

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Enhancing Mandarin Language Learning Through Cultural Integration: An Exploratory Study on Learner Engagement and Competence

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of cultural integration on the Mandarin language learning experience, filling a crucial gap in current research that often overlooks the role of cultural elements in language acquisition. Specifically, it assesses how a Cultural Integration Program influences learners' language skills, cultural understanding, and motivation. An exploratory methodology was applied, involving a questionnaire distributed to 12 participants. Part A of the questionnaire contained 16 quantitative items focused on assessing language proficiency, cultural awareness, and motivational factors. At the same time, Part B included four open-ended questions that offered insights into participants' personal experiences within the program. The data were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative approaches to understand measurable outcomes and nuanced personal reflections comprehensively. The findings suggest that cultural activities when embedded in language programs foster greater interest, improve communication skills, and enrich cultural understanding among learners. These insights underscore the value of integrating cultural elements into Mandarin language education, highlighting the potential benefits for learners in terms of both linguistic and intercultural competence. This research offers valuable implications for educators and policymakers aiming to enhance the effectiveness of language instruction by incorporating culturally responsive practices into curricula.

Keywords: Cultural Integration; Mandarin Language Learning; Language Education

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 12 March 2025 | Accepted: 20 August 2025 | Available online: 22 January 2026

CITATION

Chua NA, Rashid RA, Soon GY, et al. Enhancing Mandarin Language Learning Through Cultural Integration: An Exploratory Study on Learner Engagement and Competence. *Environment and Social Psychology* 2026; 11(1): 3537. doi:10.59429/esp.v11i1.3537

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1. Introduction

In the ever-globalising world, the importance of learning Mandarin extends beyond linguistic competence, reaching into the heart of cultural understanding. This article delves into the transformative initiative that advocates for the seamless integration of culture into Mandarin language programmes. Language acquisition experts ^[1,2] acknowledge the inherent interconnectedness of language and culture, and a holistic approach to education, recognising the reciprocal relationship between the two. The integration program goes beyond conventional language instruction, providing an immersive learning experience that harmoniously combines linguistic skills with cultural insights to enhance Mandarin proficiency.

The current approach to Mandarin language education often falls short in fostering a deep understanding of Chinese culture, leading to a disconnect between linguistic skills and cultural competence. This gap creates a challenge for learners who wish to effectively communicate and engage in culturally appropriate ways within Mandarin-speaking contexts.

Hence, the study's primary goal is to investigate the effects of integrating Chinese culture alongside Mandarin learning, explore the belief on the practical methods of this approach, and the impact of cultural competence immersion on students' learning experiences in a Mandarin-speaking environment. This study sheds light on its potential impact on Mandarin language education. Two research questions derived from the study:

1. How does incorporating cultural resources for a more immersive experience enhance Mandarin language learning?
2. What impact do experiential cultural activities have on Mandarin language proficiency and real-world language application?

In relation to the two research questions above, there are five hypotheses for this study. They are:

H1: Incorporating cultural resources into Mandarin language programs significantly enhances learners' Mandarin language proficiency (knowledge of Hanzi, Pinyin, and overall communication skills).

H2: Participation in experiential cultural activities (e.g., music, calligraphy, pottery, wushu, paper cutting) significantly improves learners' appreciation and understanding of Chinese culture.

H3: Cultural integration in Mandarin language programs positively influences learners' motivation to continue studying the language.

H4: Learners who engage in culturally integrated Mandarin programs demonstrate higher levels of intercultural competence compared to learning Mandarin without cultural elements.

H5: Extending the duration and diversity of cultural integration activities leads to greater learner engagement and perceived benefits in Mandarin learning.

2. Literature review

2.1. The interconnectedness of language and culture

The interconnectedness of language and culture forms a foundational aspect of language acquisition, particularly evident in the context of Mandarin. Language and culture are symbiotic, with one influencing and shaping the other. Language is a dynamic system firmly rooted in cultural contexts, rather than merely a set of grammatical rules and vocabulary^[1]. The intertwining of language and culture are further emphasized as they shape and reflect a community's values, norms, and worldviews^[2].

In the realm of Mandarin language learning, cultural understanding emerges as a catalyst for proficiency. Cultural nuances, expressions, and social etiquette are intricately woven into the fabric of Mandarin, requiring learners to go beyond linguistic competence. Understanding the cultural underpinnings enriches language learning by providing context, depth, and authenticity. This sentiment, echoed by researchers ^[such as 3], reinforces the broader educational principle that integrating culture into language learning enhances various aspects of proficiency. Applying similar principles in the context of Mandarin education can similarly contribute to a more comprehensive and culturally enriched language learning experience for students.

Moreover, the idea is that integrating cultural content into language learning, as seen in the context of Mandarin education, can positively impact vocabulary acquisition. By exposing learners to culturally oriented texts, educators can create a more engaging and effective learning environment, promoting a deeper understanding of the language within its cultural context^[4]. The interplay between language and culture in Mandarin extends to pragmatic language use. Gaining insights into Chinese culture equips learners with the skills to navigate social interactions appropriately, fostering effective communication.

This is in line with the findings of research, which contends that cultural and social factors impact the methods Thai students use to learn Chinese, mainly when speaking ^[5]. Integrating Chinese culture into Mandarin education can enhance these strategies, providing a more comprehensive and effective approach to language learning, especially in developing speaking skills.

In other words, the interconnection of language and culture holds paramount significance in Mandarin language learning. Language, deeply rooted in cultural contexts, shapes the values and worldviews of a community. For Mandarin learners, recognising the intricate weaving of cultural nuances into the fabric of the language is crucial. Beyond linguistic competence, delving into cultural underpinnings is essential for a profound and authentic learning experience. Exposure to culturally oriented texts enhances engagement and deepens language understanding within their cultural context. Integrating Chinese culture into Mandarin education extends to pragmatic language use, especially in speaking, enhancing learners' strategies and contributing to a more comprehensive language learning approach. Recognising and integrating cultural elements in Mandarin education is fundamental to fostering a holistic learning experience that enriches proficiency across linguistic skills and cultural competencies.

In sum, the symbiotic relationship between language and culture is crucial for achieving true proficiency in Mandarin, as cultural insights provide the necessary context and depth for meaningful communication. Integrating cultural understanding into Mandarin education not only enhances linguistic skills but also fosters a more authentic and enriching learning experience.

2.2. Holistic curriculum design

Developing a curriculum seamlessly integrating language skills with cultural knowledge is paramount in language education. By recognising the inherent interconnection between language and culture, educators can create a holistic and enriched learning experience for students. Language is not merely a set of grammatical rules and vocabulary, but a dynamic system deeply rooted in cultural contexts ^[1]. Including cultural information in language lessons is more than learning new words and grammar rules. It helps students understand cultural nuances, expressions, and social norms better, giving them a full picture of the language in its real-life setting.

This approach ensures that language learning is not isolated but embedded within the cultural tapestry from which it originates. Language and culture are intricately intertwined, shaping and reflecting the values

and norms of a community ^[2]. So, a curriculum that combines language skills with cultural knowledge in a smooth way helps students communicate in real life in a way that is nuanced and sensitive to other cultures.

It is highlighted that the significance of this integrated approach, emphasising that cultural understanding catalyses proficiency ^[3]. Going beyond linguistic competence, students delve into the cultural underpinnings of the language, resulting in a more profound and authentic learning experience. Exposure to culturally oriented texts further enhances engagement and deepens language understanding within their cultural context^[4].

It is found that incorporating cultural information, such as folk customs, social humanities, and other relevant cultural aspects, into language education improves the content taught, keeps students more interested, and makes learning more effective^[6]. This approach accelerates the subconscious assimilation of language and culture and fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture among students. Additionally, it plays a crucial role in helping students recognise and comprehend the various cultural nuances that emerge in cross-cultural communication, thereby honing their skills in navigating diverse cultural landscapes. Overall, adding cultural elements goes beyond just teaching a language. It creates a more complete and immersive learning experience that speeds up language learning and improves communication across cultures.

Basically, a curriculum that combines language and culture in a way that does not clash helps students learn the language and builds their cultural competence. This gives them a solid foundation for communicating effectively in the target language. A holistic curriculum design merges language skills with cultural knowledge to provide a nuanced and contextually rich learning experience, ensuring that students can navigate and communicate effectively within the cultural framework of the language. This integrated approach to language education not only enhances linguistic proficiency but also develops cultural sensitivity and understanding.

2.3. Cultural themes and contexts

In every society, cultural themes and contexts serve as vibrant threads weaving together the rich tapestry of human experience. Festivals and celebrations illuminate the collective spirit, providing occasions for communities to express joy, tradition, and shared identity. Daily life and customs, the subtle rhythms of existence, showcase the nuances that shape a society's character, from daily routines to social interactions. Culinary traditions entice the senses, offering a flavorful exploration of cultural history and regional diversity. Traditional arts and crafts embody the creative spirit, preserving heritage through craftsmanship, reflecting both aesthetic beauty and functional significance. Together, these elements form a kaleidoscope of cultural expression, illustrating the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation that defines the essence of societies worldwide.

2.3.1. Festivals and celebrations

To enhance cultural comprehension, one can delve into the vibrancy of cultural festivities and celebrations, like the spirited Chinese New Year or the enchanting Mid-Autumn Festival. Immersing oneself in festival-related vocabulary, greetings, and traditional practices not only enriches language skills but also cultivates a profound appreciation for Mandarin traditions ^[7].

2.3.2. Daily life and customs

Explore the daily lives and customs within Mandarin-speaking communities, delving into common phrases, etiquette, and social norms. By integrating these aspects into the learning process, individuals can develop practical language skills and elevate their cultural competence ^[6].

2.3.3. Culinary traditions

Chinese food is a culinary experience and a cultural and artistic expression deeply intertwined with daily life and well-being ^[8]. One can dive into the diverse world of Chinese cuisine. Exploring traditional dishes, proper dining manners, and the cultural significance of different foods adds a sensory dimension to language learning, helping students learn new words and become more familiar with Chinese food culture ^[9]. Moreover, the food theme enables learners to learn words in their applicable contexts and link concepts together more effectively for better communication.

2.3.4. Traditional arts and crafts

Delving into traditional Chinese art and craft, particularly calligraphy, extends beyond developing artistic skills. They encompass academic success, heightened language learning motivation, a deeper cultural understanding, a connection to ancient scripts, and an alignment with the principles of nature. According to observations and feedback, students who participate in Chinese calligraphy learning exhibit better academic performance in their respective classes ^[10]. Calligraphy might enhance language learning enthusiasm by making the process more enjoyable and culturally immersive. This approach connects learners to the roots of the language and provides insights into the historical development of written Chinese, fostering a richer appreciation for the script.

Incorporating cultural themes and contexts in Mandarin language education is a multifaceted approach to enriching students' linguistic proficiency and cultural competence. By integrating festivals and celebrations such as Chinese New Year and the Mid-Autumn Festival, learners expand their vocabulary and gain insights into traditional practices, fostering a deeper appreciation for Mandarin traditions ^[7]. Exploring daily life and customs further enhances practical language skills, providing students with a nuanced understanding of etiquette and social norms in Mandarin-speaking communities ^[6]. The culinary tradition themes immerse students in the wide range of Chinese food, adding a sensory element to language learning and teaching them about the cultural significance of different foods ^[8, 9].

Lastly, engaging in traditional arts and crafts, particularly calligraphy, enhances artistic skills and correlates with academic success and increases motivation to learn a language. This makes for a more complete and culturally immersive language education experience ^[10]. This comprehensive approach connects learners to the roots of the language, providing insights into historical development and fostering a richer appreciation for Mandarin culture. In essence, the examination of these discrete cultural themes and contexts serves to enrich the pedagogical content of Mandarin language curricula. It augments the acquisition of linguistic competencies by facilitating the application of lexical items and idiomatic expressions within their culturally situated contexts.

2.4. Mandarin learning and cultural competence

The integration of cultural elements into Mandarin language education emphasises the interconnectedness of linguistic proficiency and cultural competence. Language and culture are symbiotic, influencing and shaping each other ^[1, 2]. For Mandarin learners, understanding the intricate cultural nuances woven into the language is crucial for a profound and authentic learning experience, going beyond mere linguistic competence. The incorporation of cultural content positively impacts vocabulary acquisition, creating a more engaging and effective learning environment ^[4]. This interplay between language and culture extends to pragmatic language use, enhancing learners' strategies, particularly in speaking ^[5].

A holistic curriculum design, seamlessly integrates language skills with cultural knowledge ^[1, 2]. It recognises that language is deeply rooted in cultural contexts, fostering a comprehensive understanding of

cultural nuances, expressions, and social etiquette. Exposure to culturally oriented texts enhances engagement and deepens language understanding within its cultural context ^[4]. The integration of cultural information accelerates the assimilation of language and culture, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture among students ^[6]. This comprehensive approach provides a holistic and immersive educational experience, nurturing cross-cultural communication proficiency.

In specific cultural themes and contexts, such as festivals, daily life, culinary traditions, and traditional arts and crafts, linguistic proficiency and cultural competence intertwine. By integrating festivals and celebrations, learners gain insights into traditional practices, expand their vocabulary and foster a deeper appreciation for Mandarin traditions ^[7]. Exploring daily life and customs enhances practical language skills, providing a nuanced understanding of etiquette and social norms ^[6]. Culinary tradition themes immerse learners in the diverse world of Chinese cuisine, offering a sensory dimension to language learning and exposing students to the cultural significance of various foods ^[8, 9]. Delving into traditional arts and crafts, particularly calligraphy, correlates with academic success and heightened language learning motivation, creating a holistic and culturally immersive language education experience ^[10].

This interconnected approach ensures that Mandarin language programmes not only add depth to linguistic proficiency but also enhance language learning by providing practical, real-world applications of vocabulary and expressions within their cultural contexts. This interconnected approach ensures that Mandarin language programmes not only add depth to linguistic proficiency but also enhance language learning by providing practical, real-world applications of vocabulary and expressions within their cultural contexts, thereby fostering a more profound and functional understanding of the language and its cultural nuances.

3. Methodology/Materials

This exploratory study used a questionnaire to gather learners' beliefs about a programme which was designed for Mandarin language education and incorporated a multifaceted approach that combined language skills and authentic cultural experiences together. It was a 12-day cultural programme orchestrated by a prominent Chinese university. The Short-Term Language and Culture Program was based on the trip shown in <https://youtu.be/WQJLhAtaB8g>. The deliberate selection of twelve participants in this study used the purposive sampling strategy ^[11]. Researchers utilize this method to understand the variations leading to different outcomes and help to identify factors contributing to success or failure of a programme. The qualitative nature of the study drove the deliberate choice and did not seek generalizations. The programme participants were recruited based on the level of engagement in both quantitative and qualitative processes, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the study's focus. It ensured a nuanced exploration of perspectives, enhancing the richness of data without compromising the quality of the research. Since the participants were partners in the programme, they had access to their information and a say in how the programme was run. By taking part in this research, they had a chance to support new discoveries that might help others in the future.

Authentic cultural resources, including music instruments, inventions, food, writing, printing, drawing art, paper cutting, pottery, wushu, and Chinese character, form an integral part of the program. These resources were carefully selected to expose students to real-world language usage, colloquial expressions, and cultural nuances. These hands-on experiences provide students with opportunities to learn and enhance their language skills in authentic cultural contexts, reinforcing their interest, understanding, and proficiency. Participants' feedback was collected and reflection sessions were carried out to explore the impact of the cultural integration program. There were 20 questions created based on the study of the literature review.

Tables 1 and 2 show 16 quantitative and four qualitative questions respectively. The quantitative items were related to the content of language (questions numbers 1, 3, 4, and 5), culture (6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11), motivation (questions numbers 2, 14, 15, and 18), and other factors (12 and 13). On the other hand, the qualitative data was collected through questions 16, 17, 19, and 20 (refer to table 2). The credibility of these questions was determined through a robust process involving agreement of the interpretation by subject expertise and inter raters, as well as a pilot study. After collecting the responses, a meticulous cross-verification process was applied, comparing the responses with the pilot study results to ensure consistency and reliability. This rigorous verification process aimed to enhance the overall validity of the study, guaranteeing the integrity of the collected data. Lastly, the data were analysed accordingly using descriptive (for quantitative data) and thematic analysis ^[12] (for qualitative data). In sum the main constructs and variables of the study are presented in Table 1. While the quantitative findings (Part A) are presented in Table 2 and Table 3 shows the Qualitative Data findings (Part B).

Table 1. Variables of the Study

Construct	Variable (in words, not abbreviations)	Measurement / Indicators
Mandarin Language Proficiency	Knowledge of Mandarin	Self-reported improvement in overall Mandarin knowledge (100%)
	Mastery of Chinese characters (Hanzi)	92% agreed Hanzi classes enhanced their Mandarin
	Mastery of Mandarin phonetic system (Hanyu Pinyin)	100% agreed Pinyin classes improved their Mandarin
	Communication skills in Mandarin	Qualitative responses: improved fluency and confidence in speaking with native speakers
Cultural Appreciation	Understanding of Chinese traditions and practices	Engagement with festivals, customs, etiquette
	Engagement in cultural classes	100% agreed musical, pottery, drawing, wushu, calligraphy, and paper cutting classes increased cultural liking
	Depth of cultural learning	Qualitative responses: better understanding of traditions, arts, cuisine, inventions
Motivation	Motivation to continue learning Mandarin	92% reported program motivated them to keep learning Mandarin
	Engagement through cultural integration	92% agreed cultural learning engaged them in Mandarin study
	Long-term learning intention	100% supported continuing learning Mandarin and Chinese culture in China
Intercultural Competence	Ability to use Mandarin in real-world cultural contexts	Qualitative responses: confidence in speaking, ability to interact with native speakers
	Cultural sensitivity	Recognition of etiquette, social norms, and deeper appreciation of Chinese society
Programme Evaluation	Perceived strengths	Enhanced interest, communication skills, and cultural immersion
	Perceived weaknesses	Short duration (58%), challenging content (8%), lack of preparation (8%)
	Suggestions for improvement	Extend duration, more off-campus activities, more participants, additional funding

Table 2. Quantitative Findings (Part A)

Questions	Data Gathered
Content: Language	
1. Cultural Integration Program has enhanced my Mandarin knowledge.	100%
3. The learning schedule is good for non-native to know China and like Mandarin.	100%
4. The Hanzi classes have enhanced my Mandarin.	
Agree	92%
Disagree	8%
5. The Hanyu pinyin classes have enhanced my Mandarin.	100%
Content: Culture	
6. The musical classes made me like Chinese culture and Chinese language.	100%
7. The writing printing class made me like Chinese culture and Chinese language.	100%
8. The Chinese drawing class made me like Chinese culture and Chinese language.	100%
9. The pottery class made me like Chinese culture and Chinese language.	100%
10. The wushu class made me like Chinese culture and Chinese language.	100%
11. The paper cutting class made me like Chinese culture and Chinese language.	100%
Other Factors	
12. All the teachers are very skillful and helpful.	100%
13. All the classes were very helpful to engage students in learning Mandarin.	100%
Motivation	
2. Cultural Integration Program has motivated me to continue learning Mandarin.	
Agree	92%
Not sure	8%
14. Learning Chinese culture is important, and it has engaged me in learning Mandarin.	
Agree	92%
Not sure	8%
15. Learning Chinese culture eased me to understand better Hanzi and pinyin.	
Agree	92%
Not sure	8%
18. Learning Chinese and Chinese culture in China should be continued in the future.	100%

Table 3. Qualitative findings (Part B)

Questions	Qualitative Data
16. The strength of Culture Integration Program:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> benefit, improve = 2 quotations (17%) want to learn mandarin, language = 4 quotations (33%) better communication, to speak = 2 quotations (17%) learn culture = 7 quotations (58%)
17. The weakness of Cultural Integration Program:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no weakness = 3 quotations (25%) too short = 7 quotations (58%) very challenging = 1 quotation (8%) students need to prepare before the program – 1 quotation (8%) Chinese culture (arts, cooking and its invention), Chinese culture, Chinese culture, Mandarin culture, Chinese culture, Chinese culture, Chinese culture = 7 (58%)
19. What did you learn from Cultural Integration Program:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language, Hanzi and pinyin, Mandarin language, language = 4 (33%) Firsthand experience = 1 (8%) Communication skill, communicating, fluent, speak to native speaker = 4 (33 %) How to balance physical and emotion to study better = 1(8%)
20. My suggestions for the improvement:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 weeks, Longer, more frequent, one month, more time, more than 7 days, longer, 2/3 weeks = 8 (%) More out campus activity = 1 (8%) More participant = 1 (8%) To Get fund = 1 (8%) No improvement is needed = 1 (8%)

4. Results and findings

4.1. Demographic details

In this research, twelve participants (three males and nine females) affiliated with a local institution engaged with the questionnaire. They were the same group of students who participated in the integrated programme. Financial commitments, averaging five thousand ringgit per participant, underscored their dedication to acquire the knowledge and practice the language learned. Their transportation expenses were covered by the institution. The small sample size of twelve participants was deliberately selected to facilitate a more manageable and focused research approach, allowing for in-depth analysis and individualized attention to each participant's learning outcomes within the context of the integrated program.

4.2. Quantitative results

The present study aimed to examine the perceptions and beliefs held by students on the potential influence of their involvement with the cultural themes and contexts integrated within the programme. The students' responses highlighted the interconnectedness of language and culture, validating the efficacy of the strategy in facilitating a comprehensive Mandarin learning experience.



Figure 1. Quantitative Findings

Source: Devised by Author (2025)

Figure 1 shows the quantitative findings which illuminate a narrative of success based on the integration of the cultural themes and contexts. Overall, participants unanimously acknowledged the programme's positive impact on their Mandarin proficiency level and cultural appreciation. The following are detailed explanations of each finding, which is also presented in Table 1.

4.2.1. Language content in the cultural integration programme

The research findings highlight four key points regarding the language content in the Cultural Integration Programme: the significant enhancement of Mandarin knowledge, the positive perception of the learning schedule, the substantial contribution of Hanzi classes to Mandarin enhancement, and the universal improvement in Mandarin proficiency through Hanyu Pinyin classes. These points collectively demonstrate the programme's comprehensive approach to language learning and its success in fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Mandarin language among participants.

a. Enhanced Mandarin Knowledge

A unanimous agreement among participants (100%) indicates that the Culture Integration Programme has been highly effective in enhancing their Mandarin knowledge. This suggests a comprehensive positive impact on language acquisition through the integration of cultural elements.

b. Positive Perception of the Learning Schedule:

All participants, particularly non-native learners, had a positive perception of the learning schedule. This indicates that the structure and timing of the programme were well-received, providing an effective framework for non-native speakers to understand China and develop a liking for Mandarin language.

c. Hanzi (Chinese character) Classes Contributing to Mandarin Enhancement:

A substantial 92% agreement among the participants signified that the Hanzi classes within the programme had significantly contributed to the enhancement of participants' Mandarin skills. This suggests

that the inclusion of Chinese characters in the curriculum had positively impacted language learning for the majority of participants.

d. Hanyu Pinyin Classes and Mandarin Enhancement:

All participants agreed that the Hanyu pinyin classes had universally enhanced their Mandarin proficiency. This underscores the effectiveness of incorporating Pinyin, the phonetic system, as a valuable component in improving language skills.

4.2.2. Culture content in the cultural integration program

The evaluation of the Cultural Integration Programme reveals seven key points regarding its cultural content: the positive impact of musical classes, the favorable perception of the writing printing class, the influence of the Chinese drawing class, the positive influence of the pottery class, the impact of the Wushu class, the cultural affinity fostered by the paper-cutting class, and the exceptional skill and helpfulness of all teachers. These points collectively illustrate the diverse and effective methods employed by the programme to enhance participants' appreciation and understanding of Chinese culture and language.

a. Positive Impact of Musical Classes:

All participants agreed that the musical classes within the Culture Integration Programme had played a pivotal role in fostering a positive attitude towards Chinese culture and the language. They expressed interest in both aspects, emphasising that the cultural enrichment could be achieved through musical education.

b. Positive Perception on Writing Printing Class:

Participants unanimously agreed that the writing printing class had significantly contributed to their positive perceptions on Chinese culture and language. The incorporation of writing printing appeared to be an effective cultural element in cultivating a favourable attitude towards both language and culture.

c. Chinese Drawing Class Influence:

All participants agreed that the Chinese drawing class had universally contributed to their appreciation for Chinese culture and language. This suggests that artistic expression through drawing serves as an impactful medium in enhancing cultural understanding and language liking.

d. Positive Influence of Pottery Class:

All participants also agreed that the pottery class had made them like Chinese culture and language. The hands-on experience of pottery appeared to be a compelling element in cultivating a positive connection to both cultural and linguistic aspects.

e. Wushu Class Impact:

All participants recognised that the Wushu class had contributed to their positive feelings towards Chinese culture and language. The incorporation of traditional martial arts, such as wushu, appeared to be effective in enhancing cultural appreciation and language liking.

f. Paper Cutting Class and Cultural Affinity:

All participants also recognised that the paper-cutting class had influenced their interest towards Chinese culture and language. This suggests that the traditional art of paper cutting serves as a culturally enriching element, fostering a positive attitude towards both language and culture.

g. Other Factors in the Cultural Integration Programme:

Participants expressed a 100% agreement that all teachers had been exceptionally skilled and helpful. This positive sentiment was extended to the perceived efficacy of the classes in engaging students in learning Mandarin. The findings underscore the overall success of the teaching staff and instructional methods, highlighting a positive and supportive learning environment that effectively captured students' interest and participation in Mandarin language education. The unanimous agreement on these factors indicated a consistent and positive experience shared by the participants in their language learning journey. The quantitative results revealed a high level of satisfaction among participants regarding the teaching staff and instructional effectiveness in Mandarin language classes.

4.2.3. Motivation and importance of learning mandarin and Chinese culture

The findings reveal four key points regarding the motivation and importance of learning Mandarin and Chinese culture: the significant motivation to continue language learning, the acknowledged importance of cultural understanding, the enhanced comprehension of language elements through cultural learning, and the unanimous support for ongoing education in China. These points underscore the interconnectedness of language acquisition and cultural immersion in fostering a comprehensive learning experience.

a. Motivation to Continue Learning Mandarin:

A substantial 92% agreement among the participants indicated that the Cultural Integration Programme had served as a significant motivator for participants to continue learning Mandarin. This suggests that the programme's emphasis on cultural integration plays a pivotal role in sustaining learners' interest and commitment to maximise language acquisition.

b. Perceived Importance of Learning Chinese Culture:

92% of the participants acknowledged the importance of learning the Chinese culture, which had actively engaged them in learning Mandarin. This implies that understanding and appreciating the cultural context positively impacts learners' motivation and commitment to the language-learning journey.

c. Enhanced Understanding through Cultural Learning:

Majority of the participants (92%) agreed that learning Chinese culture had enhanced their understanding of Hanzi and pinyin. This implies a positive correlation between cultural insights and improved comprehension of the written and phonetic aspects of the Mandarin language.

d. Strong Support for Continuing Mandarin and Cultural Learning in China:

All participants supported the continuation of learning Mandarin and Chinese culture in China in the future. This suggests a collective belief among participants in the value of studying both language and culture within the real, cultural context itself.

In summary, the quantitative findings demonstrate the positive impact of the Cultural Integration Programme's on Mandarin learning and cultural appreciation, fostering continuing interest among participants.

Based on the five hypotheses and the results reported in the study, the major findings have been structured into Table 4.

Table 4. Major Findings Based on Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Focus	Findings	Support
H1: Incorporating cultural resources enhances Mandarin proficiency	Mandarin language knowledge (Hanzi, Pinyin, communication)	100% participants agreed Mandarin knowledge improved; 92% reported Hanzi skills enhanced; 100% reported Pinyin improved	Supported
H2: Experiential cultural activities improve cultural appreciation	Cultural classes (music, calligraphy, drawing, pottery, wushu, paper cutting)	100% agreed each cultural activity increased appreciation of Chinese culture and language	Strongly Supported
H3: Cultural integration increases motivation to learn Mandarin	Learner motivation	92% agreed program motivated them to continue; 92% agreed culture helped them engage in learning Mandarin	Supported
H4: Learners in integrated programs develop intercultural competence	Intercultural competence (understanding, appreciation, application)	Qualitative data showed deeper understanding of traditions, etiquette, and customs; participants reported more confidence in real-world communication	Supported
H5: Longer and diverse programs enhance engagement and benefits	Duration & diversity of activities	67% suggested longer programs (2–4 weeks); requests for more off-campus activities and funding; participants felt short duration limited depth	Partially Supported

4.3. Qualitative results

The qualitative analysis of the Cultural Integration Programme’s impact yields a nuanced understanding of participants’ perspectives, which underscored the symbiotic relationship between language and culture, affirming the effectiveness of the approach in fostering a holistic Mandarin learning experience.

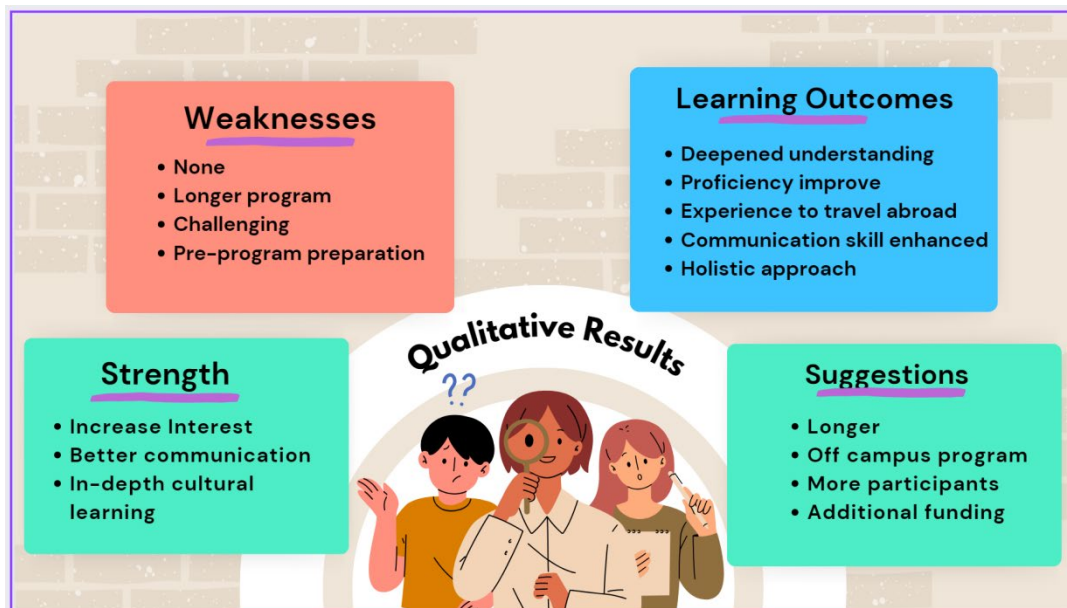


Figure 2. Qualitative Results

Source: DeVised by Author (2025)

The qualitative results are depicted in Figure 2. They basically illuminated both commendations and areas for enhancement for the Cultural Integration Programme characterized. Generally, the participants collectively recognized that the programme had favourable influence on Mandarin language competence and cultural appreciation. The following subsections elucidate the findings derived from the qualitative data. All participants’ names cited with the quotes have been replaced with fictional names.

4.3.1. Strengths of the cultural integration programme

The qualitative data highlighted the strengths of the Cultural Integration Program through its impact on advantages and improvement, increased interest in learning Mandarin, improved communication skills, and the depth of cultural learning the participants experienced. The evaluation of the Cultural Integration Programme identified four thematic strengths: enhanced benefits and improvement in language skills, increased interest in learning Mandarin, facilitated better communication and speaking skills, and in-depth cultural learning. These themes collectively demonstrate the programme's multifaceted approach to promoting language acquisition and cultural understanding among participants.

a. Enhanced Benefits and Improvement:

Findings revealed that a notable 17% of the participants expressed the programme's efficacy in providing tangible benefits and improvements in various aspects. They emphasised how the cultural integration programme had positively impacted their overall learning experience, fostering a more holistic understanding of Mandarin language and culture. This was evident in the quotes below.

"I have noticed a significant benefit in my language skills and cultural awareness through this program. It has improved my Mandarin learning experience." Participant (P) 1 (P1)

"The integration of culture has added a new dimension to my Mandarin learning. It's not just about language; it's about a comprehensive improvement in my skills and understanding." (P2)

b. Increased Interest in Learning Mandarin:

A substantial 33% of the participants indicated a heightened desire to learn Mandarin as a direct result of the cultural integration programme. They expressed a newfound interest in the language, highlighting the programme's ability to make Mandarin learning more appealing and engaging. Below are the examples of the responses:

"The Chinese cultural elements introduced in the programme have sparked my interest in learning Mandarin. It's not just a language; it's a journey into a rich and fascinating culture." (P3)

"I now want to learn Mandarin more than ever. The cultural integration has made the language come alive for me." (P1)

c. Facilitated Better Communication and Speaking Skills:

Approximately 17% of the participants acknowledged the programme's positive impact on their communication abilities, specifically in speaking Mandarin. The integration of cultural components was cited as instrumental in enhancing verbal proficiency and effective communication. For example:

"I feel more confident in speaking Mandarin now. The cultural insights provided in the programme have improved my communication skills significantly." (P1)

"The focus on culture has made a real difference in my ability to speak Mandarin fluently. It's not just about words; it's about effective communication." (P2)

d. In-Depth Cultural Learning:

58% of the participants expressed a strong emphasis on the programme's effectiveness in facilitating in-depth cultural learning. As shown below, they highlighted the programme's success in providing a comprehensive understanding of Chinese culture, extending beyond language acquisition.

"This programme goes beyond language—it's an immersion into Chinese culture. I've learned so much about traditions, customs, and the cultural fabric that enriches Mandarin." (P1)

"Learning culture alongside language has been the most valuable aspect of this program. It's like experiencing China in every lesson." (P3)

4.3.2. Weaknesses of the cultural integration programme

Qualitative data also highlighted the weaknesses of the Cultural Integration Programme, in which concerns were mainly related to duration, programme difficulty, and the perceived need for pre-programme preparation. These became valuable insights for programme refinement. The feedback on the Cultural Integration Programme revealed three additional themes: insights on the programme's duration, the challenging nature of the programme, and the perceived need for pre-programme preparation. These themes reflect participants' experiences and suggestions for refining the programme to enhance its effectiveness and participant preparedness.

a. Feedback on Programme Duration:

A substantial 58% of the participants perceived the short duration of the programme as a weakness. This feedback suggests a consensus among participants that the programme's brevity provided limited depth of language and cultural exploration.

"The program felt a bit rushed; a longer duration would have allowed for a more comprehensive exploration of Mandarin language and culture." (P2)

"While the content was good, I wished the programme had been longer to delve deeper into certain topics." (P4)

b. The Challenging Nature of the Programme:

A smaller percentage, 8%, found the programme to be very challenging. This suggests that a few participants experienced difficulties, either linguistically or culturally, indicating a perceived level of complexity in certain aspects of the programme.

"Some parts of the programme were quite challenging for me. It pushed me out of my comfort zone." (P3)

c. Perceived Need for Pre-Programme Preparation:

8% of the participants expressed that students should be provided with an opportunity to prepare prior to the programme. This suggests that some participants felt a lack of readiness or believed that prior preparation could enhance their overall experience.

"I think a bit of preparation before the program would have been beneficial. It was demanding without prior knowledge." (P5)

Despite the weaknesses identified above, there was a notable 25% of participants who expressed that the Cultural Integration Programme had no discernible weaknesses. They found the programme to be

satisfactory across various dimensions, highlighting a positive perception of the programme's design and execution. Below are some of the responses gathered:

"I couldn't identify any specific weaknesses in the program. It met my expectations and provided a well-rounded learning experience." (P6)

"For me, the programme was well-structured, and I didn't encounter any significant weaknesses." (P2)

4.3.3. Learning achievements from cultural integration program

Qualitative data reveals diverse learning outcomes which emphasised students' achievement in understanding the culture better, improving the language proficiency, experiencing the lived culture firsthand, enhancing their communication skills, and balancing their physical and emotional well-being through a holistic approach. These have affirmed the programme success. The learning achievements from the Cultural Integration Program were categorized into five distinct themes: deepening understanding of Chinese culture, improving language proficiency, exploring new culture through firsthand experience, enhancing communication skills, and balancing physical and emotional well-being. These themes encapsulate the comprehensive educational outcomes and personal growth experiences that participants gained from the program.

a. Deepen Understanding of Chinese Culture:

A substantial 58% of the participants highlighted the learning outcomes they achieved centred around various aspects of Chinese culture, including arts, cooking, and inventions. This suggests a predominant focus on cultural enrichment, indicating that participants gained a comprehensive understanding of diverse facets within the Chinese cultural landscape. Below are some of the responses gathered:

"I learned a lot about Chinese culture, from arts to cooking and fascinating inventions. It was a holistic immersion into the richness of Chinese traditions." (P1)

"The programme delved deep into Chinese culture, providing insights into various aspects. It was a profound cultural learning experience." (P2)

b. Improve the Language Proficiency:

33% of the participants identified language-related outcomes, encompassing Mandarin, Hanzi, and Pinyin. This suggests that a significant portion of participants experienced improvements in linguistic skills, including written characters and phonetic representation. The following are their responses:

"My language skills, especially in Mandarin, Hanzi, and Pinyin, improved significantly. It was a valuable language learning experience." (P2)

"The programme enhanced my proficiency in the Mandarin language, making me more confident in reading and understanding Hanzi and Pinyin." (P5)

c. Explore New Culture through Firsthand Experience:

A small percentage of the participants (8%) mentioned that they achieved learning through firsthand experience with the Chinese culture. This suggests that the participants believed they learned better when they were provided with the opportunities to travel abroad, immersing themselves with the culture. This has given them a broader cultural understanding through activities done beyond the classroom setting.

"The programme provided a unique chance for travel abroad, allowing me to experience Chinese culture firsthand. It was a transformative experience." (P7)

d. Enhance Communication Skills:

Another 33% of the participants emphasised that they had improved their communication skills, being able to communicate fluently and speak to native speakers. This suggests that the programme contributed to practical language application and effective communication.

"I feel more confident in communicating, especially speaking with native speakers. The program enhanced my practical language skills." (P6)

"One of the key takeaways was the improvement in my communication skills. I can now speak more fluently, especially with native speakers." (P1)

e. Balance Physical and Emotional Well-Being:

8% of the participants mentioned that they learned how to balance their physical and emotional aspects in order to study better. This suggests a holistic approach to learning that encompasses the development of both physical and emotional well-being.

"The programme taught me to balance my physical and emotional well-being, contributing to a more effective and sustainable study routine." (P7)

4.3.4. Suggestions for improvement of the cultural integration programme

Qualitative data also indicated a unanimous desire for such programme to be longer in duration, with suggestions for more off-campus activities, increased number of participants, and additional funding. To refine the Cultural Integration Programme, suggestions include extending its duration, increasing off-campus activities, boosting participant numbers, securing more funding, and acknowledging its existing strengths—each tied to one of the five themes proposed for enhancement. These themes encompass a holistic approach to improving the programme's depth, reach, and sustainability.

a. Extend the Programme Duration:

The majority participants (67%) suggested to extend the duration of the programme. The responses in terms of the length varied, but they ranged from two weeks to one month.

"I suggest making the programme longer, perhaps two or three weeks. More time would allow for a more in-depth exploration of both language and culture." (P2)

"Extending the programme to one month would be beneficial. It would provide more time for comprehensive learning and cultural immersion." (P1)

b. More Off-Campus Activities:

A small percentage of the participants (8%) recommended to incorporate more off-campus activities. This indicates a desire for a diverse range of activities beyond the classroom setting which can enhance the overall learning experience.

"Adding more off-campus activities would make the programme more dynamic and enriching. It would provide practical exposure to the culture." (P3)

c. Increase the Number of Participants:

Another 8% of participants proposed the idea of getting more participants to join the program. This implies a desire for a larger and more diverse participant group, potentially fostering a richer cultural exchange within the programme.

"Increasing the number of participants would bring more perspectives into the program. It could create a vibrant and diverse learning environment." (P4)

d. Additional Funding:

8% of the participants suggested the need to secure more funding for the program. This implies that participants recognise the potential benefits of additional resources in enhancing the programme's quality and offerings.

"Securing additional funding would enable the programme to expand its offerings and perhaps include more resources for participants." (P5)

e. No Improvement Needed - Recognition of the Programme's Strengths:

Another 8% of the participants expressed that no improvement was needed, indicating their satisfaction with the existing structure and content of the programme.

"I believe the programme is already well-structured, and I don't see a need for significant changes. It met my expectations." (P1)

The qualitative data discussed above reveals the strengths of the Cultural Integration Programme, including positive impacts on Mandarin language learning and cultural understanding. While the strengths are acknowledged as the success of the programme, there were also weaknesses that require some considerations for programme refinement. Desire for a programme with extended period, more outdoor activities, and increased funding indicate some areas for improvement that can be picked up during the programme review.

4.4. Discussion

Guided by our research questions, this section unravels the intricacies surrounding Mandarin language education and cultural integration. These questions serve as beacons, illuminating the path to a deeper understanding of the impact of cultural elements and experiential activities on Mandarin language proficiency and real-world application. It aims to shed light on the interconnectedness of language and culture^[13].

Research question 1: How does incorporating cultural resources for a more immersive experience enhance Mandarin language learning?

The findings from both quantitative and qualitative data illuminate the profound impact of incorporating cultural resources into the Cultural Integration Program. The quantitative results reveal a significant positive influence on various language learning aspects, with 92% of participants expressing motivation to continue learning Mandarin and emphasising the importance of Chinese culture in their studies. This underscores the strong connection between cultural exposure and sustained motivation in language acquisition^[10].

Furthermore, the quantitative data demonstrates perceived improvements in vocabulary learning when exposed to culturally oriented texts, supporting the notion that cultural content enhances vocabulary acquisition, especially in the context of Mandarin education. This emphasises the pedagogical benefit of integrating cultural resources into language learning programmes^[4].

Qualitatively, participants echoed these sentiments, noting that they achieved better understanding of the Chinese culture, including arts, cooking, inventions, and language. These qualitative findings align with the quantitative data, reinforcing the idea that cultural resources significantly contribute to a more immersive language learning experience, leading to better language learning.

Participants' suggestions for programme improvement, such as lengthening the programme duration, incorporating more off-campus activities, and securing additional funding, reflect the perceived value of cultural integration. The collective advocacy for an extended programme duration indicates a recognition that prolonged exposure to cultural resources could further enhance Mandarin language learning^[14]. The interconnectedness of language and culture emerges as a recurrent theme in both the current findings and previous studies. The symbiotic relationship between language and culture, shapes and influences each other^[1, 2]. The inclusion of cultural elements positively impacts vocabulary acquisition, creating a more engaging and effective learning environment^[4]. This integration extends to pragmatic language use, enhancing learners' strategies, particularly in speaking, aligning with the findings of the research^[5].

In the broader context of holistic curriculum design, the seamless integration of language skills with cultural knowledge proves paramount^[1, 3, 6]. Such an approach ensures that language learning is embedded within the cultural tapestry, providing students with a nuanced understanding of cultural nuances, expressions, and social etiquette.

Cultural themes and contexts, including festivals and celebrations, daily life and customs, culinary traditions, and traditional arts and crafts, emerge as crucial elements in Mandarin language education. Integrating these themes enriches students' linguistic proficiency and cultural competence, offering practical, real-world applications of vocabulary and expressions within their cultural contexts.

In summary, the findings highlight the transformative impact of cultural integration on Mandarin learning, emphasising the interconnection of linguistic proficiency and cultural competence. It proves that the Cultural Integration Programme fosters cross-cultural communication proficiency, offering a comprehensive and immersive educational experience.

Research question 2: What impact do experiential activities have on Mandarin language proficiency and real-world language application?

The examination of both quantitative and qualitative data provides in-depth insights into the influence of experiential activities on Mandarin language proficiency and real-world language application within the Cultural Integration Programme. studentsative analysis indicates a positive association between experiential activities and language proficiency, with 100% agreement that all activities in the program were beneficial for engaging students in learning Mandarin. This underscores the contribution of experiential activities to a positive and supportive learning environment. Participants' expressions of enhanced communication skills, including fluency and the ability to communicate with native speakers, further emphasise the positive impact of experiential activities. These qualitative findings align with the idea that practical, real-world language application, often facilitated through experiential activities, enhances overall language proficiency^[15]. Participants' suggestions for program improvement shed light on the perceived impact of experiential activities. Recommendations, such as incorporating more off-campus activities, reflect a desire for a broader range of experiential learning opportunities beyond the classroom. This aligns with the impact the participants had when travelling abroad, which reflected the authentic real-world application of Mandarin within a cultural context. This suggests that experiential activities contribute to a comprehensive and holistic language learning experience^[1, 2].

The symbiotic relationship between language and culture requires learners to delve beyond linguistic competence, enriching their understanding with cultural context, depth, and authenticity. This is consistent with the larger educational principle that researchers have shown which enhances various aspects of proficiency in language learning^[3]. Furthermore, integrating cultural content, particularly through experiential activities, positively impacts vocabulary acquisition, creating a more engaging and effective

learning environment. This notion extends to pragmatic language use ^[4], enhancing learners' strategies, particularly in speaking^[5].

In the realm of holistic curriculum design, the seamless integration of language skills with cultural knowledge ensures a comprehensive understanding of cultural nuances ^[1, 3, 6]. Exposure to culturally oriented texts enhances engagement and deepens language understanding within its cultural context, facilitating the assimilation of language and culture ^[4]. This approach, when extended to experiential activities, provides a rich and immersive educational experience, nurturing cross-cultural communication proficiency.

Cultural themes and contexts, such as festivals and celebrations, daily life and customs, culinary traditions, and traditional arts and crafts, further enrich Mandarin language education. By integrating these themes, learners gain practical, real-world applications of vocabulary and expressions within their cultural contexts. This comprehensive approach, involving experiential activities and cultural integration, not only adds depth to linguistic proficiency but also enhances language learning by providing meaningful connections to cultural realities.

5. Conclusion

The research findings from the Cultural Integration Programme offer valuable insights into the multifaceted dynamics of Mandarin language education, emphasising the interplay between cultural integration and experiential activities.

The interconnectedness of language and culture emerged as a foundational aspect of Mandarin language acquisition. Both quantitative and qualitative data consistently demonstrated the positive impact of cultural integration on Mandarin language learning. Participants expressed deepened cultural understanding, highlighting the symbiotic relationship between language proficiency and cultural immersion. The incorporation of culturally oriented texts and themes contributed significantly to vocabulary gains, underlining the pedagogical value of integrating cultural resources into language programmes ^[16]. It is also found that integrating Orang Asli culture into English lessons captivates students ^[17], in which Cultural celebrations, native language use, cooking, and parading outfits were particularly stimulating and motivating. Teachers expressed a high value for culturally responsive teaching.

The study revealed a compelling relationship between experiential activities and Mandarin language proficiency, as evidenced by unanimous participant agreement on the helpfulness of program classes. Qualitative data further supported this, with participants reporting improved communication skills and a desire for additional off-campus activities. Experiential learning, including travel abroad, emerged as a catalyst for real-world language application, enriching participants' language proficiency through practical experiences ^[18].

Participants' suggestions for programme improvement, including desires for a longer duration, more off-campus activities, increased participation, and additional funding, provide holistic recommendations for enhancing future iterations of the Cultural Integration Programme. These insights, coupled with the positive aspects of cultural integration, experiential learning, and technology use, offer a comprehensive foundation for refining and optimising Mandarin language education programmes ^[19, 20].

The findings from this research have implications for future research endeavours and pedagogical practices in Mandarin language education. Understanding the symbiotic relationship between language and culture, the effectiveness of experiential activities, and the positive role of technology integration informs educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers. Future research could delve deeper into specific technological tools, diverse experiential activities, and the long-term impact of cultural integration on

language proficiency. In essence, the Cultural Integration Programme serves as a model for creating immersive and engaging Mandarin language learning experiences. By recognising the synergies between language and culture, and leveraging experiential activities, educators can foster a holistic learning environment that nurtures language proficiency, cultural competence, and sustained learner engagement^[21, 22, 23, 24, 25]. The mentioned study^[26] offers a pathway to deepen practical understanding of the native language and culture for Baloch and Chinese students. The research sheds light on the dynamics of language and cultural integration. It underscores the importance of incorporating cultural elements in language education, emphasising the need for tailored approaches that resonate with the cultural backgrounds of diverse student populations. Additionally, it highlights the relevance of understanding learners' beliefs in shaping effective culture integration initiatives, thereby contributing valuable insights to the broader discourse on language education and cultural integration.

In conclusion, the Cultural Integration Programme research highlights the pivotal role of cultural integration in Mandarin language education, revealing consistent positive impacts on language proficiency and cultural understanding. The study emphasises the compelling connection between experiential activities and Mandarin proficiency, particularly through travelling abroad, promoting real-world language application. Participants' suggestions for programme improvement, coupled with desires for a longer duration, more off-campus activities, increased participation, and additional funding, provide valuable insights for programme refinement. The findings hold broader implications for Mandarin language education, offering guidance to educators and policymakers in creating immersive and engaging learning experiences. The programme stands as a model for integrating language, culture, and technology for holistic education.

Acknowledgment

The study is to fulfil the Sabbatical Leave requirements of Nurul Ain Chua Binti Abdullah from Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Malaysia. The research conducted during this Sabbatical Leave aims to contribute valuable insights into the field of study, further enhancing the academic profile of Universiti Malaysia Terengganu.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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