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How is an Academic English Skills (AES) module, delivered in a UK Higher Education (HE) setting, understood, and experienced by Chinese students?

A Narrative Inquiry Using Inductive Reflexive Thematic Analysis

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Abstract

In the academic year 2021/22, the UK Higher Education (HE) sector welcomed 679,970 international students into its space which is equivalent to 24% of the total HE student population and received an associated gross economic benefit of £41.9 billion (London Economics, 2023). It is reported by London Economics (2023) that China continues to be the 'largest sender' of students, with one out of four international students being Chinese who are embarking on undergraduate or postgraduate study in the UK. In this context a number of international education pathway providers whose main activity is controlled by the UK, USA and Australian markets are partnered with universities to provide international students routes into partner university study. Together, they offer a choice of over 1,400 programmes that in 2016 generated a global income of USDollars825 million (ICEF, 2016). This study investigates how some Chinese students understand and make meaning of studying the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) component (Academic English Skills module) of their pathway programme. It explores some tensions that exist in the teaching and learning contexts that involve Chinese students, set against a backdrop of cultural and historical considerations, and explores Chinese education reform initiatives. Consideration is given to the internationalisation of Western HE, the economic role that international students play in this environment and the positioning of EAP in this education context. Using a narrative inquiry approach, the study offers opportunities for six participants to tell their stories of how they make meaning of studying AES. The findings that are analysed using inductive reflexive thematic analysis highlight that attention needs to be focused on improving the AES module (and other EAP programmes, as relevant) to provide a positive and intrinsically rewarding education experience for our visiting Chinese students. It aims to elevate an appreciation of Chinese students who are studying at HE level in the UK that sees them more than key income contributors to the HE sector.

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Author’s Declaration

“I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.”

Printed Name: Clare Watson

Signature:

List of Abbreviations

AES	Academic English Skills
Ac Lits	Academic Literacies
BANA	Britain, Australasia, and North America
BALEAP	British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes
CHC	Confucian-heritage Culture
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CEFR	Common European Framework of References for Language
CEAP	Critical EAP
CV	Curriculum Vitae
EdD	Doctorate in Education
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EGAP	English for General Academic Purposes
ELT	English Language Teaching
EP	Education Permanente
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
ESAP	English for Specific Academic Purposes
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England

HCT	Human Capital Theory
HRD	Human Resource Development
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
ISC	International Study Centre
IC	Intercultural Communication
IY2	International Year Two
MOE	Ministry of Education
NPM	New Public Management
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PE	Permanent Education
PMP	Pre-masters Programme
RE	Recurrent Education
SELMOUS	Special English Language Materials for Overseas University Students
SFL	Systemic Functional Linguistics
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TA	Thematic Analysis
UFP	Undergraduate Foundation Programme
UK	United Kingdom
UKCISA	UK Council for International Student Affairs
UK ENIC	UK National Information Centre for Global Qualifications and Skills
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USA	United States of America

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background to the Study

1.1 Aims of the Study

This study aims to strengthen an appreciation and understanding of Chinese students as they study an Academic English Skills (AES) module, that sits under the umbrella of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), at United Kingdom (UK) Higher Education (HE) level. A key aim is to consider the appropriacy and effectiveness of AES for Chinese students. There are two core guiding professional aims 1) to nurture my intrinsic curiosity which has evolved due to working with Chinese students in education capacities for approximately 20 years and 2) to inform EAP professionals involved in designing and delivering AES programmes to Chinese students, along with enhancing my own professional practice. In addressing the research question **'How is an Academic English Skills (AES) module, delivered in a UK Higher Education (HE) setting, understood, and experienced by Chinese students?'** appropriate reference is made to the impact on the UK HE international student recruitment arena, of the internationalisation of Western HE. There is a determination to unravel tensions that commonly exist in an EAP teaching and learning environment, specific to the teaching of Chinese students. This is attempted through consideration of common perceptions and approaches to teaching Chinese students, but predominantly through an exploration of stories told by students themselves; six Chinese students undertaking an AES module as part of their UK university pathway programme. Driven by narrative inquiry, the opportunity to investigate and understand participant experiences is facilitated. This chapter contextualises the focus of this research by offering an insight into the relevance of my professional context to the aims of this study. The origins and purpose of EAP is introduced as a lead into the dissertation. Before moving onto Chapter 2, the selected research approach to the study and methodology used is presented.

1.2 Professional Context

My interest in working with Chinese students in a teaching and learning environment began in 2004 when I found myself embracing an opportunity that was to transport me from working as an educator in the UK to Chengdu, China. Working on the establishment of a joint education venture project between a UK based boarding school and Chengdu Foreign Language School, I took up the role of Head of Centre for the Chengdu arm of this project. The role included a small number of hours teaching English and International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam preparation classes. Studying the UK 'A' level curriculum, all students were Chinese from mainland China who were preparing for entry into UK or Australian universities. This experience of working with a homogenous group of students in their home country was quite a contrast to what I had been used to. Prior to this, since 1994, I had been working in various English Language Teaching (ELT) settings predominantly teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), in roles that ranged from teaching, to mentoring, team

leading and course directing. Settings included English Language Schools in Greece and UK based boarding schools. In each setting, students had individual motivations for learning the English language which were predominantly linked to either gaining employment in the tourist industry (Greece), or academic study taught through the medium of English (UK based boarding schools). Lessons were typically lively, active, and fun. Accustomed to these lively lessons with students who, for most of the time, actively participated, I found myself in Chengdu in a study environment where many of the Chinese students displayed characteristics of obedience and servitude, appearing confused and yet curious, and were difficult to read. At first, I agonized over how to adapt and manage my teaching practice to effectively adjust to this new teaching and learning arrangement. I engaged in what Schon (1983) would describe as reflecting-upon-action, doing so after each lesson through consideration of lesson development, interaction patterns, the teacher and student relationship, student responses to content and delivery, and language development, not necessarily all at the same time. I was regularly perplexed, with a lack of familiar experiences upon which to draw and no theoretical or procedural knowledge that I could enlist to aid my professional practice. At times, I found myself acting unexpectedly and feeling disappointed by my responses as a teacher. I questioned why I seemed unable to encourage oral communication in class and to enable active participation that did not involve putting one's hand up for permission to speak. There may have been moments when I reflected-in-action (Schon, 1983), although many of my responses to events may merely have been operating as 'critical functions' which according to Eraut (1995, p14) often supersede 'being in action'. However, eager to learn from this new professional experience, I began a process of understanding the complexities of intercultural communication. This understanding was key to the establishment of a positive teaching and learning environment, one that was shared with my Chinese students, and which initiated an enthusiasm for professional development which continues to this day. Since the experience of 2004 in Chengdu, university employment in the UK, Ireland and China has presented me with opportunities to move from the teaching of EFL to teaching and managing in EAP contexts. As part of this transition, I have evidenced a changing English Language Teaching (ELT) landscape, with a geographical and demographical widening of the teaching and learning of the English language. I have been fortunate enough to continue working with Chinese students, as a tutor, course director and manager, therefore contributing to their learning experience as they undertake EAP study as part of their route into UK university undergraduate and postgraduate education.

My most recent role is as Head of Centre. Employed by a global pathway education provider (who I refer to as Provider A throughout this dissertation, for the purpose of company anonymity), I am assigned with the task of heading one of the providers' UK based International Study Centres (ISC) which is situated in the grounds of the partner university. Pathway programme provision, controlled predominantly by the UK, United States of America (USA), and Australian markets, offers international students routes into partner university study. With an offering of over 1,400 programme choices,

pathway education in 2016 created a global income of USDollars825 million (ICEF, 2016). Charged with preparing fee-paying international students for entry into partner universities, providers operate in a private-public partnership with mutually selected university partners and have a range of finance and education models. Upon completion of a competitive tendering process, contractual agreements with a time span of between three and thirty years are reached between the provider and the university (Redden, 2018). An appreciable constituent of this relationship is the contractual expectations for the pathway provider to engage in effective and strategic international student recruitment, to focus on market growth and to demonstrate the achievement of mutually ambitious student progression (from provider to university) targets. Failure to meet these expectations commonly results in the university partner deciding not to re-new the contract and to move on to another provider. This concentration on progression targets, related to assessment, acts as a stimulant for the endorsement of a neoliberal education, one that leans towards a preference for education as a product, which in this instance, is generated and maintained for the international consumer. In short, this pathway programme education parcel, marketed for the international student population, with exam success and progression at its heart, may indeed be likened to what Bauman (2003, p20) would classify as 'a knowledge package' with students engaging in a 'liquid-modern world' of consumption. The pathway provider has dual responsibility to deliver a high-quality education experience to its consumers and to fulfil its obligations to stakeholders (student, parent, agent, university to name a few). According to Cunnington (2019, p11), the multi-faceted position of global pathway providers, may encourage the emergence of a type of provider 'behaviour'. A provider's preoccupation with company profit via student progression runs the danger of creating and maintaining an education curriculum that concentrates on exam preparation, potentially leaving students deprived of a meaningful and life-long learning education experience.

Maintaining that the fundamental purpose of education is to allow and encourage individuals to experience 'socialisation' (become members of cultural, social, and political systems), along with the obtainment of individual autonomy, namely 'subjectification' (Biesta, 2009, p40), I question an education that prioritises qualification. Certification, that espouses education as a means to an end, sits uncomfortably with my faith in the potential stimulation, through education, of Dewey's (2008) proposed virtues of intrinsic qualities outlined as creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, whole-heartedness, and responsibility. I am acutely aware that by investing in education, students/families/other economic stakeholders may (rightly or wrongly) have high expectations of satisfactory economic return that will allow them to contribute to the economy of the society in which they belong. However, my professional concerns of working in such a consumer led education atmosphere have intensified as my breadth of knowledge has widened and my number of professional experiences has increased. How students are experiencing their EAP (in this instance, AES) study in the UK is of interest to me, along with reflecting on how well we prepare our students for academic study and/or employment. Likewise, how we achieve these goals while maintaining a high-quality

educational experience that equips students for life, is paramount to my educational values and research interest. I support Breen's (2021) point that given the popularity of a UK HE education for Chinese students there should be an increased effort to monitor Chinese students, in this context, by respecting their cultural and historical heritage in relation to education pedagogy. This study is specific in exploring the understanding and meaning making that the participants (six Chinese students) attach to their study of the AES module of their pathway programme delivered at the ISC that I manage.

This dissertation has been influenced by my professional experiences so far. It has been led by my privilege in being part of international education at HE level, by my interest in what UK HE offers Chinese students in the form of EAP, and student responses and experiences.

1.3 The Role of English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

Alongside UK university academic entry requirements as set by the relevant institution, international students are required to meet or exceed an English Language level that is stipulated by the UK Government and is connected to the successful obtainment of a study visa. This requirement specifies a minimum entry level of B2 on the Common European Framework of References for Language (CEFR) which is an international framework measuring language proficiency (GOV.UK, 2021). This level, set by the UK government for entry into undergraduate and postgraduate programme of study varies across HE institution, with some universities requiring a higher entry level depending on programme and level of study. Students who do not fulfil the English language requirements at application stage are required to study a pre-sessional EAP programme (the length of which depends on the English language grade that the student is entering on) normally delivered at the university where they plan to study. For pathway programmes that I manage students enter with a specified English language grade appropriate for either Undergraduate Foundation Programme (UFP), International Year 2 (IY2) or Pre-masters Programme (PMP) study. All students are required to take the AES module which consists of 5 direct contact hours per week and spans an academic year. The participants in this research are required to pass their discipline subjects and their AES module, to progress to the partner university.

Positioned under the umbrella of English Language Teaching (ELT), EAP has been adopted by many universities across the globe, dating back to when it was reportedly first used as a Western concept and ELT related term in 1974 (EAPFoundation, 2020). Designed to prepare international students for integration into university life, common EAP programmes aim to support students through the development of their English language and academic skills. Paying attention to components of academic communicative practice including sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, academic genres, reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills (Rao, 2018), EAP promotes student autonomy and the development of critical thinking skills. There is a masterful synthesis of needs analysis with relevant institutional/university requirements which, according to Rao (2018) are imbued with socially

constructed rules and regulations. Students must pay attention to and be successful in not only mastering the English language but also being competent in academic literacies and the Western world of academic conventions and capabilities, as per those socially constructed rules. EAP study is typically intense, delivered at a quick pace and laced with rigorous assessment. Challenges are plentiful as students grapple with the high expectations for them to learn about academic practices in a short space of time and to do so in the English language which is not their native tongue. It is worth noting at this stage that Chinese students being transported from a Chinese education environment to a UK one with different cultural, academic, and pedagogic dimensions cannot be an effortless transition and inevitably different responses and learning styles from Chinese students come to the fore. Connectedly and concerningly, I have witnessed repeated interchanges in EAP staff rooms that refer to the inability of Chinese students to speak up in class, to engage in critical thinking, to understand and question the meaning of evidence to support their academic work to write an academic essay. These interchanges ignite stark reminders of my own experiences in 2004, when I was a novice teacher of Chinese students. As highlighted by Bamber (2014), Chinese students in this education context may suffer feelings of marginalisation and 'otherness' and be conscious of their status as tradeable commodities. Interestingly, Tian and Lowe (2009, cited in Bamber, 2014) suggest that an over-internationalisation of a recruitment market may indeed create negative effects for the students in question, with the hazard of experiencing marginalization and 'otherness' potentially culminating in poor academic performance. Ruminations in staff rooms about supposed inadequacies in academic and language skills run the risk of compounding these feelings of negativity as such thoughts may indeed transfer to and from the classroom. No longer a novice tutor of Chinese students, my experience, reflection, professional development, motivation, and deep-rooted interest in this international student cohort, has altered my perception of these students as being silent and passive. This study attempts to challenge the 'us' and 'other', the 'East' and the 'West', alternatively considering an education space that is complex, interesting, and worthy of exploration.

1.4 Research Approach and Participants

To help explore my research question, the study approach utilises a review of and engagement with relevant literature and Narrative Inquiry. Through an empirical study of an interpretive nature, a qualitative approach is selected, an approach that, according to Martin (2003, p110), encourages opportunity to consider 'subjectivity, reflection, multiple interpretations, and context'. According to Clandinin and Rosiek (2007, p39), who demonstrate a faith in Dewey's pragmatic ontology that considers experience as 'a changing stream', narrative inquiry through research and analysis allows for an appreciation of human lives and changing experiences. Narrative inquiry is selected to explore the stories of participants with interviewing utilised as a research tool to unravel how six Chinese students, through participating in three interviews, understand their AES study experience. Inductive thematic analysis that according to Braun and Clarke (2006, p78) offers capacity for flexibility, and the provision

of ‘a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data’ is the main form of analysis and is followed up by narrative analysis. Assuming that ‘social reality is not unitary or fixed’ (McAllum et al., 2019, p359), the intention of aligning with this research approach was to consider events as participants saw them, in time and changing, not to attempt any establishment of foundations of truth (for more on this please see 5.1 ‘Narrative Inquiry’). The analysis of the stories is therefore an interpretation of events rather than an attempt at producing representations that are accurate. The six participants in this study are all from mainland China, aged between 18 and 22 and enrolled on the IY2 programme and all are studying the Academic Skills (AES) module which is the EAP component of their programme. Upon successful completion of IY2 they will be accepted by the partner university to enter Year 3 of their chosen Degree. Each participant has reached a low B2 English language level, or above, on the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR), equivalent to an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score of between 5 and 6.5, namely Upper Intermediate. Volunteer participants were selected from IY2 rather than UFP due to their English language level. This was to ensure where possible that participants were able to confidently articulate themselves during interviews and for my transcribing activity to be unmuddied by units of speech that were difficult to decipher due to language fluency.

1.5 Formulation of Research Questions

Recognised tensions related to teaching Chinese students in a UK HE context are acknowledged and discussed in detail in Chapter 3.2 ‘Specific Tensions’, with supporting evidence of my professional experiences, and relevant literature. Core tensions may be summarized as follows: teacher-student relationship, communication, critical thinking, writing, memorisation, and motivation. In light of these identified areas of concern, interview questions are led by two guiding questions in the first interview for each participant. Consideration when formulating these guiding questions is given to treating the interview as an opportunity for participants to tell their stories. Mishler's (1991) advice to avoid the inclusion of narrow questions in interviews that may heed elaboration or responses is taken. The first question is intentionally open-ended to encourage detailed responses, and is introduced by ‘How’, as pertinent to a narrative inquiry question from where according to Kartch (2017, p1074), ‘open-ended phrasing …invites the narrative’:

1. How are you experiencing and understanding study on your Academic English Skills Module

To focus in on challenges as a point of research interest begins with ‘Tell me about,’:

2. Tell me about any academic challenges you are facing while studying AES.

For the second and third interview, questions were formed from the analysis of the preceding interview data, as part of an organic interview process.

1.6 Dissertation Outline

This dissertation continues with a further 6 Chapters. Chapter 2 'The Positioning of UK HE in the Globalised Arena' sets the scene of this study by discussing the positioning of UK HE in a globalised and neoliberal context. An exploration of this context is significant to this study due to the correlation between the shift from university as a public to a private good and the increase in international student populations as contributors to the economy of HE institutions. In addition, this Chapter considers the relation between the knowledge economy and human capital theory, and the purpose of education. Chapter 3 'China's Education Context' explores contrasting views of Chinese students in a UK HE EAP teaching and learning space, and highlights tensions that exist. There is an attempt at contextualising and critiquing discussions that offer proposed understandings of Chinese behaviours as evidenced in UK HE classrooms. These discussions and presumptions are debated and set against a backdrop of alternative positions. Beginning with the 'large culture' approach attention is diverted from treating Chinese students as one homogenous group that positions them as unable to participate successfully in their new academic environment, towards a 'small culture' approach. Pivotal to this critique, is consideration of the influence of Confucianism on education in China in an historical, cultural, and philosophical context, along with the outlining of the genealogy of Chinese education reform, up to the present day. Chapter 4 'Introduction to English for Academic Purposes (EAP)' explores the background, purpose, presence, and variations of EAP practices in Western university study before moving on to consider the Academic Skills (AES) module delivered by Provider A. Chapter 5 'Methodology' covers the methodology and approach used for this study. It outlines narrative inquiry, the participant process, participants, ethical considerations, method of data collection: the narrative interview, the transcription process, and concludes with a detailed account of my inductive thematic analysis and narrative analysis interpretations, as the nucleus of this study. Chapter 6 shares the key themes while presenting the findings and discussion section. Chapter 7, offered as the final chapter of this study, considers 'Implications of the Findings, and Research Opportunities and Recommendations, Reflections on Data Collection, Inquirer's Journal, Limitations, and Concluding Remarks'.

Chapter 2: The Positioning of UK HE in the Globalised Arena

To aid contextualisation of this study, this chapter introduces the positioning of UK HE in a globalised arena, highlighting key concepts that are forming education agendas today: globalisation, neoliberalism, and the knowledge economy. While doing so, it considers Human Capital Theory (HCT), New Public Management (NPM) and the issue of fee-paying international university students, along with the role of English Language Teaching (ELT) in this context.

2.1 Globalisation and Neoliberalism

Nederveen Pieterse (2012) points out, in his consideration of the periodization of globalisation, that as a concept it can be understood from varying perspectives, units of analysis, and timescales, with the term 'globalisation' being regularly adopted in its present use in Business Studies in the 1970's, rising in popularity in the 1990's. However, its origins can be seen as far back as 3000 BCE with the establishment of connections for trade and exchange, within an environment of advancing agriculture and urbanization (Nederveen Pieterse, 2012). Woods (1998, p5) suggests that the term has more recently been used as a 'fashionable way to analyse changes in the international economy and in world politics' and is generally understood as an increasing interaction amongst people across the globe, and an increase in cultural and trade exchange. Associated with developments in technology, communication, global travel opportunities and global finance, globalisation can, according to Nederveen Pieterse (2012, p4) be viewed as a 'growing connectivity over time'. It is presented by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD) in 2009 as 'a phenomenon of increasing worldwide interconnectedness that combines economic, cultural and social changes', (OECD, 2009, p1). Jacques (2009) suggests that the term could be viewed as a Western term as part of a process in which there are expectations for the remainder of the world to become increasingly Westernised. Either way, as a result of this phenomenon, global competitiveness has intensified, with increasing attention placed on world economic growth and wealth (Infed.org, 2015).

Aligning with this focus on economic growth are governments that have chosen a neoliberal political approach that promotes open markets and free trade, calls for a decrease in state intervention, and deregulation of markets (Torres, 2011). Olssen & Peters (2005, p313) in discussing neoliberalism highlight its economic relation to globalisation regarding 'freedom of commerce' but they maintain that it is only one component of globalisation, namely 'a specific economic discourse' dominating economic relations of the world. Viewed as the 'hegemonic discourse of western national states' neoliberalism may be considered as preserving some key principles of classical liberalism; self-interested individuals, free market economics, a commitment to laissez-faire and commitment to free trade (Olssen & Peters, 2005, p314). However, in contrast to the classic liberalism negative conception of the state that endorses individual autonomy, with individuals achieving a state of freedom realisable through a limitation of

state intervention, neoliberal takes on a positive conception of the state. While reducing the state role and providing opportunities for the maximisation of the market, the state takes on the role of establishing the appropriate market, laws, and institutions (Olssen & Peters, 2005). Accordingly, the individual is, through the provision of state conditions, moulded into one that is 'an enterprising and competitive entrepreneur' (Olssen & Peters, 2005, p315). This competitive entrepreneur is created through self-investment in education and training that allows for integration into the world of work and contribution to a country's economic growth.

Treated in this neoliberal space as human capital an individual contribution to societal wealth is encouraged and said to also increase individual success and competitive advantage in the global job market.

2.2 Human Capital Theory (HCT), the Knowledge Economy and the University

A key concept in neoliberal ideology, Human Capital Theory (HCT), although reportedly evident prior to the 1960's was developed and cemented by Becker and Schultz during the 1960's, increasing in appearance in political and policy spheres across the globe during the second half of the twentieth century (Little, 2003). During this period, the idea that investing in education for the purpose of producing effective workforces that were to contribute to the production of economic growth and wealth, became an established notion (Little, 2003). Bowsher (2018, p516) asserts that human capital 'crystallizes the neoliberal strategy' by 'shaping individuals into the form or enterprise' thus 'radically expanding economic rationality across all areas of social existence'. As stated by Dahlman and Aubert (2001), there is a strong correlation between the development of societal progress, economic growth, and human capital. HCT, according to Schultz (1961), focuses on the qualitative component of Human Resources, namely knowledge and skills that if developed offer human beings opportunities to become productive individuals. It recognises knowledge and skills as a form of capital and promotes individual investment in one's education (Schultz, 1961). Without it, according to Schultz, for those who do not generate income from owning property, there would only exist 'hard, manual work and poverty' (p16). Under the HCT model, individual investment in education and training is regarded as a core individual responsibility to facilitate a contribution to the establishment of a highly skilled workforce, as deemed necessary in a globalised and competitive world. Individuals acquire skills through 'deliberate investment in education' (Little, 2003, p438) and in doing so, offer a contribution to a society's economic prosperity, whilst enabling individual future opportunities.

In this context, it is worth considering the concept of lifelong learning to appreciate the correlation between learning for human growth and development and learning skills to enter the work force. For this one can go back to the 1960's and UNESCO's influence on educational policy. Through its *education permanente* (EP), one can identify an understanding of informal/formal/non-formal

education as something widely available to individuals, irrespective of age and background. Education, considered as a lifespan endeavour, was to nurture individual growth through collective responsibility and contribution to a public good. Witnessing a strategic shift from this education position, Centeno (2011, p140) highlights the re-focus of education on the development of skills for 'professional (and economic) improvement'. This re-focus, further developed by the Council of Europe's *permanent education* (PE) in 1967, in response to concerns around global change, promoted formal and non-formal education that addressed 'equalisation', 'participation' and 'globalisation' (Centeno, 2011). Aligning with the needs for an improvement of economic development as identified through European policy, it initiated a shift from education for self-awareness and growth to one that prepared individuals for participation in societal integration and effective contribution to economic growth. According to Murphy (2000) the OECD, expanding on the Council of Europe's *permanent education,* proclaimed its acknowledgement of societal inadequacies to address the needs of individuals as situated within the conditions of global forces through the launch, in 1973, of a *Recurrent Education* (RE). RE, introducing the notion of a 'knowledge society' sought to promote learning experiences as recurring while incorporating a human capital model of education that cemented a link between employability skills and learning for life (Field, 2001). A significant shift here is the pulling back of state support, replacing it with individual responsibility and shared accountability.

There is limited scope in this study to conduct an in-depth analysis of HCT and debates surrounding it, but understanding its basic design is necessary to assist contextualisation of this research. It is worth noting that HCT is not without its critics and as pointed out by Schultz (1961) the consideration of human beings as wealth that can be increased by individual self-investment can for some 'run counter to deeply held values' (p22). As it stands, the HCT's model of education, holding central the value that learning should be instrumental in increasing economic prosperity for individuals and societies may neglect to acknowledge the importance of the intrinsic benefits of education. As argued by Nussbaum (2010) an education that encourages ownership of thought, individual growth, and personal autonomy as intrinsic values, rather than education for extrinsic purposes such as employment, sets forth opportunities for individuals to flourish. Nevertheless, HCT stands firm in its assumption that self-investment in education encourages high levels of learner motivation as students develop work related skills that will supposedly allow them to obtain employment commensurate with desired earnings (Little, 2003). Accordingly, self-investment in education and training is set to strengthen life choices and bring forth income opportunities that would otherwise be unobtainable. However, as highlighted by Livingstone (2012), there is a discord between the obtainment of credentialism, the 'learning-earning' hypothesis, and the number of available graduates as supply overpowers demand. Notwithstanding, HCT supposes that all learners have extrinsic motivations that include successful job opportunities and status within society whereby extrinsically motivated learners understand learning as

‘a means to an end’ (Little, 2003, p446). Existing as a model of education that is contributing to the knowledge economy, its presence continues to pervade HE throughout the world today.

Kennedy (2012, p163) proposes that the knowledge economy is ‘laden with ideological connotations’ and with definitional variations that offer convenience in uses and purposes. Rizvi and Lingard (2009, p441) in referring to OECD policy, acknowledge the knowledge economy as ‘a requirement of the global economy, in which knowledge is assumed to be a key ingredient’. Kennedy (2012) points out that many areas of a society’s infra-structure may fall under the umbrella of the knowledge economy, and that includes education, quantifiable in relation to employment and value. As indicated by Robertson (2000, cited Dale, 2005), to accommodate the knowledge-based economy defined by the OECD (2005, np) as ‘…an expression coined to describe trends in advanced economies towards greater dependence on knowledge, information and high skill levels…’. HE establishments are experiencing a re-shaping of familiar frameworks and traditional structures that once upheld HE as a public good. Moving on from the term ‘knowledge economy’ that emerged in the early 1990s, Olssen and Peters (2005) define ‘knowledge capitalism’ whereby human beings are ‘economically self-interested subjects’ and responsible individuals (p314). From a neoliberal perspective, HE institutions are respected as the producers of knowledge for those self-interested individuals, knowledge that aims at strengthening individual human capital in order to stimulate economic development and growth (Patrick, 2013). They are considered the core drivers of the knowledge economy (Olssen & Peters, 2005) and play a role in developing a work force that is purportedly essential for the management of changing economies around the world (Torres, 2011). They are, as suggested by Kennedy (2012, p179), promoters of ‘practical and work-relevant knowledge, the ‘trainers’ of the next generation of ‘productive workers’. As a result, the university may be viewed as functioning as a commercial enterprise, providing knowledge for the economy through self-investing students, and therefore entangled in the commodification of education. Responsible for building banks of individuals who can contribute to an effective workforce, universities may, by some, be viewed as having moved away from operating as a public good.

According to Giroux (2004, p495) neoliberalism is ‘one of the most pervasive and dangerous ideologies of the twenty-first century’, infiltrating HE establishments and forcing them to operate as gatekeepers of knowledge and skills development. Giroux and Giroux (2006, p24) affirm that HE institutions through the corporatization of HE are engaging in a ‘curriculum organized around markets and militarization’. In competing for students in the HE markets, they display changing behaviours demonstrating ‘the manifestation of academic capitalism, distinguished by universities as entrepreneurial marketers and knowledge as a commodity rather than a public good’ (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004, cited Portnoi et al. 2010, p1). Giroux (2004, p495) suggests that in these neoliberal times, critical education and aspirations for a global democracy are facing ‘a crisis of enormous

proportions'. Motivated by a neoliberal ideology that endorses a reduction in state intervention in favour of a free-market economy and individualism, the university institution has taken on the characteristics of commercial suppliers of education, viewing students as consumers (Olssen and Peters, 2005). They have, according to Torres (2011), placed themselves at the forefront of commercial activity, both with distance learning provision and home and overseas education activity. Patrick (2013, p4) views this production of knowledge within neoliberal policy as commercial exploitation, in its disregard of individual development and growth as students become consumers, consuming 'disciplinary knowledge'. In reviewing the notion of the learner as a commodified subject, Patrick (2013, p6) believes that individuals have been 'subjugated to the needs of capital and the economy'. Additionally, Baltodano (2012, p489) assert that this neoliberal approach to education has 'taken away the joy of learning, the creativity of teaching and the formation of strong public intellectuals'. According to Torres (2011, p190) the role of the university to prepare students for entry into the labour force in the face of global competition has indeed been as a response to education reforms and he recognises that universities are facing increasing pressure to obtain revenue through student income and engagement in public-private partnership initiatives. Likewise, Olssen & Peters (2005) assert that universities are strongly encouraged to cement ties with industry and to initiate economically beneficial private-public partnerships. However, describing the university's role under neoliberalism as having a 'mercantile function' (Torres, 2011, p190) challenges this role, along with the commodification of knowledge. As further pointed out by Torres (2011), neoliberal reforms have, due to the retraction of government financial support for study, limited HE access for some students who face unaffordable tuition fees.

Individual investment in the UK HE education sector can be substantiated by the introduction of study fees by the Labour Party in England in 1998 which resulted in the discontinuation of the rights of home students to receive state funded HE education provision. A study fee of £1000 per academic year per student was introduced, rising to £3000 in 2004. From 2012, universities in England, under the direction of the UK Coalition Government's HE reform, were able to implement a study fee of £9,000 per year (Hefce, 2012), for undergraduate study and at the time of writing universities can charge up to £9,250. The introduction of this funding system has transferred responsibility for study fees from the state to the student with the latter contributing to the HE sector's financial stability and economic standing. For eligible students, government loans are available averaging out at a 5.8% interest rate and are repayable at the point of entry into graduate employment, as per an income threshold stipulation. For students who are not fully eligible for a student loan, they are advised by the government to seek other means, including taking up part-time employment (GOV.UK, 2022). It is worth noting that there are variations in study fee arrangements in the UK, with the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland enabling these variations. For example, in Scotland if students have been resident for a full 3 years prior to entry into an undergraduate programme at a Scottish university, they are not required to pay for their tuition fees.

Although there is a study fees cap for UK citizens studying at HE level in the UK, there is no such cap or standardisation of study fees for overseas/international students studying in the country or its islands. International students are classified as those who do not fulfil residence criteria to live in the UK (Universities UK, 2020, cited Rogers, 2021). With undergraduate degree programme fees ranging from between £10,000 to £26,000 in 2020, students can be expected to pay up to £58,000 to study a medical degree, with no limit on postgraduate study fees being imposed upon universities (Rogers, 2021). The UK sits at second place to the US as an international student study destination with income from overseas students contributing a significant source of funding to the university sector. In looking at the economic benefits to the UK as a host country for HE international students whose study varies between pathway programme to PhD, London Economics (2023) reports that the gross benefits have increased from £31.3 billion in 2018/19 to £41.9 billion in 2021/22. As pointed out by Torres (2011) in the USA alone, international students 'are eagerly sought out by public universities…to deal with their financial woes' (p187). Self-investment in university education, be it by home or international students, positions the student into the role of consumer with expectations of value for money, high quality teaching and learning standards and good career prospects upon study completion.

According to Infed.org (2015), a focus on economic growth and international competitiveness, in response to globalisation, creates the requirement for individuals across the globe to widen their knowledge base and develop appropriate skills. Needed to facilitate an individual's ability to operate at a global level, knowledge and skills are also key to making a successful and positive contribution to a country's economic strength (Infed.org, 2015). In relation to this focus on this increased knowledge base, reporting by HESA (2023) signifies that the academic year 2019/20 saw a total of 556,985 international students enrolled on HE programmes in the UK with evidence of growth in 2020/21 which sat at 605,130. Although the global impact of the spread and management of COVID-19 significantly affected international student mobility, as highlighted by London Economics (2023), international student recruitment continues to boom with the total number of international students studying at HE level in the UK in 2021/22 rising to 679,970, which is equivalent to 24% of the total HE student population. According to this report, 'China remains the largest 'sender'' with one in four international students being from China. According to London Economics (2023) out of international **first year** students that are enrolled in UK HE in the academic year 2021/22, China comes out at the top with 99,965 Chinese students of a total international student cohort of 350,145. As demonstrated by this data, the UK HE sectors continues to experience growth in international student enrolments, with Chinese students forming the largest percentage. According to Breen (2021, p1), despite the manifestation of COVID-19 along with an intensification of political tensions between China and the West, Chinese students continue to have a 'thirst for Western education'.

As pointed out by Wilkinson (2022), in response to this continued growth of international student populations (of which Chinese students have a significant presence) in the UK HE arena, and the shift

from the university as a public good to an institution that prioritises commercial activity, there has been over recent decades, a focus on the internationalisation of HE which includes consideration of the decolonisation of the curriculum. As universities have become embroiled in the purposeful pursuit of providing education as a commodity, they have, according to Wilkinson (2022), created internationalisation strategies that consider both the student and the university. In fact, as raised by Chowdhury and Phan (2014, p65) the internationalisation of the university is, by some, 'idealised and romanticised'. While these strategies aim to stimulate the income of the university and to enhance HE institutional profiles and reputational standing, they also claim to support students to be successful in global societies. Yet, while doing so, as pointed out by Chowdhury and Phan (2014, p3), they compartmentalise international students by giving them titles such as the 'deficit', the 'surplus', the 'cosmopolitan, global' and the 'self-determined'. While the 'deficit' model suggests that international students come with deficits (please refer to Chapter 3.3 'The Chinese Learner' for more on this with reference to Chinese students), the 'surplus', as highlighted by Chowdhury and Phan (2014, p3), although setting forth international students as assets to educational institutions, is in itself a title that encourages further stereotyping of international students, as are the 'cosmopolitan, global' and the 'self-determined' labels. Chowdhury and Phan (2014, p3) highlight that more recently, further categorisations have been added; 'passive 'other'', 'elite 'other'' and 'economic subject' with the Western university contributing to the notion of 'otherness' through categorisation, be the labels negative or positive. Additionally, Chowdhury and Phan (2014, p5) highlight a link between the internationalisation of the university and colonisation, pointing out that the function of education in a colonised environment is to transmit education from the educated coloniser to 'the culturally and educationally 'deficient' colonised subject'. For Chowdhury and Phan (2014, p19), the promotion and marketisation of a Western education demonstrates how the 'colonial mentality still rings true'. At the same time, Wilkinson (2022, p238) asserts that in fact most university internationalisation strategies, developed and led by members of university senior management teams, often actually fail to establish or follow through effective implementation and therefore offer nothing more than 'warm words'. It may be acknowledged, however, that many international students achieve positive outcomes in their roles in this internationalisation of the university as they obtain Western academic qualifications that enable successful entry into the global job market.

While within this Chapter so far there has been discussion around the link between HCT and the university, it is worth introducing the connection between these and the presence and prevalence of the English Language Teaching (ELT) industry. The latter, as pointed out by Anderson (2005, cited Chowdhury and Phan, 2014), has and continues to be at the forefront of the marketisation of education. As touched upon in Chapter 1.2 'Professional Context', my professional roles in Greece, China, and other parts of Europe witnessed the popularity of studying the English Language for study or professional purposes. Students were fee-paying and parents were eager to ensure that their children

were given opportunities to learn the English language, deemed essential for successful study or employment, either locally or abroad. It was widely acknowledged during my teaching experience in Greece, that many of the parents could barely afford to pay for the English language tuition fees. However, they believed that by not enrolling their children in the local Language School they would be depriving them of the same career opportunities that their peers would hopefully encounter. This self-investment in studying the English language, is a well-grounded example of the presence of HCT in education whereby those fee-paying students have expectations of increased opportunities that will materialise through successful career paths or academic study. In an academic context, to enrol on a UK HE programme, students need to evidence competency in the use of the English language in preparation for being taught through English as the medium of instruction. Therefore, for many international students embarking on a UK HE study path, self-investment in education starts long before entering an undergraduate or postgraduate programme; it begins at the stage of learning the English language.

2.3 New Public Management (NPM)

Immersed in this commodification of education and adoption of HCT is New Public Management (NPM). NPM, in situ from at least the early 1980's, acts as a new mode of institutional governance that includes the education sector. Using private sector management models that centre around efficiency, accountability, accreditation, and universalisation, its focus is on marketisation and corporate management (Torres, 2011). It considers the privatisation of education and positions students as customers. Olssen and Peters (2005, p315) ascertain that the positive notion of the state in neoliberal policy places individuals as 'constructions of the state', partly fulfilled through the implementation of accounting, auditing, and management techniques, as present in NPM. Torres (2011) reports that with the coming together of a 'managerial class' in the university sector that focuses on market principles, business models and strategies, ramifications of diminishing professional autonomy have been intense. Giroux (2002, p445) asserts that accountability techniques are deeply embedded in teaching practices, imposed as measures decided upon from a top-down management 'corporate culture' perspective. As further highlighted by Torres (2011, p189), public education reform linked to international competitiveness (coined by Torres as 'competition-based reforms') also anchors around the performability of teachers. In short, these reforms centre around the standardisation of testing and accountability, low-cost association and with a vocational angle that universities are to adopt to contribute to society's 'economic well-being' (Torres, 2011, p189). According to Day and Sachs (2004), institution and government reactions to global competitiveness have aggressively introduced performativity and accountability measures on the education policy front and these measures emphasise managerial professionalism as a dominant discourse, with a focus on teacher professionalism. This approach contrasts to a collegial and collaborative approach to teacher professionalism, considered as democratic managerialism and favoured by teacher unions. Managerial professionalism seemingly

endorses a culture of accountability that encourages education providers to offer efficient education provision to students as consumers, and any additional stakeholders (Day and Sachs, 2004). Ball (2003) notes that the responsibility of accountability is transferred from manager to teacher with the latter being obliged to comply with performativity measures that represent 'quality, value or value of an individual…within a field of judgement' (p216). Such an approach is more often than not supported by the implementation of Continual Professionalism Development (CPD) into the lives of teaching professionals, including those employed in the HE sectors. This management strategy aligns with a Human Resource Development (HRD) framework that intends to initiate and develop skills for those already in the workplace (in this instance teacher/lecturers/tutors). In doing so, it, as suggested by Forrester and Payne (2000), moulds individuals into flexible and malleable workers, who are disciplined rather than empowered.

There are additional challenges relating to this NPM model that relate to the professional status of an education practitioner in the HE sectors. It is not uncommon for teachers/tutors/lecturers to be on variable hours contracts, without the opportunity of a full-time, permanent position within the organisation in which they work. Inevitably, there are feelings of job insecurity, alongside increased anxiety brought about by administrative tasks and burdens that relate to accountability and performativity. This links with Kennedy's (2012) reference to job degradation and disharmony between occupational status and work content as teachers experience significant administrative activity partly due to the implementation of accountability measures. This, to some, is remote from their vision of the teaching and learning environment that they believed they were signing up for. One is reminded here of Freire's (2017, p11) thoughts on the world of work:

> If for a person to be in the world of work is to be totally dependent, insecure, and permanently threatened – if their work does not belong to them – the person cannot be fulfilled. Work that is not free ceases to be a fulfilling pursuit and becomes an effective means of dehumanization.

Elaborating on the degradation of the teacher role, Robertson (2012, p594) in referencing the OECD's display of educational data, suggests that such statistical policing of teacher performance in correlation with student success, has significant potential to elevate pressure on teachers and their practice. Ball (2003) goes further, describing performativity as a system of terror, with teachers being subjected to regular productivity and governance measurements and regulations. This may indeed be evidenced through the UK HE's concentration on competition and accountability where 'economic goals are given priority over its social and cultural purposes' (Rizvi and Lingard, 2009, p446). Alongside such accountability measures, some university academics, according to Wilkinson (2022, p241) also feel that the push for an internationalisation of the university and related structures and initiatives tend to 'squeeze out innovation' while the positioning of students as consumers and teachers as providers can result in a process-driven approach that further hinders academic autonomy and creativity. Wilkinson (2022) observes that many international academics new to the UK HE system, are taken aback by the

notion of students as consumers, the consequential role of the educator as provider, and associated tensions around the attainment of the desired assessment grades. As noted by Chowdhury and Phan (2014), this consumerist environment continues to unsettle some academics who battle with their educational values and aspirations in face of management models and the marketing of education. Finally, through top-down communication that fails to integrate any co-construction of decisions or activity, the teaching environment may indeed become oppressive with employees becoming what Freire would term 'lifeless and petrified' (2017, p45).

Current experience in my own professional context as Head of Centre at the ISC in which I work is permeated with the achievement of ambitiously set student progression targets, with expectations of high progression outcomes that enable students to transition to the partner university. Directives on how to achieve these targets flow into the teaching teams and are implemented by accountability and performance measures. Increasing teacher performativity through compulsory Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activity that is imposed upon the teaching staff is at the heart of the ISC's strategic planning. Carefully linked to the achievement of progression targets is an intense focus on exam preparation and the obtainment of high results. As a Head of Centre, performance related bonuses are closely linked with the attainment of these targets along with other inflexible performance measurement strategies. Regular anxiety permeates through the ISC as tutors and managers anticipate the next ever changing accountability measure and performativity tools that are implemented in a cyclical manner. Furthermore, over 80% of the tutors are employed as sessional, hourly paid members of staff, with lack of stability or professional status.

To sum up, for Torres (2011, p193), 'neoliberalism has utterly failed as a model of economic development' and yet it continues to pervade our societies at base level, taking on the new common sense, something he describes as becoming 'naturalised' (p181). At the same time, Torres expresses concern over neoliberalism's common sense that permeates 'the way we live, practice, teach, provide advice to our students' (p183). Accordingly, key think tanks such as the World Bank and OECD maintain the common sense (a process of naturalisation) in relation to a neoliberal education, notwithstanding the criticism and attention that it continues to receive (Torres, 2011). The OECD since the 1990s, has according to Rizvi & Lingard (2009, p440), viewed education 'in instrumental terms, as a handmaiden to the organization's primary interest in economic matters', with economic efficiency pivotal to the OECD's focus on education, working with the discourse of the knowledge economy. Patrick (2013, p5) argues that proposing resistance to neoliberal policy is challenging as it refutes the domination of these international think tanks, including the World Trade Organisation, that continue to maintain economic policies that are neoliberal in nature.

It is within this context that this research study takes place. It centres around Chinese international students who are enrolled in UK HE studies and are notably investing in their education and contributing to the income generation of the HE sector. Before moving on to Chapter 3: 'China's Education Context', the final section of this chapter offers a rumination on the purpose of education as relevant to the discussion presented so far.

2.4 The Purpose of Education

There are social democratic, liberal, and neoliberal viewpoints contributing to entrepreneurial and international education policy discourses. They range from education for individual development, good citizenship, social justice, widening participation, social cohesion, and the development of employability skills (Centeno, 2011). Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2003) in offering consideration of a variety of definitions of education, advocate education from a communitarian viewpoint, highlighting the importance of an education that is for individual development and lifelong learning, through freedom rather than indoctrination. Brown (2021), in discussing the marketisation of ELT, also rejects education that is indoctrinatory and calls instead for an education that is emancipatory for students. While not dismissing the nurturing of individual empowerment through education that may come from the development of skills and knowledge, he favours education that is emancipatory in nature in allowing students to have the skills to help them to change and challenge power relations and social structures, and for this he endorses critical pedagogy (for more on critical pedagogy, see Chapter 4.1 'EAP: Background, Purpose, and Approaches'). Nussbaum (2010) in calling for a liberal education that offers students preparation for life, promotes education as an opportunity for individuals to experience investigation, reasoning, and ownership of thought. Dewey (2008), as alluded to in Chapter 1. 2 'Professional Context' demonstrates a conviction that education should encourage the stimulation of individual qualities: creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, whole heartedness, and responsibility. Giroux and Giroux (2006, p29) in petitioning for an education that provides much more than job skills training, command one that seeks to endow students with the ability to:

> 'contest workplace inequalities, … and challenge those injustices that contradict and undercut the most fundamental principles of freedom, equality, and respect for all people who make up the global public sphere'

They propose that students should experience an education environment that offers a 'safe space where reason, understanding, dialogue, and critical engagement are available.', in antipathy to the isolated mastering of exams and acquisition of low-level work skills (Giroux and Giroux, 2006, p30). To this end, for Giroux and Giroux, principal values endorsed by universities should be democratic, with the advancement of a democratic culture only obtainable through an education that is considered a public good and not existing for commercial gain. For Nussbaum (2010), universities need to endorse a non-instrumental education that advances possibilities for students to critically engage, understand those around them and themselves, and participate in a 'decent world culture'. She appeals to universities to

divert emphasis away from company profit creation and skills preparation for the world of employment (2010, Para 22). Instead, they should nurture core educational values that enhance personal autonomy, ownership of thought and opportunity for individuals to flourish. Patrick (2013, p6) supports this proposition, also advising for a reclaim of education from neoliberalism to allow students to develop the self 'in accordance with wellbeing and individual flourishing as core aims of education'.

It may be recognised and appreciated that some learners who invest in their education will have expectations of economic return on their investment. According to Giroux (2002, p432), students are eager to enrol on courses that enable them to obtain 'professional credentials that provide them with the cachet they need to sell themselves to the highest bidder'. However, under the HCT model, there lies the possibility that self-investing learners will be moulded into technically trained and passive individuals as they are cultivated for exam success and trained in the development of skills and characteristics that will support their progression into the workforce. As stated by Nussbaum (2010), such characteristics may impede opportunities to experience learning that is meaningful and motivational, thus alleviating real opportunity for individual growth and personal autonomy. Nussbaum (2010) in believing a liberal education that offers individuals the capacity to reason sees minimal benefit in vocational training. However, Bridges (1997) proposes that reconciling personal autonomy and 'enterprise' is possible, provided an individual's capacity to reason is achieved firstly. He argues that a liberal discourse on autonomy needs to consider 'personal *competence*', suggesting that practical ability that allows for lifetime choices to be made without dependence on others, can effectively supplement critical engagement and knowledge (Bridges, 1997, p154). Therefore, a total rejection of entrepreneurial qualities that are necessary in the 'social and economic context of the twenty-first century' should not be on education agendas (Bridges, 1992, p97). Zisner (2004) supports this position, advocating for an education that is available to those who need to develop skills to enter the workforce, rather than just for the privileged and the elite.

Considering Bridges's idea of reconciliation, it is worth moving on to consider Robeyn's (2006) outlined suggestions of education as *instrumental, non-instrumental, economic and non-economic*. Her presentation of three educational models; education as human capital (instrumentalistic), the right to education, and education as a capability (both multi-dimensional) offers food for thought. The instrumentalistic is relevant to HCT, prevalent to university education as already discussed. Focusing on the development of skills as an education experience that is a one-off product, it sits at the opposite end of a durable education that as suggested by Bauman (2003) should be for life. A HCT model of education, linked to economic capital may indeed neglect the intrinsic benefits of education. To confront this model of education means re-focusing on learning for learning, embracing Nussbaum's call for education that is not for economic gain. It also begs the question, is there potential for consideration of an education pyramid that facilitates a fusion of models, placing HCT at the foot of the pyramid, the rights of education in the middle and possibilities for 'being and doing' placed at the top? Such

considerations will run throughout this research, as the education experiences of Chinese students studying on an English for Academic Purposes module at UK HE level are explored.

To follow on from discussing the purpose of education and as a foreword to the next Chapter 'China's Education Context', it is appropriate to consider the purpose behind so many Chinese students choosing UK HE for their undergraduate or postgraduate study. As noted by Dahlman and Aubert (2001), over the last quarter of a century China has achieved significant economic growth and yet it needs to continue this growth while providing employment opportunities to its ever-increasing population. It needs to 'seize the 21st century – exploiting knowledge to regain its place in the world economy' (Dahlman and Aubert, 2001, p3) and to make use of knowledge in the service, industrial and agricultural sectors. To accommodate the knowledge economy, China is currently industrious in its restructuring of its university sector and yet lacks the capacity for educating so many of its population at HE level. Places in Chinese universities are limited and competitive, with many students needing or indeed wanting to look outside of China for HE opportunities. The Bright Futures Project (2022), created to study East Asian student mobility, conducted a survey that sought to understand what was informing the decisions behind Chinese students choosing the UK as their HE study destination. Findings revealed that 93% of the student sample had chosen a UK university for quality of education provision. In addition, there is the notion that future employers in China will pay attention to the rankings of universities on the CVs of potential new recruits. Secondly, the Bright Future Project (2002) outlines that 83% of their Chinese research participants believe that UK HE study opportunities will enhance their future career prospects. Therefore, Chinese students alone are investing in a western education that will supposedly offer them a foothold in the competitive job market in China (should they decide to return to their home country). The assumption therefore could be that exam success is paramount to successful completion of their study, providing recognizable and valuable credentials to fulfil or at least support their career aspirations. As a final rumination for this Chapter, I refer to and support Hyslop-Margison and Naseem's (2017) call for an education that allows students to understand themselves as 'subjects in history rather than mere objects of economic globalization and structural change'.

Chapter 3: China’s Education Context

3.1 Background

As a result of China’s economic development and associated growth in societal and individual wealth, an increasing part of its young population is embarking on a Western education. As referred to and evidenced in Chapter 2.2 ‘Human Capital Theory (HCT), the Knowledge Economy and the University’, Chinese students have for some time occupied the largest percentage of the international student population in UK HE and despite concerns surrounding the impact of COVID 19 on student mobility and international student recruitment, the number of Chinese student enrolments continues to grow. Benefiting from China’s economic development and the related international mobility of its students, UK HE institutions continue to be tasked with delivering high quality education to this international student cohort (indeed to all students). The UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA, 2023) presents its international Student Charter which offers guidance on how to follow key principles that are created to ensure that international students are provided with what it calls ‘world-class international student experience’. With the development of internationalisation in Western HE and a related increase in the diversity of cultures of international students, there needs to be a higher level of awareness of ‘intercultural living’ for staff and students and as necessary for the facilitation of Western HE academic progress (Jin and Cortazzi, 2017, p240). Jin and Cortazzi (2017, p240) argue that it is ‘our moral, academic and professional obligation’ to meet the needs of our visiting international students. This approach is supported by Shi (2006), who believes that Western universities, as beneficiaries of significant numbers of visiting Chinese students, should try to heighten their understanding of these students in this educational context. Ryan (2011, p2) in asking for an increased focus on reciprocity of knowledge between Chinese and Western educators, (just as Biggs in 1996 encouraged a systems educational approach to cross-cultural activity) suggests that an increased transnational flow of academics and students between education systems in China and the Western world should ‘provide new ways of knowing, making meaning and interacting’ (Ryan, 2011, p2). As it stands, readily available are a variety of discussions and debates that have developed in academic communities that relate to the teaching and learning of Chinese students (Clark and Gieve, 2006) many of which can be contested. Given that the world’s largest number of learners of English come from China, many of whom study English or through the medium of English predominantly although not exclusively in the UK, USA, Australia, it is not surprising that related research has emerged from within the discipline of TESOL and Applied Linguistics (Jin and Cortazzi, 2006).

This Chapter will explore some of these discussions and debates, understandings, and presumptions. Firstly, it will outline and consider specific tensions that, for some, exist in the teaching and learning of Chinese students in a Western education context that have supposedly resulted in the regular labelling and pigeonholing of these students in relation to student classroom behaviour. The outline will cover teacher-student relationship, communication, critical thinking, writing, memorisation, and motivation,

in that order. While doing so, a few possible justifications for the tensions are considered, merely as thought triggers at this stage. It should also be noted that the outline of these tensions is not intended to generalise issues but rather to summarise common dilemmas, while drawing upon the thoughts of Biggs (1996, p50) who believes that 'what some Western observers are seeing is not what they think it is'. Secondly, it will present key common interpretations of Chinese student behaviour in a Western education environment, while linking common explanations to these behavioural characteristics. This will be followed by an exploration of alternative approaches to these notions of understanding Chinese students in a teaching and learning context. It will then move on to consideration of a selection of Chinese education reforms, with the intention of enhancing an understanding of the background and realities of contemporary Chinese students that are visiting the UK to study at HE level.

3.2 Specific Tensions

3.2.1 Western Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationship in China

The teacher-student relationship is an issue that is often raised in UK HE academic circles as one that is challenging for teachers who struggle to encourage their Chinese students to effectively participate during lessons and for whom the teacher appears to be the embodiment of knowledge, not to be challenged or interrupted (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). As suggested by McMahon (2011), a common perception in the West of Chinese teachers is that they are authoritarian and unapproachable in their teaching practice. They are, according to Biggs (1996), considered to be highly authoritarian by Western observers. The Chinese teacher is a 'model of authoritative learning' that encourages students to model others through 'a common learning cycle of demonstration-mimesis-practice-performance' (Jin and Cortazzi, 2006, p10). This may be the case in some instances, however, in elaborating on the role of the Chinese teacher as authoritarian and unapproachable, Biggs (1996) refers to extensive research that has concluded that Chinese teachers are considered by Chinese students as warm and friendly and even though the teacher-student relationship may indeed be hierarchical in comparison to the relationship in the West, it generally has a high quality of mutual respect and responsibility. As highlighted by McMahon (2011), it is normal for a Chinese teacher to be living on campus and to be available to provide individual attention for their students outside of the classroom schedule. The teacher is assigned less classroom contact time than Western teachers, to have time outside of the class, to answer the questions that students could not ask during the lesson and to engage in extra-curricular activity. This provides opportunity for the teacher to offer additional support, to answer questions and to build a caring relationship between teacher and student. Clark and Gieve (2006) propose that many Chinese students have similar expectations of their Western teachers. When these expectations are not met on the realisation that most teachers in Western HE operate by an appointment only arrangement, outside of lesson time, there may be a breakdown in the relationship, or the student may withdraw from any further attempt at interaction. It is not uncommon for teachers in the West to express frustration at the eagerness

of some Chinese students to stay behind after lesson and to ask questions or seek clarification that they failed to seek during class time, and Chinese students, upon realising that the teacher is in a hurry to leave and does not have time for them directly after class, may often be disappointed and surprised (Biggs, 1996). Jin and Cortazzi (2017) present findings from their study that explored the differences between Chinese and British students when it comes to speaking up in class and asking the teacher questions. Accordingly, the British students felt comfortable asking questions and believed that the teacher welcomed them using their initiative as it encouraged interaction and active learning. They assumed that their Chinese peers' reluctance to ask questions was a demonstration of disinterest or passive learning. Chinese students, on the other hand, understood their British peers' eagerness to ask questions as 'disrespectful interruptions' of the teacher (Jin and Cortazzi, 2017, p242). Additionally, it is widely acknowledged that class sizes in a typical Chinese education setting are large (at least by Western standards), often averaging between 50-60 students. Consequently, as pointed out by McMahon (2011), classroom management may be challenging resulting in the discouragement of student interaction and asking of questions during lesson time, thereby resulting in a lesson that is generally teacher dominated with students remaining quiet and attentive. In this context, both teachers and students adopt various strategies for teaching and learning. Students are encouraged to listen attentively, 'internalise thoughtfully' and absorb content knowledge (Jin and Cortazzi, 2006, p11). For the Chinese students in Jin and Cortazzi's study, they were drawing on their past educational experiences of listening attentively, avoiding interrupting the teacher and thus being respectful in the classroom. They were waiting patiently for the teacher to provide answers as the lesson progressed, something they considered to be part of learning and not related to a lack of confidence, fear of challenging the teacher, or even lack of English Language proficiency.

3.2.2 Oral Communication

Reluctance to speak up in class, often associated with the term 'passive learner', is a common frustration expressed by Western teachers teaching Chinese students and is often, according to McMahon (2011) viewed by those teachers as a silence that indicates an unwillingness to participate or/and an inability to do so. Jin and Cortazzi (2017, p242) point out that different approaches to learning between British and Chinese students are frequently interpreted by Western teachers as Chinese students having deficits in a skill, 'deficits in the person of those who are cultural others: misunderstanding verbal behaviour can be transferred to misunderstanding the person', rather than understanding it from the educational context in which the student has come from. Setting aside the aspect of teacher-student relationship and limited student interaction and participation, as touched upon above, according to McMahon (2011) difficulties with oral communication are regularly encountered by Chinese students as they attempt to engage in communicative tasks that were taken for granted in their previous study experience when speaking in their mother tongue. Clark and Gieve (2006) highlight that this so-called reluctance to speak up in class could be as a result of limited linguistic confidence and that speaking in a so-called normal

voice is much easier when speaking in the mother tongue. Additionally, being used to large group sizes in China where there is limited opportunity to speak in English and many measurements of English language competency are obtained through multiple choice questions (Biggs, 1996) students may take time to tune into communication in the English language once in the West. Nicols (2003, cited Clark & Gieve, 2006, p67) argues that oral performance in classroom conditions where students 'attempt to make a transition from one state to another', in other words they experience change from the familiar to the unfamiliar, might not necessarily be the most effective way of encouraging the emergence of voice. Holliday (1994, p138) in drawing upon research in English Language teaching points out that many students may find a new 'classroom regime' problematic and therefore find speaking up difficult, and he uses as an example the supposed learner-centred approach as evidenced in a BANA English Language teaching lesson, (BANA referring to Britain, Australasia, and North America's involvement in the commercialisation of ELT). According to Holliday (1994, p138) this learner centredness has flaws in that it 'depends on a high-contact, high-visibility, high-confrontational methodology culture' with the teacher acting in a surveillance role. This role enables the teacher to decide what students should say and do and ascertain if they are performing as expected and, in this context, it is highly probable that oral communication may be stinted as students freeze at the point of delivery. Deng (2011) asks the question of who is to decide what normal behaviour in a classroom is and, on whose basis, should behaviour be judged as problematic. What is classified as active participation and engagement and who decides this? Interestingly, Holliday (1994, p140) in his reference to a BANA scenario refers to how some students are labelled for example 'Japanese' when not fitting the 'learning group ideal' in a classroom activity. The non-conformist behaviour of a student who is not participating in 'the prescribed way' may be perceived by the teacher as unacceptable and a diversion from the so called 'learning group ideal' (Holliday, 1994, p138). Wu (2011, p574) argues that pedagogical interaction that encourages patterns of questions and answers (often demonstrated in interactive patterns between teacher and student) is insufficient and should instead be an 'encounter of interpretations' often with things being left unsaid. Additionally, Holliday (1994, p136) points out that in every classroom there is the potential for conflict as different viewpoints may come to the fore, and that in a BANA scenario this may become amplified as there are students from different countries with different world views. There is the risk reality that these amplifications may induce different expectations of 'teacher', 'student', 'classroom' and 'institution' (Holliday, 1994, p136) which may create tension and misinterpretations. When a lesson is not going as planned, as perceived by the teacher, with a student who is not behaving as expected, there is the tendency to blame the nationality and culture of that student (Holliday, 1994).

3.2.3 Critical Thinking

According to Atkinson (1997), Chinese students have an inability to think critically, due to the concept of critical thinking being far remote from their own cultural beliefs and values. Moosavi (2020) in

linking Orientalism with the treatment of international students (for more on this, please see section below: 3.3 'The Chinese Learner'), questions this position, and associates it with common academic discourse that regularly positions East Asian students as being incapable of critical thinking. At the same time, Nussbaum (2010) observes that during recent periods of education reform in China, attempts have been made to explore a liberal arts approach to education that endorses exploration and critical engagement. However, according to Nussbaum (2010) such attempts at an integration of critical engagement into the curricula have so far been limited, due to China's general resistance to forms of critical expression. The issue of Chinese students critically engaging or not in their Western education study is complex. Firstly, as alluded to, Chinese students educated in China may not have been encouraged to think critically, although recent education reform suggests the opposite (see more on this in the section 3.2 'Periods of Chinese Education Reform' below). Secondly, whether critical thinking skills can be taught and learned is questionable. Atkinson (1997) argues that critical thinking is not a skill that can be learned, rather it is something that should be considered as part of social practice, it should be:

> 'an organic part of the very culture that holds it up as an admirable achievement – more at the level of common sense than a rational, transparent, and – especially – teachable set of behaviors' (p72).

In a Chinese student context then, two matters are evident that contribute to difficulties that some (not all) Chinese students studying at HE level in the UK face on the critical thinking front; a) for some, critical thinking is not regarded as an organic part of their culture and daily living and b) it is arguable whether it can be taught and learned as a skill. Research conducted by Nichols (2003, cited Clark and Gieve, 2006, p56) on critical thinking skills in an Australian context, questions how capable home students are when it comes to critical engagement. Yet, they are not commonly deemed incapable, rather they are categorised as a 'novice' student with the former label being reserved for their Chinese peers.

3.2.4 Writing

Common frustrations amongst EAP tutors include the skill of writing and a Chinese student's inability to successfully compile an extended piece of academic writing, without significant lifting of text, resulting in high levels of plagiarism. In referring to teachers of writing in the English language in China, Jin and Cortazzi (2006) suggest that few Chinese teachers have developed sophisticated academic writing skills in English and pay minimal attention, if at all, to 'academic socialisation' (p19). They suggest that this may play a part in many Chinese students arriving in the UK without knowledge of expected academic discourse patterns. Additionally, Chinese students have little or no familiarity with authorship, originality, source acknowledgement and consequences of plagiarism (Jin and Cortazzi, 2006). Xu (2012), in acknowledging how many Chinese students may struggle with academic writing, highlights a potential explanation by suggesting that Western thought patterns differ to Chinese

thought patterns. Huo et al. (2022) support this by pointing out that Western and Easter nations have their own thought patterns that relate to language. Consequently, Xu (2012) notes that that while Western writing takes on a high level of objectivity, including analysis and observation a Chinese writing approach can be considered a subjective integrated method of writing 'which emphasizes the integrity and unity of human society and nature'. Lian (2010, cited Huo et al., 2022) emphasises that for most Eastern students adapting to Western education, it is necessary not only to transform language forms but also their thinking. Ren (2019) goes further and highlights how Western through patterns tend to be abstract and analytical in contrast to eastern nations that instead of being analytical are holistic, ambiguous and subjective. In considering the effect of different thought patterns on writing style, Ren (2019) notes that Chinese students typically emphasise coherence rather than language form and struggle with a Western approach to text organisation, and sentence and paragraph structure. For Ren (2019) a Western approach to academic writing presents topic sentences at the beginning of paragraphs as key to the line of development of the text, and yet Chinese students are familiar with writing short, subjective sentences that potentially reflect the psychology of the writer. Jin and Cortazzi (2006, p18) point out that there is a tendency for Chinese students to lean towards using an inductive writing pattern that consists of 'background-before-main-point presentation of ideas', thus frustrating Western teachers unable to find main ideas where they are expected to be. Therefore, when studying EAP, Chinese students need to adapt to a linear western thought pattern that contrasts to a Chinese circular thought pattern, at the same time as developing English language skills in order to effectively articulate their thoughts and the ideas of others (Xu, 2012). Challenges are abound as they learn the art of paraphrasing and how to avoid lifting significant chunks of text from articles and integrating it into their own writing piece. Struggling to fully understand Western academic concepts and requirements, some Chinese students may recourse to mimicking Western practices and academic discourses (Rizvi, 2007), rather than producing authentic work for which they may be judged and may rely on copying text, resulting in high levels of plagiarism. Such behaviour may be understood by Western teachers as simply an inability of students to be able to demonstrate high level or even satisfactory writing skills. Pavlenko and Lantolf (2003, cited Clark and Gieve, 2006) discuss research that has centred around writing and identity and suggest that learners who are writing in a language that is not their first may experience an initial loss of their first language and thus need to reconstruct their identity through their second language which can be a challenge in itself.

Finally, supposedly influenced by a Confucian approach to learning (see more on this in the section below 3.4 'The Confucian-heritage Culture (CHC) Connection'), Chinese students are taught that writing is something that should avoid complex arguments, instead it must be simple, indirect, and poetic, delivered in short excerpts, not unlike the brief conversations in the Chinese classics (Wu, 2011). Academic writing can indeed be challenging for many students, home and international, and with these additional differences between Chinese and Western styles of writing Chinese students have various

challenges to overcome. By understanding more these different approaches to writing that contribute to challenges Chinese students face when introduced to academic writing, teachers may be better positioned to work with Chinese students in a less frustrated and tense environment.

3.2.5 Memorisation

Chinese students are, according to Shi (2006) regularly charged with being heavily reliant on memorisation and rote learning, and are therefore deemed only capable of reproducing knowledge, rather than analysing it. Biggs (1996) acknowledges this assumption and goes further in believing that some Western observers are unable or unwilling to distinguish the difference between rote learning and memorization. This is hardly surprising given dictionary definitions of the two. 'Rote' learning is defined by CollinsDictionary (2022), as 'the act of learning or memorizing something by repetition'. To 'memorize' on the other hand is defined by CollinsDictionary (2022) as: 'if you memorize something, you learn it so that you can remember it exactly'. As highlighted by Biggs and Watkins (1996, p271) rote learning (learning by repetition) can be classified as 'mechanical memorization' and is known to be used by students throughout the world who are preparing for exams. Although memorisation may not be exclusive to Chinese students, as emphasised by Lee (1996, cited Clark and Gieve, 2006), it is considered, by many of them to be a useful strategy that helps them to understand the meaning behind language, behind a text, and is thus viewed as a valuable part of the learning process. It is believed to be a crucial learning strategy that, through repetition, can stimulate and help students to 'understand the world' (Biggs and Watkins, 1996, p272). However, some Western observers, according to Biggs and Watkins (1996) fail to understand how and why some Chinese students utilise memorisation as a learning strategy. On (1996) emphasises that for Chinese teachers and students, memorization precedes understanding and is supported by the teacher whose role it is to encourage reflective thinking while guiding students to move forward and develop. Biggs (1996) supports this position, arguing that memorisation should not be viewed as learning at surface level but should in fact be considered as a strategy that enhances deep learning (learning that is meaningful), through repetitive activity with reflection at each stage of repetition. Wu (2011, p579) proposes that when students memorize text, meaning arises, and the language itself becomes 'redundant'. However, Atkinson (1997) maintains that memorisation is utilised by Chinese students as a learning strategy that enables them to compile a timed composition that is built from memorised chunks of text and formulaic phrases, without the necessity for any intellectual stimulation or absorption of knowledge. Jin and Cortazzi (2006, p9) in acknowledging a link between memorization and culture, refer to the art of creating Chinese characters and script, including calligraphy, and view such artful activity as one that is 'active memorisation of the precise movement'. They believe that engagement in this activity from an early age could significantly impact the way that Chinese students are taught and learn through memorisation and repeated practice. McMahon (2011) supports this, while linking it with a Confucian tradition (see more on this in the section below 3.4 'The Confucian-heritage Culture (CHC) Connection', insisting

that memorisation does encourage the development of understanding and should not be confused with rote learning.

As pointed out by Holliday (1994), when faced with study or personal stress related to change, it is natural for some students to 'conserve' their culture at which point 'old values are marshalled in a closing of ranks against innovation' (p128). Detachment, be it conscious or sub-conscious from normal education experiences may encourage a re-calling of previously taught learning strategies and a welcome or unwelcome reconciliation with memorization techniques (Holliday, 1994). It may be a natural reaction, for many Chinese students, that to keep up with the pace of UK HE studies and unfamiliarity of the new learning environment, a resurfacing of memorization at a surface learning level may emerge (rote learning). However, as highlighted by Biggs (1996, p54), learning, including strategies such as memorization should be considered in context and terms of a system of learning by interpreting 'a piece of the action in terms of the system of which it is part, not in the terms of an exotic system'. According to Biggs (1996), for someone in the West, repetition could be construed as a memorization technique that is nothing more than a surface approach, and yet for educators and those educated in a Confucian-Heritage Culture (CHC), this act of learning is something quite different.

3.2.6 Motivation

Another tension that exists in the teaching and learning of Chinese students in the West is the perception that those students typically only display extrinsic motivation which is demonstrated by their engagement in rote learning in order to pass exams. Biggs and Watkins (1996, p273) suggest that this understanding does little more than intensify the polarisation between the East and West and suggests that the categorizations of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations of learning 'do not travel well, at least not to the Orient'. While viewing intrinsic motivation as something which allows for education to be meaningful, Western educators believe that Chinese students are devoid of this motivation element (Biggs, 1996). However, according to On (1996), a Confucian-heritage Culture of education (see more on this in 3.4 'The Confucian-heritage Culture (CHC) Connection') inspires the co-existence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and the integration of the two that are realisable through personal development and growth, and 'upward social mobility' (p38). As highlighted by Biggs and Watkins (1996), there exists a 'mixed motivational steam' that consists of 'personal ambition, family face, peer support, material reward and…interest' (p273). For the Chinese student, if one is to consider a Confucian-heritage education approach, achievement motivation is identified through objectives of success for the student as individual, in relation to their social groups and the whole of society (Biggs and Watkins, 1996) thereby exhibiting both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Linking with and elaborating upon the tensions outlined above, this Chapter will now move on to consider some typical notions of Chinese student behaviour in HE in the UK, along with common explanations.

3.3 The Chinese Learner

Clark & Gieve (2006) in providing a useful synopsis of varying responses to teaching and learning in relation to Chinese students, refer to an established description that places them under the label of the 'Chinese Learner'. Such categorisation is presented with the inference that Chinese learners form part of a homogenous group of students that has collective learning characteristics that are deemed different from other international student cohorts. Led, to a degree, by Western tutors, lecturers, managers, and researchers, discourse surrounding the 'Chinese Learner' centres around Chinese behavioural characteristics in the classroom (as briefly touched upon in the outline of tensions above). As highlighted by Kumaravadivelu (2003, pp710-713), these typical representations of Chinese students in a Western learning and teaching context centre around three key aspects:

- They are obedient to authority; regarding the tutor as the embodiment of knowledge, a person who is unapproachable and unchallengeable.
- They have an inability to effectively participate in any classroom interaction, particularly that which requires pair or group work.
- They lack critical thinking skills and general critical awareness.

Additionally, as reported by Clark and Gieve (2006) these learners are frequently labelled as lacking, burdened with deficits and heavily reliant upon rote learning and memorization. Shi (2006) expresses concern over such common labelling which goes further in describing them as merely receptive and passive learners, disciplined, learning by imitation and reproductive rather than analytical. Wu (2011, p570) questions frequently heard labels including 'dependent' and 'silent' and in considering Chinese students in a cultural context, highlights how they are often compared to Western students who instead of being 'dependent' and 'silent' are reportedly 'deeply analytical and speculative' and therefore considered to be better learners. Moosavi (2020, p2) highlights how commonly, in Western academia, East Asian students are considered to be 'intellectually deficient' in comparison to their Western counterparts. Here we are reminded of the notion of Orientalism, that according to Said (2003, p40), positions the Oriental as 'irrational' and 'depraved' and needing to be dominated by Westerners due to the rationality of the European who is viewed as 'virtuous, mature, normal'. In doing so, Orientalism, according to Chowdhury and Phan (2014) devises and sustains power structures that continue to maintain and force 'the political power of the imperialists' (p38). Moosavi (2020) goes further in pointing out that, disturbingly, there continues to be evidence of Orientalism in Western universities, with East Asian students being at the centre of xenophobia and racism. Linking his interpretation of aspects of Edward Said's Orientalism to a reoccurring negative discourse around East Asian students, Moosavi (2020) suggests that there is a mood of superiority in academic communities. Within these communities, East Asian students are often understood as 'naturally deficient, backward and

uncivilised' (Moosavi, 2020, p3). For Chowdhury and Phan (2014, p31), such a construction of the individual student 'privileges certain forms of subjectivity and marginalises other ways of being'. Interestingly, Chowdhury and Phan (2014) also link Orientalism to how subjects (referring to international students) are constructed in the internationalised university, and this links back to the discussion in Chapter 2.2 'Human Capital Theory (HCT), the Knowledge Economy and the University' around the categorisations of international students.

Such interpretations of East Asian students can set forth a misunderstanding of the student in question and contribute to further labelling and unqualified assumptions (Deng, 2011). Interestingly, Ryan (2011, p8) highlights the fact that many Chinese students have taken up this opportunity to study outside of China which could mean they are in fact much more 'internationalised' than their Western peers and yet they are frequently criticised for being different. Discourse surrounding these stereotypical representations resonate with my own professional experience in Chengdu, China, where I initially regarded Chinese students as a homogenous group of students with collective learning characteristics including and not exclusive to subservience and obedience (as alluded to in Chapter 1.2 'Professional Context'). As a novice tutor inexperienced in teaching Chinese students, and led by more experienced colleagues, I contributed to the formation of these representations, and naturalised stereotyping in my daily teaching practice. Upon reflection, I prefer to believe that I was attempting to manage my professional experience in unfamiliar surroundings and doing what Kumaravadivelu (2003) would describe as helping to reduce 'an unmanageable reality to a manageable label' (p716). However, even today, exchanges between teachers in some staff rooms of English Language teaching (ELT) departments (also mentioned in Chapter 1.2), present a common view that supports the key representations referred to earlier by Kumaravedivelu, and other assumptions, while demonstrating a tendency towards producing 'large culture' explanations.

According to Clark and Gieve (2006) some researchers and ELT practitioners, to help them understand the deficits that Chinese students studying in the UK supposedly have, point to 'features of Chinese culture as explanatory variables'. However, as pointed out by Kumaravadivelu (2003, p710), such an evident eagerness to 'forge a causal connection' between culture, often Confucianism, (see more on this in the section below 3.4 'The Confucian-heritage Culture (CHC) Connection'), and classroom behaviour has resulted in arguable and even contradictory findings and discussions. For Clark and Gieve, (2006) a so called Western 'large culture', defined by Holliday (1999, p237) as signifying 'ethnic', 'national', and 'international' discourse has contributed significantly to and maintains a negative labelling of Chinese students. It is suggested by Clark and Gieve (2006, p55) that adopting a 'large culture' approach to understanding Chinese students places them into a homogenous culture of 'cultural fixity' (Clark and Gieve, 2006, p55) and encourages generalisations and 'racial stereotyping'

(p69). For them this so called Western 'large culture' discourse continues to be steered by Western instructors which:

> 'rather than being interrogated for ethnocentric bias and stereotyping, are validated by recourse to a Confucian heritage explanation which appears plausible rather than being empirically established' (Clark and Gieve, 2006, p60).

A key approach to understanding what Biggs and Watkins (1996, p269) call the 'paradox of the Chinese learner' is the attempt by some to forge links between Chinese student behaviour and a Confucian-heritage Culture (CHC). Biggs and Watkins assert that although it is challenging to define exactly what a Confucian-heritage Culture is, it appears to be the most useful approach to understanding how the Chinese student learns and adapts in education environments that they are not familiar with. This Chapter will now explore notions of the Confucian-heritage Culture (CHC) a linking to the 'large culture' discourse discussed here, and its influence on education in China.

3.4 The Confucian-heritage Culture (CHC) Connection

In searching for a connection between the 'Chinese Learner' and culture, a popular research response has been to draw upon Confucianism and its influence on Chinese education and learners. This has not been for the sole purpose of understanding Chinese student behaviour but also to explore what strategies they are using, given that research indicates that Asian learners often excel in their score achievement, in comparison to their Western counterparts (On, 1996). Kember (2016) points out that various studies have highlighted how Asian students in general tend to evidence higher academic achievement than their Western counterparts, particularly in the area of Mathematics and Science. There are multiple understandings of Confucianism with various models being presented and given the scope of this study, rather than explore this in depth, it will only be touched upon to contextualise this discussion. For Jacques (2009), Westerners struggle to understand the nature of Confucian politics (education included) as it appears to be something very unfamiliar and remote. This could help justify some Western understandings of the key components of a Confucian led education that appear to contribute to some Western interpretations.

Wu (2011) summarizes a Confucian perspective of learning as:

> 'a process of incessant modification of self, undertaken for the attainment of enlightenment and happiness. And the role of teaching is to detect the horizon of student readiness and make it a handover of a learning opportunity' (p575).

Wu (2011) also proposes that varying interpretations of Confucianism have existed since the influence of the West on Chinese education and that modern interpretations of Confucianism do not necessarily align with the pedagogic values that can be understood from reading the *Analects,* which is composed of a selection of Confucius teaching and learning excerpts and quotes. As highlighted by Shi (2006, p124) Confucianism is indeed 'a multi-dimensional concept' that has changed over time, 'adapting

itself to new political and social demands'. It is possible, as suggested by Wu (2011) that the fusion between a Confucian-led education and a Western one has created misunderstandings of this education tradition. Jin and Cortazzi (2006), in discussing Confucian heritages of learning, refer to the Confucian teachings of Zhu Xi from 1130-1200. Under Zhu Xi's teachings education was a route for the transference of morals and values through the encouragement of a familiarisation with a classical text which was to be followed by reflection and understanding and stimulated by interaction and social discussion. According to On (1996, p35), this process of reflection was to instil a 'spirit of enquiry and open-mindedness'. According to Jin and Cortazzi (2006) this model of Confucian education encouraged the development of an independent mind and was focused around 'moral self-cultivation' achievable through intense and thoughtful study of texts. Wu (2011) states that a Confucius pedagogy, in its focus around the study of classical texts, encourages student inquiry through related dialogue with the tutor. On (1996, p25) asserts that Confucian conceptions of teaching and learning endorse 'human perfectibility and educability', with an emphasis on 'effort and will-power' that is rewarded by social mobility and progression. It considers education as pivotal to personal development, it is egalitarian in that personal development through education can be achieved by those who desire it, achievable by concerted effort and concentration of mind (On, 1996). A Confucius pedagogy requires students to exhibit intense efforts to learn and to demonstrate diligence over ability, the latter being considered as an attribute that is 'uncontrollable' over the 'controllable' attribute of effort and exertion (Biggs and Watkins, 1996, p275).

These interpretations run contrary to a general Western educators' view of a Confucian influenced education that focuses on little more than memorization, recitation of texts and the passing of exams Wu (2011). Wu (2011) questions such Western generalisations that centre around a Confucian education as one that insists on the memorization of the classics, requiring students to interpret texts rather than challenge them. Tan (2011) supports Wu's attempt to challenge these Western interpretations of Confucian education that suggests it does little more than stimulate opportunity for memorization that is later regurgitated. Deng (2011) although supporting Wu's questioning of generalisations of Confucian pedagogy suggests that Wu fails to acknowledge the way that Confucian pedagogy has evolved. Clark and Gieve (2006, p58) in arguing that such discussions rarely explore cultural change related to political, economic and social developments in China, consider what was supposedly taught by Confucius against what appears to have been created as the 'Confucian cultural tradition'. They suggest that in being unable to understand the difference between the teachings of Confucius and a 'sociocultural system that has appropriated 'Confucian values'', some researchers are unable to find a solid chain of causality (Clark and Gieve, 2006, p58). They assert that at the core of Confucian teaching and learning was reflective thought, careful inquiry, and opportunity for students to question and explore and yet, a construction of the Confucian cultural tradition created by some Western academics, particularly those involved with teaching Chinese students, ascertain the following:

- The teacher is considered the bestower of truth
- Students are said to parrot those truths
- Students engage in regular memorization
- Students are considered as docile and passive
- Conformity is encouraged

Biggs (1996) in exploring what he considers to be Western misconceptions of 'surface' and 'deep' learning in relationship to a Confucian-Heritage Learning Culture (CHC), draws upon interpretations of 'good' learning which lean towards a 'deep' learning approach, said to include the following qualities:

- Classroom-based assessment
- Utilisation of varied teaching methods
- Meaningful and contextually appropriate content
- A warm, as in sympathetic and comforting classroom environment

Highlighting that these are considered by Westerners to be Western teaching and learning characteristics that are rarely visible in a Confucian-heritage Culture (CHC) classroom he highlights how it is commonly reported that Chinese classes are large in number and lessons are delivered by teachers who are authoritarian. Additionally, in a Chinese classroom, lessons are said to be led by expository learning and task development there is an emphasis on exam preparation, and learning is by rote (Biggs, 1996), and yet he comes up with something quite different. According to Biggs (1996, p46) such classroom characteristics are considered in the West to be the 'antithesis' of what 'good' learning is. Yet, there is evidence in the Chinese classroom of what one can call a 'non-Western deep-oriented teaching…and learning' (evidence of 'good' learning) that consists of cooperative learning, expectations of high cognitive level outcomes and a warm classroom culture (Biggs, 1996, p57). Furthermore, Biggs (1996) in considering the generic nature of deep and surface learning (the former supposedly prevailing in the West and the latter in the East) suggests that both are context dependent and are according to text and classroom activity. According to Biggs (1996, p53) wide assumptions of surface learning in a Chinese classroom need to be questioned. He proposes that the extrinsic nature of surface learning is to pass exams, it aims to 'satisfice' the demands of tasks often requiring a student to dedicate minimal effort to reach the requirements set. However, in the Chinese classroom, there is often evidence of intense effort and Biggs suggests that although repetition is a common learning strategy, it is used to facilitate meaning and understanding and should not be mistakenly associated with learning indicative of surface learning. Biggs (1991) highlights that deep strategies involve enhancing understanding to satisfy curiosity, and proclaims that:

> "Confucius himself saw learning as deep…his methods were individual and Socratic, not expository; his aim was to shape social and familial values in order to conserve a particular political structure. These do not appear particularly conducive to surface learning.' (Biggs, 1991, p30).

In supporting this position, On (1996) views the Confucian tradition concept of learning as one that encourages a deep learning approach with a focus on reflective thinking and intrinsic value, rather than the endorsement of memorization for the sake of it.

Considering the teacher-student relationship, Biggs (1996) proposes that this CHC education setting does not endorse a simple transmission mode of education delivery from teacher to student but rather it encourages collective activities and discussions, far removed from a Western understanding of the relationship. Wu (2011, p573) in considering a Confucius pedagogy, asserts that the teacher is not to be merely considered as the purveyor of knowledge but as the person who has the 'interpretive capacity to detect the horizon of a learner's fore-sight' and to guide the learner to learn. The teacher guides the student into being ready to accept 'a handover of a learning opportunity' (Wu, 2011, p575). For Wu (2011) learning is defined in Confucian terms as not just absorbing knowledge but learning how to grow which means 'polishing, carving, transforming and becoming' (p574).

3.5 Cultures of Learning

In addition to the 'Chinese Learner' approach and notions of the influence of Confucianism on education, a significant amount of research has been conducted around 'cultures of learning', in other words, understanding diverse cultural stances relating to learning behaviours in international classrooms. Some researchers view the 'Chinese culture of learning' as very different and potentially inferior from a 'Western learning culture' (Shi, 2006). Jin and Cortazzi (2017) present arguments for considering 'cultures of learning' alongside intercultural communication (IC). Although a contentious term, 'Chinese culture of learning' is often used as a way of drawing attention to 'socio-cultural aspects of key practices' to be understood as 'frameworks of expectations, attitudes, values and beliefs about how to teach or learn successfully' (Jin and Cortazzi, 2006, p9). For Jin and Cortazzi (2006, p8) it allows for the framing of expectations for both student and tutor; it is an 'interpretive system' whereby students interpret the actions of their tutors and peers and attempt to engage accordingly. Although Jin and Cortazzi (2006) discuss international students in general, they do have a specific focus on Chinese students and suggest that the concept of 'cultures of learning' was originally presented to confront Western stereotypical observations of Chinese students. Understanding that all international students bring to the international classroom 'dimensions of diversity of world knowledge, social experience, cultural and intellectual resources', they argue that students, staff and those in the local community can profit from this wealth of diversity (Jin and Cortazzi, 2017, p248). Through practising 'cultures of learning' by engaging in a process of enhancement of reciprocal understanding, value will be added to student and staff experience and a positive learning environment will be created. Through learning

about 'cultures of learning' through reflection, observation, and dialogue both teachers and students can reach an understanding that can enhance classroom practice (Jin and Cortazzi, 2017). For Jin and Cortazzi (2017), this is necessary for the maintenance of internationalisation in the HE sector but is only achievable if an effort is sustained at grass roots level, not just with regard to the creation of policy and its implementation. This proposal includes a discussion around the internationalisation of curriculum and staff professional development. Jin and Cortazzi (2017, p241) propose that adopting an approach that encourages staff and students to learn *about* each other, *from* each other and *with* other could alter the dynamics in an international classroom and allow for more understanding and harmony. Understanding differences in learning behaviour and the reasons behind these differences could help foster a less judgemental approach to other cultures, and in this instance divert attention away from negative labelling of Chinese students. Furthermore, for Jin and Cortazzi (2017, p245), stereotyping can be offset by concerted attention to 'cultures of learning' and intercultural communication. It can be curbed if students in a diverse group can feel confident enough to share their own experiences of teaching and learning, along with having opportunity to confidently express their expectations (Jin and Cortazzi, 2017).

3.6 Small Cultures

As pointed out by Holliday (1994, p125), a significant amount of ELT related research has centred around 'profiling regional traits', in other words, common characteristics of international students have been assigned to them depending on their region of origin. Holliday (1994) introduces a concept called 'BANA', which stands for Britain, Australasia, and North America's (touched upon in Chapter 2.2.2 'Oral Communication') involvement in the commercialisation of ELT, that was particularly flourishing in the 1990's. Although strands of research during the 1990's indicated perplexity at the Chinese learning characteristics and sought explanations that placed students into homogenous groups (Biggs, 1996) that approach has certainly been challenged by many since then. The teaching of English Language in this context typically utilises a *normative paradigm* model which takes for granted '*priori* knowledge of regional cultural traits' (Holliday, 1994, p129). In doing so it offers a framework that links student behaviour to cultural characteristics, as an explanation for student behaviour in the classroom. Aligned with the construction of a 'learning group ideal' (Holliday, 1994 p126), it compounds stereotypical observations, with stereotyping defined by Jin and Cortazzi (2017, p245) as 'exaggerated or wrong sets of expectations about a group' preserved not just for Chinese students. Holliday (1994) in questioning this *normative paradigm* model argues for an *interpretive paradigm* that would allow for a more subjective and thus individualistic approach to classroom behaviour. Through his research into English language teaching and learning, Holliday (1994) considers the complexities of culture, a term that he considers to be multi-faceted. For Holliday, culture means the culture of a group, irrespective of size and composition and he acknowledges students as 'social groups…equally complex and varied, by virtue of *being* social groups' (p127). Holliday (1999, p238) in asserting that

applied linguistics is dominated by 'large culture' discourse that produces overgeneralizations of 'foreign' students, prefers a 'small culture' approach, that 'attempts to liberate "culture" from notions of ethnicity and nation and from the perceptual dangers they carry with them'. Holliday, (1999, p238), prefers to shift the focus on classroom behaviour from national, ethnic, international (large culture) to 'cohesive social groupings' (small culture) and proposes that a 'small culture' does not necessarily need to be contained inside a 'large culture', nor does it need to be subservient. Instead, it is a model that allows for the consideration of social groupings that can indeed be considered as a 'middle culture' bringing together educators and tutors from across national cultural boundaries, over a brief period (Holliday, 1999, p239). Clark and Gieve (2006) appreciate a 'small culture' approach as a way of understanding Chinese learners in a Western educational context, suggesting that for students it is not just a case of skills development but a process that is indeed complex and sometimes problematic. For Clark and Gieve (2006, p68), adopting a small culture approach allows for individuality and 'locates the learner as negotiating with particular others in the class, with the teacher and with content knowledge'. This can partly be achieved by considering all students as individuals and therefore moving away from cultural influence explanations that are often based on 'reified, abstracted and frozen conceptions of culture' (Clark and Gieve, 2006, p69). A 'small culture' approach will consider 'social processes as they emerge' and allow for students to try to make sense of their experience and circumstances (Holliday, 1999, p240). The construction of a small culture in the classroom can, according to Clark and Gieve (2006) be encouraged through a range of strategies that include negotiation between teacher and students of curriculum including materials, and assessment. For Bron et. al, (2016), a negotiated curriculum encourages students to be involved in the planning of lessons, offers opportunity for them to share what they would like to learn and how and thus have a voice in the teaching and learning process. According to Holliday (1999), a 'small culture' will form in a classroom environment which typically involves the coming together of individuals who in turn will collaborate with peers and tutors to create meaning and sets of group rules. Individuals will no doubt come to the group with their own 'culture *residues* from other educational, classroom, collegial and peer experiences' (Holliday, 1999, p249). Holliday further asserts that with these cultural *'residues'* commonalities will exist which will help with formation of the new group, of the new 'small culture'. He points out that in cultural research, 'large cultures' are essentialist, that is having a set of characteristics that espouse ethnic, national and international differences with 'small cultures' being considered heuristic in learning something or ways of discovery. Although Holliday considers, in depth, culture as a concept, it is referred to here without in-depth analysis merely to touch upon different approaches to understanding and researching Chinese students in a teaching and learning context.

3.7 Social and Other Justifications

There are some researchers that instead of adopting a 'large culture' or 'small culture' approach to explain common aspects of Chinese learner behaviour, offer consideration of social justifications.

Kumaravadivelu (2003) while strongly urging for a rejection of a binary divide of students from the West and students from China argues that other potential key factors for the responses of many Chinese students studying at UK HE level are often overlooked. For Kumaravadivelu (2003), the behaviour of Chinese students studying in a foreign language may be influenced by 'several social, cultural, economic, educational, institutional, and individual factors' (p714). Clark and Gieve (2006) in considering some of these alternative explanations endorse those that avoid assigning cultural characteristics to students that cement them into a homogenised and fixed group and instead understand that all students may experience challenges in adjusting to a new academic and personal environment. Rather than offering a cultural explanation, be it large of small, variables such as educational context with excessive workloads and academic demands that may affect active classroom participation should be considered (Kumaravadivelu 2003). Many international students beginning their UK HE journeys may take time to adjust to a different style of teaching and learning, and studying in the English language which is not their native language may compound feelings of disconnection from their familiar way of life, and thus increase levels of anxiety. According to Kumaravadivelu (2003), while attempting to process new surroundings, students may become overwhelmed by a study period that is, in some instances, intense and competitive. In this new and unfamiliar educational environment students are sometimes forced to engage with discourses that may place him or her in 'new and unexpected ways' (Clark and Gieve 2006, p68). Ecochard and Fotheringham (2017) suggest that some Chinese students may suffer from one or more of the following feelings related to disruption: fear of academic loss/failure, inadequate performance, lack of confidence and disorientation due to a change in teaching and learning styles. Additionally, they will experience change in space, location, and time. Furthermore, involved in a UK HE landscape that sees an over-internationalization of Chinese students, these students may experience feelings of marginalization and otherness (Tian and Lowe, 2009, cited in Bamber, 2014), which may impact academic performance. They may, according to Bamber (2014) also experience feelings of otherness as they are treated like tradable commodities, linked with the marketisation of education. Holliday (1998, p245) suggests that 'otherisation' can be seen as a system that reduces the foreigner to 'a simplistic, easily digestible, exotic or degrading stereotype'. Additionally, Holliday (1999) expresses concern about the notion of 'Western' vs 'Chinese' as part of the process of 'otherisation' that reduces Chinese students 'to peripheral, not thinking automata' (p247).

In considering social integration factors, McMahon (2011) points out that research highlights common frustrations of Chinese students in being unable to engage with home students due to language barriers and cultural differences, resulting in an intensification of feelings of isolation. Biggs and Watkins (1996, p277) suggest that social integration challenges may exist for many international students but perhaps even more so from 'collectivistically-inclined' students who tend to identify and bond with students from their own ethnic groups. This collectivist behaviour is often criticised by Western teachers and students, often to the point of demonstrating 'hostility' (Biggs and Watkins, 1996, p278.) even though

this coming together of ethnic groups is common, with 'expat' behaviour around the world as a useful example here. That said, many students do arrive at their UK HE study destination with high expectations of social integration and cultural interaction with local students, and yet, are often, according to Jin and Cortazzi (2017, p246) disappointed that this expectation is 'often unrealised in practice'.

In linking with the potential for some of the social justifications presented here, it is worth considering Shi's (2006) empirical study of Chinese students in Shanghai that presents a view of Chinese students as active and seeking interaction with their Western teacher. Attempting to challenge the stereotypical view of Chinese students, Shi's (2006) study investigates Chinese learners studying the English Language in Shanghai. The analysis of data gathered in 2013 through the completion of questionnaires by 400 Chinese middle-school students learning English in Shanghai, ascertained that contemporary Chinese students are not all displaying the typical learner characteristics that they are regularly labelled with. Instead of passive and docile learners, the students in the research indicated elements of being active learners and with a preference for student-centered classroom interaction, they were willing to participate in learning styles that encouraged collaboration and interaction (Shi, 2006). They shared a preference for equality with tutors, rather than viewing them as knowledge givers only, unable to be approached and even challenged. This outcome could indicate a difference in Chinese student behaviour when in China, confirming that some social integration difficulties may be highly influential on student behaviour. Shi's research participants were based in Shanghai where students would not necessarily be experiencing some of the disruptive elements referred to above that are associated with moving and studying abroad.

Finally, cultural stereotyping continues to be endorsed in some teaching and learning environments and yet this stereotypical view of the 'Chinese Learner' is, according to Ryan (2011, p6), outdated and inappropriate for 'contemporary realities' and not particularly helpful in understanding paradoxes and tensions that exist. For Jacques (2009) Westerners, accustomed to running the world for so long, are not well versed in understanding and recognizing difference (p157). Furthermore, as suggested by Holliday (1994, p127), a Western perception that views 'other societies' as 'unchanging and unvaried' puts forward an image 'of backwardness'. For Shi-xu (1997, cited Clare and Gieve, 2006, p57), this approach risks stigmatizing this international student body while 'locking a cultural group into its past'. As an additional piece of the jigsaw, Shi (2006) highlights that with China's moving economic and social picture, new generations of Chinese students coming through into a Western education are typically demonstrating many common characteristics with their Western counterparts. It is worth noting at this stage that from the mid-80's to the mid-1990's, Chinese students studying at university in the UK, typically belonged to the academic elite and they arrived with high academic scores gained through their education in China and demonstrated high levels of motivation to learn (Jin and Cortazzi,

2006). With the changing education scene in China more academically strong students are being offered places at the increasing number of Chinese universities. Those who are unable to enter a Chinese University or have a specific aim to study abroad may choose the UK as a study destination. Jin and Cortazzi (2006) maintain that this generational change of Chinese students visiting the UK to study has presented Chinese students who are now more extrinsically interested, often lacking an intrinsic motivation to learn and yet potentially more active in their learning. According to McMahon (2011), a key extrinsic motivation for these students is to have the ability to compete in the global job market through securing suitable employment, upon successful completion of their undergraduate or postgraduate programme. There is conflict here between what is outlined in 3.2.6 'Motivation' section of this Chapter and in the findings section 6.1 Theme: 'Motivations', but the levels of complexities running throughout this discussion are vast. This Chapter will now discuss periods of education reform in China and its influence on contemporary Chinese students studying at HE level in the UK.

3.8 Periods of Chinese Education Reform

In acknowledging China's increase in economic stability and growing influence and importance around the world, Ryan (2011) calls for an improvement in reciprocal understanding and awareness between China and the West. Jacques (2009) in *When China Rules the World: The Rise of the Middle Kingdom and end of the Western World* urges the world to prepare itself for the potential domination of the world by China with its increasing superpower status and suggests that there must be mutual and effective engagement and dialogue at economic, political, social, environmental, and educational levels. In focusing on the education part of this reciprocal understanding and preparedness, Ryan (2011), in editing *Education Reform in China: Changing Concepts, Contexts and Practices*, encourages sincere academic dialogue and calls for inquiries into the aspirations of the new generation of Chinese students that are coming to study at Western universities. According to Ryan (2011, p3), to help understand this new generation of contemporary Chinese students and to take advantage of an interconnectedness of Chinese and Western learning cultures, it is important to understand China's 'current realities and future trajectory'. For Ryan (2011) with respect to education, it is important to take into consideration past and present education reforms and she divides these reforms into eight periods to help understand these current realities and the educational experiences of visiting Chinese students. Ryan (2011) argues that this level of understanding will help to alleviate current stereotypical portrayals of Chinese students studying in the West, with labels such as 'Chinese Learner' only fueling these stereotypes that do not resemble the realities of contemporary Chinese students. To respect the scope of this research study, a selection of Chinese education reforms, past and present, are presented in summary format and do not include opportunities to explore the layers of complexities and labyrinth of each reform, neither do they include all education reform initiatives. Furthermore, they do not examine in detail successes or failures of each reform period. However, it is hoped that the exploration deepens an awareness and stimulates a

heightened understanding of Chinese students that are studying in the UK, at HE level, and as relevant to the research question of this dissertation.

Education in China was formally recognized by Premier Wen Jiabao (serving from 2003-2013) in 2010 as a vital national priority in the securement of China's economic security and has since undergone notable change, as evidenced through regular introductions of new education approaches and initiatives (Ryan, 2011). Over the past four decades China has been active in instigating various education reforms across the whole spectrum of its education system, including the primary, secondary and HE sectors. In line with changing national and international economic status China has immersed itself in 'rapid and extensive reform' across its education system and continues to increase investment in education, with an emphasis on quality (Ryan, 2011, p1). As pointed out by Tan and Hairon (2016, p315), in preparing students for engagement in China's economic positioning in the world during the 21st Century, China's eighth and most radical education reform to date promotes 'dynamic and inviting learning environments' while reimagining its 'educational paradigm and practices'. However, this recent education reform is just one in many that have been implemented to help strengthen China's standing in the world and it is not the most recent, even if the most radical. Going as far back as the mid-1800s, this Chapter will briefly consider the genealogy of education reform in China to the present day while attempting to connect common reform themes with considerations in this Chapter so far. The purpose of this exploration is to help understand the background and educational experiences of Chinese students who transition to the UK to study, rather than relying on broad Western cultural explanations that often emerge from an absence of detailed awareness. Running throughout the education reforms, is the common theme of traditional, Confucian education, contemporary notions of Confucian cultures of learning and the influence of Western education on the Chinese education system.

Wu (2011) provides a transparent genealogy of China's education reforms, dating from the mid-19th century to the time of presenting the genealogy in 2011. In doing so, Wu, separates the key reforms into four 'transformations' of China's modernization of education, with each representing 'an epistemological break with China's tradition' and incorporation of elements of a 'Western consciousness of modernity' linked to a set of political occurrences (Wu, 2011, p581). In discussing the historical outline of Chinese education reform, Wu suggests that the modernization of education in China is an on-going battle between Western modernity and Chinese Confucian tradition with Western education practices being selected and adapted and a Confucian tradition being reinterpreted, transformed, and reinvented. Participants of this on-going battle have included Chinese educators who have attempted to engage with education policy and practices from the West, against those who reject these practices as intrusions to Confucian education and values. This Chapter will now consider each transformation event and while it is challenging to avoid a descriptive analysis of each, it is helpful to explore them to align with the context of this research. It offers something to consider surrounding

common understandings of Chinese students and explanations that are linked to Confucianism and its influence on education in China.

According to Wu (2011), as a reaction to invasions from the West, including a defeat by France and the UK in the Second Opium War that ended during the Late-Qing Dynasty in 1860, Chinese education reformers began to adopt a new approach to education, to an education that had until then been untouched by 'the 'modern' epistemology of the West' (p581). At this stage, the Confucian tradition of education in China with its emphasis on the teaching of morals and values and belief in the intrinsic values of education was upheld as deemed fundamental to the education of China's population (On, 1996). However, feeling politically and economically vulnerable, China's elite moved towards allowing, (to a controlled degree), for the influence of Western education upon its own Chinese education system with a view to learning from the West and protecting itself from future conflicts with the outside world. This consent of influence was by no means considered a process of unification but rather viewed as an 'otherness' that was necessary to help strengthen China's position against invading foreigners (Wu, 2011, p581). China, convinced that the notion of education in China was something that provided 'substance' against the Western concept of education as something that provided 'function', began at this stage of reform to encourage combining China's learning of fundamental principles with a so-called Western learning for 'practical application' (Wu, 2011, p581). During this reform process, China was drawing upon the West's strength of instrumental knowledge and began to include subject specific areas of Mathematics and Physics onto its education agenda (Wu, 2011). According to Wu (2011) the first Western influenced education institution to be established was the Tongwen Academy (Tongwen Guan) in 1861, introduced in China as a government led school (heavily reliant on foreign teachers), created to teach interpreters Western languages, with scientific subjects being included at a later stage. A key aim of this Academy was to increase levels of understanding of Western countries and 'thereby reduce the likelihood of violent altercations' (Mouat, 2015, p734). The Tongwen Academy was also welcomed by the British who believed that it's presence and development of interpreters would help improve Sino-British relations (Mouat, 2015).

3.8.1 Transformation One – Interactions Between the East and West

Bailey (2013) suggests that education reform did not have much impact until the end of the Boxer Uprising in 1901 (a rebellion from 1899 until 1901 against the influences of Japanese and Western ideas on the country) which alerted the Chinese elite to the urgent need to work on the unity of the nation. Responding to 'debilitating internal decline and aggressive external threat' (Bailey, 2013, p399) China believed it was essential to train its people to be loyal and hardworking and to move them away from 'backward customs…and beliefs' (p400). Emphasis was placed on professionalizing education and creating training schools for teachers. By 1902, China's education system, again influenced by Western education systems and pedagogies, adopted a Japanese model of education (in 1898 Peking University

had been founded, and based on a Japanese curriculum, was set up to help modernize education in China) and in 1904 there was an increasing number of proponents of a more practical-oriented (vocational) education that drew on educational strategies borrowed from Germany (Bailey, 2013). In 1905, the Qing Government abolished the Chinese civil examination system that had been in situ for 1300 years. This had been considered an exam system that had a solid ethical and moral stance and had been revered by many as a key link between society, culture, and politics (An, 2014). Bailey (2013, p400) points out that this 'Confucian-based civil service examinations' was superseded by a countrywide three-tier school system that absorbed both Western and Chinese teaching and learning. Attention was prioritized on an 'intercultural curriculum' that further endorsed China's education for 'substance' and the Wests education for 'practical application' (Wu, 2011, p582). By 1910 a number of Japanese 'westernized schools' had been established in China with the Chinese education system being significantly influenced by the West at this stage (Wu, 2011, p581). According to Wu (2011, p570) this pedagogic discourse transformation saw the weakening of a Confucian pedagogy through the spotlighting in academic circles of 'modern epistemology' discourses, with proponents of traditional education and values, becoming marginalized. It moved from a high-level focus on ethical and moral values, to knowledge development and the development of professional skills and attributes (An, 2014) all the while endorsing an egalitarian education that according to Bailey (2013) was maintained until there was a shift in approach in the 1980's. According to Bailey (2013), in 1912, debates surrounding the role of the university came into the spotlight with some educators and politicians calling for universities to be more relevant to the needs of its students, China's economy and society. Others argued for universities to remain as forebearers of knowledge acquisition and research, an argument that continues throughout the world today. According to Bailey (2013), at the same time, the issue of the democratization of primary school education was being considered with a potential rejection of the study of Confucian classics as a learning activity, thus heralding in a process of moving away from a Confucian led education.

3.8.2 Transformation Two – a Rejection of the Confucian Education Tradition of Interpretive Reading of Classics

The occurrence of China's 4 May Movement in 1919 witnessed students demonstrating in Beijing in response to the governments granting of privileges to Japan (Hao, 1997). According to Wang and Weir (2007) over 3,000 students gathered to demonstrate against the imperialism of Japan, along with political corruption at a domestic level. Operating as a progressive movement that evolved as part of the New Culture Movement, it called for a new Chinese culture in response to a thirst for Western modernity that supposedly offered science and democracy, thus instigating another shift, this time radical, from the Chinese traditional culture (Wu, 2011). As highlighted by Wu (2011) in breaking with Chinese traditional culture, proponents once again rejected a Confucian culture of education, including

the reading of classics, which was said to be keeping China back from modernity and instead advocated an appropriation of a Western education in relation to subject content and pedagogy.

3.8.3 Transformation Three – the Influence of the Soviet Unions' Centralized System of Education

Following the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the country moved towards modelling its education system on the Soviet Union's centralized system of education and, rebelling against Western bourgeois and Chinese cultural norms continued its move away from China's education tradition and Confucian values (Wu, 2011). According to Wu (2011, p583), the new government-controlled system viewed students as contributors to 'economic forces'. According to Pepper (1978), when the Chinese Communist Party came to power in 1949, around 80% of a 500 million population were classified as illiterate, with only approximately 17 million pupils enrolled at primary school level (concentrated mainly in urban areas) and just 1 million pupils studying at secondary school level. Pepper (1978, p863) notes that during the 1950's and 60's there was an effort to expand formal education facilities and an emphasis on state involvement and attention and yet a decentralization of management that was often assigned to local 'brigade managers' an initiative that was considered 'schools run by the people with state aid'. In addition, there was a review of curriculum, and a move 'in the direction of the more practical and scientific' deemed necessary to catch up with the West (Pepper, 1978, p848). By 1965, primary school enrolments had increased to 84.7% of the population in China (Pepper, 1978). As further highlighted by Pepper (1978, p851), during this period there were variations in school type with some offering full time study, and others part time for those whom it was necessary to study and work. The best pupils from the key schools (defined by Ye (2015) as schools that were prioritized by the government, in terms of offering these schools reputable teaching staff and quality facilities), were channeled, according to Pepper (1978) into the best colleges via the unified entrance examinations but also based on two other criteria: class background and a record of political activism. However, further changes were implemented and, according to Pepper (1978), in 1968 modes of elitist education were eradicated including the separation of academically strong and weak students, unified entrance exams, choice of school location and full or part time provision. At the same time, there was a reduction of rote learning and an increase in the development of analytical skills under a new more egalitarian teacher-student relationship (Pepper, 1978). This new process included the simplification of course content, an increased focus on politics and the integration of manual labour participation (either in the communes or factories) into the school practice as managed by the workers' propaganda teams. Moving towards the 'direction of expanding and equalizing educational opportunities', special schools that had been created for cadres were abolished, along with girls' schools, Overseas Chinese schools and 'key point' schools (Pepper, 1978, p859). Curricular revision took place with the introduction of new teaching materials and fresh textbooks – standardized in some cases coming as early as 1970. The general rule was that all students moved from one year to the next, irrespective of academic performance and grades were included as excellent, good, average rather than pass or fail. Links that had started after the

Cultural Revolution between schools and local factories and communes and were further cemented and regular school-run workshops were integrated into the school curriculum with the aim of teaching 'the practical application of classroom instruction in Physics and Chemistry' (Pepper, 1978, p861).

3.8.4 Transformation Four – Standardization of Chinese Education

Moving closer to the present day, in 1978 China opened to foreign companies that wanted to conduct business in/from China, therefore, allowing foreign investment into the Country. Referred to by Westerners as China's open-door policy, it began to have 'active participation in the world market' (Huan, 1986, p1). According to Wu (2011), in the 1980's in relation to China's response to globalization and the introduction of its open-door policy, the country entered a new wave of education. It adopted a positivist approach by aligning with a 'Western epistemology of objectivity' (Wu, 2011 p584). Zhu (2019) asserts that this period saw the emergence of the most important education reforms that were prioritized on China's political agendas. Standardization of education commenced, and although a national entrance exam system had already been reinstated in 1977, the 1980's saw the introduction of further exams, firstly in the English language, followed by other subjects and China joined with the West in a positivist approach to education research and objectivity (Wu, 2011).

Fom 1996-98, China embarked on yet another period of education reform which was radical in nature again looking to the West for inspiration on education systems and curriculum development in an era of globalized competition (Liu and Kang, 2011). According to Liu and Kang (2011), during this period, it was established that too much attention was being assigned, through an excessively centralized control system, to examinations and memorization as a traditional learning strategy and key consideration was given to key areas of education that included content, implementation, goals and assessment. This was further elaborated between 1999-2001 through a 'systematic and structural' education reform (Liu and Kang, 2011, p26). Acknowledging that Chinese students needed to develop problem-solving skills that involved creativity, necessary for an effective and efficient workforce, China, according to Ryan (2011) expedited its reform plans. This reform brought into the spotlight curriculum, structure, content, assessment, admin structure and a fresh learning and teaching approach. This was to help fulfil the aim of fostering student creativity, independence, and collaboration through skills development to aid China's competition at a global level, while experiencing some withdrawal from a traditional transmission approach to education (Ryan, 2011). Tan and Hairon (2016, p323) propose that this reform challenged traditional education in China that once centred around the 'didactic teaching of textual knowledge'. In addition to promoting independence and creativity, it attempts to address outdated curriculum, the habit of rote learning, and prioritizes cooperative learning (Tan and Hairon, 2016). It also, as noted by Ryan (2011) connected curriculum content more with student interests, motivations, and life experiences. It is worth noting that this reform was also felt in the Chinese university sector predominantly through the implementation of the entrance examinations, said

to be aligned with the changed school system. These entrance exams now consist of multi assessment task types that are said to assess analytical skills and problem-solving ability, in line with China's requirement of citizens that are innovative and analytical (Liu and Kang, 2011).

China continues its fervor for education review and reform and in 1999 China's Ministry of Education (MOE) shared ***'Confronting the Twenty-first Century Education Rejuvenation Action Plan'*** and instigated the beginnings of a new period of reform, while establishing a Basic Education Reform Expert team (Liu and Kang, 2011). Tasked with considering curriculum design and implementation, the team was assigned to sharing the vision with education practitioners across the country where collaboration and creativity were encouraged and the introduction of a 21st Century education system was launched nationwide. Liu and Kang (2011, p27) propose that a bottom-up approach was adopted that was set to enhance 'democratic, equal and communicative curriculum development', shifting from a hierarchical arrangement of education reform. The stipulation of key educational priorities running through this Ministry of Education (MOE) education reform plan is particularly pertinent to this dissertation focus. As outlined by Liu and Kang (2011) the areas of prominence include the acquisition of knowledge through; hands-on learning, enhancement of creativity, life-long learning, development of the student mind, problem solving, development of communication skills and collaborative learning. Some of these attributes, often assumed by Western observers to belong to Western education have been highlighted in this Chapter as areas that Chinese students studying in the UK at HE level, are supposedly lacking in. There are assumptions that Chinese students are not encouraged to learn and develop such skills in China, hence the reasons some tensions exist. They are assumed by some (as discussed earlier in this Chapter) to be disadvantaged in China from learning in large groups and doing little more than engaging in rote learning, through teacher-led activities. And yet, these students are experiencing education in China that at times mirrors a Western or at least contains core characteristics of a Western style education. It can be ascertained, therefore, that experience of education in the West for Chinese students may not be (or should not be, if the recent education reforms have any bearing) as alien to them as is so often presumed in Western academic circles. However, as pointed out by Tan and Hairon (2016, p324), China's education system in such a populous country is not only diverse in its educational development across the provinces but also 'uneven'. Despite China's effort to roll out this reform across China, some areas in the Central and Western parts of the country are less advanced in the implementation process than in the East, with stark differences in resources and competencies between those in rural and urban areas. This could provide one explanation for the continuation of common classroom behavioural characteristics in our visiting Chinese students, depending on individual representations of those characteristics. Furthermore, Ryan (2011, p4) highlights that the introduction of this reform has not been welcomed by all with open arms and is not without challenges, as many educators in China have wrestled with attempting to synthesise 'the best aspects of traditional teaching and learning practices' with reportedly successful education practices that are being imported

from the West. For some, there is a reluctance to take on Western ideas that seem to challenge 'deep-seated cultural practices' and yet despite challenges and associated hostility toward external Western influences on the reform structure, these reforms have gone ahead (Ryan, 2011, p4). To avoid implementing a top-down approach, there continues to be consideration of cultural values and localised engagement and evidence of the application of hybrid models i.e., Western models of education with 'Chinese characteristics' (Ryan, 2011, p4). Kember (2016) suggests that the integration of Western models of education into China's education system has focused on a fostering of creativity, alongside an emphasis on critical thinking, project-based learning, independent learning skills and problem solving. According to Kember (2016) China's preoccupation with academic excellence through rote learning has been supported by a Western model of education that encourages a more holistic approach to teaching and learning that aims at developing effective communication skills. Kember (2016) further suggests that while a combination of Western and Chinese models of education exist in China, the Chinese system continues to maintain its own structure and characteristics. However, Deng (2011) believes that China's modernization of education continues to be problematic with tensions between 'Western thinking and indigenous educational tradition' and the creation of these hybrid pedagogies (p561). Furthermore, as suggested by Wu (2011) such hybridization, as effective as it might seem, runs the risk of abandoning cultural diversity where the 'ancient vision of Confucian pedagogy becomes lost in the name of progress and integration' and as such becomes a 'threat to cultural plurality' (p571).

Tan and Hairon (2016) in conducting research in some urban and rural areas in China have identified some local key challenges that teachers and school Principals have encountered during this reform process. The move away from a so called 'exam-culture that inhibits the flourishing of new spaces', has for some teachers, been difficult to understand and manage as it has not only meant a change in the way that education is delivered but also a necessary change in the 'mind-set' of many practitioners (Tan and Hairon, 2016, p322). Expectations for schools to demonstrate academic excellence by producing students who can compete for university places has created a reluctance in certain institutions to create classroom communities that focus on anything other than exam development activities (Tan and Hairon, 2016). Competition for university places is 'fierce' and schools are aware of this (Ryan, 2011, p4) with teaching practices often 'focused and ruthless' to help students pass their exams and be competitively placed to be in a position to apply to Chinese universities (Biggs and Watkins, 1996, p277). Some critics of the reform have suggested that comparable exam results obtained before and during the reform indicate lower academic achievement and 'foundational knowledge and skills are not as solid', suggesting that the quality of education has been degraded (Liu and Kang, 2011, p34). For these and other reasons, many teachers and Principals have reverted to the old system or simply continued to use it with its so called 'old fashioned methods' and approaches (Liu and Kang, 2011). Rarely, if at all, are teachers and Principals observed or monitored by government education officials to check the implementation of and engagement in this reform (Liu and Kang, 2011, p39).

In *Education Reform in China: Changing Concepts, Contexts and Practices* Ryan (2011) considers the impact of education reform on Chinese students and suggests that outside of China, there is limited awareness of these reforms and impacts. This aligns well with this dissertation topic and Western academic generalisations surrounding Chinese students that are often generated without sincere knowledge of their recent experiences of education in China. Ryan (2011) showcases considerations of whether the curriculum reform with its focus on changes in the teaching and learning approach has achieved what it set out to achieve. In asking if Chinese students are now more versatile in their critical thinking and problem-solving skills, Ryan (2011) questions what the reform looks like for Chinese students and the educators that are working with them. Liu and Kang (2011) who through their roles as key drivers of this eighth-curriculum reform, provide evidence from their work inside China's education forum of a more democratic classroom with successful (albeit with challenges,) implementation of curriculum content that is more aligned to students' experiences, interests, and motivations. For them there is a sense of optimism. Following the piloting of a compulsory education curriculum (2001-2004) in secondary schools across China, there was an intense period of evaluation, reporting, feedback, and independent appraisal. During the completion stage (2004-2007) of this compulsory education curriculum evidence was gathered, as organised by the MOE, through surveys and consultations with a selection of stakeholders consisting of education authorities, schoolteachers and principals and education experts. This evidence, according to Liu and Kiang (2011, p31) highlighted an increase in student motivation, demonstration of critical thinking skills and a 'sense of responsibility and collaboration'.

In 2006, President Hu Jintao called for a deeper focus on student creativity and innovation, suggesting that a transmission method of education be replaced by innovation, maintaining that students need to be inspired by 'curiosity and exploration' (Liu and Kiang, 2011, p35). From August 2007 onwards China's education reform began a stage of re-reflection and further implementation of its reforms. Liu and Kiang (2011) note changes in some education establishments that took part in the reform that include not only a different approach to teaching but also an increase in subject variation, changes in textbooks, and a shortening of the weekly number of teaching and learning hours that students are expected to engage in. Most importantly, they observe that the implementation of the new curriculum has been a collaborative effort 'democratic, open, scientific, equal, dialogic and consultative' (Liu and Kang p34). Recognising that the changes will take time to recognize, they are confident that this combination of Eastern and Western education will augment confidence for all stakeholders involved. Ryan (2011) believes that this evidence of engagement with this reform is admirable even if uneven across areas of China. However, despite Liu and Kang's optimism, they continue to witness amongst Chinese academic circles a despondency towards these reforms with some evidence of a decline in the quality of learning with areas of concern surrounding methods being used and the presence of old teaching and learning habits that will not go away overnight.

According to Ryan (2011), for China's public there is a sense of pride in the country's economic growth and standing in the world and this partly shines through in the recent education reform practices. However, many scholars believe that taking on Western education strategies must not erode China's 'local wisdom and traditions' (Ryan, 2011, p4). Deng (2011) suggests that modernization has resulted, to a degree, in a homogeneity of pedagogic practices around the world with culturally diverse countries adopting similar curriculum structures. Deng (2011, p562) considers China to be an interesting example of the complexities of interaction between 'Western educational thinking' and 'indigenous cultural heritage' and its transformations of pedagogy in the name of the 'modernization of education'. Deng (2011) highlights the tension between the hybridization of the two, emphasising the need for continual adaptation and modification in socio-cultural contexts. On the topic of standardization, Deng (2011) believes that it has linked China's education system with a global consumer model of education that focuses on the development of a workforce and as such, an education that has been significantly influenced by Confucianism with a focus on morality and ethics has been taken over by the importation of Western educational values. However, for some Chinese educators, according to Deng (2011, p564) there is a resurgence of Confucianism with views that 'China should return to its own roots of inspiration'. Either way, for Ryan (2011, p5), mutual respect must be encouraged so that the West can also learn from China through 'dialogue between the worlds great civilizations and intellectual traditions'.

Each of the reforms discussed so far, going as far back as the late Qing Dynasty, highlight China's active participation in the arena of education and demonstrate that Chinese educators have not simply been 'passive imbibers of Western knowledge' (Bailey, 2013, p417). However, there are many layers of complexities in each reform, and overlaps between them. It may be deduced from this discussion that commonly held Western views of Chinese students and their learning characteristics, as discussed earlier in this Chapter, do not seem to have considered the details of Chinese education reforms that suggest something other than an education system that is led by a Confucian pedagogy alone. However, even within China itself, there are contradictions and anomalies inherent in these reforms. As suggested by the eighth education reform, according to Ryan, 2011, proponents of a Western type of education (as opposed to traditional Chinese) have promoted it has a means to a 'deep' learning experience and yet supporters of a Confucian style education believe that at the root of a Confucius pedagogy is the enhancement of 'deep' learning that is facilitated by appropriate teaching and learning strategies. Understanding and unravelling the reforms discussed in this Chapter has been challenging due to ambiguities created by overlaps of reforms, some repetitive aims and strategies and discontinuities in the education reforms. Furthermore, it has been surprising to learn of regular periods of a rejection of a Confucian pedagogy that seem to be integral to most of the reforms. However, what is apparent is the regular appearance of elements of Western education in China's education system. Such perplexities have reminded me of Dewey's thoughts that resulted from his two-and-a-half-year visit to China,

beginning in 1919. Wang and Weir (2007) in exploring Dewey's time in China and relevance to education, indicate that Dewey in viewing China as a country of contradictions, perplexities and fascinations, considered it to be very much at the other side of the world in every sense. It is possible to relate Dewey's experience and understanding of China to the country's periods of education reform and anomalies and these reforms and experiences of Chinese students need to be at least partially understood as relative to the country's political, social, and cultural heritage. China's education reform periods do not stop here. As recent as 2016, China was continuing with the development of both short- and long-term education initiatives and promoting equitable education and lifelong learning opportunities through its national medium- and long-term education reform and development plan (2010-2020) (Zhu, 2019, p354). More recently China has introduced the "Double Reduction" policy and on 21st December 2021 the MOE during a Press Conference updated the progress made since the beginning of this initiative in September of the same year (MOE, 2021). Aimed at softening the study pressures that Chinese students face in China, the policy states a reduction in homework and after school private education/tutoring activity. Benefits of the policy were presented at the Press Conference which claimed that private tutoring organizations have decreased by 83% for the face-to-face market and 84% for the online market. Furthermore, it was claimed that more than 90% of students had felt the benefits of a reduction in homework and an increase in time to rest (MOE, 2021). Through restricting many private education providers from operating as profit making institutions through via private tutoring, the "Double Reduction" Policy has had a significant impact on many organizations who are now seeking alternative models of business to stay afloat. Private tuition has, according to Jin and Cortazzi (2006) been a popular option for parents to help their children improve their English language or develop in subject areas. Parents and students alike are said to have relied on this type of education provision to help facilitate successful entry into a university in China or abroad, in a highly competitive study environment (Jin and Cortazzi, 2006). However, it has been ascertained by the Chinese Government that such provision, delivered outside of the classroom hours (normally evening and weekends) significantly contributes to a study work overload, while lining the pockets of private providers and such activity should be managed by schools in the form of after school extra-curricular provision. Time will tell whether this decrease in top-up education provision for students provided by private organizations will have a noticeable impact on Chinese student behaviour and performance when coming to study in the UK.

China's education reforms have been intense and at times difficult to implement and yet as pointed out by Zhu (2019) it has made considerable progress in the area of education. Its newest education reform is the first stage (2020-2035) towards achieving China's socialist modernization, helping fulfill China's realization of 'the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics' (Zhu, 2019, p355). According to Zhu (2019, p357), through China's Education Modernization 2035 Plan, the country will become:

> “a prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful socialist nation by the middle of the 21st century”.

According to Zhu (2019, p355), aimed at bringing China into a modern socialist country that is ‘wealthy, democratic and harmonious’, China’s Education Modernization 2035 Plan created by China’s MOE was launched in February 2019. Through this plan, one can identify China’s sharpening of focus on providing equal access to education for its citizens through the standardization of compulsory education, with key components of this reform aimed at creating a contemporary education system which requires another detailed review of primary, secondary and HE education provision. To help achieve its aims there will be an increase in financial investment to facilitate the development of a high quality and internationally competitive education that includes the creation of new world-class universities that will also increase international interest in studying in China (Xi and Zhang, 2019). For the university sector in China, a significant focus will centre around internal quality assurance, rather than a reliance on external inspections which has, according to Xi and Zhang (2019) been the main quality assurance mechanism used so far. This new drive for reform has reportedly also been a response to the international world organizations global education strategies, including the World Bank and UNESCO’s 2015 ‘Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good’ paper (Zhu, 2019).

As part of China’s modernization strategy, this education reform is, according to Zhu (2019, p355), expected to stimulate ‘a great rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation’ and it will strengthen China’s national identity and its international role on the world stage. According to Xi and Zhang (2019, np), this plan is committed to forging ahead in ‘innovation, quality assurance and lecturer training’. It is divided into eight key areas: the prioritization of education, people-orientation, the development of well-being, lifelong learning, personalized teaching, the integration of knowledge and practice, integrated development and the co-construction of teaching and learning (Zhu, 2019). Reform actions include a review of education governance systems, an increase in educational technology, a focus on vocational education and a heightened awareness of effective attendance monitoring and implementation strategies (Zhu, 2019, p356). There will be a tightened focus on teacher quality with increased access to teacher training in the areas of pre-employment and continuing professional development (CPD) once teachers are in their roles (Xi and Zhang, 2019). According to Xi and Zhang (2019), the plan recognizes that many teachers in China may need to re-consider their established ways of teaching and learning and to also embrace educational technologies and new developments in this sphere of education. Zhu (2019) points out that although this reform has already been launched, local provinces are currently in the process of producing their own local plans that demonstrate intentions and strategies for implementation. It remains to be seen whether this reform will be successfully adopted nationwide or will also face a similar set of challenges as those experienced in the attempt at implementation of the eight reform, discussed above. Either way, the past educational experiences of contemporary Chinese students undertaking HE study in the UK should be taken into consideration as

part of the reciprocal dialogue that is being advocated by Ryan (2011). The following Chapter will introduce EAP as a lead into how Chinese participants of this study understand and make meaning of it in their UK HE study environment.

Chapter 4: Introduction to English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

Chapter 1.3: 'The Role of English for Academic Purposes' provided a brief overview of EAP as a concept and this Chapter offers an elaboration of that overview. However due to the scope of this study, it is only possible to present a broad outline of EAP and discussions surrounding it, as relevant to the dissertation purpose. This Chapter begins with an introduction to the background and purpose of EAP. This is followed by a discussion around the Academic Skills Module (AES) as the module that is the focus of this study. Key tensions that exist in the EAP arena are then discussed and the Chapter concludes with my thoughts on AES, in relation to the purpose of education, before leading into Chapter 5.

4.1 EAP: Background, Purpose, and Approaches

According to MacDiarmid and MacDonald (2021, p2), EAP is present in and influenced by diverse political, cultural, education and geographical contexts. It has been embraced, since the 1980's and 1990's, by many universities across the world and is increasingly more widely recognized as a discipline. As referred to in Chapter 1.3 'The Role of English for Academic Purposes (EAP)', EAP as an English Language Teaching (ELT) term was, according to EAPFoundation (2020), first documented in 1974. In 1975 at the Special English Language Materials for Overseas University Students (SELMOUS) Conference at the University of Birmingham it was reportedly officially referred to as a branch of English Language Teaching (ELT). Sitting under the umbrella of ELT it emerged, according to Ding and Bruce (2017, p32), in response to a recognised need for 'specialised streams of ELT' to support the academic and professional needs of international students. Emerging further from what Hyland and Shaw (2016, p1) call 'the fringes of the English for specific purposes (ESP) movement in the 1980's', EAP differs from general English language teaching and learning or learning English for occupational, such as English for Business, purposes. Ding and Bruce (2017, p37) state that the overarching aim of EAP is to allow students to develop and integrate knowledge and skills that will enable effective participation at HE level. It takes students beyond learning general English to exploring 'new kinds of literacy' with the intention of providing students with appropriate communication skills to successfully function in certain academic and cultural environments (Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002, p2). According to Clark and Gieve (2006) EAP, in its assumption that the development of skills is one of the core functions of education, offers international students training not only in academic English language development but also general study and critical thinking skills. Clark and Gieve (2006) report that through the study of EAP, students are provided with an opportunity to reconcile the learning gap between their home education institution and their new academic environment, and to increase their levels of confidence and feelings of security in their study journey (Clark and Gieve, 2006). Throughout this journey, it is commonly acknowledged, according to Hyland and Shaw (2016), that students of EAP need to adopt new roles as they learn how to adapt in unfamiliar academic worlds and acclimatise to an

often-alien way of studying and communicating at HE level. To support this endeavour, Hyland and Shaw (2016, p1) assert that EAP, as a branch of applied linguistics, is centred around the communicative needs of students immersed in academic contexts and consists of four key principles, as follows:

Table 1. Four Main Principles of EAP

Concept	Gloss
Authenticity	Classroom texts and tasks should be as close to the real academic world as possible.
Groundedness	A commitment to link pedagogy and research. A research base underlies materials and instructional practices.
Interdisciplinarity	EAP is not itself a theory or a methodology but employs an eclectic range of theories and methods.
Relevance	Linguistic and contextual relevance is ensured through needs analysis.

Source: Hyland and Shaw (2016, p1)

Hyland and Shaw, 2016, p2) further point out that students of EAP are expected to engage with unfamiliar genres, to read academic content and reproduce it in writing, and to take part in unfamiliar speech activities such as seminar discussions and oral presentations, in English.

As highlighted by Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002), although predominantly taught to international students studying at HE level who are using English as a mode of instruction, it is also appropriate for academics around the world who are required to communicate and often publish in English and more recently has even found its way into some school classrooms. Blaj-Ward (2014, p6) suggests that it has received significant benefit from insights generated by EAP practitioners and for Ding and Bruce (2017), it is framed by theory and is a research-led discipline that is evidenced and supported by a growth in published research and discourse. In considering EAP as a discipline, Ding and Bruce (2017) briefly examine research and theories that they believe contribute to the knowledge base of EAP, regarding syllabus design, programme development, creation of materials, and pedagogical approach. These are highlighted by Ding and Bruce (2017, p37) as Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Corpus Linguistics, Genre Theory, Academic Literacies (Ac Lits) and Critical EAP (CEAP). While this Chapter does not have scope to discuss each of these approaches in detail, it does provide a brief outline of each to provide basic understanding in the context of this dissertation.

Developed by Michael Halliday, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is an approach that views language as a 'social semiotic' system, in other words, it is a 'meaning-making' system where the

emphasis is on the 'social use of language in context' (Ding and Bruce, 2017, p9). Coffin and Donohue (2012), explain an SFL approach to EAP as one that analyses the relationship between language, text and context, to support an understanding of academic discourses. In doing so, it considers language in use and the system of language to help explain how individuals make meaning through language and its relationship with society. Hood (2016, p202) suggests that SFL helps in the discipline of EAP to unravel the 'un-commonsense nature of academic knowledge in different fields' by taking an approach that is predominantly linguistic. This approach has informed some EAP practices that focus on linguistic features in a text and is considered useful in disciplinary contexts (Ding and Bruce, 2017, p9).

Corpus linguistics, according to Ding and Bruce (2017), is also a popular approach in the EAP arena. It is concerned with gathering, through computer aided analysis, naturally occurring language data (corpus) in the written text, including transcriptions of oral communication, and highlighting frequency of linguistic items (Ding and Bruce, 2017). According to Nesi (2016, p206), this approach to EAP offers opportunities for 'data-driven learning' and helps to increase understanding of academic discourses. It is, as pointed out by Nesi (2016), useful for researchers who wish to examine features of different types of academic texts and according to Ding and Bruce (2017) it is regarded as valuable in the identification of vocabulary in academic contexts and has made a significant contribution to vocabulary research in EAP.

Ding and Bruce (2017, p10) assert that genre theory has contributed most to the knowledge base of EAP and has been widely welcomed and implemented in EAP professional communities. They point out that there are varying approaches to the use of genre theory in EAP with the most common being an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach that looks at categorising and analysing the kind of texts that EAP students are asked to write (Ding and Bruce, 2017). Flowerdew (2011, p140), in considering genre analysis and in drawing on the work of Swales 1990; Bhatia 1993, 2004; Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995; Johns 1997, offers a definition of genre from an ESL perspective: 'Genres are staged, structured, communicative events, motivated by various communicative purposes of specific discourse communities'. For Shaw (2016, p243), genre analysis in EAP helps to facilitate genre knowledge for those who are positioned 'outside the circle of expert producers of the texts…' by an exploration of not only the text itself but also its situation and function. Shaw (2016) in proposing that many academic writers typically focus on the content of a text and do not necessarily have expert knowledge of the formal features of some genres, suggests that in this respect genre analysis in EAP practices is a useful approach.

Emerging in connection to widening participation agendas in the UK, Academic Literacies (Ac Lits), according to Blaj-Ward (2014, p34), steers attention away from the development of skills, towards exploring the complexities of inhabiting academic communities or practice. Lillis and Tuck (2016) propose that while mainstream EAP aims at helping students to be successful in their studies through

being introduced to academic genres and conventions, it typically guides them in how to engage with these genres and conventions, rather than how to challenge them. In that respect, they favour an Academic Literacies (Ac Lits) approach to EAP which they consider to be more transformative in nature in that, instead of reifying academic conventions, attempts to view them as 'contested/able' (Lillis and Tuck, 2016, p33). For Ding and Bruce (2017, p13) proponents of this approach support the challenging of 'types of socially ordained constraints faced by a range of academic writers'. Lillis & Tuck (2016, p30) highlight how Ac Lits is a recent empirical and theoretical field, that in drawing upon critical theories, bestows an interest in academic writing and reading as 'ideologically shaped, reflecting institutional structures and relations of power'. While there may be, according to Blaj-Ward (2014), a shared concentration on academic discourse in mainstream EAP and Ac Lits, there are variations in pedagogic practices, with some critics arguing that Ac Lits it does not sufficiently address the linguistic competency of students.

Lillis and Tuck (2016) propose that Critical EAP (CEAP) is more aligned to Ac Lits than mainstream EAP, as it considers the life experiences of students who bring to the classroom diverse layers of knowledge. Benesch (2009, p81) advocates CEAP as an approach that 'widens the lens of academic purposes to take the socio-political context of teaching and learning into account' and does so by considering the 'complex' social identities (class, race, gender, age, ethnicity) of both tutor and student. By scrutinizing the hierarchical structures of societies and institutes, CEAP explores the roles that individuals play within those structures and the relative presence of power relations while searching for areas of potential change (Benesch, 2009, p81). For Benesch (2009) mainstream EAP fails to consider the social issues that may be impacting the lives of students, such as job prospects and financial position. It does, however, have the potential to adopt a critical stance in which an exploration of these types of issues could allow students to engage in political processes that could enhance their lives (Benesch, 2009). While recognizing that there are some who criticise CEAP for having a supposed agenda that is 'activist' in nature, Ding and Bruce (2017, p15), promote it as a useful approach to EAP if considered for 'consciousness-raising' purposes. This aligns with Giroux and Giroux's (2006, p28) support of critical pedagogy that despite its political and moral stance, does not aim to endorse a 'propagandistic' view, rather it aims at promoting a classroom environment that is 'fused with a spirit of inquiry' and a 'culture of questioning' (p29). However, Hyland and Shaw (2016) question if it should be the responsibility of the EAP professional to explore 'the academic socio-political status quo to critique these cultural and linguistic resources' (p5) or to develop a student's academic literacy skills to facilitate successful entry into university study.

As pointed out by Hyland (2016) there are questions about how EAP achieves what it sets out to, and debates continue to this day about just how discipline specific EAP should be. According to Hyland (2016), there are some that believe that English for General Academic Purposes (referred to by Gillett (2022) as EGAP) is adequate in meeting the requirements of international students. EGAP concentrates

on general and generic academic skills which are considered transferable across university disciplines (Gillett, 2022). Hyland (2016, p20) suggests that an EGAP approach typically 'disguises variability' through viewing 'academic literacy as a single, overarching practice' with students being required to 'isolate skills, language forms and study activities thought to be common to all disciplines' (p18). Hyland and Shaw (2016, p4) when discussing EGAP suggest that even though at times EAP treats literacy as something that may be taught as a 'set of discrete, value-free rules and technical skills used in any situation', this approach has seemingly proved successful in many tertiary contexts. However, as pointed out by Hyland (2016), there are EAP academics who favour a more discipline specific approach (referred to by Gillett (2022), as English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP)) as different disciplines may require distinctive styles of writing and have varying requirements with regard to how to evaluate and reference texts. A key question in this debate is whether there are language skills and features that may be transferred and utilised across these disciplines, or if a more specific approach is required (Hyland, 2016). In presenting a case for specificity in EAP (ESAP), Hyland (2016) suggests that this approach may be more effective in increasing student motivation as students spend time focusing on features of language, skills, and genres that are appropriate to their individual subject specialism, while potentially initiating knowledge that is subject specific. Expanding this point, Hyland (2016, p22) highlights that 'ways of knowing' are linked to learning how to write in a subject and 'learners are required to think their way into their disciplines by learning to craft their writing in community-specific ways' (p21). Interestingly, supporting this viewpoint, when considering the AES module which follows an EGAP approach (see 4.2 The Academic English Skills (AES) Module below for further detail), feedback obtained from students on a termly basis, regularly highlights that many of the students lack motivation to study AES, and question its lack of integration with academic subjects. Yet, as suggested by Hyland (2016), there are additional challenges highlighted in this debate including the suggestion that EAP professionals typically have significantly less disciplinary knowledge than discipline specialists thus making it challenging for them to teach specific EAP. Blaj-Ward (2014) suggests that rather than debate which one is better, EGAP or ESAP, EAP professionals in varying roles should be guided by the context and student needs when adopting a particular approach. Finally, as pointed out by MacDiarmid and MacDonald (2021), specificity in some foundation programmes and pre-sessional courses is now becoming more common.

Supporting EAP as a discipline, irrespective of selected approach, is the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP). Replacing SELMOUS (mentioned earlier in this Chapter) in 1989, it operates as a global forum for EAP professionals, and offers individual and institutional membership while aiming to bring together EAP professionals through conference activity, dialogue and awareness raising of EAP as a discipline. As part of that support and to highlight the responsibilities of an EAP tutor, particularly for those who are new to the profession, it provides a

BALEAP Competency Framework for Teachers of English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP, 2008), with an Overall Competency Statement as follows:

> 'An EAP teacher will be able to facilitate students' acquisition of the language, skills strategies required for studying in a further or higher education context and to support students' understanding of approaches to interpreting and responding to the requirements of academic tasks and their related processes' (BALEAP, 2008, p3).

The BALEAP (2008, p3) 'Summary of Competency Statements' outlines the industries' expectations of core teacher competencies, categorised under the following headings: Academic Practice, EAP Students, Curriculum Development, Programme Implementation. EAP tutors engaging with the framework are expected to evidence a 'systematic understanding of the main theoretical areas of a discipline and critical awareness of current issues' (BALEAP, 2008, p2). The purpose of the framework is multi-faceted and may, according to BALEAP (2008), be used for tutor recruitment and the training of tutors and is considered by MacDiarmid and MacDonald (2021) as a useful guide for EAP tutors. However, as pointed out by MacDiarmid and MacDonald (2021) pedagogies that are EAP specific, in other words, what is occurring in EAP classrooms to facilitate learning, have been given limited attention since the emergence of EAP as a discipline. Instead, attention appears to be centred around the studying the rhetorical and linguistic characteristics of academic discourse rather than the EAP practitioner (MacDiarmid and MacDonald, 2021).

The development and popularity of EAP is partly due, according to MacDiarmid and MacDonald, (2021) to HE's internationalization agenda. Indeed, the aggressive recruitment of international students as part of HE internationalization strategies (refer to Chapter 1.2 'Professional Context', for more on this) plays a significant role in the increasing provision of EAP programmes across the globe. When applying for undergraduate or postgraduate study in the UK, international students who do not meet the required English language entry level need to enrol on an EAP programme to be delivered (in most cases) by the selected university. Many UK universities offer an academic year and shorter pre-sessional programmes, with the entry point being defined by a student's level of English language. A short term Pre-sessional programme tends to be intense, spanning over a 10- or 5-week period. Following successful completion of a programme, students can enter their chosen undergraduate or postgraduate programme without having to submit another IELTS, or equivalent, score. A long term Pre-sessional programme (varying in name depending on education establishment) can span an academic year and may require full-time study (15+ hours per week). Global education pathway providers are also involved in this space and as highlighted by Gillett (2022) the pathway programmes that they offer include academic subjects, with the EAP component running alongside these subjects. The AES module which is a focus area of this dissertation falls into this bracket. There are universities that also offer In-sessional EAP Programmes that are designed to support students during their period of academic study and take place alongside their university academic programme (Gillett, 2022). Finally, as highlighted

by Blaj-Ward (2014), different terminologies exist within the EAP domain, that are dependent on context and preference. The AES module is one such terminology and will be discussed following the next section: 'Tensions in the EAP Arena'.

4.2 Tensions in the EAP Arena

There are tensions surrounding EAP that are worth noting. Firstly, the growth of EAP across the globe is, according to Hyland and Shaw (2016, p5), being interpreted by some as an additional negative contribution to the socio-political implications of the dominance of the English language. This layer of dominance impacts directly upon the daily lives of some scholars and international students who are forced to engage in EAP, and who are required to write in, and often publish in, a language which is not their native one (Hyland and Shaw, 2016). Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002, p9) argue that engagement with EAP is not 'a politically neutral activity' and they refer to Canagarajah's thoughts surrounding the growth of the English language as a commodity. In doing so, they highlight Canagarajah's argument that the spread of the use of the English language 'works to maintain socio-political elites' while reinforcing Third World country dependency (Canagrajah, 1999, cited Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002). This is sometimes reinforced, according to Hyland and Shaw (2016, p5), in the EAP domain, by a lack of appreciation and respect for the wealth of student cultures and backgrounds as 'they lump individuals together, ignore differences and devalue their practices'. However, and reassuringly, Hyland and Shaw (2016) point out that this neglect of appreciation now receives much more of a response and deserved attention than it once did. In referring to English as the academic lingua franca, Mauranen et al. (2016) point out that while there are some that propose that EAP does nothing more than magnify the disadvantage for those academics whose first language is not English, there are proponents that believe it expands opportunities for the sharing of research and developments across the globe. Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002), support this in recognizing that while EAP can indeed be considered a commercial activity that is spanning the global HE industry, it does offer students of varying education levels an opportunity to be successful in their studies when learning through English as a mode of instruction. EAP programmes, irrespective of their commodified nature, are, according to Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002, p2), enabling students to have the communicative skills required to engage in certain cultural and academic contexts.

The 'instrumental stance' of EAP, however, is, according to Hyland and Shaw (2016, p7), a regular cause of disagreement and area of critique. In Chapter 2 'The Positioning of UK HE in the Globalised Arena' I discussed education in a globalised, commodified, and neoliberal context and now find Ding and Bruce (2017, p12) exploring EAP in this same context as they suggest that 'ideological, economic, social and political influences' have helped inform EAP within a HE environment. Ding and Bruce (2017) propose that EAP is focused on outcomes that are arranged around business and profit with requirements for students to develop academic literacies in a noticeably short space of time and is indeed

believed by some to be a product of a neoliberal approach to education. Simons and Masschelein (2008) propose that the majority of English for Academic Skills modules focus on skills for success (as evidenced in the AES module, outlined below, see 4.3 'The Academic English Skills (AES) Module)' and are therefore merely advocating a neo-liberal approach to education that provides added value rather than higher learning. For many students studying EAP, the academic context is very remote from their education experiences, and the content can seem unconnected to their lives, which potentially erodes any intrinsic benefits of learning, as pertinent to a human capital model of education (Simons and Masschelein, 2008). Busch (2018) shares concerns that by encouraging an intense development of skills as a means to an end (in the case of EAP, to progress to the chosen university) there is the possibility that learners are missing opportunities to experience the pleasures of study and increased knowledge. Furthermore, Rao (2018) suggests that the objectives of EAP cannot be naively understood as a response to student needs. Rather, through socially constructed regulations and rules, they unite with the dominance of HE institutional requirements that impose academic conventions that have naturalised this social construction process (Rao, 2018). Benesch (2001, cited Hyland and Shaw, 2016, p6) asserts that EAP students are indeed being slotted into 'the cogs of the institutional machine'.

Finally, Hyland and Shaw (2016) suggest that the practical application of EAP often results in it being considered by some as inferior to disciplines that are more theoretical in nature. Compounding this criticism is the view that the EAP tutor is often considered to be nothing more than the provider of a support function to subject specialists (Hyland and Shaw, 2016, p2). This Chapter will now discuss the AES module that is delivered by Provider A to international students studying on the IY2 programme and in doing so, will link with relevant literature discussed so far.

4.3 The Academic English Skills (AES) Module

4.3.1 Introduction to the Module

As previously mentioned, EAP programmes or modules are not only provided by university departments but also by private pathway education programme providers. For the latter, students are required to study an EAP module as part of their pathway programme and as highlighted by Blaj-Ward (2014) it is not common for these providers to integrate this module with the academic subjects. The AES module that is delivered by the education provider in which I work for (Provider A) falls into this category; it is offered as a stand-alone and non-integrated module. How Chinese students experience and make meaning of this module provides the backbone of this dissertation. The following section provides an overview of the module.

As touched upon in 1.3 'The Role of English for Academic Purposes (EAP)', students who enrol on either a UFP, IY2 or PMP Programme with Provider A are required to study the AES module, which is delivered alongside subject modules, and consists of 5 direct contact hours per week. The IY2

programme which the participants in this study are enrolled on totals 28 weeks. Delivered by each of the provider's International Study Centres (ISC's) ranging from Aberdeen to Durham to Dublin and Florida, the AES module has been created by the Global Head of AES Curriculum and is managed by a Head of English in each ISC. The core aim of this module is to support students in their development of reading, writing, speaking, listening, critical thinking and independent learning skills, in an academic context. It is designed, according to Provider A (2022), to offer language and academic skills training to encourage students to be successful in their academic studies at university. Using an EGAP and a genre-based approach, AES focuses on the development of generic academic skills and covers writing an extended essay, understanding the longer text, listening to lectures, enhancing presentation skills and taking part in seminar discussions. By using an EGAP approach there is a standardisation of AES across the ISC's, irrespective of what discipline the student has chosen. Although it could fall under the watchful eye of critics who would rather endorse an ESAP approach to EAP (as discussed previously in this Chapter), in this education pathway context the fact that students can change their choice of major at any point in their pathway programme, right up to the point of completion, is taken into consideration as offering students flexibility.

4.3.2 Academic Writing

As noted by Blaj-Ward (2014), academic writing, viewed as central to a student's academic experience, has received significant attention from EAP researchers and practitioners. As a result, a variety of approaches to writing are being implemented across EAP communities. Reminded of Hyland and Shaw's (2016, p2) reference to how EAP students are expected to 'write and read unfamiliar genres' and to consistently read and 'recreate it in writing', students studying the AES module have the same requirements. Using academic conventions, they are required to research a topic and to write, based on their research, an extended piece of writing of approximately 2,500 words, as a piece of summative assessment. As AES follows an EGAP method there is no discipline focus to this writing task, and students are given a selection of topical essay titles to choose from by the tutor, rather than being able to select their own. When discussing a pragmatist stance in second language learning, Silva (1997, p359) in writing 'On the Ethical Treatment of ESL Writers' suggests that tutors should avoid thrusting topic titles, such as 'peace education, conflict resolution, environmental concerns, political issues, particular ideologies, literature, critical thinking', upon students and instead focus on the strategic issues related to writing. Students should be given an opportunity to write about their own topic and should at the same time, have their own styles of writing respected (Silva, 1997). Pennycook (1997, cited Haque, 2007, p89) argues that if topics are tangential to students, they may not fully question the topic which could potentially result in them being unable to critically engage. That said, students are encouraged through this task to develop their paraphrasing skills, to summarize effectively, understand stages and structure of academic writing, learn about academic integrity and to develop and support an author's position. Overall, the approach to this writing piece is process driven. According to the British Council

(2023, np), a writing process approach considers writing as a 'creative act' that should involve informative and positive feedback within the process, rather than giving feedback just at the end of a completed writing task. The students studying AES are offered an opportunity to submit their essay as a draft and to receive feedback from the tutor, prior to a final submission. Stages of the process writing, are stated by the British Council (2023) as consisting of pre-writing activity, focusing in on ideas, evaluation, structuring of text and editing and in this regard this is how AES students are guided to complete their extended essay. This AES essay task is a significant activity for students and how this is understood by the participants of this study is explored in Chapter 6.2.2. 'Challenges of Oral and Written Communication'.

4.3.3 Curriculum & Integration of Critical Thinking

According to Advance HE (2017, np), an internationalised curriculum is one that provides students with 'global perspectives of their discipline' while supporting them in acquiring 'a set of values and skills to operate in diverse cultural environments'. Attempting to internationalise the curriculum, AES weaves global topics (generic, not discipline specific as such) into module content. Many of these topics are unfamiliar to Chinese students (the international student cohort chosen for dissertation purposes) and they are required to question, analyse, evaluate and to engage in critical thinking, often with limited or any referential connection to the topic or relationship to individual values and aspirations. From my experience of working with this module, firstly as Head of English, secondly and in a more detached role, as Head of Centre, contextualisation is minimal, and appreciation of cultural and educational differences, learning needs and life experiences, exist only at a superficial level. Nevertheless, there is an expectation for students to critically engage with set topics and to demonstrate a critical stance at each stage of reading, writing, listening and speaking skill development. Each AES lesson closes with a short section called 'Critical Thinking' that, through a set of questions, encourages students to reflect and critically discuss what they have been covering during the lesson. Additionally, one of the weeks is dedicated to 'Criticality', suggesting that critical thinking can be taught and learned as a discrete skill. This approach to critical thinking conflicts with Giroux's (2010, p716) endorsement of Freire's belief that critical thinking is 'a tool for self-determination and civic engagement' and not something that should be taught and tested. How the participants understand Critical Thinking and its integration in the AES module is explored in 6.3. 'Theme: Critical Thinking and Chinese Students'.

4.3.4 The Development of Listening, Speaking and Reading Skills

The development of listening skills, assessed through mid and end of term summative exams, focuses on identifying main ideas in lectures, listening for specific detail, effective note-taking skills, recognizing digressions and understanding lecture structures. Likewise, a student's ability to communicate orally, is assessed through a mid and end of term summative exam, in the form of seminar

discussions and poster presentations. The development of speaking skills is encouraged through an integrated skills approach in appropriate lessons and outlined as 'Integrated Skills: Listening into Speaking'. The key areas of concentration are academic discussions, presentations and seminars but also include pronunciation and language work. For the development of reading skills, students learn about how to find sources, how to effectively skim and scan texts for key information, how to deal with unfamiliar vocabulary in texts, how to identify author stance and how to critically evaluate information. Independent learning is encouraged, and students have access to an online independent learning platform called 'Insendi' that is populated with an abundance of independent learning tasks. Following an inspection of the AES module, UK ENIC which is the 'UK National Information Centre for Global Qualifications and Skills', produced a 2019 Executive Statement. Within this statement it is reported that the module was well-designed in helping to develop and test academic English language skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking, and providing students with a suitably broad exposure to English to support their wider academic life.

In familiarising oneself with the AES module, it could be understood that Provider A is intending to train students in how to integrate academic practices into their study and therefore be suitably prepared for entry to university. Additionally, by encouraging autonomous learning and critical thinking through classroom practice, it could be ascertained that Provider A is a supporter of a liberal education that encourages individuals to flourish through education. However, success in AES for these pathway students is measured by the accumulated grades of a heavy assessment load and having the capacity to flourish could be questionable in this context. As highlighted by Hedge and MacKenzie (2016, p6), although considered a key learning development measurement strategy, assessment risks being counter-productive if over assessment takes place, often resulting in 'well drilled pupils who tend towards compliance not questioning'. This supports the thoughts of Giroux and Giroux (2006) who argue that teaching and learning should not relegated to the mastering of tests but should offer a space in which reasoning and critical engagement become possible. Formal feedback from both tutors and students of AES highlights a pattern of dissatisfaction relating to the number of summative assessments that are included in the module. Students are required to focus very much on passing exams (not too dissimilar to the supposed education system and experience in China, see Chapter 3.8.4 'Transformation Four – Standardization of Chinese Education' for more) in what could be considered an unrealistic timeframe. As a result, there is limited opportunity to experience any intrinsic benefits such as personal growth and creativity. In considering further, at this stage, the much-discussed exam culture of Chinese education - AES and indeed EAP in general, with the assessment focus over intense periods of study, may be reflecting that culture, without any intention of doing so. It is important to point out here that successful completion of AES is not only an aim of each student but also of each tutor and Head of English. Tutors, operating as professionals who wish for the best for their students, are also acutely aware of the ambitious expected progression rates of the ISC and the monitoring of this by both Provider A and the

partner university. Therefore, tension is intense to ensure that students are successful in their assessments. At the same time, the AES module is rigorously controlled by the Global Head of AES Curriculum and tutors have limited autonomy to veer away from or adapt the prescribed curriculum and outlined AES framework, although tutors will implement their own individual teaching styles into their classroom practice.

In further considering the AES module, I draw again upon Adeyemi and Adeyinka's (2003) promotion of a communitarian education that was referred to in Chapter 2.4 'The Purpose of Education', as one that is based on a lifelong development of the individual, partly realised through freedom, rather than indoctrination. For me, the AES module, developed and delivered by Provider A, falls more into the indoctrination category. It teaches a set way of doing things and expects students to study as a means to an end. In doing so, it runs the risk of creating a type of student who is led towards academic success, through compliant behaviour. This reminds me of Nussbaum's (2010) discussion around 'atomistic' individualism that erodes any opportunity for individual flourishment, due to a pre-occupation with passing exams and obtaining a qualification. AES as an intense and rigorous module has a rigid, prescriptive, and over assessed approach and in this respect falls short of promoting liberal education characteristics that include individual growth and flourishment. On the contrary, it could be argued that through study on this AES students are being encouraged towards docility, a characteristic that Nussbaum (2004) argues against when promoting a liberal education. However, it may also be argued that Provider A in its private international education function role is accomplishing two areas of responsibility 1) the satisfaction of students and relevant stakeholders, should the student achieve progression 2) fulfilling university partner contractual progression rate agreements. In doing so, the provider continues in its successful acquisition of growth while increasing its reputation within the pathway education sector.

Finally, while it may be recognised that I entered into this dissertation with a set of assumptions about how Chinese students may understand and experience their AES module, as falling under the umbrella of the discipline of EAP, I set out on this journey to ascertain if my set of assumptions are misguided and/or can be challenged. The following Chapter provides details on the methodology that was used to support this aim and begins with narrative inquiry.

Chapter 5: Methodology

In this Chapter I firstly articulate my understanding of narrative inquiry and discuss the reason behind my choice of adopting this interpretive research approach for this dissertation. Secondly, an outline of the participant selection process, the participants, and ethical considerations is presented, and followed by a description of the method of data collection used and the transcription process. The Chapter moves on to offer my Thematic Analysis, as the key analytical method of this research study. To encourage

claims of trustworthiness in this study, I draw upon Morrow's (2005, p251) discussion around standards of 'goodness' or 'trustworthiness'. Morrow (2005) suggests that irrespective of the research paradigm, these standards can be enhanced by evidencing sufficiency of and immersion in the data, and attention to subjectivity and reflexivity. This study attempts to demonstrate that attention has been given to each of these areas of research quality. Riessman (2008, p184) when considering trustworthiness of qualitative research, advises researchers to evidence arguments that are transparent and methodically presented and this is what I attempt to achieve in the following sections. Beginning with narrative inquiry, I outline not only my methodological approach but also my intentions to demonstrate the rigour and thoughtfulness that run throughout this study for the purposes of providing research quality and clarity to the reader.

5.1 Narrative Inquiry

An experiential qualitative research approach underpins the empirical component of this study. This approach is described by Braun and Clarke (2022, p160) as one that sees language as a tool for the communication of meaning and offers participants opportunities to 'give voice' to the tapestries of their lives. According to McAllum (2019, p365), arriving in the 1960's, narrative inquiry as a qualitative approach where 'ontologically, a given narrative is understood to present one view of reality among many other possibilities' began to firmly take root in the 1980's. Emerging, according to Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), in the area of humanities, it has sustained different definitions with continuing disagreements amongst scholars. Riessman (2008, p13) proposes that narrative inquirers are indeed a 'diverse bunch' that draw upon different traditions and approaches, yet, according to Clandinin and Rosiek (2007, p33), there are affinities and commonplaces among those who use narrative inquiry as a research approach. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) propose that narrative inquiry as a methodological response to the positive paradigms sees a shift towards finding different ways of thinking about experience. In aligning with Clandinin and Rosiek's (2007, p34) belief in narrative inquiry and advocacy of a 'Deweyan view of experience' as one that appreciates 'immediate human experience as the first and most fundamental reality we have', narrative inquiry as a methodological research approach is utilised in this study. In supporting a pragmatic ontology of experience, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007, p34) endorse Dewey's understanding of 'temporality' where experience is viewed as 'continuous and a 'changing stream'; experiences are 'in temporal transition', belonging to the past, the present and the future whereby social reality is not fixed. Individuals are continually 'in interaction with their situations in any experience' (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007, p34). Narrative inquiry facilitates an opportunity in this study to explore the experiences of the participants as they study the AES module at the ISC, and to understand how they make sense, through their storytelling, of their experiences that are continuous, affected by feelings and aspirations and situated in their educational context. While engaging in my narrative inquiry, I acknowledge Denzin's (2001, pxiii) assertion that narratives do not proffer foundations of truth, rather they 'create the very events they reflect upon' and are 'reflections *on*-not-

of the world as it is known'. For Riessman (2008, p10) the study of stories unveils truths about human experience and yet as she points out these truths are always 'incomplete', and 'partial' (Riessman, 2008, p186). Additionally, I acknowledge Riessman's (2008, p6) guidance to have no expectation of attaining 'an exclusively faithful representation of a reality' and in-fact I had no desire for this outcome. I anticipated that the inquiry would regularly shift with 'truths' materialising as interpretations of experiences and events, as opposed to accurate reproductions of them. This aligns with relativism as an ontological approach to research that according to Braun and Clarke (2022, p176) allows for unexpected events to occur and therefore open multiple avenues for participants to make sense of their experiences. In this respect, data do not 'reveal a single underlying truth but located sense-meaning' (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p176).

In considering definitions of terms used within narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007, p42) propose that 'story', as told by the storyteller is the 'phenomenon' and that 'narrative' in name offers the 'structured quality of experience to be studied' (the inquiry). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state that narrative inquirers explore, describe, and write narratives of people's lives that are shared through their storytelling. For Clandinin and Rosiek, (2007, p42) narrative inquiry attempts, through the study of experience as it is lived through storytelling, to respect individual experience as 'a source of important knowledge and understanding'. It involves the collection of stories to help us understand 'experience as lived and told' (Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk, 2007, p459). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007, p36) remind us that storytelling is not new; for as long as we can remember human beings have been sharing and living out their stories to those who will listen. In discussing the increasing use of narrative inquiry in education, Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p2) suggest that both learners and teachers are storytellers, they are 'characters in their own and other's stories'. In considering 'narrative', Riessman (2008, p187) suggests that it is not a direct report of storied events but rather 'one articulation' that is expressed from a point of view that aims at encouraging others to see the events in a way that is similar. In discussing narratives further, Riessman (2008) highlights that the diverse opinions of narrative inquirers are varying and conflicting interpretations of what a narrative is and what it is not, and narratives may emerge in:

> 'many forms and sizes from tightly bounded stories…to long narratives that build over the course of several interviews and traverse temporal and geographical space - biographical accounts that refer to entire lives or careers' (Riessman, 2008, p23).

Narratives range from being understood as an episode or a biography and/or a segment, with some inquirers seeking narrative coherence and some not (Riessman, 2008). Riessman (2008) proposes that many inquirers believe that a narrative unit cannot be recognised unless there exists a plot consisting of a beginning, middle and an end, and yet others, according to Savin-Baden and Niekerk (2007, p464) assert that 'narratives do not necessarily have a plot or structured storyline but are interruptions of reflection in a storied life'. Either way, Riessman (2008, p11) in promoting narrative inquiry as a method

that facilitates the study of 'the particular' suggests that through this approach 'particular histories of individuals are preserved', they are 'assembled into a "fuller" picture of the individual'. As an inquirer explores a participant's unfolding story there is the potential for the emergence of how participants make sense of their experiences and as storytellers understand their world and their position in it (Riessman, 2005, p1). Within this study, to address the research questions, as inquirer, I utilise interviewing as my data collection technique and I watch and listen as the narratives come through as segments of experiences, rather than biographies.

It is worth noting at this point that there are also variations in the way that roles within narrative inquiry are labelled and for the purposes of this study, I choose inquirer-participant and when discussing the interview; narrator-listener, unless referring to terminology used by other researchers.

5.2 Participant Selection Process

Following ethical approval from the University of Glasgow, and the granting of permission from Provider A, I emailed all Chinese students that were enrolled on the International Year Two (IY2) January 2022 Programme, asking for volunteers to participate in the study. IY2 students have expectations of progressing to Year 3 of an undergraduate Programme with the Provider A's partner university and all need to pass the AES module, along with academic subject modules. To be accepted onto IY2 students must fulfil academic entry criteria and demonstrate that they have achieved a minimum overall English language level score of 5.5 in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test, or equivalent. Achieving a 5.5 indicates that the person taking the test is a 'Modest user', with the following IELTS evaluation:

> 'The test taker has a partial command of the language and copes with overall meaning in most situations, although they are likely to make mistakes. They should be able to handle basic communication in their own field' (IELTS, 2022, np).

The IELTS test measures the English language level of Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking skills. Stipulation of this minimum level of English was considered important for the empirical component of this study in the hope that participants would be able to modestly communicate in the English language as the language in which the interviews were to be conducted. It was also for transcription purposes as I wanted to avoid amplifying the complexity of the transcription process. As the interviews were in the English language and not the participants' native language, I hoped for transcripts to be decipherable as much as possible and not hindered by an attempt at unpacking the language and transcribing significant potential language inaccuracies. The details of the study were outlined in the body of the email and the Consent Form, Participant Form and Privacy Notice were attached as supporting information. The email was sent at the end of February and first interviews were scheduled to begin in the second week of March to ensure that a) participants had settled into their new study surroundings and b) they had experienced a couple of months of studying the AES module. Intervals of four to five

weeks between the first, second, and third interviews were planned to allow me to have sufficient time to transcribe the data and ascertain relevant new interview questions for the interviews one and two. Additionally, it was felt that the more time participants had to experience their AES study, the more experiences they would be able to share in their interviews. It was important to make sure that the interviews were finished by the middle of June which would see the participants busy preparing for their assessment period.

This recruitment part of the process was not as straightforward as I had expected. Unfortunately, the January intake turned out to be much smaller than anticipated which resulted in me having only 22 students to approach for volunteers and I was aiming at recruiting six. This number had been chosen to help facilitate scope for the collection of sufficient data for analysis purposes as collected through participant engagement in three interviews. This was taking into consideration Morrow's (2005) suggestion that when considering adequacy of data in qualitative research it might be more appropriate, depending on the research context, to seek 'the information-richness of cases' rather than aim for a large number of interviews or interview samples. Within the first week of sending my email asking for participants, I received three responses from students who were eager to be involved in the study and following the signing of the Consent Form interviews were set up as per my interview planning document. However, while planning the research, I had, perhaps naively, assumed that I would have too many volunteers coming forward and that I would need to select participants based on a first-come-first-served basis (that was pointed out in my email requesting volunteers) but that turned out not to be the case. The final three participants came forward only in response to a follow up email from myself, and the interviews with the first three participants were already underway. Consequently, interviews for the final three ended up with shorter interval periods in-between interviews one, two and three. Although this did not appear to have any impact on the participants, it required me to move more quickly on transcribing the interviews and conducting an initial analysis to prepare for the second and third interviews.

Table 2: Participants

N.B. All participants were aged between 18 and 21. To help protect anonymity, pseudonyms were used for each participant, and created from using typical and current English names that many contemporary Chinese students are using.

Participant	**Name (Pseudonym)**	**Gender**
One	**Josh**	**Male**
Two	**Li**	**Male**
Three	**Mary**	**Female**
Four	**Luvia**	**Female**
Five	**Roy**	**Male**
Six	**Cleo**	**Female**

For all participants, the third interview was scheduled no later than the week before assessment week, to respect the period of exam preparation. Although there was no direct evidence that this impacted the interviews themselves, it did mean that I was interviewing participants who were at different points of their AES module, and it did of course create a level of anxiety in that I was concerned I would not have enough participants for the research were any to decide to withdraw. As a risk management strategy, I had planned to keep a reserve list of volunteers to draw upon. However, this was unachievable, and I decided that should any student withdraw, I would contact students from a different International Study Centre across the network, also owned by Provider A, one that would mirror the ISC in which I work. I was fortunate in that there was no participant withdrawal.

Due to continuing disruption as a result of COVID-19, mainly relating to lockdowns or limited flight options for students coming from China, not all students were in the ISC for the start of their studies and as a precaution students were offered a choice of being interviewed face-to-face in the ISC or via Zoom. However, by March, when the interviews started, all participants had arrived and yet still chose to be interviewed via Zoom, rather than face-to-face. Zoom offered some useful features including security where interviews could be stored without relying on any third-party software, and it provided convenience for both interviewer and interviewee regarding flexible location and scheduling of interviews. Additionally, Zoom used as an interview tool is, as highlighted by Archibald et al. (2019) straightforward to use and navigate. The downside of using Zoom for this purpose is the potential for the technical issues to arise but fortunately there were no such issues during any of the interviews. I had however taken this disadvantage into account and had a back-up plan which would have resulted in participants visiting me in the ISC to do the interview, if they agreed. A face-to-face interview would have meant interviewing participants in the ISC which may have magnified my position as Head of Centre, and the hierarchical relationship between myself and the participants. I believed that Zoom potentially provided a less hierarchical arrangement, although I have no confirmation of this.

5.3 Ethical Considerations

As this dissertation involved human participants, ethical approval was sought and granted by the College of Social Sciences at the University of Glasgow, prior to the start of the study. To protect anonymity of participants as much as possible, identifiers were replaced with codes that were recorded on a coding sheet for my reference purposes and pseudonyms were used. The relationship between inquirer (Head of Centre) and participants (students of the ISC) was a dependent one and therefore assurance was provided to the participants that by taking part in the research there would be no disruption to that relationship and no advantages or disadvantages related to study progression from the ISC to the partner university. Conscious of this dependent relationship, I was apprehensive about the presence of power relations. Additionally, there were no guarantees that interview responses would be genuine, and I was conscious of the fact that there was a probability that some responses given to

interview questions might be what they thought I wanted to hear and not what they genuinely wanted to express. Being aware of the dependent/social power relations between myself as Inquirer, and the participants, I reflected on my own identity and recognised that I was in a position of power, for want of a better phrase, in relation to both staff and students in the Centre. I was conscious of the potential negative influence that these power relations could have on the research process. However, I wanted in this study to be viewed as an Inquirer, as Researcher, and Facilitator of the interviews, not as Head of Centre. To this end, I evaluated what strategies I could implement to address these potentialities. Creating a space for participants that was not oppressive was deemed important to a) respect them as participants and b) to support the quality of the data obtained. Taking this into consideration, in an attempt to divert attention from the fact that the participants were going to be interviewed by the Head of Centre, in the Head of Centre's Office at the end of a corridor, and to avoid causing any level of discomfort to them, I decided that if the interviews were to take place in the Centre, a room other than my own office would be chosen for the interviews. As it turned out all of the interviews took place via Zoom (see previous paragraph for more detail). During the interviews, I attempted to be informal, including the way that I dressed, rather than wearing formal office wear, I wore more casual clothing, for example, while also hoping to be taken seriously as Inquirer.

I was satisfied that during the interviews participants appeared comfortable and confident as they expressed their thoughts in a fluid and unhesitant manner. Even one participant who was less communicative than the others, was assertive in expressing her dissatisfaction at the AES module and her Tutor's approach to critical thinking. This could have indicated that she was aware of my Head of Centre role and believed I could respond in a hierarchical way to her complaint by addressing the Tutor (even though the Tutor was not named). This also alerted me to the realisation that perhaps the participants considered themselves to be in the position of power, not the other way around, given their role as consumers and mine as provider in such a neoliberal education environment. However, overall, I felt that the responses in general were indicative of the fact that our dependent relationship was not having too much of an impact on the interviews, if at all. As an added layer to the complexity of this process was the reality that the interviews were being conducted in the English language which in itself could be positioned within the context of the impact of the colonisation of education (refer back to Chapter 2.2 'Human Capital Theory (HCT), the Knowledge Economy and the University', for reference to this). To this end, I highlighted to the participants how fluency over accuracy was important when answering questions and that I would not be judging their use of the English language, as long as I could understand their responses. Additionally, along with recognizing the dependent relationship, I was also throughout the study aware that my own views could influence (indirectly or directly) the process and indeed the findings. In this regard, I acknowledged the fact that, according to Holmes (2020), positionality can be informed by reflexivity, and should the researcher reflexivity engage in the research process there is optimism that any influence will be limited. Finally, no financial incentives were offered

for participating in the research and participants were informed of the right to withdraw at any time during the interview process. reflecting on additional literature relating to issues of power within Neoliberalism and International Education. 2-3 paragraphs.

5.4 Method of Data Collection: The Narrative Interview

McMahon (2011, p405) highlights how research authenticity is often 'rooted in validity, reliability and triangulation' and proposes that this nature of authenticity does not sit well within the area of qualitative research. McMahon (2011, p405) proposes that an attempt at achieving 'reliability' in an interview would 'force interviewers to be more structured' and could limit 'validity'. McMahon (2011) suggests considering 'trustworthiness' in place of validity and reliability that is typically linked to a positivist approach. As pointed out by Mishler (1991), mainstream tradition researchers involved in analysing interview data would indeed question the measurement in narrative analysis of 'objectivity, reliability, and validity' (p75). As a response, Mishler (1991, p76), outlines opportunities to systematically analyse narratives to 'generate meaningful and promising findings', arguing that such rigour is contained within the methodological and theoretical disposition of the researcher. I attempted a rigorous and systematic approach to my data collection and analysis, as shall be evidenced in the remainder of this Chapter.

Narrative interviewing is a qualitative data collection method which considers stories that are constructed through the technique of interviewing and are collected and analysed with the aim of understanding participants and the experiences that they share during the interview process (McMahon, 2011). Mishler (1991, p121) in questioning how participants (which she refers to as respondents) 'shaped by the form and context' that is framed by interviews, come to understand themselves and their place in the world, suggests that mainstream traditional interviewing is hierarchic and potentially disruptive:

> 'The standard interview through both its form and hierarchic structure of the interviewee-interviewer relationship tends to obscure relations between events and experiences and to disrupt individual's attempts to make coherent sense of what is happening to them and around them' (Mishler, 1991, p120).

In contrast, narrative interviewing, as pointed out by Holstein and Gubrium (2016), is an interactional experience between inquirer and participant that generates opportunities for the production of narratives of the lives of people, and their circumstances. A narrative interview, according to Riessman, (2008), is designed to initiate detailed responses, rather than short answers that would be common in mainstream interview set-ups. Additionally, Mishler (1991) maintains that in the mainstream traditional interview, the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is one that is 'marked by a striking asymmetry of power' with the potential of alienating the interviewee (p117). The narrative interview, challenges this by, according to Mishler (1991, p118), offering a possibility to challenge such power relations by encouraging the interviewee to share their story, express their voice and 'make sense of

their experiences'. Mishler (1991, p67) considers participant responses in a narrative interview as opportunities for the co-construction of stories and expression of meaning, further suggesting that in this environment there is an encouragement of a joint construction of meaning, dependent on the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. Riessman (2008, p23) supports this view suggesting that during a traditional model of interviewing, questions are typically answered by 'a vessel-like "respondent" in comparison to a narrative interview that involves an interviewer and interviewee who together build the narrative and construct the meaning. Connelly and Clandinin (1990), believe that the relationship between inquirer and participant in narrative inquiry is collaborative, it involves storytelling that is mutual where data collection becomes a collaborative activity through the coming together of inquirer and participant.

To help foster this collaborative relationship Kartch (2017, p1074) calls for interviewers to demonstrate an emotional attentiveness to the interviewee so that, in a comfortable space, 'rapport can be built…through attentiveness, respect, and authenticity'. Kartch (2017) proposes that unlike in a traditional interview where the interviewer directs the interview, in narrative interviewing, the interviewee is encouraged to direct the conversation and invited to tell their story, while the interviewer adopts the role of facilitator, thus favouring a narrator-listener over an interviewer-interviewee arrangement. During the interviews in this study, I attempted to act as facilitator, considering Kartch's (2017, p1075) point that as facilitator, the narrative interviewer is not merely a 'passive listener' but rather one who facilitates the interview as a 'meaning-making experience'. I tried to listen carefully and to respect silences allowing participants to pause, think and continue, as appropriate. Riessman (2008, p24), suggests that in a traditional interview scenario, unexpected interviewee responses and uncertainties would commonly be regarded as 'digressions'. Such digressions in standard survey interviewing are often, according to Mishler (1991) disregarded at the analysis stage as redundant items. In narrative interviewing however uncertainties are to be welcomed as opportunities to further explore the unfolding narrative (Riessman, 2008) and I hoped in each interview to be surprised by unexpected responses or/and topics during the interview process. An example of an unexpected topic comes from Josh who when asked about the teacher-student relationship in China, begins to discuss communism as the ideological positioning of his teachers and moves on to share the impact of this on his Chinese education experience. This creates rich data which is explored during the thematic analysis stage.

To avoid what Kartch (2017, p1075) terms as a 'one-shot' interview approach, each participant was asked to participate in three interviews, with the idea that the first interview was to lay the groundwork for the emergence of main themes. It was anticipated that the second and third interviews would pursue an elaboration of those main themes, while potentially introducing new themes and topics. Nasheeda et.al, (2019) suggest that a follow up interview allows for the seeking of clarification and the filling in of any missing links that might have surfaced from the previous interview. This relates to the scheduling of my interviews where time was scheduled in-between interviews to not only seek clarification ready

for the next interview but to explore what areas could be expanded upon. During each interview, while listening attentively I also referred, when appropriate, to my prepared main interview and prompts questions. In this respect, Kartch (2017) proposes that follow up questions in a follow up interview can also offer participants a chance to expand on their narrative with for example, clarifications, and elaboration of points. For the second and third interview, questions were formulated in response to the thematic analysis of the previous interview, occurring as part of an organic interview process. They were formed after identifying some potential areas of interest which were to be expanded upon. In anticipation of detailed responses, 60 minutes was scheduled for each interview with some interviews taking only 45 minutes and others between 60 and 90 minutes, depending on the length of responses obtained using open-ended questions.

5.4.1 Narrative Interview Questions

For Mishler (1991, p53) interview questions belong to a process that is circular where the meaning and answer to a question is established between the interaction of interviewer and interviewee (narrator-listener) as 'they try to make sense of what they are saying to each other'. Mishler (1991) highlights, however, that this process is complex and laden with challenges and there is the potential for the suppression of storytelling if a traditional interview format that consists of narrow questions is formulated and used. However, Mishler (1991) believes that even in response to focused and narrow questions, it may still be possible for the interviewer to seek opportunities that allow for the emergence of elaborated responses. In this instance, according to Mishler (1991), the interviewer must be skilful and flexible in recognizing the potential for the flow of a participant's response, and to encourage the development of an elaboration of that response. Morrow (2005, p255) suggests that when considering numbers of questions composed and asked, the fewer the questions the more potential for the elicitation of stories and 'deeper meanings' from those telling the stories. According to Kartch (2017, p1074), narrative interviewing invites the participant to share their story by answering open ended questions. For the interview questions for the first interview with each participant, I allowed myself to be guided by Kartch's (2017, p1074) reference to the creation of 'open-ended phrasing that invites the narrative'. To elicit extended answers to questions thus inviting the narrative, I prepared two open-ended questions that began with 'How...'/Tell me about...':

Question 1: How are you experiencing and understanding study on your Academic English Skills Module?

A set of prepared prompt questions were also formulated:

- How are you experiencing the tutor/student relationship and classroom culture in the UK?
- Teaching methods – any differences?
- What were your expectations of the tutor? Are your expectations being met?

- Tell me about what you consider to be the main differences between your study in China and in the UK.
- What expectations did you have of this module and study in the UK?
- What do you understand to be the purpose of the AES module?

Question 2: Tell me about any academic challenges you are facing while studying on this Module.

Prompt questions:

- Which skills do you find to be the most challenging part of this module?
- Tell me about your experience of collaborating with your peers in and outside of lessons.
- How are you experiencing independent learning?
- Are you having opportunity to engage in critical thinking?

According to Esin (2011) narrative interviewing can become challenging if the interview questions have not been effectively composed which may result in limiting an opportunity to obtain a participant's story. I identified with this challenge while interviewing Mary who in each interview gave very brief responses, and when encouraged to expand on points, responded with minimal participation. After the first interview with Mary, I re-visited my questions to consider if they were poorly constructed and thus impacting the elicitation of responses. However, I established that the same opening open-ended questions had generated lengthy responses with the previous participants, and I therefore questioned whether my responses as listener had been effective or not (see more on this in Chapter 6.6 'Reflections on Data Collection'). An additional challenge to interviewing may surface, as pointed out by McMahon (2011, p405), in a cross-cultural interview scenario where 'cultural differences may affect how…knowledge is generated' and this is something that I kept in mind, given the cross-cultural nature of my study. McMahon (2011) urges researchers who are in this context to pay particular attention to intercultural communication including the interpretation or potential misinterpretation of non-verbal language. However, non-verbal language was not a focal analysis point in this study. Finally, both second and third interview questions varied for each participant as they had been formed from the analysis of the previous interviews and constructed to seek elaboration on important points or clarification of certain areas.

5.5 The Transcription Process

As pointed out by Poland (1995, p292), the idea of achieving accuracy in transcription work is in itself problematic due to the 'intersubjective nature of human communication, and transcription as an interpretive activity'. According to Tilley (2003), claims of trustworthiness of data can be reinforced by evidencing and making clear the complex nature of the transcription activity. Hammersley (2010, p556) asserts that when considering interview data, there is no 'one correct' transcription and therefore

the data should not be viewed as 'simply given'. Poland (1995, p294) suggests that attention should be paid to the trustworthiness of transcripts as our research data and that this can be partly achieved by considering how 'faithfully' the transcript reproduces the oral to the written. However, Poland warns that researchers should be aware that there are limitations in reproducing the oral when searching for a 'full flavor' of an interview (p294). Braun and Clarke (2013, p177) assert that a transcription is not a 'facsimile' but a 'representation … two steps removed from the actual interview experience' and I kept this in mind as I worked through the development of each transcription. I was conscious of Riessman's (2008, p28) point that by involving themselves in a task that is 'deeply interpretive', inquirers are 'implicated at every step', and the transcription activity is permeated with researcher infiltration that is linked to the theoretical position of the inquirer. Lapadat and Lindsay (1999), in discussing language as primary data that is produced by interaction between humans suggest that a researcher's choice about transcription typically links to theories that they hold, with decisions made reflecting their own theoretical position and assumptions. While transcribing data, be it audiotaped or videorecorded, researchers make decisions about what to transcribe and how, along with how to represent the data (Lapadat and Lindsay, 1999, p66). I am aware that to help underpin my claims of trustworthiness for this study, it is essential to evidence a rigorous and methodical approach to the procedures and processes used, including highlighting the transparency of my transcription work and discussing the complexities that I faced when transcribing the spoken to the written.

Approaching the transcription process manually, my interpretation of the meaning-making processes was systematic as I engaged in what Nasheeda et al. (2019, p1) would describe as a 'complex set of analytic processes' that are linked with the transcription of stories. Conducting the interviews via Zoom meant that I had immediate access following the interviews to a transcript that had been generated by Zoom. However, it was necessary for me to carefully cross reference these transcripts while listening to the video recordings for the first time (regularly pausing, stopping, and repeating areas that were unclear) as the transcript function of Zoom provides transcripts that are permeated with errors. These errors were mainly related to vocabulary with wrong words included in the transcripts and this did in fact create an amusing read, at times. Although this cross-checking of transcripts with the video recordings was time consuming it felt like a useful part of the process as I began to become familiar with the data. This was followed up by reading and re-reading the transcripts, even before beginning the stage of thematic analysis, thus involving myself in what Nasheeda et al. (2019, p3) refers to as a 'holistic-content reading process'. Once this stage was completed, I re-read the transcripts again and this time attempted to create coherence in relation to ascertaining punctuation mark points and the beginning and end of sentences. As pointed out by Poland (1995, p297), the researcher often must make a 'judgment call' in deciding where a sentence begins and ends and where a comma or a full stop should sit, if not obvious, as it is clear that placing a comma in the wrong position could change the meaning. I became quicker in making these judgment calls the more I became immersed in the transcription

activity. Within this process, I chose to be guided by pace and intonation, along with pauses to aid my punctuation decisions. An added layer of complexity was that I was transcribing oral communication that was from non-native English participants. Riessman (2008) suggests that tidying up text may aid readability, and I understood this as I worked through this process but chose to ignore language errors that may have been as a result of participants not speaking in their native language unless the errors were hindering understanding. There was no intent to focus on language accuracy as fluency and expression of meaning from my non-native participants was the priority with content over language being the focal point. At first this was a challenge for me as my English language teaching background means I automatically focus on grammatical inaccuracies and other related language development issues when considering oral or written work when teaching international students. However, I quickly overcame this challenge and began to enjoy what I was reading, without feeling compelled to correct it. To aid my effort at transcription, I borrowed key transcription conventions as developed by Braun and Clarke (2013). These conventions included underlining words that participants had emphasised along with non-verbal utterances 'er', 'mm', 'err' that indicated pauses. I did so to enhance my understanding of emphasis and to re-imagine the interview and yet was all the time aware that during my thematic analysis these non-verbal utterances would not actually be taken into consideration. In hindsight, this part of the process involved an in-efficient use of my time and I only used it during the 1st set of transcriptions, but it did, I believe, encourage a deeper familiarisation with the data as I worked through this transcription stage. My own language was given minimal attention during the transaction process as although I had intentions to encourage a collaborative relationship (not necessarily realised, see following paragraph) in the interviews, our interaction was not going to be a point of analysis. I only tidied up my language to achieve relevant clarity regarding understanding questions that I had asked.

When considering the supposed collaborative nature of a narrative inquiry interview, Mishler (1991, p132) refers to studies that have provided interviewees with access to the relevant transcript, as an opportunity to review it, therefore, providing them with 'a voice in the interpretation and use of findings'. Mishler (1991) highlights how such research methods can alter the typical definition of the role of researcher and command a more collaborative relationship between the researcher and participant (inquirer-participant). Although I was intent on fostering a collaborative relationship between myself and my participants, the timeframe of the study did now allow time for participants to review transcripts and adopt an interpretive role, therefore casting a doubt in my own mind over the nature of effective collaboration between inquirer and participant in this research. Finally, overall, the experience of transcribing the oral to the written was monotonous, and I grew concerned about the amount of time that was required to fulfil this task. However, despite the frustrations experienced I never failed to recognise the significance of this part of the analytical process and through rigid time management I remained disciplined and committed to this task.

5.6 Narrative Analysis

Esin (2011, p94) proposes that narrative analysis offers a 'creative means of exploring and describing realities, which are arranged and bound in time' while considering 'the individual and cultural resources people use to construct their narratives'. Esin (2011) points out that varying typologies can be found in narrative inquiry and suggests there are no set guidelines on how to approach narrative analysis and yet there are two key approaches; one that centres around the linguistic structure of a narrative and the other around the content. Riessman (2008) in considering narrative inquiry methods in human sciences, offers up a selection of models of analysis that are appropriate for oral narrative inquiry. This selection includes structural analysis, dialogic/performance analysis, and thematic analysis, as appropriate to the research question and nature of the study. Riessman (2008) sets forth thematic analysis as one that focuses on the content of the story. According to Riessman, (2005, p2) thematic analysis, in most instances, focuses on *what* is being told, rather than *how* something is being told, thus emphasising the narrated over the narrator, the 'told' rather than the 'telling' and considering language as a resource rather than being an area of exploration. This approach aligned with my research question and the aim of investigating the experiences of the participants, rather than the participants themselves and thus thematic analysis was chosen as the method of analysis.

5.7 Thematic Analysis

For Riessman (2008), from the stories that participants share, thematic analysis allows analysts to explore common thematic elements that are then explored with a focus on content. Andrews (2019, p3) believes that this method of analysis is flexible and, in allowing the researcher to identify and explore patterns within and across the data set, encourages the provision of a 'rich, detailed and complex account of the data'. It is, according to Braun and Clarke (2022, p4), a robust method of qualitative analysis that through a systematic process of data coding and theme development, offers a method for the development, analysis and interpretation of patterns across the dataset. Braun and Clarke (2022, p11), in endorsing thematic analysis as a qualitative research technique, offer up an analogy between individual approaches to life where 'some of us revel in uncertainty and a world with many moving parts', and a thematic analysis (TA) approach in research. Identifying personally with this approach to life, I chose to embark on a journey of inductive thematic analysis. For Braun and Clarke (2006, p78) inductive thematic analysis sees the development of themes and codes that are 'driven' by the data and is an approach that is viewed as a rich, flexible, interpretivist process in contrast to deductive thematic analysis that begins with pre-conceived themes that are based on theory or expected knowledge. Additionally, in asserting that reflexivity is an essential part of the process for any qualitative researcher Braun and Clarke (2022, p5) promote reflexive thematic analysis (reflexive TA), as an approach which requires the researcher to question and interrogate the 'what', 'how' and why' of the research, along with considering the research impact. It encourages the researcher to be 'active, engaged and thoughtful

about the approach' that has been chosen (Braun and Clarke 2022, p9). Braun and Clarke (2022, p7) highlight that understanding the purpose of reflexivity and engaging with it in practice, along with being at ease with 'uncertainty' and 'subjectivity' helps a researcher to develop 'qualitive sensibility'. The latter they define as 'a way to capture the values, assumptions, orientation and skills needed to conduct reflexive TA' (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p7). According to Braun and Clarke (2022, p8), data analysis should be considered an art and not a science, with creativity at the core of the process and yet set within a rigorous framework. To encourage rigour, I maintained reflexive throughout the process of my analysis, and kept a methodical record of each stage to help support audibility of the analysis of my data. Throughout my analysis I thought about how I was approaching it and why and I regularly wrote in and re-read my Inquirer's Journal excerpts to help me to process my thoughts along the way. Throughout this journey, while considering Braun and Clarke's (2022, pxxix) statement that qualitative research, of which thematic analysis belongs, is 'a skilled endeavour', I expected to develop my analytical skills and, at the same time, hoped to experience uncertainties and challenges along the way.

Focusing, through my reflexive TA, on complex and rich data, I refrained from fitting the data into what Braun and Clarke (2006, p83) would call a 'pre-existing coding frame' and I aimed at exploring themes that would develop outside of any pre-conceived codes. That said, partly due to the research question, the open-ended interview questions, and my own set of assumptions, there were some expectations for specific themes to emerge. These assumptions had been influenced by my own professional experience of the AES module and of teaching and learning in relation to Chinese students and included: tensions in teacher-student relationship (differences between China and UK), a learner vs teacher-centre approach, and critical thinking.

My analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2022, p35) latest thematic analysis phases named 'six phases of reflexive thematic analysis'.

Table 3: Six Phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Phase 1	Familiarising Yourself With The Dataset
Phase 2	Coding
Phase 3	Generating Initial Themes
Phase 5	Refining, Defining and Naming Themes
Phase 6	Writing Up

Source: Braun and Clarke (2022, pp35-36)

5.7.1 Phase 1: Familiarising Yourself with the Dataset

These phases were used to guide my analysis and whereas previously I had worked with these phases with discipline and rigidity, this time my approach was more flexible, as I engaged in my analysis that saw various stages taking shape within the phases. Braun et al. (2016, p196) assert that thematic analysis

commonly includes ‘a recursive, reflexive process of moving forwards and sometimes backwards through data familiarization, coding, theme development, revision’. I acknowledged that the phases did indeed need to be considered not sequentially but concurrently, to allow for flexibility, a core characteristic, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), of effective thematic analysis. During Phase 1, the prepared transcripts were printed off and read again, in what Braun et al. (2016, p198) would describe as a reading in a ‘curious and questioning way’. Firstly, any items of interest in relation to the research question, for example reference to the teacher relationship in China and the UK were highlighted and notes added against each item. This was repeated for each participant transcript. Already familiar with the data due to engagement in the transcription stage, Phase 1 facilitated a deeper familiarisation with the data and this continued as I embarked on a manual and systematic coding process of the whole data set.

5.7.2 Phase 2: Coding

McAllum et al. (2019) view coding as a key thematic analysis strategy that facilitates the selection and reduction of data. Braun and Clarke (2022, p54) suggest that coding should be led by the research question and approach and be considered key to maintaining research ‘insight’ and ‘rigour’. For Braun and Clarke (2022, p55) coding is a process of ‘interpretation’, it is ‘organic, evolving and subjective’ with each code identifying areas of interest in the data. This process of making meaning is one that is subjective and not seeking the truth (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Codes, as ‘the smallest unit,’ should encapsulate different meanings, rather than capture multiple meanings and close engagement with this coding process should encourage insight and understanding (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p52). To further encourage close engagement with the data, I chose to participate in a manual process of coding, as opposed to using a software programme, such as QDAS. I believed that this would be manageable as I did not have a large set of qualitative data but only six participants, times three interviews each. However, there were moments when I questioned this choice. Firstly, the task of coding each interview was very time consuming, and secondly, experiencing anxious periods of questioning whether my codes were right or wrong, I debated if the use of a software programme would strengthen my analytic process. However, I reminded myself of Braun and Clarke’s (2022) guidance not to take an approach of right or wrong but rather to develop codes that enable you to start to understand and appreciate meaning in the data set.

Phase 2 involved three stages which I named Thematic Analysis One, Two, and Three. In Thematic Analysis One I began the process of manually generating codes that were data, not theory driven, as in, not approached with any questions in mind or theoretical framework. Each interview transcript text was transferred to the left-hand column of a newly created word document. Considering and identifying key features of all the data, descriptive codes were created and placed in the right-hand column. I was engaged in the semantic coding of text, through capturing what is articulated by Braun and Clarke

(2022, p57) as 'explicitly expressed meaning' and the 'surface of the data'. As pointed out by Braun and Clarke (2022, p58) latent codes that commonly focus on a more *'implicit'* level of meaning are at times more abstract and therefore more difficult to establish at this stage, at least for the inexperienced analyst. While generating these semantic codes, there were times when I questioned the length and content of a code and was concerned that I was not being successful in my coding exercise, and neither was I identifying latent codes. However, understanding from previous experience that each analysis will have varying characteristics, with no one size fits all, such anxiety was brief. At this stage of my analysis, I confirm that the codes were typically descriptive and semantic, see example of Thematic Analysis One below:

Table 4: Example of Thematic Analysis One, Data Extract with Codes

Data Extract	Code
So, the first thing is we have to choose a topic, but the thing is, we just moved here and you know university and most of us like are totally blind to what we need to be learning in the future. So, I mean I've done a lot of readings, before I came to this university but most of them I'm not really sure. So I think the whole module that the whole pre-master module is not proving any how do you, like knowledge content… (Josh)	Feeling totally blind The module is not providing knowledge content.

According to Braun et al. (2016, p199) theme development comes from the 'clustering'; the putting together of codes that have a possible connection, to establish 'higher level patterns' which are considered to be meanings that represent an idea in the data. In Thematic Analysis Two, all codes were re-visited, and the same number was assigned against codes that had been identified as having an apparent relation to each other, see Table below for an example:

Table 5: Example of Thematic Analysis Two, Numbering of Codes (isolated extracts taken from the data set, for the purpose of this example)

Extract	Codes - China
…I always class had more than 50 people in 1 classroom …we don't really have much opportunities to talk with the teacher in class… (Josh)	1. Not much chance to talk to teacher as the classes in China have more than 50 in them.

…sometimes the teacher asks question and you have to do some preparation and you can't give the wrong answer, em, which is quite common in China I think, we always have the right answer, it's the only answer. (Josh)	1. Always expected to give the right answer in class in China.

For the Thematic Analysis Three stage, all codes, in accordance with their assigned number were transferred to a new word document and clustered together, with clusters on the left-hand side of the page under a loosely named heading 'Theme' with relevant excerpts on the right-hand side. The aim was the development of commonalities across the whole data set. This involved beginning to separate the texts for the first time as excerpts began to be placed alongside the clustered codes. Certain excerpts were inserted twice, if associated with more than one code. Some codes quite comfortably came together with what seemed to be what Patton (1990, p15) describes as with 'recurring regularities in the data' and yet there were some codes that appeared irregular, isolated, and unconnected, for example 'a library should be interesting'.

Table 6: Example of Thematic Analysis Three, Clustering

Theme Purpose/motivation	Excerpt
Just wants to pass	I just want to pass everything yeh, because I think English is not my subject, for me English is like the tools to pass it and continue my coursework. (Mary)
English is a tool to help pass Not interested in a high score, just passing	…lots of parts is difficult but I think that's ok, I can ask my classmates or ask my tutors, so erm, I not always not worry about that, maybe because English is my took, I just need to pass it, I'm not worried about my score, I don't need highest score because English is not my subject. (Mary)

Once all of the data had been coded through the three stages, the analysis moved into Phase 3 of Braun and Clarke's (2022) Thematic Analysis.

5.7.3 Phase 3: Generating Initial Themes

Phase 3, according to Braun and Clarke (2006) initiates the interpretive analysis of the data. A theme, according to Braun and Clarke (2022, p87) captures the 'multi-faceted manifestations of a single, central concept from the dataset'. Themes are not simply '*in* the data', waiting to 'emerge', instead they arise through an '*active* process' of analysis (Braun et al., 2016, p196). In Braun and Clarke's presentation of the six phases of thematic analysis in 2006, this phase was called Searching for Themes and was later, upon their reflection, changed to Generating Initial Themes (Braun and Clarke, 2022). This highlighted to me as thematic analyst, that through careful consideration of the codes that had been assigned to the data set, the key purpose and function of this stage is to begin to generate themes and not search for them as such. The role of the analyst, according to Braun and Clarke (2022, p77), is to explore meanings that are expressed as similar or shared across the varying contexts. In my analysis the aim was not to focus on high levels of frequency in the data, however commonality between identified patterns, themes and sub-themes was observed. Working through this phase I acknowledged Braun and Clarke's (2006, p82) belief that a theme 'captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning with the data set'. Tuckett (2005, cited Braun and Clarke, p88) suggests organising data into 'meaningful groups', as relevant, and at this stage this is what my analysis began to involve. Initiating theme development and transitioning to a higher conceptual level the clusters were integrated into a mind map, through the use of mind-mapping software, Mindomo.

With my Thematic Analysis Three documents, I began my Thematic Analyse Four stage and began to analyse how codes could be combined to establish an overarching theme. Being a visual learner, I began the process of creating a mind map which consisted of initial Candidate Theme bubbles. According to Braun and Clarke (2022) Candidate Themes capture multiple concepts that contribute to the same organising concept. Having considered similarity in meaning in the data set for each participant, I now began looking across the data set (at each participant Thematic Analysis Three sheet) and considering the manually clustered coding, highlighted in different colours clusters that were similar in meaning. Highlighted clusters were then placed into a Candidate Theme bubble on the mind map and a broad name was assigned to it, for example 'Education Experience in China'. It was motivating to see initial themes were capturing something interesting and meaningful in relation to my research question and yet I was aware that at this stage the clusters and candidate themes were broad, and that refinement of these themes would follow in the next phase. The mind map was a busy one, and in this phase, it was manipulated, tweaked and re-ordered several times, (please see Appendix A). Some of the codes were placed into more than one Candidate Theme, if an overlap was established, for example 'Embarrassed if you give the wrong answer as so many other students will hear your wrong answer' was placed in 'Teacher-Student Relationship' and 'Education in China'. A Candidate Theme called 'Miscellaneous' was added to store a handful of codes for which I could not find a place for, for example, 'Lost being

able to be an advocate' with plans to re-visit the theme in Phase 4 (Developing and Reviewing Themes). Subthemes were starting to be identified, for example a subtheme in the Candidate Theme 'Critical Thinking China' referred to challenging returning home from study abroad, as a critical thinker. Braun and Clarke (2022, p87) suggest that this phase helps the researcher to try to work out what is going on and to help 'develop' an 'analytic understanding'. The way I approached this phase resulted in the mind map as being an extension and elaboration of my Thematic Analysis Three, and I was left with 13 Candidate Themes and many subthemes. I reflected that I may have fallen slightly outside of Braun and Clarkes' 6 Phases and understood that the subthemes were more a range of codes, rather than subthemes as such. However, for me, it was key document in encouraging understanding and depth of analysis.

5.7.4 Phase 4: Developing and Reviewing Themes

Braun and Clarke (2022, p77) propose that themes, each having a unique 'central organising concept', are 'patterns anchored by a shared idea, meaning or concept. They are *not* summaries of everything about a topic' (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p8). Additionally, according to Braun and Clarke (2022) themes need to have clear distinctions between them. I kept these thoughts in mind and, understanding that refining themes could potentially mean letting go of some tentative Candidate Themes, a process of further development and conceptualisation began. There was a re-engagement with the whole of the data set and the coded extracts, to check for coherence, or to see if anything of interest had been previously missed or neglected. Returning to my mind map, themes were rejected, collapsed, expanded and some theme items moved from one to another. Two themes were collapsed into one with *Education in China* and *Education in UK,* becoming *Experiencing Education: China and the UK* to help avoid a pure description of participant experiences of these two education systems. Rather, the aim was to understand one with the other and to explore key differences that may impact on the Chinese student experience. *Perceptions of teacher-student relationships* became embedded into this overarching theme, with further sub-themes of class sizes and implications, China's growth and competitive population, purpose of study and studying AES at the International Study Centre, in the UK. The latter seemed to sit better in *Experiencing Education: China and the UK* rather than as a stand-alone theme due its relevance to the participants experience of studying in the UK. *Fear of Failure* was absorbed by *Motivations. Chinese Education Policy* was removed, with some of its codes moving across to *Experiencing Education: China and the UK.* Likewise, *Communication* was deleted, along with *Doing my Best* which saw some codes moving across to *Motivations.* Finally, the theme *Miscellaneous* was disbanded at this stage, with some of its codes either absorbed by other themes, or deleted altogether due to lack of interesting meaning, for example 'not many good books in the library'. In total, there remained three Themes, *Motivations*, *Experiencing Education: China and the UK,* and *Critical Thinking and Chinese Students,* with a total of six sub-themes. It was indeed a recursive activity as I moved backwards and forwards around the themes and codes and data set. It was an intense period of reviewing and refining themes, checking boundaries between themes and establishing if a story was

unfolding, while also moving away from basic summaries and entering an interpretive analysis. For me, this Phase merged with Phase 5. This part of the process was challenging, and I was cautious that I might have been imposing bias while deciding on initial themes. For future research projects of this type, I would consider approaching an independent judge to facilitate an opportunity to have another critical eye. Finally, the themes emerged through my interpretation of participant interpretations, in other words I was doing what Braun and Clarke (2022, p215) call '*making sense* of what our *data set* (not just an individual participant) tell us'.

5.7.5 Phase 5: Refining, Defining and Naming Themes

Working with the three Themes and sub-themes that had been identified, I wrote a brief description of each before moving onto the Findings part of my analysis, as outlined in the following Chapter 6 'Findings and Discussion'.

Chapter 6: Findings and Discussion

The purpose of this study has been to explore how Chinese students understand and make meaning of studying AES as a module that sits under the umbrella of EAP in a UK HE environment. Following on from the previous Chapter that concluded with Phase 5 of Braun and Clarke's (2022) thematic analysis phases, this Chapter begins with Phase 6: Writing Up. It unveils and discusses the findings, as appropriate to the research question through an exploration of the three core themes, (and sub-themes): *Motivations, Experiencing Education: China and the UK,* and *Critical Thinking and Chinese Students*. For a visual representation of the final themes and sub-themes, please refer to Appendix B. To support readability and effective coherence, findings and discussions and reference to appropriate literature are interwoven.

6.1 Theme: Motivations

The motivations of the participants to study the AES module in the UK is the central organising concept of this theme which evolved from asking them 'How are you experiencing and understanding study of your AES module?'. Various motivations were identified during the analysis of the data that included extrinsic; passing the AES module to progress to the partner university, and keeping parents happy, and intrinsic; having opportunities to communicate with international peers in the English language, being able to critically engage in lessons, and to feed curiosity about classmates who are from diverse cultures and countries, see summary table below:

Table 7: Participants' Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivations

Participant	Extrinsic Motivation	Intrinsic Motivation
Mary	To pass AES to progress to university and to keep parents happy.	To communicate in English and communicate with native speakers.
Li	To learn English to pass AES	To explore through learning and feed curiosity about other cultures. To understand others.
Josh	To pass AES and use it as a tool to achieve academic success.	To understand different cultures
Roy	To make parents happy and be successful.	To communicate well in English, have critical engagement with others and learn about new things.
Cleo	To pass AES	To learn new things.
Luvia		To be surprised by individuals from different cultures and feel positive about life.

Li, when asked about how he is experiencing study on the AES module, expresses an extrinsic motivation to pass his AES exams, alongside an intrinsic motivation to gratify his curiosity about

different cultures and backgrounds and to stimulate, what he describes as his 'international mind', as further articulated in the excerpts below:

> Oh, I'm really an international mind I respect everybody from different country different, because we have respect and the world can be best so I'm good with everybody. (Li).
>
> I love the multicultural because I'm the personality like I'm curious about everything different style, the food and the which country people are from… Well, staying outside of China, I will try my best to communicate with the colleague always my friend or my teacher or tutor I love to talk and love to communicate. (Li)

Likewise, Josh displays an intrinsic motivation to understand other cultures and longs to learn about different countries from his international classmates. At the same time, he is extrinsically motivated to study AES to progress to university and views the opportunity as a tool 'I just feel yeah this is like the tool I have to use it to get me to my purpose'. The intrinsic motivation of the participants indicate that they hope to benefit from a study experience that goes beyond mere credentialism. These findings can be linked back to the discussion in Chapter 3.2.6 'Motivation', where it was reported that many Western educators, according to Biggs and Watkins (1996), hold the view that most Chinese students are void of intrinsic motivation to study and are led instead by a single extrinsic motivation to pass exams resulting from their education experience in China. In that discussion it was highlighted that, Biggs and Watkins (1996, p273), in questioning these common perceptions, assert that Chinese students, like many others, commonly demonstrate a 'mixed motivations steam'. The findings also support On's (1996, p38) discussion around students who are immersed in a Confucian-heritage Culture (CHC) approach to education which is said to encourage individuals to be motivated by both personal growth and successful 'upward social mobility'. Having worked with Chinese students for over 20 years, these findings are not unexpected. However, they are critical in questioning the claims that Chinese students have no intrinsic motivation to learn which in turn affects their classroom behaviour. The following section explores the second theme and provides an opportunity to establish if the participant motivations discussed above are being actualised while studying the AES module.

6.2 Theme: Experiencing Education: China and the UK

As inquirer, I was interested to see that to help make meaning of studying the AES module, participants drew upon comparative education experiences between China and the UK and this theme encapsulates how the participants feel about these differences. In recalling memories of being educated in China, they connect those experiences to understanding their current study context while also looking to the future towards their university period. This blending of the past, present, and future, supports Clandinin and Rosiek's (2007, p34) appreciation of narrative inquiry that aligns with Dewey's pragmatic ontology

that understands experiences as 'continuous' and affiliated with the past, present and future. In doing so, it reinforces my faith in narrative inquiry as an interpretive research approach that explores and links continuous experiences through storytelling. The next section begins with an exploration of the sub-themes starting with participant experiences of the AES module before moving on to discuss some challenges of oral and written communication, the teacher-student relationship, and critical thinking and Chinese students.

6.2.1 Making Meaning of the Academic English Skills (AES) Module

None of the participants find the AES module content to be interesting and they all share a sense of general disappointment at the module's approach to teaching and learning. Josh, in describing the AES module as 'frivolous' and 'really horrible' asks himself if it is due to the module design or the ineffectiveness of the tutor, or both. Feeling that the programme is too simple, lacking in useful content knowledge and not particularly useful for his future, he recognises his main challenge is having to engage in a module that he does not respect as noted below:

> I'm honestly, I feel bad in this module because I don't think this module is well designed and sometimes when I look back and I think 'what have I learned from this module' and I couldn't think of anything. So, that's really you know, a theme, to me, because I think for pre-master course the AES module is the major part of it and but this one for me is quite a failure, and to my experience a lot of my classmates complain, they have the same feeling to this module. (Josh)

Josh brings in other actors to his story by referring to his classmates believing that within their own social group they share negative thoughts about the module. Roy, criticises the AES curriculum for being inflexible and too prescriptive, as he articulates in the excerpt below:

> It's very prescriptive, I think the module is very prescriptive. You know that's also very like Chinese module like you have to do this in this part and you have to do it yeah so I don't feel I can study very independently...to be honest. (Roy)

Both Josh and Roy's understanding of AES align with my professional assessment of the module that is outlined in Chapter 4.3 'Tensions in the EAP Arena', where I state that the curriculum is rigidly prescriptive and over assessed. Additionally, while expressing a sense of disappointment about the module, participants share a general resentment of the quantity and type of AES assessments, revealing that for them this feature of the AES module mirrors the emphasis on exam preparation in China's education system. In discussing periods of Chinese Education Reform in Chapter 3.8.4 'Transformation Four – Standardization of Chinese Education', I refer to Biggs and Watkins's (1996, p277) statement

that, operating in a competitive Chinese university climate, most education environments in China are 'focused and ruthless' in their approach to exam preparation. Participant concerns about the quantity of AES assessments extend to the limited amount of time they are given to prepare for their exams or complete coursework assignments. They feel deprived of quality time to engage in interesting aspects of academic learning, such as research and reading, and feel that any opportunity to learn anything in depth is absent. In Chapter 3.2.5 'Memorisation', there is a brief discussion around memorisation which was presented as an area of tension in the EAP teaching and learning environment, in relation to Chinese students. Although there are varying interpretations of memorisation, as outlined in that Chapter, it remains that, as pointed out by Shi (2006), there are common negative claims made by some Western educators that Chinese students rely too heavily on memorisation to succeed in their academic study. One participant, Li, supports this supposition by recalling his reliance on memorisation as a learning strategy when preparing for this English language exams in China. However, he is somewhat surprised and disappointed to find himself reverting, in the UK, to utilising memorisation as a learning technique to help manage the intensity and unrealistic expectations of the AES exam arrangements. This behaviour supports Holliday's (1994) suggestion that when faced with a new education environment, Chinese students may unexpectedly re-call previous familiar learning strategies. This reconciliation with the technique of memorisation might indeed, according to Holliday (1994), be unwelcome and this is evidenced here through the story that Li tells.

6.2.2 Challenges of Oral and Written Communication

As touched upon in Chapter 3.7 'Social and Other Justifications', it is common for Chinese students in the UK to experience, according to Ecochard and Fotheringham (2017), negative feelings associated with a disruption to their education environment and location, space, and time. Ecochard and Fotheringham (2017) outline three specific issues that some international students face when trying to acclimatise to a new dominant culture: academic, linguistic, and socio-cultural. Many international students, according to Ecochard and Fotheringham (2017) suffer periods of confusion as they try to develop academic language skills and adopt the academic rules and regulations associated with their UK HE education. Some struggle with socio-cultural integration that involves how students 'navigate their new city' and adjust to 'their experience with the host society and population' (Ecochard and Fotheringham, 2017, p103). Findings in this study present evidence that some of the participants feel academically and linguistically challenged in their new academic surroundings while studying the AES module. Presented in Chapter 3.2.2 'Oral Communication', as an area of tension that is experienced in the Chinese teaching and learning context in the UK HE arena, oral communication, is, as pointed out by McMahon (2011), a key area of concern amongst Western academics who are teaching this international student cohort. As noted in that Chapter, Chinese students demonstrating a so-called reluctance to speak up in class are consequently and regularly labelled 'passive learners'. Indeed, as referred to in Chapter 1.2 'Professional Context', I contributed to this labelling activity while I was

teaching Chinese students in Chengdu in 2004, until my intercultural understanding was strengthened through experience, attending teacher training sessions and regular reflection on my professional practice. Since then and to the present day, witnessing, on a recurring basis, the frustrations of EAP tutors as they endeavour to motivate their Chinese students to orally interact in lessons, the word 'reluctance' holds negative connotations. In many EAP classrooms, it is used to report that Chinese students are simply unwilling to orally participate in activity work. Participants share from their own standpoint what they interpret to be their inadequacies in communicating in the English language and recall how in China oral communication had been so easy and unproblematic. This bolsters McMahon's (2011) observation that many Chinese students studying in the UK through English as the medium of instruction, feel the impact of not communicating in their mother tongue which was something they had taken for granted in their previous education environment in China. For Luvia, the fear of talking with international peers due to her lack of linguistic confidence generates high levels of anxiety resulting in a tendency for her remain quiet in her AES lessons, especially during the seminar sessions. This is noted by her when referring to language issues 'I actually I think I cannot really to talk with them, because the language or like I'm not really going to talk.' She is unable to understand her AES tutor and feels nervous and embarrassed. In China, her classes were teacher led, as she explains in the following extract:

> When I was in China and the teacher most of time is the teachers to talk, talk something to us and here they have some questions for me, for us…I cannot understand what she talked about' (Luvia)

It can be understood here that a key reason for minimal communication during lessons is a lack of confidence in linguistic ability and fluency, not necessarily a reluctance to speak or a demonstration of passivity. An additional justification for a reluctance to speak up in class is discussed in Chapter 3 'China's Education Context'. In a study conducted by Jin and Cortazzi's (2017) that explored differences in approach to oral communication in class, between Chinese and British students, they established that a key reason for a so-called reluctance for Chinese students to speak up was patience and respect for the teacher. Fear of interrupting did not appear to be a motivation to stay quiet, rather they were drawing upon their previous Chinese experience of being taught in large class sizes and learning how to patiently wait for the teacher to provide the knowledge, without interruption. While the participants in this study indicate that their oral communication is stinted by their lack of linguistic competence and confidence, it could also align with their previous experience of learning when to speak up in class and when not to.

In Chapter 3.2.4 'Writing', the tension around Chinese students and academic writing is highlighted, with reference to claims by some Western educators that Chinese students are unable to draft an

extended academic essay without resorting to high levels of plagiarism. In that Chapter, key differences between writing styles in China and the UK are noted, to offer a defence of why some Chinese students may find the development of academic writing skills so difficult. To summarise, as stated by Xu (2012) a writing style that is circular and less linear than in the West is the usual form in China and as highlighted by Wu (2011) Chinese students are guided towards writing simply and poetically as a result of a Confucian education approach to writing. Participants in this study recognise the different approaches to writing in China and the UK and in doing so go towards affirming the issues discussed in 3.2.4 'Writing'. They associate the differences with the challenge they encounter when trying to compile an academic piece of writing in AES. They identify and share some of the core reasons for these challenges as lack of linguistic ability, working with unfamiliar academic conventions, challenges of learning how to paraphrase and summarise, lack of time to effectively research a topic, and how to structure an essay that is more linear than circular. Mary's experience of the development of academic writing skills mirrors Luvia's thoughts around the benefits of communicating in the native language. Mary felt comfortable developing her writing skills in China and yet feels unable to express her thoughts in English, as stated below:

> Because Chinese is my native language so I have lots of ideas, can write but in the UK I still have lots of ideas but don't know how to explain in English and write in English. Yeh, this is my problem. (Mary)

Jin and Cortazzi's (2006) assertion that Chinese students come with little, if any, knowledge of authorship and its purpose, hence the reason many of them find creating an academic piece of writing problematic, seems to be supported by these findings. Participants are familiar with writing compositions in China without using referencing conventions and are perplexed at having to evidence points, cite authors and create reference lists in an academic essay. The task is considered unusual and unrelated to their previous experience, as communicated by Luvia:

> In the academic writing, we should use something reliable, true, like we cannot talk our thinking directly and that is not common with Chinese like, we just write, I think that so and talk something about my, experience and yeah just myself experience. (Luvia)

While sharing these challenges participants also understand Provider A's expectations of them to write an academic essay, in one term, as unrealistic and unreasonable. Josh considers the request to create an essay draft and a final submission within a few of weeks of each other as 'impossible' and believes it would take this amount of time just to prepare and write an introduction. Given the challenges that these participants evidence in this study, along with considering Xu's (2012) exposition on Western and

Chinese thought patterns, which suggests that the former requires higher levels of objectivity compared to the latter, it is not surprising that participants find the expectations difficult to navigate when writing an academic essay for the AES module.

6.2.3 Teacher-Student Relationship

It is evident from the findings that for participants the teacher-student relationship is important, and their interpretations of this relationship help them to make meaning of studying the AES module. As inquirer, it was refreshing to hear from participants about the teacher-student relationships in China and the impact that these relationships have on their study in the UK. The findings relate back to the discussion in Chapter 3.2.1 'Teacher-student Relationship' that highlighted common Western perceptions of the teacher-student relationship in China. As discussed then, according to McMahon (2011) some Western interpretations of a lack of participation in class by some Chinese students leads one to believe that it is a result of how Chinese students are taught to regard the teacher as an embodiment of knowledge, a purveyor of authority, and a person not to be interrupted (McMahon, 2011). While this could offer one justification for many Chinese students appearing quiet and supposedly uncooperative in the EAP classroom, it may at the same time be slightly misleading. While considering the Chinese teacher to be a person of the highest authority who demands a prominent level of respect, each participant has positive memories of spending time with their teachers in China. They consider their high school teacher in China to be a friend who understands what Roy describes as 'their behaviours and personalities'. This supports Biggs's (1996) view that many students in China, while respecting the high-level teacher status, also consider their teachers to be friends who are warm and caring. Li's understanding of the Chinese teacher and student relationship also supports Biggs's (1996) claim that there commonly exists a level of mutual respect in these relations. Li fondly remembers his Chinese teacher as someone with whom he respected, built a good relationship with over several years and as a key person who provided him with knowledge, while with helping him to develop as an individual. This finding can be linked to 'The Confucian-heritage Culture (CHC) Connection' section in Chapter 3.4 that while discussing varying interpretations of Confucianism, and its influence on education in Chinese society, notes Wu's (2011) definition of a Confucian education as one in which the teacher is not only the knowledge giver but also a person who provides learning opportunities and encourages individual growth. At the same time, it appears that the nurturing and friendship part of the teacher-student relationship that contributes to a student's growth is mainly developed and maintained outside of regular lesson time with participants recalling spending time with them in individual evening or weekend tutorials. This affirms McMahon's (2011) belief that it is common for the Chinese teacher, who typically lives on the school campus, to make themselves regularly available for their students outside of the classroom schedule. However, sharing his ruminations on how Chinese students regard their teachers as friends, Josh states although this may be the case, actual interaction between teachers and students during lesson time is minimal due to large class sizes that sometimes exceed 80. Josh

upholds that this is the main reason Chinese teachers dedicate time to students outside of regular class time. While Jin and Cortazzi (2006) propose that students in these large classroom contexts in China learn how to be attentive during lessons, and to quietly absorb new knowledge, Li believes that, in some cases, large class sizes impact the academic success of some students who become left behind and unable to remain academically on track. In such instances, the Chinese teacher tries their best to help an underperforming student to pass, even with mediocre results, as explained by Li:

> They cannot give you much time like because it has so many students, they have so many stuff to manage and if you left behind, they will try pass, but they don't expect you like being a higher grade or something. (Li)

The benefits of being taught in small group class sizes in the AES module is acknowledged by participants who are grateful that the AES tutor has time to provide them with individual attention and feedback. Li welcomes this and sees it as a potential preventative measure for students being academically left behind. Although participants appreciate the attention AES tutors give them during lessons, overall, they see them as less approachable than their Chinese counterparts due to their unwillingness to spend time with them before or after lessons, unless by appointment during office hours. As a result, the AES tutor is not positioned by the participants in the same approachable or friendship light as the Chinese teacher. Cleo misses the friendship she had with her Chinese teachers and states '...in the UK I don't think we can do it like this'. The sharing of this experience supports the suggestion offered by Biggs (1996) that many Chinese students are disappointed when they realise that their teacher in the UK is not as readily available outside of class time, as their teacher in China would have been, to provide individual attention.

Interestingly, the female participants do not elaborate on their positive teacher-student relationship back home in China, while the male participants offer deeper reflections on this point by exploring this relationship in the context of some key differences between the education system in China and the UK. Riessman (2008, p24) proposes that narrative inquiry often allows the inquirer to follow participants 'down their trails'. I felt fortunate in being able to experience this as I listened to Josh perceptively analyse the teacher and student relationship in China and the UK, by connecting it to politics, ideology, culture, mindset, and education systems. In trying to make meaning of his experiences, he engages in long turns, and passionately shares his interpretations of the teacher-student relationship. While he recognises the close relationship between students and teachers in China and reflects on the impact of large class sizes on the teacher-student interaction, he introduces the reluctance of most Chinese teachers to engage in worthwhile dialogue with students and attributes this to their communist tendencies. By positioning all Chinese teachers as communists, Josh asserts that they are not at liberty to discuss many things with their students. Required to take an entry level teaching exam that focuses

on Marxism theory, teachers thereafter, according to Josh, must be careful discussing their views with their students or encouraging students to discuss theirs. He describes their position:

> In the classroom if you say something (referring to the teacher) like you know err make people feel liked you don't like your country and you will be punished, you probably will erm be get off your position. (Josh)

Believing that the dominance of communism in China prevents both teachers and students from discussing global topics, Josh concludes that speaking his opinion in a Chinese classroom could potentially cause others to associate him with nationalism, which for him would be problematic. For Josh, however, his AES tutors in the UK are free to talk openly to their students and yet it is evident to him that they are also part of a system which he refers to as 'a big big big AES system'. Comparing his AES tutors to Chinese teachers he believes they are all required to follow rules and regulations in relation to what they teach and how, with the AES tutor controlled by the AES system and the Chinese teacher by the communist state. He expands on this by referring to his AES tutors, in the excerpt below:

> They have to fulfil the requirements given to them by the upper erm, supervisor, superiors, erm, so erm, they have to do something which they also wish they don't like to do. (Josh)

This depiction of the AES tutor as someone who is not freely available to students outside of class times and who follows rules and regulations at the expense of creativity in the classroom, in this context, is a negative one and can be linked back to the discussion in Chapter 2.3 around 'New Public Management (NPM)' and its culture of accountability. It should be recognised that Provider A as a privately owned education organisation, prioritizes profitability and is significantly reliant on income from the students progressing to the partner university, as part of the contractual arrangement. It could be said to that it follows private sector management models that, according to Torres (2011), place accountability, universalisation, and accreditation at the core of an organisation. Situated in this corporate, top-down culture environment, AES tutors are exposed to techniques of accountability. Such techniques are, according to Giroux (2002), embedded in many teaching practices in the HE sectors. Held accountable for the progression of AES students to the partner university, AES tutors are closely monitored by the Global Head of AES Curriculum whose regular inspection mechanisms dictate that the curriculum is followed without any deviation. Evidently, this is picked up by Josh through his recognition that the AES tutors are part of a 'big big big AES system'. This finding helps substantiate the argument made by Torres (2011) that professional autonomy in the HE teaching sector has been weakened by the utilisation of private sector management models in the HE system. The erosion of professional autonomy is evidenced in the context that Josh and the other participants find themselves, with their AES tutor having no alternative but to closely follow the AES curriculum and associated module

specifications. It is, as an EAP teacher and manager and EdD researcher, unsettling to see how the participants in this study are seemingly exposed to the effects of top-down management methods on the teaching team. It is even more unsettling to align these findings with reference made in Chapter 2.3 'New Public Management (NPM)' to Freire's assertion that top-down communication in the education workplace can create an oppressive teaching and learning environment, that filters into its employees becoming 'lifeless and petrified'.

6.3 Theme: Critical Thinking and Chinese Students

In Chapter 3.2.3 'Critical Thinking' there was a brief reference to a common Western assumption that Chinese students are not familiar with the term critical thinking and consequently find it difficult to critically engage when studying in the West. The findings in this study do not affirm these assumptions as each participant shares what critical thinking means to them and reference their understanding of it in China, the UK, or both. The central organising concept of the theme *Critical Thinking and Chinese Students* is how participants understand critical thinking and how it seemingly affects their study and personal lives. Participants are not asked to directly share their definition of critical thinking, instead they are asked, in interview one, in reference to the AES module, 'Are you having opportunity to engage in critical thinking?'. The purpose of this question was twofold a) to explore their understanding (if any) of critical thinking and b) to ascertain if the AES module integrates critical thinking well enough into its design and delivery. In hindsight, as this was not an open-ended question, it ran the risk of participants answering with a 'yes' or 'no' and yet each participant offered detailed responses and evidenced their awareness of critical thinking as a concept. The theme consists of three subthemes that encapsulate key areas of critical thinking in relation to the experiences of the participants a) the failure of the AES module to effectively engage students in critical thinking activity b) returning to China from abroad with a critical mind, c) experiencing conflict when critically engaging with international peers during study on the AES module in the UK.

6.3.1: The AES Module's Approach to Critical Thinking

The responses from participants in relation to the question about engaging in critical thinking puts into question Atkinson's (1997) assertion that critical thinking for Chinese students is so remote from their daily lives that they are unable to understand it as a notion and as a result are unqualified to discuss it or to critically engage, at any meaningful level. While participants highlight that critical thinking is not a common part of everyday life in China, and that students in China do not normally think about why something is the way it is, they all share an understanding of what it means to them. Mary links critical thinking to group discussions in her AES lessons, discussions that she considers to be organised by her tutor around topics that are political. While understanding that she and her classmates are being encouraged to analyse and evaluate information to form an argument, she is at the same time affronted at being required to engage in what she believes to be politically led discussions that are being

introduced to her and her classmates by her AES tutor. Her frustration is firmly articulated in the following extract:

> I just a student, a person, I won't be a Politician and em how to say that, I don't care about it because I can't change it…when he asks my opinion I just say I have no personal interest. (Mary)

Josh's interpretation of the approach to critical thinking in his AES lessons can be seen to align with Mary's interpretations, to a point. While considering his AES tutor's level of critical thinking to be very low level, he shares how he believes that the AES approach of asking students to discuss topical issues such as 'food miles' or 'climate change' as a way to stimulate critical thinking, is nothing more than an endorsement of political correctness. His tutor's suggestion that climate change is a 'bad thing' is, for Josh, an attempt at influencing students on this topic, and therefore morally wrong. This supports Silva's (1997, p359) suggestion that was outlined in 4.2.2 'Academic Writing', that English language teachers should avoid imposing topics upon students such as 'peace education, conflict resolution, environmental concerns, political issues, particular ideologies, literature' and instead allow students to discuss their own topics of interest in order to initiate meaningful critical engagement. It also supports some ruminations I made about the AES module in Chapter 4.3.2 'Academic Writing', in relation to its approach to writing that sees it weaving global topics into the content, with expectations for students to critically engage with the topics, often without any referential connection or interest in the subject matter.

6.3.2. Returning to China with a Critical Mind

While all participants exhibit individual understandings of what critical thinking means to them, some offer more detailed responses than others. Josh talks critically about the concept and associates it with conflict and disharmony in his own personal contexts. He shares the impact of thinking critically on his life and re-integration into Chinese society when he returns to China after studying his high school years in Australia. His descriptions of his experience of critical thinking position him as a as highly aware individual who believes that returning to China for him, with a critical mind, was problematic. He shares how, after returning, he regularly sought evidence from his father for his opinions and looked for objective arguments which angered his parents, and he understood that returning with a critical stance had caused upset. Additional complications came to the fore when he realised he no longer felt integrated into Chinese society and began to feel like an outsider in his own country. His attempt to share new ways of thinking was rejected by his parents and friends in China, causing him to feel frustrated and isolated, as highlighted in the excerpt below:

> But the point is I find is really difficult to get into the tiniest of society because nowadays, I am so a critical thinking and how I treat with people I find is really difficult to get into the society

> on China so cannot communicate wisdom. It's really difficult because we putting different ideas they don't understand'. (Josh)

Josh's belief that his critical awareness is a result of high school education in Australia supports the view by Atkinson (1997) that critical thinking develops over time and is specific to certain cultures and values and is not something that can be taught overnight. At the same time, there is no direct evidence that Josh developed his critical thinking skills while in Australia. Neither is there evidence that these skills were not developed in China prior to moving abroad.

6.3.3 Tension with International Peers

Roy positions himself as an individual who is curious and questioning and always seeking to critically engage with his AES peers, the curriculum materials, and his tutors. In making meaning of his critical thinking, he shares stories of trying to engage with his AES peers where he consciously adopts a neutral position before developing an argument through the consideration of relevant and reliable evidence. Indeed, this links to the AES module's approach to the development of academic writing and speaking skills where students are taught to support arguments by presenting relevant evidence. Like Josh, Roy experiences tension associated with critical thinking but tension of a different kind and to evidence this he draws upon his communication with some of his classmates during AES seminar sessions. He was disappointed when some of his Middle Eastern classmates when discussing women's rights, failed to provide evidence to support their position and Roy believed that they had no interest in doing so. He felt this had created 'a big conflict' between himself and relevant classmates. To help ease this conflict, he does not attempt to persuade those who are resistant, noting that 'if somebody is resistant to their point you cannot process that, I just told the point and I'm supporting my idea'. Roy believes he is alone in endeavouring to develop his critical thinking skills. He believes that his AES tutor while attempting to encourage critical thinking, falls short of fostering it as a value that could reach across cultures within the classroom setting. Through the sharing of these experiences of critical thinking Roy articulates a clear understanding of what critical thinking means for him.

To sum up, all participants share what critical thinking means for them and there is no absence of comprehension surrounding critical thinking as a notion, even if there are individual variations and levels of understanding. Their understanding of this notion could be considered as resulting from studying the AES module that purportedly integrates critical thinking into its' curriculum (for more on this please refer to Chapter 4.2.3 'Curriculum & Criticality in Academic Writing'). However, this could be questionable as the participants criticise the AES module for its approach to critical thinking and failure at effective integration into content and discussions. Josh goes as far as describing critical thinking in AES as a part of the lesson where 'you don't have to you know really use your brain'. On the other hand, it could be argued that their understanding of critical thinking is a result of the reportedly successful implementation of China's eighth education reform (see Chapter 3.8.4 'Transformation Four

– Standardization of Chinese Education' for more for more detail). Liu and Kang (2011) reported that at the completion stage of this reform, between 2004 and 2007, the compulsory school curriculum was said to be successful in enhancing student motivation and critical thinking skills. Finally, it could also be argued that the Western assumption that Chinese students are never exposed to critical thinking is misguided and can in this instance be linked back to the values of a Confucius education that, as pointed out by On (1996, p35), depending on interpretations, is aimed at encouraging open-mindedness and 'a spirit of enquiry'. These findings present a paradox as the participants demonstrate a level of understanding of critical thinking and yet they share that most Chinese people do not know what it is, let alone engage in critical thinking activity. This could correlate with Nussbaum's (2010) understanding that although critical thinking in Chinese schools is an agenda item, it has in fact received limited attention due to the government's reluctance to enhance critical awareness in its population. To further explore the impacts of these findings requires a heightened focus and opens notable opportunity for future research (please see 6.5.2.3 'Critical Thinking', for more on this).

6.4 Narrative Analysis Findings

When working with my reflexive TA, as the core method of analysis in this dissertation, I observed that, seemingly to help make meaning of their experiences, participants were introducing characters into their stories. My reflexive TA although referring to characters when relevant, did not consider the relationships or influence of these relationships on participant events. McAllum et. al (2019) point out that thematic analysis while compartmentalising data may not direct attention to how the narrative or stories link. On the other hand, narrative analysis as an interpretive qualitative research analysis technique, understands that 'humans intersubjectively construct their social realities in and through their interactions with another' (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018, cited McAllum et. al (2019, p359). Bruner (2002) proposes that narrative analysis, in addition or instead of thematic analysis, may present interesting information about the relationship between characters in a narrative that can help enhance a deeper understanding of the stories being told. I was eager to explore how the additional characters introduced by participants in this study were contributing to their interpretation of events and stories. Evidently, the additional characters were absent from the interviews and therefore unable to corroborate the interpretation of events, and their role within those events. Nevertheless, a brief narrative analysis, functioning as a complement to the reflexive TA, of the different roles that the characters supposedly performed in the participant stories is offered below.

A number of characters appear in the stories shared by Josh and seem to help him make sense of his education experiences in the UK and China. In the UK, for him, his classmates are adversaries, they are affirmers of his belief that studying the AES module is a disappointment and a futile study experience, as expressed below:

> …and to my experience a lot of my classmates complain, they have the same feeling to this module…we are like we most of us like nearly everyone dislike the tutor. (Josh)

Josh appears to need to draw on these characters to help affirm his own feelings from his experiences of the module. When asked about his understanding of critical engagement in AES, Josh responds by drawing on his life in China and viewing family members, teachers, and the wider Chinese community, as antagonists. He positions his parents and teachers as partly responsible for his feelings of isolation and frustration as they refuse to acknowledge the new ideas that he wants share upon his return from Australia. He is the protagonist of the story who wants to influence people when in China and to share his enlightened approach to life after studying abroad but instead feels like an outsider. Li, on the other hand, generally sees Chinese parents as positive roles models who operate, in collaboration with teachers, as key players in ensuring their children remain academically on track. Family members are also present in Luvia's stories, where she indicates that her brother is an important figure in her life. Without the support of her brother who is also in studying in the UK, Luvia is confident that she will not adapt and succeed in her academic study. In referring to his communist teachers in China, Josh views them as negative contributors to the Chinese education system that for politically motivated reasons prevents students from openly questioning teachers in the lessons or having opportunity to critically engage with peers. Additionally, he considers his AES tutor to be unsupportive in helping him to fulfil his quest to learn and explore through education. Mary sees her AES tutor as one who propagandizes the political views of the West and aggravates her feelings of irritation at having to discuss world issues that she does not believe she should be expected to discuss. Roy's casts the role of some of his AES classmates in a negative light. They are characters that are averse to thinking critically and consequently cause him to feel disappointed in their responses and reactions.

It can be evidenced in the findings, that key characters in the participant stories are family members, classmates, and teachers. The roles that these characters play are either supportive or unfavourable. What is worth noting is that there is an absence in these stories of, apart from AES tutors, any characters that belong to the ISC where the AES module is delivered. As Head of that Centre, and as Inquirer in this study, this is disconcerting as it could indicate one of two things, either participants do not consider the role of other members of staff as important or that they are not receiving any meaningful support from these members of staff. Either way, there is no evidence to support either concern. An implication of this directs future research opportunities into the auxiliary roles that staff, other than teaching personnel, play in supporting students in their academic study at the ISC.

Within the scope of this study, I have attempted to remain aware of the validity of my research, as evidenced through my reflexive TA and brief narrative analysis. Led by Riessman's (2010) focus on validity in narrative inquiry, I have attempted to provide evidence of a) the stories told by participants

and b) the analysis, in other words, the story told by myself, as inquirer. At the same time, I am aware that the interpretation of data from the study could most certainly be open to further analysis and interpretation. Furthermore, I have been aware throughout the analysis that I have been an outsider to the participants, as in I do not belong to their social groups in relation to background, nationality, age or study context. I have attempted to consider what Braun and Clarke (2022, p214) call 'representation ethics' and to minimize harm in my interpretations of the participant interpretations. It is my intention to share the findings but to avoid reinforcing any further negative stereotypes about Chinese students in an EAP context. On the contrary, the implications of these findings should be to achieve quite the opposite by increasing an understanding in EAP academic circles that will in turn help to address common tensions that have been discussed in this dissertation so far. The next Chapter will begin by discussing the implications of these findings in detail.

Chapter 7: Implications of the Findings, and Research Opportunities and Recommendations, Reflections on Data Collection, Inquirer's Journal, Limitations, and Concluding Remarks

7.1: Implications of the Findings and Research Opportunities and Recommendations

Chapter 2 'The Positioning of UK Higher Education (HE) in the Globalised Arena', explored the link between globalisation, neoliberal education policy, and international students. In that Chapter, I argued that pathway education providers, pre-occupied with organisational profit, are complicit in endorsing a neoliberal form of education that places international students into the role of consumers. The participants of this study are international students who could indeed be categorised as consumers who are purchasing what Bauman (2003, p20) would describe as an education 'knowledge package'. In this consumer led education environment, providing Chinese students with pre-university EAP study in the UK that is of intrinsic benefit and not just created for qualification purposes, is of principal importance to the preservation of my professional values. As an educator I seek to examine if Chinese students studying EAP are receiving a meaningful and high-quality education that will contribute to their learning as a life-long endeavour while also fulfilling short term aims of being prepared for university study in the UK, in these commercial conditions. The aims of this study were to enhance my professional knowledge of how Chinese students understand and make meaning of studying on an EAP programme (in this instance the AES module). I entered the study with my own negative interpretations, that have evolved through my extensive work experience, of how some Chinese students may be experiencing the AES module and had an appetite to explore this through the eyes of the students rather than as EAP Tutor, Course Director, Head of Department, or Head of Centre. There were no expectations that my negative interpretations would be affirmed. On the contrary, I was optimistic that they would be challenged as, working with many advocates of the AES module, I sometimes question my own professional judgement and criticism of the module, in this respect. However, key findings have significantly supported some of my professional concerns that centre around the appropriacy, for Chinese students, of the content of the AES module, the assessment burden, the associated teaching methodology and implications around well-being and academic development. When referring to a neoliberal approach to education in Chapter 2.2 'Human Capital (HCT), the Knowledge Economy and the University', it was highlighted that the commodification of education (in which pathway education, as the focus of this study, comfortably sits) may, as pointed out by Baltodano (2012, p489) have the potential to deprive individuals of 'the joy of learning, the creativity of teaching'. The findings from this study suggest, that at least for some Chinese students studying the AES module, the 'joy of learning' is not being realised. On the contrary the students are engaged in an instrumental form of education that focuses on the obtainment of qualifications, as a means to an end. Neither are some AES tutors being able to experience the benefits of being involved in the 'creativity of teaching' as they are bound and inhibited by top-down corporate management accountability measures.

The negative nature of the findings suggests that there is an urgent requirement to pay more attention to Jin and Cortazzi's (2017, p240) advice for UK educators to embrace a 'moral, academic and professional obligation' to international students, of which Chinese students must be included. Likewise, Point 4 of the UKCISA (2023, p6) International Student Charter (referred to in Chapter 3.1 'Background') which calls for a collaborative staff effort to help deliver 'a world-class international student experience' for all international students studying in the UK should be genuinely followed Interestingly, the UKCISA (2023, p6) suggests that rather engaging in 'ad hoc or occasional efforts', staff should offer support that is sustained and cohesive and this is a recommendation as this dissertation comes to a close. Focused individual recommendations that have emerged from this study are all associated with the overarching recommendation which is a call for an increase in understanding of Chinese students in the UK HE realm. Additionally, I repeat my defence in Chapter 1.2 'Professional Context' of Breen's (2021) statement that unless we increase our attention on the Chinese international student population in the UK HE sectors by deepening our understanding of and respecting their historical and cultural heritage, Chinese students may begin to favour other study destinations. I believe the result of this would be detrimental to the UK HE scene, on a variety of levels. As reported by London Economics (2023) the contribution that international students in general make towards the UK is not exclusively economic. They are important for creating diversity on campuses and in many cases are 'cross-subsidising' home undergraduate students (London Economics 2023, iii). Overall, they, according to London Economics (2023, iv), help to improve the UK education system and elevate the reputation of the UK abroad. The contribution of Chinese students to the UK HE is significant and while they should be valued as important contributors to the UK economy, they should at the same time be offered an education experience that matches their expectations. This section now moves on to discuss three focused areas of recommendation: a potential re-orientation of the AES module that includes curriculum, critical thinking and Chinese students and the teacher-student relationship, while linking this to future research ambitions and opportunities.

7.1.1 Review and Potential Re-orientation of the AES Module

As discussed in Chapter 4.1 EAP 'Background, Purpose, and Approaches', according to Ding and Bruce (2017, p37), EAP aims to support international students in learning how to assimilate knowledge and skills to help enhance their communication at HE level. The AES module that has been created by Provider A to help prepare students for university study in the UK, has absorbed the same aims. A core intention of the module is to help students to confidently integrate standard academic practices into their study while learning how to be confident communicators, autonomous learners, and critical thinkers, for effective preparation for entry into university life. However, findings signal that participants believe they are receiving minimum benefit from studying the AES module. Additionally, the fulfilments of some of the student intrinsic motivations as discussed in the previous theme: 'Motivations', that include

curiosity to learn, effective communication with international peers and critical engagement are not being fully actualised. The findings from this study indicate that overall, the AES module is failing to provide the participants with an education experience that is positive and intrinsically valuable. Lacking in inspirational content, the module is also considered by participants to be assessment heavy, ineffectual in its attempt to integrate critical thinking into the content and sparing in its provision for tutors to initiate and maintain a creative teaching and learning environment. The study environment is intense and the approach to the development of oral and writing skills appears to be ineffective for some Chinese students. The implications of these findings could present an argument that some Chinese students, subjected to an AES curriculum that is prescriptive with a heavy assessment load, are being guided towards docility, a characteristic that Nussbaum (2004) strongly opposes against when promoting a liberal education. Chapter 2.4 'The Purpose of Education', provided a brief discussion around alternative views of what the purpose of education should be. In that section, I supported Nussbaum's (2010, Para 22) call for universities to embrace a liberal education that by steering attention away from an instrumental form of education, leads individuals towards effective participation in 'a decent world culture'. I also presented my endorsement of Giroux's (2006) conviction that education should not be led by exam proficiency but rather it should present an opportunity to engage in a comfortable space that offers opportunities for individual to reason, understand, and critically engage in dialogue. In supporting these positions and aligning with the Panjwani et al.'s (2018, p5) belief that a liberal education can 'nurture criticality and reach a more peaceful world', I propose a reorientation of the AES module towards a liberal education standpoint, beginning with consideration of potential curriculum development.

7.1.1.1 Curriculum Development

To stimulate interest for Chinese students studying this compulsory module, it is suggested that attention is given to creating content and contextual referencing that is appropriate for Chinese students. This is not to suggest that attention is given to Chinese students at the expense of other international students. Rather, it is to propose that a more earnest understanding of the needs and aspirations of Chinese students could help this student population to feel more stimulated and in receipt of a meaningful and rewarding education. In supporting Hedge and MacKenzie's (2016, p4) suggestion that a curriculum should encourage students 'to *be*, to *do*, and to *know*', I recommend an AES curriculum that is of intrinsic, in addition to instrumental value for Chinese students. Currently, focusing on the 'to *do',* the curriculum focuses on the training of students in the development of academic skills to facilitate progression to the partner university and yet falls short of encouraging students 'to *be'* and 'to *know'.* While eager to endorse a liberal education led EAP experience that focuses on education as a pathway to individual growth and flourishment, my professional experience does not extend to a detailed knowledge of the development and implementation of a liberal curriculum. Understanding Nussbaum's (2010) conviction that a liberal education can be made available through studying politics, philosophy,

history and by working with meaningful education activities that stimulate flourishment, individual growth, autonomy and diligent thinking, my research intentions will include developing my professional awareness in this area. In addition, while considering Nussbaum's (2010) claim that technical training for the passing of exams can hinder sincere opportunities for individual growth and flourishment, attention should, alongside content development and pedagogic approach, be directed towards addressing the over-assessment of student performance on this module. An assessment approach, endorsed by Hedge and MacKenzie (2016) that ensures assessment follows curriculum rather than leads it, is a proposition at this stage. The recommendation for future research in this area, therefore, comes with two parts; a) the potential for EAP academic communities to explore how a more liberal educational stance can be adopted for EAP programmes and b) engage in my own professional research that explores the granular details of successful liberal education programmes and initiatives to build my own knowledge in this area of education.

The sharing of this proposition to review and re-orientate the AES module with Provider A who owns the module will need to be subtly presented. Provider A, responsible for fulfilling its obligations to its students and other key stakeholders, may well be cautious about making changes to the current, carefully crafted AES curriculum. I acknowledge that attempting to instil the values of a liberal education into the discipline of EAP in general may come with challenges, given the position of EAP in HE, in a neoliberal education policy space, as discussed in Chapter 2 'The Positioning of UK Higher Education (HE) in the Globalised Arena'. Referring to that Chapter, I am acutely cognizant that universities are complicit in the commercial supply of education to students (as is Provider A), of which international students pay a high economic price and expect a return on their investment. It is therefore more realistic and potentially achievable to recommend the creation and implementation of a liberal, non-instrumental form of education for Provider A, without a total exclusion of some elements of an education that are instrumental in nature, as discussed in Chapter 2.4 'The Purpose of Education'. Referring to the discussion around Robeyn's (2006) three models of education: *instrumental, non-instrumental, economic and non-economic*, in that Chapter, it may indeed be possible in this educational context, to take note of the potential overlap of education models that Robeyn's (2006) proposes and create a fusion of instrumental and non-instrumental education for Chinese students (and indeed all international students) studying at pathway level and beyond. Such a re-orientation of the AES module and some EAP programmes could be a step towards moving to an enjoyable and meaningful education for Chinese students, without dismissing the instrumental form and stakeholder aims of academic success. In other words, there is the potential for a reconciliation of both and I recommend this as a future research opportunity.

7.1.1.2 A Re-thinking of Approaches to the Development of Oral and Written Communication

As outlined in the findings and discussion section, there is evidence that challenges associated with oral and written communication are significant to some participants' negative learning experiences of studying AES in the UK. The findings support literature presented in Chapter 3.2.2 'Oral Communication' which outlines three key reasons for challenges with oral communication that are regularly encountered by some Chinese students: a) a lack of linguistic confidence b) familiarisation with previous classroom management strategies in China that minimize oral communication in class due to large class sizes and c) feeling inhibited when unable to speak in the mother tongue and in what Clark and Gieve (2006) refer to as a 'so-called normal voice'. As particularly noted from the findings in this study, for some participants, any opportunity to efficiently speak with international peers and tutors in the UK is significantly hindered by a lack of linguistic confidence, loss of talking in the 'so-called normal voice' and related high levels of anxiety. There is an opportunity here to deepen an understanding of why many Chinese students seem unable to effectively interact in a UK HE classroom environment. Most importantly there is an opportunity, through understanding and further research, to explore how these oral communication issues may be overcome or at least lessened in ways that no longer make the students feel, as described by Jin and Cortazzi (2017, p242) as having a 'deficit. I am optimistic that with an increase in understanding and fresh approaches to oral communication and Chinese students, there can be a move away from some commonly held Western assumptions, as pointed out by Clark and Gieve (2006) that pigeon-hole Chinese students into a homogenous group of students are simply reluctant to talk in class.

Regarding addressing this issue in an EAP classroom, as a starting point, it may be of value to revisit Holliday's (1994) sentiment (see 3.2.2 'Oral Communication') about the common practice of the management of oral communication in a so called normative English Language teaching classroom. According to Holliday (1994), in this context, the tutor, in checking if the students are responding correctly as per the tutor's expectations, tends to perform the role of a judge, rather than a facilitator and in doing so potentially stints effective communication and interaction, rather than encourages it. This normative approach is evident in the AES lessons where during seminar discussions, students are judged by the tutor on their oral performance. In line with lesson learning outcomes, these sessions are carefully orchestrated and focus on language accuracy rather than fluency, while involving strategic turn taking. In each session, students are assigned roles to act out, topics to discuss, interaction structures to follow, all aligned to a marking criterion that outlines rigid expectations of the students. Therefore, the anxiety of the participants in this study that relate to oral skills may be validly justified, particularly given the key reasons why some Chinese students feel unable to communicate well in class. It is worth pointing out that my professional experience of such a normative English Language environment is not exclusive to working for Provider A, it includes working on University EAP programmes in the UK

and with a joint UK-Chinese venture in China itself. As a future research opportunity, I would like to link this discussion to calls by Freire (2017) for all educators to adopt a classroom environment that is dialogic classroom and nurtured by the teacher. As it stands, the AES classroom is far removed from a dialogic environment and yet claims to support the encouragement of critical engagement and a building of oral communication confidence. It is indeed an interesting area of research that could be further explored.

The findings of this study present academic writing as another key challenge for the participants and can be linked with literature discussed in Chapter 3.2.4 'Writing', that highlights some core differences in writing styles between China and the UK as some of the reasons that Chinese students may struggle with the development of academic writing. As referenced in that Chapter, Xu (2012) suggests that rather than criticise Chinese students for poor academic essay writing skills while studying at HE level in the UK, it would be more helpful for educators to widen their knowledge and understanding of some of these key variations in writing and the impact of this on students. In increasing levels of understanding there may be opportunities to explore ways of supporting Chinese students more effectively in their academic writing endeavours. Participants while reflecting upon the challenges of academic writing appear to understand some of the reasons why they feel so challenged in this area of development. They share their experience of being unfamiliar with academic writing conventions that are so remote from their experience in China and believe that being expected to embrace these conventions in a limited period is too demanding and unrealistic for them, and therefore of limited benefit. Engaging with these findings opens future research opportunities around the approach to the development of academic writing skills in common EAP programmes, particularly in relation to the AES module. Exploring different approaches to academic writing, while considering key differences between writing styles in China and the UK, should at least be a priority for curriculum designers, managers and tutors working in EAP teaching and learning environments.

7.1.1.3 Critical Thinking

In Chapter 3.2.3 'Critical Thinking', there was reference to Atkinson's (1997) argument that critical thinking while integrated into the social practice of some cultures, does not carry over well into Chinese society. In questioning Atkinson's argument, Moosavi (2020), referring to Orientalism and the historic dehumanisation of non-Westerners (see Chapter 3.3 'The Chinese Learner' for more on this), defies what he believes to be crude generalisations about East Asians being unable to think critically. In doing so, he highlights that in itself critical thinking is 'notoriously difficult to define' and asserts that it may indeed be problematic to measure and may 'manifest in culturally specific ways' (Moosavi, 2020, p2). The findings in this study imply that the Chinese participants understand what the notion means to them and even go as far as criticising the AES module for its lack of effective integration of critical thinking into the content. As mentioned in Chapter 3.8.4 'Transformation Four – Standardization of Chinese

Education', China's latest education reform, led by the Minister of Education's (MOE) ***'Confronting the Twenty-first Century Education Rejuvenation Action Plan'*** has, according to Liu and Kang (2011) evidenced success, at least in urban areas of China, in administering and implementing a school curriculum that encourages critical thinking amongst its student populations. Given the generation of the participants of this study, it is likely that they have all experienced aspects of this education reform in China in one way or another. At the same time, their understanding of critical thinking as a notion could be linked to the time-honoured influence of The Confucian-heritage Culture (CHC) (discussed in Chapter 3.4 'The Confucian-heritage Culture (CHC) Connection)', that promotes open mindedness and curiosity in individuals. However, as highlighted by the story told by Josh, some Chinese teachers are purportedly disinclined to critically engage with students or to encourage them to think critically, due to their allegiance to a communist China. While there is no evidence of either of these hypotheses in this dissertation, there is an identification of paradoxes running throughout this discourse around Chinese students and critical thinking. In that regard, future research opportunities are plentiful and could also extend to exploring different definitions and understanding of critical thinking in international student communities. Whether or not their understanding of critical thinking matches Western interpretations or not, is an area that is open to future study and exploration (see more on this in 6.8 'Limitations of the Study', below). Either way, the findings suggest that rather than rely on potentially outdated Western assumptions that Chinese students are unable to engage in critical thinking, there exists a need for a deeper understanding of Chinese students in this context. As an immediate and practical response to Roy's disappointment with the lack of critical engagement when in lessons with his AES peers, Jin and Cortazzi's (2017) endorsement of 'Cultures of Learning', as introduced in Chapter 3.5 'Cultures of Learning', is a recommendation for consideration. In calling for an approach to the international classroom that sees it as a hub of diversity and global collaboration, they call for the development of mutual understanding that is generated through periods of reflection, dialogue, and observation in the classroom (Jin and Cortazzi (2017).

7.1.1.4 Teacher-student Relationship

Implications of the findings are critical in provoking a correction to some long-held views in the West of some characteristics of the typical teacher-student relationship in China, and the supposed impact of this on Chinese student classroom behaviour in the UK. As discussed in Chapter 3.2.1 'Teacher-Student Relationship', some Western educators of Chinese students in the UK, according to McMahon (2011), associate quietness in the classroom with the Chinese teacher-student relationship back home in China that sees the Chinese teacher as domineering and unapproachable and the student as passive and obedient. Interestingly, the findings in this study turn this frequent Western interpretation on its head and affirm McMahon's (2011) argument that Chinese students commonly have a warm and caring relationship with their teachers in China. Furthermore, findings show that a key reason for lack of classroom engagement in the UK is a lack of linguistic confidence, not the teacher-student relationship.

The AES tutor does not come out favourably in this study, with findings suggesting that AES tutors are not as friendly as their Chinese teacher counterparts and are too prescriptive in their teaching methodology. I recommend that this relationship is researched further and is led by consideration of a Freirean (2017) approach to the teacher and student relationship with a view to incorporating such an approach into Provider A's teaching and learning strategy. Freire (2017, p45) in believing that the role of education is to allow for individuals to realise individual fulfilment, asserts that a traditional and common 'banking system' of education that views teachers as a 'depositors' of knowledge and students as 'depositories', needs to be replaced by a relationship that is dialogic and non-oppressive. Freire (2017, p33), in working with Brazilian peasant populations, interrogated how the teacher and student relationship was functioning and called for educators to work '*with*', rather than *'on'* the student (Freire, 2017, p33). Although the AES module and the teaching methodology is designed at the outset with dialogic communication in mind it can be considered weak in fulfilling this aim.

This section will now offer some personal reflections on the data collection process of this research and brief reference to my 'Inquirer's Journal' before moving on to the 'Limitations of the Study', followed by 'Concluding Remarks'.

7.2 Reflections on Data Collection

Entering this study with limited experience in research interviewing, I felt like a novice and regularly experienced feelings of uncertainty. As pointed out by Riessman (2008) that although relinquishing control as a narrative inquirer may be necessary to encourage the production of extended narratives, it can be quite a daunting experience for the inquirer, especially a novice one, and may potentially result in increased levels of anxiety. At the same time, I was eager to learn from this experience and to improve my interview behaviour, and I followed, as I had previously, the basic rules of narrative interviewing. However, as suggested by Richards (2011, p95), effective interviewing relies on much more than 'the internalization of basic rules of procedures and the development of core skills'. Richards (2011) recommends a process of interview self-reflection to support the development of research interview activity, and this is something that I took onboard wholeheartedly. While reflecting on my interview behaviour throughout the process, I was testing my listener ability and placing myself on trial throughout each interview that took place. At the same time, the opportunity of engaging in reflection encouraged me to be self-critical and through an increasing familiarity with the technique of interviewing, I began to feel more comfortable, confident, and skilful in utilising this research tool. To help facilitate this self-reflection during and after the interviews, I reached out again to Uhrenfeldt et al.'s (2007, p5) Guided Reflection Framework, created 'to enhance novice researchers' reflexivity'. This framework, offered as a reflexive tool when videorecording an interview (in my case, Zoom), encourages an exploration of interviewer behaviour with particular attention to paralinguistic communication, proxemics, and timing. The paralinguistic communication element encouraged me to

consider voice tone and word emphasis to see if they had any impact on the interview and the responses and overall interaction patterns. When considering proxemics, I particularly considered eye contact to ascertain if it was indicating anything that I should have been aware of. For example, in the first interview with Mary I noticed that that this participant regularly lowered her eyes (which is not something I had noticed during the live interview itself) and I considered whether this could be indicative of feelings of unease when offering responses to my questions and/or associated with the narrator-listener power relations, or indeed for other reasons unknown. I decided in the second interview to give more time for responses and to emphasise that we could pause or stop the interview at any time should the participant feel uncomfortable.

Consideration of timing was significant for the development of my interview technique. As a narrative inquirer, I took with me to each interview, Riessman's (2008, p24) suggestion that, to support the production of a narrative, longer turn taking is required than in a standard conversation, and this necessitates attentive listening. The inquirer needs to respect pauses and anticipate signals that may denote the completion of an interviewee response (Riessman, 2008). According to Mishler (1991), through respecting silences, there may be an increased chance for the stimulation of the emergence of participant voice and as suggested by Kartch (2017, p4) an opportunity for the participant to 'drive the conversation'. I discovered that, as reported by Mishler (1991), interviewees may indeed offer a detailed respone to an interview question, if provided with time to respond and speak. In considering my interview behaviour, I recognised that at times I did listen patiently as participants engaged in long turns, telling stories of their experiences. This attentive listening allowed for opportunities for me to do what Riessman (2008, p24) would describe as follow them 'down their trails', while negotiating 'openings for extended turns and associative shifts in topic'. However, when reflecting upon each interview as I watched the Zoom video recordings, I recognised that I had not always respected silence. On the contrary, I had sometimes jumped in with my own response or comments, potentially missing an opportunity that could have arisen from respecting silence. To this end, I acknowledged that I had failed to fully heed Mishler's (1991) advice which states that a key skill is the interviewer's ability to avoid disrupting a narrative response by unnecessary interruptions, and Riessman's (2008) caution against not respecting longer turn taking. Moreover, I had on occasion perhaps spoken too much and interacted as if in a standard conversation and occasionally asking a questioning and not waiting for an answer, see below for a couple of examples of this with Luvia, in the second interview:

Example of not waiting for an answer, in response to my question:

> Int: Probably also because you have very large classes? Interesting okay, thank you. There was something else I wanted to expand on…

Talking about academic essay writing and the differences in China and the UK: a missed opportunity?

Int: And you talked about not having an ending in some of your Chinese writing so, is structure also problematic? Okay that's fine. Now the main thing I'm going to move on to is the teacher student role.

7.3 Inquirer's Journal

It was only when I came to the actual empirical element of this study that I began to record my thoughts in what I called my 'Inquirer's Journal'. Every time I re-visited this Journal to add a new thought and reflection, I read some previous excerpts, normally from the day or week before. This helped me to appreciate how much I was developing as an inquirer, despite elevated levels of anxiety and doubt in my own research ability. Below I share three very personal and brief excerpts from my Journal which came at different points in the process:

Initial stages of interviewing

I have now interviewed the first three Participants and they were all so different. Participant 1 is noticeably confident, thoughtful, and articulate and the interview lasted around 90 minutes as he offered such lengthy responses. I thoroughly enjoyed it! Participant 2 was also confident and had so much say in answer to my questions. Participant 3, on the other hand, gave limited responses and didn't appear to be interested in meeting with me. This threw me and I will now need to look back over the recording again, paying attention to how I responded as listener and check my questions.

Thoughts on the transcription process

This transcription process is unbelievably time consuming; I have no idea how I will complete this dissertation on time as it is taking me weeks just to get the transcripts done and put into order, ready for analysis. As one transcript becomes developed, I have another interview and along comes another transcript task! However, I understand this importance of this and that's it's all part of the process so I must stay patient, crack on and stop worrying!

Data analysis

Having spent hours today analysing data from Participant 1, I am feeling more confident and managing to see light at the end of the tunnel. This participant's data is 'rich' and interesting, even though I am only at the thematic analysis stage of Interview 2, Coding Stage 2. I am looking forward to moving into the next part of this process where I hope to begin to see theme development. Always doubting that I am doing thematic analysis correctly, I feel more assured that there is no one way and I just need to be less anxious.

7.4 Limitations of the Study

This study has been approached from a qualitative research angle and includes voluntary participation of only six Chinese students. Therefore, there has been no attempt at generalisation and no suggestion that the findings are representative of all Chinese students studying the AES module or other EAP programmes that are provided by HE institutions in the UK. Neither is there any claim that all EAP programmes, created and delivered by a number of pathway education providers and universities across the UK are identical in design and delivery. While I consider the small number of participants, belonging to only one EAP provider, to be a limitation of this study there has at least been an attempt to understand and acknowledge how some Chinese students make meaning of studying EAP (in this instance AES), in the UK. This comes with the hope that recommendations can be considered within the EAP teaching and learning communities that include Chinese students, as considered appropriate.

Additionally, the participants in this study were students of the IY2 Programme at the ISC and were of a similar age and at the same stage of their study journey. Considering this to be a limitation of the study, it is proposed that future research considers increasing the number of participants and going across the entirety of Provider's A's pathway programme suite that includes UFP, IY2 and PMP programmes. It is anticipated that this could provide more varied data, given the difference in age groups, levels of maturity and English language ability of students studying on these programmes. Of particular interest would be the PMP programme which typically consists of Chinese students that are confident communicators in the English language, and who arrive with high levels of linguistic ability, and a mature disposition due to age and the stage of study.

Finally, scope in this study does not allow for any in-depth reference to critical thinking with regard to its origins and varying complex interpretations (and the important influence of German philosophy or Bertrand Russell, and Dewey, in China). Reference to critical thinking has been limited to how participants in the study understand it and how the AES module approaches the encouragement of critical thinking into each lesson. There are opportunities to explore the relationship between Chinese students and critical thinking in UK HE environments further. There is scope here for a study led by scholars of critical thinking as it is an area which has a vast amount of literature associated with it, with an introduction to critical thinking going as far back to Socrates in the 5th Century BCE in Athens.

7.5 Concluding Remarks

When I began this dissertation, I had already started to develop an earnest understanding of different education contexts and philosophies which was helping me to constructively observe my own professional position in education, in a globalised HE world. This understanding was coming from intense study, as an EdD candidate, and was fundamental in securing my interest in the creation of a

dissertation that would develop my knowledge, research attributes and confidence as a researcher and educator. Through engagement with this dissertation, I have learned about the impacts of globalisation on education, the complexities of the commodification of education, the changing landscape of HE in the UK and the positioning of EAP in this context. In doing so, I have strengthened my professional knowledge and found answers to long sought-after questions and ambiguities. Foregrounding my work with Chinese students in an EAP context, this dissertation has helped me to establish further my core educational values on a personal and professional level. It has helped to define me as an individual, and most importantly it has confirmed many of my assertions about the teaching of Chinese students in UK HE environments. This study has attempted to understand Chinese students and their classroom behavioural characteristics through consideration of relational social, cultural, and historical aspects and with the aim of helping to alleviate some tensions that exist in some EAP teaching and learning contexts. An exploration of how participants understand their study on an AES module, as part of the realm of EAP has taken place and helped to substantiate my professional assessment that the AES module is, in parts, ineffective in motivating Chinese students and preparing them for university study in the UK. This affirmation has been afforded by insights expressed through the eyes of the participants of this study, insights that offer opportunities for EAP professionals to understand some of the fundamental reasons that some perplexities and challenges exist when teaching Chinese students in this education context, and to reflect upon on how they may be addressed. In this respect, the module does not fulfil its purpose of supporting international students in the development of academic skills, critical thinking, autonomous learning, and increased student confidence. This links to reference made, in Chapter 4.2 'Tensions in the EAP Arena', to the suggestion by Simons and Masschelein (2008) that many English for Academic Skills modules are created to add value as opposed to a higher learning experience and may be regarded as supporting an approach to education that is neo-liberal in nature. Findings have indicated that there is a need to re-consider how appropriate EAP programmes are for contemporary Chinese students, with suggestions offered on how improvements can be made.

The study has taken place with open eyes and has reminded me of my responsibility as an educator to respect, nurture, and value Chinese students in their quest to develop and grow through the experience of studying EAP and further programmes that are delivered in UK HE settings. Taking into consideration contemporary Chinese students, this conclusion calls for a review that is not exclusive to the AES module at the centre of this study, but EAP in general, and calls for a focus on an education experience that is liberal in essence and thus intrinsically rewarding. This aligns with Nussbaum's (2010) promotion of an education that, intrinsic in nature, encourages ownership of thought, individual growth, and personal autonomy. It urges educators to increase a recognition that Chinese students, alongside all students, should be offered opportunities, as proposed by Nussbaum (2010), to make positive contributions on a global stage, rather than being viewed as tradeable commodities in UK HE sectors. While I remain optimistic that a heightened understanding of Chinese students in this context

may be possible, I have no expectations of an effortless shift in some academic communities of an understanding of this student population. Referring back to Orientalism (as touched upon in 3.3 'The Chinese Learner'), Moosavi (2020, p7) suggests that common Orientalist views of East Asian students in a Western university environment are so deep-rooted that many academics continue to accept relevant stereotypes as 'unquestionable truths'. Additionally, in calling attention to the internationalisation of the university and the impact on academic staff (refer back to Chapter 2.3 'New Public Management (NPM)' for more), Moosavi (2020) asserts that there exists resentment from some Western university academics. They view university internationalisation strategies as mechanisms for the intense recruitment of East Asian students (of which Chinese students form the largest percentage), correlating with 'a neoliberal internationalisation' of the university (Moosavi, 2020, p4). An embracement of the internationalisation of the university needs to be, as highlighted by Wilkinson (2022, p242), 'hard-wired into every aspect of a university's activities – a silver thread, not a bolt on'. To this end, I support Wilkinson's (2022) request for collective responsibility in this education context, and collaboration in university communities.

My concluding remarks about this study take us back to Chapter 3.3 'The Chinese Learner', where there was a discussion around a common Western educators' positioning of Chinese students as a homogenous group of learners that generally display classroom behavioural characteristics of docility, passivity, silence, and dependence. Against that backdrop, Ryan's (2011, p6) thoughts that such stereotypical, large culture approaches to Chinese students is no longer appropriate for 'contemporary realities' were presented. The findings in this study uphold Ryan's view and support Holliday's (1994) stance that some Western views that position some societies as backward due to being different, need to be challenged. Furthermore, they support Moosavi's (2020) questioning of the presence of Orientalism in university settings, further endorsing the need to re-consider and challenge negative academic discourse around East Asian students. In Chapter 3.7 'Social and Other Justifications', there was reference to Holliday's (1999, p245) questioning of large culture approaches that refer to 'Western' vs 'Chinese' when considering different classroom behavioural characteristics between Chinese students and their international classmates. For Holliday (1994a) such a categorisation has the potential to condemn Chinese students to 'peripheral, not thinking automata' (p247). I conclude that such outdated Western perceptions that attempt to lock Chinese students into their past is no longer (if indeed it ever was) sustainable and support and promote Ryan's (2009) request for an intensification of academic dialogue and a recognition of and respect for a new generation of Chinese students. At this point, I return also to Dewey whose interest in China, according to Wang and Weir (2007, p76) led him to suggest that it should not be simply understood as an 'alien political morphology'. Rather, it should be understood as a politically and economically different world but treated as such with understanding and respect. I align with these thoughts and follow Dewey's stance of viewing China 'neither respectively nor instrumentally, but prospectively' (Dewey, cited Wang and Weir, 2007, p82). I also

endorse Jacques (2009) argument that Westerners, often so familiar with running the world, struggle to understand and recognise differences. Should a sincere and mutual understanding and meaningful academic dialogue between the China and the UK be reached, I am optimistic that stereotypical labelling of Chinese students as passive learners, will gradually disappear from academic circles and discourses and encourage a more harmonious relationship between Chinese students and UK educators. I conclude by once again acknowledging Jin and Cortazzi's (2017, p241), (see Chapter 3.5 'Cultures of Learning') call for a teaching and learning approach that encourages students and staff to learn *about* each other, *from* each other and *with each* other, to help nurture an international classroom that has at the core the values of mutual understanding and respect.

Finally, the ending of this dissertation is the beginning of new explorations and improvement opportunities in my professional practice. While appreciating that my professional curiosity has, to a degree, been satisfied, it has also been further stimulated and I look forward to new beginnings as an education researcher and EAP practitioner.

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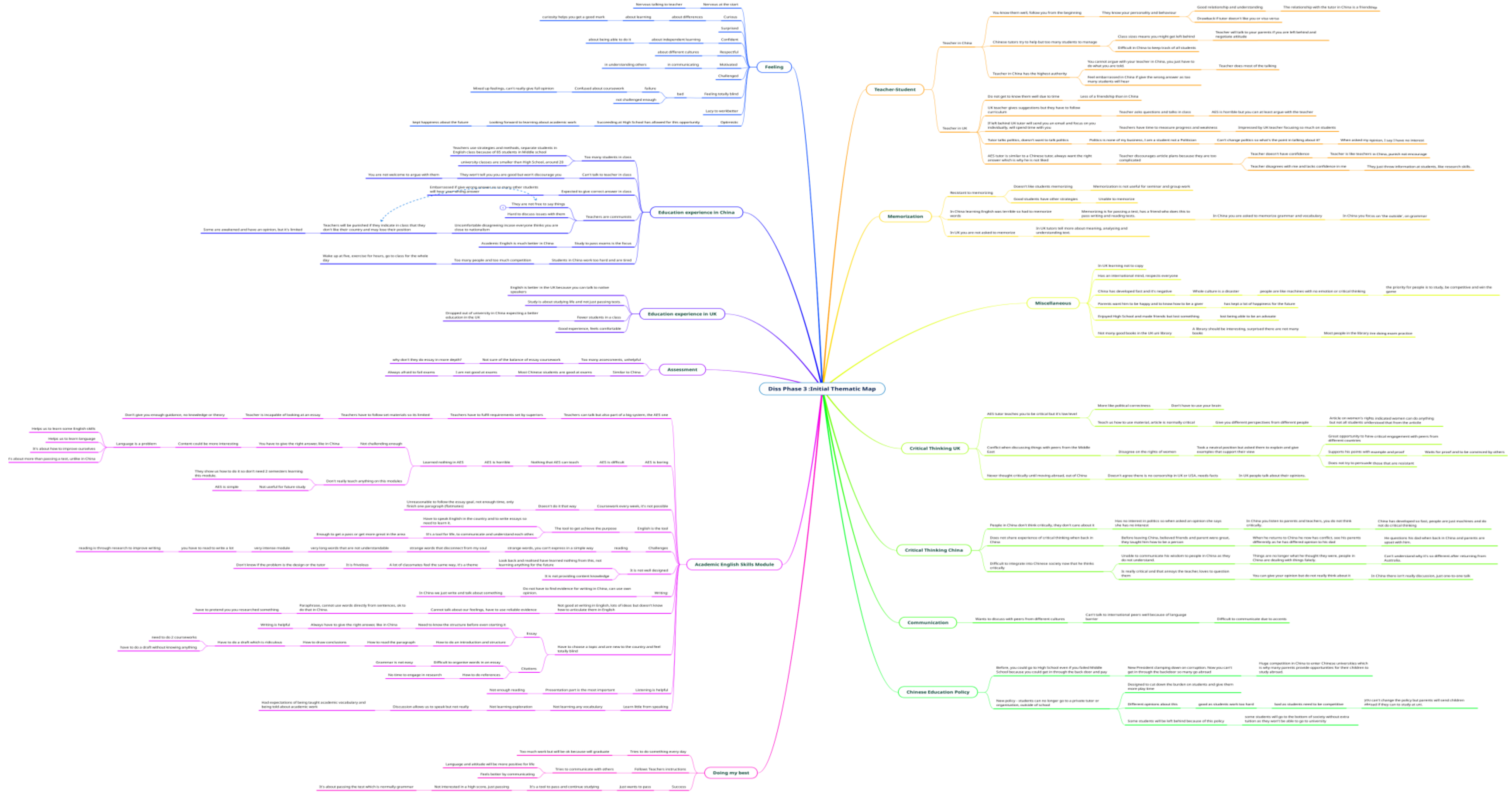
Appendix A: Candidate Themes



Appendix B: Thematic Analysis Final Themes and Subthemes