

Instant messaging and the facilitation of collaborative, student-led learning and teacher-support: the NZCEL EAP scenario

Anthea Fester | George Horvath

Waikato Institute of Technology
(Wintec), Hamilton, New Zealand

Abstract

In the last couple of decades, the increased use of technology in the education sector has led to smartphone use becoming more prevalent in supporting students' learning. Apart from applications (apps) specifically designed for language educational purposes, such as Duolingo, there are also instant messaging apps that are not specifically designed for education purposes, but that can be useful in supporting learners. These include instant messaging apps such as, WhatsApp and WeChat. Instead of relegating phone app use to merely a source of entertainment and distraction, teachers increasingly use them as a vital form of communication to enhance education, including language learning. Apps have thus shifted from a tangential position to the forefront of the learning space. For the purposes of this research project, WeChat was used as the messaging app. This article focuses on the initial findings of a pilot study and concentrates on the perceived purposes for the participants' posts as they relate to the use of the app as a tool for collaboration, peer-support, and knowledge sharing. Data was gathered through an online survey, semi-structured interviews, and an analysis of the WeChat posts. Analysis of the posts and comments made by students during the interviews suggest that the tool formed a vital link between them, their classmates and teachers, and, at times, served as a social platform underlying the key educational purposes of the programme.

1 | INTRODUCTION

A considerable amount of research has been published on the use of smartphone instant messaging apps in language education. Despite the availability of this research, there remains a paucity of evidence on the benefits to language learners of using an instant messaging app as a tool for a supportive, collaborative and mainly student-led EAP environment. The main purpose of this article is to suggest how an instant messaging app, such as *WeChat*, can be used as an avenue for informal additional information exchange to complement the more formal classroom and Learning Management System (LMS) platform environment. The EAP tertiary environment described in the article is a New Zealand Certificate in English Language (NZCEL) Level 4 Academic programme.

A Vygotskian embedded socio-cultural (SC) approach was used to underpin this research. One of the key tenets of the approach is a focus on collaborative learning between learners and their peers. This study describes the use of an instant messaging app to promote collaborative learning. In this article the term *collaborative* is used to mean working together to support learning and sharing information; the term *student-led* suggests student-initiated sharing of knowledge rather than teacher-initiated sharing.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

Three pertinent areas to this study will be discussed in this literature review. Initially, some aspects of the socio-cultural theoretical approach will be described as the underpinning theory for this study. Following that, the notion of incorporating social networking systems into second language teaching will be addressed and then some previous research on the use of instant messaging apps, such as *WeChat* and *WhatsApp* will be explored.

2.1 | Socio-cultural perspective

From a theoretical perspective, the research reported has a strong socio-cultural underpinning as the focus is on collaboration and support where learning occurs socially between learners, and with their teachers, in the instant messaging app space.

In his seminal work, Vygotsky (1978) elaborated on the notion of socio-cultural theory, where the emphasis was on the idea that human intelligence is initially developed in society and that learning occurs socially prior to individual learning. This theory highlights the point that social interaction is central to cognitive development. Several researchers (including van Lier, 2004, Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Lantolf & Poehner, 2014; Gánem-Gutiérrez, 2018) have explored a range of aspects related to Socio-cultural theory (SCT). Lantolf and Thorne (2006, p. 4) addressed the relevance of SCT to learning additional languages, stating that SCT is “a theory of mediated mental communication, it is most compatible with theories of language that focus on communication, cognition, and the meanings rather than on formal positions that privilege structure”. With the use of a social instant messaging app as a tool (artefact) to promote informal language learning and support as in the study reported here, the communication that is highlighted in an SCT approach is evident.

In addition to the general benefits of using an SCT approach mentioned above, some research has focused specifically on collaboration or affordances of adopting this approach within the

learning space. For example, the concept of affordances, as they relate to the use of technology tools and the concepts of ecological and socio-cultural theory, were investigated by van Lier (2004) and highlights the connection between the environment learners find themselves in, the ability to use what is in that environment (including technological ability/tools) and their perceived opportunities to act within the environment. More recent research by Gánem-Gutiérrez (2018) highlighted the collaborative nature of using the virtual world, with the research focused on using wikis, 3D virtual worlds (3D VWs) and 3D digital games. Gánem-Gutiérrez, (2018), in addressing the connection between a SCT approach and collaboration, highlights the key role that interaction plays for both mental and sociocultural engagement when learning a language. These previous studies provide insight into the potential of using an instant messaging app for collaboration, which is explored in this paper.

While addressing the SCT construct, Li (2018) asserts that all our activities are facilitated by using symbolic signs and language as tools (physically and psychologically). This suggests that there is constant interpreting and establishing of meaning so that learners are seen to be active meaning-making agents. Taking these tenets of SCT into account, it is a suitable approach to underpin the exploration in the research reported here. Furthermore, there does not appear to be any previous research conducted on the use of the *WeChat* app to promote student-led learning, collaboration and teacher support in a New Zealand (or another Western) EAP environment.

2.2 | Integrating social networking sites (SNS) into second language learning/ acquisition

The benefits of using social networking sites (SNS) in language learning has been postulated by several researchers over the last decade (Dogoriti et al., 2014; Bull et al., 2008; Lai, 2016; Kacatl & Klímová, 2019; Keogh, 2017). The emphasis on the idea that interaction in a socially constructed space between students and students as well as between teachers and students, promotes the concepts underpinning an SCT approach. For example, Dogoriti et al. (2014) investigated the use of *Facebook* to promote a sense of community amongst language learners while simultaneously using *Moodle*, a learning management system (LMS). In our study, both *WeChat* and *Moodle* were used. *Moodle* has many advantages, such as the fact that it is a platform to disseminate information and provide discussion forums. However, it does not allow for the ease of information dissemination that instant messaging apps do. The significance of this combination (LMS and instant messaging app) is a point of distinction in the research reported here. There does not appear to be any other research focusing on the use of *WeChat* as a supporting app while using an LMS in an EAP environment in a Western-based tertiary institution. Bull et al. (2008) suggest that with SNS, informal learning can occur as a support for more formal education. This means that students can be engaged in their academic studies, but not be tied to time constraints such as scheduled class face-to-face contact for some of their educational needs. Using an instant messaging app that is readily available on their phones also means students are more likely to interact and engage in collaborative and supportive activities in an informal environment.

Mobile phone apps have become an indispensable part of language learning today. The use of mobile phone apps has accelerated in the past decade and there is a growing body of literature on their employment as a tool to support English language learning (Lai, 2016; Klímová, 2018; Kacatl & Klímová, 2019). Kacatl and Klímová (2019) promote the term mobile learning (m-learning) to refer to the methodology that includes using mobile apps to enhance language learning. Apps that are

suitable for language learning can be categorised into those that are specifically designed to support language learning, such as *Duolingo*, and other generally used messaging apps, such as *WhatsApp* and *WeChat*, that have the ability to be used to enhance or support language learning. This shift in Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is not surprising as studies in the last decade have highlighted the value attached to mobile phone use. Keogh (2017) highlights the point that smartphone use is pervasive and perceived to be a cultural artefact by the younger generation to ensure constant contact between friends and colleagues. Macalister (2017), while discussing language learning principles and MALL, advised that in order to ensure successful pedagogical outcomes, students must be motivated by teachers who are making the most use of the potential of mobile devices. This crucial comment needs to be considered whenever a teacher imbeds MALL into a programme.

2.3 | Instant messaging apps and its use in enhancing language learning

Research into the use of *WeChat* as an educational support tool has largely centred on usage in China, which is not surprising considering that it is a China-based app. Some studies have related to the development of vocabulary in English. Lei (2018) conducted a study on the use of *WeChat* to enhance English vocabulary learning and to employ a system of self-regulated learning. In another study, Lai (2016) also concentrated on the development of vocabulary by creating a mobile immersion environment. However, for Lai's study, *WhatsApp* was used. In Lai's study, clear links were ascertained between frequency of use of the app and vocabulary gain. Both Lei's (2018) and Lai's (2016) studies focused on lexical development.

Furthermore, there have been few studies conducted on the use of *WeChat* to enhance English language learning. One example is a study by Liu (2014), who focused on using *WeChat* in ESP (English for policing) training courses, with the purpose of improving students' interests, motivation, and efficiency of vocational field training. Another study by Wang (2017) investigated the use of *WeChat* to improve the pronunciation of English for Chinese students at a business school in China. A study conducted by Jiang and Li (2018) at the University of Queensland, Australia, focused on measuring learners' perceptions on incorporating a *WeChat* task linking up learners of Chinese in Australia with native Chinese speakers in China.

Despite a range of studies on the use of instant messaging apps, such as *WhatsApp* and *WeChat*, to enhance English language learning, there does not appear to be any research on the use of these apps to promote collaborative learning in an informal, supportive (mainly student-led) environment and where the teacher was also present in the messaging app space.

3 | AIMS OF THE STUDY

The main aim of this project was to evaluate the use of an instant messaging app, in this case *WeChat*, to facilitate collaborative learning, student-led support and teacher support in an NZCEL Level 4, Academic programme, within an EAP tertiary context in New Zealand. Sub-questions covered that are the focus in this article include:

1. What did the participants in the NZCEL Level 4 cohort mainly use the *WeChat* app space for, specifically focusing on collaboration, student-led support and teacher support (key purposes for the posts)?

2. What are these language learners' opinions about using *WeChat* as a supporting tool for their programme?

4 | METHOD

This method section will initially focus on the setting for the project and the ethical considerations. After that, the project participants and the data gathering tools will be described.

4.1 | Setting

The study was conducted in a language teaching centre at an institute of technology in New Zealand. The centre consistently offers all nine qualifications, across seven levels, of the New Zealand Certificate in English Language (NZCEL) programmes. These programmes range from NZCEL Level One (Foundation) to Level Five (Academic) on the New Zealand Qualification Authority (NZQA) Framework (NZQA 2019). The present study was carried out with students enrolled in a Level Four (Academic) programme in the first semester of 2019. Many of the students (a mix of local migrants and international students) choosing to study at this centre aspire to do further tertiary mainstream study after completing their Level Four programme. As the NZQA framework aligns their qualifications with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), it is worth mentioning that these students on entry to NZCEL L4, were mostly at an Upper Intermediate, High B1 level (Exam English, 2019).

The Level 4 Academic programme was 18 weeks long, with students receiving a minimum of 20 hours per week of face-to-face classes. In addition, they were expected to engage in a range of self-study tasks outside the classroom. The face-to-face classes were split into 10 hours for the Reading and Writing component of the programme (taught by one teacher) and 10 hours for the Listening and Speaking component (taught by another teacher).

Key resources and interactive activities were accessible to the learners via *Moodle*. The course also included two one-hour computer lab classes in which students could practice their pronunciation and Listening subskills taught in class earlier. For most of the students enrolled in the programme, the Level Four certificate was often the final formal EAP qualification prior to gaining entry to their mainstream study at the institute of technology.

4.2 | Ethical considerations

This research was undertaken by two of the teachers on the NZCEL programme used in this research. Therefore, certain additional ethical considerations had to be established for the research project to ensure student safety. In addition to the regular ethical aspects, such as ensuring anonymity and completing consent forms, teachers (who were also researchers on the project), had no access to any data from the project until course grades were submitted and locked into the institution's student management system. Students were also informed at the start of the programme that the focus of the research was on their use of the *WeChat* app and that their assessment outcomes would not be affected by their use or lack of use of the app.

4.3 | Participants

At the start of the study all 74 students enrolled on the NZCEL Level 4 Academic programme were invited to participate in the research study and all students agreed to have their *WeChat* posts used in the study. They were also provided with information sheets that outlined the research project as well. The students ranged in age from teenagers to mature students (some over 50 years old).

There were at least seven different nationalities represented across four streams, including, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Colombian, Chilean, Indian and German. When students were asked at the start of the course about using the *WeChat* app, most indicated that they were familiar with the app, having used it prior to enrolling in the programme (either because they were Chinese or because they had used it in previous study in the centre).

4.4 | Data gathering tools

A triangulation method was used with three data collection tools, including a survey, semi-structured interviews, and the *WeChat* posts. The first tool used was the *WeChat* group chats, with these groups being set up by the two Listening and Speaking teachers and the students. Altogether there were four *WeChat* groups—one per class (called Streams). As members of the *WeChat* groups, the Listening and Speaking teachers collected screenshots of all the posts over the semester for all four classes.

The second data gathering tool used was semi-structured interviews and although all the students were invited to participate only 17 chose to do so. The interviews were conducted by other teachers in the centre who did not evaluate the participants in the programme, thus ensuring participants' safety. The interviews were conducted in Weeks 15 and 16 of the 18-week course. Interview questions were designed to gain additional data related to the use of *WeChat* to promote student-led collaboration and support and to gauge how students felt about using the app. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The third tool used was a survey questionnaire that all students were invited to complete. To disseminate the survey, all students in the course were emailed a link to a *Google Form*. This ensured anonymity for all participants, and 16 participants chose to complete the survey.

5 | DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This article mainly reports on the research findings that focus on the purposes for the *WeChat* posts over the semester; some analysis of comments from the interviews and questionnaires will be relayed as far as they relate to the perceived purposes of the *WeChat* posts. Academic, technical, visual and social support will be described in the data analysis.

The researchers chose to focus on the following key aspects for the *WeChat* post analysis as they perceived these to show student-led collaboration, student support and teacher support in the chat space:

- academic issues or non-academic issues
- questions—direct to the teacher, open questions to the whole class or directed at one person
- shared information solicited (requested questions/responses) or unsolicited (information shared without a question/ request for the information)
- Visual aids used

Across the four class streams, there was a total of 3,419 posts over the 18 weeks, with most of the posts sent in the first 16 weeks. Total class post numbers were as follows: Stream A: 823 posts, Stream B: 478 posts, Stream C: 966 posts and Stream D: 1152 posts.

6 | PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS

Figure 1 shows the participants' response to the survey question, *Did you enjoy using WeChat?* More than 81% of the students who responded indicated that they enjoyed using the app.

In a follow-up survey question, participants were asked "*If you enjoyed using WeChat, why do you think you enjoyed using it?*" Some of the students' responses included the following:

I can communicate with my friends, teachers, and classmates easily.

...because it is easy to contact classmates and teachers.

...easy, quickly.

Convenient.

I enjoyed using WeChat because these applications is new for me. I never use WeChat in my country.

The responses above indicate that learners who responded to the survey, generally enjoyed using the app, and the speed and ease with which they could access information. In fact, for almost all solicited information, somebody in the chat would respond within a minute or two with the requested information. These comments highlighted the value of using an instant messaging app. The fact that respondents also mentioned that the information was easily available, further demonstrates the usefulness of the chat space. The comment made by a student who had not used *WeChat* before (see above) also suggests that at least one learner enjoyed using a new app.

In another question, which focused more on their learning, participants were asked *Which posts put on WeChat did you think benefited your learning on your level 4 course?* Some responses included:

Course tutors or some students would have to know and know what is the homework. What is the main, very useful information...

...some sharing, some pictures, uh, uh, just uh contain the content on the whiteboard.

...maybe the structure about the essay.

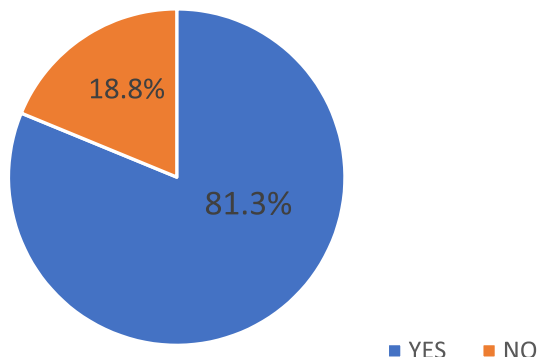


FIGURE 1 Responses to question *Did you enjoy using WeChat?*

...there may be some grammar issues. Some grammar key points was provided by student, might be suitable for a student. And also the classmates can provide some exceptional ideas about that.

...a practical announcement: timetabling...scheduling...

The responses above suggest that learners found using the app useful for several aspects of their studies, some specific to course content and some meta-course aspects. The instant messaging app space affords students opportunities for collaborative support and social interaction for language development that the SCT approach espouses (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

6.1 | Solicited and unsolicited information shared in the chat

Table 1 shows the breakdown of the number of *WeChat* posts that indicated collaboration and support provided through solicited information. According to the table, the most posts were direct from students to specific teachers (187 posts). As can be seen, however, the total number of questions directed from students to students (either to whole class or to specific students) was 154 (83 + 71) posts. These numbers suggest that learners recognised both their classmates and their teachers as having played an essential role in supporting them in this informal instant messaging app space.

In terms of academic-related support, specifically between classmates, many posts shared included photos of class activities and PowerPoint slides, technical support for *Moodle* and answering queries around assessment or encouraging comments related to assessment or workload (See Figure 2 below for example posts). Students also sent classmates meta-content information such as rooms allocated for induction sessions, meetings, or assessments. Interestingly, further data analysis reveals that for two of the classes, on several occasions, it was the class representatives who provided a substantial amount of the unsolicited information for the class. Getting students to be active rather than passive learners is one of the tenets of the SCT approach, and the findings indicated that learners actively supported and engaged with classmates in the *WeChat* space.

It is worth noting that there were 62 questions shared by classmates that related to non-academic issues. These shared questions suggest that several students felt comfortable requesting information or assistance from their classmates that did not necessarily relate to academic issues. This demonstrates how *WeChat* can be used as a platform for social communication and support in keeping with SC theory.

TABLE 1 Questions - solicited (requested) information

Question interaction	Academic	Non-academic
1. Direct from a student to the teacher (e.g., <i>Hello [teacher's name], where do we upload our interviews ...?</i>)	187	7
2. From a student open to the class (e.g., <i>Are there two compulsory orientation sessions...?</i>)	83	14
3. Directed from a student to specific classmates (e.g., <i>[student's name] which article can we use for Reading 1 assignment?</i>)	71	41
4. From a teacher to students (e.g., <i>Hi [student's name] can you call [student's name] to arrange your discussion, please?</i>)	27	9
Totals	368	71

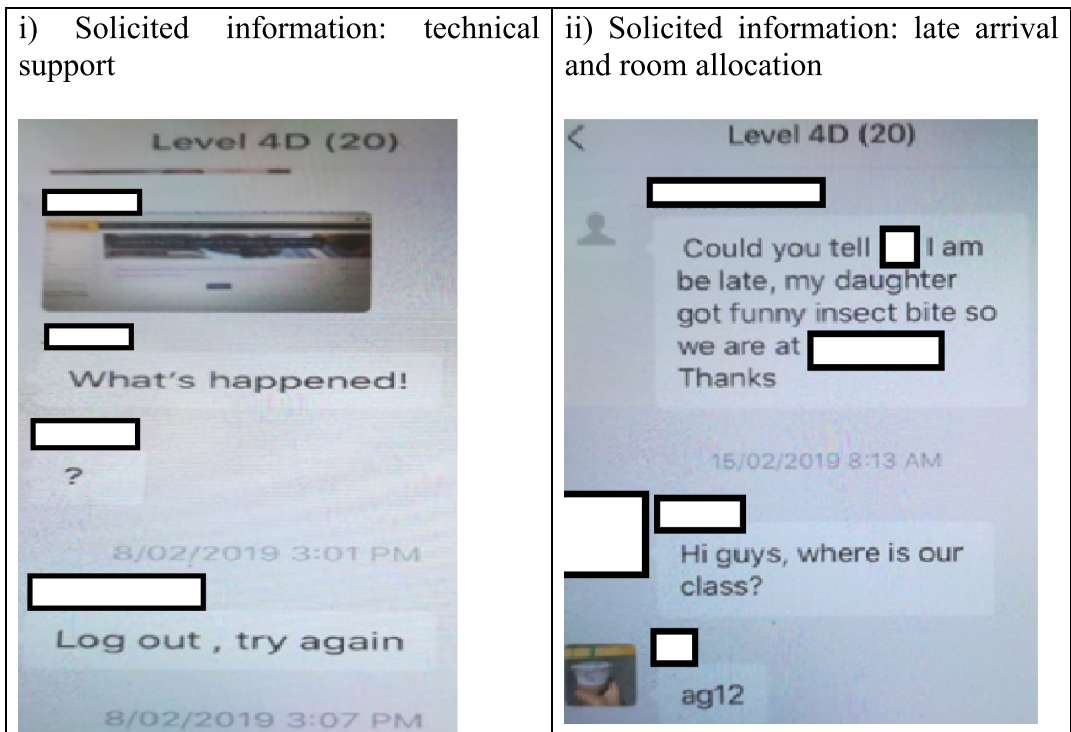


FIGURE 2 A sample of WeChat posts.

Table 2 shows the number of unsolicited posts where no questions were asked. There was not much difference in the number of posts for unsolicited academic information between those posted by teachers or students. The posting of unsolicited information suggests a strong support and collaborative element to the use of the *WeChat* app between learners, as well as between teachers and learners. As indicated with the examples in Figure 3 (below), there were many posts that linked to personal or social events. It is interesting that the amount of non-academic posts from student to students was 156 posts, compared to those from teachers to students, which was only 21 posts. These numbers suggest that students were more inclined to reach out to their classmates directly rather than their teachers for non-academic issues. Based on anecdotal evidence (comments made in class), this supportive interaction led to classmates feeling closer and friendships forming within some class groups. The use of a social application, such as *WeChat*, promotes this type of collaboration and support.

In terms of social communication interaction, it is worth mentioning that in the survey, participants were asked whether they felt comfortable using *WeChat*, and if they did, whether they could say why they thought they felt comfortable using the app? Some responses were:

- ...to organize the group easily.
- We have lot of friends.
- I can talk to my classmates and teachers anytime.
- ...do not need to wait the response like with using traditional email.
- ...because it is easy to assess.
- ...video chat, share moments, talking.

TABLE 2 Unsolicited (no question) information shared

Interaction	Academic	Non-academic
1.From teacher to students (e.g., <i>Good morning L4, just a reminder that your discussion assessment is in Room xxx today.</i>)	334	21
2. From students to class (e.g., <i>This week you submit your Reading Assignment and your writing.....</i>)	315	156
Total	649	177

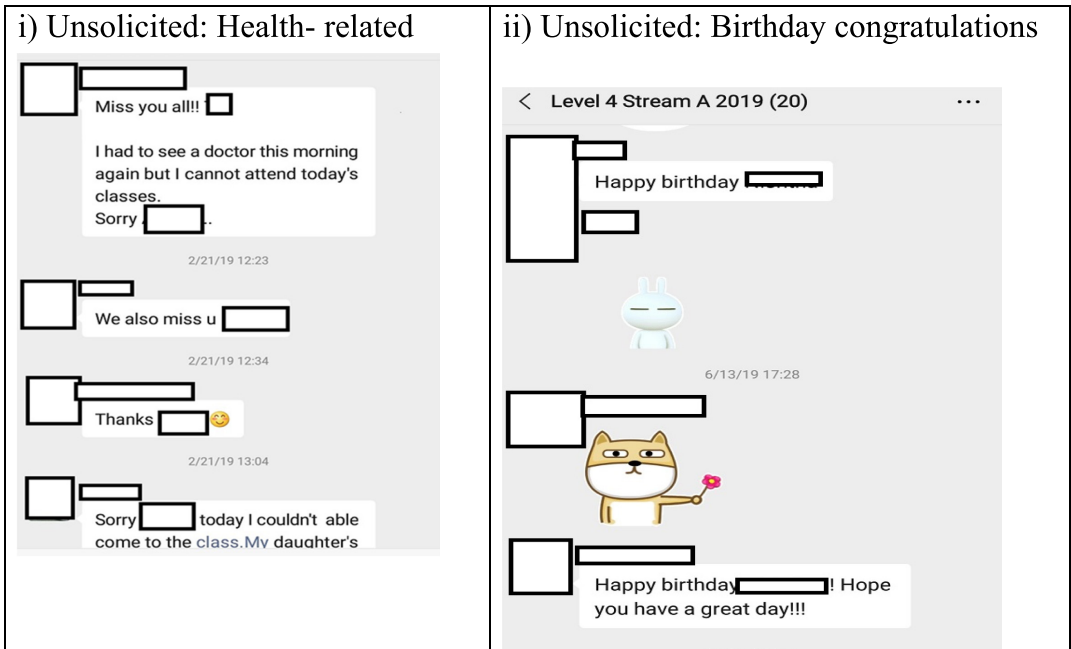


FIGURE 3 Examples of non-academic unsolicited information posts

So, several comments related to non-academic interaction. Based on these comments and many of the posts, it is fair to say that there was quite a bit of support for social, personal issues or celebratory events. These types of posts included supporting Muslim classmates with encouraging and sympathetic words after the 2019 Christchurch mosque shootings, celebrating the birth of a child, sharing photos of festivals or events they attended over weekends, or encouraging each other when classmates were ill or running late (See Figure 3 above).

6.2 | Visual language support and other resources

The number of visual aids included in posts are shown in Table 3 above with a total of 491 academic-related posts. As can be seen, pictures of PowerPoint slides, whiteboard notes, pictures from books and screenshots were all posted. As mentioned above, the space was initially thought to be a space to complement in-class activities, but as can be seen in Table 3, there were many occasions where pictures of in-class activities were shared. This, in a sense, created a merging of the out-of-class informal space and the in-class formal space. One of the advantages of all the

TABLE 3 Types of visual aid in posts

Visual aid type	Academic	Non-academic
PowerPoint slides	183	0
Whiteboard notes	147	1
Photos (people)	0	136
Other (screenshots, pages)	161	22
Total	491	159

posts related to class resources shared, was that students who were absent could use them to get information from the lesson. Another advantage was that those students who were in the class could review and reflect on the session content and bring any questions they had to class in the next session. Table 3 also shows that students shared 136 non-academic related photos with the class. This suggests that several students were comfortable sharing photos of their social experiences with their classmates.

7 | LIMITATIONS

The first point is that there was a discrepancy in the number of participants who engaged in the *WeChat* posts (all the students across the four classes) compared to the number of students who chose to be interviewed (17) or who chose to complete the survey (16). These low participant numbers for the interviews and survey participation could have been due to the timing of the interviews and survey completion requests as these happened towards the end of the course. Anecdotal evidence from a few students suggested that they were too focused on their upcoming final assessments. So, this was a timing issue for the researchers to consider with future research involving students. Some students suggested that they were concerned about speaking English in the interviews or completing a survey in English. So, these thoughts, although anecdotal, need to be considered when English language learners are asked to participate in interviews or surveys which are in English.

8 | RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS

Based on comments made in the interviews it is recommended that students be allowed to vote on which instant messaging app they would like to use. The *WeChat* app was used, but another instant messaging app would also have sufficed.

One of the challenges for the teachers was that they were responding to student messages over weekends and in the evenings, which could cause workload issues. One way to address workload issues for the teachers would be to allocate fixed timeslots during which students could expect responses from the teachers, e.g., only during the usual working week hours or only until a set time in the evenings during the week.

An interesting follow-up study would be to conduct a similar analysis with a group of learners at the lower CEFR levels and compare the support and interaction with that of this upper intermediate group.

It was useful that students and teachers jointly decided that only English would be used in the chat space. This was to ensure that all students would have access to any shared information.

In addition, it meant that students could engage in meaningful communication in English. We recommend that teachers intending to use instant messaging apps with their students establish clear protocols in the use of these apps.

9 | Conclusions

The use of a social instant messaging app provided numerous occasions for students to interact with their classmates as well as with their teachers. Generally, it appears as though the use of the *WeChat* app to promote greater collaboration and support for these language learners was mostly successful, based on the amount of interaction (see the number of posts above) throughout the first 16 weeks. The data indicates that learners found the app option, as a form of disseminating information and providing support, to be useful. The learners indicated that they enjoyed having this additional *WeChat* space (in addition to the LMS Moodle) as it was instant and more accessible. Based on the interactions, it seems as if a strong rapport was built between students, while supporting each other.

As mentioned before, these messaging apps are no longer relegated to the position of entertainment only, or seen to be tangential; rather, they appear to play a vital role as a support mechanism for language learners. Students seem to enjoy having the additional communication source and the reality is that instant messaging apps will probably continue to act as a vital tool for language teachers and learners.

REFERENCES

- Bull, G., Thompson, A., Searson, M., Garofalo, J., Park, J., Young, C., & Lee, J. (2008). Connecting informal and formal learning: Experiences in the age of participatory media. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 8(2), 100–107.
- Dogoriti, E., Pange, J., & Anderson, G. S. (2014). The use of social networking and learning management systems in English language teaching in higher education. *Campus-Wide Information Systems*, 31(4), 254–263.
- Exam English (2019). *Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)*. <https://www.examenglish.com/CEFR/cefr.php>
- Ganem-Gutierrez, G.A. (2018). Collaborative activity in the digital world. In J.P. Lantolf, M.E. Poehner & M. Swain (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of sociocultural theory and second language development (1st ed., pp. 391–408)*. Routledge.
- Jiang, W., & Li, W. (2018). Linking up learners of Chinese with native speakers through WeChat in an Australian tertiary CFL curriculum. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 3(14), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-018-0056-0>
- Kacatl, J., & Klímová, B. (2019). Use of smartphone applications in English language learning- A challenge for foreign language education. *Education Sciences* 9(3), 179. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci9030179>
- Keogh, C. (2017). Using WhatsApp to create a space of language and content for students of International Relations. *Latin American Journal of Content and Language Integrated Learning*, 10(1), 75–104. <https://doi.org/10.5294/lacil.2017.10.1.4>.
- Klímová, B. (2018). Mobile phones and/or smartphones and their apps for teaching English as a foreign language. *Educ Inf Technol*, 23, 1091–1099.
- Lai, A. (2016). Mobile immersion: An experiment using mobile instant messenger to support second-language learning. *Interactive Learning Environments* 24(2), 277–290. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2015.1113706>
- Lantolf, J.P., & Thorne, S. (2006). *Sociocultural theory and the genesis of second language development*. Oxford University Press.

- Lantolf, J.P., & Poehner, M.E. (2014). Sociocultural theory and the pedagogical imperative on L2 education: Vygotskian praxis and the research/practice divide. *Routledge*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203813850>
- Lei, Z. (2018) Vocabulary learning assisted with smartphone application. *Theory and practice in Language studies*, 8(11), 1511–1516.
- Li, J. (2018). Digital affordances on WeChat: Learning Chinese as a second language. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 31(1–2), 27–52.
- Liu, Z. (2014). A study on the application of WeChat in ESP training. *Theory and practice in language studies*, 4(12), 2549–2554.
- Macalister, J. (2017). Language learning principles and MALL: Reflections of an adult learner. *The TESOLANZ Journal*, 25, 12–24.
- NZQA. (2019). *New Zealand Certificate of English Guiding document*. <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/qualifications-and-standards/qualifications/EL-quals/NZCEL-Guiding-Document.pdf>
- Van Lier, L. (2004). *The ecology and semiotics of language learning: A sociocultural perspective*. Kluwer academic Publishers.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Harvard University Press.
- Wang, K. (2017). Status quo and prospective of WeChat in improving Chinese English learners' pronunciation. *English Language Teaching*, 10(4), 140–149.

How to cite this article: Fester, A. & Horvath, G. (2022). Instant messaging and the facilitation of collaborative, student-led learning and teacher-support: the NZCEL EAP scenario. *TESOL Journal*, 00, e691. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.691>