



Understanding and Enhancing Intercultural
Interaction in TESOL:
A Study of Chinese Students and Their Lecturers

韩宛彤 Wantong Han, PhD

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as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

Declaration

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Abstract

With the internationalisation of higher education, TESOL classrooms have become important sites of multicultural interaction, especially with the increasing presence of Chinese students. While their inclusion enriches classroom diversity, cultural and educational differences pose challenges for lecturer–student engagement (Zhu & O’Sullivan, 2022). This study explores how intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL is perceived, experienced, and interpreted by Chinese students and lecturers, moving beyond static and one-dimensional accounts of culture and communication.

The study is informed by small culture (Holliday, 1999), cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1986), rapport management theory (Spencer-Oatey, 2000), the Teaching Through Interaction (TTI) framework (Pianta, 2017), and the Comprehensive Model of Intercultural Communication (CMIC) (Nadeem & Zabrodskaia, 2023a). Together, these perspectives provide a multidimensional framework for examining cultural influences, relational management, pedagogical interaction, and processes of adjustment and adaptation in intercultural lecturer–student interaction.

This study adopts a qualitative methodology. Data were collected through focus group interviews with Chinese students, open-ended questionnaires, and in-depth interviews with lecturers. Participants included 18 Chinese students and 13 lecturers from TESOL Programmes in Scottish universities. The findings draw on participants’ accounts of their experiences, interpretations, and responses to intercultural interaction in these settings.

The findings suggest that intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL was often perceived as characterised by surface harmony alongside underlying tension. Participants’ accounts also indicate that these interactions

were understood as complex, dynamic, and strongly shaped by contextual conditions. Both structural and non-structural factors were described as influencing engagement and interaction. The study also identifies practical implications for supporting more responsive and effective intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL.

Overall, this research contributes to understanding intercultural lecturer–student interaction as a perception-based, contextually constructed, and relationally negotiated process in higher education.

Key words: culture, intercultural interaction, lecturer-student interaction, intercultural interaction adaptation, intercultural interaction adjustment, TESOL, Chinese students, higher education

Author presentations

“Intercultural Engagements between Lecturers and Chinese Students in TESOL Context” -Wantong Han. Presented at the 2024 Scottish TESOL and Applied Linguistics Postgraduate Research Conference, May 2024

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background and context

In the context of deepening globalisation, higher education is increasingly an important area of national soft power competition (Li et al., 2018). International student mobility continues to grow, reshaping university programmes and interactional environments (Choudaha & Van Rest, 2018). In 2024, 17,070 Chinese students were admitted to UK universities. UCAS data show an 8.9% rise in Chinese applications for 2025. This highlights the renewed appeal of UK higher education. Most Chinese students, primarily postgraduates, often choose universities for their international reputation, programme quality, and staff expertise (Consoli, 2024).

However, the growth in international student numbers does not automatically lead to a high-quality intercultural educational experience. Numerous studies have shown that lecturer-student interactions in intercultural teaching and learning environments continue to involve complex challenges. These issues are especially prevalent in language courses. This is a highly interaction-dependent teaching and learning context. In such contexts, cultural differences, power structures, and mismatches between communicative strategies and expectations are particularly salient (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017; Tran & Pham, 2016). Students from high-context cultures are sometimes misinterpreted as “disengaged” or “lacking in critical thinking” because of their silence, avoidance of open questions, and respect for teachers’ authority (Chen, 2016). Such mismatches may contribute to marginalisation, a reduced sense of engagement, experiences of surface integration, but deeper alienation.

Additionally, lecturers may experience confusion and pressure when working

with students from different cultural backgrounds. Research suggests that many university lecturers lack systematic training in intercultural teaching and learning, and their cross-cultural understanding often relies on personal experience, advice from colleagues, or “trial and error” teaching practices (Holliday, 2013). They may also fall into cultural stereotypes when explaining international student behaviour and lack a deep grasp of the cultural logic behind it. Such misunderstandings may shape patterns of interaction between lecturers and students (Ryan & Louie, 2007). In addition, some lecturers teach interaction as a test of language proficiency, overlooking its culturally constructed nature (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

In recent years, research has shifted from national cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1980) to more complex socio-cultural approaches, emphasising culture as a dynamic, co-constructed process rather than a static variable (Dervin & Dervin, 2016; Holliday, 1999). Approaches such as Culturally Responsive Teaching and Global Competence Education argue that lecturers should integrate students’ cultural experiences into curricula and assessment (Gay, 2015), promote respect for diverse values (Deardorff, 2020), and view internationalisation as embedded in knowledge construction rather than as superficial pluralism (Leask, 2015).

Therefore, this study focuses on the characteristics and perceived factors influencing interactions between lecturers and Chinese students in TESOL programmes. On the one hand, TESOL programmes provide a particularly useful context for examining language learning, cultural exchange, and pedagogical interaction. Understanding these interactions may help universities build more culturally responsive and equitable teaching and learning environments. It may also support a move away from one-way models

of Chinese student integration or lecturer instruction. Instead, it supports the co-construction of a more inclusive international curriculum.

In this study, the research context is TESOL programmes in UK higher education, where Chinese postgraduate students represent a significant proportion of the international cohort. These programmes are highly interaction-oriented, with classroom activities, discussions, and feedback exchanges forming a central part of the learning process. This makes them an especially rich site for examining intercultural lecturer–student interaction. The choice of Scottish universities as the research site was primarily pragmatic, informed by considerations of institutional access, participant availability, and the researcher’s positional embeddedness within the Scottish higher education context. The study does not conceptualise Scotland as a distinctive national or cultural variable, nor does it seek to undertake a comparative analysis between Scottish and other higher education systems. Rather, the Scottish context is treated as a bounded and accessible empirical setting within which broader questions of intercultural lecturer–student interaction can be examined. Consequently, the findings are not interpreted as uniquely “Scottish” but as illustrative of interactional experiences that may be relevant to other internationalised TESOL contexts.

Furthermore, global education faces a variety of challenges, making it increasingly imperative to understand cultural differences and explore strategies for collaborating across them. This study aims to identify practical interaction strategies and institutional support by examining the perspectives of both lecturers and Chinese students. It is important to clarify that this study adopts an exploratory qualitative approach that focuses on lecturers’ and students’ perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of intercultural interaction in TESOL classrooms. Accordingly, the emphasis is not on

interaction as a directly observable behavioural process, but on how participants remember, evaluate, and give meaning to interaction. This perception-oriented focus is consistent with the study's qualitative design and allows for a deeper exploration of how intercultural interaction is socially constructed through participants' narratives.

By analysing participants' accounts of interaction in TESOL programmes, this research seeks to contribute to discussions of teaching and learning in internationalised higher education. It also aims to support more equitable educational practices in increasingly diverse contexts.

1.2 Rationale

It is worth noting that although extensive research has been conducted on intercultural education, international student adjustment, and intercultural interaction, important gaps and shortcomings remain.

Most of the existing research on international student adjustment focuses on issues such as language barriers, cultural differences, and conflicting learning styles (Andrade, 2006; Marginson, 2022). These studies shed light on the challenges faced by international students, but attention to the dynamics of intercultural interaction is often lacking in their examination. Additionally, many earlier studies tend to treat culture as a fixed, static characteristic (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1986; Triandis, 2006). They often emphasise national cultural dimensions, such as individualism versus collectivism, or high versus low power distance, thereby frequently overlooking the dynamic nature of intercultural interactions and the fluidity of culture. Moreover, while sociocultural norms have been widely discussed in the intercultural research (Leech, 2014; Ogiermann, 2009; Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2003), existing

studies often lack in-depth exploration of the specific social behaviours and contexts associated with lecturers' and students' positionalities. Parallel to this, questions regarding how students adjust and adapt to cross-cultural environments, as well as how instructors understand and respond to students' behaviours, remain underrepresented in current literature (Harrison & Peacock, 2009).

Further, existing literature tends to adopt macro-cultural theories to explain programme interactions, such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions model. The Hofstede model, which serves as a starting point for comparing different cultures, has been widely criticised for its treatment of culture as a static and predictable variable (Holliday, 1999). Intercultural interaction is increasingly understood as a contextualised, relational and negotiated process (Adler & Aycan, 2018). Therefore, this study attempts to integrate the perspectives of small culture theory and cultural dimensions theory, emphasising not only national cultural differences but also the dynamic ways in which culture is practised, negotiated, and reconstructed during interactions. Additionally, most existing research on teacher-student interactions has focused on primary and secondary education, particularly emphasising emotional attachment and management mechanisms between teachers and students. There has been little attention paid to power dynamics, communication differences, and the complexities of academic identity construction in higher education, particularly at the graduate level. The TESOL program is situated at the intersection of language, culture, and academic norms, which inherently presents multiple challenges to cognitive, affective, and social identity. This study seeks to integrate Rapport Management theory (Spencer-Oatey, 2000), the Teaching Through Interaction framework (Pianta, 2017), and the Comprehensive Model of Intercultural Communication (Nadeem & Zabrodskaia, 2023a) to explore

ethnocultural traditions and small culture dynamics in interaction, including role, context, power negotiations, and adaptation processes.

To better understand the practical challenges of intercultural classrooms, it is necessary to examine real-world teaching contexts in which such tensions become evident. Despite widespread institutional advocacy for multiculturalism and internationalisation, the cultural mismatch remains prevalent in teaching practice (Kayyali, 2025). Chinese students in TESOL programmes are often misunderstood due to their perceived silence and indirect communication styles. At the same time, lecturers frequently lack culturally responsive strategies to establish effective pedagogical connections (Sally & Jiang, 2020). As a result, intercultural misunderstandings persist, hindering meaningful engagement. Moreover, existing research seldom investigates the underlying causes or developmental mechanisms of such mismatched interactions from a dual perspective. Equally important, it rarely summarises or synthesises the experiences that contribute to successful and effective intercultural engagement. This gap in the literature limits our understanding of how to foster inclusive and productive learning environments in intercultural contexts. In the current context of increasing interculturalisation in higher education, improving the quality of lecturer-student interactions is a matter of teaching effectiveness. It is also a critical issue related to educational equity, the inclusion of diverse perspectives, and the construction of students' sense of belonging. Therefore, it is essential to undertake a systematic investigation into the characteristics of lecturer-student interaction within TESOL programmes. By combining the experiential perspectives of both lecturers and Chinese students, this study aims to identify transferable interaction strategies applicable across similar contexts. Ultimately, the goal is to provide both theoretical support and practical insights for enhancing

intercultural teaching and learning in higher education.

Given these considerations, this study addresses both the theoretical and practical aspects of the gap outlined above. On the theoretical side, it aims to develop a dynamic framework for understanding intercultural lecturer–student interactions in TESOL programmes. This challenges the previously static and essentialist views of culturally determined behaviours. On the practical side, the study explores how relational negotiation and cultural understanding can help lecturers and students navigate cultural differences. Such understanding is seen as a foundation for constructive collaboration. The value of developing more effective intercultural interaction lies in its potential to support more inclusive and responsive teaching and learning. Ultimately, the study seeks to identify key factors that participants associated with lecturer–student interactions. It also addresses cultural anxiety and behavioural misinterpretations. The goal is to promote deep mutual understanding and foster genuine pedagogical partnerships between lecturers and students. In the era of globalisation in higher education, the TESOL programme is not only an educational vehicle for language instruction but also an arena for the negotiation of values, the advancement of educational equity, and the coexistence of cultures. An in-depth analysis of the interaction mechanisms within this context is both academically significant and practically relevant for improving the quality of multicultural teaching in the future.

1.3 Research aims and questions

As globalisation in higher education has intensified, challenges associated with intercultural learning have become increasingly visible. Although existing research has examined intercultural communication across a range of educational contexts, comparatively fewer studies have focused on how

lecturers and Chinese students in TESOL programmes perceive, experience, and make sense of intercultural interaction in the classroom. In particular, prior work has often documented barriers such as language proficiency, academic adjustment, and participation norms, while paying less attention to how participants themselves interpret these experiences and how they connect with theoretical understandings of culture, rapport, and interaction in internationalised higher education contexts.

In response to this gap, the present study is framed as an exploratory qualitative investigation of lecturers' and students' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of intercultural interaction in TESOL classrooms.

Correspondingly, the research questions are as follows:

1. In the setting of TESOL programmes, how are the characteristics and dynamics of intercultural interaction between lecturers and Chinese students perceived, experienced, and described?
2. What underlying factors or educational experiences were perceived to shape the dynamics and characteristics of intercultural lecturer–student interaction in the TESOL context?

The study also identifies pedagogical implications and potential interaction-support strategies, which emerge inductively from participants' accounts and are presented in the recommendations and implications sections. By addressing these questions, the study offers an exploratory account of how lecturers and Chinese students in TESOL programmes perceive and evaluate intercultural interaction. The findings are presented in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, followed by an integrative discussion in Chapter 8. Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by synthesising the theoretical and empirical contributions and outlining implications and recommendations informed by the themes emerging from the

data.

1.4 Positionality and background

As a Chinese student who has studied in both China and the UK, I bring a dual cultural perspective to this study of intercultural interactions between lecturers and Chinese students in TESOL higher education. My academic journey began at a normal university in China, where I spent three years deeply immersed in Chinese educational values and teaching philosophies. Subsequently, I pursued and completed my TESOL studies in the UK, during which I personally experienced the cultural, linguistic, and pedagogical shifts that international students often encounter.

These intercultural academic experiences have not only shaped my research interests but also positioned me as both an insider and an outsider in this study. On the one hand, I share the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the Chinese student participants, which allows me better to understand their experiences, struggles, and perspectives. On the other hand, my position as a researcher and a graduate of a British TESOL programme gives me some degree of distance and analytical perspective when interviewing Chinese students and interpreting their experiences.

Throughout my academic training, I have gained experience conducting qualitative research, including semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and thematic analysis. These methodological foundations have enabled me to engage critically with data and reflect on the power dynamics, cultural assumptions, and communicative practices that underlie lecturer-student interactions.

As an individual with both personal and academic connections to this topic, I am aware that my perspective may affect how I interpret the data, particularly regarding empathy and expectations. Therefore, I have adopted a reflexive approach throughout this research, constantly questioning my assumptions, documenting my responses, and seeking to ensure that participants' voices are authentically and respectfully represented. This reflexivity aims to enhance the study's transparency, trustworthiness, and ethical integrity.

1.5 Significance and contributions of this study

Firstly, this study contributes to understanding intercultural lecturer–student interaction in higher education as a dynamic cultural space involving language learning, cultural negotiation, shifting power relations, and identity construction. Participants' accounts in this study suggest that lecturer–student interaction in multicultural programmes may at times appear polite on the surface while remaining relationally distant. They also suggest that surface-level harmony may sometimes mask emotional disconnection, and that cultural norms such as politeness, face-saving, and social distance were often associated with student silence. Lecturer accounts further indicated that some lecturers prioritised teaching efficiency and course completion, sometimes at the expense of deeper relational engagement. Such patterns may hinder relationship-building, reduce engagement, and contribute to persistent misunderstandings. In response to this issue, the study highlights the limitations of superficial harmony and emphasises the importance of authentic communication, mutual understanding, and trust-building. This, in turn, requires greater awareness of the cultural anxieties, expression strategies, and cognitive misinterpretations that shape these interactions.

In addition, this study combines pilot classroom observation, student focus groups, in-depth interviews with lecturers, and open-ended questionnaires within a multi-method qualitative design. This approach supports a more layered and contextual understanding of intercultural lecturer–student interaction by bringing together contextual material and participant accounts. As a result, the study moves beyond simplified cultural explanations towards a more interpretive understanding of how interaction is perceived, experienced, and negotiated in intercultural educational settings. It also suggests that culture is shaped through specific communicative practices rather than functioning as a fixed variable. In this respect, the study offers useful insight for future research on interaction mechanisms in intercultural educational contexts.

Moreover, this study proposes a dynamic four-step framework of understanding, adjusting, challenging, and adapting for fostering more synergistic intercultural interactions between lecturers and Chinese students in TESOL contexts. While this framework has not yet been implemented in practice, it is grounded in established intercultural communication theories and informed by empirical findings. It offers a theoretically robust and practically relevant approach to addressing the psychological distance and interactional barriers that often exist in multicultural learning environments. By encouraging cultural humility, communicative flexibility, critical reflection, and inclusive integration, the framework has the potential to reduce misunderstandings, alleviate anxiety, and foster mutual trust. It contributes to understanding intercultural dynamics and provides a strategic foundation for future pedagogical innovation in globalised higher education. It also suggests that the dilemma of superficial harmony alongside underlying indifference in intercultural contexts may be addressed through more responsive and

collaborative mechanisms. By engaging multiple stakeholders, such an approach may help improve the quality of interaction and enhance the well-being of both lecturers and students in teaching and learning.

Overall, the study contributes to a more dynamic, context-sensitive, and participant-informed understanding of intercultural lecturer–student interaction. By identifying sources of misunderstanding and proposing a framework for more responsive intercultural engagement, it offers both theoretical support and practical guidance for internationalised higher education.

1.6 Limitations of this study

Although the study adopts an integrated design and a multidimensional approach, there are still some limitations regarding methodology, theory, participants, and context relevance.

Firstly, in terms of research methodology, the multi-method qualitative strategy enhanced the richness of the data, but certain constraints reduced the completeness of the findings. The absence of Chinese students in the observed classrooms limited the relevance of the observation phase as a direct source of participant-specific evidence, while the focus group interviews carried the risk of social desirability bias. Additionally, the limited number of lecturer participants constrained the breadth of perspectives gathered.

Secondly, integrating multiple frameworks helped construct a holistic analytical lens for the study. However, this integration revealed issues such as conceptual overlap and a lack of focus on structural power, identity construction, and marginalisation in multilingual classrooms. Certain models, such as TTI and CMIC, were also originally developed in non-higher-education

contexts, which limits their applicability to dynamic university environments.

Thirdly, the study's participant design presents limitations in terms of scope and representativeness. The student participants were exclusively Chinese, and the lecturers were drawn only from TESOL programmes, limiting cultural diversity and disciplinary variation. Data were collected from TESOL programmes in Scottish universities for reasons of access and feasibility. The findings are therefore contextually situated rather than culturally specific, and while this bounded scope limits generalisability, it allows for in-depth exploration within a coherent institutional setting.

As a final point, the researcher's positionality may introduce bias into the study. As a Chinese researcher studying Chinese students, I was at risk of over-identification with student participants and of underrepresenting more critical or structural interpretations. Simultaneously, cultural distance may have influenced the interpretation of lecturers' narratives. Additionally, this was the researcher's first time conducting a large-scale, multi-method project. As a novice researcher, I recognise limitations in my research experience, time management, and theoretical integration. These factors are important to consider in the overall evaluation of the study's rigour.

While this study provides valuable insights into intercultural lecturer-student interactions in TESOL contexts, it has certain limitations. These limitations highlight the importance of future research taking a more critical and reflexive methodological approach, using larger comparative samples, and further refining the theoretical models.

1.7 Structure of this thesis

This thesis consists of ten chapters. Each chapter is logically connected and follows a coherent structure. The study systematically explores the research and theoretical foundations related to intercultural interactions between lecturers and Chinese students in TESOL programmes. The study also addresses its practical implementation, key findings, and critical discussion. The structure is as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the research background and context, and explains the rationale, objectives, positionality, and significance of the study. It provides readers with a foundation for the investigation that follows.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews key issues related to intercultural lecturer-student interactions, including intercultural communication, teacher-student dynamics, such interactions in higher education, and the behaviours of Chinese students. It highlights existing research gaps and positions this study within the broader academic literature. This chapter provides a critical foundation for understanding the key concepts and developments in the relevant fields, thereby framing the context for the current study.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

Based on the reviewed literature, this chapter constructs a theoretical framework by integrating multiple theories, including Small Culture Theory, Rapport Management Theory, the Teaching Through Interactions (TTI) model, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, and the Comprehensive Model of Intercultural Communication (CMIC). These theories are combined to analyse the

intersection of language, emotion, power, and cultural dynamics in lecturer-student interactions in TESOL contexts.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter details the qualitative methodology adopted in the study, including the research design; data collection methods (pilot classroom observation, focus group interviews, in-depth interviews with lecturers, and open-ended questionnaires); data analysis procedures; and ethical considerations. In addition, it discusses the strategies used to ensure research reliability and validity.

Chapter 5: Contextual Insights from the Pilot Observation Study

This chapter presents descriptive and contextual insights drawn from the pilot classroom observations. These observations served as familiarisation work and informed the design of the subsequent interviews and questionnaires, while also providing background for understanding the participant accounts developed in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

Chapter 6: Views from Chinese Students

This chapter presents Chinese students' accounts of interaction in TESOL programme settings, focusing on how they perceived, experienced, and interpreted intercultural interaction.

Chapter 7: Views from Lecturers

This chapter presents TESOL lecturers' accounts of intercultural teaching and interaction with Chinese students. It focuses on how lecturers perceived student participation, pedagogical adjustment, and intercultural challenges in TESOL classrooms.

Chapter 8: Discussion

This chapter synthesises the key themes emerging from Chapters 6 and 7, with Chapter 5 serving as contextual background. It interprets participants' descriptions of the roles of national culture, small culture, academic purpose, relational strategies, and adaptation in intercultural interaction.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

This chapter summarises the main findings, addresses the research questions, and outlines the study's theoretical and practical contributions. It provides targeted recommendations for lecturers, students, institutions, and policymakers, reflects on the study's limitations, and suggests directions for future research in intercultural education.

Through this structure, the thesis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of intercultural interactions in TESOL programmes.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to literature review

This chapter first introduces the concept of interaction and outlines its role in social relationships. It then considers how culture shapes interaction, before reviewing key research on intercultural interaction in higher education. The discussion gradually narrows to intercultural lecturer–student interaction, addressing both the commonly identified benefits and the challenges of intercultural teaching and learning. These challenges include language barriers and adaptation processes in interactions between lecturers and international students. The chapter concludes by drawing together the main insights from the literature and clarifying their relevance for understanding intercultural lecturer–student interaction.

Across the reviewed studies, several patterns and limitations become apparent. Research on intercultural communication and on classroom interaction often develops in parallel, with limited dialogue between the two. Many studies emphasise either general models of intercultural competence or detailed interactional data, leaving less attention to how interaction is experienced and interpreted in everyday educational contexts. In addition, lecturers' and students' perspectives are not always equally represented in higher education research.

Taken together, these observations suggest the need for a more integrated analytical perspective. The literature indicates that a comprehensive understanding of intercultural lecturer–student interaction requires attention to at least three interrelated dimensions: cultural influences on expectations and behaviour, the management of interpersonal relationships within institutional settings, and the processes of interactional adjustment and adaptation over

time. These dimensions provide the conceptual basis for this study's theoretical framework, enabling a more balanced exploration of how lecturers and students perceive, experience, interpret, and negotiate intercultural interaction in TESOL.

2.2 Interaction

This study examines the characteristics and dynamics of interactions between Chinese students and lecturers in intercultural contexts. To better understand intercultural and lecturer-student interactions in the follow-up research, it is imperative first to clarify what interaction is. Social interactions and social relations are fundamental to individual and societal lives (Okumdi & Akporaro, 2022). Interaction is often understood as involving participants' behaviours and responses, which are shaped by various factors, such as their backgrounds or psychology (Argyle, 1994). When interaction occurs, the participants tend to form a cycle in which they influence each other's behaviour (Ploderer et al., 2014). People in an interaction constantly adjust their behaviour in response to each other's reactions, creating a feedback loop (Bandura, 1986). In summary, the process of interaction seems to be influenced by a plethora of flexible factors.

The performance of interaction is often complex and varied. Kitishat and al-Freihat (2015) summarise social interaction as taking the form of verbal or non-verbal communication. This may include spoken words, subtle gestures, expressions, postures, eye contact and other communicative behaviours that can transmit information. While verbal communication conveys clear meaning through words, non-verbal communication, such as body language, tone of voice, and eye contact, adds emotional depth to the interaction (Burgoon et al.,

2021). Therefore, when studying social interactions, a wide range of communicative behaviours may be relevant. Interaction is a dynamic process that extends beyond mere verbal exchange.

In this study, intercultural lecturer–student interaction is viewed as a form of social interaction. The study focuses on lecturers' and Chinese students' perceptions, experiences, interpretations, and descriptions of the broader dynamics of their interactions.

2.3 Culture and interaction

In this study, interactions between lecturers and students in an intercultural context are explored, with a focus on the link between culture and interaction. The purpose of this subsection is to explain in detail the complex relationship between culture and interaction.

2.3.1 Culture

To clarify the definition of “culture”, it is necessary to examine the relationship between culture and interaction. Numerous scholars have extensively discussed the complexity and broad scope of culture.

Culture involves knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and the competences and habits that people acquire as members of society (Avruch, 2022). As such, the study of culture involves numerous factors and spans many aspects of human social life. Kroeber (1952) describes culture as a pattern of behaviour and habits transmitted through a system of symbols that reflects the unique values and history of a group. It follows that culture is often displayed through the transmission of various signs and symbols.

However, describing culture purely in symbolic terms is overly simplistic. Culture is not just a static system of symbols. It also includes people's understanding and interpretation of those symbols (Lizardo, 2016).

“Culture consists of the derivatives of experience, more or less organised, learned or created by the individuals of a population, including those images or encodings and their interpretations (meanings) transmitted from past generations, from contemporaries, or formed by individuals themselves” (Schwartz, 1992).

From this perspective, human involvement in the formation and establishment of culture is highly valued. Culture changes over time and remains dynamic in its continuity, which adds to its richness and diversity.

In a vibrant culture, both commonalities among groups and individual differences are preserved (Hofstede, 1986). Hofstede (2001) emphasised the importance of culture as a foundation for individuals' understanding of themselves and others. Culture helps individuals develop a sense of belonging, enabling them to identify with a particular group (Alshammari et al., 2023). However, defining culture solely through group-level commonalities tends to oversimplify the diversity within cultural groups (Chao & Moon, 2005). While the values and behavioural patterns of culture are often shared collectively, each individual's understanding and practice of culture varies according to their perspectives (Matsumoto et al., 2008). This variation gives culture both cohesion and internal diversity.

The concept of “small culture” focuses on the cultural characteristics that emerge within small groups of people who share common experiences and contexts (Holliday, 1999). This perspective addresses the limitations of broad generalisations about national or large-scale cultures by placing greater

emphasis on individual and situational expressions of culture. Spencer-Oatey (2008) further argues that culture not only shapes collective behaviour but also influences how individuals interpret their own actions and those of others. It is therefore evident that culture and human behaviour are deeply intertwined. Culture shapes not only what people do but also how they think and make sense of the world.

Based on the perspectives of the scholars mentioned above, this study explores culture as a dynamic set of symbols that interact with individuals and are both collective and individual in nature. The cultural identities and understandings of culture demonstrated by Chinese students and lecturers in the TESOL programme are assumed to reflect elements of both “big culture” and “small culture”. At the same time, these identities and understandings are also dynamic and diverse.

2.3.2 The influence of culture on interaction

Based on the explanation of culture in the previous chapter, there is a strong link between culture and people. Culture plays a role in guiding behaviour as well as shaping its interpretation (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). This subsection explores the link between culture and interaction.

This programming guides people in communicating, interpreting information and reacting in social situations (Corbitt et al., 2004). From this perspective, the influence of group culture on behaviour is emphasised, particularly in the sense that individuals within the group tend to behave similarly under its influence (Zhang & Zuo, 2006).

In contrast, the small-culture view places greater emphasis on individuality and

the influence of small-group dynamics (Holliday, 2016). Spencer-Oatey (2008) also notes that culture defines behavioural practices and influences how individuals interpret others' behaviour. Thus, in any interaction, participants' cultural backgrounds may influence how they engage and how they interpret each other's communicative behaviour. Burgoon et al. (2021) also highlight how non-verbal behaviours, such as gestures, eye contact, and physical proximity, are culturally specific and reflect deeper social norms. For example, these non-verbal cues often differ significantly across cultures and reveal underlying societal expectations (LaFrance & Mayo, 1978). Interactions may be shaped by culture, but interactions may also reinforce or challenge cultural norms.

Therefore, the influence of culture on interaction is not limited to its initial formation. It is a long-lasting and cyclical influence, while also shaped by interaction itself (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003). Given the reciprocal and enduring relationship between culture and interaction, individuals often adjust their behaviours and attitudes when exposed to new cultural environments (Berry, 2005). Cultural norms provide the blueprint for expected behaviour, but the architecture of actual interaction is constructed in real time through contextual contingencies (Matsumoto, 2007).

Overall, the influence of culture on human behaviour is undeniable. The relationship between culture and interaction is complex. Interaction may take different forms across cultural contexts and be dynamic and adaptive. Therefore, based on the complementary perspectives discussed above, interactions between intercultural lecturers and students may be shaped by multiple factors. These include group culture, small culture, individual understanding, and the specific context of the interaction.

2.3.3 Interaction styles across different national cultural perspectives

Based on the review of previous studies presented above, interaction styles vary across cultures, and these differences influence how individuals engage with one another, interpret behaviour, and manage relationships.

“Culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from another. ... Cultural lenses condition how individuals perceive and evaluate the actions of others.” (Hofstede, 1980).

Such an understanding reminds us that what may appear as natural or self-evident in one context is often the outcome of culturally specific ways of thinking and relating. Based on relevant theories and research, this chapter examines interaction styles in different national cultural contexts. Understanding these patterns from different national cultural perspectives will be helpful. It allows for a better understanding of national cultural influences that cannot be ignored in interactions between lecturers and students in TESOL contexts.

Hall (1976) uses high and low context as dimensions to distinguish between cultures and explain how culture determines interaction styles. In high-context cultures, such as East Asian cultures, communication relies heavily on non-verbal cues, implicit understanding, and contextual factors (Shen et al., 2024). In contrast, low-context cultures, e.g., North America, prioritise direct, explicit and clear communication (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). His research further supports these distinctions, showing that direct communicators in low-context cultures value openness, whereas indirect communicators in high-context cultures view subtlety as respectful (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018).

Hierarchical differences in cultures also shape differences in interaction style (Hofstede, 2001). In cultures such as those in Latin America and the Middle East, where formal hierarchical structures are common, interaction habits tend to reflect a strong respect for authority (Hooker, 2003). In this sense, communication between individuals of different status is more cautious, with subordinates or juniors showing courtesy and respect towards senior officials. In contrast, in low power distance cultures, interactions emphasise equality, and people often feel comfortable questioning authority or engaging in open dialogue with superiors, resulting in a freer and more relaxed communication style (Daniels & Greguras, 2014).

Another influence on interaction style is the degree of individualism or collectivism within a culture. According to Triandis (2006), individualistic cultures prioritise personal goals and encourage the expression of unique ideas, often leading to competitive or self-centred interactions, as seen in North America and Western Europe. In contrast, collectivist cultures in regions such as East Asia, Africa, and Latin America emphasise group harmony and interdependence (Yang, 2024). Individuals in these cultures are more likely to adopt a cooperative and accommodating interaction style, focusing on group consensus rather than individual preferences (Markus, 1991). However, it is important to note that individualism and collectivism are not opposites but can coexist and manifest differently depending on the contexts (Brewer & Chen, 2007). Understanding these cultural orientations provides valuable insight into the diverse ways people communicate and manage relationships across cultures. However, it is important to note that individuals' interaction styles are highly dynamic and influenced by a variety of factors, including context, participants, power relations, and identity, among others (Ali, 2023). In intercultural lecturer-student interactions, lecturers' and students' interaction

styles may vary depending on the programme context.

In addition, in many cultures, non-verbal communication often conveys more than language alone, especially in high-context societies (Burgoon et al., 2021). For example, maintaining eye contact is often seen as assertive and respectful in Western cultures. In contrast, in some East Asian cultures, it may be seen as disrespectful or intrusive (Alexander, 2025). Physical contact and proximity are other areas where interaction styles differ. For example, Latin American and Middle Eastern cultures are known for closer physical proximity during interactions, whereas North American and Scandinavian cultures often prefer more personal space (Hall, 1976).

In cultures that place a high value on etiquette, such as South Korea and France, social interactions are typically governed by established protocols and demonstrate respect for social conventions (Leech & Tatiana, 2014). Titles, polite language and ritual greetings are often used to show respect. In contrast, cultures with a more informal style of interaction, such as Australia or the Netherlands, prioritise friendly and casual communication (Bojadjiev et al., 2023). In these cases, even in professional settings, people may address others by their first name and avoid complicated formalities (Spencer-Oatey, 2008).

Hall's (1976), Hofstede's (2001), and Triandis's (2006) theories of cultural dimensions divide cultures into high- and low-context, individualistic and collectivist, and high- and low-power distance. However, these classifications may oversimplify cultural realities and overlook the internal diversity and heterogeneity that exist within cultures. Therefore, it is important to be cautious of cultural stereotypes and to recognise the fluidity and hybridity of cultures, particularly in the context of globalisation and modernisation (Holliday, 1999).

This suggests that national cultural factors may influence the communication styles between lecturers and students in this study. However, individual adaptability, contextual influences, and cultural blending cannot be overlooked. Lecturers and students from different cultural backgrounds may adjust their communication styles during interactions in response to these factors. Recognising this dynamic interplay is essential for understanding the complexity and fluidity of intercultural interaction in educational settings.

2.4 Cultural differences bring opportunities and challenges to interaction

The above discussion provides a foundational understanding of culture and interaction. Further review of previous studies reveals that cultural differences present both opportunities and challenges for interaction.

Diverse cultural perspectives may stimulate innovation and creativity. A multicultural team is often more likely to solve complex problems successfully because it can draw from a variety of cultural backgrounds and offer more diverse solutions (Earley & Ang, 2003). Intercultural interactions provide individuals with valuable opportunities to acquire new knowledge, skills, and values (Braslauskas, 2021). Moreover, they not only enhance cultural understanding but also encourage self-reflection on one's cultural assumptions, thereby improving intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2011). Individuals and organisations that are adjusting to a globalised environment need such growth to succeed. Although cultural differences may pose initial adjustment challenges, successful intercultural interactions can lead to deeper relationships based on trust and cooperation. By understanding and respecting each other's cultural backgrounds, participants in interaction can develop

mutual trust (Chua et al., 2012). This trust is especially crucial in international projects and multilateral collaborations, where it serves as the foundation for sustainable long-term cooperation (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

However, in some contexts, cultural differences may also lead to miscommunication, increased collaboration costs, or reduced decision-making efficiency (Shachaf, 2008). Research suggests that monocultural teams may outperform multicultural ones in decision-making when the task is clearly defined and time is limited (Misoc, 2017). In internationalised classrooms, it remains debatable whether students' multicultural backgrounds truly enhance diversity in classroom discussions. There is also a need to consider whether some students are disadvantaged due to differences in cultural communication styles (Liu et al., 2010). For instance, Chinese students may be more accustomed to expressing their views indirectly, whereas Western educational systems often prioritise direct expression and critical debate (Durkin, 2011). This raises questions about whether such processes of cultural adaptation may also affect Chinese students' academic performance.

While cultural differences present opportunities for interaction, they can also pose challenges that hinder communication and cooperation. Individuals may feel uncomfortable or confused when confronted with unfamiliar cultural norms and communication styles (Mulyadi et al., 2024). Berry (2005) points out that adapting to intercultural interactions may involve culture shock, including anxiety, uncertainty and a sense of belonging. This experience may initially negatively impact the interaction. Misunderstandings are common in intercultural interactions due to differing interpretations of behaviour associated with cultural differences (Wen et al., 2025). For example, as described by Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2018), direct expression may be perceived as honest and straightforward in some cultures but considered rude

or offensive in others. If not addressed promptly, such misunderstandings can escalate into conflict and further hinder effective interaction (Guo, 2025). In some intercultural contexts, imbalances in power and resources may result in cultural hegemony, in which the dominant culture dictates the norms of interaction and marginalises the less dominant one (Robertson, 1995). This not only limits inclusivity but also exacerbates intercultural inequality. English as a global lingua franca puts native English-speaking groups at an advantage in intercultural communication, whereas non-native English speakers may incur additional language adaptation costs (House, 2018). Research also suggests that in intercultural interactions, minorities often adapt more to the dominant culture, while dominant groups make fewer adaptations (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). In UK higher education classrooms, Chinese students are often expected to adapt to Western academic norms, such as active participation in discussions and critical thinking (Durkin, 2011).

In sum, cultural differences have a dual impact on interaction. They can serve as a source of motivation, stimulating innovation and deepening cooperation, but they can also present challenges that hinder communication and collaboration. A key question that warrants reflection is whether all cultures have an equal voice in intercultural interactions. For example, Western academic cultures emphasise critical thinking and direct expression, whereas some parts of Asia, Africa, and other regions may value respect for authority and indirect communication more.

When these contrasting styles of interaction come into contact, are all styles respected equally, or are certain approaches perceived by the dominant culture as “less proactive” or “less critical”? Such cultural bias may influence not only how students are perceived but also their confidence in international classrooms. These issues highlight the need to examine intercultural

interaction more directly, as it is within such encounters that cultural differences, biases, and power relations are most clearly negotiated.

2.5 Intercultural interaction

Intercultural interaction aims to facilitate the sharing of information and meaning. However, its complexity arises from the fact that the parties involved often interpret interactions through different cultural frameworks and ways of thinking (R'boul, 2020). Hofstede (2001) highlights that cultural contexts strongly influence behavioural patterns and communication styles. Expressions considered appropriate or polite in one culture may be perceived as impolite or offensive in another (Fuad Hasyim, 2025). Intercultural interaction expands both the context and the purpose of communication and is often accompanied by cultural learning and exchange (Chen & Yang, 2016). Therefore, while it retains the fundamental qualities of interaction, intercultural interaction also involves greater complexity. It shows heightened dynamism and greater demands for adaptation due to cultural differences.

In summary, intercultural interaction is characterised by both shared communicative intentions and significant cultural differences. These differences can enhance communication, but they can also cause misunderstandings, discomfort, or even conflict. Its complexity lies in the need for participants to navigate varying cultural norms, assumptions, and interpretive frameworks.

Therefore, this study focuses on lecturer–student interaction in intercultural educational settings, where participants bring different cultural resources, expectations, and interactional norms into classroom communication. To support this focus, this section reviews key concepts and debates in

intercultural interaction, identifies recurring limitations in prior work, and clarifies how these gaps motivate the framework developed in this study.

2.5.1 Intercultural awareness

“Intercultural awareness, a fundamental prerequisite for intercultural interaction, involves recognising how cultural differences shape perspectives and behaviours, approached with openness and tolerance.” (Byram, 1997).

This view usefully emphasises that intercultural awareness is not only about recognising difference but also about cultivating a reflective stance towards one’s own cultural positioning. However, Hall (1976) argues that much of culture operates at a subconscious level, and individuals often become aware of their cultural assumptions only when they are exposed to different cultural contexts. Understanding cultural differences in communication styles is essential for preventing conflicts caused by misinterpretation (Hall, 1976). Individuals without intercultural awareness may misinterpret these differences, leading to failed interactions.

A deeper understanding of one’s own culture and that of others, along with an active interest in both similarities and differences, fosters intercultural awareness (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2004). Such awareness encourages open-mindedness, enhances tolerance, and promotes meaningful international exchange (Zalli, 2024). Expanding cultural knowledge can also strengthen an individual’s credibility and expertise, while increased cultural awareness contributes to the development of empathy and sensitivity towards other cultures (Tomlinson, 2000).

However, research suggests that theoretical knowledge alone is insufficient for

developing true intercultural competence; rather, practical experience is also essential (Kolb, 2014). Kitsantas and Meyers (2001) found that a period of study abroad significantly enhanced students' intercultural awareness. Nevertheless, Deardorff (2011) argues that long-term immersion in another culture generally facilitates intercultural awareness more effectively than short-term experiences. Supporting this view, Trilokekar and Kukar (2011) observed that some short-term exchange or study abroad programmes may unintentionally reinforce "cultural othering" rather than promote genuine understanding. Jackson (2018) further points out that although studying abroad is widely regarded as enhancing intercultural awareness, not all students benefit equally, particularly when such experiences lack structured guidance and reflective support. This suggests that awareness is not an automatic outcome of exposure, but depends on how intercultural experiences are structured, interpreted, and supported.

Nevertheless, attempts to understand other cultures may sometimes lead individuals to over-rely on cultural generalisations, overlooking individual differences and inadvertently reinforcing stereotypes (Dervin & Dervin, 2016). For instance, in an intercultural classroom, teachers may attribute international students' behaviours primarily to cultural background, while neglecting other factors such as adaptability, academic ability, or personality. Moreover, research by Akanwa (2015) reveals that intercultural adaptation is often asymmetrical, with minority groups expected to adjust to dominant norms, while the dominant culture remains unexamined and privileged. Therefore, achieving genuine intercultural competence requires a balance between cultural understanding and individual recognition, supported by both reflective learning and lived experience.

Moreover, Deardorff (2011) argues that intercultural awareness involves not

only understanding others' cultures but also reflecting on one's own. Through such reflection, individuals can recognise that their behaviours may be perceived as impolite or inappropriate in different cultural contexts. Another important contribution of intercultural awareness to intercultural interaction is its capacity to reduce the anxiety and uncertainty that often arise from cultural differences. Ibrahim (1991) emphasises the importance of expressing empathy in culturally appropriate ways when engaging with diverse groups. He distinguishes cultural empathy from sympathy, noting that it involves understanding others' values and perspectives without assuming superiority or pity. Additionally, Lu (2024) observes that international students are more likely to participate actively when instructors employ inclusive and culturally sensitive interaction strategies.

Accordingly, these insights into intercultural awareness have shown that it plays a crucial role in supporting effective intercultural communication, but also that it has limitations when applied uncritically. In intercultural lecturer–student contexts, awareness matters because it shapes how lecturers interpret student behaviour and how students evaluate teaching practices. Considering the roles of power, individuality, and reflective thinking is important for improving interaction beyond surface-level cultural differences. This calls for more inclusive and critically informed approaches to building intercultural competence in higher education.

2.5.2 Intercultural competence and cultural hegemony

The growing cultural diversity in globalised societies has positioned intercultural competence as a vital skill for effective collaboration across educational, professional, and social contexts (Zakaria et al., 2004). Scholars

generally define intercultural competence as the integration of cognitive, affective, and behavioural abilities required to navigate cultural differences (Bennett, 2015). Despite variation in definitions, scholars agree that success today depends as much on intercultural communication as on technical skill (Zakaria et al., 2004). In lecturer–student interactions, intercultural competence is a critical yet often debated concept that plays an important role in shaping educational outcomes in culturally diverse classrooms (Cushner & Mahon, 2009).

To further unpack this concept, scholars have studied intercultural competencies from various perspectives. Deardorff (2011) defines it as a combination of knowledge, attitudes, and skills that enable individuals to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations. This suggests that intercultural competence is fundamental to intercultural interaction and informs every aspect of it. Barrett (2011) adds that individuals with intercultural attitudes tend to demonstrate respect, curiosity, and openness toward other cultures. Such attitudes help reduce prejudice and support effective communication (Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002).

Spitzberg (2010) links intercultural competence to the effectiveness and appropriateness of intercultural interactions, suggesting that it is essential for improving the quality of communication across cultures. However, this approach often assumes neutral benchmarks and ignores how marginalised groups are expected to adapt to dominant norms (Holliday, 2016). In contrast, Kim (2009) emphasises the individual attributes of intercultural competence, defining it as the capacity to build cooperative relationships across diverse social and cultural contexts. This perspective foregrounds intercultural competence as the capacity to build cooperative relationships across diverse contexts, thereby supporting trust and collaboration in educational

environments.

Nevertheless, Phipps (2019) cautions that collaborative discourses may conceal unequal expectations placed on individuals from non-dominant cultures. Similarly, Bennett (2004) raises concerns about the focus on communication adaptation, questioning whether effective communication implicitly requires alignment with Western traditions of dialogue. Marginson (2022) further argues that neoliberal education systems often frame intercultural competence as a matter of individual skill deficit, rather than addressing the structural inequalities that shape intercultural experiences. The ideal of “effective communication” may therefore reinforce Western-centric norms, reflecting postcolonial critiques of epistemic dominance as discussed by de Sousa Santos (2018).

Some scholars argue that intercultural competence develops over time through experience and reflection (Hammer et al., 2003). This perspective emphasises that sustained engagement in intercultural interactions allows individuals to gradually accumulate the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for competence development. Gudykunst (2004) suggests that managing anxiety and uncertainty in intercultural situations enhances individuals’ sensitivity and adaptability, enabling them to navigate cultural differences more effectively. Consequently, situational practice plays an important role in building intercultural competence. Barrett (2013) further proposes that activities such as intercultural exchange programmes, international learning experiences, role-playing, case studies, and online intercultural interactions can significantly enhance competence. However, this pragmatic approach has been criticised for reducing cultural complexity to rehearsed behavioural scripts. Dervin (2017) argues that such methods risk essentialising cultural difference and failing to address the fluid and dynamic

nature of identity in intercultural contexts. Furthermore, Kolb (2014) highlights that while practice is important, reflection plays a more critical role in helping individuals deepen their understanding of cultural differences. Through reflective learning, individuals can approach future interactions with greater confidence and appropriateness.

Critics also point to the Western bias embedded in many models of intercultural competence. Tran (2013)'s study of Vietnamese students reveals that collectivist cultures may value communal observation and shared learning more than individualised practices. Similarly, Joseph Mbembe (2016) critiques global competence discourse as privileging Euro-American norms while marginalising other ways of knowing.

Although research has proposed structured, model-like approaches to developing intercultural competence, access to these opportunities remains unequal. According to existing studies, individuals with higher levels of education and international experience are more likely to develop intercultural competence. In contrast, those from disadvantaged backgrounds or with limited access to international exchange may face greater challenges in achieving comparable growth (Bennett, 2004). Moreover, intercultural competence training carries the risk of reinforcing cultural stereotypes (Dinges, 1983). Dervin and Dervin (2016) warn that superficial or overly generalised training may inadvertently reinforce "us–them" dichotomies, deepening exclusion rather than promoting genuine inclusion.

In summary, the literature highlights several key resources for effective intercultural interaction. These include awareness, flexible communication, sensitivity to non-verbal cues, humour, and trust. However, many competence-based approaches assume that all participants contribute equally. They often

overlook how institutional norms and power relations influence what is considered “effective” communication. As a result, these approaches may not fully reflect how lecturers and students actually understand and experience interaction. This limitation suggests the importance of studying intercultural interaction in specific classroom contexts, with particular attention to how lecturers and students perceive, interpret, and feel about their interactions in real time.

2.5.3 Intercultural adjustment strategies

In the literature, adjustment is often discussed together with adaptation, yet the two terms are not always clearly distinguished. This lack of clarity is important for the present study because lecturer–student interaction involves change at different levels. Some challenges require immediate coping within the interaction itself, such as managing turn-taking, responding to participation norms, or adjusting feedback practices. Other changes develop more gradually and may affect identity, belonging, and learning orientation.

In this chapter, adjustment refers to short-term, situation-specific behavioural and communicative changes in response to unfamiliar classroom norms (Deardorff, 2011; Gudykunst, 2004). Adaptation, by contrast, is used to describe longer-term psychological and identity-related changes, as individuals gradually internalise new cultural expectations (Kim, 2001; Ward et al., 2020).

Although these two levels can be analytically distinguished, they are closely connected in practice. Repeated interactional adjustments may gradually contribute to deeper processes of adaptation over time. Clarifying this distinction helps to avoid conceptual confusion and provides a clearer

foundation for examining intercultural adjustment strategies in classroom interaction.

Although analytically distinct, these processes are closely interrelated in practice. Short-term adjustment strategies may accumulate into longer-term patterns of adaptation, while both processes are embedded within wider acculturation contexts shaped by power relations, institutional norms, and sociocultural expectations. This conceptual overlap has often been left under-theorised in existing studies, creating ambiguity about how different layers of intercultural change should be interpreted in educational settings.

Building on these distinctions, this subsection reviews commonly discussed interaction-level adjustment strategies proposed to support intercultural communication between lecturers and students. In intercultural communication research, adjustment is repeatedly framed as a practical focus because it offers actionable ways to reduce misunderstandings and support collaboration (Deardorff, 2011; Gudykunst, 2004).

At the core of these efforts is intercultural awareness, which enables individuals to recognise and accept cultural differences with openness and sensitivity. This awareness helps reduce cultural bias and conflict by discouraging monocultural judgments and encouraging cultural empathy (Byram, 1997). Respect and understanding of different cultural backgrounds are essential to achieving successful intercultural engagement (Aririguzoh, 2022). Furthermore, recognising each other's values and developing intercultural skills are key to fostering effective interculturalism (Dvorianchykova et al., 2022). Language learning and cultural knowledge provide individuals with essential tools to navigate intercultural differences (Liu et al., 2023).

Adjusting communication style is one of the most important strategies. Communication approaches should be adjusted to suit different cultural expectations to manage interactions effectively (Braslauskas, 2021). Additionally, intercultural competence enables individuals to respond flexibly in diverse cultural contexts, while creativity helps them develop innovative solutions to cultural misunderstandings. For instance, during conflict or negotiation, individuals may need to modify their communication to align with the face needs of the other party, which is vital for maintaining respect and avoiding confrontation (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

In addition, strong non-verbal communication skills are essential for effective intercultural interaction. Understanding and appropriately using non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice, can greatly enhance communication across cultures (Sadiki, 2020). However, the interpretation of non-verbal cues is often culture-specific. For instance, gestures, eye contact, and emotional expressiveness can carry very different meanings across cultures, which may result in miscommunication or even unintended offence (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013). Therefore, while non-verbal competence is important, it must be accompanied by cultural sensitivity and contextual awareness. Humour has also been shown to play a role in building successful intercultural relationships. When both parties understand the cultural context behind each other's humour, it can create a sense of closeness and rapport (Mullan & Béal, 2021). Therefore, mutual understanding of the cultural elements embedded in humour may be a key factor in facilitating meaningful intercultural engagement (Ladilova & Schröder, 2022). Nevertheless, humour can also act as a cultural boundary. If used without awareness of the cultural context, it may exclude those unfamiliar with the references or reinforce dominant cultural norms (Bell, 2007).

Trust, a cornerstone of long-term cooperation, requires transparent communication, shared goals, and mutual respect for cultural norms (Hofstede, 1986). Researchers have confirmed this view in recent years, and specific strategies have deepened it (Zabelavičius, 2024). Cultural empathy, quality interaction, and transparency are key to building trust in intercultural communication (Yu et al., 2021). Essentially, trust is enhanced when both parties in an intercultural exchange can establish cultural resonance and communicate effectively (Zabelavičius, 2024). However, much of the existing literature tends to oversimplify the process of trust-building by treating it as a set of universal behaviours, often overlooking the structural and institutional barriers that limit equitable engagement across cultures (Marginson, 2022). In intercultural contexts, trust-building is not always straightforward. In university lecturer–student interactions, for instance, it involves more than transparent communication and shared goals. It also requires addressing potential conflicts arising from cultural differences (Dietz et al., 2010). Dogra et al. (2007) found that students from different backgrounds may hold differing expectations of lecturers and the challenges lecturers face in building consistent trust while respecting cultural diversity.

2.5.4 Intercultural adaptation challenges

After exploring key aspects such as intercultural awareness, competence, and strategic approaches, it is equally important to understand the potential challenges that may arise in intercultural interactions. To provide a better understanding of the difficulties that lecturers and students may encounter at the intercultural level, this section focuses on intercultural adaptation.

In contrast to the more immediate, interaction-focused notion of adjustment,

adaptation is commonly used to describe deeper, more enduring changes in individuals' emotional orientations, self-concepts, and relational positioning within the host educational environment.

This separation risks obscuring how power asymmetries, dominant academic norms, and institutional cultures condition what forms of adaptation are possible or desirable. As a result, adaptation is often framed as a unidirectional process of fitting into pre-existing norms, rather than as a negotiated and relationally co-constructed trajectory that unfolds through everyday classroom interaction.

Intercultural adaptation, as a key theme in intercultural communication, is closely linked to the quality of intercultural interaction. It plays a crucial role in enabling individuals to communicate effectively in new cultural environments by adjusting their behaviours and communication styles (Ward et al., 2020). The process of adaptation is influenced by a range of factors, including individual personality traits, the level of available social support, and environmental conditions (Hu, 2023). However, intercultural adaptation is not always a smooth or positive experience. It can lead to psychological stress, feelings of isolation, or even cultural alienation (Kim, 2017; Lewthwaite, 1996). For instance, many international students report experiencing identity confusion or cultural conflict as they adjust to unfamiliar educational or social contexts (Kim, 2001). Research has shown that some Asian students may hesitate to participate in classroom discussions at Western universities due to fear of making mistakes (Li & Jia, 2006). Importantly, such difficulties are not solely the result of cultural differences; rather, they stem from a combination of factors, including teacher attitudes, classroom structure, and the level of peer support (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009).

“There are large group and individual differences in how people (in both groups in contact) go about their acculturation (described in terms of the integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation strategies), in how much stress they experience, and how well they adapt psychologically and socioculturally. Generally, those pursuing the integration strategy experience less stress and achieve better adaptations than those pursuing marginalisation; the outcomes for those pursuing assimilation and separation experience intermediate levels of stress and adaptation.” (Berry, 2005).

This highlights that acculturation is not a uniform process, but one in which chosen strategies significantly influence both stress levels and adaptation outcomes.

Ward and his team (Searle & Ward, 1990) distinguished between two key dimensions of acculturation: psychological and sociocultural. Psychological adaptation refers to an individual's emotional and mental well-being during the process of adjusting to a new cultural context. This includes factors such as homesickness, stress, depressive symptoms, and overall life satisfaction (Glass & Westmont, 2014). This perspective is valuable because it highlights the inner, less visible dimensions of intercultural transition that might otherwise be overlooked. In contrast, sociocultural adaptation concerns the practical skills necessary to function effectively in a foreign country, such as navigating the living environment, building and sustaining interpersonal relationships, and adapting to local cultural norms and values (Xiong & Zhou, 2018). The distinction between psychological and sociocultural adaptation highlights that successful intercultural adjustment is not only about acquiring external skills but also about maintaining internal well-being.

In the process of adaptation, Kim (2001) found that individuals adapt to new

cultural environments by developing adaptive competencies. This adaptation is typically reflected in improved language skills. It is also seen in the formation of social support networks. Additionally, it involves an increased understanding and acceptance of cultural differences. Among these, language proficiency plays a vital role. According to Ward et al. (2020), strong language skills not only facilitate integration into the host society but also enhance the effectiveness and quality of intercultural interactions. Liu et al. (2025) found that proficiency in the host language helps reduce misunderstandings and boosts self-confidence, enabling individuals to engage more actively in communication and collaboration in intercultural settings. However, language competence alone does not guarantee complete integration. As Yuan et al. (2013) point out, even fluent non-native English speakers may struggle with informal social interactions, highlighting the limitations of linguistic adaptation in addressing deeper social and cultural barriers.

Furthermore, social support plays an important role in cultural adaptation. Ward et al. (2020) found that support from family, friends, or host communities can effectively alleviate psychological stress during the acculturation process, thereby creating a more positive environment for intercultural interaction. Brunsting et al. (2021) also found that social support not only fosters emotional well-being but also facilitates individuals' adjustment to unfamiliar cultural settings.

Furthermore, the specific approach to acculturation directly influences the outcomes of intercultural interaction. It is important to emphasise that the relationship between acculturation and intercultural interaction is not unidirectional but reciprocal (Horenczyk et al., 2015). On the one hand, effective acculturation improves the frequency and quality of intercultural encounters. On the other hand, regular engagement in intercultural interaction

enhances individuals' familiarity with, and openness to, the host culture. This reciprocal relationship has been confirmed in studies on international students (Bennett, 2015; Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Zhou et al., 2008). For instance, Bastien et al. (2018) found that students with higher levels of academic and sociocultural adaptation reported more effective and meaningful interactions with members of the host cultural group.

In summary, previous research has shown that successful acculturation promotes intercultural interactions; however, the process is not always linear or entirely positive. Models proposed by scholars such as Kim (2001) and Berry (2005), while helpful in explaining the dynamics of acculturation, need further exploration regarding their applicability in higher education settings. Previous research has emphasised that acculturation is not only a challenge at the individual level but is also influenced by environmental and systemic factors (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). Much of the literature treats adaptation mainly as an individual psychological outcome. It pays less attention to the relational, pedagogical, and institutional conditions that shape intercultural experience over time. In classroom contexts, interactional practices, teaching expectations, and institutional structures actively influence how adaptation unfolds.

In addition, adaptation is often examined without sufficient reference to the wider context in which international students and lecturers operate. This can obscure how power relations, dominant academic norms, and institutional cultures shape what kinds of adaptation are possible or encouraged.

These limitations highlight the need for a more interaction-focused and process-oriented framework. Such an approach allows adjustment and adaptation to be understood as interconnected processes within lecturer–

student communication. This perspective informs the later use of an integrated theoretical framework in Chapter 3, supporting a more situated analysis of intercultural competence and adaptation in TESOL.

2.5.5 Summary of intercultural interaction

This section has shown that while intercultural awareness, competence, adjustment, and adaptation are central to understanding intercultural interaction, they are often discussed in fragmented and conceptually inconsistent ways. Awareness and competence are frequently presented as static qualities or lists of skills. Adjustment is often reduced to short-term behavioural coping strategies, while adaptation is framed mainly as an individual psychological outcome. Such separations can obscure how these processes unfold through everyday classroom interaction.

Moreover, much existing research adopts a deficit-oriented perspective that places the burden of intercultural difficulties primarily on international students. In doing so, it underplays the relational, pedagogical, and institutional conditions that shape interactional experience. This tendency limits the explanatory power of approaches that treat intercultural development as either a fixed set of competences or a one-directional process of individual change.

Taken together, these limitations point to the need for a more integrated and interaction-sensitive perspective. Such an approach should connect cultural expectations, relational negotiation, and processes of adjustment and adaptation within situated classroom interaction. This orientation provides the foundation for the conceptual framework developed in the following chapter.

2.6 Teacher-student relation and interaction

Building on the discussion of intercultural interaction, these dynamics become particularly significant in higher education, where everyday teaching and learning are enacted through lecturer–student interaction. Within classrooms, intercultural exchange is primarily enacted through lecturer–student interaction. Although this study focuses specifically on lecturer–student interactions within university settings, these interactions can be understood as part of the broader category of teacher–student relationships, which have been extensively examined in educational research. Since most existing literature addresses teacher–student interactions in general, this section draws on these broader discussions to inform the analysis. Reviewing studies on teacher–student relationships helps build a foundational understanding of interaction dynamics relevant to higher education contexts.

Relationships between educators and learners are widely regarded as foundational for effective collaboration and learning (Paterson, 2005). A strong teacher–student relationship serves not only as the basis for classroom interaction but also as a critical factor in improving educational outcomes (Pianta et al., 2012). These relationships often emerge naturally and are shaped by ongoing teaching and learning processes (Koca, 2016).

“Teachers have the primary responsibility for pulling students into classroom activities and for establishing the tone and feeling of the classroom atmosphere. The receptive and approachable teacher, versus the domineering or disconnected teacher, can make students feel included with positive affect in the class.” (Englehart, 2009)

This highlights the role of teachers in creating inclusive classroom climates, underscoring that their attitudes and approaches directly shape students'

experiences of belonging and engagement.

However, in intercultural and higher education contexts, the development and interpretation of teacher–student relationships become more complex. In multicultural classrooms, differing understandings of concepts such as authority, distance, and familiarity may challenge the formation and maintenance of these relationships, potentially leading to miscommunication or tension (Hofstede, 1986). Therefore, teacher–student relationships are inherently dynamic, evolving through diverse teaching practices and classroom interaction (Pianta, 2017).

Specifically, teacher–student interaction is a multifaceted process that unfolds through a range of situations, forms, and content in classroom settings, reflecting both diversity and adaptability (Van de Pol et al., 2010). Such interactions are shaped by the individual characteristics and needs of both teachers and students (Li, 2017). They may include verbal exchanges, non-verbal expressions, or technology-mediated communication, each contributing not only to knowledge transmission but also to emotional support and behavioural guidance. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these diverse and flexible forms of interaction in managing cultural differences remains uncertain. While teacher–student interactions aim to support both cognitive and emotional aspects of learning, their success in intercultural contexts requires further investigation and contextual adaptation. Building on this background, this section will explore the main characteristics of teacher–student interaction, focusing on research areas and findings particularly applicable to intercultural settings in higher education.

2.6.1 Teachers' insights and interaction

Research consistently suggests that teachers do not merely transmit knowledge but actively construct interactional environments that shape students' motivation, engagement, and sense of belonging (Eschenmann, 1991). This highlights interaction as a vital pedagogical tool for encouraging student participation and fostering deeper engagement.

Whitaker (2020) emphasises that when educators view interaction as a motivational process, they become more responsive to students' emotional and academic needs, which in turn supports a more positive classroom climate and stronger intrinsic motivation (Avci, 2016). Ahea et al. (2016) also note that teachers play a pivotal role in shaping students' academic outcomes, with positive teacher–student interactions emerging as a key contributor to student success. In line with this, Nugent (2009) argues that teachers who proactively initiate classroom interactions can effectively enhance students' learning experiences. He also stresses that educators must genuinely believe in the power of interaction to improve academic motivation (Nugent, 2009). With this conviction, teachers strive to continually improve their interactions to help students develop a stronger sense of belonging and purpose in the classroom. Krause et al. (2010) add that when lecturers are willing to build positive relationships and engage with learners, education becomes a more enjoyable and balanced experience. This suggests that teachers' beliefs not only influence the quality of interaction but also contribute directly to a harmonious and effective learning atmosphere. However, Hofstede (1986) noted that teachers' beliefs may be challenged by varying cultural expectations in intercultural classrooms. In some cultures, for instance, teachers are viewed primarily as authority figures, while in others, they are expected to adopt a more egalitarian and collaborative role (Hofstede, 1986). Harlin et al. (2009)

further suggest that differing expectations can create inconsistencies in how teachers perceive and enact their roles, potentially complicating their interaction with students from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, while teachers' beliefs are central to shaping effective interactions, such beliefs must be exercised with cultural awareness and adapted sensitively in intercultural educational contexts.

Several scholars have explored the relationship between teacher behaviour and the quality of teacher–student relationships. For example, encouraging student participation in classroom discussions, offering timely feedback, and showing respect for students' opinions can significantly enhance students' perceptions of their teachers while also reducing academic dissatisfaction (Pogue & AhYun, 2006; Tang & Hu, 2022). These findings suggest that the alignment between teachers' beliefs and behaviours plays a crucial role in shaping student perceptions and fostering meaningful engagement. Marzano et al. (2003) further emphasise that providing constructive guidance, rather than constant criticism, is essential for building positive teacher–student relationships. Tschannen-Moran (2014) also highlights the importance of teacher behaviours that demonstrate respect and trust toward students, which can help reduce negativity in the classroom and create more supportive opportunities for growth. Similarly, Denia et al. (2022) conclude that effective teacher–student relationships reduce disruptive behaviours and contribute to a learning environment that is more inclusive and conducive to success for all students.

Additionally, teachers' perceptions and beliefs are closely tied to the quality of teacher–student relationships. Rubie-Davies et al. (2015) emphasise that teachers' perceptions have a direct influence on students' learning outcomes. They argue that eliminating stereotypes and prejudices and raising

expectations for all students is essential for creating equitable learning environments (Rubie-Davies et al., 2015). By treating students as equals, attending to their individual needs, and maintaining the belief that every student is capable of success, teachers can foster inclusive classrooms that significantly enhance academic achievement (Debasu & Yitayew, 2024). This reinforces the idea that teacher perceptions play a critical role in shaping a positive classroom climate. Pianta et al. (2012) highlight that teachers' beliefs are central to the formation of meaningful teacher–student relationships, as these beliefs inform how teachers perceive and support their students. Marzano et al. (2003) add that using positive reinforcement and establishing clear behavioural expectations are effective strategies for promoting prosocial behaviours such as cooperation and mutual respect. This underscores the importance of consistency and a positive orientation in teachers' beliefs for managing student behaviour and fostering an optimal learning environment (Stronge, 2018).

Conversely, interactions perceived as inconsistent or unfair may lead to student behavioural issues. Gregory and Weinstein (2008) found that students were more likely to exhibit resistance or disengagement when they sensed favouritism or a lack of fairness in teacher behaviour. These findings suggest that teacher beliefs and actions must consistently reflect fairness and respect, as any deviation can provoke negative emotional responses from students and ultimately undermine classroom effectiveness.

In summary, teachers' beliefs and perceptions play an important role in shaping the quality of teacher–student relationships, influencing students' motivation, behaviour, and academic engagement. When educators act with fairness, provide positive guidance, and maintain consistent expectations, they are more likely to foster a supportive learning environment. In the context of

this study, which examines lecturer-student interactions in multicultural university classrooms, these findings are significant. They highlight the importance of considering how lecturers' beliefs and perceptions influence their everyday interactions with students from diverse cultures. This understanding helps explain variations in interaction quality and supports the exploration of how cultural differences shape lecturers' interpretations, expectations, and communicative behaviours in practice.

2.6.2 Environment and atmosphere as interaction mediators

Teacher–student interaction plays a crucial role in shaping the learning environment, serving both as a foundation for instruction and a motivating force in education (Ezinwa, 2024). It fosters student engagement, cultivates a positive classroom climate, and supports academic learning by demonstrating teacher care and responsiveness (Sakineh & Ali, 2020). When teachers create a student-friendly environment, they enhance learners' motivation, which in turn contributes to greater academic engagement and achievement (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). Moreover, when students are encouraged to share their knowledge in a welcoming classroom atmosphere, their task-related motivation and positive emotions are significantly strengthened, thereby improving the effectiveness of group work (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). Interactive behaviour not only shapes students' individual emotional and cognitive states but also influences overall classroom dynamics, which in turn affects levels of engagement and academic performance (Kelder et al., 2015). From a relational perspective, these interactional moves can also be understood as forms of rapport management through which teachers and students negotiate trust, respect, and mutual alignment (Spencer-Oatey et al.,

2017). A supportive learning atmosphere, therefore, becomes both a condition for and an outcome of effective teacher–student interaction, enhancing participation and improving learning outcomes (Barr, 2016). As Mercer (2016) points out, learners develop knowledge most effectively in specific contexts through collaboration, discussion, and the co-construction of meaning with others. Thus, an ideal learning environment should not only offer appropriate resources and structure but also actively promote communication and interaction.

Furthermore, Wang and Degol (2016) emphasise that classroom climate plays a key role in shaping students' achievement goal orientations. When a learning environment promotes mastery, emphasises effort, or focuses on performance, it influences how students establish their academic goals (Church et al., 2001). These goal orientations then affect students' motivation, learning behaviours, and eventual academic outcomes (Yi Li & Shieh, 2016). Creating an environment that encourages positive engagement, collaboration, and constructive feedback is therefore vital to fostering an effective teacher-student relationship and facilitating student achievement.

In summary, the dynamic nature of teacher–student interaction shapes the classroom climate, which in turn influences both students' short-term academic performance and their long-term development (Pianta et al., 2012). Previous research suggests that by fostering a positive learning environment and psychological atmosphere, teachers can enhance student engagement and stimulate their academic and personal growth. While teacher–student interaction is widely regarded as essential to the learning process, cultural differences in multicultural classrooms may introduce complexities that require adaptive strategies. Although such interactions contribute to creating a supportive classroom climate, their effectiveness in intercultural settings

depends on the degree of cultural sensitivity and adaptability demonstrated by both teachers and students. These insights are particularly relevant to this study. They highlight the importance of considering how classroom climate, relational processes, and learning engagement may be experienced differently when cultural expectations and communication styles differ. They also provide a useful foundation for exploring the relational and emotional dimensions of intercultural lecturer–student interaction in higher education.

2.6.3 Power dynamics and face culture in interaction

Many previous studies show that a key feature of teacher-student interaction is power dynamics. Traditionally, teacher-centred interaction reinforces the teacher's intellectual authority and control over the classroom (Hofstede, 2011). This approach is common in many high-power-distance cultures, such as those in East Asia, where teachers are often regarded as unchallengeable authorities and students are expected to follow instructions without question (Wang & Torrisi-Steele, 2015). However, as educational philosophies have evolved, there has been a gradual shift towards more egalitarian models of interaction (Zhou et al., 2024). In the classroom, power relations are typically expressed through teachers' control and students' compliance (Manke, 1997). Teachers maintain their authority through the transmission of knowledge, the regulation of student behaviour, and the administration of assessment.

In contrast, students participate by receiving instruction and meeting classroom expectations (Shepard, 2001). This power relationship forms the foundation of educational activity, but it can also hinder equitable interaction between teachers and students. Research has shown that when teachers share power appropriately and encourage student voice, it can enhance

motivation and increase classroom engagement (Smith et al., 2005). Conversely, overly centralised or rigid power structures may suppress student initiative and even provoke resistance (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). Moreover, power dynamics are deeply shaped by cultural factors. In high power distance cultures, students tend to display more deference to teachers, reinforcing traditional hierarchies and classroom authority (Hofstede, 1986). These cultural elements become particularly salient in intercultural educational settings, where teachers must navigate and adapt their use of power in response to diverse cultural expectations and classroom norms.

In the studies of lecturer–student interactions, face culture significantly influences how communication unfolds in the classroom. Face culture refers to the protection of one’s self-image and social dignity during interpersonal interactions (Goffman, 2005). It constitutes a core dimension of how rapport is negotiated and maintained in educational encounters. In teacher–student interactions, face culture often reflects how students are perceived and how teachers’ efforts to protect students’ social image are perceived. For instance, students may refrain from asking questions in class for fear of appearing ignorant. At the same time, teachers often seek to preserve students’ self-esteem through encouragement and supportive responses (Brown et al., 1987). This cultural emphasis on face has a considerable impact on the patterns and effectiveness of classroom interactions (Wu, 2009). In face-conscious cultures, teachers who fail to consider students’ need to maintain face, especially when asking questions or giving feedback directly, may unintentionally provoke negative emotional responses (Puccio & Gonzalez, 2004). This can reduce students’ willingness to participate in class and limit learning outcomes (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018).

On the other hand, using indirect communication and offering positive

reinforcement can help teachers maintain students' face while also enhancing their motivation to engage with learning (Li et al., 2020). Power dynamics and face culture are closely interconnected in teacher–student interactions, jointly shaping both the classroom atmosphere and the overall quality of interaction (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hofstede, 1986). Furthermore, Cornelius and Herrenkohl (2004) suggest that face culture can influence how students perceive power relationships. When students believe that a teacher's use of authority respects their values and dignity, they are more inclined to engage actively and constructively in classroom activities (Rubie-Davies et al., 2015).

In summary, previous studies have highlighted the significance of both face culture and power dynamics in teacher–student interactions. These elements have also been emphasised in the earlier literature review on intercultural communication. Consequently, to better understand how these concepts manifest in diverse educational settings, it is important to incorporate or reframe these concepts in the context of intercultural lecturer-student interactions. A multidimensional perspective on face and power can provide deeper insights into the dynamics at play in such interactions. This also underscores the relevance of Rapport Management as an analytical lens for examining how relational goals, face needs, and interactional rights are negotiated in intercultural lecturer–student communication.

2.6.4 Emotion and psychology in interaction

By reviewing previous literature, this section highlights that the emotions and psychological states of both students and teachers are closely intertwined with the quality of their interactions, offering an empirical basis for interpreting lecturers' and students' interactional experiences.

Teacher–student interactions are crucial for addressing students' psychological and emotional needs, significantly influencing both their academic achievement and overall well-being (Pianta, 2015). By showing care, encouragement, and support, teachers foster emotional connections that enhance students' engagement and sense of belonging (Osterman, 2023). For example, teachers who demonstrate tolerance towards students' mistakes and encourage them to take risks, rather than criticise or dismiss their efforts, provide valuable emotional support. Students with learning difficulties are especially in need of this support (Hattie & Marsh, 2004). Through such encouragement, teachers not only help to build students' self-confidence but also create a learning environment where students feel safe to face challenges and explore new knowledge (Zacarian & Silverstone, 2020).

However, the affective dimension of teacher–student interactions is neither singular nor universal, and its intensity and nature are influenced by cultural context (Hagenauer et al., 2016). For example, in some cultures, teachers may adopt a more direct approach to their interactions, proactively expressing care and praise. In contrast, other cultures may place greater emphasis on maintaining a professional distance and avoiding excessive emotional expression in the teacher–student relationship (Hofstede, 1986). As a result of this cultural variation, educators need to be mindful of students' cultural backgrounds. They should adapt their interaction strategies to maintain effective teacher–student relationships.

Interaction and dialogue are key tools in understanding students' psychological needs (Mercer, 2016). Wang (2023) supports the view that teacher–student interaction is a dynamic exchange that mutually shapes students' knowledge, emotions, and behaviour. He suggests that teachers must not only transfer knowledge effectively but also gain a deeper understanding of students' needs,

interests, and challenges through ongoing interaction. Mercer (2016) further supports this perspective, noting that in an inquiry-based learning environment, teachers engage students through questioning, discussion, and feedback, while students contribute by asking questions and expressing their opinions. This interactive process not only motivates students to learn but also enables teachers to adapt their strategies to improve teaching effectiveness.

Besides, teacher–student interactions are crucial for addressing students’ sense of belonging and competence (Spilt et al., 2011). Positive emotional interactions, such as expressions of care, encouragement, and support from teachers, create a safe learning environment that boosts students’ self-confidence and sense of belonging (Baeva & Bordovskaia, 2015). This emotional connection not only motivates students to learn but also helps reduce anxiety and other negative emotions, providing a protective mechanism for their mental health (Le et al., 2021). However, negative interactions also pose risks. When teachers are indifferent or overly critical, students may feel ignored or dismissed, which can damage their self-esteem and attitude toward learning (Fecho, 2011). Thus, emotional support is a key component of promoting a positive classroom atmosphere and preventing mental health problems among students. Pianta (2015) highlights that when a positive teacher–student relationship is established, both students and teachers develop greater affection for each other and the classroom, which in turn enhances students’ motivation to engage in tasks. From this perspective, teacher-student relationships significantly impact the overall classroom experience. Positive relationships increase student engagement and communication, which lead to a greater sense of belonging (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Becker and Luthar (2002) find that for students from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds, strong teacher-student relationships can provide

essential support in overcoming external pressures, resulting in positive academic and social outcomes. Notably, the impact of teacher–student relationship often extends beyond the classroom. Research indicates that students who experience positive teacher–student relationships are more likely to develop healthy relationship and maintain positive attitudes towards learning throughout their lives (Yu et al., 2021). This relationship not only supports students' current academic progress but also lays the foundation for their long-term social and professional development.

Previous studies have shown that positive emotional interactions can foster deeper emotional connections between students and their teachers, thereby enhancing students' sense of belonging in the classroom. However, it remains unclear whether such emotional connections can be universally understood and accepted by all students, particularly in intercultural contexts. These insights are relevant to the present study because they highlight how intercultural differences may shape the emotional dimensions of teacher–student interaction. They also provide a useful basis for considering how emotional support is perceived and experienced in intercultural higher education settings.

2.6.5 Developments with interaction

Previous studies have also found that teacher-student interaction influences both academic and non-academic outcomes. The interaction between teachers and students plays a vital role in students' academic development.

As Kalpana (2014) notes, learning is inherently a social process in which knowledge is constructed through engagement with others. In this way, teacher-student interaction contributes not only to the transmission of

knowledge but also to the development of the students' academic skills. A supportive classroom environment, clear communication, and constructive feedback have been found to significantly enhance academic performance (Hattie & Marsh, 2004).

Moore et al. (2010) identified three primary types of interaction in education: learner–content, learner–teacher, and learner–learner. Building on this, Li et al. (2020) observed that with the rise of digital teaching, interaction has shifted from a traditional one-way model to a more multi-directional approach. For example, the quality of classroom questioning, particularly the use of higher-order questions, has been shown to correlate positively with learning outcomes (Graesser & Olde, 2003).

In terms of interaction content, knowledge acquisition, competence development, emotional learning, and value formation constitute the core components of teacher–student interaction. Mu and Wang (2019) further highlight that effective interaction is a crucial condition for achieving deep learning, especially in online education contexts.

In addition, teacher expectations play a significant role in shaping students' academic trajectories. When teachers express trust and provide positive feedback, students are more likely to engage and exceed expectations (Harlin et al., 2009). Conversely, low expectations may constrain students' academic potential, particularly among those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Rubie-Davies et al., 2015). Having a fair and encouraging attitude on the part of teachers is beneficial not only for reducing educational inequality but also for increasing a student's motivation and capacity for learning.

The quality of teacher–student relationships is also strongly linked to academic and social outcomes. Positive relationships are associated with better

academic performance, higher motivation, and increased rates of homework completion (Gehlbach et al., 2012). Roorda et al. (2011) found that such relationships significantly improve school engagement and achievement, whereas negative relationships are correlated with lower levels of both. McGrath and Van Bergen (2015) further pointed out that negative interactions can have particularly harmful effects on at-risk students' academic and emotional well-being.

Similarly, Hamre and Pianta (2001) demonstrated that strong teacher–student relationships predict better academic outcomes and social competence, while poor relationships yield the opposite effect. Murray and Greenberg (2000) also found that positive student–teacher bonds reduce behavioural problems. Importantly, Spilt et al. (2011) noted that teacher well-being is positively related to the quality of teacher–student relationships, which in turn influence students' academic success and socio-emotional development. It has also been found that students' motivation is strongly shaped by the quality and perception of teacher–student interaction (Akhtar et al., 2019).

Based on the reviewed literature, teacher–student interactions appear to play an important role in shaping academic achievement, emotional well-being, classroom engagement, and overall student growth. These findings provide a strong foundation for understanding the complex nature of teacher–student interaction. By building on these insights, this study aims to explore how such elements of interaction are perceived, experienced, interpreted, and practised in multicultural environments, and how cultural differences influence the development of meaningful relationships in the classroom.

2.6.6 Summary of teacher-student interaction

Overall, existing research recognises that teacher–student interaction is a dynamic and multidimensional process shaped by beliefs, behaviours, classroom environments, cultural expectations, emotional exchanges, and power relations. Although its pedagogical value is widely acknowledged, the interaction process itself remains complex and context-dependent.

While these studies show that teacher–student interaction is multidimensional, much of the literature remains fragmented across separate strands, such as relationship quality, communication behaviours, and engagement outcomes. This makes it difficult to understand how interaction functions as a coherent process in real classrooms. To address this limitation, interaction needs to be examined within its specific teaching and institutional contexts.

Moreover, cultural differences are sometimes treated as relatively stable traits, overlooking their dynamic and context-dependent nature in classroom interactions. Within this broader context, lecturers' own beliefs and practices become particularly significant. Teachers' beliefs and behaviours play a central role in shaping the quality of these interactions. When guided by fairness and respect, teacher–student relationships can foster inclusive and supportive learning environments. Yet in intercultural settings, differing expectations and communication styles may complicate the interaction process. This underlines the importance of cultural awareness and the ability to adjust teaching practices, both of which are highly relevant to the present study. Furthermore, unequal access to resources and variation in teaching styles may pose additional barriers to effective interaction in multicultural environments.

Additionally, emotional support, such as encouragement and constructive feedback, contributes to improved performance, while academic support

contributes to increased confidence. These insights suggest the importance of balancing professional standards with culturally responsive support. This concern informs the direction of the present study.

Taken together, this review highlights the need for a framework that connects cultural expectations, relational dynamics, pedagogical practices, and developmental processes within contextually situated lecturer–student interaction. This integrative orientation directly informs the construction of the conceptual framework presented in the following chapter.

2.7 Distinctive Features of Lecturer-Student Interaction in Universities

In higher education, teacher-student interactions are more complex and diverse than they are in primary and secondary education. The goals extend beyond knowledge transmission to encompass the holistic development of students and the cultivation of social responsibility (Biggs & Tang, 2011). In this context, university lecturers serve not only as educators but also as mentors and advisors, offering both academic support and personal guidance (Lammers & Murphy, 2002).

Therefore, the following section reviews distinctive features of lecturer–student interaction identified in previous research. This overview helps clarify the specific aspects that warrant attention when studying teacher–student interaction in higher-education contexts.

2.7.1 Climate of major institutions

Unlike primary or secondary education, which generally follow a standardised

pedagogical approach, higher education encompasses a wide range of disciplines, each with its epistemological foundations, teaching methods, and professional culture. These disciplinary differences influence not only the content and structure of learning but also the nature of lecturer–student interactions.

Becher and Trowler (2001) categorise academic disciplines into “hard” and “soft” sciences, each fostering distinct interactional styles. In hard disciplines such as engineering and physics, lecturers often adopt a hierarchical and task-oriented approach, focusing on technical skill development and problem-solving accuracy (Becher & Trowler, 2001). In contrast, soft disciplines such as the social sciences and humanities place greater emphasis on critical thinking, interpretive analysis, and dialogic engagement. Given these considerations, lecturer–student interaction tends to be more collaborative, supporting open discussion and the exchange of diverse perspectives (Neumann et al., 2002). Theoretical subjects, in particular, often rely on open-ended classroom dialogue to nurture students’ critical thinking skills (Biggs & Tang, 2011). These disciplinary characteristics shape the dynamics of lecturer–student interaction and are particularly relevant to this study. As this research focuses on TESOL programmes situated within the social sciences, it is essential to consider how the disciplinary context informs the nature and patterns of classroom interaction.

Moreover, universities that prioritise student well-being often place strong emphasis on fostering faculty–student interaction by providing more opportunities and institutional encouragement for meaningful engagement (Holles, 2021). Although university well-being is widely recognised as a key component of quality education, it remains unclear whether such support extends equally to intercultural contexts. There is a need to reassess how

institutional support addresses the well-being of both lecturers and students from diverse cultural backgrounds. While many universities promote the development of students' intercultural competence in their official materials, empirical research has revealed a lack of evidence demonstrating the actual effectiveness or outcomes of these claims (Bloom & Miranda, 2015; Choi & Bae, 2022). Due to this gap in institutional practices, it is imperative to critically evaluate whether these practices are truly facilitating intercultural educational experiences in higher education.

These insights underscore the importance of examining lecturer–student interactions within their specific disciplinary and institutional contexts. In TESOL programmes, intercultural engagement is both frequent and foundational. Understanding how disciplinary norms and university-level support shape interactional dynamics is essential. This study is trying to explore how cultural, pedagogical, and institutional factors interact to influence the quality and inclusivity of lecturer–student interaction in multicultural higher education settings.

2.7.2 University course setting

The curriculum in higher education differs significantly from that of basic education. For instance, modularisation and credit-based systems are commonly adopted in many universities, enabling students to select courses based on their personal interests and career aspirations. This flexibility fosters diverse modes of interaction, as lecturers engage with students from various disciplinary backgrounds and with differing levels of expertise (Barnett & Coate, 2004). Assessment design is also a key factor that shapes teacher–student interaction. The use of continuous assessment methods, such as essays,

projects, and presentations, promotes regular feedback and continuous improvement. These practices support ongoing communication between lecturers and students, which helps to strengthen academic engagement and deepen understanding (Pianta, 2017). In addition, the use of formative assessment enables lecturers to identify students' learning needs and respond with timely and constructive feedback. This process not only facilitates academic progress but also reinforces the relationship between students and lecturers, contributing to a supportive and responsive learning environment (Carless, 2006).

Factors such as class size, institutional policies, and resource availability can significantly influence the quality of teacher–student interaction. For instance, large lecture halls accommodating hundreds of students often limit opportunities for personalised engagement, making it difficult for lecturers to address individual needs effectively (Exeter et al., 2010). In contrast, small seminars or tutorial groups provide a more intimate environment that supports tailored instruction and fosters deeper academic relationships (Jamieson*, 2003). Wright et al. (2019) discuss how smaller class sizes allow lecturers to provide more personalised support to students and build stronger relationships. In contrast, large lectures limit meaningful interaction and limit the ability to provide personalised feedback.

In addition, the interaction and relationship between lecturers and students in higher education play an important role in educational outcomes and learning satisfaction (HHDNP, 2020). In such a context, lecturers are more inclined to adapt their teaching methods to meet students' needs, creating opportunities for mutual growth (Divaris et al., 2008). In addition, the democratic classroom management model often promoted in universities encourages a student-centred approach, which enables students to share their ideas and opinions

more freely. This environment supports the development of critical thinking skills by fostering logical reasoning, analytical ability, and the capacity to internalise and apply knowledge innovatively (Veiga Simão & Flores, 2010). The emphasis on rational dialogue and reflective thinking in university settings further enhances meaningful lecturer–student interaction (Tsui, 2002), adding both depth and intellectual value to classroom exchanges. Interactive strategies commonly used in higher education, such as group discussions, cooperative learning, and interactive questioning, offer students increased opportunities to engage in active learning (Brockbank & McGill, 2007). These approaches transform students from passive recipients of information into active participants in knowledge construction, promoting collaboration and deeper academic engagement. Importantly, such lecturer–student interactions have demonstrated a profound impact on academic exploration and the cultivation of critical thinking for both parties. The development of students' critical thinking skills yields long-term academic benefits (Cottrell, 2023). Nyadanu et al. (2015) argue that lecturers play a significant role in shaping students' academic aspirations and achievement goals.

In summary, previous studies highlight the distinctive features of higher education that shape lecturer–student interaction, from flexible curriculum design to classroom size and pedagogical strategies. They underscore the central role of interactive, student-centred learning environments in promoting academic engagement, personal growth, and critical thinking. These characteristics of university education provide a basis for understanding the challenges and strategies relating to lecturer-student interaction in higher education courses.

2.8 Intercultural lecturer-student interaction in the university

Based on the above literature review on intercultural interaction and teacher-student interaction, the main areas and concepts of this study have been explained and understood. This study focuses on teacher-student interaction in an intercultural higher education context, which involves more than simply combining intercultural interaction and teacher-student interaction. It has its unique characteristics. This section presents an overview of intercultural teacher-student interactions in higher education.

2.8.1 Cultural kaleidoscope in the university

Cultural differences between lecturers and students significantly shape teacher–student interactions in intercultural higher education settings. These differences manifest in communication styles, attitudes toward authority, and underlying beliefs about education (Gay, 2018), often creating interactional patterns that diverge from participants’ previous learning experiences. However, such deference can also hinder the development of independent thinking and limit students’ willingness to question or challenge ideas (Hofstede, 1986; Shiraev & Levy, 2020). In contrast, low power distance cultures encourage more egalitarian classroom relationships, where open dialogue, critique, and student autonomy are highly valued (Hwang & Francesco, 2010). Balancing respect for authority with the cultivation of student agency remains a key challenge for intercultural classroom practice.

Beyond cultural values, individual personality traits and previous intercultural experiences also influence how students adjust to interactive learning environments. For instance, students with introverted dispositions may experience difficulty adapting to classroom models that emphasise verbal

participation and open discussion (Lawrence, 2015; Wilson et al., 2013). Moreover, the quality of interactions beyond the classroom, including peer support, participation in extracurricular activities, and social integration, contributes significantly to students' sense of belonging and overall adaptation to the new environment (Alshammari et al., 2023).

Moreover, in multicultural classrooms, cultural diversity affects not only verbal behaviour and classroom norms but also broader expectations regarding educational goals, learning approaches, and the nature of lecturer–student relationships (den Brok & Levy, 2005). While these differences can lead to misunderstandings or disengagement, they also offer valuable opportunities for mutual learning. Engaging with diverse perspectives enables both students and lecturers to question assumptions, expand their educational worldviews, and develop intercultural competence (Omeri et al., 2003).

In sum, the interplay of cultural norms, personality traits, and social integration processes creates a complex landscape for lecturer–student interactions in intercultural higher education. These insights help clarify the underlying factors that influence participation, adaptation, and engagement. They offer a valuable foundation for analysing how interaction unfolds in multicultural classrooms. They also inform how such interaction may be supported more effectively.

2.8.2 Multicultural classroom

As internationalisation continues to reshape higher education, multicultural classrooms have become increasingly common, making intercultural teacher–student interactions more important than ever (Knight, 2008). These interactions not only enrich students' academic experiences but also have a lasting impact on their educational and personal development. Nieto (2015)

emphasised that strong lecturer–student relationships are crucial for supporting students’ academic success and socio-emotional growth. In intercultural classrooms, students are exposed to diverse perspectives and develop more flexible problem-solving strategies through engagement with teachers from different cultural backgrounds (Deardorff, 2011). Such experiences foster the development of intercultural competence and prepare students to navigate cultural diversity more effectively (Eden et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the extent to which international and domestic students have equitable educational experiences in these multicultural settings is often overlooked and warrants further attention (Grant & Sleeter, 2012).

In addition, multicultural classrooms offer a valuable platform for students to develop the skills needed to collaborate with individuals from diverse backgrounds, thereby significantly enhancing their intercultural competence (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Within this diverse environment, the varied experiences and perspectives that both lecturers and students bring not only stimulate innovation in teaching and learning but also foster teamwork and problem-solving abilities (Kolb, 2014). These interactions do more than convey knowledge. They offer students valuable opportunities to engage with cultural differences and develop their social skills.

Furthermore, the intercultural classroom experience equips students with essential skills for navigating an increasingly globalised workplace (Lyu, 2024). Through collaboration with lecturers and peers from diverse cultural backgrounds, students enhance their adaptability, communication abilities, and intercultural awareness (Earley & Ang, 2003). These competencies are critical for success in international professional settings and play a significant role in supporting students’ long-term career development. The multicultural classroom thus functions not only as a site for academic learning but also as

a platform for fostering global perspectives and intercultural competence (Page & Ho, 2025). However, not all multicultural classrooms are equally effective in cultivating these skills. Research suggests that mere exposure to culturally diverse environments does not automatically lead to improved intercultural competence (Gregersen-Hermans, 2015). Instead, meaningful development often requires structured guidance, intentional pedagogical design, and opportunities for critical reflection (Bennett, 2009).

Taken together, previous research underscores the potential of multicultural classrooms to foster students' academic growth, social development, and intercultural competence. However, these benefits are not automatically realised through exposure alone. Without intentional pedagogical strategies and reflective support, the transformative potential of intercultural classrooms may remain underutilised. This highlights the importance of examining how intercultural competencies are developed through lecturer–student interactions in practice. For this study, such insights serve as a foundation for exploring how lecturers navigate cultural diversity, how students engage with intercultural learning opportunities, and which contextual factors enhance or hinder these processes.

2.8.3 Adjustment and adaptation in teaching and learning

Diversity in classrooms presents new challenges to educators and requires both lecturers and students to adapt to multicultural teaching and learning environments (Jabeen, 2019). Lecturers need to adjust their teaching styles and enhance their intercultural teaching competence. Key areas of this adaptation include pedagogical approaches, assumptions about prior knowledge, classroom management, support services, and language

expectations (Carroll & Ryan, 2007; Jones et al., 2019).

Research has shown that teachers with strong intercultural competence can significantly enhance student engagement, motivation, and academic achievement (de Jong et al., 2013). In addition, Eden et al. (2024) emphasised the importance of cultural awareness in building positive relationships with students from diverse backgrounds. They argue that intercultural competence is crucial not only for educators but also for students, as it fosters mutual understanding and promotes inclusivity in culturally diverse classrooms (Eden et al., 2024). Educators who can develop and sustain intercultural rapport contribute to the creation of inclusive learning environments that support both student success and well-being (Perez, 2024).

Nevertheless, challenges remain. Misunderstandings can arise when teachers and students interpret classroom interactions through different cultural lenses, even when they communicate in a shared language such as English (Anderson, 2018). These misalignments are often rooted in differing cultural and educational backgrounds. For instance, mismatches between teaching styles and students' learning habits can result in confusion, tension, or reduced participation (Hofstede, 1986). As Gay (2018) points out, teachers must critically reflect on their cultural assumptions and be willing to adapt their practices to meet the diverse needs of their students.

At the same time, as lecturers make adjustments, international students are also undergoing intercultural learning and adaptation. As Gill (2007) observes, intercultural adaptation often results in personal transformation, affecting the way that international students view their educational experiences, self-concepts, relationships with others, and core values. However, this process is rarely immediate. Instead, it unfolds gradually and may involve emotional,

cognitive, and behavioural shifts.

Moreover, the ability to interact effectively in a multicultural classroom begins with a deep understanding of one's cultural identity. As Jones et al. (2019) suggest, recognising and reflecting on one's cultural background is a necessary first step toward meaningful intercultural engagement. Intercultural learning thus encourages not only awareness of others but also introspection and critical self-reflection (Ippolito, 2007).

In conclusion, although many studies have highlighted the challenges lecturers and students face in intercultural adjustment, these issues remain complex. Building on this, the present study explores how lecturers respond to cultural diversity in practice. It also examines how students gradually develop a sense of belonging in a new cultural environment. Additionally, it investigates what institutional and classroom-related factors support or hinder these processes.

2.8.4 Challenge of language differences

In intercultural teacher–student interactions, language skills often present a significant challenge. Language use is considered an “extremely complex” element in such settings, as it directly influences the effectiveness of communication in higher education (Ismailov, 2024). Language barriers are frequently cited as one of the most common obstacles in intercultural classrooms. Students may avoid asking questions or participating in discussions due to a lack of confidence in their language abilities (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998), and lecturers may find it difficult to convey complex concepts in a second language. These difficulties can reduce student engagement and impair understanding of course content and classroom instructions (Csillik, 2022).

However, the concept of "language barriers" is not always straightforward. Research suggests that even students with high levels of language proficiency can struggle with academic discourse (Snow & Uccelli, 2009). Even an individual fluent in everyday English may find it difficult to write academic essays or participate in higher-order discussions. Similarly, Albaba (2021) reflects on her experience as a multilingual speaker, noting that linguistic fluency did not fully prepare her for the demands of real-life academic and social interaction. The cases discussed here emphasise the importance of distinguishing between a general language proficiency and the capability to function effectively in multilingual academic settings.

Language challenges, therefore, are not absolute but relative. They are shaped by factors such as context, academic background, and individual confidence (Bui, 2019). As Kalaja and Melo-Pfeifer (2019) argue, the "multilingual turn" redefines language competence by focusing on actual language use in context rather than comparing learners to native-speaker norms. This perspective calls for a more nuanced understanding of linguistic challenges and their role in shaping intercultural classroom experiences.

Overall, these findings suggest that improving language proficiency alone is insufficient to overcome the interaction challenges in intercultural classrooms. The language-related difficulties faced by intercultural lecturers and international students are complex and multifaceted. This supports the need for a nuanced understanding of how language challenges affect interactions between lecturers and Chinese students in this study.

2.8.5 Summary

This section has explored key themes in the literature on intercultural lecturer–

student interaction in higher education. Research consistently shows that cultural diversity influences not only verbal communication but also broader expectations regarding teaching methods, learning strategies, and the roles of both lecturers and students. With appropriate support, multicultural classrooms can encourage active participation, foster intercultural competence, and better prepare students for global professional environments. Nevertheless, ongoing challenges such as mismatched expectations, emotional stress, and language-related difficulties continue to affect the quality of these interactions.

While existing studies offer valuable insights, many tend to adopt an idealised view and pay limited attention to how intercultural interaction plays out in daily life. They often overlook the emotional and cognitive demands placed on participants and seldom examine the unequal burden of adaptation. Moreover, many studies discuss “communication problems” primarily as skill or proficiency issues, while paying less attention to how relational expectations and interactional rights are negotiated and contested in everyday classroom talk. This gap supports the use of Rapport Management in the framework, as it makes visible how intercultural difficulties can become relational trouble shaped by power, face sensitivities, and institutional norms rather than merely individual deficits. In many cases, students are expected to adapt to dominant classroom norms, whereas lecturers’ roles in addressing cultural diversity receive less scrutiny. Furthermore, language proficiency is often treated as a static ability, without acknowledging that it can vary with factors such as personal confidence, prior educational experience, and familiarity with academic discourse. These limitations highlight the need for more practical and inclusive approaches in future research.

Considering these gaps, this study focuses on the experiences of Chinese students and their lecturers within an intercultural context. It examines how

both groups navigate interaction challenges in practice and identifies the contextual and institutional factors that facilitate or constrain effective and inclusive interaction.

2.9 Chinese students as international students in Western classes

In the context of globalisation, more Chinese students are choosing to study abroad. However, intercultural learning is a major challenge for international students, especially during the process of adapting to changes in educational, social, and living environments (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016), such as when studying abroad. Numerous studies have shown that Chinese students may exhibit distinctive patterns of experience and participation in Western classrooms, particularly regarding language challenges, academic adjustment, and cultural adaptation.

2.9.1 Silence of Chinese students

A further review of the literature reveals that silence is frequently used to characterise Chinese students in international classrooms. Numerous studies have shown that international students, particularly those from East Asia, tend to be less verbally engaged, often remaining silent, refraining from initiating speech, or avoiding participation in classroom discussions (Choi, 2015; Heng, 2018; Tran, 2013). This silent behaviour can pose challenges for Western lecturers, especially those accustomed to highly interactive teaching models (Jackson, 2002). Some lecturers report frustration at the apparent reluctance of Chinese students to express their ideas, despite efforts to encourage participation through various strategies (McMahon, 2011). In some cases, this

silence is misinterpreted as apathy or a lack of interest (Cheng, 2000).

However, such behaviours are shaped by a complex interplay of cultural, linguistic, and educational factors and should not be viewed simply as passivity or unwillingness to engage. For instance, while silence in Western academic settings is often equated with disengagement, in Chinese educational culture, it can signify respect, deep reflection, or caution in speaking (Nakane, 2007). Moreover, some British lecturers have observed that although many Chinese students are quiet in class and reluctant to ask questions or voice opinions, they still perform well in written assignments and examinations (Zhu & O'Sullivan, 2022). Nonetheless, prolonged classroom silence is often perceived by British lecturers as awkward and detrimental to effective lecturer–student interaction (McMahon, 2011). Importantly, a lack of verbal participation should not be assumed to reflect a lack of critical thinking. As Tian and Low (2011) argue, Chinese students may be reflective and critical, even if they do not verbalise their thoughts in class.

Overall, while classroom silence among Chinese students is widely acknowledged, it is often framed as a barrier to interaction and participation. The following sections further explore the underlying factors contributing to this silence, including language barriers, classroom interaction dynamics, culture shock, and academic adjustment.

2.9.2 Language challenges

According to Jackson (2002), Chinese students often worry about their ability to express ideas clearly in English. This concern is echoed by other scholars who have identified language as a major factor influencing classroom silence. For instance, Jin and Cortazzi (2006), and Heng (2018); Jin and Cortazzi

(2006); Shi (2006) suggest that many Chinese students feel unprepared to speak in front of professors or peers because English is their second language. As a result, students with limited English proficiency often experience communication anxiety and prefer to remain silent rather than engage with others (Dewaele, 2017).

Horwitz et al. (1986) highlight how fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension can lead to withdrawal and silence in language learners. Moreover, cultural notions also contribute to silence, as students may fear embarrassment or making mistakes in public (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Sun, 2016).

This anxiety reduces their willingness to take the risk of speaking during classroom interactions (Hsieh, 2012). Furthermore, Chinese students commonly believe that expressing their thoughts accurately requires a high level of language proficiency (Liu, 2006). When they feel their English is inadequate to support effective classroom communication, they may choose silence as a strategy to avoid embarrassment or misunderstanding (Shi, 2006).

These findings highlight that language challenges are a major reason for some Chinese students in class. Their reluctance to speak often stems from anxiety about making mistakes or being misunderstood.

2.9.3 Culture shock

Culture shock is a key factor influencing the behaviour of Chinese students in Western classrooms. When international students enter a new cultural environment, they often experience anxiety stemming from confusion and uncertainty, which can negatively affect their classroom adaptation (Hsieh,

2012). Cultural values play a crucial role in this process, particularly in how students adjust to the host country's education system, communication norms, and classroom interaction styles (Wang & Greenwood, 2015). For instance, students from individualistic cultures tend to engage more actively in competitive learning, express independent views, and participate openly in classroom discussions (Tavares, 2022). In contrast, Chinese students from collectivist backgrounds are more likely to show deference to authority, remain quiet in class, follow teachers' instructions closely, and avoid initiating ideas or asking questions unless explicitly invited (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006).

Collectivism is one of the core values of Chinese culture (Hofstede, 2001), and this cultural background often makes Chinese students more cautious about expressing their opinions, particularly in situations where disagreement might disrupt group harmony. They tend to avoid directly voicing views that could potentially offend others (Wei et al., 2013). In multicultural academic settings, such culturally shaped classroom behaviour may be misinterpreted as introversion or a lack of interest in learning. Furthermore, the long-standing cultural tradition of showing deep respect for teachers and their authority (Min, 2016) also influences how Chinese students engage in classroom interactions, often leading them to listen attentively rather than challenge or question lecturers directly.

The concept of power distance is also evident in the classroom behaviour of Chinese students. In China, teacher–student relationships are typically hierarchical, with students expected to show respect for the teacher's authority and rarely to openly question their views during class (Chiu et al., 2016; Min, 2016). Consequently, when Chinese students enter British classrooms, they may feel unaccustomed to expressing their opinions directly and often appear passive in their interactions with lecturers (Hsieh, 2012).

2.9.4 Academic adaptation

Adjusting academically to Western education systems is a multifaceted process for Chinese students, involving not only cultural and educational differences but also language competence and classroom dynamics. This adjustment plays a crucial role in promoting Chinese students' social integration and continued academic engagement abroad (Tinto, 2012; Yuan et al., 2013), and is widely recognised as a key component of international students' intercultural transition (Meng et al., 2018). Nonetheless, the contrast between Chinese and Western academic expectations, difficulties in language use, limited interaction with local educators, and the pressure stemming from strong academic ambition often contribute to heightened academic stress among Chinese learners (Yan & Berliner, 2009a).

There are notable contrasts between Chinese and Western classroom practices, particularly in terms of interaction and learning approaches. In China, the classroom environment is typically teacher-centred, in which students are expected to listen attentively and take notes (Wang et al., 2017). Learning tends to prioritise memorisation and passive knowledge absorption (Entwistle, 1994), with less focus on fostering independent thinking or learner autonomy (Wang & Byram, 2011). Conversely, Western educational settings encourage student agency, critical thinking, and collaborative discussion (Cheng, 2000). Lecturers in these contexts generally expect students to actively engage in classroom dialogue and enhance their understanding through interactive participation (Kingston & Forland, 2008).

These differences can initially create discomfort for Chinese students, who often require time to adapt to the participatory, discussion-based learning style

of Western classrooms (Wang & Greenwood, 2015). Importantly, Chinese students should not be assumed to lack critical thinking skills. They are more inclined to express their ideas in writing or in private discussions rather than openly challenge lecturers in class (Ryan & Louie, 2007). Moreover, classroom silence and passive participation among Chinese students often stem from deeply rooted educational traditions and collectivist cultural norms (Yan & Berliner, 2009b). Such behaviours, however, are sometimes misinterpreted by Western lecturers as disinterest or a lack of academic motivation, which may be perceived as a lack of motivation (Cheng, 2000).

Differences in language and writing conventions also present significant challenges to the academic adjustment of Chinese students. Their English writing is often influenced by Chinese grammatical structures and rhetorical styles, which can create difficulties in meeting the expectations of Western academic settings (González et al., 2001). In addition, Chinese students may use non-verbal communication such as smiling and eye contact in ways that do not align with British cultural norms. This can sometimes result in misinterpretation or misunderstanding during intercultural exchanges (Scollon, 2001).

Lecturers' roles and teaching methods are also crucial in supporting Chinese students' academic adaptation. Western lecturers often expect students to speak up and engage in classroom discussions. However, Chinese students may respond more positively to structured support and guided interaction (Durkin, 2011). Research indicates that their participation tends to improve when instructors use leading questions rather than open-ended ones (Parris-Kidd & Barnett, 2011).

Moreover, Chinese students studying in the UK are reported to have fewer

opportunities for intercultural engagement during their university experience (Yu & Moskal, 2019). This limited interaction can hinder their social integration and academic success. Their preference for independent study, shaped by prior learning habits, may reduce their willingness to participate in peer discussions. This difference contrasts with the collaborative learning approach commonly encouraged in Western classrooms and can contribute to difficulties in adapting to new academic environments.

2.9.5 Summary

The experiences of Chinese students in Western classrooms are complex and multifaceted. They are shaped by cultural backgrounds, educational models, and further diversified by individual characteristics and contextual factors. While some studies portray Chinese students as passive learners who rely on memorisation and show deference to teacher authority (Durkin, 2011), an increasing number of researchers argue that such generalisations are overly simplistic and do not apply to all Chinese learners (Heffernan et al., 2010). For example, Tian and Low (2011) found that Chinese students performed comparably to other international students on critical thinking tasks, despite cultural and linguistic differences. This suggests that they possess critical thinking skills but may express or apply them in culturally specific ways. Moreover, many Chinese students view studying abroad not just as a challenge but as an opportunity to explore new approaches to learning and to adapt to the social norms and academic expectations of the host culture (Wang & Byram, 2011).

Nonetheless, Chinese students often encounter considerable challenges in their academic transition. One major issue lies in the contrast between

Chinese and Western classroom practices. Chinese classrooms tend to be teacher-centred, emphasising memorisation and passive reception of knowledge, whereas Western classrooms encourage student initiative, critical thinking, and active participation through discussion (Wang et al., 2017). This shift in expectations can cause discomfort, particularly in areas such as classroom communication and verbal expression (Yan & Berliner, 2009a). Furthermore, Chinese students may experience difficulties with academic writing conventions and non-verbal communication norms, which do not always align with Western academic standards (Scollon, 2001).

It is also important to recognise the diversity within the broader category of “Chinese students”. Using the term Chinese learners to describe all students from Chinese-speaking regions risks overlooking significant differences in educational experiences, cultural orientations, and adaptive capacities. For example, students from Hong Kong may be more familiar with Western academic norms due to their British-influenced education system than their peers from mainland China or Taiwan (Watkins, 2012). Additionally, learning styles are not static. They evolve in response to new academic environments and pedagogical demands (Gieve & Clark, 2005), indicating that Chinese students’ academic behaviours are shaped by their immediate context rather than predetermined by culture alone.

These insights underscore the importance of avoiding cultural generalisations and recognising the evolving, context-dependent nature of Chinese students’ academic behaviours. For this study, such perspectives are essential in understanding how Chinese students navigate intercultural classroom environments, particularly in their interactions with lecturers.

2.10 Relevant empirical research

Empirical research on intercultural lecturer–student interaction in higher education has increased in recent years. However, studies still differ greatly in both theory and method. A common problem is that “intercultural classroom challenges” are sometimes explained in broad ways, such as “national cultural norms,” or in individual ways, such as “low confidence” or “language anxiety.” These explanations are often too general because they do not clearly show how opportunities for participation are created through real classroom teaching and talk. This issue is evident in research on silence, where it is increasingly treated as a context-dependent communicative resource rather than a fixed cultural trait (Nakane, 2007). This also suggests that we should interpret silence by looking at local classroom expectations and practices, rather than assuming silence is caused by nationality alone (Holliday, 1999).

To review the most closely related empirical studies, this section groups them into three overlapping strands. Each strand tends to use different theoretical frameworks and research designs.

First, comparative-cultural and culture-dimensions studies often use national-level cultural ideas to describe differences in participation norms, teacher authority, and communication styles. This approach can help identify perceived expectation gaps, but it becomes weak when “culture” is treated as a stable group trait. In that case, it is difficult to explain why students from the same country may behave differently, or why the same student may participate differently across tasks and topics (Holliday, 2013). Empirical research on silence in UK universities shows that silence and speaking up are strongly shaped by the local “participation ecology” of specific courses and classroom communities, including what counts as an acceptable contribution in that

setting (Wang & Moskal, 2019).

Second, adjustment and adaptation research focuses on students' longer-term development and transition experiences (e.g., stress, coping, belonging, academic socialisation). Theoretically, this strand often employs adaptation frameworks that conceptualise adjustment as multidimensional and evolving (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006). Methodologically, it often uses surveys and interviews, including studies in the UK context (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006). Recent qualitative work also provides detailed interview-based accounts of international Chinese students' transition experiences, including perceived challenges and coping strategies (Holliman et al., 2024). However, a key limitation is that classroom interaction is often treated as only one background factor. Because of this, many studies can show what students feel and report. Still, they cannot show how opportunities for participation are produced through the moment-by-moment organisation of classroom talk and teaching practices.

Third, interaction-focused classroom research studies participation through detailed analysis of classroom talks and teaching practices. Many studies in this strand use Conversation Analysis (CA) or other closely related methods of classroom discourse analysis. The theoretical focus is on how participation is organised in sequences of talk, for example, through turn-taking, wait-time, and teacher allocation. Methodologically, this strand often uses recorded classroom interactions and fine-grained analysis, which makes it well-suited to explaining how participation becomes possible (or difficult) in real time. For example, research on turn-taking and teacher wait-time shows how timing and allocation can shape student opportunities to contribute (Ingram & Elliott, 2014). In English for Academic Purposes (EAP) settings, multi-method studies combining classroom data with teacher and learner interviews show that

participation can take different forms within the same classroom, including willing, silent, and forced participation (Wei & Cao, 2024). Related UK research also treats silence as a socially organised practice linked to agency and power, rather than as an individual deficit (Wang et al., 2022). In addition, doctoral theses in UK higher education often make methods transparent and combine classroom-based evidence with interviews, which is useful for understanding participation in context (Wei & Cao, 2024).

Across these three strands, a clear methodological tension appears. Survey and interview studies offer breadth and can track longer-term adaptation, but they rely heavily on self-report and cannot reconstruct the detailed sequence of classroom interaction (Holliman et al., 2024; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006). In contrast, interaction-analytic and observation-based studies can explain micro-level participation mechanisms in detail, but they are often smaller in scale and may not fully connect classroom interaction to longer-term adaptation experiences and institutional constraints (Ingram & Elliott, 2014; Wei & Cao, 2024).

This empirical landscape helps to position the present study. The study uses a multi-method qualitative design and includes classroom observation as part of the pilot study. The pilot observation is used to familiarise the researcher with the basic classroom context and interaction routines, and to support the design of interview questions and open-ended questionnaire prompts that better reflect the local classroom setting and participant experiences. After the pilot stage, the main data sources (interviews and open-ended questionnaires) focus on participants' interpretations of interaction, participation expectations, and intercultural challenges. Theoretically, this study integrates the Teaching Through Interaction model (TTI), Rapport Management theory, and the Comprehensive Model of Intercultural Communication (CMIC). This integrated

framework supports analysis of teaching practices that shape engagement opportunities, relational concerns in interaction, and participants' longer-term intercultural adjustment experiences. Finally, by combining national-cultural perspectives with a small-culture lens, the study avoids overly general explanations based on nationality. Instead, it examines how classroom norms are produced and negotiated within specific groups, tasks, and institutional settings.

2.11 Conclusion of literature review

This chapter has reviewed key research on intercultural lecturer–student interaction in higher education, with attention to how culture, institutional expectations, and classroom practices shape participation and teaching–learning relationships. Overall, the literature suggests that intercultural interaction is influenced not only by broad cultural expectations but also by the local realities of internationalised university classrooms.

However, two limitations are especially relevant to the present study. First, many studies still treat cultural differences as relatively fixed group traits and rely on broad national categories to interpret classroom behaviour. This approach often under-explains how cultural meanings shift across tasks, topics, and classroom roles, and it can overlook the hybrid and context-dependent ways in which participants understand themselves and each other. In response, this study treats culture as dynamic and context-sensitive. It draws on a small-culture perspective to examine how classroom-specific norms and expectations are perceived, experienced, and negotiated in particular groups and activities.

Second, existing research often remains fragmented in both theory and evidence, limiting what we can know about participants' lived experiences. Some studies provide valuable accounts of international students' adjustment and intercultural competence. Still, they rely mainly on self-report data and pay limited attention to the organisation of real-time classroom interaction. Other studies offer detailed descriptions of classroom talk, but they do not consistently connect interactional events to participants' feelings, interpretations, relational concerns, or longer-term adaptation. As a result, there is still a need for studies that show how classroom interaction is experienced and made meaningful by both lecturers and students, and how these experiences shape participation and engagement.

Two recurring assumptions in the intercultural classroom literature require more explicit acknowledgement. Culture is frequently treated as a stable national attribute from which behaviour can be inferred, yet such categorisation risks obscuring how meanings are negotiated in specific classroom moments. At the same time, intercultural competence is often framed as an individual skill to be acquired, a framing that can inadvertently shift attention away from the institutional routines and power relations that shape participation. Recognising these tendencies is important, as they narrow the ways classroom interaction problems are defined and the locations of responsibility for change. The following chapters, therefore, revisit these assumptions and consider alternative ways of conceptualising interaction.

To address these gaps, the present study focuses on how intercultural lecturer–student interaction is experienced, interpreted, and negotiated by lecturers and Chinese students in TESOL classrooms. It prioritises participants' perspectives by examining what lecturers and students view as supportive, risky, appropriate, or challenging in everyday classroom and institutional

interaction, and how they explain their participation choices and interactional expectations.

Chapter 3 Theoretical Frameworks

3.1 Introduction to the theoretical framework

This chapter outlines the theoretical architecture that underpins the analysis of intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL classrooms. As reviewed in the literature chapter, several recurring themes and theoretical perspectives have emerged in the exploration of interactions between lecturers and students in TESOL programmes.

While each of the above theoretical traditions offers important insights into intercultural classroom interaction, none of them alone is sufficient to capture the full complexity of lecturer–student interaction in internationalised TESOL settings. Hofstede’s cultural dimensions provide a macro-level lens for understanding patterned value orientations, yet they tend to treat culture as relatively stable and nationally bounded. Holliday’s small culture perspective responds to this limitation by foregrounding the emergent, situated, and relational nature of culture within specific classroom communities.

However, cultural perspectives alone cannot explain how interactional quality is pedagogically organised in practice. Pianta’s Teaching Through Interaction (TTI) framework addresses this gap by offering a structured account of how emotional support, classroom organisation, and instructional support shape learning environments. However, TTI focuses primarily on pedagogical processes and does not theorise how interpersonal meaning, face concerns, and relational expectations are negotiated across cultural boundaries. Spencer-Oatey’s Rapport Management theory complements TTI by explicitly theorising how rapport, face sensitivities, and sociality rights are managed in interaction, making it particularly relevant for intercultural lecturer–student encounters.

Finally, while Rapport Management and TTI illuminate interactional dynamics in situ, they remain limited in accounting for longer-term processes of change in identity, belonging, and communicative orientation. The Comprehensive Model of Intercultural Communication (CMIC) addresses this temporal dimension by conceptualising intercultural communication as a developmental process involving intercultural effectiveness, competence, adjustment, and adaptation.

Taken together, these perspectives are integrated in this study as a layered analytical framework: cultural theories (Hofstede and small culture) contextualise interaction, TTI and Rapport Management explain how interactional quality and relational meaning are co-constructed in practice, and CMIC accounts for how repeated interactional experiences accumulate into longer-term intercultural development.

3.2 Cultural perspectives on interaction

This section introduces the cultural lenses used to contextualise intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL classrooms. It combines a macro-level perspective (Hofstede’s cultural dimensions) with a micro-level perspective (Holliday’s small culture) to avoid over-generalising behaviour by nationality. Together, these two cultural perspectives help explain how broader value orientations and locally produced classroom norms may shape what lecturers and students expect, notice, and interpret during interaction.

3.2.1 Hofstede’s Culture Dimensions Theory

Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory refers to intercultural differences in

organisational and national culture defined as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others” (Hofstede, 2011). Hofstede proposed six cultural dimensions to describe and compare the values and behavioural patterns of different cultures (see Figure 1). These dimensions include power distance, individualism and collectivism, masculinity and femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, behavioural differences (Hofstede, 1986), and indulgence and restraint (Hofstede, 2011). These dimensions provide a systematic framework for understanding cultural differences and have been widely used in the fields of education, management, and marketing.

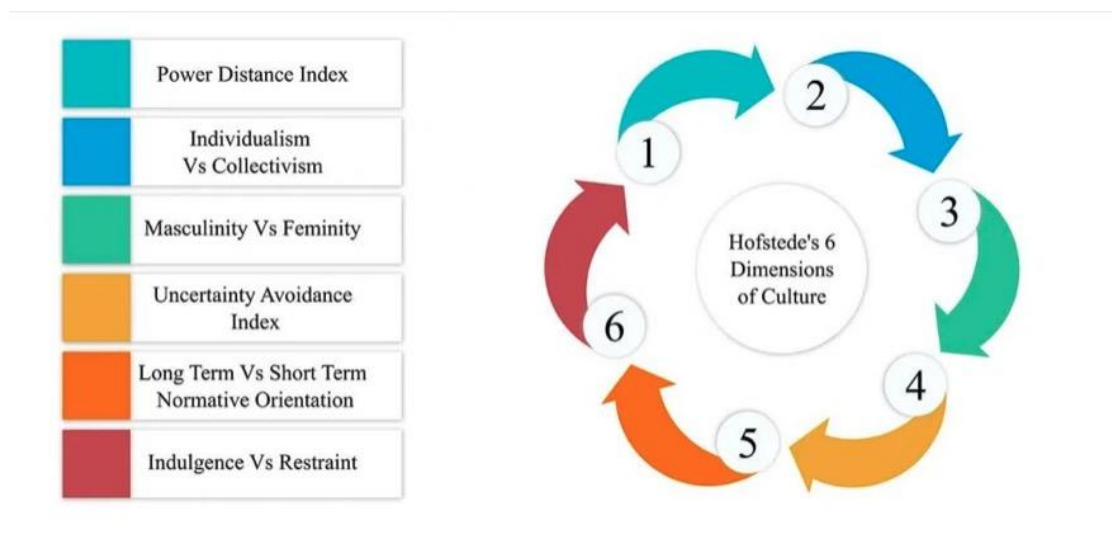


Figure 1 Hofstede's 6 Dimensions of Culture (Nickerson, 2023)

In a society, power distance refers to the degree to which power is distributed unequally and accepted. Cultures with high power distances tend to emphasise hierarchy and authority, while cultures with low power distances emphasise equality and participation in decision-making (Hofstede, 1980). Individualist cultures emphasise individual goals and independence, while collectivist cultures emphasise group harmony and interdependence (Hofstede, 1980). Masculine cultures emphasise competition, achievement

and material success, while feminine cultures emphasise caring, quality of life and relationships (Hofstede, 1980). Uncertainty avoidance refers to a society's tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity. High uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to have clear rules and structures, while low uncertainty avoidance cultures are more willing to accept uncertainty (Hofstede, 1980). Cultures with a long-term perspective place a high priority on the future, permanence, and adaptability, while cultures with a short-term perspective emphasise tradition, the past, and the present. Chinese culture is typically described as long-term-oriented (Hofstede, 2011). Indulgent cultures emphasise enjoyment of life, pleasure-seeking, and freedom of expression, whereas restrained cultures emphasise restraint of desires and adherence to social norms. China is characterised by restraint (Hofstede, 2011).

3.2.2 Applications and reflections of cultural dimensions on education

Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions has become increasingly popular in the field of education in recent years. Using this method, researchers have discovered that cultural differences profoundly affect teaching practices and students' learning behaviour. It remains one of the most popular cultural theories used in the social sciences (Taras et al., 2011).

Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory serves as a foundational framework for interpreting and anticipating behavioural patterns in diverse cultural settings, particularly in intercultural communication studies, where it facilitates the examination of intercultural barriers and adaptive mechanisms (Minkov & Kaasa, 2021). For example, in Northeast Asian corporate intercultural management practices, the power distance and collectivism dimensions

profoundly influence the efficiency of internal communication, shaping hierarchical decision-making processes and collaborative norms (Huang et al., 2021). Its analytical scope broadens when integrated with Inglehart's cultural dynamics theory, offering a multidimensional lens for decoding transnational cultural disparities and evolutionary cultural shifts across societies (Beugelsdijk & Welzel, 2018). Research shows that in educational contexts, students from high-power-distance cultures, such as China, may be more silent and passive in Western classrooms. Students from low-power-distance cultures are more willing to participate in classroom activities. This theory provides a useful lens for interpreting cultural differences in educational interaction (Gao, 2021).

Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions has received considerable attention but has also been heavily criticised, mainly due to methodological problems (Minkov & Kaasa, 2022). These critical points can be summarised as poor face validity, excessive inter-dimensional correlations, and biased samples (Minkov & Kaasa, 2022). First, the theory may overgeneralise diversity within the same country or culture. For example, students in different parts of China may differ significantly in their educational backgrounds and cultural values (Watkins, 2012). Alternatively, culture is dynamic, and cultural values may fluctuate with societal changes over time. For example, with globalisation, Chinese students' classroom behaviours may gradually converge towards Western models (Gieve & Clark, 2005).

Signorini et al. (2009) reviewed Hofstede's model and explored some of its limitations, particularly in the field of higher education. These limitations include the oversimplification of cultural differences, inconsistencies across categories, a lack of empirical evidence from educational settings, and the static rather than dynamic nature of the overall cultural model. Tung and

Verbeke (2010) research supports the idea that how culture varies between space and time in Hofstede's theory needs to be rethought. Minkov and Kaasa (2022) showed that only two of the six dimensions were both meaningful and replicated in the World Values Survey, namely individualism-collectivism and indulgence-restraint, and that these were more applicable to country-level analyses. Żemojtel-Piotrowska and Piotrowski (2023) suggested that the Hofstede model remains influential for the next generation of social scientists interested in intercultural differences.

3.2.3 Holliday's Small Culture

To address the limitations of big-culture thinking, Holliday (1999) believes it is beneficial to focus more on small cultures within each national or ethnic culture. Small cultures refer to small social groupings and activities with a cohesive pattern of behaviour (Holliday, 1999), and focusing on small cultures can best embrace cultural complexity and avoid cultural stereotyping.

Adrian Holliday introduced the term "small cultures" to challenge broad national and ethnic generalisations prevalent in discussions of the culture (Holliday, 1999). Instead of viewing culture as tied to grand narratives of nationality or ethnicity, Holliday suggested that cultural phenomena could and should be understood within any social context, such as a classroom, office, or community group. In the realm of English language teaching, the "small cultures" perspective highlighted that every classroom has its own unique culture, constructed by its participants rather than merely reflecting national or ethnic cultural norms (Holliday, 2013). This perspective argues that teachers and students together construct a "classroom culture" which is influenced by, but not limited to, their national or ethnic backgrounds.

In intercultural relations, the “small cultures” perspective challenges traditional approaches that primarily consider national or ethnic categories as the main determinants of culture. Instead, it promotes an understanding of culture as emerging from any social environment or context, such as a specific workplace, academic institution, or community group. Holliday (1999) suggests that this perspective enables a deeper understanding of small-scale culture and enables the recognition of nuanced cultural processes that dominant small-scale discourses would otherwise obscure. Small culture sees culture as a flow that relates to everything that happens around people. It offers the potential for a decentred interculturality not located within any particular culturalist (Holliday, 2025). In TESOL programmes, this directs analytical attention to how participation norms, feedback expectations, and rapport are locally negotiated rather than assumed from national labels. Observing and understanding these underlying common traits as a basis for connecting us promotes a critical understanding and interpretation of what is happening culturally between us. Recent studies have further elaborated on this, suggesting that recognising these “small cultures” is crucial for effective intercultural communication and collaboration, especially in environments where diverse individuals coalesce and generate shared practices and understandings.

All in all, the concept of a small culture helps to challenge the problematic idea that culture is a monolithic and static entity. As a result, the idea of a small culture is presented as the antithesis of the dominant narrative, which is often associated with larger groups, such as racial or ethnic groups, in intercultural education and research. It requires us to consider what people do and say together in response to and in adaptation to a variety of socio-economic and political forces and influences (Dervin, 2024).

3.2.4 Application of small culture in education

The concept of “small culture” was initially proposed as a critique of over-generalised national and ethnic cultural narratives. Over time, it has evolved into a valuable analytical tool for understanding the dynamic and context-specific nature of culture in various settings, including physical classrooms and digital learning spaces.

The small culture concept has been increasingly applied in educational research. For example, Johansen and Tkachenko (2019) used it to explain the learning culture of international schools, while Aspinall (2006) analysed its relevance to educational outcomes. Similarly, Dlaska (2013) examined how small cultures shape teaching practices. More recently, Yang (2024) applied the small culture model to analyse cultural representations in Korean textbooks, and Silva (2024) used the concept to explore how language teacher institutions address the needs of linguistically diverse students and navigate sociocultural and sociopolitical barriers to promoting social justice. Moreover, Liu (2024) employed the small culture framework to investigate international students’ intercultural academic adaptation strategies and proposed a new theory of intercultural education grounded in small culture thinking. Elliot (2023) used the concept to explore ways of fostering intercultural stimulation within the doctoral community. In the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), Young et al. (2021) adopted the small culture approach to enhance intercultural communication learning. Additionally, Pazio (2022) applied it to understand how European students experience and interpret feedback.

In recent years, while the theory of small cultures has provided a dynamic perspective on cultural studies, it also requires critical reflection. Holliday (2021) suggests that a complete rejection of the “big culture” framework may

undermine the feasibility of cross-group comparisons and, conversely, make it more difficult to understand intercultural interactions. This does not negate the theory's innovative value but emphasises the need to balance small dynamics and small structures, and to avoid falling into depoliticised cultural romanticism. The use of the concept of small cultures in analysing intercultural behaviour therefore needs to avoid moving from the extremes of big cultures to the extremes of small cultures.

3.2.5 Multidimensional cultural perspectives on this study

This study draws on both Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory and Holliday's small culture perspective to build a multidimensional understanding of intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL programmes.

Firstly, Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory provides a systematic theoretical framework for interpreting possible national-cultural influences in intercultural interactions and applies to the interaction scenarios between TESOL international lecturers and Chinese students in this study. The theory offers a lens through which broader ethnocultural value orientations may be linked to participants' accounts of interaction. The multidimensional integration of the theory permits the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the pathways through which culture influences interaction. This system enables the embedding of national cultural traits into specific interaction variables. It provides this study with both explanatory and practice-oriented theoretical tools. These tools allow for a systematic analysis of how national culture may shape differences in lecturers' and students' interaction expectations, practices, and interpretations.

In contrast, “small cultures” or students' responses to the learning environment

can play an important role in student behaviour and performance. As Clark and Gieve (2006) point out, students of many nationalities often show evidence of adapting learning strategies and methods to meet the requirements of specific institutes, departments, and even faculty. In this study, the relationships formed between Chinese students and lecturers in TESOL courses are treated as small cultural groups. Applying the concept of small culture to analyse them, this study seeks to avoid stereotypes associated with big culture and broad national generalisation as far as possible. The small-culture lens supports the research by focusing on lecturer–student relationships within the TESOL classroom context, rather than reducing interaction to ethnic or regional differences.

Overall, the unique cultural characteristics of the participants in the TESOL course may be understood as emerging within small-culture contexts that may be influenced by the participants' national culture but should not be reduced to national characteristics. According to the concept of small culture, participants from different small cultural backgrounds may have different values, expectations, and interactional experiences in intercultural adaptation. It also means they may need different supports and resources to help strengthen the intercultural lecturer-student interactions.

In summary, combining Hofstede's national cultural framework with the relational lens of small culture theory enables a more nuanced analysis of intercultural lecturer–student interactions. Hofstede identifies structural value differences, while small culture highlights the dynamic, context-specific nature of classroom practices. Together, they support a comprehensive understanding of intercultural engagement in TESOL contexts.

3.3 Interaction and relational management perspective

Whereas Section 3.2 explains the cultural context in which interaction takes place, this section focuses on how interaction is organised and experienced in practice. It draws on the Teaching Through Interaction model (TTI) to examine the quality of teaching practices that structure opportunities for engagement, and on Rapport Management theory to examine how lecturers and students manage relationships, address concerns, and navigate interactional expectations. These two lenses are used together because effective participation in intercultural classrooms depends on both pedagogical design and relational safety.

3.3.1 Pianta's Teaching Through Interaction (TTI)

As the subjects analysed in this study are lecturers and students. There may be dynamic characteristics in this interaction based on their identity. The TTI framework, an effective tool for analysing the characteristics and effects of lecturer-student interactions, also underpins this study's analysis of their dynamic characteristics.

The TTI framework draws heavily on earlier theoretical and empirical work. It provides a framework for defining, describing, and measuring teacher–student classroom interactions, which was later operationalised in a classroom observation tool (Brophy, 1999; Eccles & Roeser, 2011). The TTI framework organises teacher-student interactions around three broad areas (see Figure 2) of teacher support for student development: emotional support, classroom organisation and pedagogical support (Hamre et al., 2013). These are based on their presumed prominence for student development in the areas of social and emotional development, self-regulation and attention, and achievement,

respectively. Within these three broad domains, the TTI specifies a set of interaction dimensions (e.g., teacher sensitivity, effective behaviour management, quality of feedback) that provide detailed behavioural markers and descriptions of the indicators for each dimension as they may appear (Pianta et al., 2008).

Classroom Interaction		
Emotional Support	Classroom Organization	Instructional Support
• Positive Climate • Teacher Sensitivity • Regard for Student Perspectives	• Behavior Management • Productivity • Negative Climate	• Instructional Learning Formats • Content Understanding • Analysis and Inquiry • Quality of Feedback • Instructional Dialogue

Figure 2 Teaching Through Interaction Framework (Pianta et al., 2012)

Emotional support refers to whether teachers meet students' psychological needs through positive verbal and non-verbal behaviours and create a learning environment based on respect and trust (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Classroom organisation focuses on how teachers maintain effective classroom management through strategies such as behaviour regulation, time management, and the encouragement of participation. This is particularly important in multicultural contexts, where expectations regarding order and structure may vary significantly across cultures (Pianta et al., 2008).

Instructional support examines how teachers can enhance students' cognitive and academic development by providing quality feedback, promoting conceptual understanding, and modelling effective language use (Mashburn et al., 2008).

Classroom organisation refers to the teacher's ability to ensure that the classroom operates efficiently. That order is maintained through behavioural management, time management, and the facilitation of student participation (Pianta et al., 2008). This dimension directly impacts students' classroom experience and learning outcomes, and is especially important in multicultural classrooms. Students in intercultural environments may have different expectations of classroom rules. For example, Asian students tend to follow strict discipline, whereas Western students may allow more room for free expression in the classroom. The effectiveness of classroom organisation has a direct impact on student engagement and concentration (Hattie & Marsh, 2004).

Instructional support refers to the role of teachers in helping students improve their cognitive and academic skills through quality feedback, conceptual development, and language modelling (Mashburn et al., 2008). This dimension emphasises the teacher's role in helping students understand complex concepts, develop critical thinking, and acquire academic skills. The implementation of instructional support in intercultural settings requires a high degree of cultural sensitivity. Students' language proficiency, learning habits, and cultural backgrounds can affect their understanding of course content. For example, international students may have difficulty following academic content due to language barriers, at which point teachers can help students overcome these challenges by providing visual materials (e.g., charts, videos) and simplifying terminology (Macgregor & Folinazzo, 2018). In addition, high-

quality feedback is critical to student growth. In an intercultural classroom, instructors need to be mindful of whether feedback is given in a way that students can properly understand. Instructional support not only affects students' academic achievement but also enhances their confidence and sense of inclusion in the classroom (Pianta et al., 2008).

3.3.2 Application and reflections of TTI

In recent years, Pianta's "Teaching Through Interaction" (TTI) model has gained significant traction in both educational research and practice, particularly for its in-depth analysis of classroom interaction dynamics. It is widely recognised as a foundational approach to enhancing student learning and development across school courses (Allen et al., 2013). The TTI framework offers a multidimensional perspective that captures the complexity of teacher-student relationships.

In the context of primary education, the TTI model has been widely used to examine the relationship between the quality of teacher-student interactions and various student outcomes. For instance, studies have explored the association between interaction quality and students' literacy and mathematics development. Pakarinen et al. (2017) investigated how teacher-student interaction supports reading skills, while Pakarinen et al. (2017) examined its influence on overall academic skills. Similarly, Merritt et al. (2019) found that teachers' emotional support significantly affects young students' behavioural development. Other research has linked teacher engagement to students' social competence (Soininen et al., 2023) and analysed how classroom interactions relate to behavioural risks (Hoglund et al., 2015). Further studies have extended the framework's application to vocabulary development

(Hatfield et al., 2016; Hu et al., 2021). More recently, Elka and Zhao (2024) demonstrated that teachers' emotional support significantly and negatively predicted problem behaviours in children.

Overall, these findings highlight the value of the TTI model in offering a structured framework for assessing how different aspects of teaching, such as emotional support, classroom organisation, and instructional guidance, contribute to students' academic and social development.

However, despite its strengths, the TTI framework has certain limitations. It focuses primarily on observable teacher behaviours and often overlooks the deeper cultural and contextual influences that shape classroom interactions. Its reliance on fixed categories may also limit its ability to reflect the flexible and evolving nature of communication, particularly

in diverse or intercultural learning environments. In addition, the model tends to place greater emphasis on the teacher's role while underestimating students' active contribution to shaping interactions. Most existing studies using the TTI model have been carried out in early childhood or primary education, with limited application in higher education, where interaction patterns are often more complex. Therefore, although the TTI framework remains a valuable tool, it should be applied carefully and, ideally, be supported by other theoretical approaches that consider cultural differences, relationship dynamics, and specific educational contexts.

3.3.3 Spencer-Oatey's Rapport Management Theory

Rapport Management Theory, as articulated by Spencer-Oatey (2000), is adopted to analyse how lecturers and students manage rapport in intercultural

classroom interaction, particularly through face concerns, sociality rights/obligations, and interactional goals. This framework is especially relevant to TESOL settings where participants may hold divergent expectations regarding authority, participation, and appropriate emotional expression. It also extends classic politeness accounts by foregrounding relational rights and goal-oriented interaction, which are salient in institutional talk.

Spencer-Oatey (2000); Spencer-Oatey (2008)'s rapport management framework builds on the politeness theory of Brown et al. (1987), complementing and expanding it to help gain a more holistic understanding of people's behaviour. The politeness strategy proposed by Brown and Levinson focuses on managing face concerns in social interactions, particularly positive and negative face concerns. A positive face refers to a person's desire to be appreciated and recognised by others, while a negative face involves autonomy and freedom from imposition. This theory provides a basis for analysing social behaviour. However, some scholars have identified shortcomings in this theory. Matsumoto (1988) criticised that politeness theory for ignoring the interpersonal or social perspective on face and for overemphasising the notion of individual freedom and autonomy. Spencer-Oatey (2000) also argues that their politeness and face studies place too much emphasis on the self and ignore the sociality of face. She also noted that Brown and Levinson's study of politeness focused primarily on the harmony of relationships and ignored relationship conflict. In her view, harmonious relationships are people's subjective perceptions of harmony and disharmony, stability and turmoil, enthusiasm and hostility in interpersonal communication, which are subjective, social, and dynamic. This broader understanding of interpersonal harmony led Spencer-Oatey to introduce the concept of rapport

management.

Spencer-Oatey (2000); Spencer-Oatey (2008) conceptualised rapport management as a framework that builds on the theory of politeness, introduces additional dimensions, and summarises rapport management into three main domains: face, social rights, and interactional goals (see Figure 3). It provides a holistic approach to understanding and analysing how individuals establish, maintain, and negotiate social relationships in a variety of communication settings.

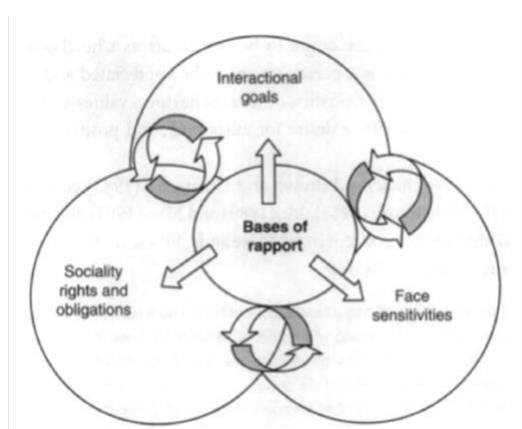


Figure 3 Rapport Management Theory (Spencer-Oatey, 2008)

Firstly, face management concerns maintaining or restoring one's own and others' dignity, self-esteem, and social identity during communication. This draws on the politeness theory of Brown et al. (1987) and focuses on how people use politeness strategies to maintain or repair face. That means, rapport management requires focusing on and balancing these face-saving issues in social interactions. In a teacher-student relationship, this may mean addressing the multiple understandings of face that arise from the different cultural and social experiences of both parties.

Social rights encompass the expectations and obligations of individuals in social relations and focus on balancing power and solidarity in communication

(Spencer-Oatey, 2000). This concept suggests that by understanding and respecting the social rights of interacting partners, individuals can better manage rapport across different environments. This includes fairness and respect for others' rights, as well as the right to have others take their views seriously. In such cases, people can manage these rights by asserting, challenging, or compromising them in interactions. In a teacher-student relationship, this may mean that definitions, habits, and perceptions of each other's status and rights play a role.

Regarding interactional goals, these reflect the goals people pursue in social interactions and can be influenced by personal, situational, and cultural factors (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). That is, when managing rapport, individuals must consider the goals of the interaction and adjust their behaviour accordingly to maintain a harmonious relationship. Alternatively, people can achieve a mutually satisfactory outcome by clarifying intentions, making concessions, or persuading others. The goal of interaction will also change the way teachers and students get along.

3.3.4 Application of Rapport management strategy

Spencer-Oatey (2000) argues that applying rapport management to intercultural domains requires consideration of more factors. Including the broader influences on rapport management strategies, namely contextual assessment norms, socio-pragmatic conventions, and paralinguistic conventions. Fundamental cultural values and the available repertoire of rapport-management strategies are also considered to influence the management of intercultural rapport. In an intercultural context, participants' basic cultural values and management strategies may differ significantly,

affecting their behaviour. People from different cultural backgrounds may have very different thoughts and behaviours shaped by their own experiences, which can be challenging for rapport management. Getting to know each other's cultures and keeping an open mind are considered to be positive approaches.

The concept of rapport management, proposed by Spencer-Oatey (2000), is used in research on intercultural communication, business interaction, language teaching, face, and politeness. This framework emphasises maintaining harmonious relationships and achieving mission-oriented goals.

In the context of intercultural interaction, rapport management can help people navigate cultural differences, address face-threatening behaviours, and maintain a balance between politeness, power dynamics, and social distancing (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Ogiermann (2009) explores the application of relationship management in intercultural polite behaviour and finds differences in politeness strategies and relationship management across cultures, which lead to misunderstandings and conflict in intercultural interaction. Kádár and Mills (2011) also propose the universality and particularity of rapport management in East Asia, based on their study of politeness in the region. In addition, Mills (2009), Bousfield (2008), Culpeper (2011), Leech (2014), and other scholars have referred to rapport management when studying politeness and impoliteness. They affirm the significance of the theory in intercultural interaction.

Rapport management is widely used to analyse relationships in business activities. Spencer-Oatey and Xing (2003) compared and analysed the interactions between two UK-China business welcome conferences and explored the role of rapport management in intercultural business

communication, and found that participants from different cultural backgrounds can maintain good relationships by adapting rapport management strategies. Schnurr and Zayts (2011) analyse the application of rapport management in the process of disagreement resolution and find that it helps reduce disagreement in a multicultural business environment. Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) also include rapport management as something businesspeople should learn. Bhatia and Bremner (2012) also support the benefits of rapport management in building good relationships in business English communication. These studies suggest that rapport management can be effectively applied in professional and intercultural settings.

3.3.5 Complementary insights on interaction and relational management perspective

In this study, Pianta's Teaching Through Interaction (TTI) model serves as the key theoretical framework for examining the dynamics of lecturer–student interaction in academic settings. It provides a structured lens to examine how these elements shape student engagement and learning. Although the model has primarily been applied in early childhood and primary education, its core focus on the quality of interactions remains highly relevant to higher education contexts.

In intercultural classrooms, where communication styles, expectations, and educational norms often differ, the TTI framework helps identify how specific lecturer behaviours and interactional patterns shape students' academic experiences. By focusing on observable elements of teaching and learning, the model serves as a practical tool for examining both the challenges and opportunities of intercultural engagement.

To complement the behavioural focus of TTI, this study incorporates Rapport Management theory, which offers a relational and interpersonal perspective. This integrated approach supports the exploration of strategies that promote more inclusive, supportive, and effective intercultural learning environments.

Rapport management has been widely applied in intercultural communication and business, but is less explored in education. Although less explored in education, several studies support its relevance. Culpeper et al. (2010) used rapport management to analyse student impoliteness across countries, confirming its applicability in understanding student behaviour. Xu and Chen (2015) highlighted its role in shaping university teachers' professional identity, while Wang (2018) found that Chinese students' behaviour aligns with rapport management principles, reflecting cultural traits. Holmes and Riddiford (2011) showed that learning rapport management strategies in the classroom enhanced students' workplace communication skills. Although its use in education is limited, these studies affirm its feasibility, making this study an extension of the theory's application in this context.

This study also draws on Rapport Management Theory (Spencer-Oatey, 2000) to examine the social and psychological aspects of interaction between TESOL lecturers and students in intercultural higher education settings. The theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals manage relationships during interaction, focusing on elements such as face, sociality rights, obligations, and interactional goals. In this research, Rapport Management will be used to explore how lecturers and students navigate politeness, respect, empathy, and relational harmony in classroom interactions.

This perspective is particularly relevant in TESOL environments, where participants often come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and

may hold different expectations regarding appropriate communication styles, perceptions of authority, and emotional expression. By applying this theory, the study seeks to reveal how rapport is established, sustained, or disrupted in intercultural classroom settings, and how these relational processes affect students' sense of comfort, willingness to participate, and overall engagement. In this way, Rapport Management offers valuable insights into the often subtle but significant interpersonal dynamics that shape the quality of intercultural educational experiences.

Taken together, TTI and Rapport Management offer complementary insights. TTI structures the pedagogical practices that shape opportunities for engagement, while Rapport Management uncovers the relational undercurrents that influence intercultural interaction.

3.4 Interaction adaptational process perspective

The interactional and relational perspectives outlined above illuminate how rapport is negotiated and how the quality of pedagogical interaction is constructed in classroom encounters. However, they primarily capture interaction as a situated and moment-to-moment process. What remains under-theorised in these approaches is how such interactional experiences translate into longer-term changes in participants' communicative orientations, emotional security, and sense of belonging in intercultural educational contexts.

To address this temporal and developmental dimension, this study incorporates the Comprehensive Model of Intercultural Communication (CMIC). CMIC extends the interactional focus of TTI and Rapport Management by conceptualising intercultural communication as a dynamic process involving intercultural effectiveness, competence development, adjustment, and

adaptation. In this way, CMIC does not replace the interactional frameworks but builds upon them by situating classroom interaction within a broader trajectory of intercultural change. This integration enables the study to connect micro-level interactional practices with longer-term developmental processes in a theoretically coherent manner.

3.4.1 Comprehensive Model of Intercultural Communication (CMIC)

As this study focuses on lecturer-student interactions in an intercultural context, the theoretical support also needs to account for an important factor in intercultural communication, in addition to the managerial dimension of the lecturer-student relationship. Intercultural communication (IC) occurs when a Chinese student interacts with a British lecturer.

A review of previous research on intercultural interaction in the literature review section revealed that common concepts in the IC literature include intercultural effectiveness (ICE), intercultural competence (ICC), intercultural adjustment (ICA), and intercultural novelty (ICN) (see Figure 4). All of these elements are considered important for international students engaging in intercultural communication, as they can help them adapt to a different culture (Nadeem et al., 2020).



Figure 4 Comprehensive Model of Intercultural Communication (Nadeem & Zabrodska, 2023b)

Failure of effective IC can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction, which ultimately hurts students' higher education goals (Nadeem et al., 2020).

Therefore, IC experts recommend that individuals possess attitudes, skills, and knowledge that emphasise effectiveness and appropriateness, thereby facilitating a smoother transition to a new cultural environment (Chen & Starosta, 1996; Deardorff, 2006; Spitzberg, 2010).

Given the importance and widespread use of these elements, a research model that combines the four elements has proven useful for exploring the dynamic validity and interrelationships among the characteristics of international students and other groups requiring intercultural interactions, also known as the CMIC (Nadeem & Zabrodskaia, 2023a). What can be established through CMIC is that international students can adjust to their host culture, but it takes time and effort and varies from person to person (Nadeem & Zabrodskaia, 2023b). CMIC links the four main concepts of IC as necessary stages of adapting to a new culture. The model proposes that students must be effective (ICE), which then paves the way for competence (ICC), leading to adjustment (ICA) in an intercultural environment, after which they have the potential to adapt through intercultural novelty (ICN) (Nadeem & Zabrodskaia, 2023a).

The terms ICE, ICC, ICA, and ICN differ in conceptualisation and practical application. The CMIC clarifies the inherent confusion about ICE, ICC, ICA, and ICN (Nadeem & Zabrodskaia, 2023a). It is seen that these terms represent transitional stage pathways that evolve as international students are exposed to new cultures. There is no doubt that the model is purely based on the results of well-known models and theoretical approaches to IC. However, it offers a new way to understand IC dynamics. Nadeem and Zabrodskaia (2023a) indicate that CMIC is an ongoing process, similar to AUM (1995; Gudykunst, 1993, 2004), the process model (Deardorff, 2006), DMIS (Bennett, 1986, 1993) and other well-known models of IC research (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

Through CMIC, it can be observed that a person cannot become effective, competent, adaptive, or acclimatised to a new environment in such a short period as claimed in the literature; rather, this requires commitment and time, which vary from person to person (Nadeem & Zabrodskaia, 2023a).

In addition to being a comprehensive model of IC specifically for international students, the current study has successfully demonstrated the differences between popular conceptualisations of IC research, such as ICE, ICC, ICA, and ICN. In CMIC, it is argued that the effectiveness of communication varies before adaptation to a new culture and that these are individual developmental stages. According to CMIC, international students become effective (ICE) and competent (ICC) in intercultural interactions; they may then adjust (ICA) and adapt (ICN) to the new culture. Theoretical reasoning is drawn from established models, theories, and perspectives in IC research by linking their outputs and further organising them into stages and phases of intercultural contact.

3.4.2 CMIC on this study

Given that this study explores the dynamics and characteristics of intercultural interactions between Chinese students and TESOL lecturers, the interactions reported and interpreted by participants appear to align closely with the four stages outlined in the CMIC model and the sequential relationships among them. Since the CMIC model integrates insights from multiple intercultural theories, it provides strong theoretical support for capturing the complexity and diversity of lecturer–student interactions in intercultural settings.

In addition, the CMIC model is particularly relevant for analysing how individuals adapt to new cultural environments, making it a useful framework

for examining the evolving nature of lecturer–student engagement in this study. The intercultural interaction between lecturers and Chinese students is a dynamic process, characterised by shifting behaviours, expectations, and adjustments. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of this process requires a multidimensional perspective.

In this regard, the CMIC model serves as a valuable analytical tool. It facilitates a deeper investigation of the dynamics of intercultural communication by highlighting the interplay among adaptation, intercultural effectiveness, communication competence, and cultural adjustment. This makes it particularly well-suited to supporting the analysis of interaction dynamics in this research.

3.5 Summary of the theoretical framework of this study

Based on the above analysis of Hofstede (1980)'s Cultural Dimensions Theory, Holliday (1999)'s Small Culture concept, Spencer-Oatey (2000)'s Rapport Management theory, Hamre et al. (2013)'s Teaching Through Interaction (TTI) model, and Nadeem and Zabrodska (2023b)'s Comprehensive Model of Intercultural Communication (CMIC), this study proposes an integrated theoretical framework to guide the exploration of intercultural lecturer-student interaction within TESOL programmes in Scottish universities. This framework provides a multi-layered structure that connects cultural, social, and pedagogical dimensions (see Figure 5). Together, these perspectives provide a comprehensive exploration of how intercultural interactions are shaped, maintained, and adapted in the classroom.

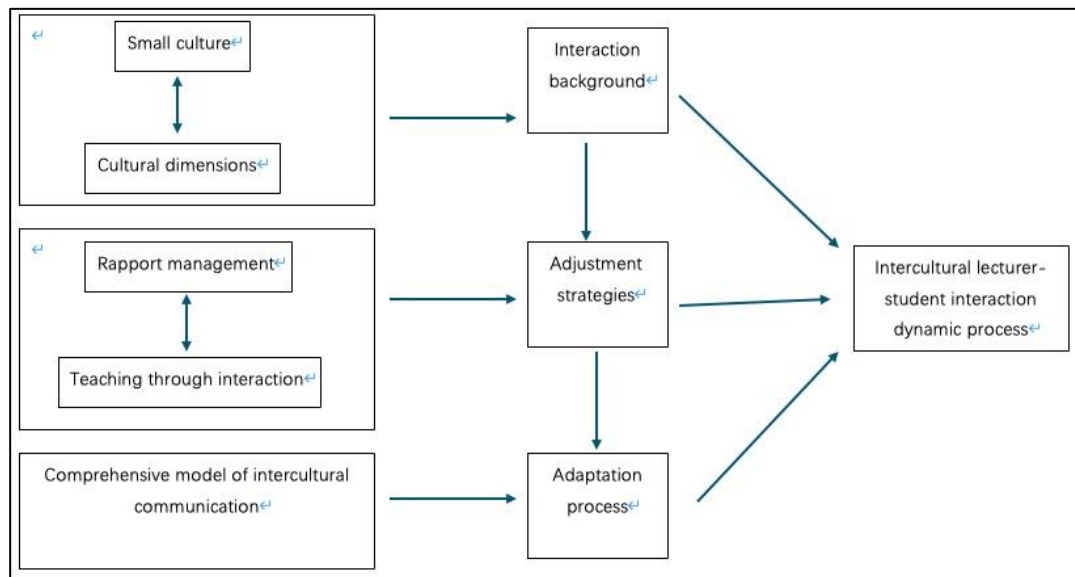


Figure 5 Theoretical Framework for this study

This figure visualises the layered and cyclical integration of five theoretical perspectives used in this study. The lower layer represents cultural contextualisation, combining Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Holliday's small culture perspective to account for both macro-level value orientations and locally emergent classroom norms. The middle layer represents interactional processes, in which Pianta's Teaching Through Interaction (TTI) framework captures the quality of pedagogical interaction, and Spencer-Oatey's Rapport Management theory accounts for the relational negotiation of face, sociality rights, and interactional goals. The upper layer represents intercultural development over time, conceptualised through the Comprehensive Model of Intercultural Communication (CMIC). The directional arrows indicate reciprocal and developmental relationships: cultural context shapes interactional practices; interactional experiences accumulate into longer-term intercultural effectiveness, competence, adjustment, and adaptation; and these developmental changes, in turn, reshape future classroom interaction. The framework, therefore, functions not only as a

conceptual synthesis but also as an analytical guide for interpreting the data in this study.

In summary, this study does not aim to apply all theoretical models equally. Rather, it integrates selected perspectives to build a multidimensional analytical framework. This integrated approach enables a more holistic and context-sensitive analysis of intercultural lecturer–student interaction. Hofstede and Holliday offer cultural depth and contextual nuance. Rapport Management and TTI connect relational and pedagogical interaction. CMIC captures the temporal and developmental nature of intercultural interaction. Together, these theories guide the interpretation of complex interactional patterns in TESOL programmes and allow the study to examine the factors that may support or constrain intercultural engagement in higher education. Bringing these perspectives together allows the analysis to move between macro-patterning, local practice, pedagogical form, micro-relational motives and longitudinal sequence. Omitting any one layer would create a conceptual blind spot. For example, losing small-culture would risk over-generalisation to national traits, while omitting Rapport Management would reduce the ability to account for subtle face-related interactional strategies.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, reflections on research paradigms and positions provide fundamental guidance for the research methods and design. The interpretivist paradigm primarily informs the researcher's approach to the study methodology. Qualitative research is deemed the most suitable for this study. Open-ended questionnaires and in-depth interviews with lecturers are used to gather data from lecturers, while focus group interviews are utilised to collect data from students. Additionally, classroom observations were conducted as a pilot study. Rather than serving as a primary empirical dataset for answering the research questions, this pilot phase was used to test the feasibility of classroom-based observation in the local TESOL context and to generate contextual insights that informed the refinement of subsequent interview and questionnaire instruments.

This chapter outlines the study's methodological design, which is framed as an exploratory qualitative investigation into lecturers' and students' perceptions and experiences of intercultural interaction in TESOL classrooms. The study does not seek to analyse naturally occurring interactional events through recordings or discourse analysis. Instead, it focuses on how participants interpret, evaluate, and make sense of intercultural engagement based on their lived experiences. This methodological orientation aligns with the study's integrated conceptual framework. Cultural dimensions and small culture guide the study in examining how participants locate interaction within both broader cultural expectations and locally produced classroom norms, a focus best accessed through accounts of lived experience. Teaching Through Interaction (TTI), Rapport Management, and the Comprehensive Model of Intercultural

Communication (CMIC) further inform the focus of the interview and questionnaire prompts on perceived opportunities for engagement, relational concerns (e.g., face and participation risk), and changes over time. The pilot classroom observation provided contextual grounding for these prompts by identifying salient classroom routines and expectations in the local TESOL setting.

The study focuses on participants' recollections and interpretations of intercultural interactions rather than on behavioural event counting. For this reason, thematic analysis was selected as the primary qualitative method. Thematic analysis enables systematic identification and interpretation of patterns in participants' accounts and is therefore especially appropriate for investigating how perceptions constitute understandings of interaction.

4.2 Research paradigms

Research paradigms serve as essential foundations, streamlining the investigative process for scholars. Researchers must ascertain the research paradigms that align with and buttress their research intent (Lincoln et al., 2011). Baxter Magolda (2004) explains that a research paradigm serves as an overarching framework that governs methodological processes and shapes how knowledge is acquired, interpreted, and utilised within its investigative domain. The widely used paradigms are positivism, pragmatism, and interpretivism. Each of them plays a key role in orchestrating the research process. According to the purpose and design of this study, the interpretivist paradigm primarily guides the research orientation. The following details explain the rationale for choosing the interpretivist paradigm to support this study and why positivism and pragmatism were considered but not adopted as

the pr.

4.2.1 Research paradigms considered for the research

The positivism paradigm underscores the primacy of objectivity, quantification, and empirical observation (Park et al., 2020). Positivist scholars often seek to identify universal laws of causality and use structured methodologies, as well as inductive reasoning, experiments, and investigations. Henderson et al. (2011) argue that the emergence of post-positivism is a response to the inherent limitations of strict objectivity, which are typical of positivist positions. However, this study emphasises the experiences and expectations of lecturers and students. And the study does not aim to test or deduce extant phenomena, rendering this paradigm less conducive.

Interpretivism, also termed constructivism or phenomenology, has its roots primarily in the social sciences and the humanities (Schwandt, 1994). Interpretivist researchers focus on understanding the subjective meanings and interpretations that individuals give to their experiences. The criticality of context, cultural dimensions, and the role of the researcher in moulding the research narrative is acknowledged (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). Qualitative modalities such as interviews, observations, and content analysis are conventionally used to interpret and explain human behaviours and societal phenomena. Given the research's focus on intercultural interactions between lecturers and Chinese students, and its attempt to understand their individual experiences and perceptions, the interpretivist paradigm offers pertinent guidance. In exploring the nuanced dynamics of intercultural interaction between lecturers and students within the UK university context, this study aligns with the interpretivist research paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm, emphasising the subjective interpretation of social phenomena, is deemed

crucial for understanding the complexities of human behaviour and social interaction in diverse educational environments (Dodgson, 2023). The study of intercultural interaction involves complex social phenomena that are highly contextual and influenced by individuals' backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences. Interpretivism's emphasis on the social construction of reality and the importance of context is crucial for exploring these phenomena in depth.

The pragmatism paradigm propounds that the validity and efficacy of knowledge are contingent on its practical implications and utility (Barlas & Carpenter, 1990). Pragmatists orient their inquiry toward problem-solving and underscoring the pragmatic application of research outcomes. This research is deeply concerned with understanding the subjective experiences, perceptions, and meanings that lecturers and students attribute to their intercultural interactions. Pragmatism is more focused on the practical implications and outcomes of research, which may not fully capture the depth of subjective experiences that this study aims to explore.

4.2.2 Ontological and epistemological stances

According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), research paradigms are always primarily characterised by their ontological, epistemological, and methodological tendencies. In a research context, ontology addresses questions about the fundamental nature of the phenomenon under study (Moon & Blackman, 2014). That is, a researcher's ontological stance affects how they view their research object and how they conduct their research. Epistemology is concerned with providing a philosophical basis for determining what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that it is adequate and legitimate (Maynard, 1994). It focuses on issues related to the

sources of knowledge, criteria for determining truth, and ways of knowing. Understanding the ontological and epistemological perspectives of interpretivism can help guide this study's advancement.

An interpretivist ontology holds that reality is constructed by social agents and their interpretations, rather than being fixed or objective. Interpretivism is interested in specific contexts and holds that reality and knowledge are not objective but are shaped by the people within those contexts(Ormston et al., 2014). Therefore, in this study, the lecturers and students' intercultural interactions are considered to be affected by many factors. They may take different forms, and the participants' interpretations are important. Following the interpretivist perspective, this research operates under the assumption that reality, particularly within the realm of intercultural interaction in academia, is socially constructed (Geertz, 2008). This view acknowledges that cultural identities and interactions are fluid, shaped through subjective interpretations and interactions within the academic environment.

Interpretivist epistemology holds that, in order to gain knowledge of a complex world, it is necessary to study the experiences and perspectives of the people who live in it (Schwandt, 1994). It seems that researchers must look further into the real world to understand, explain, and analyse these concepts and ideas through scientific methods and language, including interactive interviews, qualitative observation, and other research tools. Furthermore, interpretive methods rely on naturalistic methods such as interviews, observations, and analysis of existing texts (Lincoln et al., 2011). The epistemological stance of this study posits that knowledge of intercultural relationships is best gained through subjective interpretation, aligning with the interpretivist emphasis on understanding the meanings that individuals attribute to their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This approach necessitates methodologies that

enable close interaction between the researcher and participants to capture the depth of subjective experiences. Therefore, this study insists that understanding the experiences and perspectives of lecturers and students can help understand the actual relationship between lecturers and students in higher education.

4.3 Research methodology

Research methods are specific procedures for collecting and analysing data, and developing accurate research methods is an important component of research design (Trochim & Donnelly, 2001). This study is dedicated to studying intercultural interaction between lecturers and Chinese students in an intercultural context. Therefore, choosing appropriate research methods can help make the research feasible and credible. Mertens (2023) believes that three research methods are commonly used in academic research, namely quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. The key difference among these three research methods lies in the type of data collected. Quantitative researchers gather numerical data, while qualitative researchers focus on collecting non-numerical data such as text, images, and participants' reflections or attitudes toward specific experiences.

Perks and Thomson (2015) argue that interpretive methods in social research should be more qualitative, using methods such as unstructured interviews or participant observation. Interpretive researchers suggest that access to reality is often mediated by social constructs such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and tools. Interpretivist philosophy emphasises the importance of the complexity and essence of things. The goal of this study is to explain and analyse the nature of intercultural interaction between lecturers

and Chinese students in an intercultural context. The chosen research method for this study is consistent with an interpretive stance, using qualitative research tools to interpret participants' experiences, perceptions, and views. As Lincoln and Denzin (2011) stated, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. It seems that qualitative researchers study objects in their natural settings to understand or explain phenomena by examining the meanings people attach to them. Qualitative research is primarily exploratory research. It is used to understand root causes, perspectives, and motivations. This is well-suited to the original purpose of this study, which is to understand trends in people's thinking and opinions.

Qualitative research aims to understand the social reality of individuals, groups, and cultures through the feelings and lives of participants (Taylor et al., 2015). Therefore, people and groups are studied in their natural settings. Research that follows a qualitative approach is exploratory and seeks to explain "how" and "why" a specific phenomenon or behaviour operates in a specific context (Austin & Sutton, 2014). Since this study focuses on participants' feelings, individuals, groups, and cultures are considered of research value. This also reaffirms the suitability of qualitative research methods for this study.

The research design integrates multiple qualitative methods to enable triangulation of participants' perspectives rather than the triangulation of interactional events. Focus group interviews with Chinese students, open-ended questionnaires, and in-depth interviews with lecturers constitute the primary sources of empirical data. Classroom observations were conducted solely for contextual and sensitising purposes, to familiarise the researcher with classroom routines, participation formats, and institutional settings. These observations informed the development of interview prompts and questionnaire items but were not used as primary data for fine-grained

interactional or discourse analysis.

This multi-method design supports an exploratory approach to understanding how participants perceive and narrate intercultural interaction and how their experiences resonate with established theoretical constructs.

4.4 Research design

Based on the study's purpose and methodological support, this study adopts a qualitative, multi-method design. The purpose of the study, the research questions, and the methods of data collection and analysis are outlined below.

4.4.1 Research aims and questions

Having outlined the nature of intercultural interaction and its possible influences, the next step is to examine how such interactions are perceived, experienced, and interpreted by lecturers and Chinese students in TESOL contexts. The aim is not to prescribe change in advance, but to explore these interactional dynamics and allow implications and possible strategies to emerge from participants' accounts. Correspondingly, the research questions are set as follows:

In the setting of TESOL programmes, how are the characteristics and dynamics of intercultural interaction between lecturers and Chinese students perceived, experienced, and described?

What underlying factors or educational experiences were perceived to shape the dynamics and characteristics of intercultural lecturer–student interaction in the TESOL context?

4.4.2 Sampling technique

To explore the experiences and perspectives of Chinese TESOL students and their lecturers in Scotland, this study employs a qualitative, multi-method design that incorporates focus group interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and classroom observations. Given the specific focus on selected universities in Scotland, a purposive sampling strategy was deemed most suitable for selecting interview and questionnaire participants. This approach enabled the targeted selection of Chinese TESOL students and their lecturers, ensuring that the individuals involved have experiences and insights directly relevant to the research questions.

For the focus group interviews, the selection criteria include willingness to participate, diversity in academic standing, and variability in linguistic backgrounds. For the questionnaires, all lecturers who teach TESOL courses to Chinese students at the selected universities will be invited to participate, aiming to provide a comprehensive overview of instructional perspectives and strategies. In addition to direct engagements through interviews and questionnaires, the study includes classroom observations to gain firsthand insight into the instructional dynamics and student engagement within TESOL environments. Observations will be conducted in a selection of classes identified through convenience sampling, based on accessibility and lecturers' consent. This will cover a variety of course types and stages of instruction, aiming to observe a broad spectrum of teaching and learning interactions. These observations were not used for fine-grained interactional or discourse analysis. Instead, they served a contextual and sensitising function, informing the development of interview and questionnaire prompts and supporting

interpretive triangulation.

This multi-method sampling approach is designed to ensure depth and breadth of qualitative insight, capturing the nuanced experiences of Chinese TESOL students and the pedagogical approaches of their lecturers in Scotland. Acknowledging the limitations inherent to purposive and convenience sampling, efforts will be made to mitigate selection bias through a transparent selection process and a clear delineation of sampling criteria. This strategy supports the study's aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the educational experiences of Chinese TESOL students in Scottish universities, offering valuable perspectives for stakeholders in TESOL education.

4.4.3 Sample size

As a qualitative study, the determination of the sample size will also reference data saturation. Braun and Clarke (2021) noted that although the applicability of data saturation to qualitative research requires further examination, it remains a method for determining sample size. During the data collection process, attention was paid to the emergence of recurring themes and to the point at which no substantially new themes were identified, to help determine an appropriate sample size for the study.

16-24 students for focus group interviews

age range: 22- 40 years

8-16 lecturers for questionnaires and in-depth interviews

age range: 22- 65 years

4.4.4 Pilot study

The essence of qualitative research lies in the depth and richness of the data collected. Recognising this, researchers put considerable thought into designing interview and questionnaire questions. This process involved iterative revisions, in which the researcher meticulously scrutinised each question, refining it to ensure neutrality (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). The overarching aim was to craft questions that would evoke genuine responses, free from the biases of potential leading or threatening implications.

To reinforce the credibility and relevance of these research instruments, the researcher conducted a pilot study. Feedback from this pilot phase played an instrumental role in enhancing the quality of the interview and questionnaire questions, aligning them more closely with the research objectives. This crucial step not only validated the practicality of our questions but also provided a snapshot of the potential insights we might glean during the broader study (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

Furthermore, pilot classroom observations formed an important part of this preparatory process. Observing classroom routines and interaction formats informed the further refinement of both interview and questionnaire questions. This iterative process of pilot observation followed by adjustment added depth and specificity to the research tools and helped strengthen the quality and relevance of the data collection instruments.

In this study, the pilot phase consisted of classroom observations conducted prior to the main data collection. Following guidance on pilot studies in qualitative research, the purpose of this phase was developmental rather than analytical: it was used to assess practical access, classroom routines, and participation formats, and to improve the wording, focus, and contextual

relevance of the focus group schedule, open-ended questionnaire prompts, and lecturer interview guide (van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001). Because no Chinese students were present in the observed classes, the observation notes were not treated as direct empirical evidence for addressing the core research questions. Instead, they functioned as pilot scaffolding that strengthened instrument design and ecological validity.

4.4.5 Rationale for the multi-method design

This study adopts a qualitative, multi-method design to develop a layered understanding of intercultural lecturer-student interaction as perceived and interpreted by participants. The use of multiple qualitative tools is supported in qualitative methods literature as a means of enhancing depth and credibility through complementary forms of evidence and perspective (e.g., triangulation and methodological complementarity). In this study, student focus groups are used to elicit collective sense-making and interactionally generated accounts of classroom engagement, while lecturer open-ended questionnaires provide a flexible, low-burden format for capturing reflective perspectives across participants and contexts. Building on issues emerging from the questionnaires, follow-up in-depth interviews allow for probing, clarification, and richer interpretation of key themes. These methods are therefore not treated as separate strands, but as mutually informing tools that provide breadth (questionnaires), interactionally prompted perspectives (focus groups), and depth (interviews), aligned with the exploratory and perception-focused aims of the study. Classroom observations are retained as a pilot and sensitising component to inform instrument development rather than as a primary source of findings.

4.5 Recruitment

I am a Chinese student studying in Scotland, and I used to use certain communication platforms that will be familiar to the potential participants in this study, e.g., WeChat. This will allow me to take advantage of this convenience when conducting participant recruitment. Since I am a Chinese international student and a member of this social group, it may be easier to gain the participants' trust and cooperation in the research. Furthermore, inside researchers have a direct understanding of cultural and community norms, which helps them design and conduct research. Therefore, when designing invitations and questions, I will choose methods and questions that are familiar to Chinese international students. Also, when interviewing Chinese students, I will take advantage of our shared experiences to help participants share their experiences more freely.

1. At the start of the study, my official email will be sent to lecturers who work at MSc/MEd TESOL programmes in universities in Scotland, and participants will be able to express their willingness to participate by replying to the email. And my supervisors can help me contact my potential participants, as they work at the university in TESOL programmes.
2. I will post study invitations with some details about this study on social media. e.g., WeChat Chinese students' group, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to invite Chinese students and lecturers working on MSc/MEd TESOL programmes at universities in Scotland.
3. Snowball sampling will be used to help collect an adequate sample size. So, after the interviews, I will ask the participants to invite friends or classmates who meet the sample requirements to participate in my study.

4.6 Data collection

To fully understand the dynamics of Chinese students' and lecturers' experiences in the UK's higher education system, a multifaceted research approach is adopted. This study aims to gather comprehensive data by combining observational techniques, questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. This section delineates each method employed, its relevance, the pertinent literature supporting it, and the corresponding participant demographics. Although multiple methods are used, they are not treated as separate strands. Instead, they are integrated to provide layered access to participants' accounts: focus groups foreground collective student meaning-making, questionnaires map lecturer perspectives at scale, and interviews deepen interpretation through follow-up probing and clarification.

Although multiple data collection methods were employed, the study's analytical focus rests on participants' reflective and interpretive accounts. The interviews and questionnaires were designed to elicit participants' perceptions, evaluations, and sense-making processes in relation to intercultural interaction. Observations were conducted to contextualise these accounts and to enhance the researcher's understanding of classroom environments.

The data collection process was sensitive to participants' non-native English backgrounds. Provisions for Chinese-mediated interviews, with strategies (Flyvbjerg, 2006) to address translation challenges, were in place. Before conducting the interviews, the interview format and language to be used will be discussed with participants. Both online and face-to-face methods were adopted based on the participants' preferences. In online interviews, participants were also invited to turn on their cameras to provide visual

information. Discrepancies during analysis were addressed by revisiting participants for clarity. This approach was primarily intended to minimise the researcher's subjective assumptions.

4.6.1 Observations

The classroom observations in this study were conducted as a pilot study rather than as a primary empirical method for answering the research questions. Their function was methodological and contextual:

1. To test the feasibility of observing TESOL classroom interaction in the institutional setting.
2. To familiarise the researcher with classroom routines, participation formats, and teaching organisation.
3. To generate context-sensitive insights that informed the refinement of subsequent focus group, questionnaire, and interview questions.

Importantly, because the observed classes did not include Chinese students, the observation notes did not constitute evidence of intercultural lecturer–Chinese student interaction as defined in this study. The pilot observation data, therefore, serve a preparatory role, supporting instrument calibration and improving the contextual validity of later participant accounts.

In this study, classroom observation was retained because it enabled the researcher to become familiar with the local TESOL teaching environment, including recurring participation formats, lecturer questioning styles, classroom organisation, and verbal and non-verbal interaction routines. These observations were useful not as a source of primary findings but as a way to

identify contextually relevant issues that could later be explored through interviews and questionnaires.

At the University of Strathclyde, classroom activities and group seminars were observed within the TESOL Master's programmes. Attention was paid to both verbal and non-verbal aspects of classroom interaction, such as questioning patterns, turn-taking, responsiveness, silence, and general classroom organisation, in order to build contextual familiarity with the local TESOL setting.

Because no Chinese students were present in the observed classes, these observations were not used to analyse intercultural lecturer–Chinese student interaction directly. Instead, they provided background on the TESOL classroom context and supported the interpretation of the experiences later reported by lecturers and Chinese students.

The observations were conducted first, and the preliminary analysis will help establish and refine the questions for the subsequent interviews and questionnaires in this study. A concrete example illustrates this chain: during a seminar observation, I repeatedly noticed students using brief silences after the lecturer's questions as a reflective strategy rather than as an indication of disengagement. An early interview draft included the prompt "Why do you not answer questions in class?", which risked assuming non-participation. Based on the observation, the prompt was rephrased to: "Can you describe what goes through your mind when you choose not to respond immediately to a lecturer's question in class?" This rewording reduced leading assumptions and generated richer accounts of reflection, turn-taking and face management in subsequent interviews and focus groups.

4.6.2 Semi-structured focus group interview

A focus group interview is regarded as a qualitative data collection tool, and its notion is within the framework of qualitative interpretive inquiry (Wilkinson, 2014), which is in accordance with the interpretive qualitative orientation adopted in this study. Carey and Smith (1994) defined the focus group interview as using a semi-structured group session, moderated by a group leader, held in an informal setting, to collect information on a designated topic. Beyond the individualistic insights garnered from one-on-one interviews, focus groups often reveal aspects that emerge only in the presence of peer interactions. This social setting can evoke a spectrum of sentiments, memories, and viewpoints, thus providing richer data (Then et al., 2015). For this study, it's essential to understand not just the experiences of Chinese students but also the shared and contrasting views within this community. The collective milieu of focus group discussions encourages participants to respond to, build upon, or sometimes challenge their peers' views. Moreover, Chinese students in the UK's MSc/MEd TESOL programmes might encounter unique challenges or benefits that are best understood when discussed collaboratively. Shared experiences might surface, ranging from academic expectations, cultural adjustments, to linguistic nuances, and capturing these in a group setting can help identify common themes and areas of divergence with greater clarity. Furthermore, the mutual validation or counter-argument in real-time within the focus group discussions ensures a richer, more nuanced exploration of participants' accounts, as peers can correct or expand upon points raised by fellow participants, leading to a more accurate and nuanced understanding (Liamputtong, 2015).

However, the multi-person participation model of focus group interviews may lead some participants who are not articulate, lack confidence, or have

communication barriers to be unwilling to participate or to avoid sharing their own experiences during participation (Gibbs, 1997). Therefore, this study also fully respects participants' wishes by creating a comfortable environment conducive to sharing personal experiences and does not completely rule out the use of one-on-one interviews. In one-on-one interviews, the researcher will consider recounting content shared by other participants to the interviewee and asking for their views or thoughts to help compensate for the lack of peer interaction. Additionally, researchers will use their own experiences to help create an environment conducive to sharing. During the interview process, researchers will also share their experiences of teacher-student relationships and situations they have heard about, thereby helping to reduce the pressure or discomfort caused by identity differences between interviewers and interviewees. This also stimulates participants' interest in participating and their desire to share. Care was taken to create an environment in which participants felt comfortable sharing their views and experiences.

In general, the data collected from the focus group interviews are mainly Chinese students' subjective experiences and feelings regarding lecturer-student interaction in TESOL courses during their study abroad period. As well as the perspectives they demonstrate when other participants share their experiences.

The focus group schedule was developed and refined with reference to qualitative interviewing guidance that emphasises open-ended questioning, flexible probing, and topic coverage aligned with research aims. Questions were worded to elicit participants' lived experiences and interpretive evaluations of intercultural interaction, while avoiding overly leading or culturally loaded assumptions. The final guide, therefore, reflects both methodological principles and contextual insights gained from the pilot

observation phase.

4.6.3 Open-ended questionnaires

Open-ended questionnaires provide a flexible platform for participants to express their views and opinions freely. Given the nuanced nature of intercultural interactions in academic settings, it's pivotal that the data collection method can capture the depth, complexity, and diversity of lecturers' experiences (Bryman, 2016). Otherwise, this format fosters deeper, more nuanced responses and can often yield insights that structured questionnaires may overlook (Nardi, 2018). For instance, one potential pitfall of structured questionnaires is that they can unintentionally guide or limit responses. Open-ended formats ensure that the researcher's biases or preconceived notions don't restrict the responses, leading to more authentic data. Furthermore, the participants are lecturers. They are likely busy professionals. Long interviews may discourage participation. A tailored questionnaire may reduce their concerns. The act of responding to questionnaire items might also stimulate their interest in the study, prompting them to engage further with the researcher for more in-depth interviews (Dillman et al., 2014). The questionnaire for lecturers was designed to gather lecturers' accounts of their experiences of interacting with Chinese international students, as well as their perceptions of the dynamics of those interactions.

In practice, the open-ended questionnaire was distributed to lecturers teaching TESOL-related courses across Scottish universities via email and professional networks. A total of 13 complete responses were collected. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were invited to indicate whether they were willing to take part in a follow-up in-depth interview. This sequential design enabled

the study to first map broad patterns in lecturers' experiences and then explore selected issues in greater depth through interviews.

4.6.4 In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews, as a qualitative research method, are unparalleled in capturing the richness of participants' experiences and perceptions. Unlike quantitative tools, which may limit respondents to predefined categories, in-depth interviews allow participants the freedom to voice their thoughts, feelings, and interpretations, resulting in a more authentic representation of their lived experiences (Dillman et al., 2014). In the context of this study, understanding lecturers' nuanced perspectives is crucial. Their interactions with Chinese students in the UK's higher education context are shaped by a myriad of factors, both overt and subtle. Furthermore, the sequential approach of first administering open-ended questionnaires and then following up with in-depth interviews enables iterative understanding. While the questionnaires might highlight general trends and recurrent themes, the interviews can delve deeper into the reasoning behind such patterns. This approach not only provides granularity to the data but also enables further clarification and elaboration of issues emerging from the questionnaires (Maxwell, 2012). This can help deepen the understanding of the characteristics and trends reflected in the questionnaire section.

The interview guide was developed with reference to qualitative interviewing principles that prioritise depth, clarification, and exploration of meaning-making processes, and it was tailored to follow up on themes emerging from the open-ended questionnaire responses.

4.7 Actual recruitment and data collection process

Actual recruitment and data collection for the study were carried out broadly in line with the research plan, although some practical adjustments were made during implementation. The following sections outline the actual process and explain how the data were collected in practice.

4.7.1 Observation implementation

The implementation of the research design involved several practical adjustments as fieldwork progressed. While the overall multi-method structure (pilot observation, student focus groups, lecturer questionnaire, and lecturer interviews) remained intact, recruitment outcomes and access conditions did not fully match the original plan. In particular, the pilot classroom observations revealed that Chinese students were not present in the observed setting, which required the observation component to be repositioned as a pilot study rather than as a data source for answering the research questions. In addition, although lecturer questionnaire recruitment was successful, fewer lecturers than expected ultimately took part in follow-up in-depth interviews. This section, therefore, provides a reflective account of what was implemented as planned, what changed in practice, and how methodological adaptations were made to maintain the coherence and integrity of the exploratory research design.

A total of eight observations were conducted during October and November of 2023. One observation focused on the course “Research Methods for TESOL”, which took place in a relatively small classroom with a female lecturer and 6 students. Two other observations were conducted in the course “Contemporary Issues in Language Teaching”, taught by a male lecturer in a big classroom with 12 students. The remaining five observations were for the

“Research Methodologies and Reasoning MSc Seminar”, held in a large classroom with around 25 students and male lecturers.

The students observed in these classes were a mix of international students from various backgrounds and local Scottish students. My role was identified as both an observer and a student. I participated in classroom activities and group discussions while simultaneously conducting my observations. Throughout the process, both the students and the lecturers appeared relaxed and comfortable. Each observation session lasted more than two hours. The observations were meticulously recorded in notes, with a focus on the lecturer’s interaction style, the students’ responses, and the overall classroom atmosphere.

These pilot observations, therefore, informed the subsequent research design primarily through instrument refinement. Specifically, they helped identify contextually salient interactional conditions (e.g., class size, seating arrangements, participation routines, and lecturer feedback practices), which were translated into targeted prompts for the later focus groups, open-ended questionnaires, and lecturer interviews.

4.7.2 Students’ interview execution

This study focuses on the intercultural lecturer-student relationship between Chinese students and lecturers in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) programmes in Scotland. The selection of participants was mainly concentrated in the Scottish region of the United Kingdom, and all participants were from TESOL courses in Scottish universities. In order to better understand the intercultural experiences and interactions of Chinese students and lecturers. The study used focus group semi-structured interviews

to collect data, aiming to capture deeper insights and diverse perspectives through open dialogue. As Table 1 shows, 8 focus groups were organised, and each group had 1 to 4 students. A total of 18 students were recruited to participate. Two sets of data came from one-on-one interviews, because the participants said that they were *“very shy and would be more willing to share their experiences or express their ideas when they were alone than when they were with many people.”* Among these participants, there were 4 males and 14 females. These participants were Chinese citizens who completed their undergraduate education in China and then came to the UK to study TESOL. The interview scenarios included online meetings and face-to-face conversations. The offline interviews were conducted at the University of Strathclyde, where the environment was quiet and easy to communicate in order to promote the participants’ openness and honest expression. Each interview lasted approximately 40 to 70 minutes, and I used a semi-structured interview guide for the conversation, ensuring that all the predetermined research topics were covered while also leaving enough space for participants to share their personal experiences and perspectives. Detailed information about the participants can be found in the table below.

Table 1 Participant Information

Group	number	University	gander	age	Code name
G1	1	University of St. Andrews	female	28	S1-1
G2	3	University of the West of Scotland	female	24	S2-1
		University of the West of Scotland	female	25	S2-2
		University of the West of Scotland	male	23	S2-3
G3	2	University of Glasgow	female	25	S3-1
		University of Edinburgh	female	24	S3-2

G4	1	University of Edinburgh	female	23	S4-1
G5	2	University of Stirling	female	24	S5-1
		University of St. Andrews	female	23	S5-2
G6	2	University of the West of Scotland	female	25	S6-1
		University of Edinburgh	male	29	S6-2
G7	3	University of Glasgow	female	23	S7-1
		University of Glasgow	female	26	S7-2
		University of Glasgow	female	27	S7-3
G8	4	University of Aberdeen	female	22	S8-1
		University of Aberdeen	male	23	S8-2
		University of St. Andrews	female	22	S8-3
		University of Edinburgh	male	25	S8-4

Before the interviews, I provided participants with an overview and introduction to the study and informed them that the interviews would be recorded. Face-to-face interviews were recorded using audio recordings, as the camera was stressful for participants. Online interviews were recorded with faces displayed. Each group of participants was interviewed using pre-determined interview questions. Additional questions were asked based on their responses to help explore their experiences and experiences of intercultural lecturer-student interactions. In order to help interviewees overcome communication barriers and express their ideas more effectively, a flexible language interview strategy was adopted. In the actual interviews with Chinese students, all participants chose to be interviewed in Mandarin. They expressed that using Mandarin can help them better express their ideas without the language barrier that reduces their desire to share and the accuracy of their expressions. This seems to be consistent with the many benefits of conducting interviews in the participants'

native language, as emphasised by Cortazzi, Pilcher, and Jin Xu (2025).

4.7.3 Lecturer open-ended questionnaire execution

The open-ended questionnaires were distributed and recruited through email and social media platforms, with satisfactory results. A total of 13 responses were collected from the lecturers. The responses were complete, rich, and substantive. The participants were all lecturers from TESOL-related courses, and each had experience interacting with Chinese students. The participants came from different university institutions and varied in age, teaching experience, educational background, and gender. This diversity contributed to the breadth and variety of the sample.

4.7.4 Lecturer in-depth interview execution

A total of 4 lecturers who had completed the open-ended questionnaire agreed to participate in follow-up in-depth interviews. Among these participants, one was female, and three were male. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom or Microsoft Teams, depending on participants' preferences and availability. Each interview lasted between 20 and 30 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. The interviews focused on lecturers' experiences of teaching Chinese students, perceived interactional challenges, pedagogical adjustments, and strategies for supporting intercultural engagement in TESOL classrooms.

The interview questions were designed to delve deeper into the responses provided in the questionnaires, allowing for further discussion and detailed explanations. Additional questions were also developed to align with the

research objectives. During the interviews, the participants shared their experiences and strategies for interacting with Chinese students in great detail.

4.7.5 Research process: challenges and adaptations

Overall, the research process progressed smoothly. Access and scheduling were manageable. The planned stages of data collection were completed. Some practical challenges still emerged. These required small but meaningful adjustments. This section summarises those changes. It also explains how they shaped the final dataset.

A key set of adaptations related to student data collection. Focus groups were selected to support a relaxed atmosphere. They were expected to encourage participants to build on each other's accounts. In practice, focus groups were harder to organise than anticipated. Participation within groups was uneven. Some participants were reluctant to discuss personal experiences with unfamiliar peers. This was reflected in quieter contributions. Some participants offered minimal elaboration. Others mainly confirmed classmates' views. Many participants also preferred online sessions. They found these easier to arrange around study and personal commitments.

Several participants requested one-to-one interviews. They explained that an individual felt less pressured. They also felt it enabled freer expression. Many Chinese student participants preferred to use their first language. They felt that Chinese allowed more accurate and detailed expression. They also felt less constrained by real-time language conversion. Allowing participants to use their preferred language supported depth and accuracy in meaning-making. This aligns with qualitative aims. It supports representing participants'

perspectives as fully as possible. In response, the plan was adapted. A small number of one-to-one student interviews were added. Online arrangements were used where appropriate. The student dataset, therefore, includes focus group contributions and individual interview accounts.

During student interviews and focus groups, another pattern became noticeable. Female participants were more strongly represented in the student sample. They also tended to provide more detailed narratives. They more often offered explicit reflections on feelings and emotions. Male participants often provided shorter accounts. They also tended to elaborate less. This difference cannot be attributed to a single factor. Participant comfort and rapport may have played a role. My position as a female researcher may also have shaped how comfortable some participants felt.

For lecturer data collection, online engagement was also generally preferred. Convenience and time constraints were common reasons. The open-ended questionnaire stage worked better than expected. Lecturers provided rich and reflective responses. These responses offered substantial insight into teaching experience. They also showed careful reflection on intercultural lecturer-student interaction. Fewer lecturers than anticipated took part in follow-up interviews. The interviews that were completed were especially detailed. They enabled deeper probing and clarification. They also provided richer contextualisation of lecturers' reflections. This material was particularly valuable for interpreting key themes.

4.8 Data management and analysis

Thematic analysis in this study is applied to participants' narrative and reflective accounts rather than to transcribed interactional data. The analytical

focus is therefore on identifying patterns of meaning in how lecturers and students describe, interpret, and evaluate intercultural interaction, rather than on examining the sequential organisation of talk or micro-interactional processes. This approach is consistent with the study's exploratory orientation and with its aim of examining how established intercultural communication theories resonate with participants' lived experiences.

Research integrity, especially in qualitative studies, is underpinned by the principle of reflexivity, a central tenet of critical ethnography. Reflexivity mandates an ongoing critical self-examination of one's predispositions and biases, and how these inherently shape the research trajectory (Foley, 2002). Recognising this, this study is anchored in authenticity and continual self-reflection, ensuring the mitigation of subjective influences throughout data collection and subsequent analysis. Observation notes and recordings were revisited repeatedly and transcribed into written descriptions where appropriate. Questionnaire responses were used directly as textual data. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed.

4.8.1 Linking the theoretical framework to data management

The theoretical framework presented in Chapter 3 is not used simply as background. It directly informs how the study was designed and how the data were handled and analysed. This section explains how the integrated framework was put into practice across data collection and analysis, ensuring consistency between the study's theoretical basis and its empirical work.

As shown in Figure 5 (Section 3.5), the integrated framework guided both the

data collection design and the analytic procedures. Following its layered structure, classroom observations were used primarily to provide contextual grounding regarding pedagogical organisation and classroom participation formats, while semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were used to explore participants' perceptions, emotional experiences, and longer-term intercultural development.

More specifically, Pianta's Teaching Through Interaction (TTI) framework guided what was attended to in observations of pedagogical interaction quality, including emotional support, classroom organisation, and instructional support. Spencer-Oatey's Rapport Management theory informed analysis of how lecturers and students managed rapport, including face sensitivities, sociality rights and obligations (e.g., fairness), and interactional goals, as reflected in participants' accounts.

At the cultural contextualisation layer, Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Holliday's small culture perspective were used to interpret how broader value orientations and locally negotiated classroom norms shaped interactional expectations and participation patterns. Finally, the Comprehensive Model of Intercultural Communication (CMIC) provided a developmental lens for examining how repeated interactional experiences related to changes over time, such as intercultural effectiveness, communicative competence, emotional security, and a sense of belonging in the classroom.

Taken together, these perspectives supported a coherent, multi-level approach that links pedagogical interaction, relational negotiation, and intercultural development within a single analytical framework.

4.8.2 Accuracy in translations and interpretations

In conducting research across linguistic and cultural boundaries, the accuracy of translations and interpretations becomes paramount to preserve the integrity of the data collected. To address this, all interviews, questionnaires, and observational data involving non-English responses were translated and interpreted with careful attention to both linguistic accuracy and cultural meaning. This helped ensure that translations were not only linguistically accurate but also culturally sensitive, preserving the nuances and meanings intended by the participants (Choi et al., 2012).

To further enhance accuracy, a dual-check system was used where possible. After the initial translation, translations were reviewed again to identify any discrepancies or ambiguities. This iterative process helps in maintaining the fidelity of the translated data to its original form. Additionally, participants were invited, where appropriate, to review and validate the translations of their responses, offering them the opportunity to clarify or amend their statements, thereby ensuring that their perspectives are accurately and faithfully represented.

4.8.3 Reliability and validity in data analysis

Thematic analysis, as a commonly used method of data analysis in qualitative research, offers flexibility, accessibility, and the ability to provide rich, detailed, and complex data accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method facilitates an understanding of the complexity of the data, making it a suitable choice for the data analysis process in this study. Throughout this process, one must familiarise oneself with the data, generating codes, identifying themes, and interpreting the data.

In this research, the researcher has chosen to use software tools for coding and analysing the data, aiming for an accurate identification of themes through the analysis of interview transcripts and related textual data. While some researchers believe, as Patton (2015) suggests, that manual tools for data coding and analysis might be more efficient and reliable than software programmes, Castleberry and Nolen (2018) argue that software can aid researchers in organising and analysing vast amounts of textual data. Software analysis can provide technical support, making qualitative research more efficient and in-depth. Castleberry and Nolen (2018) also recommend the use of NVivo software, which can facilitate researchers in easily identifying patterns and trends within the data and associating them with corresponding labels or codes. Moreover, NVivo software can assist researchers in comparing and cross-validating data during the thematic analysis process to ensure the reliability and accuracy of the analysis results. Following such coding procedures, multiple sub-themes were identified, and each was connected to the research question according to the thematic analysis method to identify relevancies. Special cases or circumstances were considered separately for analysis.

After this, the data underwent two rounds of coding. The first cycle coding processes can range in magnitude from a single word to a full paragraph, an entire page of text or a stream of moving images. In the second cycle coding processes, the portions coded can be the exact same units, passages of text, analytic memos about the data, and even a reconfiguration of themselves developed thus far. This kind of coding can be checked repeatedly to avoid misunderstanding or ignoring subtle information (Saldaña, 2021).

4.8.4 Thematic analysis procedure in this study

In this study, thematic analysis with an inductive orientation was employed, which implied that the themes identified were closely connected to the data itself (Patton, 1990). Therefore, the aim of this research was to discover themes that emerged post-data collection, rather than attempting to fit them into a rigid pre-existing coding framework or the researcher's analytical preconceptions. To rigorously conduct the thematic analysis of the data in this study, the thematic analysis steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) (Table 2) were referenced.

Table 2 Phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

First, I familiarised myself with the dataset by repeatedly reading transcripts from audio and video recordings and making initial notes. Where ambiguities arose, participants were contacted for clarification. I then generated initial codes by systematically marking meaningful segments of the data, ensuring that contextual detail was preserved. These codes were subsequently collated into candidate themes, which were refined iteratively to capture relationships both within and across the data.

During the reviewing phase, I checked the internal coherence of each theme and how they related to one another to form a broader narrative of the findings. Once satisfied with their clarity and distinctiveness, I defined and named the

themes using concise and meaningful labels. Finally, the report was produced, where themes were supported with vivid extracts to demonstrate how they reflected participants' experiences.

4.8.5 Language in thematic analysis

In qualitative research, maintaining the consistency of the language used for data analysis with the language of data collection is a fundamental requirement for preserving the integrity and accuracy of the data (Temple & Young, 2004). For bilingual researchers, deciding when to translate has important implications for the credibility of subsequent research as it relates to concepts of accuracy, inclusivity, consistency, and transparency in the analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Esfehiani and Walters (2018) emphasise that it is crucial in thematic analysis that the main message embedded in each theme and the socio-cultural issues associated with it must not be lost when researchers deal with translations between the source language and English. To avoid this problem, it is crucial to become deeply familiar with contextually critical information and topics. Esfehiani and Walters found through comparison that translation point C (see Figure 6) seems to be the most conducive to cross-language theme analysis.

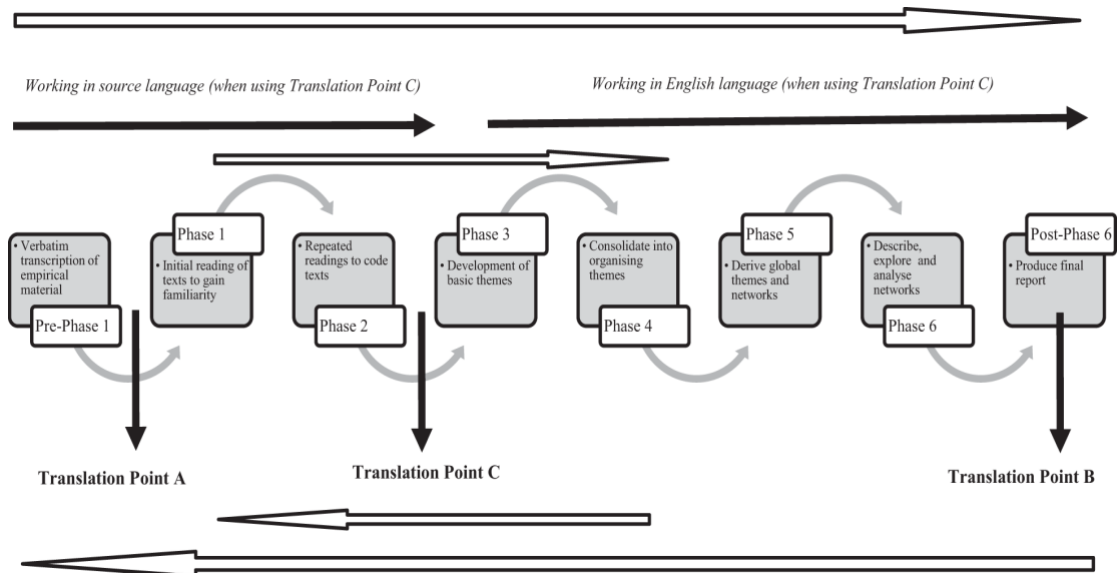


Figure 6 Translation in thematic analysis (Esfehani & Walters, 2018)

By transcribing interviews and then conducting the next stage of thematic analysis in the source language, the researcher automatically engages in a sustained and comprehensive engagement with the contextual, rhetorical and sociocultural aspects and nuances of the material. Of course, Squires (2009) also advocates developing codes in the source language before theming them in English and considers this approach to be methodologically sound. Depth and accuracy of reading comprehension also become more credible when texts are organised in the native language (Campbell, 1990). Therefore, it is argued that exploring and studying native language texts in the early stages of thematic analysis can provide researchers with faster, deeper and more reliable familiarity. They are very familiar with the socio-cultural context of the society under study (Esfehani & Walters, 2018). Applying translation point C, the author identified the best English explanation of the underlying themes between Stages 2 and 3. These basic themes are then developed into organising themes and global themes in English in Stages 4 and 5, and into thematic networks in Stage 6, which are used to construct and write the final report in English.

Researchers typically deal with a culture-based language that includes an idiosyncratic set of terms and concepts that are not easily translated into English (Esfehiani & Walters, 2018). In intercultural studies, language differences are often perceived as a barrier (Squires, 2009). For instance, certain idioms or specific expressions in Chinese may not have direct equivalents in English, and these details are crucial for understanding the participants' intentions and emotions. Given that the data in this study include interviews conducted in Chinese with Chinese international students, this portion will be coded, and themes will be identified in Chinese. When a Chinese theme was formed, its English translation and interpretation were followed. Studies show that the subjectivity in the translation process can affect the objectivity and accuracy of research, especially when dealing with data that involves complex emotions and cultural contexts (van Nes et al., 2010). Therefore, in this study, the researcher chose to retain the original Chinese text during the analysis phase until preliminary thematic analysis results were formed. This strategy not only ensures the completeness of the information extracted from the data but also aids in accurately conveying the meanings of these themes when writing the English paper. In the final research report, key quotations and theme descriptions were translated into English to ensure comprehension and acceptance by an international audience.

In summary, using Chinese for preliminary data coding and thematic analysis in this study was necessary, not only adhering to the best practices of qualitative research but also ensuring the accuracy and depth of the research results. The choice of this method was intended to maximally respect and preserve the original expressions of the participants, thus providing a genuine and comprehensive research perspective.

4.9 The Rigour and quality

Qualitative research, at its core, is about deeply understanding people's real-life experiences and sharing them truthfully. Just like Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggested, the way we conduct our study matters a lot for its reliability. In simpler terms, it's crucial to ensure that what we find out and report is a genuine reflection of what participants truly feel and experience. In this study, the researcher took extra care to represent what the participants shared honestly, recognising that the information they gave was personal and sensitive. The main goal was to add meaningful insights to existing academic discussions. The study also aimed to present new perspectives that might challenge or confirm what we already know, as highlighted by Shenton (2004). The researcher also made sure the research methods were clear and easy to follow. This way, if someone wants to conduct a similar study in the future, they can clearly understand how the area developed.

Throughout this research, the researcher was focused on building a genuine connection with participants, handling the information ethically, being aware of any influences, and reflecting on the methods. This approach helped ensure that the study was both honest and of high quality.

4.9.1 Engagement and ethical concerns

Ensuring deep and genuine engagement in qualitative research is fundamental for capturing the complexities of the phenomenon under study. Active engagement with participants not only fosters trust but also deepens the understanding of the subject matter (Patton, 2002). Through observations, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions, this research ensured that the engagement was both meaningful and consistent, allowing for the richness of

the data. Qualitative research, given its intimate nature, often grapples with intricate ethical dilemmas (Jones et al., 2013). Before commencing the study, participants were comprehensively briefed about the study's objectives, methods, potential risks, and their rights, ensuring an informed consent process. Anonymity and confidentiality were upheld rigorously, with data identifiers being removed and secure storage practices employed. Further, the choice to offer interviews in Chinese was not merely a methodological one but an ethical stance, ensuring participants could express themselves freely, minimising linguistic discomfort and potential misinterpretation (Roulston & Choi, 2018).

In practical terms, institutional ethical approval for this study was obtained from the University of Strathclyde ethics committee prior to participant recruitment (see Appendix 8). All participants were provided with a detailed information sheet outlining the purpose of the study, what participation would involve, foreseeable risks, and the voluntary nature of involvement. Written informed consent was obtained before any interviews or questionnaires were administered, and consent was reaffirmed verbally at the beginning of each interview session.

Participants' right to withdraw was explicitly communicated both in writing and verbally. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason and without any negative consequences. They were also informed that they could request the removal of their data within a specified period after participation (e.g., two weeks), after which anonymised data would be integrated into the thematic analysis and could no longer be feasibly separated.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, all identifying information was

removed during transcription and analysis. Participants were assigned codes (e.g., S1–S18 for students and L1–L13 for lecturers), and any potentially identifying institutional, geographical, or personal details were masked in the thesis. Only the researcher and supervisory team had access to the raw data.

Regarding data storage and security, audio recordings, transcripts, and questionnaire responses were stored on encrypted, password-protected university-approved systems. Data were not stored on public cloud services or personal devices without encryption. In accordance with institutional data protection policy, all research data will be retained securely for a fixed period (e.g., five years) and then permanently deleted. These procedures were implemented to ensure compliance with ethical governance standards and to safeguard participants' privacy throughout the research process.

4.9.2 Power relationship and reflexivity

The dynamics of power are inherent in research settings and are accentuated within research (Wittmayer & Schäpke, 2014). Recognising potential hierarchies among researchers, lecturers, and students, the researcher deliberately sought to equalise the research environment. This included facilitating an environment where students feel unconstrained and can voice their experiences authentically, and ensuring credibility. This is mainly reflected in the researcher's listening attitude during interviews and in minimising the researcher's presence in the environment during classroom observations.

Reflexivity is more than self-awareness. It is an ongoing interrogation of one's influence on the research process and vice versa (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2017). Throughout this study, there was a conscious endeavour to practice reflexivity, scrutinising potential biases and preconceived notions. Personal

biases, both overt and subtle, were addressed regularly to avoid influencing data interpretation. The researcher kept reflective journals. The researcher also engaged in discussions with peers and supervisors. These steps helped ensure the integrity of the study.

4.9.3 Positionality

Because the researcher is a Chinese student studying in the UK, the researcher can be considered an “insider researcher”. According to Greene (2014), insider research is defined as “research on one’s social group or society”. Loxley and Seery (2008) also provide a similar definition, stating that insider research is conducted by members of a group, for instance, people in the same group with the same cultural, biological, or professional characteristics. The researcher chose the Chinese student population because it’s easier to organise than other international student groups, which might benefit this study. For instance, the insider researcher’s background in their study (Bell & Waters, 2018) helps researchers pose meaningful questions, read non-verbal cues during interviews, and project a more genuine understanding of the culture in their studies (Merriam et al., 2001). Moreover, interactions between insider researchers and participants are more natural because insider researchers are familiar with the culture or social environment and know how to approach participants without stereotyping or judging them (Aguilar, 1981). However, DeLyser (2001) believes that, because of the greater familiarity between insiders and participants, there is a risk of losing objectivity and making assumptions based on the insider researcher's prior knowledge and experiences. In this research project, maintaining objectivity is crucial. Therefore, in this research process, the researcher’s identity brought both

practical advantages and a deeper contextual understanding, but it also carried some risk of reducing objectivity. Thus, the researcher must repeatedly check for objectivity in the data collection and analysis process.

4.9.4 Limitations

This study, while offering valuable insights into the experiences of Chinese TESOL students and their lecturers across eight selected universities in Scotland, is subject to several limitations that warrant consideration. Firstly, the choice of universities, limited to Scotland, may affect the generalisability of the findings to other geographic regions. The cultural, educational, and linguistic landscape in Scotland is unique, and while this provides a rich context for investigation, it also means that the findings may not be directly applicable to TESOL settings in other countries or regions with different educational norms and cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, the sampling method, though designed to capture a wide range of perspectives, is based on purposive and convenience sampling techniques. While these methods were selected for their practicality and relevance to the research questions, they inherently limit the ability to generalise the findings to all Chinese TESOL students and lecturers globally. The sample's representativeness is constrained by the selection criteria and the willingness of individuals to participate, which may introduce selection bias. Future research could address these limitations by expanding the study to include TESOL environments in different geographic locations, employing random sampling techniques where feasible to enhance the representativeness of the sample. Longitudinal studies could also offer deeper insights into the evolving experiences and challenges faced by Chinese TESOL students and lecturers,

providing a more dynamic understanding of their educational journeys.

4.10 Summary

This chapter has outlined the qualitative, perception-oriented research design adopted in the study. The methodological approach aligns with the research questions by focusing on lecturers' and students' experiences and interpretations of intercultural interaction. Classroom observations were conducted as a pilot study. They provided contextual and feasibility insights that informed the refinement of focus group and questionnaire prompts and strengthened the ecological validity of the main data collection. The primary empirical data consist of lecturers' and students' reflective accounts collected through focus group interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and in-depth interviews, which were coded and analysed thematically. Issues of translation accuracy, analytical rigour, reflexivity, and ethical integrity were also addressed to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

Chapter 5 Contextual Insights from the pilot observation

Chapter 5 presents contextual insights drawn from the pilot classroom observations. These observations were conducted as preliminary familiarisation work to document classroom settings, interaction routines, and situational features in the TESOL teaching environment. They also informed the design of subsequent data collection instruments, including focus group prompts and questionnaire items.

The evidence presented in this chapter is mainly descriptive and serves a supportive, contextualising function. Rather than providing the main basis for analytical claims, the observation notes offer background for understanding the lecturer and student accounts examined in later chapters. In keeping with the perception-oriented and exploratory design of the study, the main analytical arguments of the thesis are developed primarily from participants' reflective accounts in Chapters 6 and 7.

5.1 University setting and interaction dynamics

This section presents classroom observation notes as descriptive and contextual material, focusing on features of the university setting such as classroom layout, class size, and resource availability. These observations are not treated as standalone analytical evidence, but as background information that helps situate the student and lecturer accounts examined in later chapters.

5.1.1 Classroom layout and lecturer-student interaction

The seating arrangements in the observed classrooms were flexible, with students free to choose their seats. Across the observed sessions, students tended to settle quickly at the beginning of class unless a task required them

to move. In Classroom Observation 3, fewer verbal exchanges and less eye contact with the lecturer were recorded among some students seated in the back rows. In the same session, students seated in the front rows were more often observed interacting with the lecturer, both visually and verbally. Front-row students were also more often within the lecturer's immediate line of sight during whole-class explanation and questioning.

In Classroom Observation 1, the classroom was arranged in pods, with students sitting in small clusters rather than traditional rows. During this session, participation was observed across multiple groups in the classroom, with interactions between students and the lecturer occurring across different parts of the room and with multiple students contributing to the discussion. When the lecturer posed a question, responses emerged from different clusters rather than from only one part of the room, and follow-up comments were often made within groups before being addressed to the whole class.

In Classroom Observation 3, although the room layout remained unchanged, students were divided into groups, repositioned their seats, or slightly adjusted their directions. These small physical adjustments were often made quickly and informally, usually at the lecturer's instruction or in response to the requirements of the task. During task-based activities organised in groups, peer exchanges and requests for clarification from the lecturer were observed frequently. On several occasions, students first discussed a point quietly within their group before one member addressed the lecturer on behalf of the group.

What is documented here is not an explanation of interaction, but a descriptive account of how spatial organisation and task-related seating patterns featured in classroom activity. Later chapters draw on participant accounts to explore how such classroom conditions were described, experienced, and interpreted

by participants.

5.1.2 Class size and classroom interactional context

The three sets of classroom observations were conducted in classes of varying sizes. For example, in Classroom Observation 2, which included six students, interactions between the lecturer and students were noticeably more frequent than in Classroom Observation 1, which had twelve students, and Classroom Observation 3, which had twenty-five students. Turn-taking in this smaller class was also easier to follow, with lecturers able to respond to individual comments before moving on to the next contribution. Pauses after questions were more noticeable in this setting, and individual students had more time to complete their responses without overlap from other speakers.

In the larger class observed in Classroom Observation 3, interaction was not distributed equally across all students during the session. The lecturer was observed to interact more frequently with students who participated actively, while quieter students contributed less often and fewer individualised exchanges were recorded overall. The lecturer also spent more time addressing the class as a collective audience before returning to individual responses.

Additionally, in the smaller observed class, student contributions were often longer, whereas in the larger class responses more often took the form of brief answers to lecturer questions. In the smaller class, exchanges sometimes developed over several turns, with lecturers asking follow-up questions and students extending or clarifying earlier comments. By contrast, in the larger observed class, interaction more often consisted of brief responses to lecturer questions.

Across the observed sessions, differences were recorded in interaction frequency, contribution length, and the distribution of lecturer attention across students. The differences recorded here relate mainly to interaction frequency, contribution length, and the distribution of lecturer attention across students. These observations are included as contextual reference points, with their meaning for students' and lecturers' experiences examined later through participant narratives.

5.1.3 University resources and classroom interactional context

In all three classroom observations, both lecturers and students made use of smartboards and multifunctional teaching tools. Slides, online search tools, and digital prompts were integrated into the teaching sequence rather than used as separate activities, and the shift between spoken explanation and screen-based reference occurred regularly during the observed sessions.

For instance, in Classroom Observations 1 and 2, lecturers used online tools to conduct interactive Q&A sessions. In these moments, attention in the room was often jointly directed towards the smartboard, after which students responded orally or through short exchanges with peers before speaking to the lecturer. In some cases, the screen was used to display prompts, examples, or key terms that were then taken up in subsequent classroom talk.

In contrast, Classroom Observation 3 did not include the same type of interactive technology-based activity. In this session, online search tools were also used during content explanation. During these moments, student responses and exchanges were recorded in the observation notes. The lecturer occasionally moved between the screen and the students while

explaining results from the search, using the displayed content as a reference point for further clarification. This was followed by short sequences in which students looked at the screen, consulted peers briefly, and then responded to the lecturer's follow-up questions. However, the technology-assisted interactions observed in these sessions were often brief and task-focused. They were usually tied closely to the immediate learning objective rather than extended discussion beyond the task.

What the observation notes capture here is the practical presence of teaching resources within everyday classroom activity. Smartboards, online tools, and visual materials appeared as part of the organisation of tasks, explanation, and response. How these resources were described and experienced by lecturers and students is considered later through their reflective accounts.

5.2 Cultural background and lecturer-student interaction

This section presents observation notes related to cultural diversity, language use, and classroom interaction in the observed TESOL settings. These observations are treated as descriptive and contextual material rather than as standalone analytical evidence. The observations in this section provide background for the later discussion of participant perspectives, particularly the lecturer and student accounts presented in Sections 6.5.4, 6.5.5, and 7.4.

5.2.1 Cultural diversity in the observed classroom context

It was noted that students from different cultural backgrounds participated and expressed themselves in different ways during classroom activities. In Classroom Observations 1 and 3, some students from Western European

countries such as France and Germany were observed to participate more frequently in verbal discussions than some of their peers from East Asian or Middle Eastern backgrounds during the recorded sessions.

For instance, in Classroom Observation 3, the lecturer actively engaged students from African countries by asking about their educational backgrounds and their experiences adapting to life in Scotland. Some of these contributions were made in response to direct lecturer prompts, while others followed after students referred to one another's comments or experiences.

In all three classrooms, lecturers introduced activities that invited students to refer to different cultural contexts, and these activities were accompanied by interaction among students and between students and lecturers during the observed sessions. These moments often occurred when examples were drawn from everyday life, prior educational experience, or practices from students' home countries. In some cases, students compared how similar classroom practices, educational expectations, or social routines were understood in different national settings. At other times, cultural references appeared more briefly, for example in short examples, passing comments, or quick comparisons offered during discussion tasks.

This section records them as part of the wider classroom context. The ways in which such differences were understood by lecturers and students are taken up in the later interview and questionnaire chapters.

5.2.2 Language-related challenges in classroom participation

It was observed that some students using English as an additional language contributed less frequently during whole-class discussion in the recorded

sessions. In these moments, participation sometimes took the form of shorter answers, delayed responses, or brief exchanges that did not continue beyond a single turn. At times, students paused before answering, looked towards peers, or waited for the lecturer to reformulate a question before responding.

The observations also recorded several recurring lecturer responses in moments involving language-related difficulty. In Classroom Observation 1, for example, the lecturer invited students using English as an additional language to answer questions and listened patiently to their responses. In Classroom Observation 2, the lecturer allowed students to use translation software when working with academic terminology. In Classroom Observation 3, the lecturer used simplified language and incorporated visual aids such as pictures and videos during teaching activities. At times, key terms or instructions were repeated, rephrased, or supported visually before students responded. On some occasions, the lecturer slowed the pace of explanation slightly when introducing task instructions or unfamiliar terminology.

Additionally, during group activities in Classroom Observation 3, some students relied on peer support when communicating with the lecturer. In small-group interaction, students were also observed to check meanings quietly with one another before one member spoke to the lecturer on behalf of the group. This pattern was more visible during task clarification and discussion of unfamiliar concepts than during routine classroom exchanges.

Across the observed sessions, lecturers were repeatedly recorded rephrasing questions, slowing explanation, repeating key terms, and using visual or peer-supported forms of classroom communication. How these support practices were experienced by students was explored further through the subsequent interviews.

The purpose here is to document the interactional circumstances that later became a focus in participant accounts. Students' and lecturers' own interpretations of these language-related challenges are examined in the following empirical chapters.

5.2.3 Culturally responsive practices in the observed classroom context

Lecturers were observed to introduce examples and follow-up questions referring to different cultural backgrounds represented in the classroom. References of this kind were often introduced as part of explanation, example-giving, or follow-up questions rather than as separate discussion topics in themselves.

In all three observed classrooms, lecturers initiated conversations about students' cultural backgrounds and experiences during classroom interaction. In several instances, students responded by offering short comparisons between practices in Scotland and those in their home countries, or by referring to earlier study experiences in other educational settings.

Across the observation notes, cultural background appeared in a series of brief classroom moments in which it was acknowledged, invited, or discussed. These moments are included here as part of the observed interactional setting. Later chapters consider how such practices were interpreted by students and lecturers in their reflective accounts of intercultural classroom experience.

5.3 Lecturer behaviour and attitudes on interaction

This section presents observation notes related to lecturers' classroom

practices, including expressions of expectation, feedback practices, and affective stance during teaching. These observations are treated as descriptive and contextual material rather than as standalone analytical evidence. Their significance is explored further through the lecturer and student accounts presented in Chapters 6 and 7.

5.3.1 Lecturer expectations and student performance

The observation notes recorded occasions on which lecturers used direct invitation, praise, or acknowledgement during classroom talk. In the subsequent classroom exchange, one or more students then contributed. These expressions of expectation were usually brief and embedded in ongoing classroom talk rather than presented as formal statements. They were conveyed through direct invitation, short praise, acknowledgement of effort, or requests for students to expand on an initial answer.

For instance, in Classroom Observation 3, the lecturer publicly praised a student's effort. The student responded immediately, and additional students also contributed to the discussion that followed. In some cases, the lecturer addressed students by name before inviting a response, while in others, the lecturer used phrases inviting students to add detail, explain their reasoning, or continue a point that had already been introduced. These moments were often followed by a short pause, after which one or more students spoke.

In Classroom Observations 2 and 3, lecturers referred not only to academic matters but also to aspects of students' lives outside immediate coursework. On several occasions, these references appeared before or after task discussion, for example when the lecturer briefly asked about students' study experiences, daily routines, or adjustment to the local environment. These

moments were brief and formed part of the classroom exchanges recorded in the observations.

These moments are presented here as part of the observed classroom interaction. Their possible significance is explored later through participants' accounts.

5.3.2 Lecturer feedback practices in classroom interaction

In Classroom Observations 1 and 3, lecturers posed open-ended questions to students. In these moments, students were observed to give longer responses, and more contributions were recorded. In several instances, lecturers then followed initial answers with clarification requests or invitations for elaboration.

Lecturers were also observed to respond to students' contributions with positive affirmation, and additional contributions were recorded in the interaction that followed. These affirmations were usually brief, taking the form of short verbal responses, nodding, or acknowledgement before a follow-up question or a transition to another speaker. In several instances, feedback also included light reformulation of a student's wording.

In Classroom Observations 2 and 3, different forms of feedback were recorded across students and classroom situations. In some cases, feedback took the form of direct prompts or concise confirmation, whereas in others it involved longer clarification, rephrasing, or step-by-step questioning. During group tasks, lecturers sometimes responded to a group rather than to one individual, while in whole-class discussion feedback often followed a named or clearly directed student contribution.

These observations are presented as contextual material, and the subsequent

interviews explored how students and lecturers perceived different feedback practices in classroom interaction. Across the observed sessions, feedback was recorded not only in corrective form but also in prompts, confirmations, rephrasings, and extended clarification during classroom talk.

5.3.3 Observable affective behaviours in the classroom context

In Classroom Observations 1 and 3, the instructors incorporated humour into their teaching, and laughter or smiling responses were recorded during the sessions. These humorous moments were usually brief and occurred during explanation, transition between tasks, or informal exchanges with students.

In addition, the lecturers displayed visible enthusiasm for the subject matter during classroom teaching. In some moments, lecturers varied their tone of voice noticeably when introducing examples, asking questions, or highlighting important concepts. They also used animated facial expressions and hand movements while explaining ideas, particularly during longer stretches of teacher talk.

The observation notes also recorded that lecturers' affective stance was expressed through their movement and positioning in the classroom. At certain points, lecturers moved closer to students when responding to questions, paused beside particular groups during tasks, or leaned slightly forward when listening to student contributions. During whole-class teaching, eye contact was distributed across different parts of the room, and lecturers occasionally smiled, nodded, or gave short verbal acknowledgements while students were speaking.

Affective stance was also visible in the way transitions were managed between activities. In several instances, lecturers used a lighter or more conversational tone when shifting from explanation to task work, or from one discussion topic to another. This was sometimes accompanied by short humorous remarks, encouraging phrases, or a noticeable softening of voice.

These observations informed the subsequent interviews with lecturers, which included questions about how they approached classroom atmosphere and affective engagement in teaching. The observation notes therefore captured affective stance mainly through visible and audible classroom behaviours. How such lecturer behaviours were experienced and interpreted is examined later through the interview data.

5.4 Summary and contextual reflections

This chapter has presented contextual insights drawn from the pilot classroom observations conducted in TESOL settings. Rather than serving as the main evidential basis for the study's analytical claims, these observations provided descriptive and sensitising material that helped situate the lecturer and student accounts examined in the later chapters. In this sense, the pilot observation study contributed primarily to the refinement of the research focus, the design of the subsequent data collection, and the contextual background against which later participant accounts were interpreted.

First, the observations drew attention to several visible features of the TESOL classroom context, including variation in classroom layout, class size, participation format, and the use of teaching resources. These features helped identify aspects of classroom activity that required further exploration through participant accounts. In particular, the observations highlighted differences

between whole-class and group-based interaction, variation in how lecturer attention was distributed across students, and the practical role of digital tools in explanation, prompting, and task organisation. As a result, the pilot study helped refine later interview and questionnaire questions by foregrounding classroom conditions that participants might themselves perceive as relevant to their experiences of interaction.

Second, the pilot observations highlighted the importance of cultural diversity and language use as recurring features of the observed TESOL settings. Visible differences in participation, lecturer prompting, and peer-supported communication drew attention to issues that could not be fully understood through observation alone and therefore required participants' own interpretations. In this respect, the pilot study helped clarify an important methodological boundary in the research: what could be documented through classroom observation was not the same as what could be understood through lecturers' and students' reflective accounts. The observation notes provided contextual reference points for the later exploration of how cultural background, language-related difficulty, and intercultural sensitivity were perceived and interpreted by participants.

Third, the observations identified a number of recurring lecturer practices, including expressions of expectation, feedback moves, and affective behaviours such as humour, enthusiasm, and visible encouragement. These practices were recorded as part of the observable interactional environment. Their value within the study lay in drawing attention to areas that later became important in the interviews and questionnaires, particularly in relation to how students and lecturers experienced feedback, classroom atmosphere, encouragement, and relational positioning in intercultural settings. In this way, the pilot observation study helped shape the focus of later interviews and

questionnaires on practical and relational aspects of classroom experience, without making the observation notes themselves the basis for explanatory claims.

More broadly, the pilot observations helped identify classroom features that were later explored more fully through participant accounts. These included the local and situated nature of classroom routines, visible feedback practices, forms of encouragement, participation risk, and classroom atmosphere. Such features helped guide attention to themes that participants later described in interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires. In this sense, the value of the observation phase lay in helping to frame later participant-centred inquiry rather than in generating explanatory claims about intercultural interaction. In this sense, the pilot observations helped identify issues and contextual features that later supported a more grounded interpretation of participants' reflective accounts.

In conclusion, these pilot observations provided contextual and feasibility-related insights into TESOL classroom conditions and participation formats. Although they were not used as the main evidential basis for the study's analytical claims about intercultural lecturer–Chinese student interaction, they functioned as sensitising and preparatory material that supported the design of subsequent interviews and questionnaires, and they provided contextual grounding for the interpretation and analysis of participants' reflective accounts in Chapter 8.

Chapter 6 Views from Chinese Students

This chapter presents Chinese students' accounts of interaction in TESOL programme settings. The findings reported here draw primarily on student focus group interviews and open-ended questionnaire responses, with contextual observation notes used in a limited supporting role to situate the reported experiences. The focus group interviews involved 18 Chinese students and were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and, where necessary, translated by the researcher. Quotations are presented exactly as spoken. Where translations are provided, the original language is presented first, followed by the researcher's translation in square brackets.

6.1 Identification of emerging themes in this chapter

In this chapter, a combined deductive and inductive approach was employed to examine Chinese students' perceptions, experiences, and accounts of lecturer–student interaction in TESOL programmes within an intercultural context. This approach led to the identification of five major themes and eleven sub-themes. It enabled the analysis to engage with the theoretical framework as an interpretive lens while also allowing new themes to emerge from participants' narratives. Some themes were anticipated during the research design phase, informed by existing literature and theoretical frameworks. For example, the themes “Reasons for choosing TESOL Programmes in Scotland” (6.2) and “Intercultural adaptation” (6.4) illustrate the complex motivations behind Chinese students' decisions to study abroad and highlight the challenges they encounter in adjusting to language, culture, daily life, and academic demands.

On the other hand, informed by the theoretical expectation of a fusion between

educational and social contexts, the theme of “Lecturer-student interaction contexts” (6.3) was anticipated and further divided into two sub-themes: “Academic interaction context” (6.3.1) and “Social interaction context” (6.3.2). This distinction helps organise students’ accounts of communication with lecturers in different settings and clarifies how they described the relationship between academic and social interaction in TESOL programme contexts. In addition, through in-depth coding, categorisation, and continuous comparison of participants’ narratives, the analysis identified themes relating to factors that students perceived as shaping their interactions with lecturers, as well as the strategies they described adopting to navigate intercultural communication challenges. This part of the analysis is represented by two major themes: “Factors affecting interaction” (6.5) and “Chinese students’ interaction and adaptation strategies” (6.6). Within “Factors affecting interaction,” six sub-themes were identified: “Language competence” (6.5.1), “Classroom setup and atmosphere” (6.5.2), “Course design” (6.5.3), “Lecturers’ personality and experiences” (6.5.4), “Students’ personality and experiences” (6.5.5), and “University settings and support” (6.5.6). Similarly, the theme of “Intercultural adaptation” (6.4) was further detailed into “Daily life adaptation” (6.4.1), “Social adaptation” (6.4.2), and “Academic adaptation” (6.4.3), each derived from the lived experiences of participants. These sub-themes emerged through a careful process of inductive analysis and reflect participants’ accounts of how Chinese international students adjusted their behaviour and interaction strategies in response to differences in language, culture, and classroom context.

By employing this combined thematic analysis approach, the chapter examines how participants’ lived experiences and interpretations resonate with, refine, or complicate existing theoretical accounts in intercultural education.

This approach offers a more comprehensive understanding of how lecturer–student interaction in TESOL programmes was perceived and interpreted by participants in intercultural settings. It allows for an in-depth exploration of the multiple factors that participants identify as shaping their interaction experiences and the ways in which they interpret their effects on communication. Additionally, it highlights the various coping strategies that students adopt in response to intercultural challenges, revealing the dynamic ways in which they adapt to and engage with their learning environments.

To ensure that participants' opinions and experiences were accurately captured and conveyed, all interviews were conducted in Chinese. This decision was made because all participants were Chinese students, and they indicated that using their native language enabled them to express themselves more fluently and precisely. As a result, their authentic perspectives and internal reflections could be fully articulated.

To document participants' original contributions, this chapter presents data excerpts in a bilingual format, including both the original Chinese expressions and their corresponding English translations. This approach preserves the linguistic and cultural nuances of the original statements while also making the data accessible and verifiable for international readers. By adopting this bilingual presentation, the study aims to maintain the contextual integrity of participants' responses while meeting the standards of intercultural academic interaction.

It should be noted that Scotland is treated in this thesis as the bounded empirical setting of the study rather than as an analytical cultural variable. References to Scotland in this chapter therefore serve to contextualise participants' study choices and experiences, not to attribute interactional

outcomes to a uniquely Scottish cultural environment.

6.2 Participants' reasons for choosing TESOL programmes in Scotland (study-site context)

In the interviews, Chinese students described multiple reasons for choosing TESOL programmes in Scotland, including programme design, perceived career prospects, institutional reputation, and practical considerations related to living conditions. Some participants expressed a clear prior interest in TESOL itself. This was sometimes linked to previous knowledge of English education or to exchange programmes promoted by partner universities in China. For example, S1 stated that he “*目标明确 (has clear goals)*” in choosing TESOL, and S7-1 mentioned that the “*TESOL 专业涉及宽泛 (TESOL Programme covers a broad range)*”, which made it appealing. Participants also referred to the structure of the programme. For example, S1 mentioned that smaller class sizes were attractive because they seemed to offer a more “authentic” study-abroad experience and more opportunities for “*师生互动*” (“*lecturer–student interaction*”). Similarly, S6-2 said: “*我选择来苏格兰的时候是因为选的学校专业，我的专业我很喜欢，从事这方面的话让我觉得会很有前途*” (“*I chose to come to Scotland because of the programme offered by the university. I really liked the programme, and I felt that working in this field would have good prospects*”).

At the same time, participants also referred to institutional reputation and the perceived value of the degree. In several interviews, university ranking was mentioned as an important factor in the decision-making process. S3-2 stated, “*只有两个学校录取我，排名对我来说很重要，所以这个选择就很明显*” (“*Only two universities accepted me, and ranking was very important to me, so the*

choice was quite obvious”). S7-2 also explained that the choice was connected to both ranking and future use of the degree:

“其实我并不是一定要选择苏格兰,因为我当时受到了几个大学的 offer,……它 QS 最高啊,并且他的专业名字有英语两个字,我觉得我可能会回国,考个政府的事业编的话,或者是学历认证会比较方便……” (“Actually, I did not necessarily have to choose Scotland, because I had offers from several universities... but its QS ranking was the highest, and the programme title included the word ‘English’. I thought that if I returned to China, it might be more convenient for government jobs or degree recognition”).

In a similar way, S7-3 said, “我感觉我和你俩的想法差不多,第一个是因为这个 QS 排名,我肯定是选择高的去” (“I think my thinking was similar to yours. First, it was because of the QS ranking. I would choose the higher ranked one definitely”).

For some participants, decisions were also influenced by family expectations and advice from others. S4 noted that:

“我觉得我的这个选择受到了父母的影响,因为我当时也收到了其他学校的 offer,还有传媒行业的,但是爸妈还有好多同学都是传媒方向的,他们觉得这个行业不是特别好,所以还是想让我做老师,所以最后就选择来读 TESOL 了” (“I think my choice was influenced by my parents, because I had also received offers from other universities and in media-related fields, but my parents and many classmates were in media and felt that industry was not particularly good, so they wanted me to become a teacher, and in the end I chose TESOL”).

These accounts show that programme choice was not always based on curriculum alone, but could also involve advice from family members and practical views about future work.

Participants also described Scotland itself as part of the attraction. Several referred to the local environment, safety, and general atmosphere. S6-2 described Scotland as “安逸” (“relaxed”) and “舒适” (“comfortable”), while S7-3 mentioned “安全” (“safe”) as one reason for choosing it. S2-3 also referred to “苏格兰人民的热情” (“the warmth of the Scottish people”). In addition, some participants mentioned impressions formed through media and promotional materials. S7-3 said that watching trainspotting made him want to live in Scotland, while S5-1 commented: “一开始有几个选择，我看了看大家的宣传图，就感觉这个大学比较好看，然后就决定了” (*At first I had several choices. I looked at the promotional pictures and felt that this university looked nicer, so I decided on it*). These accounts show that participants’ choices were also connected to place-based impressions and expectations of everyday life. Finally, a small number of participants referred to more practical considerations. One participant (S6-1), who needed long-term medication, particularly valued the healthcare benefits available in Scotland. Two other participants mentioned cost-effectiveness as part of their decision. Although these issues were discussed less frequently than programme interest or university ranking, they were still part of how some participants explained their choice of study destination.

6.3 Students perceived contexts of interaction

In the interviews, participants described academic and course-based communication as the primary context in which they interacted with lecturers. Coursework and essays serve as the main motivations for their communication, while supervision of graduation projects leads to deeper lecturer-student engagement. Moreover, although social interactions occur less frequently, they

provide substantial support for intercultural adaptation and the study abroad experience, as they facilitate cultural integration and foster closer relationships between lecturers and students through various everyday interaction themes.

6.3.1 Academic tasks as a key context for interaction

In the interviews, students described academic tasks as the main reason for contacting lecturers. These exchanges typically revolve around “topic discussion based on TESOL course” (S2-1, S7-2 S7-3, S3-1) “course requirements” (S6-1, S4), “homework” (S3-1, S8-2), “exams” (S6-1), “assignment” (S8-2).

Participants described academic tasks as a key context for lecturer–student interaction, and these interactions took place across different formats, including questions raised in class, follow-up communication after class, and more sustained discussion around assessed work. Several students referred to topic discussion based on TESOL courses, course requirements, homework, exams, and assignments as common reasons for contacting lecturers.

S2-1 described how interaction often began in class, where lecturers checked students’ understanding and responded to questions when needed:

“比如老师说：这个问题还有没有人不懂？我们不会的话就说一下，让老师到身边讲一下……然后第三学期论文的时候，我就主要是通过邮件和导师沟通了。” (“For example, the lecturer would ask whether anyone did not understand the question. If we did not understand, we would say so, and the lecturer would come over and explain it... Then, during the dissertation stage in the third semester, I mainly communicated with my supervisor by email.”)

This kind of interaction was not limited to classroom exchange but also

extended to presentations and dissertation work. S2-2 noted:

“下课了会有 presentation, 老师会和我说 ‘把你的选题提前报给我, 我要了解你的思路, 然后再看可行性。’ 交论文的时候, 我大多数都是和导师线下见面的。” (“After class, there would be presentation-related contact, and the lecturer would say, ‘Send me your topic in advance. I want to understand your ideas first and then see whether it is feasible.’ When it came to the dissertation, I mostly met my supervisor in person.”)

Group-based academic tasks were also mentioned as an important setting for interaction. S6-2 explained that:

“基本上都是课上老师带着交流……我们会分组, 然后坐在一起解决一些他们提出的问题。课后我们也会有基于小组作业的一些互动……基本上都是面对面的。” (“Basically, most of it happened in class with the lecturer guiding the interaction... We would be divided into groups and sit together to solve some of the questions they raised. After class, we also had some interaction based on group assignments... it was basically face to face.”)

Together, these accounts show that academic interaction took place in both immediate classroom exchanges and more sustained communication around assessed tasks.

The interviews showed that course requirements and homework were frequently mentioned as part of lecturer–student interaction. Participants described these exchanges as involving not only clarification of task requirements, but also discussion of course content and ideas.

Question-and-answer interaction in class was commonly mentioned. Participants described lecturers asking whether students had understood the lesson, responding to questions during class, and giving guidance on

academic tasks. Feedback on group discussions during class (S6-2, S4) and asking for students' opinions on course design after class (S7-2) were also mentioned.

Participants also referred to lecturer feedback on classroom participation, course learning, assignments, and dissertations. One-to-one thesis guidance and assignment feedback were mentioned by several students (S8-2, S2-2, S6-1) as part of their regular contact with lecturers.

Although academic-based interactions are the most frequent, this does not necessarily indicate that students are enthusiastic about exploring TESOL course content. Instead, their interactions are often driven by academic requirements or initiated by lecturers. This issue will be discussed in more detail in the section that addresses student interaction strategies (6.6). Some participants also mentioned that lecturers asked about their educational or work backgrounds, which sometimes led to discussion of English education practices in different countries. This is presented further in Sections 6.3.3 and 6.3.4.

6.3.2 Social interaction enhances cultural experiences and development

In addition to academic interactions, many participants also mentioned social interactions with lecturers. These were described in relation to travel, everyday life, adaptation to living in Scotland, and activities outside the classroom. For example, S8-4 noted that:

“除了课堂互动之外，老师会缩短上课时间，然后延长了一下课后的时间，会问我们有没有在这边旅行什么的……然后会推荐我们去哪里玩之类的，这种与生活相关的东西……还会问我的故事，来这边的适应情况或者什么的”

(“Beyond classroom interaction, the lecturer would shorten class slightly and spend more time afterwards asking whether we had travelled around here... then they would recommend places to visit, things related to life here... and also ask about my story and how I was adapting after coming here”).

Participants also referred to activities that connected lecturer–student interaction with local cultural experience. S8-1 shared that one lecturer took the whole class on a city walk and explained the architecture and history of the city, while another lecturer sometimes mentioned local musicals or stage performances in class and asked whether students might be interested in going together. S5-2 similarly described how, during the dissertation period, a lecturer emailed students about a small concert and encouraged them not to put too much pressure on themselves. S5-2 commented that the lecturer sounded “很真诚” (“very sincere”) and seemed to be “一个很关心我的老师” (“a lecturer who really cared about me”).

For some participants, these interactions were valued as part of the wider study-abroad experience. As S8-4 stated, “对我们来说，来这边（留学）和老师的互动和体验才是我们最关心的” (*“For us, the interaction and experience with lecturers while studying here is what we care about most”*). In a similar way, S5-1 remarked, “我觉得就是如果两个人之间只是有事说事，那你们的关系可能就只到那里” (*“I think if two people only talk when something is necessary, then the relationship may remain at that level”*).

At the same time, some participants noted that lecturers rarely interacted with them outside class, or that informal encounters were limited to simple greetings (S7-2). Several participants described this as disappointing (S6-2, S6-1, S7-3). S4 further explained that informal conversation could be difficult to initiate:

“我觉得可能就是我很难找到那种可以跟老师去闲聊的话题，因为其实我感觉老师的交流都是很浅层的，就是 *say hello* 也不会说太多。个人的事情，我也不知道怎么去跟他们建立这种比较亲密的个人生活相关的话题，他们也不太会主动和我去聊这些。” (*I think it is difficult for me to find topics for casual conversation with lecturers, because I feel that the communication is usually quite shallow, just saying hello and not much more. As for personal matters, I do not know how to build that kind of closer topic related to personal life, and they are not very likely to talk to me about these things either.*)

Overall, the interviews revealed that social interaction scenarios appear to be riskier and more challenging for Chinese students than academic interactions. These challenges are likely due to differences in cultural backgrounds and experiences. This topic is further elaborated in the chapter that discusses intercultural adaptation challenges and the factors influencing interaction.

6.3.3 Social interactions as bridges to academic engagement in TESOL

Participants also described situations in which academic and social interaction overlapped. In TESOL classes, programme activities sometimes prompted students and lecturers to share their own educational experiences and backgrounds in class (S4, S3-1, S3-2, S7-3). S3-2 further noted that lecturers also shared their own educational and work experiences during these discussions. In these accounts, personal background sharing formed part of wider classroom discussion.

S4 also noted that, besides regular classroom teaching, TESOL lecturers often set activities that required students to search for information after class, which created further opportunities for interaction. As S4 explained,

“除了一般课上的内容，Teso1还有一点就是他经常设置一些活动，就是让大家课下去搜搜。然后这个也能让我有很好的机会去和老师互动。然后他们会问我最近在做些什么这样的。” (*Besides the usual classroom content, another feature of TESOL is that lecturers often set activities and ask us to search for things after class. This also gave me good opportunities to interact with lecturers. They would also ask me what I had been doing recently.*)

Participants also described how discussions could move from casual conversation to more academic topics. As S1 emphasised,

“我们有时候关于不同国家教育实践的讨论往往是从随意对话演变而来的，可能就是从一个很小的话题开始讨论，越来越大。” (*Sometimes our discussions about educational practices in different countries developed from casual conversations. It might start from a very small topic and gradually become a bigger discussion.*)

These accounts show that academic and non-academic topics were not always clearly separated in TESOL interaction.

6.3.4 Multicultural discussions foster global perspectives

Moreover, participants described the multicultural TESOL classroom as a setting in which lecturers and students discussed educational practices, policies, and cultural experiences in different countries. S6-1 described such discussion as part of group interaction:

“是在小组的情况下，就是有一半中国人，一半法国人这样，然后他就会和我们讨论我们的文化……在谈论适应性问题的时候，也会谈论到一些文化，我们就会有互相的分享。” (*It happened in group situations, with half Chinese students and half French students, and the lecturer would discuss our cultures*

with us... When talking about adaptation, we would also talk about culture and share with each other.”)

S8-2 also noted that these discussions often extended to English education in different national contexts:

“这应该是一个好的事情……我们经常讨论这些问题，以及英语在不同国家的重要性和影响力，还有不同地区的教育政策和体系。这给了我一个了解不同地方的信息的机会。” (“I think this is a good thing... We often discuss these issues, as well as the importance and influence of English in different countries, and the education policies and systems of different regions. This gave me an opportunity to learn about different places.”)

Together, these accounts show that discussion of culture and education across different countries formed part of lecturer–student interaction in the TESOL classroom.

6.3.5 Summary of lecturer-student interaction contextual characteristics

Interviews with Chinese students showed that lecturer–student interaction was most frequently described in relation to academic tasks, including lessons, assignments, exams, and dissertation guidance. These interactions were often task-oriented and linked to immediate academic needs, such as clarifying course requirements, discussing feedback, or seeking guidance. In this sense, academic interaction formed the main context in which students contacted lecturers.

Beyond academic matters, participants also referred to social interactions, although these were mentioned less frequently. These included sharing travel

suggestions, introducing local places and cultural activities, offering advice on balancing study and life, and engaging in informal conversation. While less central than academic interaction, these exchanges were described by some participants as showing lecturers' care and as helping to build a more personal connection. At the same time, some students reported difficulties initiating social interaction, referring to limited opportunities, brief informal encounters, or uncertainty about suitable topics for casual conversation.

The findings also suggest that academic and social contexts were not always clearly separated, particularly in the multicultural TESOL classroom. Participants described situations in which personal experiences, cultural background, and educational practices in different countries were discussed alongside course-related topics. In some cases, relatively casual conversation appeared to lead into more academically focused discussion, especially when students and lecturers drew on their own educational or professional experiences.

Taken together, these findings suggest that lecturer–student interaction in TESOL was shaped by both academic demands and wider social contact, although academic interaction remained the more dominant form. Social interaction, while less frequent, added a relational and cultural dimension to students' experiences, and the overlap between academic and social talk was a noticeable feature of the multicultural classroom context.

6.4 Chinese students' intercultural adaptation

6.4.1 Daily life adaptation

Most participants (S1, S2-2, S2-3, S3-2, S5-1, S5-2, S8-2) indicated that

adapting to daily life in Scotland was relatively easy. They described accommodation, food, and everyday shopping as not being very different from life in China, which made it easier to settle into local life. Participants often related this ease of adaptation to familiar daily routines such as cooking, shopping, and managing basic living arrangements.

S5-1 also noted that living with a familiar undergraduate roommate made adaptation easier:

“我和我的本科舍友一起出国，我们两个考虑住在一起。这个对我的适应有很大的帮助……我有熟悉的室友，其实在各方面都适应得挺快。” (“I went abroad with my undergraduate roommate and we decided to live together. This helped my adaptation a lot... Having a familiar roommate meant that I adapted quite quickly in many aspects.”)

S3-2 explained that

“可能是因为我之前在英格兰生活过，我觉得大部分的方向是趋同的，我适应得很容易。” (“Maybe because I had lived in England before, I felt that most things were quite similar, so I adapted very easily.”)

S1 also described everyday adjustment in practical terms:

“在这边需要适应的就是，我要自己做饭、吃饭、饮食方面的……再就是去采购好生活用品，自己烧好饭，就没有什么其他的生活问题。” (“What I needed to adapt to here was mainly cooking for myself and dealing with food... and also buying daily necessities and preparing meals. Other than that, there were not really any major problems in daily life.”)

Overall, participants generally described daily life adaptation as relatively smooth, particularly in relation to shopping, cooking, accommodation, and basic everyday routines. These accounts suggest that everyday adjustment

was not the main difficulty for most participants.

6.4.2 Interpersonal adaptation highlights cultural differences

The interviews showed that many participants experienced difficulty in adapting to intercultural interpersonal interaction. These difficulties were often described in relation to topic choice, communication style, humour, and the challenge of developing closer relationships during a relatively short period of study abroad. Overall, most participants (such as S3-1, S3-2, S4, S5-1, and S7-3) described intercultural communication as limited or, at times, difficult to sustain.

S7-1 described this difficulty in terms of both language and topic choice:

“我感觉在社交上也挺难的，就是难以适应。当我跟别人 social 的时候，不管是跟老师还是跟别人的外国同学，我就感觉没什么话可说……首先可能是语言不是特别的方便。第二个是我根本想不到什么话题能说。” (‘I feel that social interaction is also quite difficult and hard to adapt to. When I socialise with others, whether with lecturers or foreign classmates, I often feel that I do not have much to say... First, language is not always very convenient. Second, I simply cannot think of what topics to talk about.’)

Several participants also felt that conversations with foreign classmates or lecturers often remained at a relatively superficial level. As S7-3 stated,

“他们聊的东西其实都挺浅层的……比如说一大群人很认真在谈论的事情只是这个超市里新进了一种面包。” (‘The things they talk about are actually quite shallow... for example, a whole group of people may be seriously discussing something that is just a new kind of bread in the supermarket.’)

S7-1 and S7-2 similarly noted that this kind of interaction was common, and

they found it difficult to continue such conversations for long.

Differences in familiar topics and communication styles were also mentioned as barriers to participation. S4 referred to topics such as “足球比赛” (“football matches”), while S6-2 mentioned “网络流行梗” (“internet memes”) as examples of topics that could make group interaction harder to follow. S6-2 also explained that lecturers and local or European students sometimes used slang, catchphrases, or local references that were not easy to understand, which made it difficult to feel fully included in the interaction.

In addition, some participants felt that the high proportion of Chinese students in TESOL programmes further limited opportunities for wider intercultural contact. As S4 noted, “它其实大部分都是中国人，没有一个特别好的那种跟特别多外国人交流的圈子” (*It is actually mostly Chinese students, and there is not really a very good circle for communicating with a large number of foreigners*). Participants suggested that this made it easier to remain within familiar social circles and reduced opportunities for broader intercultural communication.

The interviews also showed that some Chinese students approached intercultural interaction cautiously. S1 explained that “在不清楚的情况下表达出来的话可能会冒犯到人家” (*expressing oneself without sufficient understanding might offend others*). In addition, S5-1 recounted an experience of racial discrimination on the subway, which affected how she felt about integrating into the wider social environment. These accounts show that participants' experiences of interpersonal adaptation were varied, but many described intercultural interaction as an area that required ongoing adjustment.

6.4.3 Novel and challenging academic adaptation and engagement

The interviews showed that Chinese international students in Scotland's academic environment experienced both novelty and challenge. Some participants expressed positive views of local lecturer–student interaction and the wider research atmosphere. For example, S8-2 stated,

“我挺喜欢，这边挺舒服的……跟国内相比来说，这边的学术环境也要比国内好很多，因为我觉得这边的学生和老师的关系上，我觉得更友善一些。” (“I quite like it here; it feels quite comfortable... Compared with China, the academic environment here is much better, because I feel the relationship between students and lecturers is friendlier.”)

Similarly, S3-1 and S5-2 described local lecturers as generally friendly and the interaction atmosphere as relatively relaxed. These accounts suggest that some participants experienced the academic environment as more open and approachable.

At the same time, many participants described academic adaptation as demanding, particularly in relation to reading load, pace, and preparation requirements. Several students referred to “reading 材料特别多、进度紧张” (“an overwhelming amount of reading material and a very tight pace”), especially in the first semester (S7-2, S7-3). S7-2 explained:

“刚开学的第一个月的时候，我就觉得那个 reading 的材料特别多……如果不用翻译软件看的话，我在上课前是完全看不完的。” (“In the first month after the semester started, I felt that there was a huge amount of reading... If I did not use translation software, I simply could not finish it before class.”)

S4 similarly noted, “我觉得硕士要读的内容有点太多了，如果不提前做好 pre

reading 的话，上课之前上课之后的东西我就没太能理解” (“I think there is a bit too much reading in a master’s programme. If I do not do the pre-reading in advance, I cannot really understand the class properly.”)

These accounts show that reading and pre-class preparation were experienced as a major part of academic adjustment.

Participants also commented on differences in teaching methods. Compared with the more lecture-led approach they associated with previous education in China, Scottish classes were described as involving more group discussion, lecturer–student interaction, and student presentations. For some participants, this was unfamiliar at first. S6-2 noted that group discussion could feel disjointed: “大家各说各的……如果你不积极说话，那他们就不知道你面临什么问题。” (“Everyone says their own things... If you do not speak actively, they will not know what problems you are facing.”) S8-2 also linked this difficulty to previous educational experience:

“我们更强调的是应试教育……对于英国这种 critical thinking，其实反而理解得很少。很多时候，我们都是按照老师的想法在做，没有实际地去考虑和思考一些东西。” (“What we emphasised more was exam-oriented education... In contrast, we understood much less about this kind of critical thinking in the UK. Many times, we simply followed the teacher’s ideas rather than considering and thinking about things ourselves.”)

These accounts suggest that more interactive and discussion-based teaching required adjustment in both classroom participation and ways of thinking.

In addition, some participants referred to uncertainty around grading, feedback, and language use. S6-1 mentioned confusion about the grading system, while S5-1 referred to feedback as sometimes vague. S8-4 connected this to being more familiar with the grading standards, thinking patterns, and detailed

instructions of the Chinese educational system. Participants also noted that language difficulties could affect their classroom participation, including difficulty expressing ideas clearly (S5-2) and concern about inaccurate word choice (S3-2).

Overall, academic life in Scottish universities was described as both new and demanding. While some participants appreciated the more open and egalitarian classroom atmosphere, many also referred to difficulties related to reading, independent preparation, participation, feedback, and language. At the same time, some participants suggested that these challenges became more manageable over time. As S7-3 noted, “第二学期慢慢就开始如鱼得水” (“By the second semester, things gradually began to feel much easier”).

6.4.4 Summary of Chinese students' intercultural adaptation

Findings from the interviews show that Chinese international students in Scotland encounter diverse adjustment issues in daily life, social interactions, and academic engagement. On the daily life front, most participants (e.g., S1, S2-2, S2-3, S3-2, S5-1, S5-2, S8-2) reported that accommodation, food, and shopping were not drastically different from their experiences in China. Many adapted to the local pace within one month (S2-2), often with support from friends or roommates (S5-1), which eased the transition.

However, intercultural communication in social contexts presented greater challenges. Several students (e.g., S3-1, S3-2, S4, S5-1, S7-3) described interactions with local or international classmates as limited or superficial. Some students exercised caution in conversations, often out of concern about unintentionally offending others (S1). Social comfort was sometimes stronger in programmes with a high proportion of Chinese students (S4), which offered

immediate support but limited broader intercultural engagement. A few students also reported experiences of exclusion or subtle discrimination (S5-1), indicating that the openness of the social environment plays a key role in shaping students' confidence in intercultural communication.

In academic adaptation, students appreciate the novel classroom atmosphere described as “友好、开放 (*friendly and open*)” by S8-2, S3-1, and S5-2. Yet, they also identified difficulties related to reading load, expectations for active participation, ambiguous feedback, and English proficiency (S7-2, S4, S5-1, S6-1, S8-4). The emphasis on critical thinking and discussion-oriented learning in TESOL classrooms placed considerable pressure on students unfamiliar with these norms. This was also observed by the lecturers, which is interpreted more from the lecturer's perspective in Chapter 7.

Nevertheless, as time passes and with self-adjustment, many students (S7-3) gradually reach a state of “如鱼得水 (*like a fish back in water (idiom), glad be back in one's proper surroundings*),” recognising that these challenges can positively contribute to improving their language skills, critical thinking, and self-management.

It should be noted that references to ‘Scottish universities’ here indicate the study site where participants were recruited, rather than an analytical claim about Scotland as a distinctive cultural case. Overall, the multicultural environment of Scottish universities not only opens a window for intercultural learning and exchange for Chinese international students but also requires them to continuously adapt in daily, social, and academic domains. These intercultural adaptation experiences provide valuable context for analysing the interactions between Chinese students and lecturers.

6.5 Factors affecting Chinese students' interaction with lecturers

6.5.1 Language barriers limiting interaction

Language barriers were repeatedly reported by participants as a major obstacle in intercultural educational settings, particularly when academic communication became complex. Although participants varied in self-assessed proficiency and confidence, many described how perceived linguistic limitations reduced understanding and lowered their willingness to engage with lecturers.

6.5.1.1 Lecturer accents affect Chinese students' listening comprehension

Although many participants noted that TESOL lecturers generally adjusted their accents, some still identified “口音难懂” (“difficult-to-understand accents”) (S7-1, S3-2, S8-3) and “较快的语速” (“fast speech rate”) (S6-2) as prominent challenges during the initial study-abroad period, especially in classes where multiple accents were present. S6-1 stated,

“我的老师是西班牙人，我的同学是法国人，他们说话经常带上家乡话，口音容易混淆且难懂。” (“My lecturer is Spanish and my classmates are French. They often speak with their local accents, and the accents are easy to confuse and difficult to understand.”)

S8-2 similarly noted,

“我觉得还是语言，因为特别是苏格兰这边的口音相对来说更重一些。刚出国的时候，刚来的头几个月，我觉得无论是生活还是学习，口音都比较难适应，比较难理解。” (“I think language was still the main issue, because the accent in

Scotland is relatively stronger. In the first few months after arriving abroad, whether in daily life or study, I found the accent quite difficult to adapt to and understand.”)

These accounts show that, in classes where different accents were present, listening comprehension could become more difficult for some Chinese students. Adapting to different accents and speech rates was described as taking time. As S7-1 remarked, “我在一开始的时候……根本听不懂……到了研究生后半段,我才能开始适应。” (*“At the beginning... I could not understand at all... It was only in the later part of my postgraduate study that I began to adapt.”*)

Some participants also mentioned that, during classroom interaction, others would sometimes switch to more familiar slang or abbreviations (S6-2, S7-2), which made it harder to follow the discussion. To cope with this, several students described making additional efforts outside class, such as doing pre-reading, checking unfamiliar words, or discussing course material with peers (S2-2, S5-2). Participants described these strategies as helpful, although listening adaptation still took time. Overall, these accounts suggest that accent and speech rate were important factors affecting listening comprehension and early classroom participation.

6.5.1.2 Conceptual academic terms and default acronyms

In the academic field, “专业用语 (*specialised terminology*)” (S2-3) and “默认缩写 (*default abbreviations*)” (S8-4) often inadvertently increase the difficulty of interactions between Chinese students and lecturers. For instance, abstract terms such as “epistemology” “ontology” (S3-2), which frequently embody complex philosophical backgrounds, or words like “Brexit” (S8-4) that carry

specific historical and contextual significance, become hard to integrate with existing knowledge when they are initially presented without sufficient preliminary explanation or practice.

As S8-4 explained:

“我觉得课堂上很明显的一个差异就是，中国学生跟他们欧洲或英国本地学生，他们这边习以为常的专业术语或者缩写什么的我是不懂的……比如讨论一个叫做脱欧的话题，然后脱欧在英国这边有一个专有的词汇，但是当老师说这个词的时候，我是完全不知道它是什么意思的……其实我们当时课堂中的中国学员很多都不知道这个是什么东西，然后我们要去问老师，这个情况也经常会发生。”

(“I think one obvious difference in class is that Chinese students do not understand some of the specialised terms or abbreviations that European or local British students are already used to... For example, when discussing Brexit, there was a specific term commonly used in the UK, but when the lecturer used it, I had no idea what it meant... In fact, many of the Chinese students in our class did not know what it was either, so we had to ask the lecturer. This kind of situation happened quite often.”)

Some participants suggested that, when they did not understand a key term or abbreviation, it became harder to follow the rest of the discussion or respond immediately. S7-2 also noted that even when lecturers repeated what they had said, the meaning was not always immediately clear, and this could make students hesitate to ask again. These accounts suggest that unfamiliar terminology, default acronyms, and context-dependent references could affect Chinese students' comprehension and participation during classroom interaction.

6.5.1.3 Linguistic insecurity limits positive interaction

Language challenges were also described as affecting students' confidence and mindset during interaction. Some participants reported feeling nervous about interacting with lecturers, especially in the early stage of studying abroad. As S8-3 explained,

“我觉得我刚来的时候会比较紧张和老师的互动，就像他们说的，我希望老师不要找我，不要点我的名，不要跟我说话，因为我怕暴露我的语言不好。” (*“When I first arrived, I felt quite nervous about interacting with lecturers. As they said, I hoped the lecturer would not call on me, would not pick me, and would not speak to me, because I was afraid of exposing that my English was not good.”*)

Similarly, S5-1 mentioned that some peers were “害怕跟老师沟通” (“afraid to communicate with lecturers”), even when they clearly had questions, because they were worried about their spoken English.

Participants also described situations in which listening difficulty made them withdraw from classroom interaction. S7-2 recalled one legal linguistics class in particular:

“老师给我们放了一段音频，然后让我们去思考和分析。但是那个音频没有字幕，我就完全听不懂在说什么……其他同学听懂了就会跟老师讨论这个话题……这个时候，我就觉得我难以融入到和老师的互动中，就会觉得很尴尬。” (*“The lecturer played an audio clip for us and asked us to think about it and analyse it. But the audio had no subtitles, so I could not understand it at all... The other students understood it and discussed the topic with the lecturer... At that moment, I felt it was hard for me to join the interaction with the lecturer, and I felt very awkward.”*)

S7-2 also noted more generally that, when students could not understand what

was being said in class, they sometimes could only “点头” (“nod”) or “保持沉默” (“remain silent”).

In addition, some participants noted that even when they had ideas, they could not always express them fully or accurately in English. As S7-3 stated,

“尽管我有的时候也有把一些话题想得很深入，但是因为一些很深的东西我表达不清楚，那我因为我的语言的原因，我最后说出来的还是很浅显的……就是换一种语言表达很深的想法，对我来说是需要去提前做很多准备的。”
(*“Although sometimes I do think about some topics very deeply, I cannot express those deeper things clearly, so because of my language limitations, what I finally say still comes out as quite superficial... To express deep ideas in another language, I need to do a lot of preparation in advance.”*)

S3-1 similarly explained,

“我觉得因为英语不是我的母语，我在沟通上面可能有时候无法很准确地表达出我的一些情感，我也很担心我的意思没有传达到位，所以我会很紧张，因为语言的问题。” (*“Because English is not my mother tongue, sometimes I cannot express my feelings very accurately in communication, and I worry that my meaning is not conveyed properly, so I become very nervous because of the language issue.”*)

S8-3 also returned to this point when describing classroom activities:

“我觉得我在活动的时候，我真的希望老师不要跟我讲话。不是我不喜欢跟老师讲话，是我担心我听不懂老师在说什么，或者是老师问我的东西，我不知道该如何表达出来。虽然有的时候我脑子在动，但我真的说不出来。我觉得可能是很大的一个原因是语言障碍。” (*“During activities, I really hoped the lecturer would not talk to me. It was not that I did not like speaking with lecturers; I was worried that I would not understand what the lecturer was saying, or that*

I would not know how to express what the lecturer was asking me. Sometimes my mind was working, but I really could not say it. I think a major reason was the language barrier.”)

Taken together, these accounts suggest that language difficulty affected not only students' comprehension but also their confidence and willingness to participate. When students felt unable to understand fully or express themselves clearly, interaction with lecturers could feel risky or embarrassing. At the same time, some participants also suggested that this confidence could improve gradually through more positive experiences in and beyond the classroom (S3-2, S5-2).

6.5.1.4 Differences in language use and communication norms

Participants also referred to differences in language use and communication norms between Chinese and English. These differences sometimes made students feel uncertain about whether they were speaking appropriately, politely, or clearly during intercultural interaction. As S8-3 explained,

“我不了解他们，我就怕说话的时候很没有礼貌。因为英语中很多礼貌用语，我会在说话的时候忘记，就会变成那种中文的思维。我就担心我表现的不好。”
(“I do not really understand them, so I worry that I may sound impolite when I speak. In English, there are many polite expressions that I may forget to use when speaking, and then I fall back into a Chinese way of thinking. I worry that I will not perform well.”)

Similar concerns were mentioned by other participants. S1 noted that speaking without fully understanding the situation might “冒犯到人家” (“offend others”). S3-1 similarly explained that, because English was not her first

language, she sometimes could not express her feelings accurately and worried that her meaning had not been “传达到位” (“conveyed properly”). S7-3 also remarked that even when he had thought deeply about a topic, what he finally said still came out as “很浅显” (“quite superficial”).

Taken together, these accounts suggest that some students were concerned not only with grammatical or lexical accuracy, but also with whether their way of speaking was polite, appropriate, and sufficient to convey what they really meant. In this sense, differences in language use and communication norms made some participants more cautious during lecturer–student interaction.

6.5.2 Relaxed class environments facilitate interaction

Participants frequently referred to class size and classroom atmosphere when describing lecturer–student interaction. Several participants associated small classes with more discussion and a more positive interactive experience. As S8-1 explained,

“刚来的第一年我很喜欢，因为很多新鲜感，上课方式跟中国不一样，很多都是小班的，然后老师会提问一个问题，大家进行很多的小组讨论。会触及到英国的文化，这跟我过去的经历是不一样的。” (“I really liked the first year after I came here, because everything felt new. The teaching style was different from China. Many classes were small, and the lecturer would raise a question and everyone would have lots of group discussion. It also touched on British culture, which was different from my previous experience.”)

In these accounts, smaller classes were often associated with more opportunities for discussion and interaction.

By contrast, some participants, such as S2-2, noted that larger classes offered

fewer chances for interaction because of the number of students. Participants also mentioned that, in larger classes, more proactive students were more likely to interact with lecturers, while quieter students might participate less. In addition, lecturer–student exchanges in larger classes were sometimes described as being limited to “简单的问题” (*“simple questions”*) (S7-1) or “yes or no” responses (S6-2), with fewer opportunities for more extended discussion.

Participants also noted that classroom seating affected lecturer–student interaction. Group seating was described as making it easier to approach the lecturer and “不会有距离感” (*“not creating a sense of distance”*) (S2-2). As S1 mentioned,

“想要互动的同学会坐到靠近老师的位置，因为尽管老师会照顾每一个小组，但更多的可能还是与坐在靠前位置的同学” (*“Students who want to interact will sit closer to the lecturer, because although the lecturer attends to every group, there is still likely to be more interaction with those sitting nearer the front”*).

These accounts suggest that seating arrangements could shape how easily students felt able to interact.

Finally, many participants noted that classroom atmosphere also influenced their willingness to interact. Most interviewees stated that in a “轻松愉快的氛围” (*“relaxed and pleasant atmosphere”*) (S2-2, S7-2, etc.), interaction felt more natural, even in the presence of language and cultural differences. Participants often associated such an atmosphere with more comfortable lecturer–student communication. At the same time, some participants also linked this atmosphere to the lecturer’s personality and classroom design. This is discussed further in the section on lecturer personality and classroom interaction.

6.5.3 Course design shaping interaction opportunities

Participants frequently referred to course design and classroom activities when describing opportunities for lecturer–student interaction. Several participants associated “有趣新颖的课堂活动” (*“interesting and innovative classroom activities”*) (S3-2), “使用技术和互动平台” (*“using technology and interactive platforms”*) (S8-1), and a “精心设计的课程” (*“well-designed curriculum”*) (S4-1) with greater willingness to engage in class. In these accounts, interesting and well-designed activities were often associated with more discussion and more active interaction between Chinese students and lecturers.

Participants also referred to lecturers’ teaching style when describing their classroom experience. For example, “按照他们的想法打开主题” (*“introducing topics based on their ideas”*), “比较新的课件” (*“relatively new course materials”*), and “与时俱进的教学资源” (*“up-to-date teaching resources”*) (S5-2) were described as making the class more engaging and discussion more active. By contrast, lecturers who relied on “死板的朗读 PPT” (*“rigid, monotonous PPT reading”*) were described as making interaction less appealing. Participants also noted the importance of feedback. In some cases, discussion was described as being undermined when the lecturer was “不给 feedback” (*“not providing feedback”*) (S7-2). Limited feedback was associated with uncertainty about how to respond or improve, and with less positive expectations for subsequent interaction.

Some participants also described lecturers as making efforts to design more intercultural and inclusive content. As S8-1 explained:

“我们其实在第一年入学的时候，有一门课是讲如何进行跨文化交际、跨文化

学习的。在那个课堂上，我的老师会主动找到很多很多这种社会话题、社会命题。然后让各个同学来发表自己国家的社会现象，大家就会根据一个文化的交流和分析，我们有这样的课程设置，在这个课堂上老师就会跟我分享很多他的一些背景和他对彼此国家和文化的了解。” (*In our first year, we had a course on how to carry out intercultural communication and intercultural learning. In that class, my lecturer would actively introduce many social topics and issues, and then ask students to talk about social phenomena in their own countries. We would then discuss and analyse them from a cultural perspective. In this course, the lecturer also shared a lot about his own background and his understanding of our countries and cultures.*)

Similarly, S7-3 described TESOL classes as more inclusive than classes in some other fields:

“我觉得其实有可能是因为我们是文科，加上我们学的是语言学，它可能涉及很多东西，这些让老师变得非常的包容。整体来讲，我们这个课的体验感是非常好的。我有一个舍友，她是其他专业的，然后我们住在一起，她就经常跟我讲，她的老师会有种族歧视，不尊重学生。还有很多其他专业的同学也表示有这种经历，但是我们文科，至少我们这个专业，我从来没有听说过这种事情。” (*I think it may be because we are in the humanities, and we study linguistics, which involves many different things. That makes lecturers very inclusive. Overall, our experience in this programme has been very good. I have a roommate from another subject, and she often tells me that some of her lecturers are racist or do not respect students. Many students from other disciplines have also mentioned this kind of experience, but in the humanities, or at least in our programme, I have never heard of such things.*)

At the same time, some participants questioned the practical relevance of certain TESOL content for future work in China. As S7-2 noted:

“我觉得我们当时上教育的那个课的时候，从 *reading* 材料能看出老师选的一些材料有的时候会侧重在中国的教育背景下。” (*I think when we were taking that education course, you could see from the reading materials that some of the texts selected by the lecturer were sometimes focused on the Chinese educational context.*)

However, some participants still felt uncertain about how to apply parts of the course content or teaching methods in their future careers in China. Several participants (such as S8-1, S8-2, and S8-3) therefore suggested that more interculturally relevant and practically meaningful Chinese content might encourage further discussion in class.

In addition, “模拟课堂教学活动” (*“simulated classroom teaching activities”*) (S8-1) were described as particularly well received, as they allowed students to practise in more realistic settings and created further opportunities for lecturer feedback and interaction. Taken together, these accounts suggest that innovative activities, interactive platforms, timely feedback, and inclusive course design were often associated with more active participation and more positive lecturer–student communication. By contrast, rigid delivery, limited feedback, and uncertainty about practical relevance were more often linked to confusion or more passive participation.

6.5.4 Lecturer traits and background influencing engagement

6.5.4.1 Lecturer’s agreeableness enhances student engagement

In the interviews, participants frequently referred to lecturers’ attitude and personality when describing their classroom experience and willingness to interact. A recurring theme was that TESOL lecturers who were seen as “平

易近人” (“*approachable*”) (S1, S3-1) and friendly were more often associated with easier communication and a more relaxed classroom atmosphere. In participants’ accounts, this kind of teaching style appeared to make students feel more comfortable asking questions and responding in class.

By contrast, some participants described “消极情绪” (“*negative emotions*”) (S4) or an overly strict style as making interaction feel more pressured. S8-1, for example, drew a clear contrast between two lecturers:

“我也有遇到过老师的一些行为，让我觉得不太能接受，甚至有的时候可能会有一种从性格上的不同吧。我有一个老师，他非常严格，他的严格跟中国的一些很严格的老师就非常像，非常的不近人情，非常的完美主义。我跟他沟通就会感觉到压力非常大，但是我和另外一个老师，他非常的亲和。他每次都先关心我的情绪，然后问我问题，再慢慢地把话题引导到学习上，我就会更加容易接受这种亲和的沟通方式。” (“*I have also encountered some lecturer behaviours that I found difficult to accept, and sometimes it may also be related to differences in personality. I had one lecturer who was very strict. His strictness was very similar to that of some very strict teachers in China—very impersonal and very perfectionist. When I communicated with him, I felt a lot of pressure. But another lecturer was very warm and approachable. Each time, he first cared about my emotions, then asked me questions, and only gradually guided the topic towards study. I found this kind of approachable communication much easier to accept.*”)

Taken together, these accounts suggest that lecturer agreeableness and approachability were often associated with more comfortable and positive interaction, whereas a stricter or more distant style could make some Chinese students feel more hesitant in communication.

6.5.4.2 Lecturers' knowledge of Chinese culture and education experience

Participants frequently referred to lecturers' educational and teaching backgrounds when describing lecturer–student interaction. In particular, some participants noted that lecturers who had previous experience teaching Chinese students, or who were more familiar with Chinese educational backgrounds, were easier to interact with. In these accounts, such familiarity was often associated with teaching that felt more understandable, relevant, and approachable.

At the same time, some participants felt that their lecturers did not have a deep understanding of Chinese students' previous educational experiences. As S8-2 explained,

“说实话，我觉得我的老师不是对中国学生以前的经历和上学的体系，他们不是很了解，因为我之前有跟我的导师聊过相关的一些东西，他们对我的经历表示非常的惊讶。因为他们发现完全不在一个经历上，完全是不同的教育体系中。”
(*“Honestly, I think my lecturers do not really understand Chinese students' previous experiences or schooling system. I talked with my supervisor before about some of these things, and they were very surprised by my experience, because they realised it was completely different and came from a very different educational system.”*)

A similar point was made by S8-4, who suggested that some lecturers had only a limited or outdated understanding of China:

“嗯，我觉得他们还是不知道的，因为大部分老师没有去过中国，也没有有的老师甚至很少接触中国学生。他们对中国的感知还是保留在很久很久以前的那种状态，然后随着越来越多的中国留学生出现，他们才开始逐渐去尝试了解。”
(*“I think they still do not really know, because most lecturers have not been to*

China, and some have had very little contact with Chinese students. Their understanding of China often remains in a very old state, and only as more and more Chinese international students arrive do they gradually begin to try to understand it.”)

Some participants also suggested that lecturers might know certain terms, such as “*高考*” (“*Gaokao*”), but not necessarily understand the meaning such experiences carry for Chinese students.

By contrast, participants often described lecturers with more extensive teaching experience, especially experience of working with Chinese students, as easier to approach. As S8-1 noted,

“我觉得这个跟老师的工作经验和工作时长是有关系的，我接触的一些老师，他们有非常丰富的经验去接触中国学生，而且每一年的中国新生的到来，他们都能接触到，我认为他们是比较了解中国学生需要什么，他们也知道中国学生的文化背景是什么。这个时候我觉得就比较他说的东西比较容易让我有亲近感，我会比较愿意跟他去互动。” (“*I think this is related to the lecturer’s work experience and how long they have been teaching. Some lecturers I have met have very rich experience of working with Chinese students, and every year when new Chinese students arrive, they interact with them. I think they understand better what Chinese students need, and they also know more about Chinese students’ cultural background. In that case, what they say feels easier for me to relate to, and I am more willing to interact with them.*”)

Taken together, these accounts suggest that lecturers’ familiarity with Chinese students’ educational backgrounds and prior teaching experience were often associated with more comfortable and effective interaction, while limited understanding could make communication feel more distant or less aligned with students’ expectations.

6.5.5 Individual dispositions and readiness for interaction

6.5.5.1 Extroverted students engage more actively in interaction

Participants also referred to personality when explaining differences in lecturer–student interaction and participation in university activities. In particular, extroversion was often associated with a greater willingness to initiate contact with lecturers and to take part in activities beyond the classroom. For example, S1 stated, “我性格比较外向……我会主动互动” (*I am relatively extroverted... I take the initiative to interact*), while S4 similarly noted, “我是一个外向的……我还积极与讲师聊天” (*I am an extrovert... and I also actively chat with lecturers*). In these accounts, a more outgoing personality was often linked to greater confidence in speaking with lecturers and showing oneself in academic settings.

At the same time, not all students described themselves in this way. Some participants suggested that limited social confidence or weaker social skills could make interaction more difficult. S1, for instance, mentioned that some classmates were “比较宅” (*more homebound*), and were therefore less likely to take the initiative to interact with lecturers. S7-1 described her own strategy in more cautious terms:

“我觉得我的策略就是，老师提问我就说，老师不问我就不说，因为我会担心我主动说，我会觉得很奇怪，因为我不太习惯去主动和老师说话。这可能跟我以前在公立学校上学有关系，我觉得老师是很忙的，我主动去说话的话，如果我说了一些没有用的话，老师会觉得心里很不愿意，我会担心，所以我在这边也不太主动跟老师说话，但是老师如果问我问题，我就会尽可能地积极地回答。有时候我觉得我答得也不是很好，我可能是我自己觉得自己很积极，但我觉得

老师可能觉得我没有那么积极。” (*I think my strategy is that if the lecturer asks me, I will speak, but if the lecturer does not ask me, then I will not speak. I worry that if I speak first, it will feel strange, because I am not used to taking the initiative to speak to lecturers. This may be related to my previous experience of studying in a public school. I feel that lecturers are very busy, and if I speak first and say something unimportant, they may feel unwilling, so I worry about that. So here I am not very proactive in speaking to lecturers, but if they ask me questions, I will try my best to respond actively. Sometimes I feel that I do not answer very well. I may think I am being active, but the lecturer may not see me as that active.*)

Taken together, these accounts suggest that personality shaped how readily students initiated interaction, responded to lecturers, and engaged in wider university activities. More extroverted students were often described as more proactive, whereas quieter or more cautious students were more likely to wait for lecturers to initiate contact.

6.5.5.2 Educational backgrounds shape students' adaptability

Participants frequently linked their intercultural adaptation to their previous educational backgrounds in their home countries. Some noted that coming from exam-oriented educational settings made it harder to adapt to learning environments that emphasised critical thinking and open discussion. As S8-1 stated,

“我认为这可能与中国的教育体系有关……更注重应试教育……对批判性思维的理解较少，而这在英国是高度重视的。” (*I think this may be related to China's educational system, which focuses more on exam-oriented education, and has a more limited understanding of critical thinking, whereas in the UK*

this is highly valued.”)

Participants also referred to earlier classroom norms that shaped how they behaved in interaction. Some mentioned that, in their previous lecturer–student relationships, students were not encouraged to “接话茬” (*“jump in and add to the conversation”*) (S7-2, S7-3), and that this made freer classroom interaction in the UK feel unfamiliar at first. As S7-3 explained,

“我们习惯在讲话之前，脑海中先想好想说的话……确定是有意义的话，而不会浪费其他人的课堂时间。” (“We are used to thinking through what we want to say before speaking... making sure that it is meaningful and does not waste other people’s class time.”)

These accounts suggest that previous classroom expectations shaped how cautiously some students approached discussion with lecturers.

By contrast, participants with prior intercultural living or learning experience often described adapting more easily to the new environment. S4, for example, shared, “我在澳门读书，有很多外国教授，所以我很习惯与他们互动。” (*“I studied in Macau and had many foreign professors, so I am very used to interacting with them.”*) Similarly, S3-2 noted,

“可能是我以前在英格兰生活过，所以我觉得大部分的情况是趋同的，让我和老师的互动也容易很多。” (“Maybe because I had lived in England before, I felt that most situations were quite similar, which made my interaction with lecturers much easier.”)

In these accounts, previous exposure to intercultural or Anglo-style educational settings was associated with faster adjustment and greater ease in communication.

Participants also suggested that earlier experiences of lecturer–student

relationships shaped their later expectations. As S1 explained,

“我的整个学习过程中，因为我是比较乖的学生，老师也比较喜欢我。然后我整个学习过程中，我对老师的印象都挺好的。我觉得我遇到了很多很好的老师，所以我对老师的期待和体验都是比较正向的。因此我也比较乐于去跟老师沟通交流。” (*“Throughout my whole learning process, I was a relatively obedient student, and teachers also liked me. So throughout my studies, I had quite a good impression of teachers. I think I met many very good teachers, so my expectations and experiences of teachers have been quite positive. Therefore, I am also more willing to communicate with lecturers.”*)

Taken together, these accounts suggest that students’ previous educational and intercultural experiences shaped their expectations of lecturers, their classroom participation habits, and the ease with which they adapted to lecturer–student interaction in the UK.

6.5.6 Institutional environment and its role in interaction

6.5.6.1 Effectiveness of academic and psychological counselling

In the intercultural adaptation process, the support services provided by the university play a crucial role. In the interviews, participant S1 mentioned that she appreciates the one-on-one consultation and guidance services offered by course instructors, which cover not only academic issues but also provide support for life pressures and mental health. These one-on-one psychological counselling sessions help Chinese students adapt to the intercultural educational environment by promptly addressing course-related challenges and offering targeted advice and support. Such services enable students to receive personalised tutoring and emotional regulation when facing academic

difficulties or emotional distress, while also creating opportunities for in-depth interactions between lecturers and students.

Moreover, S5-2 emphasised that she benefited from the language and academic services provided by the university for international students.

“我们大学提供的辅导服务非常有帮助，为我提供了很多学术帮助和建议，包括语言润色服务，这些是专门为国际学生设计的。 (The tutoring services provided by our university are extremely helpful, offering me a lot of academic assistance and advice, including language polishing services. These are specifically designed for international students.)” (S5-2)

Such support services help students overcome language barriers and academic challenges, greatly aiding their adaptation process and ensuring that they receive timely guidance and improvement in academic writing and oral expression. However, because some Chinese students are either “清楚一些部门的职责 (not clear about the responsibilities of certain departments)” (S8-2) or “不知道以这样的信息 (not aware of such information)” (S5-1), they often miss out on these intercultural support services. This indicates that there is still room for improvement in the dissemination of information and promotion of these services. By ensuring that more students are aware of and actively utilise these resources can enhance their integration into the new academic environment and increase their confidence in interacting with lecturers.

6.5.6.2 Informal intercultural activities foster a sense of belonging

Universities not only assist students in transitioning smoothly by providing academic and administrative support, but also actively enhance their sense of

belonging and cultural identity through various cultural activities. For example, S2-1 stated, “中国新年期间, 我在大学的免费早餐区看到一个标语, 上面写着‘农历新年快乐’ (*During Chinese New Year, I saw a sign in the university’s free breakfast area that read ‘Happy Lunar New Year’*) ”. These activities are not exclusive to Chinese students. Rather, they are open to all students, thereby promoting intercultural understanding and communication.

Moreover, students’ expectations for informal intercultural academic activities indicate that they wish to find a balance between everyday life and academic discussion. For instance, S8-4 expressed a desire for “学术讨论可以更随意一些” (*academic discussions can be more casual*), suggesting that integrating academic activities with daily life allows lecturers and students to get to know each other better, fostering intercultural understanding, awareness, and respect for other cultures.

In addition, the intercultural communication courses offered by the university help students understand various social phenomena from multiple countries, which not only increases their understanding of other cultures but also deepens their insight into their own. This intercultural communication course is particularly beneficial for international students.

“我们讲师会积极提出各种社会话题和问题, 邀请来自不同国家的学生分享自己国家的社会现象。 (*Our lecturers actively introduce various social topics and questions, inviting students from different countries to share the social phenomena of their nations.*)” (S8-1)

This kind of course design demonstrates the university’s high regard for international students, while also providing a platform for multicultural exchange between lecturers and students. Ultimately, this curriculum not only equips international students with effective intercultural communication and

learning skills but also offers robust support for Chinese international students' future studies in Scotland, thereby promoting lecturer–student interactions both inside and outside the classroom, enhancing cultural understanding, and cultivating a more inclusive academic environment in a multicultural context.

6.5.7 Summary of influences on their interactions

This section highlights that lecturer-student interactions in TESOL contexts involving Chinese students are shaped by multiple interrelated factors, including language proficiency, classroom environment, curriculum design, lecturer personality and experience, student personality, and the university's support system. Language-related challenges such as unfamiliar accents, rapid speech, and complex academic terminology often hinder students' comprehension and reduce their willingness to participate. Many students report feeling confused when adjusting to diverse accents and colloquial expressions, which not only limits their engagement but also undermines their confidence. However, when lecturers use clear interaction strategies and provide repeated explanations, students gradually develop language confidence, enabling them to participate more actively in classroom interactions.

The classroom environment also plays a crucial role. Smaller class sizes and flexible seating arrangements tend to foster a more intimate and accessible learning atmosphere, promoting more meaningful communication between lecturers and students. A relaxed and friendly setting encourages students to engage in discussions, whereas larger classes often limit opportunities for dialogue and inhibit deeper academic exchange. Furthermore, well-designed curricula that incorporate interactive platforms, modern teaching tools, and

culturally relevant content can move beyond traditional lecture-based instruction. These innovations promote spontaneous academic discussion and hands-on learning, allowing students to relate classroom content to their own cultural experiences and thereby enhancing their overall participation.

The personality and experience of the lecturer are also key factors influencing the quality of interaction. Lecturers who exhibit warmth, approachability, and a solid understanding of Chinese culture, especially those who have taught in China or previously interacted with Chinese students, are often more effective in adapting their teaching approaches to meet the specific needs of this group. Such adaptation helps foster trust between lecturers and students, bridge cultural differences, and support both academic communication and interpersonal connections. In contrast, lecturers who appear emotionally disengaged or maintain an overly strict demeanour may create a tense classroom atmosphere, which can discourage students from participating and reduce their overall willingness to interact.

Similarly, student personality and educational background play a significant role in shaping interaction dynamics. Extroverted students tend to engage more readily with lecturers and actively participate in academic and social activities. This not only enriches their educational experience but also helps them build supportive peer networks. In comparison, students who come from exam-driven educational systems or who are more introverted may struggle to initiate communication. As a result, their limited interaction with lecturers can hinder both academic progress and the development of close peer relationships, ultimately affecting their overall adaptation and integration in an intercultural learning environment.

In addition, the university support system is a vital element in promoting

effective interaction. Services such as academic and psychological counselling, one-on-one tutoring, and targeted language and academic support help students navigate the challenges of intercultural adjustment. Moreover, informal intercultural activities, including cultural festivals and academic discussion events, enhance students' sense of belonging and create relaxed settings where lecturers and students can engage more freely. These initiatives not only facilitate smoother transitions into new academic environments but also foster dynamic, inclusive, and mutually respectful lecturer-student interactions.

6.6 Students' interaction and adaptation strategies

6.6.1 Avoiding interaction unless necessary

In the interviews, many participants described adopting a relatively passive or cautious interaction strategy. When they faced uncertainty in interaction, such as language difficulty, concern about saying the wrong thing, overthinking, or personal discomfort with spontaneous communication, they often preferred a “非必要，不互动” (“*not interacting unless necessary*”) approach (S6-2). Even participants who had made efforts to prepare for interaction sometimes felt that they still appeared less proactive than other students.

Some participants described this tendency quite directly. As S4 explained,

“我觉得我在师生互动中还是比较消极的，因为老师在跟我互动的时候，其实我心里是想尽快结束互动的。” (“I think I am still rather passive in lecturer–student interaction, because when a lecturer is interacting with me, what I am actually thinking is that I want the interaction to end as quickly as possible.”)

Other participants similarly noted that nervousness during interaction made

them hope that the exchange would end quickly (S3-1, S4).

Participants also described being more willing to interact only when they felt certain about what they wanted to say. S6-2, for example, noted that when unsure about an issue, they were reluctant to express their ideas or opinions. However, if asked about something they felt confident about, they would try to interact with the lecturer. In this sense, participation was often described as conditional rather than spontaneous.

Avoidance was also mentioned in relation to potentially sensitive or conflicting topics. As S6-1 stated,

“我们在学术讨论的时候，就是肯定会讨论一些差异性。然后，当讨论到差异性的时候，如果有歧义，那么我们双方都会尽量避开不谈，这样就不会产生太大的冲突。” (*In academic discussion, we certainly talk about differences. When those differences may lead to disagreement, both sides tend to avoid pursuing them further so that no major conflict will arise.*)

Taken together, these accounts suggest that reduced interaction was often a cautious strategy used when students felt uncertain, unprepared, or concerned about potential misunderstanding.

6.6.2 Language preparation

Many participants also described advance language preparation as a strategy for supporting interaction with lecturers. This included preparing useful expressions in advance, reviewing vocabulary or sentence patterns before class, and organising key points before meetings. In these accounts, such preparation was often associated with feeling more ready for interaction and better able to express ideas.

As S4 explained,

“我有去提前准备一些互动的话语，或者是提前了解一下下节课可能会需要用的一些词或句式。但实际上，到真正互动的时候，我还是会紧张。” (“I would prepare some expressions for interaction in advance, or try to learn some of the words or sentence patterns that might be needed in the next class. But in reality, when it comes to the actual interaction, I still feel nervous.”)

This suggests that advance preparation could provide support, even though it did not always remove nervousness completely.

S3-1 similarly described preparing language before meeting with a dissertation supervisor:

“比如说，我们现在要开那个毕业论文的导师会，我可能就要跟导师有更多的交流。但是，可能又担心自己因为口语不是特别的流利，会在交流的过程中有一些误解。我就会提前写一下备忘录，整理好自己的语言，然后这样子在沟通的时候会高效一些。” (“For example, when we have a dissertation supervision meeting, I may need to communicate more with my supervisor. But because I worry that my spoken English is not very fluent and that there may be misunderstandings during communication, I write notes in advance and organise my language, so that the communication can be more efficient.”)

Taken together, these accounts suggest that language preparation was a common strategy used to support interaction. Although it did not always remove anxiety, it often helped students feel more organised and more confident when speaking with lecturers.

6.6.3 Peer collaboration

Chinese international students also described relying on peer support to cope

with barriers in lecturer–student interaction in intercultural classrooms. During real-time classroom interaction, some students reported turning to Chinese classmates for immediate help when they had difficulty expressing themselves or understanding what was being discussed. This could include asking a classmate how to phrase a question in English or asking for help with translation. As S5-1 explained,

“我觉得，当我非常不会表达我的想法的时候，我就会转头问我的同学，然后我或者是我让他们帮我翻译一下就是。” (*“When I really cannot express my ideas, I turn to my classmates or ask them to help me translate.”*)

Participants also described checking understanding collectively when they realised that others were confused in similar ways. As S5-2 noted, sometimes “大家其实都是懵懵的状态” (*“everyone is actually in a state of confusion”*), and students would then try to sort things out together. After class, some participants continued these discussions with Chinese classmates in the same field in order to clarify unclear content (S5-1). Others mentioned relying on stronger peers, including “学霸” (*“academic superstars”*) (S6-1), as an important source of help.

At the same time, some participants also suggested that this kind of peer support could create a degree of dependence. As S5-1 remarked, “我觉得有依赖性也不是坏事，但会让自己觉得上课不用太认真。” (*“I think dependence is not necessarily a bad thing, but it can make you feel that you do not need to be too serious in class.”*)

Taken together, these accounts suggest that peer support was an important strategy through which Chinese students managed uncertainty in classroom interaction. It provided immediate help with comprehension and expression, although in some cases participants also recognised the risk of becoming

overly reliant on peers.

6.6.4 Pre-class preparation

The interviews showed that many Chinese international students used pre-class preparation as a strategy for coping with interaction challenges in intercultural classrooms. This often-included checking course slides in advance (S2-2), identifying unfamiliar or specialised vocabulary (S2-3), and thinking in advance about what they might want to say in class. In these accounts, pre-class preparation was often associated with feeling more ready to follow the lecturer's content and respond during discussion.

For example, S2-2 referred to “提前想好自己要说什么” (*“thinking in advance about what you want to say”*), describing how discussion points were prepared beforehand almost like rehearsal in order to avoid answering incorrectly during group discussion. Some participants also described previewing likely classroom content before class. As S5-2 explained,

“我有做一个语言的练习和学习，我在上课之前会去看一下接下来可能要讨论什么，然后去学习一下相关的一些用词，或者看一些资料，有了解一个大概的情况，然后这样就避免了我在课上听不懂老师在跟我交流什么。” (*“I did some language practice and study. Before class, I would look at what might be discussed next, then learn some related vocabulary or read some materials, so that I had a general understanding. In this way, I could avoid not understanding what the lecturer was saying to me in class.”*)

In a similar way, some students also prepared more formally before meetings with supervisors. For instance, S3-1 described writing out key points in advance so that nervousness would be less likely to affect the interaction.

At the same time, some participants suggested that pre-class preparation also had limitations. Although preparation could help students become familiar with new vocabulary and likely discussion topics, some still felt nervous when classroom discussion moved beyond what they had prepared. As S4 noted, when this happened, students might feel that they “不知道怎么接话” (*“did not know how to continue the conversation”*). S4 also mentioned that sometimes “自己看书比听课更高效” (*“reading on one’s own is more efficient than listening to lectures”*), which could mean that even when students understood the content, they were not always willing to speak in class.

Taken together, these accounts suggest that pre-class preparation was an important strategy for helping students feel more ready for lecturer–student interaction. At the same time, its usefulness could be limited when interaction became less predictable or when students remained cautious about speaking despite being well prepared.

6.6.5 Culture learning

The interviews also showed that some Chinese students used culture learning as a strategy for coping with intercultural communication challenges. For these students, learning about local culture and background was described as a way of reducing uncertainty, avoiding inappropriate expression, and feeling more prepared for interaction with lecturers. Some participants noted that, when they first arrived in the UK, they felt so nervous about exposing their language limitations or speaking inappropriately that they even hoped lecturers would “不主动找他们交流” (*“not proactively approach them for communication”*) (S8-3). At the same time, they also recognised the need to adapt more actively by learning about the local context.

Participants described different ways of doing this. S3-2 mentioned learning about local culture through study-abroad seniors, online information, and films, which helped reduce awkwardness in face-to-face interaction. S1 similarly suggested that learning about a lecturer's cultural background and about Scotland more generally could make interaction easier and more interesting. In addition, S8-2's experience suggested that earlier positive lecturer–student relationships, including experience of communicating with teachers while serving as a class monitor in China, could also support adaptation in the new context.

This strategy was described clearly by S6-2:

“我会多学习这边的文化，避免又冒犯到他们。我觉得这个很重要，因为有时候文化不同，我很担心说错话，然后或者是说话不礼貌。因为我们有时候用一些礼貌用语，会没有注意到他们的礼貌用语，所以这些如果不去提前去准备的话，当真正互动的时候，我就会表现得有一些消极。就是可能让他们觉得我不是很积极，不是很想互动或者不感兴趣，或者是我说的话不对，说的东西不对。”
(“I will learn more about the culture here, so as to avoid offending them again. I think this is very important, because sometimes cultural differences make me worry that I may say the wrong thing or sound impolite. Sometimes we do not notice their polite expressions, so if I do not prepare for these things in advance, then when real interaction happens, I may appear rather passive. They may think that I am not very active, that I do not want to interact, that I am not interested, or that what I say is not appropriate.”)

Taken together, these accounts suggest that learning about local culture was used by some students as a practical way of preparing for interaction. In participants' accounts, this strategy was often linked to reducing nervousness and feeling more confident about how to speak appropriately in intercultural

classrooms.

6.6.6 Summary of Chinese students' strategies

In summary, Chinese international students employ a variety of strategies to cope with intercultural classroom interactions and to overcome multiple obstacles related to language, culture, and personality. Some students, due to insufficient language proficiency, excessive caution, or nervousness, tend to adopt a “非必要，不互动 (*not interacting unless necessary*)” approach or try to end interactions as quickly as possible (as described by S6-2, S3-1, S4), which they felt might be interpreted by others as indifference or limited engagement in class, with limited expression, and only attempting to interact with lecturers on topics they are certain about. At the same time, advanced language learning and pre-study have become common strategies (S6-1, S8-3). By reviewing course materials, preparing specialised vocabulary, and rehearsing discussion topics, students not only improve their fluency but also reduce the anxiety caused by language inadequacies, thereby boosting their confidence to participate actively. However, over-reliance on pre-study can sometimes result in students feeling nervous and overwhelmed when classroom discussions go beyond their expectations, even leading them to depend solely on self-study and lack real-time interaction.

To overcome these barriers, students also collaborate with peers to quickly resolve difficulties in expression and information asymmetry (S5-1, S5-2, S6-1). Although this strategy helps create a low-risk native language safe zone, excessive reliance on peers may diminish individual initiative to participate. On the other hand, actively learning about the cultural backgrounds of the UK and Scotland has become an important way to alleviate the tension of intercultural

communication (S8-3, S3-2, S1, S8-2). This strategy not only helps students better understand the teaching styles of lecturers and the classroom atmosphere but also enhances their confidence and adaptability in intercultural environments. Overall, these strategies interweave to form a coping mechanism for Chinese international students in intercultural lecturer–student interactions, reflecting both their helplessness when facing language and cultural challenges and their efforts to achieve more effective communication through proactive preparation and peer support.

6.7 Summary and reflection

Findings from the interviews suggest that students often perceived a mismatch in intercultural lecturer–student interaction, particularly regarding when interaction was initiated and what it was for. Chinese students often engage with lecturers mainly when they need help with assignments or essays. As a result, these interactions tend to focus on completing tasks rather than exploring academic content in depth. Language challenges, such as difficulty understanding lecturers' accents or unfamiliarity with subject-specific vocabulary, place considerable pressure on students. Cultural expectations, including the Chinese norm of quiet listening, contrasted with the Western emphasis on active verbal participation, further add to this pressure. As a way to manage this pressure, many students speak less in class or rely heavily on memorised or pre-prepared content to manage discussions, limiting meaningful engagement. This pattern reflects Spencer-Oatey's concept of interactional goals, where engagement remains task-focused rather than exploratory, and highlights limited instructional support as framed by the TTI model.

Several key factors contribute to these challenges. Firstly, language functions not only as a tool for communication but also as an invisible barrier. Students with limited English proficiency often withdraw from interaction due to fear of making mistakes. When lecturers speak too quickly or use excessive slang without recognising these difficulties, students become even more reluctant to speak. This aligns with Rapport Management's emphasis on face needs, as students' reluctance to speak often stems from the fear of losing face, and indicates insufficient emotional support within the TTI framework. Secondly, although curriculum design claims to support multiculturalism, its content is frequently Eurocentric and disconnected from Chinese students' lived experiences. Finally, although universities offer support such as tutoring services and cultural activities, several participants reported being unaware that these resources exist. Some students may know about them but are unsure how to access them, which greatly limits their effectiveness. This echoes Small Culture Theory, suggesting that classroom content fails to engage with students' immediate cultural realities, while CMIC highlights the need for institutional responsiveness to intercultural needs.

To cope with these challenges, students have adopted two main strategies. The first involves preparing in advance by reviewing course materials, looking up unfamiliar vocabulary, or even drafting scripts for class discussions to build a sense of security. The second strategy relies on peer support, where students seek help from classmates or follow those with stronger English skills during class activities. While these methods can reduce anxiety and provide immediate relief, they may also lead to an over-dependence on familiar peer groups. This reliance can limit opportunities for direct engagement with lecturers and hinder the development of broader communication skills. In the short term, these strategies help students manage academic demands. But in

the long term, they may keep students within their comfort zones and prevent them from fully developing their intercultural competence. These coping strategies reflect CMIC's stage of intercultural adjustment and demonstrate indirect ways of managing face and sociality rights, as outlined in Rapport Management.

It is worth noting that relaxed social interactions, such as lecturers taking students on city tours or engaging in casual conversations about daily life, can effectively narrow the distance between lecturers and students. When lecturers show an understanding of Chinese culture, such as recognising the importance of the National College Entrance Examination, or express genuine concern for students' well-being, students are more likely to trust them and become more open during academic discussions. This highlights that lecturers' attitudes and intercultural sensitivity play a vital role in breaking down communication barriers. In these contexts, lecturers are not only facilitators of academic knowledge but also bridges that connect diverse cultural perspectives. This corresponds to the TTI model's emotional support dimension and illustrates how rapport is strengthened when lecturers validate students' identities and interactional goals.

Overall, lecturer–student interaction in intercultural classrooms shows clear contradictions. Students want to integrate but often hold back, as curricula still reflect Western perspectives and support services rarely meet real needs. Participation is shaped by both language and trust. Their coping strategies help reduce pressure but also trap them in safe routines.

The next chapter shifts the focus to the lecturers' perspectives, exploring how they respond to these challenges through pedagogical adjustments, the design of interactive activities, and the provision of personalised feedback. By

examining both sides of the interaction, this study aims to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of intercultural classrooms and to identify practical approaches for enhancing lecturer–student engagement.

Chapter 7 Views from Lecturers

This chapter presents lecturers' accounts of intercultural teaching and interaction with Chinese students. Evidence comes primarily from open-ended questionnaire responses completed by thirteen lecturers and four in-depth interviews; classroom observation notes are used only where they provide contextual detail. Quotations from interviews and written responses are reproduced verbatim.

7.1 Identification of emerging themes in this chapter

As this study focuses on lecturers' and students' perceptions of intercultural interaction in TESOL classrooms, it is essential to consider both lecturer and student perspectives. This chapter examines lecturers' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL classrooms, drawing on their reflective accounts rather than on recordings of interactional events.

A total of 13 completed open-ended questionnaires and 4 in-depth interviews were collected from TESOL lecturers who have experience teaching Chinese students at universities in Scotland. The questionnaires aimed to gather background information about the lecturers, as well as their experiences, challenges, and strategies. The interviews explored the same areas in greater depth and gave participants the opportunity to reflect and discuss additional issues. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and yielded a rich set of qualitative data. By integrating the responses from the questionnaires and interviews, several key themes emerged and are discussed in the following sections.

Based on the literature review, the theoretical framework, and the design of

the study, several main themes were anticipated in advance, including “Interaction topics” (7.3), “Lecturers’ background and personality” (7.4), “Chinese students’ learning and interaction behaviour” (7.5), “Lecturers’ interaction challenges” (7.6), and “Lecturers’ interaction strategies” (7.7). During the thematic analysis process, sub-themes were grouped under each main theme in order to support a more detailed analysis.

In their accounts, lecturers consistently expressed a strong concern with intercultural teaching and learning. Lecturers’ accounts included detailed observations and reflections on Chinese students’ participation, learning behaviour, and intercultural adjustment. However, lecturers’ accounts also suggested that their interpretations and teaching responses were shaped by factors such as educational background, prior experience, and broader ideological assumptions, which they often described as challenging in practice. Lecturers also described a range of pedagogical practices that they viewed as helpful in supporting Chinese students’ participation and adjustment in intercultural classrooms.

7.2 Age, gender, nationality

The initial analysis of the questionnaire provided basic demographic and professional information about the TESOL lecturers. Among the participants, there were 10 males and 3 females. Seven lecturers were identified as British, while the remaining six were from non-British backgrounds. Most respondents were between 30 and 50 years old, with a smaller number under 30 or over 60.

Lecturers within the 30 to 50 age group tended to provide more detailed and reflective responses to the open-ended questions. This may suggest that their greater teaching experience has helped them develop deeper insights into

cultural and pedagogical issues. In contrast, lecturers under 30 contributed fewer responses, which may indicate more limited exposure to culturally diverse classrooms or that they were relatively new to academic teaching.

Most participants reported having between 3 and 10 years of experience teaching Chinese students. A few had either less than 3 years of experience or over 10 years, representing the least and most experienced ends of the spectrum. In addition to teaching experience, some lecturers also described the scale of their contact with Chinese students. For example, Lecturer 12 explained that in one MSc TESOL programme there were approximately 260 students, of whom about 220 were from China. As he described, *“in the MSc TESOL programme, we have about 260 students, and out of those probably 220 must be from China.”* He further noted that although he did not consider himself to have very many years of experience with Chinese students, he nevertheless interacted with a large number of them every year. This suggests that lecturers’ perceptions were shaped not only by the length of their experience but also by the intensity of their contact with Chinese students.

7.3 Interaction topics

The questionnaire captured lecturers’ perspectives on various aspects of their interactions with Chinese students (see Figure 7).

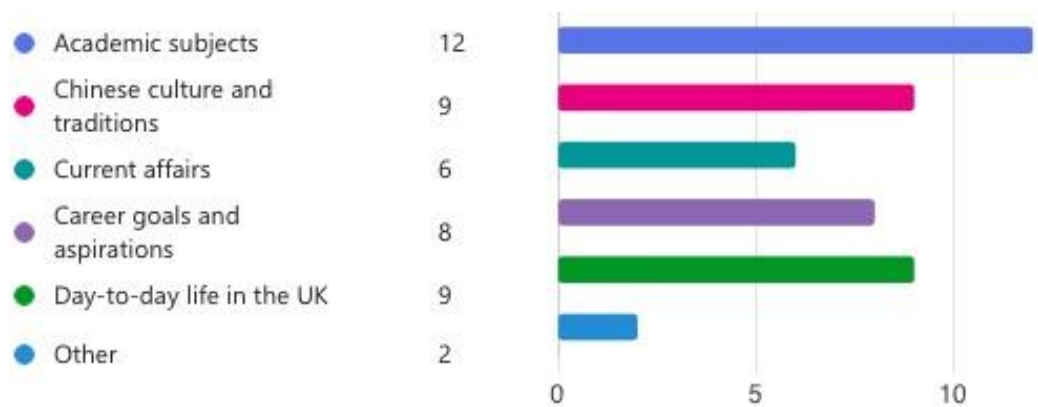


Figure 7 Topics of Lecturer-Student Interaction

According to the questionnaire data, the most frequently selected topic in lecturers' interactions with Chinese students was academic content. Twelve lecturers selected this option, indicating that academic matters remain central to these interactions. This focus may relate to students' strong emphasis on learning outcomes and academic performance.

In addition to academic discussions, topics such as Chinese culture and tradition, as well as daily life in the UK, were also common. Each was selected by nine lecturers. These responses suggest that Chinese students maintain a strong connection to their cultural identity while also expressing interest in adapting to British society and lifestyle. Career goals and aspirations, chosen by eight lecturers, also emerged as a frequently discussed topic. This reflects the importance Chinese students place on future planning and their perception of studying abroad as a key step toward achieving career success.

In contrast, current affairs were selected by only six lecturers, suggesting that Chinese students may be less engaged with global or political topics. Instead, they appear more focused on personal academic and career development. Other topics were chosen by just two lecturers, indicating that most interactions concentrated on the key areas already mentioned.

In summary, lecturer-student interactions were primarily centred on academic themes, with cultural, personal, and career-related topics serving as important secondary areas. These patterns reflect Chinese students' academic motivations and their efforts to adapt to a new educational and cultural environment while planning for their future.

Academic discussions were an important part of lecturers' interactions with Chinese students, often centred around course content, assignments and teaching methods. Several lecturers mentioned that Chinese students are willing to share their educational experiences and actively seek guidance in academic challenges. This kind of active participation not only enhances communication between students and lecturers but also helps students gain a deeper understanding of the academic content. In the TESOL Programme, academic discussions were often naturally triggered by course topics. For example,

“Okay, so I teach a couple of courses in my current workplace that are looking at issues related to global English and the kind of change that is happening in the world at the moment concerning how English is perceived. ... We're looking at, you know, non-native varieties of English being legitimised. And this means that a lot of the traditional ideology about native speakerism and all of this stuff that goes along with, you know, the reasons why English has spread as a global language, you know, so things like colonialism and imperialism and neoliberal globalization driven by the United States and capitalism, all that stuff, we have to talk about those things. And sometimes our conversations about those things can be a little bit like this.” (L13)

These topics often carry strong intercultural and critical dimensions, encouraging students to reflect on the relationship between language and

society from a global perspective. They serve as a basis for academic discussions that are directly connected to the course content. Lecturers also promote critical thinking and student engagement by using question-based prompts and group discussions. In doing so, they help students deepen their understanding and develop analytical skills. Academic discussion, therefore, goes beyond simple knowledge transmission. Lecturers also noted that academic discussions frequently involved comparing educational practices across contexts. In TESOL courses, students often drew on their own experiences of learning English in China when discussing teaching methodology. As Lecturer 13 explained, discussions about English teaching frequently involved reflecting on students' previous learning experiences and considering whether certain teaching approaches would work in Chinese classrooms. Such exchanges demonstrate that academic interaction often became a space where theoretical ideas from the course were negotiated alongside students' personal educational experiences.

Beyond academic topics, Chinese students frequently bring non-academic concerns to their lecturers. These conversations often focus on adjusting to life abroad, navigating unfamiliar social and institutional systems, and addressing practical day-to-day challenges. Lecturer 6 noted: “..... *They would talk to me about their life here or deal with other things at the university that are not related to my programme.*” This suggests that lecturers play an important role in students' non-academic adjustment, providing not only academic guidance but also cultural and social support. The non-academic discussions reflected the challenges faced by Chinese students in adapting to life abroad, including cultural differences, the complexity of social systems, and the handling of practical issues. These interactions reflect the multiple roles of the lecturers, not only as academic mentors, but also as important sources of support for

Chinese students in their intercultural adaptation.

7.4 Lecturers' background and personality on intercultural education

Lecturers' cultural background and personality traits play a key role in intercultural lecturer-student interactions, especially in building trust and facilitating effective communication with Chinese students. Several lecturers believed that their ability to establish good relationships with Chinese students was largely due to their upbringing or cultural exposure experiences.

Building trust was widely recognised by lecturers as a foundational element in fostering effective interaction with Chinese students. Many lecturers linked their perceived approachability and ability to build trust to their cultural background and familiarity with the Chinese education system. For instance, a Lecturer noted:

"I think my experience with the Chinese education system helps me connect with Chinese students. It gives me the confidence to engage with them, and I feel like my background makes me more approachable, which helps in building mutual trust." (L6)

This illustrates how shared cultural values and personal attributes can play a crucial role in creating an environment of mutual respect and understanding. As Yu et al. (2021) suggest, cultural empathy, quality interaction and transparency are key contributors to the development of trust in intercultural communication. In intercultural settings, trust often functions as a bridge that enables more open communication and deeper engagement, especially when lecturers demonstrate intercultural sensitivity.

For many lecturers, the development of such intercultural competence stems largely from accumulated teaching experience. Repeated interaction with Chinese students not only enhances their understanding of student behaviours and expectations but also informs the adaptation of their pedagogical approaches.

“I’ve taught English to Chinese students quite a lot over the years. And more recently, I’ve taught TESOL to Chinese students. And so, yes, I would say in both, if you combine both of those things, yes, I’ve taught TESOL to Chinese students... yes, I have quite a lot of experience with Chinese students.” (L13)

This long-term engagement has allowed some lecturers to discern patterns and respond more effectively to students’ needs in intercultural classrooms. Lecturers who had direct exposure to Chinese educational environments expressed a deeper familiarity with classroom culture, including behavioural norms and student expectations. As Lecturer 7 stated:

“I think I’m more familiar with the culture of education in China... How people behave in class, how they respect their lecturers, what they expect from their lecturers, what they expect from each other in class... I’ve been to China three times on work visits.” (L7)

Such experiences contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the implicit cultural codes that shape student behaviour and lecturer–student dynamics. As Hammer et al. (2003) note, intercultural competence does not develop instantly. It requires time, exposure, and critical reflection. However, this kind of situated knowledge was not shared by all participants. The questionnaire data showed that only four lecturers had teaching experience in Chinese-speaking countries, and just three had worked directly in China. In contrast, the majority (9 lecturers) did not have such a background. This gap suggests

that the development of intercultural awareness among lecturers is uneven and often shaped by individual teaching pathways.

For those without direct experience in China, regular interaction with Chinese students became a primary source of cultural insight. Some lecturers adopted a dialogic and inquiry-based approach to cultural learning. A Lecturer shared:

“Not that I read on my own or that I watch features, but I ask them questions... And so, I ask them how true that is, how representative that is... I ask them a lot of questions because I’m genuinely interested.” (L12)

This type of interaction not only creates a collaborative atmosphere but also provides a natural opportunity for real-time cultural learning. The lecturer’s account illustrates how informal and reciprocal engagement can lead to meaningful cultural understanding, especially when it is guided by genuine curiosity and openness. Everyday moments, such as students offering cultural gifts, become valuable starting points for deeper reflection and intercultural exchange.

Importantly, many lecturers viewed their development of intercultural skills as an ongoing, informal process grounded in practice and reflection. Lecturer 13 highlighted the importance of experiential learning: *“I think I just had to learn on the job, ... I do a lot of reflection on my practice anyway.”* This emphasis on reflective practice underlines a core feature of intercultural teaching competence: adaptability. By engaging in self-reflection and responding flexibly to classroom realities, lecturers enhance their capacity to support students from diverse backgrounds. This continuous process of learning through doing reinforces the importance of practical experience and personal engagement in fostering intercultural understanding.

7.5 Chinese students' learning and interaction behaviour

7.5.1 Class with Chinese students

All interviewed lecturers had Chinese students in their classrooms, and eight of them noted that these students made up about half or more of the class, highlighting their significant presence in TESOL programmes. Lecturers described teaching Chinese students as both rewarding and demanding. Many used terms such as *“enriching”*, *“collaborative”*, and *“eye-opening”* to express the value they found in intercultural engagement. At the same time, the experience was described as *“challenging in all senses of the word”*, requiring *“empathy, patience, and support”*. Students were frequently characterised as *“hesitant, careful, polite”*, which helped create a respectful learning environment but sometimes limited open classroom dialogue. Lecturers observed that building connections took time and encouragement, although the overall experience was still perceived as *“relaxed”* and *“diverse”*.

Lecturers highlighted the cultural value that Chinese students bring to the classroom. Their unique backgrounds introduced new perspectives and enriched class discussions. As Lecturer 4 noted, conversations about cultural differences created meaningful opportunities for knowledge exchange. Lecturer 3 further commented that Chinese students contributed to *“greater diversity in thought/experience”*, which particularly benefited domestic students. Their presence also supported the development of intercultural communication skills among their peers. According to Lecturer 2, these interactions offer valuable preparation for working in global environments.

In addition to their cultural contributions, Chinese students were consistently praised for their academic dedication. They were described as *“disciplined”*, *“meticulous”*, and *“hard-working”*, and their strong work ethic was seen as a

positive influence on the overall classroom atmosphere. In group settings, they were perceived as respectful and cooperative. As Lecturer 8 observed, *“They prefer to listen to everyone’s ideas.”* While this approach fosters group harmony, it can also result in less frequent expression of individual opinions.

In sum, lecturers described teaching Chinese students as a complex but rewarding experience. It involved navigating cultural diversity, supporting academic tasks, and addressing interactional challenges through thoughtful and adaptive teaching strategies.

7.5.2 Politeness masks genuine feedback

Politeness was frequently noted by lecturers as a defining feature of Chinese students’ classroom interactions. As Lecturer 13 observed, *“I get the feeling that Chinese students are often very... polite and very positive and they say very nice things.”* While this behaviour reflects cultural norms valuing harmony and respect, it also creates ambiguity in communication. In face-conscious contexts, indirectness and positive expression are often employed to avoid confrontation or embarrassment (Ting-Toomey, 2005), but such strategies may unintentionally obscure students’ genuine thoughts and limit opportunities for pedagogical adjustment.

This pattern is further evidenced by the rarity of critical feedback. Lecturer 13 remarked, *“It’s unusual for me to receive negative feedback from a Chinese student.”* Such reluctance may be rooted in cultural norms that discourage direct criticism, particularly when directed at authority figures like lecturers. These norms often emphasise respect, harmony, and avoiding confrontation, which can make students hesitant to express disagreement or offer critical feedback in academic settings. As Lecturer 13 elaborated, *“...when I*

encourage them to be critical of me... sometimes they're a bit surprised.". This reflects the influence of hierarchical norms within Chinese education, where lecturers are regarded as authoritative figures and critique may be perceived as disrespectful.

These observations can be understood through the lens of Rapport Management (Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2003), which highlights how individuals manage relationships, face, and interactional goals. In this context, the politeness displayed by Chinese students can be understood as a deliberate effort to maintain positive rapport with their lecturers by avoiding face-threatening acts such as disagreement or criticism. Although this approach helps sustain a respectful and harmonious classroom environment, it may also restrict open dialogue and reduce opportunities for genuine mutual understanding.

Furthermore, the broader hierarchical structure of Chinese education reinforces this dynamic. As Shiraev and Levy (2020) note, students from high power distance cultures tend to show deference to lecturers, often avoiding behaviours perceived as challenging authority. While this contributes to an orderly classroom atmosphere, it may also suppress critical engagement and openness.

From the perspective of the Chinese students in Chapter 6, their politeness strategies were in part related to their adaptive challenges. The meaning of politeness should be understood within its cultural context. While it may seem like avoidance from one perspective, it can also signal thoughtful restraint and relational sensitivity from another. However, the politeness strategy did not completely mask the students' attitude towards negative interactions.

In summary, while politeness facilitates harmonious interaction, it may also

conceal students' reality perspectives. Balancing these interpretations is essential. For lecturers, recognising culturally embedded communication patterns can lead to more nuanced understanding. For students, developing the confidence and tools to express disagreement respectfully may help promote more open, constructive interaction. Ultimately, intercultural feedback processes benefit from reciprocal awareness and adaptation on both sides.

7.5.3 Silence in class

Lecturers observed that Chinese students are generally less likely to initiate classroom discussion compared to their European peers. This behaviour is not due to a lack of ideas, but rather reflects cultural norms that value respect, turn-taking, and the avoidance of interruption. As Lecturer 6 noted: *"They just don't interrupt others who are speaking. They prefer to wait and see if anyone else wants to add something before they speak."* In contrast, European students were seen as more comfortable expressing their views immediately, reflecting differing cultural expectations around communication and participation.

Such patterns may be shaped by deeper cultural attitudes toward power and hierarchy. According to Hofstede (2001) societies vary in their acceptance of power distance, which influences how individuals interact with authority figures and participate in group settings. In this context, Chinese students' reserved behaviour may be misinterpreted as disengagement, when it is in fact rooted in politeness and deference.

Lecturers also noted a strong emphasis on notetaking among Chinese students. As Lecturer 6 observed, *"Chinese students tend to take detailed notes during class and prefer to write everything down, while other*

international students might raise their hands immediately to ask questions.” This habit suggests a high regard for the lecturer’s content and a desire to retain information accurately, aligning with a more passive, content-focused learning style.

Further analysis reveals that these behaviours are closely tied to the traditional Chinese education model, which is typically lecturer-centred. As Lecturer 7 explained: *“Chinese students are used to lecturer-led and imparts the knowledge to the students.”* In contrast, many European students are educated in more student-centred systems that promote active dialogue and critical questioning. This difference can present challenges for Chinese students when adapting to Western classrooms that emphasise discussion, critical thinking, and learner autonomy.

In sum, lecturers perceived that cultural norms and prior educational experiences may shape Chinese students’ classroom behaviour in significant ways. Their respectful and attentive approach may be well-intentioned but can lead to misunderstandings in participatory learning environments. Recognising these patterns is essential for fostering inclusive and culturally responsive teaching.

7.5.4 Preference for private and small group expression

Lecturers frequently observed that Chinese students tend to be quieter in large group settings but more expressive in smaller groups or private interactions. As Lecturer 12 noted:

“Some of them are quiet... perhaps not too keen on expressing their views in front of everyone... but they will give their views in a smaller group or with

me in private. If it is a forum or an email, they do.” (L12)

Lecturers interpreted this behavioural pattern as reflecting a cultural inclination to avoid public exposure, especially in situations where there is a risk of making mistakes or receiving criticism. Lecturers and prior literature suggest that such tendencies may be linked to the Chinese concept of “face,” which stresses the importance of maintaining one’s social image and dignity in interpersonal contexts (Goffman, 2005). Speaking publicly, particularly in front of authority figures or peers, may be perceived as risky and potentially damaging to one’s face. As a result, students often prefer written or private forms of communication, where they feel less vulnerable and more in control.

This communication style is also shaped by the traditional Chinese educational model, which positions the lecturer as the central authority and students as passive recipients of knowledge. This hierarchical structure can limit students’ confidence and reduce their willingness to speak spontaneously, particularly in intercultural classrooms where language barriers and unfamiliar academic norms increase their sense of uncertainty.

Lecturers also noted a clear difference between student behaviour in formal classroom settings and more relaxed, post-class interactions. As Lecturer 6 observed:

“Even the most outgoing students are more reserved during class... But after class, it’s completely different...they’re much more relaxed and open. They’ll share their personal thoughts, experiences, and even concerns.” (L6)

This shift illustrates the role of context in shaping communication behaviour. In formal classroom environments, the lecturer is perceived as an authoritative figure deserving deference, which encourages restraint and formality. Outside of class, however, this power dynamic softens, allowing students to engage

more freely and personally.

Such observations suggest that while Chinese students may initially appear reserved, this does not reflect disengagement but rather culturally informed interaction strategies. Informal spaces offer a more comfortable context for expression, where the lecturer is not only respected as an authority but also approached as a mentor and supporter. Understanding this contextual difference is crucial for building rapport and encouraging deeper engagement across cultural boundaries.

7.5.5 Overgeneralisation of cultural background

Some lecturers noted that Chinese students tend to speak about their cultural background in broad, generalised terms, which can be a source of frustration. Lecturer 13 remarked:

“It sometimes has happened to me that Chinese students will speak about China or the Chinese context in very generic terms... The Chinese system is like this, or Chinese people learn languages like this... it seems like a very simplistic way to talk about 1.4 billion people.” (L13)

This tendency suggests a limited awareness of internal cultural diversity and reflects a surface-level understanding of one’s cultural identity. As Deardorff (2011) points out, genuine intercultural awareness requires not only understanding other cultures but also critically reflecting on one’s own. When students present their national culture in overly uniform ways, it may indicate limited intercultural competence, particularly in recognising the complexity and diversity within their society.

In international classrooms that promote nuanced cultural perspectives, such

generalisations may not align with the course's values and can reduce opportunities for meaningful intercultural dialogue. However, lecturers also noted that this pattern was not consistent across all students. Lecturer 12 observed that some Chinese students expressed diverse views on cultural topics, which occasionally led to class discussions or debates. This suggests that students' intercultural sensitivity varies and may develop through exposure and active engagement.

In summary, while some Chinese students initially discuss cultural topics in generalised terms, this tendency often stems from their educational background and limited intercultural experience. Although such approaches can restrict deeper intercultural engagement, they also provide valuable opportunities for development. When students are guided to reflect critically on both their own and others' cultural contexts, they are more likely to build genuine intercultural understanding.

7.5.6 Students' socio-economic and academic backgrounds

Lecturers identified students' socio-economic and academic backgrounds as key factors influencing their classroom participation and confidence. Lecturer 13 observed:

"The IELTS level requirement is higher than it was at my previous workplace... they come from an environment where either their families can afford to pay these very expensive fees, or they were successful in getting scholarships... Maybe it means that they're just more confident." (L13)

This reflection suggests that students who have benefited from strong academic preparation or financial stability may demonstrate higher confidence

and engagement.

Socio-economic privilege often provides students with access to high-quality educational resources, exposure to interactive learning environments, and more opportunities for academic achievement. These advantages can enhance their capacity to adapt and engage actively in international classrooms. As a result, such students may feel more at ease expressing their opinions, asking questions, and communicating with lecturers, largely due to the positive reinforcement they received in previous learning contexts.

In contrast, students from less advantaged backgrounds may face a range of challenges. Limited exposure to communicative or student-centred pedagogies, combined with financial stress and language barriers, can lead to lower self-confidence and more passive classroom behaviour. As Wilson et al. (2013) suggest, personality traits, and prior cultural experiences significantly shape students' adaptive capacity in unfamiliar academic settings.

Moreover, these disparities may reinforce existing inequalities in the classroom. Students with fewer resources often need to overcome not only academic and linguistic hurdles but also emotional and cultural adjustment pressures. This can result in reduced participation, less frequent interaction with lecturers, and slower adaptation to the academic expectations of a new environment.

In sum, socio-economic and academic backgrounds play a crucial role in shaping Chinese students' classroom engagement. While some students benefit from strong preparation and support, others may struggle with systemic disadvantages that affect their ability to interact confidently and succeed academically.

7.6 Lecturers' interaction challenges

From questionnaire data (see Figure 8), the majority of lecturers felt that social events, university programmes, and shared academic interests significantly facilitated interactions with Chinese students. Cultural curiosity and exchange were also highlighted by many as influential. Conversely, fewer lecturers pointed out limited social events, lack of time or opportunities, personal comfort zones, language practice, and common hobbies as factors influencing interactions.

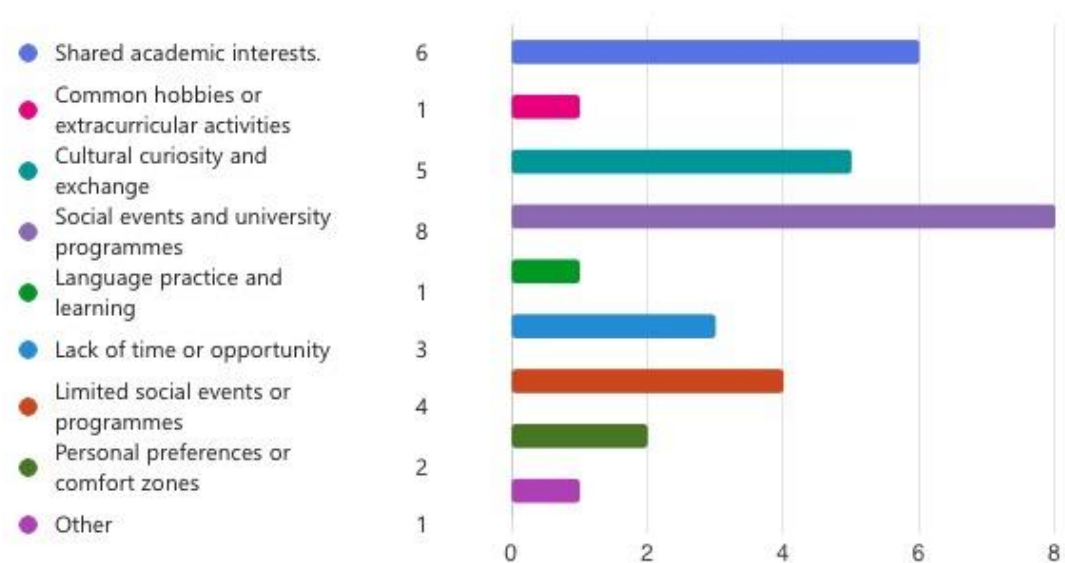


Figure 8 Factors Affecting Willingness to Interaction

7.6.1 Building trust

Lecturers consistently highlighted the importance of building trust in intercultural lecturer–student interactions. As Lecturer 5 noted, *“It often requires time to establish trust & faith.”* Trust is not immediate; it requires sustained effort from both lecturers and students, particularly in intercultural contexts where expectations and communication styles may differ.

One effective way to foster trust, as several lecturers pointed out, is through

informal communication outside the classroom. Lecturer 6 observed: *“During communication after class, they seem much more relaxed.”* This suggests that Chinese students, who may be more reserved in formal settings due to cultural norms, are often more open in low-pressure environments. Informal interactions can offer space for students to express concerns, ask questions, and build rapport with a person.

However, relying solely on informal communication has its limitations. Some students, particularly those who are introverted, lack confidence, or face language barriers, may not feel comfortable participating in these settings. Furthermore, lecturers often experience heavy workloads and limited time, which can make it difficult to maintain consistent informal engagement. As a result, the chances to build trust may become unevenly distributed, unintentionally excluding certain students and reinforcing existing disparities.

Therefore, while informal interactions can contribute to trust-building, they should not be the only method used. It is important to adopt a more deliberate and inclusive approach that incorporates trust-building into regular classroom activities. This ensures that all students have equal opportunities to engage, participate, and feel supported.

7.6.2 Difficult teaching adjustments

Lecturers reported that adapting teaching strategies for Chinese students in intercultural classrooms presents specific challenges. Lecturer 7 shared:

“At the beginning of the academic year, some Chinese students look very troubled by the idea of me placing them in pairs or in groups. I think they lack confidence in that kind of learning... they’re also learning from each other,

which of course is not something I think in my experience that Chinese students have been used to.” (L7)

This reflects the discomfort many Chinese students feel toward collaborative learning formats, particularly group discussions and peer exchanges.

This discomfort can be traced to the traditional Chinese education system, which prioritises lecturer-led instruction, individual academic performance, and passive learning. In such contexts, students are rarely encouraged to participate in interactive or cooperative learning. As a result, when placed in student-centred, dialogic learning environments, they may struggle with expressing ideas, questioning others, or seeing the value of group work.

Lecturers also frequently commented on the silence of Chinese students during class discussions. Lecturer 12 noted: *“I will ask questions... but then no one says anything. And you know, I cannot be forcing people all the time.”* Such silence has practical consequences. It limits real-time feedback, making it difficult for lecturers to assess student understanding or adjust instruction accordingly. This lack of interaction can reduce classroom dynamism and discourage lecturers from prompting further discussion. For international students, the perceived lack of participation can diminish motivation and create a “cold spot” in classroom engagement.

More critically, the silence of Chinese students in the classroom created direct pedagogical challenges, complicating lecturers’ efforts to engage them in the classroom, as previously described in Section 2.9.1. This theme will be revisited in the discussion chapter with further theoretical insights.

In summary, the challenges of teaching adjustment stem not only from pedagogical differences but also from cultural and systemic factors shaping student behaviour. Addressing these requires sensitivity, scaffolding, and

inclusive strategies that bridge learning expectations across cultural contexts.

7.6.3 Different perspectives on ideological concepts

Lecturers identified clear challenges in engaging Chinese students with complex ideological concepts and critical thinking practices. These differences often surfaced in discussions on topics such as globalisation, capitalism, and democracy. Lecturer 13 observed: *“Sometimes when I talk to students from China... who didn’t grow up in a new Liberal capitalist society... their understanding of capitalism, of democracy... these things are quite different.”* This reflects how Chinese students’ interpretations of such concepts are shaped by distinct socio-political and educational contexts, which may contrast with the Western, often critical, perspectives held by lecturers.

This divergence can lead to communication gaps during class discussions. Lecturers may expect students to critically examine dominant ideologies, while students shaped by state-aligned educational discourses may respond from perspectives grounded in national pride, a focus on social stability, or pragmatic reasoning rather than critique. These contrasting approaches can influence students’ willingness to participate and may result in misunderstandings when interpreting core academic concepts.

In addition, concerns were raised about students’ critical thinking development. Lecturer 13 noted: *“Some Chinese students... have not been encouraged to develop critical thinking... they are trained to be receptive to what they read and what they are told by their lecturers and not to question it.”* This suggests that students may be more accustomed to knowledge transmission rather than knowledge interrogation. In classroom environments that prioritise analytical dialogue and independent thinking, this receptive mindset may hinder active

participation and critical debate.

The reluctance to question authority or engage in open critique may be misread as disengagement or lack of academic ability. In reality, it reflects different educational conditioning, where questioning the lecturer can be viewed as disrespectful rather than intellectually engaged.

In sum, ideological and epistemological differences between lecturers and Chinese students can pose barriers to effective interaction. Addressing these differences requires not only pedagogical adjustments but also cultural sensitivity to students' educational backgrounds and ways of thinking.

7.6.4 Language barriers and confidence

Research findings show that language remains one of the most significant barriers affecting Chinese students' classroom interaction, particularly in expressing critical thinking and engaging with complex academic concepts. While many Chinese students perform well in reading, writing, and grammar, oral communication and self-confidence often become major obstacles to effective participation.

One major reason for this lies in the exam-oriented nature of English language learning in China. Several lecturers pointed out that Chinese students' language learning is heavily shaped by standardised test preparation, especially for exams like IELTS. As Lecturer 7 noted: *"My Chinese students... have too much of a focus on IELTS preparation... this is at the expense of their oral language skills."* This exam-centric model prioritises accuracy over fluency, resulting in students who are competent in structured tasks but hesitant in spontaneous or interactive settings.

In addition to limited speaking practice, a lack of confidence further restricts students' engagement. Lecturer 13 observed: *"It could be a lack of confidence in their speaking skills..."* while Lecturer 12 added: *"Sometimes they feel they have to be excellent... they'll say, 'my English is not good enough to speak in public.'"* These statements suggest that students may perceive making language errors as a threat to their self-image. As a result, they often refrain from participating, even when they have adequate language proficiency.

Moreover, language difficulties extend beyond oral communication. Lecturer 2 noted: *"Despite many Chinese students having a good command of English, nuances, idiomatic expressions, and complex vocabulary can pose difficulties."* This suggests that deeper engagement with abstract or critical academic content is hindered not by conceptual gaps, but by linguistic barriers, which limit their ability to analyse complex ideas or articulate critical responses.

Another contributing factor is students' reliance on translation technology. Lecturer 11 mentioned: *"Over-reliance on technology such as translators (spoken or even images/documents)."* While such tools may provide short-term assistance, they can also discourage active language development and reduce students' confidence in using English independently.

Furthermore, some lecturers expressed concern that linguistic challenges may mask students' true academic potential. Lecturer 3 reflected: *"Sometimes I am concerned it is to do with language ability, not academic ability."* This distinction is crucial, as it indicates that students' silence or limited participation may reflect communicative limitations rather than cognitive ones.

Importantly, these language issues also affect students' ability to interact meaningfully with lecturers. As Lecturer 13 remarked: *"In order to give me kind of critical feedback... they need to be able to use English quite*

sensitively.” This highlights how even when students wish to engage critically, linguistic insecurity may prevent them from doing so, especially in interactions involving nuanced or evaluative expression.

Consequently, language barriers can reinforce existing power dynamics in intercultural classrooms. In many cases, students already perceive the lecturer as an authority figure, and the added pressure of speaking in a second language may increase their reluctance to participate. As a result, they may remain silent rather than risk embarrassment or misunderstanding. This not only limits interaction but can also lead to emotional frustration, especially when students feel unable to express their views clearly.

Over time, this frustration may evolve into a cycle of self-doubt and withdrawal from classroom communication. When students perceive that their feedback may not be accurately understood or taken seriously due to language issues, they may choose to disengage entirely. Such outcomes can weaken the openness and reciprocity that underpin effective intercultural learning environments.

In summary, language barriers influence far more than surface-level communication. They shape participation, confidence, and lecture–student dynamics. Addressing these challenges requires more than linguistic support. It calls for culturally responsive teaching strategies that build students’ confidence, encourage risk-taking, and foster inclusive dialogue across language differences.

7.6.5 Feedback interpretation creates misunderstandings

The data indicates that Chinese, or more generally non-British, students often

struggle to interpret feedback accurately due to cultural and linguistic differences in communication styles. In British academic settings, feedback is commonly delivered using polite and indirect language intended to encourage students and avoid confrontation. However, many Chinese learners who are unfamiliar with this approach may find the feedback unclear, which can make it difficult to understand the intended message and recognise the seriousness of the comments. Lecturer 12 illustrated this point:

“Here, people in English will be very politically correct, right? So.. even your supervisor... will never tell you something like, ‘you must do this.’ And so sometimes students find that confusing because they think it’s a suggestion.” (L12)

Some lecturers expressed confusion when students did not follow their advice. This pattern, explored in more detail in section 8.2.5, reflects a mismatch in communication expectations between high-context and low-context cultures.

Lecturers are increasingly aware of this cultural gap and have begun adjusting their feedback strategies to promote better understanding. As Lecturer 12 acknowledged: *“That’s something that needs to change for us.”* While efforts to communicate more directly are underway, shifting established communication norms remains a challenge for lecturers, particularly when balancing clarity with cultural sensitivity.

In sum, differing interpretations of politeness and directness in feedback can hinder students’ academic development and highlight the need for clearer, culturally adaptive communication in intercultural classrooms.

7.6.6 Lacking university settings and support

The data suggest that institutional constraints significantly limit the frequency and quality of informal interactions between lecturers and Chinese students. According to the questionnaire results, 46% of lecturers reported “rarely” interacting with students outside the classroom, 23% did so “occasionally”, another 23% “often”, while only 8% selected “never”. Although some degree of engagement exists, out-of-class interaction remains limited.

Several factors contribute to this limitation. While shared academic interests and curiosity about cultural exchange were cited as motivations for interaction, structural barriers played a more decisive role. Many lecturers and students alike cited time constraints, lack of opportunities, and limited social events as major obstacles. Institutional workload pressures were identified as a critical barrier. Lecturer 13 highlighted that *“our workloads are very full and it’s very difficult to find time... to engage with students in a non-classroom environment.”* Despite the clear benefits of informal communication, the intense demands placed on academic staff leave little room for building meaningful connections.

Students’ schedules also posed challenges. As Lecturer 12 noted, students are often *“rushing to another class, or they want to study, relax,”* leaving little time for interaction beyond the classroom. For international students, these pressures may be compounded by the need to adjust to a new linguistic and cultural environment. Thus, the structural rigidity of academic timetables, on both sides, hinders spontaneous or sustained interaction.

Furthermore, institutional support for intercultural engagement is often superficial. Some universities organise peer-sharing meetings or informal lectures, which can offer useful insights. As Lecturer 6 commented, *“My*

institution organizes meetings where lecturers share their experiences and tips... but they're not formal training programmes." While such activities create space for collegial exchange, their informal nature limits their impact. Without structured, culturally targeted training, lecturers may struggle to respond effectively to the specific needs of groups like Chinese students.

The lack of investment in students' broader wellbeing also emerged as a recurring concern. Lecturer 13 noted that universities appear more focused on financial outcomes than on holistic student support: *"I think that the universities are more concerned with the income that the students generate and not so concerned with the wellbeing of the students once they're here."* This institutional prioritisation undermines the creation of inclusive and supportive environments. The absence of tailored extracurricular programmes, cultural integration initiatives, or informal mentoring structures leaves both lecturers and students with limited resources for building trust and rapport.

Moreover, even when lecturers have received formal training in teaching and student psychology, it often lacks cultural specificity. As Lecturer 12 reflected: *"I had modules on teaching and psychology... but nothing on Chinese students."* This gap highlights that while pedagogical training is commonly provided, it often lacks a focus on developing the intercultural competencies essential for navigating the complexities of diverse learning environments. Consequently, many lecturers may lack the preparation needed to navigate cultural differences through approaches that are both educationally sound and culturally attuned.

In summary, while both students and lecturers may be open to engaging beyond the classroom, institutional structures and priorities often create barriers. Heavy workloads reduce the availability of extracurricular activities,

and the absence of targeted intercultural training limits opportunities for meaningful connection. These constraints hinder trust-building and mutual understanding, ultimately affecting the quality of intercultural interaction in higher education.

7.7 Lecturers' Interaction strategies

This section reports lecturers' descriptions of the pedagogical practices they use in intercultural classrooms. It does not seek to evaluate the effectiveness of these practices as outcomes, but instead provides material that informs the recommendations presented in Chapter 9.

7.7.1 Understanding Chinese students' experiences and cultural backgrounds

To address the challenges faced by Chinese students in adapting to intercultural classrooms, many lecturers have adjusted their teaching and interacting strategies. These strategies not only support student learning but also foster a more inclusive and trusting learning environment.

One widely used approach is the creation of open and supportive communication channels. For example:

"I employ several strategies: Encouraging Open Communication, creating an open and supportive classroom environment where students feel comfortable expressing their concerns and asking for clarification." (L2)

This approach helps alleviate students' anxiety, particularly among those who may lack confidence in expressing themselves or fear making mistakes. By positioning themselves as approachable and responsive rather than

authoritative figures, lecturers can better identify students' needs and foster greater engagement.

Another effective strategy involves integrating students' cultural backgrounds into course content. Lecturer 3 noted: *"I have tried to include more non-western (esp. Chinese) examples in my lectures and tutorials."* This practice not only demonstrates respect for students' cultural identities but also increases their sense of belonging. When students see familiar cultural references in the classroom, they are more likely to engage actively and connect the content to their lived experiences. Using culturally relevant examples also promotes deeper understanding and encourages participation, especially in discussions that invite personal or contextual input.

In addition to adjusting teaching content, some lecturers make use of students' linguistic and cultural elements to build rapport and reduce communication barriers. Questionnaire data revealed that three of the thirteen lecturers had some proficiency in Chinese, including one native speaker. These lecturers occasionally incorporated Chinese phrases during interactions with students. As Lecturer 12 explained: *"I chat in English, but sometimes... if I realize everybody in the group is Chinese, then I might say hello, goodbye, thank you in Chinese..."* This small linguistic gesture can have a significant impact, making students feel acknowledged and respected.

When lecturers use students' native languages, even in simple ways, it can create a sense of familiarity and psychological safety. This practice signals a willingness to bridge cultural gaps and strengthens the relational dimension of teaching. For students who feel distant or uncertain in a foreign academic environment, such efforts foster a stronger sense of belonging and boost their confidence in class.

More broadly, incorporating students' cultural and linguistic identities into classroom practices is an effective way to encourage engagement and build trust. When lecturers' express curiosity about and respect for students' cultural backgrounds, they help create a more supportive learning environment and gain deeper insight into students' experiences and challenges.

7.7.2 Introducing activities gradually

A step-by-step approach to classroom interaction has proven effective in engaging Chinese students who may be unfamiliar with group discussions or reluctant to speak due to prior exposure to lecturer-centred learning environments. By beginning with low-pressure, personal communication and progressively moving toward academic dialogue, lecturers help students gradually adapt to new expectations while building confidence. Lecturer 7 illustrated this approach:

“So, I would start by asking the students to talk to their partner, you know, someone sitting behind beside them, right from the very first class. Maybe at the beginning, I would try to make them comfortable by saying and tell your partner three things about yourself or tell your peer, you know, your colleague in class, three things about yourself and learn three things about them. And so I would ask them to feedback to the whole group about each other.” (L7)

Initiating interaction through familiar, non-academic topics helps reduce anxiety and lowers the perceived risk of speaking publicly. This incremental method not only eases students into participation but also fosters peer connection, laying a foundation for deeper classroom engagement. Such strategies are especially important in intercultural settings, where unfamiliarity with interactive learning methods can discourage student participation. When

lecturers scaffold communication in manageable stages, they help establish a supportive environment that enables students to gradually transition from silence to active engagement. This shift is essential for thriving in student-centred educational contexts.

7.7.3 Providing alternative forms of interaction

To address students' hesitation in verbal classroom participation, some lecturers have adopted alternative forms of interaction that reduce real-time pressure while encouraging meaningful engagement. Lecturer 12 shared his experience using delayed-response platforms:

“Whereas in the forum, they have time to think about what they want to say... they can make sure that they have no mistakes... and they can always go back and edit it. The forum is more friendly... I’ve tried other formats where it’s not written but spoken, like Padlet, students can write or record themselves, and they can edit what they record.” (L12)

These delayed-response platforms, whether in the form of written forums or spoken recordings, give students the opportunity to process information, draft responses, and make revisions at their pace. This flexibility helps reduce the anxiety associated with making language errors or struggling to articulate ideas clearly, which is particularly helpful for students who lack confidence in public speaking. By allowing greater control over their output, these platforms enable students to communicate with increased clarity and assurance.

For Chinese students, these flexible formats align well with their communicative preferences and learning habits. Such tools not only provide a lower-stress environment for expression but also offer space to demonstrate

deeper thinking and language proficiency. By accommodating diverse communication styles, these approaches help bridge linguistic and cultural gaps while fostering inclusion.

Moreover, this form of interaction signals the lecturer's sensitivity to students' needs, enhancing the sense of support and trust in the classroom. As students gain confidence through these alternative channels, they are more likely to gradually participate in real-time discussions. Ultimately, incorporating asynchronous and multimodal tools contributes to a more equitable and responsive learning environment, supporting both academic engagement and intercultural adaptation.

7.7.4 Inviting feedback and criticism

Actively inviting students to give feedback or voice criticism has proven to be an effective strategy for reducing the cultural barriers that often inhibit open lecturer–student communication. Lecturer 13 noted:

“Well, I suppose it’s, I’m inviting them to criticise me, or I’m inviting them to give me feedback, constructive feedback. And when they have an invitation, then they’re quite happy to tell me, you know, if they think that I want them to do it, then they’re all there. It’s okay. If they think that I might feel embarrassed or ashamed or, you know, something. If they think it’s gone make me feel bad, then they don’t want to tell me.” (L13)

This deliberate invitation reframes feedback not as a challenge to authority, but as an expected and welcomed part of classroom participation.

In the context of Chinese educational culture, students are typically socialised to show deference to lecturers and avoid direct criticism, especially toward

authority figures. As a result, providing negative feedback may feel uncomfortable or even inappropriate. This cultural norm often leads to silence or non-engagement, which can hinder the development of a responsive and dynamic classroom environment.

However, when lecturers explicitly encourage feedback, they create psychological safety for students, redefining critique as constructive rather than confrontational. As Lecturer 2 emphasised: *“Create an open and supportive classroom environment where students feel comfortable expressing their concerns and asking for clarification.”* Such an environment helps students overcome internalised hesitations and encourages a more participatory classroom culture.

This practice also benefits lecturers, who gain valuable insights into student needs and perceptions. By normalising two-way communication, it enhances mutual understanding and trust. Over time, students begin to engage more critically and confidently, while lecturers are better equipped to adjust their teaching strategies accordingly.

In sum, proactively inviting feedback is both a culturally sensitive and pedagogically effective approach. It empowers students to engage more meaningfully, challenges traditional hierarchical assumptions, and fosters a classroom dynamic rooted in openness, mutual respect, and shared growth. These qualities are essential for effective intercultural teaching.

7.7.5 Emotional support

Lecturers employ a range of strategies to support Chinese students in expressing their ideas more effectively. One such approach is personalised,

one-on-one interaction outside the classroom. For example, Lecturer 6 shared: *“To solve this challenge, I talk to them after class, tell them not to be too nervous in class, and feel free to ask me questions.”* These informal conversations offer students a low-pressure setting to voice concerns and seek clarification without the anxiety of peer judgment. As a result, students are more likely to engage openly and develop trust in the lecturer.

Moreover, lecturers often adapt their communication styles in real time based on students’ classroom responses. When signs of confusion appear, immediate clarification is provided. As Lecturer 10 explained:

“When I see a puzzled look on their faces, I will ask if they understand what I say. ...Then I will choose to explain in more detail, give some examples, and use a translation tool when necessary.” (L10)

This responsiveness not only helps students comprehend the content more thoroughly but also demonstrates the lecturer’s attentiveness and respect for their learning needs.

In addition, some lecturers emphasise the importance of understanding cultural interpretations of silence. Rather than viewing silence as disengagement, they consider it as a potential sign of reflection or cautious participation. Lecturer 5 noted: *“depending on the time available - being explicit in my communication & leading by example - encouraging discussion & appreciating the need for silence/contemplation & viewing it as a tool...”* This perspective is particularly relevant when teaching students from cultures, such as China, where silence may reflect thoughtfulness, politeness, or deference rather than lack of interest.

Building on these experiences, lecturers described how they monitored classroom cues and adjusted their communication accordingly—for example,

by making expectations more explicit, allowing more thinking time, or offering alternative ways to contribute. They felt that these practices helped them create a more inclusive and empathetic classroom atmosphere, and they perceived that this approach could reduce participation pressure and support students' willingness to speak when they were ready.

In sum, lecturers' accounts highlight cultural sensitivity and emotional awareness as important orientations in intercultural teaching, which they associated with improved rapport and communication. By respecting students' emotional positions and responding adaptively, lecturers can effectively bridge communicative gaps and support students' academic and personal development.

7.8 Summary

This chapter presents lecturers' perceptions and accounts of intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL programmes. Questionnaire and interview data reveal several key themes. These themes highlight both the opportunities and challenges within intercultural engagement in higher education.

Academic topics are the core of most lecturer-student interaction. However, non-academic discussions also play an important role. Topics such as cultural adjustment and personal wellbeing help shape the learning experience. Lecturers are seen not only as educators but also as sources of support. They often help students manage cultural transitions. This aligns with Rapport Management's focus on relational harmony, where emotional support enhances students' willingness to engage in TTI framework. It also reflects CMIC's emphasis on adaptation during intercultural transitions.

Cultural communication styles can limit openness. Politeness, avoidance of confrontation, and a preference for private or written expression are common. These habits make mutual understanding more difficult. Such patterns come from students' previous educational experiences. They also reflect deeper cultural values like respect for hierarchy and face. These patterns are consistent with Rapport Management theory, where maintaining face and avoiding conflicts.

Lecturer attributes also affect the quality of interaction. Cultural background, personality, and intercultural competence all matter. Lecturers with more experience, or those who have lived or taught in China, tend to be more understanding. They are better able to recognise students' needs. They often adopt more flexible and empathetic strategies. Building trust, showing language sensitivity, and engaging with students personally can improve the classroom environment. Such responsiveness reflects the emotional support dimension of the TTI model and highlights the role of intercultural sensitivity in effective adjustment, as outlined in CMIC.

Despite these efforts, barriers remain. Institutional workload pressures limit interaction time. Many lecturers lack formal training in intercultural communication. Feedback is often misunderstood due to different expectations. These problems restrict deeper engagement. Student participation is also shaped by background. Socio-economic and academic differences create further challenges.

Lecturers described a range of pedagogical practices they use in response to these perceived challenges. They introduce interactive activities gradually. They use alternative communication tools. They also invite students to give feedback more openly. These approaches help reduce barriers. They build

mutual understanding and rapport. But they also require time, reflection, and strong institutional support. These accounts resonate with instructional support in the TTI model and with CMIC's emphasis on adaptive practices in intercultural engagement.

In sum, these findings reflect not only the practical experiences of lecturers but also their emotional responses and thought processes as they navigate intercultural teaching. By focusing on the lecturers' perspectives, the study highlights how they interpret and adapt to the challenges of working with Chinese students in TESOL programmes. These insights lay the foundation for the next chapter, which will introduce student perspectives. Comparing both viewpoints will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of intercultural interaction, revealing areas of agreement, misunderstanding, and opportunities for improved engagement.

Chapter 8 Discussions

8.1 Introduction to discussion

Previous chapters have presented participants' reflective accounts of intercultural interaction in TESOL contexts, drawing on focus group interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and in-depth interviews with lecturers. These data capture lecturers' and students' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of classroom interaction.

Scotland is treated here as a bounded and pragmatic research site. The study does not aim to draw causal cultural comparisons; rather, the Scottish context provides a specific setting within which participants' perceptions were gathered. Consequently, transferability of the findings should be considered in light of contextual similarities and differences.

This chapter discusses how lecturers and students made sense of intercultural interaction in TESOL classrooms, including the patterns, tensions, and factors they associated with those experiences. Situated within the broader context of intercultural education, it focuses on how participants perceived cultural values, institutional structures, individual traits, and pedagogical environments as relevant to their experiences of classroom interaction.

The central aim of this chapter is to explore the multi-layered and often contradictory ways in which participants described and understood intercultural classroom interaction. It begins with a discussion of the key themes emerging from participants' accounts (Section 8.2). Participants' accounts suggest that interactions which appeared functional or effective on the surface were sometimes also experienced as shaped by cultural misunderstanding, power asymmetry, and forms of marginalisation.

Following this, the chapter considers three broad analytical dimensions in participants' accounts. Section 8.3 discusses how participants described the relationship between national cultural expectations and the culture of the TESOL programme context, including areas of tension, negotiation, and adjustment. Section 8.4 examines how lecturers and students described the use of social strategies within academic environments, including the affective and relational dimensions of interaction. Section 8.5 then considers how participants understood intercultural adaptation as a dynamic, negotiated, and sometimes uneven process.

Throughout this chapter, interaction is discussed not as a neutral exchange of information, but as a socially, culturally, and institutionally embedded practice, as perceived and articulated by participants in their accounts.

8.2 Discussion of key findings

This subsection offers a discussion of the key themes emerging from participants' accounts of lecturer–student intercultural interaction. By comparing both perspectives, the discussion highlights areas of mutual understanding as well as potential misalignments in how lecturers and students interpreted interactional expectations, roles, and meanings. Ten key themes are examined in this subsection, each discussed in relation to previous research to show both similarities and differences.

8.2.1 Complex interactive experiences and feelings

Participants described lecturer–student interaction as complex, emotionally

layered, and shaped by multiple factors. In participants' accounts, lecturer–student interaction was often described as involving contradictions and tensions for many Chinese students in intercultural TESOL programmes (Paterson, 2005). Participants linked this complexity to power distance in lecturer-student relationships (Hofstede, 2001).

Some participants described lecturer–student interaction as relatively optional, with self-study or written tasks sometimes being preferred to participation in discussion. These accounts resonate with previous studies that discuss the relative silence of some Chinese students in Western classroom settings (Choi, 2015; Heng, 2018; Tran, 2013). Students explained that their silence was often linked to high-context communication preferences, in which maintaining harmony was prioritised over direct confrontation or questioning of authority (Hall, 1976; Ting-Toomey, 2005). Students linked this attitude to their previous experiences with lecturer-centred education in China (Nakane, 2007) and to limited confidence in Western classroom interaction styles (Hsieh, 2012). Participants' accounts also suggested that limited confidence in their language skills could intensify these barriers, with silence sometimes being described as a protective response to potential embarrassment. Participants reported that intercultural lecturer-student interaction did not always achieve the openness or mutual understanding often assumed in idealised accounts of intercultural education.

Many students described feeling nervous during interaction, and they often linked this to a reduced willingness to engage. This is consistent with Kalaja and Melo-Pfeifer (2019), who noted that language users' emotional responses shape classroom participation and identity. These emotional struggles were often described as limiting students' willingness to express ideas and

participate actively. Students associated these barriers with cultural expectations around face and respect for authority, which encouraged restrained self-expression. As a result, some participants described classroom interactions as formally polite but lacking the depth or openness they associated with meaningful communication.

As some students adapted to the classroom environment, they described changes in their interaction patterns over time. As their language skills improved and they gained a clearer understanding of classroom expectations, some students reported becoming more willing to overcome anxiety and try different ways of participating. Participants often described this shift as increasing their sense of engagement and enabling more comfortable or meaningful interaction with lecturers. These accounts suggest that accumulated intercultural experience may support the development of greater confidence and intercultural competence (Hammer et al., 2003).

Participants described a common pattern of “surface harmony masking underlying tension.” They linked this pattern to cultural expectations such as collectivism and hierarchical order. Many Chinese students explained that respect for lecturers was often shown by remaining silent and avoiding direct challenges, rather than by asking questions or expressing disagreement. This also reinforces the widespread use and influence of social norms and politeness strategies in intercultural interactions (Brown & Levinson, 1978; Liu, 2020; Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Participants noted that such surface harmony could also conceal emotional suppression and internal tension. This finding aligns with Bulut Albaba (2017), who highlights that institutional and social pressures often override individual innovation and promote conformity, even when alternative pedagogical ideals are present.

While interactions were often described as harmonious on the surface, participants' accounts suggested that they could also involve underlying tension. Some strategies discussed in previous research were also reflected in lecturers' and students' accounts. A supportive classroom environment (Hamre et al., 2013), encouragement from lecturers (Osterman, 2023), and ongoing cultural adaptation (Ward et al., 2020) have all been shown to help reduce emotional barriers and increase students' willingness to engage in interaction. Overall, participants described intercultural lecturer–student interaction as a dynamic and evolving process shaped by adaptation, learning, and emotional adjustment.

In participants' accounts, this “surface harmony” was associated with cultural expectations, language anxiety, identity-related concerns, and teaching structures. While the atmosphere was often described as calm and orderly on the surface, participants also associated it with underlying tension and limits on open communication. Participants suggested that addressing these deeper emotional and cultural challenges could help create more open and inclusive communication in classrooms.

8.2.2 Task-driven academic interactions

In participants' accounts, interaction in TESOL programmes was often organised around academic tasks, including course requirements, assignment discussions, and dissertation guidance. Many scholars have discussed the task-centric nature of lecturer-student interactions. As described by participants, this task-centred model did not always align comfortably with the more relational communication expectations that some Chinese students associated with their prior educational and cultural experience.

While clearly defined tasks may help students master content and improve learning efficiency (Pianta et al., 2008), participants' accounts also pointed to limitations in predominantly task-driven interaction. Some participants felt that it left limited space for expressing personal feelings, thinking processes, or cultural uncertainties. Participants also suggested that task-based exchanges could leave emotional connection underdeveloped.

However, Ippolito (2007) argues that overemphasis on academic achievement overlooks the complexities of intercultural teaching and learning. Participants noted that the task-centred model, while often efficient, may not fully address the emotional and cultural dimensions of interaction in intercultural contexts (Lemke, 2021). In this sense, limited attention to the cultural and affective dimensions of interaction may reduce students' motivation to engage (Salili et al., 2012). This points to a tension between academic achievement and the broader intercultural and relational support that some participants appeared to value, including space to express emotions, adapt, and engage in more relational forms of learning.

In many students' accounts, interaction with lecturers was described as largely functional and oriented towards the completion of academic tasks. This pattern can be interpreted in relation to broader discussions of emotional distance and task-oriented relationships in market-driven higher education (Barnett, 2005). Some Chinese students suggested that this tendency limited interaction to surface-level discussion and made it more difficult for lecturers to recognise underlying challenges such as language anxiety and intercultural adjustment. In participants' accounts, this interactional pattern did not always create space for the complexities of cultural adaptation and emotional struggle to be expressed. When interaction was experienced as focusing mainly on tasks, the classroom could come to feel more transactional, with less room for

intercultural understanding or emotional support. These accounts are consistent with McConachy (2017), who noted that pragmatic interactions can lead students to develop an instrumental understanding of communication.

Participants also described how time constraints and course demands could lead lecturers to focus mainly on student-initiated questions, which was often experienced as reinforcing a more task-oriented and one-way communication pattern. Effective interaction is not only about the transfer of knowledge, but also about relationship building and the co-construction of meaning (Cummings, 2001). Participants suggested that a strongly task-oriented model left insufficient room for relationship-building and co-construction of meaning. Scholars emphasise that in intercultural TESOL programmes, interaction should support not only academic learning but also cultural understanding and students' sense of identity and belonging. This is especially crucial for students from high-context cultures, who are more accustomed to indirect communication and relationship-oriented interaction (Hall, 1976). In participants' accounts, the lack of cultural sensitivity was associated with disengagement. In participants' accounts, this lack of cultural sensitivity was associated with disengagement.

In addition, participants' accounts suggested that task-driven interaction could reinforce the lecturer's discursive dominance within the classroom power structure. This interpretation is also broadly consistent with previous studies suggesting that some Chinese students' behaviour may be influenced by educational traditions that place strong emphasis on lecturer authority in education (Min, 2016; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Wei et al., 2013). Because students often relied on lecturers' explanations and feedback in relation to task criteria, interaction could become narrowed into a more one-way question-and-

answer pattern. This could limit opportunities for students to position themselves as co-constructors of knowledge, and could make it more difficult to move beyond a lecturer-centred interactional model, with possible implications for students' agency and critical thinking (Xhomara, 2022). This reliance on lecturer authority further reinforces the power imbalance within the classroom, preventing students from actively participating in the co-construction of knowledge. Moreover, limited opportunities for negotiated interaction in intercultural classrooms may contribute to cultural misunderstanding and make relationship-building and trust more difficult (Bakhov et al., 2024). Without more negotiated forms of interaction, some students may feel alienated, and lecturers may have fewer opportunities to understand students' learning needs and cultural backgrounds in greater depth. In conclusion, although lecturers and students generally recognised the importance of academic tasks, participants' accounts suggested that task-oriented interaction alone was insufficient for addressing cultural background and emotional need in intercultural classrooms. These accounts point to the value of a more holistic approach to interaction that balances academic tasks with relational and cultural support.

8.2.3 Linguistic and cultural barriers

Participants' accounts suggested that language and cultural barriers were important in shaping their experiences of lecturer–student interaction in this study. Some Chinese students described remaining silent or relying on highly polite forms of expression, which they often associated with limited confidence in English and unfamiliarity with Western teaching models (Heng, 2018; Jin & Cortazzi, 1998; Shi, 2006). Participants' accounts can be read in relation to

Hofstede's concept of power distance, particularly in how respect and deference to authority were described.

Consistent with previous scholarship, participants' accounts suggested that language barriers could contribute to some Chinese students feeling marginalised. Participants often associated this sense of marginalisation with lower academic self-efficacy and reduced willingness to participate in classroom interaction (Brown et al., 1987; Kim, 2001). Even with language skills, students often lack confidence in speaking. This supports Liu (2006)'s view that perceived competence can be as influential as actual competence in shaping intercultural communication. This underscores the importance of perceived competence, which may be influenced not only by language proficiency but also by cultural expectations regarding self-expression and authority in the classroom.

This pattern is consistent with Hofstede's concept of power distance (Hofstede, 2001). The cultural expectations of maintaining respect and deference to authority create a unique challenge in intercultural classroom settings, where students may feel compelled to silence their thoughts in order to maintain face and preserve interpersonal harmony. In lecturers' accounts, students' politeness and silence were often interpreted as masking underlying issues, with these expressions being understood in relation to face-saving strategies (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). This face-saving strategy can be understood through Spencer-Oatey's (2008) Rapport Management Theory. Lecturers generally understood that differences in interaction styles were shaped by students' cultural backgrounds. Participants suggested the need for greater cultural sensitivity to foster meaningful interaction. As discussed in section 7.6.5, this issue makes it difficult for lecturers to obtain authentic feedback and a deeper understanding of students' learning needs. This interpretation is also

consistent with Spencer-Oatey (2008), who argues that misalignment in communicative styles and expectations may disrupt the balance between rights, obligations, and interpersonal harmony. Moreover, this mode of interaction increases the psychological distance and sense of separation between lecturers and students. Indirect communication and face-saving strategies can create psychological distance, making students feel disconnected and less willing to engage in open discourse. Participants' accounts also suggested that social norms could reinforce unequal power dynamics, with some students describing greater fear when engaging with lecturers and more formal, less accessible patterns of interaction (Brown et al., 1987; Kim, 2001).

In summary, students' silence and excessive politeness, aimed at maintaining harmony, often hindered meaningful participation and contributed to feelings of marginalisation and reduced self-efficacy. Lecturers, while aware of these cultural values, still faced challenges in addressing students' learning needs.

8.2.4 Different expectations about interaction

While task-oriented interactions dominated lecturer-student exchanges according to participants' accounts, students and lecturers reported differing expectations regarding the content and goals of these interactions. Chinese international students expressed a strong need for emotional support and guidance beyond academic matters. They reported wanting lecturers to provide advice on adapting to Western culture and building social connections (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2001). Many students perceived lecturers as both academic guides and cultural mentors, especially since the lecturer was often the most familiar local figure in their new environment. This expectation

highlights the broader concept of "role ambiguity" in intercultural interactions (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), where students expect lecturers to play a role that goes beyond just teaching academic content to also providing emotional support and guidance in adjusting to a new culture. This perception aligns with previous studies on the social support expectations of Chinese international students (Brunsting et al., 2021; Sameroff, 2013).

In contrast, TESOL lecturers reported prioritising academic discussion and knowledge transfer in their interactions with students. They emphasised guiding students toward rigorous academic thinking and critical engagement. Several lecturers explained that maintaining professional boundaries and focusing on their pedagogical responsibilities meant that providing personal or emotional support fell outside their role. Instead, they viewed such support as the responsibility of dedicated student services or other specialised units.

Participants' accounts thus revealed notable differences in how Chinese international students and TESOL lecturers perceived the roles and purposes of lecturer-student interactions. Chinese students frequently described intercultural and emotional support as essential to both their academic and personal development. Lecturers, however, tended to see students primarily through an academic lens. This contrast in perceptions points to differing understandings of lecturer-student relationships in the multicultural classroom setting.

8.2.5 Different interpretations of expressions and feedback

Chinese international students reported that they often expressed their ideas indirectly in classroom interactions, drawing on cultural norms such as face-saving (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017). Many participants described maintaining

harmony and showing respect for authority as more important than directness and confrontation (Brown & Levinson, 1978; Hofstede, 2001). They also reported disclosing their true thoughts more openly in private settings with lecturers, while remaining very cautious in public or formal classroom situations. Students explained that this dual approach helped them preserve harmony and avoid conflict (Hofstede, 2001).

In contrast, TESOL lecturers reported viewing feedback primarily as a tool to improve teaching and classroom dynamics. They expected direct feedback from students and emphasised that open communication helped them understand students' confusion and adjust their teaching accordingly (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001).

Participants' accounts pointed to clear differences in how the two groups interpreted feedback and indirectness. Chinese students explained that their indirect style helped preserve face and maintain harmony, while lecturers reported that such indirectness sometimes made it difficult to identify students' real challenges. Several lecturers noted that direct feedback was intended as constructive guidance, yet some Chinese students perceived it as judgmental or critical. Students frequently described feeling reluctant to question authority figures openly due to high power distance. These differing interpretations of feedback and communication styles sometimes resulted in discomfort or misunderstanding between lecturers and students (Liu et al., 2010).

A further example reported in Section 7.6.5 illustrates this complexity. One lecturer described giving polite advice that was intended as clear guidance, yet some students interpreted it as optional rather than obligatory. Participants noted that lecturers sometimes softened their feedback using indirect strategies. Chinese students explained that, based on their high-context and

high-power distance background, they tended to treat such indirect suggestions as flexible choices rather than firm instructions.

Participants described how these differences in interpretation sometimes led to frustration on both sides. Students reported believing they had been given choices, while lecturers expected students to treat the suggestions as instructions. Many participants noted that intercultural classrooms involved ongoing adjustments by both lecturers and students according to context, relational goals, and their perceptions of appropriate behaviour.

Participants suggested that promoting mutual understanding requires more than simply exchanging feedback; it also involves openly discussing how each side interprets interactions and addressing underlying assumptions. Some participants noted that without such clarification, attempts to encourage engagement could sometimes result in more cautious and shallower discussions.

8.2.6 Different focus on intercultural interaction strategies

In interviews, many Chinese international students described the self-adaptation strategies they used to overcome language barriers, cultural differences, and adjustment to the new academic environment. They reported exercising considerable autonomy in adapting, often compensating for gaps in language, knowledge, and cultural understanding by relying on personal initiative. Several students linked this approach to the importance of personal responsibility. In contrast, some participants noted that students from more collectivist cultural backgrounds tended to seek greater relational support and community-based learning. Students also explained that their reluctance to openly express difficulties or confront authority was closely related to the

cultural concept of 'face' (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). This perception sometimes limited the depth of lecturer-student interaction.

TESOL lecturers, on the other hand, reported focusing more on external factors such as course design and classroom management. They emphasised their role in creating a participatory learning environment to support students' adaptation. Participants' accounts revealed differences in how lecturers and students perceived their respective roles and responsibilities in the adaptation process. Some lecturers and students referred to the influence of Western-centric pedagogical models, which they felt often expected international students to adapt to existing norms rather than adjusting those norms to better accommodate diverse cultural backgrounds (Joseph Mbembe, 2016). Students frequently described themselves as the primary agents responsible for adaptation through self-regulation, while lecturers saw themselves mainly as facilitators providing external guidance. Participants' accounts suggested that, although both lecturers and students made intercultural efforts, adaptation strategies often remained oriented towards Western communicative and pedagogical norms. Within this pattern, students were more often described as relying on self-regulation, while lecturers positioned themselves mainly as facilitators of the process.

Participants further noted that when lecturers and students held differing expectations and interaction styles, classroom interactions sometimes became more one-sided. Lecturers described leading most discussions, while some Chinese students reported adopting a more passive role, particularly when they felt constrained by high power distance. Even when course content was thoughtfully designed, a lack of shared understanding of students' adaptation processes could limit deeper engagement. Students explained that they sometimes remained silent or participated only superficially when they

found it difficult to express themselves in ways that aligned with their cultural norms. Several participants observed that misalignment in communication goals and styles occasionally led to reduced interaction depth and challenges in building trust and rapport (Spencer-Oatey, 2008).

Cultural and educational differences also appeared in participants' accounts of role expectations. As noted by (Cai, 2023), pedagogical interactions in Western systems tend to emphasise cognitive development through discussion, whereas in some Eastern educational traditions, students often approach learning through self-management. Participants suggested that failure to recognise and reconcile these differences could contribute to misunderstandings and reduced balance in classroom interactions. Some students described feeling unseen or misunderstood when their adaptation approaches were not fully acknowledged.

8.2.7 Amplified power dynamics in an intercultural context

Chinese international students reported perceiving unequal power relations between lecturers and students, which they attributed to both cultural and institutional backgrounds. Many participants linked this perception to the concept of power distance (Hofstede, 2001) and to the hierarchical dynamics discussed in Section 2.6.3. Students explained that this power imbalance felt more pronounced in the intercultural setting, where they had to navigate their own cultural expectations of hierarchy alongside Western expectations of more egalitarian lecturer-student relationships. They described how fear of losing face or offending the lecturer often led them to remain silent or express ideas indirectly. Participants noted that these cultural differences sometimes placed additional constraints on their willingness to speak openly, leaving them feeling

caught between their familiar indirect style and the directness expected in the Western academic context.

In addition, students reported that the predominantly one-way teaching mode reinforced their passive learning habits. They explained that the limited space to question or express dissent made classroom interactions feel more formal and less substantive. Some participants noted that this lack of active engagement affected their opportunities to develop critical thinking, academic agency, and intercultural academic identities (Ryan & Viete, 2009).

Participants noted that hierarchical power dynamics and cultural communication norms constrained the depth and authenticity of classroom interactions. They explained that the power distance between lecturers and students, combined with cultural expectations around authority and face, sometimes made it difficult for Chinese students to assert their voices in more egalitarian settings. One-way teaching reinforced passive learning habits. These factors often resulted in shallower interactions, in which students felt less able to express their ideas fully, and lecturers received less genuine feedback.

8.2.8 Ideological concept and social norms impact

Participants reported that interactions between lecturers and Chinese students in TESOL programmes were shaped by differing ideological assumptions and socially constructed views of knowledge. In courses addressing topics such as democracy, capitalism, and globalisation, both lecturers and students noted clear ideological undertones in academic discussions. Chinese international students described approaching these topics with assumptions shaped by their national education systems, which emphasised respect for authority and social

stability rather than personal autonomy and critique.

Lecturers and some students referred to Western higher education as being closely associated with liberal humanist values that emphasise personal autonomy, critical thinking, and the questioning of dominant ideologies (Barnett, 1997). They described classrooms as spaces for open debate, where knowledge is constantly challenged and reinterpreted. In contrast, Chinese international students explained that their previous educational experiences in China were often framed by national values, social stability, and respect for lecturers (Bush & Haiyan, 2000). Participants noted that, as a result, they sometimes responded to sensitive or politically charged topics from the standpoint of national identity, pragmatism, or respect for authority rather than through direct critique. Several students reported protecting their cultural and national identity during such discussions, which contributed to more reserved engagement.

When lecturers invited students to challenge concepts such as neoliberalism or to reflect on state power, some Chinese students reported feeling uncomfortable or confused. Participants attributed this discomfort to conflicts between their personal experiences, belief systems, and the critical frameworks presented in class. Students described experiencing a sense of tension when navigating their national upbringing alongside Western expectations of critique. They explained that ideological discussions sometimes intensified existing power dynamics because cultural expectations around authority and respect made open critique feel like a challenge to both the lecturer and their own cultural values. Several participants noted that resisting or limiting engagement served as a way to protect their cultural identity and values. Some students expressed concern that openly criticising national ideology in front of peers might threaten their sense of self-identity,

especially within collectivist cultural contexts that prioritise social harmony and group identity. Lecturers occasionally overlooked subtle forms of student expression, such as storytelling, personal reflection, or indirect responses. Students suggested that their indirect style, which helped preserve face and avoid confrontation, was sometimes misinterpreted as passive participation rather than thoughtful engagement.

8.2.9 Institution support

Participants reported that universities offered various services to support intercultural adjustment. These included psychological counselling, academic assistance, and cultural activities. However, Chinese international students and some lecturers noted that these services often felt marginal, fragmented, or superficial. They explained that the services were rarely integrated into a complete support system. As a result, the services did not fully address the challenges students faced in building meaningful lecturer-student interactions. Participants also observed that these services did little to reduce perceived power imbalances or communication barriers caused by cultural differences.

In current TESOL programmes, both lecturers and students described the course schedules as highly intensive and rigid. Participants explained that this left limited time or space for interaction outside the classroom. Lecturer-student interaction, therefore, depended mainly on classroom tasks. Students and lecturers reported that this task-oriented approach weakened the social and emotional aspects of interaction. It made it more difficult to build cultural understanding, trust, or emotional support. Some Chinese students noted that this was especially challenging for those from high-context cultures. They valued relational support in their learning.

Participants described university support for international students as symbolic or inconsistent. Although services such as language tutoring, writing centres, and counselling were available, many Chinese students reported difficulties in accessing them. They mentioned unclear information, complicated procedures, and cultural barriers as the main reasons. Students explained that they were often unfamiliar with institutional systems. They also hesitated to seek help because of cultural norms around face-saving. These factors prevented them from using the available resources fully.

Many lecturers received training in pedagogy and counselling. However, participants noted that this training rarely included knowledge of specific cultural contexts or intercultural interaction strategies. Students and lecturers suggested that this gap limited lecturers' ability to understand students' cultural backgrounds. Some participants observed that the training still reflected mainly Western-centric teaching standards. Lecturers continued to be viewed as transmitters of knowledge. They were rarely seen as active partners in building understanding with students. According to participants, this kept intercultural lecturer-student interaction as a secondary element rather than a core part of education.

Lecturers raised a further concern about the growing influence of market logic in university policies. Several lecturers observed that institutions often focused more on the economic value of international students than on their educational well-being. Participants suggested that this market-oriented approach risked making lecturer-student interaction purely functional. The relationship often became limited to task completion and academic supervision. Students reported that the interaction felt transactional. There was little room for emotional connection or deeper cultural understanding.

8.2.10 Experiential background and personalities

Participants reported that students' personality traits and previous educational and social experiences influenced their learning and interaction with lecturers. Students explained that they were shaped by their personal traits as well as their cultural upbringing and educational background. They noted that these internal and external factors affected their ability to establish effective interaction with lecturers.

Chinese international students described how extroversion, language fluency, study abroad experience, or multicultural upbringing gave some students an advantage. These traits helped them engage more easily in the UK TESOL programmes, which emphasise autonomy, critical thinking, and active participation. In contrast, students who were more introverted or had been educated in a test-oriented system often remained passive in class. They reported that their ways of expressing ideas were sometimes misunderstood by lecturers or interpreted as a lack of participation (Lawrence, 2015; Wilson et al., 2013).

Participants observed that these differences in background and personality created unequal participation in the classroom. Students who were familiar with Western cultural norms and educational structures found it easier to build relationships with lecturers and express their ideas. Students from collectivist or high-context cultures sometimes struggled to participate in environments that valued individualism and open interaction (Gerhards & Hans, 2013).

Personality and previous experience also affected students' ability to build relationships with lecturers and to develop their own identities in the intercultural context. Introverted students or those with limited intercultural

exposure reported difficulty in asserting themselves. They described feelings of alienation and heightened anxiety about navigating intercultural interactions. Some students explained that they lacked effective coping strategies and often remained silent in class. Participants noted that this silence was frequently seen as a personality issue rather than a result of structural or cultural factors.

Lecturers also commented on how students' personalities and backgrounds influenced the quality of interaction. Some experienced lecturers reported that they tried to adapt their interaction strategies according to students' behaviour. However, most lecturers noted that they had not received systematic intercultural training. They lacked clear guidance on how to interpret and respond to different student behaviours. Participants suggested that more training in cultural competence would help lecturers support students better and create more inclusive learning environments.

8.2.11 Summary

This subsection has explored ten interrelated themes in intercultural interaction between lecturers and Chinese students in TESOL programmes. The analysis drew on the perspectives of both lecturers and students. These themes included emotional responses, task demands, linguistic and cultural barriers, differing expectations, institutional structures, ideological influences, and individual backgrounds.

Participants' accounts showed that intercultural lecturer-student interaction is a complex process. It is shaped by the interplay of cultural values, communicative norms, power relations, educational traditions, and personal experiences. Previous studies often described Chinese students' silence, indirectness, and caution as fixed cultural behaviours. However, students in

this study reported that these responses were also linked to emotional pressure, linguistic insecurity, identity concerns, and uncertainty about classroom expectations. Interactional difficulties, therefore, need to be understood within a broader intercultural and institutional context rather than as simple cultural traits.

A key pattern that emerged was the tension between academic purposes and relational needs. Both lecturers and students recognised the importance of academic tasks. Yet their expectations of interaction were not always the same. Lecturers tended to focus on knowledge transfer, academic guidance, and professional boundaries. Chinese students often hoped that interaction would also offer emotional support, intercultural guidance, and a stronger sense of connection. As a result, interaction frequently remained functional and task-driven rather than deeply relational or intercultural.

Linguistic and cultural barriers continued to play a central role. Even when students had sufficient language proficiency, they sometimes hesitated to speak because of low perceived competence, fear of negative evaluation, or different ideas about politeness, authority, and classroom behaviour. Differences in how lecturers and students interpreted expressions, politeness, and feedback also created misunderstandings. These misunderstandings arose not only from language but also from differing assumptions about face, roles, obligations, and communicative intent.

Another clear finding was the unequal demands for adaptation. Students were often expected to adjust to Western academic norms such as direct expression, active participation, and critical engagement. Lecturers, by contrast, focused more on course design and classroom management. Participants noted that the burden of adaptation fell mainly on students. Intercultural interaction in

TESOL programmes, therefore, continued to operate largely within Western communicative and educational norms.

Power relations also remained prominent in lecturer-student interaction and sometimes felt stronger in intercultural settings. Chinese students often viewed the classroom as a hierarchical space where lecturers held authority. They therefore remained cautious. Ideological assumptions, institutional practices, and market-oriented logics further shaped how interaction was experienced. Support systems existed, but participants described them as fragmented and not always responsive to students' emotional and intercultural needs. Interaction was thus influenced by both individual behaviour and wider institutional structures.

Finally, personality traits and previous experiences played a role in interaction. Students who were more confident, linguistically fluent, or familiar with multicultural environments adapted more easily. Students who were more introverted or came from exam-oriented systems sometimes found it harder to participate. Participants suggested that these differences should be seen in relation to broader inequalities in cultural capital, social expectations, and institutional support rather than as purely personal limitations.

Taken together, the findings in this section provide a clearer picture of intercultural lecturer-student interaction in TESOL higher education. They show that such interaction is not only a communicative practice. It is also a space where issues of power, identity, inclusion, adaptation, and educational values are negotiated. Both lecturers and students experienced challenges, but these challenges were not shared equally. Chinese students often carried a greater burden in navigating unfamiliar linguistic, cultural, and institutional expectations.

8.3 Perceived Interaction Contexts in TESOL

This section builds on the findings presented in Section 8.2. It shifts the focus from specific interactional patterns and tensions to the broader cultural contexts that shape these patterns. Participants' accounts showed that intercultural lecturer-student interaction was influenced by both national cultural orientations and the cultural norms that emerged within the TESOL programme. This section, therefore, explores how lecturers and students understood their interactional experiences through the combined influence of their broader cultural backgrounds and the small culture developing in the TESOL environment.

It is important to clarify one point about the research setting. The Scottish context of this study was chosen for practical reasons. These reasons included access to participants, institutional affiliation, and ease of recruitment. The Scottish setting was not selected for analytical comparison with other national contexts. References to national culture in this section, therefore, reflect participants' own interpretations and meaning-making processes. They do not represent claims about objectively distinctive Scottish cultural patterns. The analytical focus remains on how lecturers and students perceived and negotiated cultural influences within their immediate TESOL classroom environments.

8.3.1 Perceived national cultural influences on interaction in TESOL

This subsection explores how participants perceived the role of national cultural dimensions in shaping intercultural interaction in TESOL programmes.

The analysis draws on the theoretical frameworks presented in Section 3.2 and the literature reviewed in Section 2.5.2 as sensitising lenses. Participants' accounts showed that lecturer-student interaction was not experienced as culturally neutral. Instead, it was influenced by differing assumptions about communication, authority, participation, and appropriate classroom behaviour.

First, the findings align with previous studies (Heng, 2018; Tran, 2013) that identify silence as a common behaviour among Chinese students in international classrooms. Many participants explained that silence served as a culturally situated strategy. It reflected values such as face-saving, group harmony, and respect for authority (Min, 2016; Ward et al., 2020). Students reported that they preferred to communicate with lecturers privately rather than speak during class. Lecturers acknowledged that these patterns were often shaped by cultural background. However, Western lecturers sometimes misunderstood them as a lack of interest or engagement (Cheng, 2000; McMahon, 2011). Participants noted that these behaviours were meaningful within the Chinese high-context communication style (Hall, 1976; Ting-Toomey, 2005).

At the same time, many lecturers reported that they expected students to speak up in class. They viewed verbal participation as a key sign of engagement. This expectation reflected cultural preferences for direct and individual expression. Such preferences are common in individualistic and egalitarian societies (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 2006).

The findings also showed that language anxiety remained a significant barrier to interaction. Several students reported concerns about their English proficiency. They feared losing face if they made mistakes. This fear further reinforced their tendency to remain silent. These experiences echo earlier

studies on the intersection of language barriers and power dynamics (Heng, 2018; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006).

In addition, some Chinese students actively engaged with lecturers after class. They also demonstrated strong academic performance in written work and assessments. These observations nuance the stereotype of Chinese students as passive learners (Ryan & Louie, 2007; Zhu & O'Sullivan, 2022). Participants explained that students' engagement often took alternative forms. These findings suggest that intercultural interaction styles need to be interpreted in relation to differences in power distance and high- or low-context communication preferences.

Lecturers' interaction styles were not fixed. For instance, some lecturers became more informal and approachable during office hours. Participants described intercultural interaction as a two-way adaptive process. Both students and lecturers adjusted their behaviours according to relational cues, perceived roles, and institutional expectations (Holliday, 1999).

Overall, participants confirmed that both student and lecturer behaviours were shaped by national cultural frameworks. These behaviours were often interpreted through different cultural lenses, which led to mismatched expectations. Factors such as high- and low-context communication styles, power distance, individualism versus collectivism, and face-saving norms played a significant role in lecturer-student interactions. This supports the arguments of Marginson (2022) and Phipps (2019), who emphasise that intercultural competence must be understood in relation to structural and contextual factors. The study highlights the importance of recognising national culture while also encouraging mutual awareness and flexible pedagogy in culturally diverse settings.

However, national culture alone does not fully explain the variation and flexibility observed in participants' interactional behaviour. To understand how these behaviours were reshaped within the immediate TESOL setting, it is necessary to consider the dynamic role of classroom culture.

8.3.2 The dynamic role of classroom culture

National cultural frameworks help explain some recurring interactional tendencies. However, they do not fully account for the context-specific shifts observed in this study. Participants' accounts can be interpreted in ways that support Holliday (1999)'s concept of "small culture." This theory emphasises that culture emerges not only from nationality but also from local, contextualised practices within specific educational settings. The intercultural TESOL programme in this research showed how classroom cultures were co-constructed through everyday interactions between Chinese students and lecturers.

These small cultures were shaped by broader national cultural values such as collectivism and power distance. At the same time, they were more dynamic and responsive to the immediate social and educational context. Participants noted that student learning behaviours were not static. They evolved in response to contextual cues, teaching styles, and interpersonal relationships. For instance, students who were initially silent in large lectures became more expressive in smaller group settings. This finding aligns with Watkins (2012), who argues against the homogenisation of "Chinese learners" and emphasises diversity within cultural groups. Students in this study showed greater willingness to express opinions and share personal experiences when the teaching environment became more informal and student-centred.

The findings also build on earlier research (Pianta, 2017; Wright et al., 2019). They show that academic small cultures can serve as meaningful spaces for intercultural development, relationship building, and identity negotiation. However, the impact of these small cultures was often limited by institutional structures and entrenched cultural habits. Even when lecturers tried to encourage openness and dialogue, students sometimes continued to hold back. This happened due to the pressure of assessments or culturally ingrained patterns of behaviour. These observations support Phipps (2019) argument that intercultural dialogue often faces difficulties when students from non-dominant cultures are expected to adapt without reciprocal understanding or support.

In conclusion, the study shows the importance of situational and contextual cultures in shaping lecturer-student interactions in TESOL programmes. These cultures are not fixed or predetermined. They are continually formed through the specific teaching environment, classroom practices, and patterns of communication. Interaction styles and student engagement shifted according to the design of the classroom setting, the lecturer's approach, and the relational atmosphere. TESOL programmes, therefore, developed their own localised interactional norms. These norms influenced how both students and lecturers participated. Efforts to create more open and inclusive settings did encourage student voice. However, the effects of contextual culture were still shaped by institutional structures and habitual teaching routines. The research indicates that TESOL programmes are shaped by local practices and classroom norms, while still being influenced by national culture.

Taken together, the findings suggest that lecturer-student interaction in TESOL cannot be understood solely through national culture or contextual classroom culture in isolation. The next subsection, therefore, considers how these two

layers of culture interact, overlap, and sometimes generate tension within intercultural teaching and learning.

8.3.3 Tension and integration of national cultures and TESOL context cultures

This study shows that intercultural TESOL programmes are shaped by the ongoing interaction between national culture and the situational culture specific to the TESOL environment. These two dimensions influence classroom norms, communication styles, and the emotional and intellectual dynamics of teaching and learning. National cultural values such as power distance, collectivism, and sensitivity to face continued to affect how students perceived authority, how they chose to communicate, and how comfortable they felt participating. These values often encouraged respect for authority and caution in public expression (Hofstede, 2001; Min, 2016). In this study, many Chinese students remained quiet in formal classroom settings. This was especially true during whole-class discussions or when lecturers were perceived as having strong authority. This finding is consistent with previous research (Heng, 2018; T. Jackson, 2002; Tran, 2013).

However, the classroom did not simply reflect national cultural patterns. Following Holliday (1999)'s concept of small culture, the classroom served as a space where cultural meanings were constantly negotiated. Participants reported that in less formal settings, such as tutorials, peer group work, or conversations after class, students became more willing to participate, ask questions, and share personal experiences. These moments of informal interaction helped form a flexible and evolving classroom culture. This culture was shaped by both the institutional context and the interpersonal relationships

between lecturers and students.

This classroom culture did not oppose national culture. Instead, it adapted and reshaped it. As Gieve and Clark (2005) argue, learning behaviours are not fixed traits. They develop in response to teaching practices and classroom norms. The Chinese students in this study did not simply adopt Western norms of communication. They adjusted their behaviours according to the situation. For example, some students preferred to explore their ideas in small group work before speaking in the larger classroom. Others chose to express disagreement through written feedback rather than direct discussion. These examples illustrate what Watkins (2012) describes as contextual learning flexibility. Students shifted between different cultural approaches depending on the setting and interaction style.

The findings also suggest that the blending of national and situational cultures sometimes produced new forms of misunderstanding. For instance, when lecturers used softened or indirect expressions to appear polite, students occasionally interpreted these as optional rather than instructional. This misalignment created a hybrid communication environment. In this environment, the usual association of Western pedagogy with low-context and low power distance interaction did not always hold. Both students and lecturers sometimes shifted between cultural codes depending on the context. This led to moments of unintended ambiguity.

Furthermore, the construction of classroom culture was often unequal. It placed a greater burden of adaptation on students than on lecturers. Although lecturers designed activities intended to be inclusive, the responsibility for adjusting to unfamiliar norms, such as open critique or assertive participation, fell more heavily on students from non-dominant cultural backgrounds. These

observations support Phipps (2019) argument that implicit power imbalances shape intercultural interaction. Marginson (2022) also points out that intercultural competence is often viewed as an individual challenge rather than a shared institutional responsibility.

Lecturers' reflexivity and cultural sensitivity played an important role in shaping inclusive classroom environments. Lecturers who recognised their own cultural positions and adopted responsive teaching strategies created safer spaces for students to engage. These strategies included demonstrating openness, affirming diverse participation styles, and using flexible assessment methods. This supports the findings of Pianta (2017) and Wright et al. (2019), which emphasise that teaching approaches and classroom structure are key to enabling mutual dialogue.

At the same time, these pedagogical practices helped address the tension between national cultural values and the situational norms of the TESOL programme. National cultures influenced how students communicated, their comfort with participation, and their perceptions of authority. In contrast, the TESOL programme introduced expectations for active involvement, critical discussion, and open exchange of ideas. These two cultural forces did not always align and often created moments of friction. However, when both students and lecturers recognised these influences and made conscious efforts to bridge them, the classroom became a more integrated and relational space.

In conclusion, the study shows that the ongoing interplay between broader national cultural values and the situational dynamics of the TESOL learning environment shapes intercultural TESOL programmes. National culture continued to influence how students perceived authority and chose to

participate. At the same time, the classroom operated as a space of negotiation, adaptation, and identity formation. These findings confirm that lecturer-student interaction is not merely a transfer of knowledge. It is a culturally embedded and evolving process. Recognising the dual influence of national and situational culture allows for a more nuanced understanding of intercultural engagement. This perspective highlights the importance of fostering environments in which lecturers and students can work together to shape classroom culture.

8.4 Perceived interactional practices in TESOL programmes

The previous section examined broader cultural and contextual influences on lecturer-student interaction. This section focuses on how participants described interactional practices within TESOL programmes. The findings showed that lecturer-student interaction involved both relationship management behaviours and academic-purpose interactional practices. These two dimensions often became closely interconnected in the TESOL context.

8.4.1 Relation management behaviour in lecturer-student interactions

This study showed that relationship management strategies played a crucial role in shaping intercultural interactions between lecturers and Chinese students in TESOL programmes. Drawing on Spencer-Oatey (2008)'s rapport management theory, the findings indicated that successful interaction depended not only on language ability but also on the negotiation of face needs, interactional goals, and sociality rights and obligations. These elements were

especially important in classrooms where differences in power, cultural expectations, and communication styles were present.

Both lecturers and students actively employed relationship-management strategies to navigate intercultural challenges. Lecturers often adapted their communication style to accommodate students' concerns about face and hierarchy. They used strategies such as personalised encouragement, indirect questioning, and allowing wait time after asking questions. These approaches helped reduce pressure on students and created a more supportive learning environment. Some lecturers also explicitly acknowledged cultural diversity in class. This signalled openness and respect for students' backgrounds.

Students used their own relationship management strategies. Many chose to express agreement through non-verbal cues or indirect comments. Some preferred to use written communication when expressing disagreement. These strategies allowed them to maintain respectful relationships with lecturers while still participating in classroom discourse. Students also selectively approached lecturers after class for clarification or feedback. This helped them avoid potential face-threatening situations in front of peers.

Interactions outside the classroom offered additional spaces for rapport-building. These included informal chats, small group activities, and social events. In these low-pressure environments, both lecturers and students could establish mutual understanding and trust. As students felt more comfortable, they became more willing to engage in classroom discussions and take academic risks.

The findings confirmed that effective relationship management required cultural awareness. Lecturers who showed intercultural sensitivity and flexibility were better able to interpret student behaviour and respond

appropriately. Rather than viewing silence or indirectness as a lack of motivation, these lecturers recognised such behaviour as culturally shaped. They responded with empathy and adjusted their pedagogical approach.

However, the responsibility for maintaining rapport was often unevenly distributed. Students were generally expected to adapt more to dominant classroom norms, such as open critique or direct participation. This supports Phipps (2019) argument that intercultural interaction often involves implicit power imbalances. Students from non-dominant cultural backgrounds faced greater adjustment demands.

Overall, relation management was an active, two-way process. Both lecturers and students used intentional strategies to maintain positive relationships, manage face concerns, and achieve interactional goals. When applied with cultural awareness, these strategies enhanced trust, improved classroom engagement, and supported meaningful intercultural communication in TESOL settings.

8.4.2 Academic purposes in lecturer-student interaction

The findings showed that interactions between lecturers and Chinese students in TESOL programmes were mainly focused on academic tasks. These tasks included course discussions, assignment feedback, dissertation supervision, and content clarification. Such task-oriented exchanges helped achieve teaching goals. They aligned with the “instructional support” domain in Pianta (2017) Teaching Through Interactions (TTI) model. This domain includes structuring content, scaffolding understanding, and fostering engagement. Lecturers used question-and-answer formats, written annotations, and personalised guidance. These practices provided cognitive support that helped

students improve their comprehension and academic performance (Pianta et al., 2008).

However, a purely task-driven approach had limitations in the intercultural context. Structured interactions supported cognitive engagement but often neglected the emotional side of learning. This was especially important for students from high-context, face-oriented cultures such as China (Hall, 1976; Ting-Toomey, 2005). Several students reported that academic feedback was helpful. Yet they hesitated to ask follow-up questions or admit confusion. They feared losing face or appearing incompetent. This finding supports previous research by Anderson (2018) and T. Jackson (2002). These studies showed that intercultural misunderstandings often arose from mismatched expectations around communication styles and relational norms.

Participants' accounts suggested that lecturers who combined academic guidance with emotional support were better able to create classrooms experienced as safer and more supportive. They used warm encouragement, humour, empathetic listening, and informal check-ins. These strategies aligned with the emotional support dimension of the TTI model. This dimension includes regard for student perspectives and sensitivity to students' needs (Pianta et al., 2008). Students reported that such emotional support reduced their anxiety about authority and public speaking. It made them more willing to participate in class discussions. Research by Rubie-Davies et al. (2015) and Baeva and Bordovskaia (2015) also suggests that positive emotional interactions increase students' confidence and motivation.

In addition, some lecturers used culturally responsive teaching techniques. These included icebreaker games, group-based reflection tasks, and opportunities for anonymous expression. These strategies helped Chinese

students express their opinions more comfortably. They aligned with Gieve and Clark (2005)'s emphasis on contextual responsiveness. They also supported McGrath and Van Bergen (2015) claim that affective connection is particularly important for international students in unfamiliar academic environments. When lecturers were aware of students' cultural communication preferences, such as indirectness or hesitation, they could design interaction formats that encouraged participation without forcing students into unfamiliar modes of expression.

The findings indicated that emotional support was not just a "soft" addition to teaching. When combined with cognitive scaffolding, it changed academic engagement from simple compliance to more relational participation. This echoes Fecho (2011)'s idea that student voice can only flourish in emotionally safe spaces. Relationship-oriented interactions also helped lecturers notice subtle signs of withdrawal, confusion, or distress. These signs were often invisible in purely task-focused exchanges. These blended practices, therefore, bridged the divide between cognitive and affective pedagogies and supported deeper intercultural engagement.

Overall, lecturer-student interactions in intercultural TESOL programmes were primarily guided by academic purposes. These interactions aimed to support students' understanding of course content, assist with assignment completion, and provide feedback for academic success. Emotional support and cultural sensitivity improved the quality of these exchanges. They helped strengthen students' engagement with academic learning. Emotional responsiveness, personalised communication, and sensitivity to students' communicative preferences served as tools to facilitate more effective academic participation. In the context of intercultural education, academic purpose remained central to lecturer-student interaction. Efforts to improve the quality of interactions

contributed directly to students' academic outcomes and educational development.

8.4.3 Social interaction behaviours in academic environments

The findings showed that in intercultural TESOL programmes, academic and social interactions were not separate or opposing dimensions. Instead, they were mutually reinforcing parts of a dynamic pedagogical process. Academic interactions were often structured and goal-oriented. Social interactions were more informal and relational. However, in this study, the boundary between them became blurred. Lecturers combined cognitive scaffolding with relational engagement. They used informal social strategies to reduce cultural distance and increase students' willingness to participate in academic activities. This integration of formal and informal elements supported intercultural engagement (Leask, 2009).

The findings were consistent with Deardorff (2011)'s argument that intercultural learning involves both cognitive and relational growth. Intercultural competence is developed through knowledge transmission, empathetic interaction, and identity negotiation. Similarly, Holliday (1999)'s concept of "small culture" emphasised the co-construction of meaning within specific classroom settings. Lecturers who consciously integrated informal dialogue, humour, and social bonding activities created more inclusive and low-anxiety classroom environments. Students, in turn, showed greater academic initiative and emotional resilience. These accounts suggest a strong relationship between emotional safety and intellectual engagement.

The blending of academic and social dimensions can also be understood through the Pianta (2017) Teaching Through Interactions (TTI) framework. This

framework identifies three core domains: emotional support, classroom organisation, and instructional support. In this study, these three domains worked together rather than in isolation. Informal rapport-building activities outside the classroom supported emotional needs. Culturally inclusive classroom structures encouraged participation. Clear feedback and academic scaffolding provided instructional support. These combined mechanisms helped students manage language barriers (Csillik, 2022; Yuan et al., 2013), overcome face-related anxieties (Ting-Toomey, 2005), and adjust to new epistemological norms (de Sousa Santos, 2018; Tran & Pham, 2016).

Students who experienced warmth, responsiveness, and informal recognition from lecturers were more willing to take cognitive risks and initiate academic dialogue. This finding supports Rubie-Davies et al. (2015), who noted that respectful use of power encourages truly participatory interaction. It also aligns with Yan and Berliner (2009), who emphasised that students from non-dominant cultural backgrounds thrive when lecturer-student relationships go beyond instrumental functions and become relationally inclusive. Spencer-Oatey (2008) rapport management theory provided a useful framework here. Trust, respect, and shared goals formed the basis of both academic success and intercultural understanding.

However, the integration of social and academic interaction required intentional cultural awareness. Some students continued to struggle with internalised power distance (Hofstede, 2001), language anxiety (Dewaele, 2017), or unfamiliar norms of argumentation (Kingston & Forland, 2008). Lecturers, therefore, needed to move beyond generic rapport-building toward a more nuanced and reflexive pedagogy (Dervin & Dervin, 2016).

In summary, effective lecturer-student interaction in intercultural TESOL

programmes cannot be fully understood by separating academic and social elements. Meaningful engagement emerged when these two dimensions were integrated. Trust, emotional support, and cultural awareness increased students' willingness to participate and strengthened their sense of belonging. Academic learning became more effective when supported by responsive relationships. Social rapport gained depth when connected to shared educational goals.

These findings suggest that intercultural competence develops not only through structured academic activities but also through everyday relational practices that shape classroom culture. By recognising the importance of both academic structure and relational care, TESOL lecturers can create more inclusive and engaging learning environments. This integrated approach helps reduce barriers to participation and encourages students from diverse cultural backgrounds to contribute with confidence and authenticity.

8.5 Intercultural adjustment and adaptation in participants' accounts

This section focuses on how participants described lecturer–student interaction in intercultural TESOL programmes as part of an ongoing process of adjustment and adaptation. This process is not simply the transmission of knowledge or a linguistic exchange. It is relational and context-dependent. It involves ongoing negotiation between lecturers and students through shifting identities, emotional attunement, and cultural reinterpretation. These findings align with Deardorff (2011)'s model of intercultural competence. This model views adaptation as both personal and relational development that occurs through ongoing interaction and reflection.

In the early stages of classroom interaction, many Chinese students used avoidant and indirect strategies. These included silence, polite nodding, or deferral to authority. These behaviours were often misread as disengagement. However, they were culturally situated responses. They were shaped by high-context communication preferences (Hall, 1976), face-saving concerns (Ting-Toomey, 2005), and traditional classroom hierarchies in high power-distance cultures (Hofstede, 2001). This finding is consistent with previous literature (Heng, 2018; R. L. Jackson, 2002; McMahon, 2011) that identifies strategic silence as a common adaptive behaviour among Chinese international students in Western classrooms.

As interaction accumulated over time, the findings showed a gradual shift. Through repeated exchanges, feedback loops, and increasingly confident attempts to participate, some students moved from “strategic silence” to “intentional voice.” This pattern supports Ward et al. (2001) and Bennett (2009), who describe intercultural adaptation as a non-linear process involving affective, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions. Students’ growing willingness to express themselves reflected not only increased linguistic confidence but also a stronger sense of belonging and trust. This shift was particularly noticeable when lecturers used culturally responsive strategies such as lowered formality, humour, personalised feedback, and acknowledgement of students’ home cultures.

The study showed that adaptation was co-constructed rather than individual. Students did not adjust in isolation. They responded to multiple influences, including peer relationships, classroom atmosphere, and institutional norms. This aligns with Dervin and Dervin (2016), who argue that it is too simplistic to focus only on individual effort in intercultural interaction. Instead, such interaction is shaped by shared understanding and ongoing dialogue.

Lecturers were not passive recipients of cultural differences. Many actively modified their teaching approaches. They adjusted questioning styles, feedback methods, and participation expectations in response to students' interaction strategies. This interpretation is consistent with critiques by Marginson (2022) and Stronge (2018), who note that lecturers play a key role in shaping fair and effective interactions.

Inclusive classroom climates supported students' adaptation. These climates involved low perceived threat, acceptance of silence, and relational trust. This finding is consistent with Baeva and Bordovskaia (2015) and Rubie-Davies et al. (2015), who emphasise that emotional safety is essential for students from minoritised cultures to move from surface-level engagement to genuine participation. In this context, emotional support served as a foundation for academic growth.

Overall, intercultural lecturer-student interaction in TESOL programmes can be understood as a multidimensional and evolving process of mutual adaptation. Adaptation was not a linear adjustment made by students alone. It emerged as a shared endeavour shaped by relational dynamics and pedagogical responsiveness. Through situated interaction, both lecturers and students participated in the co-construction of meaning. This enabled gradual shifts in communicative behaviours, engagement patterns, and classroom belonging. The findings highlight the complex and context-sensitive nature of intercultural adaptation. Identity, emotion, and cognition intersect to produce nuanced trajectories of participation and learning.

8.6 Summary of discussion

This chapter has synthesised lecturers' and students' accounts to discuss how intercultural lecturer-student interaction was perceived and experienced in TESOL programmes. Drawing on the empirical data and theoretical frameworks, the discussion showed that intercultural classroom interaction is not a neutral or technical process. It is deeply embedded in cultural, institutional, and relational dynamics.

The findings indicated that participants perceived task-driven academic interaction (8.2.2) as supporting curricular efficiency and instructional clarity. At the same time, they experienced it as coming at the cost of emotional connection and cultural inclusivity. Participants' accounts suggested that students' interactional behaviours were associated not only with language proficiency, but also with linguistic anxieties, face concerns, and power distance values (8.2.3, 8.2.7). Participants described misaligned expectations and interpretations between lecturers and students regarding the purpose and depth of interaction (8.2.4, 8.2.5) as contributing to breakdowns in mutual understanding and hindering reciprocal dialogue.

A central theme in this chapter is that intercultural interaction can be understood as a negotiated and evolving practice. It is not simply an issue of student participation or lecturer technique. Participants' accounts in Section 8.3 suggested that the tension between national cultural norms and academic "small cultures" was associated with both constraints and opportunities for pedagogical transformation. Participants often linked student silence and deference to power distance values and collectivist expectations. However, participants also described cases in which lecturers cultivated more context-

specific classroom cultures, which they associated with greater relational trust and more confident participation.

Section 8.4 showed that participants perceived the integration of social strategies into academic environments as potentially enhancing the quality of interaction. However, such effects were context-dependent. Participants' accounts suggested that this integration was experienced as more effective when cultural awareness, relational sensitivity, and institutional support were present together. Drawing on Rapport Management Theory (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), the section suggested that classroom interaction needs to balance face needs, interactional goals, and social rights and obligations. In practice, this balance was rarely achieved in standardised academic settings.

Section 8.5 highlighted that intercultural adaptation is an uneven and often asymmetrical process. Although both lecturers and students attempted to adjust, structural constraints, cultural misunderstandings, and power dynamics frequently hindered deep mutual adaptation. The over-reliance on Western pedagogical norms and standardised feedback mechanisms further marginalised culturally diverse students and reinforced implicit hierarchies.

These findings suggest that meaningful intercultural interaction requires a rethinking of pedagogical relationships. This involves moving beyond deficit models that attribute communication breakdowns mainly to student limitations. Instead, the findings point to the importance of recognising how institutional structures, teaching practices, and cultural ideologies shape participation. Effective intercultural pedagogy needs to be dialogic, flexible, and grounded in cultural humility. It should acknowledge that both students and lecturers bring diverse knowledge, communication styles, and relational practices to the classroom.

In conclusion, this chapter points to the need to move beyond simply managing cultural diversity toward more meaningful engagement with difference. Intercultural TESOL contexts should not be seen as neutral or static environments. They are dynamic spaces where identities, values, and understandings are constantly negotiated. Rather than treating cultural variation as a challenge to be managed, the study suggests viewing it as an opportunity for mutual learning and shared meaning-making. Participants' accounts suggest that when lecturers and Chinese students are able to co-construct interactional norms through open dialogue and cultural sensitivity, there is greater potential to address hidden power imbalances and foster more inclusive learning relationships.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

This study has investigated lecturers' and Chinese students' perceptions and accounts of intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL programmes. It also considers possible strategies for improving these interactions, as suggested by participants' accounts and the study's overall analysis, within the broader context of intercultural higher education involving Chinese students. Drawing on lecturers' and students' accounts of intercultural classroom interaction collected through focus-group interviews, in-depth interviews, and open-ended questionnaires, this chapter synthesises the study's findings in relation to the two research questions. Consistent with the scope of the dataset, the focus here is on participants' perceptions, interpretations and reported experiences. It summarises key perceived characteristics of intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL programmes, identifies the cultural, educational, and institutional influences that participants themselves associate with these experiences, and draws out practice-related implications from these accounts, which are developed further in the recommendations section. The chapter then evaluates the study's contributions at both theoretical and practical levels, discusses its limitations, and suggests directions for future research. Finally, the chapter presents practical recommendations for teaching and policy development in higher education and reflects on the researcher's academic development through the course of the study. The chapter argues, based on participants' accounts, for the value of a more collaborative and inclusive intercultural environment in supporting student resilience and strengthening teaching and learning. Throughout, the chapter maintains a clear focus on participants' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations, rather than treating classroom interaction as something directly observable or

universally generalisable.

9.2 Answer research questions

9.2.1 Lecturer-student intercultural interaction characteristics and dynamics

Question 1: In the setting of TESOL programmes, how are the characteristics and dynamics of intercultural interaction between lecturers and Chinese students perceived, experienced, and described?

Drawing primarily on lecturers' and students' accounts from focus group interviews, in-depth interviews, and open-ended questionnaires, the study suggests that intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL programmes was often perceived as marked by surface harmony alongside underlying tensions. Participants commonly described lecturer–student interaction as largely organised around academic tasks such as course requirements, assignment discussions, and dissertation supervision. However, participants also reported that lecturers often paid limited attention to students' emotional and cultural adjustment needs. In addition, participants frequently associated interactional strategies with broader social and cultural norms. Many participants associated Chinese students' relative indirectness in communication with cultural norms related to power distance and face concerns, and suggested that this sometimes made it harder for lecturers to fully understand students' thoughts or concerns. This contributed to greater information asymmetry and psychological distance between lecturers and students. At the same time, participants' accounts indicated that informal interactions, group discussions, the sharing of personal experiences, and a more open classroom atmosphere could help create a small-culture space

between lecturers and students. Participants suggested that such interactional spaces could, to some extent, reduce the constraints associated with more hierarchical or face-sensitive communication norms, while also encouraging greater willingness to engage. Many lecturers reported that, through experience and reflection, they had developed a greater understanding of Chinese students and aspects of Chinese cultural expectations, and that they had adjusted their teaching and interactional approaches accordingly. However, participants' accounts also suggested that TESOL programmes could still reflect Western-oriented assumptions or norms. Some participants suggested that these expectations could reinforce existing relational distance or make lecturer–student interaction feel less accessible. As a result, some seemingly harmonious interactions between students and lecturers could still involve stress, limited effectiveness, or emotional strain.

In conclusion, participants' accounts suggest that intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL programmes is often experienced as outwardly harmonious yet shaped by underlying tensions. Although both lecturers and students were described as actively adapting, participants also identified continuing challenges related to cultural expectations, communication norms, and emotional support. Taken together, these accounts indicate that intercultural lecturer–student interaction extends beyond academic task completion and requires greater awareness, empathy, and support if more meaningful engagement is to be fostered.

9.2.2 Factors perceived to shape interaction

Question 2: What underlying factors or educational experiences were perceived to shape the dynamics and characteristics of intercultural

lecturer–student interaction in the TESOL context?

Participants' accounts suggest that the dynamics and characteristics of intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL programmes are associated with a complex interplay of structural and non-structural factors. Although these categories are analytically separated here, they are closely interconnected in practice. The following discussion synthesises participants' reported experiences and interpretations in relation to the findings chapters, with support from the literature review. An overview is presented in Figure 9 and explained further below.

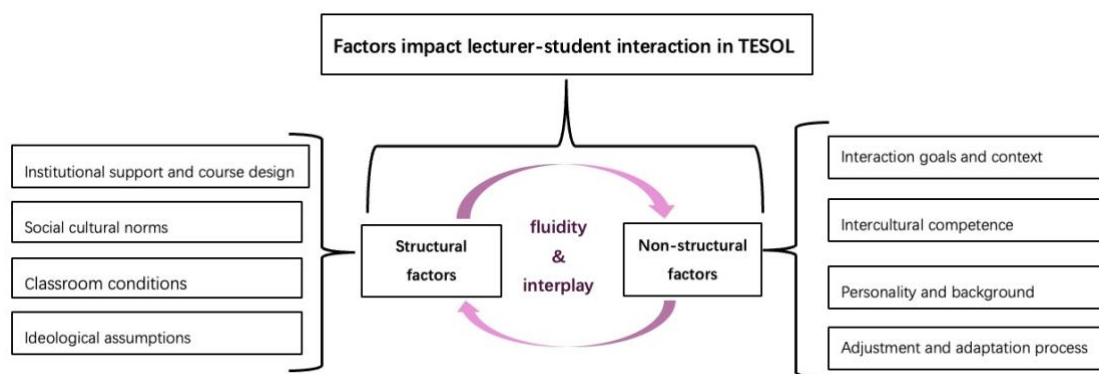


Figure 9 Factors Impacting Lecturer-Student Intercultural Interaction in TESOL

9.2.2.1 Structural factors

Understanding the structural conditions associated with intercultural interaction is important for analysing how Chinese students and TESOL lecturers described their engagement with one another. In this study, structural factors refer to institutional, organisational, and broader cultural frameworks that participants associated with expectations, behavioural norms, and interactional patterns. These elements formed part of the wider context within which lecturer–student interaction was experienced and interpreted.

A. Institutional support and course design

First, participants' accounts suggest that institutional support and course design are important factors associated with intercultural interaction in TESOL contexts. Universities that implement structured internationalisation efforts, such as providing intercultural training for lecturers, offering targeted support services for international students, and adopting inclusive teaching strategies, often create more effective and responsive learning environments. In contrast, some participants suggested that where such support was limited or absent, cultural misunderstandings were more likely to remain unresolved. As discussed particularly in Sections 6.5.3 and related later chapters, participants associated adequate institutional resources with greater confidence and a stronger willingness to participate in classroom interaction. In addition, participants and previous studies alike suggest that course content integrating global perspectives and diverse cultural viewpoints can encourage more meaningful engagement. This interpretation is consistent with previous studies discussed in Sections 2.6.2, 2.7.2, 2.8.1, and 2.8.2 of the literature review, which emphasise the importance of institutional structures and curriculum design in supporting multicultural education.

B. Social cultural norms

Next, participants frequently associated lecturer–student interaction with broader sociocultural norms, often in subtle but pervasive ways. Many participants associated Chinese students' more restrained communication styles and reluctance to express disagreement with cultural values related to respect for authority, group harmony, and face concerns. These traits have been extensively discussed in the literature review, particularly in Sections

2.3.2 and 2.3.3, and are further supported by findings presented in Sections 6.5.5, 7.5.2, and 7.5.3.

Participants also linked concerns about power distance and face to more hierarchical perceptions of classroom interaction, suggesting that such norms could shape students' sense of when and how it was appropriate to participate and could contribute to silence or hesitation. The influence of these cultural frameworks is discussed in detail in Section 2.6.3 of the literature review and revisited in Sections 8.2.3, 8.2.5, and 8.2.7. Taken together, these accounts indicate that deeply embedded sociocultural norms were widely perceived as relevant to intercultural communication.

C. Ideological assumptions

Third, participants' accounts suggest that ideological assumptions influence how lecturers and students understand the purposes and processes of education. As discussed in Sections 6.5.4, 6.5.5, 7.6.3, and 8.2.8, many participants described TESOL teaching as valuing individual expression, critical thinking, and open discussion. In contrast, both lecturers and Chinese students often referred to prior educational experiences that placed greater emphasis on authority, discipline, and collective classroom norms. This divergence was often associated not only with differing participation patterns, but also with contrasting understandings of what effective learning and teaching should involve.

These contrasting assumptions can lead to mismatched expectations and communication gaps in intercultural classrooms. The literature review also reflects this tension. Section 2.3.3 discusses differing cultural interaction styles, while Section 2.9.1 examines how previous studies have linked Chinese

students' silence to broader cultural and ideological influences. Together, these insights suggest that ideological assumptions can subtly but significantly shape how lecturer–student interaction is interpreted and negotiated.

D. Classroom conditions

Finally, participants' accounts and contextual observations both indicate that practical classroom conditions may be relevant to intercultural interaction. As discussed in Section 5.1, classroom observations provided contextual background on classroom organisation, while participants' accounts in later chapters suggested that smaller class sizes and more flexible seating arrangements were often experienced as more supportive of participation. These contextual observations are considered here only as supportive background, while the main analytical claims come from participants' reflective accounts in later chapters. Participants' accounts suggested that environments allowing greater visibility, mobility, and proximity were often experienced as making interaction feel more fluid and accessible. Contextual observations from Section 5 provided supportive background for this interpretation.

This connection between space and engagement is also recognised in previous studies. As reviewed in Section 2.6.2, the classroom environment has been identified as a key structural factor that influences students' willingness to participate, particularly in intercultural settings. Taken together, these accounts highlight the importance of considering how learning spaces may influence communication dynamics in multicultural classrooms.

In summary, participants' accounts suggest that these structural factors formed an important part of the broader context within which intercultural interaction in TESOL programmes was experienced and interpreted. They were

associated not only with patterns of participation, including who spoke, how they spoke, and when they chose to participate, but also with wider expectations concerning authority, engagement, and learning.

9.2.2.2 Non-structural factors

While structural factors formed part of the broader context of interaction, participants' accounts also highlighted the importance of individual agency in how such conditions were experienced, negotiated, or at times challenged. In this study, non-structural factors refer to more individual-level elements, such as personal traits and prior experiences, that participants associated with interaction in intercultural TESOL settings. These factors were often linked to differences in how individuals perceived, adapted to, or responded to broader structural frameworks at the micro level.

A. Interaction goals and context

First, participants' accounts suggest that the goals and context of interaction are closely associated with the tone, content, and depth of lecturer–student exchanges. As discussed in Sections 8.2.2, 8.2.4, and 8.2.6, participants commonly described academic interactions as more formal and task-oriented, whereas non-academic conversations were often experienced as allowing greater personal expression, emotional openness, and cultural exchange.

The importance of interaction context is also evident in students' reflections in Sections 6.3 and 6.5.2, where they described increased comfort and willingness to engage when the environment felt relaxed or supportive. Section 7.3 further highlights how interaction purposes and topics shape student

participation. Taken together, these accounts suggest that lecturer–student interaction was associated not only with individual traits, but also with how particular goals and contexts were perceived and interpreted.

B. Intercultural competence

Participants' accounts suggest that intercultural competence is an important factor for both students and lecturers. For students, abilities such as language fluency and cultural literacy were often associated with their understanding of classroom norms and their confidence to participate, as discussed in Section 6.6.2. For lecturers, the capacity to recognise culturally shaped behaviours such as interpreting silence as reflection or politeness rather than disinterest is key to avoiding misjudgements and building relational trust, as discussed in Section 7.4.2.

The importance of intercultural competence is also supported in the literature. Sections 2.6.2 and 2.7.1 of the literature review highlight how such skills enable individuals to navigate cultural differences and support effective communication in diverse educational settings.

C. Personality and background

Furthermore, as discussed in Section 6.5.5, participants' accounts suggest that students' personal and educational backgrounds were associated with differences in readiness for intercultural engagement. Some participants described students from urban areas or with prior international experience as showing greater confidence and autonomy, while students from more rural or less culturally diverse backgrounds were sometimes described as needing

more time and support. Participants also often associated extroverted personalities with greater willingness to participate, whereas more introverted students were described as sometimes remaining silent even when their language proficiency was sufficient.

Lecturers' personalities and prior experiences were also described as relevant to the dynamics of interaction. Section 7.4 suggests that lecturers with international teaching backgrounds or greater interpersonal sensitivity were often described as adopting more inclusive and adaptive teaching styles, which participants associated with lower participation barriers and a more supportive classroom atmosphere.

These findings are consistent with earlier studies discussed in Sections 2.5.1, 2.5.2, and 2.8.3 of the literature review, which highlight the strong connection between personality traits and interaction behaviours. Contextual observations in Section 5.3 provided some supportive indications that personal dispositions and attitudes could be relevant to how lecturers and students engaged in intercultural settings. However, the main analytical basis for this interpretation comes from participants' reflective accounts in the findings chapters.

D. Adjustment and adaptation process

Finally, participants' accounts in Section 6.6 suggest that many students adopted adaptive interaction strategies in response to communicative challenges, reflecting a degree of agency in how they managed intercultural communication. Informal social interactions were also frequently associated with increased confidence, which participants often linked to greater willingness to participate in academic settings.

Lecturers' adaptation strategies, including adjustments in teaching style and communication approaches, were also described as important. As discussed in Section 7.7, such adaptations were often associated with a more inclusive classroom environment and with greater student engagement.

The importance of adaptation and strategic flexibility is also widely acknowledged in the literature. Sections 2.5.3, 2.5.4, and 2.8.3 highlight how effective adaptation on the part of both students and educators is essential for promoting meaningful intercultural interaction.

In summary, participants' accounts suggest that intercultural lecturer–student interaction cannot be understood solely in relation to institutional or cultural structures. It was also closely associated with the dynamic interplay of individual experiences, adaptive strategies, lecturers' responsiveness, feedback practices, and students' personal characteristics. These accounts highlight the importance of recognising individual variability within shared cultural contexts when seeking to foster more effective intercultural communication.

9.2.2.3 The interplay and fluidity between structural and non-structural factors

The findings of this study suggest that intercultural lecturer–student interaction cannot be fully understood through a simple distinction between structural and individual-level influences. Rather, participants' accounts indicate that these dimensions are closely interconnected, with boundaries that are often fluid and shifting in practice.

Participants' accounts suggest that institutional and cultural structures were

associated with the expectations of both students and lecturers, yet these structures were also interpreted, reinforced, and at times reshaped through individual practices. Across participants' accounts, some students were described as becoming more willing to speak in more supportive classroom environments or in response to peer influence, while some lecturers were described as adapting their teaching approaches after becoming more aware of students' interactional needs. These accounts suggest that individuals were not positioned only as recipients of structural conditions, but also as active participants in negotiating and, in some cases, reshaping those conditions.

Participants' accounts also suggest that non-structural factors such as personality, motivation, and prior experience were associated with how students responded to institutional norms. For example, some students appeared able to participate actively while still orienting themselves toward group learning rather than individual self-assertion, which suggests a nuanced negotiation of different cultural expectations. By contrast, students with more limited prior exposure to Western academic conventions were often described as needing more targeted support and guidance.

Participants' accounts further suggest that miscommunication was often associated with mismatched communicative styles and differing assumptions about interaction. In some cases, politeness strategies intended to show respect appeared to reduce the clarity or force of a message. When lecturers and students worked with different assumptions about clarity, responsibility, and hierarchy, intentions could be interpreted differently. Taken together, these accounts highlight the intersection of institutional power, language style, and social expectation in intercultural interaction. Rather than locating the issue in cultural difference alone, the findings suggest that difficulties often arose from differences in how authority and participation were expressed and understood

across contexts.

Therefore, intercultural interactions between lecturers and students should be understood as a dynamic and ongoing process, shaped through continuous negotiation between structural expectations and individual agency. Neither side operates within a fixed cultural script. Instead, both lecturers and students bring flexible, adaptive strategies informed by their institutional environments, cultural assumptions, and lived experiences.

In conclusion, participants' accounts suggest that the dynamics and characteristics of intercultural interaction in TESOL programmes were associated with a complex interplay of structural and non-structural factors. Institutional policies, sociocultural norms, and curriculum design formed part of the broader framework within which interaction took place, while individual attributes such as intercultural competence, communication goals, and personality were associated with how these conditions were experienced and negotiated. Crucially, the findings indicate that the boundary between structure and agency was often fluid, with lecturers and students interpreting, reinforcing, or at times challenging interactional norms through everyday practice.

Ultimately, participants' accounts suggest that lecturer–student interaction in TESOL contexts was associated with several overlapping factors, including institutional expectations, differing cultural assumptions, and individual uncertainties such as face concerns or uncertainty about participation norms. Taken together, these conditions often contributed to interactions that appeared harmonious on the surface, while still containing underlying tension.

9.3 Contribution

9.3.1 Extending and challenging the existing literature

Drawing on lecturers' and students' reported experiences and interpretations. This section identifies the study's main contributions to the literature on intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL contexts. Drawing on lecturers' and students' reported experiences and interpretations, it demonstrates how the study extends, refines, and challenges existing understandings by foregrounding the emotional, relational, and contextually negotiated dimensions of interaction.

9.3.1.1 Challenging the dominance of task-oriented models

Much of the existing literature emphasises that classroom interaction in higher education is primarily driven by academic tasks, focusing on the efficient transmission of knowledge and the achievement of measurable learning outcomes (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Brophy, 1999). It is also widely accepted that such task-oriented interactions promote clarity, structure, and assessment alignment, especially in international classrooms (Carroll & Ryan, 2007; Deardorff, 2006; Leask, 2015). However, these studies often overlook the emotional and cultural dimensions of interaction, particularly in intercultural TESOL settings (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Glass et al., 2021).

This study contributes to the literature by challenging the assumption that a predominantly task-driven model is sufficient for understanding intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL settings. The findings indicate that while TESOL lecturers often prioritize academic content and provide structured feedback, many Chinese students in this study reported limited emotional

support and described significant barriers to more genuine participation. These students frequently remain silent, avoid expressing disagreement, or seek help only in private. This suggests that a predominantly task-focused interactional pattern may, in this context, leave existing hierarchies insufficiently challenged and may limit opportunities for more open communication. Such findings align with broader critiques of Western-centric classroom norms (Gieve & Clark, 2005; Holliday, 1999; Watkins, 2012) and reflect the role of face culture and indirect communication patterns in maintaining surface-level harmony (Hofstede, 2001; Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2003; Ting-Toomey, 2005). In this respect, the study extends existing literature by showing that intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL cannot be understood adequately without attention to emotional support, relational distance, and culturally shaped participation practices.

9.3.1.2 Reinterpreting silence as strategic agency

Drawing on participants' accounts, this study challenges earlier research that tends to interpret silence or minimal participation primarily as a language deficit or lack of academic preparedness (Andrade, 2006). Instead, it shows that such behaviours may also reflect strategic responses to power asymmetries and intercultural discomfort. Participants' accounts also indicated that students were often more engaged in informal or small-group discussions, reinforcing recent calls for a “small culture” approach to classroom interaction, where meaning is co-constructed through lived experience rather than predetermined by national culture alone (Holliday & Amadasí, 2019; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Tran & Pham, 2016). In this respect, the study extends earlier literature by repositioning silence not simply as absence, but as a contextually meaningful

and sometimes strategic response.

9.3.1.3 Repositioning emotional and relational support as core components

This study contributes to the literature by showing a clear disconnect between lecturer and student expectations regarding feedback in intercultural TESOL classrooms. While lecturers focus on academic performance and critical engagement, students often hope for support related to cultural adjustment and emotional wellbeing. In this respect, the study extends existing literature by showing that intercultural classrooms need to address affective and relational support, not cognitive development alone (Deardorff, 2011; Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Ward et al., 2001). The findings also suggest that reliance on Q&A formats alone, or on predominantly lecture-based delivery, may limit opportunities for more meaningful interaction. These findings also imply the value of more structured informal opportunities for expression and feedback, which may help surface students' concerns and support more adaptive teaching (Byram, 1997; Jackson, 2018; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018).

In addition, this study contributes by showing that many existing frameworks have not sufficiently recognised the importance of rapport management in intercultural classroom interaction. The study shows that certain relational behaviours, such as inclusive language, empathy, and responsiveness to students' concerns, are central to the development of emotional safety and trust in intercultural classroom interaction. These practices appeared particularly relevant for many Chinese students in this study. However, they are often absent in TESOL teaching models. While earlier research tended to view rapport as a secondary issue, this study demonstrates that rapport

management plays a central role in participants' accounts of student engagement and intercultural adaptation (Deardorff, 2011; Holmes & Riddiford, 2011; Spencer-Oatey, 2008). These findings also support previous claims that relational support can lower emotional barriers and make classroom interaction more effective (Smith et al., 2005).

9.3.1.4 Revising assumptions about cultural interaction styles

This study further challenges enduring binary distinctions between Western low-context and Eastern high-context communication norms (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2001). While Western academic discourse is often portrayed as valuing explicitness, individual agency, and directness in feedback (Carroll & Ryan, 2007; Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001), the findings reveal that TESOL lecturers in intercultural classrooms sometimes adopt softened, indirect expressions as part of their relational and face-sensitive strategies. These adaptations are often made with the intention of maintaining rapport and avoiding overt confrontation, which reflects a subtle shift towards high-context communicative practices (Holmes & Riddiford, 2011; Spencer-Oatey, 2008).

However, many Chinese students in this study were described as drawing on prior educational experiences in which hierarchy and teacher authority were more strongly emphasised, and this sometimes shaped how they interpreted classroom power relations and lecturer guidance (Hofstede, 2001; Liu et al., 2010). As a result, when lecturers use mitigated or polite suggestions, students often misread these as non-binding or entirely optional. In this respect, the study extends existing literature by showing that communicative expectations in intercultural TESOL classrooms are often negotiated within a hybrid interactional space that cannot be explained adequately by traditional binary

cultural models. The findings support critiques of deterministic cultural frameworks and reinforce the need for more fluid, context-sensitive approaches, such as Holliday (1999) “small culture” model and Dervin and Dervin (2016) call for understanding cultural complexity through emergent classroom dynamics.

Moreover, this example further suggests how the interaction of high-context and low-context assumptions may contribute to silent breakdowns in feedback and misunderstanding of pedagogical intent. In this way, the study challenges prior literature that assumes clearly defined communicative styles by national origin and highlights the importance of meta-communication in intercultural education.

9.3.1.5 Integrating relational strategies into academic goals

This study also contributes by challenging the assumption that academic and relational goals must be treated as separate. Previous studies often view these as competing concerns (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Carroll & Ryan, 2007). In contrast, the study shows that lecturers who engage students effectively often do so by integrating relational strategies into academic activity. For example, some lecturers explain concepts using examples from students' cultural backgrounds or offer personalised feedback that recognises individual learning needs. These practices were associated with learning environments experienced as both academically supportive and emotionally responsive. In this respect, the study extends existing literature by showing that academic and relational goals are not competing dimensions, but mutually reinforcing aspects of intercultural lecturer–student interaction (Deardorff, 2020; Tran & Pham, 2016; Ward et al., 2001).

9.3.1.6 Advancing a small culture perspective on interaction

This study further extends the literature by showing how interaction is understood and negotiated through both broader cultural expectations and classroom-specific practices. In this respect, the study shows that while national culture may shape general expectations, classroom routines and shared experiences are often more immediately relevant in shaping interaction. These findings support the concept of “small culture”, which focuses on how meaning is negotiated in specific classroom contexts rather than being determined by national traits alone (Holliday, 1999, 2021). This perspective helps explain why some classrooms develop into spaces of trust and mutual learning, even when participants come from very different cultural backgrounds. It also reinforces the view that intercultural classroom interaction should be understood as a flexible and evolving process shaped by participants and context (Byram, 2020; Glass & Westmont, 2014; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

Taken together, the study contributes to a more context-sensitive understanding of intercultural lecturer–student interaction, one that integrates emotional, cultural, and relational dimensions rather than treating adaptation as solely individual or linear. Based on participants’ accounts, the study presents a dynamic and reciprocal view of interaction in which lecturers and students gradually negotiate trust, meaning, and participation through shared experiences and ongoing adjustment. In this way, the study contributes to existing literature by foregrounding rapport management, emotional support, and classroom-specific dynamics within intercultural TESOL contexts.

9.3.2 Supporting, refining, and extending the theoretical framework

9.3.2.1 Evaluating Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions in TESOL contexts

This study shows that Hofstede's model remains useful as an initial macro-level lens for interpreting some patterns reported in participants' accounts. For example, participants frequently linked some Chinese students' reluctance to question or openly disagree with lecturers to orientations towards authority, hierarchy, and uncertainty (Hofstede, 1980, 2011). Such tendencies were reflected in participants' descriptions of students' hesitation to ask questions or challenge lecturers in public settings.

However, the study also highlights that Hofstede's dimensions risk oversimplifying complex intercultural behaviours. The model does not account for the diverse experiences of students from different regions, backgrounds, or with varying levels of international exposure (Minkov & Kaasa, 2022). Participants' accounts indicated that while some students appeared to follow more traditional interactional norms, others were more vocal and participative, particularly in informal or small-group settings. These patterns highlight the limitations of applying fixed cultural values to explain evolving interactional behaviours.

Moreover, the acceleration of globalisation and the hybrid nature of contemporary educational contexts have increasingly blurred traditional cultural boundaries, making it necessary to move beyond static national traits (Gieve & Clark, 2005). Thus, the study argues that Hofstede's model should be used cautiously and supplemented with more dynamic, context-sensitive approaches.

Overall, this study refines the use of Hofstede's model in TESOL contexts by showing that it remains helpful as a macro-level cultural reference, but insufficient on its own for explaining the diversity and fluidity of participants' interactional experiences. Its value therefore lies in providing an initial orientation rather than a complete explanation of intercultural classroom dynamics.

9.3.2.2 Supporting and extending Small Culture theory

This study supports and extends Small Culture Theory by showing that intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL is best understood as relational, situational, and co-constructed rather than as the product of fixed cultural dimensions. Macro-level cultural frameworks can be useful as starting points, but when used alone they may unintentionally deepen stereotypical interpretations of students' behaviour. By contrast, Small Culture Theory allows interaction to be understood as negotiated, situational, and co-constructed, thereby offering a more flexible and less deterministic account of intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL settings.

To address the limitations of macro-level cultural explanation, this study supports the use of Small Culture Theory as a more context-sensitive way of understanding how meaning is negotiated within specific classroom settings (Holliday, 1999, 2016). Participants' accounts indicated that students' participation varied across different teaching formats. Many students were described as engaging more actively in group discussions than in formal lectures, suggesting that classroom routines and peer dynamics were often more immediately relevant to interaction than national culture alone.

The study shows that lecturer–student interaction was shaped not only by

broader cultural background, but also by role expectations, institutional settings, and ongoing negotiation within the classroom. These micro-level dynamics support and extend the relevance of the small culture perspective in intercultural TESOL education. However, the study also recognises that small cultures are fluid and context-dependent, making them difficult to generalise or measure quantitatively.

Taken together, the study contributes to intercultural research by showing that both macro- and micro-level perspectives are needed to reflect the complexity of classroom culture more adequately. They also point to the need for future research to explore how small culture patterns might be operationalised without losing sensitivity to context-specific factors.

Overall, this study supports the relevance of Small Culture Theory in TESOL contexts by showing that participation and meaning-making were often shaped through classroom-specific routines, peer dynamics, and ongoing negotiation. At the same time, the findings suggest that Small Culture Theory is most effective when considered alongside broader structural and cultural frameworks, since institutional conditions and teaching modalities also influenced how interaction was experienced and interpreted.

9.3.2.3 Supporting the Teaching Through Interaction (TTI) Model in intercultural settings

The TTI model highlights three core domains of teaching: emotional support, classroom organisation, and instructional support (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta et al., 2008). This study supports and refines the value of the model in intercultural classrooms. Lecturers noted that providing timely feedback, personalised guidance, and structured learning environments was associated

with reduced student anxiety and greater willingness to participate. While TTI captures emotional and instructional dimensions well, it does not fully address how power distance and face concerns may shape the expression and reception of support across cultures.

However, the study shows that emotional support in intercultural classrooms must be culturally attuned. Many Chinese students were hesitant to express confusion or dissatisfaction openly due to face-saving concerns. As a result, lecturers often struggled to interpret students' needs accurately, which could make feedback less effective. These outcomes reflect the cultural constraints on emotional expression (Ting-Toomey, 2005) and highlight the need to adapt the TTI model for intercultural contexts.

This study contributes to this adaptation by emphasising the importance of relational sensitivity within the TTI framework. Classroom organisation and feedback strategies need to take students' cultural orientations and communication preferences into account if they are to be fully effective.

Overall, this study supports the value of the TTI model in intercultural TESOL settings, particularly in relation to emotional, organisational, and instructional support. At the same time, the study shows that the model is most effective when adapted to account for cultural sensitivities such as power distance, face concerns, and indirect communication.

9.3.2.4 Integrating Rapport Management with TTI

Participants' accounts in this study show that rapport management plays a central role in fostering a positive classroom climate. The use of inclusive language, empathetic listening, and attention to students' emotional cues was

often associated with greater willingness to participate. These relational strategies can be usefully interpreted through Spencer-Oatey (2008) Rapport Management Theory, particularly its emphasis on face needs, social rights, and interactional goals.

In practice, lecturers who were able to integrate rapport-building behaviours within their academic instruction, such as using culturally relevant examples or acknowledging individual progress, were more consistently associated with trust-building. These findings position rapport as a central component of effective teaching in intercultural TESOL settings.

One of the main theoretical contributions of this study is to show that combining Rapport Management Theory with the TTI model offers a more holistic framework for understanding lecturer–student interaction. This integrated framework helps explain both the cognitive and emotional dimensions of learning, and highlights why more inclusive and responsive interaction matters in intercultural classrooms.

Overall, this study shows that integrating Rapport Management Theory with the TTI model provides a more relational and culturally sensitive framework for understanding lecturer–student interaction. This integrated perspective highlights why face concerns, communicative expectations, and rapport-building practices are central rather than secondary in intercultural TESOL classrooms.

9.3.2.5 Extending the CMIC to educational contexts

The Comprehensive Model of Intercultural Communication (CMIC) focuses on the gradual development of intercultural effectiveness (ICE), intercultural

competence (ICC), and intercultural adaptation (ICA), offering a useful framework for understanding how individuals adjust to intercultural environments (Chen & Starosta, 1996a). This study supports and extends the value of the model in capturing the ongoing and reciprocal nature of adaptation in TESOL contexts. Interview data indicated that many Chinese students actively employed strategies such as advance preparation, peer learning, and informal consultation to manage language challenges and increase participation. At the same time, lecturers were also described as making continuous adjustments to support students' learning, including modifying teaching materials, integrating visual aids, and designing more inclusive group work. These accounts show that adaptation in TESOL contexts is reciprocal and evolving, which supports the continued relevance of the CMIC model.

However, the study also shows several limitations in applying the CMIC framework to classroom interaction. While the model effectively explains personal and relational aspects of adaptation, it does not sufficiently account for broader contextual influences. Factors such as class size, teaching modality, and institutional support were shown in participants' accounts to be highly relevant to the interactional environment. These structural conditions are rarely considered in the CMIC model, yet the findings suggest that they can significantly shape how and when adaptation occurs.

In addition, the CMIC model primarily centres on individual adaptation, offering limited insight into the development of shared classroom cultures. This represents a significant gap in TESOL settings, where the findings suggest that intercultural dynamics are shaped not only by personal strategies but also by evolving classroom practices, routines, and expectations. As Holliday (1999, 2013, 2021) argues, classroom interaction is better understood through the lens of "small cultures," where meaning is constructed contextually through

shared experience. The CMIC model does not fully account for these co-constructed cultural dynamics.

Therefore, while the CMIC framework remains useful for outlining individual adaptive trajectories, this study argues that it needs to be extended to incorporate environmental, institutional, and relational variables. Future iterations of the model should consider how contextual constraints and emergent classroom cultures influence the pace and quality of adaptation. Doing so would enhance its explanatory power and provide a more comprehensive guide for supporting intercultural interaction in higher education.

Overall, this study shows that the CMIC model remains useful for understanding adaptation in intercultural settings but is not sufficient on its own for analysing TESOL classroom interaction. Its value would be strengthened by integrating structural, institutional, and classroom-cultural dimensions alongside individual adaptation processes.

9.3.2.6 Summary and reflection

Overall, this study supports, refines, and extends several theoretical models by highlighting the complexity of intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL contexts. This study shows that no single model is sufficient on its own for understanding intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL contexts. While Hofstede’s cultural dimensions offer a useful starting point, the study also highlights the need to move beyond static national traits in order to account for individual and situational variation. In particular, this study shows that Small Culture Theory reduces the risk of over-attributing interactional difficulties to fixed cultural dimensions and of reinforcing stereotypical

interpretations of Chinese students' classroom behaviour. Small Culture Theory therefore provides a more nuanced understanding of how classroom practices, relational dynamics, and context-specific negotiation shape interaction. The TTI model remains useful in identifying emotional, organisational, and instructional dimensions of teaching, but its explanatory value is strengthened when combined with Rapport Management Theory to address cultural sensitivities, face concerns, and power asymmetries. The CMIC model also remains valuable for understanding adaptation, although the findings suggest that it should be extended to incorporate institutional, environmental, and classroom-specific factors.

Among the models used in this study, Small Culture Theory and Rapport Management offered the strongest explanatory value because they captured the fluid, relational, and context-dependent nature of classroom interaction more effectively than the other frameworks. By comparison, the TTI model provided practical insight into teaching behaviour but required cultural supplementation to be fully effective in intercultural classrooms. CMIC was useful in framing adaptation, yet less able to account for structural and institutional influences. Taken together, this study contributes to a more dynamic and contextually grounded theoretical understanding of intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL settings of intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL settings, one that integrates cultural orientation, relational negotiation, pedagogical support, and adaptation as interconnected rather than separate dimensions.

9.3.3 Practical implications

This study makes several practical contributions to TESOL and intercultural

higher education. One of its central practical contributions is the development of a Four-Step Dynamic Support Framework organised around understanding, adjusting, challenging, and adapting (see Section 9.4.1). Grounded in intercultural communication theory and informed by the reported experiences of Chinese students and TESOL lecturers, this framework translates the study's findings into a context-sensitive structure for improving intercultural lecturer–student interaction in multilingual and multicultural classrooms. In this way, the study offers practical guidance for lecturers, students, institutions, and other stakeholders seeking to foster more inclusive and responsive forms of intercultural engagement.

A further practical contribution of the study lies in showing that intercultural development should not be treated as a linear process. Instead, the framework demonstrates that understanding, adjustment, challenge, and adaptation are interconnected and may recur in response to changing classroom dynamics, emerging tensions, and evolving relationships. This reframes intercultural development as an ongoing and reflective process rather than as a one-time intervention.

The study also makes a practical contribution by distinguishing between structural and non-structural influences on classroom interaction (see Section 9.2.2). Structural factors include institutional policies, curriculum design, and cultural norms, while non-structural factors include individual experiences, personality traits, and emotional readiness. By showing that these influences are fluid, interrelated, and context-dependent, the study provides a more practical basis for understanding why intercultural interaction cannot be improved through fixed or one-dimensional solutions alone.

This has clear practical implications. The findings show that managing

intercultural interaction requires flexible, context-sensitive strategies rather than reliance on static models. In practice, this may include diversifying modes of participation, adapting feedback styles, and creating safer spaces for informal dialogue. The study also highlights that beneath the appearance of harmony in many classrooms there may remain barriers to communication and emotional connection. This suggests that educators need to look beyond visible participation alone and consider whether students feel respected, understood, and included.

Finally, the practical contribution of the study also lies in reframing intercultural engagement as mutual meaning-making rather than one-way adaptation. By presenting perspectives from both Chinese students and TESOL lecturers, the study shows that responsibility for inclusive learning environments is shared rather than borne by students alone. In this respect, classroom interaction should be understood not only as a means of delivering content, but also as a space for negotiating relationships and deepening cultural understanding. These practical insights may also be relevant to other internationalised higher education settings, particularly those involving multilingual classrooms and culturally diverse student populations.

9.4 Recommendations

The recommendations presented in this section are derived from participants' accounts of their interactional experiences and the challenges they perceived in intercultural TESOL classrooms. To present these implications in a coherent and practice-oriented way, a Four-Step Dynamic Support Framework (Understanding–Adjusting–Challenging–Adapting) is used as an integrative organising lens for the recommendations that follow.

9.4.1 Recommendations framework overview

This framework is a synthetic outcome of three interrelated strands of the study: the recurring themes identified primarily in lecturers' and Chinese students' accounts in Chapters 6 and 7, informed by the contextual observations presented in Chapter 5; the integrative discussion of interactional dynamics, power relations, emotional support, and adaptation in Chapter 8; and critical reflection on the theoretical models underpinning the research, including Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Holliday's small culture, Pianta's Teaching Through Interaction model, Spencer-Oatey's Rapport Management theory, and the Comprehensive Model of Intercultural Communication.

Across participants' accounts, a recurring pattern emerged in how intercultural interactional difficulties were recognised, negotiated, and gradually addressed. These patterns did not appear as fixed or linear stages. Rather, they suggested a cyclical process in which awareness, behavioural adjustment, critical questioning, and longer-term adaptation interacted dynamically. This process-oriented orientation is also consistent with existing models of intercultural competence, including the work of Deardorff, Hammer and colleagues, and Berry.

On this basis, and through a synthesis of the study's findings and participants' reported strategies, this section presents a Four-Step Dynamic Support Framework organised around understanding, adjusting, challenging, and adapting (see Figure 10).

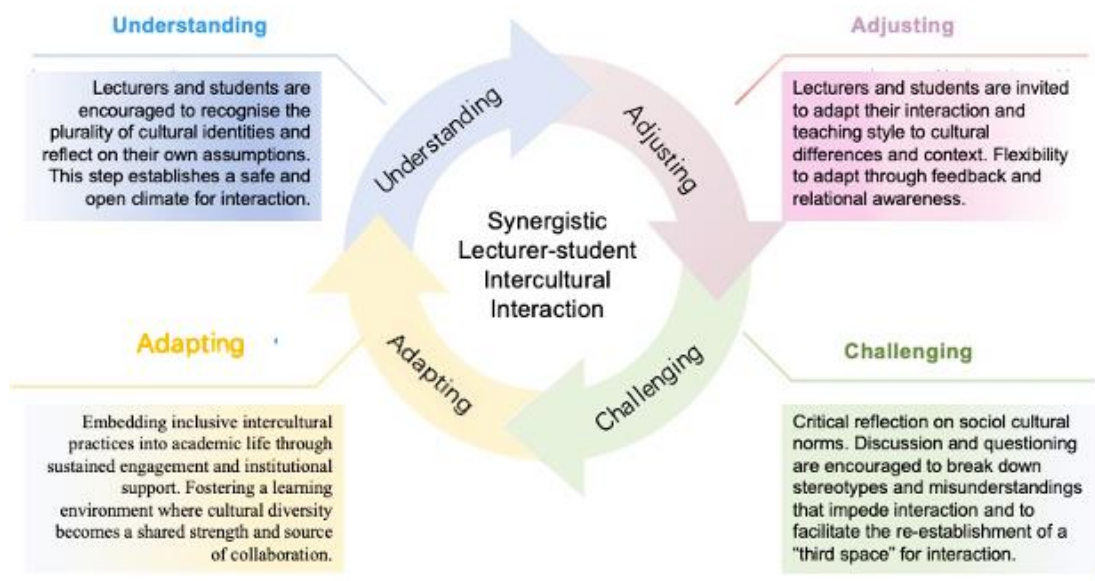


Figure 10 Four-Step Dynamic Support Framework for Lecturer–Student Interaction

The framework is not presented as a separate research question or as a universally applicable model. Rather, it serves as a context-sensitive synthesis that translates participants’ experiences and perceived challenges into pedagogical implications. Its purpose is to support more reflexive, relationally attuned approaches to intercultural interaction in TESOL classrooms.

To ensure feasibility and practicality, each recommendation under this framework should be linked to the specific needs and contexts of students, lecturers, and institutions. We acknowledge that cost, time, and institutional support will impact the ability to implement these strategies. Therefore, the following recommendations incorporate considerations of cost-effectiveness, scalability, and alignment with institutional goals.

The framework draws on students’ accounts of anxiety, silence, face concerns, and confidence-building, alongside lecturers’ descriptions of trust-building, gradual scaffolding, and feedback negotiation. It also reflects strategies that participants reported using in intercultural encounters. Taken together, these

accounts suggest a recurring developmental logic across the broader analysis. Each step is grounded in intercultural communication theory and supported by pedagogical orientations discussed in previous research.

The four steps are interdependent rather than discrete. Understanding provides the basis for adjustment; adjustment creates space for challenging established assumptions; and challenging, in turn, supports longer-term adaptation. Adaptation then informs subsequent cycles of understanding. In this sense, the framework reflects a recursive process of intercultural development, consistent with the cyclical orientation of the Comprehensive Model of Intercultural Communication and with Deardorff's process-based view of intercultural competence.

In the sections that follow, the framework is applied across four stakeholder levels: lecturers, Chinese students, institutions, and government bodies. Each set of recommendations is linked to one or more of the four stages so that the practical implications follow a shared conceptual logic rather than appearing as a disconnected list of suggestions.

9.4.1.1 Understanding

As suggested by both this study's findings and existing theoretical perspectives, the first step towards improving intercultural lecturer–student interaction is to foster mutual understanding through cultural humility. Lecturers and students are encouraged to recognise the diversity of cultural identities present in the classroom, including national, regional, and individual dimensions. Moving beyond simplistic stereotypes is essential, as reductive cultural assumptions can lead to miscommunication and inhibit the development of trust (Bennett, 2015). Instead, both parties should approach intercultural interaction with

openness, respect, and a willingness to learn from one another (Holliday, 2013).

Participants' accounts in this study suggest that greater understanding can foster a safer, more open climate for interaction. Several participants reported feeling more confident and more willing to engage when lecturers acknowledged their cultural backgrounds and encouraged intercultural exchange in the classroom. These accounts indicate that fostering mutual understanding can support inclusion, reduce anxiety, and strengthen academic engagement.

This emphasis on understanding is also consistent with previous research. Hammer et al. (2003) argue that intercultural sensitivity can facilitate movement from ethnocentric to more ethnorelative orientations, while Deardorff (2006) conceptualises intercultural competence as a process grounded in reflection, curiosity, and effective communication. Taken together, the literature and the findings of this study suggest that understanding should be treated as a foundational orientation for intercultural interaction. It helps create the conditions for later processes of adjustment, critical reflection, and longer-term adaptation, while also encouraging a more nuanced view of classroom interaction as shaped by both broader cultural expectations and context-specific variation.

At a practical level, this may be supported through accessible forms of intercultural preparation, such as short workshops, guided reflection activities, or classroom-based opportunities for cultural exchange. Such initiatives do not need to be resource-intensive, but they do require institutional recognition and a commitment to fostering openness and inclusivity within the learning environment.

9.4.1.2 Adjusting

Building on the mutual understanding established in Step One, the second step focuses on how lecturers and students may translate cultural awareness into more responsive communicative behaviour. In intercultural TESOL classrooms, this involves adjusting how people speak, listen, explain, and respond in ways that are more sensitive to different expectations and preferences (Deardorff, 2006). Adjustment is therefore understood not as abandoning one's own style, but as developing greater flexibility and relational awareness in interaction.

Participants' accounts in this study suggest that such adjustment was important for supporting student engagement. Students reported feeling more confident and involved when lecturers provided clear explanations, allowed adequate wait time, and incorporated culturally relevant examples. Informal exchanges and interactive formats, especially small-group discussions, were also described as helpful in reducing anxiety and increasing willingness to contribute. These accounts indicate that responsive adjustment in communication can make classroom interaction feel more accessible and inclusive.

This emphasis on adjustment is also supported by previous research. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) argue that intercultural interaction is an ongoing process of negotiation in which meanings develop through dialogue, while Byram (1997) highlights the need for continuous reflection and modification of communicative behaviour. Studies such as Jackson (2018) further suggest that interactive practices can strengthen intercultural communication and reduce anxiety. In this respect, the findings of the present study are also consistent with the integrated use of Teaching Through Interaction and Rapport

Management. Together, these perspectives highlight the importance of aligning pedagogical support with relational sensitivity.

At a practical level, this step suggests the value of interactive teaching practices, opportunities for low-risk participation, and ongoing reflection on classroom communication. Such adjustments do not require a complete change in teaching style but rather a willingness to make gradual, context-sensitive modifications that can support more sustained intercultural engagement.

To make these adjustments more feasible, institutions may offer practical support such as guidance for culturally sensitive lesson planning and clearer feedback practices. Lecturers can be encouraged to introduce small, incremental changes rather than overhaul their teaching approaches entirely. Peer mentoring or collegial exchange may also help staff share effective practices, while students may benefit from formative opportunities that encourage low-risk participation and greater intercultural confidence.

9.4.1.3 Challenging

Building on the understanding and adaptive awareness developed in the first two steps, the third step involves encouraging lecturers and students to engage in critical reflection on the sociocultural norms that continue to shape classroom interaction. Norms related to communication style, power relations, and face concerns may remain influential and, if left unexamined, can constrain openness and reinforce asymmetries in participation (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2001). The third step, therefore, calls for explicit questioning of these assumptions so that intercultural dialogue can move beyond surface harmony towards more meaningful engagement.

In practical terms, lecturers may support this step through structured debates, reflective journaling, peer feedback, and facilitated group reflection, all of which can encourage both lecturers and students to examine and question underlying cultural assumptions. Many of these activities can be implemented through existing online platforms or regular classroom practices, making them relatively feasible in resource-constrained settings. Their sustainability may be strengthened when institutions recognise such work through professional development opportunities or other forms of support for inclusive teaching.

Participants' accounts in this study suggest that students became more confident and participatory when lecturers invited them to reflect on hidden cultural tensions and discuss how these tensions influenced classroom dynamics. Reflective journals, facilitated discussions, and structured debates on cultural values were described as helpful in making previously less visible barriers more discussable and negotiable. These findings echo Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2018)'s argument that openly addressing communication norms can enhance intercultural clarity and also resonate with intercultural perspectives that emphasise the co-construction of shared meaning through critical dialogue. Although this step may be difficult, as it requires participants to reconsider familiar assumptions and practices, it is presented here as a valuable orientation for moving beyond superficial agreement, fostering trust, and preparing the ground for longer-term intercultural dialogue.

9.4.1.4 Adapting

The final step involves integrating intercultural practices more fully into everyday academic activity. At this stage, cultural diversity is not simply accommodated but increasingly recognised as a pedagogical resource. Both

lecturers and students contribute to creating a classroom environment in which intercultural interaction becomes a more routine, valued, and collaborative part of learning. This step, therefore, focuses on sustaining inclusive intercultural practices over time through continued engagement and institutional support.

Participants' accounts in this study suggest that ongoing intercultural activities, such as peer-led discussions, mentoring, and recognition of diverse contributions, were associated with a stronger sense of belonging and a greater willingness to participate. Participants also highlighted the importance of institutional support, including induction events, intercultural workshops, and access to culturally sensitive pastoral services. These accounts indicate that adaptation is more sustainable when intercultural engagement is embedded in the wider academic environment rather than treated as a one-off intervention.

This emphasis is also supported by previous research. Ward et al. (2001) and Deardorff (2020) note that long-term intercultural training and institutional commitment reduce stress and promote lasting engagement. Glass et al. (2021) emphasise that inclusive practices must move beyond symbolic gestures and become embedded within teaching, assessment, and support systems.

At a practical level, this step may be supported through longer-term institutional strategies, such as mentoring provision, peer support, staff development, and the integration of intercultural considerations into induction, curriculum design, and student support. Such measures are more likely to be effective when they are treated as part of ongoing academic practice rather than as isolated initiatives.

9.4.2 Recommendations for TESOL lecturers

Drawing on participants' accounts, this subsection outlines context-sensitive considerations for TESOL lecturers that align with the Four-Step Dynamic Support Framework. The framework is intended to serve as a flexible and evolving orientation rather than a fixed method, embedded in everyday practice and responsive to the changing dynamics of the classroom.

Effective intercultural teaching begins with a shift in perspective. Lecturers are encouraged to move beyond deficit-based interpretations of Chinese students' classroom behaviour and to avoid treating silence, caution, or indirect communication as straightforward signs of disengagement. Instead, such behaviours may be better understood as interactional styles shaped by prior educational, cultural, and relational experiences. A key recommendation is therefore to approach classroom interaction with relational and contextual sensitivity, viewing it not only as a means of assessing performance, but also as a social process co-constructed by all participants.

Participants' accounts in this study suggest that intercultural challenges often emerge in less visible forms, including anxiety, self-censorship, and emotional distance, rather than in overt academic difficulty alone. For this reason, intercultural interaction should be treated as a shared responsibility rather than a problem for students to solve independently. Lecturers may support this process by creating lower-risk spaces for participation and by making classroom norms more transparent. Clarifying expectations for discussion, offering multiple participation formats, and explaining the role of disagreement in academic debate may help reduce confusion and strengthen intercultural confidence.

Lecturers may also consider using anonymous feedback tools or digital

platforms through which students can ask questions or raise concerns without fear of judgment. Such strategies may help widen participation and reduce anxiety for students who are hesitant to speak in class. Where possible, their value may be enhanced by institutional support that helps ensure accessibility and integration into existing teaching practices.

Finally, this study encourages lecturers to approach culture as complex, fluid, and context-dependent rather than as a source of fixed explanations. Intercultural interaction is shaped not only by broader cultural expectations but also by classroom dynamics, individual experience, and institutional conditions. There is therefore no single method that guarantees participation in every context. Instead, lecturers are encouraged to observe, reflect, and adapt their teaching in relation to the students and situations before them. An open, reflexive, and inquiry-driven stance is central to supporting meaningful intercultural engagement.

By applying the four-step framework flexibly and responsively, lecturers may foster classroom environments that are more inclusive, emotionally safe, and culturally attuned. Over time, this ongoing process of reflection and adjustment may contribute to more collaborative, reciprocal, and sustainable intercultural practices in TESOL teaching.

9.4.3 Recommendations for Chinese Students

Drawing on participants' accounts, this subsection outlines context-sensitive considerations for Chinese students in intercultural TESOL classrooms. Guided by the Four-Step Dynamic Support Framework, students are encouraged to view classroom interaction as a continuous process of reflection, adjustment, and growth rather than as a one-time challenge.

First, students may benefit from developing greater intercultural awareness. This includes becoming more familiar with communication norms, participation expectations, and academic conventions in the classrooms they are entering. Behaviours such as silence, indirect expression, or deference to authority may be valued in some prior educational and cultural contexts, but they may be interpreted differently in other classroom settings. By recognising these differences, students may be better able to make informed choices about how to participate while still maintaining a sense of their own cultural identity.

Second, students are encouraged to adjust their participation gradually. Small-group discussions, written responses, and informal conversations with lecturers after class may offer lower-risk ways of contributing. Such approaches can help reduce anxiety and build confidence over time. Adjustment does not mean abandoning one's own communicative style. Rather, it involves expanding one's ability to communicate across different educational contexts.

Third, students may need to work through internal concerns about making mistakes or losing face. Participants' accounts in this study suggest that anxiety about imperfect language use can sometimes limit willingness to engage. However, in intercultural classrooms, participation often depends less on flawless expression than on willingness to ask questions, explore ideas, and take part in discussion. Letting go of excessive self-monitoring may therefore support greater confidence and initiative.

Finally, students may benefit from adopting a flexible and adaptive mindset. Classroom dynamics can change across topics, teaching methods, and group interactions. By reflecting on their experiences, attending to their emotional responses, and communicating with others when needed, students may

become better able to respond to these shifts. Participation does not necessarily require speaking in every class. It can also involve sustained engagement, ongoing learning, and contributing at appropriate moments.

In conclusion, intercultural adaptation should not be understood as becoming “Western,” but as developing the confidence and skills needed to engage effectively in diverse classroom environments. By approaching interaction through the four-step process of understanding, adjusting, challenging, and adapting, Chinese students may find more meaningful and manageable ways of participating in intercultural TESOL classrooms.

9.4.4 Recommendations for the institution

Drawing on participants’ accounts, this subsection outlines a set of context-sensitive considerations for institutions that support intercultural learning in TESOL contexts. Institutions play an important role in shaping the conditions under which lecturer–student interaction takes place, since policies, support systems, and classroom structures all influence the quality of intercultural engagement.

First, institutions are encouraged to embed intercultural competence more firmly within teaching and learning strategies. This may include providing ongoing staff development in intercultural communication, inclusive pedagogy, and classroom relationship management. Such provision can help lecturers respond more sensitively to diverse student needs and support more inclusive forms of interaction. To improve feasibility, this training may be integrated into existing professional development structures rather than introduced as a wholly separate initiative. Its uptake may also be strengthened when institutions recognise intercultural teaching as an important dimension of good

educational practice.

Second, institutions should develop support systems that respond to both the emotional and academic needs of international students. Structured mentoring, peer support networks, and accessible wellbeing services may help reduce emotional distance, strengthen students' sense of belonging, and improve communication between students and academic staff. These forms of support are particularly valuable when they are integrated into the wider academic environment rather than treated as separate or optional services. In practical terms, institutions may improve feasibility by building on existing student support structures and by using both in-person and online channels to widen access.

Third, curriculum design should reflect intercultural awareness more explicitly. Institutions may encourage the inclusion of diverse perspectives, international case studies, and comparative tasks that allow students to draw on their own cultural knowledge within classroom discussion. Such approaches can help position cultural diversity as a resource for learning and support more critical engagement with global perspectives. To make this realistic, institutions may introduce such changes gradually through curriculum review, staff guidance, and the adaptation of existing teaching materials rather than through immediate large-scale redesign.

Fourth, institutions may also promote classroom structures that support inclusive interaction. Flexible participation formats, smaller discussion-based settings where possible, and the use of anonymous feedback tools can make interaction more accessible to students with different communicative preferences and levels of confidence. Expanding participation pathways may help ensure that meaningful contributions are not limited to those already

comfortable speaking openly in class. These adjustments are often more feasible when introduced incrementally and aligned with existing teaching practices. At the same time, their effectiveness may be strengthened when staff are supported in understanding why such flexibility matters.

Finally, institutions should foster a reflective and adaptive institutional culture. Feedback from students and staff should be used not only for quality assurance, but also to inform ongoing improvement in intercultural teaching and support. Since both policy and everyday practice shape intercultural engagement, institutions need to remain responsive to changing student needs and classroom realities.

In summary, institutions have both the responsibility and the capacity to foster more inclusive, adaptive, and culturally responsive learning environments. By strengthening intercultural training, student support, curriculum development, and inclusive classroom design, they can create conditions in which lecturers and students can better engage across differences with confidence and mutual respect.

9.4.5 Recommendations for the government

While participants' accounts did not directly address government policy, the broader findings of this study suggest several implications for government bodies that shape higher education and support internationalisation in TESOL programmes. As key stakeholders, governments influence the broader policy conditions in which intercultural learning occurs across institutions.

First, governments may strengthen intercultural engagement by more explicitly incorporating intercultural competence into national education strategies and

quality assurance frameworks. Rather than treating it as an optional skill, policy frameworks may recognise intercultural competence as an important dimension of teaching and learning in internationalised higher education. In practical terms, this could involve clarifying expectations for inclusive pedagogy, staff development, and student support within policy guidance and evaluation frameworks. Such an approach is likely to be more feasible when integrated into existing quality assurance and funding structures rather than introduced as a wholly separate agenda.

Second, governments may support institutional initiatives that promote intercultural understanding through targeted, sustainable funding. This could include support for collaborative research, teaching resources, and platforms that enable international student perspectives to inform policy and practice. These kinds of measures may help reduce structural inequalities and improve the support available to international students. Their longer-term value is likely to be greater when they are embedded in sustained policy commitments rather than short-term interventions.

Third, education ministries and regulatory bodies may help strengthen lecturers' professional development through national or sector-wide support for training in intercultural communication, inclusive pedagogy, and teaching in diverse classrooms. Providing such opportunities at scale may improve teaching quality and contribute to a more inclusive academic culture. To improve feasibility, these initiatives may be delivered through existing professional development networks, online platforms, or sector partnerships rather than requiring entirely new structures.

Fourth, governments may also encourage greater collaboration between institutions, both domestically and internationally. Partnerships, exchanges,

and joint initiatives can support shared learning in curriculum design, staff development, and student support, while also helping to bridge the gap between policy aspirations and classroom practice. Such collaboration is likely to be most effective when supported through realistic, longer-term incentives that encourage institutions to treat intercultural engagement as a shared area of development.

Finally, governments may strengthen inclusive communication for international students by promoting clearer, more accessible, and more culturally sensitive information about academic expectations, support services, and relevant rights and responsibilities. Transparent communication at the policy and system level can help reduce confusion, build trust, and support students' ability to navigate higher education more confidently.

In summary, government bodies have an important role in shaping the wider conditions under which intercultural education develops. Through policy direction, sustained support, and inclusive governance, they may help institutions create learning environments that are better able to support equitable, diverse, and internationally engaged forms of higher education.

9.5 Limitations

9.5.1 Limitations of research methodological practices

This study employed a multi-method qualitative design with a view to obtaining a deeper understanding of intercultural lecturer-student interactions from multiple perspectives. Classroom observation was used as contextual and familiarisation work to support the researcher's understanding of classroom settings and recurring participation formats, and to inform the design of the

focus group interviews and open-ended questionnaires. Focus group interviews were used to explore Chinese students' reported experiences during intercultural interactions with TESOL lecturers and related feelings of intercultural adaptation. Open-ended questionnaires and in-depth interviews were used to collect TESOL lecturers' perceptions of cultural differences in their teaching practices in relation to their interactions with Chinese students, as well as the interaction strategies they adopted. While these methods enhanced the diversity and depth of data sources, they still faced several challenges in their actual implementation.

Firstly, the classroom observation component did not include Chinese students in the TESOL programmes observed due to actual university teaching arrangements and sample limitations. This meant that the study could not compare participants' reflective accounts with direct observation of Chinese students' classroom participation. As a result, the analysis relied mainly on students' self-reported experiences and lecturers' perceptions rather than on direct behavioural observation. Secondly, the organisation and conduct of the focus group interviews relied on participants' subjective expressions, which may have been influenced by group pressure or social expectations, thereby affecting the authenticity and diversity of the data. In addition, although the sample of lecturers covered a wide range of nationalities and teaching experience backgrounds, the overall sample size was limited and did not adequately represent the diversity within the TESOL lecturer community.

9.5.2 Limitations of the theoretical framework

This study constructs a comprehensive analytical framework by combining Pianta's Teaching Through Interaction model (TTI), Rapport Management

Theory, the CMIC model, Small Culture Theory, and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory in order to explore the characteristics and dynamics of intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL contexts from multidimensional perspectives, including relational processes, cultural adaptation, interaction strategies, and context. Although this multi-theoretical framework helps to enhance explanatory power and diversity of perspectives, there are several theoretical limitations.

Firstly, TTI theory has mainly been used to analyse the characteristics of interactions between teachers and students at the pre-school and basic education levels. When applied to the study of interactions in higher education, especially in intercultural contexts, this study may face a problem of poor theoretical fit. University lecturer-student relationships tend to be more complex and egalitarian, with significant differences in interaction patterns and affective appeals, and the original structure of TTI theory may not be sufficient to comprehensively cover such highly dynamic and culturally intertwined interaction situations. Second, the CMIC model emphasises the development of individual intercultural competence and the process of cultural adaptation; although it can explain how students and lecturers gradually adapt to multicultural environments, its theoretical framework focuses more on the development of competence at the individual level than on specific interactive behaviours and language practices. Therefore, in the analysis of interaction, the CMIC model may be insufficient in terms of operationalisation and detail. Thirdly, Rapport Management theory provides a powerful perspective on how lecturers and students establish, maintain, and adjust interpersonal relationships through language behaviours, especially when faced with cultural differences and identity negotiation. However, the theory is mainly used in micro-pragmatics and language interaction and has limited explanatory power

for macro teaching structures, educational institutional contexts, and cultural power relations, making it difficult to fully account for the structural and institutional factors in universities. Fourthly, Small Culture theory stresses the contextual and generative nature of culture, which is inspiring in analysing immediate interaction and the construction of common culture in TESOL programmes. However, its vague theoretical boundaries and broad conceptual definitions make it easy to overlap with other theories in practical application and may lead to the generalisation of the concept of 'culture' in the study. Finally, as a classic tool for analysing national cultures, the cultural dimensions theory is useful in analysing the differences between lecturers' and students' values in the context of Chinese and Western cultures. However, its direct use in explaining specific lecturer-student interactions may lead to a tendency of "cultural determinism", which deepens stereotypes and reduces the explanatory power of complex social interactions in the intercultural teaching and learning arena.

This study seeks to construct a multifaceted, integrated theoretical framework to understand intercultural lecturer-student interactions across structural, relational, cultural, and contextual dimensions. While this integrative approach is conceptually innovative, several challenges emerged during its development. One major difficulty is that the selected theoretical models originate from different disciplinary traditions and emphasise different aspects of interaction. For instance, the Teaching Through Interaction (TTI) model focuses on behavioural mechanisms within classroom exchanges; Rapport Management Theory centres on interpersonal relationship dynamics; Small Culture Theory highlights context-dependent meaning-making; and both Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and the Comprehensive Model of Intercultural Communication (CMIC) attend to national culture and individual adaptation. Placing these

models within a single framework risks producing overlapping or disconnected analyses without a coherent conceptual thread. As a result, the framework sometimes lacks structural clarity and theoretical consistency.

Another limitation concerns the insufficient attention to structural power in classroom interactions. Although this study explores cultural adaptation and interaction strategies, it finds a limitation in the existing theoretical models. Most of the integrated theories do not adequately address questions of authority. For example, they fail to clarify who controls the discourse and who defines acceptable norms in intercultural classrooms. This leaves the framework under-equipped to account for the linguistic marginalisation experienced by Chinese students in English-dominated academic environments.

Additionally, the framework does not fully consider how processes of cultural identity formation shape lecturer-student interaction. For example, some Chinese students may remain silent or withdraw from classroom engagement due to uncertainty around their cultural identity. These emotionally and culturally complex behaviours are difficult to explain using the current theoretical tools. The absence of a perspective on identity conflict and reconstruction during intercultural adaptation creates a gap in understanding the more nuanced and non-linear aspects of students' intercultural experiences.

In summary, although this study integrates multiple theories to enhance understanding of intercultural lecturer–student interactions, some limitations remain. The framework still lacks clarity in articulating theoretical hierarchies and structural coherence. It also pays insufficient attention to issues of power and identity.

9.5.3 Participant- related limitations

The participant profile and sampling scope of this study affect the interpretive reach and wider applicability of the findings. This study centres on the interaction between Chinese international students and TESOL lecturers, a group that remains underrepresented in international higher education. Their predominantly monocultural backgrounds and disciplinary specialisations may also impose certain limitations on the generalisability of findings.

Firstly, the student cohort did not include international students from other cultural backgrounds (e.g. Southeast Asia, Africa, the Middle East, etc.) in the comparative analyses of their participation. This prevented the study from fully revealing the similarities and differences between students from different cultural backgrounds in coping with intercultural teaching and learning environments. As a result, the generalisability of the findings across cultures is limited. Second, the group of teachers was comprised of lecturers engaged in TESOL teaching and did not include teachers from other disciplinary backgrounds. While this setting helps to focus on intercultural interactions in the field of language teaching and learning, it may also conceal the strategies and teaching styles adopted by lecturers from other disciplines. These lecturers may respond to cultural differences in different ways. Therefore, the findings reflect more the characteristics of interactions in a particular teaching and learning arena rather than the dynamics of intercultural lecturer-student interactions in higher education.

The samples in this study were drawn from Universities in Scotland, so the circumstances of intercultural interactions in TESOL programme scenarios in Scottish Universities may be reflected in the findings. Finally, most of the

student participants in this study were female, resulting in a gender imbalance in the sample. This may affect the representativeness of the findings, particularly when analysing gender differences in teacher-student interactions, where the conclusions are more biased towards female students' experiences and expressions. The findings of this study may not apply to all gender groups, as male students may have different interaction styles and acculturation processes.

9.5.4 Researcher's positional limitations

In qualitative research, the identity, experience and position of the researcher have a significant impact on the research process. As a researcher with a Chinese background, I am both the designer and the implementer of the study, as well as a member of the cultural insiders of the research topic.

However, this "familiarity" may also lead to bias in the analyses. On the one hand, I may be more inclined to interpret the words and behaviours of the interviewed students through the lens of cultural identity and empathy, overlooking the broader structural factors or critical perspectives underlying them. On the other hand, being a "member of an external culture" may affect my understanding of the cultural stance and expression of the lecturers when I am confronted with their interview materials. In addition, this is the first large-scale study I have undertaken, involving interview design, classroom observation, data coding and analysis, etc. There is still much room for growth in time management, methodological integration, and theoretical deepening. Therefore, the researcher's inexperience and positional factors should be important considerations when assessing the study's quality.

9.6 Academic and personal growth

Throughout my academic journey, I have experienced substantial growth both academically and personally. This development has deeply influenced how I understand knowledge, collaborate with others, and respond to challenges. It has been shaped through continuous reflection, active engagement in academic activities, and constant adaptation to new environments.

Academically, I have made progress in several key areas, including critical thinking, independent research, academic writing, and self-confidence. When I began my studies, I often found it difficult to connect different theoretical perspectives or conduct thorough critical analyses of scholarly literature. However, through consistent practice, active participation in seminars, and wide reading across various academic sources, I gradually learned to question assumptions, evaluate competing arguments, and develop structured reasoning. Conducting my research project significantly enhanced my ability to organise ideas, analyse data, and communicate complex concepts effectively. I also learned how to follow academic conventions and support my arguments with appropriate evidence. Writing a literature review was particularly transformative, as it sharpened my analytical thinking and deepened my understanding of how the field has evolved. It also helped me recognise gaps in existing research. In addition, working with peers from diverse academic backgrounds exposed me to different perspectives and taught me how to integrate insights from multiple disciplines. This broadened my thinking and improved the depth of my academic analysis.

On a personal level, I have experienced meaningful growth through navigating a new academic and cultural environment. Entering this unfamiliar setting challenged many of my assumptions and pushed me to step outside my

comfort zone. At the beginning, I struggled with language barriers and occasional self-doubt. However, these difficulties became turning points for personal development. They helped me build resilience, patience, and a more open mindset. I became more flexible and better able to handle unfamiliar situations, whether it was adjusting to different teaching methods or managing competing academic deadlines. These experiences also improved my interpersonal skills and made me more empathetic in my communication. Over time, I formed meaningful academic and social connections. Another key part of my personal development has been an increased sense of self-awareness. Facing academic pressures and managing expectations taught me to better understand my values, strengths, and areas for improvement. I learned to set achievable goals, track my progress, and stay motivated, even in the face of setbacks.

My academic and personal development are closely connected. The progress I made in my studies would not have been possible without the personal qualities I gained, such as persistence, time management, and emotional awareness. Likewise, many aspects of my personal growth were made possible by academic challenges. Together, these experiences have built a strong foundation for my future studies and professional development. I now feel more confident in conducting research, contributing to academic discussions, and responding to complex issues with a thoughtful and critical mindset. I am more self-motivated and better prepared to face the demands of a rapidly changing global environment. The growth I have experienced so far has had a lasting impact. It has strengthened both my academic skills and my character, shaping me into a more thoughtful, resilient, and responsible individual. I am confident that this development will continue to influence my future work and research. It has inspired me to engage actively with academic

and social issues, drawing on the knowledge and skills I have gained.

9.7 Future research

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, future research on intercultural lecturer–student interaction in higher education could be extended in several important directions.

First, future studies could make greater use of classroom observation as a complementary method, particularly in settings that include the real-time participation of Chinese students. Rather than replacing participants' reflective accounts, such observation could add contextual depth and help researchers compare reported experiences with situated classroom interaction. Longitudinal observation may be especially valuable, as it could illuminate how engagement, adjustment, and lecturer–student relationships develop over time across a semester or programme.

Second, further theoretical development is needed. Although the integrated framework used in this study offered a useful basis for interpreting intercultural lecturer–student interaction, its limitations became more visible when applied to complex and evolving classroom contexts in higher education. Future studies should continue to test, refine, and contextualise these theories in relation to empirical data. Researchers might also consider drawing on additional perspectives, such as sociocultural theory or critical intercultural approaches, to strengthen the explanation of power, identity, and context in intercultural academic interaction.

Third, the findings and recommendations from this study may serve as a useful starting point for further empirical investigation. Future research could examine

how the proposed strategies operate in classroom practice and explore the conditions under which they are perceived as helpful by students and lecturers. While the present study focused on Chinese students in TESOL contexts, some of its insights may have broader relevance to intercultural lecturer–student interaction involving other international student groups. However, this would need to be examined through further comparative research rather than assumed in advance.

Fourth, future research could broaden the participant pool to include international students from a wider range of cultural backgrounds, such as Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and other regions, as well as lecturers from disciplines beyond TESOL, including business, engineering, humanities, and the social sciences. Such comparative work could help identify both shared and context-specific patterns in interaction, adaptation, and communication across higher education settings.

Finally, given this study’s finding that lecturer–student interaction was often described as marked by surface harmony alongside underlying tension, future research should explore more closely how such tensions are recognised, negotiated, and addressed in practice. Even where overt conflict is absent, emotional discomfort, communicative hesitation, and limited mutual understanding may still constrain meaningful engagement. Further work could therefore investigate both theoretical and practical approaches for making these latent tensions more visible and for supporting more inclusive, productive, and genuinely reciprocal intercultural interaction.

9.8 Conclusion

Drawing primarily on student focus groups, lecturer interviews, and open-

ended questionnaires, with pilot classroom observation providing contextual background, the study demonstrates the complex, dynamic, and context-sensitive nature of intercultural engagement in multilingual classrooms.

One of the study's central contributions is its analysis of the structural and non-structural factors associated with interaction. While previous research has often treated these dimensions separately, participants' accounts in this study suggest that they are closely interconnected and continuously negotiated in classroom practice. By showing how institutional conditions, sociocultural expectations, adaptive processes, and individual experiences interact in participants' accounts, the study provides a more integrated understanding of intercultural lecturer–student interaction. In doing so, it also challenges essentialist interpretations that reduce classroom behaviour to fixed national-cultural traits or narrowly task-based responses.

The study also develops a Four-Step Dynamic Support Framework organised around understanding, adjusting, challenging, and adapting. Rather than presenting intercultural interaction as a linear process, this framework conceptualises intercultural interaction as cyclical, developmental, and shaped by changing classroom relationships and institutional conditions. In this sense, the framework offers a context-sensitive way of translating the study's findings into practical guidance for lecturers, students, and institutions.

Another important contribution lies in the reinterpretation of classroom silence in participants' accounts. Rather than treating silence as a sign of language deficiency or disengagement, the study shows that it was often described as strategic and culturally shaped. It recognises that silence can reflect students' efforts to manage emotional risk, navigate unfamiliar participation norms, or express respect within a hierarchical setting. This urges educators to adopt

more empathetic and flexible approaches to student engagement.

At the theoretical level, the study makes a theoretical contribution by supporting, refining, and extending several existing models. It suggests that Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions remain useful as a broad cultural reference point, but should be applied with caution and in conjunction with more context-sensitive perspectives. It supports Small Culture Theory as a particularly valuable lens for understanding how meaning is negotiated through classroom routines and relationships. It also shows that the Teaching Through Interaction model is more analytically useful in intercultural settings when read alongside Rapport Management Theory, particularly regarding emotional support, face concerns, and relational sensitivity. In addition, the study suggests that the CMIC model remains helpful for understanding adaptation, but requires further extension to account for institutional, structural, and classroom-specific influences.

Overall, participants' accounts point towards a shift in how intercultural engagement is understood in higher education. Rather than treating it as a one-sided problem of student adjustment, this study frames it as an ongoing and reciprocal process of negotiation, trust-building, and shared meaning-making. In this way, the study makes both theoretical and practical contributions by offering a more integrated and context-sensitive understanding of intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the underlying tensions, negotiated adjustments, and relational complexities that shape intercultural lecturer–student interaction in TESOL. It argues for a more reflective, collaborative, and culturally humble form of engagement in higher education.

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Appendix 1 Example Note for Classroom Observation

Observation notes

27, September 2023

Class setting: 12 students, medium classroom, small group seating

about 120 minutes

Information observed:

1. At the beginning of the class, the lecturer engaged in light, non-academic interactions by asking a few students about their lives and other matters.
2. The lecturer asked a question; after a brief pause, one student responded, and the lecturer nodded to show encouragement.

3. When no one responded to a question, the lecturer called on a specific student to share their thoughts.
4. Students who did not usually volunteer to share their opinions were asked directly for their thoughts by the lecturer.
5. Students who appeared less willing to answer questions seemed to have lower language proficiency compared to those who actively participated.
6. During group discussions, the lecturer joined the groups to listen to students' conversations.
7. The lecturer also participated in group discussions by asking for more details on a particular viewpoint.
8. The lecturer frequently moved around the classroom while teaching, which allowed for relatively close proximity to different students.
9. When the class discussed educational systems in different countries, the lecturer invited students from various regions to share their experiences. This led to noticeably higher engagement, even from students who were usually less active in other activities.
10. Male students participated less actively in class interactions compared to female students, and there were fewer male students in the classroom overall.
11. The classroom atmosphere remained relaxed throughout the session, with no signs of tension.
12. A quiz activity during the class was particularly engaging for students and led to further explanation and interaction.
13. Three students demonstrated significantly more active participation than others in the classroom.
14. These actively participating students were seated near the front and centre of the classroom.
15. Students seated along the sides of the classroom appeared to interact less frequently.
16. The lecturer showed genuine interest when students shared their views, often nodding in encouragement.
17. The lecturer recounted his experience, and the students seemed interested.
18. Students who don't talk much often show their opinions by nodding their heads

19. At the end of the course some students had some academic and non-academic interactions with the lecturers. They chatted about assessment and holiday plans. These students were those who were very active in the class.

Appendix 2 Focus group interview schedule

学生焦点小组半结构化面试问题

面对面的介绍性声明：

我们现在正在录音。再次感谢您同意参加本次个人采访。请注意，您所说的任何内容都将在转录过程中匿名，并且您可以随时停止参与，且无需给出解释。您也可以拒绝回答问题。拒绝参加不会受到任何处罚。我还向您发送了一份参与信息，其中包含如果您对今天的采访有任何疑问或意见时应联系谁的信息。

1. 你为什么来苏格兰读书？

你喜欢在苏格兰的大学生活吗？为什么？

-你用了多长时间适应了这边的大学生活？

-你在这边的大学里有过不自在或难以融入的经历吗？

2. 你觉得师生关系在你适应留学生活中有怎样的作用？

-你和英国老师之间的互动情况怎么样？

-你觉得你和老师的互动与其他背景的学生相比有什么不同？

-在你们的互动中有感受到文化的差异吗？

-你们在互动中聊及文化话题吗？

-你认为文化差异有阻碍你们的沟通吗？可以举一些例子吗？

3. 你觉得你以往的教育经历对你留学生活有影响吗？

- 在中国，你与大学老师的关系怎么样？

- 你在留学之前对英国的师生关系有过怎样的猜测？

-你借鉴过哪些和中国老师相处的方式来和英国老师相处吗？

4. 你认为自己有被老师重视或尊重吗？

-你认为老师有哪些做法令你觉得被尊重和被欢迎？

-你认为老师有哪些做法令你觉得不舒服或难以接受？

- 您与英国老师产生过误解吗？当时是什么情形？

- 你觉得这些冲突和误解是什么原因导致的呢？

- 你是如何与讲师解决这个问题的？

- 你做了什么努力和办法来理解老师的观点？

- 您觉得你的方法有用吗？为什么？

5. 在你的留学经历中，你认为跨文化师生关系还有哪些其他的困难？

- 你认为这些困难是普遍现象吗？

- 当你面对这些困难时，你是怎样想的？

- 你认为这会影响你的整个留学体验吗？

- 您认为大学有哪些做法降低了你的留学体验？

- 您认为大学有哪些做法提高了你的留学体验？

6. 您的老师询问或了解过你以往的教育经历？

- 你认为英国老师了解现在的中国学生的教育经历吗？为什么？
 - 你认为英国老师有哪些对中国学生的了解是不准确的？
 - 你希望英国老师在了解中国学生时关注些什么？
 - 你希望英国老师怎样做来加强你的跨文化师生关系？
7. 对于跨文化师生关系，你有什么其他想补充的内容或想分享的故事吗？

Appendix 3 Interview Record Example with Chinese Students

学生采访第七组

我： 你们为什么来苏格兰留学？

S7-2 我先说我，嗯。首先为什么要来苏格兰留学？其实我并不是就是一定要选苏格兰，而是因为学校他在苏格兰，所以我就来了。因为当时我手里说的，说到 offer 好像是那有几个，就丽兹，兰卡，还有诺丁汉，还有那个格拉，那时候的格拉它的 QS 是最高的啊。然后他这个专业名字他不是有英语两个字嘛？我觉得万一要回国找工作，还是啥可能会考考编制，可能就认证起来比较方便。然后还有一个就是苏格兰，那时候还有另外一个主要原因是因为苏格兰她好像就是当时我来的时候是据说比较安全，就主要是因为安全这个因素。然后还有一个原因，就那时候我高中的时候，我当我其实不太懂英格兰、苏格兰区别，但是高中的时候有一次我们音乐课，然后我们老英语老师给我们放一个什么勇敢的心，就那个电影，然后里面不是有那个风笛声，我知道原来有一个苏格兰，所以就正好就选了苏格兰，就来格拉。

S7-1 我是当时选学校的时候，因为那个格大，他不收那个申请费，所以我就选上，我就申请上了这个账，之后还申请了英国还有一个圣安德鲁斯要了我这俩纠结。后来我也是看这个专业，感觉这个专业比较广泛，所以才选择了这，但是其实来之前我对苏格兰一无所知，然后这格大我都没听说过他，我是来了被录取之后才开始查他的信息的，所以也是因为学校选择了苏格兰。

S7-3 我感觉我跟你们俩差不多，第一个是因为这个 QS 排名你肯定要挑最高的去。嗯，就性这样，性价比高一些。第二就是安全原因，苏兰确实会比英格兰是我了解的会安全，然后再加上又我以前特别喜欢一个电影，你知道吗？就是不知道你们看没看过就要猜火车那个电。喜欢那个电影就是在格拉斯哥和爱丁堡拍的，然后我因为那个电影我特别喜欢索弗兰，然后如果让我能选的话，那我肯定。

我： 那你们用多长时间适应了这边儿的大学生活？哪方面适应的好？哪方面适应的不好？

S7-1 我先说吧。嗯，我感觉我好像那一年，感觉我感觉到现在我都还没适应，他也不是，就是。什么是？就是怎么着才。学习上没有适应，也不算没有适应，就我现在学习，我没有学习的心思，我一点都不想学习。我感觉如果说是语言上适应的话，好像确实是我读博士或者是研究生后半段我才能开始适应，因为一开始确实老师他那个说的话有口音根本听不懂。而且他，而且同学你像咱班不有一个那个雅思考官嘛？他那个英苏格兰英语，那上课时我是一句没听懂过，但是现在搜索谈英语我能听懂一些了。嗯，所以说就。嗯，所以在研究生的时候我感觉语言上其实并没有太适应，就老是说话，我可能听懂个百分之，就按照了他那个英语比较标准上能听懂个百分之六七十，听懂可能听懂更多，但是你要能记住并能理解，能抓住他那个关键信息，可能也就六七十。然后如果是生活上的适应，学习生活上的适应的话，其实一直挺适应的，因为他就是研究生，就是要读 reading，然后写 IC，然后有 deadline 这些就是有明确的目标让你下一步该做什么，所以说还是挺适应的。而且你知道为啥我们几个玩得还好吗？我们几个就是因为学习结得远，我们就一起学习，然后课前的时候一起讨论，然后一起什么什么的，所以说这方面我们都至少对于我来说挺适应的。嗯嗯，然后我说完了，嗯。

S7-2 我其实不懂，就是怎么样去评判叫适应，其实我也不太懂。然后我在想就是我如，如果要是说适应的话，我觉得可能从成绩来说，因为我觉得我可能上学期我觉得我可能就还不太适应。因为特别是刚开学的第一个月，我当时又觉得那个 reading 材料特别多，我觉得你要让我不用翻译软件，你叫我看，我觉得我上课前 reading 我都看不完，我只能就比如他可能要布置一个是主要的 reading，一个可能是附加的，我可能只看完那一个主要的 reading 感觉都挺够呛。就你这边看完我那边就不知道他讲了什么，就忘记

他讲了什么。后来慢慢的话到了那个第一学期，下半学期到第二学期时候我感觉就好了一点，就是你看 reading 速度会稍微快一点，你就知道可能有些是什么重点，而且有些什么数据那一块看不懂就不要再看，就跳过了，可能就稍微好一点。然后写作的话感觉第二学期比第一学期要好一点，因为第二学期最起码就是你，不管你有的没的，你都能够编出来字，因为我得到时候第一学期期末时候让我写 2,000 还是 3,000 字，我觉得好多呀，后来一对比，那个毕业论文那 7 至少那个什么七八千字还是多少字我觉得，嗯，就算很少的了。所以我觉得可能就是学习方面的话，第一学习不适应，到第二学期会好一些。然后不适应的话主要就一开始的是阅读材料太多，就速度不太适应，然后写作的话就是没有写过那么一大段的，然后还有口语方面也是，就是你刚来的话，然后有那种 SEMI 的那种讨论，在国内好像就是没有。嗯，这样子，那种一整节课老师都让我们讨论，以学生为主导。一开始来还觉得不太适应，因为感觉有点不值性价比，到后来的话就感觉还比较适应这一块，因为感觉你得多发言才能回本的感觉，然后结束。

S7-3 我的理解。适应就是能不能如鱼得水、得心应手。但是我觉得就像本地人，作为一个亚洲人，要像上，要是想像本地人一样那种适应我觉得是不太可能，就是怎样能让自己过得更顺利，反正我从学习上，我也从学习和生活上讲，我觉得学习上也是第一学期，就是完全不是说完全不能适应，反正是适应这个过程很艰难。嗯，我觉得对我来说最大的挑战就是因为这个思维方式不同。就是写论文这个思路不同，我以前的理解就是 academic writing，就我以前理解是应该先写一个 argumentation，然后再写 arguments，就这种结果我第一次交那个作业时候我还记得特别清楚，就是这个，我这种写的学数学的方式完全是反的，然后这个第一次这个作业就不是特别理想，然后我当时压力特别大，加上生活压力也特别大，然后我就在纠结我能不能拿一等学位这件事情就纠结了好久，然后以至于我又扬了。然后又感冒了，压力特别大。嗯，天天在寝室里哭。我就。

S7-3 然后就是，然后 reading 又特别多，任务又特别紧，第一学期就很难很难，然后我的解决办法就是跟我的教授不断的 meeting，然后后来他就教我怎么样改这种就是学术思维，后来改了之后，然后也是第二学期慢慢就开始如鱼得水，然后再加上就是还能还有精力去参加下校，还有精力想想别的这些东西，就是这个过程很漫长，反正就是适应，学习上适应很漫长。然后生活中我感觉我去的第一天，其实我对这个生活就很，我可能是比较麻木吧。就是我即使我到了英格兰，不是苏格兰，苏格兰的时候我都有一种我还在中国的感觉。就是我没有。国界的那种感觉，就是我朋友也有外国人，或者是就外国人就跟我国籍不一样的人。然后也有跟我估计一样的人，我就没有感觉生活上有一种很强的割裂感，就生活还算过去，生活上适应，觉得适应挺快，比学习上要适应的要更快一些，然后再加上这边人普遍都比较友善，我感觉比英格兰要更加友善。然后你想融入进去，可能适应的话就会更快一些，但是就是口音是一个问题，因为苏泊兰口音我真的是听不懂，但好好就好在因为我的老师，我选课那几门老师他们都是他们的，就是上课不会带很浓的口音，我觉得这点还是适应的蛮快的。

我： 你们有没有在大学里有过不自在或者难以融入的感觉？有没有过这种经历？

S7-3 我觉得可太多了。觉得小组讨论这点最明显，我觉得普遍，我觉得亚洲学生他就是不愿意发言，就是在小组讨论上。因为刚才子然也说了，就是他英国这种教育模式就是以学生为主导，就是可能这一上两什么，上一次 tutorial 可能上半节课老师讲，后半节课可能就完全让你来讲。然后你白人那个思维也不是白人，慎用词，哈哈哈，他们是他们，哈哈哈。他们跟你的思维完全不一样，他你可能一开始你 get 不到他那个点，然后你融入不进去他那个讨论的氛围，但是你又有很强的观点。但就是这样。再加上毕竟文化背景不一样，就很多问题。比如说我当时我记得我们讨论就是上有文门课叫 language learning variables。讨论就是大家对老师的看法，因为你知道中国教育制度，我们当时有小组有一个是加拿大人，你知道中国教育制度，它跟就是北美教育制度肯定完全不一样，就我们谈论就是教师对教师的这个看法完

全不一样，就他说的东西我就是完全不能理解，尤其是就是当这种，他们北美教育占主流这种，就是这种小组的时候，你谈的话你完全不能理解他这个点。

S7-2 OK。嗯，我说，嗯，我觉得就是有一个难以融入的，我感觉就是印象最深刻的就是我当时第一学期上那个法律语言学的课，然后有一次是需要小组讨论，然后讨论，因为那个法律语言学它是要去分析一个法庭的一个庭审、一个片段，然后从什么语言学的角度。然后老师就给我们放了一段那个音频，然后让我们小组讨论去分析，但是他那个音频他又没有给我们字幕，然后我就听不懂他在说什么。然后当初那节课，我当时我好像，因为那个是，我好像是刚刚，因为我是，就是就是后来又重新选另外一门课，我刚去好像第二周，然后我就去跟有好像就都是老外是一个组，然后他们就是有的话是有两个是美国人，然后有一个就是那个加拿大人。然后他们就在讨论这个什么，那个这个庭审，然后讨论，因为他们听得懂，但我又听不懂，我只能在旁边就是旁听他们，然后他们讨论完之后，他们又去讨论，比如说美国的法律是什么什么什么样，什么加拉的法律是什么什么样，因为我们是给他给的那个庭审片段是英国的法律，他就说这两者有什么区别啊？什么？但是我对于法律什么都不懂，我又听不懂，甚至我觉得我这就是难以融入进去，我在旁边坐立难安，而那个时候那个老师他又是巡回，每个组，他都要站一会，就问一下你们讨论怎么样？然后他就站在我旁边，因为我是坐在最外面，因为你们躺着怎么样？我当时只能尴尬的，嗯，就在那尴尬的就点头。然后我看老师一走，旁边那个组员他可能比较好心，因为他是课代表，就那个黑人。然后他就问我，问我感觉怎么样？我说 OK，IM OK。但是我可以不懂他们在讨论什么，就是脚趾头就抠地的那种感觉，然后还有的话，还有一个就是之前好像是刚才宁哥说，就是有些时候可能就是口音还是什么，因为我当时记得我们就是组里边就是有另外一堂课，就是那个 Bob 那个课，那个就那个 Bob 那堂那个什么就是学术英语那个课，然后不是要就是两个人为一组，然后讨论文献了嘛。我记得有一次我好像是和那个印度人，那个印度，那印度女生在一个组，就要互相讨论文献，她说的话从头到尾我都没有听懂她在说什么，只有零星蹦的几个单词。我是懂是说什么意思。但是我又不能因为是小组讨论我又不能，好像就两个人还三个人，我又不能说，我听不懂你在说什么，我只能让他不断地重复，重复太多我又不好意思。然后后来我就只能就是说一些无关紧要的话，就这种我觉得就挺难融入的，就是一个是语音的问题，还有一个就是，对，还有一种就是有些时候对不了解，就是那种学科背景也有可能一个关系，对。

S7-3 好，结束我能补充一点，就文化这一点。嗯，你知道当你在一个就是以英国文化为主这种课堂氛围里，比如说老师讲课的时候，他自然会自然而然会举一些，就是只有英国人才懂得梗。这个时候你把 get 到，嗯，就比如说，虽然我虽然说，比如说有一次我记得我们 semantic 那个老师他讲梗的时候，他讲哈利波特梗。然后我不喜欢哈利波，我就 get 不到这个梗，get 不到这个语言里面的就它这个语用到底是它，因为它讲语言学，它这个到底是精彩在哪？我就 get 不到这个梗。

S7-3 然后因为我本身我没有，就是从小在英国的成长环境，还有一些英国最普通的食物，我们有一节课我记得讲那个区分，就是饼干，如何区分饼干和曲奇这种，因为语义学它如果你语言有歧义的话，可能会在法律、英语里面它会有什么有很大的影响，然后就让我们区分什么，就包括各种三明治，什么赛百味三明治，包括什么？什么各种各样三明治，然后我就在想三明治不就只有一种嘛？嗯，我当他们讨论就是什么说我认为 subway 三明治不是三明治的时候，我说我完全不能理解，就是因为你不是完完全全从那个文化环境里长大，他说一些很细微很日常的东西你根本 get 不到。

我：就是他会有解释吗？会有。老师会给你们解释这些吗？

S7-3 老师不会解释太多，老师他讲的时候他就会默许你知道这个东西。我当时都没听懂，你知道英国它有一种曲奇叫 shop red。我一开始以为 short bread 是面包，但 short bread，哈哈，我说这个东西

为什么要叫短面包？但它是个饼干，难道硬的不就是应该饼干吗啊？哈哈，这是这个涉及到语义学的问题，然后我就完全一，而且因为我没有这个背景知识，所以我那节课就是上起来就特别吃力，就是这个单词你明明认识，但他跟你想的不是一个东西，甚至你都没有意识到他这个东西，他是跟你想，就是你，你认为那东西是不是同一个东西啊？哦，这样。

S7-1 嗯，然后我的话，我感觉除了宁哥跟子然刚才说的，我感觉在社交上也挺诶。刚咱这个问题是难以适应，是吧？你就是跟别人 social 的时候跟，不管是跟老师还是跟啥，我就感觉没啥话可说，就不像跟咱们中国人这么就是啥都能说得出来。跟老师首先可能第一个语言不太好吧，第二个你根本想不到什么话题能跟他们说。然后跟那些外国人一样，其实我们之前就是小韩见过那个越南那个男的 Brian。小韩还请我们吃过那个广阿蔓。对，我 Brian，对我们之前跟那个 Brian 玩得好，我跟他玩得好是因为他也喜欢 keep up，他喜欢 black pink，我俩都挺喜欢的，然后见面就说这，然后剩下的真没啥可说的。然后，嗯，所以我就感觉除了学习方面学习之外的 social 也挺难适应的。第一个语言可能不太好，我是那种不太喜欢愿意开口说的。第二个还是因为不了解他们的生活，就是你，你想咱们中国人见面就是咋说呢？就因为咱们的生活轨迹其实差不多的，然后就是这文化背景什么都差不多，所以你很多的地，你，你，比如你。

S7-2 我想补一下贺云催可能就是什么，你说是那种 ideology，那种价值观那种吗。

S7-1 也有你们跟老外兜售的时候，你们都说啥呀？我真没啥说。

S7-2 是一个好问题，刚才贺宇说我就想起来就是跟老师 social。

S7-3 哼，就是白人搜索模板，每次见面第一句完了 hows going，然后夸你的外套，夸你衣服好看，然后问你最近干嘛呢？就这一套，基本讲一下天气，讲一下最近的电影，就是这种。

我： 嗯，但是我们中国社交不会这样说，是吧？

S7-2 嗯，对，然后让我想起来我之前跟导师 meeting，还有就是他那个老师是，就是英国本，应该是英国本地的白人，然后他每次跟我 meeting 第一句话就是 hows going。我一开始想他问我怎样，我还认真地想想呢？我到底最近怎么样？到底是好还是不好？还是说我就是一个状态怎么样？对，我一开始还在想就是我该怎么样，就是认真地回答这个问题，我还得思索一下。后来我才发现人家就是一个客套，所以我后来的时间就是 good not bad，我就觉得这可能就是一个差异。对。

S7-3 而且我感觉很是很明显一点，因为我感觉我的那种外国朋友相对来说比较多，就是不论你跟哪个国家的人聊天，他们聊的东西其实都挺浅层的。自然你没有这个感觉，就是他不会往很深入的层次聊，就是他比如说他聊聊天，一大群人就很认真谈，在谈论一件事，其实这件事情只是可能就是这个超市里新进了一种面包，这他不会讲一些很深入的问题，就是有，我觉得这可能也是跟，可能跟文化差异有关。他们不会讲一些就是特别深入问题，他们不，也不会问到你很多隐私，或者问到你一些你对什么事情，嗯，看法可能会造成一些冲突，就是语言上冲突，那些东西他们都不会讲。嗯，对，就比如说我觉得我跟你就是起码我认识你那些朋友，他肯定不会说。嗯，对。巴以冲突您怎么看？我觉得这个问题他绝对不会谈。

S7-3 是这样。

我：那有融入的很好的经历吗？很好的。

S7-2 如果说算蓉蓉很好一次经历的话，就是有一次那个 Brian 第一次带我们去吃越南的那个河粉的，越南河粉的时候，但是因为我觉得真好吃，因为 Brian 当时说很好吃，我倒是想越南河粉能有多好吃，但

第一次去说哎呦真的很好吃。嗯，然后他给我们介绍这个肉应该怎么吃，然后这个东西要蘸一蘸，我觉得那次揉入得很好。因为找到大家都喜欢吃的东西，因为我们都是用筷子。对。

S7-1 其实我感觉咱们跟他们越南人融入的其实挺好的。跟 Brian。嗯，对，嗯。但是就是为啥我们不跟他玩了呢？是因为他这个人有问题，是跟是他人品问题，不跟他玩了。对，但就说文化上可能也跟他也不是欧美的，他是，他也是亚洲人的，所以说文本的合集比较相近。

S7-3 是吧？你不觉得我们跟他文化上虽然很接近，但我们跟他不能谈论政治。对，他不能，你包括你跟台湾人接触，你不能跟他谈任何政治。

S7-1 就这种。对。

S7-3 是的，就反正你铁律就是跟哪个国家人相处都不要谈论政治。是的，我感觉这样反，如果你想融做得好的话，不要谈增值，就即使你知道，对一些他在你这样的，你也不要谈论。对，是的。

我： 你们和这边的老师的互动的互动都发生在什么情况下？互动多吗？

S7-1 嗯，挺多的，咱还算挺多的。咱。

S7-3 挺多的，挺多，主要咱们算是好学生，其实。

S7-3 咱们都是一等学位啊。

S7-2 我觉得的话，反正就是课上老师问题，你肯定有时候就是回答，或者是你提出你的问题，一般要互动的話，我觉得可能就主要集中在你约老师那个 office hour 那一块吧。对，有可能就互动会比较多。对，你会主动去约。然后还有一个可能就是有一些时候走在路上面买菜会遇到老师，然后那个时候可能会打下招呼，对，而且还偶遇了好几次，关键是，对，可。

S7-2 然后的话你说哪个是 Peach？还 James。

S7-3 Peach，我都遇到他 n 次了。

S7-2 对，因为老是住在附近，有些时候见面会打到会打招呼，然后除了 office hour 感觉其他时间就没有什么互动了，因为我们学员好像没有举办。就是我之前就听，比如说像那个语音学的，他们好像每周还是每个月都会有什么什么 Lingo 是三一带五带啊？对对对，差不多了，反正就自己带午饭社团，然后来一个那种午饭什么会议，什么午饭论坛，那个我看我们制的专业好像就没有这种。

我： 上课上互动多吗？

S7-1 上播的课，我感觉咱嗯多吗？多。对，你看咱们上安卓的那门课， language 什么 variety 的时候，咱们几个不定，咱们几个不就是一组嘛，坐一起咱们还都挺踊跃回答问题的，而且主要是您对他就特别 critical，他会给你提很多问题跟老师，然后我感觉相对于其他学生，你看有的组那些女生全都闭麦，一句话不说。嗯，咱组那个谁我都忘她叫啥了。

S7-3 小组氛围。

S7-1 对，所以说我们还相对来说比较多的跟老师互动，我感觉。

S7-2 但，但是我们好像没有，但是我们没有线上课，好像就除了贺吧？好像之我之前听贺好像有线上的。对我们其他我和宁哥都是线下课，我。

S7-1 还有线上的。对，我都忘了啊。

S7-2 对，你不是，就是好像说之前我记得你当时不是出去旅游，然后不说就最后几节课，就是还什么哦？线上说到了出车祸还是啥哦？对。

S7-1 对对对对。那个是我指的 Tiso 的课，不是咱专业的那个 TISO 人多，咱专业人少。

S7-3 嗯，对，我觉得反正还有一点就是互动，就是我们互动跟那些国际学生互动方式不一样。就是我觉得我们亚洲学生不喜欢接老师话茬。

S7-3 会歌梗或者抛出一个玩笑，一些美国学生或者英国学，他就会说，他就会接一句话茬。但中国学生不是这样，中国学生都是准备好了一大段话，组织好了之后，想好了之后老师过来回答这个问题，都是这样。

S7-1 对对对。

我：那老师会不会跟他们的互动就会多一点？

S7-2 会会，而且我感觉我们的互动有点中规中矩，就是老师提的问题，然后我去回答，但是像那种，比如说像其他那些，比如说老外学生，他可能会自己也会提出一个话茬，我有一个问题我怎么看的？怎么东西？他可能有些时候他不是会针对老师的这个问题，他会创造一个新的话题，像我们就感觉有点中规中矩，老师问啥？然后我回答啥？或者是我有老师说有什么问题，然后我有这个问题我会问。但是如果老师没有说啥，我们不会主动，会说我有啥啥动，我感觉我们好像也不会这样子。

我：你在你和老师的互动中有感觉到和老师的文化的不同吗？

S7-2 你没有留到好像是吗？我觉得好像是有，但是我记不清楚具体场景，因为我当时和宁哥我记得好像就是我们是不是上 lue 那个社会语言学？好像有一次是啥什么一个文化的，因为那个好像是说的是什么？他说的是什么？政体吗？还是什么？就我记太清楚，反正都社会语言我知道。对，但是我你可以说一下，因为我记录的具体是因为什么原因，到时候说的他讲，因为。

S7-3 他好像又加民族种族之间到底是怎么区分？嗯，他用的是以从英国角度出发怎么来讲的。

我：这就是那堂课讲的就是关于文化的，是吗？

S7-2 嗯，差不多，反正社会语言学就是有点从社会学的角度，然后去什么就从语言学角度研究社会问，我刚才当时就有这种。

S7-3 啊，就那节课，他老师就是我，我觉得就是我，你这让我想一下，我们这后来之前，后来上下校就是有一节课讲的就是 field work，要以 critical 一点的就是思维来看这个问题，他当时里面就提到一个很重要论点，就是我就学者，就是包括社科的学者，他在做研究的时候，你不要以那种 European 那种是，就是为中心来思考问题，那叫什么？它有一个专业名词，就是来专门。

S7-2 来批评，是说你说话什么？an 是 angle centric 吗？还是 angle。

S7-3 centric？他就是说这些学者，西方学者他在讲的包括他不仅是做研究，然后发论文，包括他讲课的时候，他一这个昂格鲁萨克斯为中心，所以他这个思维发散的起点也是这个昂格鲁萨克斯。所以他给你讲的时候好多东西都是从，比如说英国这边怎么样，或者欧洲这边怎么样，所以他就把这种东西当做，就是，

也不是想当然，就是把它当成一种很天然的东西给你讲，但这种东西对我们来说就是不可思议，也不是不可思，就是比较陌生，就是为什么会是这样？就这种你需要一定的背景去理解老师，可能他甚至还没有意识到这个问题。

S7-2 对，然后就觉得我们到时候上那个教育，就是那个 Angela 那个课的时候，我觉得从那个就是个 reading 那个材料能看出来，Angela 就是他选，就那个老师，牛老师他会选的一些材料，它会有一些时候会侧重的在中国教育这个背景下，对对对。

S7-1 对。

S7-2 或者写。但是我上其他课，比如说我上 push 那个法律语言学，它就没有，就是类似专门去找一些亚洲的作者写的这些期刊，然后再上 Louis 的那一个，那个叫啥社会语言学，它好像会有意识地去选一些这个中国作者、亚洲作者的那些文章，但是我总觉得就是老师他不会去主动去了解，去专门去看一下，就是比如亚洲是怎么研究，就是还是有一些文化的那些差距的那种感觉。

S7-1 但我感觉因为格大他主要就是中学生，不中学生，中国人学生很多修改老师他诶，他在有意地避免一些文化差异度，他尽量避免了，但是肯定是在他不自觉地说的時候可能会体验出来，但是我感觉这已经挺好了。

我：你们在留学之前有想象过这边的老师是什么样的吗？

S7-1 没有，好像没有，贵。

S7-3 没想这么深。

S7-1 嗯嗯嗯，但是想过这些就是留学生的生活。我倒想过。嗯，我还是挺留学生的生活的。

我：能说说你的师生互动策略吗？

S7-1：我觉得我的策略就是，老师提问我就说，老师不问我就不说，因为我会担心，我主动说我会觉得很奇怪，因为我不太习惯去主动和老师说话。可能这是跟我以前在工立上学有关系，觉得，老师是很忙的，我主动去说的话，如果我说了一些没有用的话，老师可能会心里不是很愿意，我会我会担心，所以我在这边是不太主动跟老师说，但是老师问我问题，我就会我会尽可能的积极的回答。虽然有的时候我觉得我打的也不是很好，就是可能我觉得我很积极，但我觉得老师可能觉得我没有那么积极。

S 7-2：对，有的时候我觉得我们自己觉得很积极的回答，很积极的参与，但是可能真的没有外国同学看起来那么积极。有可能我们内心活动比较多，但是不太善于表达吧，所以我也在在想办法鼓励自己，心里暗示自己要多去说，但可能有的时候真的需要我去说的时候，我又。会开始打退堂鼓，就没有自信去说，怕说错，或者是说的不好，表达的不准确。因为我觉得有的时候我想的比较多，但是我真正说出来的东西又很浅。我就会觉得我说的很没有意思。

S7-3：我倒不太会担心我说的东西很浅，因为我觉得我他们上课聊天说的那些就是很浅显，没有很深奥的那种分析呀，所以我觉得。尽管我有的时候也是想的很深，但是我可能因为一些很深的东西，我我表达不清楚，所以我还是就说出来的是很浅的，但我也不太会担心，嗯，有的时候如果我要是提前能知道这节课。要讲什么的话，我会提前准备，然后可能会提前梳理一下逻辑，就自己提前在脑海中练习一遍怎样表达我这个东西，用英文，这样的话会好一点。因为语言跟因为不是母语。所以，就是换一种语言，表达很深的想法，对我来说，还是需要提前去做一些准备的。

我：你们在国内上大学的时候和老师关系怎么样？

S7-2 嗯，我来，我先来，我觉得感觉和国内大学老师就是那种非常的就是一板一眼，就是老师学生，就是有一种就是也不说是等级，就是明显那种两个人所处的地位不同。就是老师你跟老师说话的时候，你要先去思考掂量掂量那种感觉，比如说他，你不是说在大学里，比如你要去问老师问题，你要先去想好，就我问了这个问题不能说是一个非常弱智的问题，一定要是我就是思考想不出来的问题，因为有些时候你要问国内老师问题要太简单，国内老师反而会有点不高兴。

S7-2 其实你都没有就是想过思考过，你就问我这个问题。但是你要在，反正在英国的话，反正我在格拉上，其实我就觉得就是你问老师，即使是再愚蠢的问题，他们也都觉得就是他，他们不会去批评你，就是你怎么问这样的问题，他们就会给你这样，就他们不管你问什么问题都很包容，但是国内老师反正我遇到的不会这样，就是如果你要问愚蠢的问题，他还说你怎么问这么简单的问题呢？你好好去想想，然后你再再来问我，就这一种。

S7-2 首先就第一个，然后第二个的话就是和国内的大学老师，我觉得就是课上就是关系没有那么近，反正就是要是我跟他就是毕业之后，你叫我再跟他进行交流互动，我是不会跟他交流互动的。但如果要是国外老师，我毕业之后，比如说走路上看到他，我可能还会想跟他主动去聊一聊，就这一种师生关系，没有那么的就那个，嗯嗯嗯，有差距感，就那种感觉。

S7-3 不是我，我觉得大概就是子然说的这样。我赞同，就是在国内的话，我反正觉得就是因为可能是从小教育的原因，就是觉得一定要尊重老师，就是老师。嗯，他学时长语音，你就不管怎么样，你在生活中还是在学习中，你都要对他很尊敬，即使他脱离老师这个环境，你依然要对他很尊敬。

S7-3 就是这样，反正我觉得我跟我只跟我接触最多的老师关系处得非常好，比如说我本科论文导师，因为我经常跟他去他办公室找他聊天，或者聊一些问题的话，但是就是跟他维系，维持关系的这个点在于学习，就是因为通过学习加强和他联系。比如说你要是成绩好，老师跟你关系就好一点，嗯，但是不会跟你不会出现什么样的情况，就是你跟老师唠嗑唠得特别好，或者生活上哪一个点跟老师特别契合，然后跟老师处得好，基本都是围绕学习。

S7-3 对，在英国的话我觉得可能老师他有一套很严格的那种，就是比如说 office hour 那种，所以跟老师维持的关系也是从学术上，但是可能老师他那种就是跟学生相处的方式会更体系化、更官方化，我感觉跟，反而跟那种跟外国的老师就是不会有很多的机会在生活中见到。因为你见到老师就是 office hour，嗯，反而会没有很多机会去跟老师相处。我感觉是这样。嗯，而且老师他就是公，私就是私，他不会像中国老师也会问你最近学习也说身体怎么样，或问问别的家里怎么样，就外国老师就是你今天有什么问题来问你，就是来问这个。嗯，多一句他也不会反问，因为他们的文化背景可能觉得这就是是什么冒犯什么的，对，可能对于中国人来说这反而失去了一份，就是你，你失去了一个你，是一个可能你跟老师相处的一个机会，就是你没有那个抓手去跟老师相处。

我：你在这边有没有过老师的哪些做法让你觉得自己被尊重和被欢迎？

S7-1 嗯，没有没有，这尊重他一一都挺尊重我们的，他的做法都挺尊重我们被欢迎。好像没有。那一视同仁，最起码他不歧视有的老师，就是他平等地对待每一个，就每个国家的学生，大家都有平等的发言的机会，然后他也会认真回答你问题，就是态度什么完全都一样。这我感觉就算是尊重吧。嗯，因为欢迎，我感觉小可。

S7-2 我觉得尊重反正就有一个点，因为我当时第一学期，我当时是上语音课，我觉得太难，我不是转成了那个法律语言学的课，但是一开始的时候我可能中间就是第一周的课我没去，然后第二周的课一开始我好像也没去，然后我就有点听不懂，然后我当时就有 office 拉，我当时就问老师，我说我好像就有点听不懂，我底子不太好。然后我就跟，然后后来再上课的时候我就跟老师提议，我说就是我感觉你一讲一堂课讲太多了，能不能稍微语速慢一点？能不能就是少放一点内容？然后他当时好像就是多，我说好像就多来一点实践的内容，然后老师后来他在下一节课他就改了那个好像是课件，好像是好像改了课件就是多了很多让我们分析的这个内容。然后可能当时说我是刚转进去，然后我当时就跟老师说说，反正我就说说，感觉挺多感觉大家感觉都听不懂你在说啥。

S7-2 然后他当时下课之后还问我这节课我有没有听懂，我当时就挺感动的，因为我感觉就是反正头一次遇到就是你跟老师提了一些内容，就我觉得你这个地方就是可能稍微讲有点快，但是然后老师能够听进去，并且能够可能稍微调整，然后还问你反馈，我觉得这可能是我第一次偶尔感觉到还蛮奇特的，因为我觉得就是你说就如果你要是正儿八经，比如说你，可能就是你和一个人说你讲课讲得太快啦或啥。那其他老师可能都会觉得我这么多年我就是这样讲过来的，大家都没说你讲得快，就你一个人说你讲得快什么？他就是他能够听清，能够听就是听清楚学生的需求，并且能够改进，还能会给你反馈，我觉得这点就感觉还挺好的。

S7-3 嗯嗯，赞同。

S7-3 他平平等尊重每一位同学的诉求，就不论你这是多么不起眼的诉求，他都会很认真对待。比如说，是的，就是你去办公室约那个 office hour，可能前一个学生他可能不小心拖了一点时间，拖了 5 分钟或者 3 分钟，就多这么一点点时间，这个老师他都会跟你说这是你约的时间，即使前面一个学生超过了时间，你也可以随时进来，因为这是你的时间，就是我觉得这是很尊重学生。

S7-2 对，第一次我还不不懂，因为第一次我看就是到我遇的那个点，我看里面还有人在那个讨论嘛？然后我在想我是不是就要在外面等，然后我就没有敲门？然后老师正好就出来看有没有学生的时候，我一正好在楼下，我未在门口等，然后后来我等学生下来之后我才进去，然后老师就是说我怎么到现在才来？然后我说我，你不是有人跟你讨论嘛？我就没有打扰。然后他就说下次遇到这种情况，就是如果到你时间点我还在和别人讨论，你就要敲门提醒我，因为那是你的时间轮到了你去和我就是讨论这个事情，那如果你要是敲门时间池的话，那相当于你的时间就被别人挤占，那留给你的时间就变少了。

S7-1 对，他们都特别守规矩。

S7-3 我就说受欢迎的话能，可能就是可能不会说，是很明显表现说很欢迎，但是我通过老师反映他的反应，他的表情，就我觉得他对有学生的某些行为他会比较赞许。比如说他如果你跟老师侧面反映出你很努力学习，这种情况下其实他们波澜不惊，就是你说你熬夜写论文，或者你读多本书、多少书，他们都其实无所谓，他们不会杀中国老书。我天，你太努力了，我天呐。你是个好学生，他们不会，他们就是当你提出一个很有创新性的观点，或者一个很坚决、很独立、很清晰的观点时候，他比如说，而且这个观点恰好就是大家没有或者非常 critical thinking，他们会非常赞许你，甚至还会记录下来。

我：老师有没有哪些做法让你觉得不舒服？难以接受？

S7-2 我感觉好像没有哎。

S7-1 好像。

S7-3 我觉得有一件事说让我感觉有点不舒服,就是,但其实我觉得这件事情也不能算是什么不好的地方,就是我们有一位老师,他对学生论文的要求极其严格,挨个玩意,我知道你说谁,他对你写作的评价就是完全就是卡着那个评分标准,就是就像一个机器一样的评判你的就是完全不讲任何人情啊。像一个机器一样,就是评判你这个人,就比如说他平常生活中虽然跟你,就是跟你相处得很好,或者学习中人很,但是只要是这个论文只要稍微有一点不对,他可能就是其实我觉得很多老师他在,包括我感觉他们批卷的时候,就是阅卷的时候,他们不会说完全严格的按照那个批卷标准,但是我的有一位老师就是像这个我适应一样,他严格按照那个标准卡这个分数。嗯,这个让我觉得有点不太近人情,可能就是让我是,反正给我感觉就是给学生挫败感很大。嗯,尤其是你第一次写的时候,他会,他因为他这种严格可能给我打击会非常非常大。

S7-1 嗯,我想到一个确实不被尊重,不能说,因为就是我之前选过一个那个格大的那种语言的兴趣班法语课那老师她是个阿尔巴尼亚人,反正我们班上有一个女的是台湾的,她就说她来自台湾,她不说来自中国,她说她是台湾 Niece。然后老师就把他的台湾人的那个法语写到黑板上,跟那个谁诺中国人那个法语并列着,而且老师就很接受他是,我们是中国人,他是台湾人这个事实。我就感觉我被冒犯了,然后我们全班中国人都很生气。

S7-1 这个涉及到政治这种问题,但是你像在格大上这种课程,必须的,这些课我们班也有一个台湾人,我们跟他关系还不错,是吧?好像老师就没有专门的题这方面。

S7-1 哦,反正他就没有避讳这种政治上的这种东西。嗯,而且我,而且上那个法语课,说实话那个老师也不算格大的正式老师,他也是那种聘的,就跟孔子学院老师一样,是从那个国家聘过来的啊。他们也他上课就格外的喜欢那个伊朗一个女的,长得也还挺好看,那个男的是个老头,就特别喜欢,还有还喜欢当地人,就不喜欢我们这些中国人。

我: 怎么感觉他不喜欢中国人?

S7-1 因为他就是不提问我们,不太提问我们问题,提光提问那些人问题,让那些人回答问题。就能明显地看出来。

S7-1 我怕这是可能属于不被尊重、不受欢迎。嗯,然后别的,但我只是说这个老师他不算是格大了,那你像宁格子然他们就没有体会到了,因为他们没有选这个法语这个课。嗯嗯,所以说不知道算不算这个,你的这个研究的范畴里算。

我: 你们学校提供的课吗?

S7-3 嗯,我觉得老师反正也其实我觉得有可能是因为我们是文科。这不上我们学的是语言学,它可能涉及到很多东西,让这些老师人变得非常的包容。就整体来讲,我们这个课体验感非常好。因为我当时有一个舍友,他是商科的,我跟他住在一起,他天天晚上我们会一起做饭,就会见到他,经常会跟我讲他老师就是他格大的,这些老师是种族歧视,就不尊重学生,还有很多很多其他。其他专业,对,反正我觉得我们文科,至少我们这个专业来没有。

我: 你觉得课堂上有没有哪些设置促进了或阻碍了你和讲师的互动交流?

S7-2: 我觉得课堂上就是氛围很好,请送的氛围比较容易促进我们互动。就感觉是朋友。

S7-1 我觉得如果课上的人少,会容易互动。老师会询问几乎每个人的想法。一节课里几乎大家都能有机

会互动。但是大课就很少互动了。有也是简单的那种。或者只有几个勇敢的会主动问问题吧。不怎么见到中国学生在大课上互动。

S7-3:我感觉大课里就是老师讲,学生听,和小班课差别很大。小班课可以一起探讨一个主题。就比较容易互动。

我:那与老师发生过误解吗?

S7-1 具体想不起来,但是应该是有的。哈哈,具体是确实想不起来了,就是我好像就。嗯,前段时间在 SR 的时候好像就有过误解,就人家问的问题我听不懂,但是。语言的问题,他嘟嘟一长串,他说的太长了,然后还可以,我有点听不懂,但是我就按照我理解那个意思回答,当然回答的不是人家想要的那个答案。嗯,有这种我,所以我想博士现在有。那之前肯定是有。

S7-3 理解少,你先说我说我们,我觉得误会少的原因是因为我们知道我们中国学生知道就是语言,它可能包括文化理解是一个重大障碍,所以一般涉及到重要,比如说下达教学任务或者作业的时候,我们都会跟老师确认一下,或者同学之间。嗯,所以根本不给误解留机会。

S7-2 对,而且我觉得就是你说那种,比如说老师问题,但是我可能没有理解这个问题的意思,然后我回答了这个问题,我觉得还挺多的。嗯,因为我觉得我可能就是,反正我可能就是,比如说老师要问那个问题,然后我可能就协作讨论之后,然后我去回答。然后我觉得我们经常能够懂老师想问我想问的问题的意思,但是我经常有看到很多那种老外学生老师可能问的是问题 a,他非要说,我要来分享一下我的个人经历吧。他回答的是问,他回答的是 b,他不回答老师问的这个问题。

S7-2 我经常看到这种情况,但是老师好像也就是那种无所谓,你分享就分享嘛,然后他还会就着你分享的这个东西,他可以总结一下你这个点很好,但是我觉得没有那种,因为就是你没有回答出来这个问题,或者你理解错,可能就是我,可能就你就要纠正,你好像没有纠正这个概念。

我:你们的老师有了解过你们的教育背景吗?或者工作经历?

S7-3 不怎么了解。

S7-1 诶,咱上了安卓的课,是不是让自我介绍?我这也算是了解吗?嗯,明白,你比较了解我,知道我有,我之前工作过,教过书。嗯,然后他上部分有的时候他还会,我忘了有没有他 cue 到我?好像没有,反正他知道我有这个就是教过中文的经历。反正在课下的时候他还问过我相关的。

S7-3 但这个的了解是基于我们的课堂内容,因为我们课堂内容是跟教育有关的,就他可能是把这个做一个引子,可能是问你是否有教学经验,这样他不是为了解你而去了解。

S7-1 对,是的。嗯,对,嗯,没有老师想了解我了,我感觉。

S7-3 那我也觉得,我觉得这些西方老师他们普遍可能有一个共识,我感觉他不会去过多了解学生,因为他觉得你的国家、你的背景,包括你,甚至你处于社会哪个阶级,他就是觉得这些问题很敏感,所以他不会去问。我觉得他不会去主动,很深地了解这样。

S7-1 嗯,对,嗯,万一投诉了他。

我: 嗯,那你觉得英国老师有没有哪些对中国学生的了解是不准确的?

S7-1 他好像没有评价我，还只让我们自己来分享。嗯，是吧？他有评价过吗？

S7-2 就是比如说像 Angela 那堂课，然后跟教学跟语言学习有关，可能就是我们也可能就会分享，比如说你以往的学，比如语言学习，或者是你有，比如说你有教过英语、教过中文那种学，就是那种教师的教学经历，或者是你作为第二语言学习的一些学习心得，有这种会让我们去分享，就是都是跟那种跟上课的主题有关，因为我们就是语言教学什么变量？

我：在你的留学经历中有没有自己你觉得的跨文化师生关系的困难

S7-1 听到的有。我现在想要说让他就是主要还是学生自己的原因，那个学生不太好好学习，又错过 deadline，然后还要跟老师就是让他延期这那的，有这种。oh，还有一个还看的说是也是格大的一个学生，他在读语科，然后学校专门把他挂了，就他的成，他的数学考了一分，卷面分考了一分。然后是说他说的学校故意把他挂，因为老师不想让他通过什么，因为学校的那个招的人有点多了，他们要控制这个招生人数，然后就把那个人给挂了，有这种，然后他就去跟老师 battle 去了，这算是吗？这好像不是跨文化的。嗯，现在。

S7-3 语言算是一个，但是我感觉老师一般都会很耐心去听，你对，他知道你这个语言可能不会那么流利或者是地道，他都会很耐心听你说。对，是的。嗯，而且我觉得跨文化那一定是中，那英文跟这个中文之间有一个交流，但是我们完全都是在一个英文为主导这个文化氛围里，就根本没有这个中国和英文这个 connection 的机会呀。嗯，就没有这个机会，因为你都是在学人家的东西，咱也不是来做交。

S7-1 我感觉跨文化像这种意识形态上的不同也算跨文化，因为之前就是之前那个去非洲之前那个培训就是说要提醒我们有很多人都是跨文化不适应，就说你去了国外，只有你会有三个时期，什么热恋期，嗯，蜜月期。什么冷静期？什么期？就是咱，不过咱跟老师好像没有聊过。对，老师。

S7-3 就是跟老师他会很因为毕这些毕竟涉及到一些，比如说政治立场，政治这些东西他很敏感，老师绝对不敢说，包括你的种族，但是有一些学生的话，他可能跟你讲的时候就包括就是举一个例子，比如说，他可能就直言不讳地跟你说，诶？我觉得不应该是这样，我觉得不用这样，但是对吧？嗯，有问题你就反正这也是一个意识形态冲突，嗯，跨文化一些冲突，但是你这你也没办法去改变它或者怎么样。

我：对于跨文化师生关系，你有想补充的内容或者分享的故事吗？赶不出师生发生的小故事什么的。

S7-2 可能你就能可能就是。嗯，我记得，反正也不算是冲突或者啥，就是有些时候你可能要注意，就是你在给老师写邮件的时候，你是怎么称呼老师的？但这个不是发生在我身上，我当时我就是有个同学，他就是他是当时说我那个法律语言学课，他就是第一就期中考的时候，然后他挂了，然后他到了，因为是周六周日出成绩，他就想问老师怎么补救？什么方法？要什么补考？还是什么？然后呢？他以为教我们的所有老师都是教授，哈哈，然后我们那个老师就是 push，他只是个博士，他不是教辅，他只是讲师。然后他给老师发的邮件就是他的，一般就是比如说即使你发的是教授博士，不是加上他的姓氏，他直接发了一个 professor appeals，冒充什么什么什么意思？就是他直接搞错了老师的这个职称，他不是教授，而且这个职称后面应该加的是姓氏，他加了名字说我应该怎么办？我问他应该怎么办，但是老师就没有回他，一直到上班了之后，他又再发一份邮件，老师才回他，可能就是这一块可能有一点，可能老师会有点在意吧。

S7-2 首先你把我称呼搞错了，然后你又突然间在我周六、周日我休息的时候，你来打扰我什么？然后你又把我名字和姓，你又给我弄错了。嗯嗯，因为我突然想到，因为我们那时候有一门课，老师不叫那个 Louis

strange。嗯，奇怪，然后老师就说你不要叫我 doctor strange，就不要叫我奇异博士这样称号可能就这一块算是跨文化当中可能有些老师对于称呼会比较在意这一块，然后我们可能有些时候就不会，嗯，特别在意可能这一块算，嗯。

S7-3 你一说这个称呼，我想起来有一个算是跟老师之间跨文化。就是这样，就是我，反正在我印象中就是如果我称呼一个教授，就是学生，从我这个角度出发，就是学生，就是一定要尊重老师，就是你在是不论是在生活中还是学习中，你称呼这个教授你都要叫他某某教授。但是我的很多同学就是不是，比如说我有一个教授叫 Carol half，我同学就叫他 Carol，甚至他老师自己也说你就叫我 Carol，但是我就是张不开那个嘴，我每次我都叫他 professor half，就这样啊。还有就是包括就是你觉得你在他面前，你突然就叫他名字，我，我就是觉得不自在，我就觉得一定要叫某某教授。还有就是，对对，就是，也是。

S7-3 我觉得他们可能看到你改不过来，就反正也知道你叫的是他，他就是很自然而然去接了这个称号，毕竟他什么都听过嘛。我觉得可能他见得比较多，还有就是老师刚才自然说到这个老师这个私人时间还有工作时间，他其实界限是非常清晰。你说中国他一个硕导，他可能带他的学生，他甚至催论文的时候，比如说，诶，你论文写完了吗？我可能是中午催你，我也可能你今天晚上我催你，反正肯定，反正很有极大的可能是在 NON working time，但是在这边的话就是老师工作时间就是工作时间，非工作时间就是非工作时间，你非工作时间发这个东西我是不会看的。

S7-3 师为什么发回邮件这么慢？就是为什么说自己不擅长回邮件，难道这不就是一个邮件的问题嘛？但很多老师他把这个 working 和 life 这个 Bon boundary 分得非常明显。我跟你说。

S7-1 谢谢，我感觉他这条界限他只针对于硕士、本科、硕士学生，因为我发现这个。对，我发现这个博士之后，老师你像 David，他也周末回邮县。

S7-1 对，就是。但是就因为我感觉博士可能对他们来说更重要，硕士他只是在完成他的任务，所以说他不会说周六日回。但是他像博士的话是。

S7-1 但可能因为对，但是我可还是感觉硕士可能对他们来说并没有那么重要。

S7-2 嗯，我觉得可能还有一点也算是文化差异，就是就是我，我就是最近看我那个硕士同学，他要写毕业论文，然后他和他导师就是通过微信联系，然后比如他好像有一次他在。

我： 是外国人吗？

S7-2 不是，他就是他是国内读研，然后他国内现在要教硕士论文，然后有一次他在那个图书馆里边，就是把那个苹果不是打成那个勿扰模式，不是接不到电话，他就没有接到他导师的电话，导师打了他很多电话，然后微信发了很多，还有微信什么那个电话也打了很多，他就没有接。等他下午出图书馆，他反应过来的时候，他发现他导师把他给删了。是对，他删了，然后他又赶快去打电话给他导师，向他导师赔礼道歉，就很害怕他老师就感觉不想管他的那种。考虑一道歉，然后他导师再把他重新加了回来的这一种。但是我觉得像杰。

我： 导师找他干嘛？

S7-2 就是说一下改改论文，就是说改论文这事就为一个很小的事情，可能就打电话给他，他没接，打好几电话他没接，他就很生气，他保持，但是我觉得这种事情反正我觉得可能不会出现在像国外这种情况，不会说我发邮件，比如说反正我那种，我觉得国外可能联系不会通过电话联系，或者什么通过那种社交软

件那种联系，而且我觉得不会通，不会，因为你比如说我一个下午我不回你邮件，不回啥？我老是就要跳脚把你给删了，我觉得这种情况没有。嗯，你可能算是一个师生之间的距离吧。嗯，距离之间，可能国内师生之间的距离，不是有那种同盟那种概念，比如我是同盟，我大家这些关系就很紧密，老师和学生之间就是下一起的那一种支撑一体。但是国内国人就国外了，可能不会距离这么近的，就是因为我不打，不回你邮件，不回你电话，就一个下午就把我删了，这种情况或老师就很生气的那种，我觉得应该不会。

S7-1 有点耍大牌的感觉。对。

S7-2 因为他导师是副院长。可能。

S7-3 嗯嗯，好难啊，你这同学。

Appendix 4 Open-ended questionnaire schedule

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) for the research project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction. *

☐ Yes

☐ No

2. What is your age?

☐ 25-34

☐ 35-44

☐ 45-54

☐ 55-64

☐ 65 or over

3. Which university do you work for?

4. What is your nationality? (Please state below.)

5. What is your gender?

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Non-binary

☐ Prefer not to say

6. How many years have you been teaching in university settings?

☐ 1-3 years

☐ 3-5 years

☐ 5-10 years

☐ 10+ years

7. How many years of experience do you have teaching classes in your field of expertise?

- ☐ 1-3 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ 5-10 years
- ☐ 10+ years

8. Have you ever taught in China or a Chinese-speaking country?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

9. If yes, please state the country below.

10. Approximately, how many Chinese students are there in your classes?

- ☐ None
- ☐ Small groups
- ☐ Around half
- ☐ More than half
- ☐ Almost all

11. How would you rate your knowledge of the Chinese language?

- ☐ No knowledge
- ☐ Basic user
- ☐ Intermediate user
- ☐ Advanced user
- ☐ Native speaker

12. Which of these Chinese dialects do you use? (Tick all that apply)

☐ Mandarin

☐ Cantonese

☐

13. How familiar are you with Chinese culture, traditions, and history?

☐ Very familiar

☐ Familiar

☐ Some familiarity

☐ Little familiarity

☐ No knowledge

14. To what extent do you agree that Chinese students' learning habits are different from other students?

☐ Strongly agree.

☐ Agree

☐ Neutral

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

15. Please describe the learning behaviours of Chinese students in your classes in three words or phrases below

16. When engaging with Chinese students, which topics do you usually discuss? (Choose all that apply)

- ☐ Academic subjects
- ☐ Chinese culture and traditions
- ☐ Current affairs
- ☐ Career goals and aspirations
- ☐ Day-to-day life in the UK
- ☐

17. To what extent do you interact with Chinese students outside of the classroom?

- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

18. What is the main reason for your level of interaction with Chinese students outside of the classroom? (Tick all that apply)

- ☐ Shared academic interests.
- ☐ Common hobbies or extracurricular activities
- ☐ Cultural curiosity and exchange
- ☐ Social events and university programmes
- ☐ Language practice and learning
- ☐ Lack of time or opportunity
- ☐ Limited social events or programmes
- ☐ Personal preferences or comfort zones
- ☐

19. Can you use three words or phrases to describe your teaching experiences with Chinese students?

20. Have you engaged in collaborative research or projects with Chinese academics on the study and learning habits of Chinese students?

☐ Yes

☐ No

21. If yes, what was the title of the research or project? Please state below.

22. What benefits have you observed from having Chinese students in your classes?

23. What is the biggest challenge have you encountered with Chinese students in your classes?

24. What specific strategies or actions have you implemented to overcome this challenge?

25. If you are interested in participating in a 30 minute follow-up interview, please enter your email here

Appendix 5 In-depth interview with lecturer example

2024 年 11 月 29 日 上午 10:40|36 分钟 17 秒

说话人 1 00:00

Card. Yeah, our first question is, do you have many experience with intercultural education with Chinese student?

说话人 2 00:17

I suppose all education with Chinese students is intercultural education. Yeah, because there is a cultural bridge that needs to be crossed, you know. So I've, I mean, I've taught English to Chinese students quite a lot over the years. And more recently I've taught tiso to Chinese students. And so, yes, I would say in both, if you combine both of those things, yes, I have quite a lot of experience with Chinese students.

说话人 1 00:56

So is it easy for you to interact with Chinese student? Is that easy?

说话人 2 01:03

It's easy enough to interact. I think the thing for me is that sometimes I'm not sure. I suppose I'm, if I have to compare Chinese students with students from other cultural backgrounds, a difference may be the. I'm sometimes not sure what the students are really thinking. I get the feeling that's the Chinese students are often very, they're, well, they're usually very polite and very positive and they say very nice things. But I'm never quite sure if they mean it. You know, I wonder if they're saying these positive things because they don't want to embarrass me. But, you know, other cultures are maybe quicker to be critical. If they're not happy about something, they will tell me they're not happy. Whereas it's unusual, I think, for a Chinese student to tell me that they're not happy.

说话人 1 02:14

And do you think it's happened for most of Chinese students?

说话人 2 02:20

I mean, that's difficult to say, really. I think, well, maybe they're happy, you know, maybe I'm a wonderful teacher. I don't know. But I just feel that there is, it's a general tendency, I would say. It's, it would be, it's unusual for me to receive negative feedback from a Chinese student.

说话人 1 02:45

Okay, so I do think their feedback maybe in sensory, maybe.

说话人 2 02:52

Well, yeah, maybe a bit insincere or just, yes, they're a bit hesitant to say, to make negative comments about their teacher, I feel.

说话人 1 03:07

Yeah, and I see that I your your answers from the questionnaire, you choose to address this challenge by being openly self critical and encouraging critical reflection from them as well. So can you expand in detail how you implement this approach and does it work?

说话人 2 03:29

Yeah, I mean, I suppose I do this more or I can, it's easier for me to do this in a TikTok class. And because a lot of what I'm doing as a teacher, I'm kind of modeling techniques, you know? So sometimes I will say to the students, let's say, for example, I give instructions and the instructions are not very clear. Then I will maybe just stop and I can see that people haven't really understood. I'll stop and I'll say, okay, I gave those instructions quite badly, didn't I? And maybe they will laugh, you know, they'll be a bit embarrassed for me, but they'll kind of go, yeah, a little bit. And then I will say to them, how could I give those instructions more clearly? And I'll, so I'll encourage them to basically tell me what I should have done, you know. So yeah, that's an example. Or maybe if I'm giving them a task and I don't know, I'm writing something on the board and it's a bit messy, I might just stand back and go, oh, that's not very clear, is it? How could I change this? You know, and then they can tell me how to make it clear for them, those

kinds of things.

说话人 1 04:50

So it have already worked for you to s through solve this problem.

说话人 2 04:57

Well, I suppose it's, I'm inviting them to criticize me or I'm inviting them to give me feedback, constructive feedback. And when they have an invitation, then they're quite happy to tell me, you know, if they think that I want them to do it, then they're all there. It's okay. If they think that I might feel embarrassed or ashamed or, you know, something. If they think it's gonna make me feel bad, then they don't want to tell me.

说话人 1 05:28

Yeah, it's like the same answer from you said that you use the extrinsically motivated to describe Chinese student.

说话人 2 05:41

I did say that the, yeah, I think a lot of Chinese students are extrinsically motivated. I think that a lot of the motivation that seems to be extrinsic. There seems to be a lot of pressure from parents, from, you know, families on, and maybe it's Chinese students who come to the UK because obviously your families are investing a lot of money and you know there's a lot at stake for Chinese international students who come to the UK. And I think that places are kind of extra extrinsic motivation on them. But also I think that there is a lot of, there seems to be a general culture within the curriculum in China that relates to, you know, you're studying English to pass the exams, you know, to pass the tests. That's the main motivation. There don't, there seems to be less motivation to study English so you can be better in English. No, that doesn't seem to be a particularly important goal. Actually, being able to speak English well is not as important as being able to get a good score in the exam.

说话人 1 07:00

Yeah, so how do you think the language have affected them to have interaction with lectures?

说话人 2 07:08

Well, that's a possibility, yeah. I mean, it could be a lack of confidence in their own speaking skills. And maybe if you combine that with my kind of sense that they don't want to embarrass me, you know, they're scared to be critical of me cuz it's gonna make me feel bad. Maybe they, in order to give me kind of critical feedback, they need to be able to use English quite sensitively. You know, you, that's quite, you know, you need a careful vocabulary choices, careful use of language in order to give criticism in a kind of gentle way. And maybe they don't have the confidence to do that because they don't, they're not so confident in their own speaking skills.

说话人 1 08:02

And how much do you think is the culture differences have affect in this problem?

说话人 2 08:12

Well, I mean, I think, I mean, I spoke about the kind of educational culture, the culture that exists in the curriculum in China. My feeling about educational culture in China is that it's very assessment oriented. It's all about passing the tests. And it's not really, nobody is really, nobody's really learning for learning's sake. Nobody's learning because they want to learn. They're all learning cuz they wanna get good marks in the exam and then they want to go and get a good job after there and they want to do what their parents tell them to do or they want to, you know, it's, it's all about achieving other outcomes.

说话人 2 08:57

And I think that is important from that side of things. What we were talking about with, and with, in terms of developing speaking skills so that they can actually use English in a variety of contexts. But also I think the curriculum and the kind of common methodologies in in Chinese educational contexts seem to be very prescriptive. And there's a sense that the, you know, the teacher is the person in a position of authority. The teacher is the person that knows everything. And the students are encouraged to be quite passive learners and, you know, just taking the information, memorize the information for the tests. Don't

ask difficult questions. Just take taking the information. So I think that's, I mean, I'm, again, I'm generalizing a lot here, but I think that is the kind of traditional approach to education in China. And which means that when I then say to my Chinese students, oh, you know, when I encourage them to be critical of me or to to ask them when I ask them questions like, oh, how could I do this better or even what do you think about this? Sometimes there a bit surprised. They're like, oh, why don't ask? But you know, why are you asking for my opinion? You sh, you sh tell, you tell me what to think. You're the teacher, you know, so that's quite a cultural difference that has to be kind of bridged somehow. You know, I'm expecting the students to participate and to give their thoughts and their, to express their views and opinions. They're expecting me to tell them and what their views and opinions should be.

说话人 2 10:57

You know, however, having said all of that over the last two or three years, I get the sense that maybe things are changing a little bit. There seems to be a higher level of criticality amongst the Chinese students that I've been working with recently. Maybe because I'm now working in a different context, I'm working in Glasgow, maybe the students are slightly different in there in their approach, maybe because they're maybe they're learning backgrounds have been a little bit different. And but I do find, yeah, in the last more recently, there seems to be a kind of shift in terms of there's a more of a willingness, let's say, to express their opinions and their views, you know.

说话人 1 11:50

Yeah, I understand. So can you describe that? Why do you think the universe, the students from the university you work them for before and no, how does it difference? Do you think they have different experi educational experience in China?

说话人 2 12:09

May maybe, I don't know exactly, but I think, well, where I work now, the IELTS level requirement is higher than it wasn't my previous workplace. And the fees that students must pay are much higher. So I'm guessing that the students that I'm working with now come from a different socio economic

background. You know, they come they come from an environment where either their families can afford to pay these very expensive fees or they were successful in getting scholarships to pay for their very expensive fees. You know, so I'm guessing that their backgrounds are a little bit different. I don't know if that has an effect on their and willingness to criticize. Maybe it means that they're just more confident. Maybe they're used to being able to express their opinions and for that to having some, that to have some kind of impact. Maybe the students at my previous workplace, we're a little bit because the IELTS requirement was a bit lower. Maybe they were a little bit less confident in their own English and maybe also they had to work much harder to get to the UK in the first place. And the educational culture that they're used to is right.

说话人 2 13:48

Okay, I need to get the good scores. I need to get good grades in my exams. Maybe that pressure to get the good grades is a little bit higher for those students. But I don't really know for sure. I'm just guessing.

说话人 1 14:03

Okay. Have you receive any pre training or education in intercultural education?

说话人 2 14:16

Not specifically, I don't think. But when I worked in the further education sector in Scotland, I worked a lot with asylum seekers and refugees and, you know, students that came from various different backgrounds. And I did get some training there in how to deal with students who are perhaps who have experienced trauma or students who have got mental health difficulties or students who I've got literacy problems. Maybe they're, they, maybe they had a very limited educational background in their own country and they're not literally in their first language. And then of course they have to learn English and become literate in a second language. So I did get some training in those kinds of things. So obviously the kind of intercultural aspect of working with Learner Spoon, you know, the, these, well, these issues that I'm talking about, a lot of those issues were related to the cultural backgrounds that they came from, you know, especially, for example, women who didn't get access to an education in their culture, came

to Scotland with no literacy skills or students I had who had come from countries where there was a war. You know, they had suffered all kinds of trauma. So, you know, that was part of their cultural makeup, if you like. They had experienced all kinds of traumatic things or their Cho, you know, their children has had suffered things as well. And their priorities and their interests were very much driven by the backgrounds that they came from, you know?

That's not the same as very few of those students were from China. So I don't know how much of that relates to your study.

说话人 1 16:30

Search. So do you have any prepare, do you did any prepare to teach Chinese student before the program start?

说话人 2 16:41

I don't think I ever had any formal training. I think I just had to learn on the job, you know, I just had to learn as I went. I've done a lot of reading about it, obviously, and I've, I feel that my, as my experience has grown, I, I, you know, I do a lot of reflection on my practice anyway. And I and I, you know, I'm interested in my students and their backgrounds and how that affects their, there they're learning when they're studying on my programs. But I don't think I've had any formal training on it now that I can think of.

说话人 1 17:20

Okay. Okay. I'm I see that you mentioned ideology as a common topic of your interaction with students. So could you explain on what you discuss on ideologies?

说话人 2 17:36

Okay, so I teach on a couple of courses in my current workplace that are looking at issues related to global Englishes and the kind of change that is happening in the world at the moment with regard to how English is perceived. You know, traditionally English was perceived as as the domain of the inner circle

countries and native speakers. And you know, you will remember this from your English as a Global Language merchant. And you know, it was basically there was ownership of the language lay with peep with people from the NR circle. But now the English is regarded as a global language and we're talking more about global Englishes. We're looking at, you know, non native varieties of English being legitimized. And this means that a lot of the traditional ideology about native speakerism and all of this stuff that goes along with, you know, the reasons why English has spread as a global language, you know, so things like colonialism and imperialism and neoliberal globalization driven by the United States and capitalism, all that stuff, we have to talk about those things. And sometimes our conversations about those things can be a little bit like this.

说话人 2 19:12

You know, I feel like I'm talking about this subject and the students are maybe not quite understanding it. I, I think maybe and I think a lot of it is to do with our cultural backgrounds. You know, I kind of, I've grown up in a new Liberal capitalist society. And I think a lot of things that I, and, you know, I, I, sorry, I've grown up in a new Liberal capitalist society in a country with a very colonizing and pedialistic history. So I kind of understand the, why that's a problem, you know. And, but sometimes when I talk to students from China, for example, who didn't grow up in a new Liberal capitalist society, but there are no, you know, now that China is a very outward looking country, they're finding that they're having to engage with with this with these ideologies. But sometimes they're, you know, their understandings of these things are a little bit well, they're very different from mine, you know, their understanding of capitalism, of democracy. You know, these things are quite different. And so we sometimes have quite interesting discussions about those things. But what I have to do is to, I realize, you know, it's taken me a while, but I now realize I can't assume that my student's understanding of some of these concepts is the same as mine. They might have a different perception of what these things mean. So, you know, there's a lot of negotiation of meaning goes on between me and my students when it comes to these big ideological issues.

说话人 1 21:08

Yeah, I, I. So it's always happened in BA based on your program settings.

说话人 2 21:16

Yes. And then also when the students are doing the dissertation and I'm supervising students, then we have these discussions on a one-to-one basis. And it's usually I'm a lot more focused because we're looking at the role that these concepts and themes plays within this, the context of their individual dissertation. But because it's a one-to-one discussion, it kind of allows us to go quite a bit deeper, you know.

说话人 1 21:47

Absolutely. So besides the ideology, what other topics promote the most interaction between you and Chinese student?

说话人 2 21:59

I suppose when we talk about teaching methodology as well. And you know, cuz remember I'm, I'm, I'm, I only teach t song now. I only work with I people who are learning to be English language teachers. And a lot of the discussion is about differences. Like what are they, what have they experienced is as learners of English in their, when they were at school or when they were at university, how what kinds of methodologies have they experienced and how is that different from what we do on our program? And also not just what we do, but what we're suggesting that they should do as well. And then a lot of the discussion is about how can the things, you know, because they will lead articles that tell them or you should use this methodology or not methodology. But then they have to think, but is that going to work in China? You know, so we have some quite interesting discussions about that. Because of course, there are some practical issues like, you know, if they're teaching a class of 60 students, it's very difficult to do very communicative activities, you know, pair work and group discussions instead. And, but also, you know, if you want to do something more participatory where you're inviting the students to give their opinions, sometimes the students just say, oh, that won't work in China. Chinese students aren't like that. And that leads to interesting discussions because then I ask, why are Chinese students not like that? What is it about? You know, I, is it, are Chinese students really not like that or have they just been conditioned not to be like that? You know, what if you get, what if you a, have you tried asking a question?

You know, so we have quite interesting discussions like that.

说话人 1 24:04

I see that you said that lack of time or opportunity or limited social events or programs have limiting your interaction outside of the class. So do you, how do you think that university or program settings affect your interaction?

说话人 2 24:23

Yeah, I mean, I think there is, how do I say this?

说话人 1 24:34

I hesitate.

说话人 2 24:38

I think the, the, the, I mean, you know yourself, the situation with Chinese students who come to the UK from the university's perspective. And I'm not happy saying this, I feel a bit embarrassed to say this, but from the university's perspective, the biggest motivation for having lots of Chinese students at UK universities is because they generate lots of money. You know, it's an economic imperative. The universities have been put in a position where they need to generate money from somewhere. And Chinese students seem to be an easy way to get that money. And so, once the students have paid their fees, then it's really just a matter of, I don't know, I'd, I think that the universities are more concerned with the income that the Ch, the students generate and not so concerned with the wellbeing of the students once they're here. And I think that means that there is very little scope allowed. And for us to put on additional supports or provide additional opportunities for our, to eh, for us to interact with our students. Stu universities are under financial pressure in every area. And part of that means that teachers, lecturers are also, are, we're worked quite hard, you know, our workloads are very full and it's very difficult to find time for us to find time to engage in social events or social activities with our students. And I think that's a big shame because I think it could be really beneficial for the students and for us to have opportunities to interact with our students in a non-classroom environment, I think that would be really good. And

unfortunately, those opportunities are very limited and because universities want to maximize the income. And of course, if they pay us or if they give us time to socialize with our students, then that's time that we can't spend doing something that they would think is more productive. Yeah, so it's a, I don't know what the solution is to it because this, the context is, it's the context that is quite unfortunately.

说话人 1 27:26

And but you also describe your experience teaching Chinese student as frustrating. It seems rather negative assessment. So can do you have any frustrating stories or there is no.

说话人 2 27:43

Yeah, but yeah, frustrating is one words. I think I use some positive words too, but I think the frustration maybe just comes from that. The thing that we s, we talked about at the beginning where it's like, oh.

说话人 1 28:00

When it's hard to access them, it's like.

说话人 2 28:03

Yeah, what do you really think? You know, you know, I'll say something like, right, okay, is everybody happy with that? And everybody goes, yes. And I'm like, oh, I don't think you're active though. Yeah, tell me what you really think. Why won't you tell me? And so that can be a little bit frustrating, I suppose. And no, are there any other, do I have any other examples of frustrating stories? I guess, I don't know.

说话人 2 28:37

There is also a tendency, and this is not really a criticism, but there is a tendency for Chinese students, the, the not everybody just, you know, it, the, it sometimes has happened to me that Chinese students will speak about China or the Chinese context in very generic terms, very general terms. So you know, the Chinese system is like this or Chinese people learn languages like this. And I often find that a little bit frustrating because I think that it's a very, I don't know where that opinion comes from, but it seems like a very simplistic way to talk about 1.4 billion people, you know, to just say Chinese people learn

English like this. And do they all learn English like that? I mean, surely you know that not every Chinese person is the same, right? I mean, there are 1.4 billion different people in China. And sometimes I find those kind of over generalizations a little bit frustrating because I think it would be beneficial for everybody maybe to kind of recognise the, the, that, you know, not everybody is the same and there are differences and that can be incorporated into learning. We can't just make these assumptions about, you know, an entire population. It would be better to have a system that allows a little more kind of flexibility to accommodate individual differences, you know?

说话人 1 30:38

So what advice would you like to give Chinese student to help them engage more effectively interaction with like pictures.

说话人 2 30:51

I think maybe the first step would be to just be a bit more critical of the materials that you're using and the methods that are required, that are prescribed within those materials. And maybe think about ways in which you can allow individual reactions or individual opinions or individual views to be expressed within the context of the classroom. And it's not easy. And sometimes the conditions don't allow it very much. And I understand that.

说话人 2 31:35

But I think there is a way to be a kind of, you know, you can be a very prescriptive teacher and just say, right, here are the answers. This is the information. Now no practice. Or you can be a little more nurturing, where you encourage the students to tell you what they think about things. And when you're teaching a language that's giving them the practice, you know, you're allowing them to say what they think. And that's pure communicative language teaching. You know, that's where you're giving them the opportunity to communicate whatever they want to communicate, you know, their actual thoughts, their feelings, their ideas, and not just say some stuff that will help them pass an exam. Yeah, cool.

说话人 1 32:25

Okay, so the last two questions, do you have any other experience or story want to share with me?

说话人 2 32:37

I don't think so. I think I've told you quite a lot about the experiences I've had, I think. And I think, you know, I don't, I like I've said that I don't want to be too general about Chinese students because you know it's a big demographic and I think it might be, it's important to perhaps consider the different backgrounds that people come from within China and how that might affect their experiences and when it comes to their kind of intercultural experiences, especially because I guess that there are some students who have grown up in families that are perhaps a little more western oriented. You know, maybe they had, they went to a school where they, maybe they had an American teacher. I don't know, that kind of thing. So they're a little bit more familiar. Whereas there are other students who come and study in the UK and everything is a culture shock for them, you know, and therefore, the cultural bridge that they have to cross, the land that they have to traverse to get from, to just simply be able to engage with the cultural environment here is more challenging for them. So I guess, yeah, I think I've seen that in the previous place where I worked and I've seen it with students from other cultures as well, not just Chinese students, where everything is just so different that they just don't know how to engage with anything. And it's, it's very debilitating.

说话人 2 34:24

You know, I'm, so I think it's important to try and the cultural background and the experiences that have come from I, you know, the culture the student grew up in our are important. But maybe the more important thing is what is the impact of that on them now? And different people react to a new situation in different ways. So I don't know, maybe it's not just about culture, maybe it's about personality too, and about a sort of RAM, a sense of resilience that you might have or I don't know, just our adaptability. There are other things that need to be considered as well.

说话人 1 35:17

Yeah, it's a complex question. It.

说话人 2 35:19

Is. It is. It's very complex. And I think, I guess it's about understanding that it's complex and embracing that complexity and incorporating that in our own kind of reflections as teachers and thinking about how you, you know, those, how those various different complex issues affect our own practice and the way that our students engage with us.

说话人 1 35:48

Okay, thank you for your answers. Are you so useful? Yeah, very useful. So I started.

说话人 2 35:57

Well, I hope so, right? So I'll, I wish you luck in your in the rest of your data collection and then the rest of your studies. No doubt. I'll find out how you're getting on cuz I'm still in touch with Thomas. I see him again. And, and yeah, so I hope it all goes well.

Appendix 6 Participant information sheet

Focus group interview -Chinese students

Group	Number	University	Gander	Age	Code name
G1	1	University of St. Andrews	female	28	S1-1
G2	3	University of the west of Scotland	female	24	S2-1
		University of the west of Scotland	female	25	S2-2
		University of the west of Scotland	male	23	S2-3
G3	2	University of Glasgow	female	25	S3-1
		University of Edinburgh	female	24	S3-2
G4	1	University of Edinburgh	female	23	S4-1
G5	2	University of Stirling	female	24	S5-1
		University of St. Andrews	female	23	S5-2
G6	2	University of the west of Scotland	female	25	S6-1
		University of Edinburgh	male	29	S6-2
G7	3	University of Glasgow	female	23	S7-1
		University of Glasgow	female	26	S7-2
		University of Glasgow	female	27	S7-3
G8	4	University of Aberdeen	female	22	S8-1
		University of Aberdeen	male	23	S8-2
		University of St. Andrews	female	22	S8-3
		University of Edinburgh	male	25	S8-4

Questionnaire -Lecturers

Code name	Gander	Age	University	Nationality
L1	female	45-54	anonymously	Non-British

L2	male	35-44	anonymously	British and Polish
L3	male	25-34	anonymously	British (English)
L4	female	25-34	anonymously	Austrian
L5	male	45-54	anonymously	British
L6	male	45-54	University of Glasgow	Chinese
L7	female	65+	University of the West of Scotland	British
L8	male	35-44	University of Edinburgh	British
L9	male	35-44	University of Stirling	non-British
L10	male	45-54	University of St. Andrews	British
L11	male	45-54	University of the West of Scotland	Irish
L12	male	45-54	University of Edinburgh	Argentinian
L13	male	45-54	University of Glasgow	British

Appendix 7 Consent Form and Examples



Participants Consent Form for Lecturers and Students

Name of department: Institute of Education

Title of the study: The Intercultural Relationships between UK Lecturers and Chinese Student

- I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- I confirm that I have read and understood the Privacy Notice for Participants in Research Projects and understand how my personal information will be used and what will happen to it (i.e. how it will be stored and for how long).
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, up to the point of completion, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.
- I understand that I can request the withdrawal from the study of some personal information and that whenever possible researcher will comply with my request. This includes the following personal data:
 - Audio recordings of classroom observations that identify me.
 - audio recordings of interviews or focus groups that identify me.
 - my personal information from transcripts.
- I understand that anonymised data (i.e., data that do not identify me personally) cannot be withdrawn once they have been included in the study.
- I understand that any information recorded in the research will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available.
- I consent to being a participant in the project.
- I consent to being audio recorded as part of the project.

(PRINT NAME)	
Signature of Participant:	Date:

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) for the research project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.

13 答复

ID ↑	名称	答复
1	anonymous	Yes
2	anonymous	Yes
3	anonymous	Yes
4	anonymous	Yes
5	anonymous	Yes
6	anonymous	Yes
7	anonymous	Yes
8	anonymous	Yes
9	anonymous	Yes
10	anonymous	Yes
11	anonymous	Yes
12	anonymous	Yes
13	anonymous	Yes

Appendix 8 Ethic approval Evidence

22. Chief Investigator and Head of Department Declaration

Please note that unsigned applications will not be accepted and both signatures are required

I have read the University's Code of Practice on Investigations [involving](#) Human Beings and have completed this application accordingly. By signing below, I acknowledge that I am aware of and accept my responsibilities as Chief Investigator under Clauses 3.11 – 3.13 of the [Research Governance Framework](#) and that this investigation cannot proceed before all approvals required have been obtained.

Signature of Chief Investigator



Please also type name here:

Dr David Roxburgh

I confirm I have read this application, I am happy that the study is consistent with departmental strategy, that the staff and/or students involved have the appropriate expertise to undertake the study and that adequate arrangements are in place to supervise any students that might be acting as investigators, that the study has access to the resources needed to conduct the proposed research successfully, and that there are no other departmental-specific issues relating to the study of which I am aware.

Signature of Head of Department



Please also type name here

Date:

06 /02 / 2024

Appendix 9 Themes and example data information

Themes	Sub-themes	Theme description	Examples	Translation	Number of participants mentioning
互动情景 Interactional context	学术情景 Academic interactional context	用于讨论学术和课业相关的互动 For discussion of academic and coursework related interactions	S3-1 我觉得主要发生在我向老师询问一些关于作业的详细要求的那种情况下。我觉得是会有互动的，我们 seminar 的时候老师会提一些问题，然后这个时候我们需要跟老师会进行一个那种问答的那种互动。	I think interaction mainly happens when I ask the teacher about specific requirements for assignments. I feel there is interaction during our seminars as well, when the teacher asks questions, and we need to engage in a kind of Q&A exchange with them.	16
	社交情景 Social interactional context	讨论非学术和课业内容的互动 Discuss the interaction of non-academic and coursework content	S8-1 嗯，我补充一点就是我的老师们。嗯，我就除了在课堂上的一些学习的像，嗯，我的老师还会带我们在这个城市里面去做城市游览，就我们除了在班级里的课程，我们也会出去，大家一起整个班级，一起去周边走，然后他边会给我们介绍这个城市的建筑和历史，所以我们就更加的了解了这个城市。然后其次的话我还有一个老师，他会在课堂上给我们讲一些知识的时候，然后就会顺带着就会科普。最近在这个地方有一个音乐剧，有一个舞台剧在上演，然后问大家感不感兴趣？要不要一起去看？所以我们当时也是老师带着我们去看了音乐剧，所以像这种学习加上生活的这两种互相的补充，我会觉得这是一个特别好	"Let me add something about my teachers. In addition to classroom learning, some of my teachers also took us on city tours. Beyond our lessons in the classroom, we went out together as a whole class to explore the local area, and the teacher would introduce the architecture and history of the city along the way. This really helped us understand the city better. Also, I had one teacher who, while teaching us in class, would also casually share cultural information—for example, mentioning that a musical or a play was being staged nearby and asking if we were interested in going. So we ended up going to see a musical together with our	13

			的学习状态。	teacher. This kind of combination of learning and everyday life made the learning experience particularly enjoyable and meaningful for me.	
学生互动策略 Students' interaction strategies	同伴协作 Peer collaboration	与同学或有经验的同伴寻求帮助或互相帮助 Seek help or help each other with classmates or experienced peers	S5-1 我想想, 如果是因为非常不会表达的话, 我可能转头问一下我同学, 新同学, 我如果要问这个事我怎么问? 或者是我就翻译一下, 然后或者就是如果不是必须要问的话, 我可能也就不问了, 或者是再之后再发邮件。	"Let me think... If I really don't know how to express myself, I might first turn to a classmate—maybe a new friend—and ask how I should ask the question. Or I might try to translate what I want to say. If it's not something I absolutely have to ask, I might just drop it, or choose to send an email later instead.	6
	学习文化 Culture learning	了解和学习英国或苏格兰地区文化和高校教育情况 Understanding and learning about culture and HE education in the UK or Scotland	S3-2 我觉得我会主动学一下这边的文化, 有的时候是问问以前留学过的学姐们。或者是上网查一些资料, 看电影啥的。就主动学习一下这边的东西。了解这边的信息。但是我也和少主动去聊这些。我想的是人家和我聊的时候我不至于什么都说不, 就会太尴尬了。	"I think I would take the initiative to learn about the local culture. Sometimes I ask senior students who have studied abroad before, or I look things up online, watch movies, and so on—just to actively learn more about this place and its culture. But I don't often take the initiative to start conversations about these things. My main goal is to avoid feeling awkward if someone brings it up—I just don't want to be in a situation where I have nothing to say.	6
	学习语言 Language learning	学习和加强英语使用能力 Learning and strengthening the use of English	S2-3 对, 我也会提前预习, 这个挺有用的。不然一些新的词我在课堂上现接触真的不行。我又要查词的翻译, 又要听老师的解释。有的时候听不懂还要查这个词是什么意思。所以还是得提前预习, 尤其是专有名词啥的。	"Yes, I also do some preparation in advance, and I find it really helpful. Otherwise, it's hard for me to keep up when I encounter new vocabulary during class. I have to look up the translation while also trying to follow the teacher's explanation. Sometimes I don't even understand the explanation, so I need to look up the meaning again. So I think it's necessary to preview the	10

				material beforehand, especially when it comes to technical terms or proper nouns."	
	提前预习 Pre-learning	提前了解课堂即将讨论的内容 Know in advance what will be discussed in class	S2-2: ...但是如果说为了课堂上的互动。我可能会提前准备, 看一下课件, 因为会担心有不认识的单词会导致看不懂, 有的时候老师会把第二天将要互动的话题展示在课件上, 这样我就可以提前准备一下一些我想说的内容。这样我就不太担心在小组讨论或者回答问题的时候答非所问。	"...But if it's for classroom interaction, I might prepare in advance by reviewing the slides. I worry that unfamiliar vocabulary might make it hard to understand the content. Sometimes the teacher includes the topics for the next day's discussion in the slides, so I can prepare what I want to say in advance. That way, I'm less worried about going off-topic during group discussions or when answering questions.	6
	敏感话题讨论 Engaging with sensitive issues	讨论政治敏感的话题 Discussion of politically sensitive topics	S6-2 因为我一想到文化, 可能会想到民族这类的事情, 然后难免就冲, 可能会有一些历史的一些遗留问题, 你要说大了, 对吧? 就是我觉得倒没有什么促进吧。我觉得没有什么阻碍的。基本就是我们会避开一些什么政治这些。	"When I think of culture, I tend to associate it with things like ethnicity or nationality, and inevitably that brings up certain historical issues. If you think about it on a larger scale, these could be sensitive topics. So I wouldn't say cultural differences necessarily promote interaction, but they don't really hinder it either. Basically, we just try to avoid topics like politics."	5
	避免冲突和交流 Avoiding both conflict and communication	冷漠或闪躲, 消极的互动意愿和表现 Indifference or evasion, negative willingness to interact and performance	S6-1 我没什么压力, 有压力的时候一般选择逃避, 就是比如考虑到和老师的交流, 然后无法适应他之类的。除了上课之外, 非必要不和他见面之外, 基本和他处于陌生人的状态。 不太融入学校倒没有, 毕竟学校中就是中国人还是有一定的含量的。就是你如果非要交流的话, 也不一定逮着你的老师和你的同班同学进行交流。和他们就是一个是逃避问题, 另外一个就基本就是要交流的话	"I don't really feel much pressure, but when I do, I usually choose to avoid it—for example, when thinking about communicating with the teacher or not being able to adapt to them. Outside of class, I try not to meet with them unless it's absolutely necessary, so basically, I stay in a kind of stranger-like relationship with them. As for fitting into the school environment, it's not really a problem—after all, there are quite a few Chinese	9

			就是，除非学术方面的不得已性的交流了。	students around. So if I need to interact with others, it doesn't have to be with the teacher or classmates specifically. When it comes to interacting with them, it's usually either avoidance or academic communication that's necessary."	
影 响 互 动 的 因素 Factors affect interaction	机构支持 Institution support	大学里对国际学生和讲 师的跨文化互动提供的 环境，政策，活动等 University environment, policies, activities, etc. for cross-cultural interaction between international students and lecturers.	S5-2 然后还有就是学校还有那种 tutorial 的服务， 员工不是你的导师，但是他会给你很多学习上的帮助 和建议。还有就是一些语言上面的润色的服务，我也 有去约过几次，还挺好的。不算课程，它就是一种 Academy English service，应该是专门面向就是这 种海外的学生提供的一种服务。	"There's also a tutorial service at the university. The staff members there are not your academic supervisors, but they can provide a lot of support and advice related to your studies. There are also services for language polishing—I've booked a few sessions, and they were quite helpful. It's not part of the formal curriculum; it's more like an Academic English service, which I think is specifically designed for international students."	12
	学生背景和个性 Students' background and personality	学生以往经历和个性特 征 Students' previous experiences and personality traits	S4 我感觉就是可能是因为性格比较外向，就比较 E 人，然后我会主动地去跟外国人说话。所以就帮助 我认识的人很多。不一定跟每个人都融入很好，但 起码你认识人很多，你可以从中筛选一些可能以后可 以慢慢发展的人。我觉得这一点我做得还是不错的， 就是很主动，交往方面很主动，也会主动开口说话， 不会说觉得很尴尬和怎么样。而且我当时其实有就是 我跟中国同学玩得也很好，但是我也有尽量去跟外国 同学交往，就是比如说有外国同学邀请你去参加一些 party，可能有一些同学他就会觉得好累，还要说英	"I think it might be because I'm quite outgoing—more of an extrovert—so I tend to take the initiative to talk to international students. That's helped me get to know a lot of people. I may not become close with everyone, but at least I've met many people, and from there I can choose which connections might develop further over time. I think I've done quite well in this regard—being proactive in social interactions and not feeling awkward or hesitant about starting conversations. At the same time, I also got along well with my Chinese classmates,	8

			语, 就不太想去。但我就会觉得可能想去尝试一下, 你多尝试的时候你也会觉得可能有进步。	but I made an effort to engage with international classmates too. For example, when some foreign classmates invited me to parties, some Chinese students might feel too tired or not want to go because it means speaking English. But I wanted to give it a try. The more you try, the more you feel you're making progress."	
文化差异 Cultural differences	双方的民族文化差异和社会文化差异 national cultural differences and socio-cultural differences between the two sides	S8-1 对, 我也是觉得刚来的时候会有很多文化背景上的差异, 比如说跟老师上课的时候, 他会特别的喜欢互动, 但是对于我来说的话, 我可能更多的时候是喜欢听, 然后包括如果安排小组讨论, 我也不太喜欢主动表达我的内心的一些想法, 但其实我也都, 就是, 我也在用我的方式参与, 但是这个可能就是对于英国的这个学习来说不太一样。	"Yes, I also felt that when I first arrived, there were many cultural differences. For example, in class, the teacher really encouraged interaction, but for me, I tended to prefer just listening. And when it came to group discussions, I wasn't very comfortable expressing my personal thoughts proactively. But I was still participating—in my own way. It's just that this might not align well with the expectations of the UK learning environment."	9	
讲师背景和个性 Lecturers' background and personality	讲师以往经历和个性特征 Lecturers' past experiences and personality traits	S8-2 我觉得。嗯, 怎么说呢? 其实他们只是表面上了解, 但实际上其实我觉得非常不了解中国学生, 他们对于中国学生只是一个。我觉得不止中国把, 他们对于世界各级学生都非常礼貌, 但是, 但他们我觉得更兴奋他们自己的文化。	"Well, how should I put it... I think they only understand Chinese students on a surface level. In fact, I feel they don't really understand us at all. And it's not just about Chinese students—I think they're polite to students from all over the world, but they seem more enthusiastic and engaged when it comes to their own culture."	14	
语言挑战 Language challenges	由于语言差异或语言不精通带来的互动困难 Interaction difficulties	S2-2 我是属于刚上课第一周, 我就感觉没融入语言环境, 听课很费劲。当时也查了, 老师也知道咱中国学生听全英的课程费劲。不仅我听不懂, 我问我同学,	"During the first week of classes, I felt that I hadn't adapted to the English-speaking environment at all—it was really difficult to understand the lectures. I even	16	

		caused by language differences or limited language proficiency	他们也表示听不懂。后来慢慢的就好了。	looked into it and found that the teacher was aware that Chinese students often struggle with fully English-taught courses. It wasn't just me—when I asked my classmates, they also said they couldn't understand much. But things gradually got better over time."	
	课堂设置和氛围 Class settings and atmosphere	课堂上的气氛, 座位等 Classroom atmosphere, seating arrangements, and related aspects	S5-2 就是一种氛围, 就是你进去每次推开教室门, 老师就是会很热情跟每个人打招呼, 然后等下课的时候, 就有时候单独跟老师问问题, 然后走的时候, 就比如大家都会说 have a nice day 之类的, 我觉得其实不是说只针对于你某一个人, 就是他那种文化很令人舒服。	"It's more like a kind of atmosphere. Every time you walk into the classroom and open the door, the teacher warmly greets everyone. After class, if you go ask a question individually, when you leave, people usually say things like 'have a nice day.' I feel like it's not directed at you personally—it's just part of the culture, and it feels really warm and pleasant."	10
	课堂教学内容 Course design	课程话题和课件内容等 Course topics and materials	S8-2 对于很多中国留学生来说, 我们是在毕业后是打算回到中国的。但是他这些学的东西其实对于反而回到中国会很不适应, 包括像 t so 这门专业, 在国内甚至都没有一个专门跟它能对应的专业名称, 很多留下生活之后都很难找工作。	"For many Chinese international students, our plan is to return to China after graduation. However, what we learn here can actually make it harder to adapt once we're back. For example, with a major like TESOL, there isn't even an exact equivalent for it in China's academic or professional system. Many students who have lived abroad find it quite difficult to find a job after returning."	11
讲师的策略 Lecturers' interaction strategies	了解中国学生 Understanding of Chinese students	通过直接经验或间接经验了解中国学生的学习习惯和互动习惯 Understanding Chinese students' learning and	S8-1 我的师生关系我觉得已经非常好了, 因为我们专业的老师他们其实就是做跨文化、做语言教学的。嗯, 然后他们非常的懂中国学生的一些缺点、弱点以及一些性格上的差异。所以像我的, 我当时在写论文的这个导师, 他就会跟我有许多一对一的互动, 所以我们会他就会很着重于去关心我的国家的文化, 嗯,	"I think my relationship with my teachers is already very good. In my programme, most of the teachers specialise in intercultural studies and language education, so they really understand the weaknesses, challenges, and personality differences of Chinese students. For example, my dissertation supervisor had a lot of one-on-	8

		interaction habits through direct or indirect experience	然后来帮助我更好的做我的学习研究之类,所以我觉得至少我接触的所有的本专业的老师这种,他们对于这种师生关系和这种不同文化的这种,他们都是非常包容的,但是可能会在其他的一些专业的老师可能就偏,比如说偏理论,偏那种工科一点的,他们可能就不太会注重这些。嗯,当然我也不是特别确定。	one interaction with me and paid particular attention to my cultural background in order to better support my learning and research. So at least from my experience, the teachers in my field are very open and understanding when it comes to teacher-student relationships and cultural differences. But I've heard that in other fields—especially those that are more theory-based or science/engineering-oriented—teachers might not pay as much attention to these aspects. Of course, I'm not entirely sure about that."	
	学习中国文化和情况 Learnings about Chinese culture and situations	主动了解和学习中国相关的文化, 社会情况, 教育政策等 Actively learning about Chinese culture, society, and educational policies	S8-3 可能就是第一节课的时候, 然后可能会找你。嗯, 了解一下你的国家的文化, 或者你是来自地区的文化, 可能会多问两句。我觉得这个可能是一种尊重学生的一种表现。	"Maybe during the first class, the teacher might approach you to learn a bit about your country or the culture of the region you're from. They might ask a few extra questions. I think this is probably a way of showing respect toward students."	9
	讨论文化差异 Discussion about culture differences	课堂上公开讨论不同地区的文化和情况以促进大家对彼此文化的了解 Encouraging open classroom discussions about different regional cultures and contexts to promote mutual cultural understanding	S2-2 有, 聊很多, 咱们因为那个教育嘛, 所以它每个国家的那个教育背景都不一样。所以咱老讨论这种问题, 就是包括学制或者是英语的这个重要性在国家里的影响。可能我们咱说英语好一点或差一点对在中国国内影响不大, 但是如果在非洲国家的话, 或者是那个印度那边, 他影响其实是很大的。嗯, 他们英语要是不好的话, 他可能就是找不到好工作, 或者是生活都困难。	"Yes, we talk a lot about this. Since we study education, and every country has a different educational background, we often discuss these kinds of issues—like differences in education systems or the role of English in different countries. For example, in China, whether your English is strong or not may not have a huge impact. But in some African countries or in India, English proficiency can make a big difference. If their English isn't good, it might be hard for them to find a	10

				good job or even manage daily life."	
	利用非学术性互动 Using non-academic interaction	通过关心学生非学术性适应和生活来促进双方关系 Fostering the relationship by caring for the non-academic adaptation and life of the student	S4 然后一般除了课上的内容,我觉得 TESOL 还有一点是它经常会设置一些 event,就是课下让大家去 social,然后也有很好的师生互动,他们会问问你们最近在干什么.	"Apart from what we learn in class, I think one nice thing about the TESOL programme is that it often organizes events outside of class for socializing. These events also provide good opportunities for teacher-student interaction. The teachers might ask us what we've been up to recently, which creates a friendly atmosphere."	5
	小组讨论 Group discussion	组织多人互动的方式降低学生的互动恐惧 Using group-based interaction strategies to reduce students' anxiety about participation	S5-1 有有有,在就是在课堂中,有的老师他们会组织小组讨论,然后过来听你们聊的,然后会再问一些问题,就可能还是在因为所我和老师所有交流都是在课堂中,所以就还是在课堂中举例,然后他们可能因为也不会亚洲蹲,然后他们就会跪下来听你说。然后我就觉得他们能跪下来认真的在听听我们在聊什么,然后再给我们一些建议,就感觉还挺好的,就是很就感觉至少他很认真地听学生们都在准说些什么或者是聊些什么。	"Yes, definitely. In class, some teachers would organize group discussions and then come around to listen to what we were talking about. They would also ask follow-up questions. Since all my interactions with teachers mainly happened in the classroom, I'll give a classroom example. Because they don't usually do the 'Asian squat,' some of them would kneel down next to us to listen more closely. I felt it was really nice—they were genuinely listening to what we were saying and then offering suggestions. It made me feel that they truly cared about what students were discussing."	7
跨文化适应挑战 Intercultural adaptation challenges	人际交往适应 Social adaptation	与其他国际学生和老师的交往方面的适应 Adjusting to communication and interaction with international peers and	S3-2: 有,就是在和同学交往了之后。因为就是我觉得在这里读硕士你就一年。如果我在这边和别人交朋友,其实也就是这一年的友谊,我回去之后其实也就基本上来说不会联系,因为大家都在不同城市,然后我就很少去和他们交往,就算有朋友的话也只是限于那一个选修课的那一个小组,然后那个选修课结束之	"Yes, after interacting with classmates, I did feel that way. I think doing a master's degree here only lasts for one year, so if I make friends during this time, the friendship might only last for that year. After going back to China, we'll all be in different cities, and we probably won't keep in touch. So I rarely try to build deeper	11

		academic staff	后就没有了。嗯，所以我觉得这方面有点感觉不是很好。	relationships. Even if I do make friends, it's usually just within a group for one elective course, and once that course ends, the connection also fades. So in this aspect, I feel a bit disappointed."	
	学术适应 Academic adaptation	适应英国或西方的教育体制，包括课程设置，教育重点和特点，评估标准和方法等 Adapting to the academic system in the UK/West, such as course structure, learning priorities, and evaluation methods	S6-1 应该是，就是我们每个人习惯不一样，他肯定不能适应我们每个人，所以可能就是当我们所有人递交作业的时候，他会按照他自己的喜好来评定分数。作业和考核时，他也有给过框架，就类似于就是几个要点，你自己尝试贴进点答，但是你可能觉得你贴到点了，但他觉得你没有。	"I think it's probably because everyone has different habits and preferences, and the teacher can't adapt to each of us individually. So when we all submit our assignments, it feels like they grade them based on their own personal preferences. During assessments, they did provide a framework—like a few key points to focus on—and we were expected to align our answers with those. But sometimes, even if I felt I had addressed the points, the teacher might think I hadn't."	14
	日常生活适应 Daly life adaptation	英国衣食住行方面的适应 Adaptation to daily life in the UK, including clothing, food, housing, and transportation	S1 就我自己做饭嘛，就吃饮食方面就没什么问题，就前几天去采购好生活用品，后面就自己烧饭就没问题。	"I cook for myself, so there's no problem with food. I just went shopping for daily necessities during the first few days, and after that, I've been cooking on my own without any issues."	6
选择 苏 格 兰 TESOL 的原 因 Reasons for chosen TESOL in	学校声望和就业 前 景 University reputation and career prospects	学校的 QS 排名和专业 的就业前机会 The university's QS ranking and the career prospects of the programme	S3-2: 因为我录取的学校。我只有两个学校录取我，一个是诺丁汉，一个是爱丁堡，就这个选择很明显，排名很重要对我来说。	"I was only admitted to two universities—Nottingham and Edinburgh—so the choice was quite clear. Rankings were very important to me."	7

Scotland	课程设置 TESOL course design	课程的具体教学内容和实用性等 The specific content and practical relevance of the course	S1 那是因为这所学校, 是因为选的这个学校, 这个专业。我当时就是想要目标很明确, 就是想要那练 Tesol 专业。然后拿到的 offer 当中只有就圣安给的是 tesol 专业, 其他的是教育学, 所以说就选择圣安。	"It was mainly because of the university and the programme I chose. My goal was very clear at the time—I specifically wanted to study TESOL. Among all the offers I received, only St Andrews offered me a place in a TESOL programme. The others were in general education, so I chose St Andrews."	4
	苏格兰风土人情 Local customs and lifestyle in Scotland	苏格兰的人文地理 The social and geographic environment of Scotland	S3-1: 其实如果是从现实的角度来说, 应该是因为我申请到了那个格拉斯哥大学, 所以我来苏格兰。另一个原因就是, 其实我也挺想体验一下苏格兰的文化, 因为我之前是在英格兰读过 2+2。但是后面我就来了苏格兰读研。	"To be honest, from a practical point of view, it was mainly because I got an offer from the University of Glasgow, so I came to Scotland. Another reason is that I was actually quite interested in experiencing Scottish culture. I had previously done a 2+2 programme in England, but then I chose to come to Scotland for my master's degree."	5
	经济和福利 Economy and welfare	学费, 房租医疗和生活费等考虑 Considerations such as tuition fees, rent, healthcare, and cost of living	S6-1 我父母为我选择了这个专业和这个学校, 主要是考虑到地区原因, 相比于苏格兰, 英格兰的医疗并不是完全免费的。我的身体出于一些情况考虑需要定期就医和拿取药品, 而苏格兰的医疗是完全免费, 就是无论是从挂号预约到取药拿药都不需要钱, 所以我选择了苏格兰。	"My parents chose this programme and university for me mainly because of regional considerations. Compared to Scotland, healthcare in England isn't completely free. Due to some health conditions, I need to see a doctor regularly and get medication. In Scotland, healthcare is fully free—there's no charge for appointments or prescriptions—so we decided on Scotland for that reason."	3