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指導教授：施佑芝老師

Dr. Doris Shih

真善美聖

**A Preliminary Study of the Effectiveness of Using
Multimedia Materials in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign
Language: Perceptions of Educators and Students**

學生：劉彥君 撰

Joy Yan-Jyun Liou

Joy Liu 403110539
CCIII—Prof. Doris Shih
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A Preliminary Study of the Effectiveness of Using Multimedia Materials in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language: Perceptions of Educators and Students

Outline

Thesis Statement:

This preliminary study introduces historical facts of multimedia and demonstrates how the two most frequently used multimedia materials: cards and videos assist in teaching and learning in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language classroom in Taiwan.

I. Introduction

A. Advanced technology would support teachers to maximize their instructions.

Acquiring a foreign language can be achieved in local classroom with the supplement of audio-visual (A-V) materials or a more updated term: multimedia materials.

B. Educators of English language have long been exploring ways to construct appropriate digital materials for learners of English as an International Language (EIL), one may be wondering about the cases in the teaching of other foreign languages.

II. Literature Review

A. Importance of Mandarin Chinese in present days, take top ten languages used in Internet for example.

1. English is with competitors.

B. Situated Cognition Theory emphasizes the importance of cultural-related learning.

- C. Social Constructivist Teaching expects learners to be actively engaged in class rather than being a passive listener.
- D. Multimedia helps to present knowledge that a printed text cannot achieve.
 - 1. Authentic environment
- E. Adopting audio-visual aids into education started from World War II.
- F. The use of media instructing materials should be supplement rather than supplant.

III. Research Questions

IV. Methodology

- A. Participants
- B. Instruments and Data Collection Procedure
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V. Results and Discussion

- A. General results
- B. Discussion of Cards
- C. Discussion of Videos

VI. Conclusion

- A. The key to an effective teaching or learning is not media itself but educators.
- B. For future studies, researchers can select a specific multimedia aid or address a certain learning situation in particular about TCFL according to learning theories.

Abstract

With the development of technology and the emergence of Chinese language, different kinds of multimedia have been applied to facilitate both teaching and learning process in Teaching Chinese as Foreign Language (TCFL) classrooms. In the company of traditional textbooks, multimedia teaching materials are put into use in class to provide extra information to supplement the course contents. For those who are interested in TCFL but not yet ready to go into depth about it, this preliminary study is designed to be served as a general guideline and introduction of collected opinions from students and educators on the effectiveness of using multimedia materials in TCFL in Taiwan.

A Preliminary Study of the Effectiveness of Using Multimedia Materials in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language: Perceptions of Educators and Students

1. Introduction

Language is used in communication, not merely in written or reading mode. For a second-language learner, the best way to acquire a non-native language in four skills is usually the biggest concern. The idea of “Situated Learning” has been brought up in the field of education for a long period of time. Situated learning, according to the intellectual anthropologist Jean Lave and educational theorist Étienne Wenger, “takes as its focus the relationship between learning and the social situation in which it occurs” (14). Thus, it is common to see pupils sent to other foreign countries or foreigners coming to our country to master a certain language. Nowadays, advanced technology would support teachers to maximize their instructions. Acquiring a foreign language can be achieved in local classroom with the supplement of audio-visual (A-V) materials or the more updated term: multimedia materials. Media formats actually include various kinds, such as whiteboards (text and visual), PPT slides (text and visual), CDs (music and voice), DVDs (visual), and computer media (text, audio, and video) (Instructional Technology And Media For Learning 6). Educators of English language have long been exploring ways to construct appropriate digital materials for learners of English as an International Language (EIL), one may be wondering about the cases in the teaching of other foreign languages. This preliminary study introduces and historical facts of multimedia and demonstrates how the two most frequently used multimedia materials: cards and videos assist in teaching and learning in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language classroom in Taiwan.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Importance of Mandarin Chinese

Zhenfang and Shabbir proposed that people tend to choose a particular language with the potential benefits in the communication of spoken number of people, institutions and businesses (48). English has been seen as a dominant language; however, with the total 1,197 million native speakers of Chinese, it is with competitor (Tinsley and Board 7). For instance, in this digital era, the Internet is necessary in everyday life around the world. Collected from the Internet World Stats (see Figure 1), Chinese runs a close to the usage of English on the Internet.

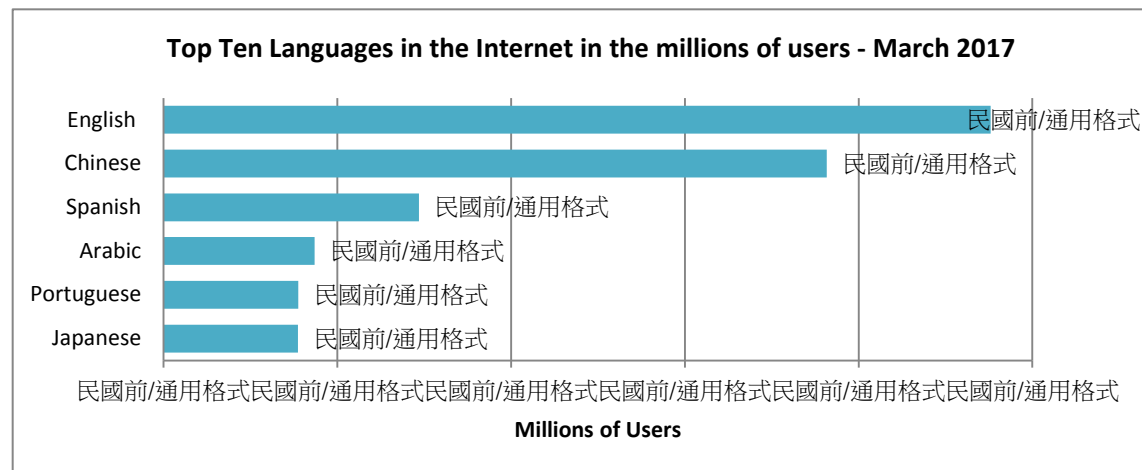


Figure 1. Top ten languages in the Internet. (source: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm>)

2.2 Situated Cognition Theory

“Situated Cognition” is a theory which emphasizes learning has to be social or cultural-related instead of detached. According to Shen and Huang, knowledge is meaningful only if it is tied up with an applied situation. For example, studying a dictionary indeed increases our vocabulary, but we cannot surely understand the usage of a certain word. When we talk with native speaker, then will we learn how the words are used in the native speaker’s mother culture and daily conversation. In actual education settings, however, without sufficient educational resources and budget, it is

difficult to create an authentic environment in school. Thus, applying multimedia materials based on this theory in class has been prevailing recently. (59)

2.3 Social Constructivist Approach

The idea of constructivist teaching is learner-centered which students are encouraged and expected to be actively engaged in class rather than being a passive listener (Kalpana 13). Social Constructivist Approach, proposed by Soviet psychologist Vygotsky, highlights the importance of interconnection between individuals. “Educators, parents and students are learning partners. Knowledge is built in discussion, cooperation and interaction” (Shen and Huang 72). To promote cooperative learning, educators can adopt multimedia into lesson, such as PowerPoint, online resources, handouts to create opportunities, for students to work as a team and in the meanwhile learn from each other (73).

2.4 Examples of the Effectiveness of Multimedia

Owing to its economic and political aspects, Chinese is estimated to be learned by billions of learners in the future (Hao 1043). Unlike English, in Chinese, the meanings vary when the tones of pronouncing a syllable are different (Zhenfang and Shabbir 50). However, change of tones cannot be performed through traditional printed text. It can only be delivered either by Chinese teachers or via audio-visual media. The purpose of learning a language is not merely about learning its grammar to know how to write, instead, we learn it for communication. With the growing emphasis on communicative techniques, the use of videos in foreign language learning classroom has increased rapidly (Cakir 67). When non-Chinese speaking students are learning this language, videos help with bringing the authentic environment into the classroom (68). Reddy pointed out that videos profoundly influence the “production, distribution and use of sound and picture in communication” (114). Besides, one of the advantages of applying video into classroom is that it can

also build students' attitudes of "sympathy, understanding and appreciation" (Johnson 404). Hoban's *Movies That Teach* also points out that the more frequently the films are applied, the more "independent learning" will be resulted (18).

2.5 AV Materials during World War II (WWII)

The techniques and methods of audio-visual materials we applied in present-day teaching have actually been implemented already. It has already made its reputation during WWII (De Bernardis and Olsen 256). Adopting it into education is not a new trend. During war period, the need for mass military training and home front propaganda purpose made both the Allies and Axis powers turn to the use of A-V materials as aids for both educating and advertising purpose (Molenda 8). Shortly after WWII, A-V educational technologies such as films, slide/filmstrip projectors, opaque projectors, radio receivers, and record players became more available and were collected into libraries entries (Nolan 262). Later on, with the appearance of computers after 1950s, the term "A-V" was revised to become "multimedia."

2.6 Advantages of Audio Visual Aid

According to Reddy, through sensory organs meaningful information is transferred. Based on Swittich and Schuller's research (qtd. in Reddy 2), sight and hearing take up eighty-seven percentages and seven percentages respectively in the proportion of a normal learner learning process (2). Audio visual materials, as mentioned in its given name, featured in stimulating mainly these two sensory receivers.

The main purpose of teacher using multimedia materials in class is to make lessons more effective. The aids used should be in consonance with "the intellectual level and the previous experience of the students" (Daniel 3813). Thus, the use of media instructing materials is "supplement instead of supplants" (Reddy 4). The teachers have to adopt the best A-V aid which assists themselves

to transmit to “a learner facts, skills, attitudes, knowledge, understanding and perception” (1).

3. Research Questions

In education, the perceptions between educators and students are both important, the research questions of this study are related to finding out the educators' and students' perceptions of multimedia usage in TCFL:

- A. What are the opinions of students and educators on the use of multimedia materials in TCFL classrooms?
- B. What kinds of multimedia materials are being applied in the classroom so far?
- C. What are the benefits/difficulties in using the multimedia materials?
- D. What skills do the educators and students think are improved by using the multimedia materials in TCFL classroom?

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

Thirty-five students and educators are invited to engage in this study. For students, they have to have the background of learning Chinese. For educators, they have to have the experience of practicing multimedia materials in class. There is no restriction on age, sex, and nationality. For the reporting of results, SR represents student respondent, while ER stands for educator respondent; as SI is for interviewee of student and EI is for interviewee of educator.

4.2 Instruments and Data Collection Procedure

Two versions of interview questions and questionnaire were conducted in this study. They had been reviewed by Professor Doris Shih and classmates of the class. One version was designed for students; the other was designed for educators. In the interview section (see Appendix A for educator's version and B for student's version), five people from these two groups received interview questions before the arranged

dates. On the arranged dates, a consent letter (see Appendix E) was prepared to confirm their agreement on attending the interview. The interview was recorded and notes are taken for data analysis in the future.

On the other hand, two versions of questionnaires were distributed separately (see Appendix C for educator's version and D for student's version). To collect students' response, the questionnaire was spread on online platforms such as: Facebook, Reddit and Survey Tandem. As for educators', the questionnaire were shared and allocated from educators to educators. For both students and educators, the questionnaires were divided into two parts. Part A was for personal information whereas part B was for their opinions on the use of multimedia aids in TCFL. Open-ended questions were provided in Part B to have more comprehensively findings on the participants' perception on in-class multimedia materials of TCFL.

4.3 Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data was analyzed by contents. First, approving or surprising information was written down when reading through the notes taken in interviews or results of the questionnaires from both educators' and students'. Points were examined and then categorized into major or minor themes according to the research questions. Description of each category was added in the margin. Finally, the descriptions were identified, compared and studied if correspond with the statement raised in literature review.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 General Results

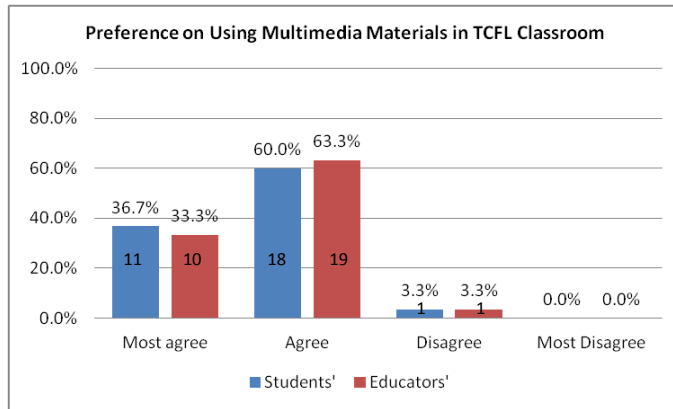
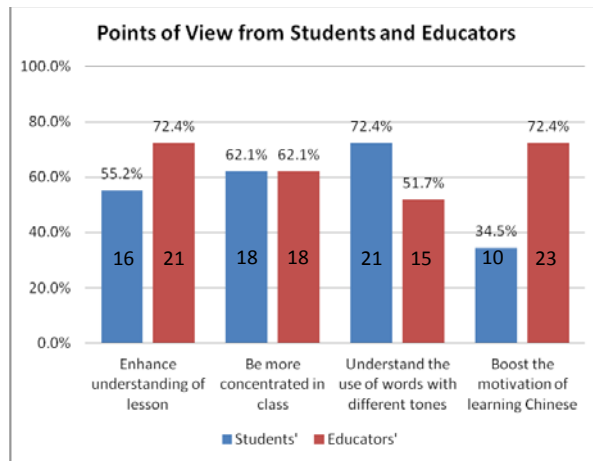


Figure 2 shows that the majority of students and educators go for the practice of using multimedia materials in TCFL classrooms.

Figure 2. Preference on Using Multimedia Materials in TCFL Classroom

For students (see Figure 3),

55.2% of them agree that



multimedia help with their improvement in understanding of lesson; 62.1% believe multimedia tools boost their concentration in class and 72.4% of them consider it helpful in assisting them with

Figure 3. Points of View from Students and Educators

comprehension of how words are used in different tones in

conversations.

As for educators, they share the same percentage with students with the regard of making students be more attentive in class under the help of multimedia. However, there is a slight difference compared to educators' perspectives in regard of enhancement of lesson comprehension and understanding of pragmatics. Besides, perception of students differs largely from educators' in the case of boosting motivation. Seventy four percentages of the educators assume that multimedia help

increase students' interest in learning Chinese whereas only 34.5% of students agree on this point of view.

The results of the questionnaires demonstrate that 96.7% and 66.7% of student respondents prefer the use of texted-based and video respectively (see Table 1); from educators' response, 76.7% for both use of cards and video (see Table 2), therefore, the discussion of this study will be focused on the effectiveness of cards and videos.

Types of Multimedia	Students'
Text-based	96.70%
Manipulatives	36.70%
Audio	56.70%
Video	66.70%
Computer media	60.00%
Mobile Device	33%
Others	13.30%

Table 1. Students' preference on Types of Multimedia

Types of Multimedia	Educators'
Cards	76.70%
Handouts	46.70%
Poster	16.70%
Real Objects	63.30%
Audio	53.30%
Video	76.70%
Computer media	60%
Smartphone	40.00%
Tablet	26.70%
Others	20.00%

Table 2. Educators' Preference on Types of Multimedia

5.2 Effectiveness of Cards

When it comes to teaching vocabularies, according to SI1, SI4 and SI5, Chinese teacher tends to use flashcards as teaching tools instead of PowerPoint slides, which meets up with one of the educators' statement. EI1 mentioned that even though it takes more time to prepare for flashcards, especially when course books are without supplementary pack of them, flashcards are handier and can be combined with several kinds of in-class activities, such as memory, identification and TPR (Typical Physical Response) activities with any level of group. Sometimes educators can even assign students to create their own flashcards and bring them to class for presentation and home for practice, and, as follows, provoke students' "independent learning" (Hoban 18).

Moreover, use of flashcards as aid in TCFL classrooms can be designed according to students' language levels (SI4). For instance, on the basis of R9 of educators' questionnaire, flashcards can be designed into "Writing a Story Based on the Picture". Students are asked to describe the picture in Chinese. In the beginning, they are allowed to describe in short terms and vocabularies; gradually, educators will encourage and lead them to create longer sentences or even disclosures based on the grammar taught. Hence, the adoption of teaching aids is in consonance with students' intellectual level and previous experience (Daniel 3818). Likewise, students can not only increase new vocabularies but also apply them simultaneously. As how Shen and Huang propose, to make a learned knowledge meaningful, we should apply it in a real context (59).

Though PowerPoint slides do share the same function as flashcards, they are reusable, perpetual, interactive and capable of presenting concrete and abstract content, flashcards will not be influenced by equipment problems such as power failures (EI2).

5.3 Effectiveness of Videos

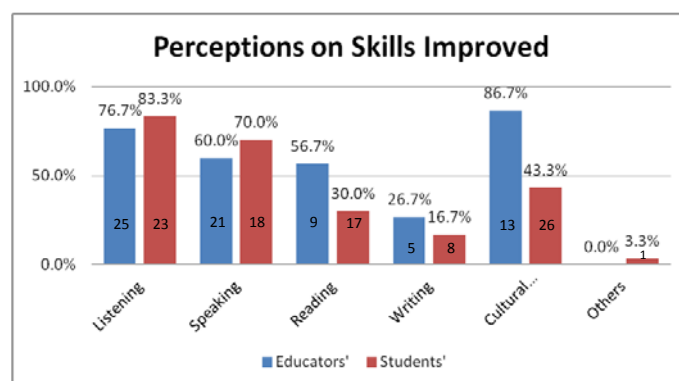


Figure 4. Perceptions on Skills Improved

Figure 4 demonstrates skills considered improved by both students and educators. The similarities from these two subjects fall on listening and speaking abilities. Since the majority of students' responses focus on videos in the questionnaire, the

effectiveness of videos in improving students' listening and speaking skills will be discussed in this section.

From students' perspective, video is regarded as useful tool of providing different tones and accents of native Chinese (SR5, 8, 13, 16), and opportunities for students to understand better what is said at various speed (SR12, 15, 18). Students are offered to obtain extra knowledge from textbooks, they can not only obtain words and phrases that books do not include (SR21), but also acquire a more informal and friendlier spoken Chinese (SR20, 24). Quoted from SR7, "[Videos] show you real usage. Teachers tend to speak clearly but that's not the case in reality." With this feature of videos, students get to know how close they are to being able to understand and speak regular Chinese (SR15, 18). As Cakir stated in his article, authentic environment can be brought into classroom with the help of videos (68).

On the other hand, all of the five educator interviewers' point out that the highest principle to have videos serve as effective teaching materials is to make sure the length of it falls within three to five minutes. Otherwise students will either lose their focus or fail to get the message educators are going to convey, especially for those at elementary levels. To make video more useful, educators can combine exercise on handouts to facilitate students' learning and comprehension. The handout can be designed to make up for elements that videos cannot present, such as answer to questions in written words. (EI1) Apart from this, educators can also make their own videos to maximize their teaching based on students' need or lesson requirement. For example, educators can muffle the sound and let his or her students read out subtitles provided after listening to it. (EI5) In this way, students' speaking and reading abilities are trained. If situation allowed, educators can also assign video project for their students. Quoted from student respondent 1, "In the process of making that project, my teammates and I can put what we've learned into use and see how far we've gone."

As a result, cooperative learning can be formed with educators providing space and time for students to complete teamwork and learn from each other together (Shen and Huang 73).

Conclusion

The key to an effective teaching or learning is not media itself but educators. Educators have to evaluate, examine and think over what and how the best method is to assist their teaching and students' learning performance. There is an old saying that goes, "Well begun is half done." Without having a correct attitude in advance of applying multimedia materials as in-class aids, no matter how special or innovative the teaching material is, educators cannot make the most out of it and students may not be aware of how the materials assist them in their language abilities improvement. With this cognitive awareness, for future studies, researchers can select a specific multimedia aid or address a certain learning situation in particular about TCFL according to learning theories.

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Appendix A

Interview questions [Teacher's Version]

1. Are multimedia materials considered as effective materials to be used in your teaching of Mandarin Chinese?
2. How did you apply multimedia materials in your lessons?
3. Do you have complete freedom to design your curriculum?
4. What types of the multimedia materials have you applied so far? Did you design your own multimedia materials, or do you take those designed by others?
5. Which skills of the students do you think are improved by the use of multimedia materials? (Ex: Reading/writing/listening/speaking/vocabulary/grammar/cultural background)
6. What are the benefits/difficulties in using the multimedia materials?

Appendix B

Interview questions [Student's Version]

1. What do you think about Mandarin Chinese? Is it hard for you?
2. Why do you want to acquire this language?
3. Does your teacher supplement his or her classes with multimedia materials?
If so, what are they?
4. Do you think multimedia materials help with the learning Mandarin Chinese? Why or why not?
5. Which skills of you do you think is improved by the multimedia materials?
(Ex: reading/writing/listening/speaking/vocabulary/grammar/cultural background.)
6. Is there anything you think that multimedia in class can do but a lecture can't?

Appendix C
**Questionnaire on Using Multimedia in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign
 Language (Student Version)**

Dear all,

This is Yan Jun Liu from Fu Jen Catholic University English and Literature Department.

This is a questionnaire intended to explore what would be affected or improved (i.e, learning motivation, language skills) by using multimedia materials in TCFL classroom. The result will be used as future guide in TCFL; thus, your opinions really matter.

Part A is for personal information; Part B is for opinions on the use of multimedia aids in class.

If you are interested in the result of this questionnaire, please leave your email address in the end of the questionnaire.

Many thanks to you. Your assistance would be highly appreciated. Please note that your data will be kept confidential and used only on research purpose.

Researcher Yan Jun Liu

(joy920148@gmail.com)

A. Personal Information

1. Gender: Male Female Prefer not to say
2. How old are you? _____
3. How long have you learned Chinese? _____ years _____ months
4. Have you ever lived in any Chinese speaking country?
 - Yes. Which country? For how long? _____
 - The purpose is for Travel Study Other _____
 - No.

B. Opinions on Multimedia Materials

1. What kind of multimedia has your teacher applied in lesson so far?

- Text-based (i.e., books, handouts, posters, cards, etc.)
- Manipulatives (i.e., real objects, models, mock-ups, etc.)
- Audio (i.e., mp3)
- Video
- Computer media (i.e., ppt)
- mobile devices (i.e., smart phones, iPad, etc.)
- Others:

2. Do you like your teacher applying multimedia materials as aids in class?

- Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

2b. Why do you like your teacher applying multimedia materials as aids in class?

(Multiple Selection)

- Makes me more active and concentrated in class.
- Builds my interests and motivation of learning Chinese.
- Understand how words will be used in different conversation and with

different tones.

- Enhance my understanding of the lesson.
- I love to learn something more than books.
- Others: _____

2c. Why don't you like your teacher applying multimedia materials as aids in class?

(Multiple Selection)

It is time-consuming. (For example, books take me less time to cover the same content.)

It is not really related to the text-book.

There is too much extra information. (For example, in the video)

I cannot catch up with the content.

I feel bored.

Others: _____

3. What skills do you think are improved via the use of multimedia materials in class?

Listening.

How? _____

Reading. (i.e., some of the videos are without subtitles)

How? _____

Writing. (i.e., writing handouts)

How? _____

Speaking.

How? _____

4. Is there anything you think that multimedia in class can do but a lecture can't?

Appendix D
Questionnaire on Using Multimedia in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign
Language (Teacher Version)

Dear teachers,

This is Yan Jun Liu from Fu Jen Catholic University English and Literature Department.

This is a questionnaire intended to explore what would be affected or improved (i.e, learning motivation, language skills) by using multimedia materials in TCFL classroom. The result will be used as future guide in TCFL; thus, your opinions really matter.

Part A is for personal information; Part B is for opinions on the use of multimedia aids in class.

If you are interested in the result of this questionnaire, please leave your email address in the end of the questionnaire.

Many thanks to you. Your assistance would be highly appreciated. Please note that your data will be kept confidential and used only on research purpose.

Researcher Yan Jun Liu
(joy920148@gmail.com)

A. Personal Information

1. Gender: Male Female
2. How long have you taught Chinese? _____ years _____ month

B. Opinions on Multimedia Materials

1. What kind of media tools do you use in your classroom? (Multiple Selection Accepted)

- Cards
- Handouts
- Posters
- Real objects
- Audio
- Video
- Computer media
- Smartphone
- Tablets
- Others:

2. Do you like to use multimedia materials as aids in your class?

- Most agree Agree Disagree Most disagree

2b. If you chose “Most agree” or “agree”, why do you choose multimedia materials as aids in TCSL classroom?

- Makes my students more active and concentrated in class
- Raise my students’ interests and motivation of learning Chinese
- Allow my students to understand how words will be used in different conversation and with different tones
- Help me clarify the idea I taught in class
- Can create a light classroom atmosphere
- Take me less time to prepare my lessons
- Others: _____

2c. If you chose “Disagree” or “Most disagree”, why?

- It is time-consuming in class. (For example, books take me less time to cover the same content.)
- It takes me a long time to prepare for it.
- There is too much extra information (for example, in the video)
- My students show no interest in the content
- I prefer traditional teaching approach
- Others: _____

3. Do you have complete freedom to make your curriculum?

- Most agree Agree Disagree Most disagree N/A

4. How do you select your multimedia materials? (Multiple Selection Accepted)

- Follow school/program policy
- According to my students' interest
- According to my interest
- Related to my lecture
- Follow other teachers' suggestion
- Related to my preferable teaching method
- Others:

5. What kind of media tools do you "prefer" to use in your classroom? (Multiple Selection Accepted)

- Text-based (i.e., books, handouts, posters, etc.)
- Manipulatives (i.e., real objects, models, mock-ups, etc.)
- Audio
- Video

- Computer media (i.e., ppt)
- Mobile devices (i.e., smart phones, iPad, etc.)
- Others:

6. What skills do you see are improved by your students via the use of multimedia materials in class?

- Listening. How? _____
- Reading. How? _____
- Writing. How? _____
- Speaking. How? _____

Appendix E
Consent Form

Dear participant,

This is Yan Jun Liu from Fu Jen Catholic University English and Literature Department. This is a research intended to explore what would be affected or improved (i.e, learning motivation, language skills) by using multimedia materials in TCFL classroom, which is called: The Effectiveness of Using Multimedia Materials in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language: Perceptions of Educators and Students. The result will be used as future guide in TCFL; thus, your opinions really matter.

The interview will last within an hour. You have all right to decide whether or not to take part in the interview. If you agree to engage in this interview, please sign below in the signature bar. Feel free to raise your concern at anytime; the researcher will answer every each of them patiently till you fully understand.

Many thanks to you. Your assistance would be highly appreciated. Please note that your data will be kept confidential and used only on research purpose.

Researcher Yan Jun Liu

joy920148@gmail.com

Signed (participant): _____

Date: _____