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Learning in a Third Space: Chinese Student Teachers' Conceptualisation of Pedagogy, Curriculum and Identity in Aotearoa New Zealand Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

This study set out to explore Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy, with a particular focus on intentional teaching, in the Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education (ECE) context. As the research progressed, the inquiry evolved from describing these perspectives to examining how they were shaped within initial teacher education (ITE) programmes as Chinese student teachers navigated a cross-cultural context. A two-phase explanatory sequential mixed methods design was employed. Phase 1 consisted of a bilingual online survey distributed across Aotearoa New Zealand. Phase 2 involved two rounds of one-on-one semi-structured interviews with seven participants purposefully selected from Phase 1. A pragmatist worldview informed the study throughout. Funds of knowledge, funds of identity, and third space theory, identified through the literature review as potentially useful theoretical resources, became particularly salient during Phase 2 and were drawn upon to deepen the interpretation of Chinese student teachers' learning and cross-cultural experiences.

Findings indicate that Chinese student teachers demonstrated a shift away from traditional Chinese ECE approaches. Moreover, multiple factors were found to shape Chinese student teachers' perspectives, particularly ITE, cultural background, educational and upbringing experiences, and parenthood (for those with children). In particular, findings indicate an association between Chinese student teachers' views of their cultural background and their pursuit of pedagogical integration or assimilation. At a broader level, social biases against and deficit discourses about Chinese student teachers contributed to the devaluation and invalidation of Chinese student teachers' cultural identities and heritage, constraining their ability to draw on their funds of knowledge and funds of identity within ITE contexts.

This study provides an empirical exploration of Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECE context and the ways in which they navigate a cross-cultural understanding of teaching and learning. On the one hand, this study highlights the adaptability and malleability of Chinese student teachers' pedagogical beliefs,

reflecting their openness to local pedagogical discourses. On the other hand, this study suggests that Chinese student teachers experienced tensions in negotiating their culturally shaped pre-existing beliefs and dominant pedagogical expectations, as well as in negotiating their emerging professional identities in relation to their cultural identities. This study calls for more culturally sensitive interpretations of Chinese student teachers' pedagogical perspectives and lived experiences, and for the acknowledgement and validation of Chinese student teachers' rich funds of knowledge and funds of identity to support their professional learning and identity construction in a third space.

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Glossary of Māori Words

Māori Words	English Explanation
Hapori	Section of a kinship group, family, society, or community
Kaiako	Includes all teachers, educators, and other adults who have the responsibility for the care and education of children in ECE
Te Kōhanga Reo	Māori-medium early childhood centres with a focus on retaining and revitalising Māori language and culture
Pākehā	New Zealanders of European descent
Tamariki	Children
Te Whāriki	The bicultural early childhood curriculum of Aotearoa New Zealand
Te reo Māori	The Māori language
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	The te reo Māori text of Aotearoa New Zealand's founding document.
Tikanga Māori	Māori ways of doing, including practices, customs, and rituals
Whakamana	Empowerment

Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter begins with the research background to contextualise this study. It then presents the rationale for focusing on Chinese student teachers, followed by a reflection on my positionality as the researcher. The research scope is subsequently clarified through the presentation of the research aim and questions, as well as definitions of key terms. This chapter concludes with an overview of the thesis structure, which provides a roadmap for the nine chapters that constitute this thesis.

1.1 Research Background

1.1.1 Early Childhood Education in Aotearoa New Zealand

Early childhood education (ECE) in Aotearoa New Zealand refers to the education provided to children from birth until they enter school (Ministry of Education, 2025). Children can start school from the age of five and must be enrolled by the age of six. The ECE services in Aotearoa New Zealand are quite diverse and the main types include kindergartens, education and care services, home-based services, playcentres, and Te Kōhanga Reo (Cherrington et al., 2022). These ECE services differ in various aspects, such as the age range of children they typically serve, the hours of provision, staff qualification requirements, and ownership (Cherrington et al., 2022). According to the 2025 ECE Census, among children attending licensed ECE services, 72% attended education and care services, 14% kindergartens, 5% home-based services, 5% playcentres, and 5% Te Kōhanga Reo (Education Counts, 2025b).

The diversity of ECE provision in Aotearoa New Zealand reflects the distinct historical roots of different service types, shaped by multiple factors such as changing societal needs, political movements, and Māori language and cultural revitalisation. Historically, kindergarten, originally developed by the German educationalist Friedrich Froebel, was introduced to Aotearoa New Zealand by progressive citizens in the late 19th century (May & Bethell, 2017). Although initially established primarily to educate children from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds, kindergarten then grew into a national movement that benefited a wider group of children (May, 2018). The first playcentres

were established in 1941 in affluent suburbs as a form of parents supporting each other and learning alongside their children while running the service collaboratively (May, 2018; Stover, 2016). Education and care services evolved from earlier crèches and childcare centres, which expanded particularly from the 1960s as increasing numbers of women with young children entered paid employment and demand for full-day childcare grew (May, 2007; Ritchie, 2018). Home-based services generally involve smaller group sizes and provide education and care in home environments (Layland & Smith, 2015). Notably, the establishment of the first Kōhanga Reo (Māori-medium ECE setting) in 1982 was a result of Māori-led movements for language and cultural revitalisation and self-determination to counter the impacts of colonisation (Ritchie, 2018).

Since the 1980s, two major developments have significantly shaped the contemporary landscape of ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand: the integration of education and care, and the advocacy of including te reo Māori and tikanga Māori within the ECE sector (Ritchie, 2018). Regarding the first development, there were historically two main strands in the development of ECE services in Aotearoa New Zealand, with one focused on care, and the other focused on education (Mutch, 2004). The separation of care and education was reflected in differences in operating requirements and government funding for kindergarten and childcare services, as well as the professional status of kindergarten teachers and childcare workers (Smith & May, 2006). The transfer of childcare administration from the Department of Social Welfare to the Department of Education in 1986 marked a significant step towards the integration of care and education (Meade & Podmore, 2002). This integration was further advanced by the 1988 Meade Report, *Education to Be More*, and the subsequent government policy *Before Five*, which promoted greater coherence across diverse ECE services in areas such as funding, regulation, and teacher education (May, 2007; Mutch, 2004).

The second development concerned the increasing recognition of te reo Māori and tikanga Māori within the ECE sector. Aotearoa New Zealand was built upon *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (*The Treaty of Waitangi*), a founding document signed between the British Crown and Māori in 1840. The Treaty was intended to create partnership between the two parties; however, different understandings of

the text and breaches of it led to conflicts and wars (Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, n.d.). From the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, Māori activism intensified around land rights, social and legal equality, and the revitalisation of te reo Māori and Māori culture (Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, n.d.). These protests and movements contributed to a renewed recognition of the Treaty in public life over subsequent decades, including in the area of ECE.

These two major developments helped create the context for the development of Aotearoa New Zealand's first national bicultural ECE curriculum, *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum* (hereafter *Te Whāriki*), published by the Ministry of Education (1996). This curriculum document was used in the ECE sector for over 20 years before being updated in 2017. Using the metaphor of a woven mat, *Te Whāriki* acknowledges the diversity of local curricula across ECE services, and establishes a strong bicultural foundation grounded in *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* within the ECE sector.

1.1.2 Early Childhood Initial Teacher Education in Aotearoa New Zealand

Initial teacher education (ITE) in Aotearoa New Zealand refers to the formal preparation undertaken by prospective teachers to develop the professional knowledge, skills, and practices required to enter the teaching profession and thrive in their first teaching roles (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2024a). The function of ITE is to prepare beginning teachers with the professional knowledge, pedagogical skills, ethical dispositions, and practical experience needed to teach effectively in diverse educational settings and thus support the learning, wellbeing, and success of all learners while meeting the explicit standards and responsibilities of the teaching profession. In doing so, ITE also plays a crucial role in transmitting the values, expectations, aspirations and norms of the profession, supporting the formation of professional identity as teachers learn to participate in and contribute to the socially, culturally, and historically situated practice of teaching.

The Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand is responsible for approving, monitoring, reviewing, and moderating ITE programmes to assure the quality of ITE provision and the

preparation of future teachers (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2024a). Approved ITE programmes are offered at bachelor's, graduate diploma, postgraduate diploma, and master's levels, with programmes preparing teachers for different educational sectors, including ECE, primary, and secondary.

Graduates from ITE programmes are expected to meet the Standards for the Teaching Profession, first introduced in 2017 and subsequently updated in 2026. The 2026 Standards outline eight standards across three domains: professional knowledge, professional practice, and professional engagement. It describes "what high-quality teaching practice looks like and what it means to be a teacher in Aotearoa New Zealand" (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, n.d.-b, p. 7). The Standards serve as an important framework for ITE providers in designing their programmes and assessing student teachers, and completion of an accredited ITE programme is deemed to indicate readiness to enter the profession and eligibility for professional registration and certification.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, teachers are required to be registered with the Teaching Council and hold a current practising certificate to be recognised for pay, licencing, funding and ratio purposes. Registration does not expire unless a teacher deregisters or their registration is cancelled, while practising certificates are generally valid for three years and must be renewed (Ministry of Education, 2026). ITE graduates can apply for both registration and certification at the same time upon the completion of their ITE programme. Once ITE graduates meet the relevant registration and certification requirements, they may be registered as teachers and issued a provisional practising certificate, which allows them to begin teaching (Ministry of Education, 2026). To gain the full practising certificate, beginning teachers need to complete a two-year induction and mentoring programme, with support from their employer and a mentor who holds a full practising certificate (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2025). This registration and certification mechanism serves as an important mechanism for professional accountability and quality assurance in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The development of early childhood ITE has been connected to the historical development of ECE services in Aotearoa New Zealand. The earliest ECE teacher training programme can be traced to the teacher training courses provided by kindergarten associations to prepare teachers for the expanding free kindergarten movement across Aoteraora New Zealand (Q. Zhang, 2021). Later in the 1960s, New Zealand Childcare Association developed the first childcare training courses for childcare workers (Q. Zhang, 2021). The separate kindergarten and childcare teacher training pathways were subsequently replaced by an integrated three-year diploma-level training qualification provided by Colleges of Education since 1987, later raised to a bachelor-degree qualification, making ECE teacher training comparable to teacher training in the school sector (Smith & May, 2006). Over time, early childhood ITE has further diversified into the range of qualification pathways available today.

Professional experience placements (practicum) are an important part of learning in early childhood ITE programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand (Aspden & McLachlan, 2017). The Teaching Council requires a minimum of 80 days of professional experience placements for one-year and two-year programmes, and a minimum of 120 days for three-year programmes or longer (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2019b). During professional experience placements, student teachers are expected to develop their practice and gain teaching experiences with a diverse range of learners, including infants, toddlers, and young children (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2019b).

The ECE sector in Aotearoa New Zealand has faced ongoing challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers (Andres et al., 2022; Office of Early Childhood Education, 2024). Registered ECE teachers have been included on Immigration New Zealand's Green List, providing a potential pathway to residence for those who meet the relevant requirements (Immigration New Zealand, n.d.). Early childhood ITE programmes may appeal to international students and migrants because they provide a pathway to becoming a registered ECE teacher, supporting both professional opportunities and longer-term settlement in Aotearoa New Zealand (F. Huang, 2021), contributing to

the cultural and linguistic diversity of the student teacher population within early childhood ITE programmes.

1.1.3 Increasing Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Aotearoa New Zealand

Aotearoa New Zealand is grounded in a bicultural foundation and partnership between the Crown and Māori as tangata whenua; at the same time, the country has become increasingly culturally diverse in recent decades. As a well-known immigrant-friendly country, Aotearoa New Zealand has attracted people from across the world, especially from developing nations (Rana, 2021). The 2023 Census results show that people in Aotearoa New Zealand identify with a wide range of ethnicities, in descending order as European (67.8%), Māori (17.8%), Asian (17.3%), Pacific peoples (8.9%), Middle Eastern/Latin American/African (MELAA, 1.9%) and other ethnicities (1.1%) (Stats NZ, 2024a). There are over 150 languages spoken in this country, and nearly 30% of the entire population were born overseas (Stats NZ, 2024b). Compared with the 2018 Census data, the 2023 Census data demonstrate an apparent increase in ethnic diversity within Aotearoa New Zealand (M. Lee, 2024). More importantly, population projections suggest that this increasing trend is expected to continue, with Aotearoa New Zealand becoming even more ethnically diverse in 2048 than in 2023 (Stats NZ, 2025b).

Within this changing demographic context, ECE settings in Aotearoa New Zealand need to be prepared to serve an increasing number of children and families from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In response to this increasing diversity, one key strategy, as identified by researchers in Aotearoa New Zealand and similar societies (e.g., Australia), is to build a diverse ECE teaching workforce that reflects and represents the social composition of the population (Griffiths et al., 2022; Qi & Campbell, 2022).

Research indicates that there are multiple benefits to diversifying the ECE teaching profession. For example, Gide et al. (2022) noted that for children from non-dominant cultural backgrounds, having their ethnicities represented within the teaching team is crucial for them to develop positive cultural identities and a sense of belonging within the learning environment. For

children from dominant cultural backgrounds, opportunities to interact with a diverse teaching team are also beneficial in supporting their development of multicultural awareness and respect for both their own and others' cultures (Gide et al., 2022). In addition, studies show that immigrant families could be more engaged in their children's learning and able to strengthen relationships with ECE services when there are staff members within the teaching team who share their language and culture, and who can serve as translators, interpreters, and cultural brokers (Kumar, 2022; Norheim & Moser, 2020; Qi & Campbell, 2022).

Moreover, as stated in *Te Whāriki*, the bicultural early childhood curriculum of Aotearoa New Zealand, all children are expected to "grow up in New Zealand as competent and confident learners, strong in their identity, language and culture" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 2) and to "learn in their own ways, supported by adults who know them well and have their best interests at heart" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 2). A diverse ECE teaching workforce that has valuable cultural knowledge of children from different cultural backgrounds would contribute positively to supporting and strengthening children's development in their identity, language, and culture.

Being aware of the importance of a diverse ECE teaching workforce, in 2019, the Ministry of Education of New Zealand introduced a critical policy document, *He Taonga te Tamaiti, Every Child a Taonga: Early Learning Action Plan 2019–2029*, within which it stated, "all children should have equitable access to a well-qualified early learning workforce that mirrors the diverse cultures and genders that constitute Aotearoa New Zealand" (Ministry of Education, 2019b, p. 22). While the gender issue, noted in the *Early Learning Action Plan*, is equally important, this study focuses specifically on cultural representations within the early learning workforce, responding to national policy imperatives. In line with the ten-year action plan, the Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand required ITE providers to focus on "enabling flexible pathways into ITE to increase diversity and grow the workforce while safeguarding teacher quality" (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2019a, p. 3).

However, bringing more culturally diverse student teachers into the ECE ITE programmes is only the first step. Of particular importance is to ensure that these culturally diverse student teachers are well-supported in their ECE ITE programmes so that they can experience success and be adequately prepared to implement the curriculum. In doing so, the ECE sector in Aotearoa New Zealand stands to benefit in the long term. Therefore, it becomes an important and valuable research area to explore how international or immigrant student teachers understand curriculum and pedagogy in the host culture context and what supports and challenges they may encounter during their ITE experiences.

1.1.4 Importance of Understanding International or Immigrant Student Teachers' Perspectives and Experiences

In the global context, some research suggests that learning to teach is often a challenging process for international or immigrant student teachers to navigate. For instance, drawing on questionnaire data from 11 Asian student teachers enrolled in a Master of Teaching (Early Childhood) programme at an Australian university, Rouse and Joseph (2019) noted the challenges of mastering English as a second language, understanding unfamiliar ways of teaching and learning, linking theoretical knowledge to practical applications, and dealing with financial and visa issues alongside already stressful learning tasks.

Similarly, in Australia, Nuttall and Ortlipp (2012) explored a Singapore Chinese student teacher's experience of practicum assessment with her supervising teacher in a preschool. Interview data from this Singapore Chinese student teacher suggest that she struggled to meet the practicum expectations of her supervising teacher, who viewed and assessed her through a "difference-as-deficit" lens (Nuttall & Ortlipp, 2012, p. 55). The supervising teacher's deficit-oriented discourses, demonstrated through feedback, undermined the student teacher's efforts to complete the practicum and contributed to a negative perception of her Asian identity as someone who was not good enough as a teacher in the Australian context (Nuttall & Ortlipp, 2012).

In Canada, Massing (2018) conducted an ethnographic study investigating the learning experiences of five African Muslim refugee female student teachers within an early childhood teacher education programme. The study specifically explored these student teachers' understanding and delivery of caring practices in ECE contexts, revealing significant tensions between their cultural and religious perception of care practices and professional practices rooted in Western ideologies that prioritised children's independence and self-feeding (Massing, 2018).

These studies highlight the additional challenges and obstacles that international or immigrant student teachers may face when navigating professional learning in cross-cultural contexts, compared with their local counterparts. In particular, a deficit-oriented perspective towards international or immigrant student teachers, whether consciously or subconsciously held by those who work with them (e.g., teacher educators and associate teachers), may affect their professional learning by invalidating their cultural perspectives.

In the Aotearoa New Zealand context, some studies have also explored international or immigrant student teachers' ITE learning experiences. For instance, Moles (2014) examined the learning experience of a Cook Islands woman in an ECE ITE programme. The participant reported that, having grown up in a society different from Aotearoa New Zealand, she felt tensions between her culturally shaped understandings of gender and education and those of her local classmates and lecturers, which made her wary of sharing her perspectives. Moles (2014) suggested that by including diverse perspectives in the ITE classroom and encouraging international or immigrant student teachers to build new knowledge based on their existing understandings, teacher educators could create a more equitable and empowering environment for these student teachers.

Likewise, Rana (2021) examined the ECE ITE learning experiences of eight international Indian student teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand and noted both their cultural adjustments to Aotearoa New Zealand society and the importance of maintaining their Indian identity. Rana (2021) compared ECE in India, where formal learning and didactic teaching approaches have historically been dominant, with ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand, where child-centred and play-based pedagogy is

more prevalent, and highlighted these student teachers' transitioning understandings of curriculum and pedagogy. The author argued for a deeper understanding of diversity and called for the recognition and inclusion of the diverse perspectives and voices that international student teachers could contribute to the Aotearoa New Zealand ECE sector (Rana, 2021).

These listed studies suggest a shared interest within the research community in understanding the perspectives and experiences of international or immigrant student teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand and beyond, particularly in societies that are becoming increasingly diverse due to globalisation and migration. While these existing studies have made valuable contributions to deepening the understanding of international and immigrant student teachers, further exploration is needed in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, especially given the evolving perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy over recent decades.

1.1.5 Evolving Perspectives of Curriculum and Pedagogy in ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand

Aotearoa New Zealand has a child-centred, play-based, and culturally responsive ECE foundation, which is best illustrated by its first bicultural national early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). This curriculum was critical to the professionalisation of ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand and gained an international reputation for its pioneering stance and leading role in the 1990s (Tyler-Merrick et al., 2019). As indicated in this curriculum document, children are placed at the centre of the curriculum, and their learning through play is explicitly recognised and valued. In addition, upholding the spirit of Aotearoa New Zealand's founding document, *Te Tiriti o Waitangi,* signed in 1840, the curriculum emphasises the importance of biculturalism and commits to providing opportunities for all children to "develop knowledge and an understanding of the cultural heritages of both partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9). From the perspective of this curriculum document, teachers are expected to support the cultural identity of all children from diverse backgrounds through culturally sensitive and responsive practices across a diverse range of ECE services.

Twenty years later, in a new era in which the social context has changed, and ECE theories and practices have evolved, the Ministry of Education introduced an updated version of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017). This revised curriculum document further consolidates the previous foundation on culture, language and identity, while also providing new guidance for teachers. The revisions in this updated version of *Te Whāriki* include an increased focus on teachers' significant responsibilities to facilitate children's learning and development through intentional teaching (also referred to as intentional pedagogy) (McLaughlin & Cherrington, 2018). As stated in this revised curriculum document, "kaiako are the key resource in any ECE service. Their primary responsibility is to facilitate children's learning and development through thoughtful and intentional pedagogy" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 59). This description of teachers as intentional was regarded by McLachlan (2017) as "a marked shift" (p. 8) from the previous stance, in which teachers tended to adopt a more passive role in children's learning and play.

As pointed out by Tyler-Merrick et al. (2019), this new emphasis on early childhood teachers' intentionality reflects a global trend in acknowledging the importance of teacher-child interactions and the active and socially mediative role of teachers in children's learning and play, aligned with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Historically, as noted by Moore et al. (2014), generations of theorists and educators, including Rousseau, Froebel, Dewey, Boyce, and Piaget, have contributed to the prevalent view that children learn naturally through play, with teachers primarily facilitating such opportunities. Influenced by this accumulated understanding of play as a natural learning process, early childhood teachers are more likely to develop the belief that children's learning through play is associated with teachers' passive rather than active practices (Colliver, 2022). Thus, from such a stance, by stepping back and providing time, space and materials for play, children would be empowered to make their own decisions, and their autonomy would be supported in the play process (Kilderry, 2015).

Building primarily on the theoretical heritage of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, intentional teaching drew researchers' and practitioners' attention to the cultural dimension of play (Grieshaber

et al., 2021). From this sociocultural perspective, play is conceptualised as a "learned cultural practice" (Fleer, 2015, p. 1801) that benefits from social interactions with peers and adults, rather than relying solely on children's self-exploration. Socio-cultural theory suggests an orientation for early childhood educators to take an active role in supporting children's learning through play, informed by valued curriculum priorities. However, such a stance is not easy to embrace, given the longstanding tradition of relying on children's free play and self-exploration in ECE settings in countries like Australia and New Zealand (Lewis et al., 2019). Moreover, without a clear understanding, the term "teaching" can easily be associated with schoolification, which has long been resisted within the ECE sector in New Zealand (Alcock & Haggerty, 2013; Cameron, 2018). Therefore, the evolving perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy in ECE in New Zealand, particularly the integration of intentional teaching within predominantly child-centred, play-based, and culturally responsive settings, have rendered the ITE learning process even more complex for student teachers from culturally diverse backgrounds. This complexity deserves targeted exploration.

1.2 Rationale for Choosing Chinese Student Teachers as the Focus

Based on the research background outlined above, exploring how international or immigrant student teachers understand curriculum and pedagogy in the New Zealand ECE context emerges as an important and valuable research topic. Among student teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds, this study focuses on Chinese student teachers for the following three reasons.

First, there is a growing presence of Chinese student teachers in New Zealand ECE ITE programmes. According to the statistical data from Education Counts (2025a), the number of students enrolled in ECE ITE qualifications (excluding equivalent full-time students) who identified with an Asian ethnicity doubled from 1,010 in 2019 to 2,070 in 2024. While there are no disaggregated data indicating how many of these students identify as Chinese, it is reasonable to infer that they account for a notable proportion, given that Chinese is the fourth largest ethnic group in New Zealand based on the 2023 Census (RNZ, 2024), and that China has been the largest source

country for international students in New Zealand for quite a long time (Education New Zealand, 2025). In addition, although not supported by statistical data, some researchers have also noted the growing presence of Chinese student teachers in New Zealand ECE ITE programmes in their works (Burke, 2024b; Rana, 2021; Yang, 2025).

Second, despite the growing presence of Chinese student teachers, there was limited research focusing specifically on Chinese student teachers in the New Zealand ECE context at the beginning of this study in 2022. A detailed search of the existing literature at the initial stage of this study revealed that there were a number of studies focusing on other Chinese stakeholders in the New Zealand ECE context. These existing studies were predominantly about Chinese immigrant parents and families (A. Chan, 2014, 2018; A. Chan & Spoonley, 2017; Guo, 2012; R. Huang, 2013; Q. Zhang, 2012), with a smaller number focusing on Chinese immigrant children (Guo, 2010; Guo & Dalli, 2012), and Chinese immigrant teachers (F. Huang, 2021). Regarding Chinese student teachers, I located only four pieces of literature published before 2022. These included one master's thesis on Chinese early childhood student teachers' employment experiences (Heald, 2007), one opinion paper on supporting Chinese student teachers in distance learning (Wong, 2007), one peer-reviewed research article examining immigrant Asian early childhood student teachers' practicum experiences, which included Chinese participants (S. Murray, 2015), and one doctoral thesis regarding the identity formation of culturally and linguistically diverse student teachers, including Chinese participants, in an ECE graduate diploma programme (Dolan, 2017). This scarcity of research focusing specifically on Chinese student teachers partially justified the research focus of the present study.

Third, there are significant differences between Chinese cultural and educational traditions and those of New Zealand, which may give rise to distinctive challenges, tensions, and negotiations for Chinese student teachers. As an ancient Eastern civilisation, Chinese culture is widely perceived as differing considerably from Western cultures. Despite divergent political and economic systems, Chinese societies share some common cultural and educational traditions, beliefs, and values due to

shared historical roots and the profound influence of Confucianism (C. K. K. Chan & Rao, 2009; Choy, 2017; Rao et al., 2017). Confucianism is a philosophy traditionally attributed to the sage Confucius in the sixth century BCE and further developed by his disciples and later followers over subsequent centuries (Goldin, 2014). Its enduring influence is reflected in many aspects of Chinese societies, including the ECE traditions. Many researchers argue that, due to the profound influence of Confucianism, ECE in Chinese societies has traditionally emphasised children's academic learning, moral development and behavioural regulation, and a teacher-dominated or teacher-directed approach has been prevalent in ECE settings (C. K. K. Chan & Rao, 2009; Cheng, 2006; Li, Rao, et al., 2011; Li & Wang, 2017; Tobin et al., 2009; Yuen & Grieshaber, 2009). Research has also reported that student teachers from Chinese societies tend to be more familiar with teacher-directed approaches, as this way of teaching is "how early childhood education should be" (Dolan, 2017, p. 136). Consequently, it is worth exploring what prior beliefs Chinese student teachers bring with them and how they negotiate these beliefs with local understandings of curriculum and pedagogy in the New Zealand ECE context.

It should be noted that choosing Chinese student teachers as the focus of the present study does not devalue the importance of researching student teachers from other cultural backgrounds in New Zealand ECE ITE programmes. In the following section, I will discuss my positionality by outlining how my personal background and identity have shaped my interest in this research topic and influenced the conduct of this study.

1.3 My Positionality

As a Chinese national, I have lived in China for over thirty years and completed all my education there before coming to Aotearoa New Zealand for my PhD studies in 2022. My research interest in ECE in New Zealand began ten years ago when I was doing an ECE master's programme (2014–2017) at a Chinese university. At that time, learning stories, a strengths-based and descriptive assessment tool from New Zealand, attracted significant attention from ECE researchers and practitioners in China due to the translation and introduction of a series of books about learning

stories written by Professor Margaret Carr and her colleagues (Carr et al., 2010; Carr & Lee, 2012). In the 2010s, writing and sharing learning stories became a common practice for ECE teachers in many centres across China. The distinctive philosophy and practice of assessment sparked my academic interest in ECE in New Zealand.

After obtaining my master's degree, I started to work as an ECE teacher educator in another Chinese university, teaching courses such as early childhood curriculum development and supervising student teachers' practicums. It was during the lecturing and supervising processes that I started to notice the disconnection and inconsistency between course-based learning and centre-based practicums for student teachers. While the child-centred and play-based philosophy has been explicitly outlined in China's national ECE guiding document, *Early Learning and Development Guidelines for Children Aged 3 to 6 Years* (Ministry of Education, PRC, 2012), there remained an apparent reliance on area-specific (e.g., literacy and mathematics) teacher-directed group teaching in many ECE settings in China. This inconsistency made it difficult for student teachers to develop a coherent understanding of how to educate young children in ECE environments. Being aware of the disconnection, I developed an interest in the role of ITE in shaping student teachers' pedagogical perspectives.

In addition to the traditionally dominant teacher-directed approaches, some new approaches that value children's agency and play have emerged in more economically developed provinces of China, including Anji Play, Lijing Play, and Gamification of the Curriculum (Niu, 2023). These new approaches reflect efforts to shift from long-established traditions in China. However, the pendulum seemed to swing strongly in the opposite direction. Based on my observations as an ITE lecturer, the idea that early childhood teachers should primarily take on the role of providing materials and observing, without "interfering" with children's "true" play has emerged, as well as an increasing rejection of the traditions and teachers' active role in children's learning. These emerging ideas prompted me to consider how Chinese ECE teachers might draw insights from the evolving approaches to curriculum and pedagogy in New Zealand.

Moreover, my dual identity as a Chinese student studying ECE in New Zealand and a PhD researcher allows me to approach Chinese student teachers from both an insider and an outsider perspective (Zheng et al., 2023). From the insider perspective, as someone who shares the language and culture with Chinese student teachers, I am in an advantageous position in building trusting relationships with them, understanding their perspectives and experiences sensitively, as well as relating to their concerns and challenges when navigating between home and host cultures. From the outsider perspective, I do not play any instructional role in their ITE learning and cannot affect any assessments on their performance within ITE programmes. This outsider role provides a safe space that enables Chinese student teachers to share their perspectives and experiences more openly. In addition, this outsider role enables me to notice aspects that may not be evident from an insider perspective.

Collectively, my educational background, working experiences, and dual identity constitute the positionality that shaped my research interest in this topic and informed my engagement with Chinese student teachers, as well as my interpretations of their perspectives.

1.4 Research Scope

In this section, the research aim and questions are presented, followed by definitions of key terms, to clarify the scope of this study.

1.4.1 Research Aim and Questions

This study aims to investigate Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy, with a particular focus on intentional teaching, in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECE context. Central to this investigation is exploring the factors that influence Chinese student teachers' perspectives of teaching and learning, as well as the supports and challenges related to their broader learning experiences within ITE programmes as they navigate a cross-cultural context. Here, the cross-cultural context refers to an environment where the differences and intersections of values, beliefs, practices, and worldviews could arise when people from different cultural backgrounds engage in shared activities.

Five research questions are generated to guide this study:

RQ1. How do Chinese student teachers understand curriculum and pedagogy in ECE contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand?

RQ2. How do Chinese student teachers understand and implement intentional teaching in child-centred, play-based, and culturally responsive ECE contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand?

RQ3. What factors influence Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy?

RQ4. How have ITE programmes facilitated Chinese student teachers' understandings of curriculum and pedagogy?

RQ5. What supports and challenges do Chinese student teachers describe in relation to their ITE experiences?

This study draws on concepts of funds of knowledge and funds of identity (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014a), together with third space theory (Gupta, 2020; Recchia & McDevitt, 2018), to conceptualise the resources Chinese student teachers bring into ITE programmes, and to explore how these resources interact with the professional discourses of curriculum and pedagogy within ITE. Definitions of these theoretical terms are presented in the following section and are further discussed in the theoretical resources section in Chapter 2.

1.4.2 Definitions of Key Terms

Below are definitions of key terms used in this study.

Chinese student teachers: Interchangeable with student teachers of Chinese heritage. In this study, it refers to those who are (a) currently enrolled in an ECE ITE programme approved by the Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand that leads to teacher registration, and (b) self-identify ethnically as Chinese. This term is used to refer to individuals who identify as ethnically Chinese, regardless of nationality or citizenship. It includes Chinese international students, Chinese immigrants, New Zealand-born Chinese, and others of Chinese heritage (see Section 3.4.1.1 for further explanation).

Perspective: A construct encompassing an individual's or a group's stance, philosophical position, attitude, view, belief, or particular way of looking at events or situations (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

Curriculum and pedagogy: While curriculum and pedagogy are two concepts that are often used and defined separately, this study adopts Susan Edwards's (2021) use of curriculum and pedagogy in a working paper for OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), where curriculum and pedagogy are understood as "concepts used to describe approaches to teaching and learning in ECEC settings, including what and how young children learn" (p. 5).

Early Childhood Education: The type of education provided for children before they enter school. In the New Zealand context, ECE is commonly offered to children from birth to five years of age. Main ECE service types in New Zealand include kindergarten, education and care services, home-based services, playcentre, and Te Kōhanga Reo (Cherrington et al., 2022).

Intentional teaching: The purposeful and deliberate actions of teachers, drawing on both their knowledge of individual children and professional knowledge and skills to provide meaningful, appropriate, and culturally responsive curricular experiences for all children in ECE (McLaughlin et al., 2016).

Play-based learning: The use of play and a rich array of play experiences to foster children's learning. Following Danniels and Pyle (2018), play-based learning is understood as a continuum that "incorporates varying levels of adult involvement in play" (p.4), with child-directed play (free play) and teacher-directed play (adult-directed and structured playful activities) as the two ends of this continuum.

Culturally responsive practice: Valuing and responding to each child's unique identity, language, and culture. Culturally responsive practice requires teachers to develop a good understanding of children's and families' cultural backgrounds and to support children's learning and wellbeing in environments where their cultural heritages are represented, and their lived cultural experiences are incorporated into the curriculum (Humphries, 2019).

Funds of knowledge: It refers to "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133).

Funds of identity: It refers to "historically accumulated, culturally developed, and socially distributed resources that are essential for a person's self-definition, self-expression, and self-understanding" (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014a, p. 37). Funds of knowledge become funds of identity when people use them to define themselves.

Third space: A concept initially used by postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha to refer to an "interstitial space of cultural encounter in which the colonizer and the colonized negotiate, producing hybridity in culture" (Bhandari, 2022, p. 171). In this study, the third space refers to a constructed space where Chinese student teachers negotiate perspectives and discourses from home and host cultures to develop and produce hybrid understandings and identities (Recchia & McDevitt, 2018; Tatham, 2025).

1.5 Thesis Structure

This thesis is structured into nine chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the broader research background and context. Chapter 2 reviews the literature relevant to the research topic and outlines the emerging theoretical resources from the literature review. Chapter 3 presents the research methodology and methods, providing an overview and detailed description of the two-phase mixed-methods research using an explanatory sequential design (i.e., quantitative strand followed by a qualitative explanatory strand). Chapter 4 reports on the findings from Phase 1, a predominantly quantitative survey conducted across New Zealand. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 report on the findings from Phase 2, which draw on data from two rounds of one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Chapter 5 focuses on Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy. Chapter 6 focuses on factors influencing Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy. Chapter 7 focuses on the supports and challenges Chinese student teachers described as relevant to their ITE experiences. Chapter 8 discusses the key aspects

emerging from the research findings. Finally, Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by summarising the overall study, outlining implications for stakeholders, reflecting on the limitations, and identifying directions for future research.

1.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter began with an introduction to the research background to contextualise this study. The research background highlighted the increasing ethnic and cultural diversity in Aotearoa New Zealand and the growing need to diversify the ECE teaching workforce. However, bringing more culturally diverse student teachers into ITE is only the first step; further efforts are needed to understand the perspectives and experiences of international or immigrant student teachers in order to better prepare them within ITE. Importantly, international or immigrant student teachers' professional learning processes occur in a context where understandings of curriculum and pedagogy continue to evolve in New Zealand, which adds to the complexity of preparing these student teachers.

Following the research background, the rationale for choosing Chinese student teachers as the research focus was explained. A reflection on my positionality as the researcher was then presented, illustrating how my educational background, professional experiences, and dual identity have collectively shaped my research interest and decisions in this study. Following this reflection, the research scope was clarified by presenting the research aim and questions, as well as definitions of key terms used in this study. This chapter concluded with an overview of the thesis structure, outlining the main content of the nine chapters that constitute the thesis.

Chapter 2 Literature Review and Theoretical Resources

This chapter reviews the relevant literature and introduces theoretical resources identified through the review as potentially useful for this study.

The literature review begins by synthesising research on the experiences of culturally diverse student teachers in initial teacher education (ITE) programmes to establish a broad foundation for understanding the common challenges and supports these student teachers may encounter. It then narrows the focus to Chinese student teachers in cross-cultural ITE contexts to examine the existing research focused specifically on this group. Following this, a review of early childhood education (ECE) traditions in Chinese societies is presented. The chapter then outlines the prevailing and evolving understandings of curriculum and pedagogy in ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand, illustrating the context within which Chinese student teachers undertake their ITE programmes. Finally, particular attention is given to intentional teaching and play-based learning in ECE contexts, demonstrating the complexity of understanding and navigating these important concepts.

The literature review identifies funds of knowledge, funds of identity, and third space theory as potentially useful theoretical resources for this study. These theoretical resources are introduced in greater detail, including how they have been used in existing research and their potential relevance to the present study.

2.1 Literature Review

The literature review consists of five sections: (1) culturally diverse student teachers' experiences in ITE programmes; (2) Chinese student teachers in cross-cultural ITE contexts; (3) ECE traditions in Chinese societies; (4) ECE curriculum and pedagogy in Aotearoa New Zealand; and (5) intentional teaching and play-based learning in ECE contexts.

2.1.1 Culturally Diverse Student Teachers' Experiences in ITE Programmes

This section synthesises the literature on culturally diverse student teachers' experiences in ITE programmes, focusing on two key aspects: challenges and supports.

2.1.1.1 Challenges

Over the past few decades, developed countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have experienced a significant influx of immigrants and refugees, resulting in increasingly multicultural societies (De Haas et al., 2019; Rana, 2021). In response, many governments have been encouraging the development of a diverse ECE teaching workforce to cater to the diverse learning needs of young children from minority cultural backgrounds (Cheruvu et al., 2015; Gide et al., 2022; Qi & Campbell, 2022; Ross, 2014). Accordingly, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds enrolled in ECE ITE programmes (Ortlipp & Nuttall, 2011).

While ITE providers expect to prepare student teachers to be sensitive to young children's diverse cultural identities, Nuttall and Ortlipp (2012) noted that similar considerations are not widely extended to student teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds within their own ITE experiences. Drawing on culturally and linguistically diverse early childhood pre-service teachers' practicum experiences in Australia, Nuttall and Ortlipp (2012) analysed how the student teacher had failed the practicum due to the associate teacher's lack of cultural responsiveness, as the associate teacher judged the student teacher based on a single "appropriate" way of communicating and interacting with children. In a similar vein, Han (2006) argued that some teacher educators viewed culturally diverse student teachers' backgrounds as a deficit that needed to be fixed, due to the existence of overt racism and more commonly evident "unrecognised and unconscious ethnocentrism" (p. 45). Therefore, student teachers with minority heritage may face additional challenges in their ITE journeys compared to their local peers (Spooner-Lane et al., 2009).

A frequently reported problem is the tension between culturally diverse student teachers' deep-seated beliefs about curriculum and pedagogy, and the authoritative discourses presented in ITE programmes (Joseph & Rouse, 2017; Leaupepe, 2009; Massing, 2018; Moles, 2014; Rouse & Joseph, 2019). As Dolan (2017) stated, student teachers do not enter ITE programmes as "tabula rasa" (p. 116) but with pre-existing beliefs. According to Massing (2016), these pre-existing beliefs

about education, which are closely linked to one's cultural background, are derived from four sources: (1) personal histories and theories; (2) experiences as students in the school system; (3) prior experiences working in the field; and (4) personal experiences as parents or familial caregivers.

If student teachers come from societies and cultures that differ from the host culture in which the authoritative discourses were generated, tensions may therefore arise. For example, Leaupepe's (2009) research on Pasifika early childhood teacher education programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand showed that some student teachers from societies where play is not highly valued or recognised for its contributions to children's development struggled to understand authoritative discourses about play. Among the six Pasifika student teachers, only one demonstrated significant change after taking a course on play, whereas the remaining five had their prior beliefs about play shaken but not dislodged (Leaupepe, 2009). Another study involving a Cook Islands student teacher revealed similar tension, in which Moles (2014) found that allowing children to express themselves and make their own decisions challenged the student teacher's values and beliefs about teaching, because "children should be silent, learning formally and controlled by adults as she had been in her childhood" (p. 174).

When encountering such belief tensions, studies indicate that culturally diverse student teachers may respond in multiple ways. First, culturally diverse student teachers may appear to embrace dominant discourses but continue to adhere to their prior beliefs when they are not required or closely supervised to follow dominant practices. For example, Leaupepe (2009) explained that because student teachers' deep-seated beliefs were formed in the past, they act as tacit knowledge and are resistant to change, even though the new knowledge they learnt in the ITE programme may challenge their beliefs to some extent. Therefore, these student teachers' acceptance of authoritative discourses may only be a form of "superficial acceptance" (Leaupepe, 2009, p. 57), and they are likely to revert to their former positions in practice.

Second, culturally diverse student teachers may entirely discard their prior beliefs and embrace the new ones. For instance, research indicated that in order to pass the practicum and

meet graduation requirements within a set length of time, some student teachers with minority backgrounds may be required to set aside their educational beliefs, shed their cultural practices that are incompatible with those of the "good ECE" (Langford, 2006, p. 118), and adopt an entirely new way of educating young children (S. Murray, 2015). Eventually, at the end of the programme, these culturally diverse student teachers may retain "only superficial signifiers of their cultural identities in practice" (Massing, 2016, p. 79). Notably, institutional-level factors, such as professional and accreditation standards and assessment criteria, may also serve to legitimate or prioritise certain practices and create pressure for student teachers to conform to these "good" practices. As Call (2022) noted, when the teaching standards are used in a regulatory rather than a developmental way, they may promote safe practices aligned with assessment rubrics rather than innovative and creative ones.

Third, unlike the two situations described above, student teachers from minority backgrounds may also construct their hybridised professional beliefs and identities through a dialogic process between their funds of knowledge and the authoritative discourses (Gupta, 2006; Massing, 2015). For instance, Recchia and McDevitt (2018) reported how a Chinese ECE student teacher in a United States ITE programme found a middle ground between the student teacher's cultural beliefs about not wasting food and the local practices of self-feeding to develop skills with utensils, in which food waste was seen as part of the learning. However, this dialogic and reflective process should not be expected to occur naturally among student teachers; rather, it relies on deliberately designed ITE programmes and culturally responsive teacher educators (Amos, 2017).

2.1.1.2 Supports

In response to these challenges outlined in Section 2.1.1.1, some researchers have proposed strategies and suggestions to support culturally diverse student teachers in navigating their ITE programmes. One support is to help culturally diverse student teachers build connections between their past and their current learning. For instance, Gupta (2006) suggested that teacher educators could apply principles of constructivist learning theory and constructivist pedagogy to provide

student teachers with opportunities to reflect on their own experiences and childhood contexts, thereby constructing new understandings. In addition, Massing (2018) noted the value of scaffolding in promoting immigrant and refugee students' use of picture books and songs as pedagogical tools. Among the many scaffolding strategies, the most effective were those that could evoke recollections of teacher candidates' experiences "back home" (p. 74).

Moreover, since culturally diverse student teachers need to understand a new perspective of teaching and learning that differs from their own, some researchers have noted the importance of sufficient preparation before commencing practicum. For example, Joseph and Rouse (2017) developed play workshops as a method to facilitate international student teachers' understanding of early childhood contexts in Australia before they commence placement. The workshops include opportunities for international students to engage in a range of open-ended play activities and an assessment tool training section, which were useful in providing a "place and space" (Joseph & Rouse, 2017, p. 46) for international students to gain knowledge, skills, and understanding. However, the play workshops also have limitations as they differ from real-world ECE settings and may reduce students' confidence in their capacities (Joseph & Rouse, 2017).

As the student teaching experience greatly affects student teachers' perspectives, researchers also suggested changing the current practicum structure and assessment to enable diverse student teachers to experience success while at the same time maintaining their cultural identities (Brownlee & Chak, 2007; Matengu et al., 2021; Nuttall & Ortlipp, 2012; Rouse & Joseph, 2019). For instance, S. Murray (2015) highlighted the inequity of requiring all student teachers to complete their practicum in a set length of time, regardless of their cultural or ethnic origins. S. Murray (2015) believed that additional time was necessary for minority background pre-service teachers to develop expected skills. Moreover, S. Murray (2015) claimed that student teachers' and associate teachers' voices in assessment should be considered alongside the criteria set by ITE institutions. Nuttall and Ortlipp (2012) recommended shifting the language used in assessment documents from "difference" to "expectation" so that teacher educators can form positive

expectations for diverse candidates and thus support their success through the "self-fulfilling prophecy" (p. 59) effect. Furthermore, by examining a Japanese international student's experience in a field-based course in the American context, Amos (2017) found that there were no meaningful cultural discussions between the student and the supervisors, and thus strongly recommended providing culturally responsive supervision to international supervisees, particularly during practicums.

Supporting the identity construction of culturally diverse student teachers within ITE has also been identified by researchers as essential. It has been increasingly recognised that learning to teach is not only about understanding teaching theories, mastering content knowledge, and developing pedagogical strategies, but also about identity construction, namely, how one views oneself as a teacher (Beijaard, 2019). A review of 29 empirical studies of student teachers' identity development noted that current scholarship focused on four broad factors in shaping identity, including reflective activities, learning communities, context, and (prior) experiences (Izadinia, 2013). In addition, Izadinia (2013) pointed out that there was a gap in exploring the various ways in which teacher educators, including associate teachers and lecturers, might shape student teachers' identity construction. Drawing on data from immigrant and refugee women student teachers, Massing (2015) argued that these immigrant and refugee student teachers authored their professional identities through the dialogue between their personal biographies and the authoritative discourses in ECE, despite the expectation for them to appropriate normative practices.

In addition, after synthesising 22 studies focusing on immigrant early childhood educators' identity construction, including studies on pre-service teachers, Xu et al. (2025) identified two processes of professional identity construction for these (student) teachers. The first is "forced forgetting" (Xu et al., 2025, p. 11), through which immigrant early childhood educators were forced to forget their pre-existing beliefs and conform to local norms. The second one is "conscious remembering" (Xu et al., 2025, p. 11), through which immigrant early childhood educators demonstrate resistance to the assimilative pressure of the dominant discourses and try to preserve

their own cultural identities. Moreover, Recchia and McDevitt (2018) remarked that, by respecting and acknowledging culturally diverse student teachers' cultural identities and funds of knowledge within the ITE programme, teacher educators can create a "third space" (p. 28) for them to negotiate conflicts, construct their professional identities, and redefine themselves as early childhood teachers in their learning journey. These studies highlight the importance of attending to culturally diverse student teachers' identity construction and creating an environment in which they can negotiate different or even competing discourses and identities. Despite the current research progress, aligning with the observation from Rushton et al. (2023), I argue that further investigation is needed to explore the identity negotiations of teachers, particularly student teachers, from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Taken together, Section 2.1.1 presents a synthesis of the existing literature on culturally diverse student teachers' experiences in ITE programmes. These reviewed studies demonstrate a shared and growing interest across countries in understanding how student teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds navigate their ITE journeys. While these student teachers commonly encounter conflicts or tensions between their pre-existing beliefs and dominant pedagogical discourses, the literature suggests that culturally diverse student teachers respond to these challenges in different ways, including superficial acceptance, complete assimilation, or potentially, the development of negotiated and hybrid beliefs. In addition, various forms of support have been identified to help culturally diverse student teachers better navigate their ITE journeys. These supports include helping culturally diverse student teachers build connections between their past experiences and their new learning, providing sufficient preparation prior to commencing placement, improving practicum structures and assessment practices, and supporting their identity construction as ECE teachers in host cultural contexts.

2.1.2 Chinese Student Teachers in Cross-Cultural ITE Contexts

Following the review in Section 2.1.1, this section narrows the focus to Chinese student teachers in cross-cultural ITE contexts. The following review clusters the existing literature around

four topics: (a) tensions between Chinese student teachers' culturally shaped beliefs and dominant local discourses, (b) differences in learning and communication styles between home and host contexts, (c) deficit-based cultural assumptions and stereotypes about Chinese student teachers, and (d) reframing Chinese backgrounds as resources and assets.

2.1.2.1 Tensions between Chinese Student Teachers' Culturally Shaped Beliefs and Local Discourses

Growing up in Chinese societies or Chinese families, student teachers with Chinese heritage bring their unique cultural knowledge and beliefs into ITE programmes. Some research has revealed that Chinese student teachers' ingrained beliefs and upbringing experiences may lead to different understandings of children's learning, resulting in the implementation of practices that may be discordant in host contexts. For example, Recchia and McDevitt (2018) reported that a Chinese student teacher struggled to care for infants and toddlers in classrooms in the United States because "ideas from her culturally grounded experience … positioned her at odds with some of the dominant theories and practices" (p. 21). However, through purposeful reflection, this Chinese student teacher was able to develop authentic practice in the third space by drawing on diverse funds of knowledge and gradually constructing her emerging teacher identity (Recchia & McDevitt, 2018). S. Murray (2015) also reported that a Chinese student teacher in the New Zealand context sometimes used a direct-teaching approach and closed-ended questions to interact with children rather than letting children lead their own learning, suggesting that the student teacher's actions may reflect their upbringing in Taiwan.

More recently, Yang (2025) explored Chinese migrant ECE teachers' cultural and professional adaptation, examining the experiences of five student teachers and five provisionally registered ECE teachers in the New Zealand ECE context. Yang (2025) found that, in addition to the language challenges posed by English and Te Reo Māori, Chinese immigrant teachers needed to negotiate between a structured teaching approach and a play-based teaching approach, obedience-based learning and autonomy-driven learning, and risk-avoidance and risk-tolerance (Yang, 2025).

While these studies shed light on the tensions between Chinese student teachers' culturally shaped perspectives of teaching and learning in ECE and the dominant local discourses, there is a potential risk of oversimplifying education in Chinese societies as a unified and entirely teacher-directed, highly structured model without attending to its internal diversity. Such oversimplification and over-criticism may lead to further devaluation of Chinese culture and education, and the invalidation of Chinese student teachers' cultural knowledge and experiences in host contexts.

2.1.2.2 Differences in Learning and Communication Styles between Home and Host Contexts

Beyond these potential belief tensions, studies have also noted differences in learning and communication styles between home and host contexts for Chinese student teachers, which could influence their professional learning within ITE in cross-cultural contexts, particularly during practicums.

For example, Zheng et al. (2024) explored three Chinese international pre-service teachers' professional experiences in the Australian ECE context. Zheng et al. (2024) found that some Chinese student teachers may have expectations of mentoring that derive from their learning habitus (a Bourdieu's analytical concept) developed in China, which may be misaligned with those of the mentor teachers. As Zheng et al. (2024) analysed, one participant's expectation of receiving explicit guidance from one-on-one mentoring appeared to stem from her previous one-on-one learning experiences (i.e., private tutoring or shadow education), which are common among middle-class families in urban China. However, the mentor teacher was not as directive as the Chinese student teacher expected; instead, the mentor teacher expected the student teacher to be proactive and ask questions (Zheng et al., 2024). In addition, the Chinese student teacher's lack of confidence in her English language ability further constrained her active communication with her mentor teacher (Zheng et al., 2024).

Similarly, in her study of ethnic minority ECE ITE graduates from the Pacific nations, China, and Japan in the New Zealand context, Moles (2011) found that differences in social expectations and culturally shaped ways of communicating led to reluctance among ethnic minority teachers to

raise questions with lecturers in class and voice their opinions during their ITE learning processes. This type of communication challenge for Chinese student teachers has also been noted by Yang (2025), who pointed out that Chinese student teachers often report communication stress in an environment where they need to communicate effectively in English as a second language.

These studies are valuable in highlighting the additional challenges for Chinese student teachers regarding learning and communication styles; however, they may also risk reinforcing an impression that Chinese student teachers have a language-related deficiency, while overlooking the potential contributions that Chinese student teachers can make to the ECE sector as bilingual professionals when communicating with families and children from similar backgrounds. This is not intended to minimise or dismiss these challenges; rather, the aim is to shift the research focus towards how Chinese student teachers can be better supported through culturally appropriate and responsive practices within ITE programmes so that they can build confidence and recognise the value they bring to the profession.

2.1.2.3 Deficit-Based Cultural Assumptions and Stereotypes about Chinese Student Teachers

In the Australian context, Nuttall and Ortlipp (2012) examined a Singaporean Chinese student's struggle to pass her final-year practicum as an international student in an ECE ITE programme in Australia. Nuttall and Ortlipp (2012) noted that during the practicum, this Singaporean Chinese student was viewed by her associate teacher from a "difference-as-deficit" (p. 55) perspective, through which she was repetitively being reminded and positioned by her associate teacher as an Asian who, by default, was perceived as having an English language problem and a lack of creativity. The associate teacher's negative perception of the student teacher's identity was internalised by this student, which ultimately led to her failure of the practicum, as "Sue's supervising teacher expected her to struggle and indeed she did" (Nuttall & Ortlipp, 2012, p. 59). The study by Nuttall and Ortlipp (2012) highlights the existence of deficit-based cultural assumptions held by some associate teachers towards Chinese student teachers in ECE ITE programmes, which may affect their interaction with and assessment of Chinese student teachers.

Although not specifically focused on Chinese student teachers, Heng (2018) explored the stereotypes about Chinese international students in the United States higher education, which is also beneficial for understanding Chinese student teachers' cross-cultural navigation experiences. Heng (2018) noted that Chinese international students were widely perceived stereotypically as passive and excessively dependent, unwilling to participate in class, and as uncritical thinkers and rote learners by faculty members and college peers. Heng (2018) argued that attention to Chinese international students' challenges without understanding the sociocultural contexts influencing these challenges may result in the unwitting perpetuation of deficit images of Chinese student teachers. By situating Chinese international students within broader sociocultural contexts and tracking their changes over time, rather than adopting a static perspective, Heng (2018) presented a more holistic understanding of Chinese international students' experiences and highlighted the agency that they demonstrated in adapting to new environments and expectations during their learning processes.

These studies are insightful in that they highlight the deficit-based cultural assumptions and stereotypes about Chinese student teachers/Chinese international students that may exist among those who undertake the responsibility of teaching and supporting them in cross-cultural contexts, such as associate teachers and lecturers. Within such deficit-based assumptions and stereotypes, Chinese student teachers may be expected to act and behave in particular ways, which may then be used to justify the validity of these assumptions and stereotypes. These studies also highlight the risks of researchers falling into the trap of reinforcing deficit-based cultural assumptions and stereotypes, as well as the importance of intentionally challenging deficit-oriented rhetoric about Chinese student teachers. As the tile of Heng's (2018) article states, "Different is not deficient."

2.1.2.4 Reframing Chinese Backgrounds as Resources and Assets

Some studies have indeed suggested the importance of taking a strengths-based perspective to counter deficit discourses about Chinese student teachers. For example, Zheng et al. (2018) argued that the cultural and linguistic capital that Chinese international students possess, as well as

the contributions that they can make to the ECE sector, should be recognised. In their study, Zheng et al. (2018) described how a Chinese student teacher in an Australian practicum setting used her cultural and linguistic capital to comfort a Chinese child who could not speak English very well, which boosted the student teacher's confidence as an ECE teacher and also earned the appreciation of her associate teacher. In a study involving three immigrant students from China, India, and Korea, Recchia and McDevitt (2018) highlighted the importance of acknowledging the value of the funds of knowledge and funds of identity that these student teachers had accumulated and developed through their past life experiences. Recchia and McDevitt (2018) argued that by facilitating negotiation between these funds and newly encountered knowledge, immigrant student teachers could be supported to develop hybrid understandings and authentic practices within a "third space" (p. 28).

Some studies have also suggested that Chinese student teachers' past experiences can serve as valuable resources for reflection in the construction of pedagogical beliefs and that the cultural capital they possess can contribute to the ECE sector in many ways. For example, Dolan (2017) found that the "boring and old-fashioned" (p. 123) teacher-directed instruction experience Chinese teacher candidates had may lead them to seek more learner-centred approaches in the future. Additionally, although not focusing on student teachers, Jiang's (2022) research reported that some teachers of Chinese heritage in Australia viewed their cultural background as a positive influence, as it provided an alternative perspective on play pedagogy and another possibility for being a teacher. By integrating Chinese traditional high expectations for children, two teachers from the study stated that they were able to complement the sometimes "too free" (Jiang, 2022, p. 76) learning approach in Australian ECE settings. Furthermore, F. Huang (2021) discussed the potential advantages of Chinese immigrant teachers with rich cultural capital. These advantages include facilitating smooth transitions from family to ECE settings for immigrant children, bridging cultural and communication gaps between immigrant families and settings, building trust and partnerships, and serving as role models for immigrant children (F. Huang, 2021).

While these studies used different terms to refer to the strengths or assets that Chinese student teachers possess through their lived experiences, such as cultural and linguistic capital, funds of knowledge and funds of identity, they collectively represent an effort to counter deficit discourses about this group of student teachers. These capitals or funds deserve further attention if the goal is to create more equitable, inclusive, and supportive ITE environments for Chinese student teachers, as well as those from other international or immigrant backgrounds, to support them in becoming confident professionals.

Taken together, this section synthesises research on Chinese student teachers around four topics: (a) tensions between Chinese student teachers' culturally shaped beliefs and dominant local discourses, (b) differences in learning and communication styles between home and host contexts, (c) deficit-based cultural assumptions and stereotypes about Chinese student teachers, and (d) reframing Chinese backgrounds as resources and assets. This existing body of literature is primarily situated in New Zealand, Australia, the United States, and Canada, where Chinese student teachers were either the central focus of investigation or examined as part of broader groups of student teachers of colour or those with international or immigrant backgrounds. These existing studies provide a rich foundation for this study.

2.1.3 ECE Traditions in Chinese Societies

Given the reported links between culturally diverse student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy in ECE and the cultural and social norms in the societies where they are originally from (Massing, 2018; Moles, 2014; Rana, 2021; Yang, 2025; Zheng et al., 2018), this section reviews research on ECE traditions in Chinese societies to provide contextual grounding for understanding Chinese student teachers' lived experiences.

Research has shown that although many Chinese societies have had divergent histories in recent centuries and have established respective political and economic systems, they share some common cultural beliefs and views about education (Choy, 2017). The most influential philosophy shaping Chinese beliefs and values is Confucianism, which emerged in the 6th century BC and has

continued to evolve and transform over the next two thousand years (Choy, 2017; Sun & Rao, 2017). As "a worldview, a social ethic, a political ideology, a scholarly tradition, and a way of life" (Slote & DeVos, 1998, p. 3), Confucianism still plays a significant role in modern and contemporary Chinese societies. Influenced by this powerful philosophy, traditional Chinese pedagogies emphasise conformity, discipline, moral development, and academic achievement, and teacher-directed approaches have been widely adopted across different ECE settings within Chinese societies (Li, Rao, et al., 2011; Li & Wang, 2017; Rao & Chan, 2009). While it is important to acknowledge the historical and ongoing influence of Confucianism, ECE in Chinese societies is not static; it continues to change and evolve within a globalised context, where the exchange of perspectives between the East and the West is common.

In Mainland China, since the implementation of the Reform and Open-up Policy in 1978, Western educational theories and approaches, such as the Project Approach, the Montessori Method, and the High Scope approach, have been introduced into the ECE sector (Li, Wang, et al., 2011). At the end of the 1980s, the National Education Committee (former Ministry of Education) of the People's Republic of China (1989) released a foundational document, *Kindergarten Work Regulations and Procedures (Trial Version),* which emphasised child-initiated activity and the importance of play. Subsequently, in 2001, the *Guidance for Kindergarten Education (Trial Version)* was issued by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, which provided guidance on teaching and learning in ECE around five domains: health, language and early literacy, social development, sciences and arts (J. Zhu & Zhang, 2008). Y. Liu and Feng (2005) argued that reforms in ECE in Mainland China since 1989 have popularised certain educational ideas among practitioners, including respecting children, active learning, play-based teaching and learning, and teaching and learning through daily life in kindergartens. However, Y. Liu and Feng (2005) noted that the focus on transforming educational ideas without considering the conditions required to realise them, as well as a division between advocates and practitioners due to the top-down nature of these reforms, has limited the full achievement of these reform goals.

Although transformative efforts have been constrained, these reforms in ECE have indeed diversified ECE approaches and practices in China. Some scholars argued that ECE in China reflects a hybrid of three cultural threads: traditional Confucianism, communist ideology, and Western culture (J. Zhu & Zhang, 2008). Bullough and Palaiologou (2019) also argued that Western, Soviet, and Chinese traditions and cultures have shaped ECE in China. The influences of these cultures on ECE in China have been selective and dynamic, resulting in diverse forms and practices of educating young children across China (Bullough & Palaiologou, 2019, p. 6; J. Zhu & Zhang, 2008). For example, some researchers have reported the emergence of *Eduplay*, a Chinese version of play-based learning, as a compromise between Western and Chinese philosophies (Lin et al., 2019; Rao & Li, 2008).

In 2012, the Ministry of Education of China issued the *Early Learning and Development Guidelines for Children Aged 3 to 6 Years* (Ministry of Education, PRC, 2012), which provided clear learning and development goals for children of different ages and corresponding teaching suggestions for teachers. This document has enabled teachers to establish reasonable expectations for children and to implement pedagogical practices accordingly. As a result of ongoing reforms, ECE in Mainland China has been undergoing a tremendous shift, moving from a more didactic, teacher-directed, knowledge-transmission pedagogy to a constructivist, child-initiated, and child-directed pedagogy (Choy, 2017; Li & Wang, 2017).

A similar trend can also be found in other Chinese societies. In 2006, the Curriculum Development Council of Hong Kong revised the *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum*, which was first introduced in 1996. This revised version emphasised a child-centred approach and recommended allocating more time to play (S.-C. Wu & Rao, 2011). In Macao, the Education and Youth Development Bureau launched the *Curriculum Framework for Formal Education of Local Education System* in 2014, stating that early childhood curriculum should be delivered through play-based learning activities (Education and Youth Development Bureau, Macao, 2014). ECE in Taiwan entered a new era after the introduction of the *Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool Activities* in 2017 (Vong

L.-F., 2017). Following this official document, the ideology of ECE has gradually shifted from imparting knowledge to free play or guided learning (Shih, 2024).

Taken together, research indicates that ECE in Chinese societies has shifted from traditional Confucian values that emphasise teacher direction and knowledge transmission to a more child-centred approach. These curriculum reforms in ECE in Chinese societies over recent decades, partially promoted by transnational communication and knowledge exchange, have also resulted in the diversification and hybridisation of ECE forms and practices. Notably, these studies suggest that ECE in Chinese societies is not static but continues to evolve and hybridise different perspectives within a globalised context. Accordingly, the younger generations of Chinese student teachers may have experienced ECE in ways that differ from those of older generations as ECE continues to develop in Chinese societies.

2.1.4 ECE Curriculum and Pedagogy in Aotearoa New Zealand

This section traces the evolving understandings of curriculum and pedagogy in ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand to illustrate the context within which Chinese student teachers undertake their ITE programmes. Major shifts in these understandings relate to perspectives on child development and the teacher's role in supporting children's learning.

The evolving understandings of curriculum and pedagogy in ECE in New Zealand are inseparable from the ongoing development and reform of the sector itself. While ECE in New Zealand has a history of more than 130 years, since the establishment of the first kindergarten in Dunedin in 1889, it was not until the 1980s that it became a formal construct referring to an integrated sector serving children from birth to school entry (McLachlan, 2011).

During the development of ECE in New Zealand in the first half of the 20th century, as noted by McLachlan (2011), many theorists and their theories played a role in shaping teaching philosophies in ECE in New Zealand, including Froebel's theories of children learn through interactions with specially designed materials known as Frobel's gifts, Dewey's theories about

learning through real experiences, and Freudian theories about the importance of children's free play in supporting psychological development.

Stover (2016) also noted the profound influence of Susan Isaacs's visit to New Zealand in 1937. Isaacs's definition of play as a psychological state of mind in which a child engages in activities that are freely chosen underpinned the approach to free play in the early years and supported its wide adoption in later decades (Stover, 2016). McLachlan (1991) argued that this free play approach had theoretical roots in Piaget's cognitive development theory. Piaget's cognitive development theory views children as active learners who construct knowledge through their exploration of the physical world and who develop through a series of predetermined stages (McLachlan, 1991). Piaget's theory emphasised the importance of educational environments and materials, and supported the free play approach within which children explore the world like a "lone scientist" (Siraj-Blatchford, 2004, p. 142).

In the 1980s, ECE in New Zealand developed rapidly, with several milestones, including the establishment of the first Kōhanga Reo (Māori-medium early childhood centre), the integration of early childhood care and education under one administrative system (the Department of Education, later the Ministry of Education), and the introduction of three-year teacher education programmes preparing teachers for both childcare and kindergarten services (Everiss et al., 2017; Stover, 2016). These efforts contributed to the professionalisation of the early childhood workforce.

Since the late 1980s, there has been a shift from individualistic developmental perspectives to sociocultural perspectives of learning and development in New Zealand and other nations (e.g., the United Kingdom and Australia) (Anning et al., 2009). For example, Smith (1993) reflected on ECE's dominant reliance on Piaget's theory and argued that greater attention should be given to Vygotsky's theory, as it emphasises the social and cultural context of children's development. Within Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, learning is seen as promoting development rather than simply following development, and children's development is understood as a collaborative and shared

process that occurs through interactions with adults and peers, rather than an individual one (Smith, 1993).

In 1996, the first national bicultural ECE curriculum framework for Aotearoa New Zealand, *Te Whāriki*, was issued by the Ministry of Education, representing a significant achievement in unifying a diverse and fragmented ECE sector (McLachlan, 2011). In using the metaphor of a whāriki, "a woven mat for all to stand on" (May, 2002, p. 32), the document recognised the diversity of ECE provision in Aotearoa New Zealand, whether teacher-led, parent-led or whānau-led (Shuker & Cherrington, 2016). *Te Whāriki* upheld the spirit of *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* and asserted that "all children should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge and an understanding of the cultural heritage of both partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9). The curriculum emphasised children's various cultural backgrounds and identities, and recommended culturally sensitive and responsive practices to cater to their diverse learning needs (Ministry of Education, 1996).

While the 1996 version of *Te Whāriki* drew on multiple theoretical perspectives (e.g., Māori pedagogy, the ecological theory of human development) and was informed by local voices, international literature, and influential early childhood approaches (e.g., the Reggio Emilia approach, the Project Approach, and Developmentally Appropriate Practice), it is widely acknowledged to have a strong sociocultural foundation (Anning et al., 2009; Fleer, 2019). As *Te Whāriki* clearly stated, "This curriculum emphasises the critical role of socially and culturally mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relationships for children with people, places, and things" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9). However, as Anning et al. (2009) suggested, this sociocultural perspective of children's learning and development requires teachers to take a more proactive teaching role in supporting children, and it has created tensions for teachers as they shift their thinking within a system with a strong free-play tradition in New Zealand. Hedges (2010) also noted the difficulty teachers experience in appropriating the new sociocultural discourse, as the developmental psychology they were familiar with mediated their understandings.

As a unique and ground-breaking curriculum framework, *Te Whāriki* has been acclaimed nationally and internationally. However, concerns from the ECE community also emerged over time regarding this curriculum document and its implementation. For example, as Blaiklock (2010) noted, the generalised nature of *Te Whāriki* and the lack of subject knowledge within it may constrain educators' ability to provide effective and balanced learning experiences for children. Te One and Ewens (2019) also noted that the open-ended nature of *Te Whāriki* may be used to justify existing practices and could present challenges in fully realising its social justice agenda.

After 20 years of implementation, *Te Whāriki* was updated in 2017 in response to changes in social circumstances, policy directions, and advances in research and practice (Ministry of Education, 2017). The updated version of *Te Whāriki* further strengthened its foundation by placing even greater emphasis on "bicultural practice, the importance of language, culture, and identity, and the inclusion of all children" (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 4). In addition, the 2017 version of *Te Whāriki* introduced some new guidance, with particular attention given to enhancing awareness of teachers' important role in supporting children's learning and development through thoughtful and intentional pedagogy (Ministry of Education, 2017). This new document outlined the knowledge, skills, awareness, and commitments that teachers need to fulfil their responsibilities (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Unlike the 1996 version, the 2017 version of *Te Whāriki* explicitly listed theories and approaches underpinning its stance, including the Bioecological model, sociocultural theories, Kaupapa Māori theory, Pasifika approaches, critical theories, and emerging research and theory (e.g., neuroscience) (Ministry of Education, 2017, pp. 60–62). Fleer (2019) argued that the new version of *Te Whāriki* actively promotes theoretical plurality, which leads to diverse interpretations and understandings of the teacher's role in supporting children's learning and development when viewed through different theoretical lenses. Fleer (2019) also presented a table to illustrate these different approaches and theories and their corresponding implications for practice and demands for teachers. This theoretical complexity and plurality in *Te Whāriki* may allow early childhood

teachers to adjust their roles flexibly in practice when working with different contexts, children, and learning outcomes; however, it may present particular challenges for student teachers, as they are still in the early stages of professional development.

Taken together, understandings of curriculum and pedagogy in ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand are not fixed but constantly evolving as the sector develops. In the first half of the 20th century, multiple influences contributed to the prevalence of the free-play approach. Closely following that period, psychological discourses, particularly Piaget's cognitive development theory, shaped individualistic perspectives on child development, where educational environments and materials were emphasised to enable children's free exploration. Since the late 1980s, there has been a gradual shift from individualistic developmental perspectives to sociocultural perspectives, which emphasise the cultural dimensions of learning and development, and the critical role of adults and peers. The 1996 version of *Te Whāriki* reflected a strong sociocultural foundation, and children's language, identity, and culture were emphasised. The updated version of *Te Whāriki* in 2017 further strengthened the previous sociocultural stance and made explicit the expectations for teachers to support children's learning through thoughtful and intentional pedagogy.

2.1.5 Intentional Teaching and Play-Based Learning in ECE Contexts

This section reviews literature on intentional teaching and play-based learning in ECE. It presents the growing interest in intentional teaching within the ECE community, the potential tensions between intentional teaching and play-based learning (a dominant pedagogical discourse in ECE), and how these tensions can be managed by interpreting play-based learning as a continuum with different types of play located along it.

The concept of intentional teaching has attracted increased attention in the field of ECE globally since its introduction in Ann S. Epstein's book, *The Intentional Teacher: Choosing the Best Strategies for Young Children's Learning* (Epstein, 2007). Epstein (2007) explained intentional teaching as the need for teachers to "always be thinking about what we are doing and how it will foster children's development and produce real and lasting learning" (p. 10). Intentional teaching

requires teachers to act with specific learning outcomes or goals in mind, whether that learning is child-guided or adult-guided, and whether it is planned or spontaneous (Epstein, 2007, p. 3). Aligning with sociocultural perspectives on children's learning and development, intentional teaching emphasises teachers' crucial role in supporting and extending children's learning through various learning experiences. To implement intentional teaching effectively, teachers need to have "a repertoire of instructional strategies and know when to use a given strategy to accommodate the different ways that children learn and the specific content they are learning" (Epstein, 2014, p. 2).

The term intentional teaching and its variations (such as intentional teacher, intentional pedagogy, and intentionality) were then widely adopted and incorporated into some countries' ECE curriculum frameworks, including the United States' third version of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)* in 2009, Australia's *Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)* in 2009 and Aotearoa New Zealand's updated *Te Whāriki* in 2017.

In the United States, the position statement regarding the third version of DAP issued by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) stated that intentional teaching means "teachers are purposeful and thoughtful about the actions they take, and they direct their teaching toward the goals the programme is trying to help children reach" (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2009, p. 10). In Australia's first national ECE curriculum framework, EYLF, intentional teaching was defined as "educators being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions" (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009, p. 17). In the second version of the EYLF, the word "intentionality" is used to highlight both educators' and children's intentions in extending and enriching learning (Australian Government Department of Education [AGDE], 2022).

Generally, intentional teaching requires teachers to demonstrate intentionality in their curriculum decisions and pedagogical actions to support children in achieving valued learning outcomes. In contrast to being passive in children's learning and viewing themselves primarily as facilitators, teachers are expected to take a more proactive role through intentional teaching (Lewis

et al., 2019). While a proactive role is appreciated, intentional teaching does not mean that teachers always need to do something. Sometimes, not acting can also be an intentional choice (Nakatsubo et al., 2021). It is the intentionality behind decisions to act or not that justifies intentional teaching, rather than the action itself (M. Y. Chen et al., 2024). Intentionality is not only about knowing when to step into children's play and expand their learning experiences, but also about knowing when to step out and leave space for children to explore on their own or solve problems with peers (M. Y. Chen et al., 2024).

In New Zealand, the past decade has also seen a growing interest in intentional teaching within the ECE community, particularly after the update of *Te Whāriki* in 2017. This revised curriculum document clearly states that teachers' primary responsibility "is to facilitate children's learning and development through thoughtful and intentional pedagogy" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 59). Although this term may be new to New Zealand practitioners, the emphasis on teachers' proactive role in children's learning is not new (McLaughlin & Cherrington, 2018). Drawing on sociocultural theory, some earlier studies examined the dominant tradition of free play and teachers' non-interference in ECE in New Zealand, calling for a more balanced stance in practice (Hedges, 2000; Meade, 2000). In alignment with some previous studies, McLaughlin et al. (2015) reiterated that the importance of teachers and teaching had been underestimated in dominant ECE discourses in New Zealand, which had limited the principles of *Te Whāriki* to the ideological level rather than actionable behaviours. By comparing intentional teaching in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, McLaughlin et al. (2016) argued that the quality of ECE services could be enhanced through intentional teaching, thereby leading to a more equitable sector for all learners and families.

Despite the growing interest in intentional teaching within the ECE community, some studies have reported that teachers may experience tensions when embedding intentional teaching in traditionally play-based ECE contexts, particularly when play-based learning is (mis)interpreted as relying largely on child-initiated free play. For example, Grieshaber (2010) argued that the inclusion

of intentional teaching in Australia's curriculum framework, EYLF, represents a departure from tradition, as "there is a long history of privileging free play in early childhood education settings" (p. 40). Free play has traditionally been viewed as the demonstration of children's autonomy and independence, which could potentially be undermined by adult intervention (Grieshaber, 2010). Within a sector where the views of free play and educator non-intervention have been widely accepted, it can be challenging for educators to balance child-initiated free play and adult-generated curriculum experiences to optimise children's learning (Grieshaber, 2010). W. Zhang and Birdsall's (2016) study of early childhood educators' science pedagogy in New Zealand also suggested that participants' understanding of play-based pedagogy focused largely on free play, with educators mainly providing resources, rather than actively mediating children's learning and interactions with resources and supporting children's conceptual development through intentional teaching.

Meanwhile, there is a growing consensus to conceptualise play-based learning or learning through play as a continuum that includes different forms of play and varying degrees of teacher involvement, which may help manage the tensions experienced by ECE practitioners (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Different terms may be utilised in theoretical and curricular frameworks to represent the nature of play types along the continuum. For example, in the United Kingdom, practice guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage suggested a continuum of approaches consisting of four major types: unstructured play without adult support, child-initiated play, focused learning with adult guidance, and highly structured activities (Department for Children, Schools, and Families, 2009). This document indicated that while the middle two approaches are ideal forms, the other two forms at the ends of the continuum could also be useful for certain learning needs and situations; therefore, a mixture and balance of these approaches may generate the best outcomes for children (Department for Children, Schools, and Families, 2009).

Similarly, Pyle and Danniels (2017) noted that there is often a narrow definition of play-based learning that equates it with child-directed practice, which can lead to uncertainty for practitioners. In their study, Pyle and Danniels (2017) identified five types of play situated along a

continuum: free play, inquiry play, collaboratively designed play, playful learning, and learning through games. The authors argued that such a broad conceptualisation of play-based learning could enable ECE teachers to implement play-based pedagogy without the fear of "hijacking play" (Pyle & Danniels, 2017, p. 287). Edwards (2017) also noted the tension between the exploratory potential of play as a freely chosen activity and the intentional teaching approach in promoting knowledge development. Edwards (2017) proposed the Pedagogical Play Framework, which consisted of three types of play (open-ended play, modelled play, and purposefully-framed play), to move beyond the binary understanding of play and intentional teaching. Edwards (2017) argued that all play-types are of equal pedagogical value and that these play-types can be used in multiple combinations. Overall, literature indicates that conceptualising play-based learning as a continuum may help manage tensions between free play and intentional teaching, enabling teachers to adopt flexible roles and strategies to support children's learning and development through a rich array of play experiences.

Taken together, this section reviews literature on intentional teaching and play-based learning in ECE contexts. The literature indicates that there has been a growing interest in intentional teaching within the ECE community, particularly in countries such as the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. Drawing on sociocultural theory, intentional teaching positions teachers to take a proactive role in supporting and extending children's learning, rather than simply leaving children to explore on their own. It is the intentionality, rather than the action itself, that justifies intentional teaching practices. While research and policy advocate for intentional teaching, studies also indicate that ECE educators may perceive tensions when embedding intentional teaching within traditionally play-based contexts, particularly when play-based learning is narrowly viewed solely as child-initiated free play. Researchers have suggested a broader conceptualisation of play-based learning, defining it as a continuum with free play or unstructured play as one end, teacher-directed or highly structured play as the other, and other types of play situated along this continuum. This conceptualisation could help educators manage these tensions, allowing them to demonstrate intentionality across a range of play activities while fostering valued learning outcomes.

In the preceding sections of this Chapter, literature relating to this study has been reviewed and synthesised. The current scholarship serves as the foundation for the present study and points to the need to explore how Chinese student teachers construct their understandings of curriculum and pedagogy within New Zealand ECE, as well as how they navigate their ITE journeys in a cross-cultural context. Cross-cultural understanding is therefore central to this study. The next section presents the theoretical resources identified through the literature review as potentially helpful for this study.

2.2 Emerging Theoretical Resources from the Literature Review

The literature reviewed in this chapter identified three theoretical resources that appeared potentially useful for this study: funds of knowledge, funds of identity, and third space theory. These theoretical resources have been used in previous research to understand how learners draw on culturally and socially situated knowledge, negotiate identities, and navigate learning across different cultural and educational contexts. Their relevance in existing research suggested their potential value for understanding the perspectives and experiences of Chinese student teachers. However, these theoretical resources were not adopted at the outset of this study as a predetermined theoretical framework guiding the formulation of the research questions and the overall research design. Rather, their relevance became more salient as I engaged with the qualitative data during Phase 2. As Varpio et al. (2020) argued, some researchers may hold many theories in mind when starting a study and "it is not until data analysis processes are underway that the researcher will determine which theory or theories should shape the final study interpretations and conclusions" (p. 992). The timing of engaging with these theoretical resources is further explained in Chapter 3 in relation to the study's pragmatist worldview.

2.2.1 Funds of Knowledge and Funds of Identity

The term *Funds of knowledge* was defined by Moll et al. (1992) through a sociocultural lens as "these historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (p. 133). The term was coined to challenge

the long-standing tradition of viewing children of colour and their families, as well as those with migration backgrounds, from a deficit perspective (Hibbs, 2024; Hogg, 2011; Poole, 2017). The term was built on the premise that "people are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" (Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. ix). In their seminal ethnographic study of working-class Mexican communities in Tucson, Arizona, the United States, Moll et al. (1992) challenged the narrative that these families were socially disorganised and intellectually deficient; rather, they possessed ample cultural and cognitive resources that could be intentionally incorporated into classroom instruction to support their children's learning. Examples of household funds of knowledge include agriculture and mining, economics, household management, material and scientific knowledge, medicine, and religion (Moll et al., 1992). The authors suggested that household visits could serve as a valuable methodological tool for teachers to study funds of knowledge and draw on these funds to inform classroom teaching (Moll et al., 1992).

While initially focused on children and students, the concept of funds of knowledge was later extended to initial teacher education, particularly research involving student teachers from non-dominant backgrounds (Hibbs, 2024). For example, Gupta (2006) argued that immigrant and minority teacher candidates do not simply absorb the child development knowledge from teacher educators and then apply it to practice. Instead, they enter the college classroom with existing beliefs and personal funds of knowledge, which act as filters that mediate their professional learning (Gupta, 2006). It is believed that when teacher candidates' funds of knowledge are formally acknowledged within the teacher-education classroom, their effectiveness as teachers can be enhanced (Gupta, 2006, 2013). In contrast, failing to provide adequate space and support to integrate these funds of knowledge into ITE programmes may turn these funds into barriers to teacher development (Recchia & McDevitt, 2018).

In 2014, Esteban-Guitart and Moll further developed the funds of knowledge approach by proposing a new concept termed *funds of identity*. They define funds of identity as "historically

accumulated, culturally developed, and socially distributed resources that are essential for people's self-definition, self-expression, and self-understanding" (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014a, p. 31). This new concept serves as a complement to or a critique of the funds of knowledge framework (Hogg & Volman, 2020). While funds of knowledge focus on the resources that families and communities possess, funds of identity shift the focus to the resources that individuals develop and use to define and understand themselves (McDevitt, 2023). As Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014) explained, "funds of knowledge become funds of identity when people actively internalize family and community resources to make meaning and to describe themselves" (p. 33). In other words, all funds of identity are funds of knowledge, but not all funds of knowledge are funds of identity (Esteban-Guitart, 2023a). Individuals may engage with their funds of knowledge differently (integrate, incorporate, modify/transform, or reject) to develop their unique funds of identity (Hibbs, 2024). Researchers argued that migrant teachers bring their diverse funds of identity to the host context, which may require reorientation, but could be equally valid for their teaching (Rathore & D'Silva, 2024).

In some studies, the concepts of funds of knowledge and funds of identity have been used together to refer to "a complete inventory of meaningful social knowledge, cultural competences, and subjective productions" (Esteban-Guitart, 2023b, p. 11) that individuals develop through their life trajectories (Charteris et al., 2018; McDevitt, 2023). Acknowledging the funds of knowledge and identity that student teachers bring with them not only benefits their professional learning and identity construction but also encourages these teacher candidates to recognise and value the rich funds that children possess in their future teaching (Hibbs, 2024).

The concepts of funds of knowledge and funds of identity are potentially valuable in this study as they (a) promote a strengths-based lens for understanding Chinese student teachers' learning in ITE programmes, challenging deficit views that position them as needing to be filled with a universal model of "good" practice; and (b) acknowledge the diverse and dynamic nature of each Chinese student teacher's funds of identity, suggesting that although they may share certain

sociocultural experiences, these experiences are personally interpreted, selectively internalised, and actively drawn upon in shaping their identities.

2.2.2 Third Space Theory

Third space theory is a postcolonial theory initially developed by Homi Bhabha (1994). From Bhabha's perspective, culture and identity are not fixed essences but are negotiated within the in-between space of the cultural encounters of the coloniser and the colonised (Bhandari, 2022). Bhabha framed the third space as a site where "contrasting cultural beliefs and oppressive, dominant narratives come into contact" (Abraham, 2021, p. 2). It is a space where hybridity, new interpretations and new meanings could be produced and generated (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37). The concept of third space has since been adopted across various disciplines and research contexts.

For example, in geography, Soja (2008) used the notion of *Thirdspace* to challenge the Firstspace—Secondspace dualism. From Soja's perspective, Firstspace refers to the material/real space, Secondspace refers to the mental/imagined space, and Thirdspace represents a new way of thinking about and interpreting space that moves beyond the dualism (Borch, 2002; Soja, 2008).

An influential application of third space theory in education was the work of Moje et al. (2004), in which the authors used the concept of third space to represent a reconstructed space where discourses and knowledge from students' first space (home, community, and peer networks) meet those from their second space (more formalised institutions such as school). Moje et al. (2004) argued that literacy teaching could benefit from integrating the diverse or even competing knowledges and discourses within the constructed third space.

In existing studies, some researchers have used third space theory to explore culturally diverse (student) teachers' experiences. For instance, Ghim (2020) used Soja's Thirdspace theory as the theoretical framework to study Chinese transmigrant early childhood teachers in the United States. Following Soja's conceptualisation of Thirdspace, Ghim (2020) referred to Firstspace as the real world, where Chinese transmigrant teachers experienced multiple transitions, Secondspace as

Chinese transmigrant teachers' interpretation of these lived experiences, and Thirdspace as a space where reconciled practices are enacted (Ghim, 2020, pp. 21–23).

In a study of three immigrant early childhood student teachers from China, India and Korea, Recchia and McDevitt (2018) explained third space as "a hybrid place where professional knowledge and various funds of knowledge are brought in and negotiated to produce new knowledge" (p. 16). Recchia and McDevitt (2018) used third space as a framework to understand how immigrant teachers negotiate and navigate the potential differences between two types of knowledge and practices. Although researchers may have different understandings of what constitutes first space and second space, the essential point is that these spaces can be reconstructed to form a third space where the binary thinking or separation could be disrupted (Abraham, 2021; Moje et al., 2004).

Third space theory is potentially helpful for this study because it suggests that when Chinese student teachers' funds of knowledge and identity encounter the professional discourses presented in their ITE programmes, a third space might be constructed to allow them to negotiate and reconcile different perspectives and identities. This space opens possibilities for rethinking, negotiation, and the development of new understandings.

2.3 Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 presented a literature review relevant to this study, followed by an explanation of the theoretical resources identified through the literature review as potentially useful for the study.

The literature review was structured around five areas. First, the review examined research on culturally diverse student teachers' experiences in ITE programmes to highlight commonly encountered challenges and supports. Second, the review focused on research regarding Chinese student teachers' navigation of cross-cultural ITE programmes. Third, the review outlined ECE traditions in Chinese societies to contextualise Chinese student teachers' lived experiences. Fourth, the review traced the evolving understandings of curriculum and pedagogy in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECE context. Fifth, the review paid particular attention to intentional teaching and play-based learning, highlighting the complexity of understanding these important concepts.

The final section introduced funds of knowledge, funds of identity, and third space theory as emerging theoretical resources. Their conceptual development and applications in previous research were reviewed, providing a basis for considering their relevance to this study. The next chapter explains how these resources were subsequently drawn upon as the research evolved within the study's pragmatist worldview.

Chapter 3 Methodology and Methods

As introduced in Chapter 1, this study aimed to explore Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy, with a particular focus on intentional teaching, in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECE context. Central to this investigation was exploring the factors that influence Chinese student teachers' perspectives of teaching and learning, as well as the supports and challenges related to their broader learning experiences within ITE programmes as they navigate a cross-cultural context. The following five research questions (RQs) were proposed to address the research aim and guide this study:

RQ1. How do Chinese student teachers understand curriculum and pedagogy in ECE contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand?

RQ2. How do Chinese student teachers understand and implement intentional teaching in child-centred, play-based, and culturally responsive ECE contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand?

RQ3. What factors influence Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy?

RQ4. How have ITE programmes facilitated Chinese student teachers' understandings of curriculum and pedagogy?

RQ5. What supports and challenges do Chinese student teachers describe in relation to their ITE experiences?

The five RQs were structured to progress from broad foundational understandings to more specific knowledge and practices. RQ1 established the foundational context by examining how Chinese student teachers understood curriculum and pedagogy in ECE contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand. As explained in Section 1.4.2, curriculum and pedagogy are concepts used to describe approaches to teaching and learning, including what and how young children learn. Exploring Chinese student teachers' perspectives in curriculum and pedagogy provided a foundation for subsequently examining their perspectives of intentional teaching. Given that ECE in New Zealand is predominantly child-centred, play-based, and culturally responsive, RQ2 sought to explore how

Chinese student teachers developed their understandings of intentional teaching and implemented it within a context that differed from ECE traditions in Chinese societies. RQ3 served to identify the key factors that influenced Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy, including intentional teaching. Recognising that ITE plays a crucial role in shaping student teachers' teaching beliefs and practices, RQ4 focused on how ITE programmes have facilitated Chinese student teachers' understandings of curriculum and pedagogy. Finally, RQ5 examined the broader context for perspective development by exploring the supports and challenges that Chinese student teachers described in relation to their ITE experiences. This question (RQ5) was designed to identify supports that ITE programmes responded to Chinese student teachers' unique needs, as well as the challenges that constrained their professional learning within ITE. Insights from RQ5 were intended to inform improvements in ITE practices to create a more culturally inclusive, responsive, and supportive learning environment for Chinese student teachers, as well as those from other ethnic minority backgrounds.

To address the proposed research aim and questions, a mixed methods approach with a two-phase explanatory sequential design was adopted. This chapter first explains the pragmatist worldview underpinning this study, then discusses the rationale for using a mixed methods approach, followed by an overview of the research design. The processes of participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis for each phase are subsequently presented. Following this, ethical considerations and mitigation strategies are discussed. This chapter concludes with a critical reflection on researcher reflexivity and its implications for data collection and interpretation.

3.1 Pragmatist Worldview

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), a *worldview* in mixed methods research comprises a set of beliefs and philosophical assumptions about knowledge that inform a study. The term "worldview" is often used interchangeably with "paradigm" (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Different worldviews can lead to different perspectives on ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodology, and rhetoric, thereby shaping research decisions and actions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

For the present study, a pragmatist worldview was adopted. A pragmatist worldview (or pragmatism) sidesteps the dualism of objectivity and subjectivity, rejecting the forced choice between the philosophical stances that there is only one singular reality independent of the researcher and that all realities are entirely individual constructions (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Rather, it acknowledges that "there are singular and multiple realities that are open to empirical inquiry and orients itself toward solving practical problems in the 'real world'" (Feilzer, 2010, p. 8).

Moreover, a pragmatist worldview also prioritises the research question over the methods being used (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). It moves beyond the long-standing quantitative and qualitative debate, suggesting that quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods can be used flexibly, as long as the methods chosen have the potential to answer what the researcher wants to know (Feilzer, 2010). In other words, instead of arguing about which method is metaphysically superior, a pragmatist worldview values what works in addressing the research question. As indicated by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), in pragmatism "the focus is on the consequences of research, on the primary importance of the question asked rather than the methods, and on the use of multiple methods of data collection to inform the problems under study" (p. 37). Therefore, the research questions guided the selection of a mixed methods research design combining quantitative and qualitative data.

In addition, pragmatism does not require a study to remain bound to a predetermined theoretical framework; rather, its problem-centred and processual orientation provides flexibility to draw on theoretical resources as their relevance becomes apparent during the research process (Gillespie et al., 2024). Accordingly, compatible with a pragmatist worldview, this study did not begin with a predetermined theoretical framework that guided the formulation of the research questions and the overall research design. The theoretical resources identified through the literature review, as introduced in Chapter 2, were drawn upon as interpretive resources to deepen the understanding and interpretation of the findings.

Furthermore, Morgan (2014) argues that pragmatism is more than practicality and has a strong bond to a social justice agenda because "pragmatism emphasizes that all aspects of research inherently involve decisions about which goals are most meaningful and which methods are most appropriate" (p. 1050). This emphasis also draws attention to the purposes and consequences of research, including the ways in which research may contribute to socially meaningful change. Therefore, alongside what the findings show, it is important to consider their implications and what they may contribute to meaningful improvements in educational practice.

The ultimate intention of this study is to deepen understanding of this particular group of student teachers through an examination of the factors shaping their understandings of curriculum and pedagogy and their emerging teacher identities. In doing so, the study seeks to generate insights that can meaningfully inform and strengthen pedagogical practice in initial teacher education.

3.2 Rationale for Using a Mixed Methods Approach

As articulated in the research aim, this study not only sought to explore Chinese student teachers' understandings of curriculum and pedagogy but also to explain how their perspectives were shaped throughout their ITE learning journeys in a cross-cultural context. Given the complex nature of this inquiry, neither quantitative nor qualitative data alone could provide a comprehensive understanding in both breadth and depth. Therefore, a mixed methods approach, underpinned by a pragmatist worldview, was selected to integrate both types of data (quantitative and qualitative) to answer the research questions, rather than being constrained to a single type (Cook & Kamalodeen, 2020; Creswell, 2015, p. 2). Within the mixed methods approach, the quantitative component (Phase 1) aimed to identify trends and patterns in perspectives among a relatively large number of Chinese student teachers, while the qualitative component (Phase 2) served to provide in-depth insights into how these perspectives were formed, ensuring that the research questions were thoroughly addressed.

3.3 The Mixed Methods Design Overview

Among the three core designs within the mixed methods approach, an explanatory sequential design was applied, which begins with collecting and analysing quantitative data and is followed by a qualitative phase to explain or expand on the first-phase quantitative results (Creswell, 2015, pp. 37–38; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 65). In addition, while this study employed a mixed methods approach, greater emphasis was given to Phase 2, the qualitative strand. Therefore, this study could be categorised as a "quan → QUAL" design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 63).

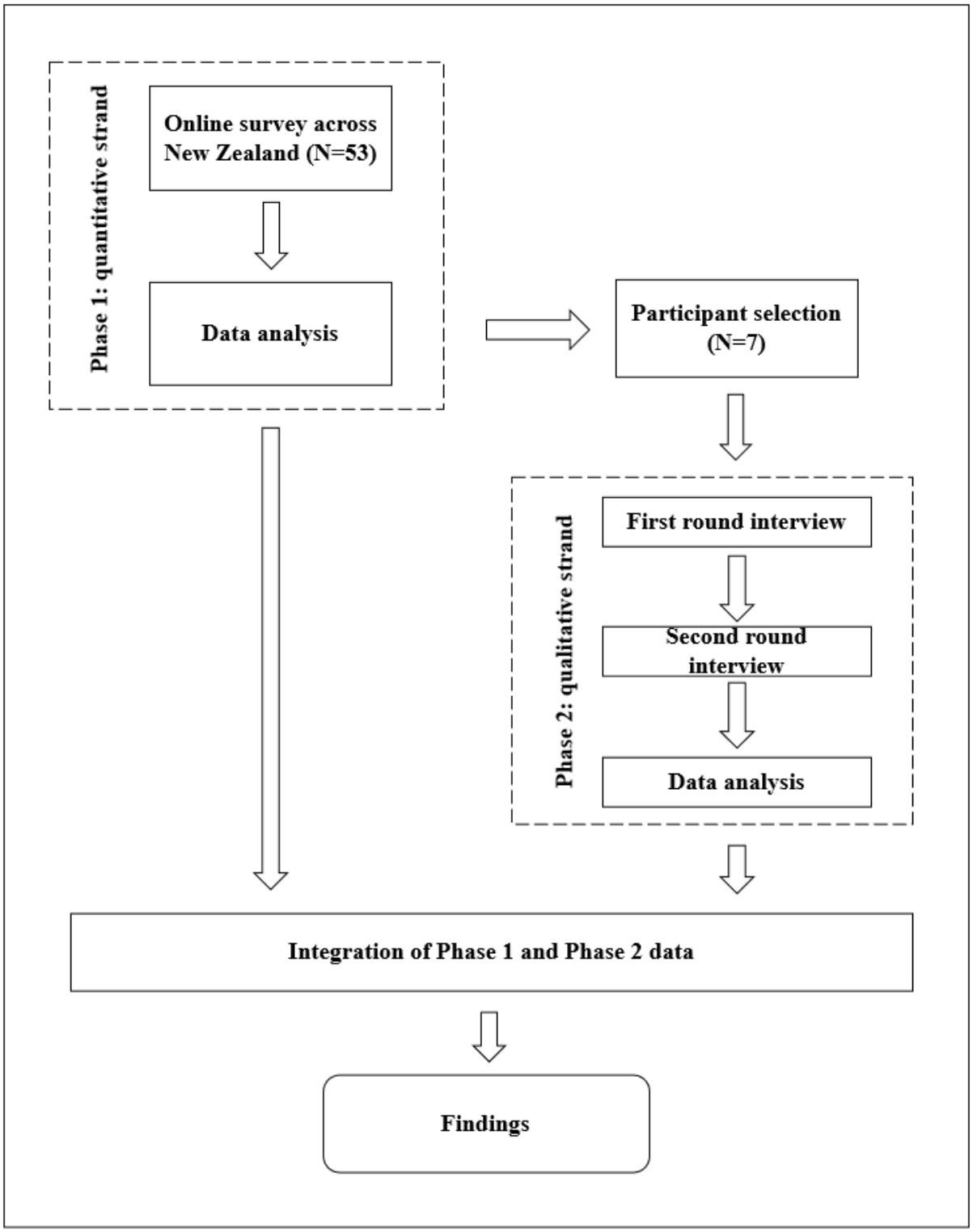
A flowchart of the research design is provided in Figure 3-1. Phase 1 of this study involved an online bilingual (English and Mandarin Chinese) survey conducted across New Zealand to capture a broad range of Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy, particularly intentional teaching. Although the survey was predominantly quantitative, open-ended questions were also included, allowing participants to elaborate on their opinions. Phase 1 resulted in 53 responses, comprising 10 from the English version of the survey and 43 from the Mandarin Chinese version.

Phase 2 consisted of two rounds of one-on-one semi-structured interviews with seven self-nominated participants with diverse perspectives to deepen understanding of how Chinese student teachers' perspectives were shaped within their ITE programmes. Phase 2 also served to explore more deeply Chinese student teachers' ITE experiences to identify the supports and challenges that were relevant to their professional learning. The seven participants for Phase 2 were purposefully selected from a pool of 17 self-nominated participants from Phase 1 using a maximum variation sampling strategy. This sampling process is explained further in Section 3.5.1.

The two-phase explanatory sequential design enabled the proposed research questions to be addressed in both breadth and depth by analysing the quantitative and qualitative data. Finally, the quantitative and qualitative findings from the two phases were integrated and synthesised in the discussion chapter.

Figure 3-1

The Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods Design



3.4 Phase 1

This section presents the specific details of Phase 1 of this mixed-methods study, beginning with participant recruitment, followed by the data collection process, and ending with the data analysis procedures. The purpose of this predominantly quantitative phase was to establish a baseline understanding of Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy, particularly intentional teaching, in the New Zealand ECE context. Phase 1 also served to provide an opportunity for participants to self-nominate to participate in Phase 2.

3.4.1 Participants

3.4.1.1 Defining Chinese Student Teachers

The target population of this study is Chinese student teachers in New Zealand. Given the centrality of culture in this study, *Chinese* is defined from an ethnic and cultural perspective rather than being limited to citizenship. According to Kukutai (2004), *ethnicity* generally refers to "a cultural group that has a common socio-history based on geographical, religious, ancestral or/and cultural roots" (p. 86), making it a suitable criterion for selecting participants who share a common culture. Additionally, contrary to the essentialist view of ethnicity, the constructivist perspective defines ethnicity as a social construct that is not fixed but fluid, allowing individuals to self-identify with multiple ethnicities, with affiliations that may change over time (Zagefka, 2009). Therefore, individuals who self-identified ethnically as Chinese were included, rather than limiting the selection to those holding Chinese citizenship. Such a definition of Chinese student teachers includes those who are Chinese international students, Chinese immigrants, New Zealand-born Chinese, and others of Chinese heritage.

3.4.1.2 Participant Recruitment

Based on the explanation above, the following criteria were established for selecting participants. In this study, Chinese student teachers refer to those who are: (a) currently enrolled in an ECE ITE programme approved by the Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand that leads to teacher registration, and (b) self-identify ethnically as Chinese.

ITE programmes in New Zealand are regularly monitored and reviewed by the Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand (hereafter referred to as the Teaching Council) to ensure the quality of graduates. Only graduates from approved ITE programmes are eligible for teacher registration and can become practising teachers in New Zealand. According to information on the Teaching Council website (retrieved December 2023), there were 19 ITE providers offering 32 ECE ITE programmes, including bachelor's degrees, graduate diplomas, postgraduate diplomas, and master's degrees (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2023). To ensure the confidentiality of participants and to minimise any likelihood of identification, the list of the ITE providers is not included in the published thesis. Although Massey University was listed as one of the 19 providers, it was excluded from the participant recruitment process due to ethical considerations regarding a potential conflict of interest between my supervisors, who was the ECE ITE programme coordinator, and the student teachers at Massey. This action of excluding Massey University student teachers was taken to ensure participants' autonomy and voluntary participation in this study.

In January 2024, the remaining 18 ITE providers were approached by email to ask for their willingness and ability to distribute an online survey to students enrolled in their ECE ITE programmes. At this stage, the ethics approval letter for this study (see Appendix 1) from Massey University and the information sheet for Phase 1 (see Appendix 2) were provided to these ITE providers for reference. Additional explanations and supporting documents were provided upon request via email. For one ITE provider, a separate ethics application was submitted and approved following institutional guidelines. (To maintain confidentiality, the ethics approval letter from this ITE provider was not included in the thesis.) After the initial contact, 15 ITE providers confirmed their willingness and ability to share the survey.

On 18 March 2024, a participant recruitment flyer (see Appendix 3) and the formal survey (see Appendix 4) were sent to the 15 confirmed ITE providers for distribution to their students, allowing those who self-identified as meeting the participant criteria to participate voluntarily. These ITE providers were also informed that, in addition to recruiting participants through the ITE pathway,

the flyer and survey would also be posted on Chinese and English social media platforms. One week later, on 25 March 2024, I shared the flyer and survey on the homepages of my social media accounts and in several accessible New Zealand ECE online discussion groups, including those on Facebook, WeChat, and RedNote, to supplement participant recruitment.

3.4.2 Data Collection

3.4.2.1 Survey Instrument

The instrument used for data collection in Phase 1 was a self-developed online survey, Chinese Student Teachers' Perspectives of Intentional Teaching (CSTPIT), administered by Qualtrics. The development of this CSTPIT survey was an iterative process, guided by my supervisors and supported by members of the Early Years Research Lab at Massey University, which consists of postgraduates and researchers in the field of ECE.

The CSTPIT survey (see Appendix 4) contains four sections:

1) General views on teaching and learning in ECE.
2) Views on intentional teaching.
3) ITE experiences related to intentional teaching.
4) Demographic information.

While this survey was predominantly quantitative, and most of the questions were closed-ended, some open-ended questions were also included to allow participants to elaborate on their perspectives.

At the end of the survey, participants were provided with a brief introduction to Phase 2 and a link to the detailed information sheet for Phase 2 (see Appendix 5). Following that, participants were then asked whether they were interested in participating in follow-up interviews. Those who were not interested could submit their survey responses anonymously. Those who were interested in Phase 2 could voluntarily share their contact information to be contacted regarding this opportunity.

As approved in the ethics submission, the contact information that interested participants provided was purposefully linked to their survey responses, rather than kept separate, to allow for the selection and recruitment of participants with diverse perspectives for Phase 2 based on their survey responses in Phase 1. Participants were also notified that providing their contact information would make their survey responses identifiable by the researcher, thereby ensuring informed decision-making.

3.4.2.2 Language and Translation

Since participants in this study had varying proficiency levels in English, a Mandarin Chinese version of the survey was developed to accommodate their language preferences. The decision to provide a bilingual survey was based on the recognition that the language used in a study influences not only the researcher–participant relationship but also the quality of the data collected (Cormier, 2018). Therefore, the choice of language in research matters. Researchers have a responsibility to offer participants language choices whenever possible, rather than imposing the dominant language (in this context, English) on them simply because they can use it, as a way to show respect and to empower them.

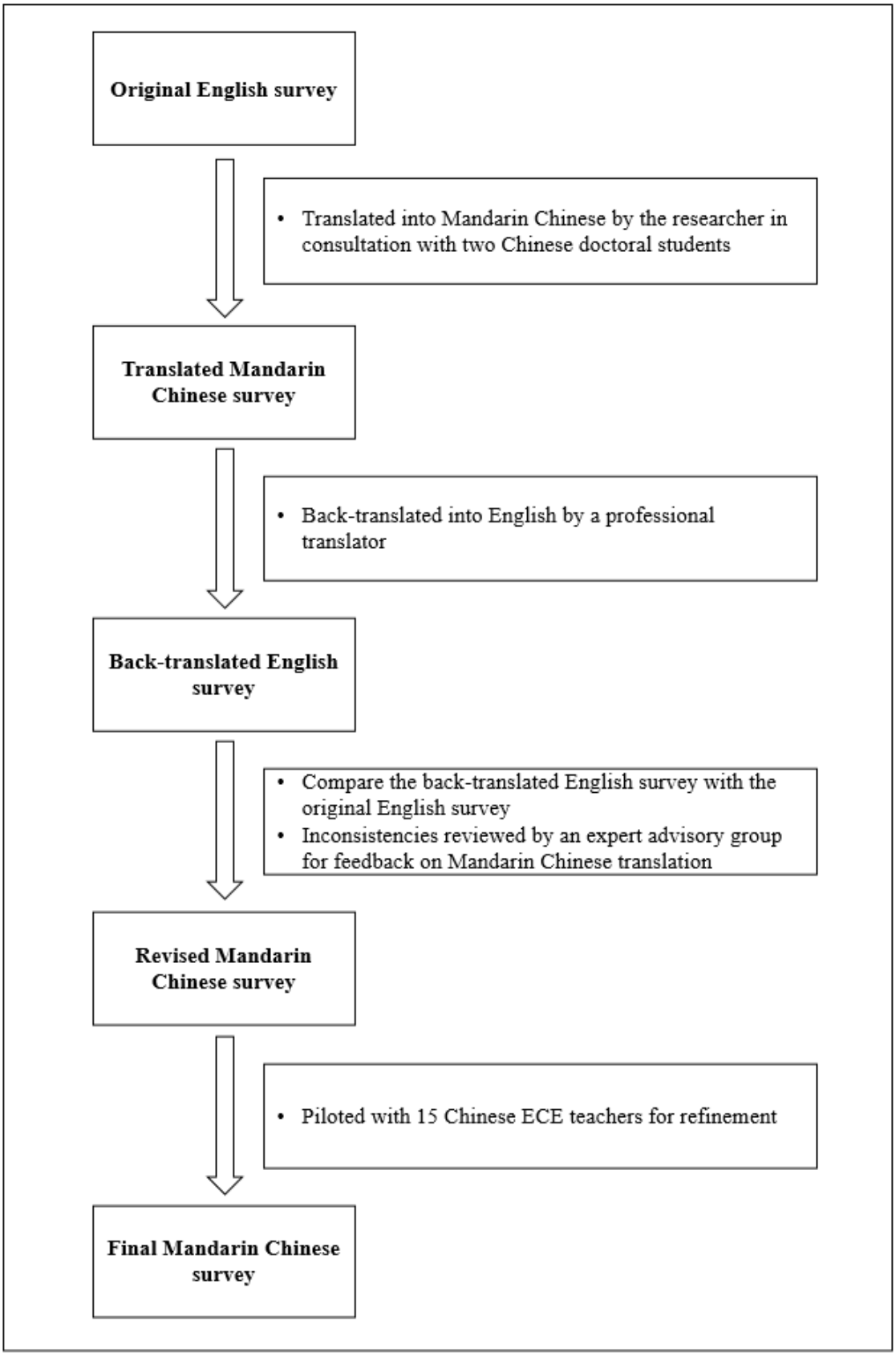
The development process for the Mandarin Chinese survey is presented in Figure 3-2. First, the original English version of the survey was translated into Mandarin Chinese by the researcher in consultation with two Chinese doctoral students in ECE at Massey University. The translated version was then back-translated into English by a registered professional translator in New Zealand (H.-Y. Chen & Boore, 2010). The back-translated survey was subsequently compared with the original English version, and any inconsistencies were identified and sent to an expert advisory group, comprising three bilingual experts in the field of ECE, for further advice on the accuracy of translation (Regmi et al., 2010). The expert advisory group consisted of two associate professors and one practising ECE teacher in New Zealand. The entire translation process was supported by the expert advisory group to ensure that the translation was socioculturally appropriate and conceptually accurate (Younas et al., 2022).

Based on the feedback from the expert advisory group, the Mandarin Chinese version of the survey was revised and then piloted with 15 ECE teachers who self-identified as Chinese in New Zealand, recruited through personal channels. Chinese teachers, rather than Chinese student teachers, were selected for piloting for two reasons. First, because I had limited access to Chinese student teachers at the piloting stage, I preferred to leave them for the formal survey. Second, Chinese teachers had completed their ITE and were former student teachers, which made their feedback equally relevant for the purpose of refining the survey. After piloting, final revisions were made to the Mandarin Chinese survey.

The information sheets for Phases 1 and 2, which were included in the survey to inform participants, underwent the same translation process to ensure conceptual equivalence between the English and Mandarin Chinese versions (Sutrisno et al., 2014).

Figure 3-2

Survey Translation Process



3.4.2.3 Data Collection Period

The online survey, available in both English and Mandarin Chinese, was open for data collection for three weeks (from 18 March 2024 to 8 April 2024). A total of 53 responses were collected, with 10 completed in English and 43 completed in Mandarin Chinese. Further details about the 53 participants can be found in Chapter 4.

3.4.3 Data Analysis

To merge the data from the two language versions of the survey and conduct the data analysis, all collected closed-ended data were exported as values. These values were then combined into a single Excel document and later imported into SPSS, enabling efficient statistical analysis. Since this study did not aim to generalise findings to a larger population based on a small subset, only descriptive statistics were conducted to summarise the characteristics of the data (Johnson & Christensen, 2019, pp. 471–503). Tables and figures were created to facilitate the visual interpretation of the data.

In addition, survey responses to open-ended questions were exported in textual form and analysed in their source languages using reflexive thematic analysis to identify shared meaning patterns (Braun et al., 2022). Given the limited qualitative data generated in the survey, manual analysis was conducted in Excel instead of using qualitative data analysis software (e.g., NVivo). Quoting practices were carefully considered to ensure accuracy and transparency in presenting the qualitative data. When quoting, survey responses in Mandarin Chinese were translated into English by the researcher for reporting purposes, while those originally in English were presented in their original form. Only minor adjustments were made for readability when necessary, without altering the intended meaning. In addition, explanatory notes were inserted in square brackets to clarify the meaning or context wherever necessary.

3.5 Phase 2

This section outlines the specific details of Phase 2 of this study, beginning with participant selection, followed by the data collection process, which included two rounds of one-on-one semi-

structured interviews, and concluding with the data analysis methods. This qualitative phase aimed to gain a deeper understanding of Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy and to explore how these perspectives were shaped through their ITE journeys.

3.5.1 Participants

3.5.1.1 Participant Selection

At the end of the Phase 1 survey, participants were provided with the opportunity to self-nominate for Phase 2. Ultimately, 17 participants self-nominated, including 15 from the Mandarin Chinese survey and two from the English survey.

Since this phase aimed to capture a range of perspectives of Chinese student teachers and explore the potential influential factors, a purposive sampling approach, specifically a maximum variation sampling strategy, was applied among the 17 self-nominees (Johnson & Christensen, 2019, p. 259).

Ten participants were initially selected based on their responses to a purposefully designed survey question (Q3; see Appendix 4), which indicated their general preference for certain approaches to teaching and learning in the early years, alongside demographic characteristics, including gender, age, ITE programme type, and parenting experience. A detailed explanation of the selection process can be found in Appendix 6.

3.5.1.2 Participant Confirmation

The 10 initially selected participants from the 17 self-nominees were contacted using the contact information they provided at the end of the survey in Phase 1 to confirm their interest and willingness to participate in follow-up interviews. Ultimately, seven participants confirmed their participation by signing a consent form (see Appendix 7). Further details of the seven participants can be found in Chapter 5. For those who were not selected or did not confirm their participation in Phase 2, their contact information was omitted from the database.

3.5.2 Data Collection

The data collection in Phase 2 included two rounds of one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the seven participants, conducted in July 2024 and November 2024, respectively. This interview method was chosen for the following reasons: (a) one-on-one interviews provide better privacy protection for participants compared to focus groups, (b) semi-structured interviews offer a moderately structured process while allowing flexibility for the interviewer to explore unanticipated topics in greater depth, and (c) serial interviews, which refer to conducting multiple interviews with the same participants, are better suited to providing rich and nuanced data compared to single-session interviews (Goyes & Sandberg, 2024; S. A. Murray et al., 2009; Read, 2018).

In this study, the first-round interviews aimed to gather background information about the participants and to initially explore their knowledge and perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy, including intentional teaching. As the student teachers progressed further through their ITE experiences, the second-round interviews sought to deepen the understanding of their evolving perspectives within ITE programmes, as well as their perceptions of their ITE experiences. In addition, prior to the second-round interview, participants were invited to voluntarily bring any works or artefacts to help illustrate their implementations of intentional teaching.

3.5.2.1 Interview Protocol

To achieve the different aims of each interview round, two interview protocols were developed to guide these interviews (see Appendix 8 and Appendix 9). Each protocol began with an introduction to the interview process, followed by purposefully designed interview questions and sub-questions. Tips for conducting interviews and useful probes for eliciting further details were also included at the end of each protocol. The interview questions were carefully designed based on relevant literature, initial survey findings, and participants' prior responses. Before the formal interviews, the interview protocols were tested and refined with feedback from my supervisors and three colleagues from the Early Years Research Lab at Massey University.

3.5.2.2 Interview Process

The first-round interviews were conducted in July 2024, while the second round took place in November 2024. The specific timeframe for the interviews was determined to capture participants' evolving perspectives as they gained more experience within ITE programmes over the academic year. The interviews were scheduled at the participants' convenience.

Given that participants were based in different cities across New Zealand, online interviews via Zoom were selected as the most appropriate method. Prior to the interviews, participants were fully informed about the interview process and their rights (e.g., the right not to answer any particular question; ask the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview). Participants also had the freedom to answer interview questions in English, Mandarin Chinese, or a combination of both languages, based on their personal preferences.

The interviews were recorded using Zoom's recording function following participants' informed consent. The video recordings were subsequently deleted, and only the audio recordings were retained for transcription. The two rounds of interview dates and recording durations are presented in Table 3-1. Chinese pseudonyms were assigned to the seven interviewees to protect their privacy.

Table 3-1

Interview Dates and Recording Durations

Pseudonym	Round 1		Round 2	
	Interview date	Recording duration	Interview date	Recording duration
Aiai	2024-07-03	51 min	2024-11-04	63 min
Bowen	2024-07-14	93 min	2024-11-01	111 min
Enrui	2024-07-18	112 min	2024-11-18	115 min
Minghao	2024-07-02	54 min	2024-11-07	67 min
Ningning	2024-07-15	72 min	2024-11-08	80 min
Rongrong	2024-07-05	53 min	2024-11-03	49 min
Shanshan	2024-07-06	80 min	2024-11-24	131 min

3.5.2.3 Data Transcription

The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researcher, and then the transcripts were sent to participants for member checking to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts (Birt et al., 2016). Given that all participants primarily used Mandarin Chinese during the interview processes, while interspersed with limited English sentences and words in their responses, the transcripts were preserved in their original language form. Explanatory notes were inserted in square brackets to clarify the meaning or context wherever necessary.

To ensure systematic organisation and easy identification, a structured naming convention was applied to the transcripts. For example, Ningning's first-round interview transcript was labelled "Ningning-1," and Ningning's second-round interview transcript was labelled "Ningning-2." In total, 14 interview transcripts were generated from seven participants for data analysis. The combined word count of these 14 transcripts was approximately 269,000 words.

3.5.3 Data Analysis

3.5.3.1 Translation Decision

In this study, the interview data were analysed in their original language (primarily Mandarin Chinese with limited English words or sentences). After the completion of data analysis, quotes and themes were subsequently translated into English for reporting purposes. This translation decision was informed by two key considerations: (a) analysing data in its original language, rather than translating it prior to analysis, helps preserve the authenticity of participants' expressions and minimises the risk of misinterpretation or meaning loss due to early translation; and (b) given the large volume of interview data (approximately 269,000 words), translating the entire dataset into English prior to analysis would be highly time-consuming and labour-intensive (Abfalter et al., 2021; H.-Y. Chen & Boore, 2010). Therefore, analysing the data in their original language and translating selected excerpts at the reporting stage was both a beneficial and practical strategy.

3.5.3.2 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Since the publication of Braun and Clarke's (2006) influential work titled "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," thematic analysis (TA), as an effective qualitative data analysis method, has gained popularity and been widely adopted in qualitative research. Braun and Clarke (2019) have identified three types of TA approaches: coding reliability TA, codebook TA, and reflexive TA. Each TA approach has its distinct philosophical assumptions and procedural practices (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis was adopted to analyse the qualitative interview data in this study. Unlike other approaches to thematic analysis, reflexive thematic analysis is a fully qualitative approach that understands meaning as contextualised and situated and recognises the possibility of multiple interpretations of the same data (Braun et al., 2019). This method was chosen because it recognises subjectivity as a resource and acknowledges the researcher's active role in generating themes and interpreting shared meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The aim of reflexive thematic analysis is not to generate accurate and replicable codes and

themes (a positivist or postpositivist stance), but rather to tell a coherent and compelling story that is deeply grounded in the data and relies on researchers' interpretation, which is influenced by "their own cultural membership and social positionings, their theoretical assumptions and ideological commitments, as well as their scholarly knowledge" (Braun et al., 2019, pp. 47–48). Therefore, even the same data may be interpreted as having multiple meanings by different researchers.

Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis method involves six phases: (1) familiarising yourself with the dataset, (2) coding, (3) generating initial themes, (4) developing and reviewing themes, (5) refining, defining, and naming themes, and (6) writing up. The six phases were followed as guidelines rather than strict rules in the data analysis process.

Initially, I familiarised myself with the dataset through multiple rounds of immersive reading and re-reading. By treating each data item individually as well as the dataset as a whole, I formed an initial impression of the interview data and documented my analytical thoughts that emerged during this process. For example, I wrote the following memo: "It's hard to distinguish the influence of ITE and student teachers' prior experiences on their overall views of teaching and learning, and their specific views of intentional teaching" (memo–2024.08.07). This thought partially informed my later decision to revise the research question from exploring factors influencing Chinese student teachers' perspectives of intentional teaching to the broader scope of factors influencing their perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy.

Given the large volume of transcripts, NVivo 14 was used to facilitate the coding process. This software allowed me to code informative and interesting segments and group them across different transcripts easily and systematically. Coding was conducted at both the semantic and latent levels. Coding was understood not as an objective process, but as an interpretive and reflexive process shaped by my perspectives, experiences, and theoretical knowledge. My positioning as a Chinese ECE teacher educator and researcher, together with my experience as an international student in New Zealand, functioned as a sensitising lens in the analysis, shaping what I attended to

and how I interpreted participants' accounts without predetermining the codes or themes. It should also be noted that the analytical orientation of this reflexive thematic analysis was primarily inductive, with coding and theme development driven principally by the data rather than by existing theories (Braun & Clarke, 2022, pp. 55–57).

After completing the coding of the 14 transcripts, relevant codes that could be organised around central concepts were collated to generate candidate themes. Themes in this study were understood as patterns of shared meaning across data items, rather than topic summaries (Braun & Clarke, 2022). These themes were generated actively by the researcher rather than emerging naturally from the data. These candidate themes were further developed and reviewed through repeated engagement with the dataset and existing research, with revisions made to ensure that they meaningfully addressed the research aim and questions. Eventually, the final themes were generated, each assigned a concise and informative name, with representative quotes selected and interwoven throughout the findings chapters (Chapters 5, 6, and 7) to help elaborate participants' perspectives. Consistent with the primarily inductive analytical orientation, the theoretical resources introduced in Chapter 2 were brought more explicitly into the analytical process at a later stage, after the initial coding and development of candidate themes. They were used as interpretive resources to deepen the understanding and interpretation of the findings rather than to determine the codes or themes. Although the data analysis process is described linearly, it was, in fact, iterative and recursive, involving ongoing revision and refinement.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

This study closely followed Massey University's *Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations Involving Human Participants*, with a full ethics application submitted, reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee on 11 December 2023. A copy of the ethics approval letter can be found in Appendix 1. Specifically, the following key ethical issues were considered to ensure the ethical conduct of the research.

Autonomy. Autonomy refers to individuals' ability to make decisions of their own free will. Throughout the research process, participants' autonomy was upheld and respected. In both the Phase 1 survey and the Phase 2 interviews, participants were offered the opportunity to participate in this study voluntarily without outside pressure and to withdraw from this study without experiencing any disadvantage. In addition, participants were provided with sufficient information through detailed information sheets (in both English and Mandarin Chinese) to ensure that their decisions about whether to participate were well-informed.

Special Relationship. As noted in Section 3.4.1, because one of my supervisors was the programme coordinator of the ECE ITE programme at Massey University, student teachers at Massey University may have felt obligated to participate in this study due to this special relationship. Therefore, Massey University was excluded from the participant recruitment stage due to this ethical concern. In addition, because I did not play any instructional role in ECE ITE programmes at any of the listed ITE institutions, there was no special relationship between potential participants and me that would affect their willingness or decision to participate in this study.

Cultural Responsiveness. Cultural responsiveness was a key consideration due to the highly culturally focused nature of this study. First, Chinese student teachers were defined from an ethnic and cultural perspective to include those who self-identified as Chinese, rather than being assumed based on their nationality or citizenship. Second, since Chinese student teachers in this study included Chinese international students, Chinese immigrants, New Zealand-born Chinese, and others of Chinese heritage, their language abilities and preferences were expected to vary. In response to this concern, participants were provided with a bilingual survey, in English and Mandarin Chinese, and the opportunity to communicate in either language during the interviews. Third, to ensure that the two language versions of the survey were conceptually equivalent, support was sought from an expert advisory group, consisting of three bilingual experts who identified as Chinese and had expertise in ECE.

Privacy and Confidentiality. Throughout the research process, participants' privacy was strictly protected. Except for collecting contact information for the purpose of selecting participants for Phase 2 interviews from the Phase 1 survey, as approved by the ethics committee, no other identifiable information about student teachers and their ITE providers was collected. Pseudonyms following Chinese naming traditions were assigned to the seven participants for Phase 2 to protect their privacy. Additionally, general terms, such as associate teacher and teacher educator, were used to replace any terms interviewees used that were potentially identifiable to a specific institution. Furthermore, throughout the research process, the data collected were carefully stored on a password-protected computer at Massey University to ensure confidentiality. No information about the participants in this study was shared with any of the ITE providers.

Knowledge Generation and Sharing. In this study, I upheld the view that participants were not merely information providers, but co-constructors of knowledge. Therefore, their inputs and insights were highly valued. For example, after the interview recordings were transcribed, these transcripts were sent to participants for member checking to ensure their accuracy. Regarding knowledge sharing, survey participants in Phase 1 will be able to access a summary of the survey findings by contacting the researcher directly via email or the online pathway on Google Drive that was included in the information sheet upon completion. Interviewees in Phase 2 will be able to receive a summary of project findings from the researcher upon completion. This knowledge-sharing process was designed to acknowledge participants' contributions to this study.

In addition, it should be noted that, although the consent form for Phase 2 included an option for participants to review and comment on a personal case story, the presentation of the thesis ultimately adopted a thematic reporting approach, drawing on excerpts from across participants rather than presenting separate personal case stories. Therefore, as individual case stories were not generated as outputs, this option was not activated.

3.7 Reflexivity

Although this study employed a mixed methods research approach, greater emphasis was placed on Phase 2, the qualitative strand of the research. As noted in Section 3.3, this study can be categorised as a "quan → QUAL" design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 63). While Chapter 1 included a discussion of my positionality, reflecting on how my educational background, professional experiences and identity shaped my research interest and the focus of this study, this section presents a reflexive account of how my identity influenced my relationship with participants, the data that I was able to collect, and my interpretation of participants' narratives.

First, my shared cultural and linguistic background with participants played a significant role in the research process. In the Phase 1 survey, 53 responses were collected, including 43 from the Mandarin Chinese version and 10 from the English version. I would not have been able to collect this number of survey responses had I used only an English version of the survey. In the Phase 2 interviews, the opportunities provided for participants to use either Mandarin Chinese or English also enhanced participants' willingness to share their views without being constrained by their English language ability. In addition, as a member of the Chinese cultural community, it was easier for me to build trusting relationships with participants who shared the same cultural background. Within this relationship, my participants felt more comfortable sharing stories that might have been difficult to tell in other contexts and to other interviewers.

Second, while my identity offered me an advantageous position in building connections with my participants and engaging empathically with them, I noticed that my identity sometimes led me to over-identify with participants' perspectives. For example, when participants talked about how some content had not been covered or sufficiently emphasised in the coursework, I initially viewed it as a reflection of reality, without being fully aware that the data were collected solely from student teachers' perspectives. This risk of over-identification was mitigated through the support of my supervisors, who offered alternative analytical perspectives during the review of my writing. Therefore, in the findings chapter, I emphasised that these reported accounts reflected only the

perspectives of Chinese student teachers and may not represent the full context, as data were not collected from other stakeholders for cross-checking. This reflection is not intended to deny or dismiss participants' accounts, but rather to acknowledge the limitation inherent in relying on a single perspective.

Third, my identity as a Chinese international student and my experiences of living in New Zealand since 2022 also played a role in my analysis of the qualitative data. As explained in the reflexive thematic analysis (Section 3.5.3), the researcher's subjectivity is influential in analysing and interpreting data. What I captured from Chinese student teachers' accounts was closely linked to my personal experiences. For example, my personal experiences of being treated with bias in New Zealand (e.g., being verbally attacked at a bus stop, being ignored by café staff) made me more sensitive to participants' accounts relating to stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. Subsequently, these experiences of bias became an important theme in illustrating Chinese student teachers' challenges. Braun et al. (2019) noted that "many reflexive TA researchers do indeed have some kind of social justice motivation" (p. 48). Similarly, although not initially foreseen or intended, my data analysis process became increasingly informed by a social justice motivation, aiming to give a voice to a group of marginalised student teachers whose perspectives and experiences may not have been sufficiently heard in public discourse.

Further, I acknowledge the existence of multiple realities and that there could be alternative interpretations had the data been analysed by another researcher. My thesis is not intended to present the only correct story, but rather the one that I can tell from my perspective, based on my cultural membership and social positioning, as well as my ideology and knowledge. Through engaging reflexively with my positionality, assumptions, and analytic decisions, I aimed to ensure methodological rigour, transparency, and coherence within the reflexive thematic analysis adopted in this study.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology and methods employed in this study. First, it presented an articulation of a pragmatist worldview adopted to guide this study, followed by an explanation of the rationale for using a mixed methods approach. It then provided an overview of the two-phase mixed methods research approach with an explanatory sequential design, which started with a quantitative phase and was followed by a qualitative phase. Phase 1 involved a bilingual (English and Mandarin Chinese) online survey distributed across New Zealand through both ITE providers and social media platforms. Phase 2 consisted of two rounds of one-on-one semi-structured interviews with seven participants purposefully selected from a pool of 17 self-nominees from Phase 1. Data analysis methods in both phases were explained in the respective sections. Ethical considerations, including autonomy, special relationship, cultural responsiveness, privacy and confidentiality, and knowledge generation and sharing, were discussed to ensure the ethical conduct of this research. This chapter concluded with a reflexive account of how my identity influenced my relationship with participants, the data that I was able to collect, and my interpretation of participants' narratives.

Chapter 4 Findings from Phase 1

This study aimed to explore Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy, with a focus on intentional teaching, in New Zealand early childhood education (ECE). Central to this investigation was exploring the factors that influence Chinese student teachers' perspectives of teaching and learning, as well as the supports and challenges related to their broader learning experiences within ITE programmes as they navigate a cross-cultural context. A two-phase mixed methods explanatory sequential design was employed, with the first phase focusing on a broad quantitative exploration of the research topic, followed by a qualitative phase that examined it in greater depth.

To collect data in Phase 1, a bilingual online survey was distributed across New Zealand in March 2024, yielding a total of 53 responses: 10 in English and 43 in Mandarin Chinese. While the survey was predominantly quantitative, with most questions being closed-ended, open-ended questions were also included for narrative responses and to provide greater meaning to the quantitative data. The quantitative data from closed-ended questions were exported to SPSS for descriptive analysis to summarise key characteristics and trends (Johnson & Christensen, 2019, pp. 471–503), while the qualitative data from open-ended questions were manually analysed using the thematic analysis method for patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This chapter presents participants' demographic information in Phase 1 and the survey results, which are structured according to the five research questions outlined in Chapter 3. These results explore: (1) Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy; (2) Chinese student teachers' perspectives of intentional teaching; (3) perceived factors influencing Chinese student teachers' perspectives; (4) perceived influences of initial teacher education (ITE) programmes on Chinese student teachers' engagement with intentional teaching; and (5) described supports and challenges within ITE. The survey results are presented with an initial level of interpretation and will be discussed fully in combination with interview data in Chapter 8.

4.1 Participants' Demographic Information in Phase 1

Table 4-1 shows that of the 53 participants in Phase 1, seven participants (13%) identified as male, 44 (83%) as female, one (2%) as gender diverse, and one (2%) preferred not to disclose their gender. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 54 years (*M* = 33.66, *SD* = 7.76), with the majority (80%) falling between 25 and 44 years. Regarding identity, 45 participants (85%) were Chinese international students, six (11%) were Chinese immigrants, and two (4%) were New Zealand-born Chinese.

Of the 53 participants, 47 (88%) had completed more than 10 years of education (including schooling and tertiary education) in China, while three (6%) had 5 to 9 years, and three (6%) had none. In addition, 26 participants (49%) had completed less than 1 year of education in New Zealand, followed by 17 (32%) with 1 to 4 years, seven (13%) with 5 to 9 years, and two (4%) with more than 15 years. One participant reported no educational experience in New Zealand, which may reflect a mistaken selection, considering their current enrolment in an ITE programme in New Zealand, or it could suggest that the participant had only just commenced the programme.

At the time of the survey, participants were enrolled in four types of ECE ITE programmes, including 10 (19%) in bachelor's degree programmes, 27 (51%) in graduate certificates/graduate diploma programmes, two (4%) in postgraduate certificates/postgraduate diploma programmes, and 13 (25%) in master's degree programmes. The four types of ITE programmes correspond to Levels 7, 8, and 9, respectively, in the New Zealand Qualifications and Credentials Framework (NZQCF) (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2024). One participant (2%) did not specify the type of ITE programme they were attending.

When participants were asked whether they had completed any other ECE ITE programmes, either in New Zealand or internationally, before enrolling in their current programme, 44 participants (83%) reported having no prior ECE ITE experience, while nine (17%) indicated that they had. Nearly two-fifths of the participants (*n* = 22, 42%) reported having parenting experience, whereas the rest (*n* = 31, 58%) did not. In terms of ECE-related work experience, 28 participants

(53%) had no prior experience, while 21 (40%) had less than four years. In addition, two participants (4%) had between 5 and 9 years of experience, and two (4%) had 10 to 14 years. No participant reported having more than 15 years of ECE-related work experience.

Table 4-1

Demographic Information of the Participants in Phase 1

Demographic variable	Number	Percentage
	n	(%)
Gender		
Male	7	(13)
Female	44	(83)
Gender diverse	1	(2)
Prefer not to say	1	(2)
Age		
18–24	7	(13)
25–34	22	(42)
35–44	20	(38)
45–54	4	(8)
Identity		
Chinese international student	45	(85)
Chinese immigrant	6	(11)
New Zealand-born Chinese	2	(4)
Years of education completed in China		
None	3	(6)
Less than 1 year	0	(0)
Between 1 to 4 years	0	(0)
Between 5 to 9 years	3	(6)
Between 10 to 14 years	14	(26)

Demographic variable	Number	Percentage
	n	(%)
More than 15 years	33	(62)
Years of education completed in New Zealand		
None	1	(2)
Less than 1 year	26	(49)
Between 1 to 4 years	17	(32)
Between 5 to 9 years	7	(13)
Between 10 to 14 years	0	(0)
More than 15 years	2	(4)
Enrolled ECE ITE programme		
Bachelor's degree (level 7)	10	(19)
Graduate certificate/Graduate diploma (level 7)	27	(51)
Postgraduate certificate/Postgraduate diploma (level 8)	2	(4)
Master's degree (level 9)	13	(25)
Non-response[a]	1	(2)
Completed any other ECE ITE programme before current enrolment		
Yes	9	(17)
No	44	(83)
Parenting experience		
Yes	22	(42)
No	31	(58)
Length of working experience related to ECE		
No prior experience	28	(53)
Less than 1 year	11	(21)
Between 1 to 4 years	10	(19)
Between 5 to 9 years	2	(4)

Demographic variable	Number	Percentage
	n	(%)
Between 10 to 14 years	2	(4)
More than 15 years	0	(0)

Note. N = 53. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

[a] Missing responses were classified as "Non-response."

These data indicated that the 53 participants in Phase 1 were a heterogeneous group. They came from a range of ITE programmes and had diverse educational and life experiences in China and/or New Zealand. Nevertheless, the cohort was predominantly female, consistent with trends in the early childhood teaching profession, and largely comprised young adults identifying as Chinese international students.

4.2 Chinese Student Teachers' Perspectives of Curriculum and Pedagogy

Findings related to Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy specifically focus on their understanding of teaching and learning in ECE. This involved examining how they perceive the teacher's role in children's learning, preferences for different beliefs about teaching and learning in ECE, and the learning domains they consider important for children. The first two aspects relate to "how to teach," while the third concerns "what to teach (for teachers)" or "what to learn (for children)."

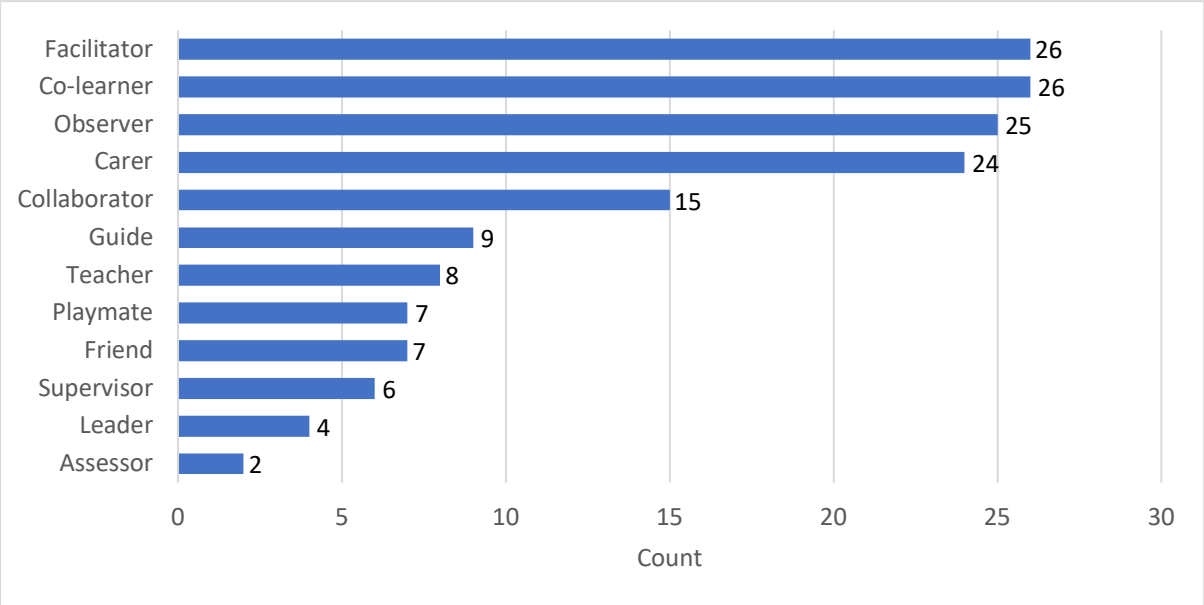
4.2.1 Beliefs About the Role of the Teacher in Children's Learning

Informed by theory and research (Ashiabi, 2007; McArdle & McWilliam, 2005; Rose & Rogers, 2012) and drawing on the research team's professional knowledge, a list of 12 roles that teachers commonly adopt in children's learning was developed. Participants were asked to select the three roles they considered most important, with the option to suggest additional roles if needed. The results illustrated in Figure 4-1 indicated that *facilitator*, *co-learner*, and *observer* were the three most frequently selected roles perceived as important, with *carer* closely following. Each of these roles was selected by more than 20 participants. The other roles were selected less

frequently in comparison, and the role of *teacher* was chosen only eight times. *Assessor*, *leader*, and *supervisor* were the three roles least frequently selected by the participants. Notably, each role was chosen at least twice, reflecting participants' diverse perspectives regarding teachers' roles in children's learning. No new roles were added to the existing list.

Figure 4-1

Important Roles Teachers Should Play in Children's Learning



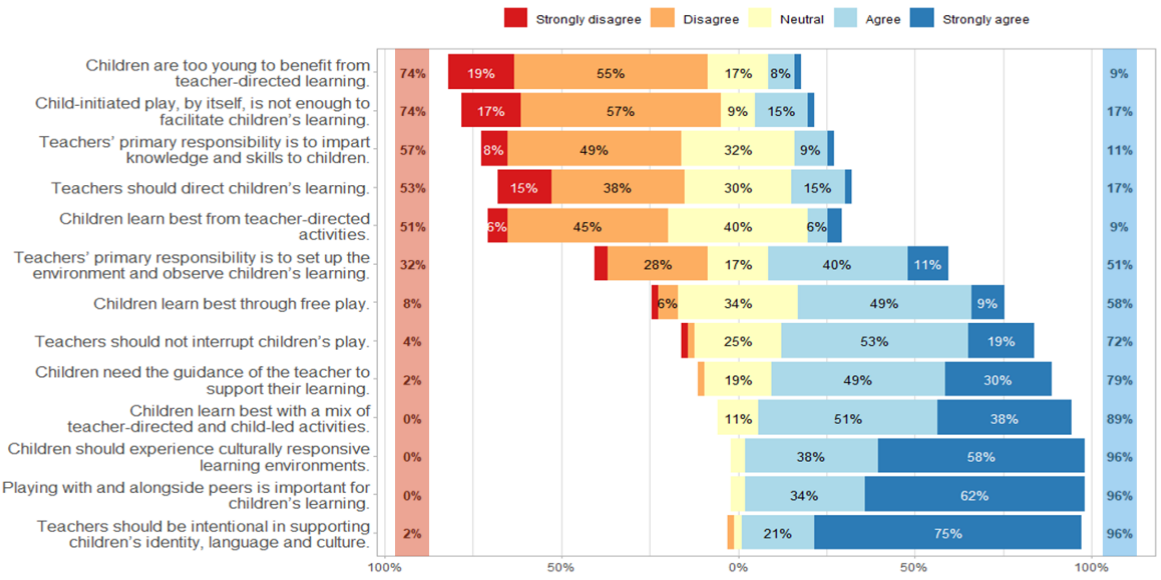
Note. Each participant was asked to select three options.

4.2.2 Preferences for Different Beliefs About Teaching and Learning in ECE

Participants were also asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with 13 statements reflecting beliefs about teaching and learning in ECE, each of which may be associated with different viewpoints along a continuum from child-led to teacher-directed. The statements were collectively developed with my supervisors and informed by relevant literature (Hamre et al., 2012; Hu et al., 2018). Participants responded to this question using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Their responses are presented in Figure 4-2.

Figure 4-2

Agreement Distribution Across 13 Belief Statements



Note. The percentages shown on the left represent the combined values of *disagree* and *strongly disagree*; those on the right represent the combined values of *agree* and *strongly agree*.

It is evident from Figure 4-2 that some statements predominantly elicited disagreement from participants. Specifically, 74% of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "Children are too young to benefit from teacher-directed learning," indicating that they believed children could benefit from teacher-directed experiences. However, more than half of participants also expressed disagreement with the following statements: "Teachers' primary responsibility is to impart knowledge and skills to children" (57%), "Teachers should direct children's learning" (53%), and "Children learn best from teacher-directed activities" (51%). In addition, fewer than 20% supported these three statements, while 30% to 40% held a neutral stance. These results suggested that while participants acknowledged the potential benefits of teacher-directed learning, they remained cautious about its use to avoid an entirely teacher-directed approach.

Another notable disagreement (74%) was directed at the statement "Child-initiated play, by itself, is not enough to facilitate children's learning," suggesting that a high percentage of participants held a positive view of child-initiated play and recognised its value in supporting

children's learning. Here, child-initiated play refers to play initiated by children, in which teachers may still get involved at certain stages.

The statement "Teachers' primary responsibility is to set up the environment and observe children's learning" generated the most divergent responses. Slightly over half of the participants (51%) expressed agreement with this statement, while 17% remained neutral and 32% disagreed or strongly disagreed. These varied responses reflected the complexity and difficulty of defining teachers' primary responsibilities.

Regarding free play, 58% of participants agreed with the statement "Children learn best through free play," and 72% agreed that "Teachers should not interrupt children's play." Fewer than 10% of participants disagreed with either of these two statements. This suggested that many participants held the belief that teachers should step back and allow children to play independently without any interruption.

Moreover, although participants generally disfavoured a teacher-directed approach, they were aware of the importance of teachers in guiding children's learning. Specifically, 79% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "Children need the guidance of the teacher to support their learning," and 89% expressed agreement with "Children learn best with a mix of teacher-directed and child-led activities," indicating a preference towards a mixed approach. This was further supported by the participants' comments, such as the following in the survey:

> *I believe children are competent learners, and their curiosities are the best motivation to keep them exploring and learning. But the teacher also plays a critical role in children's early development journey, as they are developing their cognition and social-emotional skills along with other [areas of] holistic development.*

Another participant further elaborated that there is no need to adhere to a particular approach, whether child-directed or teacher-directed, as both can contribute to the overarching goal of supporting children's learning.

I have to admit that when Chinese student teachers face such questions, there are often two or even more perspectives involved in our analysis and thinking, as we have absorbed different educational philosophies from both China and the West. When teachers' dynamic roles are broken down, especially when teachers have gained the experience to decide when to join children's learning and play, and when to withdraw, the distinction between child-directed and teacher-directed approaches becomes blurred and less important, because what the teacher aims to do is to maximise the positive learning outcomes.

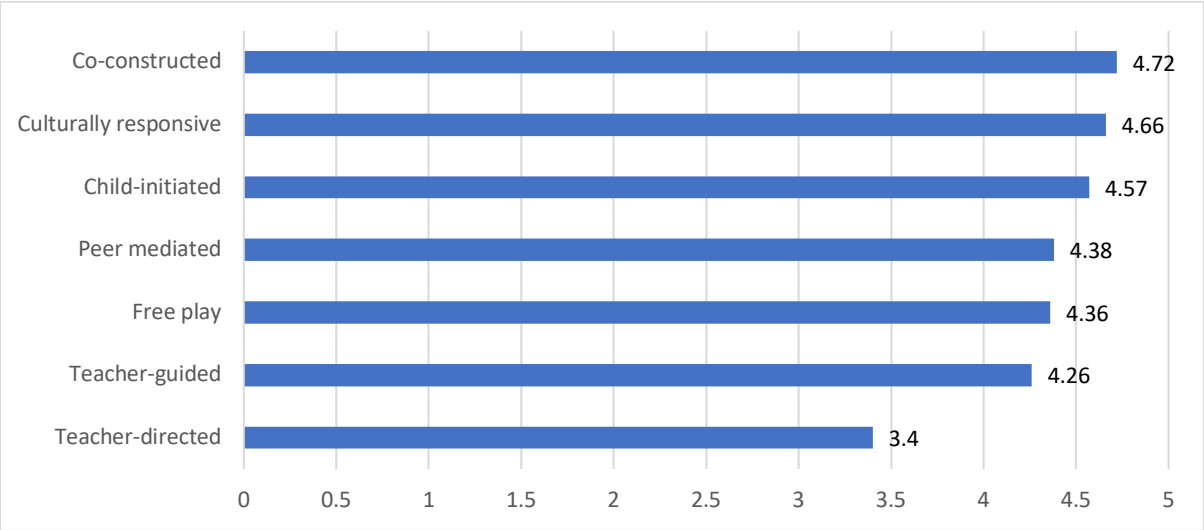
Notably, this participant also pointed out the connection between educational philosophies and culture, and articulated the complexity of navigating these differing views while constructing their own beliefs about teaching and learning in ECE as a Chinese student teacher.

Finally, three statements received near-unanimous endorsement, each supported by 96% of the participants. These three statements are "Children should experience culturally responsive learning environments," "Playing with and alongside peers is important for children's learning," and "Teachers should be intentional in supporting children's identity, language and culture." These high levels of agreement indicated a professional consensus around fundamental principles (i.e., relationships, family and community) that are explicitly articulated in New Zealand's bicultural early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*.

Furthermore, participants were asked to rate the importance of seven specific approaches to teaching and learning, which were collectively developed in discussion with my supervision team, drawing on insights from the ECE theory and literature. The seven approaches reflected the idea that play-based learning in ECE can be understood as a continuum, with free play and teacher-directed practice representing two ends, as introduced in the literature review chapter (see Section 2.1.5). Participants responded using a five-point scale in which 1 represented "not at all important" and 5 represented "extremely important." The mean response for each category was calculated to illustrate the overall trends.

Figure 4-3

Perceived Importance of Seven Different Approaches to Teaching and Learning



Note. One missing response in the teacher-directed category.

As shown in Figure 4-3, the ratings of the seven approaches to teaching and learning generally aligned with participants' responses to the previous survey question concerning agreement or disagreement with the 13 belief statements. Specifically, the co-constructed approach was rated as the most important by Chinese student teachers, reflecting their recognition of the equally important roles of teachers and children in the learning process. The second most important approach was the culturally responsive approach, which emphasises the significance of respecting children's language, culture, and identity. Child-initiated, peer-mediated, and free-play approaches were closely followed, indicating an acknowledgement of children's autonomy and peer learning. Compared to the teacher-guided approach, the teacher-directed approach was seen as less important, suggesting that participants valued the teacher's supportive role while remaining wary of overly directive practices.

4.2.3 Importance of Different Learning Domains

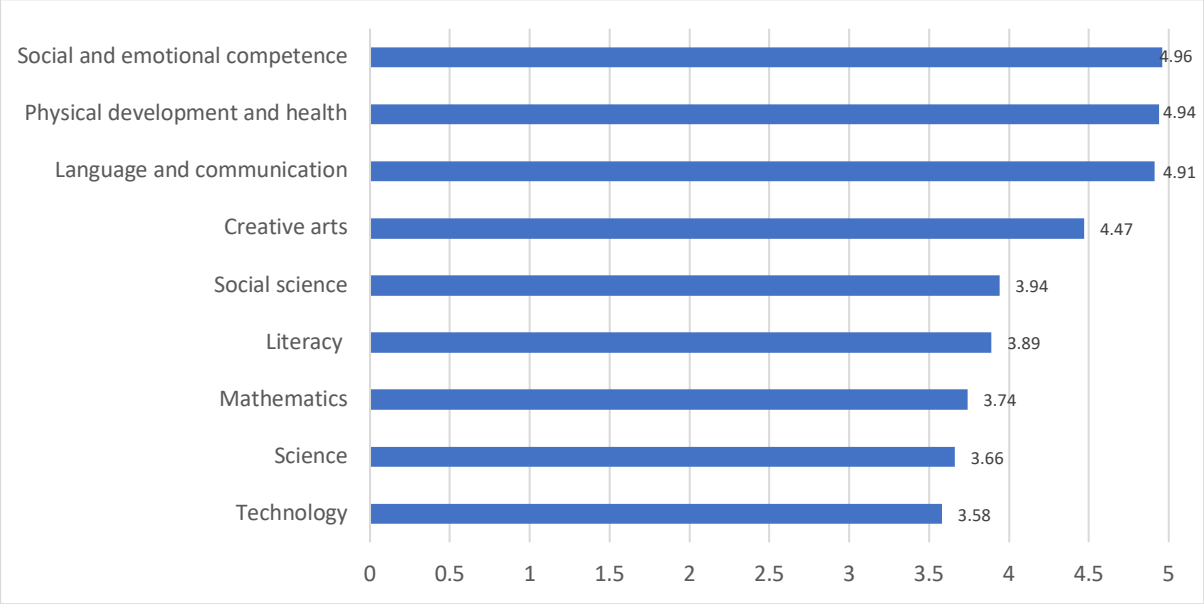
To understand what content participants considered important for children to learn, they were asked to rate nine different learning domains on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 representing *not at all important* and 5 representing *extremely important*. The mean response for each domain was

calculated to illustrate overall trends. The nine learning domains were primarily based on the classification proposed by Epstein (2014) and were adapted to align with New Zealand's ECE context and feedback from the pilot.

As shown in Figure 4-4, *social and emotional competence*, *physical development and health*, and *language and communication* were the three domains most highly prioritised by Chinese student teachers, each receiving near-unanimous support with very little difference among them. *Creative arts* ranked fourth, ahead of *social science* and *literacy*. In contrast, *mathematics*, *science*, and *technology* were rated as relatively less important. These data indicated that participants generally valued developmental domains over subject-related domains.

Figure 4-4

Importance of Different Learning Domains



4.2.4 Summary

Taken together, Chinese student teachers commonly viewed teachers as facilitators, co-learners, and observers, rather than in more authoritative roles such as supervisors, leaders, or assessors. In addition, participants showed the highest level of agreement with a mixed, co-constructed, and culturally responsive approach to teaching and learning in ECE, indicating their embrace of a culturally responsive environment where teachers and children co-construct learning,

and both play important roles. A relatively higher level of endorsement was also found for the child-initiated, peer-mediated, and free play approaches, reflecting their valuing of children's autonomy in initiating and guiding their learning and their appreciation of peer interactions. Among the two approaches that received comparatively lower levels of endorsement, participants expressed more support for the teacher-guided approach than for the teacher-directed approach, suggesting that while they recognised the value of teacher guidance, they tended to be more reserved about more directive practices. Furthermore, participants generally perceived developmental domains to be more important than subject-related learning domains. Collectively, these views reflected that Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy were not strongly aligned with traditional Chinese educational philosophies, which are generally believed to be more teacher-directed and subject-oriented.

4.3 Chinese Student Teachers' Perspectives of Intentional Teaching

Although this study aimed to explore participants' perspectives of intentional teaching, a working definition was necessary to provide a reference point for interpreting their responses. Accordingly, *intentional teaching* in this study was defined as the purposeful and deliberate actions of teachers, drawing on both their knowledge of individual children and professional knowledge and skills to provide meaningful, appropriate and culturally responsive curricular experiences for all children in ECE (adapted from McLaughlin et al., 2016).

Findings related to Chinese student teachers' understanding and implementation of intentional teaching are reported below. The understanding aspect was examined by exploring participants' familiarity with the concept of intentional teaching, the definitions they offered, and their attitudes. The implementation aspect was explored by asking participants to evaluate both their own and other teachers' intentionality in supporting children's learning, as well as the intentional teaching strategies they frequently used during practicum.

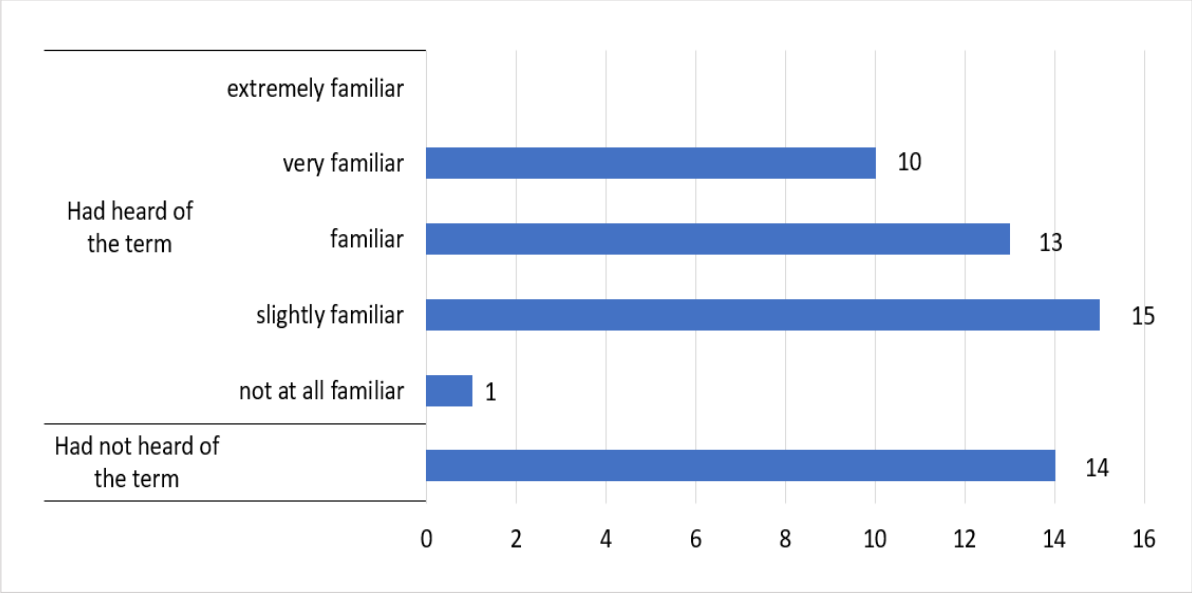
4.3.1 Understanding of Intentional Teaching

4.3.1.1 Familiarity with Intentional Teaching

Participants were asked whether they had heard the term "intentional teaching" before the survey. Those who responded "yes" were then asked how familiar they were with the concept. The results are presented in Figure 4-5, which shows that, of the 53 participants, 39 had heard of the term while 14 had not. Most participants reported having some degree of familiarity, ranging from slightly familiar to very familiar, while one stated that they were not familiar with the term at all. None of the participants indicated that they were extremely familiar with the concept.

Figure 4-5

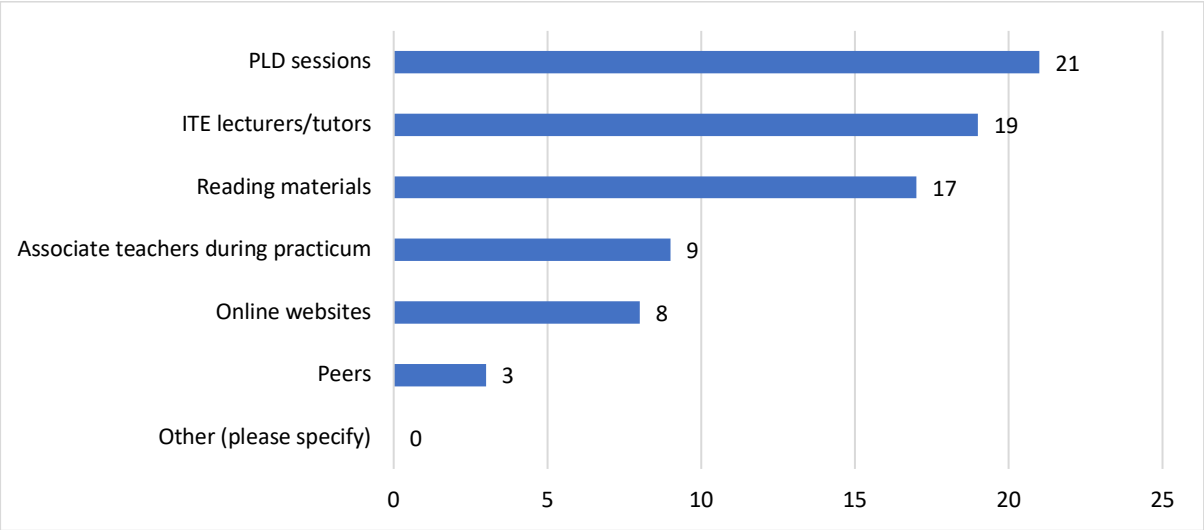
The Extent of Familiarity with Intentional Teaching



For those participants who had heard of intentional teaching, a follow-up question was offered, asking them to indicate where they had heard or learned about this concept. As shown in Figure 4-6, *professional learning and development (PLD) sessions* were identified as the main source, followed by their *ITE lectures or tutors*, and *reading materials* provided to them. Some participants also reported that their knowledge of intentional teaching came from *associate teachers during practicum*, *online websites*, and *peers*. No sources other than those listed were reported by participants.

Figure 4-6

Sources of Knowledge of Intentional Teaching



Note. Participants were asked to select all options that apply.

4.3.1.2 Definitions of Intentional Teaching

Chinese student teachers who had heard of the term "intentional teaching" were asked to write their understanding of it in their own words. Those who had not encountered the term were invited to describe what they thought it might mean. A total of 35 responses were collected, and the answers were then analysed and clustered to identify prominent patterns (themes) regarding the definition (See Table 4-2). Overall, participants offered varied definitions of intentional teaching, which fell along a continuum ranging from alignment to misalignment with the study's adopted definition (introduced at the beginning of Section 4.3). The differing understandings appeared to relate to participants' familiarity with the term.

Table 4-2

Definitions of Intentional Teaching: Themes and Exemplar Extracts

Themes	Exemplar extracts
Teachers interact with children with specific purposes and/or learning outcomes	"*Teach with a specific purpose and learning outcomes.*" "*Interact with children with teaching purposes and plans.*" "*Teachers need to have a clear understanding of the skills children should develop before starting school, and apply intentional teaching in a planned way based on each child's situation.*" "*Teaching with clear goals and specific tasks, adapting different teaching methods based on the differences in learning domains and goals*."
Teachers consistently being mindful of their behaviours and practices	"*Continuously being mindful of what you are teaching, ensuring it meets the child's interests, development stage and learning needs within the educational environment they attend.*" "*You know what you are doing as a kaiako, observe children and intentionally plan activities according to tamariki's interests*." "*An intentional teacher is … someone who can intentionally consider what, how, and when to engage with children's play and learning. An intentional teacher is someone who can notice, recognise, respect, and intentionally respond to every child's culture, and who can help children build their sense of belonging and cultural competence.*"
Teachers identify and make use of teachable moments	"*I think intentional teaching starts with the recognition of a teaching moment and teachers' approach to the learning.*" "*The concept of intentional teaching holds that every activity and all moments in an early childhood centre offer educational opportunities. Teachers are expected to be skilled at identifying and making use of these opportunities.*" "*An intentional teacher is a teacher who can seize the teaching moment*."
A balanced approach	"*Intentional teaching balanced the free play and teacher-led curriculum. It's like the braided river, children have the initiative to choose directions of learning, but it's up to teachers to ensure groups don't go off the 'riverbanks'.*" "*Teacher involved play-based learning*."

The most prominent theme was that Chinese student teachers defined intentional teaching as interacting with children with specific purposes and/or learning outcomes in mind. They perceived intentional teaching as a deliberate and purposeful act. In addition, participants regarded intentional teaching as involving teachers being consistently mindful of their behaviours and practices, aware of their role as educators, and clear about what, how, and when to engage with children. Some participants also highlighted the importance of identifying and seizing teachable moments that emerged during children's play. Furthermore, several participants viewed intentional teaching as a balanced approach, using the metaphor of a "braided river" to illustrate the dynamic interplay between children's autonomy and teachers' involvement and guidance. These understandings were, to some extent, aligned with the working definition adopted for the study.

However, it was worth noting that some participants' responses reflected potential misunderstandings or misconceptions of the term. For example, one participant questioned why New Zealand's ITE programmes placed such strong emphasis on intentional teaching, arguing that teaching, as a human behaviour, was inherently intentional. As the participant wrote: "*I don't understand why we are being taught about intentional teaching. I used to be a language teacher for adults, and from my perspective, how can teaching be unintentional?*" This participant's response reflects a reasonable difference in how the concept is interpreted, especially given their language teaching background. There is a difference in teaching as an inherently goal-directed and intentional human activity and intentional teaching as it is theorised in ECE, where the term carries a specialised pedagogical meaning. In addition, another participant equated intentional teaching with knowledge transmission. A third participant associated intentional teaching with predetermined learning results, which was in conflict with the flexible and child-centred nature of intentional teaching.

Generally, participants who had encountered the term previously were more likely to demonstrate greater alignment with the study's adopted definition than those who had not.

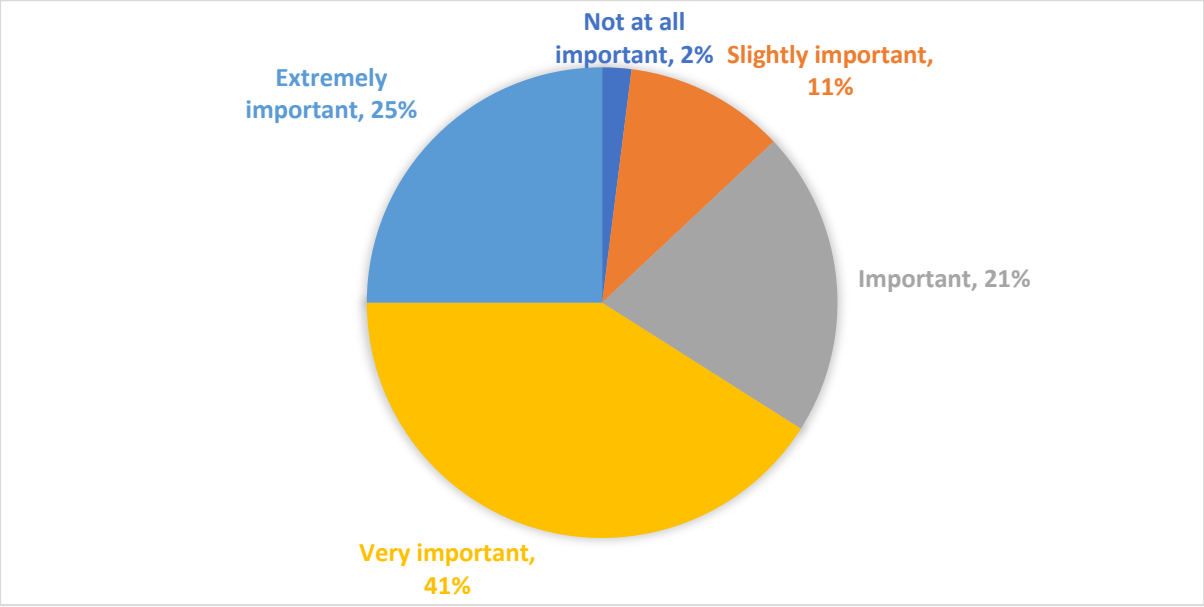
4.3.1.3 Attitudes Towards Intentional Teaching

Given Chinese student teachers' differing levels of familiarity with and understanding of the term "intentional teaching," the working definition adopted in this study was provided following the preceding questions to establish a shared understanding from which participants could respond to the latter questions. The working definition of intentional teaching was the purposeful and deliberate actions of teachers, drawing on both their knowledge of individual children and professional knowledge and skills to provide meaningful, appropriate and culturally responsive curricular experiences for all children in ECE. This definition highlights the intentionality required in teachers' pedagogical decision-making, the knowledge and expertise needed to support such decisions, and the characteristics of the curricular experiences provided.

After being introduced to the working definition of intentional teaching, participants were asked how important they believed intentional teaching was for children. As shown in Figure 4-7, nearly 90% of the participants considered intentional teaching to be important, very important, or extremely important, while 11% believed it to be slightly important, and 2% thought it was not at all important.

Figure 4-7

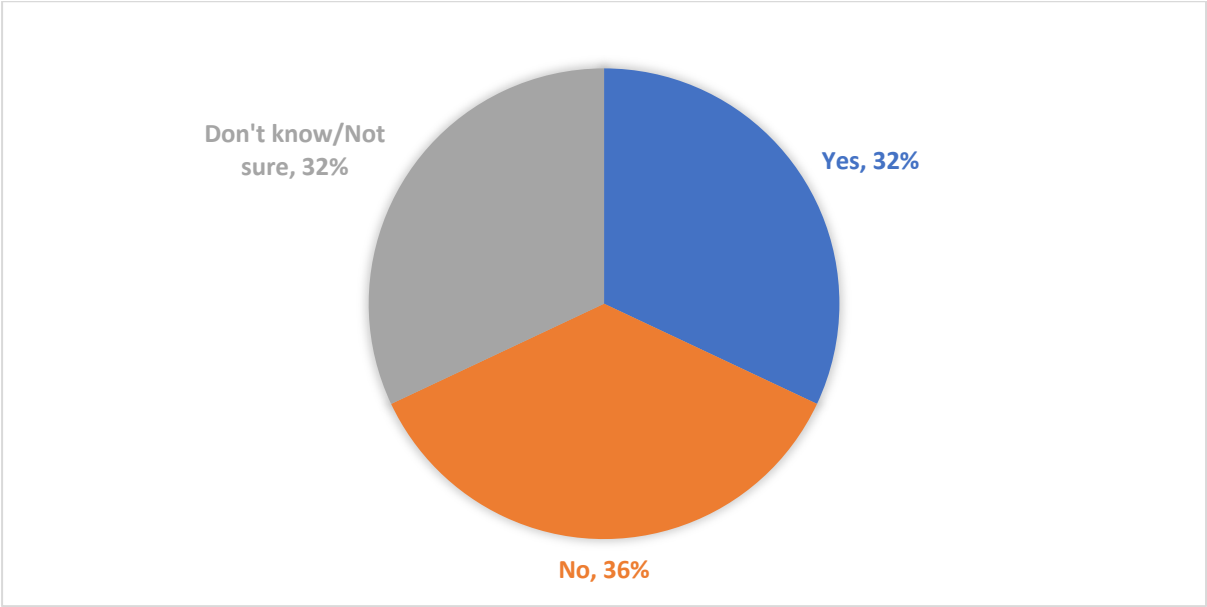
Perceived Importance of Intentional Teaching in General



When asked whether the importance of intentional teaching would vary when applied to children of different age groups, such as infants, toddlers, or young children, Chinese student teachers expressed diverse opinions, with 'yes', 'no', and 'don't know/not sure' each accounting for approximately one-third of the responses (see Figure 4-8). Those who believed its importance would change were further asked to explain their reasoning. The reasons they provided reflected an awareness of children's differences across age groups and the potential need for specialised pedagogical practices. Many held the belief that children at different developmental stages have varying needs and levels of cognitive ability. As a result, teachers need to adjust their teaching goals, methods, or strategies to accommodate children's developmental stages. For example, one participant stated, "Different stages of child development determine teachers' pedagogy in the classroom." Similarly, another participant wrote, "[You need to] adjust your teaching goals and learning outcomes to suit the age and stage of the child."

Figure 4-8

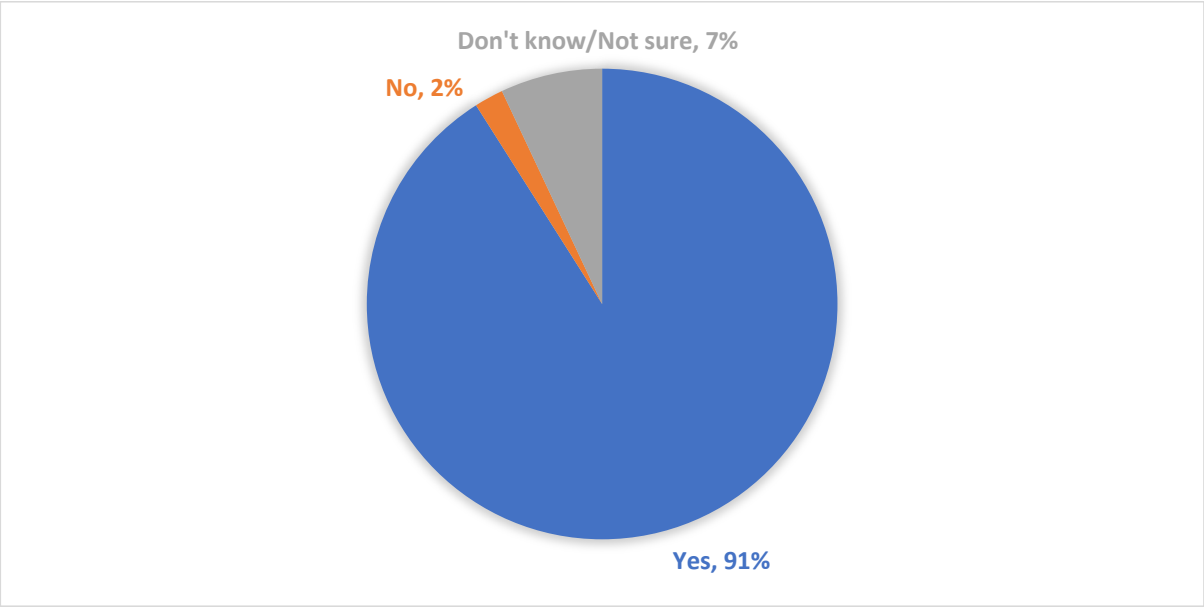
Views on Whether the Importance of Intentional Teaching Varies by Age Group



When asked whether they would use intentional teaching as part of their future teaching practice, 91% of the participants expressed a positive attitude towards it, 2% expressed a negative attitude, and 7 % were uncertain (see Figure 4-9).

Figure 4-9

Willingness to Use Intentional Teaching in Future Practice



One participant wrote:

After reading the provided definition of intentional teaching, I think it would be great if it could be fully implemented … It is not just about achieving certain teaching goals, but also involving individualised elements based on teachers' knowledge and understanding of different children.

This statement suggests that the provided definition of intentional teaching helped clarify the concept and evoked participants' interest in exploring and implementing intentional teaching in the future. Meanwhile, although a high level of willingness to implement intentional teaching in future teaching was reported, participants also acknowledged that it could be demanding in terms of teachers' capabilities and would require accumulated experience and ongoing practice. As one participant put it:

The more intentional a teaching approach is, the more it seems to demand from teachers, both in terms of their capabilities and the time they can allocate to their work. In an educational environment with such open-minded philosophies, I hope teachers can receive more support to better implement intentional teaching and ultimately benefit children.

This narrative indicates that, for some participants, there were concerns that intentional teaching may place increasing demands on teachers. Therefore, they expected to have more support for teachers in this regard to facilitate effective implementation.

Overall, the majority of Chinese student teachers (around 90%) demonstrated a positive attitude towards intentional teaching, regarded it as important for children across different age groups, and expressed a willingness to implement it in their future teaching.

4.3.2 Implementation of Intentional Teaching

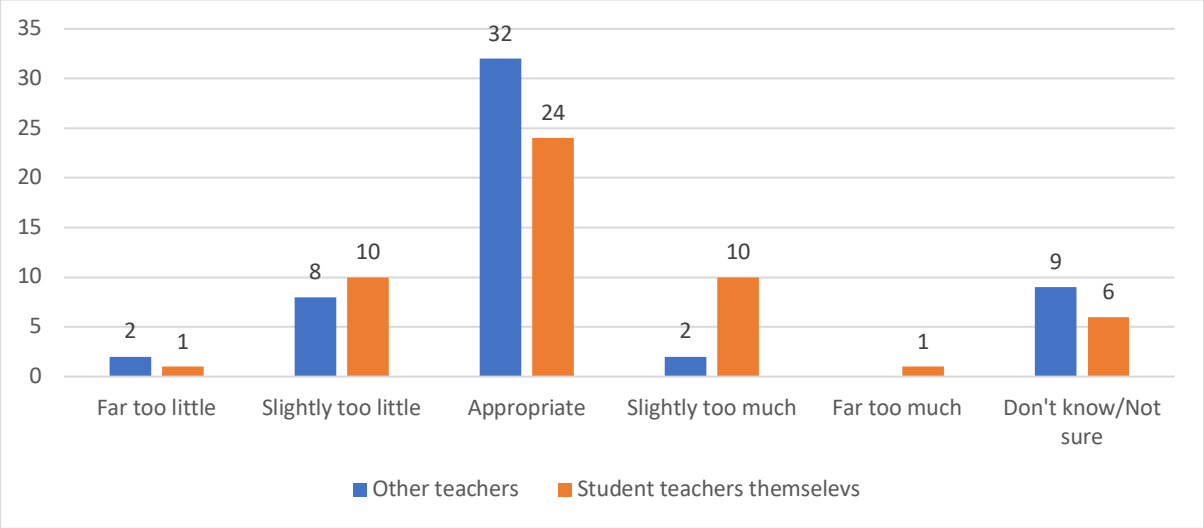
4.3.2.1 Evaluation of Their Own and Other Teachers' Intentionality in Children's Learning

Participants were asked to evaluate both their own and other teachers' levels of engagement in children's learning, in terms of whether they were not engaged enough, at an appropriate level of engagement, or too engaged. Participants were also asked to rate how intentional they and other teachers were in supporting children's learning.

Data in Figure 4-10 suggested a trend in which Chinese student teachers tended to perceive other teachers' engagement in children's learning as more appropriate than their own. In contrast, more student teachers rated their own engagement as either *slightly too little* or *slightly too much* compared to their evaluation of other teachers. Very few participants indicated either their own or other teachers' engagement was far too little or far too much.

Figure 4-10

Evaluation of Their Own and Other Teachers' Engagement in Children's Learning

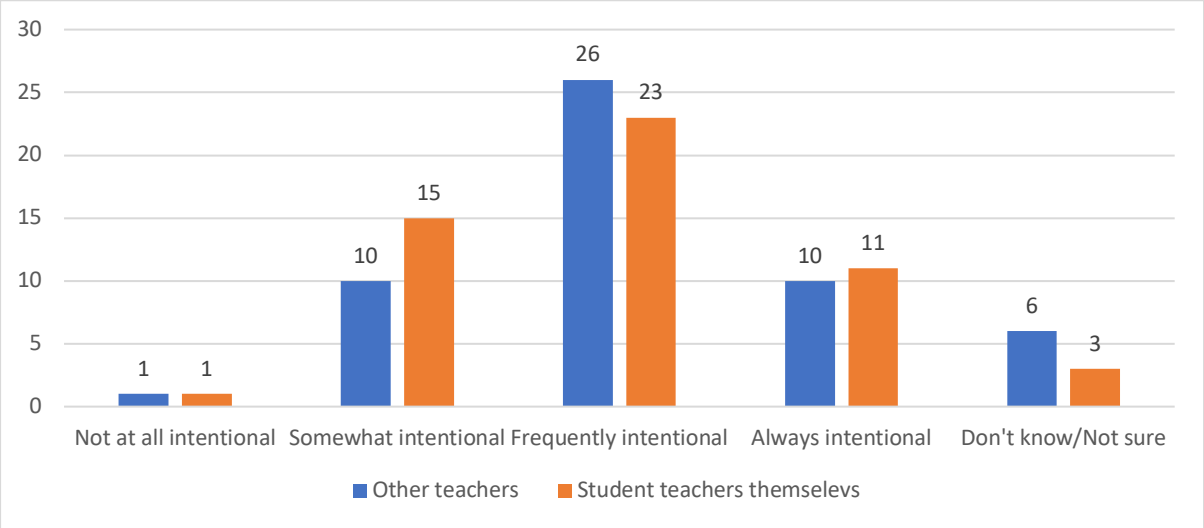


Note. One missing response in the participants' self-evaluation.

Data in Figure 4-11 revealed that Chinese student teachers perceived both themselves and other teachers as generally intentional in supporting children's learning. Most of their responses fell under *frequently intentional*, *somewhat intentional,* or *always intentional* categories, with slight differences between the two groups.

Figure 4-11

Evaluation of How Intentional They and Other Teachers Were in Supporting Children's Learning

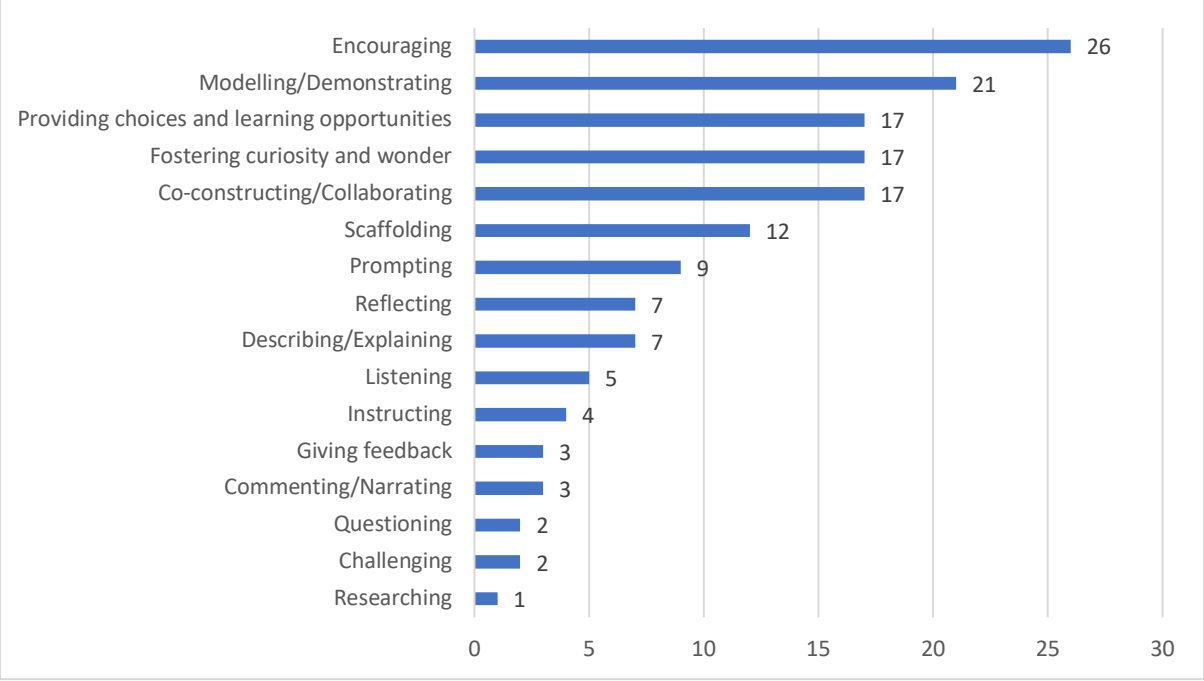


4.3.2.2 Frequently Used Intentional Teaching Strategies

Drawing from various sources (Hood, 2019; McLaughlin, Aspden, & McLachlan, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2019a; Queensland Curriculum & Assessment Authority, 2018), a list of commonly accepted intentional teaching strategies was identified. Chinese student teachers were asked to select the three intentional teaching strategies they had used most frequently during practicum. Results in Figure 4-12 showed that *encouraging* was the most frequently used strategy, having been selected by 26 participants, followed by *modelling/demonstrating*, which received 21 selections. *Providing choices and learning opportunities*, *fostering curiosity and wonder*, and *co-constructing/collaborating* ranked third, with each selected by 17 participants. The least frequently used strategies were *questioning*, *challenging*, and *researching*, each being selected by two or fewer participants. No additional strategies were added beyond those listed.

Figure 4-12

Rank of Frequently Used Intentional Teaching Strategies



Note. Two missing responses to this question.

When asked to share an example of their use of the listed intentional teaching strategies, participants generally reported using multiple strategies in combination rather than applying them in

isolation. Some examples they provided are presented below. It should be noted that these examples reflect participants' own understandings of intentional teaching and intentional teaching strategies and may not fully align with the intended meaning of this approach.

> *Example 1: I was playing with the children in the sandpit. At first, I joined in just by being present and observing. Later, I suggested, "Shall we try using this container to play with the sand?" Then we played together, each in our own way, watching and learning from one another. Some children copied how I played, while others didn't. They continued playing in their own way. I didn't interfere or expect them to follow what I was doing. I respected each child's individual way of play.*
>
> *Example 2: At a centre, I saw some children playing with sticks, building different shapes freely without any clear intention. I walked over and made a triangle with the sticks, then asked them, "What is this shape? It's got three sides and three corners." One of the children answered, "Triangle." Based on that, we went on to make a square, a pentagon, and a hexagon together.*
>
> *Example 3: There was a girl who loved drawing. She also enjoyed showing her dresses and belongings to the teachers and her friends. Sometimes, she would even draw her own clothes on paper. So, I prepared a dress template for her to colour and decorate. Later on, I also gave her a piece of tablecloth that could be shaped like a dress. She painted on it, coloured it, and used scissors, stickers, and glue to add all kinds of decorations. In the end, I helped her put the finished dress on, and she proudly showed it off to everyone in the classroom. She looked so proud, excited, and full of a sense of achievement.*

In example 1, the participant *provided choices and learning opportunities* by *modelling/demonstrating* while respecting children's freedom to play in their own way. Example 2 illustrated how the participant intentionally expanded children's mathematical knowledge through *questioning*, *modelling/demonstrating*, and *describing/explaining*. In example 3, the participant *provided choices and learning opportunities* for the girl based on observations of her interests and

continued to *encourage* her to complete the dress. However, it should be noted that the teacher's use of a template in this example reflected a degree of teacher-directed practice and may not have supported the child's agency, creativity, and empowerment.

4.3.3 Summary

In this section, Chinese student teachers demonstrated varying levels of familiarity with the term "intentional teaching." After being provided with a formal definition of intentional teaching, participants generally expressed a strong positive attitude towards it, acknowledging its importance and indicating a willingness to implement it in their future practice. Regarding its implementation, they generally believed that both themselves and other teachers were quite intentional in supporting children's learning, although they perceived other teachers as demonstrating greater engagement. Encouraging, modelling/demonstrating, and providing choices and learning opportunities were reported as the three most frequently used intentional teaching strategies, while questioning, challenging, and researching were the least. It appeared that strategies that were more straightforward and easier to implement were used more frequently by participants, compared to those requiring higher cognitive involvement. In addition, narrative responses also revealed that intentional teaching strategies were often applied in combination rather than used individually.

4.4 Perceived Factors Influencing Chinese Student Teachers' Perspectives

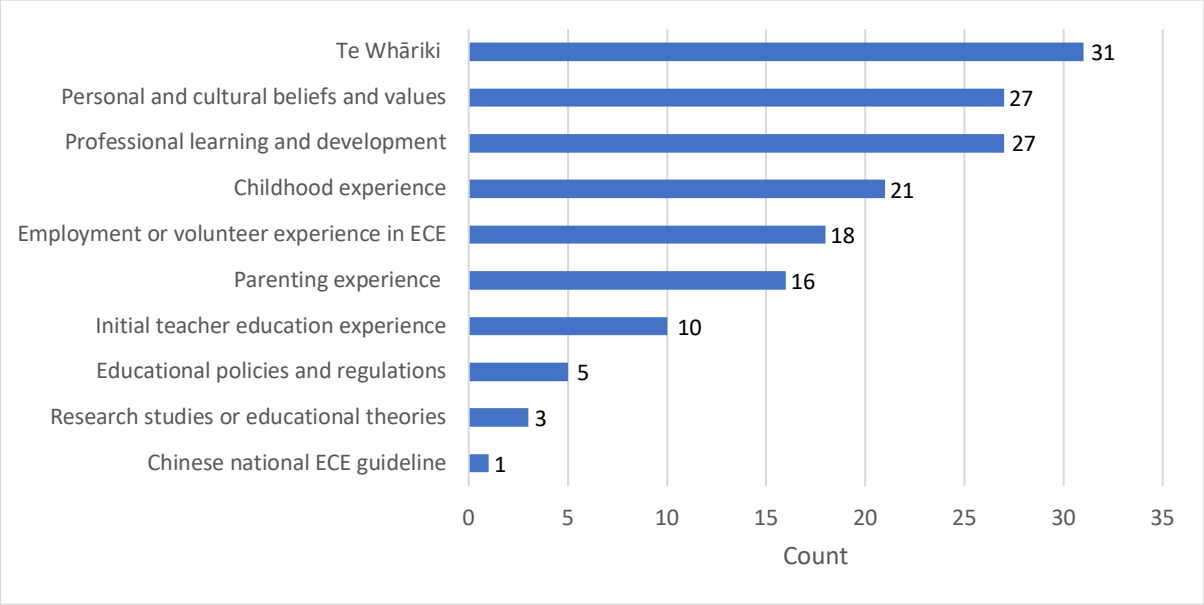
In this section, I present findings concerning factors that Chinese student teachers identified as having influenced their perspectives. They were asked to select the three top factors they believed had significantly influenced their perspectives of teaching and learning in ECE contexts, with the option to indicate additional factors not listed. The results are presented in Figure 4-13.

New Zealand's national early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, was identified as the most influential factor, followed by Chinese student teachers' personal and cultural beliefs and values, and professional learning and development. Childhood experience, working experience in ECE and parenting experience were also recognised as having an impact on their views.

Notably, initial teacher education experience was not widely acknowledged as a significant influential factor. This low level of recognition may be attributed to participants' unfamiliarity with the term, rather than reflecting its actual influence. In fact, participants' understanding of *Te Whāriki* was largely shaped by their initial teacher education experience. Therefore, its influence should not be underestimated. Furthermore, one participant reported that the Chinese national ECE guideline (i.e., *Early Learning and Development Guidelines for Children Aged 3 to 6 Years*) had a significant impact on their perspective. A more in-depth exploration of the influential factors is reported as part of the Phase 2 results (Chapter 6).

Figure 4-13

Perceived Factors That Significantly Influenced Participants' Perspectives



Note. Each participant was asked to select three options.

4.4.1 Summary

These data demonstrated that participants' perspectives were influenced by a range of factors, from broader social and cultural contexts to more specific personal experiences and learning, with some factors exerting a greater impact than others. Further exploration of these factors was conducted during Phase 2 interviews and will be discussed in the following chapters.

4.5 Perceived Influences of ITE Programmes on Chinese Student Teachers' Engagement with Intentional Teaching

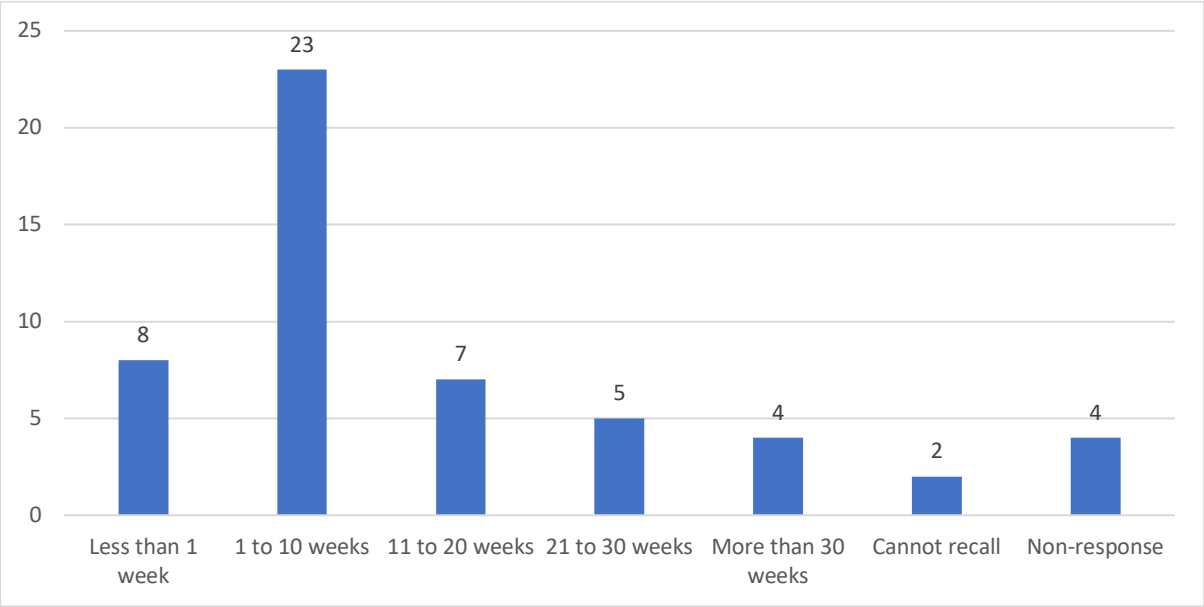
In this section, the influence of ITE programmes on Chinese student teachers' engagement with intentional teaching is reported. Before diving into it directly, a more detailed description of the participating cohort is provided to contextualise the results.

As stated in the demographic section at the beginning of this chapter, the Chinese student teachers who participated in the Phase 1 survey were enrolled in four types of ITE programmes: 10 in bachelor's programmes, 27 in graduate certificate or graduate diploma programmes, two in postgraduate certificate or postgraduate diploma programmes, and 13 in master's programmes. One participant did not specify the type of ITE programme they were enrolled in. The duration of these programmes ranged from one to three years. At the time of the survey, 38 participants were in their first year, seven were in their second year, and four were in their third year. Four participants did not indicate their year of study. In addition, participants reported varying lengths of practicum experience completed within their respective ITE programmes, as illustrated in Figure 4-14. Eight participants had less than 1 week of practicum experience, 23 had between 1 and 10 weeks, and 16 had more than 10 weeks. There were also two participants who could not recall the length and four who did not respond.

These data indicated that participants came from a range of ITE programmes, were at different stages of their studies, and had differing lengths of practicum experiences at the time of the survey. This diversity reinforced that the perspectives gathered were drawn from a heterogeneous group of Chinese student teachers enrolled in a variety of ITE programmes in New Zealand.

Figure 4-14

Weeks of Practicum Completed Within Respective ITE Programmes



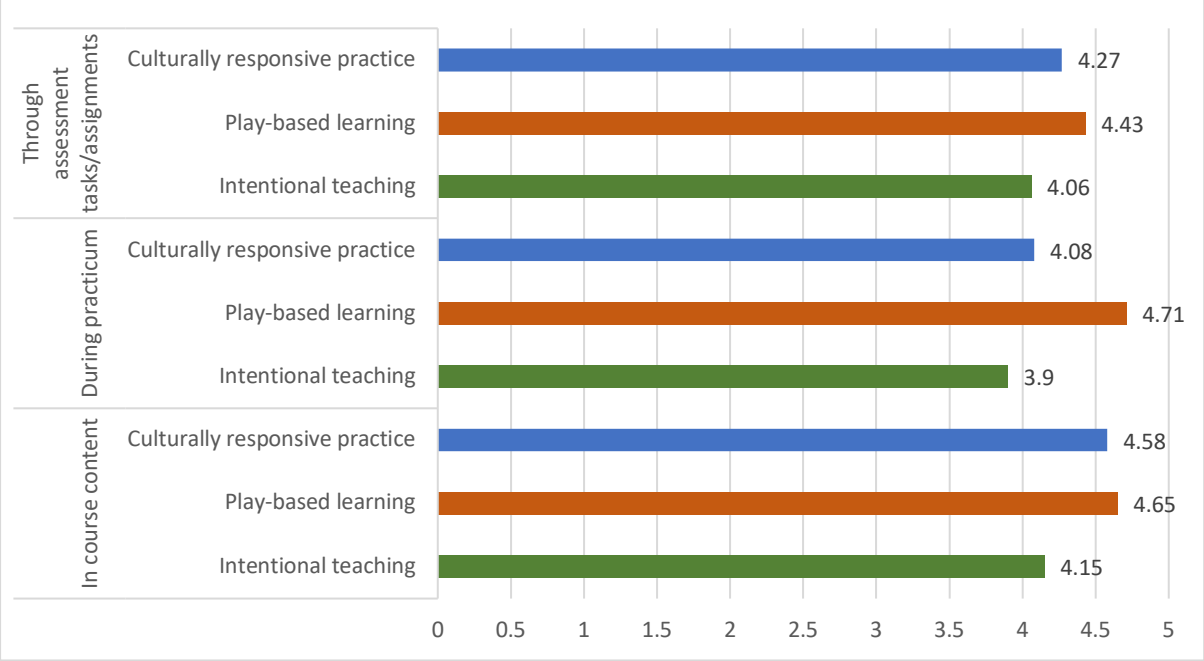
4.5.1 The Priority of Intentional Teaching in ITE Programmes

To explore how ITE programmes facilitated participants' engagement with intentional teaching, the participants were asked to indicate the extent to which intentional teaching was prioritised in their respective ITE programmes, compared to play-based learning and culturally responsive practice.

These priorities were assessed across three ITE components: course content, practicum, and assessment tasks or assignments. Participants responded using a scale, with 1 representing *not a priority* and 5 representing *top priority*. The mean value for each category was calculated to illustrate the general trend. The results are presented in Figure 4-15.

Figure 4-15

Priority of Intentional Teaching, Play-based Learning, and Culturally Responsive Practice Across Three ITE Components



A trend shown in Figure 4-15 was that play-based learning was perceived as the top priority across all three components of their ITE programmes, followed by culturally responsive practice. Intentional teaching was not prioritised to the same extent as the other two pedagogical philosophies. Regarding the three components within an ITE programme, intentional teaching was viewed as relatively more prioritised in course content and least prioritised during practicum. A similar trend was observed for culturally responsive practice, whereas play-based learning was viewed as most prioritised during practicum and least prioritised through assessment tasks or assignments.

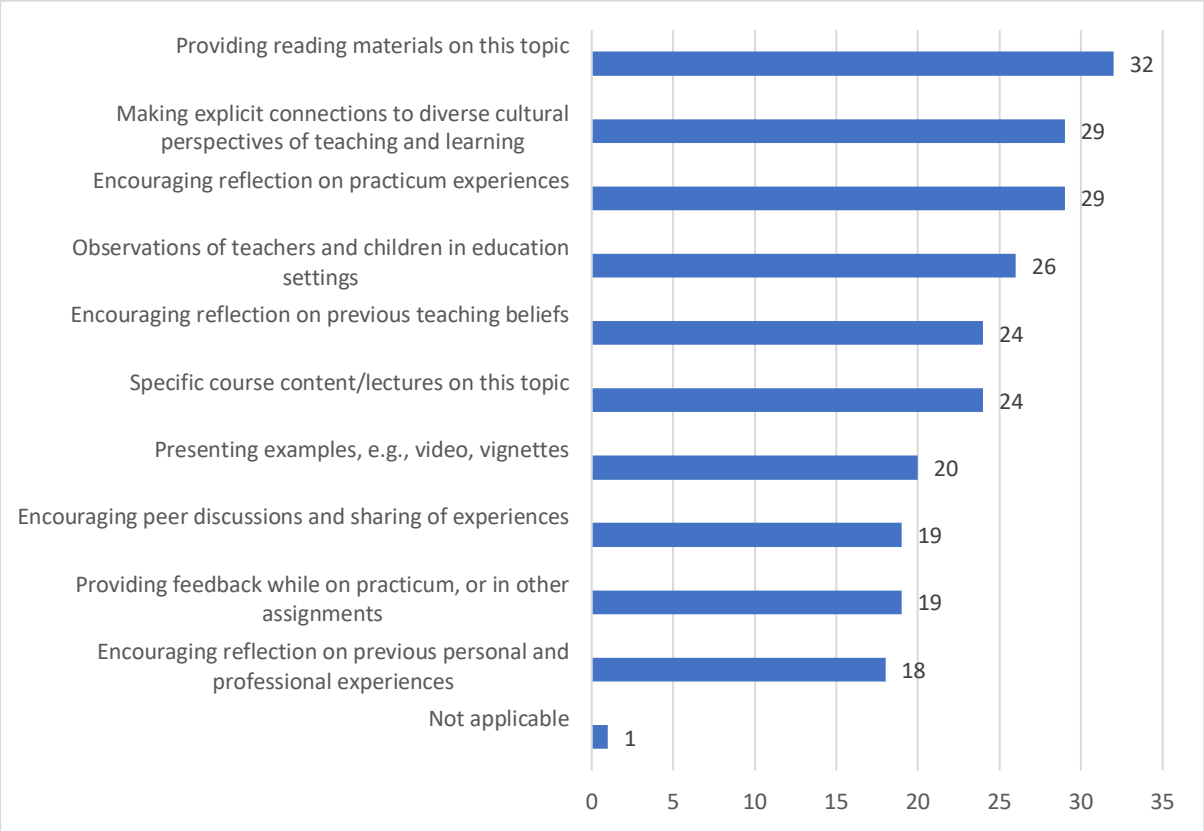
4.5.2 Ways That ITE Programmes Supported Chinese Student Teachers' Engagement with Intentional Teaching

Participants were also asked to indicate in what ways their respective ITE programmes had supported their understanding and demonstration of intentional teaching by selecting all applicable options from a provided list, with the opportunity to add additional responses if needed. The list was

developed based on the professional knowledge and teacher education experience of the research team. The results are presented in Figure 4-16.

Figure 4-16

Ways ITE Programmes Supported Chinese Student Teachers' Engagement with Intentional Teaching



Note. Two missing responses to this question. Participants were asked to select all applicable options.

The results showed that ITE programmes facilitated Chinese student teachers' engagement with intentional teaching most frequently through *providing reading materials on this topic*, followed by *making explicit connections to diverse cultural perspectives of teaching and learning* and *encouraging reflection on practicum experiences*. In contrast, *encouraging peer discussions and sharing of experiences*, *providing feedback while on practicum or in other assignments*, and *encouraging reflection on previous personal and professional experiences* were not frequently used compared to others, although these ways still accounted for a certain proportion.

4.5.3 Summary

These data indicated that intentional teaching was not viewed as being prioritised in ITE programmes to the same extent as play-based learning and culturally responsive practice. Furthermore, intentional teaching was perceived as relatively well integrated into course content but was least emphasised during practicums. Participants reported learning about intentional teaching through various means, with reading materials provided by teacher educators being the most common source.

4.6 Experienced and Identified Supports and Challenges within ITE

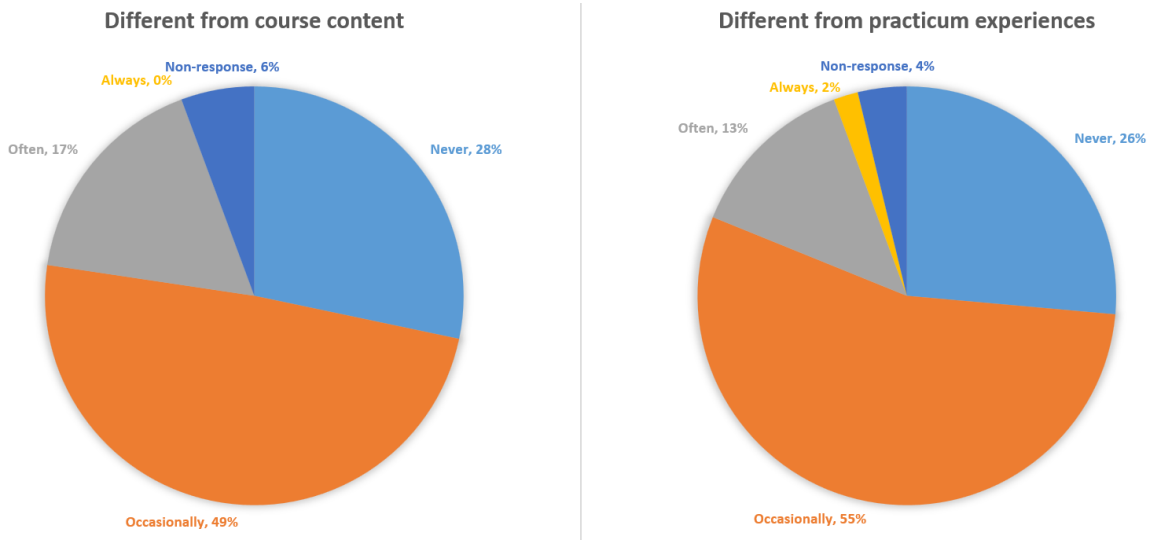
This section elaborates on the supports and challenges that Chinese student teachers experienced and identified within ITE. The challenges were investigated through an analysis of both the frequency and narrative accounts of belief dissonance between student teachers' personal beliefs and those presented in either course content or practicum. The supports were examined in terms of how participants' cultural identities had been valued within their respective ITE programmes.

4.6.1 Dissonance Between Personal Beliefs and Course Content or Practicum Experiences in ITE Programmes

Participants were asked how often their own beliefs about teaching and learning in ECE differed from course content and their practicum experiences within ITE. The results are presented separately on the left and right sides of Figure 4-17 for comparison. Those who reported experiencing such belief dissonance by selecting *occasionally*, *often*, or *always* were subsequently invited to provide an example for further elaboration.

Figure 4-17

Frequency of Belief Dissonance



According to the data presented on the left side of Figure 4-17, nearly half of the participants (49%) reported that they had occasionally experienced dissonance between their own beliefs about teaching and learning in ECE and the ideas presented in their course content, while 17% indicated that such dissonance often occurred. In contrast, 28% reported that they had never experienced such dissonance. None of the participants selected *always*, and a small proportion of participants (6%) did not respond to this question.

For Chinese student teachers who reported experiences of belief dissonance during course content learning, the examples they shared reflected two key aspects. On the one hand, participants expressed disagreement with some ideas introduced in their ITE courses, particularly regarding the role of the teacher. For example, one participant offered a more extreme account, stating, “I can hardly accept the idea that NZ ECE is not teacher-initiated, but play-based instead, because back in my school days, it was highly subject-based and focused on collective learning.” Another participant shared a similar but less intense view, commenting, “I think some knowledge, like math and literacy, needs teacher-directed teaching.” Other participants held the opinion that teachers should not just let children “purely play,” believing that children need teachers’ guidance; otherwise, children may end up with limited learning outcomes. For example, one participant commented, “My teaching

philosophy is that teachers should carefully observe and understand children in order to provide the most effective teaching strategies rather than simply letting them play. This is because many children are just playing without gaining much from it, and they need guidance from teachers." These examples demonstrated that some participants still experienced tensions between play-based learning and the role of the teacher, particularly when play-based learning was enacted by practitioners as a laissez-faire approach or perceived in this way by student teachers.

On the other hand, some participants recognised areas of initial differences and articulated a shift from their earlier beliefs, which were shaped by their education and life experiences within the Chinese cultural context, towards the philosophies introduced in their ITE courses. For instance, one participant reflected:

> *The rote learning method in China is a nightmare for children. Chinese parents don't value children's social skills. They only care about what was learned in math at school today and what text was memorised in the Chinese Literature class … I believe play can not only help children learn some simple [verbal] expressions but also let them know learning is not that boring.*

Another participant stated, "Before, I cared more about children's learning outcomes, the final results. After taking the course, now I know that the experiences and processes are more important than the results." These examples illustrated that, when facing belief dissonance, participants critically reflected on their previous experiences and developed new beliefs that aligned with the ideas introduced in their courses.

Regarding the dissonance between Chinese student teachers' personal beliefs and their experiences on practicum, a similar trend emerged from the data, as shown on the right side of Figure 4-17. Slightly over half of the participants (55%) reported occasionally experiencing such dissonance, while 13% stated they often experienced it, and 2% indicated they always did. In contrast, 26% indicated that they had never experienced such conflicts, while 4% did not respond to the question.

When invited to share examples regarding belief dissonance during practicum, 16 participants provided responses, which was higher than the number of examples (12) shared concerning course content. Many Chinese student teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the dominance of play and the absence of teaching in New Zealand ECE settings, echoing their earlier remarks about the course content. They commented that the proportion of free play far exceeded their imaginations and that there was too little intentional teaching. They believed that children should not be engaged in "purely play" without any rules or guidance. They also criticised the lack of teacher intervention in response to children's challenging behaviours, noting that this sometimes led to children hurting themselves and others.

Furthermore, some participants noted that their practicum experiences did not align with the philosophies they had learned in their ITE courses, which they had come to accept as part of their new belief system. For example, one participant commented:

> *Like what I learned at school [university/college], I know how important it is to follow the Treaty of Waitangi. We need to use a lot of Māori words in our centre. But sadly, I didn't see much at my centre, and I feel like most centres didn't care about using te reo Māori.*

The example demonstrated Chinese student teachers' perceived inconsistency between New Zealand's ECE teaching philosophies in theory and their implementation in practice, which created tensions for their professional learning.

Apart from disagreements with centres' philosophies, participants also reported tensions with other teachers during practicum. Some participants shared that they had encountered teachers who appeared less enthusiastic about delivering a quality programme or who did not enjoy the teaching profession and treated it merely as a job or a stepping-stone to residency. This contrasted with their belief that ECE is a noble profession that should be undertaken by those who genuinely love working with children. Some also described a perceived power imbalance between student teachers and practising teachers, which made it difficult for them to offer suggestions when they observed unprofessional practices. For example, one participant stated, "As a student teacher, if I

see something I think is not professional, I cannot give any comment because other colleagues wouldn't listen."

In addition, participants shared examples of how their beliefs had changed after becoming aware of the dissonance between their earlier views and the philosophies and practices encountered during practicum. For example, one participant remarked:

> *Previously, I liked to correct children, but now I guide them and allow them to discover things for themselves. I no longer insist on correcting them because what is considered correct or wrong can vary when we shift to a different lens.*

Another participant noted that when they encountered conflicting teaching philosophies with other teachers, they felt the need to reflect on whether other teachers' perspectives were valid and to adjust their own thinking and practice accordingly.

From the above findings, it was evident that dissonance between Chinese student teachers' personal beliefs and the ideas presented in either course content or practicum was not uncommon, with 66% and 70% of the participants reporting such experiences, respectively. The most frequently reported areas of dissonance concerned the status of (free) play and the role of the teacher in children's learning. It was also worth noting that participants' beliefs about teaching and learning in ECE were not fixed; rather, these beliefs evolved throughout student teachers' ITE journey as they actively and critically engaged with differing perspectives. This process reflected their ongoing growth in a cross-cultural context, contributing to the development of their professional beliefs and the construction of professional identities.

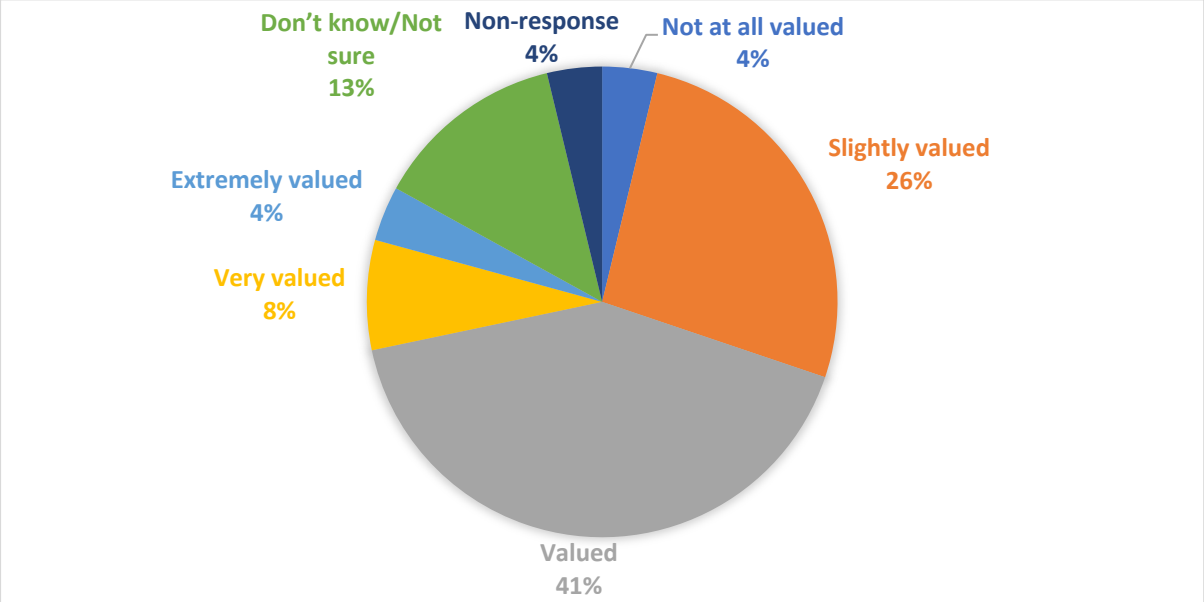
4.6.2 Perceived Acknowledgement of Cultural Identity in ITE Programmes

To explore the support experienced and identified by Chinese student teachers within their ITE programmes, particularly in relation to their cultural identity, participants were asked to what extent they felt their cultural identity was valued. The results are presented in Figure 4-18. Slightly over half of the participants (53%) reported that they believed their cultural identity had been valued, very valued, or extremely valued in their ITE programmes, while 30% felt it was slightly

valued or not valued at all. Additionally, 13% of the participants were unsure whether their cultural identity had been valued, and 4% did not respond to the question. The results suggested that ECE ITE programmes in New Zealand demonstrated varying degrees of responsiveness to student teachers' cultural backgrounds and identities. While some programmes responded effectively, with over half of the participants reporting a positive feeling, others appeared to offer limited recognition or support. Due to the length of the survey, only one question related to support was included. Further exploration of the support experienced and identified by Chinese student teachers is reported as part of the Phase 2 findings (see Chapter 7).

Figure 4-18

The Extent to Which Participants Believed Their Cultural Identity Was Valued in Their ITE Programmes



4.6.3 Summary

This section explored the supports and challenges experienced and identified by participants within ITE. Overall, dissonance between Chinese student teachers' own beliefs and the ideas presented in their course content and practicums was frequently reported, posing potential challenges for them. Regarding the support experienced and identified within ITE, the data indicated that while some participants felt their cultural identities were valued, others did not share this perception.

4.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the results of the Phase 1 survey were presented, which aimed to provide an overview of Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy, with a particular focus on intentional teaching in the New Zealand ECE context. It also aimed to provide an initial, broad-level exploration of factors influencing Chinese student teachers' perspectives, as well as the supports and challenges they experienced and identified within their ITE programmes. The results are summarised here and will be critically discussed in Chapter 8.

The 53 participants in this phase formed a heterogeneous cohort with varied educational backgrounds and life experiences in China and/or New Zealand, though predominantly female and largely comprising young adults identified as Chinese international students.

Regarding perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy, participants generally positioned teachers as facilitators, co-learners, and observers rather than in more authoritative roles. They commonly endorsed a mixed, co-constructed, and culturally responsive approach to teaching and learning in ECE, appreciating child-initiated play and teacher guidance, while remaining reserved about more teacher-directed practices. They also considered developmental domains to be more important than subject-related learning domains for children. Collectively, these perspectives reflected a departure from the traditional early childhood education practices in Chinese culture, which were commonly characterised as teacher-directed and subject-oriented (Bullough & Palaiologou, 2019, p. 39; Li & Chen, 2017).

Participants also demonstrated varying levels of familiarity with the concept of intentional teaching, which led to differing understandings that ranged along a continuum from alignment to misalignment with the definition adopted in this study. Following the provision of a formal definition, a near-unanimous positive attitude towards intentional teaching was reported. Intentional teaching strategies such as encouraging, modelling/demonstrating, and providing choices and learning opportunities were reported as most frequently used by the participants, and those strategies, along with others, were often applied in combination rather than in isolation.

Furthermore, data demonstrated that participants' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy, including intentional teaching, were shaped by a range of influential factors. *Te Whāriki* was identified as the most significant, followed by participants' personal and cultural beliefs and values, as well as professional learning and development. Other factors, such as childhood experience, ECE-related working experience, and parenting experiences, were also noted by some participants, though less frequently.

Notably, ITE programmes played a crucial role in shaping participants' perspectives; however, participants' responses suggested perceived insufficient coverage of intentional teaching within ITE. The data indicated that intentional teaching was perceived as not prioritised in ITE programmes to the same extent as other pedagogical philosophies, such as play-based learning and culturally responsive practice, particularly during practicums. Participants also reported learning about this concept in various ways, with reading materials provided by teacher educators being the most common source.

The misalignment between participants' Chinese cultural backgrounds and the New Zealand ECE context posed challenges for ITE providers in supporting participants to develop their understanding of curriculum and pedagogy. The data revealed that belief dissonance was not uncommon, occurring not only between participants' pre-existing beliefs and new pedagogical approaches but also between educational philosophies taught in class and those observed in practice. Although slightly over half of the participants reported that their cultural identities were valued within ITE programmes, findings suggest that further efforts are needed to support the wider body of students.

In the next chapter, the results of the Phase 2 interviews will be presented to offer deeper insights into these five research questions through participants' detailed and rich narratives.

Chapter 5 Findings from Phase 2 — Curriculum and Pedagogy

Chapter 4 provided a broad overview of Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy in early childhood education (ECE) in New Zealand based on data collected in Phase 1 through a predominantly quantitative survey conducted in March 2024. To provide a more comprehensive understanding of these perspectives in both breadth and depth, seven self-nominated participants from Phase 1 were purposefully selected for Phase 2, which involved two rounds of one-on-one semi-structured interviews conducted in July and November 2024, respectively. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim by the researcher, and analysed in NVivo 14 using a reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022, pp. 34–37). Data from the first-round interviews were initially coded, and the second-round data were subsequently integrated, enabling coding to build on the existing codes while allowing flexibility for the identification of new codes. Rather than being coded separately, the two rounds of interview data were treated as a unified dataset to reflect their interconnected and holistic nature.

To present the Phase 2 findings in an accessible format, the analysis is reported across three chapters, each focusing on a specific aspect of the data. Chapter 5 first introduces the demographic information of the seven participants, then reports the themes generated regarding Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy in relation to Research Questions 1 and 2, as outlined below:

RQ1. How do Chinese student teachers understand curriculum and pedagogy in ECE contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand?

RQ2. How do Chinese student teachers understand and implement intentional teaching in child-centred, play-based, and culturally responsive ECE contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand?

Chapter 6 focuses on the factors influencing Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy, targeting Research Questions 3 and 4, as outlined below:

RQ3. What factors influence Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy?

RQ4. How have ITE programmes facilitated Chinese student teachers' understandings of curriculum and pedagogy?

Chapter 7 explores the supports and challenges experienced and identified by Chinese student teachers in their initial teacher education (ITE) programmes, targeting Research Question 5, as outlined below:

RQ5. What supports and challenges do Chinese student teachers describe in relation to their ITE experiences?

According to Braun and Clarke (2022, pp. 131–133), although a combined results and discussion section is often preferred in reflexive thematic analysis, it is also acceptable to present results and discussion separately to align with thesis formatting conventions. Therefore, this chapter and the following two chapters present themes generated through an active, interpretative, and reflexive engagement with the interview data, supported by illustrative quotes with preliminary analytic insights integrated within. Subsequently, key aspects arising from the four findings chapters are discussed in Chapter 8.

5.1 Participants' Demographic Information in Phase 2

Of the seven participants, three were male and four were female. One participant was aged 18–24, two were 25–34, three were 35–44, and one was 45–54. Six of the participants were Chinese international students, while one was a Chinese immigrant who received her permanent resident visa in recent years. In terms of their ITE programmes, one was enrolled in a bachelor's degree programme, three in a graduate diploma programme, and three in a master's programme.

A further point to note is that New Zealand has a variety of ECE settings across the country to serve its diverse communities. Therefore, in addition to variation in their ITE programmes, participants also differed in their practicum experiences. Relevant to this study is that some, though not all, participants reported experiences in centres where the leadership team was primarily of

Chinese background and practices reflected Chinese cultural approaches to education. Other placements were in centres where the leadership team was primarily of New Zealand or European backgrounds and practices reflected Western cultural approaches to education. To distinguish these two types of centres and to reflect the use of inclusive language in academic writing, the terms "centres with Chinese leadership" and "centres with New Zealand/European leadership" are used in this study. Here, "Chinese leadership" and "New Zealand/European leadership" refer to the cultural backgrounds of the leadership teams.

Finally, to protect participants' privacy, each was assigned a Chinese pseudonym for reporting purposes (see Table 5-1). When quoting, references such as "Bowen-1" indicate excerpts from participant Bowen's first-round interview transcript, while "Bowen-2" refers to excerpts from the second-round interview.

Table 5-1

Demographic Information of the Participants in Phase 2

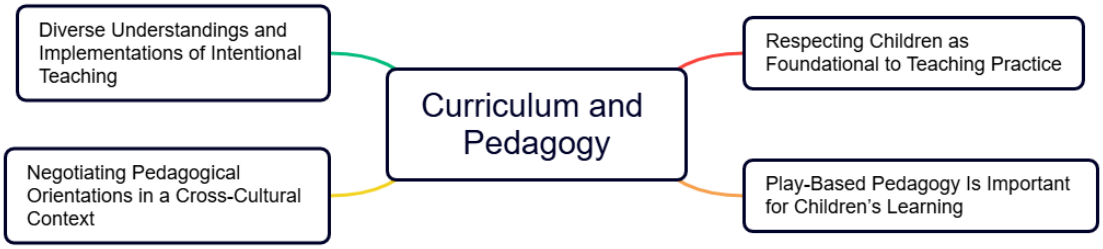
Pseudonym	Gender	Age range	Identity	ITE programme
Bowen	Male	18-24	CST	Bachelor's degree
Enrui	Male	25-34	CST	Master's degree
Minghao	Male	35-44	CST	Master's degree
Rongrong	Female	25-34	CST	Graduate diploma
Ningning	Female	35-44	CST	Master's degree
Shanshan	Female	45-54	CST	Graduate diploma
Aiai	Female	35-44	CI	Graduate diploma

Note. CST = Chinese international student; CI = Chinese immigrant.

In the following sections, themes concerning Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy, including intentional teaching, in the New Zealand ECE context are presented sequentially; however, the order does not necessarily reflect their relative importance. A thematic map is given below to represent the themes visually (see Figure 5-1).

Figure 5-1

Thematic Map of Perspectives of Curriculum and Pedagogy



In reflexive thematic analysis, a theme is not a topic summary but "a pattern of shared meaning organised around a central concept" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 77). The function of a theme is to capture shared ideas or meanings expressed by participants, either explicitly at the semantic level or implicitly at the latent level. The themes generated in this study represented a mix of both semantic and latent meanings.

In this chapter, the following themes are reported: (1) respecting children as foundational to teaching practice; (2) play-based pedagogy is important for children's learning; (3) negotiating pedagogical orientations in a cross-cultural context; and (4) diverse understandings and implementations of intentional teaching.

5.2 Theme 1: Respecting Children as Foundational to Teaching Practice

The first theme generated is "Respecting children as foundational to teaching practice." This theme captures how participants consistently emphasised respect as a core pedagogical stance in the New Zealand ECE context. Through their narratives, respect emerged not merely as a general attitude but as a professional value they came to appreciate deeply during their ITE programmes. These experiences regarding respecting children contrasted with their prior experiences in China, where, as they reported, children's voices, agency, and individual differences were often overlooked.

5.2.1 Subtheme 1: Respecting Children's Choices to Affirm Their Agency

Participants believed that teachers should respect children's choices rather than impose adults' will on them or force them to engage in activities in which they had no interest. Such respect

was seen as an acknowledgement of children's agency in the learning process. Play, especially free play, was viewed as a valuable context in which this respect could be enacted.

For example, Bowen believed that respecting children was the key philosophy that his ITE programme aimed to instil in him (Bowen-1). Moreover, when asked about the good aspects of ECE in New Zealand, he commented:

> *I think it's free play. Allowing children to make their own choices, rather than having teachers impose restrictions or limit their options. They should be free to choose what they are interested in. In China, people are used to parents or teachers making choices for children, telling them what they should play with or what they should learn at a certain age. But here [in New Zealand], we don't do that. (Bowen-1)*

Bowen's comment demonstrated his support for free play, in which children have the freedom to explore on their own and make their own choices on what to play and how to play. He believed that this was something Chinese ECE centres could learn from New Zealand. In the second-round interview, he further noted that respecting children's choices was also a form of empowerment:

> *An important point here is empowerment, one of the principles of Te Whāriki. I think it's the first one [principle], empowerment, and in Māori it's called whakamana. It means allowing children to decide how they want to spend their day and giving them full rights. Yes, I think this is a key feature [of ECE in New Zealand], giving children full rights and truly viewing them as human beings, just like any other adult. (Bowen-2)*

Here, Bowen connected the idea of respecting children's choices to his understanding and knowledge of *Te Whāriki*. Indeed, the principle of empowerment encourages educators to create an environment where "children have agency to create and act on their own ideas" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 18). His comment also suggested his belief that children should be treated as competent individuals rather than as incapable or inferior beings compared to adults.

Minghao also highlighted the principle of empowerment as one of the good aspects of ECE in New Zealand. He stated, “It’s about giving children their own space and allowing them to develop in their own direction and explore independently. I think this is better than in China, where children were grouped together and subjected to cramming-style teaching” (Minghao-1). These narratives suggested that both Bowen and Minghao drew on their personal experiences and prior knowledge of ECE in China in shaping their understanding and appreciation of the professional value of respecting children in New Zealand.

5.2.2 Subtheme 2: Respecting Children’s Individual Differences to Support Their Learning

Participants also stated that teachers should respect children’s individual differences, acknowledging that they are at different developmental stages, develop at different paces, possess diverse strengths, dispositions and learning needs, and have varied interests. Therefore, they noted it is inappropriate to treat children according to a uniform standard but instead, should recognise diversity and provide support in an individualised and responsive manner.

For example, Aiai felt that teachers in New Zealand ECE centres were quite respectful of children’s individual differences and did not have the same requirements for all children. In contrast, she remarked that in China, “teachers might require all children to sit still and listen attentively to the lesson, which is a big difference” (Aiai-1). She further commented, “Certainly, I believe that for children, even those of the same age, they’re at different developmental stages and their developmental paces vary. So, I feel that here [in New Zealand], there is a greater respect for children’s individuality” (Aiai-1).

Drawing on his observations of children during practicums, Enrui also noted that children possess diverse talents. For instance, he stated, some children may have strong language abilities, being fluent in both English and Chinese, yet struggle to solve a simple puzzle; conversely, another child might demonstrate advanced physical skills but find it difficult to understand a simple math question like one plus one (Enrui-2). Therefore, teachers need to be responsive to such individual differences. He explained with an example of a child in his practicum centre:

I noticed that he was very interested in mathematics because he would always arrange things in a very orderly or symmetrical way, giving a strong sense of order. So, I designed many activities to help develop his mathematical thinking. I believe this is their educational philosophy, letting children engage in what they are interested in and what they are good at. Therefore, when interacting with this child, I would use more of what they call "math language" to discuss stuff with him and ask him questions. (Enrui-1)

Enrui's example illustrated how he internalised New Zealand's ECE philosophies and intentionally applied strategies he had learned, such as using math language, to support children's mathematical thinking, guided by the principle of respecting children's individual differences.

Furthermore, Bowen compared the Chinese ECE guideline, *Early Learning and Development Guidelines for Children Aged 3 to 6 Years* (Ministry of Education, PRC, 2012), and *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017). He bought the Chinese guideline during his second year of study in his ITE programme. After reading it, he felt that there were too many detailed prescriptive requirements for children's learning outcomes. In contrast, he noted, "You'll find that *Te Whāriki* doesn't have anything like that. It doesn't set such specific goals for every single child or individual. That's because here, we respect children's differences and understand that everyone is unique" (Bowen-1).

From Bowen's narrative, it is evident that the idea of respecting children was embedded in his teaching beliefs. It is also noteworthy that, although not required by his teacher educators, he intentionally compared the Chinese ECE guideline with *Te Whāriki* to enhance his learning and understanding of ECE philosophy in New Zealand.

5.2.3 Subtheme 3: Respecting Children's Languages and Cultures to Strengthen Their Identities

Participants also emphasised the importance of respecting children's languages and cultures in strengthening their identities. They noted that New Zealand ECE centres often have children from diverse countries and cultural backgrounds, and therefore, teachers should be mindful of children's backgrounds and provide additional support for children from non-dominant backgrounds to affirm their identities and foster a sense of belonging.

Aiai recounted an experience during her ITE programme that profoundly refreshed her thinking and left her emotionally touched:

> *One thing that really touched me was when I was studying the ECE course, the curriculum [referring to Te Whāriki] stated that teachers should respect children's home languages. This was something I hadn't realised before. I used to think that if you came to an English-speaking country, teachers would require you to speak English. In Chinese kindergartens, children are required to speak Mandarin. You can speak your dialect at home, but you need to speak Mandarin in kindergarten. So, I thought it would be the same here until I read in the curriculum that teachers should try to speak to children in their home language. If you can speak it, that's great; if not, you can even try to learn it. This really touched me. I felt that this education truly respects each child. (Aiai-1)*

Aiai's reflection focused on one of the key philosophies of *Te Whāriki*, which is about valuing and responding to children's identity, language, and culture. As stated in the document, "Learner identity is enhanced when children's home languages and cultures are valued in educational settings and when kaiako are responsive to their cultural ways of knowing and being" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 12). After comparing the two different philosophies and practices in New Zealand and China, Aiai updated her views on language use in ECE centres and chose to align with the position of *Te Whāriki*.

Minghao also noted the importance of including children's home languages and shared his own experience with a Chinese child at his practicum centre:

> *For example, children from different cultural backgrounds here may need more support to help them develop a sense of belonging … In my previous centre, there was a Chinese child who was not very willing to talk, perhaps due to limited English proficiency or simply a reluctance to express himself. So, we introduced some Chinese songs and stories. Since he probably mainly communicated in Chinese with his parents at home, he was, therefore, more interested in listening to stories in that language. (Minghao-2)*

Minghao's example reflected his belief that respecting children's languages and cultures can strengthen their sense of identity and foster a sense of belonging at the centre. He also utilised his strengths as a Chinese student teacher to find suitable Chinese songs and stories for the child to support the child's engagement and connection to the learning environment.

In addition, Bowen also recognised the importance of incorporating te reo Māori and tikanga Māori into daily practice to support the implementation of *Te Whāriki* as a bicultural curriculum. Bowen criticised what he saw to be a tokenistic application of te reo Māori and tikanga Māori in ECE centres, calling for genuine integration rather than superficial application. As he explained:

> *I find it quite interesting when we talk about the implementation of te reo Māori and tikanga Māori, which refers to the Māori language, culture, and traditions. I think this is a very important aspect. However, in most Pākehā centres, centres run by people of European heritage, it seems that the approach is more about meeting requirements or putting on a display, whether it's for the Ministry of Education or for parents … Yes, I feel this is an area that could be improved by genuinely integrating more Māori culture. (Bowen-2)*

Bowen's explanation indicated that he had developed a relatively good understanding of bicultural practice through his ITE courses. However, the practices he observed during his practicums often fell short of his developed belief in genuinely incorporating te reo Māori and tikanga Māori into ECE learning environments. This phenomenon aligned with other researchers' findings regarding the limited implementation of *Te Whāriki* as a bicultural curriculum in New Zealand ECE settings (Williams et al., 2023). This finding is significant given that New Zealand is founded on the dual heritage of *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*, and therefore, it is important to implement bicultural practices in ECE to ensure Māori children can succeed as Māori (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 3).

5.2.4 Summary

This theme captures a shared belief among many participants that respecting children is foundational to their pedagogical understanding of ECE practice. More specifically, it includes practices that respect children's choices to affirm their agency, respect children's individual

differences to support their learning, and respect children's languages and cultures to strengthen their identities. This belief was formed and developed during the participants' ITE journey through their active engagement with the delivered course content, especially content related to *Te Whāriki*, and their observed practices during practicums. They intentionally drew on and continuously compared their prior educational experiences and knowledge of ECE in China to inform their current understanding of the importance of respecting children and treating them as competent learners, as learners with diverse needs, and as learners from diverse cultural backgrounds in the New Zealand context.

5.3 Theme 2: Play-Based Pedagogy Is Important for Children's Learning

The second theme generated is "Play-based pedagogy is important for children's learning." Participants generally held the belief that ECE should adopt a play-based pedagogy and expressed support for the play-based practices observed in New Zealand ECE settings. In contrast, they often associated teacher-directed approaches with ECE practices in China and considered this pedagogy inappropriate for young children's learning.

5.3.1 Subtheme 1: Supportive of Play-Based Pedagogy

Many participants acknowledged the importance of play in children's learning and supported the view that teachers in ECE should support children to learn through play. For example, Rongrong commented:

> *I think that, regardless of the centre's philosophy, whether it is Montessori or Reggio Emilia, play is always at the core. All kinds of learning are built upon the foundation of play. This is its strength, as play is essential for children, whether they are under five or under ten years old. (Rongrong-2)*
>
> *People often think that the goals of children and adults are in conflict, as if children only want to play, while adults only want them to learn. However, I don't think these goals are in conflict because children can actually learn many things through play. Adults, on the other hand, do hope that children can acquire some knowledge while happily engaged in play.*

Therefore, I believe the best approach is to teach children during the process of play. (Rongrong-1)

In her responses, Rongrong noted that ECE practices in New Zealand were predominantly play-based, despite the diversity of centres. Rongrong's comments reflected her belief that play is important and valuable for children's learning, and that play is not separate from learning but inherently integrated with it. This understanding of play differs from how it is perceived in China, where, as she explained, "play is more like a leisure" (Rongrong-1). This play-learning divide in Chinese culture has also been highlighted in earlier studies. For instance, Lin et al. (2019) pointed out that, due to the longstanding Confucian tradition of pursuing academic success, Chinese parents often view play and learning as dichotomous. Similarly, K.-I. Vong (2012) observed that in traditional Chinese culture, play carries a negative connotation amongst adults, which could hinder children's learning. Therefore, Rongrong's belief in the integration of play and learning suggested the transformative potential of ITE in shaping Chinese student teachers' perspectives and fostering a more holistic understanding of play and learning. Moreover, Rongrong's comments also reflected her opinion that the significance of play lies not in play itself, but in the learning that it leads to or builds upon, particularly in terms of knowledge acquisition.

Aiai also expressed her support for play-based learning in New Zealand:

I attended kindergarten [in China] for three years when I was a child, and as far as I remember, when we played, it was purely for play, like playing games such as "drop the handkerchief" or kicking shuttlecocks. Those were play. But the play here [in New Zealand] is quite different. For example, I once worked with a very good associate teacher, and she would design many play activities to help children learn something. For instance, she even made a shadow puppet theatre for the children. (Aiai-1)

I feel that the focus of play-based learning is learning. Play is not aimless play; it has learning embedded in it, whether the learning is about survival skills, emotional management, or actually learning knowledge. (Aiai-2)

Aiai noted the differences between the play she experienced during her early years in China and the play she observed in New Zealand. Her view echoed Rongrong's belief that the value of play lies in the learning it fosters, rather than in play itself. Play-based pedagogy was seen as important because it helps children learn through play, whether the learning outcomes are physical, emotional, or intellectual.

Similarly, Ningning expressed her support for the play-based pedagogy in New Zealand. She described how her understanding of play evolved during her ITE journey:

> *Regarding the concept of play as learning, I really buy into it as well. I think this is a concept that I might not have fully understood when I first came and started learning about it. But after two practicums, I really feel that children can learn a lot through play … Of course, this learning still requires teachers to intentionally support them, rather than just standing there and observing. (Ningning-2)*

Although Ningning did not use the term "play-based learning" but "play as learning" in her narratives, her description reflected an understanding that children can and should learn through play. Moreover, Ningning emphasised that teachers should play a key role in intentionally supporting children's learning through play rather than acting passively, which aligned with the concept of intentional teaching. As McLaughlin and Cherrington (2018) pointed out, intentional teaching represents a shift away from a passive conceptualisation of the teacher's role in children's learning, requiring teachers to be more active, purposeful, and deliberate in extending children's experiences through a play-based pedagogy.

Ningning's experience also reflected a potential challenge faced by many Chinese student teachers who received ECE in China, where play and learning were often viewed as separate rather than integrated, and thereby shaped a particular understanding of the relationship between play and learning. However, the three participants' narratives presented above also suggested that ITE can effectively reframe Chinese student teachers' beliefs about play and foster their support for play-based pedagogy in ECE.

5.3.2 Subtheme 2: Opposition to Teacher-Directed Approaches

In addition to an appreciation for play-based pedagogy, participants also expressed an opposition to teacher-directed approaches, which they often associated with ECE practices in China. For instance, Shanshan stated, "I strongly oppose teacher-directed approaches that educate children in a strict and harsh manner, no!" (Shanshan-1). Other participants recalled their own experiences or their children's experiences in ECE centres in China, described what teacher-directed approaches might look like, and articulated their attitudes towards them:

> *In kindergartens in China, like the one my child attended, the approach is often more teacher-directed. The entire process is led by the teacher, who decides what the children should do, and then all the children do the same thing together. For example, they might all do a craft activity, all go outside to play or whatever. (Rongrong-1)*
>
> *From my impression, though it might be narrow and personal, most teachers in China tend to lead and direct children's activities, rather than truly respecting them. (Bowen-1)*
>
> *Here, there is a strong emphasis on being child-led. It means we must start from the children's interests; it should not be teacher-led, definitely not teacher-led. It's not about the teacher telling the children what to do. This is different from how it is in China, where in the morning, teachers ask the children to sit in a row of chairs and then tell them, "Today, our tasks are …" (Ningning-1)*

These comments illustrated a recurring tendency among participants to associate teacher-directed approaches with their memories of ECE practices in China. Drawing on these personal or familial experiences, participants expressed a clear rejection of practices where children's agency and interests were overlooked, and children were expected to either listen passively to the teacher or engage in collective, teacher-directed activities. Participants' narratives suggested that, to them, teacher-directed approaches represent a lack of respect for children's individuality, which stands in contrast to the child-centred, interest-driven, and play-based pedagogy they learned and experienced in the New Zealand ECE context.

5.3.3 Summary

Collectively, participants expressed positive attitudes towards play-based pedagogy, regarding it as essential for children's learning. They valued play not for its own sake, but for its role in enabling children to learn through it. Their ITE experiences in New Zealand helped shape their current understanding of the interconnectedness between play and learning, shifting away from viewing them as separate entities, a commonly held view in Chinese culture. Furthermore, by reflecting on their own and/or their children's experiences in teacher-directed ECE settings in China and contrasting these with New Zealand's ECE practices, participants became more aware of the limitations of teacher-directed approaches and articulated clear opposition to such practices.

5.4 Theme 3: Negotiating Pedagogical Orientations in a Cross-Cultural Context

The first two themes reflect participants' shared views on respecting children and valuing play-based pedagogy. This third theme, "Negotiating pedagogical orientations in a cross-cultural context," captures how the participants navigate the tensions and contradictions that arise in a cross-cultural context in terms of understanding curriculum and pedagogy. The key concept underpinning this theme is negotiation. Faced with such contrasting culturally embedded ECE approaches, participants were engaged in an ongoing process of negotiating their pedagogical orientations, striving to develop teaching beliefs that were reasonable and authentic to themselves, whilst also meeting the expectations of the provider, such as the assessment of practicums. Of the seven participants, four expressed the view that it is necessary to strike a balance between an entirely free play approach and an overly structured learning approach, which they often described as balancing New Zealand and Chinese approaches. In contrast, the remaining three saw no need for such a balance. The perspectives of all seven participants are illustrated in the following two subthemes.

5.4.1 Subtheme 1: Seeking A Balance Between New Zealand and Chinese ECE Approaches

Four participants (Ningning, Enrui, Rongrong, and Aiai) expressed some disagreement with an entirely free play approach and a desire to balance it with a reasonable percentage of mat time

activities or more structured learning that focused on knowledge acquisition. They often referred to this balance as unifying New Zealand and Chinese ECE approaches.

For instance, Ningning shared her experience in an ECE centre where she completed her first practicum and expressed discomfort with its approach, which she described as "100% free play" (Ningning-1). Below are more detailed quotes reflecting her thoughts:

> *In the first ECE centre where I did my practicum, to be honest, there wasn't any structured learning at all. They didn't have mat time. It was completely free play. They didn't set up any learning plans for the children, no tracking, testing, or assessment before, during, or after. It was just purely free play. (Ningning-1)*
>
> *But to be honest, after that first practicum, I'd say that centre wasn't my ideal one, because I felt like it was 100% play. It wasn't like an 80% and 20%. It was 100% play. The role that teachers played there was basically ... well, from my perspective, as a teacher there, you could pretty much do nothing. The only thing you really had to do was make sure no major accidents happened. (Ningning-1)*
>
> *So, my ideal would be something like 80% and 20%. That is, for the 20%, maybe there could be about half an hour each day for some kind of lesson with the children. But the lesson would still be quite free, and the children can choose to join or not. There would be a topic each day, or maybe one topic for the whole week, to share with the children. For example, how a chick grows into a chicken, from a little baby chick to a big adult chicken. (Ningning-1)*

Ningning's comments reflected her discomfort with a purely free play approach, in which children were encouraged to play freely with little or no adult intervention, and teachers were only responsible for ensuring their safety. This idea was consistent with her earlier remark on play-based pedagogy, in which she noted that teachers' intentional support is necessary ("Of course, this learning still requires teachers to intentionally support them, rather than just standing there and observing"). It is important to note that Ningning was not against free play itself, but rather against an approach that relied solely on free play. She believed that a reasonable proportion of time, 20%

in her view, should be allocated to more structured activities such as mat time. However, Ningning also emphasised that these structured activities should remain flexible, allowing children to decide for themselves whether or not to participate. From her perspective, this kind of balance was not only beneficial for children but also made her work as a teacher more meaningful (Ningning-1).

In the second-round interview, Ningning expressed greater satisfaction with the second practicum centre, where teachers could intentionally prepare settings or design activities based on children's interests and provide some guidance. As she commented:

> *I think the centre where I did my second practicum was good. The idea of intentional [teaching] or doing some setup or providing guidance during the children's [learning] process really matched with my own thinking. It's like starting from the children's interests and then doing some intentional teaching and preparing activities for them, and that part really matched with me. (Ningning-2)*

Ningning's reflection on her second practicum experience indicated her continued belief in a balanced stance, in which teachers intentionally engage in children's learning and provide guidance, rather than adopting a completely free-play approach, such as the one she encountered during her first practicum. Ningning's account also reflected her evolving understanding of teaching, from viewing teaching as more structured activities to seeing it as intentional practices that teachers could embed in children's learning. In addition, Ningning's two practicum placements might also indicate the presence of varied perspectives and practices of play-based pedagogy in New Zealand ECE settings, with some relying more on free play and others viewing play-based pedagogy as a continuum.

Similarly, Enrui shared his expectation for a balanced approach. As he stated:

> *I think Chinese people tend to be very focused on academic learning and are very result-driven. New Zealanders might place a strong emphasis on children's natural development. I feel that when I become a teacher in the future, I'll probably take a middle path. I want to*

find a balance between the two. I can't just let children engage entirely in free play, but I also can't be like in China, where children are required to learn so many things. (Enrui-1)

He then compared his practicum experience in a centre with Chinese leadership with that of his peers who undertook their practicums in centres with New Zealand/European leadership, and highlighted differences in mat time activities.

Our lecturers told us that mat time is an activity that gives children a chance to settle down and learn something, beyond just free play. But some of my classmates' centres were really, really extreme. Some of them only had one mat time a day, and even that could just be singing a song. It would be over in less than five or ten minutes. But for me, I went to a Chinese-run centre, and it was very academic. They had at least three, sometimes even four mat times a day. And each mat time lasted between 20 and 30 minutes, usually around 25 minutes, with a very complete process. (Enrui-1)

Enrui was concerned about practices in both centres with Chinese leadership and those with New Zealand/European leadership. He felt that the former placed too much learning pressure on children, whereas the latter allocated too much time for free play. He stated that having two mat times each day would be preferable to achieve the kind of balance he envisioned (Enrui-1). Moreover, from Enrui's perspective, the value of free play lies in its function as a means for teachers to identify children's genuine interests for designing interest-based activities, namely mat time. He believed that free play is vital for children but saw no value in free play on its own, as he questioned, "If they only have free play, then what can they learn?" (Enrui-1). For him, interest-based and engaging mat time was a good example of play-based learning, an approach he endorsed (Enrui-2).

Enrui's comments reflected his attempt to strike a balance between these two different approaches. His experiences also serve as a reminder that the various types of ECE centres in New Zealand (in this case, centres with Chinese leadership and centres with New Zealand/European leadership) can contribute to the tensions in Chinese student teachers' beliefs, along with their own cross-cultural experiences. Moreover, Enrui's comments reflected an initial understanding of free

play and play-based learning that requires further clarification and theoretical grounding. On the one hand, free play should not be treated only as a means for identifying children's interests; it also has intrinsic value in supporting children's lifelong learning and development (Greve & Thomsen, 2016). Free play serves as a fundamental context for children's meaning-making and social-emotional learning, contributing to their holistic development in ways that extend beyond immediate observable interests or learning outcomes (Ahmed et al., 2023; Hewes, 2014; Stetsenko & Ho, 2015).

On the other hand, free play and play-based learning should not be regarded as two separate pedagogical approaches. This binary thinking oversimplifies the complex relationship between play and learning in early childhood contexts. Instead, according to Pyle and Danniels (2017), play-based learning is better understood as a dynamic continuum, with free play and learning through games or teacher-directed play activities at two opposite ends, while most authentic early childhood experiences exist somewhere along this spectrum. Part of the teacher's role is to skilfully embed teaching and learning support within moments of play, including in child-led free play. This continuum perspective acknowledges that play and learning are not mutually exclusive but rather interconnected processes that can coexist and mutually enhance one another depending on the level of adult guidance and the degree of child agency involved. This expanded understanding suggests that effective early childhood pedagogy requires teachers to skilfully navigate this continuum rather than adhering to rigid distinctions between play and learning contexts.

Rongrong's views were similar to those of the two participants (Ningning and Enrui) above. She shared her experiences in several ECE centres in New Zealand, where the philosophy ranged from pure play to highly structured learning (although, as she added, even the structured approaches were generally quite loose and relaxed compared to centres in China). She expressed discomfort with a completely hands-off approach and indicated a preference for a more balanced stance:

Personally, I'm not really in favour of "pure play", as this is also related to my cultural background. I feel that for young children, their personal experiences are, after all, limited, so they might still need some guidance. It's not that pure play is not okay; it's just that this totally hands-off approach... I can't help but wonder: Is there something I can teach them during their play? I think that if we expect learning to happen, there still needs to be some guidance from the teacher. (Rongrong-1)

The centre I'm currently at is more play-based. It sits more in the middle … It has play-based learning, and the teacher would teach a bit of stuff. I think they strike a good balance. It's more balanced. (Rongrong-1)

From Rongrong's account, her concern towards a completely hands-off approach is linked to her Chinese cultural background, in which, as previous researchers have also noted, teachers are seen as playing an essential role in children's learning, and children are believed to learn better through teacher guidance (S.-C. Wu & Rao, 2011). Rongrong further pointed out the limitations of children's personal experiences and the importance of teachers' guidance in expanding children's experiences, especially in terms of academic learning, such as literacy and numeracy (Rongrong-2). Therefore, in her view, a play-based pedagogy combined with some teacher-guided instruction was the balance that she envisioned.

Likewise, Aiai shared a similar stance and articulated her expectation for a balanced approach. As she commented:

I want their time to be more balanced, not having long periods of time each day just playing, but also not spending too much time solely focused on academic learning. I hope they can have a more balanced experience, somewhere between Eastern and Western approaches. (Aiai-1)

I feel that here in New Zealand, they really respect children's natural instincts, value individuality, and are very encouraging towards children. But when it comes to learning

things, there really isn't much. Sometimes it feels like you [referring to children] might not actually learn much at all, because the overall environment here isn't competitive. (Aiai-2)

Aiai's comments reflected her partial acceptance of New Zealand's approach, such as the emphasis on respecting children, while also revealing her continued belief in the importance of academic learning. She believed that a more balanced allocation of time between play and academic learning would better prepare children for the competitive world beyond New Zealand in the future. She referred to this balance as balancing Eastern and Western approaches.

Taken together, the narratives of these four participants (Ningning, Enrui, Rongrong, and Aiai) reflected their endeavours to find a balance between opposing philosophies and practices. However, what constituted a balance varied based on each participant's understanding. In general, on the one hand, they expressed concerns about entirely free play or a hands-off approach, worrying that children's learning, especially academic learning, might be limited without teacher guidance. On the other hand, they disagreed with an overly teacher-directed approach, whether it was the kind of practice in ECE centres in China or centres with Chinese leadership in New Zealand. Instead, they preferred a certain degree of teacher involvement in children's learning, aiming to expand children's experiences through teacher-led, teacher-guided or teacher-directed, yet flexible, interest-based, and engaging activities. Although some participants' grasp of the interplay between play and learning, particularly regarding free play versus play-based learning, warrants further exploration, their current understandings provide a promising foundation for integrating intentional teaching into their teaching beliefs.

5.4.2 Subtheme 2: There Is No Need to "Find a Balance"

Unlike the four participants in subtheme 1, the remaining three (Bowen, Minghao, and Shanshan) believed that there was no need to strike a balance between New Zealand and Chinese approaches. For example, Bowen stated:

People sometimes say, "Oh, look, in New Zealand they don't teach anything, right? It's always free play." Too much free play, they say, can lead to some problems, such as

children's challenging behaviours. But I don't think there's a need for balance. New Zealand doesn't need to balance with China, but China probably has something to learn from New Zealand. (Bowen-2)

Bowen's comment reflected his belief that there was no need to strike a balance between ECE approaches in New Zealand and China. He attributed this stance to having begun his education in New Zealand at a young age in high school. As he explained, "My personal values are half shaped by China and half by New Zealand. That's a small advantage for me. I've experienced both sides, and I can understand both perspectives" (Bowen-2). As a result, he identified more strongly with New Zealand's philosophies and experienced less tension in fully embracing ECE approaches in New Zealand.

Minghao also expressed the view that there was no need to strike a balance. He explained, "Different cultures are bound to have different understandings of their education, which is related to their backgrounds and cultural heritage. Therefore, I don't think it is necessary to impose a certain culture or teaching philosophy on children" (Minghao-2).

Shanshan's views shifted significantly between the two rounds of interviews. In the first round, she remarked that Chinese education, or more broadly Asian education, was too excessive and stressful, whereas New Zealand education was too relaxed (Shanshan-1). It would be beneficial for children to integrate the two in some way (Shanshan-1). However, in the second round, she had a significant shift in thinking:

When I first came here, I felt that children should be given more educational intervention. But now I've changed my mind. Yes, I've changed my view. (Shanshan-2)

Don't bring things from the East Asian cultural sphere or the Confucian cultural sphere into the West. Don't mix them. Really, don't; there's no need. It's too tiring. Eastern culture is just too tiring. Let everyone be themselves and live freely and happily. I think that's the ultimate value and meaning of being human. (Shanshan-2)

I think the New Zealand Government and the Ministry of Education should have this awareness: when a culture is not good enough, measures should be taken to prevent it from eroding a more civilised and better culture. (Shanshan-2)

Shanshan's comments reflected her contrasting attitudes towards Chinese culture, or more broadly Eastern culture, and New Zealand culture, or more broadly Western culture. She regarded the latter as more civilised, developed, and free, whereas she viewed the former as inferior and toxic. Based on this general perception of the two cultural types, she developed the professional belief that New Zealand's ECE approach is perfect and that there is no need to seek a balance. She further proposed that New Zealand should introduce regulations requiring, for example, that a centre with Chinese leadership must employ a manager with a New Zealand or European background in order to ensure its educational philosophies remained aligned and to prevent what she described as the "erosion" of New Zealand culture by Asian culture (Shanshan-2).

Taken together, these three participants (Bowen, Minghao, and Shanshan) expressed a shared view that there was no need to find a balance between ECE approaches in New Zealand and China. Their reasons included the understanding that each approach was rooted in its own cultural background and therefore could not be balanced, as well as the perception that New Zealand's ECE approach was already optimal and did not need integration with Chinese or Eastern approaches. This kind of full endorsement of New Zealand's ECE approach, on the one hand, could contribute to reduced tension for Chinese student teachers when navigating a cross-cultural context; on the other hand, it could result in potential devaluation of their own culture and identity, as well as an overlooking of their funds of knowledge, ultimately leading to a universalist perspective on teaching and learning in ECE (Recchia & McDevitt, 2018).

5.4.3 Summary

This theme reflected participants' endeavours to navigate tensions between two culturally embedded ECE approaches and to negotiate their pedagogical orientations in order to develop teaching beliefs that were reasonable and authentic to themselves. Two types of beliefs emerged

from this negotiation. The first was a rejection of both an entirely free play approach and an overly teacher-directed approach, leading participants to seek a balance between these extremes, which they often described as a balance between New Zealand and Chinese approaches. This hybrid belief was developed through the intersection, negotiation, and integration of participants' funds of knowledge and funds of identity (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014a) with the authoritative discourses they encountered in their ITE courses or during practicum, within a third space (Abraham, 2021). The second belief was a full endorsement of New Zealand's ECE approaches, with no perceived value in finding a balance between these and those in Chinese culture. This belief more closely resembled a one-way assimilation into the dominant norms in New Zealand and reflected limited activation of personal funds of knowledge and identity in their ITE learning journey (Ong, 2025). This topic will be explored in greater depth in the discussion chapter.

5.5 Theme 4: Diverse Understandings and Implementations of Intentional Teaching

Within the scope of curriculum and pedagogy, particular attention was given to intentional teaching, a pedagogical approach emphasised in the updated New Zealand bicultural early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017). This theme captures the varied understandings of intentional teaching among participants as well as the resulting diverse implementations of it in practice.

The analysis of participants' perspectives of intentional teaching was conducted with reference to the definition adopted for this study: the purposeful and deliberate actions of teachers, drawing on both their knowledge of individual children and professional knowledge and skills to provide meaningful, appropriate and culturally responsive curricular experiences for all children in ECE (adapted from McLaughlin et al., 2016). The analysis also drew on the broader body of scholarship on intentional teaching.

5.5.1 Subtheme 1: Intentional Teaching as Acting with Clear Goals or Learning Outcomes in Mind

A shared meaning drawn from participants' narratives is that they generally viewed intentional teaching as teachers acting with clear goals or learning outcomes in mind, rather than acting randomly or arbitrarily.

For instance, Rongrong shared her understanding of intentional teaching:

> *I think intentional teaching definitely has certain conditions. It has to be that the teacher themselves has a goal … I feel that, in most cases, the teacher needs to have a goal in mind, knowing what they want to teach the child, and then see whether that teaching goal has been achieved. Sometimes, though, while interacting with children, you might, without realising it, notice a particular interest they have, and then become aware of it. And then, you intentionally lead them … teach them something. That seems to work as well. But either way, the teacher must know what their teaching goal is. (Rongrong-1)*

Rongrong believed that intentional teaching requires teachers to have a goal in mind; they need to be purposeful in what they want to teach the children and then assess whether the goal has been achieved. This part of her understanding reflects the element of intentional teaching as teachers' purposeful and deliberate actions, rather than something aimless, in which teachers are unclear about what they want children to learn and how to achieve it. She also noted that, apart from planned activities, intentional teaching can also occur in teachable moments identified during interactions with children. This opinion, although not explicitly stated in this study's definition, aligns with Epstein's and other researchers' view that intentional teaching can occur through both planned and spontaneous opportunities for children's learning (Bassett, 2023, p. 6; Epstein, 2014, p. 5; Higginbottom et al., 2023).

Moreover, Rongrong remarked that the goals come from the strands of *Te Whāriki*, stating, "All of these goals are informed by the learning outcomes outlined in *Te Whāriki*" (Rongrong-1). This reflects another element of intentional teaching, namely that the goals of such practices are not

determined arbitrarily but are grounded in the learning outcomes listed in the national curriculum, which encapsulate valued learning for children in New Zealand.

The following example illustrates Rongrong's implementation of intentional teaching.

Example 1: Emotional Management

One of my successful implementations of intentional teaching… let me think [pause]. It's not about teaching academic stuff, but I still feel it counts as intentional teaching. It was about teaching a four-and-a-half to five-year-old how to manage her emotions, and I think that's also intentional teaching because I had a very clear goal in mind.

There was this girl, about four and a half to five years old. I'm not sure what she was like at home, but in the centre, whenever something didn't go her way, she would just cry and keep crying, and she wouldn't stop. Of course, the other kids were affected, and the teachers were also quite affected. What I did wasn't tell her how not to cry, because honestly, I didn't know how to make her stop crying, but I told her that she could go to a place where she felt comfortable whenever she wanted to cry and stay there for a while.

So, I took her around the classroom to see where she liked best, and she chose this reading corner we had, which was made by putting up a bookshelf, and there were some photos of her friends as well. Then I told her, "If you like it here, let's set it up for you." I found some cushions, two or three, and a small soft toy from the centre, and I told her, "Whenever you want to cry, you can come here and cry for a while."

Eventually, I noticed that sometimes, when she cried, she would go there on her own. I'm not sure if it really worked, but I feel like it probably did. From my personal experience, I think it is helpful. Having a place where you feel comfortable is, at least, helpful for managing your own emotions. So, I would say that this counts as intentional teaching.

(Rongrong-2)

Rongrong's example supported her view that intentional teaching involves teachers having a clear goal in mind and acting deliberately to achieve it. In this case, her goal was to help the girl learn to manage her emotions, which she addressed by providing a comfortable space where the child could express her sadness and develop self-regulation skills (Ministry of Education, 2019a, p. 37). Importantly, she did not simply set up a space and direct the child to use it; rather, she respected the child's autonomy by inviting her to choose a place where she felt most comfortable. This behaviour illustrates the purposeful and responsive dimension of intentional teaching. In addition, Rongrong's example highlighted her belief that intentional teaching is not limited to academic content but can also encompass children's social and emotional learning. Taken together, these actions reflect that

Rongrong's understanding of intentional teaching was contextually aligned with New Zealand's child-centred and holistic development ECE framework.

However, it should be noted that other strategies could also be effective in this situation, such as actively communicating with the girl's family to gather additional information about whether she frequently cries, or reading social and emotional learning picture books with her and her peers to support the development of emotional management skills.

Ningning also stated the importance of having a clear goal in mind and acting purposefully to achieve it as the core of intentional teaching. For example, she commented on how useful intentional teaching was for children:

> *I think it's useful. But the point of usefulness for me is that I still come back to my own idea, that intentional teaching must be purposeful. If, during a period, I have certain goals for a particular child or for a group of children, then when I set this intentional teaching, it must be directed towards that goal. Then I carry it out and keep trying, using different tools or materials to achieve that teaching goal. (Ningning-1)*

The example below, shared by Ningning, demonstrated how she intentionally sought to promote a child's social skills through water play.

Example 2: Water Play

If education is implemented based on children's interests, I do think it is quite effective. For example, I noticed that some children love playing with water. Infants, in particular, enjoy it very much. So I came up with different ways to let them play with water. For instance, I let children use a calligraphy brush dipped in water to write or draw on the ground outside. I mix water with sand, or put a lot of balls in a paddling pool for them to play with. This can go on endlessly. I can think of new variations every day for them to play with water.

But then, what is my goal? In this case, my response clearly fits their needs, because I see how excited and happy they get when they touch water … But what is my goal? If I just keep providing them with what they like, for example, they like water, so I let them play with water every day, then what is our teaching goal? We have *Te Whāriki*, and we want children to achieve certain outcomes. If we, as teachers, have goals, then we inevitably need to add more stuff to this activity.

For instance, I might know that this child still has room to grow in terms of social skills, because when he first arrived, he didn't have friends and often played alone. I might think it would be better for his future if he could play with other children. In that case, during water play, I could

> add more stuff to it. I could use a larger play area and invite other children to join in. This way, he would have the opportunity to play in the same space as his peers, giving them opportunities to interact.
>
> But at the same time, I can't force him, because just saying "Come on, make friends" won't work. My goal then becomes creating an environment that facilitates the growth I hope for. Whether that goal is achieved, however, is beyond my control. For example, if this child prefers to play alone and doesn't enjoy having anyone nearby, if he values having the space entirely to himself, then after trying once, I might notice that he reacts very negatively when other children come close, showing [negative] emotions. In that case, I would know it needs to go more slowly, or that I should try other ways to help him build a gradual learning curve, rather than trying to achieve the goal all at once.
>
> But my goal remains clear: I want him to develop social skills and be able to make friends.
>
> (Ningning-2)

Ningning's narrative and example reflected her belief that teachers should have clear goals in mind and be intentional in their curriculum decisions, rather than simply following children's interests without purposefully extending their learning. In her example, she observed that children were highly interested in water. Instead of merely planning a variety of water play activities, she considered the potential learning that could occur within such activities. Ningning's understanding illustrates an important feature of intentional teaching, which advocates that teachers should take an active rather than a passive role in supporting children's learning (Lewis et al., 2019). Building on this awareness, Ningning then decided to help a particular boy develop his social skills, drawing on both the learning outcomes in *Te Whāriki* and her daily observations of the child. This decision-making process is consistent with the definition used in this study, which emphasises that intentional teaching draws on both professional knowledge and knowledge of individual children. Moreover, while achieving the intended goal was important to her, she also noted that teachers should adopt alternative strategies if one approach proves ineffective. This sense of flexibility, in her view, is also integral to intentional teaching.

Similarly, Bowen identified clear learning outcomes as an essential part of intentional teaching. From his perspective, intentional teaching means that teachers need to be aware of what they are doing and what value or implications their actions may have for children (Bowen-1). This understanding is similar to that of Rongrong and Ningning above, and also aligns with the definition

used in this study, which conceptualises intentional teaching as teachers' deliberate and purposeful behaviour with specific outcomes or goals in mind. Such intentionality is essential for positioning teachers in a proactive and engaged role in children's learning (M. Y. Chen et al., 2024). When asked about the sources of these learning outcomes, Bowen pointed out that, in addition to *Te Whāriki*, teachers' practical experience is also an important source (Bowen-1). This highlights the significance of teachers' practical knowledge and indicates that learning to be an intentional teacher is an ongoing process. Moreover, Bowen noted that "teachers need to adjust their teaching strategies based on children's feedback to achieve the expected learning outcomes" (Bowen-1). This emphasises the flexible nature of intentional teaching, which requires teachers to continuously reflect on and adapt their practices in response to children's needs, interests, and learning progress, thereby distinguishing it from didactic teaching.

Taken together, these three participants (Rongrong, Ningning, and Bowen) viewed intentional teaching as teachers acting with clear goals or learning outcomes in mind to extend children's learning and promote their development. These goals were not confined to academic areas but also encompassed domains like social and emotional development, as illustrated in their examples. They further noted that these goals often stem from *Te Whāriki*, although some highlighted that teachers' accumulated practical experience can also serve as an important source. While they shared these core understandings, each participant also contributed unique perspectives on additional features of intentional teaching, including that it can occur in both planned and spontaneous situations, that it should remain consistent with a child-centred curriculum, and that it requires flexibility through continuous reflection and responsiveness to children's feedback. Overall, the three participants' understandings were largely aligned with the definition of intentional teaching adopted in this study and the wider body of scholarship, suggesting that their ITE programmes had enabled them to develop relatively rich understandings of intentional teaching.

5.5.2 Subtheme 2: Minimal Familiarity with Intentional Teaching

Of the seven participants, only the three in subtheme 1 (Rongrong, Ningning, and Bowen) explicitly reported having heard about or learned about the concept of intentional teaching in their ITE programmes. In contrast, the remaining four (Enrui, Minghao, Shanshan, and Aiai) had not.

For the three participants who had heard or learned about intentional teaching, the concept was introduced primarily through course content (Ningning-1), literature (Rongrong-1), and assignments (Bowen-1), whereas it was rarely mentioned during their practicum experiences. This finding is consistent with the Phase 1 survey results, which indicated that intentional teaching was most prioritised in course content and least during practicum (see Section 4.5.1).

In contrast, the four participants who reported limited opportunities to learn about intentional teaching were constructing their own understanding of this term, drawing on elements of their learning, but not necessarily in ways that align with the generally accepted definition of it.

For instance, Enrui reported that he had not encountered the exact term "intentional teaching" in his ITE courses but felt it may be similar to the concept of scaffolding. As he explained:

> *The courses did not mention the exact term. However, I think there was a similar idea that the teacher needs to provide a scaffold for the child during the teaching process, serving as a framework or support structure. I feel this is somewhat similar, roughly equivalent, to what you refer to as intentional teaching. However, compared with this notion of scaffolding, I think intentional teaching is more in line with the Chinese perspective, that we should have specific teaching goals and then design activities accordingly. In other words, it is somewhat similar to scaffolding, but more academically oriented. (Enrui-1)*

Enrui's comment reflected his emerging understanding of intentional teaching. Specifically, he associated intentional teaching with the idea of scaffolding, which he was more familiar with. Scaffolding is a strategy in which adults provide temporary assistance to children, enabling them to accomplish tasks they cannot achieve independently, with the support being gradually withdrawn as children's competence develops (van Kuyk, 2011). While scaffolding is clearly one of the strategies of

intentional teaching, intentional teaching encompasses a variety of strategies, for example, modelling and prompting, as outlined in the *He Māpuna te Tamaiti: Supporting Social and Emotional Competence in Early Learning* (Ministry of Education, 2019a).

Moreover, Enrui thought that intentional teaching was more aligned with Chinese approaches, perhaps because the term itself explicitly contains the word *teaching*. He believed that intentional teaching involves teachers setting specific teaching goals and then designing activities to achieve them. Based on this understanding, he regarded purposefully designed mat times as good examples of intentional teaching. He further remarked that, from his perspective, it is unacceptable for a teacher to randomly pick up some items/content to teach children during mat time. Instead, teachers should observe children's play to identify their interests first and then purposefully determine the topics and plan for each mat time based on the identified interests (Enrui-1). Although Enrui emphasised the importance of being purposeful and interest-driven in mat time, his understanding restricted intentional teaching to mat time activities, without recognising that it also commonly occurs in other play activities, routines, and transitions.

Minghao also reported that he had not heard about the concept of intentional teaching in his ITE programme. For him, intentional teaching means that teachers adjust their teaching strategies based on children's feedback to better meet their needs, rather than adhering to a fixed teaching plan. He commented:

> *I haven't really heard much about intentional teaching. But I feel that it could be … that teaching should not be done in a rigid way. For example, some teachers, when preparing lessons, might use the same lesson plans for many years or use the same lesson plans for different age groups. But I think teachers should adjust their teaching strategies according to the students' situations to better meet their needs, rather than following the teaching plan completely. I think there should be room for flexibility. (Minghao-1)*
>
> *My understanding of unintentional teaching is that it might be completely teacher-centred. In contrast, intentional teaching may be more child-centred, with greater attention paid to*

children's feedback. If children show no interest in a particular teaching method, then you would modify and refine the content, identifying which part caused them to lose interest and deliberately making adjustments. (Minghao-1)

Minghao's understanding highlighted the distinction he drew between unintentional and intentional teaching, with the latter portrayed as being more child-centred rather than teacher-centred. He emphasised the importance of responding to children's interests and feedback, as well as being flexible in teachers' original plans. This interpretation partially aligned with the notion that intentional teaching should be enacted in a child-centred context where children's individual needs are recognised and addressed. However, his account did not refer to clear goals or learning outcomes, which are essential elements of intentional teaching.

Similarly, Aiai shared that she had not heard about the concept of intentional teaching in her ITE programme. She remarked that intentional teaching might be similar to using play-based learning to extend and promote children's development, whether physically, mentally, or in areas such as mathematics and the arts (Aiai-1). She also noted that it might be comparable to the "observation–planning–assessment" approach that she learned in the courses (Aiai-1). This interpretation reflected Aiai's efforts to construct her own understanding of an unfamiliar term based on the knowledge she had acquired from ITE. While using play-based pedagogy and the "observation–planning–assessment" approach does not conflict with the philosophy of intentional teaching, it does not capture its essence, which lies in teachers acting with clear goals and deliberate strategies to purposefully help children achieve the learning outcomes articulated in *Te Whāriki*.

Although Shanshan reported that she had already heard about the concept of intentional teaching during her primary education ITE programme in China many years ago, this seems unlikely, as intentional teaching was first formally proposed by Epstein in 2007 in the field of ECE and had not yet been widely disseminated in China (Epstein, 2007). Her response suggested that she was framing intentional teaching within a view of education that regards teaching as a form of conscious human behaviour. As she commented:

Actually, you know, back when I was studying primary education, we had already been exposed to this kind of concept. And as a teacher, your education is definitely intentional. How can you expect children to explore and improve entirely on their own? Let me give you an example: if you put a person, actually not just a person but even a whole family, out on a grassland to live, could they somehow invent all kinds of theories, and then build ships and aeroplanes? Is that possible? No, no, no. All these scientific achievements, all these bodies of knowledge, have been passed down from generation to generation. And this kind of intentional education can bring enormous changes to people, really enormous changes. So, this kind of intentional education is extremely important. (Shanshan-1)

Shanshan's narrative highlighted the significant role of teachers in children's learning and development, which is consistent with one of the emphases of intentional teaching. She constructed her own understanding of intentional teaching, interpreting all teaching as intentional because teaching is a conscious human behaviour. However, it should be noted that not all teaching behaviours can be considered intentional teaching according to the definition adopted in this study and the wider research literature. As indicated in *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, practices such as teaching by rote or continuing traditions without critically considering their appropriateness to the current context cannot be regarded as intentional teaching, but rather as contrary to its philosophy (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009). Therefore, Shanshan's constructed understanding carries the risk of being used to justify inappropriate practices if it is not fully clarified.

Taken together, due to the limited opportunities for exposure to the concept of intentional teaching in their respective ITE programmes, these four participants constructed their own understanding of it. On the one hand, these understandings reflected partial elements of intentional teaching, such as emphasising teachers' scaffolding role, being responsive to children's feedback and adjusting original plans accordingly, and using play-based pedagogy to extend children's learning. On the other hand, their minimal familiarity with intentional teaching in ITE constrained them from

developing a deeper and more critical understanding of it. For example, they sometimes confined intentional teaching to mat time activities or did not capture its nature as a specific pedagogy that entails teachers' constant awareness and intentions in helping children achieve learning outcomes. Some also equated it with all teaching because teaching is a conscious human behaviour. Therefore, further efforts are needed to ensure sufficient coverage and effective delivery of intentional teaching in ECE ITE programmes, so that not only Chinese student teachers but all student teachers can develop a rich and clear understanding of this important term in the New Zealand ECE context. Without such efforts, student teachers may construct their own understandings of intentional teaching that may be incomplete, inaccurate, or potentially misleading, which could potentially hinder its effective implementation in practice.

5.5.3 Subtheme 3: Intentional Teaching Could Be Constrained by Many Factors

Regardless of their varying levels of familiarity with the term *intentional teaching*, participants consistently expressed positive attitudes towards it, recognising its value for children's learning. At the same time, they also identified several factors that might constrain its implementation in practice.

Some participants noted that children may respond in unexpected ways to teachers' intentional teaching practices; therefore, teachers need to be flexible, responsive and try alternative strategies or activities. Ningning shared her practicum experience with a child who was very interested in water and loved water play, so she purposefully tied some pipes to the fence in the hope of helping the child understand how water flows from top to bottom. However, the child showed no interest in the flow of water and instead only enjoyed clapping the water drops falling from the pipe. Ningning reflected, "Even though I deliberately set this up and genuinely hoped the child would understand it, his response was something I could not control. But I think that's okay. I might try other [activities]" (Ningning-2). Although Ningning suggested trying another activity in such situations, she could also have considered alternative teaching approaches, such as engaging with

the child's clapping behaviour, learning more about the child's intention, and finding opportunities for teaching within this activity.

Bowen shared a similar experience. He was reading a picture book with a child, but the child's attention was suddenly distracted by something else during the activity, and then the child ran away. Bowen commented, "When this happens, you need to calm yourself down and try again next time" (Bowen-2). These examples revealed that children are living individuals, not "robots with pre-set programmes" (Aiai-2), and their responses to teachers' intentional teaching behaviours may not always align with teachers' intentions.

Rongrong pointed out that differences between her philosophy and that of her colleagues or the centre, as well as a high teacher-child ratio, may also limit the implementation of intentional teaching. As she commented:

> *After all, in the teaching process, you are not teaching a class entirely on your own, so coordination with your colleagues is also involved. Sometimes you may want to do something, but your colleagues might feel it is not suitable for the children, and in that case, you may not be able to carry it out. Another practical issue is that you might want to run an activity, but the ratio does not allow it … So, it involves some practical working conditions, such as rostering arrangements with other teachers, communication with colleagues, and, most importantly, the centre's philosophy. Some centres do not place particular emphasis on intentional teaching, so you may not be able to bring too much of your own philosophy into the centre. (Rongrong-1)*

Rongrong's comment revealed that intentional teaching is not something a teacher can implement entirely at their own discretion. Sometimes ECE centres or colleagues may not support the intentional teaching pedagogy but prefer instead a stronger focus on free play. This kind of dissonance between teaching philosophies within the teaching team could limit the teacher's ability to implement intentional teaching in practice. In addition, the teacher-child ratio can also act as an obstacle, restricting the teacher's capacity to intentionally engage with an individual child or a group

of children. Therefore, as Rongrong suggested, effective communication and collaboration with colleagues are essential for implementing intentional teaching.

A further factor was raised by Ningning, who commented that the absence of a sustained plan may also constrain the practice of intentional teaching. She observed that during her practicum, teachers' awareness of intentional teaching was particularly strong immediately after the monthly staff meetings; however, this awareness gradually faded over time. Ningning suggested that centres should have a sustained plan for the children and outline what teachers need to do each week to support them, which can help teachers maintain a continuous awareness of intentional teaching (Ningning-1).

Taken together, participants' narratives revealed that intentional teaching is not an easy task that can always be successfully implemented at teachers' discretion and on their own. It could be constrained by many practical factors, including children's unexpected responses, different teaching philosophies within the centre or the team, a high teacher-child ratio, and the absence of a sustained plan.

5.5.4 Summary

This theme shows that participants held diverse understandings of intentional teaching and demonstrated varied implementations of it. This diversity largely stemmed from differences in their opportunities to learn about the concept during their respective ITE programmes. Among the three who had opportunities to learn about intentional teaching, there was a shared understanding that it involved teachers acting with clear goals or learning outcomes in mind, which aligned with the definition adopted in this study. In contrast, the remaining four participants, who had no such exposure, demonstrated their efforts to construct their own understandings of the term based on their existing knowledge. While these understandings reflected certain elements of intentional teaching, they were at times incomplete, inaccurate, or even misleading. In addition, participants across the sample highlighted that various practical factors could constrain the effective and successful implementation of intentional teaching. Overall, these findings suggest that ITE providers

may benefit from examining whether intentional teaching is sufficiently covered within coursework and practicums, not only for Chinese student teachers but also for the entire student teacher cohort, in order to support the development of a rich and clear understanding of this important concept.

5.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented themes generated from the Phase 2 interviews regarding Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy, including intentional teaching in the New Zealand ECE context.

The first theme, "Respecting children as foundational to teaching practice," reflected a shared belief that participants developed during their ITE journey in New Zealand, including respecting children's choices to affirm their agency, respecting their individual differences to support their learning, and respecting their languages and cultures to strengthen their identities. The second theme, "Play-based pedagogy is important for children's learning," highlights participants' collective support for a play-based pedagogy over a teacher-directed approach. Together, these two themes form the foundation of participants' stance on teaching and learning in ECE, suggesting the effectiveness of their ITE programme in preparing future teachers in the New Zealand ECE context. Notably, in developing these beliefs, participants intentionally and continually drew on their own and/or familiar experiences and knowledge of ECE in both China and New Zealand to inform their learning and understanding of curriculum and pedagogy.

The third theme, "Negotiating pedagogical orientations in a cross-cultural context," captures participants' efforts to navigate tensions between two culturally embedded ECE approaches and to negotiate their pedagogical orientations in developing beliefs that felt reasonable and authentic to themselves. Of the seven participants, four supported a balance between an entirely free play approach and an overly teacher-directed approach, often described as balancing the approaches of New Zealand and China. This hybrid belief appears to stem from an active use of their funds of knowledge and identity to engage in dialogue with the professional discourses of ECE in New Zealand within a third space. In contrast, the remaining three participants fully endorsed ECE

approaches in New Zealand and saw no need or value in such a balance. Their responses suggested a one-way assimilation into the dominant norms, in which their funds of knowledge and identity were silenced, thereby potentially limiting their capacity to enrich ECE pedagogies in a culturally diverse society.

The fourth theme, “Diverse understandings and implementations of intentional teaching,” reflected participants’ varied interpretations of intentional teaching and the resulting diverse practices. These differences were found to stem from varied levels of exposure to the term in their respective ITE programmes. For those three who reported prior learning opportunities, intentional teaching was generally understood as teachers acting with clear goals or learning outcomes in mind, aligning with the definition adopted for this study. By contrast, participants who reported no such learning experiences constructed their own understandings, which, while reflecting elements of intentional teaching, were at times incomplete, inaccurate, or misleading, thereby potentially hindering its effective implementation in practice. In addition, participants across the sample noted that various practical factors could constrain the implementation of intentional teaching, making it a challenging task for teachers. Therefore, greater efforts are needed to ensure that not only Chinese student teachers but also all student teachers develop a rich and clear understanding of this important concept.

In the next chapter, I will present the themes generated from the interview data on factors influencing Chinese student teachers’ perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy, with particular attention to the facilitative role of ITE in this process.

Chapter 6 Findings from Phase 2 — Influential Factors

As noted at the beginning of Chapter 5, the findings from Phase 2 are presented across three chapters (Chapter 5, 6, and 7) to facilitate easier engagement, with each focusing on a particular aspect of the data. This chapter reports on the themes related to factors influencing Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy in early childhood education (ECE), with particular attention to the facilitative role of initial teacher education (ITE) in shaping these perspectives. In doing so, it aims to address Research Questions 3 and 4, as outlined below:

RQ3. What factors influence Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy?

RQ4. How have ITE programmes facilitated Chinese student teachers' understandings of curriculum and pedagogy?

After conducting reflexive thematic analysis, four themes were generated: (1) Significant influence of initial teacher education, (2) Varied influence of cultural background, (3) Underlying influence of upbringing and educational experiences, and (4) Distinct influence of being a parent. Although the themes are presented sequentially for reporting purposes, this order does not necessarily indicate their relative importance. A thematic map is provided below to represent the themes visually (see Figure 6-1).

Figure 6-1

Thematic Map of Factors Influencing Perspectives of Curriculum and Pedagogy



In this study, *course-based learning* refers to the learning that occurs through coursework, usually delivered by teacher educators within tertiary institutions. This coursework typically includes

engagement with educational theories, ECE policies and regulations, guiding documents such as *Te Whāriki*, teaching standards, ethics, and other professional knowledge necessary for teacher preparation. However, it is important to note that, in some cases, participants used expressions such as “theory,” “theories,” or “theoretical stuff” to refer broadly to all course-based learning content. In addition, the terms “centre-based practicum experiences” or “practicum experiences” are used to describe student teachers’ learning experiences during practicum in ECE settings. Together, course-based learning and centre-based practicum experiences constitute the two central components of ITE programmes in New Zealand.

Another important point to note is that the data were reported solely from the Chinese student teachers’ perspective, representing only their own perceptions and understandings. Their accounts may not necessarily reflect the actual circumstances, as this study did not collect data from other stakeholders, such as teacher educators or associate teachers, to enable cross-checking.

6.1 Theme 1: Significant Influence of Initial Teacher Education

Theme 1 highlights the significant influence of ITE in shaping participants’ perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy by facilitating the development of new beliefs, promoting reflection on existing beliefs, and supporting integration of course-based learning and practicum experiences.

6.1.1 Subtheme 1: Facilitating the Development of New Beliefs

One of the key influences of ITE on Chinese student teachers, as reported by participants, was to facilitate the development of new beliefs about teaching and learning in ECE. These beliefs were considered new because participants had not previously thought about them or recognised their importance before beginning their ITE journey in New Zealand. These beliefs included (a) respecting children’s identities, (b) valuing social and emotional learning, (c) supporting inclusive education, and (d) fostering connections with families and the wider community.

For example, Enrui shared his learning experience of a course related to identity in his ITE programme, which left a deep impression on him. In this course, as he described, the teacher educator discussed Māori, Muslim, and refugee issues, drawing on relevant social events to illustrate

the importance of respecting people's identities and creating an inclusive and diverse environment. After being exposed to such ideas in this course, Enrui came to realise the importance of respecting children's identities. As he commented, "The children we work with probably come from different cultural backgrounds, and their families might come from different ones too. It's all connected, so we need to learn to be inclusive and to value diversity" (Enrui-1). Enrui's account suggests that a certain course focusing on identity provided him with new insights into ECE and helped him develop new beliefs that he may not have been fully aware of before taking the course.

Similarly, Rongrong described the influence of a course in her ITE programme on her understanding of the importance of social and emotional learning. During the interview, she frequently talked about social and emotional development. When asked where this kind of knowledge came from, she responded:

> *We had a course specifically about social and emotional development. It mainly talked about children's development [in that area] … one of the papers for the course was about how to better develop children's social and emotional competence through positive guidance. (Rongrong-1)*

Rongrong's account suggests that the course may be a key source of her belief in children's social and emotional development. Through engaging with the course content and completing related assignments, she appeared to have developed a belief in valuing children's social and emotional development. Moreover, this belief seemed to be reflected in her own parenting practices. Rongrong's child was attending an ECE centre in New Zealand. She described how she collaborated with the teachers at the centre to support her child in developing social and emotional competencies by using positive guidance strategies both in the centre and at home to address challenging behaviours (Rongrong-1). Rongrong's example suggests that she actively applied the knowledge and established beliefs from her ITE learning in her parenting practices.

In addition to course-based learning, centre-based practicum experiences played a crucial role in fostering student teachers' new beliefs. For example, Aiai reported that her practicum

experiences strongly influenced her belief in supporting inclusive education. She explained that during her practicums in New Zealand ECE settings, she encountered several children with autism, which was surprising to her because she had rarely seen neurodiverse children in ECE settings in China. As she noted, children with additional learning support needs in China usually attend special schools or are taught at home (Aiai-1). In contrast, Aiai observed that in New Zealand, the majority of children are educated in mainstream centres, where children with additional learning support needs are supported to learn alongside their peers and receive assistance from government-provided early intervention specialists (Aiai-1). She commented, "I think this is really good. It gives them a chance to interact with children without special needs … The environment is quite inclusive" (Aiai-1). Aiai's account illustrated how practicum experiences substantially reshaped her views on the education of neurodiverse children in ECE settings.

Notably, Aiai also put this new belief about supporting inclusive education into practice in her own parenting. Aiai shared how she encouraged her child to show kindness and support to a boy with special needs in the centre, to respect his differences, and to include him as a friend during play rather than exclude him (Aiai-1). Moreover, Aiai's experiences of inclusive education in her ITE programme even had an impact on her future career plans, as she shared in the second-round interview:

> *During this process, I realised that I actually have a stronger interest in inclusive education. I feel that I may have more patience when working with children with autism, and I want to know more about this area. As for my future plans, my initial thought is to take a relevant programme, and perhaps later I may focus more on this direction. (Aiai-2)*

Aiai's example illustrates that the influence of practicum experiences regarding inclusive education was far-reaching, extending beyond her professional beliefs in ECE to her parenting practices and career planning.

Likewise, Bowen reported that he had learned a lot during a specific practicum with an infant age group. Through his experiences with infants and their families, Bowen developed the

belief that fostering stronger connections with families and the wider community is essential. As he explained:

> *It is when you truly understand the child and build connections with their whānau, their families, their hapori, and the community that you can more easily understand the child's needs. Yes, this was one of my strongest impressions. [You] must establish connections with the whole family and the wider community. (Bowen-2)*

Bowen's account indicated that he actively interpreted his practicum experiences and, through this process, recognised the importance of building connections with families and communities as a means to better respond to children's needs, which is a core principle of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 20).

Taken together, these accounts highlight the significant role of ITE in shaping participants' perspectives by facilitating the development of new beliefs through both course-based learning and centre-based practicum experiences. The findings reported in this section are valuable, as they reaffirmed Levin and He's (2008) claim that "teacher education programs can and do have an influence on teacher candidates' beliefs" (p. 66). More specifically, examples of these newly developed beliefs include respecting children's identities, valuing social and emotional learning, supporting inclusive education, and fostering connections with families and the wider community. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, these beliefs were considered new to Chinese student teachers, as they had not previously thought about them or recognised their importance, likely due to their unique life experiences within Chinese culture, where such ideas were not a focus. Through engagement with new ideas and practices within ITE programmes, participants came to recognise the importance of these pedagogical beliefs and demonstrated a commitment to enact them in their future teaching. It is also noteworthy that, for some participants, the influence of ITE extended beyond beliefs about ECE to shape their parenting practices or their career aspirations.

6.1.2 Subtheme 2: Promoting Reflection on Existing Beliefs

In addition to facilitating the development of new beliefs (Subtheme 1), the findings of this study indicate that ITE shaped participants' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy by prompting reflection on beliefs formed prior to their ITE studies. In some cases, participants may have explicitly referred to "reflection"; in other cases, while they did not use this term, reflective thinking was implicitly demonstrated in their narratives. Participants' reflections were primarily focused on beliefs about (a) children's play and learning, (b) the teacher's role in children's learning, and (c) the image of the child.

First, many participants reported reconsidering or adjusting their prior beliefs about children's play and learning prompted by new knowledge or experiences. For example, Rongrong shared her belief change about children's learning, as she remarked:

> *I feel that many teachers with a Chinese background, including myself, tend to think first about what [knowledge] children are supposed to learn when designing an activity. After learning this course and gradually gaining more teaching experience, I have started to change. I still think children need to learn, but what they learn is no longer limited to academic aspects. For example, they can also learn through physical activities. Even during their own free play, they can gain something. So, the content of learning has become broader. However, overall, I still want children to learn something. I always feel that if, after an activity, the child hasn't learned anything, then that time was wasted. (Rongrong-1)*

Rongrong's comment reflected a partial shift from her earlier belief. Initially, shaped by a culturally ingrained knowledge-based tradition, she tended to equate children's learning with academic outcomes gained from teacher-designed activities. Through coursework and practicum experiences, she developed a broader conception of learning that aligned more closely with holistic views of learning, as outlined in *Te Whāriki*. This suggests that exposure to new knowledge and practices prompted Rongrong to reconsider her prior beliefs. However, as her account suggested that some of her pre-existing beliefs remained (e.g., "I still want children to learn something" and "if,

after an activity, the child hasn't learned anything, then that time was wasted"). Rongrong's example indicates that she was on a journey of reconciling her established beliefs with new pedagogical philosophies encountered in her ITE programme. It also suggests that the new knowledge and experiences served to expand, rather than replace, her prior beliefs about children's learning.

Likewise, Minghao shared his changing belief about children's messy play. He commented:

> *Like the Chinese parents at the centre, they might find it hard to accept seeing their children's clothes with all sorts of colour stains every day and everything in a mess. At first, I might have had the same feeling, but now I've become less bothered by it. I can accept this kind of messy play and the concept of learning through play in this kind of [messy] environment. I think that, over time, my perspective would … well, not completely change, but I would take the local context more into account. (Minghao-2)*

This narrative highlighted two contrasting cultural perspectives on children's play, particularly messy play. In the Chinese context, parents may interpret stained clothing as a sign that their children were not properly cared for in kindergarten. In contrast, within the New Zealand context, such stains are often viewed as evidence that children were fully engaged in exploring their environment through hands-on and bodily experiences. Although Minghao initially found it difficult to accept such play due to his prior cultural expectations, he adjusted his perspective as he became more accustomed to the local context and came to appreciate the educational value of messy play through his ITE experiences within the New Zealand context. His account suggested that he was seeking to negotiate between his prior beliefs and the local philosophy, viewing them as neither right nor wrong, but culturally and contextually grounded (e.g., "take the local context more into account").

Moreover, Enrui shared his updated understanding of free play and its relationship with learning. He commented:

> *Take free play as an example. When I first started my programme, I thought free play just meant letting children play on their own. I couldn't understand how it was possible for them*

to learn anything through play. To be honest, although I highly appreciated and respected their educational approach overall, free play was the only thing I really could not understand at the beginning. Then, during my first practicum, through my personal experience of being with the children, I came to realise that the focus of free play is not on the children but on the teacher. It is through the teacher's observation [during children's free play] that their interests can be identified. It was through this process that I came to understand how important free play truly is. (Enrui-2)

Enrui's narrative reflects a growing appreciation for free play. Initially, he conceptualised free play as children playing on their own while teachers did nothing. He questioned how children could learn from free play without teachers' involvement, suggesting a belief that children need to learn from teachers. Gradually, as he gained more first-hand experience with children's play and observed other teachers' practices, he came to recognise the value of free play and emphasised the importance of teachers actively observing children's play to gain information rather than doing nothing. This act of observation may be interpreted as a precursor to subsequent intentional engagements or actions, representing a positive shift towards positioning teachers in an active rather than a passive role in responding to children's play, which, to some extent, aligns with the idea of intentional teaching. As noted by M. Y. Chen et al. (2024), "What determines whether educators are enacting intentional teaching is not the action, but the intentionality" (p. 1382). Although observation may appear inactive, it can still demonstrate teachers' intentionality when such actions or inactions are based on a purposeful decision. Therefore, Enrui's account illustrates a subtle shift in his prior beliefs about play and a growing awareness of intentionality as a teacher. It also highlights that there may be various ways of interpreting intentional teaching, from purposeful observation through to active engagement.

The second reflection focus was on the teacher's role in children's learning. For instance, Shanshan shared her shift in belief through her explicit reflection during the practicum. She commented:

When we write our practicum reports, there is a model called Stop–Think–Change, a three-stage model. It means that when you encounter a problem, you need to stop, then think and reflect. Am I doing right? Let me give a practical example. When I first went to the centre for my practicum, whenever the children were doing something, I preferred to step in and help. Then my associate teacher told me not to intervene, but to let the children explore on their own and give them space. I realised that, in our Chinese educational background, there is a greater tendency to intervene and interfere, sometimes even to control … When this happened, I stopped to reflect. What are the results of my reflection? We should not involve or intervene too much, or even control. We should let go, give them more space to explore, and only provide help and support when they truly need it. (Shanshan-1)

Shanshan's account reflects the contribution of a reflective resource, the three-stage model, provided by her ITE provider, in helping her confront tensions that arose during practicum. At the beginning of her practicum, as Shanshan described, she showed a tendency to step in and offer help to children, which she linked to her Chinese educational background. This tendency could be interpreted as being related to her upbringing in a Chinese society, where she may be more familiar with Chinese traditional teaching approaches that emphasise teachers' instruction. As indicated in earlier studies, Chinese teachers and parents place greater value on teachers' intervention and guidance in children's play compared to their German counterparts (S.-C. Wu et al., 2018; S.-C. Wu & Rao, 2011). However, with the guidance of her associate teacher and the support of a reflection tool, Shanshan noted that she would now "not involve or intervene too much," but rather give children more space to explore independently and offer help only when they "truly need it." While it signifies a shift away from a teacher-directed approach, this kind of step back may not fully reflect the intentions of intentional teaching, which emphasises teachers' active and purposeful role in organising learning experiences for children, rather than acting primarily passively or responsively (Ranson & Cameron, 2023). Shanshan's account also highlights the ongoing challenge of finding a

balance between engaging with children without taking over the direction of play and ensuring that teachable moments are not missed in supporting their development.

The third focus of reflection was on beliefs about the image of the child. Ningning explained that reflection formed a significant part of her ITE study, and through the learning journey, her understanding of the image of the child had shifted. She commented:

> *We're always doing reflection. In the first half of the semester, our assignments already required reflection, and in the second half, reflection is also required. I'm not sure how it is in China, but at least here in early childhood education [ITE programmes], I feel like reflection makes up about 50 per cent. It feels like we're constantly asked to reflect on our past, our present, and our findings. It's really all about continuing to reflect. (Ningning-1)*
>
> *One aspect is the image of the child. My perception has completely changed. Previously, without much exposure [to ECE], I thought of the child as a blank slate who knew nothing. However, after my two practicums, I realised that even infants are very intelligent, highly competent, and also very independent. Moreover, children are capable of setting their own challenges and challenging themselves. Therefore, my image of the child has become entirely different. (Ningning-2)*

Ningning's accounts illustrate the significant role of reflection in her ITE programme and how student teachers were supported by their teacher educators to reflect on their experiences and beliefs. As she indicated, reflection was required and promoted throughout her ITE studies. Through such reflective engagement with her learning, Ningning shifted her image of the child from a deficit-oriented to a strength-oriented view, seeing children as capable, intelligent, and independent learners. This finding highlights how teacher educators can purposefully use reflection to help student teachers develop a more agentic and capable conceptualisation of children within ITE, particularly among those whose image of the child may have been constructed through distinct cultural perspectives (Burke, 2024a).

Taken together, these narratives indicate that, beyond fostering new beliefs, ITE also influenced participants' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy by promoting reflection on the beliefs they had formed prior to their ITE studies. The findings show that reflections centred on Chinese student teachers' beliefs about (a) children's play and learning, (b) the teacher's role in children's learning, and (c) the image of the child. These focal areas suggest potential conceptual challenges for student teachers from Chinese backgrounds, providing insights for ITE providers to offer more targeted support in the future. The findings also highlight the importance of accessible, easy-to-use reflection tools (e.g., the three-stage reflection model) and sufficient opportunities and time for student teachers to examine and engage with their prior beliefs. From the theoretical lenses of funds of knowledge and funds of identity, which refer to the historically accumulated, culturally developed, and socially distributed resources that student teachers with immigrant backgrounds bring with them (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014b), Chinese student teachers' prior beliefs can be understood as shaped by or derived from these funds (Monzó & Rueda, 2003). Therefore, there is value in recognising that student teachers from Chinese or other ethnic minority backgrounds are not simply expected to replace their prior beliefs with new ones. Rather, value lies in acknowledging their funds of knowledge and identity as resources (McDevitt, 2023), and in supporting them to engage with culturally and contextually grounded perspectives, as they learn to navigate between, negotiate, or integrate these perspectives within a third space in ITE programmes (Recchia & McDevitt, 2018).

6.1.3 Subtheme 3: Supporting Integration of Course-Based Learning and Practicum Experiences

The third pathway through which ITE shapes Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy is supporting the integration of course-based learning and practicum experiences. Such integration enables student teachers to apply, examine, and reflect on the pedagogical philosophies introduced in their coursework within authentic ECE settings, thereby bridging "the knowing and the being" (Whatman & MacDonald, 2017, p. 2), and ultimately contributing to the development of their professional beliefs.

First, some participants acknowledged that their ITE programme structure achieved a good balance between course-based learning and centre-based practicum opportunities. It should be noted that while participants sometimes used the term "theory" in their narratives, they often employed it broadly to refer to the wider course-based learning content rather than theory in a narrow sense. For example, Ningning commented:

> *I think this process [is good]. I feel that during the first half of the semester, it was not only about spending half of the time learning from books, but also about observing in practice how teachers carried out their daily routines, what they said and did, how they behaved, and how they organised their work throughout the day. (Ningning-1)*
>
> *From my own learning experience, I feel that the courses I'm taking now are really good. I've been listening carefully, and they have truly helped me make a big shift. I think that without these courses, if I had been thrown straight into a centre on the first day, I definitely wouldn't have managed. They did a lot of groundwork, so I felt that from both the theoretical and practical sides … They helped us to be well prepared for the transition. (Ningning-2)*

Ningning's accounts illustrate her appreciation for her ITE programme, which provided her not only with a solid course-based grounding but also with opportunities to observe other teachers and become familiar with ECE environments. As Ningning's accounts indicate, the course-based learning enabled a shift in her beliefs about ECE, laying the foundation for her understanding and interpretation of teaching practices during practicums. Moreover, as she stated, when such course-based learning was combined with centre-based practicum experiences, they collectively prepared her for the ECE teaching role, ensuring a smooth transition to the teaching profession.

Shanshan also valued the opportunities her ITE programme provided for integrating course-based learning with practicum experiences. She commented:

> *I think this way of learning is really, really good, and I strongly agree with it … For example, when you come across questions in your work [referring to practicums], you might find the answers while learning the theories. Or when you've just learned some theories, you can*

immediately use them to guide your practice. I think this approach is really great. (Shanshan-1)

Because, you know, if you just learn the theories but don't put them into practice, the effect of your learning will be quite limited. And your understanding of those theories probably won't go very deep either. (Shanshan-1)

Shanshan's narrative highlights her understanding of the reciprocal relationship between theory and practice, or more specifically, course-based learning and centre-based practicum experiences. As she indicated, on the one hand, theories can help address problems that arise in practicum situations and guide practices. On the other hand, practicums provide opportunities to examine and test theories through student teachers' active application, thereby deepening their understanding of those theories. Shanshan's account echoed Aiai's reflection that "practicum is actually a process of putting philosophies into practice, a process that helps you deepen your understanding of those philosophies" (Aiai-2). Together, these accounts suggest that some participants appeared to value the integration of course-based learning and practicum experiences, viewing them as mutually reinforcing in shaping their professional beliefs and pedagogical practices.

However, it is worth noting that centre practices are not always aligned with pedagogical philosophies taught by teacher educators in ITE courses. When such misalignment occurred, the practices observed in centres appeared to shape Chinese student teachers' acceptance and endorsement of the pedagogical philosophies presented in ITE courses. For instance, Enrui described the tension he experienced between the pedagogical philosophy introduced in coursework and the practices he observed in one practicum centre, particularly regarding how to manage children's challenging behaviours. He stated:

What we learned in the courses was presented in a very perfectionist and idealised way. It was all about how we should respect children and so on. But honestly, if you see a child in the centre constantly pushing others down, at that moment you really feel there is no need to say anything to him, you just want the other child to push back, you know? (Enrui-2)

It [referring to the course] always mentions things like, in one sentence, respect children and understand them, but it never really tells you how to actually solve these problems. (Enrui-2)

When I realised that what I had learned from the textbook was not really applicable … for example, when a child kept pushing others down, I tried to get down and patiently talk to the child, saying, "What if your friend pushed you down? How would you feel?" I attempted this approach twice, but it did not work. I then noticed that the teachers in the centre simply said, "Stop, no, thank you." I thought that was a good strategy. From that, I understood how teachers in this centre deal with such situations. (Enrui-2)

Enrui's comments suggest that he perceived a gap between learning about respecting children and receiving practical strategies for managing children's challenging behaviours. His account of "push back" also indicates that he was in the process of reconciling his personal beliefs with the pedagogical philosophies presented in ITE courses. While he attempted to apply the philosophy of respecting children, he found that the strategies of reasoning and perspective-taking under this principle appeared to be ineffective in such situations. Consequently, he showed an inclination towards adopting the observed practice within the practicum centre of using firm, brief directives such as "Stop, no, thank you" to align with the centre's approach. It should be noted that other centres may employ different strategies from those observed in Enrui's practicum centre in responding to children's challenging behaviours.

Although Enrui's case represents a single instance, it highlights how practicum experiences may, in some cases, diminish the influence of coursework, especially when student teachers have not yet consolidated their understanding of pedagogical philosophies and related strategies. It also reveals that centre practices may not always align with the ideas presented in ITE coursework, which could hinder the development of a consistent and coherent understanding of teaching and learning in ECE. Therefore, it may be beneficial to investigate further how ITE providers can create spaces that support student teachers in critically evaluating and negotiating centre practices, comparing

them with their own personal beliefs and pedagogical principles, such as those outlined in *Te Whāriki*, while developing intentional and context-sensitive approaches to teaching.

Taken together, participants' narratives illustrate how ITE programmes influence Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy by supporting integration of course-based learning and centre-based practicum experiences. As participants indicated, course-based learning served as a foundation for interpreting ECE centre practices, while practicums provided opportunities to apply the acquired knowledge through active practice. These two types of connected and integrated learning within ITE institutions and ECE centres were viewed by some participants as mutually beneficial, collectively contributing to the development of their teaching beliefs. However, some data revealed that when centre practices were misaligned with pedagogical philosophies presented in ITE courses, student teachers' acceptance and endorsement of certain philosophies were affected, leading to their questioning of the effectiveness of course-based learning. The finding suggests a need for further consideration of the status and relationship of course-based learning and practicum experiences in ITE programmes. Importantly, if course-based learning is treated as unimportant, student teachers may only be able to reproduce what they have observed in practice without being able to "identify, critique, or alter the philosophical and ideological bases in which those practices are grounded" (Couch et al., 2022, p. 2).

6.1.4 Summary

This theme highlights the significant influence of ITE on shaping participants' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy. Analysis of participants' narratives revealed that ITE exerted its influence through facilitating the development of new beliefs, promoting reflection on existing beliefs, and supporting integration of course-based learning and practicum experiences. Newly established beliefs included respecting children's identities, valuing social and emotional learning, supporting inclusive education, and fostering connections with families and the wider community. Reflection on existing beliefs centred on children's play and learning, the teacher's role in children's learning, and the image of the child. Well-structured ITE programmes also supported participants in integrating

their course-based learning and centre-based practicum experiences, enabling them to transform theoretical knowledge into internalised beliefs through active application and examination in practical contexts. Overall, the theme reaffirmed the essential role of ITE, including both course-based learning and practicum experiences, in shaping student teachers' pedagogical beliefs (Vartuli & Rohs, 2009; Wall, 2016; Yuan & Lee, 2014). It also suggests that the development of student teachers' professional beliefs is a complex and dynamic process, intertwined with prior beliefs, new beliefs, taught knowledge, and practical encounters, which opens up space for deeper exploration of the moments, tensions, and interpretations shaping student teachers' evolving pedagogical stances. In addition, the findings indicate that ITE may benefit from recognising Chinese student teachers' funds of knowledge and funds of identity, as well as encouraging critical dialogue with culturally and contextually grounded pedagogical perspectives in both coursework and practicums.

6.2 Theme 2: Varied Influence of Cultural Background

Theme 2 discusses the perceived varied influence of Chinese student teachers' cultural background on their perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy in ECE. While four participants (Enrui, Aiai, Rongrong, and Ningning) articulated that their cultural background had a generally positive influence, the remaining three (Bowen, Minghao, and Shanshan) considered it less significant in shaping their perspectives.

Notably, participants' perceptions of the influence of their cultural background appeared to correspond with their positions on whether it was necessary to integrate ECE approaches in New Zealand and China (see Section 5.4, Negotiating Pedagogical Orientations in a Cross-Cultural Context). Specifically, the four participants who regarded their cultural background as having a generally positive influence were more inclined to pursue integration between approaches in New Zealand and China, whereas the three who considered their cultural background less significant tended to emphasise assimilation into dominant local norms.

6.2.1 Subtheme 1: Cultural Background was Perceived as Having a Generally Positive Influence

Of the seven participants, four (Enrui, Aiai, Rongrong, and Ningning) perceived their Chinese cultural background as exerting a generally positive influence on their perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy in ECE. It should be noted that, when discussing Chinese culture, participants also referred to the education system within it, indicating that they viewed education as an inseparable part of culture. While they acknowledged that Chinese culture and the education within it encompassed both positive and negative aspects, they tended to see their Chinese cultural background as an asset that contributed positively to the development of their teaching beliefs.

For instance, Enrui provided a detailed account of how he perceived Chinese culture and education, as well as how his cultural background had shaped his pedagogical beliefs. He stated:

> *I believe that everything has both positive and negative sides, and it depends on how you make use of them. I think the education system in China certainly has its own advantages. (Enrui-1)*
>
> *I have always believed that my cultural background is an advantage for me and has played a positive role. Since everything has two sides, I believe it has brought me more positive than negative influences, because I approach it with a positive mindset. (Enrui-1)*
>
> *I think the influence of my cultural background is just what I said … It probably explains why I let children engage in free play, but at the same time, I still feel the need to do intentional teaching. This is what my cultural background expects of me. (Enrui-1)*

These narratives suggest that Enrui held a generally appreciative stance towards his cultural background. While acknowledging that Chinese culture and education have both positive and negative aspects, he tended to view his background as a positive influence because, as he stated, he approached it with a positive mindset. In addition, Enrui indicated that due to the influence of his cultural background, he perceived a need to include both free play and intentional teaching for children in ECE. This may be explained by the idea of intentional teaching resonating with his Chinese cultural background, within which teachers value their role in children's learning (Lin et al.,

2021). However, the distinction between intentional teaching and a teacher-directed approach should not be overlooked. While Enrui's understanding of intentional teaching may still be developing, this integration of free play and intentional teaching points to a promising way in which participants can draw on their cultural background and heritage to make sense of, and reconcile, new learning in ITE.

Building on this reflective awareness of how his cultural background informed his pedagogical choices, Enrui further articulated a broader understanding of engaging with one's cultural background, stating, "I think every cultural background has its own strengths. What matters is to integrate those strengths with your current work, while avoiding the rigid belief that everything from your own background is always correct" (Enrui-2). This account indicated that he recognised the dual potential of cultural background to empower or constrain student teachers' perspectives, depending on whether it was applied flexibly and constructively.

Aiai expressed a similar idea, stating that every culture has both strengths and weaknesses, and that the key lies in learning from the strengths of others to compensate for one's own weaknesses. She stated:

> *I actually think that every culture, of course, has both positive and negative aspects. What matters more is to make use of the positive aspects of your own culture. (Aiai-2)*
>
> *Chinese education, of course, has many aspects that we often criticise as not good. But I also believe there are positive aspects. For example, this kind of standardised education has enabled many of us to go abroad and see the wider world. (Aiai-2)*
>
> *I think that, as individuals, we should take in the good aspects from others to make up for what is less good in our own. But at the same time, we should not completely deny our own culture. (Aiai-2)*

These narratives indicated that Aiai also adopted a critically reflective stance towards her cultural background, recognising both its strengths and weaknesses rather than taking a one-sided view. She was aware that Chinese education has often been criticised, but she also emphasised that

its positive outcomes for individuals should be equally acknowledged. Importantly, Aiai highlighted the need and value of learning from the strengths of different cultures, which helps explain why this group of participants was inclined to unify ECE approaches in New Zealand and China to achieve what they call a balance.

Aiai further illustrated her stance with an example from her own parenting practice. She explained that in Chinese culture, parents often prefer to sleep in the same room as their children because they value closeness; whereas in Western culture, children commonly sleep in their own rooms, separate from their parents, due to the emphasis on independence. She concluded, "You can take the good aspects of Western culture and apply them in your own family, but that does not mean you have to turn your family into one that operates in the same way as a Western family" (Aiai-2). This finding is valuable as it revealed that Aiai was developing an understanding that there is no single correct, decontextualised, or universalist way of educating and parenting children. The finding also highlights Aiai's acknowledgement and preservation of the perceived strengths of her home culture, while resisting the pressures to devalue her cultural identity and to assimilate into the host culture.

Likewise, Rongrong commented that she perceived the influence of her Chinese cultural background as generally positive. She recognised that China's large population may have shaped a highly competitive society, which in turn often generated parental anxiety about children's education and an overemphasis on academic success (Rongrong-2). However, as she remarked, "I think there are still many good things [in my own culture]" (Rongrong-2). Rongrong further argued that it would be best to integrate the positive aspects of different cultures into one's own teaching practices. As she explained, "If we could combine the good parts from both Chinese and Western, or say New Zealand and some Asian countries, that would be the best" (Rongrong-2). This account demonstrates her inclination to integrate or unify different educational philosophies and practices in ECE contexts, rather than adopt a "fit-in" pattern of thinking.

Ningning also emphasised the positive influence of her cultural background, noting that it enabled her to view ECE from different perspectives. She explained:

> *I think it [referring to the cultural influence] is positive because it has helped me to know how I want to approach my future work in early childhood education. Since I have seen A, B, and even C, I now have a clearer position regarding my future choices, the kind of working environment I want, and how I would like to educate young children. (Ningning-1)*

Like the three participants above, Ningning's narrative reflected an appreciative view of her own cultural background. She regarded her background as an asset, rather than a deficit. She believed that her distinctive Chinese cultural background, together with her cross-cultural learning experiences in New Zealand, enabled her to adopt multiple perspectives on ECE issues and to develop hybrid beliefs informed by those perspectives, which she viewed as beneficial for her future teaching.

Taken together, the four participants (Enrui, Aiai, Rongrong, and Ningning) adopted a critical yet appreciative stance towards their own Chinese cultural background, viewing it as having a generally positive influence on their perspectives. While acknowledging certain limitations (e.g., an overemphasis on academic success), this group of participants noted that the positive aspects of Chinese culture/education should not be overlooked (e.g., valuing the teacher's role in children's learning). They tended to view their Chinese cultural background as an asset rather than a deficit that enriched their professional perspectives. This stance enabled them to appreciate the ECE philosophies in New Zealand while preserving or integrating valued aspects of their home culture, demonstrating both an intentional resistance to the "fit-in only approach" (Xu et al., 2025, p. 11) and an emerging effort to develop hybrid beliefs. This finding may help explain why this group of participants perceived a need to seek balance between ECE approaches in New Zealand and China, integrating or unifying them where possible (see Section 5.4, Negotiating Pedagogical Orientations in a Cross-Cultural Context, for more descriptions of their perspectives). Future research could further explore how student teachers with non-dominant backgrounds view their home culture, how that

stance affects their pedagogical orientations, and how they might be supported to view and utilise their cultural backgrounds as assets in their professional development.

6.2.2 Subtheme 2: Cultural Background was Perceived as Less Significant

Unlike the four participants in Subtheme 1, the remaining three (Bowen, Minghao, and Shanshan) perceived their Chinese cultural background as less significant in shaping their perspectives. While Bowen and Minghao acknowledged that their cultural background might have influenced them, they regarded this influence as limited. They believed their views were shaped more by the local New Zealand ECE context they encountered through ITE. Shanshan articulated a more pronounced position, viewing her cultural background as having minimal influence as she intentionally sought to distance herself from Chinese culture. In terms of pedagogical orientations, compared with the subgroup in Subtheme 1, Bowen, Minghao, and Shanshan seemed to place greater emphasis on assimilation than on integration.

For example, in the first-round interview, Bowen acknowledged that his Chinese cultural background exerted some influence on his perspectives, but only to a limited extent. He explained that this limited influence was because "I spent most of my teenage years here in New Zealand, and I received my education here" (Bowen-1). His account reveals the varied life experiences of Chinese student teachers, which may shape their perceptions of the influence of their Chinese cultural backgrounds. In the second-round interview, Bowen more explicitly described the influence of his cultural background as neutral, rather than positive or negative (Bowen-2). Compared to the influence of his cultural background, he regarded the local ECE context in New Zealand, provided through his ITE programme, as more significant in shaping his perspectives. Moreover, although Bowen acknowledged that a cross-cultural background could provide Chinese student teachers with additional lenses, he believed that respecting the local context was more crucial for them, indicating a tendency towards assimilation. He commented:

> *Cultural background is important because it can provide you with different perspectives. But more importantly, you need to show respect [to the local context]. You must first be aware of*

the broader environment, respect this environment, respect Te Whāriki, and respect how this environment functions. (Bowen-2)

This account suggested that, in Bowen's view, ECE in New Zealand has its own principles and practices rooted in its culture and society, and that what he and other Chinese student teachers mostly needed to do was to respect and fit into local norms. He therefore further stated that New Zealand did not need to learn from China to achieve what other participants (i.e., the four participants in Subtheme 1) described as a "balance." Bowen commented, "I think it is unnecessary to seek a balance. New Zealand doesn't need to balance, but China may have something to learn [from New Zealand]" (Bowen-2). Bowen's account indicated that he did not perceive a need for mutual adaptation or integration, instead reflecting a tendency towards assimilation to the New Zealand norms. It also suggested that, from his perspective, his funds of knowledge and funds of identity were of limited relevance to his development as an ECE teacher in New Zealand.

Similarly, Minghao believed that his cultural background had a limited influence on his perspective, noting that "the influence of cultural background may not be as great as imagined" (Minghao-1). This indicated participants' varied perceptions of the importance of their cultural backgrounds on their pedagogical perspectives. Minghao further explained how he believed international student teachers may adjust their beliefs to align with the local context:

When they [international student teachers] come here, they would adapt and adjust according to the current environment and culture … I think many of them may no longer adhere strongly to the ways of thinking rooted in their original cultural backgrounds; instead, they are likely to accept some of the influences from the local educational environment. (Minghao-2)

Minghao's narrative suggests that, although he acknowledged the cultural influence on student teachers' prior beliefs, he attributed greater importance to the host culture's local context in shaping their current beliefs about educating children, thereby highlighting the adaptable and malleable nature of teaching beliefs. For Minghao, as for Bowen, what mattered most for

international student teachers was respecting and adapting to the local context. Accordingly, Minghao perceived no necessity to integrate Chinese ECE philosophies into New Zealand (Minghao-2). Minghao's account implies that, while funds of knowledge and funds of identity may inform student teachers' prior beliefs, engagement with these funds may not be particularly emphasised or prioritised in his ITE programme through the creation of a third space for negotiation and dialogue. However, this situation may vary across ITE programmes.

The third participant in this group, Shanshan, expressed a similar but more pronounced view, perceiving her cultural background as having minimal influence in shaping her perspectives. Shanshan stated that she deliberately distanced herself from Chinese culture, as she perceived it as problematic and contributing little to the world compared with Western cultures. She commented:

> *Just think about it, over all these years, how many Chinese people have won a Nobel Prize? How many inventions and creations have come from Chinese people? What contributions has China brought to the world's civilisation and progress? If we ask ourselves honestly, are there any? Yes, but far, far, far too few. (Shanshan-1)*
>
> *It sounds harsh, doesn't it? A Chinese person denying her own culture. It sounds harsh, but this is the reality. (Shanshan-2)*
>
> *My cultural background has had little influence on me. Because most of the time, I don't agree with those ideas, and there are many cultural phenomena that I actually don't really like. (Shanshan-2)*
>
> *I think the New Zealand Government and the Ministry of Education should be aware that when a culture is not good enough, measures should be taken to prevent it from eroding a more civilised and better culture. (Shanshan-2)*

Shanshan's accounts suggest a particular stance towards Chinese culture. Due to her perceptions of the negative aspects or limitations of Chinese culture, Shanshan showed a tendency to "deny" her own cultural background and to distance herself from its influence. As Shanshan described, she disagreed with many ideas associated with Chinese culture and regarded these ideas

as a potential risk of "eroding" New Zealand's culture, something she believed should be prevented. Consistent with this attitude, Shanshan appeared to see limited need to bring or integrate her funds of knowledge and identity into her professional learning journey. Instead, Shanshan seemed to place greater emphasis on conforming and assimilating to the local norm. Shanshan's perspective suggests diversity among Chinese student teachers in how they view their Chinese cultural background and whether they regard it as a resource or a deficit for their professional development. Future research could further explore this phenomenon by examining the relationship between student teachers' perceptions of their own culture and their pedagogical choices.

Taken together, the three participants (Bowen, Minghao, and Shanshan) tended to consider their cultural background as less significant in shaping their perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy. For Bowen and Minghao, although they acknowledged some cultural influence, they described it as relatively limited and not as substantial as might be assumed. Bowen and Minghao believed that respecting and adapting to the local context was more important for student teachers of international backgrounds. Shanshan articulated a more pronounced position, viewing her cultural background as having minimal influence, as she reported intentionally distancing herself from it based on her attitude towards Chinese culture. In contrast to the four participants in Subtheme 1, who viewed their cultural background generally as an asset, this subgroup tended to downplay its significance in shaping their pedagogical perspectives. These varied perceptions reported in Theme 2 highlight the diversity among Chinese student teachers in how they view their Chinese cultural background, which appeared to shape their pedagogical orientation towards integration or assimilation.

6.2.3 Summary

This theme discussed the varied perspectives participants held on curriculum and pedagogy in ECE, and how these perspectives were shaped by their cultural backgrounds. Specifically, while four participants perceived their cultural background as having a generally positive influence, the remaining three regarded it as less significant. Notably, participants' perceptions of cultural

background appeared to shape their pedagogical orientations. When they viewed their cultural background as having a positive influence, they sought to integrate or unify philosophies and practices from both cultures. In contrast, when they viewed their cultural background as less significant, they tended to place greater emphasis on assimilation into the local dominant norm. The two different pedagogical orientations of these subgroups resonate with Berry's (1997) acculturation framework, which suggests that non-dominant groups who value both their heritage and host cultures tend to pursue integration, whereas those who privilege the host culture over their heritage culture tend towards assimilation. Such varied acculturation strategies may lead to differences in the extent to which participants draw on their cultural heritage and construct their identities as ECE teachers in cross-cultural contexts.

6.3 Theme 3: Underlying Influence of Upbringing and Educational Experiences

Theme 3 illustrates how participants' upbringing and educational experiences, spanning both family, institutional, and self-education contexts, shape their perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy. Overall, six participants reported such influences. While some discussed them in broad terms, others provided more specific examples. It should be noted that no subthemes are presented in this theme. As Braun and Clarke (2022, p. 88) explain, subthemes are optional and do not need to be applied across all themes.

First, Ningning, Shanshan, and Bowen generally stated that their upbringing and educational experiences had certain influences on their teaching beliefs, and these influences were more implicit than explicit. For example, Ningning commented, "I know that my memories of my own kindergarten days may not be very vivid now, but I believe they must still remain in some corners of my mind, and they inevitably influence me every single day" (Ningning-1). Her account suggests that she emphasised the underlying influence of her own childhood experiences in ECE settings and regarded them as a definite factor shaping her beliefs.

Similarly, Bowen remarked that he had spent his childhood and early adolescence in China before coming to New Zealand. Therefore, he thought his upbringing and educational experiences

may have had some influence on his teaching beliefs (Bowen-2). Likewise, Shanshan believed that education has a great impact on a person, likening it to the operating system for a computer. She commented:

> *Actually, I think a person is like a computer, and one's educational background is like the operating system installed on it, right? If the operating system you install is advanced and of a higher version, then the computer will certainly run more efficiently, and its functions will be more powerful. So yes, I believe educational background has an enormous impact on a person … It essentially shapes one's soul. (Shanshan-1)*

Shanshan's comment reflects an understanding of education as more than shaping one's mind; she viewed it as fundamentally transformative, shaping one's soul. The metaphor of likening one's educational background to the operating system for a computer might also suggest Shanshan's view that a person's educational experiences influence how they function and engage with the world. It should be noted that, for Shanshan herself, this education was more about self-education. As Shanshan indicated in Section 6.2.2, Subtheme 2 of Theme 2, she did not appreciate many aspects of Chinese cultural and educational traditions. Therefore, she deliberately distanced herself through self-learning and self-reflection, particularly by engaging with Western educational theories (Shanshan-1).

More specifically, the data revealed that participants utilised their upbringing and educational experiences as sources for reflection, drawing on them to apply what they perceived as positive and to avoid what they perceived as negative, which echoed an earlier study on the influences of childhood experiences on workers' commitment to caring for vulnerable children (Brannen et al., 2009).

For example, Enrui, Rongrong, and Minghao all reported that they disliked the collectivism in the Chinese education system and intentionally avoided such practices in their own teaching in the New Zealand ECE context, instead placing greater value on individualism. Drawing on Enrui's

example, when asked about his childhood experiences, he explicitly stated that he disliked collectivism:

> *Everything had to be done collectively. Even when it came to playing games, such as "Eagle Catches Chicks," you had to join in. No one would ask whether you wanted to participate; they would simply ask you to line up and start … Every child was required to comply. I felt it was extremely disrespectful, and the experience was very unpleasant for me. It left a deep impression on me. (Enrui-1)*

Following this, when asked whether he would adopt a less collectivist approach in his future teaching, Enrui responded that he had never held a collectivist mindset, not even during his practicum, as he valued critical thinking and reflection (Enrui-1). Because he disliked such collective activities, Enrui stated that he preferred to avoid them in his own practice. He then shared an example from his practicum in which a boy did not want to eat during kai time but was required by another teacher to do so. Later, Enrui discovered that the boy did not want to eat because he associated eating with having to sleep afterwards. Enrui then shared this information with his associate teacher and head teacher for further solutions. Enrui stated, "I think this is an example of anti-collectivism, where you cannot try to control him, because everything has its underlying reasons" (Enrui-1). Enrui's reflection and example illustrate that these participants critically evaluated their educational experiences and sought to avoid practices that they perceived as negative in their own teaching, particularly collectivism, which is a prominent characteristic of traditional Chinese culture that emphasises teachers' authority and children's conformity (Fike, 2020, p. 22; W. Zhu et al., 2024).

Apart from avoiding practices that they perceived as negative, participants also sought to apply those they perceived as positive in their own upbringing and educational experiences. For example, Bowen shared that he had attended a public Montessori kindergarten in China, which he described as a happy and positive experience.

What I remember is that every day I could choose exactly what I wanted to do. For example, in the kindergarten classroom, there were many areas available. There was a reading corner, an area for cooking activities, another one for building blocks, and so on. Each day, children could freely choose among these options. (Bowen-1)

This kindergarten experience appeared to affirm Bowen's valuing of children's agency in deciding what to do during play (see Section 5.2.1, Respecting Children's Choices to Affirm Their Agency). Although Bowen noted that his childhood memories were not very clear, he was certain that his kindergarten experience was happy, which partially shaped his belief that the Montessori approach is beneficial in ECE because it emphasises and promotes independence. Bowen further explained that, having been nurtured to be independent from a young age, he valued this quality and expected children to do things on their own and develop independence (Bowen-1).

In addition, Bowen mentioned that his upbringing experiences in his family of origin were quite influential in shaping his perspectives.

Since childhood, I have had a close and intimate relationship with my parents. Of course, there were arguments, but not many. They respected my ideas, and because of this, when I later worked in ECE centres, I naturally respected the ideas of children. Therefore, I believe that one's family of origin has an enormous influence on a person (Bowen-1).

This account reflected Bowen's interpretation of how his early family relationships shaped his professional beliefs, suggesting that respect for children's voices in his teaching was also rooted in the respect he had received from his parents. Bowen's narratives, whether referring to his kindergarten or family experiences, provided an example of how participants drew on their perceived positive experiences to translate into their own teaching beliefs.

It is noteworthy that Bowen's example revealed the heterogeneity of upbringing and educational experiences among participants who share the same cultural background. Depending on the era in which they attended kindergarten, the type of kindergarten they attended, the social and economic context of their family, as well as parents' educational beliefs and practices, Chinese

student teachers may have had varied growing-up experiences, which may or may not align with Chinese educational traditions. This variability suggests it is not appropriate to treat Chinese student teachers as a homogeneous group; rather, they should be understood as encompassing both shared and diverse upbringings and educational experiences, which contributed to their current different perspectives. These insights invite broader inquiry into how funds of knowledge and identity and third space theory can help explain the ways student teachers negotiate between personal histories and professional discourses during ITE.

6.3.1 Summary

Taken together, this theme illustrates the underlying influence of participants' upbringing and educational experiences across family, institutional, and self-education contexts on their perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy in ECE. Although recollections of these experiences may have faded, the feelings and views associated with them have endured and continue to shape participants' views. More specifically, participants drew on these experiences as sources for reflection, applying what they perceived as positive (e.g., Montessori educational approach; authoritative/democratic parenting) and avoiding what they perceived as negative (e.g., collectivism). The narratives also highlight that participants who share the same cultural background show both commonalities and differences in their growing-up experiences. These insights invite more targeted research on international or immigrant student teachers' diverse funds of knowledge and funds of identity developed through their personal histories, and on how these funds interact with professional discourses within the space of ITE in host countries.

6.4 Theme 4: Distinct Influence of Being a Parent

Theme 4 focuses on the specific influence of being a parent on the perspectives of four participants (Minghao, Shanshan, Rongrong, and Aiai). For these participants, being a parent was perceived as highly influential, as it fostered an eagerness to learn about educational theories, provided first-hand experience in interacting with children, and offered insights into the ECE their children received in China and/or New Zealand. These parenting experiences appeared to have

informed and enriched their perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy in ECE, enabling them to interpret and compare practices through a cross-cultural lens.

For example, Shanshan explained why parenting experience was influential for her:

I think for me, [the influential factor] is my parenting experience. When you are raising and educating your own child, you naturally start to think about these issues. Many people do not really think about such issues because they are not relevant to them. But once these things become relevant to you, you are more likely to consider them … When I was bringing up my child and came across these issues, most of the time I was looking at the latest educational theories, and a lot of those were from Western, European-American countries. (Shanshan-2)

Shanshan's account revealed that her engagement with ECE issues began even before entering her ITE programme in New Zealand, through her parenting experience in China. For Shanshan, parenting a child created a strong motivation to explore educational philosophies in ECE. Although she was raising a child in China, Shanshan stated that she relied more on Western theories than on traditional Chinese philosophies, which was consistent with her earlier remark about her preference for Western cultures over Chinese culture. Shanshan described her parenting philosophy as "entirely Westernised" (Shanshan-2), which may have contributed to her embracing ECE philosophies and approaches in New Zealand.

Similarly, Minghao also noted the influence of his parenting experiences:

You can gain some first-hand information from interacting with [your own children], from your daily communication with them, and from observing their development. This helps you understand what kinds of support and environment children at this age need, and how they might respond. Sometimes you can even try out an educational philosophy as a small experiment with your own child. (Minghao-2)

The narrative reflected Minghao's appreciation of his role as a parent, which enabled him to gain first-hand and rich knowledge of children's learning interests and developmental needs through daily parenting practices. Such knowledge of and experiences with children, as Minghao indicated,

may contribute to student teachers' development as ECE teachers in creating appropriate environments and providing support for children. It also suggested that for Minghao, the family setting served as a low-stakes context for trying out ideas and refining them through feedback from his own child. These aspects illustrated why Minghao regarded parenthood as influential in his ITE journey.

Moreover, being a parent provided these participants with rich opportunities to conduct cross-cultural comparisons between ECE in China and New Zealand, which contributed to the development of their pedagogical perspectives. For instance, drawing on his child's ECE experience in China and his observation of ECE in New Zealand, Minghao noted some differences. Minghao explained that in China, there was a strong focus on teaching and academic results, whereas in New Zealand, children were provided with spaces to explore freely on their own (Minghao-1). In addition, Minghao observed that in China, children frequently engaged in group activities such as flag-raising ceremonies or singing competitions, whereas in New Zealand, such activities were relatively less common, and children had more freedom to pursue their own interests (Minghao-1). This different emphasis on collectivism and individualism has also been highlighted in Theme 3 when participants reflected on their own educational experiences. It suggests that collectivism, as a prominent characteristic of Chinese culture, remains an enduring and deeply embedded feature of its education system across generations.

Comparing her child's ECE experiences in China with her observations in New Zealand, Shanshan criticised the high teacher-child ratio in Chinese public kindergartens, feeling that more teachers were required. Shanshan argued that such ratios limited teachers' capacity to attend to children's individual needs and, in order to avoid accidents, compelled them to impose stricter discipline by requiring children to sit still and listen (Shanshan-1). In contrast, Shanshan appreciated the lower teacher-child ratios and ECE practices in New Zealand, stating, "If I had to choose, I would choose to educate my child in the New Zealand way" (Shanshan-1). Shanshan's comments reflect her understanding that a low teacher-child ratio benefits children, as it enables teachers to observe,

understand, and intentionally respond to individual learning needs. In addition, as Shanshan indicated, low teacher-child ratios may also help to reduce conflicts among children, as children may have relatively more resources and space to explore within the ECE environment and greater access to teacher support. Such cross-cultural comparisons contributed to her appreciation of ECE provision in New Zealand.

Rongrong shared that, although her child attended a Montessori kindergarten for several months in China, she felt that its practices differed from the authentic Montessori approach. Rongrong explained that teachers in that kindergarten imposed many rules and regulations on children, such as how to place their hands, how to sit, and how to use chopsticks or spoons (Rongrong-1). However, after moving her child to New Zealand for ECE, Rongrong observed that there were fewer rules and regulations, noting, “They don’t expect children to conform to one single correct way of doing things” (Rongrong-1). Rongrong’s comments illustrate how a particular educational philosophy may be implemented differently across cultural contexts and individual settings. The differing emphasis on rules and regulations in Chinese and New Zealand ECE settings might also be understood as reflecting divergent orientations towards teachers’ directions and children’s autonomy in two cultures.

Aiai made a detailed comparison between her son’s ECE experiences in New Zealand and those of her niece in China, who was of a similar age. She noted that both Chinese and New Zealand ECE provisions had their respective strengths (Aiai-1). Her comparison can be organised into four dimensions: the ECE environment, children’s development, children’s caregiving, and pedagogical practices.

ECE environment. Aiai noted that her niece’s kindergarten offered many opportunities for children to be immersed in traditional Chinese culture, such as wearing *Hanfu* (traditional Han Chinese clothing) and learning to use Chinese calligraphy brushes. In contrast, children in New Zealand were often provided with recycled materials and loose parts, such as rocks and bottles, to support play. It should be noted that while Aiai appreciated the more formal and professional

clothing and materials, the value of loose parts should not be underestimated, as they promote creativity, imagination, and innovation (Cankaya et al., 2023).

Children's development. Aiai also observed that her niece appeared more knowledgeable and capable, as shown by her ability to recite many classical Chinese poems and act as a host for kindergarten activities. In comparison, from Aiai's perspective, although her son seemed "silly," he displayed a strong sense of security because he received more companionship and interaction from his parents than Aiai's niece, whose mother was very busy with work. As Aiai stated, "My son may look a bit silly, but he seems to have a strong sense of security. Both of us [referring to the parents] spend quite a lot of time accompanying him" (Aiai-1).

Children's caregiving. Moreover, according to Aiai, children in China received more caregiving support from extended family members, particularly grandparents who often co-reside with them and take on additional caregiving responsibilities. In contrast, in New Zealand, children's caregiving often relied more on the nuclear family, which in turn contributed to greater parent-child interaction. In addition, Aiai noted that in China, children were often provided with a formal hot lunch at kindergarten, whereas in New Zealand, children often brought their own lunch boxes, containing items such as candies and cookies, which she found concerning from a Chinese mother's perspective.

Pedagogical practices. Furthermore, Aiai pointed out that, in China, teaching practices tended to be rule-bound, with teachers establishing role models for other children to follow, communicating less with families, and offering limited support for children with special needs. In contrast, teachers in New Zealand imposed fewer rules and regulations, respected children's diversity and individuality, fostered close connections with families, and created a more inclusive environment with stronger supports for children with additional learning support needs.

Overall, by comparing the experiences of her son and her niece, Aiai identified differences between ECE in China and New Zealand from her perspective and recognised the strengths of each. As her accounts indicate, these differences are rooted in cultural values, family structures, nurturing

practices, parental expectations, and ECE philosophies. Aiai's parenting experiences contributed to her development of pedagogical beliefs and practices through a cross-cultural lens.

6.4.1 Summary

Taken together, Theme 4 highlights the distinct influence of parenthood on certain participants' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy in ECE. As reflected in the data, being a parent motivated them to engage with ECE-related issues before entering ITE, provided first-hand insights into children's learning and development, and offered opportunities for close observation of ECE practices in both China and New Zealand. Through cross-cultural comparisons, participants generally characterised Chinese ECE as more academically oriented, collectivist, teacher-directed, and rule-bound, whereas New Zealand ECE was perceived as more individualised, emotionally supportive, inclusive, and valuing of children's agency. These perceptions appeared to strengthen these participants' appreciation of the New Zealand approach, although this may not be the case for all Chinese parents. These findings invite further inquiry into the influence of parenthood on student teachers' perspectives, specifically in cross-cultural contexts.

6.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter examined four key factors influencing Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy in ECE, with particular attention to the role of ITE in these perspectives.

The first theme, "Significant influence of initial teacher education," highlighted the pivotal role of ITE in shaping participants' perspectives by facilitating the development of new beliefs, promoting reflection on existing beliefs, and supporting integration of course-based learning and practicum experiences. Newly established beliefs included respecting children's identities, valuing social and emotional learning, supporting inclusive education, and fostering connections with families and the wider community, which were aspects that participants had not previously considered or recognised as important before entering ITE in New Zealand. Reflection on existing beliefs centred on children's play and learning, the teacher's role in children's learning, and the image of the child. Through reflection, participants engaged in a process of reconciling their prior

beliefs with new knowledge and experiences. In addition, well-structured ITE programmes supported participants in integrating their course-based learning and centre-based practicum experiences, enabling them to transform learned knowledge into internalised beliefs through active application in practical contexts.

The second theme, "Varied influence of cultural background," reflected participants' differing perceptions of how cultural background influenced their perspectives. Four participants regarded their Chinese cultural background as a generally positive influence, while the remaining three considered it less significant. There seems to be a link between participants' perceptions of cultural influence and their pedagogical orientation, particularly regarding whether they sought to integrate or unify ECE approaches in New Zealand and China. Those who viewed their cultural background positively tended to believe that valuable elements of Chinese culture could be integrated into New Zealand's ECE approaches, whereas those who viewed their Chinese cultural background as less significant were more inclined towards assimilation into the dominant local norm.

The third theme, "Underlying influence of upbringing and educational experiences," illustrated the deep-seated and underlying influence of participants' own upbringing and educational experiences on their perspectives. Although memories of such experiences may have faded, the influence remained enduring and continued to shape participants' views. Importantly, data indicated that participants were not simply teaching the way they were taught, which is a commonly cited assumption in the literature but has also been questioned by other studies (Cox, 2014; Oleson & Hora, 2014). Rather, Chinese student teachers engaged in a critical evaluation and interpretation of their past experiences, drawing on them as resources for reflection; reproducing what they perceived as positive (e.g., Montessori educational approach; authoritative/democratic parenting) and avoiding what they perceived as negative (e.g., collectivism).

The fourth theme, "Distinct influence of being a parent," focuses on the unique impact of parenting experiences among the four participants who were parents. First, their role as parents

motivated them to engage with ECE-related issues, including educational theories, even before entering ITE. Second, parenting provided them with rich first-hand insights into children's learning and development, which contributed to the development of their pedagogical beliefs and competencies. Third, being a parent provided opportunities to closely observe ECE practices in both China and New Zealand, enabling cross-cultural comparisons that appeared to strengthen their appreciation of New Zealand's ECE philosophies and practices, although this may not be the case for all Chinese parents.

It should be noted that this chapter has examined only four prominent influential factors that were widely shared among this group of participants. Other factors, such as prior professional experiences in the ECE field (Horsley & Bauer, 2010), are not discussed here, not because they are unimportant in shaping student teachers' perspectives, but because they were not evident among the seven participants for this study, none of whom reported ECE teaching experiences before ITE. Nevertheless, such unaddressed factors may influence other cohorts of Chinese student teachers and therefore warrant further investigation.

In the next chapter, I will move beyond specific curriculum and pedagogical perspectives to consider the broader ITE context in which participants' beliefs were shaped. The analysis will focus on the supports and challenges that Chinese student teachers encountered and identified as they navigated their ITE learning journey in a cross-cultural context. These insights may inform future ITE practices in supporting student teachers from similar cultural backgrounds and beyond.

Chapter 7 Findings from Phase 2 — Supports and Challenges

Building on Chapters 5 and 6, this chapter reports on findings from Phase 2 regarding the supports and challenges that Chinese student teachers described in relation to their initial teacher education (ITE) experiences. This analysis aims to provide insights for future ITE practices to better support student teachers from similar or other non-dominant cultural backgrounds. In doing so, it addresses Research Question 5:

RQ5. What supports and challenges do Chinese student teachers describe in relation to their ITE experiences?

This research question (RQ5) was developed based on the increasingly recognised view of "teacher learning as identity learning" (Beijaard, 2019, p.1). Learning to teach for student teachers is not only about developing understandings of curriculum and pedagogy or mastering teaching skills and competencies, but, more importantly, about constructing their identity as teachers (Garner & Kaplan, 2019). How student teachers view their role as teachers significantly influences their commitment to the teaching profession, as well as their pedagogical beliefs and practices (Suarez & McGrath, 2022). Rushton et al. (2023) defined teacher identity as "socially constructed, dynamic and hybrid, that is shaped by discourse, narrative and emotions, and influenced by social and organisational contexts" (p. 3). Teacher identity is a concept that combines and integrates both the personal and professional aspects of identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004). Within the ITE learning journey, student teachers engaged in an ongoing process of negotiation, construction, and reconstruction of who they are and who they are becoming. This identity learning process can be even more complex for student teachers with international or immigrant backgrounds, as they need to cross borders and reposition themselves while navigating cultural differences between home and host cultures (Rathore & D'Silva, 2024; Xu et al., 2025). Recognising the complexity of identity learning processes, the findings in this chapter aim to present the supports and challenges within ITE that either open or constrain spaces for Chinese student teachers

to negotiate and construct their identities as early childhood education (ECE) teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The supports and challenges discussed here encompass both those directly experienced by participants and those not personally experienced but identified by participants as relevant to Chinese student teachers more broadly. The chapter is organised into two sections, focusing on supports and challenges respectively. Within each section, the generated themes and subthemes (where applicable) are presented. It should be noted that the supports and challenges discussed here are drawn solely from the participants' perspectives, as this study did not collect data from other parties. Therefore, the findings reflect only the participants' perceptions, which may not fully represent the full context. The intention of presenting these data is not to criticise any individual or institution, but rather to offer a source of reflection that may help the sector gain a better understanding of Chinese student teachers' experiences and respond more effectively to their specific needs, as well as those of students from diverse cultural backgrounds in ITE in New Zealand.

To protect privacy, generic terms have been used to replace potentially identifiable expressions in participants' data. For example, the term *associate teacher (AT)* is consistently used to refer to the qualified teacher at the practicum centre who provides day-to-day guidance and assessment for student teachers, regardless of the specific titles used in different ITE programmes. Similarly, the term *teacher educator* is consistently used to refer to tertiary-based faculty involved in ITE.

It is worth noting that, because each participant focused on different aspects of supports and challenges in their narratives, the data may not be evenly distributed across themes and subthemes. Although efforts were made to uphold the principle of presenting diverse participants' voices, some participants' accounts may appear more prominently than others within particular themes or subthemes.

7.1 Challenges Experienced and Identified by Chinese Student Teachers

This section reports on four themes generated from the analysis of the challenges that Chinese student teachers experienced and identified during their ITE journey, including: (1) Biases across the ITE and ECE sectors, (2) Challenges in drawing on prior experiences, (3) Inadequate practicum support, and (4) Restricted agency in practicum contexts. Together, these four themes illustrate how these challenges limited opportunities for Chinese student teachers to develop and construct their professional identity as ECE teachers in New Zealand.

Although the themes are presented sequentially for reporting purposes, this order does not necessarily indicate their relative importance. A thematic map is provided below to represent the themes visually (see Figure 7-1).

Figure 7-1

Thematic Map of Experienced and Identified Challenges



7.1.1 Theme 1: Biases Across the ITE and ECE Sectors

Theme 1 focuses on the biases that Chinese student teachers encountered during their ITE journey, both in ITE environments and ECE practicum settings. Stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination represent three forms of social bias towards a group and its members: stereotyping is the process of associating specific characteristics with a group; prejudice refers to an attitude reflecting an overall evaluation of a group; and discrimination involves biased behaviours or unequal treatment directed at a group and its members (Dovidio et al., 2010, p. 5). These three types of biases appeared to be explicitly or implicitly experienced and identified by some of the Chinese student teachers.

For example, Ningning shared that she felt the teacher educator team offered as much support as they could to her and her peers; however, she argued that they could be more culturally responsive (Ningning-2). Ningning noted that some teacher educators seemed to have only a limited understanding of Chinese student teachers and appeared to be relying on stereotypes against Chinese or outdated resources in interpreting them (Ningning-2). Ningning commented:

> *Why did I say their understanding is limited? Actually, what I mean is that our generation, if I define a generation as roughly ten years, is very different. What they understand about China is probably still the China of thirty years ago … The reason I say this is because once, when I was talking with a teacher educator about Chinese students, he/she recommended an article to me. He/she said that he/she found it very interesting and that it helped him/her understand how Chinese students think. But after I read the article myself, to be honest, I did not really buy into it. (Ningning-2)*
>
> *Some teacher educators may be senior. The Chinese people they met in the past were probably from those earlier generations. But the Chinese students coming here now are not the same. If they use those old ideas to define who we are, that's just not right. (Ningning-2)*

Ningning's accounts reflect her emphasis on the generational differences that exist among Chinese students. Ningning indicated that, due to the influence of past experiences with earlier generations of Chinese people or outdated resources (e.g., articles published many years ago), some teacher educators may have developed, to some extent, a limited and stereotyped understanding of Chinese students, particularly younger generations. Thus, teacher educators' limited knowledge may have constrained their ability to understand and interpret Chinese student teachers' thinking appropriately. Ningning's account also highlights her emphasis on her identity as a new-generation Chinese student, resisting being defined by teacher educators in a simplistic and stereotyped way. Drawing on a food example, Ningning further illustrated her point, saying that some teacher educators may feel that Chinese people are not accepting of New Zealand food, but, for her personally, it is quite acceptable. Her narrative, "I ate mixed food in China before. I ate both foreign

food and Chinese food" (Ningning-2), may serve as a metaphor for the blended, transcultural identity of a younger-generation Chinese person shaped not only by Chinese traditions but also by Western cultures introduced to China in a globalised context.

Considering the profound social transformation and rapid economic development that have occurred in China over the past decades, generational differences may be more prominently reflected among Chinese individuals (Sun & Wang, 2010). Therefore, to avoid continued stereotyping and misunderstandings, Ningning suggested that "we probably need people like you [referring to the researcher] to introduce us … that we are professional, we grew up in such an environment, and we have seen the world that they had" (Ningning-2). Ningning's narratives reflect her expectations for a more culturally sensitive interpretation and understanding of the Chinese student teacher cohort, which could benefit from further in-depth investigation.

In addition, Shanshan described the prejudice and discrimination she experienced during her practicum. Shanshan explained that when she first entered a practicum centre, she felt that other teachers were not very friendly towards her and showed signs of prejudice. Shanshan stated, "For example, when I am in a new environment, people may see me as Chinese, and their attitude towards me may not be respectful or friendly when I first enter the setting" (Shanshan-1). Shanshan speculated that such prejudice may have stemmed from negative perceptions of Chinese people formed through widely reported unfavourable anecdotes about Chinese immigrants, particularly those from older generations who grew up during an under-resourced era in China. Although not explicitly indicated by Shanshan, such prejudice and discrimination may also have historical roots and may have been exacerbated by political factors (Ip, 2013; L. S. Liu et al., 2023). Within such an environment, Shanshan stated, "I can only use my own actions to show them that the new generation of Chinese people who have received higher education is different" (Shanshan-1). Shanshan's accounts suggest that while the unwelcoming environment did not provide her with the space to embrace and celebrate her cultural identity, she nonetheless demonstrated a sense of agency and responsibility in challenging negative perceptions of Chinese people. Shanshan's

accounts also illustrate her expectation for an equitable, friendly, and inclusive environment where she can be welcomed and accepted as a valuable member.

Furthermore, Shanshan noted that Chinese or Asian student teachers were often treated unequally and differentiated from their Pākehā peers, which may represent a more explicit form of discrimination during practicum. Shanshan stated that she had both observed and heard from her Chinese peers that some associate teachers would only ask Asian student teachers to do the cleaning tasks and other chores, whereas Pākehā student teachers were not required to do so. Shanshan remarked:

> *It's like when you're doing your practicum in a centre, you can see that there are also other white students there. The white students never do the cleaning, and the teachers don't dare to ask them to. But they'll ask the Asian students to do it … This is really, really unfair to the [Asian] students. (Shanshan-2)*
>
> *Sometimes you do not dare to make a complaint. Many people, especially Chinese and other Asian students, don't usually make complaints. In fact, they [referring to associate teachers] particularly avoid doing so with white students because they know that white students have a much stronger awareness of their rights. (Shanshan-2)*

Shanshan's comment seemed to suggest that she perceived Asian student teachers, compared with those of Pākehā backgrounds, might be more likely to take on additional workloads during their practicum, possibly due to an assumed lack of awareness of their rights. Asian student teachers' reluctance to advocate for their rights may stem from a lack of trust in institutional feedback mechanisms, which are designed to support students in voicing concerns. This interpretation resonates with earlier findings that Asian international students tend to be less likely to use university support services when encountering problems (J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007). While acknowledging that these accounts were reported solely from Shanshan's perspective and may not represent the full context, the finding nevertheless highlights the need for a more focused examination of international student teachers' experiences in relation to bias. It also indicates the

importance of strengthening Chinese and other Asian student teachers' trust in feedback mechanisms so that they can voice their concerns and be supported to challenge the structural racism, whether held consciously or unconsciously by others.

7.1.1.1 Summary

Theme 1 points to a concerning challenge related to social biases, including stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination, faced by Chinese student teachers across both institutional environments and practicum settings. In institutional environments, participants perceived that some teacher educators appeared to interpret Chinese student teachers through stereotyped lenses, which was likely due to their reliance on prior experiences with earlier generations of Chinese people or on outdated resources. In practicum settings, participants described instances of feeling unfriendly treatment that appeared to stem from prejudice, as well as instances of experiencing discriminatory practices whereby Asian student teachers were asked to take on additional workloads compared with their Pākehā peers. These findings are significant as they suggest a need for more focused examination of the experiences of Chinese and other international student teachers. These findings also highlight participants' expectations to be understood in culturally sensitive ways and underscore the importance of continued efforts to foster culturally responsive and inclusive environments free from bias, so that all people's cultural identity can be affirmed and valued.

7.1.2 Theme 2: Challenges in Drawing on Prior Experiences

Theme 2 illustrates the challenges Chinese student teachers encountered when drawing on their prior cultural and learning experiences during practicums in New Zealand. Participants' accounts show that these experiences did not always transfer smoothly into the local ECE context. Some participants reported difficulties in relying on their culturally shaped expectations of children's behaviours, as these expectations did not always align with what they observed in New Zealand ECE settings. In addition, several participants described difficulties in applying their prior learning

experiences in practice, especially when these experiences were not recognised or valued within practicum settings.

7.1.2.1 Subtheme 1: Difficulties in Relying on Prior Cultural Expectations

Some participants noted that China and New Zealand hold disparate cultural expectations of children's behaviours in ECE settings, which posed challenges for them because they could not rely on their previous cultural expectations to respond to certain situations.

For example, at the early stage of her practicum, Ningning viewed children's messy play as something she found challenging to accept. Ningning explained:

> *I remember in my first week, I was standing by the sandpit and saw this kid bury themselves in the sand, with their whole body covered except for the head. And I was thinking, "Oh my gosh, their parents must be losing it!" [laughs]. But when I saw the parents come to pick up the kid, they were totally fine and even looked pretty happy. I thought, yeah, I guess that's just how kids are, right? (Ningning-1)*

This narrative reflects Ningning's struggle to reconcile the child's behaviour in the sandpit with her pre-existing cultural norms about what constitutes acceptable behaviour in ECE settings. In China, where Ningning's cultural expectations were formed, children are often expected to avoid engaging in messy play activities (e.g., water and sand play) because Chinese parents tend to be concerned about health and safety issues and dislike the messiness (Hu et al., 2016). However, after observing how parents in New Zealand responded at pick-up time, Ningning became more aware of the local cultural expectations and more accepting of messy play, as she reflected, "I guess that's just how kids are, right?" (Ningning-1).

Minghao also reported challenges related to health and safety concerns, particularly regarding messy play. Minghao explained that Chinese and New Zealand parents often react differently to such activities:

> *If it were Chinese parents, for example, when they come to pick up their child and see them covered in all kinds of paint, they would probably say, "Why are you so dirty again?" But*

foreign parents wouldn't react like that, because they usually have two or three sets of spare clothes in their bags. (Minghao-2)

As a Chinese parent himself, Minghao's account illustrates his ambivalence towards fully appreciating messy play. Minghao expressed concern that children engaging in such activities might face health and safety risks, such as accidentally drinking water mixed with sand (Minghao-2). On the one hand, Minghao's account may suggest a need for ITE programmes to consider supporting Chinese student teachers in recognising the value of messy play for children's sensory development, creativity, and imagination (Casey & Prendiville, 2020; Yin et al., 2014). On the other hand, Minghao's ambivalence towards messy play can also be seen as a strength in his professional role. As a Chinese parent himself, Minghao brings a culturally informed understanding of the concerns that other parents, particularly those from similar backgrounds, might have about messy play.

Furthermore, Ningning shared an incident at her practicum centre involving an eight-month-old who fell while climbing up a small slope outdoors. Ningning described how nervous she felt at that moment and reported ongoing tension in supporting children's risky play. As Ningning indicated, Chinese teachers may be less supportive of such behaviours to avoid incidents, especially as they are aware that Chinese parents may hold strong cultural viewpoints about safety and risk-taking (Ningning-2). Ningning's comment on Chinese parents' concerns is supported by a recent study, which found that, primarily due to the influence of personal experiences and public media, Chinese parents were concerned about the safety risks associated with outdoor risky play for children (P. Wu et al., 2025).

In contrast, New Zealand's updated national early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāraki*, as noted by Hanrahan and Duncan (2019), adopts a positive stance towards risk and risk-taking and encourages children to engage in risky play within a challenging environment, a perspective that contrasts with Ningning's cultural expectations. As Ningning commented, "I feel like the biggest challenge is about recognising the boundaries of children's abilities. When children challenge their own limits, I feel that I do not yet have sufficient experience to respond appropriately" (Ningning-2).

Ningning's account suggests that she may need more experience before feeling confident in effectively supporting children's risky play activities. Ningning's account also demonstrates a reflective stance and a commitment to children's safety and well-being, which teacher educators might draw on to extend student teachers' culturally located views by providing more practical experience and support. In this way, student teachers like Ningning could feel better equipped to support children's risk-taking while ensuring their safety.

The narratives in this section illustrate that, due to the strong emphasis on health and safety concerns in China, Chinese student teachers may have developed disparate cultural expectations of children's acceptable behaviours in ECE settings, which created challenges or tensions for them in accepting messy and risky play. The findings suggest that, in addition to providing sufficient support to help Chinese student teachers understand the developmental benefits of such activities, it is important to allow time for them to familiarise themselves with local cultural expectations and to accumulate experience in supporting children's participation in these activities. Importantly, the findings also indicate that Chinese student teachers' concerns about health and safety should not be dismissed or viewed as inappropriate. Rather, these concerns represent culturally grounded understandings that can serve as valuable resources in their pedagogical learning. Chinese student teachers' culturally situated views towards such activities could help them better understand parents' views and concerns, especially those from similar cultural backgrounds, as well as serve as a foundation for developing a critical, broadened, and contextually appropriate stance towards children's behaviours. Such a reframing of Chinese student teachers' cultural differences may also contribute to affirming their cultural heritage and strengthening their sense of identity as teachers.

7.1.2.2 Subtheme 2: Difficulties in Applying Prior Learning Experiences

Another challenge in Theme 2 is the difficulty Chinese student teachers experienced in applying their prior experiences to their student teaching practice. Although participants had accumulated various life experiences before entering ITE programmes in New Zealand, these

experiences did not always translate smoothly into the local context and were, at times, not readily acknowledged within practicum settings.

For example, Ningning noted that her childhood environment in China was quite different from that in New Zealand, which created a challenge for her to relate her own childhood experiences to the understanding of play in the New Zealand context. Ningning explained:

> *Since my family circumstances were not very good when I was a child, I only knew that both my nursery and kindergarten were attached to my mother's workplace. They were workplace-run institutions with very limited resources. My impression of them is quite vague, but I remember that they were rather boring, with little opportunity for play. I felt that I hardly played during my childhood, and my overall upbringing was largely centred on studying. (Ningning-1)*

Ningning's recollection of her childhood experiences suggests that, having grown up in an environment with limited play resources and an emphasis on studying rather than play, she perceived a tension when trying to understand the meaning of play in the New Zealand context. Ningning's narrative also illustrates how she actively drew on and reflected upon her childhood memories during her ITE learning process. Such reflective engagement can be seen as a powerful learning moment that contributed to her developing understanding of play-based pedagogy.

Furthermore, although Ningning had some play experiences during childhood, she noted that those experiences were not considered appropriate in the New Zealand context, as her associate teacher told her that the activities she introduced were not suitable for children. She explained:

> *For example, back in China when I was a child, I used to play games like paper folding, such as making boats or paper planes. But here I was told that such activities are not allowed. There were also other things [not allowed]. Anyway, many activities I tried to play [with the children] based on my childhood memories were not allowed here. (Ningning-1)*

This account illustrates the limited transferability of Ningning's childhood experiences to the New Zealand context. The games she played during her childhood (e.g., paper folding) were regarded as teacher-led activities, contrasting with her associate teacher's emphasis on child-led play, and were viewed as detrimental to children's creativity. However, it is important to recognise that there are different cultural understandings of creativity and diverse ways of fostering it in practice. In East Asian societies, such as China and Japan, paper-folding activities (in Japan, often referred to as *origami*) led by teachers or parents who provide instructions on how to make particular shapes are common among children of ECE age (Nishida, 2019). In a study examining approaches to prompting creativity in Chinese, Japanese, and US preschools, Tobin et al. (2011) observed that in such paper-folding activities, the mastery and repetition of already existing forms are viewed as foundational steps for extending and transforming these forms, ultimately promoting creativity. The authors noted that this perspective challenges Western notions of creativity, as "there is no contradiction … between creativity and direct instruction, repetition, and following models" (Tobin et al., 2011, p. 151). Therefore, although Ningning's experience represents a single case, it raises important questions about the legitimacy of interpretations of international student teachers' experiences, and the ways in which these interpretations may be shaped by narratives that regard differences as deficits (Massing, 2015; Nuttall & Ortlipp, 2012; Xu et al., 2025). Exploring a wider range of perspectives, including those of associate teachers and teacher educators, could provide deeper insight into how such interpretations are formed and enacted.

7.1.2.3 Summary

Theme 2 describes the challenges Chinese student teachers encountered when drawing on their cultural and learning experiences during their ITE learning processes. Differences in cultural expectations of children's behaviours created tensions for some participants, particularly when understanding messy and risky play in New Zealand ECE settings. Participants also experienced challenges in drawing on their prior learning experiences for student teaching, as these experiences were not fully acknowledged within practicum settings. Taken together, these findings suggest that

Chinese student teachers' prior experiences, shaped primarily within the Chinese sociocultural context, did not always transfer smoothly into the New Zealand ECE context. The findings highlight the need for further consideration of how international student teachers' prior experiences are positioned and understood, and how these experiences could be recognised as valuable foundations for pedagogical learning and integrated into local practices. The challenges described within Theme 2 also suggest a need to further examine how deficit-oriented narratives may contribute to the devaluation of international student teachers' experiences and affect their identity development.

7.1.3 Theme 3: Inadequate Practicum Support

This section presents the challenges regarding practicum support. Some participants reported experiencing insufficient support and guidance from their associate teachers during some of their practicums, although they also described receiving quality mentoring in other practicums (see Section 7.2.3 for a discussion of quality mentoring). While practicum support is essential for all student teachers, inadequate support may have a more significant impact on Chinese and other international student teachers as they navigate cross-cultural contexts.

For example, Bowen shared that during his second year of study, he experienced significant challenges in receiving support and guidance from his associate teacher. He commented:

> *Honestly, I did not feel that I learned much in my second year, because the whole environment was not supportive. My associate teacher was not very responsible, and some of the other teachers also showed many unprofessional behaviours when interacting with children. (Bowen-1)*

Bowen's account reflects his perception of the practicum environment as unsupportive. Bowen described his associate teacher as not providing the support he expected, and he also noted the behaviours of some of the other teachers that he felt were unprofessional towards children at the centre. As Bowen indicated, this practicum became a very negative experience for him, in which he felt that he had learned little (Bowen-1).

Similarly, Ningning reported that she felt unsupported by her associate teacher during one practicum in completing her practicum tasks. Ningning recalled, “After I went there and explained the course requirements and practicum objectives, many of them directly said to me, ‘No way’” (Ningning-1). Ningning reflected that those teachers’ responses might have been due to unfamiliarity with updated ECE philosophies and recent practicum requirements in New Zealand. Ningning, therefore, argued that ongoing professional learning and development opportunities for associate teachers were needed to help them better fulfil their mentoring roles. While Ningning’s experience represents a single case, it suggests the importance of professional learning opportunities for associate teachers, aligning with Whatman and MacDonald’s (2017) review of high-quality practicums, which emphasised that such opportunities can better prepare associate teachers for their roles.

Aiai shared two contrasting practicum experiences, both reflecting her experiences of insufficient support and guidance from associate teachers. She reported that, in one placement, she experienced her associate teacher as very strict, holding high standards but, from her perspective, offering limited guidance (Aiai-2). As a result, she had to rely on herself and develop her professional capabilities independently (Aiai-2). Aiai commented:

> *From my own experience, my third practicum was honestly really painful. During that time, I felt very miserable. But looking back now, it was probably the period when I made the most progress. I was so worried that I wouldn’t pass the assessment, and I was scared I wouldn’t meet the teacher’s standards, so I worked really hard. I practised mat time at home, learned lots of Māori songs by myself, and even made my own teaching materials. But I have to say, the environment made me feel really uncomfortable. I didn’t like it, and after I left, I didn’t want to go back again. (Aiai-2)*

Aiai’s narrative reflects her experience of feeling insufficiently supported during her third practicum. Without adequate guidance, the period felt highly stressful and emotionally challenging for Aiai, as she constantly worried about failing the practicum assessment. Although Aiai recognised

that she had made some professional growth during this time, largely through her own efforts as described, she associated this practicum with strong negative feelings because of how uncomfortable the environment had felt for her. On the other hand, Aiai's account also reflects her resilience and perseverance in her studies, even within such a perceived challenging environment.

In contrast, during another practicum, Aiai described experiences with another associate teacher whom she perceived as nice and easy-going. However, Aiai felt that the associate teacher was less familiar with the practicum requirements and did not provide the support she needed. Aiai shared that, although the process during this practicum was relaxed and happy, she felt that she had achieved limited professional development from it (Aiai-2). These two contrasting practicum experiences of Aiai seem to suggest that associate teachers' high expectations of student teachers, coupled with sufficient support in a safe and welcoming environment, may be important in enabling student teachers to achieve meaningful learning outcomes.

Moreover, Shanshan suggested, based on her own experience and information from peers, that some associate teachers might accept student teachers primarily for financial reasons. Shanshan explained, "Some associate teachers took student teachers just for the money, but they didn't really take on the responsibilities that an associate teacher should have" (Shanshan-2). However, it is important to note that this understanding reflects only Shanshan's personal perception and may not represent the full context. While there may be many factors that motivate associate teachers, including professional responsibility, these findings suggest a need for further inquiry into associate teachers' motivations for mentorship and ways to support associate teachers to develop more self-determined/intrinsic motivations (Gagnon et al., 2024; Woolston, 2019).

Shanshan further noted that, in some cases, the centre owner or manager was formally assigned as the associate teacher and received the allowance but delegated the responsibility of guiding student teachers to the head teacher in the classroom, who was not compensated for this role. Shanshan articulated that, in such cases, head teachers might be less motivated to offer support and guidance:

The head teacher might give the student some suggestions. But since they were not paid, do you think they would be highly motivated? So, the student ended up with an AT in name, but in reality, received very little support. (Shanshan-2)

On the one hand, Shanshan's account again reflects her view that some associate teachers' mentoring motivation is primarily linked to financial incentives. Consequently, from Shanshan's perspective, head teachers who are not paid for taking on this role may not be well motivated to provide support for student teachers. On the other hand, Shanshan's accounts point to an important issue for ITE institutions and ECE settings in ensuring that the person formally assigned as an associate teacher is indeed the one who assumes the mentoring responsibilities and is fairly compensated for their contribution.

7.1.3.1 Summary

Theme 3 highlights that many participants felt they did not receive adequate support during some of their practicum placements. Several described how inadequate guidance from associate teachers left them with negative feelings as they tried to complete practicum tasks and meet practicum requirements. Others noted instances where they felt the associate teachers were not well prepared or sufficiently motivated to take on their mentoring role. Participants' accounts indicate that reliable and sufficient support was critical for their learning during practicums. In a context where they were already managing social biases and finding it difficult to draw on their prior experiences, as indicated in Themes 1 and 2, practicum support appeared even more significant for these Chinese student teachers. Inadequate support may reduce opportunities for Chinese student teachers to negotiate diverse pedagogical philosophies and construct their emerging teacher identities. These findings invite further investigation into how international or immigrant-background student teachers perceive and navigate practicum support, and how gaps in support may affect their professional growth.

7.1.4 Theme 4: Restricted Agency in Practicum Contexts

Theme 4 focuses on the issue of agency among Chinese student teachers during their practicums. Agency is an important aspect of teacher identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009), yet some participants felt that their agency to act or speak up was constrained within practicum environments. First, some participants described restricted agency in responding to practices they considered inappropriate, as these practices misaligned with what they had learned in ITE courses. Second, some participants reported restricted agency in using feedback mechanisms to voice concerns about their practicum experiences.

7.1.4.1 Subtheme 1: Restricted Agency in Responding to Inappropriate Practices

Some participants reported having limited agency in responding to practices they viewed as inappropriate during practicums, which misaligned with what they had learned from ITE courses. For instance, Bowen shared that during one of his practicums, he noted practices where a teacher (not his associate teacher) adopted a highly controlling approach to children's eating, persisting even when the children resisted by crying and attempting to leave the table. Bowen considered such practices as unprofessional because they conflicted with what he had learned from ITE courses about respect for children. However, when such a situation happened, Bowen perceived limited agency to act in response. Bowen explained:

> *Because I am a student teacher, when my framework clashed with hers, I didn't stop her. Well, at first, I tried to offer some support [for the child], but later I realised it didn't work, since I had no way [to stop her]. If I had tried to stop her, I would have been seen as going against all the teachers in the room, you know what I mean? So, I felt really powerless. (Bowen-1)*

Bowen's narrative revealed that when he observed such inappropriate practices, although he initially attempted to support the child, his agency was constrained by the structural power imbalance between him and other practising teachers. Bowen avoided putting himself in a position where he might be regarded as opposing all the teachers in the room, particularly as the practice in

question may have been tacitly approved by others. In the second-round interview, Bowen added further reasons that constrained his actions in that situation. The reasons Bowen noted included that he was nearing the end of his practicum and did not want to risk being relocated to another centre, and that he was concerned his associate teacher might give him a lower grade in his practicum assessment if he intervened (Bowen-2). These concerns collectively constrained Bowen's agency in confronting perceived inappropriate practices. While this experience left Bowen with negative feelings (feeling powerless, regret for not intervening), it also reinforced his determination to avoid such practices in his future teaching (Bowen-2). Through reflecting on and reinterpreting his practicum experiences, Bowen further strengthened his identity as a professional early childhood teacher who would respect children and listen to their voices.

Aiai also shared an experience which, although less explicit than Bowen's, still reflected her limited agency in challenging the practices of other teachers. Aiai commented:

> *Many ECE teachers, in their actual practice, showed behaviours that were somewhat different from the requirements of the curriculum guidelines [referring to Te Whāriki]. After all, this job is pretty demanding. When teachers have been in it for many years, it's hard for them to always stay calm and show love to every child. I've even seen some teachers complain that children are too naughty or that they dislike children … and I sometimes felt this was a bit unfair to the children. (Aiai-1)*

Aiai's account highlighted that what student teachers observed in practice during practicum was sometimes misaligned with the spirit and principles of *Te Whāriki*. In Aiai's case, some teachers' negative attitudes and emotions towards children conflicted with the emphasis on creating a friendly, responsive, and nurturing environment to meet children's needs in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 30). Although Aiai was aware of such unfairness towards children, her words revealed that, as a student teacher, she was in a marginalised position with limited agency to act in response. Ningning expressed a similar point, stating that "for student teachers who lack practical

experience and do not have any appropriate position in the centre, it is quite difficult for them to make any changes" (Ningning-1).

The narratives from Bowen, Aiai, and Ningning collectively reflected a perceived power imbalance between student teachers and associate teachers, as well as other practising teachers in ECE settings, which limited their agency in responding to perceived inappropriate practices and making changes within practicum environments. This finding echoed a study by Hyland and Lo (2006), which revealed that the imbalanced power relations between student teachers and associate teachers constrained the former in expressing their feelings or raising disagreements. It is also important to note that the Confucian values of hierarchy and the maintenance of harmonious social relationships may have further hindered Chinese student teachers from challenging practising teachers during practicum (Zhan & Wan, 2016; Q. Zhang & Liu, 2025). While recognising these experiences as challenging, purposeful reflection and reinterpretation may, on the other hand, strengthen participants' professional identity by shaping their professional commitments and informing their future teaching.

7.1.4.2 Subtheme 2: Restricted Agency in Using Feedback Mechanisms

Some participants described restricted agency in using feedback mechanisms. The term *feedback mechanisms* here refers to the channels or processes through which student teachers provide feedback on their ITE programmes or raise any issues related to their study and practicum experiences. Participants' narratives revealed that, although such mechanisms were in place within their ITE programmes, their agency in using these channels to voice their concerns was constrained by various factors, leading them instead to tolerate or manage issues on their own. (see Section 7.2.4 for a discussion of positive experiences with feedback mechanisms.)

For example, Shanshan noted that asymmetrical power relations, concerns about additional time costs, and potential negative consequences collectively made the feedback mechanisms largely symbolic, preventing these mechanisms from functioning as intended. Shanshan explained that

when she or other student teachers felt unfairly treated or assessed, they had no means to speak up for themselves. Shanshan commented:

> *So, the AT can assess the student, but there is no mechanism for the student to rate the AT in return, right? You can't rate, you don't have the chance, unless you make a complaint. But as a student, you know, in this kind of unequal power relationship, would you really dare to complain about your AT? If you complain about your AT, then you may not be able to finish your practicum. If you can't finish, don't you have to do it all over again? So, many people, when they think about the time and effort they've already put in, just don't make a complaint, right? (Shanshan-2)*

Shanshan's account suggests that although feedback mechanisms existed for student teachers to make complaints and provide feedback, student teachers often did not dare to use them due to the unequal power relationship between associate teachers and student teachers, with the former acting as assessors and the latter being assessed. From Shanshan's perspective, making a complaint could harm student teachers' relationship with associate teachers, thereby risking relocation to another centre and requiring student teachers to start all over again, which were consequences they felt unable to bear. In this context, Shanshan suggested that an alternative mechanism could be introduced, whereby student teachers would have the opportunity to evaluate associate teachers after completing their practicum without affecting their assessment results. Such a system, Shanshan argued, could both inform future student teachers and contribute to building a more professional and committed team of associate teachers (Shanshan-2).

In addition, Ningning shared that when her practicum centre was unable to support her in completing one of the practicum assignments, she had to manage it on her own, which resulted in a very low grade for that assignment. Ningning remarked, "I couldn't get a high grade, and there was nothing I could do about it. Because in this practicum centre they couldn't support me in that regard, as the assignment conflicted with the centre's philosophy" (Ningning-1). Ningning further noted that, from her perspective, seeking help from the ITE institution was not a realistic option in such

circumstances. Ningning explained that “If you want to escalate to the institution, it must be a big issue” (Ningning-1). Ningning’s account implied that, in her view, the ITE institution would not respond to relatively minor issues such as the one she had encountered. Ningning’s point may also reflect her lack of trust in the feedback mechanism.

Shanshan’s and Ningning’s experiences suggest that, although feedback mechanisms are intended to collect student teachers’ voices to better address their needs, the structural challenge of power and hierarchy in mentoring and practicum assessment (Aspden & McLachlan, 2017), as well as a lack of trust in feedback mechanisms, constrained Chinese student teachers from utilising these mechanisms to make complaints or report issues. Such negative experiences may further reinforce student teachers’ perceived marginalised positions within practicum environments, constraining their agency and emerging teacher identities. The finding suggests a need to examine how feedback mechanisms might be made more transparent, culturally responsive, and trustworthy, alongside supporting Chinese student teachers to feel confident in using them. Such efforts could help ensure that Chinese student teachers’ voices are heard.

7.1.4.3 Summary

Theme 4 illustrates that many participants described having limited agency to respond to perceived inappropriate practices that conflicted with what they had learned from their ITE courses. This limited agency largely stemmed from student teachers’ marginalised positions within practicum environments, which often leave them feeling powerless. Confucian values may have further constrained Chinese student teachers’ willingness to challenge other teachers’ practices. Moreover, although some feedback mechanisms were in place within ITE programmes, the structural challenges of power and hierarchy in mentoring and assessment, together with a lack of trust in these mechanisms, appeared to limit participants’ agency in using them to express their concerns. Collectively, these challenges contributed to negative practicum experiences and seemed to constrain participants’ identity development as early childhood teachers who can make changes not only for children but also for their own learning environments. These findings suggest a need for

further investigation into the practicum experiences of Chinese student teachers, as well as those from both dominant and non-dominant backgrounds. To ensure that student teachers' professional identity development and agency are actively supported, targeted research and practical efforts could be made in addressing the power issues and the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms.

7.2 Supports Experienced and Identified by Chinese Student Teachers

Section 7.1 outlined the challenges Chinese student teachers experienced and identified during their ITE journey. Following that, this section focuses on the supports participants experienced and identified as crucial for their professional learning. These themes include: (1) Having cultural heritage and identity valued, (2) Developing a diverse teacher educator team, (3) Quality mentoring from associate teachers, and (4) Voices being heard through feedback mechanisms. Together, these four themes illustrate how these supports provide opportunities for Chinese student teachers to develop and construct their professional identity as ECE teachers in New Zealand. The themes of supports and challenges provide a complementary perspective that captures the essential aspects shaping Chinese student teachers' ITE experiences.

Again, although the themes are presented sequentially for reporting purposes, it does not necessarily indicate their relative importance. A thematic map is provided below to represent the themes visually (see Figure 7-2).

Figure 7-2

Thematic Map of Experienced and Identified Supports



7.2.1 Theme 1: Having Cultural Heritage and Identity Valued

Theme 1 presents that Chinese student teachers perceived having their cultural heritage and identity valued as an important form of support in facilitating their professional learning. Chinese student teachers noted the efforts teacher educators made in recognising and acknowledging their cultural heritage and identity and expressed expectations for further support in this regard.

For instance, Bowen shared that during his study, his teacher educator emphasised the importance of reflecting on individuals' cultural perspectives, which, although not explicitly stated, implies that all cultural perspectives have value in ECE. Bowen remarked:

> *My lecturer said something like, "Bowen, you're from China, he's from a Māori cultural background, and another person is from somewhere else." She explained that if you look at a certain matter from the perspective of a Chinese teacher, it might seem completely normal. However, from a Māori cultural perspective, the same thing could be seen as quite unusual. I was really impressed by this point she raised. (Bowen-1)*

Bowen's account reflects the teacher educator's endeavour in supporting him to develop intercultural sensitivity, which, as the foundation of intercultural competencies, is increasingly recognised as necessary for ECE teachers when responding to children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds (Lash et al., 2022). The lecturer's comments also conveyed the message that cultural perspectives should be acknowledged equally, including Bowen's Chinese perspective. The lecturer's comments could be interpreted as a recognition of Bowen's Chinese heritage and identity.

Aiai shared another example of how she felt her Chinese heritage and identity were valued. Aiai explained:

> *During Chinese Language Week, there would be some Chinese-themed activities, and some teachers would come over and ask me what certain words meant. For example, they would ask me, "What does this Chinese word mean?" Moments like that made me feel that I did have some value. (Aiai-1)*

New Zealand Chinese Language Week, first launched in 2014, is a Kiwi-driven initiative designed to promote Chinese language learning in New Zealand (NZCLW, n.d.). Aiai's account suggests that participating in such activities, where her language knowledge was recognised and sought after, allowed her cultural heritage to be acknowledged and affirmed. These moments contributed to her sense of being valued and strengthened her identity as a Chinese early childhood teacher in New Zealand.

In addition, some participants expressed an expectation for further support in helping Chinese student teachers develop their cultural identities and explore ways to draw on those identities as resources for teaching practices.

For instance, when asked about what could be done to support student teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds, Enrui reflected on his own practicum experience. Enrui commented:

> *They placed me in a Chinese-run centre. I still cannot tell whether that strengthened my cultural identity or actually reduced my opportunities to integrate into their culture. I still cannot figure it out myself. Yes, when I was placed in the Chinese-run centre, to be honest, I felt a bit upset. I thought I should have been placed in a local centre so that I could understand their education model better and keep improving my English. But I was placed in the Chinese-run centre instead. At the same time, I also felt that it gave me a kind of transition period. I could connect more easily with other Chinese teachers, and we probably share more similar perspectives. (Enrui-1)*

Enrui's account reflects his mixed feelings about being placed in a Chinese-run centre (centres with Chinese leadership) for practicum. On the one hand, as Enrui described, he had expected to be allocated to a local centre (centres with New Zealand or European leadership) so that he could better integrate into the local culture and improve his English language ability. On the other hand, although Enrui initially felt upset, he also recognised the positive aspect of this practicum arrangement. From Enrui's perspective, being in a Chinese-run centre seemed to provide a transition period that helped him connect more easily with Chinese teachers and strengthen his cultural

identity. Overall, Enrui's narrative indicates that cultural identity was an important aspect relevant to culturally diverse student teachers' ITE learning.

Following reflection on his own practicum experience, Enrui suggested that further support could be helpful for culturally diverse student teachers in developing their cultural identities. Enrui commented:

> *They could strengthen the support that the counsellors provide for us, or if they could create another role, similar to a counsellor but focusing specifically on identity. I feel that might be helpful. (Researcher: Do you want more opportunities to talk with the counsellor, or more one-on-one chances to talk with your teacher educators?) Of course, I would prefer to talk with teacher educators, but it might be hard to find them after class. (Enrui-1)*

Enrui's account reflects his suggestion for more focused attention on identity-related issues during student teachers' ITE learning processes. As Enrui indicated, it seemed important for him to have someone with whom he could discuss these matters. From Enrui's perspective, teacher educators might be the most suitable people to provide such support, but in situations where teacher educators are not available, counsellors or someone in a similar role could also be helpful. Such support may assist student teachers like him in navigating the tension between their home and host cultural identities.

Similarly, Minghao suggested that ITE providers could show greater respect for culturally diverse student teachers' cultural traditions and provide support that responds to their needs, such as helping them develop cultural identities. Minghao commented, "My idea is that they [ITE institutions] could show more respect for student teachers' traditions and pay attention to their needs, whether in terms of mental support or other kinds of support, including cultural identity" (Minghao-1). Minghao's account suggests that supports related to cultural heritage and identity might require focused attention within ITE programmes and could be beneficial for the professional learning of culturally diverse student teachers.

Rongrong shared a similar idea and provided her suggestions for helping culturally diverse student teachers. Rongrong remarked:

> *I think maybe they [ITE providers] could offer more course content related to culturally inclusive practices, more courses in this area. Because there are now indeed many people from different cultural backgrounds in all kinds of professions, and there are even more students from Asian cultural backgrounds as well. But even within Asia, every culture is still different. So, I feel that maybe they could … because we only have one course that is related to culture, related to cultural identity. I'm thinking maybe they could add more content related to cultural identity and about how teachers can make good use of their own cultural identity in practical ways. (Rongrong-1)*

Rongrong's account reflects her view that course content related to cultural identity could be beneficial for culturally diverse student teachers. Rongrong recognised the cultural diversity of New Zealand society and highlighted the importance of being sensitive to the uniqueness of each culture, even within a specific region such as Asia. As Rongrong indicated, although some efforts were already being made, she felt that further opportunities to explore this area were necessary. Such opportunities may help student teachers make use of their cultural identities in ECE environments and support their ability to implement culturally inclusive practices.

7.2.1.1 Summary

Theme 1 illustrates that Chinese student teachers perceived having their cultural heritage and identity valued as an important form of support for their professional learning and identity development. Several participants noted efforts already made in this area, including explicit explanations about the legitimacy of diverse cultural perspectives and specific activities that honour their cultures, such as the New Zealand Chinese Language Week. In addition, some participants suggested that focused attention on cultural heritage and identity in ITE could be helpful for student teachers from culturally diverse backgrounds, including those from Chinese backgrounds. The strategies participants identified included: (a) having someone, preferably teacher educators, as well

as counsellors or others in a similar role, with whom they could discuss such matters; (b) showing respect for student teachers' cultural traditions and paying attention to their identity development needs; and (c) providing sufficient course content regrading identity, including practical strategies, to support student teachers in drawing on their cultural identity as resources for teaching. These findings highlight the essential support for Chinese student teachers as they navigate their learning in a cross-cultural context and invite further research to provide more insights.

7.2.2 Theme 2: Developing a Diverse Teacher Educator Team

Theme 2 highlights another form of support regarding developing a diverse teacher educator team for Chinese student teachers in facilitating their professional learning. This kind of support is meaningful for enhancing cultural representation, reducing biases, and fostering culturally responsive teacher education.

For instance, Bowen noted that in his ITE programmes, the teacher educators were predominantly from New Zealand or European backgrounds. Bowen therefore suggested:

> *They could also bring in teachers from other places or different nationalities. For example, they could hire someone like you [referring to the researcher] to be a lecturer because you can bring in ideas from a different cultural background, instead of just hiring Kiwi-background teacher educators. (Bowen-1)*
>
> *There are always Māori and Pākeha teacher educators [in our programme]. But, for example, Chinese educators? Sorry, no, there just cannot be. (Bowen-1)*

Bowen's accounts reflect his expectation for greater cultural representation in the teacher educator team, to bring in diverse cultural perspectives. It should be noted that Bowen's comments only reflect his observations of a particular ITE programme, and there may well be Chinese teacher educators present in other ITE institutions. However, Bowen's accounts ("there just cannot be") convey an underlying message that he may have perceived the Chinese cultural background as insufficiently recognised or valued within his programme.

Bowen further explained that he felt greater diversity among teacher educators could better meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student teacher cohort, as shared cultural backgrounds may help ethnic minority teacher educators better understand the perspectives of student teachers from minority backgrounds and offer appropriate support (Bowen-2). As Bowen commented, "If there are teacher educators from their [referring to ethnic minority student teachers] own cultural backgrounds in this field, that can make a huge difference and greatly help them" (Bowen-2).

Similarly, Ningning observed that although her current ITE team made efforts to promote diversity awareness, she perceived that some teacher educators may still hold stereotypes (one form of social bias) about Chinese people that limited their understanding of the current generation of Chinese student teachers (Ningning-2). Ningning, therefore, suggested increasing diversity within the teacher educator team. Ningning commented, "The education team could ... probably improve a bit more in terms of diversity" (Ningning-2). Connecting with the challenges of biases across the ITE and ECE sectors, as presented in Section 7.1.1, Ningning's view suggests that a more diverse teacher educator team may help create a more inclusive and supportive environment and reduce the risk of Chinese student teachers being viewed through stereotypical and biased lenses.

These participants' call for greater diversity among ITE faculty echoed the argument of Yip and Ji (2024) that increasing the representation of ethnic minority faculty members in ITE programmes represents not merely surface-level diversity but also signals a commitment to diversity, which sends an affirming message to student teachers from minority backgrounds that they will be accepted and valued. Further studies could explore whether such views are held by student teachers from other cultural backgrounds and how a diverse teacher educator team could contribute to their identity development.

7.2.2.1 Summary

Theme 2 presents a key support identified by several participants concerning the development of a diverse teacher educator team for their professional learning. Participants' accounts reflect an expectation for greater cultural representation within their ITE programmes and

a need for more culturally sensitive interpretation. As these participants indicated, a lack of diversity in the teacher educator team may convey an underlying message that their cultural background is not sufficiently recognised. In contrast, greater diversity could send an affirming message to these student teachers that they will be accepted and valued. Participants also suggested that a more diverse ITE faculty could help reduce the risk of minority student teachers being viewed through stereotypical or biased perspectives. These findings are significant, as they highlight the importance of the representation of the teacher educator team in the New Zealand context, where the student teacher cohort is becoming increasingly diverse, with a substantial proportion coming from Chinese backgrounds.

7.2.3 Theme 3: Quality Mentoring from Associate Teachers

Theme 3 explores how Chinese student teachers perceived quality mentoring from associate teachers as a crucial support for their professional learning. In New Zealand, ITE programmes typically include several practicum blocks that allow student teachers to experience different ECE settings and work with children across a range of age groups. While Section 7.1.3 outlined instances of inadequate practicum support perceived by participants in certain practicums, this section presents their positive experiences of receiving quality mentoring from associate teachers. According to the participants' narratives, quality mentoring was characterised by associate teachers: a) providing constructive and timely feedback, b) offering opportunities to engage in open and explanatory dialogue, and c) modelling effective practices.

First, some participants highlighted the importance of associate teachers providing constructive and timely feedback to student teachers. Shanshan stated, "When you meet an excellent associate teacher, it's truly amazing. They will directly tell you what you did wrong, what you should not do, and what you should do instead" (Shanshan-1). Shanshan valued such feedback and expressed gratitude to her associate teacher, who pointed out that her activity plan might be too challenging for children and suggested appropriate adjustments (Shanshan-2).

Similarly, Enrui shared that his associate teacher offered him very insightful feedback. Enrui explained that when he praised a child who helped him tidy up, his associate teacher advised him to acknowledge children's qualities, such as helpfulness or responsibility, rather than only focusing on specific behaviours. This approach aimed to strengthen children's intrinsic motivation for prosocial actions (Enrui-2). This example illustrates a thoughtful mentoring approach that models how teachers might strengthen children's sense of identity and intrinsic motivation. Such feedback, as commented by Enrui, was "something that I had never thought about before" (Enrui-2). Minghao also noted that, "If we can receive some useful advice or practical guidance from them [associate teachers] promptly, I think it can help student teachers learn faster, adapt to the environment more quickly, and improve more efficiently" (Minghao-2). Participants' narratives suggest that they perceived associate teachers offering constructive and timely feedback as a crucial form of support for their professional development during practicums.

Second, offering opportunities to engage in open and explanatory dialogue was another characteristic of quality mentoring identified by several participants. For instance, Ningning emphasised the value of open communication and discussion with associate teachers. Ningning commented, "When I communicated with my associate teacher, he/she brought me new knowledge and new concepts" (Ningning-2). Ningning's account reflects the contribution of open communication and discussion with experienced teachers in helping her engage more deeply with her studies. In addition, when asked about what a supportive environment might be like, Ningning noted that it should be "inclusive" and "allow for open discussion" (Ningning-2). Ningning's account suggests that she valued a space where she could openly and safely share her opinions and discuss different views with her associate teachers. Likewise, Bowen noted that during his practicum in an infant room, his associate teacher would explain the reasons behind particular practices (Bowen-2). Bowen remarked, "My associate teacher would say, in the infant room, we [description of practice] … we do it this way because this will help [explanation of outcomes]" (Bowen-2). Bowen appreciated this explanatory dialogue and viewed it as helpful. Bowen's account highlights the role

of mentoring in helping student teachers make better sense of everyday practices and the reasons behind them. Ningning and Bowen's narratives underscore the type of mentoring that allowed them to engage deeply and meaningfully with their learning during practicums.

In addition, several participants identified associate teachers' modelling of effective practices as a third characteristic of quality mentoring. For instance, Bowen shared that during his practicum, his associate teacher demonstrated in detail how to sterilise milk bottles for infants, which he found very beneficial (Bowen-2). Bowen explained:

> *At first, I might have just given the milk bottle a quick wash and then left it there, but my associate teacher said that wouldn't work … She showed me how to do it properly … from start to finish, and she did it several times for me. (Bowen-2)*

Bowen's account reflects his appreciation of the modelling provided by his associate teacher. For student teachers like him who had no prior parenting experience, caring for infants could be challenging without appropriate modelling from associate teachers. Therefore, Bowen valued such support and regarded it as a demonstration of a strong sense of responsibility in mentoring (Bowen-2).

7.2.3.1 Summary

Theme 3 illustrates that Chinese student teachers perceived quality mentoring from associate teachers as an important form of support for their professional growth. Participants' accounts revealed that, from their perspective, quality mentoring was characterised by associate teachers providing constructive and timely feedback, offering opportunities to engage in open and explanatory dialogue, and modelling effective practices. First, as suggested by participants' accounts, constructive and timely feedback helped them notice aspects of their practices that they may not have previously realised and supported their adaptation to practicum environments. Second, open and explanatory dialogue between associate teachers and student teachers created opportunities for student teachers to engage with different perspectives and understand the reasons behind particular practices, which could contribute to meaningful professional learning. Third, through

modelling effective practices, associate teachers were able to demonstrate clearly how practical procedures, such as those involved in infant care, were carried out in ECE settings. These findings invite further consideration of the kinds of mentoring support that may be particularly beneficial for culturally diverse student teachers.

7.2.4 Theme 4: Voices Being Heard through Feedback Mechanisms

Theme 4 highlights that having their voices heard through feedback mechanisms was perceived by some participants as an important form of support that enhanced or could enhance their ITE experiences. As noted in Section 7.1.4, *feedback mechanisms* refers to the channels or processes through which student teachers provide feedback on their ITE programmes or voice concerns related to their study and practicum experiences. Establishing these mechanisms and demonstrating responsiveness to Chinese student teachers' concerns seemed to signal that their voices were valued, thereby strengthening their sense of agency.

Some participants noted the efforts of ITE providers in improving student teachers' experiences through feedback mechanisms. For instance, Ningning and Bowen both reported that their ITE providers surveyed student teachers about their satisfaction with course-based learning and practicum arrangements, which they perceived as beneficial for more effectively responding to their needs. Ningning and Bowen commented:

> *I feel that the institution often asks us to complete some feedback forms and surveys, wanting to know whether we are satisfied with their teaching and arrangements and whether any adjustments are needed. I think this shows that they want to improve things so that they can better fit students' needs. I feel that this is good. (Ningning-2)*
>
> *Everyone receives a questionnaire for you to choose options or write responses. It includes many questions, for example, whether you have felt any unfair treatment in the centre, or whether you were treated as free labour. I'm just giving examples, not the exact questions, but generally ask about your experiences within the practicum setting. (Bowen-2)*

Ningning and Bowen's accounts suggest that their ITE providers actively collected student teachers' feedback on both the course-based learning and practicum arrangements for improvement. Ningning and Bowen expressed a positive attitude towards these efforts. Such feedback mechanisms appeared to signal to participants that the ITE providers cared about their learning experiences and were willing to refine the programme to meet their needs.

An example of improvement through listening to student teachers' voices was provided by Minghao, who noted that his ITE provider reduced the assignment workload after the previous cohort provided feedback about feeling too stressed by the assignments (Minghao-2). Minghao viewed this change as evidence of ongoing improvement and emphasised that an effective feedback mechanism was essential for enhancing student teachers' experiences. Minghao commented, "Although there are still many areas that may need to be improved, I think it is generally fine … There has been some progress. It shows that giving suggestions is still necessary" (Minghao-2). Minghao's account indicates that the refinement of ITE programmes can serve as a signal to student teachers that their voices are listened to and valued, thereby enhancing their trust in the feedback mechanism and encouraging them to use it actively to raise concerns and provide suggestions.

In addition, Enrui shared that when he experienced relational stress with a head teacher during his practicum and requested a short extension for one paper assignment, the course coordinator and practicum coordinator promptly followed up on his situation and scheduled an online meeting to discuss it (Enrui-2). Enrui's example suggests that teacher educators in his programme were attentive to student teachers' circumstances and responsive in offering support when needed. Enrui's example also illustrates a more individualised form of feedback mechanism, where student teachers have direct channels to express their concerns about their learning and practicum experiences to teacher educators.

7.2.4.1 Summary

Theme 4 illustrates that having their voices heard through feedback mechanisms was perceived by Chinese student teachers as an important form of support that could enhance their

professional learning experiences. Considering that, as noted in Section 7.1.4, some participants expressed restricted agency in utilising feedback mechanisms to voice their concerns, this section highlights a more positive dimension of their experiences. Participants described efforts made by ITE providers to listen to their feedback through surveys and other communication channels, in order to inform ongoing programme improvement and monitor student teachers' learning experiences. Notably, responding promptly to student teachers' concerns and making refinements based on their suggestions appeared to signal to student teachers that their voices were valued. Such positive experiences with feedback mechanisms seemed to strengthen participants' trust in them and enhance their sense of agency in using these mechanisms. These findings invite further research into student teachers' experiences with feedback mechanisms and how these mechanisms can be strengthened to better support learning, agency, and professional identity in ITE.

7.3 Chapter Summary

Chapter 7 described the supports and challenges that Chinese student teachers experienced and identified during their ITE journey. The supports and challenges were reported separately in two sections (Section 7.1 and Section 7.2), within which the generated themes were presented. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, learning to teach is not only about developing understandings of curriculum and pedagogy or mastering teaching skills and competencies, but, more importantly, it involves constructing one's identity as a teacher. The themes of supports and challenges presented in this chapter provide complementary insights that capture the essential aspects that either limited or provided opportunities for Chinese student teachers to construct their identity as ECE teachers in New Zealand.

Section 7.1 presented four themes related to the challenges.

Theme 1, "Biases across the ITE and ECE sectors," described the social biases, including stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination perceived by some Chinese student teachers both in institutional environments and practicum settings. Theme 1 highlights participants' expectations to be understood in culturally sensitive ways and underscores the importance of continued efforts to

foster culturally responsive and inclusive environments free from bias, so that student teachers' cultural identities can be affirmed and valued.

Theme 2, "Challenges in drawing on prior experiences," described the challenges Chinese student teachers encountered when drawing on their culturally shaped expectations of children's behaviours, as well as when applying their childhood learning experiences in their student teaching. Theme 2 invites further examination of how Chinese and other international student teachers' prior experiences are positioned within ITE and how deficit-oriented narratives may contribute to the devaluation of these experiences and influence student teachers' identity development.

Theme 3, "Inadequate practicum support," described the challenges that Chinese student teachers perceived in receiving support and guidance during some practicums. Participants noted how inadequate support left them with negative feelings, and some also described instances where they felt the associate teachers were not well prepared or sufficiently motivated to take on their mentoring role. The participant accounts highlight the importance they placed on receiving adequate practicum support and invite further research on how gaps in this aspect of ITE may influence professional growth.

Theme 4, "Restricted agency in practicum contexts," described how Chinese student teachers perceived having restricted agency in responding to practices that were misaligned with what they had learned from their ITE courses, and in using feedback mechanisms to voice their concerns. Such restricted agency appeared to relate to participants' perceived marginalised positions shaped by imbalanced power relations, as well as the potential influence of Confucian values. Theme 4 invites further inquiry into how the agency of Chinese student teachers could be strengthened within practicum contexts in ways that support their professional identity development.

Section 7.2 presented four themes related to the supports.

Theme 1, "Having cultural heritage and identity valued," described how Chinese student teachers perceived having their cultural heritage and identity recognised and affirmed as an

important form of support. Participants noted both the efforts already made in this area, including explicit explanations about the value of diverse cultural perspectives and specific activities that honour their culture, such as the New Zealand Chinese Language Week. Strategies participants identified as potentially beneficial included (a) having someone, preferably teacher educators, as well as counsellors or others in a similar role, with whom student teachers could discuss such matters; (b) showing respect for student teachers' cultural traditions and paying attention to their identity development needs; and (c) providing sufficient course content related to identity, as well as practical strategies, to support student teachers in drawing on their cultural identity as resources for teaching.

Theme 2, "Developing a diverse teacher educator team," presented a key support identified by several participants concerning the development of a diverse teacher educator team for their professional learning. Participants' accounts reflected an expectation for greater cultural representation within ITE programmes and a need for more culturally sensitive interpretation. Diversifying the teacher educator team could send an affirming message that student teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds will be accepted and valued, and may help reduce the risk of these student teachers being viewed through stereotypical or biased perspectives.

Theme 3, "Quality mentoring from associate teachers," highlighted the perceived support by Chinese student teachers regarding receiving sufficient and high-quality mentoring from associate teachers during practicums. From the participants' perspectives, quality mentoring was characterised by associate teachers (a) providing constructive and timely feedback, (b) offering opportunities to engage in open and explanatory dialogue, and (c) modelling effective practices. These findings invite further consideration of the kinds of mentoring that may be particularly beneficial for culturally diverse student teachers.

Theme 4, "Voices being heard through feedback mechanisms," described how Chinese student teachers perceived having their voices heard through feedback mechanisms as an important support that could enhance learning experiences within ITE. The participants appreciated the efforts

that ITE providers made to listen to their feedback through surveys and other communication channels. Importantly, examples of programme refinements based on student teachers' suggestions signalled to student teachers that their voices were valued, which in turn could strengthen their sense of agency.

In the next chapter, the findings from both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of this study will be discussed further in relation to the existing literature.

Chapter 8 Discussion

This study explores Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy, with a particular focus on intentional teaching, in the Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education (ECE) context. Central to this investigation is exploring the factors that influence Chinese student teachers' perspectives of teaching and learning, as well as the supports and challenges related to their broader learning experiences within ITE programmes as they navigate a cross-cultural context. Here, the cross-cultural context refers to an environment where the differences and intersections of values, beliefs, practices, and worldviews could arise when people from different cultural backgrounds engage in shared activities.

Five research questions were generated to guide this study:

RQ1. How do Chinese student teachers understand curriculum and pedagogy in ECE contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand?

RQ2. How do Chinese student teachers understand and implement intentional teaching in child-centred, play-based, and culturally responsive ECE contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand?

RQ3. What factors influence Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy?

RQ4. How have ITE programmes facilitated Chinese student teachers' understandings of curriculum and pedagogy?

RQ5. What supports and challenges do Chinese student teachers describe in relation to their ITE experiences?

Although the study began with the above five research questions, the findings point to the need for a more integrated discussion that brings together several interconnected key messages that emerged from the study. These key messages are presented narratively as follows:

Building a diverse ECE teaching workforce through effective ITE benefits children and families from both non-dominant and dominant cultural backgrounds (Yip & Ji, 2024). Chinese student teachers currently represent a significant proportion of ITE cohorts in New Zealand, and

their numbers are likely to increase due to recent international education marketing policies (Stanford, 2025). The growing presence of Chinese student teachers highlights the importance of developing a deeper understanding of their perspectives and experiences within ITE programmes.

While learning to teach is already a challenging process, doing so as a Chinese student teacher in a cross-cultural context adds additional layers of difficulty. My findings suggest that Chinese student teachers are situated in learning environments shaped by historically embedded social biases, including stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination against them. Chinese student teachers' prior knowledge and experiences, accumulated largely within Chinese cultural contexts, were also sometimes unacknowledged or invalidated in their ITE programmes, indicating the existence of deficit-oriented interpretations of them (Maddamsetti et al., 2018; Rathore & D'Silva, 2024). Beyond these social biases and deficit discourses, the complexity of learning to teach for Chinese student teachers is further reflected in the need to reconcile culturally grounded prior beliefs with new pedagogical expectations, to conceptualise play-based learning as a continuum, and to construct their professional identities as ECE teachers in New Zealand.

To challenge deficit discourses and better support Chinese student teachers, it is important to acknowledge and value the rich funds of knowledge and identity (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014a) that they bring into ITE programmes, and to highlight how these funds can contribute to the development of integrated and hybrid pedagogical perspectives within the third space (Recchia & McDevitt, 2018), in which diverse discourses can be negotiated. Through facilitating active engagement with their funds of knowledge and identity, teacher educators and associate teachers can empower rather than disempower Chinese student teachers and support their professional growth.

These key messages will be discussed further in the four sections below, with connections to the study findings and the broader scholarship.

8.1 Arguing for a More Diverse ECE Teaching Workforce in New Zealand

The starting point of this study is the idea that building a diverse teaching workforce is important for the ECE sector, particularly in societies with culturally and ethnically diverse populations. The benefits of a diverse ECE teaching workforce have been documented in many studies. For example, Gide et al. (2022) argued that a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) teaching team has the potential to support the identity development of CALD children by creating a culturally safe and inclusive environment, as well as to enhance multicultural awareness in children from dominant cultural backgrounds through interacting with diverse educators. McDevitt (2021) also found that immigrant ECE teachers have a good understanding of the experiences of newcomer immigrant parents and can draw on this knowledge to develop trusting relationships with them. In addition, Tobin (2020) noted the crucial but often underappreciated role of bilingual and bicultural ECE teachers (referring to those teachers familiar with both home and host cultures, rather than the meaning of bicultural as a Māori and Pākehā partnership that is typically understood in New Zealand) in bridging immigrant communities and early childhood settings as cultural brokers and mediators. While Tobin (2020) specifically referred to the importance of bicultural staff, the implication could extend to multilingual and multicultural practitioners. These potential benefits have encouraged efforts to develop a diverse ECE teaching workforce worldwide.

In New Zealand, a nation with a bicultural foundation and increasingly superdiverse demographics (A. Chan & Ritchie, 2020), building an ECE teaching workforce that reflects this diversity has also been emphasised by some researchers. (Superdiverse refers to the complex social conditions arising from contemporary highly heterogeneous migration situations and patterns (A. Chan & Ritchie, 2020).) For example, through the examination of the different dimensions of diversity among ECE educators in New Zealand, Cherrington and Shuker (2012) noted that minority voices may be silenced due to the underrepresentation of ethnic minority educators. To increase diversity, one of the suggestions Cherrington and Shuker (2012) proposed was to ensure ITE programmes are culturally responsive to culturally diverse student teachers, thereby supporting

their success and retention in the ECE teaching profession. Griffiths et al. (2022) examined the barriers to, and facilitators of, attracting and retaining diverse ECE teachers in New Zealand, and put forward three recommendations for building and sustaining a diverse ECE teaching workforce. These recommendations were building inclusive workplace cultures, addressing factors that influence recruitment and retention (such as pay and social status), and ensuring barrier-free access to ITE, particularly regarding financial constraints (Griffiths et al., 2022). Taken together, these researchers' arguments point to the pivotal role of ITE as a key pathway for building a diverse ECE teaching workforce. Moreover, at the policy level, *Every Child a Taonga: Early Learning Action Plan 2019–2029*, proposed by the sixth Labour Government of New Zealand, set a clear expectation for ITE providers to increase diversity of student teachers and grow a future workforce that mirrors the composition of New Zealand society (Ministry of Education, 2019b).

Among the many different ethnic groups, people identifying as Chinese constitute a significant proportion of New Zealand's population. According to the 2023 Census, Chinese is the fourth largest ethnic group in New Zealand, following New Zealand European, Māori, and Indian, with a total of 279,039 people, representing approximately 6% of the total population (RNZ, 2024). The percentage of people identifying with Chinese ethnicities is projected to increase to 8% by 2048 (Stats NZ, 2025a). These numbers suggest that ECE services in New Zealand are serving an increasing proportion of children and families with Chinese backgrounds. It is therefore important for Chinese teachers to be proportionately represented in the ECE teaching workforce in New Zealand to better meet the needs of children and families from Chinese backgrounds.

Within the ITE sector, there has also been a growing number of Chinese student teachers enrolled in ECE ITE programmes in New Zealand (Yang, 2025). While Chinese student teachers may come to New Zealand and learn to become ECE teachers for various personal, familial or professional reasons, such as having a passion for the profession or seeking residency due to favourable immigration policies (F. Huang, 2021), their presence nonetheless contributes to the goal of diversifying the teaching workforce. In addition, China has been New Zealand's largest source of

international students for many years (Reti, 2025). Given the current National Party-led Government's aim to double the foreign international education market by 2034 (Craymer, 2025; Stanford, 2025), it is foreseeable that New Zealand will attract more Chinese international students, many of whom are likely to join ECE ITE programmes. However, an important question is whether ITE providers are equipped to support Chinese student teachers to succeed and achieve their aspirations in New Zealand. My study findings suggest that there may still be some distance to go before an affirmative answer can be given.

Taken together, this section discusses an increasing consensus in the literature on building a diverse ECE teaching workforce, as this can benefit children and families from both non-dominant and dominant cultural backgrounds. In Aotearoa New Zealand, calls for action to promote such efforts are also reflected in both research and policies. The anticipated increase in the number of children with Chinese backgrounds attending ECE services in New Zealand, together with the growing representation of Chinese student teachers within ITE programmes, highlights the value of this study in understanding Chinese student teachers' perspectives and exploring ways to enhance their experiences and support their success within ITE.

8.2 Challenging Social Biases and Deficit-Oriented Interpretations of Chinese Student Teachers

While learning to teach is already a challenging process, undertaking ITE programmes as Chinese student teachers in a cross-cultural context adds additional layers of difficulty. Notably, social biases and deficit-oriented interpretations that devalue Chinese student teachers' cultural identity and invalidate their cultural knowledge and experiences, as reported in Chapter 7, are among the most significant challenges in their professional learning journeys.

Biases against Chinese people in New Zealand have their historical roots. The history of the Chinese in New Zealand dates back to the mid-nineteenth century, when many male Chinese immigrants came to work as gold miners (Ip, 2024). These people left their families in China and boarded ships to New Zealand, expecting to make a fortune here so they could send money back to support their parents, wives and children who were suffering from famine, drought, and other

natural and man-made disasters (Ip, 2024). Unfortunately, only a small proportion achieved the wealth they had hoped for, while many remained poor, separated from their families, and stranded in an unfamiliar country (Ip, 2024). Today, Arrowtown near Queenstown in the South Island still preserves the settlements of Chinese gold miners, demonstrating their tough living conditions.

With the reduced job needs for gold mining in the following decades since Chinese gold miners first arrived, the anti-Chinese prejudice intensified, and Chinese immigrants were viewed as a threat to New Zealand society (Manatū Taonga—Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2021). In 1881, New Zealand passed the *Chinese Immigrants Act,* which restricted the number of Chinese people a ship could carry (one Chinese person for every 10 tons of cargo) when arriving in New Zealand, and imposed a poll tax of 10 pounds (around 2,000 New Zealand dollars today) on each Chinese person before being permitted to land (Manatū Taonga—Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2024). In 1896, the ratio was changed to one Chinese person for every 200 tons of cargo, and the poll tax for each Chinese person was increased to 100 pounds (around 20,000 New Zealand dollars today) (Manatū Taonga—Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2024).

Vosslamber and Yong (2023) argued that the poll tax legislation stemmed from stigma and discrimination against the Chinese, which in turn further reinforced the biased view within the New Zealand society that Chinese immigrants were inferior and less than fully human. This racist and discriminatory legislation lasted for over sixty years, and it was not until 1944 that it was finally abolished (Manatū Taonga—Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2021). However, the harm inflicted on the Chinese people in New Zealand had already occurred and may continue to produce negative impacts in both explicit and implicit ways.

Some studies have explored the history of discrimination against Chinese in New Zealand, but a scholarly consensus on its primary causes has yet to be reached. Fairburn (2004) compared several competing explanations of the discrimination, including the swamping explanation (worrying that Chinese will become the dominant culture), economic competition, colonial nationalism, ideological/racism, and the weakness of the Chinese state. Fairburn (2004) argued that these

explanations all had various flaws and were overly focused on the role of Europeans. Thus, Fairburn (2004) concluded that the discrimination Chinese received in New Zealand could be best explained by the reason that "Chinese had a far more powerful orientation to their home country and their culture than any other migrant group" (p. 81). From Fairburn's (2004) view, it was the Chinese immigrants' exceptional separatism and transitoriness that led to Europeans' discrimination against them.

However, there are alternative interpretations. Burton (2024) argued that Chinese immigrants' separatism and transitoriness should not be viewed as causes of the discrimination they experienced. Instead, Burton (2024) suggested that legislators' lack of cultural understanding regarding the importance of ancestry and ties to land for early Chinese immigrants led to these practices (e.g., non-settlement) being portrayed as evil, reflecting an orientalist perspective in which the Orient was defined through a Western lens. In addition, the vision of building New Zealand as "a Britain of the South" (p. 115), a sense of racial superiority, and the fear that Chinese immigrants would threaten labour and working conditions, together with the othering of the Chinese, all contributed to the enactment of discriminatory legislation targeting the Chinese (Burton, 2024). Moreover, Ip (2013) argued that, due to widespread racial ideas in which Chinese people were regarded as inferior to white Caucasians, the Chinese were consequently restricted from entry into this "white heaven" (p. 159), as well as from being naturalised. Chinese immigrants were viewed as intruders and as having no place in the nation's blueprint (Ip, 2013). Taken together, these arguments reflect the complexity of anti-Chinese discrimination in New Zealand's history and the interplay of various ideological, cultural, economic, and political factors.

In 2002, the then Prime Minister of New Zealand, Helen Clark, made a formal apology to the Chinese community who had paid a poll tax and suffered other discrimination (Clark, 2002). She hoped that all communities could be valued, honoured, and respected, and that diversity could be seen as a great strength of New Zealand (Clark, 2002). This action signals a positive effort by the Government to reconcile with the Chinese community. Yet the global rise of right-wing political

groups in recent years seems to undermine such efforts. An explicit example is how right-wing extremists use the COVID-19 pandemic to promote anti-Chinese and anti-Asian rhetoric (Kim, 2023). Research on Asian people's experiences in New Zealand during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that nearly a quarter of the 402 participants in a New Zealand nationwide online survey reported experiencing racial discrimination, with Chinese respondents reporting the highest incidence among Asian groups (L. S. Liu et al., 2023). This challenging social and political environment constitutes the broader context in which Chinese student teachers navigate their complex professional learning journeys in New Zealand.

As reported in Chapter 7, my participants described experiencing social biases, including stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination, in their learning environments across both the ECE and ITE sectors in New Zealand. During interviews, participants described how they were sometimes interpreted in stereotyped ways and how they either experienced or heard from their Chinese peers about prejudiced views and discriminatory behaviours directed towards Chinese and Asian students. These findings echoed earlier studies, which also found social biases against migrant-background student teachers and teachers, both in New Zealand and beyond.

For example, the study conducted by Griffiths et al. (2022) in New Zealand identified bias, discrimination, and stigma as one type of barrier to attracting and retaining diverse ECE teachers. Some of the participants in Griffiths et al.'s (2022) study reported that the stereotyped image of ECE teachers as white females and the presence of systemic racism within the mainstream teaching culture discouraged diverse teachers from entering and staying in the teaching profession. In addition, drawing on the analysis of the final practicum experience of a Singaporean Chinese student teacher in a four-year undergraduate programme in Australia, Ortlipp and Nuttall (2011) described how this student teacher's background was interpreted by her supervising teacher at only a superficial level and through racist typologies, which ultimately contributed to her practicum failure. These cited studies, together with my research findings, highlight the importance of challenging systemic racism towards certain groups within the broader social environment in New Zealand, as

well as within more specific ITE environments and ECE settings, to create equitable, inclusive, and welcoming spaces where non-dominant background student teachers can proudly be themselves.

Importantly, connected with social biases against Chinese and other migrant-background student teachers are the often-implied deficit-oriented interpretations or assumptions of them, which view differences as deficits rather than strengths. Such deficit-oriented interpretations invalidate Chinese student teachers' cultural knowledge and experiences, and position them as needing to fit into a "good" teacher model built primarily upon the dominant culture (Maddamsetti et al., 2018). A paradox was thus created, in which, on the one hand, student teachers from diverse backgrounds are expected to be culturally sensitive and responsive to the children attending ECE services and to value their language, culture, and identity; on the other hand, these student teachers do not seem to experience similar considerations within their own ITE programmes (Nuttall & Ortlipp, 2012).

In this present study, Chinese student teachers reported challenges in drawing on their prior cultural expectations (e.g., towards messy play and risky play) and learning experiences (e.g., paper-folding activities) during their student teaching, suggesting the existence of deficit-oriented interpretations of them. These findings echo some studies that have also noted this deficit perspective towards culturally and linguistically diverse student teachers. For example, through interviewing four pre-service early childhood teachers of colour in the United States, Cheruvu et al. (2015) illustrated how these pre-service teachers experience and combat socially imposed and self-internalised deficit conceptions of their identities as individuals and as developing teachers within a space dominated by White, English-monolingual, middle-class perspectives. Cheruvu et al. (2015) noted that, in addition to experiencing racialised relationships with peers and mentor teachers, these pre-service teachers also carry "the burden of pervasive, deficit-oriented stereotypes and assumptions about their racial and linguistic identities and their academic abilities" (p. 259). To fit in the community dominated by Whiteness, pre-service teachers of colour sometimes need to mask their racial and linguistic identities (Cheruvu et al., 2015).

Likewise, Maddamsetti et al. (2018) examined the experience of a Chinese female international pre-service teacher at a U.S. university and how the microaggressions she encountered in her coursework and fieldwork influenced her understanding of a "good" teacher. Maddamsetti et al. (2018) argued that there appears to be a highly homogeneous image of a "good" teacher in the U.S. context, within which im/migrant teachers are frequently perceived as deficient. Their cultural knowledge and skills are rarely validated in the host country's teacher education, and they also experience multiple forms of microaggressions. The feelings of exclusion and isolation created a perceived need for the participant in Maddamsetti et al.'s (2018) study to assimilate into and blend in with American teachers, who represented the "good" teacher in that context.

This pressure to assimilate has also been reflected in this present study, as three participants in Phase 2 (see Chapter 5) expressed that there is no need to "find a balance." Rather than integrating or unifying Chinese and New Zealand philosophies and practices, the three participants perceived that what mattered most was to be respectful and accepting of the local norms. Therefore, we may need to ask: Do our ECE ITE programmes send a message to Chinese student teachers that there is a homogeneous "good" teacher model and a universalist perspective of "good" ECE practices? Are there implicit biases that suggest to Chinese student teachers that, because they have different experiences and perspectives, they need in some way to meet derived Western normative expectations? Do our ECE ITE programmes create pressure for Chinese student teachers to fit in or assimilate into the local norms, even though they might need to mask, devalue, or discard their own cultural identities?

Qi and Campbell (2022) argued that, in the Australian context, while pursuing diversity, ITE programmes seem to advise student teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to be "more Australian and less diverse" (p. 236). Although set in a different context, this study similarly reveals that some of our ECE ITE programmes in New Zealand may unintentionally perpetuate deficit discourses and pressure for assimilation on these student teachers from diverse

backgrounds, who are supposed to diversify the ECE teaching workforce and enrich early childhood pedagogies through their unique perspectives.

Taken together, this section discussed the historically rooted and politically shaped pervasive biases against Chinese student teachers within society and ECE ITE programmes, as well as the closely associated deficit-oriented interpretations of them. These social biases and deficit discourses devalued Chinese student teachers' cultural identity and invalidated their cultural knowledge in some ECE ITE programmes, and internalised in them a feeling of being deficient, insufficient, and less competent. Chinese student teachers, therefore, faced pressure to fit into an implied homogenising "good" teacher model and adopt the "good" practices built upon the dominant Western ideology and discourse prevalent in the New Zealand ECE context (Rathore & D'Silva, 2024). These challenges constitute the broader environment in which Chinese student teachers navigate their complex learning-to-teach journeys.

8.3 Navigating the Complexity of Cross-Cultural Learning in ITE for Chinese Student Teachers

Learning to teach in a cross-cultural context is not a straightforward process for Chinese student teachers, but a highly complex one. At the broader level, as noted in the previous section, Chinese student teachers are learning in an environment shaped by social biases and deficit discourses. Within ITE programmes, this complexity is further reflected in the need to reconcile culturally grounded prior beliefs with new pedagogical expectations, to conceptualise play-based learning as a continuum, and to construct professional identities as ECE teachers in New Zealand. The three aspects of this complexity are unpacked in the following subsections.

8.3.1 Reconciling Prior Beliefs with New Pedagogical Expectations

Chinese student teachers begin their ITE journey not as blank slates, but with pre-existing beliefs and understandings of teaching and learning in ECE. Due to the culturally situated nature of Chinese student teachers' prior beliefs, they sometimes differ from the professional or authoritative discourses developed in the New Zealand context, thereby creating tensions.

Belief conflict or tension among student teachers with migrant backgrounds in cross-cultural contexts has also been noted in other studies. For example, in a study of immigrant and refugee women's knowledge construction in an ECE ITE programme in Canada, Massing (2016) described the dissonance between the participants' own cultural and religious constructions of caring practice for children and the dominant practices in child care centres. Massing (2016) noted that when faced with such belief conflicts, the participants either suppressed or rejected their own beliefs or subverted dominant practices to enact their own cultural practices. In the New Zealand context, Leaupepe (2009) explored the tension experienced by Pasifika student teachers regarding play, whose beliefs were shaped by their childhood experiences in societies where the value of play was not highly recognised. In the Pacific Island nations, as Leaupepe (2009) noted, children often need to take on household responsibilities, such as helping with planting, fishing, or cooking, rather than engaging in play.

For Chinese student teachers specifically, Yang (2025) examined the cultural and professional adaptation of ten Chinese migrant ECE teachers in New Zealand and outlined the contrasting educational approaches between China and New Zealand, including structured versus play-based teaching, obedience-based learning versus learning autonomy, and risk avoidance versus risk tolerance. These differences contributed to the challenges Chinese migrant ECE teachers faced in adapting (Yang, 2025). My findings align with Yang's (2025) study, as participants also reported experiencing tensions in navigating these divergent educational philosophies. As presented in the survey findings in Chapter 4, over half of the participants (66%) reported experiencing dissonance between their prior beliefs about teaching and learning in ECE and the ideas presented in their course content, as well as dissonance between their prior beliefs and the pedagogies encountered during practicum (70%). These findings indicate that a substantial proportion of participants experienced belief dissonance within their ITE programmes, both in course content learning and practicum, presenting a significant challenge for Chinese student teachers as they navigate these contexts.

The existing literature shows that, due to the influence of Confucianism, play and learning in Chinese societies have traditionally been viewed as separate, with play sometimes being perceived as harmful to learning (S.-C. Wu & Rao, 2011). Acquiring academic knowledge and pursuing academic achievement from an early age are viewed as important pathways to upward social mobility in Chinese history (Zheng et al., 2018). These cultural and historical traditions have shaped public expectations of ECE in China, particularly among parents and teachers, and contributed to a long-standing focus on academic learning rather than play in ECE settings. To achieve academic outcomes, alongside the traditional respect for teachers and emphasis on teacher authority, teachers are deemed vital for children's learning, and teacher-directed approaches are predominantly adopted in Chinese ECE settings (Cheung, 2017). These traditional views and practices in Chinese societies stand in contrast to those in New Zealand, where, as reflected in *Te Whāriki*, children are viewed as competent and confident learners engaged in a holistic, child-centred, inclusive curriculum that recognises the country's bicultural heritage, and teachers are expected to facilitate children's learning through play-based and intentional pedagogy (Ministry of Education, 2017; Tyler-Merrick et al., 2019).

While it is helpful to be aware of these general belief tensions, it is also important to note that their extent and form vary across Chinese student teachers. Importantly, Chinese culture and ECE in China are not static or fixed but are continuously hybridising and evolving within a globalised world. J. Zhu and Zhang (2008) argued that contemporary perspectives and practices of ECE in China could be viewed as a hybridity of three distinct cultural threads: traditional Chinese culture, Communist culture, and Western culture. These different cultural threads interact with one another, generating selective, dynamic, and changing influences on ECE in China (J. Zhu & Zhang, 2008). In addition, there have been continuous nationwide ECE curriculum reforms in China since 1989, initially driven by the import of Western progressive ideology, which have aimed to promote the ideas of respecting children, active learning, and play-based teaching and learning (Li, Wang, et al., 2011). Although the top-down policy-based nature of these reforms constrained transformative

efforts in ECE, they nevertheless influenced and diversified approaches in practice to varying extents in China (Y. Liu & Feng, 2005).

These mixed influences of cultural threads and educational reforms have led to varied philosophies and practices in different ECE services in China and have generated different childhood experiences among Chinese student teachers of different ages and generations. As my participants reported during interviews, some received ECE with a strong traditional teacher-directed approach, whereas others (often younger participants) reported attending ECE services with modernised or imported philosophies. For instance, the youngest participant in Phase 2, Bowen, reported that he attended a kindergarten in China that adopted the Montessori approach, where children had greater freedom and agency to choose different learning areas. This point is not intended to argue that ECE in China has entirely shifted from teacher-directed to child-centred approaches, but rather to illustrate the diversity and changing nature of educational approaches in China, as well as the generational and individual heterogeneity of Chinese student teachers' experiences. Therefore, any discussion and examination of belief conflicts or tensions that focus on Chinese student teachers needs to avoid falling into the trap of reinforcing stereotyped typologies and deficit narratives that assume all Chinese student teachers have similar childhood and upbringing experiences and hold similar prior beliefs.

8.3.2 Conceptualising Play-Based Learning as a Continuum

Another aspect of this cross-cultural learning complexity for Chinese student teachers is to develop a broader understanding of play-based learning. Earlier, play-based learning has been described as a continuum of practice, with different types of play and varying levels of teacher engagement situated along it. As Chinese student teachers undertake practicum placements in different centres as part of their ECE ITE programme requirements, they are coming to understand this continuum and to conceptualise their own understanding of the role of the teacher, perhaps as relatively static, or as flexible and responsive to different children and learning moments. In shaping this understanding, they may encounter differing perspectives of teaching and learning across

centres or among educators within the same centre, thus creating tensions in their pedagogical beliefs. This also includes reconciling content from within their programme with the models of practice they experience on practicum.

As presented in the literature review (Section 2.1.4), New Zealand has a long history of valuing free play in ECE settings. Free play has traditionally been viewed as a demonstration of agency and as offering children the freedom and flexibility to explore the environments and materials at their own pace (White et al., 2007). The free play approach in ECE, as suggested by McLachlan (1991), has theoretical roots in Piaget's cognitive development theory. Within the context of free play, teachers are often expected to provide children with the time and space to lead their own learning, while adult intervention may sometimes be perceived as potentially diverting the direction of children's play (Grieshaber, 2010). Drawing on insights from sociocultural theory, which largely builds on Vygotsky's work, some researchers have critiqued individualistic developmental perspectives, calling for greater attention to the teacher's critical role in supporting children's learning and development (Hedges, 2000; Siraj-Blatchford, 2004). In the 2017 version of *Te Whāriki*, the national curriculum of New Zealand, kaiako (teachers) are explicitly advised to be more active in facilitating children's learning and development through thoughtful and intentional pedagogy (McLaughlin & Cherrington, 2018).

Despite shifting understandings of teaching and learning in ECE in New Zealand and similar countries, such as Australia, which also has a free play tradition, researchers noted the tensions and challenges for some ECE practitioners in embracing a more active role in supporting children's learning (Grieshaber, 2010; Kilderry, 2015; W. Zhang & Birdsall, 2016). These studies indicate that not all practising teachers in New Zealand are willing to accept, or have fully accepted, the recent advocacy for intentional teaching. Moreover, James's (2020) study in the New Zealand context revealed that ECE teachers held diverse and inconsistent understandings of how children learn and how learning through play could be enacted in practice. Therefore, when these ECE teachers serve as associate teachers during practicum, they may enact their own beliefs about play and learning,

and hold corresponding expectations for student teachers, which may shape how Chinese student teachers construct their own understandings. This point is supported by participants' comments on their practicum experiences in different ECE centres during the interviews, with some participants noting that certain centres aligned more closely with their beliefs, while others did not.

In addition, as reported in Chapter 4 regarding the survey findings, while the data generally indicate that Chinese student teachers endorsed a mixed approach to teaching and learning, some participants also held non-interventionist views. For example, over half of the participants in the survey agreed with the statements that "children learn best through free play," "teachers should not interrupt children's play," and "teachers' primary responsibility is to set up the environment and observe children's learning." These non-interventionist perspectives may reflect both the influence of the free play tradition in New Zealand ECE settings and Chinese student teachers' still-developing understandings of play-based learning. The survey data also highlight participants' limited familiarity with and knowledge of intentional teaching, and a perceived insufficient emphasis on intentional teaching within their ECE ITE programmes, particularly during practicum. When Chinese student teachers have insufficient exposure to these essential concepts, such as play-based learning and intentional teaching, they may construct their own understandings, which could lead to a narrow interpretation of play-based learning and tensions when integrating intentional teaching into a play-based context.

Therefore, there is value in supporting Chinese student teachers to develop a broader understanding of play-based learning by conceptualising it as a continuum that accommodates various types of play and differing levels of teachers' intentional involvement. One example of this continuum conceptualisation of play-based learning is Edwards's (2017) work on the Pedagogical Play-framework, which comprises open-ended play, modelled play, and purposefully-framed play. Edwards (2017) argued that these play activities could be equally pedagogically valuable in practice and used in multiple combinations. Pyle and Danniels (2017) also identified five types of play along the continuum of play-based learning: free play, inquiry play, collaboratively designed play, playful

learning, and learning through games. While researchers used different terms to refer to the various types of play, the key point is that play and learning are implicitly interconnected, and that teachers can demonstrate intentional teaching across different types of play activities. Within ITE, on the one hand, teacher educators could provide further clarification on free play and play-based learning, and place greater emphasis on intentional teaching. On the other hand, professional learning opportunities could be provided to associate teachers to help them better understand the play-based learning continuum, enabling them to offer high-quality mentoring and guidance to Chinese student teachers as they construct their beliefs about pedagogical practice.

8.3.3 Constructing Professional Identities as ECE Teachers in New Zealand

The third essential aspect for Chinese student teachers to navigate in their ITE journey is to construct their professional identities as ECE teachers in New Zealand. Learning to teach itself is not only about mastering professional and pedagogical knowledge and skills, but also about developing professional identities, namely, who they are as teachers (Garner & Kaplan, 2019; Mockler, 2013). As Beijaard (2019) noted, learning to teach can and should be conceptualised as an identity-making process. Teachers' professional identity should not be understood as a fixed construct, but rather as one that changes over time through the influence of personal and professional encounters and experiences (Beijaard et al., 2004; Suarez & McGrath, 2022).

For student teachers with migrant backgrounds, their professional identity construction is inextricably interwoven with their cultural identity (Xu et al., 2025; Yip, 2025, p. 43). Cultural identity refers to "identification with, or sense of belonging to, a particular group based on various cultural categories, including nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, and religion" (V. H.-H. Chen, 2014, p. 1). In cross-cultural contexts, Ji et al. (2025) note that teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds often face dual pressures in constructing their professional identities: conforming to dominant norms and resisting the erasure of their cultural identity. In a system emphasising assimilation, teachers or student teachers from diverse backgrounds may be forced to suppress or mask their cultural identities to be accepted by the dominant community (Yip, 2025).

My findings also suggest that participants' cultural identity as Chinese is an important element that cannot be separated from their professional learning and professional identity formation. As reported in Chapter 6, there is a connection between how Chinese student teachers perceive the influence of their cultural background and their preferences for pedagogical orientations. These participants could be generally classified into two groups. One group perceived their Chinese cultural background as a generally positive influence and valued their cultural identity as Chinese. This group of participants believed that there were valuable aspects of Chinese culture and education that could inform ECE in New Zealand, and they therefore advocated integrating or balancing ECE approaches in New Zealand and China. The other group perceived their cultural background as less significant and of limited relevance, or even as having negative influences, on their career preparation. Accordingly, this group of participants placed greater emphasis on accepting New Zealand ECE approaches and assimilating into the local norms.

These two pedagogical orientations described in my study closely parallel Xu et al.'s (2025) distinction between "forced forgetting" and "conscious remembering" (p. 11), two processes through which immigrant early childhood educators construct their professional identities. Forced forgetting refers to the process by which immigrant educators relinquish their prior beliefs for new patterns and suppress their cultural identity under the pressure of exclusively conforming to the host country's norms. In contrast, conscious remembering refers to intentional, conscious engagement with their personal and cultural history, enabling them to challenge dominant discourses and connect their present with their past (Xu et al., 2025). The former process may lead to the loss of professional identity and hinder student teachers' professional growth, whereas the latter could potentially support their development and strengthen their uniqueness (Xu et al., 2025).

Therefore, it is important to support student teachers from migrant backgrounds in valuing their cultural identity and viewing it as a strength that can contribute to and enrich the ECE profession. Rana (2021) noted in her study that being Indian is important for her participants, who are Indian student teachers in New Zealand, and that they are keen to maintain their language and

culture. In a similar vein, I argue that being Chinese is also important for Chinese student teachers in New Zealand. Within ITE, Chinese student teachers or student teachers from other non-dominant backgrounds could be encouraged to build connections with their cultural identity and their culturally shaped ways of knowing and being, to form a professional identity with a strong foundation that links to their past.

A point also worth noting is the impact of policy and institutional-level factors, particularly external accreditation frameworks such as the Standards for the Teaching Profession (Education Council, 2017), on Chinese student teachers' professional identity construction. Although not explicitly derived from the data collected in this study, the significant influence of professional and institutional standards should not be overlooked, as they shape how ECE ITE programmes are designed and implemented, and how student teachers are assessed. The Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand stated that, "ITE needs to equip new teachers with the skills, knowledge, and practice they need in their first teaching role. It must also enable them to continue to learn and adapt their practice for future challenges and meet *Ngā Paerewa* | *Standards*" (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2024b, p. 4). In addition, on the web page of the Teaching Council website about the Teaching Standards, it explicitly states that the Standards describe what good teaching looks like (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, n.d.-a). In other words, frameworks such as the Teaching Standards, implicitly as well as explicitly, perpetuate the view that there are good, and potentially normative, practices and, consequently, bad practices. Call (2022) noted that when professional standards are used in a regulatory rather than a developmental way, they may promote "safe practices rather than innovative and creative practices" (p. 746). Therefore, when the teaching standards are used as an assessment checklist, Chinese student teachers may feel pressured to assimilate to these "good" practices and valued outcomes, thereby masking aspects of their identities.

Taken together, learning to teach in a cross-cultural context presents Chinese student teachers with multi-layered challenges. First, beyond navigating social biases and deficit discourses,

Chinese student teachers need to reconcile specific dissonances between their culturally shaped prior beliefs and new pedagogical expectations. Importantly, this reconciliation process is not uniform; the hybrid nature of modern Chinese culture and ECE means that these tensions can vary across Chinese individuals and generations. Second, the complexity that Chinese student teachers need to navigate also lies in developing their understanding of play-based learning and teaching as enacted in practice. This must occur not only within the context of ITE but also across different practicum centres and with associate teachers who may hold diverse teaching philosophies and expectations for student teachers. Third, professional identity construction for Chinese student teachers is inseparable from their perceptions of their cultural identity. Whether they pursue pedagogical assimilation or integration depends largely on whether they view their cultural identity as a deficit to be masked or a strength to be embraced. In addition, wider policy and institutional factors such as the Standards for the Teaching Profession may further shape Chinese student teachers' experiences, as assessment against these standards can create pressure to assimilate to dominant notions of "good" practices. Successfully navigating these complexities requires significant resilience and specific support for Chinese student teachers.

8.4 Leveraging Funds of Knowledge and Identity through Third Space Engagement

In the preceding sections, the challenges and complexity of learning to teach for Chinese student teachers in a cross-cultural context have been discussed. While it is essential to be aware of Chinese student teachers' struggles, it is equally important to recognise the strengths and resilience they demonstrate throughout their learning journeys, and to explore possibilities to enhance these positive aspects. Otherwise, focusing solely on Chinese student teachers' challenges risks reinforcing deficit discourses that portray them as less competent, insufficient, or as a burden to ITE providers. Drawing on earlier scholarship, I argue that acknowledging the rich funds of knowledge and identity that Chinese student teachers bring with them, and facilitating their active engagement with these funds within the third space, can support their professional growth and challenge deficit discourses about them (Gupta, 2013; McDevitt, 2023; Rathore & D'Silva, 2024; Recchia & McDevitt, 2018).

The concept *funds of knowledge* refers to "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133). Since its creation, funds of knowledge, as a counter-deficit discourse, has been widely applied to children and families from minority communities, as well as teachers and student teachers from migrant backgrounds (Adair et al., 2012; Hibbs, 2024; Monzó & Rueda, 2003). The concept of funds of knowledge has become attractive because it highlights that "people are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" (Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. ix). However, as this theory developed, some limitations have been identified, including the reliance on a single methodological approach (household-based ethnography, such as family visits) and adult household practices as the primary unit of analysis (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014a). In response to these limitations, the new concept *funds of identity* was proposed to diversify the methodological approach (e.g., self-portrait and significant circle) and shift the unit of analysis to children (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014a). The concept is defined as "historically accumulated, culturally developed, and socially distributed resources that are essential for a person's self-definition, self-expression, and self-understanding" (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014a, p. 37). This new concept emphasises individuals' agency in converting and transforming various funds of knowledge at the household level into their own funds of identity. In recent years, these two terms have often been used together as *FOK/I* to refer to "a complete inventory of meaningful social knowledge, cultural competencies, and subjective productions that students, families, and communities develop in order to live their lives" (Esteban-Guitart, 2023b, p. 11).

Some studies have adopted the lens of funds of knowledge and identity when studying teachers and student teachers from migrant backgrounds, noting the importance of recognising the funds of knowledge and identity they bring with them (Adair, 2011; Gupta, 2006). For instance, in a study of a Latino Jewish immigrant teacher in the United States, McDevitt (2023) noted that the teacher's own experience and identity as an immigrant enabled him to see an immigrant child who had been marginalised in the classroom and bring the child to the centre of the classroom

community through purposefully designed activities. Similarly, in Chapter 5, I reported an example of how one participant created a culturally responsive environment for a Chinese child, who was new to the ECE centre in New Zealand, by introducing Chinese songs and stories. These are some of the explicit demonstrations of how migrant teachers' and student teachers' funds of knowledge and identity could contribute to ECE services.

Notably, some researchers have linked the funds of knowledge and identity framework with the third space theory. *Third space* is a term introduced by the postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha to conceptualise an in-between space that emerges through cultural encounters between the coloniser and the colonised (Bhandari, 2022). Third space is a space of enunciation in which "the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37). The concept highlights how such a space enables resistance to dominant or hegemonic narratives through ongoing processes of negotiation and transformation (Tatham, 2025). Following Bhabha's work, researchers from various disciplines have adopted the concept of third space for different purposes, including in the field of education.

Gutiérrez et al. (1999) conceptualised the third space as a discursive space between the official space and the unofficial space, in which "alternative and competing discourses and positionings transform conflict and difference into rich zones of collaboration and learning" (pp. 286-287). Gutiérrez et al. (1999) argued that student knowledge can become new tools for learning in such a space. While acknowledging the multiple meanings of third space, Moje et al. (2004) emphasised the perspective that views third space as "a space of cultural, social, and epistemological change in which the competing knowledges and discourses of different spaces are brought into 'conversation'" (p. 44). The value of third space theory lies in its recognition of the often marginalised and overlooked knowledge that students bring, as well as its emphasis on the possibility of generating new knowledge and understandings through negotiation with formal

knowledge. Third space allows individuals to connect diverse knowledge, make new meaning, and create hybrid identities (Gutiérrez et al., 1999; Tatham, 2025).

The third space becomes particularly important for students or student teachers navigating cross-cultural contexts. Ikpeze (2016) argued that discussions of teaching across cultures would be incomplete without reference to the concept of third space, a space in which cultures, identities, values, perspectives, and ideas from the home and host contexts are brought together and negotiated. Recchia and McDevitt (2018) emphasised that it is within the third space, a postcolonial hybrid space and an in-between grey area, that migrant student teachers' funds of knowledge and identity are brought in and negotiated with the formal professional discourses to produce new knowledge and understandings. Within the third space, migrant student teachers are not restricted to adhering to dominant discourses but can challenge them by engaging with their own funds of knowledge and identity and creating hybrid understandings (Tatham, 2025).

My findings also support the view that Chinese student teachers bring rich funds of knowledge and identity, developed and accumulated through their sociocultural experiences, to inform their professional learning within the third space. For instance, the interview data suggest that my participants frequently drew on their own childhood and upbringing experiences (and for those who are parents, also their knowledge of their own children's experiences) to make sense of curriculum and pedagogy. As discussed in Chapter 6, Chinese student teachers did not simply mirror their past experiences by "teaching the way they were taught" (Oleson & Hora, 2014, p.29). Rather, during their ITE learning processes, Chinese student teachers critically reflected on their past experiences to avoid reproducing practices they perceived as negative. For example, one prominent pattern was Chinese student teachers' rejection of a strongly teacher-directed approach and their preference for play-based pedagogy, a pattern supported by both the survey and interview findings.

Moreover, Chinese student teachers' own and familial educational experiences within Chinese cultural contexts, which emphasise the importance of teachers' guidance in children's learning (S.-C. Wu & Rao, 2011), also contributed to their cautious attitude towards an entirely free

play approach, particularly when this was presented as a dominant teaching philosophy during some practicum placements. This kind of dialogue and negotiation between Chinese student teachers' personal funds of knowledge and identity, and the formal discourses presented in ITE coursework and practicum settings within the third space, leads to the development of hybrid pedagogical perspectives.

However, it is worth noting that such dialogue and negotiation may be constrained if Chinese student teachers' funds of knowledge and identity are not recognised and validated within ITE programmes and if they are not given sufficient space to engage with these funds. Therefore, drawing on relevant studies, I outline three recommendations that could be insightful for ITE providers in identifying Chinese student teachers' funds of knowledge and identity and facilitating their active engagement with these funds within the third space.

First, using multiple methods (e.g., reflection papers, self-portraits) to identify and mobilise Chinese student teachers' funds of knowledge and identity. For example, Gupta (2006) asked immigrant and minority teacher candidates to write a reflection paper about their early learning experiences and connect these experiences with one of the theoretical ideas taught in a course on theories of child development, including those from Freud, Erikson, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Kohlberg. This method, as Gupta (2006) noted, not only broadened the researcher's understanding of the richness of these teacher candidates' early learning experiences in their respective cultural contexts but also helped these candidates to connect abstract ideas of child development with concrete examples from their familiar environments. In addition, Hibbs (2024) lists ten activities that can be used to document, identify and understand students' as well as student teachers' funds of identity, including: "acrostic poems, Circles of My Multicultural Self, coat of arms, community language map, cultural X-ray, 'I Am' poem, language portrait, linguistic web, self-portrait, and significant circle" (p. 14). The self-portrait method, for instance, requires participants to draw an image of themselves, and they can also add people or things that are important to them (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014a). After the drawing is completed, the participants can explain it to others to help other people better

understand who they are and what is important to them (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014a). These various methods could help teacher educators and associate teachers appreciate student teachers' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and explore possible ways to connect these funds with their professional learning and identity construction. Through activities like writing reflection papers or drawing self-portraits, student teachers can also deepen their understanding of the importance of responding to children's culture, language, and identity in their future teaching.

Second, avoiding the imposition of a universalist perspective of teaching and caring for young children within ITE programmes. Many studies show that there is no universally applicable "good" approach for teaching and caring for young children; rather, these perspectives and practices are highly culturally situated (Nsamenang, 2009; Tobin, 2022). Gupta (2020) reminds us, "There is no one right early childhood teacher education discourse for all societies everywhere at all times" (p. 56). Therefore, it risks becoming an "act of colonisation" (Gupta, 2011, p. 3) if teacher educators or associate teachers try to impose a singular "correct" perspective on these diverse student teachers. In contrast, the diverse perspectives that migrant student teachers bring with them need to be recognised for their legitimacy and value. For example, in the study of African Muslim refugee student teachers, Massing (2018) found that these candidates saw caring practices not only as a means to ensure children's health and well-being, but also as an opportunity to teach religious and cultural values. Recchia and McDevitt (2018) also argue that migrant student teachers need to be provided with the space, time, and support to explore diverse perspectives using their funds of knowledge, rather than being expected to accept a universalist understanding of teaching and care. Therefore, it is important to be cautious about the underlying message that teacher educators and associate teachers may send to Chinese and other migrant student teachers.

Third, providing quality and culturally responsive mentoring for Chinese student teachers within safe and welcoming practicum environments to ensure they can engage with their funds of knowledge and identity. Quality mentoring from associate teachers is widely recognised as essential for student teachers' professional learning during practicum (Jafar et al., 2021). However, studies

note that associate teachers' ability to provide such quality mentoring cannot be assured and is often left to chance (Mutlu, 2014; Sewell et al., 2017). Given the complexity of learning to teach for Chinese student teachers and the multiple layers of challenges they navigate, quality mentoring from associate teachers seems to be more significant for them than their local counterparts. Importantly, such mentoring needs to be culturally responsive and address the unique struggles and needs of Chinese student teachers. Amos (2017) argues that culturally responsive supervising/mentoring should go beyond good intentions and a superficial understanding of teacher candidates' culture and identity based on a presumed, stereotyped and essentialist view. Instead, supervisors/associate teachers need to be prepared to challenge their unconscious cultural assumptions about the candidates and relinquish their power to the candidates for knowledge sharing and perspective discussion (Amos, 2017). While Amos's suggestion is insightful, I argue that power between the two parties does not have to be relinquished from one to the other but can instead be shared within a democratic relationship. In addition, Yang (2025) suggests that associate teachers who supervise Chinese student teachers should receive targeted training on the differences between the student teachers' home and host cultures, and these student teachers should be deliberately paired with associate teachers who share similar cultural backgrounds or have completed relevant training to ensure the provision of culturally responsive mentoring. Associate teachers can also benefit from engaging with more recent research that documents the current-generation Chinese student teachers' struggles and concerns during practicums in cross-cultural contexts (Yang, 2025; Zheng et al., 2024).

Taken together, this section discusses the importance of acknowledging the rich funds of knowledge and identity that Chinese student teachers bring, and highlights how these funds can contribute to the development of integrated and hybrid pedagogical perspectives within the third space, where diverse discourses can be negotiated. It then outlines three recommendations for teacher educators and associate teachers who teach and mentor Chinese student teachers. These recommendations include: First, using multiple methods (e.g., reflection papers, self-portraits) to

identify and mobilise Chinese student teachers' funds of knowledge and identity; Second, avoiding the imposition of a universalist perspective on Chinese student teachers regarding teaching and caring for young children; Third, providing Chinese student teachers with quality and culturally responsive mentoring within safe and welcoming practicum environments. While this discussion centres on Chinese student teachers, it could be insightful for understanding and supporting student teachers from other culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

8.5 Chapter Summary

Chapter 8 discusses the key messages that emerged from the study findings across four sections, with connections to the theoretical resources and the broader scholarship.

This chapter begins by highlighting that building a diverse ECE teaching workforce benefits children and families from both non-dominant and dominant backgrounds. In Aotearoa New Zealand, where the population has become increasingly diverse, calls to diversify the teaching workforce have also been reflected in both research and policy documents. Chinese student teachers currently represent a significant proportion of ITE cohorts in New Zealand, and their numbers are likely to increase further due to recent international education marketing policies. Therefore, it is valuable to research and understand Chinese student teachers' perspectives and experiences within ITE programmes.

While learning to teach is already a challenging process, doing so as a Chinese student teacher in a cross-cultural context adds additional layers of difficulty. The findings suggest that Chinese student teachers are situated in learning environments shaped by pervasive and historically embedded social biases, including stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. In addition, Chinese student teachers' prior knowledge and experiences were sometimes unacknowledged or invalidated within their ITE programmes, suggesting the presence of deficit-oriented interpretations of them. These social biases and deficit discourses devalued Chinese student teachers' cultural identity and knowledge, and placed pressure on them to fit into an implied, homogenising "good" teacher model grounded in dominant discourses in New Zealand ECE contexts.

Beyond navigating social biases and deficit discourses, the complexity of learning to teach for Chinese student teachers is further reflected in three aspects. First, Chinese student teachers need to reconcile specific dissonances between their culturally shaped prior beliefs and new pedagogical expectations in New Zealand contexts. Importantly, the hybrid nature of contemporary Chinese culture and ECE means that the dissonances Chinese student teachers experience may vary across individuals and generations. Second, Chinese student teachers also need to conceptualise play-based learning and teaching, which can be challenging as they encounter diverse pedagogical perspectives across institutional content and practicum placements. Third, as a core element of ITE learning, professional identity construction for Chinese student teachers is inseparable from their perceptions of their own cultural identity. The findings indicate that Chinese student teachers may pursue either pedagogical assimilation or integration, depending largely on whether they view their cultural identity as a deficit to be masked or a strength to be embraced.

Challenging deficit discourses and stereotypical perceptions of Chinese student teachers necessitates reframing through a strengths-based lens to enable a more empowering and equitable interpretation of their contributions. It is therefore essential to recognise the rich funds of knowledge and identity that Chinese student teachers bring and to highlight their contribution to the development of integrated and hybrid pedagogical perspectives within the third space, where diverse discourses can be negotiated. In addition to recognising these funds, three recommendations are proposed to support teacher educators and associate teachers in facilitating Chinese student teachers' active engagement with their funds of knowledge and identity. These recommendations include: a) using multiple methods (e.g., reflection papers, self-portraits) to identify and mobilise Chinese student teachers' funds of knowledge and identity; b) avoiding the imposition of a universalist perspective on Chinese student teachers regarding teaching and caring for young children; and c) providing Chinese student teachers with quality and culturally responsive mentoring within safe and welcoming practicum environments.

Although this chapter focuses specifically on Chinese student teachers, the discussion offers broader insights into the struggles and challenges that culturally and linguistically diverse student teachers may encounter, as well as the complexity of their learning-to-teach journeys within cross-cultural ITE contexts.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

Building an early childhood education (ECE) teaching workforce that reflects the increasingly diverse population is an important priority for the ECE sector in Aotearoa New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2019b). Initial teacher education (ITE) plays a key role in achieving the goal of diversifying the teaching workforce (Yip & Ji, 2024; Yip & Xu, 2025). Therefore, understanding culturally and linguistically diverse student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy, as well as their learning experiences within ITE programmes, represents an important research area that can provide insights into how these student teachers may be better prepared for their future role as ECE teachers in New Zealand.

Among culturally and linguistically diverse student teachers, this study focused specifically on Chinese student teachers. Drawing on a two-phase mixed-methods research design, this study explored how Chinese student teachers understand curriculum and pedagogy in ECE settings in New Zealand, the factors that influenced their perspectives, and the supports and challenges they experienced and identified in relation to their ITE learning. This concluding chapter synthesises the key study findings, discusses the study's contributions and implications, reflects on its limitations and delimitations, outlines directions for future research, and includes a section about researcher reflection before presenting a summary of the thesis.

9.1 Overview of the Key Findings

As a two-phase mixed-methods study, this research drew on quantitative and qualitative data to develop a more comprehensive understanding of Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECE context. Central to this investigation was exploring the factors that influence Chinese student teachers' perspectives of teaching and learning, as well as the supports and challenges related to their broader learning experiences within ITE programmes as they navigate a cross-cultural context. The survey findings from Phase 1 provided a broad picture of patterns in Chinese student teachers' perspectives, while the interview findings from Phase 2 added depth by offering detailed and rich accounts that illustrated how these

perspectives were shaped within their ITE programmes. The key findings are briefly summarised and synthesised in relation to the five research questions outlined below.

RQ1. How do Chinese student teachers understand curriculum and pedagogy in ECE contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand?

In terms of Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy, the study findings suggest that Chinese student teachers generally positioned teachers as facilitators, co-learners, and observers rather than in more authoritative roles. In addition, Chinese student teachers commonly endorsed a mixed, co-constructed, and culturally responsive approach to teaching and learning in ECE, appreciating child-initiated play and teacher guidance, while remaining reserved about more teacher-directed practices. Moreover, Chinese student teachers regarded respecting children as fundamental to teaching practices. Importantly, two pedagogical orientations were identified among Chinese student teachers, one oriented towards integrating ECE approaches from New Zealand and China, seeking what they commonly referred to as a balance, and the other inclined towards assimilation into local norms in New Zealand, arguing that there is no need to find a balance.

RQ2. How do Chinese student teachers understand and implement intentional teaching in child-centred, play-based, and culturally responsive ECE contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand?

Regarding intentional teaching, the study findings suggest that Chinese student teachers demonstrated varying levels of familiarity with and knowledge of the concept, leading to diverse intentional teaching practices. However, after being provided with a formal definition of intentional teaching, Chinese student teachers expressed a near-unanimous positive attitude towards it and indicated a willingness to implement it in future teaching. Moreover, Chinese student teachers' understandings of intentional teaching were found to be related to their varying exposure to the concept across their respective ITE programmes. Compared with play-based learning and culturally responsive practice, intentional teaching was generally perceived as being less prioritised in ITE, particularly during practicums. Notably, Chinese student teachers who reported insufficient

coverage of intentional teaching constructed their own understandings of the concept, which were often incomplete and did not fully align with established understandings.

RQ3. What factors influence Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy?

Regarding factors influencing Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy, the study findings suggest that Chinese student teachers identified a range of influences, including their ITE programmes (explored further in the next research question), their Chinese cultural background, their upbringing and educational experiences, and their role as parents (for those who have children). Notably, the findings indicate the complex learning-to-teach process for these Chinese student teachers, as they need to reconcile their prior beliefs with new pedagogical expectations, navigate different centre philosophies across practicum placements, and negotiate identity tensions within a cross-cultural context. The findings further highlight that when Chinese student teachers held a positive attitude towards their cultural background and identity, they were more inclined to pursue integrating ECE approaches in New Zealand and China. Conversely, when Chinese student teachers held a negative attitude towards their cultural background and identity, they were more likely to seek assimilation. Social biases towards Chinese people in New Zealand, deficit interpretations of this group of student teachers, and institutional-level factors (e.g., the Standards for the Teaching Profession) may have contributed to pressure on these student teachers to assimilate to perceived "good" models of teaching.

RQ4. How have ITE programmes facilitated Chinese student teachers' understandings of curriculum and pedagogy?

Regarding ITE, the study findings suggest that it played a significant role in shaping Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy. ITE exerted its influence on Chinese student teachers' perspectives through facilitating the development of new pedagogical beliefs, promoting reflection on existing beliefs, and supporting the integration of course-based learning and centre-based practicum experiences. Through these processes, Chinese student teachers became more aware of valued educational philosophies in New Zealand that had not been evident in their

own past experiences. Chinese student teachers also reconciled and negotiated their prior beliefs with new pedagogical expectations through purposeful reflection. Moreover, Chinese student teachers gradually transformed learned knowledge into internalised beliefs through active application and examination of it in practical contexts.

RQ5. What supports and challenges do Chinese student teachers describe in relation to their ITE experiences?

In terms of challenges, the study findings suggest that Chinese student teachers at times learned in environments where social biases, including stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination, were evident. Belief dissonance was frequently reported, and Chinese student teachers found it difficult to draw on their prior knowledge and experiences when on practicum in New Zealand's ECE contexts. Participants also described inadequate practicum support and restricted agency during practicums as challenges that contributed to their negative learning experiences and constrained their professional development and identity construction.

In terms of supports, the study findings indicate that while some efforts were made to value Chinese student teachers' cultural heritage and identity, participants expected greater support in this regard. Participants also reported limited cultural representation within the teacher education team and expressed expectations for a more diverse team of teacher educators. In addition, participants reported having experienced quality mentoring from associate teachers during some practicums, which was identified as an essential form of support. Furthermore, based on their positive interactions with feedback mechanisms, participants described having their voices heard as a form of support that could enhance their professional learning experiences.

9.2 Contributions

This doctoral research makes original and significant contributions to knowledge about culturally diverse student teachers in New Zealand's ECE ITE context, with a specific focus on Chinese student teachers. The contributions are empirical, conceptual, methodological, and practical:

1) **Empirical contributions.** This study provides the first mixed-methods account that systematically examines Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy across ECE ITE programmes in New Zealand and how these perspectives are shaped through their ITE experiences. It provides a broad picture of Chinese student teachers' perspectives, suggesting that they commonly endorse a co-constructed, culturally responsive, play-based approach in which teachers act as facilitators, co-learners, and observers. It also identifies two distinct pedagogical orientations among Chinese student teachers: integration (seeking a balance between Chinese and New Zealand pedagogical approaches) and assimilation (adopting local norms). Moreover, the study suggests that student teachers hold an emerging sense of constructs such as play-based learning and intentional teaching, and that there is scope for more critical engagement within ITE programmes to support a robust understanding and reflective practice.

2) **Conceptual contributions.** The findings of this study challenge deterministic assumptions that student teachers teach as they were taught, demonstrating instead that student teachers' pedagogical beliefs are dynamic, malleable, and shaped by multiple interacting influences, particularly ITE, cultural background, upbringing and educational experiences, and parenthood. It advocates moving beyond a simplistic linkage between ethnicity and pedagogical perspectives, and emphasises the importance of recognising both shared cultural beliefs and internal diversity among participants of different ages and generations. In addition, this study provides a New Zealand context-specific conceptual contribution by showing how Chinese student teachers negotiate professional identities alongside cultural identities. It reveals how Chinese student teachers' views of their cultural heritage (as deficits to be hidden or strengths to be leveraged) shape tendencies towards pedagogical assimilation or integration. The findings encourage a reframing of culturally diverse student teachers' backgrounds and heritage, promoting strengths-based interpretations that counter deficit perspectives.

3) **Methodological contributions.** Methodologically, this study demonstrates the value of a two-phase mixed-methods explanatory sequential design that couples a nationwide survey with

serial, in-depth interviews to achieve both breadth and analytic richness. It applies funds of knowledge, funds of identity and third-space theory as analytic lenses for ITE research, showing their explanatory power for understanding Chinese student teachers' cross-cultural learning processes, which may also be extended to other culturally and linguistically diverse student teachers. In addition, the use of bilingual data collection (English and Mandarin Chinese) is a field-relevant innovation that reduces language-related suppression of voice and yields richer, more authentic accounts from participants who use English as an additional language. It provides practical insights for developing and utilising bilingual tools for data collection. The study also demonstrates how reflexive thematic analysis can be utilised rigorously in ECE ITE contexts to generate patterned meanings grounded in data while acknowledging researcher positionality.

4) **Practical contributions.** By presenting the multi-level challenges (social biases, deficit discourses, inadequate practicum support, restricted agency) and effective supports (valuing identity, a diverse team of teacher educators, quality mentoring, and functioning feedback mechanisms) that Chinese student teachers experienced and identified in relation to their ITE experiences, this study provides valuable insights for future action among ITE stakeholders. It suggests treating Chinese student teachers, as well as those from other culturally diverse backgrounds, as assets rather than risks, providing targeted guidance on how teachers can implement intentional teaching across different types of children's play through conceptualising a continuum of practice in supporting play-based learning, and mobilising student teachers' funds of knowledge and identity within a third space to engage with diverse discourses.

Collectively, these contributions advance empirical understanding, sharpen theoretical explanation, model equitable methodology for culturally and linguistically diverse groups, and deliver actionable insights for the ECE ITE sector, thereby strengthening the sector's capacity to prepare a diverse, culturally responsive ECE teaching workforce. Future research may draw on the contributions of this study as a foundation for comparative work within and beyond Aotearoa New Zealand.

9.3 Implications

This study has implications for policymakers, ITE providers, teacher educators, associate teachers, and Chinese student teachers. These implications are outlined below.

For policymakers, this study prompts them to view Chinese student teachers not merely as contributors to the growth of the international education market but as important assets with the potential to enrich ECE perspectives and pedagogies in New Zealand. The growing presence of Chinese and other ethnic minority student teachers can more closely reflect the increasingly diverse population of New Zealand society and contribute to the goal of diversifying the ECE teaching workforce. Such a diversified workforce will not only benefit children and families from nondominant backgrounds by acting as cultural brokers and translators, but also benefit those from dominant backgrounds by cultivating multicultural awareness among future citizens and helping to shape a more inclusive society. It is therefore important for policymakers to continue making efforts to build a diverse ECE teaching workforce in New Zealand.

For ITE providers, this study suggests that greater attention could be paid to the challenges that Chinese student teachers experience within their ITE programmes, most notably social biases and deficit discourses that invalidate their cultural knowledge and devalue their cultural identities. Developing a diverse teacher education team was identified by participants as an important form of support in response to these challenges. A diverse teacher education team could send an affirming message to Chinese student teachers that diversity is valued within their learning environments. In addition, it may be beneficial to strengthen Chinese student teachers' trust in institutional feedback mechanisms and reassure them that these mechanisms are supportive and protect their interests. In this way, Chinese student teachers may be more willing to share the issues that they encounter within their learning processes and to seek support, rather than managing these challenges on their own.

For teacher educators, this study highlights the importance of being prepared to challenge their own unconscious cultural assumptions and stereotypical views of Chinese student teachers.

While acknowledging the existence of shared cultural beliefs and experiences, it is equally essential to view each Chinese student teacher as a unique individual with heterogeneous life experiences and distinct perspectives in certain aspects. In addition, teacher educators may consider presenting diverse perspectives of teaching and learning in ECE and encourage Chinese student teachers' active engagement with these perspectives, rather than imposing a universalist perspective that implies there is only one "good" way of educating children. There are also some strategies, such as reflection papers and self-portraits, that teacher educators could use to help identify and mobilise Chinese student teachers' funds of knowledge and identity, and subsequently support them in drawing on these funds for their ITE learning.

For associate teachers, this study suggests that, beyond reflecting on their unconscious cultural assumptions and stereotypical views of Chinese student teachers, offering quality and culturally responsive mentoring may be particularly important. The mentoring provided by associate teachers could be culturally responsive and address the specific challenges and needs of Chinese student teachers, particularly in relation to play-based pedagogy and understandings of the teacher's role in children's learning. Due to the influence of Chinese cultural traditions, Chinese student teachers may refrain from challenging and questioning associate teachers, who are often perceived as holding greater authority. Therefore, creating a welcoming, democratic, and emotionally safe practicum environment may be vital for Chinese student teachers to develop a sense of belonging and feel comfortable asking questions and sharing their perspectives. In addition, it may be valuable for associate teachers to conceptualise the mentoring process as a reciprocal learning process. In this process, Chinese student teachers not only learn local practices from associate teachers, but associate teachers may also broaden their understanding by engaging with ECE perspectives from another cultural lens. Both associate teachers and student teachers may benefit from recognising that there is not a single correct way of teaching and educating children in ECE, but that all perspectives and practices are culturally shaped and grounded. Being open-minded

and willing to consider diverse perspectives and practices may be critical for both parties' professional development.

For Chinese student teachers, this study suggests that there are actions they could take in responding to social biases and deficit discourses. Although social bias against Chinese people in New Zealand society has historical roots and represents a systemic issue, Chinese student teachers may still make their own contributions by confronting such experiences and actively seeking support from their ITE providers. To challenge deficit discourses, it may be beneficial for Chinese student teachers to develop a positive orientation towards their Chinese cultural background and to view it as a strength. What Chinese student teachers have inherited and accumulated from their home culture is not something that is "wrong" and needs to be replaced by the "correct" approach from the host culture, but can offer alternative ways of seeing the world, particularly in relation to ECE. This opinion does not imply that Chinese student teachers are expected to adhere rigidly to their prior beliefs or resist change. Rather, this opinion highlights the importance of recognising the culturally shaped nature of ECE perspectives and pedagogies. Moreover, during practicums, Chinese student teachers might benefit from being more active and exercising greater agency in asking questions and raising concerns with associate teachers. Importantly, Chinese student teachers may also view themselves not only as learners who are shaped by the ECE context, but as agents who can contribute to the shift in the ECE sector through "their purposeful, collaborative, and ethical efforts" (Dolan, 2017, p. ii).

9.4 Delimitations, Limitations, and Directions for Future Research

While recognising the contributions of this study, it is also necessary to note its delimitations and limitations, as well as to outline directions for future research. Limitations refer to the potential weaknesses of a study that are usually beyond the researcher's control, such as time and resources, whereas delimitations refer to the boundaries and inclusion/exclusion decisions consciously set by the researcher to narrow the scope of a study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Delimitations reflect the intentional decisions made by the researcher about what to include and what to exclude, which

should not be viewed as weaknesses but rather as purposeful decisions that make a study both realistic and manageable (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Jansen, 2022).

The delimitations of this present study relate to its research scope and design choices. First, this study deliberately focuses on Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy rather than on their teaching practices in ECE settings. As such, surveys and interviews were utilised to collect data, while on-site classroom observations of Chinese student teachers in ECE settings were not included in the research design. Consequently, the findings speak to how student teachers understand and interpret curriculum and pedagogy, rather than how they enact these understandings in practice. This delimitation narrows the study to perceptions rather than observable teaching behaviours, which helps maintain a coherent scope but also means that conclusions cannot be extended to actual classroom practice.

Second, the Phase 2 interviews were intentionally designed as a small qualitative inquiry. Although 17 participants self-nominated for Phase 2 interviews, seven representative participants were purposefully selected for two rounds of one-on-one semi-structured interviews in order to prioritise depth and richness of data. This allowed for a more detailed and nuanced understanding of how participants' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy were shaped within their ITE programmes, which, when combined with Phase 1 survey data, provides a comprehensive understanding of Chinese student teachers' perspectives. This delimitation does mean that certain perspectives may have been excluded from Phase 2 interviews, and thus, the findings from Phase 2 cannot be overgeneralised.

Third, reflexive thematic analysis, rather than grounded theory, was employed for interview data analysis. This study did not aim to generate a theory explaining how Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy were shaped, but instead sought to identify and explore factors influencing their perspectives in a cross-cultural learning context, as well as to investigate the supports and challenges they experienced and identified. Consequently, the findings should be

interpreted as thematic insights into Chinese student teachers' perspectives rather than as a generalisable theoretical model.

This study also has several limitations. First, the Phase 1 survey was designed to identify three groups of Chinese student teachers representing different levels of endorsement of intentional teaching, which could then inform participant selection in Phase 2 interviews. However, the survey did not yield sufficiently differentiated groupings to support this research intention as planned. Consequently, participants for Phase 2 were instead selected based on their general preference for certain approaches to teaching and learning in ECE (see Appendix 6), alongside demographic considerations, including gender, age, ITE programme type, and parenting experience, to enable the inclusion of participants representing a wide range of perspectives and experiences. Second, although this study initially aimed to focus on intentional teaching, participants in Phase 2 reported limited familiarity with the concept, which constrained in-depth exploration of the factors shaping their perspectives of intentional teaching. Consequently, the analytic focus was shifted to examine factors influencing participants' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy more generally. Third, to ensure feasibility within the timeframe of a doctoral study, data were collected solely from Chinese student teachers, and no data were collected from other stakeholders, such as teacher educators and associate teachers, to allow cross-checking. Therefore, the accounts that Chinese student teachers provided can only represent their perceptions of ITE practices, which may not represent the full context. Fourth, this study employed reflexive thematic analysis as the qualitative data analysis method, which values the researcher's subjectivity and rejects a positivist stance towards knowledge generation (Braun & Clarke, 2022, pp. 7–9). Both a strength and a limitation of this approach is that the themes were generated through the researcher's active engagement with the data and were inevitably shaped by the researcher's experiences and positionality. When viewed as a limitation, this influence was mitigated through the researcher's ongoing reflexive practices and feedback from supervisors who offered additional analytic perspectives. In addition, this study did not aim to present a universal truth, and alternative interpretations of the qualitative data remain possible.

Overall, while the existence of these four limitations may affect interpretations of the findings, they nonetheless demonstrate the dynamics and constraints of the research process in the real world.

Drawing on the delimitations and limitations discussed above, this study outlines several directions for future research.

First, given the possible misalignments between teachers' pedagogical beliefs and teaching practices (Buehl & Beck, 2014, p. 66), future studies could explore Chinese student teachers' teaching practices in practicum settings through methods such as classroom observation to examine whether gaps exist between their articulated perspectives and demonstrated practices. By identifying potential gaps between perspectives and practices, Chinese student teachers may be better supported to transform their beliefs into enacted practices, ultimately benefiting children in ECE settings.

Second, future studies could collect data from other ECE ITE stakeholders, such as teacher educators and associate teachers who work with Chinese student teachers, to gain a fuller picture of Chinese student teachers' cross-cultural learning journeys and to explore ways to enhance their experiences within ITE programmes. Moreover, future studies could examine how professional learning and development influence teacher educators' and associate teachers' capacity to work effectively with culturally and linguistically diverse student teachers.

Third, in order to maximise participant recruitment, this study did not impose restrictions on the stage participants were at within their ITE programmes. Therefore, the survey findings represent a cross-sectional snapshot of the perspectives of the 53 participating Chinese student teachers and cannot indicate whether these perspectives reflect those held at the beginning, middle, or end of their ITE learning journeys. Future research could purposefully select a group of participants at the same stage of their ITE journey (e.g., the beginning) and conduct a more rigorous longitudinal study to track changes in their perspectives over time using validated scales.

Fourth, given the increasingly diverse student teacher cohort within ECE ITE programmes in New Zealand, future research could explore the perspectives and experiences of student teachers

from other migrant backgrounds. Findings from such studies could be considered alongside this study on Chinese student teachers to advance a more nuanced understanding of culturally and linguistically diverse student teachers and to examine similarities and differences across cultural groups.

Fifth, as discussed in the discussion chapter, focusing solely on Chinese student teachers' challenges may risk reinforcing deficit discourses that portray them as less competent and as a burden to ITE providers. Therefore, future studies could explore the unique strengths that Chinese student teachers or those from other culturally diverse backgrounds bring, as well as the specific contributions they can make within ITE classrooms or ECE settings. Such research may help to reframe deficit-oriented interpretations of culturally and linguistically diverse student teachers, positioning them as valuable assets to the ECE sector in New Zealand.

9.5 Researcher Reflection

Conducting this study in New Zealand has been a unique experience for me. It prompted me to reflect on the issues of language, culture, and identity, as well as the power related to them. I am from a society where, in many aspects of life, collectivism and commonality are more prevalent than individualism and differences. As a Han Chinese, the largest ethnic group of China, accounting for over 90% of the population, I am part of the dominant group in China. I grew up in an environment predominantly surrounded by other Han Chinese. Although I learned from textbooks that there are 56 ethnic groups in China, I had not really had the chance to look from the perspective of ethnic minorities. When I came to New Zealand, it was my first time seeing the diversity of the society and the representation of different cultures and languages in daily life. Moving from a member of the dominant group in China to a member of the minority group in New Zealand, this shifting identity made me realise that being able to have one's voice heard by the public is a significant privilege.

Throughout this research process, I felt the importance of language decisions. By providing survey questionnaires in both English and Mandarin Chinese and offering options to talk in either language during interviews, Chinese student teachers were able to express their ideas freely. I still

remember one participant telling me that she felt constrained by English when communicating her ideas and thoughts to associate teachers and teacher educators, whereas she was noticeably talkative during the interviews. As one of the characters, Gloria, says in the popular American sitcom *Modern Family*, "Do you even know how smart I am in Spanish?" This applies to many people who speak English as a second language. It is, therefore, a privilege for me to offer them the opportunity to share their stories and views in a language with which they are familiar, without fear of being judged. I hope that through these narratives, descriptions, and interpretations, stakeholders in ECE ITE can see the diversity within the Chinese student teacher group, their shared and distinct experiences and perspectives, the challenges they encountered, and the resilience and agency they demonstrated in navigating ITE programmes in a cross-cultural context.

In addition, as an ECE teacher educator myself before commencing this PhD journey, and one who will return to the lecturing role after its completion, this study made me aware of how essential it is for student teachers to build connections between their past experiences and their current ITE learning. I have also developed an interest in exploring ethnic minority student teachers' teaching beliefs and teacher education experiences in Chinese universities, where culturally responsive practice has not been a focus in ITE. Moreover, this study strengthened my belief that there is not a single correct way of teaching and educating children in ECE, but that all perspectives and practices are culturally shaped and deeply rooted in their particular social contexts. Providing opportunities for student teachers to reflect on their prior beliefs and engage with diverse perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy may contribute to their development as ECE teachers with critical and dialectical perspectives.

9.6 Thesis Summary

Since ECE settings in New Zealand are servicing a growing number of children and families with diverse cultural backgrounds, it is essential that these cultures are appropriately represented within the ECE teaching workforce. Building such a workforce relies primarily on whether ITE

providers can successfully support and prepare student teachers from diverse backgrounds in the New Zealand context.

Employing a two-phase mixed-methods research design, this doctoral study conducted an initial exploration of Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy in child-centred, play-based, and culturally responsive contexts in New Zealand. This study found that Chinese student teachers generally embrace a mixed, co-constructed, and culturally responsive approach, value children's play and teacher guidance, and demonstrate reservations about teacher-directed practices. Chinese student teachers' pedagogical perspectives suggest a shift in ECE traditions within Chinese cultural contexts and indicate the influence of multiple factors, especially ITE programmes, in shaping their perspectives. Two pedagogical orientations (integration and assimilation) were identified among participants, and these orientations were closely linked to how participants viewed their cultural background and heritage. This study also deepened understanding of Chinese student teachers' ITE learning by highlighting the challenging learning environments that they face, as well as the belief tensions and identity struggles involved in their ITE learning processes. This study invites ITE providers to reflect on the goals of educating Chinese student teachers, as well as student teachers from other cultural backgrounds, particularly whether they should be expected to be more Kiwi and less themselves, or whether they could be supported to hold both or multiple cultures and identities as an integrated whole. As Gupta (2011) suggested, ITE providers may benefit from teacher education models built upon critical perspectives, such as postcolonial theory. Avoiding the ideological colonisation of diverse student teachers within ITE, who will go on to teach children from diverse backgrounds, may be key to enabling diversity to become a genuine strength for Aotearoa New Zealand.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Full Ethics Approval Letter

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

11/12/2023

Dear: Min Wang

Re: Ethics Application - OM2 23/53 - Chinese Student Teachers' Perspectives of Intentional Teaching in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECE Context: A Mixed Methods Case Study

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee:

Ohu Matatika 2 at their meeting held on **Thursday, 26 October 2023**

On behalf of the Committee I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are approved.

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely



Professor Craig Johnson
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)

Research Ethics Office, Research and Enterprise
Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand T 06 951 6841; 06 95106840
E humanethics@massey.ac.nz; animalethics@massey.ac.nz; gtc@massey.ac.nz

Appendix 2. Information Sheet for Phase 1 (English and Mandarin Chinese)





Participant Information Sheet – Phase 1

Study Title: Chinese student teachers' perspectives of intentional teaching in ECE

Researcher: Min Wang

Supervisors: Associate Professor Tara McLaughlin; Dr Karyn Aspden

Kia ora, this is the first phase of my doctoral study project. You are invited to take part in a survey to express your understanding of intentional teaching in early childhood education (ECE).

Please note that participating in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to participate, decline to answer any question, or withdraw from the study at any practicable time, without experiencing any disadvantage.

WHO AM I?

My name is Min Wang. I am a PhD candidate in ECE at Massey University, New Zealand. My supervisors are Associate Professor Tara McLaughlin and Dr Karyn Aspden.

WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

Intentional teaching is a term proposed by Ann Epstein in 2007 and has since been widely used and discussed. Although this term has attracted much attention around the world, many studies have revealed that people have varied understandings, opinions, and attitudes about it. This study aims to explore Chinese student teachers' perspectives of intentional teaching in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECE context.

WHO CAN TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

This study is seeking participants who meet the following two criteria:

1) Currently enrolled in an ECE initial teacher education (ITE) programme approved by the Teaching Council that can lead to teacher registration in New Zealand.

2) Self-identify ethnically as Chinese, whether Chinese as your sole ethnicity or as one of multiple ethnicities you identify with (e.g., Chinese international students, Chinese immigrants, or New Zealand-born Chinese, et al.).

HOW IS THIS STUDY DESIGNED?

This study uses a two-phase mixed methods case study research (MM-CSR) design.

Specifically, this study will commence with an online survey (i.e., Phase 1) to establish a baseline of Chinese student teachers' perspectives of intentional teaching across New Zealand. The online survey will be distributed through two pathways. First, I will contact ECE ITE providers to request their assistance in distributing the survey. In addition, a flyer about the survey will be posted on Chinese and English social media platforms, such as WeChat, Xiaohongshu, and Facebook, to recruit participants.

At the end of the online survey, participants will be invited to self-nominate themselves to participate in a multiple-case study (i.e., Phase 2), which consists of two rounds of one-to-one semi-structured interviews. Of these nominations, the researcher will purposefully select six participants with varied beliefs about intentional teaching for data collection. Key themes emerging from Phase 1 data will be used to guide the Phase 2 interview schedule.

Finally, the results from the two phases will be integrated to provide more comprehensive insights into Chinese student teachers' perspectives of intentional teaching.

You can choose to only participate in Phase 1 or participate in both Phase 1 and Phase 2.

The planned research timeline is shown below:

Research Timeline

Phase	Phase 1	Phase 2	
Time	March, 2024	July, 2024	November, 2024
Content	Online survey	First round one-to-one semi-structured interview	Second round one-to-one semi-structured interview

WHAT WILL YOUR PARTICIPATION IN PHASE 1 INVOLVE?

You will complete a questionnaire in the online survey system which mainly contains four parts:

1) General views of teaching and learning in early childhood education (ECE).
2) Views of intentional teaching.
3) Initial teacher education (ITE) experience related to intentional teaching.
4) Demographic information.

The estimated time to complete this survey is **10 to 15 minutes**.

WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS IN PHASE 1?

Participating in this survey (Phase 1) is completely voluntary, and you are under no obligation to participate. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Choose not to answer any particular question.

- Withdraw from the survey at any time before submitting without experiencing any disadvantage.
- Ask any questions about the study at any time.
- Access a summary of the project findings by contacting the researcher directly or through the provided link after it has been completed.

Please note that by submitting your survey, you are giving consent for your response to be included in this study, and after that point, your data cannot be withdrawn.

HOW WILL YOUR PRIVACY BE PROTECTED?

For those who only participate in Phase 1 of this project, your data will remain anonymous throughout the entire research process.

For those who participate in Phase 1 and self-nominate for Phase 2, your response to the survey will no longer be anonymous to the research team.

Throughout the research process, the researcher will make every effort to remove any identifiable information about you and your ITE institution to protect your privacy.

All data collected will be stored securely on a password-protected device and uploaded to the researcher's personal OneDrive account for backup for seven years, after which it will be destroyed.

HOW WILL YOUR DATA BE USED?

I will strictly adhere to the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations Involving Human Participants (Massey University, 2017) when using data.

The data collected from this study will only be accessed by my supervisors and me and will be used exclusively for my PhD dissertation, academic publications, conferences, and other related works.

WHO DO YOU CONTACT IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?

If you want more information or have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact us. We would be very happy to answer your questions as soon as possible.

Researcher	**Main Supervisor**	**Co-Supervisor**
Name: Min Wang	Name: Tara McLaughlin	Name: Karyn Aspden
Department: Institute of Education	Department: Institute of Education	Department: Institute of Education
Institution: Massey University	Institution: Massey University	Institution: Massey University
Phone: +64 [redacted]	Phone: +64 69517312	Phone: +64 69517389

Email: M.Wang4@massey.ac.nz	Email: T.W.McLaughlin@massey.ac.nz	Email: K.M.Aspden@massey.ac.nz

**** This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 23/53. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Associate Professor Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, email humanethics2@massey.ac.nz.***

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
TE KURA O TE MĀTAURANGA

Early Years Research Lab

参与者信息单 – 第一阶段

研究课题：华人实习教师对幼儿教育中“有意识教学”的看法

研究者：王敏

导师： Tara McLaughlin 副教授；Karyn Aspden 博士

您好，这是我博士研究项目的第一阶段。您被邀请参与一项调查，以帮助我们了解您对幼儿教育中“有意识教学”的理解。

请注意，参与本研究是完全自愿的。您可以拒绝参与、拒绝回答任何问题，或在任意可行的时间内退出本研究，而不会受到任何不利影响。

我是谁?

我叫王敏。我是新西兰梅西大学幼儿教育专业的一名博士生。我的导师是 Tara McLaughlin 副教授和 Karyn Aspden 博士。

这项研究是关于什么的?

有意识教学是 Ann Epstein 于 2007 年提出的术语，此后得到了广泛的使用和讨论。尽管这一术语在世界范围内引起了大量关注，但许多研究表明，人们对此有着不同的理解、看法和态度。本研究旨在探索新西兰幼儿教育背景下，华人实习教师对有意识教学的看法。

谁可以参加这项研究?

本研究正在招募符合以下两个标准的参与者:

1) 目前正就读于经过教学委员会批准的，能够在新西兰进行教师注册的幼儿教师职前教育课程。

2) 族群上自我认同为华人，无论华人是您唯一认同的族群，还是您所认同的多个族群之一（例如，华人留学生、华人移民或新西兰出生的华人等）。

这项研究是如何设计的?

本研究采用两阶段的混合方法案例研究（MM-CSR）设计。

具体来说，本研究将从线上调查（即第一阶段）开始，确立一个新西兰华人实习教师对有意识教学的看法的基线。线上调查的问卷将通过两种途径进行发放。首先，我将联系提供幼儿教师

职前教育的机构，请求他们协助分发调查问卷。此外，我还将在微信、小红书、Facebook 等中英文社交平台发布问卷海报，以招募参与者。

在线上调查结束时，参与者将被邀请自我提名参加一个多案例研究（即第二阶段），该阶段包括两轮一对一的半结构化访谈。在这些提名者中，研究者将有目的地选择六名具有差异化的有意识教学信念的参与者进行数据收集。第一阶段数据中浮现的关键主题将用以指导第二阶段的访谈计划。

最后，两个阶段的研究结果将被整合，以提供对华人实习教师有意识教学看法的更为全面的认识。

您可以选择仅参与第一阶段或同时参与第一阶段和第二阶段。

规划的研究时间线安排如下：

研究时间线

阶段	第一阶段	第二阶段	
时间	2024 年 3 月	2024 年 7 月	2024 年 11 月
内容	线上调查	第一轮 一对一的半结构化访谈	第二轮 一对一的半结构化访谈

您在第一阶段的参与将涉及哪些内容？

您将在线上调查系统中完成一份调查问卷，该问卷主要包含四个部分：

1) 对幼儿教育中教学与学习的一般看法
2) 对有意识教学的看法
3) 与有意识教学相关的职前教师教育(initial teacher education)经历
4) 人口统计学信息

完成此调查的预计时间为 **10 至 15 分钟**。

您在第一阶段有哪些权利？

参与本调查（第一阶段）是完全自愿的，您没有必须参与的义务。如果您决定参加，您有权：

- 选择不回答任何特定问题。
- 在提交问卷之前随时退出调查，且不会受到任何不利影响。
- 随时询问有关本研究的任何问题。
- 与研究者直接联系或在项目完成后通过以下提供的链接获取一份项目研究结果摘要。

请注意，提交问卷即表示您同意将您的回答纳入本研究。在提交问卷之后，您的数据将无法撤回。

您的隐私将如何被保护？

对于仅参与本项目第一阶段的参与者，您的数据将在整个研究过程中保持匿名。

对于参加了本项目第一阶段，且自我提名参与第二阶段的参与者，您的问卷回答对研究团队将不再匿名。

在整个研究过程中，研究者将尽一切努力移除有关您和您所在的职前教师教育机构的任何可识别信息，以保护您的隐私。

所有收集的数据将被安全地存储在一个受密码保护的设备上，并上传至研究者的 OneDrive 帐户进行备份，保存期限为七年，之后数据将被销毁。

您的数据将如何被使用？

我将严格遵循《涉及人类参与者的研究、教学和评估伦理行为准则》（梅西大学，2017 年）来使用数据。

本研究收集的数据将仅允许我和我的导师访问，并将仅用于我的博士论文、学术出版物、会议和其他相关工作。

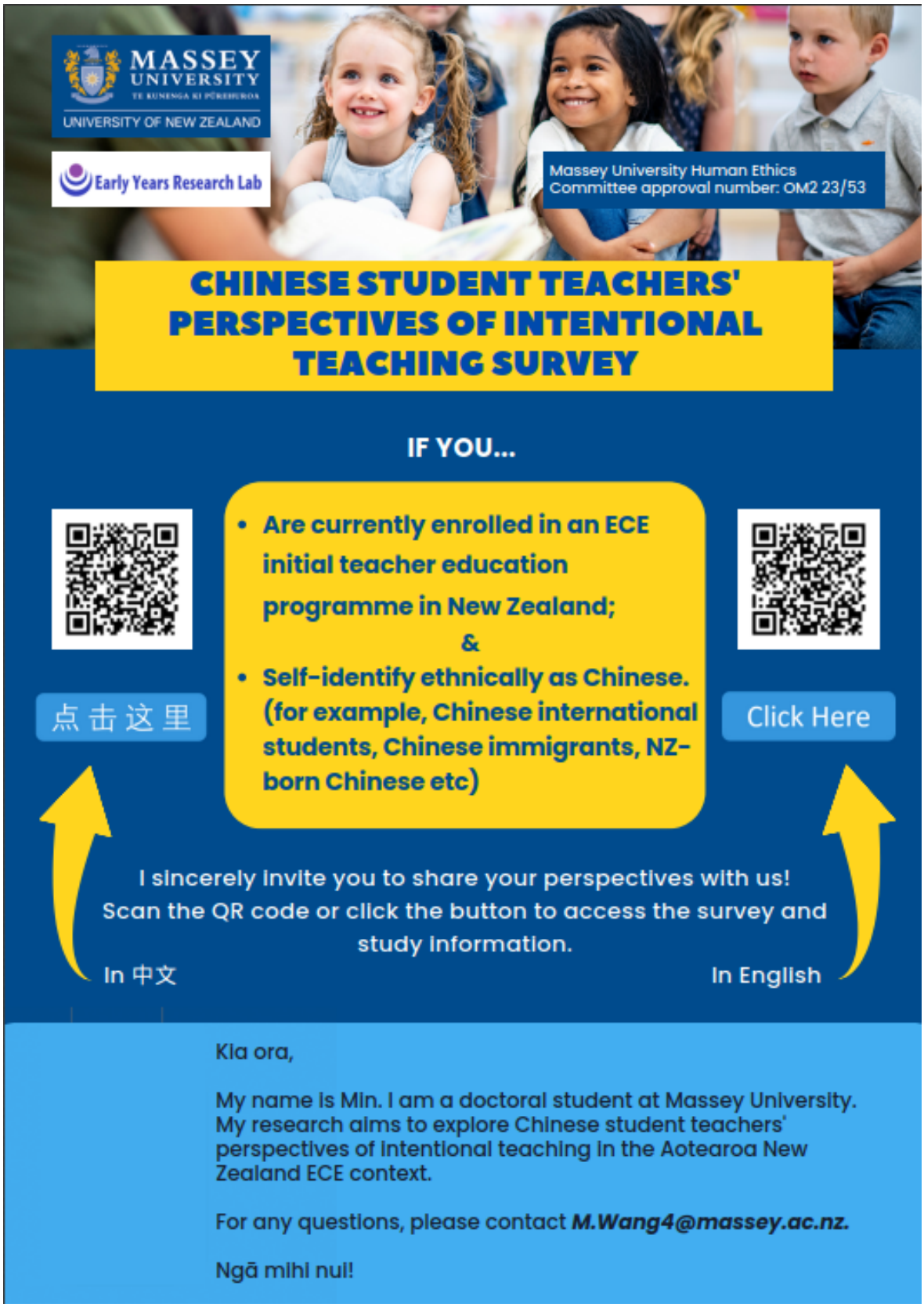
如果您有任何疑问，该与谁联系？

如果您想了解更多信息，或对本研究有任何疑问，请随时与我们联系。我们非常乐意尽快回答您的问题。

研究者	**主导师**	**副导师**
姓名：王敏	姓名：Tara McLaughlin	姓名：Karyn Aspden
部门：教育学院	部门：教育学院	部门：教育学院
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电子邮件：	电子邮件：	电子邮件：
M.Wang4@massey.ac.nz	T.W.McLaughlin@massey.ac.nz	K.M.Aspden@massey.ac.nz

本项目已经过梅西大学人类伦理委员会 Ohu Matatika 2 审查并批准，申请号为 OM2 23/53。如果您对本研究的实施有任何疑问，请联系梅西大学人类伦理委员会 Ohu Matatika 2 的主席 Fiona Te Momo 副教授，电子邮件 humanethics2@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix 3. Participant Recruitment Flyer (English and Mandarin Chinese)





华人实习教师对幼儿教育中"有意识教学"的看法调查

如果您...

- **目前正就读于新西兰的幼儿教师职前教育课程；**

  且

- **族群上自我认同为华人。（例如华人留学生、华人移民或新西兰出生的华人等）**

点击这里

Click Here

我诚挚邀请您与我们分享您的观点。
请扫描二维码或点击蓝色按钮查看问卷及研究信息。

In 中文

In English

您好，

我是梅西大学的一名博士生。我的研究旨在探索新西兰幼儿教育背景下，华人实习教师对"有意识教学"的观点。

如果您有任何疑问，请通过邮箱与我联系：M.Wang4@massey.ac.nz

非常感谢！

Appendix 4. Phase 1 Survey (English and Mandarin Chinese)

Chinese Student Teachers' Perspectives of Intentional Teaching in ECE

Kia ora, welcome to this online survey.

My name is Min Wang. I am a doctoral student at Massey University. This survey serves as the first phase of my doctoral study project and aims to provide a broad understanding of Chinese student teachers' perspectives of curriculum and pedagogy, especially intentional teaching, in the Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education (ECE) context.

Intentional teaching is a term proposed by Ann Epstein in 2007 and has since been widely used and discussed in the ECE field. Although this term has attracted much attention nationally and internationally, many studies have revealed that people have varied understandings, opinions, and attitudes about it. Through this study, I hope to collect your perspectives on this topic and let your voices be heard by the public.

Participation in this survey is **completely voluntary**, and you have the right to refuse to answer any particular question or quit at any time before submitting. Please feel free and comfortable to provide honest and accurate answers, as your response will be strictly managed and kept confidential. There is no right or wrong in terms of your response. All data collected will be used for research purposes only.

The estimated time to complete this survey is **10 to 15** minutes. Please note that by submitting your survey, you are **giving consent** for your response to be included in this study, and after that point, your data cannot be withdrawn.

For more information, please click here to refer to the participant information sheet for Phase 1 of this project. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email (M.Wang4@massey.ac.nz) or phone (+64 [redacted]).

Ngā mihi nui,

Min Wang

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 23/53. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Associate Professor Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, email humanethics2@massey.ac.nz.

Next page

Q1. *Are you an ECE student teacher in New Zealand who self-identifies ethnically as Chinese? *(Whether Chinese as your sole ethnicity or as one of multiple ethnicities you identify with)* • Yes • No	
Branch	
If "Yes" is selected Go to the next page.	If "No" is selected End of the survey: Sorry, this survey is intended for Chinese ECE student teachers in New Zealand only. We thank you for your interest and understanding. Wishing you a pleasant day!

Next page

This questionnaire is organised into 4 sections:

1. General views of teaching and learning in early childhood education (ECE)
2. Views of intentional teaching
3. Initial teacher education (ITE) experience related to intentional teaching
4. Demographic information

For the purpose of this questionnaire, the term "children**" is inclusive of infants (birth to 18 months), toddlers (one to three years) and young children (two and a half years to school entry). The term "**teacher**" encompasses the adults who work with children from birth to school entry, whether qualified or not.*

Next page

1. General views of teaching and learning in early childhood education (ECE)

In this section, you will be asked questions about your general views of teaching and learning in ECE.

Q2. Please select the **top three** most important roles you think teachers should play **in children's learning process**.

1) Assessor
2) Carer
3) Collaborator
4) Co-learner
5) Facilitator
6) Friend
7) Guide
8) Leader
9) Observer
10) Playmate
11) Supervisor
12) Teacher
13) Other (please specify) _____

Q3. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

No		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
(1)	Children learn best through free play.					
(2)	Teachers should not interrupt children's play.					
(3)	Children are too young to benefit from teacher-directed learning.					
(4)	Teachers' primary responsibility is to set up the environment and observe children's learning.					
(5)	Playing with and alongside peers is important for children's learning.					
(6)	Children should experience culturally responsive learning environments.					
(7)	Teachers should be intentional in supporting children's identity, language and culture.					
(8)	Children learn best with a mix of teacher-directed and child-led activities.					
(9)	Children need the guidance of the teacher to support their learning.					
(10)	Child-initiated play, by itself, is not enough to facilitate children's learning.					
(11)	Children learn best from teacher-directed activities.					

(12)	Teachers' primary responsibility is to impart knowledge and skills to children.					
(13)	Teachers should direct children's learning.					

Q3-2
(Optional) Feel free to make any comments in relation to your answers above.

page break

Q4. Please rate the importance of the following **approaches to teaching and learning** for children, from your perspective.
(A rating of one star indicates "not at all important," while a rating of five stars indicates "extremely important.")

Free play	★★★★★
Child-initiated	★★★★★
Peer-mediated	★★★★★
Co-constructed	★★★★★
Culturally responsive	★★★★★
Teacher-guided	★★★★★
Teacher-directed	★★★★★

Q5. Please rate the importance of the following **learning domains** for children, from your perspective.
(A rating of one star indicates "not at all important," while a rating of five stars indicates "extremely important.")

Physical development and health	★★★★★
Social and emotional competence	★★★★★
Language and communication	★★★★★
Literacy	★★★★★
Mathematics	★★★★★
Science	★★★★★
Technology	★★★★★
Social science	★★★★★
Creative arts	★★★★★

Q6. Please select the **top three** factors that you believe have significantly influenced your views of teaching and learning in ECE.

- Childhood experience
- Parenting experience (with your own children)
- Employment or volunteer experience in ECE settings
- Initial teacher education experience
- Professional learning and development
- Research studies or educational theories

- Te Whāriki (New Zealand ECE curriculum)
- Early Learning and Development Guidelines for Children Aged 3 to 6 Years (Chinese national ECE guidelines)
- Educational policies and regulations
- Personal and cultural beliefs and values
- Other (please specify) _____

Next page

2. Views of intentional teaching.

In this section, you will be asked questions about your views of intentional teaching.

Q7. Have you heard the term "intentional teaching" before?

- Yes
- No

Display logic

If "Yes" is selected Display Q8, Q9, and Q10	If "No" is selected Display Q11
Q8. How familiar are you with the concept of **intentional teaching**? • Not familiar at all • Slightly familiar • Familiar • Very Familiar • Extremely familiar	Q11. Could you please write in your own words what you think **intentional teaching** might be about?
Q9. Where have you heard about or learned about intentional teaching? (Please select **all** that apply) • ITE lecturers/tutors • Associate teachers during practicum • Peers • Reading materials • Online websites • PLD sessions • Other (please specify) _____	
Q10. Could you please write in your own words about your understanding of intentional teaching?	

Next page

For the purposes of my research, this survey adopted the following definition of intentional teaching:

> *The purposeful and deliberate actions of teachers, drawing on both their knowledge of individual children and professional knowledge and skills to provide meaningful, appropriate and culturally responsive curricular experiences for all children in ECE. (Adapted from McLaughlin et al., 2016)*

Based on this definition of intentional teaching, please answer the following questions.

Q12. How important do you think intentional teaching is for children?

- Not at all important
- Slightly important
- Important
- Very important
- Extremely important

Q13. When you think about implementing intentional teaching with children of different ages, such as infants, toddlers, or young children, does your view of the importance of intentional teaching change?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know/Not sure

Display logic	
If "Yes" is selected, Display Q13-2: Could you please explain your reason?	Otherwise, Go to the next question.

Q14. Do you think you will use intentional teaching as part of your future teaching practice?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know/Not sure

Next page

3. Initial teacher education (ITE) experience related to intentional teaching

In this section, you will be asked questions about your experience related to intentional teaching in your current ITE programme.

Q15. What level of ECE ITE programme are you enrolled in?

- Bachelor's degree (level 7)
- Graduate certificate/Graduate diploma (level 7)
- Postgraduate certificate/Postgraduate diploma (level 8)
- Master's degree (level 9)
- Other (please specify) _____

Q16. How long is your current programme?

- One year (full-time)
- Two years (part-time)
- Three years (full-time)
- Other (please specify) _____

Q17. What year are you in your current programme?

- First year
- Second year
- Third year
- Other (please specify) _____

Q18. How many **weeks** of practicum have you completed in your current programme?

- _____

page break

Q19. From your practicum experiences, how would you describe other teachers' engagement in children's learning?

- Far too little
- Slightly too little
- Appropriate
- Slightly too much
- Far too much
- Don't know/Not sure

Q20. Now thinking about your own experience, how would you describe your engagement in children's learning?

- Far too little
- Slightly too little
- Appropriate
- Slightly too much
- Far too much
- Don't know/Not sure

Q21. From your practicum experiences, how intentional were other teachers in supporting children's learning?

- Not at all intentional

- Somewhat intentional
- Frequently intentional
- Always intentional
- Don't know/Not sure

Q22. Now thinking about your own experience, how intentional were you in supporting children's learning?

- Not at all intentional
- Somewhat intentional
- Frequently intentional
- Always intentional
- Don't know/Not sure

Page break

Q23. Please select the **top three** intentional teaching strategies you have used most frequently on practicum.

- Challenging
- Co-constructing/Collaborating
- Commenting/Narrating
- Describing/Explaining
- Encouraging
- Fostering curiosity and wonder
- Giving feedback
- Instructing
- Listening
- Modelling/Demonstrating
- Providing choices and learning opportunities
- Prompting
- Questioning
- Researching
- Reflecting
- Scaffolding
- Other (please specify) _____

Q24. Thinking about the strategies above, can you give an example of how/when you demonstrated intentional teaching on practicum?

page break

Q25. Please indicate the extent to which intentional teaching, play-based learning, and culturally responsive practice are prioritized in your current ITE programme.
(A rating of one star indicates "not a priority," while a rating of five stars indicates "top priority.")

- ***Intentional teaching****: The purposeful and deliberate actions of teachers, drawing on both their knowledge of individual children and professional knowledge and skills to provide meaningful, appropriate and culturally responsive curricular experiences.*

- ***Play-based learning****: The use of play and a rich array of play experiences to foster children's learning.*
- ***Culturally responsive practice****: Valuing and responding to each child's unique identity, language and culture.*

(1) In course content

Intentional teaching	★★★★★
Play-based learning	★★★★★
Culturally responsive practice	★★★★★

(2) During practicum

Intentional teaching	★★★★★
Play-based learning	★★★★★
Culturally responsive practice	★★★★★

(3) Through assessment tasks/assignments

Intentional teaching	★★★★★
Play-based learning	★★★★★
Culturally responsive practice	★★★★★

Page break

Q26. In what ways has your ITE programme supported you to understand and demonstrate intentional teaching?
(Please select **all** that apply)

- Specific course content/lectures on this topic
- Providing reading materials on this topic
- Presenting examples, e.g., video, vignettes
- Encouraging reflection on practicum experiences
- Providing feedback while on practicum, or in other assignments
- Encouraging reflection on previous personal and professional experiences
- Making explicit connection to diverse cultural perspectives of teaching and learning
- Encouraging reflection on previous teaching beliefs
- Encouraging peer discussions and sharing of experiences
- Observations of teachers and children in education settings
- Other (please specify) _____
- Not applicable

Q27. How often have your own beliefs about teaching and learning in ECE been different than the content of your ITE programme?

- Never
- Occasionally
- Often
- Always

Display logic	
If "Occasionally" or "Often" or "Always" is selected Display Q27-2: Could you please give an example?	Otherwise Go to the next question.

Q28. How often have your own beliefs about teaching and learning in ECE been different than your experiences on practicum?

- Never
- Occasionally
- Often
- Always

Display logic	
If “Occasionally” or “Often” or “Always” is selected Display Q27-2: Could you please give an example?	Otherwise Go to the next question.

Q29. To what extent do you believe your cultural identity has been valued in your ITE programme?

- Not at all valued
- Slightly valued
- Valued
- Very valued
- Extremely valued
- Don't know/Not sure

Next page

4. Demographic information

In this section, you will be asked questions about you and your background that will be used for statistical purposes only.

Q30. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Gender diverse
- Prefer not to say

Q31. What is your age?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 or older

Q32. Which of the following statements best fits your identity?

- I am a Chinese international student
- I am a Chinese immigrant in New Zealand (holding New Zealand citizenship or a permanent residency visa but not born in New Zealand)
- I am a New Zealand-born Chinese
- Other (please specify) _____

Q33. If relevant, please list any ethnicities you self-identify with other than Chinese.

_____

Q34. How many years of education have you completed in China?

- None
- Less than 1 year
- Between 1 to 4 years
- Between 5 to 9 years
- Between 10 to 14 years
- More than 15 years

Q35. How many years of education have you completed in New Zealand?

- None
- Less than 1 year
- Between 1 to 4 years
- Between 5 to 9 years
- Between 10 to 14 years
- More than 15 years

page break

Q36. Do you have parenting experience?

- Yes
- No

Q37. Before enrolling in your current ITE programme, have you previously completed any other ECE ITE programmes, either in New Zealand or internationally?

- Yes
- No

Q38. Before enrolling in your current ITE programme, how long was your employment and/or volunteer experience in ECE settings?

- No prior experience
- Less than 1 year
- Between 1 to 4 years
- Between 5 to 9 years
- Between 10 to 14 years
- More than 15 years

Q39. Is there anything else you would like to tell me in relation to this topic of intentional teaching in ECE?

_____

Next page

An opportunity to participate in follow-up interviews.

To deepen our understanding of Chinese student teachers' perspectives of intentional teaching, I sincerely invite you to participate in **two rounds of one-to-one semi-structured interviews** after this survey.

These two rounds of interviews will be conducted in **July 2024** and **November 2024**, respectively. The specific time, place, and method (either online or in-person) of these interviews are negotiable. Each interview will last for **up to one hour**. After each interview, book vouchers will be offered to acknowledge participants for their participation and contributions to this study.

If you are interested, please leave your **name and contact information** so that I can add you to the potential participant list. I will then contact you to discuss the possibility of your participation and provide further details about the interviews.

For more information, please click here to refer to the participant information sheet for Phase 2 of this project.

Q40. Do you have an interest in participating in follow-up interviews?

- Yes
- No

Display logic

If "Yes" is selected	If "No" is selected
Display *Please note that if you provide your name and contact information, the researcher will be able to identify your response to the survey for research purposes; however, your information will be securely protected and will not be shared with anyone outside the research team. Your Name: _____ Please leave your preferred contact information. • Email address: _____ • Phone number: _____ • WeChat ID: _____ • Or other methods: _____	End of the survey.

Submit

Thank you for completing this survey!

Your response has been submitted successfully.

华人实习教师对幼儿教育中“有意识教学”的看法

您好, 欢迎参加本次在线调查。

我叫王敏，是梅西大学的一名博士生。这项调查是我博士研究项目的第一阶段，旨在广泛了解新西兰幼儿教育背景下，华人实习教师对课程和教学法，特别是对“有意识教学”这一概念的看法。

有意识教学(intentional teaching)是 Ann Epstein 于 2007 年提出的一个术语，此后在幼儿教育界得到广泛使用和讨论。尽管其在国内外引起了大量关注，但许多研究表明，人们对此概念有着不同的理解、看法和态度。通过这项研究，我希望收集您对此的观点，让公众听到您的声音。参与本次调查是**完全自愿的**，您有权拒绝回答任何特定问题或在提交问卷之前随时退出。请您放心地提供真实、准确的回答，因为您的回答将受到严格管理和保密。您的回答没有对错之分。本次调查收集的所有数据将仅用于研究目的。

完成本调查的预计时间为 **10 至 15 分钟**。请注意，提交问卷即表示您**同意**将您的回答纳入本研究，在提交问卷之后，数据将无法撤回。

如需了解更多信息，请单击此处参阅本项目第一阶段的参与者信息单。如您有任何疑问，请随时通过电子邮件(M.Wang4@massey.ac.nz)或电话(+64 022 587 4901)与我联系。

非常感谢!

王敏

本项目已经过梅西大学人类伦理委员会 Ohu Matatika 2 审查并批准，申请号为 OM2 23/53。如果您对本研究的实施有任何疑问，请联系梅西大学人类伦理委员会 Ohu Matatika 2 的主席 Fiona Te Momo 副教授，电子邮件 humanethics2@massey.ac.nz。

下一页

Q1. *您是在新西兰的一名华人幼教实习教师（student teacher）吗？ *(无论华人是您自我认同的唯一族群，还是您自我认同的多个族群之一)* • 是 • 否	
分支	
如果“是”被选择 转到下一页。	如果“否”被选择 跳转结尾： 抱歉，本调查仅针对在新西兰的华人幼教实习教师。 我们感谢您对本次调查的兴趣和理解。 祝您度过愉快的一天！

下一页

该调查问卷分为 4 个部分：

5. 对幼儿教育中教学与学习的一般看法
6. 对有意识教学的看法
7. 与有意识教学相关的职前教师教育(initial teacher education)经历
8. 人口统计学信息

出于本调查问卷的目的，"儿童**"一词包括婴儿（出生至 18 个月）、学步儿（一岁至三岁）和幼儿（两岁半至入学前）。"**教师**"一词包括从儿童出生到入学前与儿童一起工作的成年人，无论其是否符合资质。*

下一页

1. 对幼儿教育中教学与学习的一般看法

在本节中，您将被问及您对幼儿教育中教学与学习的一般看法。

Q2. 请选择您认为教师**在儿童学习过程中**应扮演的最重要的**三类角色。**

1) 评价者(Assessor)
2) 照料者(Carer)
3) 合作者(Collaborator)
4) 共同学习者(Co-learner)
5) 促进者(Facilitator)
6) 朋友(Friend)
7) 向导(Guide)
8) 领导者(Leader)
9) 观察者(Observer)
10) 玩伴(Playmate)
11) 监督者(Supervisor)
12) 教师(Teacher)
13) 其他（请具体说明） _____

Q3. 请表明您对以下表述的同意或不同意程度。

		非常不同意	不同意	中立	同意	非常同意
(1)	儿童通过自由游戏学习得最好。					
(2)	教师不应该打断儿童的游戏。					
(3)	儿童太小，无法从教师主导的学习中受益。					
(4)	教师的主要职责是布置环境和观察儿童的学习。					
(5)	与同伴一起游戏对儿童的学习很重要。					
(6)	儿童应该体验具有文化回应性的学习环境。					
(7)	教师应有意识地支持儿童的身份、语言和文化。					
(8)	当混合教师主导的和儿童引领的活动时，儿童学习得最好。					
(9)	儿童需要教师的引导来支持他们的学习。					
(10)	儿童发起的游戏，其本身并不足以促进儿童的学习。					
(11)	儿童从教师主导的活动中学得最好。					
(12)	教师的主要职责是向儿童传授知识和技能。					
(13)	教师应该主导儿童的学习。					

Q3-2 （可选）关于您对上述问题的回答，如您还有其他想法，可写在下方。

page break

Q4. 请从您的视角评价以下**教学与学习的取向**对儿童的重要性。
（一颗星表示“完全不重要”，五颗星表示“极其重要”。）

自由游戏 (Free play)	★★★★★
儿童发起的 (Child-initiated)	★★★★★
同伴中介的 (Peer-mediated)	★★★★★
共同建构的 (Co-constructed)	★★★★★
文化回应式的 (Culturally responsive)	★★★★★
教师引导的 (Teacher-guided)	★★★★★
教师主导的 (Teacher-directed)	★★★★★

Q5. 请从您的视角评价以下**学习领域**对儿童的重要性。
（一颗星表示“完全不重要”，五颗星表示“极其重要”。）

身体发育和健康 (Physical development and health)	★★★★★
社会性和情感能力 (Social and emotional competence)	★★★★★
语言和交流 (Language and communication)	★★★★★
读写能力 (Literacy)	★★★★★
数学 (Mathematics)	★★★★★
科学 (Science)	★★★★★
技术 (Technology)	★★★★★
社会科学 (Social science)	★★★★★
创造性艺术 (Creative arts)	★★★★★

Q6. 请选择您认为最深刻地影响了您的幼儿教育教学与学习观的**三个**因素。

- 童年经历
- 育儿经历（和自己的孩子）
- 在幼教机构的从业或志愿服务经历
- 职前教师教育经历
- 专业学习和发展
- 学术研究或教育理论
- Te Whāriki（新西兰幼儿教育课程纲要）
- 《3–6 岁儿童学习与发展指南》（中国国家幼儿教育指南）
- 教育政策和法规
- 个人和文化的信念与价值观
- 其他（请具体说明）_____

下一页

2. 对有意识教学的看法

在本节中，您将被问及您对有意识教学的看法。

Q7. 您以前是否听说过“**有意识教学(intentional teaching)**”这个术语?

- 是
- 否

显示逻辑

如果”是”被选择	如果“否”被选择
显示 Q8、Q9、Q10	显示 Q11

Q8. 您对“**有意识教学**”这个概念有多熟悉?

- 完全不熟悉
- 有点熟悉
- 熟悉
- 非常熟悉
- 极其熟悉

Q9. 您从哪里听说过或了解过有意识教学?（请选择**所有**适用的选项）

- 职前教师教育课程的讲师/助教
- 实习期间的指导教师
- 同伴
- 阅读材料
- 在线网站
- 专业学习和发展培训
- 其他（请具体说明） _____

Q10. 您能用自己的话写一下您对有意识教学的理解吗?

Q11. 您能用自己的话写一下您认为“**有意识教学**”可能是什么吗?

下一页

出于本研究目的，本次调查采用了以下对“有意识教学”的定义：

> *教师凭借对每一个儿童的理解和他们的专业知识技能，通过有目的的和审慎的教学行动，为幼儿教育机构中的所有儿童提供有意义的、适宜的以及具有文化回应性的课程经验。(改自 McLaughlin et al., 2016)*

根据上述对有意识教学的定义，请回答以下的问题。

Q12.您认为有意识教学对儿童重要吗？

- 完全不重要
- 有点重要
- 重要
- 非常重要
- 极其重要

Q13. 当您考虑对不同年龄段的儿童（例如婴儿、学步儿或幼儿）实施有意识教学时，您对有意识教学重要性的看法是否会改变？

- 是
- 否
- 不知道/不确定

显示逻辑

如果“是”被选择，	否则
显示 Q13-2:	下一题
能否请您解释一下理由？	

Q14.您认为您会在未来的教学实践中使用有意识教学吗？

- 是
- 否
- 不知道/不确定

下一页

3. 与有意识教学相关的职前教师教育经历

在本节中，您将被问及您在当前的职前教师教育课程中与有意识教学相关的经历。

Q15.您目前就读什么层次的幼儿教师职前教育课程?

- 学士学位
  Bachelor's degree (level 7)
- 学士后证书/学士后文凭
  Graduate certificate/Graduate diploma (level 7)
- 研究生证书/研究生文凭
  Postgraduate certificate/Postgraduate diploma (level 8)
- 硕士学位
  Master's degree (level 9)
- 其他（请具体说明）_____

Q16. 您目前就读的幼教课程学制是几年?

- 一年（全日制）
- 两年（非全日制）
- 三年（全日制）
- 其他（请具体说明）_____

Q17. 您目前处于该课程的第几年?

- 第一年
- 第二年
- 第三年
- 其他（请具体说明）_____

Q18. 您在当前的课程中已完成多少**周**的实习?

- _____

page break

Q19.从您的实习经历来看，您会如何描述其他教师对儿童学习的参与程度?

- 过少
- 略少
- 适宜
- 略多
- 过多
- 不知道/不确定

Q20. 现在回想一下您自己的经历，您会如何描述您对儿童学习的参与程度?

- 过少
- 略少
- 适宜
- 略多
- 过多
- 不知道/不确定

Q21. 从您的实习经历来看，其他教师在支持儿童学习方面的有意识程度如何？

- 完全没有意识
- 稍微有点意识
- 经常是有意识的
- 一直是有意识的
- 不知道/不确定

Q22. 现在回想一下您自己的经历，您在支持儿童学习方面的有意识程度如何？

- 完全没有意识
- 稍微有点意识
- 经常是有意识的
- 一直是有意识的
- 不知道/不确定

page break

Q23.请选择您在实习中最常使用的**三种**有意识教学策略。

- 挑战(Challenging)
- 共同建构/协作(Co-constructing/Collaborating)
- 评论/叙述(Commenting/Narrating)
- 描述/解释(Describing/Explaining)
- 鼓励(Encouraging)
- 培养好奇心和求知欲(Fostering curiosity and wonder)
- 提供反馈(Giving feedback)
- 指导(Instructing)
- 倾听(Listening)
- 示范/演示(Modelling/Demonstrating)
- 提供选择和学习机会(Providing choices and learning opportunities)
- 提示(Prompting)
- 质疑(Questioning)
- 研究(Researching)
- 反思(Reflecting)
- 鹰架(Scaffolding)
- 其他（请具体说明）_____

Q24.考虑上述策略，您能否举一个例子说明您如何/何时在实习中实施了有意识教学？

page break

Q25.请指出，**有意识教学**、**基于游戏的学习**和**文化回应式实践**这三者在您当前的职前教师教育课程中被重视的程度。
（一颗星表示“不是优先级”，五颗星表示“最高优先级”。）

- *有意识教学：教师凭借对每一个儿童的理解和他们的专业知识技能，通过有目的的和审慎的教学行动，为儿童提供有意义的、适宜的以及具有文化回应性的课程经验。*
- *基于游戏的学习：利用游戏和丰富的游戏体验来促进儿童的学习。*
- *文化回应式实践：珍视和回应每个儿童独特的身份、语言和文化。*

（1）在授课内容中

有意识教学	★★★★★
基于游戏的学习	★★★★★
文化回应式实践	★★★★★

（2）在实习期间

有意识教学	★★★★★
基于游戏的学习	★★★★★
文化回应式实践	★★★★★

（3）在评价性任务环节/作业环节

有意识教学	★★★★★
基于游戏的学习	★★★★★
文化回应式实践	★★★★★

page break

Q26.您的职前教师教育课程以哪些方式支持您理解和实施有意识教学？
（请选择**所有**适用的选项）

- 有关该主题的具体课程内容/授课
- 提供有关该主题的阅读材料
- 展示案例，例如视频、小故事片段
- 鼓励反思实习经历
- 在实习或其他作业中提供反馈
- 鼓励反思以前的个人经历和职业经历
- 和多元文化视角中的教学与学习建立起明确的联系
- 鼓励反思以前的教学信念
- 鼓励同伴讨论和分享经验
- 观察教育机构中的教师和儿童
- 其他（请具体说明）_____
- 不适用

Q27.您自身关于幼儿教育中教学与学习的信念，与您的职前教师教育课程提供的内容，有过差异吗？

- 从未有
- 偶尔有
- 经常有
- 总是有

显示逻辑

如果“偶尔有”或“经常有“或”总是有“被选择：	否则

显示 Q27-2: 能否请您举个例子?	下一题

Q28. 您自身关于幼儿教育中教学与学习的信念，与您在实习中的经历，有过差异吗?

- 从未有
- 偶尔有
- 经常有
- 总是有

显示逻辑	
如果“偶尔有”或“经常有“或”总是有“被选择: 显示 Q28-2: 能否请您举个例子?	否则 下一题

Q29.您认为您的文化身份在您当前的职前教师教育课程中得到了多大程度的重视?

- 完全不被重视
- 略受重视
- 重视
- 非常重视
- 极其受重视
- 不知道/不确定

下一页

4. 人口统计学信息

在本节中，您将被问及有关您和您的背景的问题，这些问题仅用于统计目的。

Q30. 您的性别是?

- 男性
- 女性
- 性别多元
- 倾向于不说

Q31. 您的年龄是?

- 18 岁以下
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 岁或以上

Q32.以下哪项表述最符合您的身份?

- 我是华人留学生
- 我是新西兰的华人移民（持有新西兰公民身份或永久居留签证，但不是在新西兰出生）
- 我是新西兰出生的华人
- 其他（请具体说明） _____

Q33. 如果相关，请列出除了华人以外您还自我认同的其他族群。

_____

Q34. 您在中国完成了多少年的教育?

- 无
- 不到 1 年
- 1 至 4 年
- 5 至 9 年
- 10 至 14 年
- 超过 15 年

Q35. 您在新西兰完成了多少年的教育?

- 无
- 不到 1 年
- 1 至 4 年
- 5 至 9 年
- 10 至 14 年
- 超过 15 年

page break

Q36. 您是否有过育儿经历？

- 是
- 否

Q37. 在就读当前课程之前，您是否完成过任何其他的幼儿教师职前教育课程，无论是在新西兰还是在其他国家？

- 是
- 否

Q38. 在就读当前课程之前，您在幼教机构中工作和/或志愿服务过多长时间？

- 没有先前经验
- 不到 1 年
- 1 至 4 年
- 5 至 9 年
- 10 至 14 年
- 超过 15 年

Q39.关于幼儿教育中的有意识教学这个话题，您还有什么想说的吗？

_____

下一页

一个参加后续访谈的机会

为了加深我们对华人实习教师有意识教学观点的理解，我诚挚邀请您在本次调查结束后参与**两轮一对一的半结构化访谈**。

这两轮访谈将分别于 **2024 年 7 月**和 **2024 年 11 月**进行。访谈的具体时间、地点和方式（线上或线下）均可协商。每次访谈的时间**不超过一小时**。在每次访谈结束后，我们将会给受访者提供图书代金券，以感谢其对本研究的参与和贡献。

如果您有兴趣，请留下您的**姓名和联系信息**，以便我将您添加到潜在参与者名单之中。随后我将与您联系，讨论您参与的可能性并提供关于访谈的更多细节。

如需了解更多信息，请单击此处参阅本项目第二阶段的参与者信息单。

Q40. 您是否有兴趣参加后续访谈？

- 是
- 否

显示逻辑

如果“是“被选择：	如果“否“被选择：
显示： *请注意，如果您提供您的姓名和联系信息，研究者出于研究目的将能够识别您对本问卷的回答；但是，您的信息将受到安全地保护，并且不会与研究团队以外的任何人共享。 您的姓名：_____ 请留下您首选的联系方式。 • 电子邮件地址： _____ • 电话号码： _____ • 微信号： _____ • 或其他方式： _____	调查结束。

提交

感谢您完成本次调查！

您的回答已成功提交。

Appendix 5. Information Sheet for Phase 2 (English and Mandarin Chinese)





Participant Information Sheet – Phase 2

Study Title: Chinese student teachers' perspectives of intentional teaching in ECE

Researcher: Min Wang

Supervisors: Associate Professor Tara McLaughlin; Dr Karyn Aspden

Kia ora, this is the second phase of my doctoral study project. You are invited to take part in two rounds of one-to-one semi-structured interviews to help us unpack your understanding of intentional teaching further.

Please note that participating in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to participate, decline to answer any question, or withdraw from the study at any practicable time, without experiencing any disadvantage.

WHAT WILL YOUR PARTICIPATION IN PHASE 2 INVOLVE?

You will participate in two rounds of one-to-one semi-structured interviews in **July** and **November** 2024, respectively. The time, places, and methods for these interviews will be negotiated and agreed upon by both parties. Each interview will last for **up to one hour** and will be audio-recorded.

In the first interview, you will be asked questions about your personal background and experiences, your perspectives of intentional teaching, and related ITE experiences. You will also read my summative description of your views drawn from your Phase 1 survey response and then comment on that.

In the second interview, you will be asked questions about any personal updates you may have had since the last interview and revisit your prior responses to the questions about intentional teaching in the last interview to see whether your thoughts have changed or not. Besides that, you are encouraged to bring some artifacts or pieces of work voluntarily that could represent your implementation of intentional teaching during practicum and discuss them with the researcher.

WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS IN PHASE 2?

Participating in Phase 2 of this study is completely voluntary, and you are under no obligation to participate. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Choose not to answer any particular question.
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used, and no identifiable information will be shared with anyone outside the research team.
- Ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.
- Choose to withdraw from Phase 2 of the study within one month after the data have been collected.
- Ask any questions about the study at any time.
- Review and edit the transcripts of the interview prior to data analysis.
- Read over and comment on the personal case story that has been generated based on your response.
- Access a summary of the project findings by contacting the researcher directly.

HOW WILL YOUR PRIVACY BE PROTECTED?

For those who participate in both Phase 1 and Phase 2, although the research team will be aware of your identity for research purposes, pseudonyms will be used to ensure others will not recognise you. Besides, none of your responses in this study will be shared with your ITE institution.

Throughout the research process, the researcher will make every effort to remove any identifiable information about you and your ITE institution to protect your privacy.

All data collected will be stored securely on a password-protected device and uploaded to the researcher's personal OneDrive account for backup for seven years, after which it will be destroyed.

HOW WILL YOUR DATA BE USED?

I will strictly adhere to the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations Involving Human Participants (Massey University, 2017) when using data.

The data collected from this study will only be accessed by my supervisors and me and will be used exclusively for my PhD dissertation, academic publications, conferences, and other related works.

WHO DO YOU CONTACT IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?

If you want more information or have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact us. We would be very happy to answer your questions as soon as possible.

Researcher	**Main Supervisor**	**Co-Supervisor**
Name: Min Wang	Name: Tara McLaughlin	Name: Karyn Aspden
Department: Institute of Education	Department: Institute of Education	Department: Institute of Education

Institution: Massey University Phone: +64 [redacted] Email: M.Wang4@massey.ac.nz	Institution: Massey University Phone: +64 69517312 Email: T.W.McLaughlin@massey.ac.nz	Institution: Massey University Phone: +64 69517389 Email: K.M.Aspden@massey.ac.nz

**** This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 23/53. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Associate Professor Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, email humanethics2@massey.ac.nz.***

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
TE KURA O TE MĀTAURANGA

Early Years Research Lab

参与者信息单 – 第二阶段

研究课题：华人实习教师对幼儿教育中“有意识教学”的看法

研究者：王敏

导师： Tara McLaughlin 副教授；Karyn Aspden 博士

您好，这是我博士研究项目的第二阶段。您被邀请参与两轮一对一的半结构化访谈，以帮助我们进一步了解您对“有意识教学”的理解。

请注意，参与本研究是完全自愿的。您可以拒绝参与、拒绝回答任何问题，或在任意可行的时间内退出本研究，而不会受到任何不利影响。

您在第二阶段的参与将涉及哪些内容?

您将分别于 2024 年的 **7 月**和 **11 月**参加两轮一对一的半结构化访谈。访谈的时间、地点和方式将由双方协商并达成一致。每次访谈时间**不超过一小时**，并将进行录音。

在第一次访谈中，您将被问及您的个人背景和经历、您对有意识教学的看法、以及相关的职前教师教育经历。您还将阅读一份我基于您在第一阶段的回答撰写的关于您观点的总结性描述，并进行评论。

在第二次访谈中，您将被问及自第一次访谈以来您是否有任何需要更新的信息，并回顾您在第一次访谈时关于有意识教学的回答，以帮助我们了解您的想法是否发生了变化。此外，我们鼓励您自愿携带一些能够代表您在实习期间实施了有意识教学的作品或材料，并与研究者进行讨论。

您在第二阶段有哪些权利?

参与本研究的第二阶段是完全自愿的，您没有必须参与的义务。如果您决定参加，您有权：

- 选择不回答任何特定问题。
- 在提供信息时，知晓您的姓名将不会被使用，并且任何可识别的信息将不会与研究团队以外的人共享。

- 在访谈期间随时要求关闭录音机。
- 在数据收集后的一个月以内选择退出本研究的第二阶段。
- 随时询问有关本研究的任何问题。
- 在数据分析之前审阅并编辑访谈记录。
- 阅读并评论根据您的回答撰写的个人案例。
- 与研究者直接联系，获取一份项目研究结果摘要。

您的隐私将如何被保护？

对于同时参加第一阶段和第二阶段的参与者，虽然研究团队会出于研究目的了解您的身份，但我们将采用化名以确保您不会被他人识别出来。此外，您在本研究中的任何回答，我们都不会与您所在的职前教师教育机构进行分享。

在整个研究过程中，研究者将尽一切努力移除有关您和您所在的职前教师教育机构的任何可识别信息，以保护您的隐私。

所有收集的数据将被安全地存储在一个受密码保护的设备上，并上传至研究者的 OneDrive 帐户进行备份，保存期限为七年，之后数据将被销毁。

您的数据将如何被使用？

我将严格遵循《涉及人类参与者的研究、教学和评估伦理行为准则》（梅西大学，2017 年）来使用数据。

本研究收集的数据将仅允许我和我的导师访问，并将仅用于我的博士论文、学术出版物、会议和其他相关工作。

如果您有任何疑问，该与谁联系？

如果您想了解更多信息，或对本研究有任何疑问，请随时与我们联系。我们很乐意尽快回答您的问题。

研究者	**主导师**	**副导师**
姓名：王敏	姓名：Tara McLaughlin	姓名：Karyn Aspden
部门：教育学院	部门：教育学院	部门：教育学院
院校：梅西大学	院校：梅西大学	院校：梅西大学
电话：+64 [redacted]	电话：+64 69517312	电话：+64 69517389
电子邮件： M.Wang4@massey.ac.nz	电子邮件： T.W.McLaughlin@massey.ac.nz	电子邮件： K.M.Aspden@massey.ac.nz

**本项目已经过梅西大学人类伦理委员会 Ohu Matatika 2 审查并批准，申请号为 OM2 23/53。如果您对本研究的实施有任何疑问，请联系梅西大学人类伦理委员会 Ohu Matatika 2 的主席 Fiona Te Momo 副教授，电子邮件 humanethics2@massey.ac.nz.*

Appendix 6. Participant Selection Process for Phase 2

In the Phase 1 survey, question Q3 (see Appendix 4) was designed to gather participants' preferences regarding certain approaches to teaching and learning in early childhood education (ECE). This question asked participants to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with 13 statements related to four approaches to teaching and learning in ECE. Participants responded using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Participants' responses to question Q3, alongside their demographic characteristics, were used to select participants for Phase 2. Below, I explained the selection process.

Appendix 6 Table 1

13 Statements and Corresponding Approaches to Teaching and Learning

Number	Statements	Approaches to teaching and learning
(1)	Children learn best through free play.	(a) Child-led
(2)	Teachers should not interrupt children's play.	
(3)	Children are too young to benefit from teacher-directed learning.	
(4)	Teachers' primary responsibility is to set up the environment and observe children's learning.	
(5)	Playing with and alongside peers is important for children's learning.	(b) Collaborative and culturally responsive
(6)	Children should experience culturally responsive learning environments.	
(7)	Teachers should be intentional in supporting children's identity, language and culture.	
(8)	Children learn best with a mix of teacher-directed and child-led activities.	(c) Mixed
(9)	Children need the guidance of the teacher to support their learning.	
(10)	Child-initiated play, by itself, is not enough to facilitate children's learning.	
(11)	Children learn best from teacher-directed activities.	(d) Teacher-directed
(12)	Teachers' primary responsibility is to impart knowledge and skills to children.	
(13)	Teachers should direct children's learning.	

As presented in Appendix 6 Table 1, the 13 statements can be categorised into four approaches to teaching and learning in ECE: (a) a child-led approach, emphasising children's autonomy and free play; (b) a collaborative and culturally responsive approach, centring on peer learning and culturally responsive practice; (c) a mixed approach, integrating child-led and teacher-

directed experiences; and (d) a teacher-directed approach, focusing on teachers' direct instruction and structured learning.

To ensure a consistent way of distinguishing participants' perspectives of teaching and learning in the early years, rather than doing so arbitrarily, participants' responses to each statement in Q3 using the 5-point Likert scale were assigned a corresponding numeric value: -2 (strongly disagree), -1 (disagree), 0 (neutral), 1 (agree), and 2 (strongly agree). The values were then summed within each approach to teaching and learning to represent participants' pedagogical preferences.

Five levels of agreement with a given approach to teaching and learning (favour, lean towards, neutral towards, lean away from, and against) were established based on the summed values of participants' responses to the statements within the given approach (see Appendix 6 Table 2). For example, a participant's level of agreement with approach (a) was determined by the summed value of the participant's responses to statements 1, 2, 3, and 4. A participant's level of agreement with approach (b) was determined by the summed value of the participant's responses to statements 5, 6, and 7.

Appendix 6 Table 2

Five Levels of Agreement and Corresponding Value Range

Level of agreement	Value range for approach (a)	Value range for approach (b)	Value range for approach (c)	Value range for approach (d)
	Statement 1, 2, 3, 4	Statement 5, 6, 7	Statement 8, 9, 10	Statement 11, 12, 13
Favour	5 to 8	4 to 6	4 to 6	4 to 6
Lean towards	3 to 4	2 to 3	2 to 3	2 to 3
Neutral towards	-2 to 2	-1 to 1	-1 to 1	-1 to 1
Lean away from	-4 to -3	-3 to -2	-3 to -2	-3 to -2
Against	-8 to -5	-6 to -4	-6 to -4	-6 to -4

Mathematically, for approach (a), because it has four statements, the summed value could range from -8 (i.e., strongly disagreeing with all four statements) to 8 (i.e., strongly agreeing with all four statements).

For approaches that contained three statements, such as approach (b), (c), and (d), the summed value could range from -6 (i.e., strongly disagreeing with all three statements) to 6 (i.e., strongly agreeing with all three statements).

Each level of agreement for a given approach to teaching and learning was operationalised by assigning a specific summed value range, adjusted according to the number of statements within that approach, as displayed in Appendix 6 Table 2. For example, for approach (a), a summed value between 5 and 8 was categorised as "favour." For approaches (b), (c), and (d), a summed value between 4 and 6 was categorised as "favour."

So far, I have four approaches to teaching and learning (a, b, c, and d), and five levels of agreement with each approach (favour, lean towards, neutral towards, lean away from, and against). However, the collected data revealed that, unlike the other approaches, participants generally agreed with approach (b), a collaborative and culturally responsive approach. Specifically, among the 53 survey responses, 41 participants favoured approach (b), 11 leaned towards it, and only one was neutral towards it, making it a less effective indicator for distinguishing participants' teaching and learning beliefs. This limited variability reduced the analytic utility of approach (b) for differentiating participants' pedagogical perspectives. Therefore, only the remaining three approaches were considered for capturing diverse perspectives following the maximum variation sampling strategy.

By combining participants' levels of agreement with approaches (a), (c), and (d), the 53 survey responses yielded 22 unique combinations. For example, participant N4 favoured all three approaches, whereas participant N47 leaned away from approach (a), was neutral towards approach (c), and was against approach (d).

Among the 22 combinations, the 17 self-nominated participants for Phase 2 were distributed across 10 combinations/groups. Although this limited the inclusion of some perspectives, it still provided a valuable range of viewpoints. To ensure feasibility for qualitative in-depth interviews while incorporating as many diverse perspectives as possible, I decided to select one participant

from each group. If a group contained only one participant, they were automatically selected for contact to reconfirm interest. If multiple participants were in the same group, the selection was further based on their demographic differences, including gender, age, ITE programme type, and parenting experience, to maximise sample variability. After contacting the selected ten self-nominated participants from the 10 groups, seven ultimately confirmed their participation by signing a consent form. These seven participants, with varied levels of agreement with the three approaches to teaching and learning, were the final participants for Phase 2 interviews.

Appendix 7. Consent Form for Phase 2 (English and Mandarin Chinese)





CONSENT FORM

(This form will be held for seven years)

Study Title: Chinese student teachers' perspectives of intentional teaching in ECE
Researcher: Min Wang
Supervisors: Associate Professor Tara McLaughlin; Dr Karyn Aspden

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and understood the details of the study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about this study and have them answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any time. By signing this consent form, I am indicating that:

- I agree to participate in this study.
- I understand that participation in this study is completely voluntary, and I can withdraw from this study within one month after the data have been collected.
- I understand that I can refuse to answer any questions during the interview process without giving any reason.
- I understand that the interview process will be audio recorded, and I have the right to ask the recorder to be turned off at any time without giving any reason.
- I understand that the audio recording will be transcribed, and I have the right to request a copy of it for review and editing.
- I understand that pseudonyms will be used to protect my privacy.
- I understand that the researcher will make every effort to remove any identifiable information about myself and my ITE institution from any related works.
- I understand that I have the right to read over and comment on the personal case story that has been generated based on my input.
- I understand that I have the right to access a summary of the project findings.
- I understand that the data collected from this study will be used in the researcher's PhD dissertation and related academic publications and conference presentations.
- I understand that the data collected from this study will be kept for seven years, after which it will be destroyed.

(Please choose)

- I wish to review and edit the transcript of my interview.

  ☐Yes ☐ No

- I wish to read over and comment on my personal case story.

  ☐Yes ☐ No

- I wish to access a summary of the project findings.

  ☐Yes ☐ No

I, therefore, give my informed consent for participation in this study.

Full name of participant:_____

Email: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

**** This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 23/53. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Associate Professor Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, email humanethics2@massey.ac.nz.***

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
TE KURA O TE MĀTAURANGA

Early Years Research Lab

同意书

（该同意书将保留七年）

研究题目：华人实习教师对幼儿教育中“有意识教学”的看法
研究者：王敏
导师：Tara McLaughlin 副教授；Karyn Aspden 博士

我已阅读过参与者信息单并了解该研究的详细信息。我有机会提出关于该研究的问题，并得到令我满意的答复。我了解我可以随时提出进一步的问题。通过签署同意书，我表明：

- 我同意参与该研究。
- 我了解参与该研究是完全自愿的，并且我可以在研究数据收集后的一个月之内退出该研究。
- 我了解在访谈过程中，我可以拒绝回答任何问题，无需给出任何理由。
- 我了解访谈的过程将会被录音，我有权随时要求关闭录音机，无需给出任何理由。
- 我了解录音将会被转录为文本，我有权索取转录的文本以供我审阅和编辑。
- 我了解该研究将使用化名来保护我的隐私。
- 我了解研究者将尽一切努力从相关材料中移除任何有关我本人和我所在的职前教师教育机构的可识别信息。
- 我了解我有权阅读和评论基于我的贡献而形成的个人案例故事。
- 我了解我有权获取一份研究结果的总结。
- 我了解该研究收集的数据将用于研究者的博士学位论文，以及相关的学术出版物和会议展示。
- 我了解该研究收集的数据将被保留七年，之后将被销毁。

（请选择）

- 我希望审阅和编辑访谈的转录文本。

  ☐是　　☐ 否

- 我希望阅读和评论关于我的个人案例故事。

  ☐是　　☐ 否

- 我希望获取一份研究结果的总结。

  ☐是　　☐ 否

我，因此，知情同意参与该研究。

参与者全名: _____

邮箱: _____

参与者签名: _____

日期: _____

本项目已经过梅西大学人类伦理委员会 Ohu Matatika 2 审查并批准，申请号为 OM2 23/53。如果您对本研究的实施有任何疑问，请联系梅西大学人类伦理委员会 Ohu Matatika 2 的主席 Fiona Te Momo 副教授，电子邮件 humanethics2@massey.ac.nz。

Appendix 8. First-Round Interview Protocol for Phase 2 (English and Mandarin Chinese)

First-round Interview Protocol

Hello! Nice to meet you. How are you today? Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview.
Let me introduce myself first. I am currently doing a PhD programme at Massey University. I started in 2022, and this is my third year. In terms of my research, I am in the data collection stage.
In March of this year, we conducted an online survey to investigate Chinese student teachers' perspectives of intentional teaching. I highly appreciate your response to the survey. In this interview, I would like to hear more about your thoughts on this topic.

This interview will cover three main parts:

- Your background and general views of ECE.
- Your understandings and views of intentional teaching.
- Questions related to cultural backgrounds.

Before we start, you need to know:

- The interview will last up to one hour.
- (If meeting in person) To ensure data integrity, the interview process will be audio recorded. You have the right to request to stop the recording at any time. You also have all the other rights listed in the consent form.
- (If meeting via Zoom) To ensure data integrity, the interview process will be recorded. After the interview, I will separate the video and audio and only use the audio for transcribing. The video will be deleted afterwards. You have the right to request to stop the recording at any time. You also have all the other rights listed in the consent form.
- The interview data will be used for research purposes only. Your responses will be kept confidential, and I will do my best to remove any identifiable information about you and your institution.
- Lastly, please be aware that there are no right or wrong answers. We are not looking for any particular answer; all your responses are welcome. So please feel free and comfortable sharing your thoughts.

Do you have any questions before we begin? If you're ready, I will start recording.

Interview Questions and Prompts
1. Can you please introduce yourself? • Name, age • Identify (Chinese international student, immigrant, nationality, year of immigration to NZ) • Where did you grow up? • Educational backgrounds (China, New Zealand, other countries) • Previously completed degrees or programmes (including other ITE programmes) **2. Can you tell me more about your current ECE ITE programme?** • Name of the programme, length, current year, date of completion • Are there any important courses in this programme? • Practicum experiences (time and duration, service type, children's ages, size)

- How do you feel about the programme overall? Have you come across any impressive or interesting ideas?

3. **Can you tell me about your experiences related to ECE? (Anything else?)**
    - Working experiences (Paid or voluntary, service type, children's ages, size)
    - Parenting experiences (Children's ages, attended service type, and what do you think of the service? Are you satisfied or not?)
    - How have these experiences shaped your beliefs?

4. **Do you still remember what the ECE services looked like when you were a child? (Can you provide more details?)**
    - What kind of service was it?
    - What did you usually do in that service?
    - How did the teachers teach at that time?
    - How do you feel about that experience? Was it an ideal form of ECE for you?

5. **What does your ideal ECE look like?**
    - What are the best practices?
    - What do you hope ECE can provide for children? (Such as enjoying their childhood or preparing for school)
    - Are there specific domains of children's learning that you pay special attention to?
    - Do you think academic skills (like literacy and numeracy) are important? Why?

6. **What is your perception of ECE in China and New Zealand? (Can you provide an example?)**
    - What are the advantages and disadvantages?
    - Are there any similarities or differences?
    - Can you use some words to describe ECE in both countries?
    - What do you think might be the reason(s)?

7. **What are your views on play and teaching? What is the relationship between them?**
    - Do you think the views on play are the same in Chinese and New Zealand cultures?
    - How do you view the free play approach to learning?
    - Do you think the views on teaching are the same in Chinese and New Zealand cultures?
    - What kind of learning approach do you believe is best for children?

8. **Some people would say that teachers of Chinese heritage tend to use teacher-led instructional activities rather than child-led, play-based activities. What do you think of this?**
    - Do you agree or not?
    - In what situations would you want to use teacher-directed activities?

9. **What role do you think teachers should play in children's learning?**
    - As a teacher, how do you see your role?
    - What words would you use to describe it?
    - What do you believe is the primary responsibility of a teacher?

10. **Have you ever heard of or learned about intentional teaching before this study? (Can you provide more details?)**
    - What was your immediate reaction to this concept when you first heard about it?

- Where does your knowledge of intentional teaching come from? (Essential materials or sources)
- Courses (How was it taught?)
- Practicum (Has the topic of intentional teaching come up during your practicum? Can you tell me what has been said?)
- Assignment or other resources (Webinars, books, articles)

11. (Definition) Can you use your own words to describe what intentional teaching means? (Can you elaborate more on that?)

- (If applicable) In the Q10 of the survey, you answered that intentional teaching is _____. Do you still hold that opinion? Do you have anything else to add? Has your opinion changed? Why?
- What do you think are the essential elements of intentional teaching?
- Would you still consider it intentional teaching if the teacher cannot articulate their intentions (purposes and practices) before or after the interaction or activity?
- Do you think the importance of intentional teaching is the same for children of different ages? Why or why not?

12. (Practice) What might intentional teaching look like in practice? (Can you provide an example?)

- Are there any differences between intentional teaching and traditional (instructional) teaching?
- What would teaching look like without intention?
- What needs to be considered when implementing intentional teaching practices? (Goal, content, time, strategy)

13. What do you think of the concept of intentional teaching?

- Is it a useful concept or a problematic concept? Are you more willing to accept and use this concept, or are you more opposed to it?
- What stance do you think *Te Whāriki* has towards it?
- Will you actively implement intentional teaching in your future work? Why?

14. What factors do you think might have influenced your understanding of intentional teaching? （Anything else?）

- Cultural background
- Childhood experience
- Working experience
- Parenting experience
- *Te Whāriki*
- Peers/Colleagues
- ITE

15. Are there any inconsistencies between your teaching philosophy and the ideas that your ITE programme is trying to deliver? (Can you provide an example?)

- Course learning
- In ECE settings during practicum
- What do you think might be the reason?
- Has your teaching philosophy ever changed?

16. **Do you think your teaching philosophy in ECE is related to your cultural background? (Can you provide an example?)**
    - Is this influence positive or negative?
    - How do you view or respond to this influence?
    - Besides cultural background, are there any other influencing factors?

17. **Do you think your cultural background has been respected or acknowledged in your ITE programme? (Can you provide an example?)**
    - What events or activities made you feel that way?
    - Do you think it's important for your cultural background to be respected or acknowledged?

18. **What advice do you have for ITE providers to better respond to student teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds?**
    - Do you have any comments or advice from a Chinese student teacher's perspective?

19. **Is there anything else you would like to share regarding this topic?**

20. **Do you have any other questions?**

Thank you again for your time and participation. Your input is valuable for my doctoral research. I look forward to our second-round interview in November! I will contact you before that to schedule a specific time.
(If requested in the consent form) Based on your request in the consent form, I will transcribe this recording in the coming weeks and send it to you for review and/or editing.
Thank you! Have a good day.

Probes that can be used:

1. Repeat question.
2. Anything else?
3. Any other reason?
4. Any others?
5. Could you please tell me more about your thinking on that?
6. I'm not quite sure I understood… Could you provide more information on that?
7. I'm not certain what you mean by… Could you give me some examples?
8. This is what I thought I heard… Did I understand you correctly?
9. Would you tell me what you have in mind?
10. What do you mean?
11. Can you give me an example of…
12. You just told me about… I'd also like to know about…

**** This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 23/53. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Associate Professor Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, email humanethics2@massey.ac.nz.***

第一轮访谈提纲

哈喽，您好。非常感谢您抽出时间参与本次访谈。
我先介绍一下我自己，我现在在梅西大学读学前教育专业的博士，我是 2022 年入学的，现在是博三，正处于数据收集阶段。
在今年三月份，我们进行了一项在线调查去了解在华人实习教师如何理解新西兰幼儿教育中的“有意识教学（intentional teaching）”这个概念。非常感谢您当时参与问卷调查。在本次访谈中，我们想要更全面深入地了解您对此主题的想法。

本次访谈的主要内容包括三个部分：

- 您的个人背景和幼儿教育观点。
- 您对有意识教学的理解和看法。
- 与文化背景相关的一些问题。

那么在正式开始之前，您需要知道：

- 这次访谈将会进行不超过 1 小时。
- （如果面对面访谈）为了确保数据完整，访谈的过程将会被录音。在访谈的过程中，您有权要求随时停止录音。此外，您还享有知情同意书（consent form）中列出的其他权利。
- （如果在线访谈）为了确保数据完整，访谈的过程将会被录制。在访谈结束后，我会分离录制的画面跟声音，仅对录制的声音进行转录。画面将会随后被删除。在访谈的过程中，您有权要求随时停止录制。此外，您还享有知情同意书（consent form）中列出的其他权利。
- 本次访谈的数据将仅用于研究的目的。您的回答将会被严格保密，我将尽最大努力移除任何有关您以及您所在学校（职前教师教育机构）的可识别信息。
- 最后，您的所有回答都没有对错之分。我们没有特别寻找任何特定的回答，您的任何回答都受到欢迎。所以请放心地分享您最真实的想法。

您是否有任何问题？如果您已经准备好，我将开始录制。

访谈问题和提示
1. 能否请您介绍一下自己？ • 姓名、年龄、 • 身份（华人留学生、移民、国籍、移民年份） • 生活经历 • 教育经历（中国、新西兰、其他国家） • 之前曾完成的学位（包括教师教育项目） **2. 能否详细说一下您当前就读的幼儿教师教育项目？** • 项目名称、学制、第几年、毕业时间 • 有哪些重要的课程？ • 实习经历和体验感受（时间和时长、机构类型、幼儿年龄、班级规模） • 您对项目的总体感受如何？项目中有哪些重要的或让你印象深刻的教育理念吗？ **3. 能否说一下您与幼儿教育相关的经历？（还有其他的吗?）**

- 工作经历（正式工作或者志愿者、机构类型、幼儿年龄、班级规模）
- 育儿经历（幼儿年龄，曾就读过的机构类型，您觉得机构的服务如何？是否满意？存在哪里不足？）
- 这些经历对您的教育理念有什么影响吗？

4. 您还记得您小时候的幼儿园是什么样的吗？（能否提供更多的细节？）
- 是什么样的幼儿园？
- 通常在幼儿园都做些什么？
- 在那个时间段老师是怎么教学的？
- 您对这段经历有何感受？它是您理想的教育形态吗？

5. 您理想中的幼儿教育是什么样？
- 您觉得什么是最佳的实践？
- 您希望幼儿教育可以给儿童带来什么？（享受童年，入学准备）
- 您会特别关注儿童哪些方面的学习吗？
- 您觉得学术技能（读写、计算）重要吗？为什么？

6. 您如何看待中国和新西兰的幼儿教育？（能否举个例子？）
- 各有什么优缺点？
- 有哪些相似的地方和不同的地方？
- 能否用一些词语来形容两国的幼儿教育？
- 您觉得原因可能是什么？

7. 您如何看待游戏？教学？以及二者的关系？
- 您觉得中国和新西兰文化中对游戏的看法一样吗？
- 您如何看待自由游戏的学习取向（free play approach）？
- 您觉得中国和新西兰文化中对教学的看法一样吗？
- 您觉得什么样的学习方式对儿童来说是最好的？

8. 有人说华人背景的老师更倾向于使用教师主导的活动，而不是儿童主导的活动。您怎么看？
- 您认可这种观点吗？
- 什么情况下您会想要使用教师主导的活动？

9. 您觉得教师应该在儿童的学习中扮演什么样的角色？
- 作为教师，您对自己的定位是什么？
- 您会用哪些词语表述？
- 您觉得教师最主要的职责是什么？

10. 您在本研究之前是否听过或者学习过有意识教学？（能否提供更多细节？）
- 您最初听到这一概念时的反应时什么？
- 知识的来源是什么？（关键的资料、途径）
- 课程（老师是如何介绍相关内容的？）
- 实习（有没有人讨论过这个话题？是怎么说的？）
- 作业或其他资源（讲座、书籍、论文）

11. （定义）您能否用自己的语言来描述一下什么是有意识教学?（能展开说说吗？）

- 在问卷 Q10，您回答说您所认为的有意识教学是_____，您现在是否还持有此想法？您是否还有其他补充？您的想法是否发生了改变？为什么？
- 您认为哪些是有意识教学的基本元素？
- （如果提到意图是基本元素）在互动/活动前或者后，如果教师不能够清晰表达他们的意图（目标和实践），您觉得还能算有意识教学吗？
- 您觉得有意识教学对于不同年龄段的儿童来说重要性程度一样吗？

12. （实践）您觉得在实践中有意识教学可能是什么样？（能否举个例子？）

- 有意识教学和传统的（指导式）教学有什么区别？
- 您觉得如果教学没有意识会是什么样？
- 您觉得在实践中实施有意识的教学时需要考虑哪些方面的问题？（目标、内容、时机、策略）

13. 您对有意识教学这个概念有什么看法？

- 它是一个有用的概念还是有问题的？您个人会比较愿意接受和使用这个概念还是比较反对这个概念？
- 您觉得 *Te Whāriki* 对它是什么立场？
- 如果有机会，您会在将来的工作中积极实施有意识教学吗？为什么？

14. 您觉得哪些因素可能影响了您对有意识教学的理解？（还有其他的吗？）

- 文化背景
- 童年经历
- 工作经历
- 育儿经历
- 课程纲要 *Te Whāriki*
- 同伴/同事
- 教师教育项目

15. 您本人的理念与您在项目中学习或体验到的理念是否有过差异？（能否举一个例子？）

- 课程学习
- 实习园所
- 您觉得原因可能是什么？
- 您的理念曾经发生过改变吗？

16. 您觉得您的幼儿教育理念与您的文化背景有关联吗？（能否举一个例子？）

- 影响的程度有多深？这种影响是积极的还是消极的？
- 您如何看待或回应这种影响？
- 除文化背景之外，还有其他因素影响您的理念吗？

17. 在当前的项目中，您觉得您的文化背景得到了尊重或者承认吗？（能否举一个例子？）

- 哪些行为或事件让您有这种感受？
- 您觉得个人文化背景被尊重或承认重要吗？

18. 您觉得当前的教师教育项目怎么做才能更好地回应来自不同文化背景的实习教师？

- 从华人实习教师的视角出发，您对于当前的项目有什么建议或评论？

19. 针对这次访谈的内容，您还有什么想分享的吗？ **20. 您是否还有其他问题？**

再次感谢您抽出宝贵的时间来参与本次访谈，您的回答对于我的研究非常重要。期待我们今年11 月份的第二轮访谈。我会在访谈之前与您联系协商具体的时间。
（如果有选择）根据您在知情同意书里的选择，在接下来的几周，我会把本次访谈的录音进行转录，然后发给您进行审阅和/或编辑。
谢谢！祝您生活愉快！

可以使用的探索性问题：

1. 重复问题。
2. 还有其他的补充吗？
3. 还有其他理由吗？
4. 还有其他的吗？
5. 能否告诉我您对它的思考？
6. 我不确定我已经理解了……您能否提供更多的信息？
7. 我不确定您的意思……您能否举一些例子？
8. 这是我认为我听到的……我理解的正确吗？
9. 您可以告诉我您脑海中在想什么吗？
10. 您的意思是？
11. 您能否举个例子？
12. 您刚刚告诉我……我还想知道……

本项目已经过梅西大学人类伦理委员会 Ohu Matatika 2 审查并批准，申请号为 OM2 23/53。如果您对本研究的实施有任何疑问，请联系梅西大学人类伦理委员会 Ohu Matatika 2 的主席 Fiona Te Momo 副教授，电子邮件 humanethics2@massey.ac.nz。

Appendix 9. Second-Round Interview Protocol for Phase 2 (English and Mandarin Chinese)

Second-Round Interview Protocol

Hello! It's great to see you again. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me for this second-round interview.
In July, we conducted the first-round interview on Chinese student teachers' perspectives of intentional teaching, during which you provided valuable and insightful data.

This second-round interview will cover four main parts:

- First, we will discuss any updates regarding your studies and life since our last interview.
- Second, we will revisit some questions from the survey and the first-round interview to see if you have any new thoughts or further insights.
- Third, we will focus specifically on the implementation of intentional teaching.
- Fourth, we will discuss your experiences as a Chinese student teacher in the New Zealand ITE programme.

This interview may take up to one hour.
To ensure data integrity and facilitate data analysis, the interview will be audio-recorded. You have the right to request that the recording be stopped at any time, as well as other rights outlined in the consent form.
Additionally, all data collected will be used for research purposes only. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential, and I will do my best to remove any identifiable information about you and your institution.
Lastly, please remember that there are no right or wrong answers. Please feel free to share openly and comfortably.

Do you have any questions before we begin? If you're ready, I will start recording.

Interview Questions and Prompts
1. Tell me about any updates since our last interview. • What point of study are you at? • (If completed) Are you looking for employment? Any future plans? • What courses have you been studying recently? What has been most interesting? • Can you tell me about any recent practicum experience since we last spoke? • Any other updates?
2. How do you feel about early childhood education (ECE) in New Zealand? • What aspects do you think are good, and are there any that are not? • What do you think are the key characteristics of the ECE curriculum and pedagogy here? (Play-based, culturally responsive, child-centred, mixed age) • What do you think of *Te Whāriki*? How do you use it, whether in your learning or in practice? • We noticed that some student teachers refer to the prevalent ECE philosophy in New Zealand as free play, while others refer to it as play-based learning. Are they the same thing or not? What's your opinion on that philosophy?

3. **From the survey data, we found that student teachers ranked facilitator, co-learner, and observer as the three most important roles teachers should play in children's learning. Does this align with your understanding?**
    - When describing teachers' roles, do you prefer the term 'teacher' or other terms like 'facilitator' or 'co-learner'? Why?
    - We also found that the statement "teachers' primary responsibility is to set up the environment and observe children's learning" was the most controversial in the survey. What's your opinion on this statement? Why do you think it is controversial?

4. **Now that you have completed another semester of study, tell me about your current understanding of how children learn based on your theoretical learning and practicum experiences.**
    - What do you think are the best approaches for children to learn? (Child-led, teacher-led, mixed)
    - What are your thoughts on the teacher-directed approach? Some people may think that children are too young to benefit from teacher-directed learning, do you agree? Why or why not?
    - Is child-initiated play, by itself, enough to support children's learning? Why or why not?

5. **Based on your observations, in what ways do teachers support children's learning across different domains (e.g., physical, social and emotional competence, language and communication, literacy, maths, science, technology, arts, and social science)?**
    - Were teachers using the same approach or strategy across these different domains? Why or why not?
    - What's your opinion on supporting children's learning across these different domains?
    - Are there any domains that require more teacher-guided learning?
    - Are there any domains that could benefit from more child-initiated learning?

6. **From the first-round interview, we found that participants talked about wanting to balance ECE approaches from New Zealand and China in their future teaching. What does this idea of balancing mean to you?**
    - In which aspects do you think these approaches need to be balanced?
    - How can that balance be achieved? Can you provide some examples?

7. **How would you describe the relationships among intentional teaching, play-based learning, and culturally responsive practice?**

8. **Based on your recent learning and practicum experiences, let's talk about your current understanding of intentional teaching.**
    - Have you encountered this term in the past few months? Where and from whom?
    - What is intentional teaching? How would you define it in your own words?
    - What are the essential elements of intentional teaching that distinguish it from other practices? (Awareness, purposes, assess and adjust)
    - How do you intentionally make your teaching decisions/curriculum decisions?
    - Does intentional teaching only occur during group activities, like mat time, or can it happen in other situations as well?

9. **From the survey data, nearly one-third of participants believed the importance of intentional teaching varies based on children's age. One-third believed that the importance would not change, while one-third didn't know. What is your opinion?**
    - Is intentional teaching more important for older children or younger children? Or is it the same for both? Why?
    - Will the form of intentional teaching change according to children's age?

10. **Now that you have seen other teachers' practices during practicum, can you share an example of when a teacher successfully implemented intentional teaching? Or can you provide an example of when a teacher did not do very well and could have been more intentional?**
    - Details.

11. **Before this interview, I encouraged you to voluntarily bring some artifacts or pieces of work that could represent your implementation of intentional teaching during your practicum.** ***(If applicable) What did you bring? (These could be learning stories, learning plans, or photos.)***
    (If not applicable) Can you share an example of a time when you implemented intentional teaching in your practicum?
    - Tell me about how it/they can represent your implementation of intentional teaching.
    - How would you describe the intentional teaching process? (e.g., identifying interests, setting learning outcomes, planning, interacting, assessing, and reflecting.)
    - How do you make use of *Te Whāriki* in your intentional teaching practice?
    - What kinds of purposes or learning outcomes did you set for children in intentional teaching?
    - What did you do at the planning stage?
    - How did you purposefully set up the environment?
    - How did you engage with children? What strategies did you use or find effective when implementing intentional teaching? (Encouraging, modelling/demonstrating) Are there any strategies that are not considered intentional teaching strategies? (Random activities, passive teaching, reactive teaching)
    - Did you face any challenges during your implementation of intentional teaching? What were the challenges, and how did you handle them? (Maybe reconciling intentional teaching and child-led learning; collaboration with colleagues)
    - Looking ahead, do you anticipate any challenges when implementing intentional teaching in the New Zealand ECE context in your future career?
    - What additional supports do you think would help improve your intentional teaching practice?

12. **Based on the July interview data, we have identified several factors that may influence one's teaching beliefs. (Listed alphabetically below) Which of these factors do you believe has had the most significant impact on your teaching beliefs and why? (Follow-up on cultural background)**
    - Cultural background: Can you provide an example of how your cultural background influenced your teaching beliefs? Has the influence been generally positive, negative, or both? How should student teachers view their cultural backgrounds?
    - Childhood experience (ECE & family education)
    - External information (such as friends and media)
    - Initial teacher education/The New Zealand ECE context
    - Parenting experience

13. **Nearly 70% of participants in the survey reported experiencing philosophical conflicts/tensions during their ITE journey. Do you have similar experiences from the past few months?**
    - Did these conflicts/tensions occur more in course learning or during practicum? Can you share some examples? (e.g., collectivism vs. individualism; teacher vs. free play; discipline vs. freedom)
    - What did you do when these conflicts/tensions arose? What coping strategies did you find effective?
    - Did you need to amend your practices during practicum when facing these conflicts/tensions? Did you feel comfortable doing so?
    - Did your ITE programme acknowledge these conflicts/tensions and provide support for you?
    - Do you think you need additional support, or is the current support sufficient?

14. **What aspects of your teaching beliefs or practices have changed during your ITE journey?**
    - Can you share some examples? How did that happen?
    - What was the most valuable feedback you received during your internship? Who was it from (Associate teacher or visiting lecturer)?
    - In shaping your educational philosophy, which had a greater impact: theoretical learning or practicum?

15. **Did you experience any other challenges apart from philosophical conflicts/tensions during your ITE journey?**
    - What are they?
    - Are these challenges related to culture or gender? Will they influence where you choose to work? (e.g., a Chinese centre vs. a Kiwi centre; a private centre vs. a chain of centres.)
    - Did you receive enough support to tackle these challenges?

16. **The Teaching Council of New Zealand expects student teachers to meet the standards in a supported environment. From your perspective, what is a supported environment?**
    - Can you share an example of a time when you felt your cultural background or identity was respected or valued?
    - Do you have any suggestions for the ITE providers to better support student teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds?

17. **Is there anything else you would like to share regarding this topic?**

18. **Do you have any other questions?**

Thank you again for taking the time to participate in this interview and our research project. Your input is invaluable for my doctoral research, and I greatly appreciate your contribution.
Please let me know if you would like to review and/or edit the interview transcript. If you do, I will send it to your email address once I complete the transcription in the coming weeks.
I wish you all the best!

Probes that can be used:

1. Repeat question.
2. Anything else?
3. Any other reason?

4. Any others?
5. Could you please tell me more about your thinking on that?
6. I'm not quite sure I understood …Could you provide more information on that?
7. I'm not certain what you mean by… Could you give me some examples?
8. This is what I thought I heard… Did I understand you correctly?
9. Would you tell me what you have in mind?
10. What do you mean?
11. Can you give me an example of…
12. You just told me about… I'd also like to know about…

**** This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 23/53. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Associate Professor Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, email humanethics2@massey.ac.nz.***

第二轮访谈提纲

您好，很高兴再次见面。非常感谢您抽出时间来参加我们的第二轮访谈。
在今年的 7 月份，我们围绕"华人实习教师对有意识教学的看法（Chinese student teachers' perspectives of intentional teaching）"进行了第一轮访谈，您为我们的研究提供了非常宝贵和具有启发性的数据。

本次第二轮访谈主要包括四个部分：

- 首先，我们会讨论自上次访谈以来，您在学习和生活方面的一些新进展。
- 其次，我们会回顾第一阶段问卷调查和第一轮访谈中的部分问题，看您是否有一些新的想法或见解。
- 第三，我们会特别聚焦于有意识教学的实施。
- 第四，我们会讨论您作为一名华人实习教师在新西兰职前教师教育项目中获得的体验。

本次访谈的时间约一个小时。
为了确保数据完整、促进数据分析，访谈的过程将会被录音。在此期间，您有权要求随时停止录音。同时，您还享有知情同意书（consent form）中列出的其他权利。
另外，本次访谈的数据将仅用于研究的目的。您的回答将会被严格保密，我们将尽最大努力移除任何有关您以及您所在职前教师教育机构的可识别信息。
最后，您的所有回答都没有对错之分。请放心地分享您最真实的想法。

在开始之前您是否还有其他问题？如果您已经准备好，我将开始录制。

访谈问题
1. 能否说一下自从上一次访谈之后，您的（学习和生活）各方面有什么新进展？ • 您现在处于学习的什么阶段？ • （如果已完成学习）您是否在找工作？有什么未来的计划吗？ • 您最近学习了哪些课程？有什么您觉得有趣的内容吗？ • 能否谈一下您最近的实习经历？ • 有任何其他的进展吗？
2. 您对新西兰幼儿教育的感受是什么？ • 哪些方面您觉得比较好？有什么不好的地方吗？ • 您觉得新西兰幼儿教育的课程与教学的核心特征是什么？（基于游戏，文化回应，儿童中心，混龄） • 您如何看待新西兰的国家课程框架 *Te Whāriki*，您在学习或者实践中如何使用这份文件？ • 我们注意到一些实习教师将新西兰盛行的幼教理念称为"自由游戏 free play"，而另一些则称之为"基于游戏的学习 play-based learning"。这两者是一样的吗还是不一样的？您对此理念有什么看法？ **3. 从问卷数据中，我们发现实习教师将"促进者 facilitator"、"共同学习者 co-learner"和"观察者 observer"视为教师在儿童学习中应扮演的最重要的三类角色。这与您的理解一致吗？**

- 在描述教师角色时，您更喜欢使用“教师 teacher”这个术语，还是“促进者 facilitator”或“共同学习者 co-learner”等其他术语？为什么？
- 我们还发现，在问卷中“教师的主要职责是创设环境和观察儿童学习”这一说法最具争议。您对它的看法是什么？您认为这一观点为什么会引发争议？

4. 现在您已经完成了又一个学期的学习，请谈谈您当前基于理论学习和实习经验对儿童学习的理解。

- 您认为儿童学习的最佳方式是什么？（儿童引导的 child-led、教师引导的 teacher-led、混合的 mixed）
- 您对教师主导的教学方法（teacher-directed approach）有什么看法？有些人可能认为儿童太小，无法从教师主导的学习中受益，您同意吗？为什么？
- 仅靠儿童发起的游戏（child-initiated play）是否足以支持儿童的学习？为什么？

5. 基于您的观察，在不同的学习领域，教师是以何种方式支持儿童学习的？（比如，身体发展，社会情感能力，语言和沟通，读写，数学，科学，技术，艺术，社会科学）

- 教师在不同的学习领域使用的是同样的方法或策略吗？为什么？
- 您对于支持儿童不同领域的学习有何看法？
- 是否有一些领域需要更多教师引导的学习（teacher-guided learning）？
- 是否有一些领域需要更多儿童发起的学习（child-initiated learning）？

6. 从第一轮访谈中，我们发现参与者谈到想要在未来的教学中平衡新西兰和中国的幼儿教育取向？这种平衡观点对您来说意味着什么？

- 在哪些方面您认为需要实现平衡？
- 这些平衡如何才能实现？能否举一些案例？

7. 您会如何描述有意识教学、基于游戏的学习和文化回应式实践这三个概念之间的关系？

8. 基于您最近的学习和实习经历，能否说一下您当前对有意识教学的理解？

- 在过去的几个月您是否遇到过这个概念？在哪里以及来自谁？
- 什么是有意识教学？您会如何用自己的语言对它进行定义？
- 有意识教学区别于其他实践的核心要素是什么？（意识性，目的，评价和调整 awareness, purposes, assess and adjust）
- 您如何有意识地做出教学决策/课程决策？
- 有意识教学仅发生在集体活动中，比如 mat time 吗？还是也可能在其他情境（场合）发生？

9. 根据问卷数据，接近三分之一的参与者认为有意识教学的重要性会随着儿童的年龄而发生改变。三分之一认为不会改变。还有三分之一不确定。您的观点是什么？

- 有意识教学对年长的儿童更重要还是对年幼的儿童更重要，还是一样重要？为什么？
- 有意识教学的形式会随着儿童的年龄而发生变化吗？

10. 现在您已经在实习期间观察到其他教师的教学实践，您能分享一个其他教师成功实施有意识教学的例子吗？或者您能提供一个教师做的不好、本来可以更具意识性的例子？

- 细节

11. 在本次访谈之前，我们请您自愿提供一些能够代表您在实习期间实施了有意识教学的作品或材料。

（如果适用）它们是什么？（可能是学习故事、学习计划、照片）

（如果不适用）能否请您分享您在实习期间实施了有意识教学的一个例子？

- 能否请您说一下它/它们如何代表了您实施了有意识教学？
- 您会如何描述有意识教学的过程？（例如，识别兴趣、计划、互动、评价、反思）
- 在有意识教学的实践中，您如何利用 *Te Whāriki*？
- 在有意识教学中，您给儿童设定了哪些目标 purposes 或者学习成果 learning outcomes？
- 您在计划阶段 planning 都做了些什么？
- 您是如何有意识地创设环境的？
- 您是如何与儿童互动的？在实施有意识教学时，您使用过哪些策略或者发现哪些策略有用？（鹰架、演示）是否存在一些策略不能被视为有意识教学策略？（随机活动、消极教学、反应式教学）
- 您是否在实施有意识教学的过程中遇到过任何挑战？这些挑战是什么？您是如何应对的？（或许调和有意识教学和儿童引导的学习；与同事合作）
- 展望未来的职业生涯，您觉得在新西兰幼儿教育背景下实施有意识教学是否会遇到一些挑战？
- 您觉得有哪些支持可以帮助改进您的有意识教学实践？

12. 基于 7 月份的访谈数据，我们发现了一些能够影响个体教学信念的因素（以英文首字母顺序排列）。哪些因素您认为对于您个人的教学信念有最强烈的影响？为什么？（追问文化背景问题）

- 文化背景：能否举个例子说明您的文化背景如何影响了您的教学信念？这种影响是基本上积极、消极还是中性的？实习教师应该如何看待他们个人的文化背景？
- 童年经历（儿时的幼儿教育和家庭教育）
- 外部信息（比如朋友和媒体）
- 职前教师教育/新西兰幼儿教育背景
- 育儿经历

13. 接近 70%的参与者在问卷中报告了在职前教师教育的过程中曾经经历过理念上的冲突/紧张关系（philosophical conflicts/tensions）。您在过去的几个月是否有过类似经历？

- 这些理念上的冲突/紧张关系更多发生在课程学习中还是实习过程中？能否举一些例子？（例如集体主义 vs 个人主义；教师 vs 自由游戏；纪律 vs 自由）
- 当冲突/紧张关系发生时您是如何做的？您觉得哪些应对策略比较有效？
- 当在实习中面对冲突/紧张关系时，您需要调整您的实践吗？您对于这么做感到舒适吗？
- 您的职前教师教育项目是否承认这些冲突/紧张关系的存在并且为您提供了支持？
- 您是否需要额外的支持？还是说当前的支持已经足够？

14. 在整个职前教师教育项目中，您哪些方面的信念或实践发生了变化？

- 能否举一些案例？这些改变是如何发生的？
- 您在实习中得到的最有价值的反馈是什么？来自于谁？（Associate teacher 还是 visiting Lecturer）？

- 在塑造您的教育理念方面，理论学习和实习哪个的影响更大一些？

15. 在整个职前教师教育项目中，除去理念上的冲突/紧张关系外，您是否还经历过其他挑战？

- 这些挑战是什么？
- 这些挑战是与文化相关还是与性别相关？它们会影响您未来的工作选择吗？（比如华人园 vs 洋人园；私人园 vs 连锁园）
- 您是否获得了足够的支持来应对这些挑战？

16. 新西兰教学委员会提出希望实习教师在一个支持性的环境中达到相关标准（meet the standards in a supported environment），对您来说什么样的环境是一个支持性的环境？

- 您能否举个例子说明在哪个时刻您感觉自己的文化背景或身份得到了尊重或珍视？
- 您有什么建议可以帮助职前教师教育机构更好地支持多元文化背景的实习教师？

17. 关于这个话题，您还有什么想要分享的吗？

18. 您是否还有其他问题？

再次感谢您抽出时间来参加本次访谈，以及参与我们的研究项目。您的观点对于我的博士研究非常宝贵，我很真诚地感谢您的贡献。
如果您希望审阅和/或编辑访谈转录文本，我将在未来几周完成转录后将其发送至您的邮箱地址。
祝您一切顺利！

可以使用的探索性问题：

13. 重复问题。
14. 还有其他的补充吗？
15. 还有其他理由吗？
16. 还有其他的吗？
17. 能否告诉我您对它的思考？
18. 我不确定我已经理解了……您能否提供更多的信息？
19. 我不确定您的意思……您能否举一些例子？
20. 这是我认为我听到的……我理解的正确吗？
21. 您可以告诉我您脑海中在想什么吗？
22. 您的意思是？
23. 您能否举个例子？
24. 您刚刚告诉我……我还想知道……

本项目已经过梅西大学人类伦理委员会 Ohu Matatika 2 审查并批准，申请号为 OM2 23/53。如果您对本研究的实施有任何疑问，请联系梅西大学人类伦理委员会 Ohu Matatika 2 的主席 Fiona Te Momo 副教授，电子邮件 humanethics2@massey.ac.nz。