by participants when creating vlogs in Mandarin Chinese (n=30)

Difficulty	Number of participants	Percentage
Pronunciation difficulties	17	56.7%
Struggling to find the right words	14	46.7%
Feeling self-conscious about speaking	20	66.7%
Technical issues (editing, recording, etc.)	9	30%

The most significant challenge when creating memes was finding the appropriate vocabulary in Mandarin (63.3%), suggesting that meme creation is not just solely a creative task but also a linguistically demanding one. Over half of the participants (53.3%) also struggled with designing the meme, indicating that digital literacy may be an additional layer of cognitive load in this type of activity. There are many meme templates out there, so finding the right one to highlight a specific aspect of the language can be challenging. Notably, 43.3% of students found it difficult to understand humour in Mandarin Chinese, reinforcing the deep cultural knowledge required to fully engage in meme-based tasks. A few participants (6.7%) cited technical or app-related difficulties, suggesting that technology itself may not be the primary barrier, but rather a learner's language and cultural competence.

Table 3: Table showing the difficulties experienced by participants when creating vlogs in Mandarin Chinese (n=30)

Difficulty	Number of participants	Percentage
Finding the right vocabulary	19	63.3%
Designing the meme	16	53.3%
Understanding humour in Mandarin	13	43.3%
Other	2	6.7%

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that the integration of vlogging and meme creation activities in the Mandarin Chinese programme was generally well-received by the participants. Although some participants reported minor challenges, they consistently acknowledged the numerous benefits of these activities in developing their Mandarin Chinese language skills. These benefits included a more enjoyable classroom experience, increased confidence, and noticeable improvements in speaking proficiency. This indicates a strong potential for the continued use of such activity types within the programme, particularly as students remained motivated and expressed willingness to engage with them in the future despite facing challenges.

To address the difficulties encountered, it is recommended that educators provide stronger emotional support and incorporate purposeful scaffolding techniques in their virtual classrooms. These measures may help mitigate emotional barriers such as anxiety, self-consciousness or hesitation during a performance-based task like a vlog, while supporting the learner in navigating cultural nuances required for making a meme. The teacher, therefore, plays a crucial guiding role in ensuring that students are equipped with both the necessary linguistic input and cultural understanding prior to producing their work. Additionally, learners should be progressively led into highly productive tasks such as vlogging and meme creation in a sequential, structured manner to reduce cognitive load and gradually build their confidence. Future research could further investigate the long-term impact (e.g. for an academic year) of these tasks on learner autonomy, motivation, and real-world communicative competence across different proficiency levels in the online Mandarin Chinese programme.

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