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Prompting and Learning Workflows in GenAI-Assisted Language Learning: A Qualitative Analysis of Popular Chinese Social Media Posts

Yixin Qian[1]

[1] Florida State University, USA
Email: yq23@fsu.edu

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Abstract

This study examined how popular Chinese social media posts portray GenAI-supported language learning practices. Drawing on Reflexive Thematic Analysis, the study analyzed publicly available posts and videos from three major Chinese social media platforms: RedNote, Bilibili, and TikTok (Chinese version). The findings suggest that GenAI-supported language learning is portrayed as a knowledge-dependent and context-sensitive process. Specifically, the posts frame prompting as requiring three broad forms of knowledge: knowledge about the learner and learning context, language-learning-related knowledge, and knowledge about interacting with GenAI systems. In addition, the findings show that social media posts portray GenAI-supported learning as multi-stage and multimodal, where learners organize AI support across interconnected learning activities while integrating multiple formats and platforms. Overall, this study contributes to understanding how GenAI-assisted language learning is represented in learner-facing social media content and offers implications for future pedagogical support in GenAI-assisted language education.

Keywords: Generative AI, GENAI-Assisted Language Learning, Social Media, Language Education, Chinese Language Learners

Introduction

In the present Industry 4.0 era, Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), defined as a class of technology that leverages deep learning models to generate human-like content in response to user prompts (Lim, Gunasekara, Pallant, Pallant & Pechenkina, 2023), has attracted increasing attention in education and language learning research (e.g., Alharbi, 2024; Al-Jamali & Abdalla, 2025; Lan, 2023; Pérez-Paredes, Curry & Ordoñana-Guillamón, 2025; Son, Ružić & Philpott, 2025). Recent studies have discussed the potential of GenAI-assisted tools to support language learning practices across areas such as speaking, writing, and reading, while also highlighting affordances including personalized learning, accessibility, and interactive engagement (e.g., Chea & Xiao, 2024; Crompton,

Edmett, Ichaporia & Burke, 2024; De la Vall & Araya, 2023; Tokoz-Goktepe, 2014). Alongside formal educational contexts, GenAI-supported language learning practices are increasingly discussed and circulated through digital platforms and social media, where learners encounter a growing range of prompting strategies, learning workflows, and technology-use recommendations. As these learner-facing online spaces are influential in shaping how learners understand and approach GenAI-assisted language learning (Dadgostar, Qin, Cui, Ashcraft & Yousefi-Nooraie, 2025; Wang, Dai, Li & Song, 2021), examining how such practices are portrayed and promoted in social media environments has become increasingly important. Social media posts may shape learners' perceptions and approaches toward GenAI-assisted language learning by modeling how GenAI tools, prompts, and AI-assisted learning workflows should be used. In this sense, social media platforms function not only as spaces for information sharing, but also as informal learning environments where GenAI-supported language learning practices are circulated and normalized among learners. Examining these portrayals can therefore provide insights into the kinds of learner practices, assumptions, and forms of knowledge that are being promoted in emerging GenAI-mediated language learning environments. Therefore, the present study examines how GenAI-assisted language learning practices, prompting strategies, and AI-supported learning workflows are portrayed and promoted in popular Chinese social media posts.

Literature Review

Social media discussions of GenAI-assisted language learning often include practical guidance on prompt writing and the integration of GenAI-generated content into learning activities. To situate the present study, it is therefore necessary to review how prompting strategies and AI-assisted learning workflows have been conceptualized in existing research. Prompting practices shape the quality and direction of interactions with GenAI systems, while learning workflows concern how learners organize, evaluate, and apply GenAI-generated content in language learning (Sawalha, Taj & Shoufan, 2024). Within this literature, several recurring characteristics of effective prompting practices can be identified in previous studies.

First, effective prompts are clear, specific, and concise. Learners are encouraged to avoid vague requests and state the exact action they want GenAI to perform, such as providing feedback, identifying grammatical problems, simplifying text, or generating practice materials (Huang, 2023; Hwang, Lee & Lee, 2025; Tour & Zadorozhnyy, 2025). Overly lengthy or complex prompts may reduce the relevance and usability of GenAI responses (Hwang et al., 2025).

Second, effective prompts are structured and task-oriented. They typically specify the task, the input or learning material, and the criteria or output format that should guide

the AI's response (Huang, 2023; Hwang et al., 2025; Tour & Zadorozhnyy, 2025). Thus, effective prompting involves organizing instructions, input, and expected output so that GenAI can produce more targeted and pedagogically useful responses (Huang, 2023; Tour & Zadorozhnyy, 2025; Woo, Guo & Susanto, 2025).

Third, effective prompts provide sufficient contextual and learner-specific information. Prompts may specify the learner's proficiency level, learning goals, instructional needs, and focus areas for feedback or support (Algobaei & Alzain, 2026; Brawn, 2024; Huang, 2023; Hwang et al., 2025). Such contextualization is especially important in language learning, where the usefulness of GenAI-generated content depends on its alignment with learners' linguistic level, task demands, and immediate learning needs (Huang, 2023; Hwang et al., 2025).

Fourth, effective prompts define output expectations. Learners may guide GenAI by specifying the desired tone, style, length, format, audience, or instructional approach (Algobaei & Alzain, 2026; Brawn, 2024; Hwang et al., 2025; Tour & Zadorozhnyy, 2025). These specifications help shape the form and function of GenAI-generated content, although excessive constraints may limit the flexibility and usefulness of the response (Hwang et al., 2025).

Fifth, effective prompts are pedagogically and ethically framed. In language learning contexts, prompts should encourage GenAI to provide explanations, feedback, examples, or revision suggestions rather than simply generating final answers for learners (Huang, 2023). Prompts should also avoid biased assumptions or one-sided framing, especially in culturally or socially situated communication tasks (Tour & Zadorozhnyy, 2025).

Sixth, effective prompting can be adaptive and iterative. Rather than accepting the first AI response as final, learners may refine prompts based on the relevance and usefulness of the generated output (Tour & Zadorozhnyy, 2025). This process may involve broader prompting techniques such as zero-shot, few-shot, and chain-of-thought prompting (Huang, 2023), highlighting the importance of monitoring AI responses and adjusting prompts over time.

Beyond effective prompt writing, scholars have also discussed various ways GenAI-generated content can be incorporated into language learning activities. GenAI can support diverse language-learning purposes, including feedback and instruction (Hapsari & Wu, 2022), supplementary speaking practice, progress monitoring, and psychologically safe learning spaces (AbuSahyon, Alzyoud, Alshorman & Al-Absi, 2023; Yang, 2022), as well as personalized content generation, self-assessment, writing support, automated written corrective feedback, grammar correction, vocabulary expansion, reading support, text simplification, translation, input enhancement, conversation practice, exam preparation, personalized instruction, on-demand tutoring, progress tracking, and confidence-building in communication and writing (Algobaei & Alzain, 2026; Brawn,

2024; Huang, 2023; Hwang et al., 2025; Kristiawan, Bashar & Pradana, 2024; Tour & Zadorozhnyy, 2025; Woo et al., 2025; Wu & Annamalai, 2025). This broad range of uses suggests that effective GenAI-supported language learning depends not only on writing technically effective prompts, but also on learners' ability to judge, adapt, and integrate GenAI-generated content into meaningful learning processes.

While research has identified features of effective prompts in language education, much of this work focuses on what prompts should look like. Less attention has been paid to the learner knowledge needed to formulate prompts flexibly across different learning situations. This gap matters because prompting is not simply the use of fixed templates; it requires learners to connect their learning goals, language needs, and understanding of GenAI tools in meaningful ways. Similarly, although prior studies have discussed how GenAI-generated content can support language learning through feedback, explanation, translation, and other practices, less is known about how learners are encouraged to organize such content into self-directed learning workflows. Given that social media may shape how learners understand and approach GenAI-assisted language learning, the present study explores how popular social media posts portray these two issues: the knowledge and strategies needed for effective prompting and the integration of GenAI-generated content into language learning workflows. This focus helps clarify how learner-facing online spaces frame emerging GenAI-mediated language learning practices. Therefore, the following research question guided this study:

How do popular Chinese social media posts portray the knowledge and strategies involved in effective prompting and in the organization of GenAI-generated content into language-learning workflows?

Methods

Data Collection

Data were collected from 73 publicly available short videos and posts across three major Chinese social media platforms: Bilibili (N=17), RedNote (N=37), and TikTok (Chinese version, N=19). These platforms were chosen due to their popularity among Chinese language learners and their frequent use for sharing informal educational content. All posts and videos were sampled from March 2023 to April 2026 to capture contemporary trends in GenAI-supported language learning and account for the rapid evolution of GenAI technologies in China following the introduction of widely accessible, Chinese-localized GenAI tools such as DeepSeek, DouBao, and QianWen. As all videos and posts were presented in Chinese, the researcher translated into English the data segments that were included in this paper for reporting and analysis. Popular social media posts were selected as the data source because GenAI-assisted learning practices are rapidly shared, modeled, and circulated in these spaces. Although such posts do not provide

direct evidence of learners' actual practices or learning effectiveness, they offer insight into how GenAI-assisted language learning is publicly portrayed, packaged, and promoted in everyday digital environments. Because these learner-facing spaces may shape learners' perceptions, expectations, and approaches toward GenAI-assisted language learning, analyzing popular social media posts provides a useful lens for understanding how prompting strategies, learning workflows, and GenAI-assisted language learning practices are framed in informal online spaces.

Selection Criteria

To identify relevant content, posts were selected based on two primary criteria: (1) popularity, operationalized as having the highest number of views, likes, comments, or shares on the platforms, and (2) relevance, determined by whether the content explicitly involved GenAI-supported language learning practices within the Chinese context. Popular posts and videos were prioritized because they are more likely to shape, circulate, and reflect widely visible learner-facing discourses about GenAI use. This purposive sampling strategy ensured that the analyzed data were both representative of highly visible social media content and aligned with the study's research objectives.

Data Analysis Procedure

This study employed Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) as the primary research design (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Following Braun and Clarke's six-phase model, the researcher first became familiar with the data by transcribing the original scripts from each video or post and repeatedly watching, reading, and noting initial impressions. Initial codes were then manually generated by identifying meaningful segments related to how posts portrayed the knowledge and strategies required for effective prompting and the ways GenAI-generated content was organized into language-learning workflows. Related codes were grouped into candidate themes, which were then reviewed and refined against the dataset to ensure coherence, reduce overlap, and clarify theme boundaries across the three platforms. The final themes were defined, named, and interpreted through an integrated cultural, linguistic, and educational lens, with attention to both the descriptive content of the posts and the learning intentions reflected in users' prompts and practices.

Reflexivity

Throughout the analysis, the researcher maintained an awareness of personal perspectives and interpretive positions. Reflexive notes were kept to support transparency

and self-awareness, documenting how the researcher's background, assumptions, and decision-making influenced the coding and theme development process. Given that the data focused on GenAI-supported language learning practices, the researcher paid particular attention to how prior knowledge of language learning, digital learning practices, and GenAI tools shaped the interpretation of posts and videos. Reflexive memoing was used during coding and theme refinement to record emerging interpretations, possible biases, uncertainties, and alternative readings of the data. This process helped the researcher avoid treating themes as self-evident findings and instead recognize them as actively constructed through sustained engagement with the dataset.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical compliance was ensured by restricting the analysis to publicly available content. All names reported are online pseudonyms used by influencers, and no personal identifiers were disclosed. All data were used strictly for academic purposes. As a result, this study adhered to established ethical standards for research using social media data.

Thematic Resonance Across Additional Data

To further reflect on the relevance and transferability of the themes, the researcher also reviewed an additional 15 videos or posts that were not included in the main dataset, with five drawn from each platform. This supplementary review was intended to examine whether the themes developed from the main dataset also resonated with broader learner-facing social media content.

Results

Prompting Knowledge and Strategy in GENAI-Supported Language Learning

When interacting with GenAI, learners do not simply apply fixed prompt formulas. Rather, they need prior knowledge to construct prompts that are meaningful and aligned with their learning goals. They shape prompts according to their individual learning needs, adjust instructions as those needs evolve, and employ different prompting strategies to achieve various language learning purposes. Effective GenAI use therefore requires learners to draw on knowledge across multiple domains; otherwise, they may not know where to begin or how to formulate useful instructions. This study reveals that learners may need three types of knowledge to develop a more proficient and independent prompting capacity for GenAI-supported language learning.

The first type of knowledge entails learners' ability to clearly articulate their individual needs and contextual circumstances across different learning purposes.

Influencers on these major social media platforms illustrate how this knowledge could be translated into prompting practices. For example, one influencer "西西向前冲" summarized several prompt types designed for distinct learning purposes. One prompt, aimed at study resource creation, reads: "Organize high-frequency grammar points and commonly mistaken words for Units 1 to 6 of the seventh grade (second semester)." It clearly defines the learning goal, scope, and the expected proficiency level. A second prompt, focused on diagnosing knowledge gaps, is: "Grade according to Grade 7 (People's Education Press) English standards; mark error types and the corresponding knowledge points." In this case, both the assessment criteria and evaluation method are explicitly specified. A third prompt for new knowledge acquisition states: "Turn Unit 3 shopping vocabulary into supermarket Q&A." This incorporates a learning technique, Q&A, directly into the instructions while indicating the content to be transformed. The three prompts exemplify how instructions are supported by basic contextual details and personal information. When writing prompts, learners should explicitly state their personal context, such as learning goals, current conditions, learning materials, scope, and proficiency levels, to ensure that AI-generated output aligns with their personal needs.

The second type of knowledge involves learners' ability to synthesize domain-specific language-learning knowledge from multiple domains, such as metalinguistic knowledge, cognitive psychology, sociocultural awareness, and learning strategies, into the crafting of GenAI prompts. A more complex example, provided by the influencer, "弗朗西斯教英语" on Bilibili, contains a prompt with fifteen requirements, illustrating how prompt literacy can reach professional levels through the use of multi-dimensional prompts that integrate knowledge across various fields. One subprompt reads: "Identify all the grammatical errors in the following paragraph, especially those related to tense, subject-verb agreement, singular and plural forms, prepositions, articles, sentence structure, and any expressions that are unnatural or non-native-like," demonstrating the learner's nuanced grammatical knowledge, analytical precision, and a clearly articulated focus on targeted learning objectives. Another subprompt instructs, "If there are more than 60 errors, revise it so that the total number of errors is between 50 and 60". Even if not explicitly informed by cognitive load theory, the learner's decision to constrain the feedback scope suggests an intentional effort to control task complexity and difficulty within a manageable range, revealing an awareness of cognitive regulation. Additional requirements, such as "Don't use the same old idioms and try using expressions that Gen Alpha or American teens actually say," and "Use three CEFR C2-level vocabulary items without making the response overly formal. The language should be engaging while consisting entirely of complete sentences," reflect sensitivity to language-related cultural elements, such as register, audience, and authenticity, while also demonstrating pedagogical awareness of the role of interest and engagement in language learning (Tin, 2016). Together, these examples show that prompt writing requires not only clear learning goals but also the integration of

specialized knowledge from linguistics, pedagogy, and cognitive principles to design precise and pedagogically grounded interactions with GenAI.

A third type of knowledge involves technical and programming-related competencies, as some influencers demonstrated how coding knowledge could be incorporated into GenAI prompting practices, such as generating code for website design. For instance, a RedNote influencer named "双胞胎叮当妈妈" demonstrated how she wrote a program (see Figure 1), ran it in HTML format on DeepSeek, and generated reading materials that included a core vocabulary list, Chinese translations, and supplementary information, effectively creating a simple online learning app. This process requires not only knowledge of English and language-learning approaches but also technical expertise in computer science, particularly programming skills. Similarly, another influencer, "AI山姆奥特曼", suggested that learners "Enter this prompt (a piece of website design code) to generate multiple-choice questions based on a word list. It will extract English words from the image, use them to create fill-in-the-blank multiple-choice questions suitable for first-grade students, and output the results as executable HTML code." Both cases highlight that prompt-writing knowledge can extend beyond personal, linguistic, and pedagogical knowledge to encompass digital and programming competencies associated with computer science expertise.

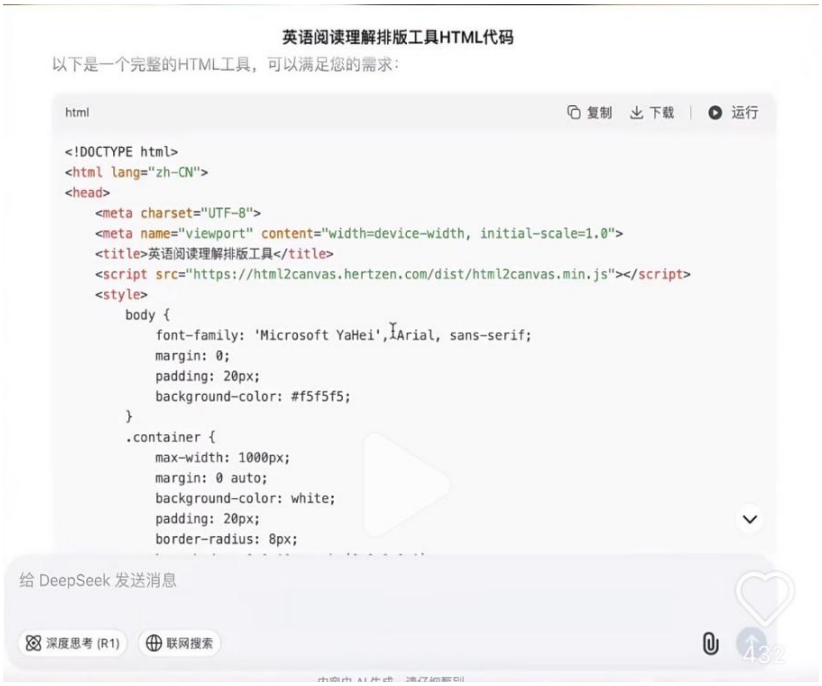

Figure 1: Screenshot of HTML Code for Reading Practice

Collectively, these examples show that popular Chinese social media posts portray effective prompting as grounded in several forms of learner knowledge. First, learners need self-knowledge and contextual knowledge, including awareness of their grade level, textbook version, learning materials, proficiency level, learning goals, and task scope. Second, they need language-learning-related knowledge, including grammatical knowledge, assessment knowledge, learning-strategy knowledge, sociocultural knowledge, and awareness of task difficulty. Third, some posts suggest that prompting may require technical knowledge, including coding concepts and basic programming knowledge. Together, these posts portray effective prompting not merely as the application of prompt templates, but as a knowledge-based practice in which learners draw on personal, linguistic, pedagogical, sociocultural, cognitive, and technical knowledge to make GenAI-generated content usable for language learning.

While the previous examples highlight the forms of knowledge learners draw upon when crafting prompts, social media posts also portray how such knowledge is operationalized through culturally situated prompting strategies. Two strategies repeatedly emphasized by multiple influencers are exam-oriented prompt writing and the use of learners' L1 in prompt construction. These strategies show that effective prompting is not presented as a generic technique, but as a practice shaped by learners' educational experiences, linguistic resources, and culturally embedded learning needs.

First, GenAI tools help learners adapt their language learning patterns in ways closely tied to the educational context where they are situated. Given the exam orientation of the Chinese education system, learners use GenAI to support English learning trajectories aligned with different exams such as high school and college entrance exams, CET, IETLS, and TOEFL. Several examples are presented to show how learners use AI tools to support exam-oriented language learning. Influence "你的英语老师Judy", explained, "The first step is to have AI provide five IELTS speaking topics." Another learner, "是你们的康康", described, "For example, when I asked, 'I'd like to know the English writing topic for the College English Test Band 4 (CET-4) in June 2024,' it immediately provided me with the actual writing prompt from this year's exam, along with a Chinese summary". Similarly, "—放羊的星星—" reported using GenAI to handle extensive vocabulary practice, noting, "For example, take the 3,500-word list from the Gaokao (college entrance exam) syllabus." These examples suggest that social media posts portray exam-oriented prompting as a strategy for making GenAI responses educationally targeted. Rather than asking GenAI for general language-learning support, learners are encouraged to anchor prompts in specific exams, test sections, official syllabi, past questions, or vocabulary lists. This strategy highlights an important prompt-writing idea: effective prompts are not context-free instructions, but are shaped by learners' situated learning needs.

Second, because GenAI can recognize and use different languages at an advanced

level, language learners are able to flexibly switch between their first and second languages when needed. For instance, the influencer "hellowinnie" write prompts such as, "Please help me analyze the background knowledge of the article from the following dimensions: ... A comparison of differences between Chinese and Western perspectives...Step 3: Writing and expression accumulation. In the chat box, we can type: 'Which expressions in the article are suitable for Chinese native speakers to learn and use in their writing?'" Another influencer, "喜欢编程的杨同学", would "Take a photo and upload the vocabulary words, then let Doubao create a short story with Chinese translation to help learn the words." Likewise, the influencer "是你们的康康" notes, "If there's something you don't quite understand (in one original English text), you can refer to the Chinese version for comparison." These examples suggest that social media posts portray L1 use as a prompt-writing strategy through which learners can draw on their existing linguistic resources when interacting with GenAI. Rather than treating the first language as interference, these posts present it as a useful source for constructing prompts that support comprehension, vocabulary learning, cultural comparison, and meaning clarification. This strategy highlights that prompting can be multilingual, allowing learners to use their L1 to make GenAI-generated content more accessible, contextually grounded, and relevant to their language-learning needs.

Overall, popular Chinese social media posts portray effective prompting as a knowledge-based and context-sensitive practice. They suggest that learners need to draw on different types of knowledge, including personal, linguistic, pedagogical, and technical knowledge, to construct prompts that fit their learning goals. In addition, multiple influencers present exam-oriented prompt writing and L1-supported prompting as two situated strategies through which learners can make GenAI responses more targeted, accessible, and relevant to their language-learning needs.

Multi-Stage and Multimodal GENAI-Supported Learning Workflows

The second theme captures how popular Chinese social media posts demonstrate ways in which GenAI can be incorporated into self-directed language-learning workflows. Two key features characterize these portrayed workflows. First, the posts present GenAI-supported learning as a multi-stage process in which learners can move through connected steps, such as input, explanation, practice, feedback, revision, and consolidation. Second, the posts show how workflow design can integrate multiple modalities and tools, including text, images, audio, video, coding functions, and translation features, to support different learning purposes. Together, these features portray GenAI as part of a structured, flexible, and resource-integrated learning process rather than a stand-alone tool for producing individual outputs.

The first feature of language-learning workflows involves the organization of

GenAI-supported learning into a multi-stage process. In these social media posts, effective GenAI use is portrayed as integrating AI support across connected steps to form a multi-step learning loop. This framing suggests that GenAI is incorporated into a structured learning flow in which multiple learning activities are sequenced to support different learning goals. An example comes from a Red Note influencer "苏嘻嘻susie", who shared the following workflow for using GenAI in improving reading:

Step 1

Find a reading passage that interests you.
Read it yourself first and try to understand the general meaning.
While reading, feel free to highlight any unfamiliar words or phrases.

Step 2

Save the file with your highlights.
Import the text into an AI platform, then prompt the AI to organize the highlighted words and generate corresponding definitions and example sentences.

Step 3

You can also ask the AI to summarize the main ideas of the article in English.
Then, compare the AI's summary with your own understanding to identify any gaps or differences.

This example illustrates a multi-stage GenAI-supported reading workflow in which GenAI assistance is integrated after the learner's initial engagement with the text. The workflow first positions the learner as an active reader who identifies unfamiliar vocabulary and develops an initial understanding of the passage. GenAI is then introduced as a supporting tool that helps organize vocabulary information and provide a summary for comparison. Importantly, GenAI plays primarily an assistant role rather than replacing the learner's work. The learner remains responsible for the major learning tasks, including recognizing knowledge gaps, making sense of vocabulary in context, evaluating the GenAI-generated summary, and refining her reading comprehension. In this sense, the workflow uses GenAI to provide additional language-learning support, while the learner continues to perform the central cognitive work required for vocabulary development and reading comprehension.

Ultimately, this three-stage model demonstrates that, beyond writing effective prompts based on learners' knowledge, they should also be capable of designing and navigating GenAI-assisted learning cycles to use such tools effectively. Noticeably, throughout this process, AI serves as a valuable assistant rather than a determinant of success. Simply using AI does not automatically improve language performance; learners must actively engage in such a learning cycle to achieve ultimate goals such as reinforcing comprehension and acquiring vocabulary. It is the learner, not the AI, who ultimately makes learning happen, albeit with the assistance of AI.

The second feature of language-learning workflows portrayed in social media use of GenAI is the integration of GenAI tools into multimodal learning process, in which learners flexibly combine different material formats and platforms to achieve their learning goals. Learners adapt the format of learning materials to their personal needs and strategically use different platforms to obtain the most suitable resources. One demonstration of this approach comes from the Red Note influencer "智博尚书":

With DeepSeek, learners take photos of the vocabulary to be memorized … then give the instruction, "for the following words, please generate a table indicating each word's Chinese meaning, English definition, and one example sentence" … then use these words for reading comprehension, entering the instruction, "please use these words to generate an English reading passage at a third-grade level … help me consolidate their application" … finally, copy DeepSeek-generated text to Doubao, with the instruction, "next I will send you a short English passage; I would like to do shadow-reading practice with you—you read one sentence and then I repeat it."

This example highlights how learners use GenAI to transform and connect diverse forms of learning materials across stages, moving from photographed vocabulary lists, to AI-generated vocabulary tables and reading passages, and finally to AI-supported shadow-reading practice based on generated texts. By photographing vocabulary in DeepkSeek, the learner converts visual input into text-based lexical data, which is then transformed into a tabular format containing meanings and example sentences. This process demonstrates the flexible combination of text, image, structured information. The learner then repurposes the same vocabulary to generate reading comprehension passages, practicing reading and comprehension skills, and finally transfers the AI-generated test to Doubao for shadow-reading exercises, thereby training listening and speaking skills and transforming learning materials from visual text to audio input, and from reading-based to listening- and speaking-oriented practice.

Through this orchestrated sequence, the learner actively coordinates different platforms and modalities to meet personal learning goals, showing that agentic use of GenAI involves not only tool selection but also simultaneous development of multiple language competencies. Learners can take advantage of the technical functions offered by different GenAI platforms and utilize diverse material formats to achieve different learning goals. With GenAI support, the same learning content, such as a set of vocabulary items, can be repeatedly presented and practiced through different forms of stimuli, including structured tables, reading passages, and audio-based shadowing. This multimodal exposure allows learners to encounter and process the same knowledge across multiple material formats, which may help strengthen memory and deepen learning.

Overall, this theme illustrates how popular Chinese social media posts portray effective GenAI-assisted language learning not as isolated prompting practices, but as the organization of structured and multimodal learning workflows. These posts depict learners

as actively coordinating sequences of learning activities, integrating GenAI support across multiple stages. At the same time, the posts portray learners as strategically combining different GenAI platforms, technical functions, and material formats to support different learning purposes and language skills. Across these portrayed workflows, GenAI primarily functions as a supporting resource that assists learners in organizing information, generating materials, and facilitating practice, while learners remain responsible for directing the learning process and engaging in the core cognitive work required for language development. In this sense, the findings suggest that social media posts frame effective GenAI-supported language learning as requiring not only prompting knowledge, but also the ability to design, manage, and navigate flexible GenAI-assisted learning workflows that integrate multiple tools, modalities, and learning activities toward personalized learning goals.

Discussion

This study suggests that popular Chinese social media posts portray prompt writing as a demanding and knowledge-based skill. Prior studies have identified several textual features of effective prompts, such as specificity and conciseness (Hwang et al., 2025), and have suggested that learners may include information such as proficiency level or learning goals to make prompts more concrete (Algobaei & Alzain, 2026; Brawn, 2024). However, these studies tend to mention such information separately, without systematically explaining how prompt writing is represented as involving broader learner knowledge and strategic awareness. The analyzed social media posts extend this line of work by portraying prompting not simply as the use of templates or isolated instructional details, but as a knowledge-dependent practice associated with three broad areas: knowledge about one's own learning situation (e.g., proficiency level, learning goals, or task needs), knowledge about language learning (e.g., grammar, vocabulary learning, or learning strategies), and knowledge about interacting with GenAI systems. In this sense, popular social media posts frame prompting as a practice in which learners are encouraged to draw on multiple forms of knowledge to construct prompts aligned with their learning needs.

Additionally, the analyzed social media posts portrayed GenAI-assisted language learning as contextually situated. Rather than presenting prompting as a context-free skill, the posts showed how learners were encouraged to use GenAI in ways shaped by local learning goals, available resources, and educational expectations. For example, in the Chinese exam-oriented context, posts often framed learners' first language as a resource for comprehension support, vocabulary learning, cultural comparison, and meaning clarification. This portrayal aligns with sociocultural theory, which views learning as mediated by culturally and historically situated tools, practices, and resources (Lantolf, 2000). From this perspective, the posts frame GenAI as part of a broader learning ecology,

where language learning is supported through the interaction between AI tools, learner resources, and local educational contexts.

The findings further suggest that the analyzed social media posts portrayed GenAI-supported language learning as both multi-stage and multimodal. Rather than presenting GenAI as a tool for obtaining immediate answers, the posts often framed AI use as part of an extended learning process involving several connected steps. For example, learners were shown as moving from input generation to explanation, practice, feedback, revision, and further application. In this portrayal, GenAI-supported learning is represented as a sequenced process in which learners organize AI support across different stages and language skills.

The posts also portrayed GenAI-supported language learning as multimodal. AI use was frequently connected with different forms of materials and activities, such as vocabulary tables, reading passages, summaries, translation comparisons, visual input, and audio-based practice. In this sense, social media content presented GenAI-assisted learning as a media-rich process in which learners engage with language through multiple formats rather than text-based prompting alone. This finding shows how popular social media posts frame GenAI-supported language learning as a structured and multimodal process.

Pedagogical Implication

Pedagogically, the findings suggest that teachers should equip learners with sufficient foundational knowledge before expecting them to interact effectively with GenAI systems. Such preparation may include helping students develop a clearer understanding of their own learning goals, language-learning processes, and appropriate GenAI use. After learners develop such foundational knowledge, prompt templates and prompting instructions may become more meaningful and effective forms of support rather than superficial formulas for learners to follow.

The findings also suggest that teachers can make productive use of contextual and linguistic resources available within learners' educational environments. For example, learners' first language can serve as a pedagogical scaffold for supporting comprehension, vocabulary learning, meaning clarification, and cross-linguistic comparison. Teachers may also draw on local examination systems, authentic local communicative situations, and culturally familiar topics and examples when designing GenAI-supported learning activities. By connecting GenAI use to learners' immediate educational goals, everyday communicative needs, and familiar cultural experiences, teachers may help students engage with AI-generated content in more meaningful and contextually relevant ways.

In addition, teachers should guide learners in designing pedagogically meaningful GenAI-supported learning workflows. Although well-designed multi-stage workflows may help learners engage with multiple language skills and pursue different learning goals,

more steps do not necessarily lead to more effective learning. In the social media posts examined in this study, some workflows may appear sophisticated partly because they are designed to attract viewers' attention. However, in everyday learning contexts, teachers should help students determine whether each step in a GenAI-assisted workflow is pedagogically necessary, logically sequenced, and manageable. This is important for avoiding excessive cognitive load caused by overly complicated or redundant procedures. Educators may also need to consider how students' learning outcomes can be assessed after they complete such GenAI-supported learning workflows.

Finally, teachers may take advantage of multimodality within these workflows by exposing learners to the same information across different representational forms, such as written texts, audio materials, summaries, visual input, and interactive practice. Such repeated and varied engagement may support richer interaction with target language content, and later easier recall of learned knowledge.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has several limitations. First, data collection and analysis were conducted by one researcher, which may have introduced subjective bias in selecting, interpreting, and coding the posts. Future studies could involve multiple coders or intercoder discussions to strengthen trustworthiness. Second, the study focused on language learning in the Chinese educational context, so the findings may not be directly transferable to other languages or sociocultural settings. Future research could examine whether similar portrayals appear across different linguistic, cultural, and institutional contexts.

Third, the study is time-bound. Because GenAI tools, social media trends, and learner-facing content change rapidly, the patterns identified here may reflect a specific moment in GenAI-supported language learning. Continued research is needed to examine how these portrayals evolve over time. Fourth, because the data came from publicly available social media posts and videos, demographic information about content creators or audiences was not available. Therefore, this study does not make claims about specific learner populations, but focuses on how GenAI-supported language learning is portrayed in widely circulated learner-facing content. The sampled posts may have been produced by different types of creators, including learners, teachers, ed-tech promoters, and commercial accounts. Future studies could compare how these groups portray GenAI use and whether their portrayals differ in pedagogical quality, accuracy, or intended audience. Future research should also move beyond portrayed practices by examining learners' actual GenAI use, learning processes, and language outcomes.

Conclusion

This study examined how popular Chinese social media posts portray GenAI-supported language learning. The findings suggest that effective GenAI use is represented as a knowledge-dependent process involving three broad forms of knowledge: knowledge about the learner, knowledge related to language learning, and knowledge about interacting with GenAI tools. GenAI-supported language learning is also portrayed as contextually situated, multi-stage, and multimodal. Pedagogically, the findings suggest that teachers should prepare learners to use GenAI appropriately and guide them in designing meaningful learning workflows. Overall, this study contributes to understanding how GenAI-supported language learning is represented in learner-facing social media content and highlights the need for more careful pedagogical support in GenAI-assisted language education.

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Correspondence

Correspondence should be addressed to the first author, Yixin Qian, Florida State University, 1114 W. Call St, Stone Building, Anne Spencer Daves College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences, Tallahassee, FL 32306.
Email: yq23@fsu.edu

Data Availability

The data supporting this study are not publicly available due to privacy and confidentiality concerns.

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