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**A cultural learning approach to acculturation:
Teaching and learning between native English-speaking teachers and
university students in Southwest China**

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requirements for the degree of**

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Abstract

The globalisation of education has affected the teaching dynamics of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) in the Chinese higher education system. The roles of NESTs are challenging and require a nuanced understanding of teaching effectiveness, cultural intelligence (CQ), and leadership in higher education. This study explores the complex and dynamic roles of NESTs in Chinese higher education, focusing on their teaching practices, CQ, and leadership contributions. Forty-five Chinese students, 15 NESTs and five Chinese university leaders (CULs) from Southwest China participated in semi-structured interviews.

Findings highlight that the pedagogical practices of NESTs were viewed positively for practical language application but criticized for being culturally incompatible. Instructional outcomes showed that perceived immediacy positively influenced affective and behavioral learning but did not affect cognitive learning. In addition, CQ plays a crucial role in shaping NESTs' teaching strategies, classroom engagement, and adaptability to diverse learning needs. Participants who described CQ-aligned practices reported more adaptive teaching and richer student participation. NESTs play an important leadership role in improving students' language skills and cultural knowledge. NESTs are credited with providing authentic language environments, innovative teaching methods, and cultural insights that enhance students' language and cultural understanding. Despite these positive contributions, NESTs have faced various challenges in their leadership role. This study emphasizes the need for culturally responsive teaching, professional development for NESTs, and collaboration between NESTs and institutions, deepens the understanding of NESTs' contributions to instructional communication, and offers suggestions for improving intercultural communication in global academic contexts.

Keywords: instructional belief model, cultural intelligence, leadership roles, native speakerism, native English-speaking teachers, intercultural communication, instructional communication

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List of Original Articles

- Article I:** Zhou, Z., Croucher, S. M., Li, M., & Hodis, G. M. (2024). Navigating English language instruction in China: Insights from Chinese students on native English-speaking teachers' practices. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 53(3-4), 102-120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2024.2422624>
- Article II:** Zhou, Z., Li, M., Hodis, G. M., & Croucher, S. M. (under review). Cultural intelligence in practice: Pedagogical adaptation among native English-speaking teachers in China. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. (revised and resubmitted)
- Article III:** Zhou, Z., Croucher, S. M., Li, M., & Hodis, G. M. (2026). Navigating leadership roles: Native English-speaking teachers in English language teaching in China. In A. Wiseman & J. McNaughtan (Eds.), *The Emerald handbook on international higher education: Navigating workforce and leadership changes in a digital age* (pp. 403–420). Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83549-788-320251025> (in press)

Chapter One Introduction

Chapter one provides an overview of the research on native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) in China, starting with a brief history of English language teaching (ELT) in China and the author's personal experiences. The chapter concludes by outlining the study's aims and introducing three articles addressing the research questions.

1.1 The Background of the Study

English teaching in China has a history of over 300 years, beginning in the early 18th century with lessons for those involved in foreign trade (Cui, 2012). Formal English education was first offered through church schools established by British and American missionaries during 1911–1949 (Bolton & Graddol, 2012). After 1949, the role of English expanded as it became integral to China's efforts to modernize through science, technology, and international communication (Wu, 2015). China's economic reforms in 1978 further boosted English's status, making it a compulsory subject in the National College Entrance Examination, and by 1982, English was designated as the primary foreign language in secondary education (Pan, 2015). In 2001, the English Curriculum Standards by the Chinese Ministry of Education aimed to develop students' overall English language skills and set learning objectives from primary school onward (Cui, 2012). Additionally, China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001 and major international events like the 2008 Beijing Olympics sparked an "English language fever", with bilingual education gaining popularity even in kindergartens (Cui, 2012). Today, English is seen as crucial for career success and personal growth, with millions of Chinese students learning the language for instrumental or integrative reasons, such as pursuing higher education abroad or working in global industries (Wu, 2015). English is regarded as – "the most important tool for communication" and "a

significant factor in people's all-round development and has even become a basic requirement for people around the world" (Pan, 2015, p. 83).

ELT in higher education has experienced fluctuations due to changes in Chinese government policies. During the 10 years of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), English learning was largely suspended, as it was associated with "US imperialism" and "British colonialism" (Wu, 2015, p. 45). Many educational institutions were closed, and intellectuals were assigned to manual labor in remote rural areas because of the connotations of capitalism and other forms of political undesirability associated with English (Adamson, 2002). However, around 1971, some universities and colleges began reopening, and English education gradually resumed, with textbooks increasingly shaped by political agendas, focusing on vocabulary, reading, and translation (Adamson, 2004; Cheng & Wang, 2012).

Currently, ELT in China has undergone significant evolution. At the university level, two main strands exist: one for English majors and another for non-English majors. English majors are those who have a passion for studying the English language and aim to become proficient in its use, as well as in related fields such as literature, linguistics and translation (Cheng & Wang, 2012). Non-English majors take English courses as part of their required university education, aiming to provide general language skills that are useful in various fields, particularly in areas such as international business, science, and technology (Rao, 2019). For English majors, they have to take English tests to check their English proficiency during their university studies. The English Test for English Majors (TEM) has been conducted in China since 1991 by the National Advisory Commission on Foreign Language Teaching in Higher Education (NACFLT) (Meng et al., 2017). It is divided into two levels: TEM-4 and TEM-8. The objective of TEM-4 is to test English competence for sophomore English majors, while TEM-8 is for senior English majors in China (Zeng & Shen, 2016). The purpose of these two tests is to evaluate the language competence and performance of

English majors at different stages, and with only two attempts permitted, the results carry decisive weight in determining students' eligibility for graduation and future employment (Meng et al., 2017; Zeng & Shen, 2016).

China, widely regarded as a major global power with a population of approximately 1.4 billion, remains the largest market for ELT, driven by its enduring global influence and ongoing economic expansion (Gao & Zheng, 2019; Wen & Zhang, 2020). As English is closely linked to globalization (Huang, 2018), it plays a crucial role in supporting China's international engagement and economic ambitions. The increasing need for foreign teachers in China has led to the wide recruitment to fill the vacancies (Rao & Yuan, 2016). Driven by the belief of policymakers in China that English-speaking countries set the standard, NESTs, here referring to individuals who speak English as their mother tongue, are often seen as "the best teachers" (Pan, 2015, p. 84). This assumption suggests that NESTs inherently have better ELT skills than Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs). As a result, many Chinese universities try to recruit NESTs (Rao & Yuan, 2016). However, the influx of large numbers of foreign teachers into the Chinese education market has raised concerns about the quality of their teaching. As more foreigners came to China to meet the large demand for language training, incidents where they violated regulations and laws, triggered floods of criticism on social media platforms (Zou, 2019). These incidents damaged the public perception of foreign teachers, including those working in Chinese higher education. Furthermore, previous research indicated that not all Chinese university students are satisfied with NESTs' teaching performance (Fang et al., 2018; Kuang, 2013), and likewise, NESTs express dissatisfaction with the learning behaviors of Chinese students (Fang et al., 2018; Lin et al., 2019). Teaching English in China can be challenging for NESTs, and even qualified Western teachers may face difficulties in Chinese classrooms (Stanley, 2012). Differences in cultures of learning may cause misunderstandings when teachers and students interpret each

other's behaviors based on their own “cultural positioning and expected norms” (Stanley, 2012, p. 36).

1.2 Personal Interest in This Study

It is vital to understand the cultural characteristics of NESTs and Chinese learners to promote the quality of English education in Chinese universities. My personal experience as a student has motivated me to seek solutions to the dilemmas I encountered.

I was an English major at a Chinese university, where I was taught by three foreign teachers over the course of three years. The three foreign teachers were from the United States, India, and Scotland. They taught us oral English at both elementary and advanced levels. However, the foreign teachers' teaching was not what I expected, and I was reluctant to participate in class activities, such as role-plays, group work, and classroom discussions. My classmates and I were silent most of the time because we were used to teacher-oriented classes that focused on grammar and translation. As a result, it took us several months to adapt to the foreign teachers' teaching styles. Although I was able to adapt to the foreign teachers' teaching style by the second semester, the oral classes still could not meet my expectations because the topics and content presented by the foreign teachers were either too simple or too difficult. This sparked my interest in cultural adaptation between native English-speaking teachers and English majors in teaching and learning. The research aims to explore the cultural differences, challenges, and coping strategies in acculturation in teaching and learning in China.

1.3 Aims of the Study

The role of NESTs in China's tertiary education system has become increasingly prominent as universities strive to enhance the quality of English language instruction and foster global competencies among students. However, NESTs face challenges related to cultural adaptation, classroom dynamics, and leadership within the Chinese tertiary education

system. To better understand these complexities, this project investigates three areas of NESTs' experiences in China's higher education. Based on the above, the current project aims at the following three main research questions:

RQ1: How do Chinese students' perceptions of native English-speaking teachers' immediate behaviors and misbehaviors influence their learning outcomes? (Article 1)

RQ2: How does cultural intelligence facilitate native English-speaking teachers' pedagogical and cultural adaptations in Chinese university classrooms? (Article 2)

RQ3: What challenges do native English-speaking teachers face in their leadership roles in China's tertiary education system? (Article 3)

To achieve a deep understanding of the complex factors influencing the effectiveness and integration of NESTs in China's tertiary education system, this study project was conducted and resulted in the following three articles.

1.4 Three Articles to Address the Thesis Questions

Article One: Zhou, Z., Croucher, S. M., Li, M., & Hodis, G. M. (2024). Navigating English language instruction in China: Insights from Chinese students on native English-speaking teachers' practices. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 53(3-4), 102-120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2024.2422624>

The first article explored how Chinese students perceive the pedagogical practices of NESTs and how these practices further influence their learning outcomes. Students' perceptions and NESTs' practices are shaped by the culture of learning, the presumed framework of expectations, attitudes, values, and beliefs about effective teaching and learning practices (Jin & Cortazzi, 2008). Using the instructional beliefs model (IBM) (Weber et al., 2011), the study examined how students' perceptions of NESTs' pedagogical practices affected their learning.

This article was submitted to the *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* (JICR), which aligns with the aims and scope of exploring how the dynamics between culture and communication contribute to communication theory, and provide real-world applications. JICR is a Quartile One journal in the Scimago Social Sciences Communication category and is recognized for publishing high quality and high impact research in the field of communication, particularly the intersection of culture and communication.

Article Two: Zhou, Z., Li, M., Hodis, G. M., & Croucher, S. M. (under review). Cultural intelligence in practice: Pedagogical adaptation among native English-speaking teachers in China. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. (revised and resubmitted).

The second article examined how CQ shaped NESTs' teaching practices and the challenges they encountered in leveraging CQ to enhance teaching effectiveness in Chinese higher education. Drawing on CQ theory (Earley & Ang, 2003), the study investigated the four dimensions—motivational, cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioral CQ—to analyze how NESTs adapted their pedagogy in intercultural classrooms.

This article was submitted to *the International Journal of Intercultural Relations* (IJIR), a Q1-ranked journal in the Scimago Communication category. IJIR's focus on advancing theory, research, and practice in intercultural relations, including intercultural communication, acculturation, and education, makes it a particularly suitable venue for disseminating this study. Its broad international readership further enhances the visibility and impact of the findings.

Article Three: Zhou, Z., Croucher, S. M., Li, M., & Hodis, G. M. (2026). Navigating leadership roles: Native English-speaking teachers in English language teaching in China. In A. Wiseman & J. McNaughtan (Eds.), *The Emerald handbook on international higher education: Navigating workforce and leadership changes in a digital age* (pp. 403–420). Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83549-788-320251025> (in press)

The third article explored the leadership roles of NESTs in China's tertiary education system by incorporating the perspectives of students, NESTs and CULs to provide insight from non-Western perspectives. It investigated how NESTs navigate their leadership roles in non-English contexts and how native speakerism (Holliday, 2015) affected their perceptions of NESTs.

This article was submitted as a book chapter to *Emerald handbook on international higher education: Navigating workforce and leadership changes in a digital age*. This handbook will be published by Emerald Publishing, which has a reputation for producing high quality, authoritative academic works. *The Emerald Handbook on International Higher Education* places a particular emphasis on understanding and managing the workforce changes brought by the digital age, emphasizing the critical role of educators in enhancing the students' learning experiences and institutional effectiveness. Notably, higher education institutions need to align their workforce and leadership strategies with this transformative shift, as digital transformation plays a crucial role in shaping sustainable education management strategies and building competitive advantages for universities (Hashim et al., 2022).

In summary, the three articles explored the pedagogical practices, CQ and leadership roles of NESTs in Chinese higher education. The first article underlined how Chinese students perceived the teaching practices of NESTs. The second explored how cultural CQ influenced the teaching of NESTs while the third examined how NESTs navigated their leadership roles within Chinese higher education. These studies align with the aims and scope of the selected journals and publishers, but also contribute to the advancement of communication theories, CQ framework and leadership roles in international higher education. The findings provide practical recommendations for educators, policymakers, and

administrators to foster inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable practices in an increasingly globalized and digitized higher education landscape.

Chapter Two Literature Review

This chapter contains two parts, the existing research relevant to NESTs in ELT and the theoretical frameworks in the current research. It aims at providing a comprehensive understanding of NESTs in ELT, with a particular focus on higher education in China. It also reviews key theoretical frameworks, namely the instructional beliefs model, cultural intelligence, and instructional leadership, which provide a foundation for understanding the dynamics of teaching and learning in China. Additionally, the culture of learning as the foundation of students' learning behaviors will be discussed, highlighting its implications within the context of ELT in China.

2.1 Literature Review

In this section, the author will discuss previous research related to NESTs in ELT, the concept of native speakerism, NESTs and NNESTs in ELT, student perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs, the limitations of NESTs in non-English contexts, and the challenges faced by NESTs teaching in China. Additionally, the research gaps will be addressed.

2.1.1 The Concept of Native Speakerism

The concept of native-speakerism is a widespread ideology within the ELT, portraying that native speaker teachers as representatives of “Western culture” and idealized methodologies (Holliday, 2015). This concept derives from Phillipson’s (1992) thesis of linguistic imperialism, which argues that the idea of the superior “native speaker” teacher perpetuates a hierarchy within language teaching that marginalizes non-native speaker teachers and their methodologies. This ideology not only reinforces stereotypes about language proficiency but also overlooks the diverse linguistic and cultural competencies that non-native speakers possess. Consequently, native-speakerism can lead to systemic

inequalities in the ELT profession, where non-native teachers are often viewed as less qualified or effective, despite their expertise and contextual understanding of their students' needs. Holliday (2015) stated that native-speakerism has negative impact on the perceptions of English and culture, creating a “cultural disbelief” in the abilities of teachers labelled as non-native speakers. Therefore, Holliday (2015) further argued that cultural belief – “a belief in the cultural contribution of all teachers, regardless of their background—is the only way to remove the prejudice that positions non-native speakers as the subaltern” (p. 11).

According to Davies (2003), native speakers can be classified into two types: the “flesh and blood type” and the “ideal type” (p. 210). The ideal type refers to the mythical and theoretical concept of native speakers. In contrast, the flesh and blood type are wider and multifaceted, involving individuals who acquire language through diverse ways (Davies, 2003). This broader notion recognizes the diverse ways people can become native speakers or native-like, reflecting the complexity and fluidity of linguistic identity.

Therefore, native speakers of English in this study refer to those who are from the inner circles, five English-speaking countries: the USA, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand (Bohmann, 2019). This classification is based on Braj Kachru's (1986) “Three Circles Model”, a framework developed in the 1980s to explain the global spread of English (Bohmann, 2019; Schmitz, 2014; Sridhar & Sridhar, 2019). It categorizes English-speaking regions into three concentric circles: inner circle, outer circle, expanding circle (Kachru, 1986). According to Kachru (1986), in the inner circle, English is spoken as a native language (e.g., the UK, USA, Australia). Countries in this circle set the standards for English usage globally. For the outer circle, English is used as a second language in countries with a colonial history (e.g., India, Nigeria). As for the expanding circle, English is a foreign language in countries without historical ties to English, like China (Kachru, 1986; Schmitz, 2014).

2.1.2 NESTs and NNESTs in ELT

The pervasive belief that NESTs are the best teacher has triggered the debate over the effectiveness of NESTs and NNESTs in ELT for decades. As a result, extensive research has been conducted to examine the teaching effectiveness of NESTs and NNESTs, mainly focusing on comparisons of teaching behavior between NESTs and NNESTs, student perceptions of their teaching effectiveness, and the impact of language background on teaching outcomes. These issues have been discussed across global educational contexts, including Asia, Europe, and North America.

The major theme in the previous research is the differences in teaching approaches between NESTs and NNESTs. Much research has shown that NESTs and NNESTs bring different strengths to the classroom (Árva & Medgyes, 2000; Baitman & Campos, 2013; Dewaele, 2018; Huang, 2018; Li & Jin, 2020; Voeun et al., 2020; Yeung, 2021). NESTs are often perceived as better at teaching speaking, pronunciation, and fluency due to their native proficiency and ability to provide authentic language exposure (Butler, 2011; Tsou & Chen, 2017). In contrast, NNESTs are generally seen as stronger in grammar instruction, structured teaching, and exam preparation (Árva & Medgyes, 2000; Koşar, 2018). This difference can be attributed to the fact that NNESTs, having learned English as a second language themselves, may have a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by their students and thus offer more empathetic and structured teaching (Moussu & Llorca, 2008). In South Korea, Chun (2014) found that NESTs were perceived as more competent in English proficiency, but NNESTs were viewed as more supportive and understanding of students' learning difficulties. Similarly, in Taiwan, Tsou and Chen (2019) pointed out that students preferred NESTs for cultural knowledge and fluency, while NNESTs were valued for their ability to teach grammar and provide exam-focused preparation. Moreover, NESTs and NNESTs differed in their evaluation of oral skills in a Chilean university context. NESTs

were more lenient and focused on fluency and pronunciation, while NNESTs placed greater emphasis on grammatical accuracy (Baitman & Campos, 2013). These distinctions illustrate how both groups of teachers' unique contributions to language learning globally.

2.1.3 Student Perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs

Student evaluations are of paramount importance in measuring teacher's teaching effectiveness (Stanley, 2012). Student perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs vary depending on context, but a general trend is the initial preference for NESTs due to their perceived language authority and fluency (Butler, 2011). However, several studies suggest that students often develop more positive attitudes towards NNESTs over time, particularly when they recognize the pedagogical strengths and empathy NNESTs offer (Deng et al., 2024; Feng & Zhang, 2022; Huang, 2018; Moussu, 2006). Huang (2018) observed that while NESTs were appreciated for their communicative approaches, they often lacked an understanding of the local educational context, an area in which NNESTs were better. In China, Feng and Zhang (2022) found that students generally favored NESTs but were also concerned that teachers' qualities—including teaching skills and the ability to understand student needs—were more important than nativeness. This aligns with the findings of Deng et al. (2024), who stated that students' motivation was positively correlated with their perceptions of both NESTs and NNESTs, indicating that factors beyond language proficiency, such as teacher-student rapport, play a critical role in shaping student perceptions.

2.1.4 Limitations of NESTs in Non-English Contexts

A native speaker as the best teacher type is believed as “an unfounded belief” (Stanley, 2012, p. 3). Previous studies highlight the limitations of NESTs, particularly in their ability to adapt to local educational practices and understand student needs. Firstly, NESTs lack understanding of local educational contexts, which makes them often struggle to adapt their teaching to local educational systems, particularly in exam-oriented cultures. Studies show

that NESTs may excel in promoting communicative skills but lack the ability to provide systematic grammar instruction and meet curriculum requirements effectively (Árva & Medgyes, 2000; Huang, 2018). This gap makes their teaching less aligned with student needs in non-English contexts. In Cambodia, for example, Voeun et al. (2020) found that students were more emotionally engaged in classes taught by NESTs but demonstrated higher cognitive engagement in NNEST-led classrooms, suggesting that the strengths of each group of teachers could complement one another. Secondly, with limited knowledge of students' native language, NESTs face challenges in explaining complex concepts or addressing linguistic difficulties that NNESTs can navigate by using first language as a resource. This is particularly challenging in settings with low-proficiency learners or where grammar-focused teaching is essential (Tsou & Chen, 2017; Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014). Thirdly, NESTs are often praised for their emphasis on communication and fluency, but this focus can come at the cost of grammar and writing instruction. In many exam-driven cultures, students need a balance of both communicative skills and formal grammar instruction, which NNESTs typically provide more effectively (Árva & Medgyes, 2000; Tsou & Chen, 2019). Therefore, a growing number of studies demonstrate the benefits of co-teaching models where both NESTs and NNESTs work together to complement each other's strengths. NESTs can focus on communicative skills while NNESTs help solidify grammatical understanding and exam preparation (Tsou & Chen, 2019; Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014).

2.1.5 Challenges Faced by NESTs Teaching in China

It is challenging for NESTs to teach English in China, and “even well-qualified Western teachers may struggle in Chinese classrooms” (Stanley, 2012, p. 36) due to the cultural and language barriers between foreign teachers and Chinese students (Luk & Lin, 2007; Luo et al., 2004; Su et al., 2020).

Differences in learning cultures can lead to misunderstandings when teachers and students interpret each other's behaviour through their “cultural values, schemas, and norms” (Leung & Morris, 2014, p. 1029). Extensive research has shown that NESTs face challenges when teaching in China, including a lack of understanding of the learning needs of Chinese students, the mismatch of foreign teaching methods in Chinese educational contexts, and lack of pedagogical expertise, all of which led to a limited impact on student learning outcomes.

A Lack of Understanding of Chinese Students' Learning Needs

NESTs often fail to understand Chinese students' learning needs, which leads to ineffective teaching practices. Studies show that NESTs are unfamiliar with the learning habits and intellectual backgrounds of Chinese students, which affects their ability to deliver content that aligns with students' expectations and preferences (Lai et al., 2016; Ma, 2017). Wang (2006) indicated that NESTs do not provide enough reflection time for students who struggle with language barriers. This misalignment can hinder their ability to effectively engage students, particularly in cultures that prioritize modesty, such as in China (Feng & Zhang, 2022). This oversight contributes to students' anxiety and withdrawal from the classroom, as NESTs do not recognize or address the emotional needs of students when they encounter difficulties.

Mismatched Foreign Teaching Methods in Chinese Educational Contexts

Teachers and students from different cultural backgrounds often cause misunderstandings as they perceive each other's behavior through their “rights, duties (norms and expectations), and obligations” (Green et al., 2020, p. 127). NESTs often encounter cultural barriers in classrooms, where local norms and expectations around classroom participation and student-teacher relationships differ from their own. On the one hand, NESTs' emphasis on student-centered and informal teaching often clashes with the traditional Chinese classroom culture, which is lecture-based and teacher-centered (Kuang, 2013; Wang,

2006). Chinese students are accustomed to more structured, systematic lessons and struggle to adapt to NESTs' casual and relaxed approaches (Fang et al., 2018). On the other hand, NESTs are often unfamiliar with China's exam-oriented educational system, which emphasizes rote memorization and test-taking skills (Kuang, 2013). As a result, students feel that NESTs play a minimal role in preparing them for English tests at university levels, resulting in further dissatisfaction (Zhao et al., 2018).

Lack of Pedagogical Expertise

The growing demand for NESTs in China has led to the recruitment of foreign teachers without qualifications. Many have limited or no formal training in education, psychology, or pedagogy, which results in varying levels of teaching effectiveness (Jeon & Lee, 2006; Li, 2013). Jeon and Lee (2006) illustrated that since the great demand for NESTs in China exceeds the supply of qualified candidates, "hiring unqualified NESTs is unavoidable" (p. 57). According to Copland et al. (2016), NESTs without qualifications requirements often lead to lower status and responsibility. Research shows that some foreign teachers faced challenges in technology integration in teaching due to unfamiliarity with Chinese educational practices (Liang, 2021). In addition, some NESTs tend to select content arbitrarily rather than adhering to prescribed materials, which results in unsystematic teaching and a lack of clear learning objectives for students (Lai et al., 2016; Ma & Zhang, 2014).

Limited Impact on Student Learning Outcomes

Several studies illustrate that Chinese students often find the course content delivered by NESTs to be too simple and unsystematic, contributing to low learning gains (Fang et al., 2018; Luo et al., 2004). NESTs' teaching was criticized as "only at the fundamental level and superficial" (Lin et al., 2019, p. 107) and the teaching content may be too simple for Chinese students to engage (Luo et al., 2004). This randomness in the teaching schedule and arbitrary course design, makes students feel uncertain and dissatisfied with their overall learning

experience (Kuang, 2013; Wang, 2006). Furthermore, since NESTs are unfamiliar with the Chinese test systems, their teaching is often seen as disconnected from students' exam preparation needs, leading to dissatisfaction (Kuang, 2013). Students report that NESTs do not significantly contribute to their success in university English exams, as their teaching methods are not aligned with exam-oriented approaches (Fang et al., 2018).

2.1.6 Research Gaps

Despite the growing body of research, several gaps remain. First, much of the research is quantitative and focuses on student perceptions (Deng et al., 2024; Yang & Liu, 2016), while research from the perspective of NESTs is underexplored. Second, there is a notable lack of context-specific research in Southwest China (Guo et al., 2020), where cultural and educational practices may differ from more commonly studied regions. Much of the existing research on NESTs in China focuses on the more developed coastal areas, such as Shanghai, Zhejiang, and Guandong (Huang, 2018; Kuang, 2013; Su et al., 2020), leaving underdeveloped regions like Southwest China underrepresented, despite the potential differences in educational practices and student expectations. This echoes the call for broader cross-regional research that includes a more diverse range of student demographics (Chun, 2014; Tsou & Chen, 2019). Third, most studies examine NESTs' teaching effectiveness from either the teacher's or the student's perspectives (Feng & Zhang, 2022; Trent, 2012), rarely incorporating a triangular perspective that includes input from Chinese university leaders (CULs). The current research aims to bridge these gaps by synthesizing the perspectives of NESTs, students, and CULs, providing a more holistic understanding of the teaching-learning dynamic in Southwest China.

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks

The following section will focus on the main theories applied in the three articles, including the instructional beliefs model, cultural intelligence, instructional leadership, and cultures of learning.

2.2.1 Instructional Beliefs Model (IBM)

Weber et al.'s (2011) IBM explains the conjunction of teacher behaviors, student characteristics, and classroom contextual factors in shaping students' instructional beliefs, and how this conjunction impacts students' learning outcomes. The first level of IBM includes teacher behaviors, students' characteristics, and course-specific issues. The second level integrates student beliefs, while the third level focuses on learning outcomes. This framework provides insights into the complex relationships among teacher behaviors, student traits, and the contextual dynamics of the learning environment, contributing to a deeper understanding of how instructional beliefs unfold and influence instructional outcomes.

In the first-order construct of IBM, there are three exogenous variables. The first variable is teacher behaviors, which are the actions taken by the teacher while interacting with one or more students (Weber et al., 2011). Examples of teacher behaviors include clarity (Kelly & Gaytan, 2020), relevance (Weber et al., 2011), immediate behaviors (Foutz et al., 2021), and misbehaviors (Kelly et al., 2019). The second variable is student characteristics (Weber et al., 2011), which are unique qualities that distinguish one student from another, such as intrinsic motivation (Goke et al., 2021), grade orientation (Vallade et al., 2014), or learning orientation (Goodboy & Frisby, 2014). The third variable is class characteristics, defined as course-specific structural factors, such as classroom justice as perceived from the syllabus or course modality (Goke et al., 2021).

The second-order construct, instructional beliefs, explains the cognitive factors that influence students' expectations in the learning process. Weber et al. (2011) originally defined

instructional beliefs as variables that assess students' perception of their own learning abilities, such as self-efficacy. This definition has been expanded to include beliefs about the classroom, the teacher, or students' relationship with the teacher such as perceived immediacy with the instructor (Kelly et al., 2020) and connectedness with one's peers (Johnson & LaBelle, 2015). Consistent with previous research guided by the IBM (Foutz et al., 2021; Goke et al., 2021; Kelly & Gaytan, 2020; Kelly et al., 2020, 2022), this study refers to students' instructional beliefs as their psychological responses to instructor behavior in the first-order construct.

The third-order construct of IBM is students' learning outcomes which includes affective, cognitive, and behavioral learning. Affective learning involves changing attitudes and emotions, while cognitive learning focuses on acquiring knowledge and understanding (Weber et al., 2011). Behavioral learning is shown through students' learning actions, such as active class participation, increased task engagement, seeking additional learning opportunities and student dissent (Weber et al., 2011). The previous research shows that behavioral learning is positively related to affective learning, cognitive learning, and teacher behaviors (Wanzer & Frymier, 1999).

2.2.2 Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

CQ is defined as "a person's capability to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts and therefore represents a form of situated intelligence where intelligently adaptive behaviors are culturally bound to the values and beliefs of a given society or culture" (Earley & Ang, 2003, p. 26). CQ may evolve through experiences with diverse cultures and multicultural exposure (Erez et al., 2013). CQ is a multidimensional concept, consisting of four dimensions: motivational, cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioral (Ang et al., 2007; Van Dyne et al., 2010).

The motivational aspect CQ, refers to the individual's "level of interest, drive, and energy to adapt cross-culturally" (Van Dyne et al., 2010, p. 135). It reflects whether one has the confidence and determination to overcome the challenges and conflicts associated with cross-cultural work (Van Dyne et al., 2010). The ability of being able to engage and persist through cross-cultural challenges is an important component in CQ, which often assume that individuals are inherently motivated to develop cross-cultural skills. Motivational CQ includes three elements: intrinsic motivation—the enjoyment derived from engaging in culturally diverse situations; extrinsic motivation—the tangible benefits gained from these experiences; and self-efficacy—the confidence in one's ability to be effective in cross-cultural encounters (Van Dyne et al., 2010). These three motivational dynamics influence how people handle cross-cultural situations, since motivational CQ directly impacts their effectiveness in navigating new cultural environments (Van Dyne et al., 2010).

Cognitive CQ is the knowledge dimension of CQ, which refers to "the leader's level of understanding about culture and culture's role in shaping the way to interact with others across cultural contexts" (Van Dyne et al., 2010, p. 135). Cognitive CQ involves an awareness of how cultures differ in different contexts and provides insight into the different ways in which people from different cultures think, communicate and act (Van Dyne et al., 2010). A key component of cognitive CQ is having a deep understanding of cultural systems, including the norms and values that are associated with different societies (Earley & Ang, 2003; Van Dyne et al., 2010). Cultural systems refer to how societies structure themselves to address fundamental human needs, such as economic production, social structures, education, political and legal controls, language conventions, and religious beliefs (Van Dyne et al., 2010). However, each country has its unique cultural system where cultural norms and values are various, like time, authority, relationships. Therefore, cognitive CQ is the factor that is

most often emphasized in typical approaches to intercultural competency (Van Dyne et al., 2010).

Metacognitive CQ refers to the individual's "ability to strategize when crossing cultures" (Van Dyne et al., 2010, p. 136). It involves the processes through which individuals understand cultural knowledge and regulate their cognitive operations related to culture (Flavell, 1979). According to Van Dyne et al. (2010), metacognitive CQ includes "awareness, planning, and checking" (p. 137). Awareness means being mindful of what is happening within oneself and in others, while planning refers to preparing for a cross-cultural interaction by predicting how to approach the people, topic, and situation. Checking is the ongoing process of monitoring interactions to determine whether our plans and expectations were suitable and need any adjustments (Van Dyne et al., 2010). These three cognitive steps examine whether people can apply their cultural knowledge to develop effective strategies to accurately interpret cross-cultural situations and assess whether our expectations are correct or if our mental model of a specific person or culture, needs adjustment (Van Dyne et al., 2010).

Finally, behavioral CQ reflects the ability to "act appropriately in a range of cross-cultural situations" (Van Dyne et al., 2010, p. 137). Specifically, this ability exhibits appropriate verbal and nonverbal actions when interacting in cross-cultural environments, which involves adjusting the behavior to suit different cultural contexts, including verbal communication, body language, and other social cues (Earley & Ang, 2003). Individuals with high behavioral CQ adjust their behaviors to align with the social norms of the culture they are interacting with, including the way they present themselves in cross-cultural situations (Earley & Ang, 2003). They latter further explain the difference between behavioral CQ and culturally competent behaviors, namely culturally intelligent behaviors, which are prescribed as purposeful, goal-oriented and mindful. Culturally competent behaviors may occur

unconsciously. Behavioral CQ emphasizes the initiatives of consciously active adaptations while culturally competent behaviors happen unconsciously and result in passive imitations. In addition, behavioral CQ requires “appropriate flexibility in speech act” (Van Dyne et al., 2010, p. 137), which is essential for successful intercultural communication and engagement (Earley & Ang, 2003).

These four dimensions of CQ are positively correlated. They work synergistically to ensure meaningful and successful intercultural communication (Earley & Ang, 2003; Van Dyne et al., 2010) by enabling individuals to engage with diverse cultures. A high level of motivational CQ acts as a driving force to learn, which further reinforces the appreciation of cross-cultural comprehension (Earley & Ang, 2003). Individuals with high cognitive CQ can discern both similarities and disparities among cultures (Brislin et al., 2006), but this knowledge must be integrated with the other three dimensions of CQ to effectively meet the real-world challenges (Van Dyne et al., 2010). Individuals with high metacognitive CQ exhibit acute consciousness of others’ cultural preferences both prior to and throughout interactions (Ang et al., 2007). They also assess cultural presuppositions and adapt their cognitive frameworks during and following these interactions (Brislin et al., 2006; Triandis, 2006). Metacognitive CQ involves advanced cognitive activities, whereas cognitive CQ relates to the awareness of norms, practices, and traditions across various cultures, gained through education and personal experiences (Ang et al., 2007). In a nutshell, motivational CQ, cognitive CQ, and metacognitive CQ serve as cognitive predictors of individuals’ intercultural competence, while behavioral CQ is the barometer of meaningful and successful intercultural communication.

2.2.3 Instructional Leadership

Instruction is considered the “core technology of the school” (Bossert et al., 1982, p. 40), emphasizing its central role in shaping educational outcomes. In the context of team teaching,

NESTs often took on leadership roles, planning lessons and guiding LETs (local English teachers) on pedagogical approaches (Copland et al., 2016). Their expertise as native speakers enable them to create an authentic language environment and provide a cultural context for language learning, thereby demonstrating their instructional leadership. As Greenier and Whitehead (2016) have articulated that as leaders in the classroom, NESTs have the potential to deeply influence the culture of learning through the many qualities essential to authentic leadership.

The theory of instructional leadership originated from empirical research conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Robinson et al., 2008), which underlined that successful teaching needs to “have strong leadership and a climate of expectation that students will learn” (Edmonds, 1979, p. 15). DeMatthews (2014) defined instructional leadership as “the leadership functions associated with teaching and learning” (p. 193). Bossert et al. (1982) further stated that effective instructional leadership involves creating a positive learning climate, establishing clear instructional goals, and fostering high expectations for both students and teachers. Instructional leadership has positive effects on student learning outcomes (Bellibaş et al., 2020; Hallinger, 2005; Robinson et al., 2008).

Hallinger (2005) proposed instructional leadership as a model focusing on three core dimensions: defining the school’s mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive learning climate. According to DeMatthews (2014), effective instructional leadership, through daily duties and responsibilities related to educational excellence, ensures that assessments, unit plans, and lessons align with standards, while implementing systems to monitor, evaluate, and improve student performance. Therefore, for NESTs in ELT, good instructional leadership involves having clear teaching plans, setting well-defined teaching and learning goals aligned with student standards and expectations,

using effective assessment and evaluation methods for student learning outcomes, and fostering a positive learning environment (Robinson & Timperley, 2007).

In this study, leadership refers to the classroom and intercultural influence that NESTs exercise rather than formal administrative authority. It is reflected in how they plan and deliver lessons, set expectations for student learning, and model authentic English use (Greenier & Whitehead, 2016; Robinson & Timperley, 2007). Leadership is also demonstrated in their ability to foster intercultural awareness and engagement, positioning them as cultural as well as linguistic role models (Copland et al., 2016; Greenier & Whitehead, 2016). In the Chinese higher education context, these roles are shaped by native-speakerism, which positions NESTs as language experts (Holliday, 2006), but also by institutional structures that often limit their authority over curriculum and assessment (Wang & Lin, 2013). Thus, NEST leadership in this research is understood as pedagogical and cultural influence within the classroom, negotiated against the backdrop of local educational traditions and constraints.

2.2.4 Cultures of Learning

The culture of learning is defined as the “taken-for-granted framework of expectations, attitudes, values, and beliefs about how to teach or learn successfully, and the use of language in teaching and learning interactions” (Jin & Cortazzi, 2008, p. 9). It establishes paradigms for what is considered “normal” in classrooms, which vary by context. For instance, Chinese students have often been stereotyped as “quiet, passive rote-learners who are respectful of teachers and teaching materials” (Stanley, 2013, p. 95).

The Confucian conception of education, as outlined in the ancient Chinese text *Xueji* (Record of Learning), explores educational ideas based on the principles of “choice” and “doing” (Tan, 2016, p. 302). Active learning in the *Xueji* centers on “moral self-cultivation”, a lifelong process requiring significant time and effort in “self-reflection and self-correction”

(Tan, 2013; Tan, 2016). Learners are expected to cultivate themselves by practicing Confucian virtues, including *Li* (normative behaviors), *Ren* (humanity), *Zhi* (wisdom), and *Yi* (appropriateness), demonstrating commitment to family, community, and the broader world (Tan, 2013). Confucius' educational philosophy integrates the individual's aesthetic, moral, and spiritual dimensions (Tan, 2013), emphasizing academic achievement and the belief that all students can excel through effort (Li, 2013; Rao & Chan, 2009). Consequently, the Chinese learning model, referred to as the “Confucian-heritage” model (Watkins & Biggs, 1996), emphasizes moral and social perfection (Li, 2013), with virtues like diligence and perseverance seen as central to the learning process. Specifically, Chinese students have developed some salient learning virtues, such as “diligence, self-exertion, the endurance of hardship, perseverance, and concentration” (Li, 2013, p. 270). These are seen as more important than actual learning activities, like thinking, asking questions, practicing, or doing research.

Rote learning, often considered passive, has been a cornerstone of Chinese education for over 2,500 years due to Confucian influences (Li & Cutting, 2011; Tan, 2014). Defined as “learning by repetition rather than understanding” (Oxford, 2009, p. 1738), it is a major learning strategy for Chinese language learners but often criticized as being passive. As a result, Chinese students are labelled as “passive rote-learners” (Chan & Rao, 2009; Jiang & Smith, 2009), or “passive recipients” (Yuan & Xie, 2013, p. 27). However, scholars argue that rote learning in Chinese culture involves active processes like deep understanding, practice, and logical thinking (Jiang & Smith, 2009; Li & Cutting, 2011; Tan, 2014). To reflect this, Li and Cutting (2011) introduced the concept of “Active Confucian-Based Memory Strategies” (ACMS), which highlights the complexity of Chinese students' learning methods. Memorization, understanding, reflection, and questioning form the foundation of interactive learning in this context (Wang, 2013). Jin and Cortazzi (1995) explained that the perception

of rote learning as passive, is relative and must be understood within the cultural framework of learning into which students are socialized. This echoes Confucius's emphasis on "learning from the past and learning from the new" and "learning from time to time" (Yang, 2008, p. 138).

Chinese students are known for virtues such as diligence, perseverance, and endurance in their academic pursuits (Li, 2013). The belief that effort outweighs innate ability is deeply ingrained in Chinese culture (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Jin & Cortazzi, 2008). Comparisons between Chinese and Western students often contrast surface versus deep learning or dependence versus independence in learners (Ryan, 2010). However, it is not fair to use these comparisons to idealize Western learning models, as both Chinese and Western approaches reflect cultural nuances in their respective education systems (Ryan & Louie, 2013).

Despite stereotypes that portray Chinese students as "passive and uncritical" (Grimshaw, 2007, p. 299), their learning behavior reflects the teacher-centered nature of traditional Chinese education (Xia & Wu, 1999). Teachers are seen as authoritative figures, while students adopt a learning-listening approach, expecting teachers to deliver knowledge through lectures (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998). This contrasts with the learner-centered pedagogy common in English-speaking countries, where active participation and discussion are encouraged (Jin & Cortazzi, 1995). These cultural differences often lead to unmet expectations between Chinese students and NESTs, as foreign teachers may struggle with students' reluctance to engage in communicative activities (Yuan & Xie, 2013). NESTs and Chinese students often interpret each other's behaviors through their cultural norms and expectations, resulting in low mutual awareness and unrealistic expectations (Simpson, 2008). Furthermore, these clashes stem from differences in teaching styles and expectations, often compounded by the belief that native English speakers are inherently the best teachers

(Stanley, 2012). Chinese students may have “unrealistic” expectations of NESTs, influenced by the Chinese culture of learning.

In summary, this chapter reviews previous research on NESTs in ELT and outlines the key theories in current research. It examines the ideology of native speakerism in ELT, the role of NESTs and NNESTs in a global context, and the general challenges NESTs face when teaching in China. The review identifies key research gaps that form the basis of the current study, which explores the dynamics of teaching and learning between NESTs and students in China from a triangular perspective. In addition, it also examines key theoretical frameworks, including the Instructional Beliefs Model (IBM), Cultural Intelligence (CQ), and Instructional Leadership. IBM is used in the first article to explore Chinese students' perceptions of NESTs' teaching practices, while CQ is applied in the second article to explore how NESTs' CQ influences their teaching in China. The third article focuses on instructional leadership and examines how NESTs play their leadership role in ELT in Chinese tertiary education. Finally, the culture of learning is examined as a key factor in understanding the dynamics of teaching and learning, particularly in the context of NESTs and students from different cultural backgrounds.

Chapter Three Research Methods

This section will present an overview of the research paradigms and explain why the qualitative research method is employed to explore the dynamics of teaching and learning, between NESTs and university students in Chinese tertiary education. Additionally, the procedure of data collection and the data analysis will be discussed.

3.1 Research Paradigms

The word paradigm was introduced to English in the late 15th century via Late Latin, from the Greek *paradeiknynai*, meaning “to show side by side”, and it refers to “a worldview that underlies the theories and methodologies of a certain scientific subject” (Meissner, 2017, p. 131). Kuhn (1997) defined paradigm as a set of shared “examples of actual scientific practice” that established the “rules and standards” for research, forming the foundation of “normal science” (pp. 10-11). In educational research, the term paradigm is used to describe a researcher’s worldview (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006) and “the lens through which a researcher looks at the world” (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 26).

A paradigm consists of ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Scotland, 2012). Ontology is “the study of being” (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). Ontological assumptions address the nature of reality, requiring researchers to adopt a stance on how they perceive the nature of existence and how things truly function (Scotland, 2012). Epistemology is “the study of the nature, extent, and justification of knowledge” (Rosenberg, 2016, p. 11). Every paradigm is “based upon its own ontological and epistemological assumptions” (Scotland, 2012, p. 9). Methodology, which refers to the process of “choosing the methods that will provide knowledge” (Rosenberg, 2016, p. 11), is concerned with the why, what, from where, when, and how data is collected and analyzed (Scotland, 2012). In other words, ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (the theory of knowledge) and methodology (the methods used to

collect data and evidence) impact the research paradigm (Meissner, 2017; Rosenberg, 2016; Scotland, 2012).

Different paradigms contain differing ontological and epistemological views, which are reflected in their methodology and methods (Scotland, 2012). The current study is focused on qualitative research which is “based on the belief that knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 23). This is grounded in the ontological position of relativism, which emphasizes “the significance of subjectivity in constructing individual perceptions of reality” (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2019, p. 27). The participants (NESTs, students and Chinese university leaders) have their own subjective understanding of this world, and their experiences and perspectives constructed through their interactions are unique. The epistemological stance of subjectivism guides the semi-structured interviews, enabling the author to “describe individual meanings and social constructions of reality/realities” (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2019, p. 28).

This approach aligns with the principle that reality is socially constructed, meaning that knowledge and understanding are shaped by human experiences, interactions, and interpretations (Schwandt, 1994). Interpretivism focuses on understanding the subjective meanings and perspectives individuals or groups assign to their experiences, focusing on how they interpret their world rather than assuming objective truths (Bryman, 2016).

3.2 The Choice of Qualitative Research

This study adopts qualitative research method to capture the subjective, situated experiences of Chinese students, NESTs, and Chinese university leaders. Qualitative research “locates the observer in the world and uses interpretive, material practices to make meaning visible through interviews” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 7). Ontologically, it assumes of multiple realities, where each participant’s perspective reflects their own cultural and

institutional position. As Creswell and Poth (2018) note, qualitative researchers conducted a study to report these multiple realities by “using the actual words of different individuals and presenting different perspectives” (p. 20). Epistemologically, qualitative inquiry values knowledge created through close engagement with participants in their natural settings. In such research, the aim is to minimize the distance or objective separateness between the researcher and those being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1988; Wolcott, 2008).

Axiologically, qualitative research acknowledges the value-laden nature of inquiry. “All researchers bring values to a study” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21). Researchers are therefore expected to make their positionality explicit, acknowledging how their values, biases, and the values embedded in participants’ accounts shape the research process (Berger, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, my position as both an insider to Chinese higher education and an outsider trained in New Zealand informed my interpretation, supported rapport with participants, and required reflexive monitoring throughout the process. In short, a qualitative design is the most appropriate for exploring the complex, intercultural nature of teaching and learning between NESTs and Chinese students, as it allows for a nuanced understanding of participant perspectives that cannot be captured through quantitative measures alone.

3.3 Research Designs

3.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were adapted as the primary method of data collection to explore the perspectives of Chinese students, NESTs, and Chinese university leaders in Southwest China regarding the teaching and learning between Chinese students and NESTs. This approach ensured that all participants were asked about the same core topics while allowing flexibility to follow up on issues that emerged during the conversation. The semi-

structured interview is both “flexible and, at the same time, standardized,” with every interview “unique and personal,” yet covering essentially the same ground (Gillham, 2000, p. 69).

In the culturally diverse context of Chinese higher education, where norms around communication, hierarchy, and disclosure vary, such adaptability was essential for eliciting authentic and detailed accounts. Semi-structured interviews are highly effective for many research purposes, especially when multiple the “open-ended questions require follow-up queries” (Adams, 2015, p. 493). This method also aligns with the interpretivist stance by enabling participants to describe their experiences in their own words, while allowing the researcher to probe for clarification and deeper insights (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Semi-structured interviewing is regarded as the preferred approach when the researcher strives to understand the participant’s unique perspective rather than produce a generalized account of a phenomenon (McGrath et al., 2019). It offers a focused yet flexible structure that facilitates exploration of relevant ideas as they arise (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

3.3.2 Interview Question Design and Rigorous Scrutiny

Interview guides for each participant group (students, NESTs, and CULs) were developed through an iterative and evidence-based process. The initial drafts were informed by prior research on teaching and learning between students and expatriate teachers (e.g., Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Li, 2009) and acculturation theories (e.g., Berry, 2006; Kim, 2001; Ward, 2001). This ensured that the questions were theoretically grounded and aligned with the study’s aims.

In this study, rigor refers to the systematic and transparent use of qualitative methods to ensure credible findings, demonstrated through extensive data collection, iterative refinement of instruments, and the application of validation strategies such as member checking, triangulation, and peer or external auditing (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The draft interview

guides were reviewed by my supervisor, whose feedback focused on clarity, relevance, cultural appropriateness, and alignment with the study's interpretivist orientation. This expert review informed multiple iterations of refinement, in which I adjusted wording, sequencing, and prompts to enhance the guides' suitability. Such iterative revision aligns with best practice recommendations for qualitative research, where data collection instruments are refined through ongoing feedback and reflexive consideration to strengthen the study's credibility and trustworthiness (Johnson et al., 2020). Before commencing the main data collection, I conducted a pilot study to assess the guides' comprehensibility, flow, and suitability. This involved interviews with two Chinese students (one online, one in person) and one native English-speaking teacher (in person). Insights from the pilot led to further refinements, including rephrasing items, adding probes, and adjusting question order to build rapport before addressing more complex topics.

3.3.3 Rationale for Likert-Scale Questions

In this study, one Likert-type question was included in the interviews of students to prompt the assessment of NESTs' teaching before inviting elaboration. This approach was intended to provide a common reference point for comparing perspectives across participants while preserving the flexibility of qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2015). Each rating was immediately followed by an open-ended probe, enabling participants to explain the reasoning behind their responses, thereby offering both a numerical indication and the contextual narrative underpinning it. This sequencing reflects the nature of semi-structured interviews, which "employ a blend of closed- and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions" (Adams, 2015, p. 493). Also, the scale included dissatisfied and extremely dissatisfied options to signal that negative evaluations were acceptable, thereby encouraging participants to express themselves honestly and freely to obtain comprehensive data. This design choice aligns with Chinese communication norms, which emphasize

indirectness, harmony, and the avoidance of public confrontation, particularly in interactions with authority figures (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Hwang, 1987). As Chinese students often prefer indirect strategies to avoid direct critique or disagreement with professors, thereby maintaining social harmony and protecting interpersonal face (Cai, 2024). Consequently, the Likert-type question provided a less confrontational and more culturally familiar format for participants to express satisfaction levels comfortably.

3.4 Data Collection

The current study employs an interview approach, with semi-structured interviews involving 45 Chinese students, 15 NESTs, and five CULs. Interviews were conducted at 14 universities covering four cities in Southwest China: Kunming, Qujing, Chengdu and Chongqing. The interviews were conducted through face-to-face, video and voice call interviews. The interview protocol consisted of two parts. The first part focused on demographic and background information from participants, and the second part involved questions regarding their teaching and learning experiences in China. Chinese students and CULs were interviewed in Mandarin, and NESTs were interviewed in English.

The 15 NESTs who participated in the interviews were from seven universities in the four cities mentioned above. The author recruited teacher participants through Chinese students who had either been taught by these teachers or currently being taught by them. All the NESTs were from English-speaking countries (UK, US and Canada) and had at least one year of experience teaching Chinese students. The group consisted of nine females and six males. Six teachers were interviewed face-to-face, and the remaining nine were interviewed through Tencent Meeting, a Chinese social media platform.

To elicit responses from students, 45 Chinese university students were interviewed, 27 male students and 18 female students. All students who participated in the interviews attended classes with at least two different NESTs and no less than two semesters. It is

hypothesized that the lengths of time students are exposed to English teachers' teaching will seriously affect their perceptions, level of satisfaction, learning experiences, views, attitudes, motivations, and learning strategies. The recruitment process for both student and university leader participants followed two steps. First, suitable candidates were identified by the author's former teacher. Then, additional participants were recruited through a snowball sampling method, utilizing the social networks of the initially identified individuals. A total of 45 Chinese university students were interviewed: eight face-to-face and 37 via Tencent Meeting. Additionally, five university leaders (three male and two female) from universities in Kunming and Qujing were interviewed. All the leaders had experience working with expatriate teachers, with one interviewed via Tencent Meeting and the remaining four through WeChat call.

It is important to note that the NESTs, students, and CULs interviewed were not necessarily from the same universities. The student participants were not always taught by the interviewed NESTs, and the CULs did not always directly supervise them. This broader sampling strategy, influenced by the circumstances of data collection during COVID-19 when some universities did not have NESTs, was used to capture a wider range of perspectives across institutions in Southwest China.

3.5 Data Analysis

3.5.1 Data Preparation

All interviews were recorded with participants' consent and the recordings were transcribed using a Chinese transcription application, *Suishenglu*. Each student's interview lasted approximately one hour. Each NEST's interview lasted around one to two hours. Each CUL's interview lasted about 45 minutes. The transcriptions from interviews were coded with NVivo to identify patterns, themes, and concepts related to NESTs' instructional communication issues from the teaching and learning experiences among students, NESTs

and CULs in the data. All quotations from students and CULs were translated from the original transcription by the author while all quotations from NESTs were original and authentic. To ensure language accuracy, the translations were reviewed and checked by the main supervisor, a Chinese-speaking academic. The research methodology complied with established ethical standards, ensuring the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality. For ethical reasons, the interview order (student 1 [S1], student 2 [S2], student 3 [S3] ... native English-speaking teacher 1 [NEST1], native English-speaking teacher 2 [NEST2], native English-speaking teacher 3 [NEST3] ... Chinese university leader 1[CUL1], Chinese university leader 2 [CUL2], Chinese university leader 3 [CUL3] ...) instead of the participants' names will be used to represent the students, NESTs and CULs. The demographics of the participants are displayed across the tables: Table 1 presents the students' ages, genders, universities, and years of study; Table 2 outlines the NESTs' nationalities, credentials, and teaching experience in China; and Table 3 lists the CULs' positions and the number of NESTs they manage.

Table 1

Demographic Profiles of Students

No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	University	Years of Study
1	Li	F	20	YD	2
2	Cai	F	21	YD	3
3	Cao	F	20	YD	3
4	An	F	23	YD	4
5	Liu	F	22	YD	4
6	Lu	F	21	YC	3
7	He	F	20	YC	2
8	Fu	F	22	YC	3
9	Hu	F	21	YC	3
10	Xu	M	21	YC	2
11	Zhu	F	21	YC	2
12	Nan	M	30	YC	4
13	Gan	F	24	YC	post-grad 3
14	Wu	F	21	YS	4

15	Ma	F	21	YS	3
16	Xie	M	22	YS	4
17	Lin	M	21	YS	4
18	Gao	M	20	YS	4
19	Sun	F	21	YS	post-grad 1
20	Han	F	21	YS	3
21	Yuan	F	24	YS	graduate in 2020
22	Zhou	F	26	QS	graduate in 2019
23	Zhai	F	19	CD	2
24	Zhan	F	21	CD	3
25	Dong	M	19	CD	2
26	Ding	M	19	CD	2
27	Hua	F	19	CS	3
28	Dai	M	19	CS	3
29	Wei	F	20	XN	3
30	Qin	M	21	XN	2
31	Jia	F	21	XM	4
32	Mo	F	21	XM	4
33	Luo	M	22	QS	3
34	Wen	F	21	QS	3
35	Song	F	22	QS	3
36	Wang	F	21	WL	2
37	Huang	F	20	WL	2
38	Zhao	M	20	WL	2
39	Zheng	M	20	WL	2
40	Dai	F	20	WL	2
41	Liang	M	20	MD	2
42	Zhang	M	21	MD	2
43	Guo	F	21	MD	2
44	Han	F	19	MD	1
45	Yao	M	21	DZKD	3

Note: Pseudonyms for participating institutions

Table 2

Demographic Profiles of NESTs

No.	Nationality	Gender	Credential	Age	Certificate	Years of teaching in China
1	UK	Female	BA	44	-	8
2	UK	Male	BA	38	-	7
3	US	Male	MA	57	TESOL	4
4	US	Male	BA	54	TESOL	16
5	US	Female	BA	-	TESOL	5
6	US	Female	BA	67	-	12
7	US	Male	BA	35	-	10
8	US	Female	BA	-	-	7
9	Canada	Female	BA	-	-	>3
10	US	Female	BA	29	-	>3
11	UK	Male	BA	33	-	>3
12	US	Female	BA	24	TESOL	1
13	US	Female	MA	35	-	5
14	US	Female	BA	31	-	3
15	US	Male	MA	35	TESOL	>3

Table 3

Demographic Profiles of CULs

No.	Gender	Positions	University	Numbers of NESTs employed
1	Male	International Cooperation and Exchanges Division and International Institute International Cooperation and Exchanges Division Deputy Director	SY	2
2	Female	Director of International Affairs Department/Dean of International Languages	KY	4
3	Male	Director of the Division of External Cooperation and Exchanges/Dean of the College of International Studies	SY	21
4	Female	Chinese Visitors Management Section Chief of Section	SD	4
5	Male	Head of the Office of the Governor General of University A/Vice President for Foreign Affairs and Adult Education of University B	WL	3

Note: Pseudonyms for participating institutions

3.5.2 Grounded Theory Coding Procedures

While the questions were semi-structured, the analysis of the data was consistent with the principles of grounded theory, which emphasizes inductive coding, constant comparison, and theory generation from participants' accounts (Charmaz, 2014; Tie et al., 2019).

Transcripts were first coded line by line through open coding, followed by axial coding to group related categories, and then selective coding to integrate these into core themes. This iterative and comparative process enabled the development of theoretical insights specific to each article: in Article 1, the findings were interpreted through the IBM to explain students' perceptions of NESTs; in Article 2, themes were linked to CQ theory to analyze teachers' intercultural adaptation; in Article 3, native speakerism framed the interpretation of NESTs' leadership roles. Thus, while each article drew on different theoretical frameworks, the data analysis across the thesis consistently reflected the grounded theory approach by allowing findings to emerge inductively from participants' learning and teaching experiences.

The grounded theory coding process provided the foundation for the thematic analysis that followed. While grounded theory guided the inductive development of categories, thematic analysis offered a systematic approach to identifying and interpreting the major themes and subthemes across the data set.

3.5.3 Thematic Analysis for Interpretation

Thematic analysis is a method for "identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) within qualitative data" (Clarke & Braun, 2016, p. 297). A theme "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a flexible qualitative research method, particularly suitable for exploring and understanding people's lived experiences and perspectives (Clarke & Braun, 2016). Through thematic analysis and data interpretation, qualitative researchers can generate detailed

descriptions using the participants' own words to support and reinforce their interpretations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Thematic analysis aligns with specific ontological and epistemological perspectives by interpreting the complex meanings of participants' experiences and constructing what is known and considered true through their personal experiences (Peel, 2020).

The current study employs thematic analysis to explore the teaching and learning experiences of NESTs, students, and CULs in Chinese tertiary education. By identifying and interpreting key themes from the data, major themes and subthemes emerge to address the three core research questions:

- (1) What are Chinese students' perceptions of NESTs' instructional methods?
- (2) How does CQ impact NESTs' teaching practices?
- (3) What challenges do NESTs face in China's higher education system?

Thematic analysis enables the author to capture the diverse perspectives of NESTs, students, and CULs, providing a deeper understanding of the cultural and institutional dynamics that shape teaching and learning in Chinese universities.

3.6 Positionality and Reflexivity

3.6.1 Researcher Positionality

Positionality “reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013 p.71). It influences how research is conducted, the methods chosen, and the interpretation of outcomes (Berger, 2015; Foote & Bartell, 2011; Holmes, 2020; Rowe, 2014). As Foote and Bartell (2011) explained, researchers' positionality is shaped by their experiences, which influence how they engage in research encounters, select processes, and interpret outcomes, and may evolve as these experiences and relationships change.

My positionality in the current research is shaped by my dual cultural and academic trajectory as a Chinese scholar trained in both China and New Zealand. I have been a Chinese student taught by NESTs, an English teacher in Chinese universities, and a Ph.D. student in New Zealand studying intercultural communication. These experiences position me along the insider–outsider continuum (Holmes, 2020).

As an insider, I share participants’ cultural and institutional contexts in China. I am familiar with the academic norms, teaching practices, and institutional hierarchies of Chinese higher education, which enabled me to connect with participants on shared cultural ground. As an outsider, I draw on perspectives shaped by Western academic training, international exposure, and the interpretive frameworks of intercultural communication research. This dual position is particularly relevant to this study, which examines teaching and learning between NESTs and Chinese students in China. My insider status facilitated access, strengthened rapport and trust, and supported culturally informed interpretation and communication through shared identity and bilingual fluency (Geertz, 1973; Holmes, 2020; Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2008). However, it also introduced risks such as unconscious bias, assumptions of shared understanding, a reduced outsider perspective, and the possibility that participants might withhold sensitive information (Holmes, 2020; Naaek et al., 2010).

3.6.2 Balancing Roles Across Participant Groups

Positionality is not static but shifts as researchers engage with participants and contexts (Ross, 2017). My position was not fixed but shifted depending on the participant group and research stage. With Chinese students, I was largely an insider, sharing linguistic, cultural, and educational experiences. With NESTs, I was more of an outsider, learning about their adaptation to Chinese higher education and cultural differences in teaching practice. With Chinese university leaders, I held a unique position, sharing institutional knowledge yet remaining an outsider in terms of seniority and leadership experience. This shifting

positionality allowed me to adapt my approach, balancing empathy and rapport with critical inquiry. To clarify how my background and relational stance shaped the research process, Table 4 outlines my positionality and reflexive practices in relation to each participant group.

Table 4

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity in Relation to Participant Groups

Participant group	Insider/outsider position	Influence on data collection	Mitigation strategies
students	Primarily insider – shared cultural background, language, and experience of learning from NESTs	Enhanced access and rapport; students sharing detailed, candid accounts; culturally nuanced and enriched data quality	Used open-ended prompts to avoid leading responses; checked for clarification instead of assuming shared understanding; kept reflexive notes on potential bias
NESTs	Primarily outsider – no direct experience as a foreign teacher in China	Enabled formal access to institutions; leaders selectively shared sensitive information	Asked follow-up questions to deepen understanding; compared responses with student and leader accounts for triangulation

CULs	Unique – insider with institutional knowledge, outsider regarding seniority and leadership role	Facilitated formal access to institutions; leaders selectively sharing sensitive details	Reassured confidentiality; used neutral phrasing; cross-checked leader statements with student and NEST data
All groups	Position shifted depending on topic and interaction	Positionality influenced rapport, trust, and interpretation of responses	Maintained reflexive journal; revisited transcripts; conducted member checking with selected participants to ensure accuracy

3.6.3 Reflexivity in Practice

Reflexivity is “a process that helps researchers to consider their position and influence during the study, and it also helps them to know how they have constructed and even sometimes imposed meanings on the research process” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013 p.76). It involves “critical self-reflection about potential biases and predispositions” (Cypress, 2017, p. 259) and “self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher” (England, 1994, p. 82). Through reflexivity, researchers become more self-aware and monitor and attempt to manage the potential biases (Cypress, 2017).

Reflexivity was woven into every stage of this study to address my shifting insider–outsider position, consistent with the view that reflexivity is a “continuous, collaborative, and multifaceted” process (Olmos-Vega, 2023, p.242). Prior to data collection, I kept a reflexive

journal to record my learning experiences with NESTs and to monitor how these might influence rapport, questioning, and interpretation (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2022). During student interviews, I avoided assuming shared understanding and instead probed for clarification, in line with relational reflexivity that challenges assumptions during interaction (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023; Peddle, 2021). When interviewing NESTs, I used follow-up questions to elicit perspectives distinct from my own cultural assumptions. In the analysis phase, I cross-checked interpretations with verbatim transcripts, drew on reflexive notes to identify possible bias, and used member checking to enhance credibility (McKim, 2023).

In conclusions, as Savin-Baden and Major (2013) stated that researchers are both “integral and integrated” (p. 76) into the research, I acknowledge that my findings are co-constructed through interactions with participants. My insider position enriched the data with cultural depth, while my outsider perspective and reflexive stance maintained analytical rigour. This combination strengthened the credibility, authenticity, and cultural sensitivity of the study’s findings on intercultural teaching and learning between NESTs and Chinese students in Southwest China.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical responsibilities are an ongoing process in qualitative research, and ethical considerations are significant in the research design (Arifin, 2018; Creswell & Creswell., 2018; Orb et al., 2004). Establishing an ethical framework ensures the thoughtful conduct of applied educational research and enhances the credibility of the findings. Therefore, researchers should protect the human subjects and avoid harming participants involved in the research process by respecting and considering their needs and interests (Arifin, 2018; Flick, 2009). Arifin (2018) stated that ethical issues are crucial throughout all stages of a qualitative study to balance the potential risks and benefits of the research. Moreover, the inherent difficulties in qualitative research can be alleviated by using well-established ethical

principles, specifically autonomy, beneficence, and justice (Orb et al., 2004). In line with these principles, Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasized that the researchers have an obligation to respect the informant's rights, needs, values, and desires.

The current research adopts the qualitative method, so the potential for risk may be unavoidable. Establishing an ethical framework ensures the thoughtful conduct of applied educational research and enhances the credibility of the findings (Peel, 2020). Flick (2009) said that thinking about ethical dilemmas should "not prevent you from doing your research but should help you do it more reflectively and take your participants' perspectives on a different level" (p. 43). Consequently, the researcher needs to be aware of sensitive issues and potential conflicts of interest because ethical dilemmas are challenging to predict in an interview (Orb et al., 2004). Furthermore, it is necessary to solve the problems if research involves sensitive issues (Flick, 2009).

The researcher applied for Ethics Approval from the Human Ethics Committee of the institution. The interview questions employed in this study underwent rigorous scrutiny and approval by the institution's review board.

Chapter Four Articles Included in the Study

Article 1: Zhou, Z., Croucher, S. M., Li, M., & Hodis, G. M. (2024). Navigating English language instruction in China: Insights from Chinese students on native English-speaking teachers' practices. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 53(3-4), 102-120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2024.2422624>

Article 2: Zhou, Z., Li, M., Hodis, G. M., & Croucher, S. M. (under review). Cultural intelligence in practice: Pedagogical adaptation among native English-speaking teachers in China. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. (revised and resubmitted)

Article 3: Zhou, Z., Croucher, S. M., Li, M., & Hodis, G. M. (2026). Navigating leadership roles: Native English-speaking teachers in English language teaching in China. In A. Wiseman & J. McNaughtan (Eds.), *The Emerald handbook on international higher education: Navigating workforce and leadership changes in a digital age* (pp. 403–420). Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83549-788-320251025> (in press)

4.1 Article One

Zhou, Z., Croucher, S. M., Li, M., & Hodis, G. M. (2024). Navigating English language instruction in China: Insights from Chinese students on native English-speaking teachers' practices. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 53(3-4), 102-120.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2024.2422624>

This article explored how Chinese students perceive the pedagogical practices of NESTs and how these practices influence their learning outcomes in Chinese tertiary education. Shaped by their cultural backgrounds, students' perceptions and NESTs' practices are influenced by the culture of learning, the presumed framework of expectations, attitudes, values and beliefs about effective teaching and learning practices (Jin & Cortazzi, 2008). Differences in learning cultures often lead to misunderstandings when teachers and students interpret each other's behaviors through their cultural positioning, expected norms, and values (Stanley, 2012; Leung & Morris, 2014). They also posed challenges for NESTs to teach in China (Luk & Lin, 2007; Luo et al., 2004; Su et al., 2020).

The research aims to identify practices that both enhance and hinder students' learning with NESTs, offering insights into the dynamics of intercultural communication in educational settings. It builds on previous studies published in the *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* (JICR), for instance, Mansson and Lee (2014) who investigated communication motives and satisfaction in intercultural student-teacher dynamics and emphasized the role of cultural factors in fostering effective communication in educational settings. Similarly, Rogerson and Rossetto (2018) addressed the importance of accommodating diverse learning backgrounds in higher education and advocated for inclusive and adaptive teaching strategies. By focusing on NESTs in the Chinese context, this study extends these discussions and offers new perspectives to the field of intercultural communication.

Furthermore, this article employed the instructional beliefs model (IBM) to analyze students' perceptions of NESTs' practice and provided a theoretical framework for understanding intercultural communication in educational settings. Delante (2020) showed the importance of adapting theoretical frameworks to intercultural settings, particularly in classrooms where cultural differences between students and teachers can impact learning outcomes. By applying IBM, this study contributed to the theoretical development of intercultural communication and aligned with JICR's focus on advancing communication theory.

In addition to the theoretical implications, the findings of this study provide practical insights for expatriates who plan to enter Chinese higher education after graduation, and for those who wish to teach English in China, emphasizing the need to integrate cultural understanding into teaching practices in intercultural setting. Similar practical insights have been discussed in the JICR, such as Vu (2022), who emphasised the importance of adapting teaching practices to different cultural contexts. Additionally, this study provides recommendations for Chinese universities to optimise the management mechanism of foreign teachers, develop culturally responsive training and enhance instruction outcomes of NESTs.

By addressing the intersection of culture, communication, and education, this study aligns with JICR's mission to advance intercultural scholarship. It contributes to discussion on culture and communication, providing theoretical insights and practical applications.



Navigating English Language Instruction in China: Insights from Chinese Students on Native English-Speaking Teachers' Practices

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Navigating English Language Instruction in China: Insights from Chinese Students on Native English-Speaking Teachers' Practices

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ABSTRACT

This study uses the instructional beliefs model to analyse Chinese students' perceptions of classes taught by Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs). Forty-five Chinese students from 12 universities in southwestern China participated in the semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate pedagogical practices were perceived positively for practical language application but criticized for culturally incompatible pedagogical practices. Instructional outcomes exhibited positive affective and behavioural changes but posed challenges in cognitive learning. The study underscores the need for tailored teaching approaches and an understanding of students' expectations to enhance the overall effectiveness of NEST-led instruction in Chinese classrooms.

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Instructional communication; language teaching; instructional beliefs model; perception; interviews

The globalization of the 21st century has made English language proficiency a crucial skill for academic and professional success. This trend is evident in China, where the government has invested heavily in English language education to bolster its competitiveness. China employs a significant number of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs), but there have been ongoing concerns about the legitimacy and calibre of their employment. Reports indicate that many NESTs in China lack proper documentation (Hinsbergh, 2023). The overemphasis on NESTs can lead to a shortage of qualified NESTs and a reliance on unqualified or underqualified teachers, which can have a negative impact on instructional outcomes, especially in Chinese higher education.

Differences in learning cultures may cause misunderstandings when teachers and students interpret the other's behaviours through their "cultural positioning and expected norms" (Stanley, 2012, p. 36). One of the primary challenges is the perpetuation of native speakerism, characterized by the belief that "native speaker" teachers represent a "Western culture" from which spring the ideals both English language and English language teaching methodology" (Holliday, 2006, p. 385). This ideology perpetuates the dominance of native speaker standards in language and language teaching methodology (Aboshiha, 2013). Auwal (2016) pointed out, "Most students prefer to be in native class because native English teachers seem more skilled, trained and experienced in teaching English" (p. 417).

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4.2 Article Two

Zhou, Z., Li, M., Hodis, G. M., & Croucher, S. M. (under review). Cultural intelligence in practice: Pedagogical adaptation among native English-speaking teachers in China.

International Journal of Intercultural Relations. (revised and resubmitted)

This article explores how NESTs employ cultural intelligence (CQ) to adapt their teaching practices and the challenges they encountered within Chinese higher education. The study highlights how their motivational, cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioral CQ dimensions shaped pedagogical strategies, classroom engagement, and intercultural sensitivity. By focusing on NESTs' perspectives, the article provides a context-sensitive and empirically grounded analysis of instruction communication in Chinese setting.

The current research aligns with the scope of the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* (IJIR), a high-ranking journal in the field of intercultural communication and education, which advances theory, research, and practice on intercultural relations, including intercultural communication, expatriate adjustment, and intercultural competence development. IJIR has published influential work on CQ in relation to expatriate adjustment, international education, and classroom diversity (e.g., Chédru & Ostapchuk, 2025; Grosch et al., 2023; Katıtaş et al., 2024; Şahin et al., 2014). Building on this foundation, the present study provides empirical insights into the application of CQ within pedagogical practice. It demonstrates the potential of CQ to foster student engagement and inclusive learning, while also illustrating challenges such as limited orientation, language barriers, and institutional isolation that constrain its application in Chinese higher education.

In summary, this article aligns with the IJIR' mission to advance intercultural theory, research, and practice across diverse educational and social contexts. The focus on cultural intelligence and culturally responsive teaching within Chinese higher education provides both theoretical contributions to intercultural communication and practical implications for

educators and policymakers worldwide. These contributions underscore the suitability of IJIR as a high-ranking venue for disseminating this work.

Cultural Intelligence in Practice: Pedagogical Adaptation among Native English-Speaking Teachers in China

Abstract

The globalization of education has underscored the critical role of cultural intelligence (CQ) in teaching and learning, especially for native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) in China. This study explores the impact of CQ on the teaching effectiveness of NESTs and the learning outcomes of Chinese university students. Drawing on semi-structured interviews, this research delves into the challenges and opportunities presented in cross-cultural teaching environments. It examines the multifaceted dimensions of CQ and their influence on pedagogical strategies, classroom dynamics, and student engagement. Participants who described CQ-aligned practices reported more adaptive teaching and richer student participation. The study highlights the importance of integrating CQ into teacher preparation programs and suggests practical implications for educators and policymakers aiming to foster intercultural competence in global academic settings.

Keywords: intercultural competence, native English-speaking teachers, cultural intelligence, teaching effectiveness

Introduction

Cultural intelligence (CQ), recognized as “a marker of cultural expertise,” is often framed as a source of competitive advantage for organizations (Dutta & Dutta, 2013, p. 254). However, its significance is not universal; rather, CQ operates as a critical competency (Earley & Ang, 2003; Iskhakova, 2018) primarily for individuals and groups engaged in cross-cultural interactions—particularly educators and students in international or multicultural educational settings. For these educators, high CQ facilitates the translation of international experiences into actionable knowledge (Sharma & Hussain, 2017). Recent research highlights that CQ enables educators to navigate diverse classroom dynamics effectively, such as adapting to students’ cultural expectations to foster inclusive learning environments (Teixeira & Klein, 2024; Wang, 2024). Yet, this framing risks naturalizing CQ as a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), inadvertently reinforcing hierarchies by privileging those who possess such “expertise” while marginalizing others. Defined as a multidimensional capacity (cognitive, motivational, and behavioral) for effective functioning in diverse contexts (Ng & Earley, 2006), CQ’s scholarly origins in Singapore, the UK, and the US reflect its ties to globally dominant paradigms. While intercultural communication competence (ICC) provides a broad framework for understanding intercultural effectiveness, this study foregrounds CQ as a practice-oriented model, highlighting how its four dimensions shape teachers’ adaptive strategies in the classroom. As “interlinked global spaces” (Dutta & Dutta, 2013, p. 254) expand, CQ’s role must be critically examined—not only for its adaptive utility but also for its potential to reproduce inequities in education (Banks, 2016).

The complexity of cultural diversity extends to education, where expatriate teachers encounter difficulties in adapting to non-English-speaking contexts, impacting classroom dynamics, teaching methods, and student interactions (Alifuddin & Widodo, 2022; Rao & Yuan, 2016). For instance, Tharapos and O’Connell (2023) indicated academics with high

CQ use culturally sensitive strategies to foster inclusive learning environments in international teaching contexts. The classroom serves as a microcosm reflecting this phenomenon, prompting teacher preparation programs to increasingly stress the significance of appreciating and understanding student cultures to enhance teaching practices (Molina, 2013). In China, the demand for native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) has surged due to global economic integration, leading to the adoption of innovative teaching methods to improve English proficiency (Rao & Chen, 2019). This trend underscores the value of CQ in instructional communication, enabling expatriate teachers to engage with and respect cultural differences, thereby enriching the learning experience (Alifuddin & Widodo, 2022; Teixeira & Klein, 2024). Li et al. (2024) emphasize that expatriates' CQ mediates the relationship between perceived cultural difference and both adjustment and performance, suggesting that CQ development may help expatriate teachers navigate culturally influenced classroom dynamics.

To better understand the growing importance of CQ in instructional communication, the current study explored how CQ relates to NESTs' teaching effectiveness in universities in southwestern China. While previous work on CQ has relied predominantly on student samples (Engle & Crowne, 2013; Iskhakova, 2018; Ott & Michailova, 2018), the current study integrates the voices of teachers via in-depth interviews. In doing so, the current study examines the effectiveness of expatriate teachers in cross-cultural settings, underscoring the importance of CQ, thus enriching the educational experiences of all participants (Alifuddin & Widodo, 2022; Wang, 2024).

CQ in Teaching and Learning

Teachers' cultural intelligence (CQ) empowers them to enrich students intellectually and socio-culturally by using cultural references to convey knowledge, skills, and values (Rajaram, 2023). Leask (2009) denoted this as the "hidden curriculum" (p. 207),

characterizing it as the active engagement of informal and incidental learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom, which significantly influences student experiences. Despite being frequently overlooked, the hidden curriculum's significance in enhancing cultural awareness and defining effective international integration practices should not be underestimated (Leask & Bridge, 2013). For example, Hui et al. (2024) found that Chinese students prefer the integration of local cultural content into English instruction, suggesting that when foreign teachers incorporate culturally relevant materials, student engagement and cultural connection improve. Additionally, Lyu and Pupat (2022) found CQ positively correlates with teaching effectiveness, a finding reinforced by recent research indicating that CQ enhances teachers' ability to foster inclusive classroom environments (Teixeira & Klein, 2024).

CQ within higher education institutions is especially vital as “the prominence and embracing of internationalization are growing steadily” (Rajaram, 2023, p. 61). For instance, Goh (2012) highlights that CQ enables teachers to “design and deliver culturally responsive curricula” (p. 394), such as incorporating local cultural references to engage diverse students effectively. Similarly, Grant et al. (2014) found that Western educators in China who adapted their teaching to students' Confucian-influenced learning styles—such as prioritizing structured instruction over open-ended discussions—fostered greater student participation. Kainzbauer and Hunt (2016) emphasize that CQ helps foreign educators in Thailand navigate cultural complexities by adapting teaching styles to local expectations, like respecting hierarchical classroom dynamics, which parallels challenges faced by NESTs in China. Recent studies further underscore CQ's role in globalized education; for example, Teixeira and Klein (2024) highlight that CQ grows through everyday intercultural interactions, enabling teachers to adapt their pedagogical strategies to diverse cultural norms and foster student-centered learning. CQ shapes teachers' pedagogical approaches, necessitating

adaptation to classroom diversity and effective student engagement in globalized environments, thus requiring the cultivation of CQ in both teaching methodologies and student development (Rajaram, 2023). Teachers proficient in CQ can prepare students for global engagement, as Molina (2013) notes: “Teachers with high CQ foster intercultural competence by modeling culturally sensitive interactions” (p. 225). Awareness and understanding of CQ and cultural diversity can better prepare students for academic success (Idrus, 2021; Wang, 2024).

CQ Theory

Cultural intelligence (CQ) refers to “a person’s capability to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts and therefore represents a form of situated intelligence where intelligently adaptive behaviors are culturally bound to the values and beliefs of a given society or culture” (Earley & Ang, 2003, p. 26). CQ, as a multidimensional construct, consists of four distinct facets: motivational (drive), cognitive (knowledge), metacognitive (strategy), and behavioral (action) dimensions (Ang et al., 2007; Van Dyne et al., 2010). CQ is malleable and evolves through multicultural experiences and exposure to diverse cultures (Erez et al., 2013). Recent research underscores CQ’s adaptability, noting that targeted training can enhance its development, particularly for educators navigating diverse classrooms (Chédru & Ostapchuk, 2025; Teixeira & Klein, 2024; Urgan et al., 2025).

The first facet, motivational CQ, is defined as “one’s propensity and commitment to act on the cognitive facet as well as persevere acquiring knowledge and understanding of a new culture and overcome stumbling blocks or failure” (Earley & Ang, 2003, p. 91). An individual with high motivational CQ view cross-cultural comprehension as a driving force, motivated by self-imposed challenges and reinforced by progress in learning (Earley & Ang, 2003). For instance, Tharapos and O’Connell (2023) found that academics with high motivational CQ were more persistent in adapting their teaching strategies and behavior to

align with local cultural expectations, demonstrating culturally sensitive engagement during international teaching assignments.

The second facet, cognitive CQ, refers to “specific knowledge that people are able to gain and comprehend about a new culture based on various types of cues provided” (Earley & Ang, 2003, p. 91). Individuals with high cognitive CQ can discern both similarities and disparities among cultures (Brislin et al., 2006). This knowledge is critical but must be integrated with other CQ dimensions to address real-world challenges effectively, as its isolated application may be limited or counterproductive (Van Dyne et al., 2010). Recent studies highlight that cognitive CQ enables educators to understand local educational norms, such as China’s exam-oriented system, facilitating tailored pedagogical strategies (Probert, 2025).

The third dimension is metacognitive CQ. It denotes the processes through which individuals understand cultural knowledge and regulate their cognitive operations related to culture (Urgun et al., 2025). This includes abilities such as planning, overseeing, and modifying conceptual representations of cultural norms for different nations or groups (Ang et al., 2007). Individuals with high metacognitive CQ exhibit acute consciousness of others’ cultural preferences before and during interactions, critically assessing and adapting their cognitive frameworks accordingly (Brislin et al., 2006; Triandis, 2006). Teixeira and Klein (2024) highlight how metacognitive CQ helps individuals reflect on intercultural assumptions and adapt their behavior during cross-cultural interactions—insights that can inform teaching adjustments in culturally diverse classrooms. Metacognitive CQ emphasizes advanced cognitive activities, whereas cognitive CQ pertains to awareness of norms, practices, and traditions across cultures, gained through education and personal experiences (Ang et al., 2007).

The fourth aspect, behavioral CQ, is “the capability of a person to enact his or her desired and intended actions to a given cultural situation” (Earley & Ang, 2003, p. 91). It involves accurately perceiving and adjusting to universal and culturally specific behavioral norms during social interactions, essential for successful intercultural communication (Urgun et al., 2025). Golis (2025) found that expatriate teachers in Chinese internationalised schools adjusted their classroom practices to better align with local student behaviors and expectations, fostering more inclusive classroom environments. This dimension is critical for translating CQ’s theoretical aspects into practical teaching adaptations in diverse educational settings (Lyu & Papat, 2022; Probert, 2025).

Cultural Issues of NESTs Teaching English in China

Native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) in China frequently encounter cultural and pedagogical challenges, particularly clashes between Western student-centered methods and Confucian educational traditions, alongside institutional constraints. Extensive research underscores the role of CQ in addressing these issues—bridging pedagogical mismatches, improving cultural preparation, and mitigating structural barriers (Cai & Hall, 2016; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Li, 2009; Stanley, 2013; Lyu & Papat, 2022). Recent studies further highlight CQ’s critical role in enabling NESTs to navigate these complexities effectively, fostering culturally responsive teaching practices that enhance student engagement in Chinese universities (Wang, 2024; Lyu & Papat, 2022).

Cortazzi and Jin (1996) have extensively explored cultural influences on language teaching, particularly in East Asian contexts like China. Their seminal work highlights how Confucian learning cultures, which emphasize teacher authority and rote learning, often clash with NESTs’ Western pedagogical approaches, such as student-centered and interactive methods. They note that Chinese students’ “silent but active” engagement (e.g., listening-focused participation) is frequently misinterpreted by NESTs as passivity, leading to

misunderstandings that hinder classroom interaction. Golis (2025) showed that expatriate teachers who tuned into students' cultural and behavioral norms were better able to navigate misunderstandings and manage classroom expectations effectively. This finding is crucial for the current study, as it underscores the need for NESTs to adapt their teaching strategies through CQ's cognitive and behavioral dimensions.

Similarly, Li (2009) examines the challenges faced by NESTs in Chinese higher education, identifying cultural differences in teaching philosophy and lack of institutional support as significant barriers. Li's research reveals that many NESTs lack formal training in cross-cultural pedagogy, resulting in superficial or misaligned instructional practices, such as over-reliance on group discussions that conflict with students' preference for teacher-led instruction. Wang (2024) extends this by showing that CQ can facilitate expatriate academics' adaptation to the cultural norms of Chinese higher education, enabling them to navigate institutional expectations and interpersonal dynamics more effectively. This aligns with the current study's focus on how NESTs' CQ can mitigate cultural mismatches by fostering culturally responsive teaching strategies, such as integrating local cultural references (e.g., Chinese media) to enhance student engagement.

Stanley (2013) provides a nuanced perspective on NESTs' intercultural adaptation in China, emphasizing the impact of limited cultural preparation on their teaching effectiveness. This qualitative study reveals that NESTs often struggle to navigate cultural nuances, such as students' fear of "losing face," which affects participation in interactive activities. Stanley argues for enhanced pre-departure training to develop cultural awareness, a recommendation reinforced by Tharapos and O'Connell (2023), who identified that reflective adaptation is a core process through which academics develop CQ during international teaching experiences. This resonates with the current study's

exploration of CQ's role in enabling NESTs to adapt pedagogically through metacognitive strategies like reflective practice and student feedback integration.

Lyu and Pupat (2022) demonstrate that CQ significantly predicts teaching effectiveness among Chinese and foreign teachers in China. Their findings suggest that cognitive CQ enables teachers to better understand and respond to local educational expectations—skills that help NESTs navigate exam-oriented learning environments by observing and adapting to local norms. For instance, Golis (2025) found that expatriate teachers in Chinese internationalised schools adjusted their teaching practices to match local expectations, including student discipline, motivation, and classroom routines. This study builds on their work by investigating how NESTs' cognitive CQ—understanding local learning behaviors through observation and self-learning—enhances instructional alignment with students' cultural expectations.

Cai and Hall (2016) explore the experiences of expatriate academic staff in Chinese international branch campuses, highlighting institutional barriers like limited orientation programs and language barriers. Their research indicates that these structural challenges exacerbate cultural misunderstandings, as NESTs struggle to integrate into the academic environment without adequate support. Probert (2025) emphasizes that culturally intelligent leadership—particularly behavioral CQ—supports educators in adapting practices within Confucian cultural settings. While the focus is on leadership, these insights are applicable at the classroom level, where NESTs must also respond to hierarchical norms to foster inclusivity. The current study extends this by examining how NESTs leverage behavioral CQ to overcome institutional barriers, creating culturally sensitive learning spaces that enhance student engagement.

Research Question

Despite growing research on CQ as a critical competency for expatriates in diverse professional settings (Ang et al., 2007; Earley & Ang, 2003), there remains a significant gap in understanding its specific application to NESTs in Chinese higher education. Existing studies often explore CQ in broader expatriate contexts or focus on general teaching effectiveness, leaving underexplored the nuanced ways CQ facilitates NESTs' classroom practices in China's culturally distinct academic environment (Lyu & Papat, 2022). Recent research highlights CQ's role in enabling educators to adapt teaching strategies to local cultural norms, such as addressing Chinese students' preference for structured learning, thereby enhancing classroom dynamics (Wang, 2024). This gap limits insights into how CQ can support NESTs in overcoming cultural and pedagogical challenges, such as aligning Western interactive methods with Confucian-influenced learning cultures (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). To address this, the current study investigates the following research question:

RQ: How does cultural intelligence facilitate Native English-Speaking Teachers' pedagogical and cultural adaptations in Chinese university classrooms?

Method

This study employs semi-structured interviews with 15 NESTs from seven universities in Kunming, Qujing, Chengdu, and Chongqing (see Table 1). They primarily taught oral English and academic writing courses to English majors, mostly within provincial universities rather than elite national institutions. Data collection took place between June and November 2022. Participants were recruited through student referrals, whereby Chinese students recommended NESTs who had previously taught them or were currently teaching them. While this method facilitated access to NESTs, it may introduce sampling bias by favoring more popular or engaged teachers, potentially skewing the findings toward those with stronger student rapport or more visible teaching styles, as noted in recent qualitative

research on participant selection in cross-cultural studies (Guttormsen & Moore, 2023). This could limit the representation of diverse teaching practices, particularly from less favored or less interactive NESTs, affecting the generalizability of the results. All participants were from English-speaking countries, specifically the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada, and had been teaching Chinese students for at least one year in China. The exclusive representation of NESTs from these countries was due to the absence of teachers from other English-speaking nations, such as Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, or Ireland, at the participating institutions during the data collection period, primarily influenced by COVID-19 travel restrictions and institutional hiring constraints at the time. This limitation, as highlighted by Golis (2025), reflects situational factors specific to the data collection context, which may constrain the diversity of cultural perspectives in the findings.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants in accordance with ethical research standards (Application 4000025686). Prior to interviews, participants received an information sheet detailing the study's purpose—to explore the role of CQ in NESTs' teaching effectiveness in Chinese universities—along with their rights, including anonymity, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. The information sheet also outlined the study's procedures, potential risks, and benefits, ensuring participants were fully informed. Written consent was obtained through signed consent forms, approved by the institution's ethics board, and stored securely to protect participant confidentiality. Participants were informed that their identities would be anonymized using pseudonyms in all study outputs, aligning with ethical guidelines for cross-cultural research (Golis, 2025).

The interview protocol consisted of two stages, developed based on existing literature on NESTs (e.g., Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Li, 2009) and informed by Ang et al.'s (2007) Cultural CQ model to ensure relevance to the study's focus on CQ's role in pedagogical adaptation.

The initial stage included nine questions on demographic and background information, while the second stage comprised 14 questions exploring participants' teaching experiences with Chinese students, such as their strategies for navigating cultural differences. To enhance validity, the interview guide was piloted with two NESTs, whose feedback refined question clarity and phrasing, consistent with best practices for designing semi-structured interviews in educational research (Kallio et al., 2016). Six participants were interviewed in person, while the remaining nine interviews were conducted online via Tencent Meeting. Each interview lasted one to two hours and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. Transcriptions, generated using the transcription application Suishenglu, amounted to 328 pages of text. To enhance the credibility of the qualitative findings, member checking was conducted by providing participants with their interview transcripts for review, a process shown to strengthen interpretive validity in cross-cultural studies (Birt et al., 2016). Participants were invited to confirm the accuracy of the transcripts and provide feedback, which was incorporated to ensure interpretations reflected their intended meanings.

Interview transcripts were uploaded into NVivo 12 and analyzed using inductive thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. An inductive approach was employed, allowing themes to emerge directly from the data without a pre-existing coding framework, ensuring the analysis remained grounded in participants' experiences. Meaning units—segments of text capturing significant ideas or experiences related to CQ and teaching—were identified through close reading of the transcripts. These units were coded line-by-line in NVivo, with initial codes reflecting specific aspects of NESTs' experiences, such as "cultural exploration" or "adapting feedback." Codes were iteratively refined through constant comparison, grouping similar codes into broader categories, and then organizing these into overarching themes, such as motivational CQ or behavioral CQ. NVivo facilitated data organization, node development, and cross-participant

analysis to identify patterns and variations. To ensure trustworthiness, the coding process involved multiple rounds of review by the research team, with discrepancies resolved through discussion, aligning with recent recommendations for rigorous qualitative analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). Reflexive memoing was used to document analytical decisions, enhancing transparency, as emphasized in cross-cultural research methodologies (Yip, 2023).

In the later stages of analysis, emergent themes were interpreted through the lens of CQ, specifically focusing on its motivational, cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioral dimensions. This allowed for alignment with the study's theoretical framework while remaining rooted in participants' teaching experiences. All interviews were conducted in English, and all quotations were original and authentic. Participant identities were kept confidential. As a Chinese researcher with experience in both Chinese and Western academic settings, the first author held a dual position, an insider to the local Chinese educational context and an outsider to the participants' experiences as foreign teachers. Her bilingual background in English and Mandarin facilitated rapport during interviews and accurate interpretation of culturally embedded responses. To mitigate potential bias stemming from this insider/outsider dynamic, reflexive memoing and peer discussions with colleagues familiar with cross-cultural research were employed, a practice supported by Probert (2025) to enhance interpretive rigor in qualitative studies. For ethical reasons, the interview order Participant 1 (P1), Participant 2 (P2), Participant 3 (P3), etc., is used to represent the participants instead of their names.

<<Insert Table 1 here>>

Findings

The findings of this study reveal that NESTs rely on the dynamic interplay of motivational, cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioral CQ to adapt effectively to the Chinese educational context. Motivational CQ fuels NESTs' enthusiasm for cultural exploration, which informs their cognitive understanding of Chinese students' learning behaviors, such as exam-driven motivation and reserved participation (often described by teachers as 'passive'). This knowledge shapes metacognitive strategies, enabling NESTs to reflect on their teaching practices and adjust to cultural nuances, such as avoiding "loss of face." These reflections manifest in behavioral CQ through culturally responsive teaching methods, like integrating Chinese cultural references and tailoring feedback. This interconnected framework underscores that no single CQ dimension operates in isolation; rather, they collectively enable NESTs to navigate and thrive in cross-cultural teaching environments. The following sections explore each dimension in detail, illustrating their contributions and interactions.

Motivational CQ

Motivational CQ is key to adapting to new cultures, positively impacting general adjustment beyond demographic factors and international experience. The responses from participants highlighted two key themes related to their motivation for teaching in China: cultural exploration and professional development opportunities.

Teaching in China for cultural exploration

Many NESTs expressed a desire to teach in China as a means of cultural exploration, distinct from their home environments. Participants articulated motivations to "see different culture" (P3), "learn some Chinese cultures" (P11), and "learn Chinese language" (P11), emphasizing China's appeal as a destination with "a very long history and rich culture" (P4). This immersion into a new cultural context was valued as an opportunity to engage with diverse ways of life, with P14 noting it as "something that I value."

This enthusiasm for cultural exploration may be influenced by structural factors, such as the increasing global visibility of China's cultural heritage and economic opportunities, which attract Western teachers seeking unique experiences. Pedagogically, the appeal of teaching in a culturally distinct environment could reflect a desire to challenge Western-centric teaching norms, as NESTs encounter different student expectations and classroom dynamics. However, these motivations may not be universally generalizable. For instance, participants' focus on China's "rich culture" might reflect idealized perceptions shaped by media or pre-arrival expectations, which may not align with the realities of teaching in varied Chinese educational settings, such as rural versus urban schools. The emphasis on language learning (e.g., Mandarin) suggests a personal investment in cultural integration, but this may be context-dependent, as not all NESTs have access to language-learning resources or prioritize this goal.

Developing the teaching career in China

Professional growth also emerged as a significant motivator, with some NESTs viewing teaching in China as a career-enhancing opportunity. For some, this was a long-held aspiration, with P12 expressing a desire to "truly teach overseas." Others, like P5, who taught in the U.S. before China, found teaching in China "less stressful than back in the States," citing respectful and well-behaved Chinese students as a draw. Additionally, some NESTs sought to diversify their careers by teaching abroad to "do something a little bit different than just teach in America" (P13).

These professional motivations may be shaped by structural factors, such as the demand for NESTs in China's expanding education market, which offers accessible entry points for early-career teachers or those without extensive teaching backgrounds. Pedagogically, the perception of Chinese students as respectful and well-behaved could reflect cultural differences in classroom hierarchies, where teacher authority is more

pronounced in China compared to Western contexts. However, this perception may not be generalizable across all Chinese educational settings, as student behavior can vary by institution type (e.g., elite versus non-top-tier universities) or regional differences. Furthermore, the notion of teaching in China as “less stressful” (P5) may be context-specific, potentially overlooking challenges such as language barriers or administrative expectations that other NESTs might encounter. The desire to “do something different” suggests an intrinsic motivation to break from routine, but it raises questions about whether these NESTs fully anticipate the pedagogical adjustments required to meet Chinese students’ learning needs, such as exam-oriented priorities.

The interplay of cultural exploration and professional growth underscores the complexity of NESTs’ motivations, which are not merely personal but influenced by broader structural and pedagogical contexts. The allure of cultural immersion may be driven by globalized narratives about China, yet its generalizability depends on individual NESTs’ preparedness and the specific teaching environment. Similarly, professional motivations reflect opportunities within China’s educational system but may vary based on institutional demands or cultural expectations. These motivations drive NESTs to engage with Chinese learning culture, enabling them to “help Chinese students” (P2, P6, P8) by introducing new intercultural learning experiences. However, the extent to which these motivations translate into effective teaching practices depends on NESTs’ ability to navigate cultural and pedagogical differences, a process further explored in the cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioral CQ dimensions.

The motivational drive for cultural exploration and professional growth not only propels NESTs to engage with the Chinese context but also lays the foundation for cognitive CQ, as their enthusiasm prompts them to observe and learn about Chinese students’ learning behaviors, which is explored next.

Cognitive CQ

Cognitive CQ reflects NESTs' ability to acquire and understand specialized knowledge about Chinese learning culture through classroom observations and self-learning. Participants identified distinct student characteristics—exam-driven motivation, low classroom participation (often expressed as listening-forward engagement), and reliance on memorization—which informed their pedagogical adjustments. These observations, however, risk cultural essentialism if presented without qualification, as they may oversimplify complex student behaviors shaped by China's educational and cultural context.

Understanding Chinese students' learning characteristics through class observation

NESTs observed three key characteristics of Chinese students' learning behaviors: lack of intrinsic motivation, low classroom participation, and reliance on memorization. These observations shaped their understanding of the Chinese educational context but require critical analysis to avoid reifying stereotypes.

First, participants noted that some Chinese students, particularly in non-top-tier universities, lack intrinsic motivation and are driven primarily by grades and exams. For instance, students struggle with understanding “Why am I in this class?” (P1), leading to a “motivation problem” (P3). P8 observed that students are “less motivated by interest or passion about the subject,” often attending classes due to parental expectations (P3), with “the test [being] the biggest motivator” (P13). This aligns with literature on Confucian heritage education, which emphasizes academic success through high-stakes exams like the *gaokao* (Li, 2012). Structurally, China's test-driven system prioritizes extrinsic rewards, reinforcing rote learning over inquiry-based approaches. However, labeling students as uniformly lacking intrinsic motivation risks cultural essentialism. Students in elite universities with greater academic autonomy may exhibit stronger intrinsic motivation, highlighting context-dependency related to institutional prestige or regional policies.

Second, NESTs frequently described Chinese students as “very quiet, very shy” (P2), “pretty passive” (P5), and “afraid to speak their own opinion” (P4). Some teachers interpreted this as shyness or passivity; however, these patterns could also be understood as reserved participation or measured turn-taking, often linked to fear of making mistakes. Participants noted this led to what they perceived as “a little bit lower” classroom participation (P13), prompting them to try “different approaches” to engage students (P8). This interpretation may stem from cultural norms of collectivism and “face-saving,” where public errors risk embarrassment. Pedagogically, traditional Chinese classrooms’ teacher-led instruction may encourage listening-forward engagement. These behaviors can also be understood as measured turn-taking or respect for authority rather than disengagement. Students in urban or internationalized schools, exposed to interactive teaching, may be more participative, indicating context-specificity. NESTs’ perceptions may also reflect Western biases prioritizing vocal participation, potentially misinterpreting cultural norms.

Third, NESTs observed a reliance on memorization, attributed to an exam-oriented context. Students “memorize things” (P15) to excel in exams, a strategy P5 described as giving a “pretty dark feeling,” with P8 noting students “want to receive notes and to be able to memorize” because “a lot of the questions for the test come from the textbook” (P13). This reflects China’s test-driven system, rooted in Confucian traditions that value rote learning for academic success. Pedagogically, textbook-based assessments reinforce this approach. However, framing students as “just memorizing” risks cultural essentialism. Chinese students’ memorization often integrates understanding, not mere rote learning. Students in progressive or international programs may employ diverse strategies, and NESTs’ negative framing may reflect a Western bias valuing creativity, overlooking the cultural validity of memorization in China.

Deepening understanding of Chinese learning culture through self-learning

NESTs enhanced their cognitive CQ through self-directed efforts, including researching cultural differences, staying informed via media, learning Chinese, and pursuing teaching qualifications. P7 found “reading articles and doing research” on Chinese-English writing differences useful, and P11 noted that learning Chinese and making Chinese friends made teaching “more effective” by helping “understand the students.” P12 highlighted that TESOL certification “prepared me for teaching since I didn’t have a background in teaching.”

These efforts may be driven by structural opportunities, such as access to professional development or local networks, but their reliance on self-learning suggests a gap in institutional support. Pedagogically, these efforts help NESTs align with students’ needs, but their effectiveness is context-dependent, with urban NESTs potentially benefiting more from resources than rural ones. Claims about student behaviors (e.g., reserved participation or memorization) informing these efforts should be approached cautiously to avoid reifying stereotypes, as NESTs’ interpretations may reflect cultural biases rather than universal truths.

NESTs’ observations and self-learning provided critical “working knowledge” (P2) for adapting teaching methods, but claims about students’ lack of motivation, reserved participation, or memorization must be qualified to avoid cultural essentialism. Literature on Confucian heritage education and collectivism (e.g., Biggs, 1996; Hofstede, 2001; Li, 2012) contextualizes these behaviors within China’s exam-centric and hierarchical systems, while highlighting their variability across institutional and regional contexts. These insights inform metacognitive and behavioral adaptations, as explored next.

The cognitive understanding of Chinese learning culture equips NESTs with insights that inform their metacognitive CQ, enabling them to reflect critically on their observations and adapt teaching strategies to align with cultural expectations, as discussed next.

Metacognitive CQ

Metacognitive CQ enables NESTs to strategically process and adapt to cultural norms, enhancing teaching effectiveness. Participants emphasized reflection, patience, flexibility, and cultural sensitivity, particularly around perceived student shyness and face-saving behaviors. These strategies, however, risk reifying cultural stereotypes if not critically examined.

Reflecting on teaching practice

Self-reflection is central to NESTs' adaptation. P7 described reflecting on cultural fit: "I don't know how to teach in a Chinese style. So, you constantly have to reflect on, how am I going to adapt? ... What is their situation, what is their previous experience?" P2 noted, "feedback is how I improve my teaching ... sometimes a student's request or a question inspires a new lesson," while P15 adapted feedback based on student preferences for "more spoken feedback."

These practices may stem from structural factors, like China's hierarchical educational system, and pedagogical mismatches between Western student-centered and Chinese exam-oriented norms. However, assuming students' reserved behavior necessitates extensive reflection risks essentializing passivity. In elite universities with internationalized curricula, students may align more with interactive methods, reducing reflection needs. NESTs' reliance on feedback may also reflect cultural biases, potentially overemphasizing perceived passivity.

Being patient and flexible

Patience and flexibility were key for navigating cultural differences. P2 emphasized "finding the way that works for you" and being "patient with yourself," P11 advocated being "more flexible," and P5 suggested to "relax." P13 attributed unmet expectations to "a cultural thing," with P12 and P10 stressing being "more understanding" and "open to students." P14 noted the need to "slow down and reflect before acting."

These strategies reflect collectivist norms prioritizing group harmony; such patterns may also reflect deference to authority and relational harmony rather than disengagement. Pedagogically, traditional teacher-centered classrooms may condition students to wait for instructions, necessitating patience. However, labeling behaviors as “a cultural thing” risks oversimplification, as engagement varies by institution and region. In progressive schools, less flexibility may be needed, and NESTs’ perceptions may reflect unfamiliarity with local practices.

Being sensitive to cultural differences

Cultural sensitivity, particularly around “face-saving,” was critical. P4 stated, “I’m very conscious of not embarrassing students in front of their classmates. If I have to give them feedback... correction... criticism, I need to do that privately.” P14 added, “I also wanna be sensitive... And I let them discuss in small groups before I call on someone,” and P5 noted, “I have to slow down alright, and don’t expect them to be so independent.”

The focus on face-saving aligns with China’s collectivist culture, where public criticism risks loss of face. Pedagogically, this addresses perceived shyness, but such characterizations risk essentialism, as reserved behavior may reflect respect or strategic engagement. Sensitivity may be less critical in Western-influenced institutions, where students are less reserved, indicating context-dependency.

Metacognitive strategies enable NESTs to adapt to Chinese classrooms, but claims about student passivity or face-saving must be qualified to avoid cultural essentialism. Literature on collectivism and Confucian education (e.g., Hofstede, 2001; Li, 2012) highlights the cultural and structural roots of these behaviors, which vary by context. The metacognitive strategies of reflection and cultural sensitivity directly influence NESTs’ behavioral CQ, enabling practical teaching adjustments to address perceived student behaviors, as detailed next.

Behavioral CQ

Behavioral CQ enables NESTs to adapt teaching to align with Chinese cultural norms, fostering responsive and inclusive classrooms. Participants described integrating cultural elements, differentiating instruction, and creating supportive environments, often in response to reserved participation and listening-forward engagement. These adaptations require scrutiny to avoid reifying stereotypes.

Cultural integration to enhance Chinese student class engagement

NESTs incorporated Chinese cultural elements, referencing “actors, actresses and singers” (P1), “TV shows” (P10), “social media” (P2), and “festivals” (P15). They adapted feedback to respect “face-saving culture” (P5, P14), with P4 noting, “I need to do that privately, not in front of the other students,” as “it is a big deal to lose face in China” (P13). These strategies align with China’s collectivist culture, fostering cohesion, but labeling students as requiring face-saving risks essentialism, as engagement varies by context. Urban schools may require broader references, while rural settings favor local ones. NESTs’ focus on face-saving may overemphasize quieter, listening-forward participation, potentially overlooking individual or institutional differences.

Differentiated instruction to meet Chinese students’ learning needs

NESTs tailored methods, with P12 stating, “change my lessons to adapt to what they need,” and P2 noting, “constantly make changes and improvements.” P15 adjusted feedback based on student suggestions, and P3 gave preparation time, noting, “I give talks for five or so minutes on something before they have a chance to react.” Strategies like “group activities” (P14) and “marks for participation” (P10, P12) aimed to boost engagement.

These adaptations reflect the exam-oriented system’s influence on student expectations, rooted in Confucian traditions. Pedagogically, NESTs’ Western training clashes with Chinese teacher-led norms, necessitating adjustments. However, assuming students need

structured tasks risks oversimplification, as progressive schools may favor interactive methods. NESTs' perceptions may reflect cultural biases.

Creating inclusive learning environment for students

NESTs fostered inclusivity by encouraging practice, with P5 being “very supportive and encouraging” and P10 urging students to “write and speak as much as possible.” P4 noted, “Chinese students need time, and they need encouragement to speak up in class, because they can be generally shy.” Students' quietness may also represent reserved participation shaped by cultural norms. NESTs also promoted critical engagement (P7) and used technology like WeChat and QQ (P14, P5, P12). P13 noted, “I tried to use technology a lot ... students are more interested if there's like some technology involved.”

The perception of shyness may stem from cultural norms discouraging public disagreement or teacher-centered classroom practices. While technology aligns with China's digital infrastructure, labeling students as shy risks essentialism, as engagement varies across institutions. In many cases, quieter classroom participation may reflect measured turn-taking or respect for authority rather than disengagement.

NESTs' behavioral adaptations address perceived student behaviors, but such claims must be qualified to avoid reification. Literature on Confucian education and collectivism (e.g., Biggs, 1996; Hofstede, 2001; Li, 2012) contextualizes these adaptations, which vary by institution, region, and student demographics. Critical examination ensures inclusive classrooms without perpetuating stereotypes.

The following table summarizes the four components of the CQ Framework, illustrating how NESTs apply these dimensions through primary themes, sub-themes/strategies, participant evidence, and their pedagogical impacts in the Chinese educational context. By integrating participant insights with structural and cultural

considerations, Table 2 highlights how these CQ components facilitate effective cross-cultural teaching adaptations.

<<Insert Table 2 here>>

Discussion

The findings of this study illuminate the pivotal role of CQ in enabling NESTs to navigate the complexities of Chinese university classrooms, aligning with prior research that underscores CQ's multidimensional impact on cross-cultural teaching effectiveness (Ang et al., 2007; Wang, 2024). By integrating motivational, cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioral CQ, NESTs adapt their pedagogical strategies to address cultural and structural challenges, such as Confucian-influenced learning norms and exam-oriented systems. However, these findings extend beyond mere confirmation of CQ's utility, offering critical insights into its broader implications for global education, intercultural competence, and the potential reproduction of cultural hierarchies. This discussion interrogates how these results reshape our understanding of CQ's role in fostering inclusive education while highlighting tensions and opportunities for future research and practice. Metacognitive CQ served as the catalytic dimension, functioning as the bridge that translated NESTs' motivational drive and cultural knowledge into culturally responsive classroom practices.

CQ as a Tool for Pedagogical Adaptation

The interplay of CQ's four dimensions—motivational drive, cognitive understanding, metacognitive reflection, and behavioral adaptation—enables NESTs to bridge the gap between Western student-centered pedagogies and Chinese Confucian-influenced learning cultures. Participants perceived that motivational CQ, evidenced by their enthusiasm for cultural exploration and professional growth, supports cross-cultural engagement, aligning with Earley and Ang's (2003) assertion that intrinsic motivation may drive such engagement. Participants reported that this motivation informs their cognitive CQ, as they observe and

learn about students' exam-driven behaviors and reserved participation. This aligns with findings by Lyu and Papat (2022), who demonstrate that cognitive and metacognitive CQ significantly enhance teachers' ability to understand and adapt to local educational expectations in the Chinese context.

Metacognitive CQ enables NESTs to reflect on these observations, adapting strategies like private feedback to respect face-saving norms, a practice supported by Teixeira and Klein (2024), who emphasize metacognitive CQ's role in real-time pedagogical adjustments. For instance, NESTs' reflections on students' preference for hierarchical interactions led to tailored feedback methods, aligning with Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimension of power distance in Confucian contexts. Finally, behavioral CQ translates these insights into practical adaptations, such as incorporating Chinese cultural references (e.g., festivals, media). As Tharapos and O'Connell (2023) found, culturally intelligent academics often embrace local culture and adjust their behavior to enhance teaching effectiveness in intercultural contexts. These adaptations reflect Goh's (2012) concept of culturally responsive curricula, where local references foster inclusive learning environments.

The dynamic interplay of CQ dimensions suggests that CQ is not a static competency but a process that evolves through iterative engagement with cultural contexts. This process-oriented view challenges static conceptualizations of CQ as a fixed trait, aligning with Erez et al.'s (2013) notion of CQ's malleability through multicultural experiences. For example, NESTs' self-directed learning efforts, such as researching Chinese educational norms or learning Mandarin, illustrate CQ's developmental nature, as noted by Ott and Michailova (2018). However, the reliance on self-directed learning to develop cognitive CQ highlights a critical gap in institutional support, such as inadequate pre-departure training or orientation programs (Cai & Hall, 2016; Stanley, 2013). This gap raises questions about the sustainability of CQ development, particularly in less-resourced rural institutions where access to

professional development is limited (Zhang et al., 2024). Without structural interventions, such as formalized CQ training, NESTs may struggle to sustain adaptive practices, potentially limiting their teaching effectiveness in diverse settings.

Implications for Global Education

The findings have profound implications for globalized education, particularly as internationalization drives the demand for NESTs in non-English-speaking countries (Rao & Chen, 2019). By demonstrating how CQ enables NESTs to create inclusive classrooms, the study underscores the need to integrate CQ training into teacher preparation programs. Such training could equip educators to navigate cultural nuances, such as students' preference for structured learning, thereby enhancing teaching effectiveness and student outcomes (Teixeira & Klein, 2024). For instance, CQ-focused modules emphasizing reflective practices and culturally responsive strategies could prepare NESTs for diverse educational contexts, aligning with Leask's (2009) concept of the "hidden curriculum," where cultural awareness enhances informal learning experiences. This is particularly relevant in China, where Confucian norms emphasize teacher authority and rote learning, requiring NESTs to adapt Western interactive methods (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996).

Moreover, CQ's role in mitigating cultural misunderstandings—such as misinterpreting reserved participation as passivity—has broader implications for fostering intercultural competence among students. NESTs with high CQ model culturally sensitive interactions, preparing students for global engagement, as Molina (2013) suggests. This aligns with Rajaram's (2023) argument that CQ-trained educators foster intellectual and socio-cultural growth by integrating cultural references into teaching. However, the study reveals the context-specific nature of CQ's application. For example, NESTs in elite Chinese universities with internationalized curricula may require less adaptation than those in non-top-tier institutions, where exam-oriented norms dominate (Cheng & Hamid, 2025). This

variability necessitates tailored CQ training that accounts for institutional and regional differences, a gap underexplored in current literature (Urgun et al., 2025). Future training programs should incorporate case studies from diverse Chinese contexts to ensure applicability across varied educational settings.

Critical Reflections on CQ and Cultural Hierarchies

While CQ facilitates pedagogical adaptation, its application raises critical concerns about the potential reproduction of cultural hierarchies in education. The study's findings suggest that NESTs' perceptions of Chinese students as "shy" or "exam-driven" may reflect Western biases that privilege vocal participation and inquiry-based learning over Confucian-influenced norms like rote learning and respect for authority (Li, 2012). Such perceptions risk cultural essentialism, where complex student behaviors are reduced to stereotypes, potentially marginalizing local educational practices (Friedman, 2005). For instance, characterizing memorization as inferior to creativity overlooks its cultural validity in China's exam-centric system, where it often integrates deep understanding (Biggs, 1996).

This tension aligns with Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital, where CQ may inadvertently privilege educators who master dominant cultural norms, positioning them as "experts" while marginalizing local practices or less adaptable teachers. The reliance on NESTs' self-learning to develop CQ further exacerbates this, as it favors those with access to resources or prior multicultural exposure, potentially excluding early-career or less-resourced educators. While Li et al. (2024) emphasize the role of learning flexibility and cultural difference in shaping CQ and expatriate effectiveness, future research should investigate how CQ training can avoid reinforcing hierarchical dynamics, perhaps by engaging local educators in the co-construction of culturally inclusive pedagogies.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations that warrant consideration. The reliance on student referrals for participant recruitment may introduce sampling bias, favoring NESTs with stronger student rapport and potentially overlooking those with less interactive teaching styles. This approach may overrepresent socially connected individuals while underrepresenting others (Ting et al., 2025). Additionally, the exclusive focus on NESTs from the US, UK, and Canada, due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, limits the diversity of cultural perspectives, as teachers from other English-speaking countries (e.g., Australia, South Africa) may exhibit different CQ dynamics (Wang, 2024). These sampling features may have shaped the narratives, as socially networked teachers might portray adaptation differently. Member checking helped moderate this risk by confirming that the thematic interpretations aligned with participants' intended meanings. The qualitative nature of the study, while rich in depth, restricts generalizability, particularly across varied Chinese educational contexts, such as rural versus urban institutions.

Future research should adopt mixed-methods approaches to quantify CQ's impact on teaching outcomes, such as student engagement or academic performance, complementing qualitative insights (Teixeira & Klein, 2024). Comparative studies across diverse English-speaking countries could elucidate how NESTs' cultural backgrounds influence CQ application. Additionally, exploring CQ's role in other non-English-speaking contexts, such as Southeast Asia or Latin America, could broaden our understanding of its global applicability (Kainzbauer & Hunt, 2016). Finally, investigating the perspectives of Chinese students and local educators could provide a more holistic view of CQ's impact, addressing the current study's teacher-centric focus and fostering reciprocal learning (Golis, 2025; Probert, 2025).

To move beyond adaptation, future research must critically address the tensions in CQ's application, particularly the risk of reinforcing cultural hierarchies through Western-

centric biases in teaching practices. CQ must be leveraged thoughtfully to foster equitable, inclusive education that respects local norms without reinforcing biases. Educators and institutions are called to action to integrate CQ training that prioritizes mutual learning with local educators, ensuring culturally inclusive pedagogies that empower all stakeholders. CQ is not just a tool for adaptation but a catalyst for transformative, equitable education.

Practical Implications

The findings advocate for systemic changes in teacher preparation and institutional support. Universities and hiring institutions in China should prioritize CQ-focused professional development, incorporating workshops on Confucian learning cultures, face-saving norms, and exam-oriented systems. Such programs could include reflective exercises and cultural immersion activities to enhance NESTs' metacognitive and behavioral CQ, aligning with recommendations for pre-departure training (Stanley, 2013). Policymakers should also address structural barriers, such as limited orientation programs, by implementing mentorship systems pairing NESTs with local educators to facilitate cultural integration (Cai & Hall, 2016). These interventions could ensure that CQ development is accessible to all NESTs, mitigating inequities in training access.

For educators, the study underscores the importance of self-directed learning and reflection to develop CQ, particularly in resource-scarce environments. Strategies like integrating local cultural references (e.g., Chinese media) and using technology (e.g., WeChat) can enhance student engagement, as demonstrated by participants' practices. However, educators must critically reflect on their assumptions to avoid cultural biases, ensuring that adaptations respect local norms without perpetuating stereotypes (Hofstede, 2001).

Conclusion

This study advances our understanding of CQ as a pivotal competency for NESTs navigating the cultural and pedagogical complexities of Chinese university classrooms. Through the dynamic interplay of motivational, cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioral CQ dimensions, NESTs adapt their teaching strategies to align with Confucian-influenced learning norms and exam-oriented systems, fostering inclusive environments that enhance student engagement and intercultural competence. By integrating culturally responsive practices and respecting face-saving norms, NESTs bridge pedagogical gaps between Western student-centered approaches and local educational expectations, enriching the learning experience. CQ's malleability, evolving through iterative cultural engagement, challenges static conceptualizations and underscores its transformative potential in globalized education. The study advocates for CQ-focused professional development and collaborative approaches with local educators to ensure equitable, inclusive education.

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Table 1 Demographic Profiles of Participants

No.	Nationality	Credential	Age	Certificate	Years of Teaching in China
1	UK	BA	44	-	8
2	UK	BA	38	-	7
3	US	MA	57	TESOL	4
4	US	BA	54	TESOL	16
5	US	BA	-	TESOL	5
6	US	BA	67	-	12
7	US	BA	35	-	10
8	US	BA	-	-	7
9	Canada	BA	-	-	>3
10	US	BA	29	-	>3
11	UK	BA	33	-	>3
12	US	BA	24	TESOL	1
13	US	MA	35	-	5
14	US	BA	31	-	3
15	US	MA	35	TESOL	>3

Table 2 Cultural Intelligence (CQ) Framework in NESTs' Teaching Practices in China

CQ Dimension	Primary Theme	Sub-Themes/Strategies	Participant Evidence	Pedagogical Impact	Illustrative classroom move (if-then mechanism)
Motivational CQ	Cultural Exploration	Intrinsic interest in Chinese culture	"I came to immerse myself in a 5,000-year-old civilization" (P4)	Sustains long-term cultural adaptation	If motivated by interest in Chinese culture → incorporate historical references or cultural anecdotes into lessons to engage students.
			"Learning Mandarin helps me understand my students better" (P11)	Facilitates authentic teacher-student connections	If pursuing language learning → use simple Mandarin phrases during class to build empathy and encourage student responses.
	Professional Growth	Career advancement opportunities	"The respect Chinese students show teachers is unparalleled" (P12)	Enhances job satisfaction and retention	If seeking career growth through respect → leverage student-teacher hierarchy to model positive interactions and foster mutual respect.
			"Smaller classes here let me focus on pedagogy" (P5)	Promotes cross-cultural teaching skill development	If benefiting from smaller classes → design personalized activities that allow for deeper pedagogical experimentation.
Cognitive CQ	Learning Motivations	Exam-oriented culture	"Students ask 'Will this be on the test?' not 'Why is this important?'" (P8)	Necessitates explicit learning objective framing	If students are exam-focused → explicitly link lesson content to test formats at the start of each class.
			Extrinsic vs. intrinsic drivers	"Parents choose their majors for them" (P3)	Requires alternative assessment designs
	Classroom Dynamics	Passive participation patterns	"It takes weeks before they'll answer voluntarily" (P2)	Demands gradual participation scaffolding	If participation is passive → begin with anonymous polls or written responses before moving to verbal discussions.
			Face-saving behaviors	"Wrong answers make them physically shrink" (P14)	Influences error correction techniques

4.3 Article Three

Zhou, Z., Croucher, S. M., Li, M., & Hodis, G. M. (2026). Navigating leadership roles: Native English-speaking teachers in English language teaching in China. In A. Wiseman & J. McNaughtan (Eds.), *The Emerald handbook on international higher education: Navigating workforce and leadership changes in a digital age* (pp. 403–420). Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83549-788-320251025> (in press)

This chapter builds upon the previous two articles by adding data from five Chinese university leaders (CULs) alongside the perspectives of 45 Chinese students and 12 NESTs in China. It was submitted as a book chapter to *Emerald handbook on international higher education: Navigating workforce and leadership changes in a digital age*. This handbook is published by Emerald Publishing, known for producing high-quality, authoritative academic works. It fits well with the handbook's focus on leadership and workforce changes in international higher education in a globalized, digital world. As the leaders in the classrooms, NESTs have the potential to deeply influence the culture of learning through the many qualities essential to authentic leadership (Greenier & Whitehead, 2016).

By investigating the leadership roles of NESTs in China's tertiary education system from the perspectives of students, NESTs and CULs, this research provides a comprehensive landscape of NESTs' leadership practices in Chinese tertiary education. Leadership is shaped by cultural contexts (Miller, 2017), especially from non-western perspectives. How NESTs navigate their leadership roles in non-English contexts requires further research. Previous research has shown that successful leadership occurs within vertically aligned cultural systems in East Asia (Hiratsuka, 2023; Schenck & Waddey, 2017; Walker, 2015). However, under the influence of native speakerism, NESTs are often perceived as the "ideal teachers" in ELT (Holliday, 2015). This study explored how NESTs navigated their leadership roles in Chinese tertiary education, providing insights into international higher education.

Chapter 24

Navigating Leadership Roles: Native English-Speaking Teachers in English Language Teaching in China

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Abstract

This study investigates the leadership roles of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) in China's tertiary education system, examining their impact on students' language proficiency and cultural knowledge. Forty-five Chinese students, 15 NESTs, and five Chinese university leaders (CULs) from the southwest of China participated in the semi-structured interviews. The findings highlight NESTs' leadership roles in China's tertiary education, particularly in enhancing students' language skills and cultural knowledge. NESTs are valued for providing authentic language environments, innovative teaching methods, and rich cultural insights. Despite these positive contributions, NESTs encountered various challenges in their leadership roles. To address these challenges, investing in NESTs' professional development, promoting cultural sensitivity, and enhancing communication and collaboration among stakeholders are essential.

Keywords: Leadership role; native English-speaking teachers (NESTs); English language teaching; native-speakerism; cultural knowledge; teaching pedagogy

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Chapter Five Discussion

This study aims to explore the dynamics of teaching and learning between Chinese students and NESTs in Chinese tertiary education. This section presents the key findings of the three empirical studies, discusses the theoretical implications and recommendations for practice, and addresses the limitations of the current study in identifying potential areas for future research.

5.1 Students' Perceptions of NESTs' Instructional Practices

This section summarises the findings of three studies that explored students' perceptions of NESTs' pedagogical practices, CQ, and leadership roles within the Chinese education system. Collectively, these provided a comprehensive view of the opportunities and challenges that NESTs faced in teaching in China, providing a landscape of NEST teaching there.

The first article explored students' perceptions of NESTs' teaching practices through the theoretical lens of IBM. Students expressed mixed feelings about these practices, particularly in their evaluations of NESTs' teaching outcomes across affective, behavioral and cognitive learning dimensions. Although NESTs were praised for their innovative teaching methods, which reduced students' speaking anxiety through the mediation of perceived immediacy, some of their unintended misbehavioral approaches, led to cognitive learning challenges.

5.1.1 Perceived Immediacy in Affective and Behavioral Learning

Perceived immediacy refers to the psychological closeness that students feel towards their teachers (Kelly et al., 2022). Student reports suggested that their perceived immediacy with NESTs enhances affective and behavioral learning within the supportive learning environment created by NESTs.

The findings suggested that NESTs' emphasis on the practical use of language, particularly speaking, listening and understanding cultural contexts, played a significant role in improving students' language acquisition and real-world application of their skills. By using interactive teaching methods, NESTs created a dynamic and engaging learning environment that encouraged active participation and meaningful use of the language. Moreover, NESTs' pedagogical practices included offering personalized feedback, allowing preparation time for answering the questions, and fostering a supportive environment to avoid situations that may cause students to "lose face". These strategies directly contributed to perceived immediacy by reducing the psychological distance between the Chinese students and the NESTs. As a result, these teaching practices reduced students' speaking anxiety and fear of making mistakes, barriers that often prevent Chinese students from speaking English. This also further demonstrated that perceived immediacy has positive effects on affective learning, including reducing anxiety and increasing motivation (Foutz et al., 2021; Kelly et al., 2015).

Consequently, this sense of immediacy also boosted students' confidence in language learning, particularly in oral English classes. For some students, NESTs' immediacy behaviors encouraged greater participation and confidence, which they described as a shift from more reserved to more engaged learning behaviors. This underscores how teacher behaviors can shape students' affective learning outcomes (Weber et al., 2011), though the degree of change varies among individuals.

However, the findings also indicated that while perceived immediacy positively influenced affective and behavioral learning, its impact on cognitive learning remained limited. Students reported minimal gains in actual knowledge from the NESTs' courses. This is because cognitive learning outcomes in the Chinese educational context are often shaped by exam-driven objectives and "dealing with exams" (Liu, 2023, p. 4). This demonstrated a

potential limitation of the IBM framework when applied in exam-oriented educational settings and suggested the need for adaptations to address cultural factors that influence learning.

In summary, the perceived immediacy not only enhanced affective learning, such as increased confidence and reduced anxiety in speaking English, but also improved behavioral learning, such as active engagement and proactive questioning. Nevertheless, the limited impact on cognitive learning underscores the importance of balancing immediacy teaching approaches with academic rigor, especially in exam-focused contexts where NESTs often overlook students' academic needs (Mairi et al., 2018). Furthermore, these also addressed the diverse needs of students and promoted inclusivity in ELT.

5.1.2 Impact of Misbehaviors on Cognitive Learning

Instructor misbehavior is defined as teacher behavior that interferes with instruction and learning (Goodboy & Myers, 2015). In this study, students identified several misbehaviors that negatively impacted their cognitive learning, including simplistic instructional content, unstructured lectures, and inconsistent learning expectations.

Firstly, the use of overly simplistic materials failed to meet the cognitive learning needs of students, particularly those seeking content that is appropriate to their level of ability. This lack of challenge undermined their learning motivation and participation, leaving students unfulfilled and disengaged from the learning process. Such disengagement hindered their academic growth and satisfaction with their learning experience. This aligns with Fredricks et al. (2004), who emphasized that effective learning requires cognitive engagement, which is enhanced by materials that challenge students to think critically and apply their knowledge.

Secondly, students expressed a desire for writing tasks that were more practical and relevant, particularly those that were aligned with the development of academic writing skills required for English proficiency testing in the Chinese education system. Writing instruction

and writing tasks often had little perceived value for Chinese students. Students are more likely to invest effort in tasks that they perceived as valuable and disengage from those they perceive as irrelevant or lacking value (Ojeda-Hetch et al., 2022). This marked the importance of relevant instructional materials in improving students' engagement and learning outcomes.

Finally, unclear learning objectives led to confusion for some students, making it difficult to link assignments to their overall learning goals. This lack of clarity sometimes resulted in frustration and increased anxiety in writing tasks, which reduced both their enthusiasm for learning and their engagement with NESTs' courses. Some students described unstructured teaching styles as barriers to effective learning, categorizing these instances as instructional misbehaviors that could jeopardize their potential to master course material and undermine their overall competence (Baker & Goodboy, 2017). These concerns did not apply to all NESTs, but they illustrate how inconsistent practices can affect perceptions of teaching quality.

In conclusion, students valued NESTs' interactive teaching that focused on practical application, and fostered engagement and confidence, particularly in English-speaking classes. However, misbehaviors such as simplistic content, unstructured instruction, and unmet academic expectations undermined cognitive learning. This is consistent with previous research suggesting that instructors' misbehavior led to learning deficits, particularly among students who highly value their learning opportunities (Goodboy et al., 2018). Perceived immediacy serves as a critical link between teachers' behaviors and successful learning outcomes (Kelly et al., 2015; Kelly et al., 2019; Kelly et al., 2022; Ojeda-Hetch et al., 2022). Understanding and making use of this relationship can improve the effectiveness of teaching in a variety of educational settings.

5.2 The Role of NESTs' CQ in Teaching

The second article examined how NESTs adapted their teaching practices in Chinese classrooms by using their CQ. According to Earley and Ang (2003), CQ is the ability of individuals to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts and represents a form of situated intelligence in which adaptive activities are shaped by the values and beliefs of a specific society or culture. For NESTs teaching in China, CQ refers to their ability to adapt effectively to the Chinese educational system and interact meaningfully with Chinese students to optimize instructional outcomes. Reports from some NESTs indicated that CQ helped them to adapt more effectively to the Chinese educational context and achieved cultural fit, despite the challenges they faced.

5.2.1 CQ in NESTs' Adaptation

The findings indicated that NESTs had high levels of motivational CQ in teaching in China, while their cognitive CQ, metacognitive CQ, and behavioral CQ were enhanced by their teaching experiences.

Motivation CQ is a key factor in the integration of NESTs into the Chinese cultural and educational environment. Their intrinsic drive for cultural exploration and professional growth motivated them to teach in China and encouraged them to learn about Chinese cultural norms and educational practices. This finding demonstrates that intrinsic motivation can facilitate adaptability (Earley & Ang, 2003). The inner drive to understand and adapt to the Chinese system, enabled them to navigate cultural differences, make meaningful connections with students, and ultimately improve teaching effectiveness. This is consistent with previous research showing that intercultural interest improves teaching outcomes (Petrović, 2011; Mahasneh et al., 2019). However, the perceived lack of institutional support may hinder external motivation to explore the full potential of their CQ. This highlights the need for supportive structures to enhance the impact of CQ.

On the cognitive side, NESTs developed a good understanding of Chinese students' learning characteristics through close classroom observation and continuous self-learning. This understanding allowed them to better grasp students' learning motivations, expectations, behaviors, and challenges, which enabled them to discover students' potential and help them achieve academic success. These findings are aligned with Han et al. (2016), who pointed out that teachers' understanding played a crucial role in reducing learners' anxiety in language learning. However, the findings also suggested that the NESTs' cognitive CQ was hindered by language barriers, lack of knowledge of Chinese culture, inadequate training in teaching English across cultures, and lack of a repertoire of pedagogical knowledge and skills. These gaps limited their ability to gain deeper insights into Chinese learning culture.

Metacognitive CQ acts as a bridge or mediator between motivational CQ, cognitive CQ, and behavioral CQ and occurs in the brain before action takes place. It involves the mental processes of planning and adapting cultural understanding and aligning it with intrinsic motivations to inform culturally adaptive behaviors (Ang et al., 2007). For NESTs, the application of metacognitive CQ was essential after understanding the learning characteristics of Chinese students, as it enabled them to make strategic adjustments. This high-level cognitive planning required sensitivity to cultural nuances and mindfulness of the cultural context, before acting in a new environment. As Devitt (2014) explained, constantly assessing and reassessing cultural knowledge and making informed decisions about how to act appropriately are essential components of metacognition. Several NESTs noted that flexibility, patience, and cultural openness foster an inclusive, culturally sensitive, and effective learning environment for Chinese students. This is consistent with the findings of Herrera (2021), who examined the relationship between self-efficacy, CQ, and pedagogical support for EFL teachers in China, and emphasised the positive influence of metacognitive

CQ on teaching effectiveness. While metacognitive CQ promotes reflection and planning, behavioral CQ translates these insights into teaching practice.

Behavioral CQ focuses on NESTs' adaptation of teaching methods to meet cultural expectations to enhance the learning experience of Chinese students. Some NESTs described adapting their teaching methods by integrating Chinese cultural elements, differentiating strategies, and responding to students' needs, which they felt helped them navigate cultural differences more effectively. This cultural responsiveness fostered a sense of trust and mutual understanding between NESTs and Chinese students, reducing the psychological distance between them. By demonstrating sensitivity to cultural nuances and adapting their teaching methods to meet students' expectations, NESTs created a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. This closer connection encouraged students to participate more actively in the classroom. In these cases, both the learning experience and the relationships between NESTs and students were strengthened. This highlights the importance of integrating students' cultural backgrounds into their teaching practice in order to foster more effective and inclusive learning environments (Chauhan et al., 2024).

5.2.2 Challenges for NESTs to Use CQ

Despite these strengths, NESTs faced significant challenges in making full use of their CQ in the Chinese educational context. The exam-driven orientation within Chinese higher education, with its strong emphasis on test scores, often constrained opportunities to foster active participation and holistic learning, though some students actively sought out these opportunities. Language barriers further complicated communication with students and Chinese colleagues. In addition, limited access to institutional information, exacerbated feelings of isolation, inadequate administrative support, including limited professional development and inadequate induction programmes. These hindered NESTs' ability to navigate institutional systems and achieve professional development. As Bourgeois and Zare

(2023) articulated, that in the absence of institutional programs and resources, foreign-born leadership educators relied on informal networks and personal resilience.

In conclusion, generally NESTs demonstrated high CQ across motivational, cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioral dimensions, reflecting their adaptability in the Chinese context. These findings support the CQ framework by demonstrating that CQ is critical for adaptability in cross-cultural settings. However, the findings also extend CQ theory by demonstrating that there are external barriers that limit the impact of CQ on teaching effectiveness. Addressing these barriers can enable institutions to better support NESTs, thereby improving teaching effectiveness and fostering a more inclusive and dynamic learning environment for students.

5.3 CULs Perspectives on NESTs' Practices

The third empirical study examined how NESTs play leadership roles in ELT in China from the perspective of CULs, using the framework of native-speakerism. Compared with Chinese English teachers, NESTs brought unique strengths and contributions. The study demonstrated NESTs' leadership role in improving students' language skills and cultural knowledge, while also addressing CULs' concerns about some managing NESTs, who displayed certain teaching misbehaviors and unprofessional conduct.

5.3.1 Contributions of NESTs' Teaching Practices

From the observations of CULs, many NESTs were perceived as bringing unique strengths that could enhance their leadership role in ELT. NESTs excelled in English language skills, providing students with authentic pronunciation and expressions that helped develop language competence. They were valued for their ability to create immersive language environments that enhanced students' oral and listening skills. This is consistent with the findings of Echiverri et al. (2021), which indicated that students improve their

authentic pronunciation within NESTs' classrooms and benefit from more engaging teaching methods that increase the clarity of instruction and learning effectiveness.

Additionally, their cultural insights introduced global perspectives, enriching students' understanding of cultural diversity while developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills. They acted as cultural ambassadors, providing students with global perspectives and authentic cultural contexts. They are seen as "authentic, walking, breathing resources about other cultures" (Barratt & Kontra, 2011, p. 20).

In terms of pedagogy, NESTs used innovative and flexible teaching methods that encouraged creativity and active participation in the classroom. NESTs employed flexible and student-centered teaching approaches that encouraged independent thinking and active classroom participation. They fostered a positive classroom atmosphere where students felt comfortable, confident, and able to speak openly without fear of making mistakes. This reflects NESTs' preference for a student-centered, task-based, and communicative approach to teaching (Zeng & Song, 2012).

Beyond the formal instruction, NESTs contributed to extracurricular activities, such as English corners, reading groups, and the establishment of libraries, which provided students with additional opportunities to practice their language skills and engage in meaningful learning experiences. Nam et al. (2023) stated that English corners serve as bridges across cultural distances, improving students' English proficiency, fostering intercultural competence, and cultivating cosmopolitan worldviews.

In summary, NESTs played a vital leadership role in ELT by leveraging their strengths in language proficiency, cultural insight, and innovative teaching methods. They enhanced students' language skills, promoted cultural understanding, and created student-centered learning environments. Beyond the classroom, their contributions to extracurricular activities

further enriched students' language skills and cultural exposure, highlighting their significant impact on tertiary education in China.

5.3.2 Concerns Regarding NESTs' Teaching Practice

According to the feedback from the CULs, several problems were identified in the teaching practices of NESTs in Chinese universities. Firstly, CULs expressed concern that a minority of NESTs neglected their teaching duties, such as through absenteeism. These cases were viewed as misconduct that violated school regulations and ethical standards and undermined trust in their professionalism. As noted by Adu and Apambilla (2024), teacher absenteeism is a significant issue in education that requires urgent attention, as quality and effective education cannot be achieved without the active involvement of teachers.

Secondly, the CULs identified deficiencies in classroom management and a lack of clear pedagogical objectives in some NESTs. Ineffective classroom management reduced student engagement, while unclear teaching objectives hindered the organisation of lessons according to students' language learning needs. These deficiencies led to poor student concentration and learning outcomes, further undermining the authority and leadership of the NESTs in the classroom. Franklin and Harrington (2019) noted that ineffective classroom practices can undermine teachers' leadership and credibility if students perceive the classroom as chaotic or unstructured, further weakening the teacher's role as a leader and authority figure.

Thirdly, the practice of "solo teaching" by NESTs, characterised by limited interaction and engagement with students, was another concern. This lack of interaction resulted in disengaged students who often resorted to distractions such as using mobile phones during class. Interactive and student-centered teaching methods are crucial in language education to maintain engagement and improve learning outcomes. The inability of some NESTs to create such an environment pointed to gaps in certain teaching practices and challenged their ability to maintain a leadership role in the classroom. According to Goodboy and Myers (2015),

boring lectures were one of the instructor's misbehaviors that hindered students' cognitive learning.

Finally, cultural insensitivity was also a major concern. CULs expressed concern that NESTs discussed sensitive topics such as religion, which violated China's strict rules against religious proselytising in educational institutions. These actions breached Chinese regulations. CULs emphasised the need for greater cultural awareness and sensitivity among NESTs to ensure compliance with institutional policies and reduce administrative difficulties. Chauhan et al. (2024) stressed the role of cultural sensitivity in promoting inclusion and mitigating language stress.

In summary, the CULs identified several problems in the teaching practices of some NESTs in Chinese universities, such as neglect of teaching duties, ineffective classroom management, and unclear teaching objectives. While these issues were not universal, they raised concerns about professionalism and potential impacts on student learning outcomes. Cultural insensitivity also violated institutional regulations and damaged NEST's leadership role in ELT. These concerns underline a wider critique of native speakerism, which often idealises NESTs for their linguistic identity without ensuring adequate training in cultural awareness. Addressing these issues is crucial to improving the teaching effectiveness of NESTs and optimizing their leadership role in ELT.

5.4 Theoretical Implications

In this section, the author incorporates the theoretical implications from the three articles, which include the theories of IBM, CQ, and native speakerism. Collectively, these studies test and extend theories of intercultural communication in a broader context.

5.4.1 Evaluation and Expanding IBM

The findings suggest that NESTs' behaviors affect their teaching effectiveness, as indicated by students' affective, behavioral, and cognitive learning experiences. The revised

IBM explores the positive role of perceived immediacy as a mediator that can enhance students' affective learning in Chinese classrooms. This is consistent with the previous research that perceived immediacy is positively correlated with affective learning (Foutz et al., 2021; Kelly & Gaytan, 2020; Kelly et al., 2015). Second, the results also show that the perceived immediacy has positive effects on students' learning behaviors, such as active engagement in class. However, the perceived misbehaviors of some NESTs interfere with students' cognitive learning (Goodboy et al., 2018). Third, the current research shows a positive correlation between affective and behavioral learning, while cognitive learning shows no significant correlation. Previous research has shown that behavioral learning is positively related to affective learning, cognitive learning and teacher behaviors such as humour (Wanzer & Frymier, 1999). However, the relationship between affective, behavioral, and cognitive learning needs further research.

Furthermore, IBM demonstrates flexibility and broader applicability in both qualitative and quantitative research in different cultural contexts. Previous studies within the framework of IBM have primarily been conducted in quantitative settings in American classrooms (Kelly & Gaytan, 2020; Kelly et al., 2019). The current study employs qualitative research by interpreting Chinese students' learning experiences with NESTs, within the framework of IBM. This suggests that application of IBM provides deeper insights into the dynamics of instructional communication in Chinese tertiary education.

In addition, the findings highlight the importance of addressing communication anxiety in intercultural communication through cultural awareness and sensitivity. This can promote a more inclusive and respectful classroom environment (Le Thi, 2023), as mutual understanding enhances effective communication. There is also a need for mutual adaptation of teaching and learning philosophies to different cultural contexts. Culturally responsive teaching methods appear to be more effective in Chinese cultural settings in optimizing

instructional outcomes, such as student engagement. Taken together, these findings further demonstrate the value of integrating cultural synergy into IBM to enhance its adaptability and effectiveness in multilingual and multicultural classrooms.

5.4.2 Exploring CQ and Instructional Outcomes

First and foremost, this study demonstrates the critical role of CQ in enhancing the teaching effectiveness of NESTs in Chinese universities. The findings indicate that NESTs with higher levels of CQ are better able to adapt culturally responsive teaching methods. For example, they integrated Chinese cultural elements into their teaching and adjusted their teaching strategies based on students' feedback and expectations. However, the direct impact of CQ on teaching effectiveness remains unclear and requires further research.

In addition, the study shows positive correlations between the four dimensions of CQ—motivational, cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioral CQ in a qualitative setting. It provides a deeper exploration of why NESTs are motivated to teach in China, and how they understand Chinese cultural norms, what coping strategies they use, and how they behave in the Chinese classroom to achieve cultural fit to meet students' learning needs. These findings contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of CQ as an important factor in better adapting to different cultural contexts.

Furthermore, the current study conducted among NESTs based in China provides a new perspective for exploring CQ, moving beyond the focus on international students (Engle & Crowne, 2013; Iskhakova, 2018; Ott & Michailova, 2018). This study broadens the scope by exploring how CQ shapes the professional experiences and teaching practices of NESTs in China. By focusing on educators, the study demonstrates how CQ influences the professional integration of NESTs, including their ability to implement culturally responsive teaching strategies and adapt to the expectations of students and institutions in different cultures.

Despite the relatively high levels of CQ, NESTs still faced significant challenges in their teaching processes in China. These challenges include insufficient institutional support, emotional, academic, and language barriers. This lack of support reduced in some, their motivation to teach, which in turn affected their teaching effectiveness. This perceived support can act as a mediator between CQ and teaching effectiveness. Future research could further explore the mediating effect of perceived support on this relationship and provide deeper insights into how this perceived support influences cross-cultural teaching effectiveness.

5.4.3 Challenging Native Speakerism in ELT

This study challenges the ideology of native speakerism in ELT by examining the leadership role of NESTs in Chinese tertiary education. Although NESTs are often regarded as ideal models for language and cultural learning due to their ability to create authentic English language environments and use innovative teaching methods, the findings highlight significant limitations of this ideology. These limitations include unmet student learning expectations, perceived misbehaviors, cultural insensitivity, and poor teaching performance in some NESTs. This evidence challenges the assumption that native speakers are inherently the best teachers of a language.

This critique aligns with Holliday's (2015) argument that native speakerism perpetuates cultural disbelief and commodifies teachers, reducing their role to a simplistic linguistic identity. Furthermore, Phillipson (2016) emphasized that monolingual approaches to language teaching are "invalid cognitively, linguistically, and pedagogically" (p. 86). These critiques reinforce the need for a paradigm shift in ELT, moving away from a reliance on linguistic identity and towards a focus on pedagogical expertise, cultural sensitivity, and a comprehensive understanding of students' learning needs.

By prioritizing pedagogical skills, intercultural understanding, and a broad understanding of students' learning expectations, this shift would promote more inclusive and equitable practices in ELT. Such an approach will benefit students by meeting their diverse needs and creating a more diverse and inclusive educational environment (Akintayo et al., 2024). It will also raise the standard of education in globalized contexts and create a conducive learning environment for students to better adapt to this fast-paced and interconnected world (Ekanayake et al., 2020).

5.5 Recommendations for Practice

This study provides several practical recommendations to optimize the teaching practices of NESTs in Chinese tertiary education, focusing on bridging communication gaps and providing academic support. These recommendations are in line with the core recommendations for fostering an effective educational environment where a considerate administrative style and support for teachers are provided (Aslanargun, 2015). These measures aim to promote an inclusive, effective, and meaningful learning environment for students and NESTs.

5.5.1 Improve Communication Systems

First and foremost, the study identified a lack of effective communication channels between NESTs and university administrators. This gap highlights the importance of effective communication, which not only enhances individual and collective productivity but also builds trust and supports professional development through open communication with leadership and strong mentoring relationships (Uslu, 2017).

To address this gap, universities should implement targeted measures to strengthen communication systems, such as establishing structured platforms, such as online portals or weekly updates, to provide NESTs with clear information on policies and timelines.

Additionally, each NEST could be assigned a liaison teaching assistant who is fluent in both

English and Mandarin, to act as a bridge between the NESTs and the administration. This teaching assistant would be responsible for providing immediate updates, clarifying institutional policies, and assisting NESTs with any logistical or cultural challenges they may encounter.

These measures would ensure that NESTs receive timely updates and clear policy guidance while facilitating their cultural and logistical adaptation. In return, this would foster a more collaborative and inclusive environment. This recommendation aligns with Zeng's (2024) findings, which underscored the importance of improving the speed and accuracy of information transfer to address administrative challenges in Chinese higher education.

5.5.2 Design Extracurricular Activities to Foster Engagement

Chinese universities should provide more diverse learning opportunities for students to interact with NESTs on campus. The findings indicate that perceived immediacy enhances students' learning experiences. To further promote this immediacy, institutions could design more extracurricular activities to encourage interaction between NESTs and students. For example, organizing regular English corners where students can practice English in a casual setting or reading groups that encourage discussions of academic topics, could significantly improve students' exposure to the language.

These initiatives would not only improve English language skills but also help to bridge cultural and psychological gaps and build a stronger relationship between NESTs and students. This is consistent with the findings of Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), who emphasised that emotional and psychological gaps in language learning environments can be addressed through positive student-teacher interactions. Similarly, Albayrak and Şener (2021) demonstrated the motivational impact of extracurricular activities on foreign language learning, and further support for such initiatives could improve both linguistic and interpersonal outcomes.

5.5.3 Provide Culturally Responsive Professional Development

The provision of professional development programs should focus on equipping NESTs with skills tailored to the Chinese context. This is particularly important because NESTs often face the challenge in teaching Chinese students, whose learning styles and educational expectations differ from those in their home countries. Targeted training programs could improve their teaching effectiveness by emphasizing culturally responsive teaching.

Culturally responsive teaching is defined as “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (Gay, 2002, p. 106). To achieve this, culturally responsive training programs should include workshops on understanding Chinese classroom dynamics, including student expectations, cultural norms, and learning behaviors. These workshops would enable NESTs to adapt their teaching methods to better meet students’ needs, foster effective classroom communication, and create a supportive learning environment.

Previous research has shown that culturally responsive strategies increase classroom participation and improve students' motivation and communication skills (Chen & Yang, 2017). Gay (2002) identified five essential components of culturally responsive teaching: developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity; incorporating ethnic and cultural diversity content into the curriculum; creating caring and building supportive learning communities; communicating effectively with diverse students; and tailoring instruction to address cultural differences. These strategies are critical for bridging cultural gaps and promoting meaningful learning experiences for Chinese students.

Additionally, the training should address classroom management strategies, with a particular focus on dealing with large classes and engaging passive learners in the Chinese educational context. As NESTs face significant challenges in addressing individual student needs due to large class sizes, mixed proficiency levels, and limited contact time, which

affect student motivation, engagement, and behavior (Lee & Chowdhury, 2018). Training programs should emphasize the importance of interactive teaching techniques and the use of technology to encourage participation. Research findings confirm that these strategies can effectively increase learner engagement and participation. Similarly, Yang (2022) pointed out the effectiveness of interactive teaching and technology in increasing learner engagement and participation.

5.5.4 Offer Language Training to Enhance Acculturation

To further support NESTs, universities should offer language training programs to help the teachers develop Mandarin proficiency. Limited language skills often hinder NESTs from building connections within the Chinese community and fully understanding the Chinese educational culture. While many rely on self-study or classroom observation to understand students' learning behaviors, these are often insufficient for addressing deeper cultural nuances.

Language training programs tailored to the needs of NESTs could focus on the practical use of Mandarin for classroom interactions. Complementary cultural exchange activities, such as peer learning initiatives or joint workshops. NESTs who learned the local language were able to model language learning for students, which improved engagement and reduced misunderstandings (Copland et al., 2016). By fostering language skills and cultural awareness, these initiatives would enable NESTs to build stronger relationships with students and colleagues, promote inclusive teaching practices, and contribute to a cohesive academic environment.

5.5.5 Broaden Recruitment Practices to Prioritize Teaching Competence

Finally, institutions should broaden their recruitment practices beyond simply English native speakers and prioritise their pedagogical competence and cultural sensitivity over language status. As the ideology of native speakerism, that the ideal or the best English

language teachers are NESTs, has been challenged in ELT (Feng & Zhang, 2022; Holliday, 2015; Ng, 2018; Silalahi, 2019), it has become clear that professional competence is considered more important than linguistic identity (Wang et al., 2020).

Flexible and inclusive recruitment strategies should also include comprehensive assessments of teaching ability, and alignment with institutional goals should be considered. As inclusive recruitment prioritized qualifications, diversity, and innovation, it can foster a dynamic academic environment, enhance global competitiveness and meet the evolving needs of higher education institutions (Achmad & Widiastuti, 2024).

In summary, to improve the effectiveness of NESTs and foster a dynamic academic environment, universities can prioritize communication, engagement, cultural responsiveness, language training, and inclusive recruitment. Strengthening communication channels can bridge gaps between NESTs and administrators, while extracurricular activities promote meaningful student-teacher interactions and cultural exchange. Culturally responsive professional development enables NESTs to better adapt to the Chinese educational context and improve teaching effectiveness. Language training supports NESTs' acculturation into the Chinese education system. Finally, inclusive recruitment that prioritizes pedagogical competence and diversity ensures alignment with institutional goals and fosters innovation and global competitiveness. Collectively, these measures create an inclusive, adaptive, and globally oriented educational environment.

5.6 Limitations and Future Directions

This section discusses the limitations of the three articles and suggests some potential considerations for future research. While these studies provide insights, they are not without challenges that need to be addressed to improve the validity and applicability of future studies.

5.6.1 Limitations

The present study has limitations due to methodological constraints and the COVID-19 pandemic and the reliance on self-reported data and virtual data collection. These challenges highlight the need for more comprehensive methods in future research.

Firstly, this study used a qualitative approach and relied on self-reported data. While qualitative approaches can provide deep insights into participants' perspectives, they may have potential personal biases (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The lack of quantitative measures limits the ability to statistically evaluate the instructional outcomes of the NESTs, thus reducing the scope for more generalizable conclusions.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic further increased the difficulties of recruiting the participants. The data collection, conducted between June and December 2022 and, due to pandemic-related constraints, relied primarily on online interviews conducted via video and voice call. This reliance on virtual interviews made it difficult to establish rapport and capture non-verbal cues (Keen et al., 2022). These factors may have influenced participants' willingness to fully share their experiences.

Finally, another limiting factor is the relatively small sample size of NESTs. As some universities in Southwest China had few or no NESTs during this period, this posed a challenge for participant recruitment. Therefore, the small sample size and the limitations of online data collection may have resulted in less comprehensive and representative data.

5.6.2 Future Research

Future research should address existing limitations by incorporating mixed methods and longitudinal studies, and by exploring cultural synergy frameworks. These approaches would provide a more comprehensive and representative understanding of the NEST experience and its impact in different educational settings.

At first, future research could include participants from a wider range of regions and educational settings in China. As the current study focused on regions with a limited number of NESTs mainly teaching speaking and writing courses, extending the study beyond the Southwest region might have differences in cultural expectations, institutional structures, and support for NESTs. In addition, the inclusion of non-traditional classroom settings, such as online learning or extracurricular activities, would further broaden the scope of future research.

Furthermore, the use of mixed methods combining qualitative and quantitative measures would provide a more balanced and rigorous analysis of the contributions of NESTs. While qualitative methods provide in-depth insights into individual experiences and perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), the addition of quantitative data would enable researchers to statistically assess the broader impact of NESTs on teaching effectiveness and educational outcomes. For example, future studies could measure how teacher behavior and misbehavior affect student learning outcomes through the mediating effect of perceived immediacy in Chinese higher education. Similarly, quantitative methods could be used to explore the relationship between NESTs' CQ and their teaching outcomes. This combination of methods would lead to a more nuanced and generalisable understanding of the role of NESTs in Chinese higher education.

Third, longitudinal research is particularly important for capturing the dynamic development of NESTs' CQ and pedagogical strategies over time. This is because longitudinal designs allow researchers to track changes and growth in their cultural adaptation and teaching practices. For example, future research could explore how NESTs' CQ develops as they gain more experience in Chinese classrooms or how their teaching strategies adapt to meet the needs of Chinese students. Longitudinal studies could also identify critical periods in NESTs' adaptation processes and highlight the long-term effects of

institutional support, cultural training, and mentoring programs. Longitudinal studies have “the capacity for a rich and flexible engagement with time” (Neale, 2020, p.2). By examining these developments over time, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how NESTs navigate and contribute to cross-cultural educational environments.

Additionally, future research could explore practical ways of integrating cultural synergistic methods, such as culturally responsive teaching methods, into classroom practice. This could be achieved through comparative studies that analyze the differences and effectiveness between cultural synergy frameworks and traditional teaching methods. Research could focus on how these frameworks enhance cultural understanding between NESTs and students, improve classroom interactions, and optimize teaching outcomes, such as student engagement and academic performance. Such studies would provide valuable insights into the application of cultural synergy frameworks and help develop statistical support for teacher training and curriculum design.

In summary, this section discusses the limitations of the study, including the reliance on qualitative data, pandemic-related challenges, and a small sample size, which affected the comprehensiveness and generalisability of the findings. To address these limitations, future research should increase the diversity of participants and use mixed methods for a more comprehensive analysis. In addition, exploring longitudinal designs and cultural synergy frameworks may deepen understanding and improve cross-cultural teaching practices. Ultimately, such research would play a crucial role in advancing intercultural education and fostering global competence in an increasingly interconnected world.

Chapter Six Conclusion

This study explored the teaching and learning dynamics between NESTs and Chinese students in tertiary education, focusing on pedagogical practices, CQ, and NESTs' leadership roles in ELT. Through an analysis of students' perceptions, NESTs' adaptation strategies, and Chinese University Leaders' (CULs) perspectives, the study highlights both the benefits and challenges of NEST-led instruction in China. Although the information gathering for this research was conducted during a global pandemic, it provides a fairly comprehensive understanding of the instructional communication between NESTs and students in Chinese tertiary institutions. By combining the perspectives of these groups, this study addresses research gaps by articulating the relationship of cultural, pedagogical, and institutional dynamics, thereby enriching the literature on instructional communication in culturally diverse settings.

By listening to students' voices, this study found that perceived immediacy positively influences their affective and behavioural learning experience with NESTs, increasing students' learning confidence, motivation, and engagement in ELT. However, instructional misalignments, such as simplistic content, unstructured lessons, and a lack of academic rigor, negatively affect cognitive learning. The findings suggest that while innovative teaching methods are valued, culturally responsive teaching methods are better aligned with Chinese students' learning expectations and test-driven learning culture to be optimized the teaching effectiveness of NESTs in culturally diverse classrooms. This emphasizes the importance of culturally responsive teaching methods in culturally diverse educational settings.

In addition, NESTs demonstrated great adaptability and flexibility in teaching through their high CQ but faced significant challenges. CQ plays a pivotal role in shaping NESTs' teaching effectiveness, which enabled them to interpret cultural norms, adjust instructional strategies, and foster meaningful student interactions. While motivational CQ supported their

cultural adaptation in Chinese classrooms, cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioral CQ were enhanced by their teaching experiences. Despite these strengths, language barriers, limited institutional support, and cultural differences in cultures of learning pose challenges to fully leveraging CQ for effective instruction. This also highlights the mediating effect of the institutional support between CQ and teaching effectiveness in cross-cultural environments.

From an institutional perspective, CULs valued NESTs for their authentic English language skills and cultural insights and recognised their leadership role in fostering an immersive learning environment with active participation and engagement, cultivating critical thinking, and developing global perspectives. However, in certain instances, issues such as absenteeism, boring lectures, and cultural insensitivity, hampered their teaching effectiveness, underscoring the need for structured professional development. These findings challenge the assumption that native speaker status equates to teaching abilities. Conversely, pedagogical expertise and cultural sensitivity are essential qualifications for effective teaching in ELT.

Theoretically, this study extends IBM by demonstrating that perceived immediacy influences affective learning and behavioral engagement, which provides new insights into student-teacher dynamics in intercultural classrooms. It also explores the flexibility and broader applicability of IBM to qualitative research in different cultural contexts and advocates the integration of cultural synergy into IBM to enhance its adaptability and effectiveness in multilingual and multicultural classrooms. Furthermore, this research broadens CQ research by shifting the focus from international students to foreign educators, showing the role of CQ in teaching adaptation and effectiveness in different cultural settings. Additionally, the study challenges the ideology of native speakerism in ELT and stresses that native speaker status alone does not guarantee effective teaching. Students may become disillusioned if teachers with minimal qualifications are hired. Success in teaching requires extensive training, strong language skills, cultural awareness, and an in-depth understanding

of students' learning needs and expectations. By focusing on these essential skills, rather than on native speaker status alone, we can improve language education worldwide, leading to more meaningful and successful learning experiences for all students.

The findings offer several practical recommendations for universities and policymakers to optimize the teaching effectiveness of NESTs in Chinese tertiary education. These include strengthening communication between NESTs and institutions, promoting meaningful student-teacher interactions and cultural exchanges beyond the classroom, providing culturally responsive professional development, offering language training for NESTs, and adopting inclusive recruitment practices to align with institutional goals while fostering innovation and global competitiveness. Taken together, these measures contribute to a more inclusive, adaptable, meaningful, and globally oriented educational environment.

Despite the contributions, this research has limitations due to its qualitative approach and COVID-19-related limitations. The lack of quantitative measures limited the generalisability of the findings, while virtual interviews limited rapport building and analysis of nonverbal cues. In addition, the small sample size of the NESTs, particularly in southwest China, posed recruitment challenges.

Future research should increase the diversity of participants, use mixed methods and explore longitudinal designs to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of NESTs in international educational settings. The cultural synergy of IBM frameworks and perceived institutional support for teaching effectiveness and CQ can be explored. In addition, the inclusion of quantitative measures of learning outcomes would further validate teaching effectiveness. Addressing these gaps will advance intercultural education and support the development of globally competent educators in an increasingly interconnected world.

In summary, this study explores NESTs' teaching practices, cultural adaptability, and leadership roles in Chinese tertiary education, shedding light on the interplay between pedagogy, institutional structures, and cultural expectations. By exploring student perceptions, NESTs' adaptation strategies, and institutional perspectives, it underscores the importance of cultural responsiveness, structured support, and pedagogical expertise in optimizing instructional effectiveness. As international education continues to expand, the ability of educators to navigate cultural differences, adapt teaching methods, and engage with diverse student populations is more important than ever. This study emphasizes the need for culturally responsive teaching, pedagogical training, and institutional support to enhance the effectiveness of NESTs in Chinese higher education. By addressing instructional challenges and professional development needs, these findings contribute to the ongoing discussion on intercultural communication and instructional communication in an increasingly globalized academic landscape.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 (A) Information Sheet (English)



School of Communication, Journalism & Marketing
Massey University

INFORMATION SHEET

Project title:

A Cultural Learning Approach to Acculturation: Teaching and Learning between Native English-Speaking Teachers and Chinese University Students in Southwest China

Researcher Introduction

My name is Zhidan Zhou, a Ph.D. student in the School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing, Massey University, New Zealand. My current project is to examine the teaching and learning between native English-speaking teachers and university students in China.

Invitation

I am cordially inviting you to participate in this study.

The purpose of the study

The aim of this research is to seek answers to the following questions:

1. How do native English-speaking teachers acculturate themselves in teaching English in China?
2. How do the Chinese students adapt themselves to the native English-speaking teachers' teaching?
3. What challenges do native English-speaking teachers encounter in the process of acculturation in teaching English in China?
4. What strategies do native English-speaking teachers and Chinese students adopt in the process of teaching and learning?
5. What are the discrepancies in expectations between native English-speaking teachers and Chinese students in terms of classroom performance?

The research will adopt an interview approach to obtain insights into the teaching and learning between native English-speaking teachers and Chinese students.

Participant identification and recruitment

The researcher will interview 15 native English-speaking teachers, 45 Chinese students, and five Chinese university leaders. Participants will be interviewed face to face in terms of teaching and learning between native English-speaking teachers and Chinese students in universities in China.

Your participation would be greatly appreciated and helpful in building an understanding of the teaching and learning between native English-speaking teachers and Chinese students. This knowledge is expected to assist other expatriate teachers as they prepare to teach English in China and help universities gain more knowledge about the teaching and acculturation of expatriate teachers.

If you wish to take part in the research, please sign the consent form attached to this letter. Participants who would like a summary of the study will receive one on completion of the thesis.

No participants will be identified in the reporting of this research. Only the researcher can get access to the interview transcripts.

All participants are free to choose how they would like to answer questions, or not to answer questions, or to withdraw from the interview.

Research contact details

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project can be raised with the thesis supervisors.

Professor Stephen Croucher, email (S.Croucher@massey.ac.nz)

Associate Professor Mingsheng Li, email (M.S.Li@massey.ac.nz)

Senior Lecturer Georgeta (Mimi) Hodis, email (gmhodis@massey.ac.nz)

School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing, Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 4000025686. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr. Gerald Harrison, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83570, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

Thank you very much for considering this invitation.

Zhidan Zhou

Telephone: 86 18287183198

Email: zhidan.zhou.2@uni.massey.ac.nz

School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing

Massey University New Zealand

Appendix 1 (B) Information Sheet (Chinese)

 <p>MASSEY UNIVERSITY TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND</p>	<p>MASSEY BUSINESS SCHOOL TE KURA WHAI PAKIHI</p>	<p>School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing Massey Business School Massey University, New Zealand 新西兰梅西大学商学部 传播、新闻、市场营销学院</p>
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研究项目简介

学习和适应新文化：中国西南地区以英语为母语的教师与大学生之间的教与学

研究人简介：

我叫周志丹，是新西兰梅西大学传播、新闻及市场营销学院的在读博士。我目前的项目是研究中国西南地区以英语为母语的教师 and 大学生之间的教与学。

本人诚挚的邀请您参加我的研究。

研究目的：

本研究主要解决以下几个问题：

1. 在中国西南地区高校的英语教学中，英语外教是如何适应中国文化和教学的？
2. 中国学生如何适应以英语外教的教学的？
3. 英语外教在中国的英语教学中，在文化适应过程中遇到了哪些挑战？
4. 英语外教和中国学生在教与学的过程中采取了什么策略去应对这些挑战？
5. 以英语为母语的教师和中国学生期望有哪些差异？

本研究将采用访谈的方式来了解以英语外教和中国学生之间的教与学的情况。

采访对象:

本研究将采访十五位英语外教, 四十五名中国学生, 五位中国大学领导。本研究将对西南地区高校英语外教和中国大学生之间的教学和学习进行面对面的访谈。

非常感谢您能参与本研究, 您的参与将极大地帮助以英语为母语的教师和中国学生之间的教学和学习的研究, 为其他外籍教师或者准备在中国教授英语的外籍教师提供有利帮助, 同时帮助大学获得更多关于外籍教师教学和文化适应的知识为高校外籍教师的管理提供参考依据。

如果你愿意参加研究, 请在本信所附的同意书上签字。

为了保证您的隐私, 所有参与者的名字都不会出现在研究报告中, 只有本人及导师可以接触到原始数据, 并且只有本人才有机会接触到存储数据的电脑。

所有参与者都可以自由选择如何回答问题, 或不回答问题, 或退出采访。

详细联系方式:

你如果对本研究有任何疑问, 请联系我的导师, 联系方式如下:

Stephen Croucher 教授, 电子邮箱: (S.Croucher@massey.ac.nz)

黎明生副教授, 电子邮箱: (M.S.Li@massey.ac.nz),

Georgeta (Mimi) Hodis 高级讲师, 电子邮箱: (gmhodis@massey.ac.nz).

本研究已经得到梅西大学人类伦理道德委员会的审查和批准, 申请号为 Southern B, 4000025686. 如果您对本研究有任何疑问, 请联系梅西大学人类伦理道德委员会主席 Gerald Harrison 博士, 联系电话 +64 6 356 9099 转 83570, 电子邮箱 humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz.

再次感谢您的参与!

梅西大学传播、新闻及市场营销学院

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Appendix 2 (A) Participant Consent Form (English)



School of Communication, Journalism & Marketing

Massey University

A Cultural Learning Approach to Acculturation: Teaching and Learning between Native English-Speaking Teachers and University Students in Southwest China

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Information Sheet attached. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

1. I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.
2. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ [print full name] _____ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 2 (B) Participant Consent Form (Chinese)



School of Communication,
Journalism and Marketing, Massey
Business School
Massey University, New Zealand
新西兰梅西大学商学部
传播、新闻、市场营销学院

项目名称

学习和适应新文化：中国西南地区以英语为母语的教师与大学生之间的教与学

项目参与同意书

我已经收到和阅读了该项目的研究简介，详细了解了本研究的内容，并就有疑问的地方进行了询问，对这些问题的回答我很满意，我理解如果还有问题，我任何时候都可以再询问。我有足够的时间考虑是否参加这项研究，我明白参与是自愿的，并且可以在任何时候退出这项研究。

1. 我同意/不同意对采访进行录音。
2. 我同意在信息表中规定的条件下参与本研究。

签名： _____

日期： _____

Appendix 3 Interview Questions for Chinese University Students



MASSEY
BUSINESS
SCHOOL
TE KURA WHAI PAKIHI

School of
Communication,
Journalism and
Marketing
Massey Business
School
Massey University,
New Zealand
新西兰梅西大学商学
部
传播、新闻、市场营
销学院

Interview Questions for Chinese University Students

中国大学生访谈问卷

Part One: Demographic and Background Information 个人背景信息:

1. Gender 性别:

Male 男

Female 女

2. Ethnicity 民族

3. Age 年龄

4. Major of your study 专业

5. Your hometown 家乡

6. You are a 你是一名_____ (check ✓)

First-year student 大一学生

Second-year student 大二学生

Third-year student 大三学生

Fourth-year student 大四学生

7. Course name 外教课程名称

Part Two: Learning Experience 学习经历

1. In your learning experience, what are the main differences in teaching between native English-speaking teachers and Chinese teachers of English? Which one do you prefer? If you could choose, which one would you choose? Explain why. 在你的学习经历中，英语外教和中国的英语教师在教学上的主要区别是什么？你更喜欢哪一个？如果你有选择，你会选择哪一个？请解释一下原因。
2. Based on your experience, what are the main challenges you have encountered in learning with native English-speaking teachers? What have you done to overcome these challenges and adapt to teaching by native English-speaking teachers? 根据你的经验，你在与英语外教学习时遇到的主要挑战是什么？你做了什么来克服这些挑战并适应英语外教的教学？
3. Could you tell me what changes have taken place in your learning behavior/style in the classroom taught by native English-speaking teachers? What has caused these changes? 你能告诉我，在英语外教的课堂上，你的学习行为/风格发生了哪些变化？是什么导致了这些变化？

4. Could you describe what aspects of teaching by native English-speaking teachers you enjoy the most and which aspects you enjoy the least? Explain in detail. 你能描述一下，在英语外教的教学中，你最喜欢哪些方面以及不喜欢哪些方面的教学吗？请提供例子。
5. Could you describe the teaching process of a native English-speaking teacher in your class: How do they teach? What teaching methods do they use most often? Which teaching methods do you like the most and which do you like the least? 你能描述一下英语外教在你班上的教学过程吗？他们是如何教学的？他们经常使用哪些教学方法？你最喜欢哪种教学方法，最不喜欢哪种教学方法？
6. On reflection, has the teaching by native English-speaking teachers met or fallen short of your personal expectations? Explain what expectations you had and how they have been met or not met. 回想一下，英语外教的教学是否达到或未达到你个人的期望？解释一下你的期望是什么，以及他们如何满足或没有满足你的期望。
7. How would you assess teaching by native English-speaking teachers: Very satisfied? Satisfied? Dissatisfied? Extremely dissatisfied? Explain why. 你如何评价英语外教的 教学。非常满意？ 满意？ 不满意？ 非常不满意？ 请解释一下原因。
8. What suggestions do you have for how native English-speaking teachers could better support students' learning? 你有什么建议给英语外教在帮助学生的学习方面可以做得更好的吗？

9. In your view, what does an ideal native English-speaking teacher look like? Have you ever been taught by such a teacher? Explain why you very much appreciate their teaching or personality. 在你看来，一个理想的英语外教是什么样的？曾经有这样理想的英语外教教过你吗？解释一下为什么你非常欣赏他们的教学或人品。

10. In your view, what does a least liked native English-speaking teacher look like? Have you ever been taught by such a teacher? Explain why you do not appreciate their teaching or personality. 在你看来，你最不喜欢的英语外教是什么样的？曾经有过这样的英语外教教过你吗？解释一下为什么你最不喜欢他们的教学或人品。

11. Could you tell me how you interact with and see support from your native English-speaking teachers inside and outside the classroom? Are they approachable, supportive, understanding, empathetic, and motivating? 你能告诉我，你在课堂内外是如何与英语外教互动并得到他们的支持的？他们是否平易近人、乐意助人、善解人意、有同情心、激励你学习？

12. Please tell me how native English-speaking teachers engage with you to provide academic and emotional support? Do they use social media platforms such as WeChat? 请告诉我，英语外教是如何与你互动，帮助你和鼓励你学习的？通过哪些社交媒体，如微信？

Thank you very much for your kind help.

感谢您的热心帮助。

Appendix 4 Interview Questions for Native English-speaking Teachers



MASSEY
BUSINESS
SCHOOL
TE KURA WHAI PAKIHI

School of Communication,
Journalism and Marketing
Massey Business School
Massey University, New Zealand

Interview Questions for Native English-speaking Teachers

Part One: Demographic and Background Information

1. Gender:

Male Female Gender Diverse

2. Country:

3. Age

4. Discipline

5. Your highest level of education:

Bachelor Master Ph.D.

Others (Please specify):

6. How long have you been teaching in China (Tick)?

Within six months

1 year

2 years

3 years

More than 3 years

7. How long have you been living in China (Tick)?

Within 1 year

1 year

2 years

3 years

More than 3 years

8. How many non-native English-speaking countries did you teach English in before you took this teaching position? (Tick)

None

1 country

2 countries

3 countries

More than 3 countries

9. How long have you been in the current teaching position?

Within 1 year

1 year

2 years

3 years

More than 3 years

Part Two: Teaching Experience

1. Could you tell me what motivated you to come to teach in China?
2. Could you describe your happiest teaching experiences at the current university?
3. Could you describe your unhappiest teaching experiences at the current university?
4. In your experience, what are the main challenges for you to teach in the current university? What are your strategies for dealing with them? What are the implications and what have you learned from the experience?
5. Could you describe to me your signature teaching methods, and your teaching pedagogy (philosophy)? Which methods work best, and which methods do not work very well in Chinese classrooms?
6. What are the contributing factors influencing the (in)effectiveness of your teaching at this university?
7. How have you adapted your teaching methods in the classroom to achieve a cultural fit to meet students' learning needs and expectations?
8. In your teaching experiences, what are the main differences between teaching and learning in China and in your own country? How have these differences impacted your teaching?
9. Could you please tell me if, at this university, if you have the freedom to design and implement your course syllabus, use your own course materials/textbooks, and plan your own assessment?
10. Could you tell me how you can leverage technology, such as social media, to engage with students and support their learning?

11. How would you describe Chinese students' characteristics of learning, such as motivations, participation, learning strategies, and classroom behavior? How have these characteristics influenced their learning behavior in your class?
12. Could you describe the kinds of academic, social, and emotional support you get from your Chinese colleagues, discipline leaders, administrators, and students?
13. What has made your cultural adaptation at this university most effective and what has made your cultural adaptation at this university least effective?
14. From your point of view, what could the university have done to help you and other foreign teachers to adapt better to the Chinese educational contexts?

Thank you very much for your kind help.

Appendix 5 Interview Questions for Chinese University Leaders



School of Communication,
Journalism and Marketing
Massey Business School
Massey University, New Zealand
新西兰梅西大学商部
传播、新闻、市场营销学院

Interview Questions for Chinese University Leaders

中国大学领导访谈问卷

Part One: Demographic and Background Information 个人背景信息:

1. Your gender 您的性别:

2. Your current and past leadership positions 您目前和过去的领导职位:

3. University you are working or worked in 您现在工作或曾经工作过的大学:

4. How many NESTs have you employed and managed now? Could you tell me some backgrounds of these NESTs? 您现在雇用和管理过多少 NESTs? 能否告诉我这些 NESTs 的一些背景情况?

Part Two: Insights for NESTs 对 NESTs 的见解:

1. Why did you invite native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) to teach at your university/school? 贵大学/学院为什么邀请以英语为母语的教师 (NESTs) 来任教?
2. What are the most important aspects you look for when recruiting NESTs in your university/school? 贵大学/学院招聘 NESTs 时, 最看重的是什么?
3. What do you think are the advantage of NESTs over Chinese English teachers in English language teaching? 和中国的英语教师相比, 您觉得 NESTs 的优势是什么?
4. Overall, how satisfied are/were you with the teaching performance of NESTs? Please give me specific examples: why or why not. 总体而言, 您对 NESTs 的教学表现满意吗? 请具体举例说明: 为什么满意或为什么不满意。
5. What have you done to facilitate NESTs' teaching at your university/school? 贵大学/学院在促进 NESTs 教学方面做了哪些工作?
6. Looking back, what are the major contributions of NESTs to teaching at your university/school? Tell me in detail what they have done to transform teaching at your university/school. 回顾过去, NESTs 对贵大学/学院教学的主要贡献是什么? 请详细说明他们为贵大学/学院的教学改革做出了哪些贡献。
7. How would you expect NESTs to take a leadership role in research in conducting collaborative research, publishing papers, and attending academic conferences? Have

your expectations been met? 您希望 NESTs 如何在合作研究、发表论文和参加学术会议方面发挥领导作用? 您的期望得到满足了吗?

8. How would you expect NESTs to take a leadership role in curricular development and course designs? Have your expectations been met? 您希望 NESTs 如何在课程开发和课程设计中发挥领导作用? 您的期望得到满足了吗?
9. In your view, what could be the barriers preventing NESTs from playing a leadership role in teaching and research at your university/school? 在您看来, 阻碍 NESTs 在贵大学/学院的教学和研究中发挥领导作用的障碍是什么?
10. In their leadership role, what new pedagogical innovations have NESTs introduced to your university/school? Tell me in detail the examples of these pedagogical changes or transformations. 在发挥领导作用的过程中, NESTs 为贵大学/学院引入了哪些新的教学创新? 请详细举例说明这些教学变革或转型。
11. What strategies do you suggest maximizing the full potentials of NESTs during their tenures at your university /school? 您建议采取哪些策略来最大限度地发挥 NESTs 在贵大学/学院任职期间的潜能?

Thank you for your kind help.

感谢您的热心帮助。

Appendix 6 Statement of Contribution Forms

 MASSEY UNIVERSITY <small>TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA</small> UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND	GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL
STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION DOCTORATE WITH PUBLICATIONS/MANUSCRIPTS	

We, the student and the student's main supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the student's contribution as indicated below in the Statement of Originality.						
Student name:	Zhidan Zhou					
Name and title of main supervisor:	Mingsheng Li, Associate Professor					
In which chapter is the manuscript/published work?	Chapter Four					
Describe the contribution that the student and members of the supervisory team have made to the manuscript/published work: ¹						
<p>The student developed the idea, collected the data and drafted the manuscript. The second author contributed to the development of theory and structure. The third author guided the interview design and refinement. The fourth author assisted in writing and editing.</p>						
Please select one of the following three options:						
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<p>The manuscript/published work is published or in press</p> <p>Please provide the full reference of the research output: Zhou, Z., Croucher, S., Li, M., & Hodis, G. M. (2024). Navigating English language instruction in China: Insights from Chinese students on native English-speaking teachers' practices. <i>Journal of Intercultural Communication Research</i>, 53(3-4), 102-120 https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2024.2422624</p>					
<input type="radio"/>	<p>The manuscript is currently under review for publication</p> <p>Please provide the name of the journal:</p>					
<input type="radio"/>	<p>It is intended that the manuscript will be published, but it has not yet been submitted to a journal</p>					
Student's signature:	<table border="0"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: middle;">ZHIDAN ZHOU</td> <td style="font-size: small; vertical-align: middle;">Digitally signed by ZHIDAN ZHOU Date: 2024.12.30 20:11:45 +13'00'</td> <td style="vertical-align: middle;">Main supervisor's signature:</td> <td style="vertical-align: middle;">Mingsheng Li</td> <td style="font-size: small; vertical-align: middle;">Digitally signed by Mingsheng Li DN: cn=Mingsheng Li, c=NZ, email=sm.s.li@massey.ac.nz Date: 2024.12.30 21:23:20 +13'00'</td> </tr> </table>	ZHIDAN ZHOU	Digitally signed by ZHIDAN ZHOU Date: 2024.12.30 20:11:45 +13'00'	Main supervisor's signature:	Mingsheng Li	Digitally signed by Mingsheng Li DN: cn=Mingsheng Li, c=NZ, email=sm.s.li@massey.ac.nz Date: 2024.12.30 21:23:20 +13'00'
ZHIDAN ZHOU	Digitally signed by ZHIDAN ZHOU Date: 2024.12.30 20:11:45 +13'00'	Main supervisor's signature:	Mingsheng Li	Digitally signed by Mingsheng Li DN: cn=Mingsheng Li, c=NZ, email=sm.s.li@massey.ac.nz Date: 2024.12.30 21:23:20 +13'00'		
<i>This form should be placed at the beginning of each relevant thesis chapter.</i>						

¹ Refer to the Massey University Publishing and Authorship guidelines ([OneMassey for staff](#), [Stream for students](#)) and/ or [Contributor Roles Taxonomy \(CRediT\) guidelines](#) for guidance.

STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION DOCTORATE WITH PUBLICATIONS/MANUSCRIPTS

We, the student and the student's main supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the student's contribution as indicated below in the Statement of Originality.	
Student name:	Zhidan Zhou
Name and title of main supervisor:	Mingsheng Li, Associate Professor
In which chapter is the manuscript/published work?	Chapter four
Describe the contribution that the student and members of the supervisory team have made to the manuscript/published work: ¹ The student developed the idea, collected the data and drafted the manuscript. The second author guided the interview design and refinement. The third author assisted in writing and editing. The fourth author contributed to the development of theory and structure.	
Please select one of the following three options:	
<input type="radio"/>	The manuscript/published work is published or in press Please provide the full reference of the research output:
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	The manuscript is currently under review for publication Please provide the name of the journal: International Journal of Intercultural Relations
<input type="radio"/>	It is intended that the manuscript will be published, but it has not yet been submitted to a journal
Student's signature:	ZHIDAN ZHOU Digitally signed by ZHIDAN ZHOU Date: 2025.08.24 19:05:12 +12'00'
Main supervisor's signature:	Mingsheng Li Digitally signed by Mingsheng Li Date: 2025.08.25 12:16:55 +12'00'
<i>This form should be placed at the beginning of each relevant thesis chapter.</i>	

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STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION DOCTORATE WITH PUBLICATIONS/MANUSCRIPTS

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<p>The student developed the idea, collected the data and drafted the manuscript. The second author contributed to the development of theory and structure. The third author guided the interview design and refinement. The fourth author assisted in writing and editing.</p>	
Please select one of the following three options:	
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<p>The manuscript/published work is published or in press</p> <p>Please provide the full reference of the research output:</p> <p>Zhou, Z., Croucher, S. M., Li, M., & Hodis, G. M. (2026). Navigating leadership roles: Native English-speaking teachers in English language teaching in China. In A. Wiseman & J. McNaughtan (Eds.), <i>The Emerald handbook on international higher education: Navigating workforce and leadership changes in a digital age</i></p>
<input type="radio"/>	<p>The manuscript is currently under review for publication</p> <p>Please provide the name of the journal:</p>
<input type="radio"/>	<p>It is intended that the manuscript will be published, but it has not yet been submitted to a journal</p>
Student's signature:	<p>ZHIDAN ZHOU Digitally signed by ZHIDAN ZHOU Date: 2025.08.25 10:21:49 +12'00'</p>
Main supervisor's signature:	<p>Mingsheng Li Digitally signed by Mingsheng Li Date: 2025.08.25 12:21:51 +12'00'</p>
<i>This form should be placed at the beginning of each relevant thesis chapter.</i>	

¹ Refer to the Massey University Publishing and Authorship guidelines ([OneMassey for staff](#), [Stream for students](#)) and/ or [Contributor Roles Taxonomy \(CRediT\) guidelines](#) for guidance.