Pedagogical Adaptions of Chinese students on a UK Music Education MA Programme

Perceptions of Chinese students, MA teaching staff, and Chinese returnees

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Abstract

Globalisation and internationalisation have interconnected people through education. While much intercultural research focuses on the culture shocks and adaptive challenges faced by international students due to academic, cultural, and educational differences, fewer studies have examined how these experiences impact their instrumental and vocal teaching approaches, career expectations, and employability. Haddon (2019) explored how Chinese students viewed their prior educational experiences in relation to their MA music studies. Further research (Haddon, 2024) examined how their overseas education could be perceived as both beneficial and potentially at odds with their home country's educational values upon their return.

The thesis extends Haddon's (2019; 2024) research by investigating enrolled students' and returnees' pedagogical and intercultural perceptions before, during, and after UK Music Education masters study, also investigating the related perceptions of programme teaching staff. Qualitative data were gathered through three sets of interviews (13 instrumental/vocal teaching students, 13 masters teaching staff, and 13 returnees). The findings reveal that overseas learning and teaching training is seen as an expansion of students' understanding of education and impacts their career decisions. Various factors, such as personality, career expectations, pre-MA educational experiences, post-MA teaching contexts, changing societal values, and the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, impact students' adaptabilities during UK study and returnees' employability and challenges in applying MA knowledge to their teaching in China. This research has implications for the teaching adjustments and adaption of overseas students, and educators in both UK and China contexts.

Table of contents

List of Tables, Chart and Figure

List of Abbreviations

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Higher education institutions (HEI)

International Baccalaureate (IB)

International Primary Curriculum (IPC)

International Middle Years Curriculum (IMYC)

Instrumental and Vocal Teaching (IVT)

Ministry of Education (MOE)

Peer Teaching and Learning (PeTaL)

Student-centred education (SCE)

Talking About Music (TAM)

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Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background: From globalisation to international higher education

Globalisation has emerged as a defining force in shaping the interconnectedness of societies worldwide. Baylis and Smith (1997) describe it as a process where events in one part of the world increasingly influence distant regions, affecting people, economies, and cultures. The rapid advancement of information and communication technologies has accelerated this phenomenon, creating what Cheung and Chan (2009) refer to as a 'borderless world'. In this context, individuals and institutions can access and share information globally, enabling networking across multiple sectors, including business, education, politics, and communication (Cheung & Chan, 2009). However, this is only feasible for those with the wealth to afford the privileges that enable such communication and travel.

While much of the attention in globalisation studies has focused on the business sector, there is a growing recognition of the critical role that higher education institutions (HEIs) play in a globalised world. As Guruz (2011) highlights, HEIs are important in preparing graduates for participation in the 'knowledge society', where specialised knowledge and skills are key drivers of competitiveness and innovation. Graduates equipped with these capabilities are seen as valuable assets, contributing to the strength and competitiveness of local industries, economies, and even nations (Cheung & Chan, 2009). This elevates the role of higher education in global development, not merely as a provider of knowledge but as a network of institutions shaping the global workforce.

In the global economy, which is increasingly driven by knowledge and innovation, individuals with interdisciplinary expertise and relational skills are becoming the primary determinants of a nation's competitiveness (Guruz, 2011). As a result, higher education institutions bear a significant responsibility to ensure that students are not only knowledgeable in their fields but also equipped with generalist skills necessary to create, adapt to and thrive in a rapidly changing global environment (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009). The expansion of international education has, therefore, become a key feature of globalisation, with HEIs around

the world seeking to adapt their curricula and methodologies to prepare students for the demands of a global workforce.

One clear indicator of this trend is the dramatic increase in student mobility. With the lifting of certain barriers to population movement, such as the end of the Cold War in 1991, the number of students studying abroad has grown at an 'unprecedented rate' over the past two decades (Paulino, 2019, p. 105). This rise in international student mobility reflects not only the appeal of acquiring overseas qualifications but also the value placed on international education as a means of improving career prospects and adapting to the needs of a knowledge-based society (Gong & Huyber, 2015; Knight & de Wit, 1997).

Political factors have also played a role in facilitating this growth. Improvements in visa policies, such as streamlined application processes and the introduction of post-study work permits, have made it easier for students to study abroad and remain in their host countries after graduation (Beine, Neol & Ragot, 2014). However, as Beine et al. (2014) noted, understanding the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that drive student mobility is essential for host countries looking to attract international students. Political, economic, and educational motivations all intersect to influence students' decisions about where to pursue their studies, making it crucial for HEIs to remain competitive in the recruitment of international students (details in Chapter 2).

Despite the many benefits of international education, it is essential to critically assess its impact. While the promise of enhanced career prospects and global competitiveness motivates students to study abroad, the reality of their post-graduation experiences often depends on a range of factors, including the different cultural values between home and host countries, the re-integration and utilisation of skills learned overseas, and the evolving demands of the employment market and global economy (Hao, Wen & Welch, 2016; Hao & Welch, 2012). As globalisation continues to transform education in this interconnected world, the navigation of these internationalised complexities among international students, HEIs and graduates is a topic worthy of exploration.

1.2 Research topic and the overarching research question: Chinese international students in a UK MA Music Education programme and their re-adaptive experiences

The growing influx of international students into HEIs, particularly in music education, highlights the importance of understanding students' overseas learning and teaching experiences and adaptions, both during their studies abroad and upon their return home (Haddon, 2019; 2024). Haddon (2019) highlighted both the benefits and challenges of these experiences. Students enjoyed an enriched curriculum, greater staff support, and exposure to a broader repertoire but struggled with adjusting to new cognitive approaches and learning strategies. However, given the sample size of nine student respondents, Haddon further questioned whether the insights provided could accurately represent Chinese students' ability to develop student agency and learning independence within the UK educational environment and to transfer these skills effectively upon returning home.

Other existing research highlights significant pedagogical and linguistic challenges faced by Chinese students in a UK music education programme. Li and Zheng (2024) explored subject-specific language difficulties faced by Chinese MA Music Education, stressing the need for targeted support from UK educators to overcome these barriers and align with the UK's pedagogical expectations. Expanding on this, Zheng and Li (2024) extended the discussion by focusing on Chinese instrument teachers in the same programme, highlighting stark contrasts between Chinese and UK music education methods. A key issue identified was the transition from a teacher-led approach, rooted in memorisation and repetition, to the more autonomous and critically engaged learning expected in the UK programme (Zheng & Li, 2024; Haddon, 2019). These findings align with broader discussions on international student adaptation, particularly in disciplines requiring a high degree of independent study and pedagogical reflection.

Beyond their initial adaptation to UK music education, Chinese students must also navigate the reapplication of their overseas learning experiences when

returning to China. Haddon's (2024) recent study delved into this issue, examining the challenges faced by returnees in reconciling UK-acquired teaching practices with the structural and cultural constraints of the Chinese education system. Although graduates valued their exposure to UK pedagogies, institutional norms and traditional expectations in China may limit their ability to implement the UK-acquired teaching approaches effectively. Overall, these studies reveal a dual adaptation process experienced by Chinese music education students: first, adjusting to the pedagogical and linguistic demands of the UK MA education, and later, reintegrating new knowledge within their home educational framework. However, research has yet to provide a comprehensive understanding of how students navigate these transitions in real teaching contexts, particularly from the perspectives of the students themselves, their UK tutors, and graduates returning to China.

To address this gap, this study investigates the adaptation experiences of Chinese students in a UK MA Instrumental and Vocal Teaching (IVT) programme and their professional trajectories upon returning to China. The overarching research question guiding this study is: *What are the perceptions of Chinese students, course tutors, and returnees regarding students' pedagogical adaptations after enrolling in a UK MA course and returnees' readaptations after returning to China to teach?* Specifically, three key themes are examined: 1) how Chinese students perceive their pedagogical experiences before and after beginning their studies in the UK, and the challenges and adaptations they encounter in response to these differences; 2) UK MA tutors' perspectives on students' pedagogical transitions; and 3) how returnees integrate their UK-acquired knowledge into their teaching practices and employment. Drawing further on the literature in Chapter 2, these themes are developed and reconceptualised into three groups of research questions, which are detailed in Sections 2.1.5, 2.2.7, and 2.3.3.

In this research, qualitative interview data were gathered through three sets of interviews to examine the adaptive perceptions of students' instrumental and vocal teaching, as well as overseas learning, among three distinct groups: Chinese

international students, UK MA teaching staff, and Chinese returnees. The study explores the dual adaption process, focusing on the pedagogical challenges and differences encountered by Chinese students who have recently started their instrumental and vocal teaching studies in the UK. It also investigates the structural factors contributing to these challenges. Additionally, the research seeks to understand how MA teaching staff perceive the pedagogical difficulties faced by students, the reasons behind these difficulties, and their views on students' adaptions. Finally, it explores the experiences of Chinese returnees, examining how the MA Music Education programme has impacted their teaching practices, employability, and the integration of UK-taught approaches into Chinese music educational contexts. Together, these perspectives provide a comprehensive view of the adaptions necessary for overseas higher education music learning and re-entry into teaching environments in an internationalised context.

1.3 The landscape of UK Music Education MA programmes, the MA in this study, and me

Postgraduate music education programmes across the UK adopt diverse approaches, each designed to address specific aspects of the field and prepare their students for various professional roles. Kingston University's Music Education MA emphasises the diversity of school-based music practices in the UK, analysing their cultural and social contexts while incorporating international perspectives on musical understanding and communication. In contrast, UCL's Music Education MA focuses on research-informed practice, encouraging students to critically engage with educational values and assumptions while developing specialised interests in music education under departmental supervision.

Trinity Laban's MA Music Education Programme places greater emphasis on the practical application of teaching and leadership skills, blending theoretical knowledge with hands-on experience to tackle contemporary challenges in music education. Meanwhile, the University of Southampton's MMus in Music (Education) adopts a research-driven approach, prioritising trends in musicological methods,

instrumental pedagogy, and foundational research skills. As mentioned above, these programmes illustrate the varied and evolving landscape of music education in the UK and offering students a spectrum of choices and specialisations to meet the demands of a dynamic and multidisciplinary field.

The MA programme involved in this study, with a focus on Instrumental and Vocal Teaching, is an evolving programme that continuously adapts its teaching formats and content. In response to the challenges posed by COVID-19 isolation policies, a hybrid model combining online and in-person teaching was introduced and remains in use, though most teaching has since returned to in-person settings. The programme description in this section is based on the student handbook from the 2021-22 academic year, reflecting the period when the first group of the research participants began their studies. Despite structural adjustments, its core teaching content influencing the student and graduate participants, such as the student-centred teaching approach, has remained largely consistent.

Distinct from other UK music education master's programmes, this MA integrates pedagogical and practical teaching trainings. During the 2021-22 academic year, the programme was delivered through a combination of weekly live lectures and smaller tutor group sessions, scheduled during specific weeks of each term. These sessions were complemented by learning materials and module content accessible through the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Students were expected to engage with these resources promptly, which typically involves watching asynchronous video content introducing key concepts, followed by tasks such as contributing to online discussion boards or writing in individual journals. The final stage of student engagement varied and included tutor group discussions, recorded responses from the teaching team, or additional resources, with some weeks featuring live lectures as follow-up content.

These lectures and smaller tutor group sessions played a crucial role in fostering students' reflective practice and academic development by guiding them toward a more comprehensive understanding of their subjects. Tutor groups, led by graduate teaching assistants and teaching staff, promote both individual and peer

collaboration to enhance subject knowledge and skill development. Additionally, students participate in peer learning groups and Peer Teaching and Learning (PeTaL) exercises, which were similarly small group sessions, alongside various tutorials and meetings. In peer learning groups, students collaboratively responded to weekly stimulus questions provided by the programme. The three PeTaL exercises, an integral part of the course, allowed students to practice and reflect on their pedagogical skills in a supportive environment. For each, they created a three-to-five-minute recorded excerpt from a one-to-one lesson (lasting 14-16 minutes) with a beginner instrumental or vocal pupil who is also a fellow student, assigned by the tutors. Students also submitted a 400-500 word written commentary reflecting on a specific aspect of their chosen lesson excerpt. This exercise serves as a mini-preparation for the subsequent practical assessment, helping students refine their teaching methods and reflective practice. Thus, these sessions were designed to encourage active reflection on their progress as instrumental/vocal teachers and academic scholars, while also fostering interaction and collaboration among their peers in the programme.

The MA course in Music Education adopts a student-centred and dialogical approach to teacher training, offering Chinese MA music students the opportunity to engage with a curriculum designed from a Western perspective with a student-centred ethos, including concerns of safeguarding. This allows them to develop their teaching practices in a student-centred mode. Compared with intercultural courses examined in Pham and Renshaw's (2013) study, this MA programme offers participants a more structured and comprehensive learning experience, which potentially deepens the influence of new teaching concepts. Unlike simply becoming 'barely familiar with basic learning principles and activities' (Pham & Renshaw, 2013, p. 81), participants follow a more intensive, step-by-step process, ensuring a deeper engagement with pedagogical concepts. For each module, the course handbook outlines learning objectives, module aims, and recommended references. Additionally, students can access recorded lectures and slide copies via the VLE. For example, in the session on Socratic Questions, students are introduced to dialogic

approaches and questioning techniques. By viewing the VLE videos, they receive a handout with sample questions categorised by function, providing examples that can be applied in their instrumental or vocal lessons.

From an academic perspective, the course handbook outlines that students' critical thinking and writing skills are also developed through literature reading, critiquing, discussion, and comparison. Their teaching skills and reflective understanding are further enhanced through assignments that focuses on reflective teaching experience (The University of York MA Music Education Course Handbook, 2021). This comprehensive training approach equip participants with a dual perspective—both as instrumental teachers and international students—allowing them to access and internalise the student-centred teaching methodologies promoted in the programme. Consequently, such a well-rounded educational experience may contribute significantly to their ability to adapt to new teaching environments and practices.

According to the MA IVT course handbook in 2021-22, the course assessment methods were designed to test both practical teaching abilities and academic critical analysis. For students' practical modules, they were tasked with recording a one-on-one instrumental or vocal lesson (14-16 minutes) with a beginner-level pupil during their first term. Alongside the recording, they must submit a 1000-word reflective commentary, as well as an appendix containing the lesson plan, pupil consent form, and relevant teaching materials. On the academic side, students completed a 750-word summative assessment focused on academic writing, guided by instructions provided during the writing preparation stage, and a 1000-word critical evaluation of a research article related to instrumental or vocal teaching, as assigned by course tutors. These assessments offered a comprehensive evaluation of both practical teaching and academic competencies.

My experience with intercultural adaptions began when I undertook the same MA programme, after having spent years immersed in the teaching approaches commonly used in China. In China, my teaching style was characterised by a hands-on and directive method. I would physically guide my students by

adjusting their hand positions or applying pressure on their shoulders to demonstrate correct finger techniques on the keyboard. When mistakes were made, I would promptly correct them and demonstrate the proper technique myself. These teaching habits had been instilled in me from a young age and were widely accepted by both my previous employers and the parents of my students. During my MA programme, I encountered a significant shift in pedagogical approaches that challenged my previous understanding. I was advised to refrain from physical contact with students and was discouraged from providing direct corrections without any scaffold approach. Instead, a learner-centred approach was emphasised, which prioritised student independence (Coats, 2006), empowerment (Wright, 2011), reflection, and a more egalitarian student-teacher relationship (Burwell, 2005). My supervisor supported my growth by offering resources rather than explicit instructions, which bolstered my independence and confidence in tackling challenges. This experience led me to question the suitability of the teaching methods I had previously employed in China and to consider whether the approaches I learned in the UK would be applicable if I returned to teach in China. Similarly, my Chinese peers in the MA programme shared concerns about reconciling differing teaching methods and the potential impact on their future career choices. These shared issues prompted me to delve deeper into these questions.

In my MA dissertation, I reviewed the literature comparing teacher-centred and learner-centred approaches in music education. I found that these teaching methods are not mutually exclusive (Hallam, 1998), and that educators can flexibly adjust their approaches as required (Elen, Clarebout, Leonard & Lowyck, 2007). Following my MA, I spent over a year teaching piano online in China. The pedagogical strategies I acquired during my studies allowed me to successfully integrate a broader range of teaching methods, including those I had previously questioned. Teacher-centred methods, while not inherently flawed, are particularly valued in Chinese society due to their alignment with the high stakes of exams such as the National College Entrance Examination (Gaokao), which prioritise exam-oriented and knowledge-transmitted learning (Zhou, 2019). Through my intercultural experiences,

I have taken on multiple roles: a Chinese student-pianist familiar with traditional methods, an international student adapting to novel pedagogies in the UK, and an online private piano teacher in China combining different pedagogies and approaches following my studies abroad.

The inspiration for this doctoral thesis stemmed from my experiences and interest in the challenges of adapting to new educational environments both when starting my studies and later, when returning to teach in China. During my MA programme in the UK, I frequently discussed with my classmates, whether or not they were experiencing similar challenges, and discovered that the teaching methods that were previously effective and well-regarded were no longer suitable or accepted within the MA framework. After returning to China, I observed that some peers struggled to implement student-centred interactive teaching methods, feeling that the concepts learned during the MA were impractical. Conversely, some of them found that while student-centred education (SCE) could be integrated into one-to-one piano teaching, it required considerable time and effort to explain and justify these methods to both parents and students. Some peers even abandoned SCE due to its significant time demands. This compelling situation prompted me to build on my MA dissertation findings and pursue this research further. Issues related to research objectivity will be examined in the reflection section of Chapter 3.

1.4 Overview of the thesis

This chapter sets the context for the study and outlines its objectives. Chapter 2 offers an in-depth literature review on various topics, including music education and student experiences in China, the cultural and academic factors affecting international students' perceptions, and the process of re-adaption for returnees once they return to China. Chapter 3 details the research methodology, including the data collection method, qualitative data analysis, and considerations related to research rigour and ethical considerations. Chapters 4-7 present the research findings, organised by participant groups: Chinese international students, MA teaching staff and tutors, and returnees. These chapters address the research

questions identified in Chapter 2. Chapter 8 discusses and synthesises findings and themes across all participant groups. The final chapter provides a summary of key findings based on the research questions, identifies the research limitations and implications, and offers recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature on the cultural and pedagogical differences faced by Chinese international students and returnees studied music education in the UK, organised into four sections. The first section focuses on music education in China, exploring historical and contemporary challenges, educational systems, and pedagogical values. Next, literature on cultural and academic influences on Chinese international students studying in the UK are reviewed, with attention given to their adaption to linguistic, academic, and cultural differences. The third section considers the re-adaption issues faced by Chinese returnees, such as reverse culture shock and reintegration for returnees. Finally, the chapter identifies the overarching research questions and summarises ancillary questions that arise from each section.

2.1 Music education and students in China

2.1.1 The state-influenced evolution of music education in China

In China, music has historically played a role in maintaining social harmony by supporting the inherited federal hierarchy (Law & Ho, 2011; Yan, 2017), serving as an important political tool that distinguished people of different identities (Li, 2020). Although this resulted in an overemphasis of the political function of music, and a neglect of its inherent creativity (Shao, 2014), music education in China developed and prospered due to the close relationship between court music and federal authority before and during the Tang dynasty (618-907) (Li, 2020). Since 1840, the development of music education and music institutions in China has been regarded as a process starting from scratch, despite its roots extending back to the imperial period (Yan, 2017).

A tight connection between state authorities and the development of music education has been recognised both in the imperial (Li, 2020) and contemporary school music education in China (Zhou, 2019; Ho & Law, 2004). Ancient music education, characterised by hierarchical and inherited features, flourished during the Han (202 BC – 220 AD), Sui (518 – 618), and Tang (618 – 907) Dynasties but began to decline from the Song to Qing (960 – 1912) Dynasties (Li, 2020). This pattern

mirrored the fluctuating growth of music education after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949: music education was halted for ten years due to the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and then resumed following the Open-door policy (Law & Ho, 2011). Since then, China's society and music education have experienced a dramatic shift from 'an insular to a global perspective' (Ho & Law, 2004, p. 161). These developments demonstrate that music education in China has been shaped, managed (Ho & Law, 2004), and often controlled by state authority (Zhou, 2019).

This close relationship between state authorities and music education continues to influence contemporary practices. The curriculum and pedagogical approaches in Chinese schools are still largely directed by the government, reflecting broader political and cultural objectives (Zhou, 2019). The Ministry of Education plays an important role in determining the content and structure of music education, ensuring that it aligns with national ideals and promotes a collective cultural identity (Ho & Law, 2004). While this state-driven approach has ensured a standardised and cohesive system of music education across the country, it has also been critiqued for limiting creativity and individual expression among students (Li, 2020). As China navigates its place in an increasingly globalised world, the challenge remains to balance the preservation of traditional cultural values with the need for innovation and adaptability in music education (Law & Ho, 2009).

National policies emphasising 'Quality Education' (suzhi jiaoyu) reforms have been released to promote a holistic approach centred on the comprehensive development of individuals, in contrast to the more rigid, examination-focused (yingshi jiaoyu) system (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). Recent scholarship indicates that these reforms seek to incorporate modern pedagogical techniques and international benchmarks, reflecting elements of Western education models such as experiential learning and student-centred education (SCE), with the goal of fostering creativity, independent thinking, practical skills, and collaborative abilities (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). Nonetheless, classroom realities, as investigated by Zhang and Leung (2023), reveal challenges in adapting SCE. The observed demonstration lessons in Zhang and

Leung's investigation tended to emphasise content-driven and teacher-led instruction over independent and collaborative exploration. Factors such as overcrowded classrooms and limited space suggest that the effectiveness of SCE may be influenced by contextual factors unique to different educational settings. Moreover, Zhao's (2022) research into the one-to-one piano teaching context in China's higher education further highlighted the complexities of adopting SCE in environments traditionally dominated by master-apprentice teaching modes. Some teachers interviewed in Zhao's study expressed a lack of awareness of alternative teaching approaches, such as student-centred approaches, and remained entrenched in the belief that the master-apprentice mode was the only viable option for one-to-one lessons. This highlights a broader challenge in shifting established pedagogical mindsets and adapting to reforms aimed at fostering more student-centred, flexible, and responsive teaching methods.

As China's music education system evolves, shaped by its legacy of state control and recent reforms, it becomes valuable to examine the impact of Western pedagogical approaches on educators' teaching practices. With an emphasis on integrating approaches such as student-centred education (SCE), it is crucial to explore how Chinese student-teachers trained in or through SCE methods perceive and implement these strategies within the constraints of their own teaching environments. Given that the UK-based MA programme (introduced in Chapter 1, section 1.3) involved in this research offers pedagogical training specifically centred on SCE, it is particularly important to examine how the Chinese student-teachers on this programme understand and apply SCE principles.

2.1.2 The structure and disparities in China's educational systems

Despite essential differences in specific educational measures and regulations according to provincial needs and regional circumstances, the Chinese educational system is broadly structured into primary, secondary, higher, and vocational education (Wu & Ye, 2018). China implements a nine-year compulsory education system that encompasses all school-age children and adolescents, typically

consisting of six years of primary education followed by three years of lower secondary education. However, regional variations exist, with some areas adopting a '5+4' structure instead of the standard '6+3' structure (Feng & Jia, 2024). Upper secondary education is optional and offers both general academic and vocational pathways. Higher education, which includes universities, colleges, and vocational institutions, is highly competitive, particularly due to the National College Entrance Examination (Gaokao). The evolving goal behind the structure and ongoing reforms is to promote 'suzhi jiaoyu', a well-rounded education focusing on moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic development at all levels (Feng & Jia, 2024).

In addition, the international school sector has seen substantial growth, particularly in major cities such as Beijing and Shanghai (Poole, Yang & Yue, 2022). Originally established to serve expatriate children aiming for universities in their home countries, international schools now increasingly cater to the aspirations of China's domestic middle class, who view international education as superior and a more secure route to foreign universities. Rising incomes have fuelled this expansion, leading many students to favour international schools to boost their chances of admission to North American and British universities (Brummitt & Keeling, 2013). The curriculum in these schools varies based on the educational framework adopted by each institution, such as the International Baccalaureate (IB), Cambridge International Curriculum, International Primary Curriculum (IPC), International Middle Years Curriculum (IMYC), as well as American and British curricula (Teach English Global, 2024). While there is limited empirical data comparing music curricula between international and public systems, the arts and music appear to be integrated as components of extracurricular activities or as Group Six subjects in the IB diploma programme (International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2024).

Compulsory education in public schools follows curriculums and standards set by the Ministry of Education (MOE), implemented nationwide by provincial and regional governments. In the context of Chinese music education in primary schools, the aesthetic dimension focuses on fostering an appreciation and understanding of

music through a combination of singing, rhythmic body percussion, and dance (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2022). This approach encourages enjoyment, performance, and creation of music for patriotic and cultural education, ensuring that students engage with music that promotes appreciation and expression aligned with broader socio-political objectives (Zhuo et al., 2024). As students progress through grade levels, the art curriculum standards become more demanding. By the eighth and ninth grades, when students prepare for the high school entrance examination (Zhong Kao), they are expected to personalise their understanding of musical pieces, develop instrumental sight-reading skills, gain experience in instrumental ensemble performance, and perform two to three solo instrumental pieces demonstrating technical difficulty and complexity each term (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2022). However, the practical implementation of the MOE's expectations reveals a complex interplay between centralised directives and regional disparities in resources (Yang & Welch, 2023). This, coupled with the pressure students face in preparing for exam subjects, results in inconsistencies in attitudes towards music as a subject, as well as in teaching requirements across different regions.

2.1.3 Expectations of music and instrumental learning in China

In the context of China's educational landscape, expectations surrounding music and instrumental learning are often contradictory (Xie & Leung, 2011) but interconnected. Although music is part of the national curriculum in schools, it is not considered an examination subject, which leads to its marginalisation within the school system (Leung & McPherson, 2010). Xie and Leung (2011) noted that music curricula in schools often allocate less teaching time compared to core subjects such as literature, mathematics, languages, and science. This prioritisation reflects a broader societal attitude that regards academic subjects as essential for future success, while music is seen primarily as a leisure activity or a means of acquiring social benefits, such as music performance certificates in both Hong Kong and mainland China (Leung & McPherson, 2010; Xie & Leung, 2011).

Guo and Cosaitis (2020) observe that the current piano education market has increasingly focused on obtaining certificates from graded examinations, winning competition trophies, and promoting a technique-driven approach to development. The paradox of school music education and instrumental education in China becomes evident when considering the high value placed on Amateur Grading Tests outside of formal school music education (Yang et al., 2021). Despite the marginalised emphasis on music education within schools, instrumental learning gains importance in the context of these tests, which are seen as enhancing students' competitiveness, particularly in relation to the highly competitive national college entrance examination (Su, 2019).

Furthermore, Bai (2021) reveals that many Chinese parents enroll their young children in after-school piano lessons due to social comparison; they observe other children participating in similar programmes and fear that without such involvement, their own child may fall behind in educational development. According to research by Comeau, Huta, and Liu (2014), Chinese parents are notably involved in their children's instrumental learning, often more so than their counterparts in North America. This involvement stems from various motivations, as Su (2019) notes: some parents attend lessons to monitor their child's musical progress due to limited opportunities to engage with school music curricula, while others provide logistical support or even participate in learning music alongside their children. This level of involvement reflects the intense educational expectations held by many Chinese parents (Law, 2014).

However, this parental involvement can sometimes lead to a lack of intrinsic motivation in children's instrumental learning. Some children report feeling pressured by their parents to continue their musical studies, even when they are personally reluctant (Leung & McPherson, 2011; Qin, 2014). This pressure often results in heightened anxiety, especially when it competes with the time needed for academic homework. In Qin's (2014) study, nearly 84% of child respondents mentioned that they were frequently or occasionally criticised by their parents for not fulfilling practice requirements. Such criticism can have a profound impact on

the child's motivation to practice instruments, as their desire to meet parental expectations and avoid disappointment replaces intrinsic motivation for musical education (Comeau, Huta & Liu, 2014). This lack of intrinsic motivation is a key factor contributing to parental frustration and, in some cases, the discontinuation of instrumental learning altogether (Ho, 2009). Bai's (2021) research also identifies key 'piano pathway turning points' in students' piano learning journeys, particularly during critical transitions such as entering primary school, moving to middle or high school while preparing for the Gaokao, and during or after university when transitioning into a piano-related career. This indicates that Chinese students' motivation for music and instrumental learning is shaped by school and exam pressures, as well as by parental expectations and involvement. Similarly, Zou et al.'s (2013) research on middle-class Chinese parents reveals a strong emphasis on academic success, with many prioritising admission to top-tier universities and investing heavily in extracurricular education. However, as Zou et al.'s sample is limited to middle-class families, it remains unclear whether parents from other social backgrounds might hold different attitudes or expectations toward their children's educational and professional futures.

Further addressing this gap, Cheng et al. (2024) highlight how different social classes in China adopt contrasting parenting styles and goals in piano education. In their study, the case with working-class parents, often driven by aspirations for upward mobility, may view piano learning as a strategic investment but struggle to provide structured support due to a lack of cultural capital. In contrast, their counterparts with middle-class parents tend to offer more well-planned guidance, aligning either with non-competitive self-development or with elite performance tracks. These findings from Cheng et al.'s study reinforce the notion that social class is a crucial, yet underexplored, dimension influencing children's musical experiences and their parents' educational strategies. This also suggests that social class could also be a contributing factor in shaping parental involvement and aspirations.

In summary, while music education and instrumental learning in China are culturally and socially valued, their role within the formal education system remains

secondary to academic subjects. The emphasis on music certifications and the growing influence of Western instruments reflect a complex interplay between exam-oriented values and modern expectations, which shape the instrumental pedagogical values that students and teachers develop in China.

2.1.4 Characteristics of instrumental pedagogical values in China

While the literature on this topic is not particularly extensive, several existing studies offer valuable insights into the characteristics of instrumental pedagogical values and the career trajectories of music students and educators in China. Among the various types of musical instrument education in China, the piano has historically been the most preferred choice for Chinese learners (Cui, 2012). Following the return of the first wave of Chinese pianists who studied abroad, these instructors, including Guangren Zhou, Zhaoyi Dan and Shizhen Ying, became leading figures in piano education and continue to hold significant influence in the field (Zhao, 2022). Many of their teaching methods and theories have been widely adopted by subsequent piano educators who initially studied under them, highlighting their substantial impact on piano instruction in China (Li, 2017). However, Zhao's study (2022) found that the teaching and learning contexts in China's higher music education may not be perceived as inherently fostering creativity. Although the importance of promoting creativity is acknowledged by their participants, a perceived lack of clear guidance in music education often leaves creativity underemphasised (Zhao, 2022). Additionally, Zhao observed that cultural factors play a significant role in shaping attitudes toward creativity: it might be viewed as a hierarchical trait, more appropriate or 'acceptable' for high-level performers. Zheng and Leung (2023) add further insights by highlighting that in China, the core of creative piano performance involves interpreting a piece with both dynamism and a sense of wholeness, guided by abstract imagination. They explain that Chinese pianists often view creativity in performance as a process of blending elements of integration—drawing inspiration across various fields—with abstraction. The inherent abstract nature of creativity, along with the interaction between cultural views of creativity and its hierarchical

acceptance, can shape expressions of creativity in the structure of piano pedagogy and the imaginative approach to piano performance in China.

Bai's (2021) research also touches upon the economic considerations of pursuing a music career, particularly the potential income of becoming a piano teacher. Some participants in Bai's study expressed the sentiment that becoming a concert performer is an exceptionally challenging and rare achievement. Consequently, many Chinese piano graduates tend to pursue careers as piano teachers, a path perceived not only as more attainable but also as a financially prudent choice, contributing to the widespread popularity of piano studies among young students (Bai, 2021). Zhang's (2024) study found that instrumental teachers working as *xiaowai* (out-of-school) instructors described their teaching methods as more 'spoon-fed', where teachers relay their personal pedagogical experiences and expect students to follow them closely, allowing little room for independent thinking or innovation. These findings suggest that instrumental pedagogical values in China are shaped by a system influenced by the teaching experiences of former instructors, as well as materialistic goals and financial pragmatism.

2.1.5 The first group of research questions

The first subsection of this literature review chapter demonstrates how Chinese music education is influenced by historical context, educational systems, regional factors, and social values. As a result, students who have undergone music education or instrumental pedagogy in China are likely to exhibit differences compared to the teaching values and approaches advocated in the UK MA programme. This leads to the first group of research questions:

> 1a) How do Chinese students who have recently started the MA perceive their pedagogical experiences and approaches before and after commencing study in the UK?
> 1b) What are their views on the pedagogical differences or difficulties that occur within their IVT during their MA course?

1c) How do they adapt to or deal with these differences and difficulties?

The next section will start with a broader review of the literature on factors influencing people's perception, cultural adaption and cultural differences, examining the challenges faced by Chinese international students—from their decision to study in the UK to adapting to language, cultural, and educational differences. These factors will also influence the process of Chinese students learning and adapting to the UK MA instrumental/vocal teaching approaches.

2.2 Cultural and academic influences on the perceptions and experiences of international students

2.2.1 Factors influencing people's perception: The context and culture

In psychology, human perception refers to one's sensory experiences, such as touching, seeing, hearing, tasting, and smelling objects (Rogers, 2017). It is also described as a complex and subjective process where individuals respond to and interpret information based on cognitive patterns influenced by past experiences, present contexts, and future goals (Rogers, 2017). This suggests that perceptions are not formed in isolation, but are the result of multiple interacting elements, each contributing to how individuals interpret and respond to their surroundings, such as 'temporal, history, traditions, belief systems and language' (Munhall, 2008, p. 607).

In cross-cultural interactions, exposure to a second culture is often considered beneficial, as it enriches one's perceptions by offering insight into the origin culture through other worldviews (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). However, such exposure can also lead to discomfort caused by sudden immersion into an unfamiliar cultural context or social system, where an individual is forced to adjust or re-evaluate both the host and home cultures (Paul, 1995). These unpleasant feelings may stem from a perceived lack of respect for familiar perceptions or previously valued ideals, dissatisfaction with newly interpreted ways, or emotional disorientation (Paul, 1995). This is relevant to the present research, as it implies that

individual perceptions are influenced by cultural shifts, particularly those that contrast with the embedded culture of their surrounding context.

Context is crucial in higher education (HE) music education research for interpreting and comparing research outcomes, as variations between institutions, such as pedagogical policies, orientations, and student demographics, can affect curriculum design, teaching practice, and assessment standards (Papageorgi et al., 2010). In terms of perceptions related to musical pedagogical experiences and adaptions, the research outcomes are particularly relevant to the specific UK MA programme introduced in Chapter 1, section 1.3. Factors influencing students' perceptions of pedagogical adaption also include the purposes of cross-cultural travel, duration of stay, and specific educational differences tied to contextual and cultural variations (Haddon, 2019). These variables offer insights into how differing perceptions of pedagogical and cultural differences are shaped and influenced.

2.2.2 Factors influencing students studying abroad and the UK

James-MacEachern and Yun (2017) suggest that overseas higher education is viewed as an expensive and intangible investment, leading international students to evaluate their choices thoroughly by consulting various information sources, such as university websites, brochures, social media, alumni, and family. Investigating students' motivations to study abroad is also a complex process due to the numerous 'potential determinants of human action' (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 8). Researchers have categorised these motivations using the framework of push, pull and structural factors, where push factors are related to conditions in the students' home countries that drive them to seek education abroad, while pull factors are attributes of host countries that attract international students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Structural factors include policies that either facilitate or restrict student choices, such as visa-related and financial issues (James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017). According to Chen (2007), students generally select their host country first, followed by a specific city and programme within that country. This decision-making process is

particularly intricate for East Asian students, as it involves various factors such as the destination country, city, institution, and political dynamics (Chen, 2007).

The factors influencing students' decisions can also be examined at national, institutional, and individual levels. National factors include safety, security, international relations, visa policies, living costs, and tuition fees (Shanka, Quintal, & Taylor, 2005; Gong & Huybers, 2015). For instance, media reports on safety issues may discourage students from choosing certain countries (Gong & Huybers, 2015). Developed countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia remain popular destinations for international students, although recent years have seen fluctuations in student intake due to the COVID-19 pandemic and political changes (Study International, 2018). In the US, stricter visa policies have contributed to a decline in international student enrolment since 2016 (Federis, 2019; Redden, 2020).

In addition, Doncel-Abad and Mendes (2024) highlight that significant expansion in the national economic landscape, along with its impact on employment and social mobility, is another factor driving the rise in Chinese students studying abroad. Since the economic reforms of 1978, China has transitioned from a state-controlled economy to a more internationalised market-oriented system (The World Bank, 2024). This transformation has been fuelled by manufacturing, exports, lower labour costs and technological advancements (The World Bank, 2024). As a result, China's middle class has expanded, creating new opportunities for entrepreneurship, factory development, and employment. These opportunities have been particularly beneficial for individuals supported by government policies, those with ownership of major enterprises, and professionals in high-demand sectors such as finance, technology, and education (Li, 2020). Notably, student migration was initially a government-sponsored programme; however, it is now largely a private choice, facilitated by commercial agents (Xiang & Shen, 2009). Earlier cohorts of Chinese students studying abroad were also required to return to China, whereas today, most are self-financed by middle- and upper-class families, giving them greater flexibility in career decisions (Doncel-Abad & Mendes).

Despite China's rapid economic growth, the hukou (household registration) system continues to reinforce social inequalities and limit opportunities for upward mobility (Li, 2020). By requiring all newborns to register under their mother's hukou, this system effectively binds individuals to their place of birth, restricting access to better social benefits, including healthcare, education, social security, and employment prospects in major cities (Wu & Wallace, 2021). As a result, students from rural areas or lower-tier cities may regard overseas education as a pathway to bypass structural constraints and improve their social standing, while also seeing it as a fast track to social mobility and integration within the limits of the household registration system (Mok, Wen & Dale, 2016). Furthermore, parental financial investment in overseas education is often seen as a strategic move to enhance social status and ensure upward mobility. Many Chinese parents believe that international degrees significantly improve career prospects, reinforcing the belief that qualifications are directly linked to progress. For those who can afford it, investing in international education serves as a way to provide their children with a competitive advantage, further entrenching social stratification (Li, 2020).

At the institutional level, the quality of education, global ranking, and reputation of universities are key pull factors, along with positive attitudes towards international students (Hung, Shive, Wang, & Diu, 2005). Chen (2007) found that students who prioritise academic programmes offered abroad tend to focus on course design, research opportunities, and alignment with their academic goals. This focus on academic factors is often linked to the economic growth of home countries like China and India, where rising prosperity has made studying abroad more financially feasible (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014; Rafi & Lewis, 2013).

Language factors also influence students' decisions (Wang & Crawford, 2021). For instance, English-speaking countries like the US and UK are particularly attractive to Chinese students due to the widespread use of English in China's education system (Gong & Huybers, 2015). At the individual level, social influences from family and peers, along with career and immigration prospects, are critical factors, with Chinese students particularly relying on input from reference groups – especially

parents, who see overseas education as a vital step toward career success (Fischer, 2015; Bodycott, 2009). In countries such as China, Korea, and Taiwan, studying abroad is often associated with gaining a global perspective and improving future employment prospects (Chen, 2007). Additionally, Chinese students place high value on direct communication from institutions, as well as insights from recruitment agencies and alumni, which highlights their careful approach to choosing institutions abroad (James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017).

The UK has long been a favoured destination for international students and, in recent years, has overtaken the US as the top choice for many Chinese students (Chen & Ji, 2020). One reason for this shift is the UK's one-year Master's programmes, which offer a more time- and cost-efficient alternative to the longer courses available in China (OECD, 2016). Additionally, the UK's high-quality education, relatively low crime rates, and English-speaking environment make it even more appealing. The UK's proactive response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including extending post-study work permits and adjusting language test requirements, further solidified its attractiveness for international students (Chen & Ji, 2020).

In the context of music education, Haddon (2019) identified several factors motivating Chinese students to pursue a Master's degree in the UK. These include the perceived high quality of education, prestigious university rankings, and the one-year duration of programmes, which are seen as enhancing employment prospects and pedagogical skills. Personal motivations such as improving English proficiency, broadening cultural awareness, and gaining diverse experiences through travel were also highlighted. Specifically, participants in the MA programme were drawn to the UK for its advanced training in Western instruments, as well as its superior jazz education, which was limited in China (Haddon, 2019). While Haddon's research aligns with broader trends, there is limited research specifically examining the motivations of music education students in the UK IVT MA programme, suggesting a need for further exploration into why Chinese students choose this path.

2.2.3 Linguistic and academic differences experienced by Chinese international students studying in the UK

Chinese international students often encounter linguistic and academic challenges when adjusting to the distinct demands and learning contexts of the English-speaking countries (Andrade, 2006). These challenges are deeply intertwined with differences in educational practices and communication styles, which can significantly affect their academic performance and overall university experience (Holliman et al., 2024).

One of the major challenges for Chinese international students is the language barrier, especially at the start of their studies. Wu and Hammond (2010), in a longitudinal study examining students from East Asian countries, including China, identified the first term as the period of greatest difficulty. During this time, students faced considerable challenges with language, especially in speaking and essay writing. The study found that while students were confident in their academic abilities, they were unprepared for the new concepts, terminology, and the advanced level of English required in a UK academic setting.

Granero and Maria (2021) and Brown (2008) further discuss these language-related challenges. Granero and Maria (2021) highlight that English proficiency is a significant concern for international students from non-English-speaking backgrounds, such as Chinese students. This issue is often exacerbated when students realise their language skills may not be sufficient for full participation in both academic and social settings, leading to feelings of disadvantage and diminished confidence. Brown (2008) notes that despite meeting the minimum English language requirements for university admission, many Chinese students experience anxiety and feelings of inadequacy regarding their language proficiency. The stress of adapting to spoken English in everyday life, combined with the academic demands of the UK system, can result in students primarily communicating with peers from their own country. This retreat can impede their language development and further isolate them from the broader university community (Brown, 2008).

In specific academic contexts, such as music education, linguistic challenges can be even more pronounced. Li and Zheng (2024) highlight that English as an additional language creates particular difficulties in learning musical terms and concepts. Musical performance instructions and terminology are often translated into Chinese through transliteration, paraphrasing, and notation during music education (Ward, 2014). Without bilingual instruction, Chinese students may struggle to engage fully in global music and research where English is the main language (Ward, 2014).

Ryan (2005) similarly identifies language, academic, and cultural adaption as major hurdles for Chinese international students. These difficulties often arise from the stark contrasts between educational practices in China and the UK. In China, education is typically more teacher-centred with a focus on rote learning. In contrast, the UK system emphasises critical thinking, independent learning, and active discussion, which can be difficult for students who are not used to these approaches. This difference contributes to the quietness of Chinese students in UK classrooms (Zhu & O'Sullivan, 2020). Researchers have found that Chinese students often seem less involved in classroom contexts (Zhu & Gao, 2012) and face difficulties adapting to foreign learning skills such as critical reading, argumentation, referencing, self-learning, and structuring their written work (Choo, 2007; Edwards & Ran, 2009). However, considering the Confucian emphasis on deference to teachers and the authority of knowledge (Chan, 1999), students' quietness in the classroom might reflect respect for the teacher and an effort to maintain classroom harmony, rather than an indication of disengagement.

Researchers have found that Chinese international students often face significant challenges when adapting to the academic differences in Western educational systems, where pedagogical approaches can be markedly different from those in China. In China, education is typically teacher-directed, with students expecting clear guidance from their instructors (Zhu & Gao, 2012). In contrast, Western educational approaches emphasize autonomous learning, which can sometimes be perceived by Chinese students as indifferent or unfriendly (Edwards &

Ran, 2009). Wang and Byram (2011) highlight that Chinese students, who are accustomed to repetitive learning and modest classroom behaviours, often struggle with the Western expectation to express personal opinions and engage critically. One participant in their study felt that 'Chinese teachers prefer docile students', suggesting that traits such as respect, modesty, and humility are highly valued in China, whereas qualities like 'inquisitiveness and curiosity' are often seen as less important (Wang & Byram, 2011, p. 414). Moreover, the critical thinking in relation to the content of published materials and the practice of openly questioning teachers and the information presented is considered valuable in UK classrooms (Wang & Byram, 2011). Critical thinking, which is viewed as a desirable skill, carries a different connotation in China; it is often associated with critiquing political ideologies rather than engaging in constructive analysis (Wang & Byram, 2011). This stresses the differing values and practices in teaching, learning, and classroom interactions between cultures.

Moreover, Chinese international students are also likely to encounter difficulties with academic assessments, experiencing anxiety about their results and struggling with unfamiliar methods, such as oral exams and group projects (Dai, 2023). Challenges related to time constraints, word limits, and balancing personal opinions with academic expectations further complicate their adjustment. Supporting these findings, Brown (2009) found that academic cultural differences caused stress for 13 postgraduate international students in the UK. The study noted difficulties with new assessment methods and writing academic essays to British standards, particularly during the initial adjustment and with increasing academic workloads. Consequently, Chinese international students face challenges with language proficiency, adapting to new academic environments, and navigating cultural conflicts.

2.2.4 Navigating cultural transitions: theoretical models and empirical insights into international students' adaption

Cultural shocks and the processes of cultural adaption have been extensively examined in various contexts, with a shift from broad historical analyses in the context of migrations and cross-national mental health studies to more nuanced studies of specific groups such as international students (Zhou et al., 2008). Berry's (1997) model of acculturation provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals navigate cultural transitions. Berry identifies four acculturation strategies: integration, separation, assimilation, and marginalisation, representing difference navigations or situations based on the degree of identification with home and host cultures, ranging from high identification with both (integration), one (assimilation or separation), or neither (marginalisation).

Berry's model also highlights that identity during cultural transitions is influenced by a range of factors including personal attributes (e.g. age, gender, education), contextual elements (e.g. permanence of relocation, migration motivation), and broader social factors (e.g. cultural pluralism, prejudice). Gu, Schweisfurth, and Day's research (2009) on cultural integration for international students differentiates between *'cross-cultural'* and *'intercultural'* experiences, emphasising the importance of interaction between different cultural contexts rather than merely acknowledging cultural diversity. They argue that while cross-cultural experiences highlight national boundary differences, intercultural experiences focus on the dynamic interactions between home and host cultures. This distinction is essential for comprehending how international students adjust to new cultural settings by incorporating cross-cultural dynamics within intercultural frameworks and will be utilised in this research to explore an integrated view of students' cultural adaption and the complexities of their interactions.

The process of cultural adaption involves navigating various stages of adjustment and stress over time. Oberg's (1960) U-curve model is influential in understanding these stages. It posits that cultural adjustment typically follows a U-shaped trajectory, starting with an initial phase of euphoria or fascination with the

new culture, often referred to as the 'honeymoon' stage. This phase is marked by enthusiasm and a positive outlook towards the new environment. However, as individuals begin to face the complexities and challenges of the new culture, they may experience a second phase of crisis or culture shock, characterised by frustration, confusion, and homesickness. Following this crisis, the U-curve model suggests a recovery phase, where individuals start to develop coping strategies and gain a better understanding of the host culture, leading to improved adjustment and adaption. The final stage, adjustment, reflects a stable period where individuals feel more comfortable and integrated into the new cultural context. Although Oberg's model provides a useful framework for understanding general adaption patterns, not all individuals follow this trajectory uniformly, as personal experiences and contextual factors can influence the timing and intensity of each stage.

Recent research has expanded on Oberg's model by examining variability in cultural adaption experiences. Demes and Geeraert (2015) conducted a large-scale study involving approximately 2,500 intercultural exchange students across over 50 countries. Their study used online surveys administered before and during the sojourn, comparing the experiences of sojourners with a control group of non-sojourning peers. Their findings reveal significant variability in stress levels over time, with higher levels of extraversion associated with more favourable stress trajectories characterised by reductions in stress compared to pre-travel levels. This suggests that personality traits can significantly influence the stress experience and adaption process.

Several studies focusing on international students have documented positive aspects of cultural adaption after studying in the UK. Research by Gu and Schweisfurth (2006) and Gu and Maley (2008) highlights benefits such as increased confidence, enhanced language proficiency, and academic achievements. Chinese students, in particular, report significant personal development, including a heightened sense of self-responsibility and independence, as well as a broader worldview and intercultural identity. Gu and Schweisfurth (2015) further note that

the adaption process often leads to a sense of differentiation from locals upon returning to their home country, reflecting a deepened and evolved sense of self.

Jiang's (2021) longitudinal study on Chinese students in Germany complements these findings by exploring how international students' identities can transcend national boundaries. Jiang observed that many Chinese students found themselves between the identities of the Chinese diaspora and Chinese nationals. This transnational community allowed participants to negotiate their identities through a balance of 'sameness' and 'differences', ultimately fostering a sense of connection to a broader and multicultural student network rather than strictly to China or their host country (Jiang, 2021, p. 152). These transnational relationships provide an inclusive frame of reference and support the outcomes that illustrate how cultural adaption can foster personal growth and the development of an intercultural identity

2.2.5 Different cultural and pedagogical expectations: Power distance, authority and the influence of Confucian values in education

While the theories and research discussed suggest that individuals can navigate multiple cultural contexts, they also highlight the pressures to meet conflicting expectations from both cultures (Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006). These pressures are particularly pronounced in aspects such as power distance and authority. Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions theory provides insight into these challenges, particularly through the power distance index (PDI), which measures the extent to which a society values hierarchical relationships and authority. The UK, with a PDI score of 35, tends towards egalitarianism and less pronounced social inequalities. In contrast, China, with a PDI score of 80, emphasises hierarchy and accepts significant inequalities as a natural part of its cultural framework.

Li and Rivers (2018) note that the educational experiences of Chinese students are significantly shaped by the cultural values of collectivism and Confucian traditions, which influence their interactions with authority figures, peers, and their overall learning approaches. These values, which have persisted through

generations, foster a societal framework prioritising harmony, unity, social order, and respect for authority and roles within families and communities (Hutchinson, 2015). Among the Confucian principles, Li 礼 (the manner) pertains to 'ritual' and includes the norms and behaviours essential for maintaining respect in various relationships (Li & Rivers, 2018). This principle implies that teachers are viewed as important figures in moral and intellectual development, akin to the respect afforded to parents (Li & Rivers, 2018). Consequently, teachers are often seen as the primary source of knowledge, with students expected to absorb and memorise the information provided.

Collectivism in China also shapes students' roles by emphasising respect for authority, group harmony, and social conformity. The Confucian value of Chi 耻 ('face disgrace') highlights the importance of maintaining respect and avoiding embarrassment in social interactions (Li & Rivers, 2018). This cultural emphasis can result in classroom environments where students are less inclined to challenge teachers or engage in debates that might disrupt social harmony. As a result, maintaining social harmony often takes precedence over individual expression or critical engagement, which can limit opportunities for creative and analytical thinking—a focus more common in Western educational frameworks (Fung, 2014). The contrast between Chinese and Western educational systems, especially the Socratic method prevalent in the West, stresses these differences (Holmes, 2005). The Socratic approach, which involves knowledge creation through processes such as volunteering answers, commenting, criticising, asking questions, or seeking clarification, may be perceived by Chinese students as bold and immodest (Holmes, 2005). These fundamental differences in educational expectations and practices pose challenges for Chinese students in Western contexts. Holmes (2005) observed that transitioning from a system valuing respect for authority and social harmony to one encouraging critical thinking and independence can create feelings of disorientation and discomfort. Understanding these cultural distinctions is crucial for fostering better educational integration, as it helps students and educators navigate and bridge the gap between different pedagogical approaches.

2.2.6 The role of international students in international HEIs: opportunities and challenges

The integration of international students into host countries' educational systems is increasingly recognised not only for its economic benefits but also for its potential to enhance the pedagogical landscape. Recruiting substantial numbers of international students contributes significantly to the economies of host countries, providing financial support to higher education institutions (HEIs) and stimulating local economies (Bodycott, 2012). Beyond these economic advantages, the presence of international students in HEIs serves as a valuable educational resource for fostering intercultural exchange. Through their participation in joint projects and academic collaborations, international students bring diverse perspectives that enrich the academic environment and contribute to the overall enhancement of local HEIs (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). Urban and Palmer (2014) emphasise that these students from overseas are often expected to represent national diversity within their classrooms, thereby diversifying the learning experiences of their peers. Thus, the presence of a diverse population of international students provides opportunities for HEIs to achieve their goals of internationalisation and global engagement.

In addition, the education and training that international students receive abroad equip them with new intercultural concepts, pedagogies, and heightened self-awareness, which they can later disseminate in their home countries. Gu and Schweisfurth (2015) argue that these students, upon returning home, carry with them foreign concepts and pedagogical innovations that can have a lasting impact on their professional and educational environments. Historically, the contributions of Chinese returnees[1] educated in Western countries to the founding of the People's

[1] Before the founding of the People's Republic of China, several early returnees from Western countries made great contributions. Deng Xiaoping's overseas learning experiences in France in 1921 shaped his economic reform views (Pantsov & Levine, 2015). Zhou Enlai was also educated in France, but for six months in 1920, which influenced early diplomatic and political strategies. Chen Yi studied and worked in France from 1919 to 1921. The French studies helped him play a key role in the new government's formation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The People's Republic of China).

Republic of China exemplify the significant influence that international education can have (Zhao, 2014). While the scale of impact may differ today, the potential for current international students to influence their surroundings through their grasp of foreign concepts remains substantial, highlighting their role as vital pedagogic resources in both their host and home countries.

There are concerns regarding the overreliance on international tuition fees and the potential academic compromises that accompany this trend (Times Higher Education, 2024). The dependence on international students for financial stability has been highlighted as a significant risk, particularly if enrolment rates decline or stagnate, which could jeopardise the financial health of HEIs (Holford, Morando & Costas, 2024). This reliance also raises questions about the potential lowering of academic recruitment standards to attract more international students, potentially compromising the quality of education offered (Times Higher Education, 2024). Lomer, Mittelmeier and Courtney (2023) noted that the increasing presence of international students has notably impacted the teaching practices of overseas staff, especially in programmes where these students constitute the majority. Educators are often required to adjust their pedagogical approaches to meet the diverse needs and expectations of these students, which can sometimes be challenging (Lomer, Mittelmeier & Courtney, 2023). For instance, a lecturer from a Russell Group University expressed concerns that the focus on recruiting international students might negatively affect educational quality (Times Higher Education, 2024). This lecturer described situations where the majority of the class comprised students from mainland China, with many struggling to keep up with the lecture content and

relying on translation devices. Such circumstances are seen as potentially lowering academic standards and undermining the integrity of the educational experience (Times Higher Education, 2024).

Furthermore, the diversity and differences among international students, as mentioned previously, are often mistakenly framed through a deficit lens. Heng (2018) found that international students are frequently perceived as lacking essential skills needed to succeed in overseas educational systems, such as speaking, academic writing, critical and logical thinking, and understanding unfamiliar pedagogies and assessments. In particular, students from China and other East Asian countries are often stereotyped as passive rote learners (Heng, 2018). Their quietness in the classroom, which may reflect a deliberate participation style, is often wrongly perceived as a lack of engagement (Wang, Moskal, & Schweisfurth, 2022). This perception can influence the attitudes of teaching staff, who may view international students' educational backgrounds as a burden rather than an asset (Mittelmeier et al., 2023). Despite these perceptions, Mittelmeier et al. (2023) found that nearly all educators viewed international students as a positive addition to their classrooms, enhancing their careers by adding variety. They also acknowledged that international students could contribute to intellectually rich discussions, benefiting both international and home students. Nonetheless, some educators expressed concerns that international students' learning experiences were particularly challenging and highlighted deficit narratives, such as difficulties with verbal participation, limited writing skills, and challenges with understanding British educational structures (Mittelmeier et al., 2023; also mentioned in Section 2.2.3).

So far, there has been limited literature on how teaching staff perceive and approach their educational practices with international students in the context of music education. Zhao's (2022) study investigated how Chinese piano instructors view SCE, focusing on four department heads who also serve as piano teachers in

Normal universities[2] and Conservatoire contexts. However, limited data explicitly indicates that these teacher participants have experience guiding students on how to teach or facilitate pedagogical approaches. Li and Zheng (2024) explored how overseas teaching staff on the MA IVT Music Education implement strategies and sessions to assist students in mastering subject-specific language in IVT teaching. Yet, there is limited data on how teaching staff perceive the pedagogical adaption and transformation that Chinese international students experienced. This gap in the literature suggests a need for further investigation into how MA Music Education IVT teaching staff perceive and approach their educational practices with international students in terms of their IVT pedagogical adaption and how these perceptions influence the support and integration of diverse cultural perspectives in students' learning processes.

2.2.7 The second group of research questions

The second subsection of this literature review chapter explores the potential influences on Chinese students studying abroad, including cultural, linguistic, and educational factors, as well as the possibilities and positive effects of cultural adaption. The chapter also reviews perspectives from overseas teaching staff on guiding international students during their studies abroad. To provide multiple perspectives for this research, the second group of research questions are:

> 2a) What are the views of MA Music Education IVT tutors who facilitate Chinese students on the students' pedagogical difficulties in their MA studying and teaching?
> 2b) What are the reasons for these perceived difficulties?
> 2c) How might students' adaptions be viewed by MA tutors?

[2] A 'Normal University' is an educational institution that focuses on training teachers and educators and provides programmes designed to prepare students for teaching careers, particularly in primary and secondary education (Hayhoe & Li, 2010).

2d) What are the views of MA tutors on how the students' learning and teaching experiences during their MA studies impact the career development and employment interests of graduates returning to China?

2.3 Returnees' re-adaptions after returning to China

2.3.1 The evolving trends and challenges of Chinese international students returning home after graduation

The trend of Chinese international students returning to China after completing their studies abroad has been significant over the past few decades. According to data from China's Ministry of Education, between 1978 and 2019, approximately 6.56 million Chinese students pursued education abroad, with 4.23 million of them returning to China after graduation (Xinhua, 2024). This return rate represents 86.28 per cent of those who completed their studies, highlighting a strong inclination among Chinese students to reintegrate into the domestic labour market after gaining international education (MOE, 2020). However, recent trends indicate a shift in this pattern. While the number of overseas Chinese students returning to China remained relatively high in 2023, there was a notable decline compared to previous years (Cheng, 2024). This decline is attributed to concerns over employment prospects and uncertainties surrounding international politics. Despite this drop, the number of returnees in 2023 was still 34 per cent higher than in 2018, indicating a longer-term upward trend in the return of Chinese graduates (Cheng, 2024).

Several factors have contributed to the high return rate of Chinese students over the past decade. The Chinese government has implemented various policy measures at both the central and local levels to facilitate the return and reintegration of overseas graduates (Cheng, 2024). Local governments in cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Zhejiang have been particularly proactive, offering generous subsidies and venture capital to attract returning students and boost the local economy (Wang, 2023). By 2015, there were 112 *Overseas Talents Introduction Bases* and 260 *Overseas Students Pioneer Parks* across China, hosting over 17,000 enterprises (Wang, 2023). Despite these supportive measures, the competitive

nature of the Chinese employment market poses challenges for returning graduates. While overseas learning experience is generally seen as enhancing employability, holding a foreign university qualification alone is not sufficient to secure successful employment in China (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Liu et al., 2022; Nachatar Singh, 2020). Hao and Wen (2016) further emphasise that the dynamic and complex nature of the Chinese job market requires more than just international credentials, necessitating a broader set of skills and competencies to navigate the competitive landscape effectively.

2.3.2 Reversed cultural shock and re-integration challenges

Chinese students returning from overseas studies often face significant challenges as they re-enter Chinese society, a phenomenon frequently described as 'reversed cultural shock' (Hao & Welch, 2012). This term refers to the unexpected difficulties and feelings of disorientation that returnees experience as they attempt to readjust to a rapidly evolving Chinese society, re-establish local networks, and navigate an increasingly competitive employment environment (Hao & Welch, 2012; Hao & Wen, 2016). The cultural and professional reintegration process can be particularly challenging due to the returnees' physical absence from China, which often results in them missing out on witnessing and adapting to domestic changes while they are abroad (Hao & Welch, 2012).

One significant challenge returnees face is the highly competitive job market in China, which has shifted over time. Whereas overseas qualifications once provided a distinct advantage, the increasing number of both overseas returnees and domestic graduates has diluted this edge (Hao & Wen, 2016). Hao and Welch (2012) noted that Chinese employers now have a larger pool of candidates, including domestic graduates who have developed soft skills such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving-skills that were once considered unique to those educated abroad. This change has led to a situation where the expectations of improving career prospects through overseas education are often met with disappointment, as the reality of the labour market in China can be different than

anticipated. Furthermore, the challenge of reintegration is compounded by the need to align returnees' newly acquired skills and perspectives with the hierarchical and network-oriented culture of Chinese higher education and the broader employment landscape (Liu et al., 2022). For instance, Liu et al.'s study on the academic career development of Chinese returnees with overseas PhD degrees highlights the critical importance of 'guanxi', or social networks, in career progression. Early-career academics, in particular, find it essential to establish and maintain connections with influential figures in their field to navigate the complexities of the Chinese academic system and advance their careers. This emphasis on personal connections stresses the challenges returnees face as they attempt to integrate into a system where social networking plays an important role in career development (Hao & Wen, 2016).

The field of music education provides a specific context in which these challenges are particularly evident. Bai's (2012) research highlights that many Chinese pianists who pursue further studies abroad during high school or university often return to China to seek employment. Haddon's (2019) investigation into the experiences of international students studying MA music programmes in the UK further illustrates these challenges. Students reported that while a UK MA degree, the ranking of the university, and their English teaching experiences might offer some advantages, the Chinese and Hong Kong job markets remain intensely competitive. More specific adaptive concerns of international students returning to China after graduating from a UK MA in Music Education programme were found by Haddon (2024), indicating that music education graduates often struggle with the potential conflicts of pedagogical expectations, approaches, and beliefs prevalent between contexts of the UK and China. For example, the parent-teacher-pupil relationship in China, coupled with an exam-oriented culture, poses significant challenges for returnees attempting to implement new pedagogical approaches learned in the UK MA. The tension between the knowledge gained from their MA studies and the realities of the Chinese educational context often results in what could be described as a form of reverse culture shock.

Despite these challenges that emerged in the reintegration process, some returnees in Haddon's (2024) investigation have responded by implementing teaching adjustments, such as adapting their teaching plans and flexible communication strategies. However, the need for further research remains evident, particularly in understanding how returnees can effectively apply their overseas education in China's music education context and the characteristics of the instrumental pedagogical values in China (as detailed in section 2.1.4). Investigating the influence of the UK MA programme on returnees' pedagogical perceptions, practices, and employability is also crucial for gaining deeper insights into the specific challenges they face and *how* they can navigate them successfully.

2.3.3 The third group of research questions

The third subsection of this chapter reviews the uncertainties and challenges faced by Chinese returnees when they return to their home country for employment after studying abroad. These challenges are linked to graduates' personal expectations, the domestic job market's requirements for international degrees and university ranking, and the perceived value of their overseas study experiences and achievements. Consequently, building on the focus of the first two sets of questions related to music teaching and learning adaption, the third set of research questions discussed in this chapter specifically pertains to returnees from the University of York's MA IVT programme (detailed in Chapter 1, section 1.3) and is as follows:

> 3a) How does the MA in IVT Music Education influence the pedagogical perceptions and practices of returnees, particularly in the implementation of student-centred and dialogical teaching approaches?
> 3b) What are the views of returnees on the potential application of MA teaching concepts in the Chinese instrumental and vocal teaching context?
> 3c) How do varied pedagogical orientations and social values affect graduates' readaption within different teaching contexts as experienced by returnees?

3d) How do Chinese graduates who have completed their MA and returned to teach in China perceive the impact of their MA learning experiences on their employability, particularly in terms of their UK MA degree, the ranking of the university, and their English teaching skills?

2.4 Recapitulation of the research questions

Good qualitative research questions (RQs) can describe some common issues or professional concerns that need to be researched, and they are provisional, general and open-ended (Willig, 2008). First of all, the research phenomenon could be comprised of processes, purposes and corresponding populations, and could be answered by asking 'how' questions (Willig, 2008, p. 20). Open-ended sub-RQs are likely to elicit multiple perspectives from different groups of participants, thus diversifying the factors involved in the field of study and cross-validating the emerging data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, the provisional feature means that initial RQs could be adjusted (Bell & Waters, 2018) if the researcher finds that adjusting research questions can be more relevant to the data of participants' perceptions emergent in the process of conducting the research (Willig, 2008), through utilising a flexible research design (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This emergent process indicates that the preliminary designed RQs may be refined and developed to better engage in and obtain the viewpoints from participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Such process- and participant-based features could prevent the researcher from asking inappropriate questions and undermining the validity of results (Willig, 2008).

An overarching research question (RQ) is firstly identified in the research by combining the emergent sub-questions with multiple perspectives on students' intercultural adaption: What are the perceptions of Chinese students, course tutors, and returnees regarding students' pedagogical adaptions after enrolling in a UK MA course and returnees' readaptions after returning to China to teach? There are also three groups of sub-RQs identified below pertain specifically to the University of

York's MA IVT programme, addressing various periods and participant groups within both the UK and China contexts:

- ***The first group: Chinese students' perspectives***

  1a) How do Chinese students who have recently started the UoY MA IVT programme perceive their pedagogical experiences and approaches before and after commencing study in the UK?

  1b) What are their views on the pedagogical differences or difficulties that occur within their IVT during their MA course?

  1c) How do they adapt to or deal with these differences and difficulties?

  1d) How do they perceive the influence of pedagogical adaptions on their teaching development and employment?

- ***The second group: MA tutors' perspectives***

  2a) What are the views of the UoY MA IVT programme tutors who facilitate Chinese students on the students' pedagogical difficulties in their MA studying and teaching?

  2b) What are the reasons for these perceived difficulties?

  2c) How might students' adaptions be viewed by MA tutors?

  2d) What are the views of MA tutors on how the students' learning and teaching experiences during their MA studies impact the career development and employment interests of graduates returning to China?

- ***The third group: Chinese returnees' perspectives***

  3a) How does the UoY MA IVT programme influence the pedagogical perceptions and practices of returnees, particularly in the implementation of student-centred and dialogical teaching approaches?

  3b) What are the views of returnees on the potential application of MA teaching concepts in the Chinese instrumental and vocal teaching context?

3c) How do varied pedagogical orientations and social values affect graduates' readaption within different teaching contexts as experienced by returnees?

3d) How do Chinese graduates who have completed their MA and returned to teach in China perceive the impact of their MA learning experiences on their employability, particularly in terms of their UK MA degree, the ranking of the university, and their English teaching skills?

2.5 Chapter summary

This chapter reviewed the literature on the cultural and pedagogical differences faced by Chinese international students studying music education in China and the UK, as well as the cultural and academic influences on these students and the re-adaption issues encountered by returnees. The overarching research questions and three groups of ancillary questions, summarised at the end, specifically focus on students, tutors, and returnees from the University of York's MA IVT programme. It is important to note that interpretations of these questions might differ when considering the unique context of the York programme as understandings of how these questions relate to broader issues in international education and returnee challenges could vary. Chapter 3 will focus on the research methodology, including research philosophy, research design, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and aspects related to research rigour.

Chapter 3: Research methodology, data collection methods, data analysis, research rigour and ethical considerations

This qualitative case study is rooted in a relativist ontology and guided by interpretivist and constructivist epistemologies, with semi-structured interviews serving as the primary data collection method. This chapter first outlines the philosophical framework that informs the research, followed by acknowledging the principles of 'fitness for purpose' and flexibility within the research design. It then examines the qualitative inquiry approaches, explains the rationale for selecting the specific data collection method, and details the procedures used for data analysis. Considerations of research reliability are addressed, along with a reflection on the researcher's reflexivity and ethical responsibilities.

3.1 Research design: Theoretical framework

The philosophical framework of research guides the direction of research objectives and outcomes, aiding researchers in formulating research questions and determining the information necessary to address them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study is grounded in a relativist ontology and utilises interpretivism and social constructivism to interpret and understand participants' subjective perspectives and experiences.

3.1.1 Research philosophy: Relativism

Research philosophy encompasses the foundational beliefs and assumptions that shape a study's design, methodology, and interpretation. It addresses crucial questions regarding how knowledge is generated, what constitutes valid knowledge, and the appropriate methods for conducting research (Newby, 2014). Research philosophy includes various paradigms, such as positivism, interpretivism, constructivism, critical theory, and pragmatism (Cohen et al., 2002). Each paradigm offers distinct perspectives on the nature of reality (ontology), the nature of knowledge (epistemology), and the methodologies used for investigation (Hammersley, 2013).

Ontology concerns the nature of reality and what can be known about it (Newby, 2014). It examines whether reality is singular and objective (realism) or multiple and subjective (relativism). Newby (2014) explains that relativists view reality as subjective, varying according to different perspectives and contexts, suggesting that there is no single, objective reality but rather multiple realities shaped by social, cultural, and personal factors. In contrast, realists argue that reality is objective and exists independently of human perceptions and interpretations (Snape & Spencer, 2003). This research aims to explore diverse perspectives from different participant groups to understand their thoughts and experiences. Therefore, adopting a relativist ontological stance is suitable for this study.

3.1.2 Paradigms of the research: Interpretivism and constructivism

The way researchers perceive the world influences what they consider valid evidence for understanding it, leading to another fundamental aspect of research philosophy: research paradigms and their underlying epistemologies. As introduced by Kuhn (1962), a paradigm represents a particular way of understanding or investigating phenomena. It functions as a framework for what is accepted as valid scientific knowledge or methods, guiding researchers in interpreting data and drawing conclusions. Kuhn (1970) further emphasised that paradigms are influenced by the social and cultural contexts of research communities at specific times. Scientific inquiry, rather than being purely empirical, relies on shared concepts and exemplary studies within these communities, which define existing knowledge and highlight unresolved areas for further investigation (Cohen et al., 2002). While paradigms do not necessarily dictate research, they help clarify its purpose and nature, allowing researchers to organise their thinking and structure their inquiry (Cohen et al., 2002).

Paradigms can be also understood as ideal types or characterisations that are not mutually exclusive or rigidly fixed (Cohen et al., 2002). They determine the nature of research questions, the methods chosen for data collection, and the approach to data interpretation. The two dominant paradigms are scientific and

interpretive approaches. Positivism, a scientific paradigm rooted in the natural sciences, posits that an objective reality exists independently of individuals (Cohen et al., 2018). It is based on the idea that reality consists of causally interacting elements that can be observed and measured, similar to physical objects in nature (Pring, 2015). Positivist research focuses on predictable, observable, and measurable facts and typically employs quantitative methods to uncover universal laws governing human behaviour (Hammersley, 2013). However, positivism struggles with studying human behaviour, especially in complex settings like classrooms (Cohen et al., 2002). Pring (2015) argues that, unlike the natural world, the social world is shaped by individuals' unique capacities to interpret experiences and construct meaning from their environment. Critics have asserted that positivism does not adequately address this complexity, making it less suitable for research in human and social sciences (Cohen et al., 2002).

Interpretivism emphasises understanding human behaviour from the inside—through empathy, shared cultural experiences, and social contexts (Hammersley, 2013). It rejects the notion of a single objective reality and instead focuses on the multiple meanings that individuals attach to their experiences. In this paradigm, individuals are seen as actively interpreting and making sense of their environment, strongly influenced by their cultural backgrounds and social contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Unlike positivism, interpretivism is better suited to exploring subjective experiences and social phenomena that cannot be easily quantified. It requires researchers to adopt a non-statistical, subjective, and qualitative approach, aiming to understand the perspectives of participants and how their actions unfold within specific cultural backgrounds and social contexts (Pring, 2015).

Given the nature of this study, which aims to explore the pedagogical challenges and adaptions faced by Chinese students studying instrumental and vocal teaching in the UK, interpretivism provides the most suitable framework. The focus on understanding students' experiences, cultural differences, and how these factors shape their learning processes aligns well with the interpretivist approach. Additionally, this research adopts a social constructivist paradigm, which

complements the study's exploration of pedagogical challenges and cultural adaptions among Chinese students and graduates. Social constructivism, as a branch of the interpretive approach, centres on the construction of knowledge and meaning through interactions within a specific context (Creswell, 2009). It emphasises that the world and our place in it are not simply given but are actively constructed through social actions and the interactions between people (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011). This paradigm underpins the idea that individuals construct their understanding of the world based on their historical, cultural, and contextual experiences, which directly influences their learning and perception of social phenomena (Creswell, 2009).

In the context of education, social constructivism posits that learners develop knowledge subjectively through their engagement with the social environment. Educational experiences are thus interpreted differently by each individual, shaped by their prior knowledge, cultural backgrounds, and daily interactions (Schunk, 2012; McLeod, 2019). Morford (2007) highlights that factors such as age, characteristics, and prior experiences influence how individuals perceive and transform their understanding of their surroundings. Consequently, students may have varied and distinctive interpretations of the same educational experiences. Furthermore, social constructivism views learning as an active, collaborative process rather than a passive one (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Cognitive development is promoted through interactions between teachers and learners, or through the sharing and negotiation of knowledge within a social or historical context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This paradigm is particularly suited to this study's focus on the social and cultural dimensions of Chinese students' learning experiences in the UK. The research explores how participants construct their perceptions of teaching and learning adaption within the UK MA programme, as well as how their previous educational and cultural backgrounds shape these adaptions. By applying this paradigm, the study aims to explore the subjective meanings that Chinese students attach to their learning experiences, considering the cultural and educational environments that shape their perspectives.

In summary, interpretivism and social constructivism provide a useful framework for understanding the interplay between individual perceptions and broader cultural and educational contexts, making them suitable approaches for this research. However, it is crucial to recognise that, in interpretivist research, the researcher plays a significant role in both data collection and interpretation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As Thomas (2013) observes, the researcher's own background and experiences—such as class, gender, ethnicity, and personal commitments—inevitably influence their interpretation of the data. This emphasises the central role of the researcher in the research process and highlights the need for transparency regarding how their background may shape their understanding and analysis (Thomas, 2013). Consequently, this thesis introduces the researcher's background in Chapter 1, section 1.3 and reflects on the researcher's positionality and its potential impact on the research outcomes in Section 3.5.

3.1.3 Research design: Fitness for purpose

3.1.3.1 Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic related to the data collection method

The research design adheres to the principle of 'fitness for purpose', as outlined by Cohen et al. (2018, p. 173), ensuring that the design and methodological choices align with the study's overarching goals and objectives. In addition to this guiding principle, flexibility is integrated as a key component of the research design. Robson and McCartan (2016) argue that research design must be adaptable, allowing for adjustments across various stages, from data collection to analysis and reporting. This flexibility is crucial when unforeseen challenges, such as external factors, impact the feasibility of initially planned methods.

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed significant challenges for qualitative research worldwide, particularly affecting traditional data collection methods. As noted by Sy et al. (2020) and Rahman, Tuckerman, Vorley, and Gherhes (2021), the need for physical distancing and travel restrictions has made many in-person data collection approaches impractical, leading to delays or even the abandonment of some research projects. In this study, the ongoing isolation policies during the

pandemic significantly impacted the choice of qualitative data collection methods. Strict public health measures and isolation protocols made methods such as face-to-face observation and focus groups less feasible (see Section 3.2.2). Consequently, it was essential to revise the research design and explore alternative methods, such as virtual interviews, to ensure that data collection could continue.

The use of internet-based data collection methods had been widely discussed and implemented before the outbreak of COVID-19 due to the unique opportunities it offers, particularly for connecting with participants remotely (Lobe, Morgan, & Hoffman, 2020). Remote data collection increases flexibility, reduces participants' travel burden, and facilitates access to a wider range of participants. However, Rupert (2017) cautions that this does not necessarily lead to more engaged participants, noting that remote methods can result in higher cancellation rates. Deegan (2015) also highlighted that participants may be distracted by multitasking during online interviews. Furthermore, concerns about privacy and confidentiality have been raised by several researchers (Sy et al., 2020; Rohman et al., 2021; Roberts, Pavlakis, & Richards, 2021). These ethical concerns must be carefully considered before conducting online data collection. Recommended strategies include providing consent forms with clear logistical instructions, offering technical guidance, using password-protected virtual meetings, and managing participants through waiting rooms (Sy et al., 2020; Rohman et al., 2021; Roberts, Pavlakis, & Richards, 2021). Contrary to the belief that online data collection is easier or less costly than traditional methods, Rupert (2017) suggests that remote methods may be more demanding, requiring researchers to address methodological, ethical, and logistical challenges, which can ultimately increase the workload for researchers (Roberts, Pavlakis, & Richards, 2021).

This study acknowledges the potential challenges associated with online data collection and prioritises traditional face-to-face methods wherever possible, adhering to social distancing guidelines. However, due to the unprecedented circumstances caused by the pandemic, remote data collection methods emerged as

a necessary and valuable alternative to ensure the research's continuity and completion.

3.1.3.2 The use of Chinese Mandarin in interviews and translation

Van Nes et al., (2010) stressed the critical role of language differences in research, particularly in qualitative studies where language influences every stage from data collection to publication. Variations in language can lead to different interpretations of concepts, which can affect the accuracy of the findings. In this study, both participants and the researcher spoke the same language during the interview data collection, which reduced the language barriers during data gathering and ensured that their perspectives were accurately captured and understood (Van Nes et al., 2010). Accurate interpretations, understanding and conveyance of meaning from the source language to the target language are essential for ensuring that the intended message is received correctly (Van Nes et al., 2010). When cultural contexts differ, maintaining the integrity of the original meaning becomes more challenging, potentially impacting the validity of qualitative studies.

In the context of investigating the perceptions of Chinese students, MA teaching staff, and Chinese returnees in a UK Music Education MA Programme, using participants' native language during the data collection process played a crucial role. Following data collection in the participants' native language, responses from Chinese participants were translated by the researcher into English for the data analysis. To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the translated data, several important steps were followed:

1. The researcher, who conducted the interviews and is proficient in both English and Mandarin, as well as in music terminology, and specific content related to the MA course, carried out the translation. Due to the subject-specific nature of the interview topics, the researcher's involvement helps preserve the original meaning and context of the data as much as possible. To ensure accuracy, minimise potential bias and avoid selective translation, the researcher employed a rigorous process of cross-checking and verification,

ensuring that the translations accurately reflect the participants' responses without selective interpretation.

2. The research employs member-checking, also known as participant validation, a process that involves returning the translated data to participants for verification (as detailed in Section 3.3.2). By involving participants in the member-checking process, the research upholds the principles of informed consent throughout the data process, ensuring that participants remain informed about how their data is presented and used, and giving them the opportunity to edit or redact any information that they feel did not represent their views or situation.
3. All translated transcripts were reviewed by the researcher's supervisor, a native English speaker, the founder of the MA course, and an experienced supervisor of Chinese international students with a background in pedagogical cross-cultural research. This review helps verify the accuracy of the English transcripts, ensuring that they are contextually relevant and free from linguistic errors.

This iterative validation process enhances the credibility and reliability of the research findings, demonstrating the researcher's commitment to accuracy and to the participants.

3.2 Qualitative collective-case research

Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on statistical analysis of data from large samples, this research employs a qualitative methodology aimed at exploring how people perceive and understand their world (Pickering, Phibbs, Kenny & Sullivan, 2020). Qualitative researchers aim to uncover and interpret the subjective viewpoints of participants, focusing on the processes, situations, and emotions they have naturally experienced (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Instead of quantifying cause-and-effect relationships or producing generalised conclusions, qualitative research delves into the personal and characteristics of subjective experiences from a smaller group of participants (Bell & Waters, 2018).

This study explores the perceptions of different participant groups regarding various music pedagogies, with a particular focus on intercultural and pedagogical adaption. It examines Chinese students transitioning into the UK MA course, their post-MA experiences, and the perspectives of UK MA teaching staff and Chinese returnees. By investigating the factors affecting these groups, this research stresses the complexities of cultural adaption and the challenges faced in the pedagogical process. Quantitative methods, which typically emphasise generalisability and statistical relationships, may overlook the individual uniqueness and subjective experiences central to this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Consequently, a qualitative approach is adopted, guiding the research questions, data collection, and analysis to engage deeply with participants' lived experiences and their interpretations of the teaching and learning processes they encountered.

3.2.1 Collective case study research

This research employs a collective case study strategy to explore the adaptive perceptions of instrumental and vocal teaching across three distinct participant groups: Chinese international students, UK MA teaching staff, and Chinese returnees. As defined by Neuman (2007), a case study involves an 'in-depth examination of an extensive amount of information about a few units or cases' (p. 42). By utilising a collective case study approach, this research aims to investigate the perceptions within these groups, focusing on their experiences within specific cultural and educational contexts.

A case study is often defined as an empirical investigation that utilises qualitative research methods, such as interviews and observations, to examine a phenomenon within its real-world context (Bryman, 2016). This approach is particularly suitable for the current study as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the complex and context-specific factors affecting the adaption of Chinese students to UK pedagogical practices, as well as the perspectives of teaching staff and returnees on these issues. McComber (2019) highlights that case studies provide a holistic and real-world perspective, making them valuable for exploring

contemporary issues like pedagogical adaption. More specifically, a collective case study design facilitates the collection and analysis of qualitative data from several contextually distinct cases that share a common phenomenon—in this instance, students' pedagogical adaption. Thomas (2013) describes a case study as involving ‘in-depth research into one case or a small set of cases’ (p. 150), with the cases in this study being represented by the three participant groups. Each group offers unique yet pertinent insights into the pedagogical challenges and adaption processes experienced during their studies or teaching.

Yin (2018) identifies a key strength of the collective case study approach as its capacity to address ‘how’ and ‘why’ research questions within a real-world setting. By analysing descriptive and heuristic data, such as the subjective experiences shared by participants, the study aims to generate explanatory insights into the factors influencing pedagogical adaption. This aligns with the broader objective of examining the impact of UK-taught methods on international students’ learning and subsequent professional practices. While the case study approach offers significant advantages for in-depth exploration, it also comes with challenges. As Bell and Waters (2018) note, the difficulty in cross-checking and validating qualitative data and the limitations in generalising findings to larger populations are inherent drawbacks. However, these limitations can be mitigated through rigorous cross-checking techniques (details in Section 3.3.2) and transparency in the data collection and analysis process, as suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018). It is also important to note that the primary goal of case study research is not necessarily to generalise findings universally but to provide deep insights into specific cases that can inform further research and practice (Stake, 1995). Therefore, the collective case study strategy thus remains a useful method for this research, focusing on gaining a detailed understanding of the adaptive challenges faced by Chinese students in the UK and the broader pedagogical implications for international education.

3.2.2 A justification of semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method

This research aims to explore the perceptions of students, tutors, and returnees regarding pedagogical experiences across cultures. Selecting an appropriate data collection method is crucial for achieving meaningful and robust results. This section evaluates several major qualitative data collection methods—questionnaires, focus groups, observation, and interviews—each with its strengths and limitations, and justifies interviews as the chosen method.

Questionnaires are popular for collecting data from a large number of participants efficiently (Johnson & Christensen, 2024) and can be administered online, by mail, or in person. However, mail questionnaires often suffer from low response rates, typically ranging from 10% to 40% (Johnson & Christensen, 2024). Although in-person and online questionnaires may achieve higher response rates, they often lack the depth required for nuanced qualitative research. The limited capacity to ask follow-up questions or explore responses in detail makes questionnaires less appropriate for this study, which aims to explore participants' perspectives and experiences comprehensively.

Focus groups, while useful for generating rich data through group interaction, pose challenges such as dominant voices overshadowing quieter participants and the possibility of conformity to social norms (Johnson & Christensen, 2024). Additionally, issues such as confidentiality and power imbalances can hinder open, honest discussions, especially with sensitive topics (Morgan & Hoffman, 2018). Due to these limitations, focus groups are not ideal for the personal and in-depth exploration this study requires.

Observation allows researchers to capture behaviour in natural or structured environments (Wästerfors, 2022). Despite its potential for capturing real-time interactions, observational data collection faces challenges related to the observer's presence. The Hawthorne effect, where participants modify their behaviours because they know they are being observed (MacCarney et al., 2007), can compromise data authenticity. Additionally, logistical constraints, such as the

pandemic, have made in-person observation difficult, and remote observation can be affected by technical issues and disruptions (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). These challenges make observation less feasible for achieving the study's objectives, which require a detailed and nuanced understanding of participants' experiences.

Interviews, on the other hand, are widely recognised as a versatile and effective method for qualitative data collection (Willig, 2008). They allow for an in-depth exploration of participants' thoughts, experiences, and perspectives through question-answer sequences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Interviews offer several advantages for this study, as they provide opportunities for participants to express their views in detail. Semi-structured interviews, in particular, offer flexibility to explore topics beyond the initial questions and enable the interviewer to clarify responses and probe deeper into areas of interest (McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Adams, 2015; Bell & Water, 2018). This method is especially helpful when working with students who are not native English and who may be not very familiar with the MA pedagogy and may require clarification of questions or terminology. Although interviews can produce large volumes of data, which can be time-consuming to manage and analyse (Baxter & Jack, 2008), they are well-suited to the exploration of complex, nuanced experiences. The ability to engage directly with participants and ask follow-up questions can ensure a rich and detailed articulation of their perspectives (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Despite criticisms that interviews may not provide a comprehensive view of the social world (Roulston & Choi, 2018), they remain a valuable method for capturing in-depth and subjective insights into participants' lived experiences.

Given the specific aims of this research, which focus on understanding individuals' perspectives, interviews emerge as the most appropriate data collection method. The depth and flexibility afforded by semi-structured interviews allow for a comprehensive exploration of participants' views and experiences, which is essential for addressing the research questions. While a multi-method approach could offer a more extensive perspective (Willig, 2008), interviews alone are sufficient for capturing the rich and narrative data needed for this study. The choice to use

interviews exclusively aligns with the constructivism epistemological stance of representing how participants experience and make sense of their world (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In summary, interviews are chosen as the sole data collection method due to their capacity to generate detailed and context-rich data, despite the challenges associated with data management and analysis. This approach is justified by the need for an in-depth understanding of participants' subjective experiences and perspectives and timely clarification during the data collection, which are central to the achievement of the research aim and questions.

3.2.3 Participants

Three distinct groups of participants were recruited for this study to gather the necessary data to address the research questions (RQs). To ensure consistency and reliability in the research, efforts were made to balance the number of participants across these groups.

The first group consisted of current MA music students who had recently commenced their MA Music Education: Instrumental and Vocal Teaching programme. These students had studied for one term, from September 2021 to December 2021. Being in the early stages of their studies, their insights were crucial for understanding their initial impressions and challenges as they adapted to new educational practices in the UK. Their participation provided valuable data on their perceptions of the Western student-centred teaching approach at the outset of their studies and how it compared with their previous learning experiences in China. Due to the impact of the pandemic, some students participated in the MA course online, which may have affected their individual experiences and perceptions of the course (details also provided in Section 4.1).

The second group included MA teaching staff and tutors responsible for delivering the MA curriculum and facilitating smaller group discussions. These individuals played a key role in shaping the learning environment and guiding students through the overseas pedagogical training process. All participating

teaching staff and tutors had at least one year of experience in mentoring Chinese students throughout their MA studies (details also provided in Section 5.1). Within the MA programme context, 'teaching staff' refers to those engaged in supervising and designing the course, while 'tutors' denotes individuals who facilitate smaller group discussions. Since both groups are involved in tasks such as marking and responding to student emails, their titles will be used interchangeably throughout the thesis in this context.

The third group comprised former graduates of the MA Music Education programme who had returned to China and secured teaching positions, whether in music studios, public schools, or private teaching settings. These alumni had completed the programme and begun their professional teaching careers in China. Their experiences provided valuable data on whether and how they had adapted the student-centred and reflective teaching methods learned during their studies in the UK to their own cultural and educational contexts (details also provided in Section 6.1). In this thesis, the terms 'graduates' and 'returnees' will be used interchangeably to refer to these individuals.

3.2.4 Sampling strategy and procedure

The sampling strategy for this research was purposive, aimed at selecting participants whose backgrounds closely aligned with the study's research questions and objectives (Newby, 2014). This strategy involved identifying the target population, creating a sampling frame, and deriving the actual sample.

The target population included three main groups: Chinese students who had recently commenced their MA programme, the teaching staff who worked with these students, and Chinese graduates who had returned to China after completing their studies. These participants were chosen based on their relevance to the research question, which investigates the adaption of students to intercultural teaching methods. Recruitment was conducted through a direct approach, leveraging the University's music department and social media channels. Although some students were studying remotely due to the pandemic, they could still be

contacted via university email. With other students and staff still present on or around campus, this strategy facilitated easy access to potential participants. An information sheet detailing the research purpose, along with a consent form, was distributed to each participant.

The researcher aimed to maximise the number of interviewees to closely match the sampling frame with the target population. However, participation was voluntary, and not all members of the target population could be guaranteed to participate. Following an initial recruitment email drafted by the researcher and subsequently approved and forwarded by the programme leader to the 2020-2021 cohort of MA music education students, 13 participants agreed to take part in one-to-one interviews and subsequent transcript checking. These volunteers were all Chinese students teaching a variety of instruments (for more detailed demographic information, see Section 4.1). Although the sample included students with diverse teaching specialisations, there was a disproportionate number focusing on Western instruments, which limited the ability to ensure equal representation of all instrument types. For staff participants, the purposive sampling strategy was implemented, with recruitment conducted through the university's MA staff email group. Participants received consent forms and information sheets (see Appendix B for further details) to ensure they were fully informed about the research objectives and procedures.

Recruiting graduates proved more challenging due to their varied graduation years and current geographic locations across China. To address this challenge, a snowball sampling strategy was employed to supplement recruitment efforts. Snowball sampling, as described by Newby (2014), involves initial participants—referred to as 'seeds'—identifying additional participants who meet the study's criteria. This approach leverages personal networks to reach hard-to-reach populations by expanding the participant pool through referrals (Baltar & Brunet, 2012). However, this method has limitations, such as potential bias, as the sample may not fully represent the broader population due to reliance on personal networks (Newby, 2010). In this study, only one participant was recruited via snowball

sampling, and this individual was from a different city and teaching context than the referring participant. Despite these challenges, the sampling strategies employed were designed to capture relevant populations and their perspectives on intercultural pedagogical adaption, contributing to the study's overall objectives.

3.2.5 The development of interview questions

The interview questions were developed and structured through engagement with relevant literature, with Haddon (2019) playing a significant role in shaping the first set of questions for students and Haddon (2024) influencing the questions designed for returnees. They are grouped into three key components. The first aspect of interview questions focuses on the interviewees' profiles in relation to the research objectives, including students' prior teaching and learning experiences, tutors' roles within the programme, and returnees' teaching contexts. The remaining two sections differ depending on the participant group.

For students, the second section explores their teaching experiences in China before studying in the UK, focusing on their pedagogical approaches, influences on their teaching, and interactions with parents and employers from their past experiences. The third section examines their teaching experiences after enrolling in the MA programme and prompts reflections on pedagogical differences, challenges, and the impact of their UK education on their teaching practices. The remaining questions also encourage participants to consider how their learning experiences may influence their future teaching in China. These interviews took place during the period from January 2022 to March 2023, and aimed at exploring students' perceptions of their teaching and learning experiences at the first term.

The second set of interview questions designed for tutors aims to triangulate the data collected from students and potential insights from returnee participants. These questions explored tutors' perspectives on the challenges Chinese MA Music Education students faced in their assessed lesson videos and commentaries, considering various teaching contexts such as tutor groups, lectures, writing tutorials, and peer learning groups. Tutors were asked about their awareness of

these challenges, the factors contributing to them, and whether these difficulties evolved over time. Additionally, the questions examined the role of prior teaching experiences in shaping students' adaptation to the MA programme and the potential long-term impact on their teaching upon returning to China. Specific attention was given to differences in teaching adaption based on the instruments taught—whether Western or Chinese traditional—as well as distinctions between instrumental and vocal teaching (research findings detailed in Chapter 5.4.4). These interviews were conducted from September 2022 to January 2023.

Another important focus of the interview questions for tutors was the representativeness of students' assessed lesson videos, and the alignment between feedback provided to Chinese students and their expectations. The interview questions were also designed to address broader themes that have been touched upon in the literature review section such as power dynamics in teacher-student relationships, peer interactions, and the influence of cultural and familial expectations on pedagogical reintegration. Finally, tutors were asked to consider the role of the university's Career and Placement service in supporting Chinese students' transition back to teaching in China and how students engaged with IVT-related employment content during their studies.

The interview questions for returnee participants focused on their teaching experiences after completing the MA and returning to China, specifically on pedagogical adaptation, career reintegration, and the influence of MA study. Key discussion points included changes in teaching approaches, potential challenges in applying MA pedagogies, and how employers, students, and parents perceived their qualifications. Career expectations and societal pressures were also examined, particularly in relation to emergent social trends like 'nei juan' [intensified competition], 'tang ping' [laying flat] and 'bai lan' [letting it rot and giving up entirely] (Ni, 2022), which were frequently mentioned by returnee participants and emergent as an additional theme. These trends were incorporated into the interview questions to better understand their impact on career choices and professional experiences. Institutional support, engagement with the Career and Placement

services, and further professional development were also considered to understand the long-term influence of the UK MA on their careers and teaching practices in China. These interviews were conducted from March to May 2023. More specific insights and relevant literature on these social trends are explored in Chapter 6.5.4.

Overall, the development of interview questions was carefully guided by the research questions to ensure they effectively captured participants' relevant and specific perspectives. Throughout both the pilot and formal interviews, the questions remained largely consistent, as the data collected indicated that they effectively prompted relevant, rich, and high-quality qualitative insights.

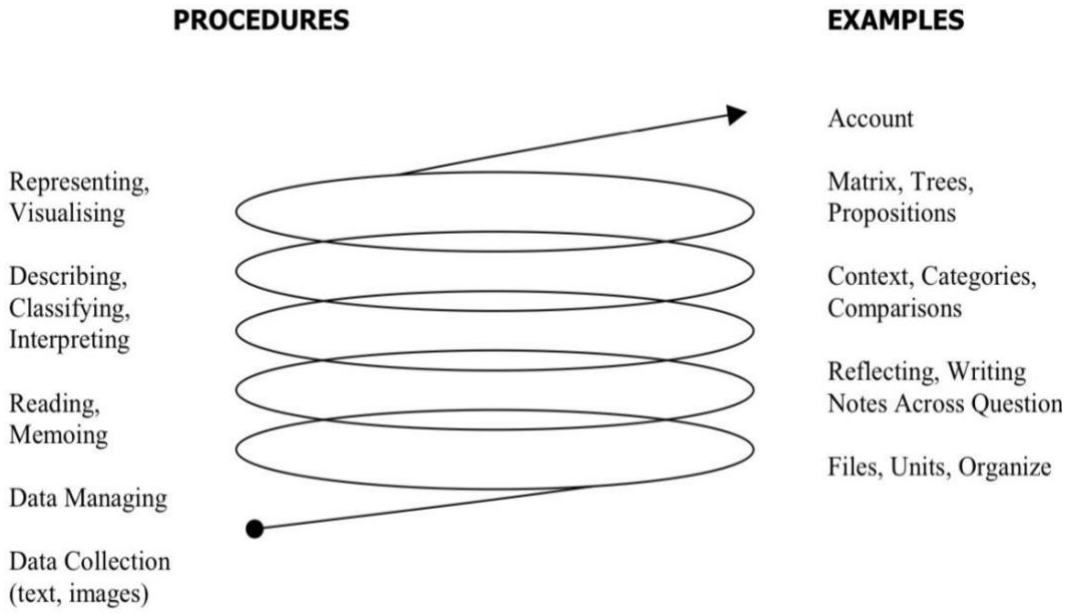
3.3 Qualitative data analysis procedures

This research follows a cyclical analysis procedure consisting of data collection, data management and classification, thematic data analysis, and data representation. An inductive thematic analytical strategy is employed to construct codes and themes, which is a central step in generating findings that address the research questions (RQs). This approach facilitates a detailed and nuanced understanding of the data, enabling the identification of patterns and insights that are essential for answering the RQs.

Qualitative data analysis is a central part of the research process, transforming raw data into meaningful insights and interpretations of the phenomena under investigation (Taylor & Gibbs, 2010). This process involves organising, describing, and interpreting data to reflect participants' perspectives, while identifying patterns, themes, and categories within the data (Cohen et al., 2018). In this study, a cyclical and flexible approach was adopted, integrating data collection, management, transcription and member checking, and thematic analysis. This iterative process necessitated a constant movement between data, codes, and themes, allowing the researcher to refine insights as new patterns and interpretations emerged (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The following paragraphs will focus on the qualitative analysis process, including the methods of transcribing, cross-checking, and thematic data analysis employed in this research.

To begin with, the analysis was guided by the qualitative analysis spiral, as outlined by Creswell (1998) and illustrated in Chapter 3, Figure 3.1 below. This model reflects the dynamic and non-linear nature of qualitative research, emphasising the continuous looping back and forth between phases. Each stage of the analysis informed and influenced the others, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the data (Cohen et al., 2018). The process commenced with the collection of data through semi-structured interviews, recorded using a digital voice recorder and supplemented by field notes to capture contextual and non-verbal cues (Tessier, 2012). These field notes provided additional layers of understanding, enriching the interview data. The interviews were initially transcribed using Microsoft Word and OneNote 2007. However, due to the limitations of these tools in managing and analysing large volumes of qualitative data, MAXQDA was subsequently employed for more comprehensive data management and analysis. This software facilitated the organisation, coding, and thematic analysis of the data, enhancing the depth and rigour of the analysis.

Figure 1: The qualitative data analysis spiral (Creswell, 1998, p. 143).



The qualitative analysis spiral was also structured around four key stages: data management, coding, theme development, and visualisation. The first step involved organising the data in secure and searchable formats, such as databases and spreadsheets, and repeatedly listening and reading to the interviews and their transcripts to become familiar with the content (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This familiarisation was critical for identifying initial ideas and patterns within the data. The second stage involved coding these ideas using thematic analysis, grouping similar concepts and identifying emerging themes. An inductive approach was employed during this process, allowing themes to develop organically from the data, rather than imposing a pre-existing theoretical framework (Thomas, 2006).

As themes began to take shape, the next stage focused on refining and interpreting these categories. MAXQDA's coding and visualisation tools were particularly helpful during this phase, as they allowed the researcher to create hierarchical tree diagrams and thematic maps, which illustrated the relationships between different themes and sub-themes. This enabled a deeper exploration of the participants' experiences and provided a structured way to interpret the complex data. The emergent themes were securely stored and organised into a password-protected database, accompanied by supporting quotes and detailed descriptions, which further enhanced the analytical process. Furthermore, MAXQDA's intuitive four-window layout allowed the researcher to view data, codes, categories, and emerging theoretical insights side by side, providing a clearer and more cohesive picture of the analysis. This streamlined the theme identification process and helped clarify the connections between different elements of the data, contributing to the coherent presentation of findings in the later chapters of the study. Thus, with such a cyclical and thematic approach by reading, re-reading, and reflecting on the raw data from interviews and field notes, the researcher was able to identify key themes and concepts that were deeply grounded in the participants' responses (Cohen et al., 2018), offering a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of pedagogical adaption across different cultural and educational contexts.

Before conducting the main data collection, a pilot study was undertaken with one individual from each participant group—Chinese international students, UK MA teaching staff, and Chinese returnees. This preliminary phase was crucial for refining the research schedule and ensuring the effectiveness of the data collection methods. After that, the subsequent and formal interviews conducted with the 13 Chinese students ranged from 47 minutes to 1 hour and 58 minutes in duration. Those with the 13 teaching staff varied between 1 hour and 2 minutes and 1 hour and 54 minutes, while the interviews with the 13 returnees ranged from 45 minutes to 1 hour and 49 minutes. Most interviews were transcribed verbatim using the auto-transcribing feature in Microsoft Word. Following this, the researcher reviewed and refined the transcripts, cross-referenced them with the original audio recordings to ensure accuracy, and translated them into English. This process involved multiple readings of the transcripts to become thoroughly acquainted with the data and to ensure a consistent understanding. Each transcript was anonymised and refined by removing any interjections and irrelevant anecdotes that did not pertain to the research objectives.

Additionally, member checking was implemented by sending translated transcripts to the respective participants, allowing them to review and verify the accuracy of the content during and after the interview data collection event. Member checking was in congruence with the constructivist epistemology applied in this research (Birt et al., 2016) and plays a crucial role in enhancing the trustworthiness of the research by involving participants in the interpretive process of data analysis (LaCroix, 2023). It serves as a validity procedure from the participant's perspective, allowing them to actively engage in shaping the research findings. This process can take various forms, as outlined by Birt et al. (2016). For instance, it may involve continuous and informal testing of information during the data collection phase, where researchers might periodically ask participants if their understanding of the responses is accurate or summarise and confirm key points made during the interview (Harper & Cole, 2012). Alternatively, member checking can occur as a formal and terminal review, where researchers share the final

transcripts or research reports with participants to solicit feedback on whether the findings accurately reflect their lived experiences (Birt et al., 2016). This study uses both approaches: all participants were given the opportunity to make any necessary additions or corrections, thus ensuring that the data captured genuinely reflects their perspectives (Robson & McCartan, 2016; see Section 3.6 for research ethics considerations). This method not only helps to reduce subjective biases and enhance data accuracy but also supports the triangulation of knowledge, ensuring that the final findings are robust and reflective of participants' authentic experiences (Birt et al., 2016). By involving participants in this review process, the research aims to maintain the integrity of the data and reinforce the credibility of the conclusions drawn.

In addition, thematic analysis serves as the core analytical framework in this research, complemented by within-case and cross-case analyses to ensure a comprehensive and integrated approach to data interpretation (Yin, 2009). Renowned for its flexibility, thematic analysis is particularly well-suited to identifying, analysing, and interpreting themes within qualitative case study data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2017). This approach facilitates an exploration of shared thoughts, common experiences, and behaviours by offering an accessible and systematic method to transform smaller data units (codes) into larger patterns of meaning that capture significant insights into the RQs (themes) (Braun & Clarke, 2017). Importantly, the relevance of a theme is not necessarily tied to its frequency in the data but to its capacity to convey critical information that sheds light on the RQs (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, the thematic analysis approach is foundational for revealing how participants' responses align with and answer the RQs through these identified patterns.

Beyond thematic analysis, within-case and cross-case analyses further enrich the research by providing both detailed and comparative perspectives. Within-case analysis delves into the unique contextualised experiences of each case, offering in-depth evidence of participants' views (Ayres, Kavanaugh & Knafl, 2003). Meanwhile, cross-case analysis integrates these findings, identifying commonalities and

differences among the cases to provide a more holistic interpretation of the emergent themes (Ayres, Kavanaugh & Knafl, 2003). This dual approach of both deep individual exploration and broader comparative interpretation is essential for thoroughly understanding the participants' perspectives in the context of case study research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

While there is overlap between the phases of thematic analysis and collective case study analysis—particularly in categorising, testing, and developing data into themes (Yin, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018)—this research places equal emphasis on the detailed description and interpretation within each individual case, as well as on comparisons across cases. Combined with the previously mentioned qualitative analysis procedures, thematic analytic techniques continue to be applied until data saturation is achieved. This means no new codes or themes relevant to RQs emerge from the collected data, ensuring that the analysis comprehensively addresses the RQs (Guest, Namey & Chen, 2020; Lowe et al., 2018). Through this rigorous process, the study aims to provide deep, contextually grounded insights that contribute to a rich understanding of the participants' experiences and the broader phenomena being explored.

3.4 Qualitative research validity and triangulation

3.4.1 Validity

Ensuring validity was a crucial aspect of the research methodology, as validity determines whether the data interpretations are justifiable based on the theories and evidence applied (Cohen et al., 2018). Ary et al. (2002) define validity as the extent to which conclusions drawn from the data are warranted by the evidence, emphasising its role in producing meaningful research outcomes. Without valid results, research holds little value, stressing the need for rigorous assessment of data interpretation.

Yin (2014) highlights reliability as a key criterion for evaluating research design, particularly in case studies. Reliability aims to minimise biases and errors by ensuring that when the same procedures are followed by different researchers,

identical findings can be reproduced (Yin, 2014). To facilitate this, the research procedures must be clearly documented, enabling future replication under similar conditions, including data collection from the same participants using the same methods (Yin, 2014). However, exact replication in qualitative research is challenging, as the data often reflect unique subjective experiences, motivations, and contextual influences, making high reliability and generalisability difficult to achieve (Cohen et al., 2018).

In qualitative research, multiple perspectives on reality complicate validation. Flick (2009) notes the difficulty of determining which view of reality is credible and how to validate socially constructed knowledge. Hammersley (2013) suggests that qualitative validity focuses on building confidence in the results rather than striving for absolute certainty. Hammersley (2013) pointed out that researchers must recognise that their accounts represent interpretations of reality, not exact reproductions. Validity, in this context, reflects the degree of confidence in the findings while acknowledging the inherent subjectivity involved.

Newby (2014) outlines three essential criteria for research to be regarded as valid and robust: representativeness, completeness, and transparency. To meet the first criterion, the data must be representative of the issue under investigation. In this study, the sampling strategies (as outlined in Section 3.2.4) were carefully designed to ensure that participants were drawn from the relevant and specific context, thus enhancing the representativeness of the data. This careful recruitment of participants was intended to ensure that the sample accurately reflected the research context, which is crucial for the research validity.

The second criterion, completeness, requires that the evidence and arguments presented in the research are comprehensive and not based on selective or anecdotal data. Anecdotalism, as noted by Silverman (2010), is a common pitfall in qualitative research, where striking or exceptional cases might be overemphasised, leading to a skewed understanding of the phenomena. To avoid this, the ‘refutability principle’ (Silverman, 2010, p. 278) was applied: this involves deliberately seeking out data that contradicts initial assumptions. Through using

negative case analysis by actively seeking out and analysing cases or data that contradict or challenge the emerging patterns (Saldaña, 2015), I explored evidence that challenged emerging patterns or themes in the study. For example, in Chapter 4, section 4.4.1 of the research findings, the majority of Chinese students felt that SCE was entirely new to them and challenging to adapt to, but a few students held opposing views; the factors influencing these differing opinions are then pointed out by the end of the corresponding section. Similar specific examples can also be found in other parts of this thesis, such as Chapter 5, section 5.4.3, and Chapter 6, sections 6.5.3 and 6.5.4, thereby countering researcher bias and offering a more complete and objective analysis. This approach helped evaluate the issues from multiple perspectives and ensured a more thorough exploration of the data (Robson & McCartan, 2016; see Section 3.5 on reflexivity

The final criterion of transparency, as suggested by Newby (2014), stresses the importance of making the research process open and clear. Throughout this research, transparency was ensured through explicitly detailing the decisions taken, including the justifications for those decisions. This involved outlining the challenges faced during the research and explaining the rationale behind the methodological choices. In addition, as previously mentioned, member checking was employed as a validity procedure, contributing to both trustworthiness and transparency in the research (see Section 3.3.2).

3.4.2 Triangulation

Multiple forms of triangulation are employed in this research, encompassing data sources, analysis methods, and descriptive triangulation. Creswell and Poth (2018) asserts that data sources can be varied if collected across different times, individuals, and locations. In this study, diverse data sources are drawn from various participant groups, research periods, and cultural contexts. Additionally, multiple analysis methods are utilised within the qualitative analysis spiral (see Section 3.3), including thematic analysis as well as within- and cross-case analysis. Crucially, the practice of sending transcripts to participants for member checking contributes to descriptive

triangulation, enhancing the authenticity and accuracy of the data while minimising researcher bias (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). As Bell and Waters (2018) suggest, accessing the research concern from multiple perspectives allows for triangulation, cross-checking findings, and validating, confirming, or challenging insights from one aspect against those of another.

3.5 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is crucial in qualitative research, as the researcher acts as a central instrument throughout the process. According to Bell and Waters (2018), the researcher's values, experiences, and interactions can significantly impact data collection and outcomes. To maintain objectivity, researchers must reflect on their own backgrounds, positionalities, and potential biases (Sutton & Austin, 2015). This involves recognising factors that might influence participants and the research dynamics, such as personal values or educational experiences. By acknowledging these influences, researchers can mitigate bias through self-reflection and member checking. In this study, my ongoing reflection helped to minimise the impact of personal assumptions, fostering a more accurate and ethical research process. As discussed in Chapter 1, section 1.3, my experiences of adaption and re-adaption necessitated a careful approach to ensure that my preconceptions did not affect an unbiased analysis of the current research.

Through extensive self-reflection and questioning, I have come to view my primary identity as that of a music researcher positioned between insider and outsider perspectives (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). My familiarity with the subject matter, shaped by personal and educational experiences, makes the participants' stories particularly resonant and relevant to me. However, this close connection to the research topic also introduces potential biases, as participants' experiences could influence my interpretations (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). From the outset of this research, I have engaged in continuous self-reflection, recognising the need to balance empathy with critical distance. This approach has led me to adopt an

interpretative understanding, enabling me to grasp the context and intentions behind participants' views and actions (Schwandt, 2005).

I have taken great care to respect and value all participant responses, especially those differing from my own experiences. To safeguard the integrity of the research, I have securely stored data and utilised robust analysis software, supporting a rigorous data analysis process. The themes identified are underpinned by substantial qualitative evidence, including detailed quotations, which have been used to substantiate the findings. Additionally, participants were given the opportunity to review and amend their responses at any stage of the research, a measure discussed further in Sections 3.3.2 and 3.4.1. This has contributed to the trustworthiness and transparency of the study. As Dwyer and Buckle (2009) suggest, researchers must be authentic, open, and deeply committed to understanding and accurately representing participants' experiences. Throughout this study, I have strived to uphold these principles, ensuring that the findings reflect a balanced, reflective, and well-considered interpretation of the data.

3.6 Ethical considerations

The current qualitative research follows the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association and ethical approval from the Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee at the University of York has been given. Two guiding principles concerning protecting any human beings who have been involved in qualitative educational research are presented in this section.

3.6.1 Participant consent, anonymity and data protection measures

All potential participants were provided with consent and information forms outlining the research's objectives, data usage, and access details. This information was reiterated at the beginning of each data collection session, and participants were informed of their right to seek clarification on any aspects of the research that might cause confusion. In addition, participants had the right to refuse to answer any questions and could access, revise, or withdraw their data and transcripts at any time for any reason. This flexibility may have resulted in not all participants

answering every question or feeling fully acquainted with the interview questions. This issue also stems from the demographic differences among participants within each group. For example, as detailed in Chapter 4, section 4.1, students started their MA course with varying levels of prior teaching experience, with one participant having none. This lack of experience affected their ability to respond to questions about their previous teaching approaches. Similarly, Chapter 5, section 5.1 notes that among the 13 tutor participants, nine were full-time teaching staff and four were Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), with their involvement in the MA course ranging from one to five years by the time of the interviews in 2022. These variations in their teaching roles and experiences impacted their perspectives on students' adaptability and employability. Additionally, in Chapter 6, section 6.1, not all returnees began teaching immediately upon returning to China. Their different teaching contexts and timelines influenced their responses to questions about recent educational trends and potential support from their employers. These variations in background, current roles and experience contributed to the issue mentioned above.

Realising the potential issues and relevant views that participants' personal experiences might bring to their responses to interview questions led the study to request participants' educational and employment backgrounds, which are outlined at the beginning of each research finding chapter. However, this information was not linked to their anonymous responses in the analysis and write-up of the material. Personal details such as gender, instrument, age, and prior place of study before enrolling in the UK were de-identified throughout all stages of data analysis and in the final thesis. Each participant was assigned a code number (details are provided in the opening of each research finding chapter), ensuring that all data were anonymised during field notes, audio recordings, transcriptions, and reporting, thereby protecting participants' privacy and minimising bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.6.2 Principle of maximising benefits and minimising harm

The research benefits both participants and future students of the MA programme who may face similar challenges. Mandarin was used in all rounds of data collection to ensure that Chinese participants could understand questions and articulate their views clearly, avoiding the hesitancy that might arise from using a second or additional language (Jiang, 2018; also detailed in Section 3.1.3.2). Previous studies have shown positive outcomes when researchers use their native languages, such as research on Chinese students' academic and psychological adjustments in the UK (Jiang, 2018) and group piano pedagogy in higher music education in Kuwait (Alosaimi, 2018). Comments and experiences shared in the research were transcribed and translated into English by the researcher, and the translations were reviewed by a native English speaker with expertise in music pedagogy, as outlined in Section 3.1.3.2. Thus, this qualitative research offers valuable and original insights into intercultural music education between China and Western countries.

The British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines (2018) require researchers to avoid deception and address potential risks and emotional harm. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and any potential drawbacks. Concerns about health and emotions during the COVID-19 pandemic were considered, including increased stress from economic disruption and travel restrictions (Shanahan et al., 2020). Consequently, student and tutor participants were offered an alternative option for data collection—online sessions—to accommodate social distancing and lockdown measures. However, Due to the pandemic making cross-border flights between China and the UK difficult to arrange, the interview data collection for returnees was conducted entirely online. Throughout the research, I maintained an open approach, allowing participants to seek clarification or express any discomfort at any time.

Additionally, my personal experiences highlighted the potential for my co-national or former MA graduate and PhD student identities to create an unequal dynamic between participants and myself. Some participants might develop an over-reliance on me, influenced by the hierarchical nature of Chinese society (McMahon,

2011; Law & Ho, 2011). For instance, before starting the design of this research PhD, I participated in an MA offer-holder meeting in mid-2020 in China as a former graduate of the specific MA programme. Only two new students attended the meeting, which was intended to address their questions and concerns about life and study before they began the MA studies. During the offer-holder meeting, some individuals expressed admiration for my expertise in music education and academic writing as well as former studying experiences in the UK. One offer-holder requested verbal advice on their written topics, which I directed them to address through official channels or qualified sources, such as their supervisor, to ensure they received appropriate and professional guidance. To address this concern, I ensured that I did not engage in any teaching or marking activities within the MA programme until after the student group data collection and member checking were completed. This was done to prevent any potential influence of my relationship with participants on the research outcomes.

3.7 Summary of chapter

Chapter 3 examined the research design, data collection and analysis methods, and issues concerning research rigour, reflexivity, and ethics. A collective case study approach was employed to investigate the perceptions of dual adaptions among students, staff, and returnees, with qualitative data gathered through three separate sets of interviews. The following chapter will begin a series of four chapters that delve into students' perspectives on their previous pedagogical experiences before the MA programme and their initial adaption after enrolling.

Chapter 4: Pedagogical approaches and understandings pre-and during-MA study of Chinese students studying music education in the UK

This chapter is the first of four research findings chapters and presents students' views on their pedagogical approaches and understanding before and during their MA studies. It illustrates findings on the adaption to pedagogical differences between students' habitual teaching approaches, developed pre-MA, and the MA teaching approaches, analysing data gathered through semi-structured interviews with 13 Chinese students who had studied their MA course for one term. This chapter will first introduce the demographics of the current student participants and will then move into the findings, utilising a findings and summary structure for each main theme. The research questions that this chapter answers are: 1) How do Chinese students who have recently started the MA perceive their pedagogical experiences and approaches before and after commencing study in the UK? 2) What are their views on the pedagogical differences or difficulties that occur within their IVT during their MA course? 3) How do they adapt to or deal with these differences and difficulties? Aspects related to tutors' perspectives on students' pedagogical differences and adaptions will be presented in Chapter 5. Returnees' perspectives on their future re-adaption after returning to teach in China will be presented in Chapters 6 and 7. The discussion will be synthesised across these chapters and presented in Chapter 8.

4.1 Demographics of the student participants

Thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted over two months by the researcher with Chinese postgraduates who had been studying for their MA for just over one term. Following ethical approval from the University of York Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee, recruitment information was initially sent to all Chinese MA students enrolled in the MA in Music Education: Instrumental and Vocal Teaching for the 2021-22 academic year (as detailed in Section 3.2.3). Thirteen participants (all female) subsequently expressed interest in participating in audio-recorded face-to-face or Zoom interviews, depending on their preference, through direct email and/or social media (WeChat). All interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese to ensure that participants could naturally and accurately express their ideas without the hesitation that may arise when using a second or additional language (Jiang, 2018; further detailed in Section 3.1.3.2). After the interviews, participants reviewed and approved their Chinese interview transcripts, after which the researcher translated the data into English. Before qualitative analysis, the translated data were sent to the respective participants for verification of the language and content. The link to access the translated data is presented in Appendix F, and the participants' demographic details are shown in Table 4.1. In the text below, S1 refers to Student Participant 1, S2 to Student Participant 2, and so on.

Table 1: Demographic information of current student participants

Participant number, instrument/vocal	Teaching experiences during undergraduate studies pre-MA	Employed teaching contexts pre-MA	Programmes graduated in undergraduate study pre-MA	Teaching location at the time of interview
S1: Guzheng	Part-time guzheng teacher – two years	One-to-one lessons in a music training organisation for children and adults	Music performance	In the UK
S2: Piano	Part-time piano teacher during undergraduate studies – three years; one-year private teaching	One-to-one and group lessons in two music training organisations for children and adults; opened a piano private studio	Music education in chordal accompaniment	In the UK
S3: Piano	Part-time online piano practising assistant	One-to-one lessons for children	Music performance in vocal accompaniment	In China
S4: Piano	Part-time online piano practising assistant	One-to-one lessons for children	Music performance	In China
S5: Viola and violin	Part-time viola teacher	One-to-one lessons in two music training organisations for children	Music performance	In the UK
S6: Guzheng	One-month school classroom teaching	One-to-one and group lessons (four to five pupils) in primary school internship	Music education	In the UK
S7: Ethnic Chinese vocal	Part-time school classroom teaching; part-time private vocal teacher	Group lessons for child pupils in primary school internship; one-to-one lessons in a music training organisation for children and adults	Music performance	In the UK
S8: Piano	Part-time piano teacher	One-to-one lessons in a music training organisation for children	Music performance	In the UK
S9: Vocal	Not teaching	Not teaching	Music performance	In the UK
S10: Piano	Part-time online piano practising assistant	One-to-one lessons for children	Music education	In China
S11: Piano	Part-time online piano practising assistant	One-to-one lessons for children	Music education	In China
S12: Piano	Private piano teaching; One-month school classroom teaching	One-to-one and group lessons in a music training organisation for children and adults; classroom teaching for children in primary school internship	Music performance	In China
S13: Piano	Part-time piano teacher	One-to-one lessons in a music training organisation for children	Musicology	In China

As shown in Table 1, all 13 participants had obtained at least a four-year undergraduate degree in music from Chinese universities and, with the exception of S9, had taught music prior to entering the UK MA programme. Table 2 provides a summary of demographic information related to the predominant teaching contexts of these 13 students.

Table 2: Demographic information of student participants: Teaching contexts

Predominant context of teaching practice	**Participant numbers**
One-to-one instrumental/vocal teaching in music training organisation	S1, S2, S5, S6, S7 (voices), S8, S10, S12, S13
Group instrumental/vocal teaching in music training organisation	S2, S6, S7, 12
Classroom music teaching internship in primary schools	S6, S7
Private one-to-one instrumental/vocal teaching	S2, S7, S12
Online piano practising assistants	S3, S4, S10, S11

The majority of student participants (n=9) worked as one-to-one instrumental teachers in music training organisations, which are institutions or entities where teachers collaborate to provide specialised music instruction outside of public school settings. Among these students, four also taught group instrumental classes within the same context. Additionally, four students worked as online piano practice assistants, while a smaller number (n=2) were involved in primary school music classroom teaching internships. The role of a piano teaching assistant, known as ‘peí liàn’ (where ‘peí’ means ‘to be with’ or ‘to accompany’ and ‘liàn’ means ‘to practice’ or ‘to train’), involves supporting and overseeing students during their practice [S4].

Table 3: Demgraphic information of interview participants: Studying and teaching location at the time of the interview

Studying and teaching location	Participant numbers (the total number)
In China	S3, S4, S10, S11, S12, S13 (6)
In the UK	S1, S2, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9 (7)

To adapt to the travel restrictions imposed by the pandemic, the MA course adopted a hybrid teaching model, combining both online and offline instruction to enable students to study remotely. According to Table 3, nearly half of the participants (n=6) were studying for the MA course and teaching Chinese pupils in China at the time of the interview due to the pandemic. Two students felt that the pandemic-induced travel restrictions had delayed their MA studies by a year; completing the degree online appeared to be a beneficial option for enhancing their academic qualifications during this period [S10, S12]. This context may have influenced their reception and implementation of pedagogies and ideas from the MA course (with more specific details provided in Section 4.3). The next section will outline findings regarding the student participants' pedagogical experiences in pre-MA instrumental/vocal teaching.

4.2 Music pedagogical experiences and approaches in pre-MA instrumental/vocal teaching

This section presents findings related to the pedagogical approaches that student participants used prior to their MA study in China and details how these habitual approaches led to pedagogical differences and adaptive concerns after starting their MA. Participants were initially asked to describe their previous instrumental/vocal teaching through an open-ended question at the beginning of the second section of the interview: 'Could you please describe the instrumental/vocal lessons that you taught in China? How did you teach when you were in China?' A follow-up question then sought to identify specific teaching approaches they had developed or

employed before the MA: 'Were there any specific teaching approaches you used?' This sequence of open-ended and descriptive questions was designed to ease participants into the interview process and encourage them to share detailed information later (Roberts, 2020). Subsequently, students were invited to elaborate on their habitual teaching approaches during each interview. The richness of the responses to this question highlights the effectiveness of this questioning strategy.

4.2.1 Habitual teaching behaviours and patterns

The findings revealed variations in teaching behaviours that student participants had developed before commencing the MA programme. Some students, for instance, employed methods such as using stickers as rewards to enhance positive teacher-pupil relationships [S7] and incorporating counting or clapping beats alongside their pupils during lessons [S2, S7]. They also facilitated pupil practice by isolating sections and instructing repetition for technical development [S2, S5, S8, S10], and reviewed pupils' practice videos for post-lesson guidance [S2, S5].

Despite these variations in teaching behaviours, the data analysis identified recurring patterns in the approaches that students applied in their lessons before pursuing the MA. Many students indicated that their teaching patterns and approaches were predominantly influenced by replicating those of their former teachers in China [S1, S3, S4, S5, S7, S10, S12]. Several participants followed a habitual teaching pattern involving task presentation, pupil playing/response, and a sequence of teacher demonstration, correction, and feedback in their pre-MA instrumental lessons [S1, S3, S5, S6, S11]. However, they perceived this pattern as lacking diversity and creativity after being exposed to reflective teaching training during a term of the MA course (for more information on the MA reflective module and relevant assessment, see Chapter 1, section 1.3). S10, who observed that the teaching content for their piano beginners was 'entirely replicated and copied' from their former teachers, expressed a lack of confidence in this approach:

> In every first lesson with beginners, I would repeatedly teach the recognition of [the] keyboard and notes as well as the handshape in a standardised way because [this was] the initial step [in] my piano learning … I'm worried about whether I could fully control the lesson as I did not have too much confidence about the copied teaching style. I would wonder if the instruction I gave was accurate and reasonable, if it was clearly expressed, and if the pupil really understood that.

Furthermore, S7, who teaches voice, also indicated that they tended to use piano accompaniments while imitating their former teachers during pupils' performances. When prompted by feedback comments in the assessment to reflect on the reasons for using this approach, they realised that they were merely copying without considering the pedagogical purpose behind these choices:

> I was used to listening to accompaniment played by my vocal tutor during the lesson, so it was natural for me to play some chordal accompaniment for the pupil in my [MA] assessed lesson … I did not think about the reason for using the piano accompaniment method before I studied the MA as I was imitating my former vocal lessons with my undergraduate tutors.

These perceptions indicated that, despite variations in the perceived and employed IVT teaching behaviours among participants, many began teaching informally, imitating and transferring teaching patterns and approaches from their former teachers before starting the MA programme. This tendency to replicate familiar teaching methods aligns with the findings of Haddon (2009), who observed that some student-teachers started instrumental or vocal teaching without formal and IVT-specific training. Instead, they relied on past experiences as students and tended to replicate approaches observed in their own learning experiences. Data analysis reveals that none of the student participants, including those with undergraduate degrees in music education, had received professional IVT training

prior to commencing the MA. Several students reported difficulties finding training explicitly related to instrumental/vocal teaching. S6 expressed uncertainty, noting that if such training exists in some form, 'it just means that [this training] is not widespread and influential'. S13 mentioned some training related to music classroom teaching but felt it was 'not necessarily contribut[ing] to one-to-one instrumental teaching skills'.

S8, who expected to receive IVT training in China, expressed disappointment at 'never' finding such training and consequently felt unequipped to teach beginner pupils, whether these opportunities arose within undergraduate courses or extracurricular activities. S4 noted a lack of emphasis on taking additional IVT training among their employers, particularly if their lessons met the expectations of parents and their pupils in music training organisations. S1 and S6 gained some 'general educational knowledge through the process of preparing for the national teaching qualification' [3][S1]; however, this knowledge 'was all about telling theoretical knowledge rather than something that you could specifically practice in your lessons' [S6]. This becomes particularly significant when considering two typical teaching characteristics identified in the data: teacher-directed transmission and the use of demonstration and modelling.

4.2.2 Transition from teacher-directed to student-centred teaching: participant reflections on pre-MA practices

Participants mentioned that their teaching style seemed to be teacher-directed or teacher-centred pre-MA, realising this after exposure to student-centred teaching approaches and reflective practice during the MA programme [S7, S10, S11, S12, S13]. They described a teacher-directed transmission characterised by their frequent

[3] In China, the national teaching qualification refers to a standardised certification or licensing process that educators undergo to meet the country's established standards for teaching competence and professionalism. The specifics of the national teaching qualification process in China can vary, and it is essential to check the current regulations and policies. Generally, obtaining a national teaching qualification may involve completing specific education and training requirements, including examinations. These requirements can be part of a university programme or a separate certification process, depending on the programmes in universities.

talking as teachers and their pupils' passive listening [S11, S5] due to a lack of school and family educational contexts encouraging self-expression [S4].

S7 felt dissatisfaction with the teacher-centred teaching mode, stating, 'In fact, a lesson with too much teacher's talk does not necessarily equal a productive lesson'; this participant, reflecting on their teaching with insights from the MA course in mind, felt that pupils were more likely to be distracted. S12 acknowledged being a teacher who used to focus on 'single-directed output' and realised, through engagement with assignment feedback from MA tutors, that they had taught what they thought [was required] as a teacher 'rather than what the pupil actually needed'.

However, for some participants, there was a reliance on this teaching approach during their time as learners. They indicated that they were used to passively receiving knowledge from their former teachers [S8], finding it 'easy' and they 'did not have to reflect' when having lessons with talkative teachers who acted as 'knowledge exporter[s]' [S11]. S13 observed that an increase in teacher-student interactions and a greater number of questions, similar to what they encountered in the MA tutor groups, led to feelings of being significantly 'overwhelmed' as a student. This is because they 'used to be led and taught in a way that every step has been told by the teacher' [S13]. Reflecting on their past, S8 described their previous learning as a style of 'spoon-feeding' and acknowledged that students taught within this approach may 'lack the ability to think independently, which was their shortcoming as a learner:

> I am very dependent on my teacher because [they told] me everything, so I am inclined to wait for [them] when I have a problem rather than consider exploring and solving it by myself.

Furthermore, this habitual transmission mode may be applied with more specific teaching approaches, such as demonstration and modelling. Participants were asked to reflect on specific approaches they used pre-MA. A consistent theme

emerged across multiple interviews, where the use of demonstration or modelling to assist pupils in identifying, overcoming and mastering techniques was perceived as the 'main' [S1] and 'easiest' [S3] IVT approach, and was the one S13 employed the 'most'. This preference stemmed from the belief that a teacher's demonstration skills and the frequency of corrections during lessons were seen as markers of high professional competence [S8, S13] and indicators of 'effective' teaching practices [S1, S3, S7, S10].

Through the use of the modelling approach, which involves imitating pupils' mistakes without explicitly and verbally revealing corrections, participants found that it assisted their pupils in identifying issues [S4, S10]. However, S3 mentioned that they 'did not think of the reason to use demonstrations' but just copied what their previous teachers had done. When asked about their pupils' reaction to lessons involving demonstration and correction, some participants noted that the lesson could become 'boring', characterised by the 'teacher's demonstrating and student's imitating' [S13]. Concerns were also raised about pupils repetitively making mistakes for the same reasons:

> [Some] pupils did not fully understand [the given] corrections but pretended they did, and then the same problem came again after a few minutes or days. [This is why] some pupils seem to be [well-prepared] for their exams but could not be able to complete a piece without [teachers' modelling] and demonstrating as he/she was used to [fully relying on] the teacher [S10].

When asked if they had any other teaching approaches, S8 expressed that using demonstrations and telling pupils what they had done incorrectly were the only teaching approaches they could use. S5 and S6 also highlighted the challenges of reflecting on and diversifying their teaching approaches, particularly when lessons were steeped within an exam-oriented and memorisation-based context. Feelings of powerlessness and tension of diversifying the used teaching approaches were

reported; participants tended to fall back on the strategy of repeatedly persuading students to repeat and memorise [S1]:

> My pupils needed a lot of drill practice with repetition for one piece in several months or the whole year, which is just for completing and memorising these demanding pieces according to grade examination requirements. We just anxiously finished all the required pieces without enough time to [consider] the pupils' musical expressions, interests and physical relaxation. I know that some optional pieces in each grade exam are good for guzheng learners to access various Chinese music styles; however, pupils may not have enough spare time or energy to access these optional pieces.

Overall, many of the participants perceived that they habitually employed teacher-directed transmission methods pre-MA, including direct correction, frequent teacher talk, and minimal questioning. Individual factors, such as their previous learning experiences with past teachers, along with contextual factors like pupils' examination-centred learning objectives, reinforced their teacher-dominated approaches and limited their teaching innovation. The awareness of a lack of IVT training or opportunities to practically enhance their teaching professionalism in China may have motivated them to study abroad and explore new pedagogical concepts.

4.3 Motivations and expectations of Chinese students pursuing the MA in the UK

Participants had diverse motivations for studying in the UK, shaped by various factors. S11 was inclined towards English-speaking countries due to the extensive English learning curricula in their past education in China, noting that this 'would make the application [process] easier'. S4 anticipated pursuing a PhD in the UK after completing their MA and felt that the experience gained from the MA in the UK would facilitate the application process for a PhD there. S3, S6, and S10 highlighted

the significance of the University's QS ranking, linking it to potential career advancement offered by the MA qualification.

Despite the emphasis on rankings, S3 and S9 acknowledged their limited knowledge of the specific MA curriculum. This suggests that their focus on institutional prestige may have overshadowed a thorough understanding of the programme and left them less prepared both psychologically and academically for potential teaching differences and adaption challenges. While only S7 mentioned seeking assistance from an international agent in China to gather information about the course pre-MA, there is not enough data to specifically illustrate the role and impact of study abroad agencies in assisting students with overseas programme applications, and whether these roles are beneficial for students' adaption to cultural and teaching differences after going abroad (More information detailed in Chapter 8.3).

When asked about participants' motivations for selecting the MA programme, a prevalent theme among participants was the desire to experience cultural and pedagogical diversity [S2, S5, S6, S7, S9, S11]. This included an expectation of encountering something 'new' [S6, S7, S9] and an attraction to Western pedagogies, particularly among those teaching Western instruments, given their origins in Western countries [S2, S7, S11]. Additionally, participants showed interest in the MA's integrated theoretical and practical modules of the MA curriculum [S1. S2, S5, S10], particularly valuing 'practical one-to-one instrumental teaching' [S1, S2]. This aligns with their vision for practical teaching approaches, which emphasises 'the knowledge of how teachers learned to teach rather than how teachers learned to play' [S2]. These perspectives highlight their expectations of gaining exposure to diverse educational experiences and new pedagogical approaches.

In addition, the availability of remote learning during the pandemic [S12, S10] and the one-year duration of the MA in the UK is likely to academically and financially accelerate their progress (Haddon, 2019) compared to the competitive preparation for national postgraduate examinations and the longer two- or three-

year MA programmes in China [S3, S6]. This makes the UK MA programme an 'easier' and appealing option, as noted by S3:

> Finding a supervisor for a MA in China is very demanding and competitive because there are fewer supervisors than [potential applicants]. Music undergraduates understand that [they are] unlikely to secure decent employment (such as a teaching position in universities or other higher educational institutions) without a MA degree. So, I could get the MA degree in the UK in just one year, and the application process was much easier than in China.

Moreover, several participants expected to enhance their career opportunities and employability after completing their MA in the UK, which aligned with Zhao and Cox's (2022) findings that employability is an important driver for Chinese students studying abroad. S10 emphasised the 'better career prospects and more employment opportunities' that the MA qualification can potentially offer. Similar career expectations were specifically associated with teaching roles in China's public schools and higher education institutions, which are recognised as challenging and competitive goals [S9, S13]. S2 commented on the excessive competition, stating, 'most music undergraduates in China expect to be music teachers after graduation no matter if they have not studied education-specialised course'. This view was supported by S3 and S5, who studied performance undergraduate degrees but expressed a desire to become an instrumental teacher, noting that it seemed to be a more 'realistic and achievable career goal' [S3] compared to roles related to 'joining an orchestra' [S5]. However, as previously mentioned, a qualification-oriented attitude coupled with a lack of prior understanding of the course and its modules, as indicated by a few students, might affect their adaptability during the MA course.

While the literature mentioned in Chapter 2.2.2 frames overseas education as a strategic pathway for upward social mobility—particularly for students from

lower-tier cities constrained by the hukou system—the research findings in this section suggest a more nuanced picture. Rather than expressing explicit aspirations to move social class, participants described more specific and immediate motivations for pursuing the MA in the UK. These included the familiarity of English-learning, improved career prospects associated with university rankings, exposure to diverse pedagogical approaches, and the practical advantages of a one-year programme with remote learning options. Some participants also shared their career expectations post-MA, focusing on teaching roles in China's education sectors. These findings indicate that students' expectations in this study are shaped more by concrete educational and employment ambitions than by broader desires for social mobility.

4.4 Views of pedagogical differences among current students during the MA (part 1)

4.4.1 Challenges and adaptions to the student-centred teaching approach

As detailed in Section 4.2, many participants demonstrated a familiarity with teacher-directed transmission, shaped by their former teachers and a context with limited teaching diversity. The student-centred approach promoted by the MA was perceived as a pedagogically distinct method. S7 noted that, 'in our MA, the teacher needs to listen patiently to the student's ideas and interests; however, in China, it is the student who must listen to the teacher'. Some participants, including S4, S11, and S12, recognised the emphasis on empowering their pupils to explore music, which involved making decisions about teaching materials. S11 commented, 'a series of Thomson's tuition books was what I normally used, and I did not try to use any other scores … it is really necessary to find a piece that interests my pupils'.

However, challenges arose for some participants in implementing this approach. S8, for instance, admitted to 'pretending to teach with a student-centred approach' in assessed lessons to align with the MA guidance in order to receive a good mark. S3 expressed discomfort, indicating that they have 'not been exposed to the student-centred mode but were suddenly required to [teach with it and] avoid

the direct-teaching approach that I was quite familiar with'. In addition, attempting to teach in a student-centred mode while using English as their second language adds an additional layer of difficulty, as highlighted by S1 and S8 (further elaboration on linguistic differences and challenges commented by tutor participants is discussed in Section 5.2). S1 noted:

> In the MA, you are learning to teach in a student-centred way, which means more interaction, communication and inspiration. This could be extremely difficult when using a foreign language to achieve these student-centred requirements, and you may also [find it] difficult to quickly come up with good English expression[s] during the recorded lesson… I think it would be much easier if I could adapt to the student-centred mode by using my native language.

In adapting to the new teaching mode, some participants appear to shift their teaching focus from themselves as teachers to their pupils, emphasising the development of independent learning and thinking. S6 found this particularly challenging, noting that the adaption 'needs time and energy … [because] the greatest difficulty is emerging from the previous teaching mode influenced by my pedagogical experience in China, as this was an inevitable teaching framework before I came to the UK'. Similarly, S13, who gained knowledge of student-centred concepts from the MA learning packages, stressed the importance of practising these new teaching approaches.

Furthermore, several students observed that their MA pedagogical practice had limited opportunities for teaching diverse pupils or engaging in meaningful interactions, especially with non-Chinese students. While all MA students are assigned pupils and required to teach their peers in practical modules, some reported having restricted access to students for regular lessons [S5, S10]. This limitation led to a reliance on 'observing, following and imitating videos provided in the VLE Learning Packages' for learning [S10]. For instance, S1 mentioned that they

'only taught' their co-national peers for the purpose of recording assessed lessons. Additionally, both students attending the course in person in the UK and those studying online from China due to the pandemic faced a shortage of UK-based or English-speaking pupils [S4]. As S4, a student studying for the MA remotely in China, described, they 'normally speak Chinese in every lesson' because their pupils 'are children learning the piano in China'. This suggests that opportunities for students to practice the new teaching mode in English were limited, especially for those without access to pupils or teaching contexts that prioritise English speaking and learning.

Unlike those students who had not previously encountered the student-centred teaching mode, a few others reported having been exposed to a similar approach before the MA [S2, S12, S13]. However, S12 noted that, while they attempted to be student-centred prior to the MA, they 'did not use the specific student-centred approaches that we accessed in the MA'. S13 echoed this viewpoint: 'The student-centred teaching style was also promoted in some curriculums of my undergraduate programme, but the course only verbally encouraged us to understand our students without providing specific teaching approaches or guidance'. This indicates that while S12 and S13 were introduced to student-centred education, they did not perceive them as having significantly influenced their teaching practice or adaption to the MA.

However, S2, who had been taught in a similar teaching style prior to the MA, showed confidence and felt less pressure in adapting to the MA:

> We were recommended to teach in a student-centred mode [during the MA], which is the same as my previous teacher… I used to study piano with a teacher who had graduated with a PhD in the UK; she focused on facilitating me instead of teaching me what she individually decided to teach… I do think that it is very difficult to find a teacher like her in China, as you may not usually feel that your tutors in China care much about your thoughts… So, I didn't find what we learnt in the MA too difficult or challenging.

In summary, the MA's student-centred teaching mode was perceived as pedagogically different by those who had never experienced this mode pre-MA. These participants faced challenges in transitioning to a student-centred approach, with variations in adaption and influences from previous teaching experiences. The shortage of pupils available for regular lessons and linguistic challenges added complexity to their adaption processes. While three participants reported having experienced a similar teaching approach pre-MA, the influence on their teaching practice and MA adaption varied, with only S2 expressing confidence in adapting to the MA. These perceptions highlight how students negotiate between their habitual teaching approaches, as well as the factors influencing their different adaptability during the MA.

4.4.2 Adapting to questioning techniques: experiences, perceived benefits, and challenges

According to the perceptions of teaching differences noted among student participants, initiating the practice of asking questions to their pupils was identified as a new teaching technique aligned with the implementation of the student-centred. S9 expressed being 'impressed by the Socratic questions and the open-ended questions in lectures' (more information on Socratic questions is detailed in Chapter 1, section 1.3). Similarly, S1 observed that 'the instrumental teaching staff involved in the teaching video of VLE packages would like to facilitate their pupils by asking questions… by doing this, the pupil's individual thoughts seemed to be acknowledged by the teacher'. S13 remarked on the wide range and variety of questions suggested in the MA, noting that it is 'easy to choose an appropriate question from the question sample list provided by the MA, even when having lessons with different levels of students', which makes this technique the one they 'most frequently used'.

A range of benefits were outlined by those who started to use student-centred and Socratic questioning techniques. By asking their pupils questions, they believed they were explicitly empowering their pupils, encouraging them to express

themselves [S7], and fostering 'multi-directed' student-teacher interactions [S6]. Subtle differences emerged when students shared specific understandings related to their attempts and refinements in using the questioning technique. S12 initially focused on 'increasing the number of questions', but 'after accessing the lecture involving Socratic questions, [they] realised that the questions involved could be systematic and various': 'I could ask another question upon a question, such as, why did I ask you this question? What is the purpose of asking this question?' S2, in addition to the number of questions used, emphasised considering 'the quality of questions, the way of asking questions, the content of the questions, and how to respond' to their pupils' answers. This echoes S6, who remarked on the importance of 'carefully' responding to pupils' questions and answers: 'If your pupil provides an answer that is completely different from what you expected, you need to explore why he or she had this answer, rather than ignoring it with panic and blindly moving on'.

However, the primary challenge arising from questioning lies in the difficulty of crafting open-ended questions [S3] and dealing with pupils who tend to be less enthusiastic about discussions [S7]. S7 expressed that the efficacy of using questions to enhance lesson interactions heavily depends on the active involvement and responses of pupils, stating, 'it can be time-consuming and useless if the pupils reported no ideas about the question asked'. S5, who studied the course in person in the UK and implemented the new teaching approaches with Chinese course peers, found both asking and answering questions to be unfamiliar and challenging:

> I am trying to ask about my pupils' feelings, which is something I would not have been able to ask about previously. However, the students I currently teach in the MA are Chinese, and they are not used to answering questions. This made me feel that the questioning is more of an exam-oriented, superficial and deliberate procedure. Additionally, I would also be afraid of answering questions as a student [in the MA lectures or tutorials]. I might

> struggle to articulate anything and have no idea if the MA tutors asked about my feelings or comments.

Another mentioned challenge is that the interaction triggered by asking questions may interrupt their teaching pace and plans [S7]. S7 felt 'disrupted by pupils' hesitation and silent response and felt a loss of control over lesson time and teaching pace'. S8 perceived that their lessons would be 'less effective' if the pupils, 'were asked about every teaching decision… Chinese parents may refuse to pay the tuition in this case… if the teaching purpose is to help the student play well, then what is the point of wasting so much time asking questions?' To ensure that their pupils can actively engage with the questions prepared, S2 suggested that 'questioning is more appropriate for older children or adult students who can express themselves' than for younger pupils. Despite this, S2 admitted that 'more questioning takes a lot of time in the lesson… you cannot completely empower them with the right to decide the content and learning pace… I really enjoyed the lesson with adult pupils as you easily understand them from the interaction'.

Alongside challenges related to pupils' capability to respond to or adapt to questions, teaching adjustments for dealing with potential disruption caused by students' silence were shared. S2 might leave time for students by 'cutting down some teaching content'; S7 would simplify the questions by asking 'closed questions with selective answers' before 'asking [an] open-ended question'. S4 shared a similar adaptive strategy related to arranging follow-up questions:

> When I first tried Socratic questions, I would directly ask students how they felt. If they did not express any feelings, I would follow up with other leading and specific questions, such as 'Do you think the melody of this piece is lively, cheerful or sad?' I think students who are not used to answering questions need the teacher to first ask questions with answer choices and then ask them open-ended questions.

Some students reported confidence in practising the questioning technique [S2, S6, S12]. For example, S6, who is studying the course in the UK, said that 'asking questions is an extremely interesting and practical teaching approach, including a multi-directed communication that I have not had before commencing the MA'. Likewise, S12, who studied in China remotely and taught Chinese pupils, reported a positive process for their pupils' adaption to answering the questions they asked:

> The pupils were quiet and inactive in answering questions for the first month, and it obviously took a lot of time for them to get used to the questions. No matter how patient I was, they just ignored and showed no ideas about the questions. However, after a month (approximately four lessons), they gradually showed a willingness to be involved in these questions and increased the speed of response. Currently, asking questions is no longer a challenge for the lesson pace as my pupils are very quick to respond.

This suggests that students who participate in the MA course remotely and implement MA teaching methods with Chinese pupils are still capable of making significant progress and adapting positively in their teaching. Open-mindedness was shown to be important when asked about their future use of questioning post-MA, but this needed to be balanced by respecting the learning expectations and purposes of pupils growing up in China [S2]. Referring to the concern of 'whether students in China would be active in answering questions' [S11], S6 mentioned that: 'Although I could not individually change the teaching context, what I can only do is equip myself with more teaching strategies and using these to positively influence my pupils!' S1, S5, S7 and S13 also reported that asking questions could be used effectively in lessons involving pupils 'who have a better ability to express themselves and would secure the teaching interaction' [S5]. However, S13 highlighted that they 'should practice more and not merely rely on whether the student is smart or willing to express themselves'. These findings reveal divergent views about students' perceptions and adaptions in relation to the questioning

technique. Their perspective on the future use of the MA teaching approaches will be presented in Section 4.5.4, which has implications for further investigation explored in detail through the examination of returnee participants in Chapter 6.

4.4.3 Differences in teaching dynamics: Students' experiences with MA tutors vs. previous teachers in China

Students reported varied experiences with MA teaching staff and tutors compared to their previous tutors or instrumental/vocal teachers in China, which influenced their evolving awareness and teaching adaptions. The MA content related to the teacher-student relationship and interactions with MA teaching staff and tutors led some to feel that the student-teacher relationship was 'neglected' in their prior experience [S13]. For example, S13 observed that 'musical corrections, certificates and results would be more necessary' in China. S6 had previous experience preparing for the national teaching qualification in China and mentioned that the MA content related to 'how the student-teacher relationship you fostered, what specific teaching approaches you used, how you would teach different levels of pupils, and how you would guide your pupils to practice post-lessons' was not specifically covered in the exam preparation.

From the perspectives of international students, some students found their MA tutors' facilitation style in tutor group sessions to be less hierarchical and more relaxed compared to their former teachers in China [S1, S2, S5]. This more relaxed approach, characterised by student-centred and dialogical approaches, was seen as 'the same as the way they actually suggested to adapt, learn and teach' [S2]. S5 and S6 also observed differences in the social dynamic between students and teachers in China and the UK. S6 noted that MA tutors were 'more focused on the guidance of their individual teaching developments', whereas in China, there was often need to 'work extra for your supervisors or tutors on their projects at some point'. Students appreciated the 'encouraging and equal' interaction with their course tutors [S5] and 'comfortable distance' maintained from their personal life [S6], in contrast to the hierarchical power that teachers in China might have over the pupils [S3]. S7

remarked that the MA course seemed to advocate for teachers to 'patiently listen to their student's ideas and interests', which appears to have inspired students to incorporate similar practices into their own teaching, providing their pupils with more opportunities to speak:

> In MA lectures or tuitions, I feel that we [the tutor and I] are connecting, rather than a divide between two separate groups. They [the tutors] asked questions and aimed to foster an equal and interactive relationship with us. Although I wasn't always given specific instructions on what to do next, I received several general directions for my concerns and questions, which allowed me significant individual space to find answers on my own. So, I will try to do the same - to adopt a similar approach in my own teaching, giving my pupils more opportunities to speak and explore, just as the course tutors did [S1].

From S1's perspective, the 'general' guidance provided by tutors appeared to promote independence in exploring answers. However, S3 found this guidance difficult to understand and relatively vague compared to the 'specific directions and practising methods' they had previously received from their former teacher in China. For example, S3 felt that the feedback in the MA was 'unforgiving' as it did not 'specifically provide what/how to do next', unlike their former teachers in China who would 'straightforwardly provide the answer' for issues and questions. S8 described the teaching attitudes and instructions of their former teachers in China as 'very strict' and 'extremely direct', noting that this 'direct' approach was perceived as 'a relatively safe, easy, and efficient' learning approach:

> I don't think this kind of following was a bad teaching approach…If I played the wrong notes or did not meet my former teacher's requirements, they would just stop my playing and directly demonstrate and tell me what needed to be corrected. In addition, my teacher would specifically provide

me with training strategies, and the only thing I needed to do in the lesson was to listen and follow her.

This reflects a disjunction of value between Chinese students' learning expectations and teaching approaches fostering independent learning, acknowledged by Edward and Ran (2009): those who have long experienced a teacher-directed teaching approach are used to expecting their UK tutors to guide and tell them 'what to do', whereas 'autonomous learning is often perceived as unfriendly and uncaring' (pp. 193-195). Given the initial linguistic challenges and cultural shocks, students' comments on their adaptive experiences after just one term of the MA suggest that gaining confidence in their relationship with MA tutors may require more time.

Moreover, some students expressed a lack of confidence and hesitation in engaging in classroom discussions and responding to lecturers' questions [S7, S11, S9], attributing this to cultural norms related to the concept of face. S7 acknowledged that the lectures were 'quite helpful', yet they felt very nervous' when faced with unexpected questions, particularly on unfamiliar topics such as 'the musician's well-being', which had not been explored in their previous music education in China. Despite lecturers' reassurances that admitting ignorance was acceptable, doing so made them 'feel [they] were losing face and caused discomfort'. S11 found that 'silently listening to the lecture or staying in tutor groups would be more familiar', and noted that 'it is quite common for students not to be able to answer questions in China'. S9 found that their co-national peers are 'somehow afraid of their lecturers' and 'are less likely to speak in the lectures' compared to domestic students in the UK.

As stated above, students reported different experiences with MA teaching staff compared to their former teachers in China, which influenced their understanding of the student-teacher relationship and their teaching and learning adaptions. Some students found the relationship with their tutors to be less hierarchical, contrasting with their experiences in China. However, a gap remains

between students' expectations for specific instructions and the facilitating approach that encourages autonomous exploration. This disparity highlights the difference between Chinese students' learning habits and the independent learning approach in the UK. Confucian cultural norms related to face values also contributed to some students' reluctance to participate in discussions, as admitting a lack of knowledge was uncomfortable for them. This warrants further investigation, including exploring how MA tutors perceive the pedagogical expectations and challenges faced by Chinese students after beginning their studies in the UK, which will be detailed in Chapter 5.

4.4.4 Views of the significance on adapting teaching modes among S2, S6 and S8 teaching instruments

Three students reported a reflective mindset and flexible approach when adapting to the pedagogical differences. Their reflective awareness led them to feel that the decision between employing teacher-directed or student-centred approaches in instrumental teaching is contextually driven; S8 felt that 'the teaching approaches suggested in the MA are appropriate for the Western or UK teaching context but are not appropriate for China's music education context'. S2 considered combining the two teaching modes and employing them for different teaching purposes: 'I think it might be useful if a teacher could use student-centred approaches during the lesson and use master-apprentice guidance … to help with their practice'. However, this seemed to be 'difficult' as 'the teacher needs to be very good at both teaching modes; otherwise, the pupil needs to understand the importance of both modes' [S2]. This participant also worried that their attention to the ideas and feelings of pupils may not necessarily have a relevant or positive response:

> Some very young children are not necessarily disciplined if you teach them in a friendly, student-centred manner … many children in China need a strict, even somewhat impersonal teacher to regulate their lesson behaviour and practice at home. For example, if I ask my pupils whether they enjoyed the

lesson or not, they are likely to respond, 'I would be really happy if I never had to learn piano again and never had to take piano lessons'.

This appears to contrast with research suggesting that qualities such as warmth and empathy are as important as musical abilities for those teaching beginners (Sloboda & Howe 1991). However, given that Chinese parents may make the decision for children to learn piano (Cui, 2023), the pupils' motivation for learning piano may be externally-driven, leading to potential resistance or lack of learner interest.

In addition, the choice between teacher-directed and student-centred modes appears to be specifically dependent on whether the teaching purpose drives towards rapid mastery or focuses on immediate outcomes and enjoyment, as one participant observed:

> If you [your pupils] would like to achieve a high professional level in a short period of time, you may just hold a few opportunities to be happy in the learning process; however, if you would like to enjoy the learning process, you may need to give up something related to immediate learning outcomes. Having said that, however, I always believe that a learning process [that] blended happiness and productiveness can exist as they are not mutually exclusive.

Apart from this, S6 felt that the teacher-directed and the student-centred modes 'were extremely different', such as the communication type characterised in each mode [S6].

> A learned-centred mode suggests multi-directed and equal communication; however, a teacher-centred transmission suggests single-directed and top-down communication… I don't think my previous teaching habit is wrong, but I hope to find a balance between different pedagogies suggested by the MA

and [those that have] developed in China … I need to flexibly adjust, adapt and progress.

The perceptions from these three students indicates that their choice between the habitual teacher-directed and the implementation of a more student-centred mode was influenced by different contexts, their pupils, their teaching and learning purposes, and their knowledge of both teaching modes. This reveals some of their considerations in developing understanding of negotiating between different pedagogies, emphasising reflection, flexibility, and adaption.

4.5 Views of pedagogical differences among current students during the MA (part 2)

4.5.1 Physical contact during musical corrections and knowledge transfer (part 1): MA study insights from S7 and S9 who teach voices

S7 and S9, who are vocal teachers, were 'surprised and confused by the suggestion in the MA course of avoiding physical contact with pupils' [S7]. They felt challenged by the requirement for more careful and restricted use of physical contact than the teaching habits they were accustomed to. S9 mentioned that the MA tutor suggested being 'carefully aware of the pupils' privacy... [but] people in China would not care about the same issue'. One common reason for using physical contact, according to S9, was that 'blending demonstration with physical touch results in [a] better and quicker learning outcome'. Similarly, S7 described a specific approach involving physical contacts used by their former teacher pre-MA and deemed it 'effective':

> My undergraduate tutor in China was effective and experienced; she asked me to perform training with physical guidance; for example, she asked me to wear high-heeled shoes and sing while heavily stamping my feet; she also pulled my hair while I sang to give me an upward feeling… There is no doubt that the training was effective, but you cannot pull your pupil's hair …

without permission during the MA-assessed lesson; that would be inappropriate or even illegal, especially if your pupil is under 18.

This suggests that, contrary to their previous experiences where physical contact was considered effective for achieving learning outcomes, the MA course introduced a different approach that limited its use. In response to these teaching difficulties, S9 adapted by demonstrating techniques differently, stating that they 'would just demonstrate how I check my breath … placing my hands on my wrist, inhaling, and instructing the pupil to follow'. Similarly, S7 used 'a blown-up balloon' as a teaching tool to 'help the pupil understand how the body should be used for breathing without physical contact'. However, recognising the complexity of teaching voice, S7 acknowledged that they 'will still use physical contact with pupils, as it is the most efficient and direct way', in their future teaching. The interview data regarding how vocal students adjust to avoiding physical contact is relatively brief, as their views on this MA pedagogical content have emerged as an unexpected theme. Given the potential contextual differences between teaching instruments and voices, the next section will primarily address the perspectives of students teaching instruments.

4.5.2 Physical contact during musical corrections and knowledge transfer (part 2): MA study insights from other participants who teach instruments

Several participants teaching instruments reported similar difficulties and perceptions regarding the MA's requirement to limit physical contact. For example, S5, a violin student-teacher, stated that they were accustomed to physically correcting their pupils' hand shapes, 'especially for beginner-level lessons', and did not 'even think about touching student as inappropriate in China', where it was viewed as 'a direct and efficient teaching approach'. Similarly, S1, a guzheng student-teacher, felt that this requirement made hand shape correction more challenging, potentially requiring 'more patience, time or even extra lessons'. In

China, S1 remarked, ‘it is quite normal and common to touch pupils to correct their hand shape’.

The reason behind these perceptions is that the concept of safeguarding around physical contact ‘was completely absent’ in their previous educational contexts [S10]. As a result, student-teachers ‘subconsciously feel that it is natural to touch their pupils’ [S11]. In addition, for those who viewed physical correction as efficient, their evaluation of teaching approaches seemed linked to how quickly learning outcomes were achieved. This suggests that result-oriented educational values might further explain the unfamiliarity with alternative approaches to physical contact in lessons.

Only a few participants offered way to adapt to this requirement, as no specific interview questions were asked to systematically explore the challenges it posed. Those who shared their insights, as outlined in this and the previous section, did so when asked about any challenges or differences in the MA programme. For instance, instead of physically correcting mistakes, S10 suggested that ‘there might be other ways to teach… I would imitate the wrong note and then demonstrate the correction so the pupil could recognise if there is a difference between the two demonstrations’.

Regarding future adherence to this teaching requirement, S11 stated that they ‘will still help their pupils by physically touching them’ but they will ‘ask for permission first or use pencils instead of their hands’. However, S1 felt it would be ‘impossible to avoid touching pupils’ because neither the pupils, their parents, nor future employers would understand why:

> Your pupils may not understand either, especially those who have had lessons with other teachers who correct them by physical contact. They do not understand why the current teacher cannot just tell them how to do the standard hand shape by holding their hands.

Overall, while the findings on physical contact were less detailed than those related to student-centred approaches and questioning techniques, this difference reflects participants' diverse teaching concepts, adaptive strategies, and future concerns in instrumental versus vocal teaching contexts. It may also relate to their perceptions of competitiveness and employability as teachers.

4.5.3 Participants' understanding of practical teaching and writing assessments

Although the original intention of this research was to explore the pedagogical differences students encountered after enrolling in the MA, some students, after sharing their teaching challenges in the interview, also mentioned the academic challenges they faced. This section will elaborate on this emergent theme.

All participants found the MA course assessment, which focuses on the assessed lesson video and reflection-oriented commentary, to be a novel teaching experience that combined planning, teaching, and reflecting. This assessment, submitted at the end of each term during the taught portion of the MA programme, required them to engage more critically with their teaching practices. S11 noted that 'the commentary needs a critical discussion of both positive and negative aspects, rather than just identifying the strengths as was the case pre-MA'. This process also helped S7 to reconsider the rationale behind their teaching choices:

> I did not think about why I was using the piano accompaniment in the MA assessed lessons – I was simply imitating my past vocal lessons in China, assuming strong piano accompaniment would be helpful. However, I overlooked the response of my beginner pupil, who mentioned her voice was weak. I subjectively thought her weak voice could be improved by doing vocal exercises and warm-ups again. Reviewing the video helped me realise I had missed my pupil's response and had not centred their real learning situation.

Despite these benefits, many participants did not feel confident preparing for the assessments, admitting that their assessed lessons did not always reflect their

regular teaching practices. Factors like ‘nerves from facing a camera’ [S1] and the need to familiarise themselves with subject-specific terminology [S4] influenced their performance. S2 observed that some of their course mates adopted assessment-oriented ‘strategies’, such as ‘rehearsing the assessed lesson before recording and submission, aiming to make the video exactly perfect’ [S2], and intentionally planning ‘what disadvantages would need to be reflected in [the] commentary, then filming the assessed lesson video with those issues in mind’ [S7]. S8 admitted that ‘pretending to teach in a student-centred way was the most difficult thing’, but S7 added that it ‘seems to be the only way to pass the module’. This approach, however, seemed to undermine the reflective intention of assignments. As S6 explained, ‘the process is not just about finding faults related to specific terms or the questions asked and hastily putting them together in a commentary, but about developing a self-reflective mindset and skills, critically reflecting on the whole lessons, and making for future teaching’ [S6].

Students also reported challenges in adapting to the MA’s academic writing, particularly in cultivating critical thinking skills and mastering referencing techniques [S6]. These challenges reflect the differences between Chinese and Western academic writing styles, which emphasis critical thinking and proper referencing (Preston & Wang, 2017). S9 observed, ‘you have to find references to support your ideas [in the MA], which we did not have to do in China’. Similarly, S3 admitted to being afraid of ‘reviewing the lesson videos and annotated comments’, stating, ‘I haven’t read any feedback yet as I’m afraid of seeing the report – I closed it quickly after seeing the mark’.

Such avoidance could potentially hinder their ability to adapt to the MA teaching approaches, gain new pedagogical insights and develop their teaching professionalism. While practical assessments have fostered reflective awareness and motivated adjustments in students’ teaching, a few assessment-oriented rehearsals and preparations appeared to be detracting from their development. Moreover, their stress associated with adapting to critical thinking and referencing in writing

reflects the different academic expectations in the MA compared to their previous studies in China.

4.5.4 Views of their future use of the MA pedagogy

When asked about their career aims and plans following graduation, all participants expressed a desire to return to China for employment, though some lacked a clear or viable plan for their future careers [S12, S9]. A few reported feelings of confusion [S11] and struggled with the uncertainties regarding their future careers [S13]. S12, however, was satisfied with teaching private lessons at home and believed that obtaining an MA degree 'could undoubtedly improve my career prospects', potentially leading to a teaching position in local schools after completing the MA.

As highlighted in section 4.3, it is not surprising that most student participants, including S1, S2, S5, S6, S7, S9, S10, S11 and S13, anticipated securing teaching positions in public sectors in China, such as schools and higher education institutions. S5 specifically mentioned a preference for returning to China and applying for a university teaching position, stating that 'the teaching environment in the UK is much less stressful… [but] I would have more sense of belonging' in China. On the other hand, S2 expressed concerns about achieving this goal without a PhD qualification, noting fewer 'opportunities to practice the MA teaching approaches' in public schools. S2 also described a marginalisation of music education, observing that music classes in schools might 'always be replaced by other examination-focused subjects… unless there is someone in the leadership of a school who studied a music degree, then they may prioritise the quality of music education'.

These perceptions align with the challenges expressed by other students contemplating roles in music training institutions, such as S2, S6, S11, and S13, regarding the future implementation of MA pedagogies. While participants appreciated the development and varied pedagogies learned during the MA at this point in their studies, they expressed uncertainties about whether they would revert to their previous teaching approaches if faced with doubts from parents after completing the first term [S13]. Specifically, S13 believed that the MA pedagogies

‘are important in both instrumental and vocal music teaching’, but faced challenges due to ‘Chinese pupils and parents [who] are driven by exam results and learning outcomes because of the pressure of school studies and the sacrificed time for practising’. S6 added that some Chinese parents ‘who thought that their own ideas of learning progressions were more suitable than [teachers’] suggestions’ cared more about ‘whether your teaching styles is the one that they were familiar with, such as the teacher-directed transmission where the teacher hierarchically instructs the pupil’.

Despite these challenges, S13 remained optimistic about the recent educational policy of ‘double reduction’, aimed at reducing ‘homework and tutoring’ post-school, which ‘might take some of the pressure off’ the school-aged pupils. Additionally, S2 viewed recent social changes positively, noting that ‘music education in China has begun to align with that in Western standards in terms of university teachers’ recruitment and curriculums’:

> It is good to see that…some universities in Hong Kong have set up branches in Shenzhen or Guangzhou, and the requirements for recruiting teachers for music courses include overseas learning experiences, overseas teaching experiences with the English language proficiency, and preferably having published academic works. I think, in the future, with the emergence of traditional and new teaching modes, something will positively emerge and improve the current status of music education in China.

In summary, participants showed a common desire to return to China for employment after their MA, though there were uncertainties about specific career paths. Many expected to secure teaching positions in the public sector, with concerns about the need for a PhD and challenges in integrating MA pedagogies with traditional music education expectations. Despite potential obstacles posed by the clash between MA pedagogies and traditional expectations, recent educational policies and evolving recruitment practices mentioned a few students suggest

positive changes. Some participants anticipate a dynamic landscape upon returning to China's educational context, which will be further explored in Chapter 6.

4.6 Summary of the chapter: Key themes

This chapter identified that prior to the MA programme, students perceived that they predominantly relied on teacher-directed transmission, utilising direct correction through demonstration, extensive teacher talk, and minimal questioning. This prevalent pattern was largely influenced by their previous learning experiences with past teachers and the examination-oriented objectives of their pupils. These factors reinforced a teacher-centred teaching style and were perceived as limiting the diversification of their teaching approaches.

The chapter also examined the pedagogical differences and challenges faced by students new to the MA's student-centred teaching methods and questioning techniques. Some students struggled with the MA's requirement to avoid physical contact, as they were unfamiliar with alternative methods for music correction and knowledge transfer.

The MA course assessments, including lesson videos and reflective commentaries, introduced students to a new and integrated teaching experience, prompting reflections on their teaching practices. However, challenges emerged in adapting to critical thinking and referencing requirements, with a few students resorting to assessment-oriented strategies that potentially undermined the reflective goals of the assignments.

Most students expressed a desire to return to China for employment after completing their MA, though some lacked viable career plans and faced uncertainties. While many anticipated securing teaching positions in public sectors, concerns were raised about the necessity of a PhD and the challenges of integrating MA pedagogies with traditional expectations in music education. The clash between MA pedagogies and traditional values in China posed potential obstacles, but recent educational policies and changing recruitment practices, as mentioned by one student, offered some optimism for shifts in music education in China.

The next chapter will present data from interviews with course supervisors, tutors, and teaching assistants who worked with and supported Chinese students on the MA course. This will triangulate the current findings and provide further insights into students' pedagogical differences, difficulties, and adaptive strategies.

Chapter 5: From the perspective of teaching staff: Pedagogical differences, difficulties and adaptions faced by Chinese MA students enrolled on an instrumental/vocal teaching course in the UK

Using the same qualitative interview method outlined in Chapter 3 and applied in Chapter 4, this chapter continues the research investigation, forming part of a concurrent triangulation case study. It focuses on the perspectives of teaching staff working with Chinese students enrolled in a master's level music education course in the UK. The questions addressed in this chapter are as follows:

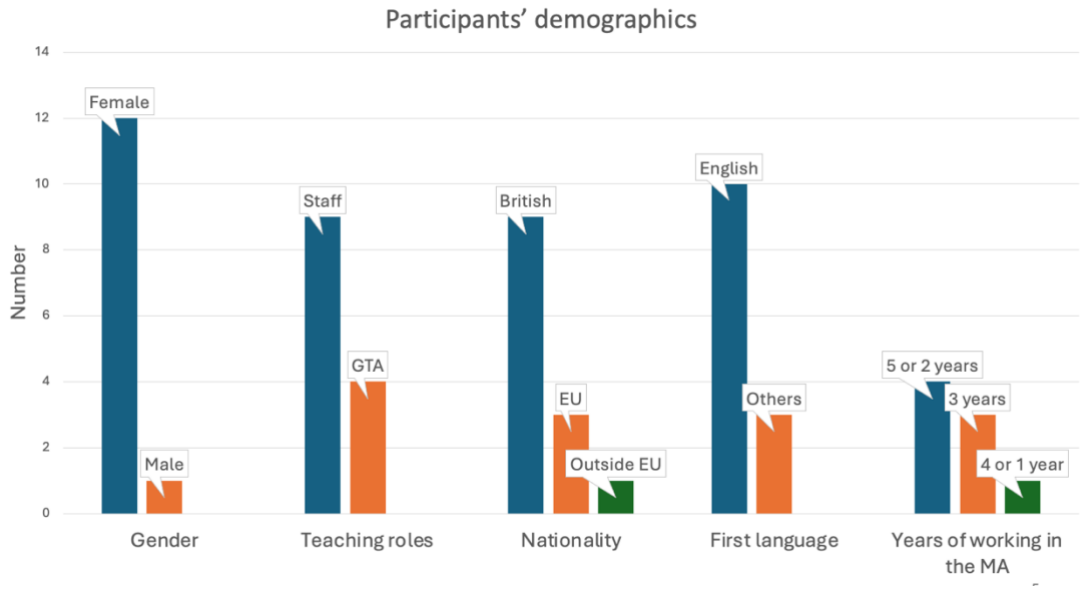
- What are the views of UoY IVT MA tutors on the students' pedagogical difficulties in their MA studying and teaching?
- What are the reasons for these perceived difficulties?
- How might students' adaptions be viewed by MA tutors?
- What are the views of MA tutors on how the students' learning and teaching experiences during their MA studies impact the career development and employment interests of graduates returning to China?

5.1 Demographics of the tutor participants

13 semi-structured interviews were conducted over a three month-period by the researcher with non-Chinese teaching staff who had been involved in various aspects of the MA programme, including course design, creation of learning materials, student supervision, lecturing, marking, feedback, and tutor group facilitation. All participating tutors had a minimum of one academic year of experience in these roles. Following ethical approval granted by the University of York Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee, recruiting information was first sent to the cohort of all teaching staff working in the MA programme for the 2022-23 academic year. 13 tutors (12 female and one male) expressed their interest in participating in the study, opting for either a face-to-face or Zoom audio-accorded interview, based on their preference. All interviews were conducted in English. In the text below, participants

are referred to as T1 for tutor participant 1, T2 for tutor participant 2, and so on. The link to access the translated data is presented in Appendix G, and the participants' demographic details are shown in Chart 1 below.

Chart 1 Demographics information of tutor participants



Among the 13 tutor participants in this study, nine were contracted teaching staff, and four were GTAs. Of these, ten were native English speakers, while the remaining three came from European countries where English was not their first language. Their length of involvement in the MA course ranged from one to five years by the time the interviews were completed in 2022. This diversity in teaching experience and exposure to varying numbers of students and graduates likely influenced their insights and perspectives on how Chinese students adapted pedagogically and academically within the MA programme.

This chapter begins by presenting the adaptive challenges that students encountered, as reported by tutors, stemming from linguistic, cultural, philosophical, and educational differences. This is followed by an exploration of triangulated perceptions of feedback, student expectations, and tutor-student relationships, with reference to the students' perspectives discussed in Chapter 4. Additionally, factors influencing students' adaption processes are examined. The chapter concludes by

addressing concerns related to students' re-immersion into their home countries, potential support systems, and employment interests.

5.2 Students' pedagogical difficulties caused by linguistic challenges

5.2.1 The linguistic issues noted by tutors that Chinese students had when teaching and learning in English

Language barriers emerged as a significant challenge, described by tutors as 'initial' [T2], 'crucial' [T3], and 'fundamental' [T4]. T6 perceived that these barriers not only impacted students' confidence in speaking during group situations but also hindered their ability to reach their full potential in teaching assessments. T2 observed that students who were not 'fully confident with English, particularly at the beginning of the year', often worried about 'if they could express their meaning clearly or ask for clarification'. This was echoed by T9, who found that most students expressed nervousness about the language during the first tutor group session, likely 'overwhelmed by the sheer amount of information'. This anxiety made it challenging for them to engage and 'talk to their own pupils, to be interactive and ask questions' [T5] during their instrumental or vocal teaching practice.

The MA programme encourages students to put pedagogical knowledge into practice by submitting one-to-one lesson videos and reflective commentaries for assessments. However, a lack of confidence in spoken English impacted students' ability to adapt to new pedagogies and teaching techniques, such as questioning [T3]. T6 noted that students 'could do it fine if they were teaching in Chinese, but in English, this was bringing their marks down; in the end, they want to get higher marks and develop their teaching'. These language challenges, particularly at the start of the programme, were described by T3 as 'very crucial' and could take up to a year for some students to overcome:

> I find many times that students are afraid to speak out. In the last two years that I've been teaching the tutor group, we've tried to create a more friendly environment where they can share their concerns. Most students said they

> are afraid to speak because they're sure their English is not very good. That's fine, but it's one of the challenges, and sometimes they cannot overcome it in one year. Last year, I had two tutor groups with around 8 to 10 students each, and in total, only about five in each group managed to overcome the linguistic challenge.

Several tutors mentioned similar challenges with English as an additional language in students' teaching. T6 explained that differences in the construction of speech between Chinese and English can result in translations sounding 'more authoritarian than intended'. For instance, the phrase 'pay attention to' in English may come across as a command, while its Chinese counterpart is likely less dictatorial. In addition, using standardised music terminology presented challenges. T10 observed that while students might have 'a clear understanding of what those terms might mean', 'they were not comfortable with using these terms' in teaching. T6 highlighted that instead of employing 'basic musical concepts, such as "dynamics", "rhythm", "articulation", and "interpretation"', some students 'used long explanations or incorrect vocabulary', making it difficulties for their pupils to understand. T6 further emphasised that using terminology served not only for accuracy but also to improve comprehension and foster more sophisticated awareness:

> It is not so that they play a 'correct' performance, it is so that they get all those clues, like something might be marked *cantabile*… encouraging the pupil to think in a singing way, and they never mentioned *cantabile*… it really would have encapsulated everything that they were doing … Knowing what that one word meant, they could have encouraged their pupil to understand that.

Another challenge for students was their overreliance on technological translation tools, which often failed to accurately convey meaning within the specific

context of music education [T13]. Despite this, tutors recognised that translators sometimes aided communication during MA sessions and lessons. T5 mentioned that while students' words might be influenced by translation software and not always reflect native phrasing, they could 'generally understand what they are saying'. Although some 'translation issues' can take place during sessions, 'group translation is very helpful':

> Sometimes, with translation, I will generally in the tutor group encourage the student's feedback in English, but sometimes when there is a clear translation issue, they [students] will have a quick discussion among themselves to come up with a word that makes more sense, which is fine because they all learn from that, and this generated some great humour, there's so much laughter around the group, they were like, 'yes, this is the word that we should use'… and I get the sense that it helps some of the rest of the group to see how it is coming up with your words in particular points [T13].

Another issue, highlighted by several tutors, was students' tendency to rehearse and script their assessed lessons due to insecurity in their English speaking abilities [T3, T6, T7, T9, T12, T13]. T13 felt that this is 'quite problematic' because 'being responded to spontaneously is really important'. T6 recounted examples where both the student-teacher and pupil scripted their speech, turning away from each other to read from notes. This lack of natural communication diminished the lesson's effectiveness:

> In some assessed lessons I have watched, both teacher and pupil had scripted their speech for the whole lesson and were clearly reading, even turning away from each other to do so. It can be quite difficult to persuade students that responding naturally to their pupil in the lesson, even if this means struggling with words and their speech being broken up, is so much better

than scripting the lesson. Their spontaneous explanations in simple language are often much clearer than those they have carefully prepared and written down in advance.

T6 and T12 noted that students' lack of confidence in their language abilities led them to reply on scripting, which hindered the 'spontaneous exchange between the teacher and student' [T12]. T3 argued that some students might mistakenly 'equated lesson plans with scripts', thereby losing the intended flexibility in teaching. Therefore, language barriers caused translated phrases to sound more commanding than intended, as T6 noted, while some students struggled to use standardised musical terminology, leading to long explanations or incorrect vocabulary that confused their pupils. Overreliance on translation tools added further challenges, particularly in accurately conveying musical terms. Group translation and peer support helped mitigate these issues to some extent, facilitating collaborative learning and communication. However, the reliance on scripted lessons, driven by linguistic insecurity, limited students' teaching flexibility and their ability to engage naturally with pupils.

5.2.2 Factors influencing students' adaption to language difficulties and relevant support provided by tutors

Tutors expressed empathetic concern for students facing 'varied' linguistic challenges [T4] based on factors such as English proficiency [T5, T13], personality [T6], and the degree to which students engaged in English-speaking environments, both academically and socially [T1, T3, T9]. Higher proficiency and 'outgoing nature' [T6] correlated with more active communication, while increased exposure to English-speaking contexts also facilitated language adaption [T1, T3, T9, T11]. T3 noted:

> We tend to see Chinese students prefer to stay with Chinese friends all the time, which is fine, obviously, but when you ask them, 'have you met people

> from other countries?' … they often say no, which means they don't really have enough opportunities to practice the language. Those who improve tend to interact more with people from other countries, including British students, and the difference is noticeable.

T1 stressed the value of forming culturally diverse groups of students from 'a variety of cultural backgrounds', as this helps students challenge their 'own cultural assumptions by talking to people who do not share them'. However, the course's demographic, with 'more Chinese students than other students' [T1], made this difficult. T3 also raised concerns about students conducting tasks 'in Chinese instead of talking in English' in tutor group sessions, which created communication barriers with non-Chinese-speaking tutors:

> That is where they can create pain…a lot of the tutors on the course are not Chinese speakers… I might pick up on a few words, but I have no idea about the idea they are getting arrived at [T11].

T13 highlighted the importance of encouraging students to communicate in English during sessions, and T3 reinforced this by stressing the persistent message to students about the necessity of using English, even in all-Chinese groups. For example, T3 specified that, 'we keep telling them, "you need to talk in English even if you're all Chinese because this is actually your chance to talk and practice the language"'. Despite these efforts, T3 observed that some students continue to converse in Chinese, possibly due to concerns about time consumption when they are short of time to complete their discussion task during the session. Furthermore, T11 noted that the language challenges were exacerbated 'during the Covid period… because so many of our students were learning online' and missed out on the immersive language and cultural experiences of studying abroad. This pandemic further complicated their ability to adapt linguistically and benefit fully from their

international education, where they would typically be ‘surrounded by the language and the culture’ [T11].

In response to these challenges, there has been substantial development of the course over the years with a heightened focus on supporting students in their linguistic adaption [T11]. Initiatives such as the ‘Talking About Music (TAM)’ sessions help students practise using basic music terminology in a ‘“safe” environment to build confidence’ [T6]. Additionally, online discussion boards also provide a platform for students to respond anonymously, providing an alternative for those who might be hesitant to speak ‘on the spot in person’ [T8]. However, participation in these activities, such as [via] the Padlet platform, has [been] shown [to be] limited, with only about ‘a third of people’ engaging, suggesting that some students might not be fully utilising the resources available [T9]. Furthermore, some students seem hesitant to seek support from services like the Writing Centre, where they could receive help with essay drafts [T11]. This perceived reluctance points to a disconnection between students’ previous learning experiences and the interactive teaching approach expected in the MA course, as T8 noted (also detailed in 5.4.1):

> Quite a lot of students start the master’s course having [previously] had more lectures, [so they may wish us] to stand in front and deliver content. Whereas we really want people to have opinions and join in interaction and discussion, and you have to be quite brave to say what you think in front of people, I think that is a challenge.

In summary, tutors’ perspectives highlight the complex linguistic and cultural challenges students face when adapting to English teaching environments. Factors such as English proficiency, personality, and cultural exposure play significant roles in students’ engagement and adaption. Encouraging diversity within student groups is vital for fostering both language practice and cultural understanding, though challenges remain, particularly in encouraging students to communicate in English. The COVID-19 pandemic has further compounded these difficulties, limiting

students' exposure to English-speaking contexts. The course has made strides in supporting linguistic adaption through initiatives like TAM sessions and online platforms, but one tutor found that student participation remains an issue. Moreover, there is a continued need to bridge the gap between students' expectations and the more interactive teaching approach of the MA programme, promoting greater participation and confidence in language use.

5.3 Students' pedagogical difficulties caused by philosophical and cultural differences

5.3.1 The challenge of adapting to critical thinking skills

Chinese students' learning and teaching adaptions due to cultural and philosophical differences are perceived as the 'main' [T2] and 'biggest' [T5] challenges, focusing on students' understanding of critical thinking and reflective teaching. T1 found that students seemed 'very reluctant at the beginning' of the course 'to disagree with what is being said, to offer alternative perspectives or to offer personal experiences and recognise them as valuable'. This hesitance may stem from a perceived lack of 'authority to do this' due to prolonged exposure to hierarchical contexts where critical thinking was not frequently involved in their educational context [T2].

When students had to prepare and submit their critical appraisal as the first written submission in a theoretical module, quite a lot of them were perceived by tutors to be 'anxious' and felt 'vulnerable' [T13]. T13 recounted a student's remark: "I've never done anything like this, [critical appraisal] is just something that we do not get taught in the Chinese education system'. Another tutor, T3 mentioned that their students expressed feeling more accustomed to 'teacher-led' instruction and had not 'always been taught to be independent learners pre-MA'; however, 'the MA course encourages students to start thinking more independently and critically'. T7 emphasised that the transition to developing critical thinking skills 'might take time… and their struggle is normal'. These insights aligned with the perspective outlined by Fan and See (2022), indicating that critical thinking is deeply embedded in Western

culture and divergent from Chinese cultural values which prioritise conformity, respect, and deference to authority.

None of the tutors mentioned the potential impact of language differences and translation issues on students' development of critical thinking, as noted by Guo and O'Sullivan (2012), where critical can be misunderstood as criticism in the Chinese context and perceived as rude and negative. As stated above, students are perceived as reluctant to offer critical perspectives initially, and they are anxious and vulnerable when preparing critical appraisal assignments. Factors related to the challenge are that Chinese students may be more teacher-led and less accustomed to independent learning, requiring time to develop critical thinking skills.

5.3.2 The challenge of adapting to reflective thinking skills

The absence of critical appraisal in their former education presents additional challenges for students when critically questioning the rationale behind their teaching approaches. For instance, some students may struggle to 'think about variables of knowledge' and flexibly apply it in different teaching situations and with pupils [T12]. Tutors noted that some students tended to rely on generalisations like saying, '"it is a Mazurka and all Mazurka are fast"; "teachers should… students always…"' [T12], or the '"variation [in this sonata meant] a bit faster"' [T6]. This indicates the tendency to prioritise familiar thought patterns, which can hinder students' understanding of certain musical concepts. T1 emphasised that students' understanding of the world and how knowledge is constructed form the foundation of their teaching approaches:

> If students think there is one single truth [i.e. what] their teachers said, then it becomes the only way for them to teach and for their pupils to learn. Whereas if you think that our knowledge is constructed or developed by us, you know, between us and this social world, there is no one true answer.

These insights aligned with the stress experienced by students as they adapt to the critical thinking learning tasks of their MA program, particularly considering their prior education in China (See section 4.3.3). Tutors noticed that some students displayed a strong inclination to 'get everything right', leading them to be overly self-critical when reviewing and reflecting on their lesson videos [T6, T9, T13]. For instance, T10 mentioned that it was common for students to focus solely on the teacher's actions, rather than considering 'what the other person, [their pupil], is experiencing'. Encouraging students to deeply reflect on their teaching approaches and think about their pupil, rather than criticising what they have done in one submitted lesson, is an area that students seemed to find challenging [T2].

Although all tutors indicated they tried to reassure that they were here to help, 'many Chinese students may feel that they ought to work harder to sort out difficulties for themselves and asking for help seemed to be an admission of failure' [T6]. T1 was concerned that 'many students do not report their difficulties until very late', 'allowing small concerns to grow into much larger ones when help would have been available early on if students had only asked' [T6]. This feeds into the biggest challenge for tutors to provide support and guidance, although tutors can sometimes 'guess' what areas students may find difficult [T8]. This was also felt to be the result of a deep-rooted cultural difference:

> I assume that [students] come from quite a master-apprentice style of education, and they are used to not speaking much with their teachers, not questioning things and having discussions, they are [going to] be less likely to feel able to speak to their teachers in that way. So, it is like being vulnerable when you are used to respecting the teacher and not having many conversations with them. Maybe they worried about what would happen if they told us; they worried about whether it would affect how we think of them or mark their work. Maybe they are worried about being judged by their peers or tutors if they bring up a particular difficulty with teaching [in a group setting] [T5].

Having said that, it is undeniable that students' 'incredible work ethic' leads to 'so much hard work' and 'all great adaptive developments' [T10]. Tutors noted significant progress among students as they engaged with the course materials and received feedback from each submission [T13, T10]. However, tutors recognised that one year 'is a limited amount of time' [T2], particularly considering the substantial transition 'from undergraduate to master's level study' [T1] and the need to adapt to philosophical, cultural and educational differences [T11]. This reveals that the one-year MA duration can not only accelerate their progress academically and financially (Haddon, 2019) but can also be very difficult and demanding for Chinese students to adapt to these differences.

5.4 Students' pedagogical adaptions and difficulties caused by educational differences

5.4.1 Student-centred teaching objectives

All respondents highlighted that transitioning to a student-centred teaching approach was unfamiliar for Chinese students, many of whom come from a very different context with a master-apprentice teaching style. This observation aligns with the experiences shared by student participants in section 4.1. As T11 noted, 'the way students were taught as a learner' in China 'is not the way we recommend for them to teach'. Such a shift in pedagogy made some students feel deeply unsettled [T6] and posed significant challenges [T7]. T13 observed that some students 'have come through [a context where] the teacher is very much in charge', leading to what T1 described as a 'massive' teaching shock when they encountered mentor-friend or student-centred approaches in the MA programme. T1, T5 and T11 emphasised that an individual's personal learning trajectory significantly influences their teaching style. This notion suggests that teaching approaches are shaped by how individuals were taught, regardless of their origin [T1]. However, if someone has 'only ever experienced a certain way of being taught' [T1], 'seen it works' [T11] and 'copied that' [T5], 'that becomes the assumption that that is the only way to teach'

[T1]. This highlights potential barriers and rigidity in teaching practices shaped by homogeneous personal and educational experiences. The transition from master-apprentice teaching habits to student-centred teaching emerged as 'a huge challenge' for many Chinese students [T1]. 'Everything that [goes] into teaching has been simulated' from a master-apprentice pedagogy [T1], making it difficult for students to adjust. Some students continued to rely on traditional methods, such as 'teachers' talking, demonstrating, and subsequently listening to the pupil play' [T9], or expecting 'the pupil to copy without having to enter into discussion' [T6]:

> I have seen this in assessed lessons, particularly the early ones: the teacher demonstrates, the pupil tries to copy them, the teacher occasionally says, 'do it again, no, no, like this', and the pupil has to guess what they are meant to be copying [without getting] a focus so that they know what to comment on. [Or, the teacher says], 'today we will start with a warm-up exercise, du, du, du, du, du [with different pitches]', and then the pupil has to do it whether they [understand why they] do this exercise or not.

T9 further noted from vocal lesson videos that some students adhered strictly to their teaching plans, even when it was clear the pupil was not 'getting the tone right'. A subtle power imbalance between some Chinese students and their pupils was also observed, as noted by T6:

> The teacher has the power to [make the pupil sing] higher and higher, and the pupil has to try, even if this pupil thinks, 'oh, this is uncomfortable'… Only when the teacher thinks the pupil sounds like them, do they go on to the next thing, [which] is possibly how they have been taught

Despite these challenges, all participants agreed that students made significant efforts and overcame many difficulties as they adapted to the student-centred teaching mode over the course of the year. The shift from 'being a teacher

who simply dictates instructions to one who helps the pupil comprehend the learning objectives' was essential for this adaption [T6]. T8 observed that students' early marks 'would often not be great, and the feedback would be quite basic', but those who engaged with the course made significant progress. However, considering the scripted lesson preparation some students used, and the admitted gap between their assessed lessons and actual teaching practices (detailed in 4.3.3), further exploration of the authenticity of students' improvements may be warranted. Tutors emphasised that neither the master-apprentice nor the student-centred approach is inherently superior: 'We do not say that our way is the best way' [T5], and students' adaptions are not about 'the Chinese way versus the English way' [T1]. Instead, T6 explained that students 'are not told that their way is wrong but are shown that there are other ways of teaching' based on research and the recommendations of the course. T5 suggested an 'exploring' attitude that students can develop and 'an ability to recognise what student-centredness is and to explain the different approaches that are out there and why this mode might then work for the pupil':

> Being student-centred doesn't necessarily mean being completely student-led or being mentor-friend. Being student-centred could mean teaching in a more master-apprentice style approach with the teacher leading it because that is what that particular student wants, expects and needs … I think it's important that we celebrate differences and realise that teaching in different styles and types of relationships with students is great. What's important is that we see what the student needs and what the student would respond to, and we work with them… So, I think it's not saying one's superior, but it's exploring those, thinking about why, challenging what you are used to, just because you've grown up with that, and thinking about why or why not, and asking those questions which again links to being critical. So, it's all this whole thing wrapped up together.

5.4.2 Questioning technique

Learning to ask questions is identified as crucial in helping students adapt to a student-centred teaching approach, marking 'a real turning point' in their MA learning [T1]. However, this skill appears to develop and improve gradually over the year [T13]. Tutors have found that while students attempt to incorporate questioning techniques after engaging with learning packages, they often struggle to understand the underlying purpose. For instance, T6 said that some students improve slightly by including more questions in their submissions, but their feedback often highlights the need for continuous improvement, which 'can be a bit disheartening'.

By reviewing the questions used by some students in their assessed lesson videos, certain insights emerged concerning students' understanding of the purpose behind using questions. T13 found that after asking a question and receiving an answer, some students did not respond effectively to their pupils' answer. Tutors such as T1, T2 and T9 noticed that some students appeared to ask questions as if they were doing 'box-ticking', rather than engaging in meaningful dialogue and reflecting on the answer. T1 remarked: 'it is hugely challenging for students not just to ask a question but know why you have asked a question and what to do after that'. Sometimes, students ask questions because they are encouraged to do so by learning materials or tutors [T3], not 'because they feel it is an important additional teaching element' [T2]. This challenge partly 'linked to the fact that they are less used to critical reflecting' [T5]: 'It is not just that "I asked questions, and this is what it says, so my teaching was good', but actually, "I asked questions, but I only asked questions because I was told to [do that] and was it good?"' As T1 noted, 'it is not enough [for students to] include five questions in a lesson if their questions were completely unrelated to what the pupil was saying and did not help the pupil to achieve that learning goal'.

Another significant challenge is pupil engagement when practising questioning techniques. T1 emphasised determined by who the pupils are and where they are [T1]. Many students, especially those teaching peers from similar

educational contexts, face difficulties due to the master-apprentice pedagogy they are familiar with [T1]. T6 found that 'many Chinese pupils find answering questions difficult because they are worried about being told they are wrong, losing face, and being humiliated'. Consequently, some students may encounter difficulties in engaging their pupils effectively, especially considering the prevalent master-apprentice learning mode in their previous education context, where direct instruction is common [T1]. This issue is further exacerbated for students who completed the course online during the pandemic and had fewer opportunities to engage with pupils from different backgrounds [T11]. Then developing questioning skills becomes increasingly challenging, as suggested by T1, as 'it is not just the teacher who matters but their pupil as well'.

Referring to concerns raised by student participants regarding the impact of questioning on time management and lesson productivity, T6 expressed understanding that students might feel their time went 'out of the window' when they tried to 'ask' rather than 'tell', particularly if the lesson focused on exam preparation. Nevertheless, T6 suggested that effective questioning could promote deeper learner reflection and long-term progress. Recognising this dynamic, however, poses some students a significant challenge, not only for students but also for their pupils [T11], especially when influenced by a result-driven and hierarchical pedagogy where quick progress is often prioritised [T1; T6]. T6 acknowledged the temptation for students to 'just slip into master-apprentice on occasion', especially when their pupil 'have always been told what to do and have not had the practice' [T6]. All tutors indicated that facilitating pupils to become independent learners is what they and the course expected, and to support this, students needed 'to think [about] what would be the most effective for the pupil to achieve' [T4].

Throughout the academic year, students began to improve their questioning techniques as they engage with Socratic questioning strategies and apply them in lessons. According to T13, 'many of them responded to what their pupils are saying a bit more, and they adjust the lesson content slightly to allow and blend [it with] what the pupil has said'. However, T2 noted varying levels of engagement with feedback.

T8 remarked that 'it is the students who read the feedback, respond and reflect on [it] that really make the biggest progression through the year'. Conversely, those 'who are only interested in earning a degree and passing each module are not much interested in engaging with course curriculum' [T2]. These views echo and triangulate findings from section 4.3, suggesting that students' qualification-oriented mindsets can influence their adaptability and progress during the MA course.

5.4.3 Hierarchical dynamics in the tutor-student relationship within the MA

Several tutors expressed satisfaction that some student participants perceived their relationship with tutors as more equalised, aligning with the tutors' intentions to foster collaborative learning [T2, T3, T5, T8]. T8 noted that 'we want to create that sort of sharing and building of knowledge together', although 'they are officially the students and we are officially the teachers'. The perceived role distinction between teachers and students, as noted by T1, T2 and T12, indicated that they do not believe their relationship with Chinese students can be equal:

> My role is to facilitate discussions, provide them feedback and make sure that they are making the most of their time here and doing well within the course, academically and personally. That's my role, my job. Their role is to attend the tutor group, try to get out of their comfort zone, ask questions if they need to, and engage with activities that we propose to them [T2].

The distinction of different roles between teachers and students, as perceived by some tutors [T1, T2, T12], inherently created an 'inevitable' power relationship [T4]. T11 said that 'there will always be a slight hierarchy in the room, even if you try to be completely equal'. A possible reason why Chinese students feel a sense of equality, as perceived by T2, is that the student-tutor relationship in the MA 'is less hierarchical than that in China for sure'. For example, T5, T9, T10 and T11 indicated that the questioning technique they used in sessions or tutor groups could serve as a model for students to observe and adopt:

> We are not both standing up and overpowering. Actually, I'm standing up because I'm using the PowerPoints, but if not, then I'm sitting down, so I'm equal with them… they might realise that this is a group conversation where we're having dialogue, we're not telling you everything, we're inviting you to discuss. So I think, maybe as time goes on, they learn to adapt to that way of learning and find that we are equal, we are just here to facilitate information, but you're the one that's going to provide it, and then we can discuss [T9]

In addition, the types of sessions students are involved in can also be influential in cultivating a sense of equality [T9, T13]:

> If you are delivering a lecture… it is more of a one-way delivery of information, so, I guess there is a power imbalance there because there is one person - me - as sort of delivering information. For the tutor groups, I think it is the same to some extent, but there's more dialogue. So again, it's slightly an unequal relationship because I'm delivering more information, but it's maybe more equal [in the tutor group sessions] than in the lecture setting [T13].

T3, T4, T7 and T13 observed that calling their UK tutors in a way that 'just put their first name' [T3] can 'probably break the barrier' because 'before the MA, they may call them "professor" or "teacher"' [T7]. This way, as T3 explained, 'does not mean they have to change how they see their tutors completely', but it shows that everything here 'is more relaxed' and less hierarchical. Some tutors perceived that this could be a 'shock' [T3] and a bit 'surprising' [T4] for Chinese students, but students 'don't seem to have a strict relationship with their [former] teachers … but it's just more obvious how you are going to call them'.

T11 believed that in creating the relationship of saying 'I am not some "all-knowing God above the students, above music education, we will constantly learn,

and sometimes it can be going on that journey together as well with the students'. The attitude of mutual learning between teachers and students also tends to weaken the hierarchical sense of the teacher-student relationship [T5, T6, T11]. Some tutors working as graduate teaching assistants who are not English natives [T2, T3] could 'sympathise with the same kind of difficulties that Chinese students experienced' [T2]:

> I feel this somehow makes them realise that we're also human beings, and we are also exposed to the same kind of challenges… that's also something that can contribute to the equal relationship between tutors and Chinese MA students.

Given that students' prior learning habits in China may vary from their current experiences, T6 reflected that 'initially when they come, they are expecting a hierarchical relationship … that I have the answer to everything'. This aligned with the perspectives of some student participants in 4.2.1, who expected to just follow their tutors and perceived it as 'safe, easy, and efficient' [S8]. T5 found that 'some of our students are used to being told information and then just repeating it and learning it'. Having considered their previous pedagogical experiences, T6 noted that some of them may still expect their MA tutors to be masters who provide 'a list of: "do this, and it will be right", "this was wrong, and that was right"'. For these type of students, it is challenging to 'expect [them] to be suddenly comfortable in an equal relationship if they've never been in one before':

> It takes two to tango … for most students, once they understand that we are expecting a more equal relationship, some of them absolutely go for it, they are so pleased and really enjoy the freedom of taking that responsibility. Others find it more difficult to take that responsibility because they are all individuals, and some people find it difficult to be responsible for themselves, but they haven't had the practice quite often; you can't expect someone to

> suddenly be self-reliant and responsible when they have always been told what to do, and then blamed for not being able to be responsible for themselves [T6].

Overall, several tutors were pleased to find that some student participants viewed their relationship as more equalised, attributing this to it being somewhat less hierarchical compared to students' previous experiences in China. Some tutors acknowledged the inherent role distinctions and inevitable power dynamics within the teacher-student relationship. Despite these inherent hierarchies, the MA environment is perceived by both tutors and students as less hierarchical compared to the student's prior experiences in China. Facilitating techniques such as questioning strategies and encouraging dialogue contribute to this perception, which serves as a model for students to observe and adopt the same teaching approach to their own lessons, though the curriculum setting may vary the potential for students to interact with tutors. Additionally, calling the tutor by their first name and sharing similar learning experiences and mutual learning attitudes can help break hierarchical barriers between students and tutors. However, the transition to this less hierarchical relationship can be challenging for some students accustomed to a more hierarchical structure before the MA and who expect their MA tutors to provide the same guiding style as their former teachers.

5.4.4 Students' varied teaching specialities

When asked about the adaptive differences between students teaching instruments as opposed to teaching voices, some tutors indicated that the MA course is very much geared towards instrumental learning [T2, T9, T13]. T2 observed that there were 'more instrumental teaching samples' than vocal ones in certain learning packages, which are used to 'demonstrate student-centred teaching' or to reflect on 'some over-leading teaching behaviours'. As a result, students have varying levels of familiarity with the teaching example, which could affect their perception and learning from the observation (Denscombe, 2003). This potentially implies that

students training to teach instruments are more likely to have more access to resources that allow them to directly observe and replicate the content presented in the teaching videos.

When the MA programme introduces students to their safeguarding responsibilities as teachers, it necessitates that they accurately and appropriately adjust their teaching methods to demonstrate their understanding of safeguarding principles and incorporate them into their teaching practices. This requirement was noted as another area of adaption for some students; some tutors noted that teaching instruments might adapt more easily to the safeguard consideration, such as the non-touch policy, and achieve desired learning outcomes through demonstration without physical contact [T3, T6, T9, T11]. For instance, T9 mentioned that as instrumental teachers, 'you can show the pupil something in other ways' if you cannot touch them, 'like wrist position, and get [your pupil] them to mimic that'. However, it might be harder for vocal teachers to think 'how else they could get their pupils to do what they wish' [T9] instead of relying on physical contact, such as holding onto the pupil's waist and feeling their diaphragm [T3]. These viewpoints support the notion that student participants teaching voice face additional adaptive challenges due to the non-touch policy.

However, this policy was also perceived as beneficial as it encouraged students to 'learn techniques… without invading someone's personal space', which could be applied in online lessons [T6]. T11 suggested that this approach 'is far better [for their pupils] to experience that by themselves, and then to be able to do it independently next time'. This aligns with the perspective that while physical guidance can provide immediate corrections, it may not support overall learning effectiveness (Yamaguchi et al., 2020); facilitating self-correction is preferable to immediate external and physical corrections (Maxfield, 2023). Furthermore, in response to social distancing measures or online vocal teaching brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, T6 highlighted the importance of reducing reliance on physical contact to achieve teaching outcomes:

> I'm personally not against touching completely, but I've found I've had to learn a lot from teaching online, where you can't touch, and so it is really good training for teaching online if you don't touch, and find other ways to do things. I mean, as a wind player … I used to rely on touch when I was teaching breathing. I always asked the student if they were happy with me just putting my hands round their waist or something like that, and I would always say to them, 'please tell me if I touch you anywhere that you are not happy with'… But teaching online, I had to learn to do things like that without touching … I think, [it] is appropriate. It helps you to learn techniques for teaching without invading someone's personal space, and you can apply that when you're teaching online as well.

Some tutors have found that, in addition to addressing requirements related to physical contact, the traditional mindset held by some students teaching Chinese instruments can also pose challenges to adapting to their MA teaching practice. In order to implement MA teaching approaches tailored to their instrument's nuances, T2 remarked that 'it could be even more difficult to apply certain teaching approaches directly'. For example, those teaching Chinese instruments and adhering to a 'mindset that [their teaching] needs to be done in the traditional way… [which]' would make 'it harder to be pupil-centric' [T4]. This potentially meant that some students kept their 'very traditional way consistently [and] … did not really adapt through the year' [T8]. This aligns with Zheng and Haddon's (2023) findings, which indicate that students teaching Chinese instruments in the UK may feel overwhelmed when using English to teach techniques, skills, and specialised terminology related to traditional Chinese instruments, such as the guzheng. T7 noted that this adaptive obstacle might stem from linguistic and cultural differences embedded in translating Chinese musical symbols into a standardised Western teaching language:

> It seems like a completely different world… they read different music, including the different symbols… I think it's easier for students who teach Western instruments to adapt to a new teaching style because the language can be easily transferred to this new teaching style just because this kind of teaching style is largely based on Western culture, whereas the Chinese traditional instruments are based on a different culture. So I think it's more difficult for those who teach Chinese traditional instruments to adapt than those who teach Western instruments, to be honest.

T7 stated that they had observed some students using translation software in their lessons to translate the traditional techniques and terminology of Chinese musical instruments; however, 'it looks so weird':

> I think the beauty of learning traditional instruments is also about the rapport developed between students and teachers, just like the teachers explain, 'yeah, this is how you do these traditional stuff' and the teacher can then pass on this knowledge, but now, we are asking you to change the way you do that, so it's quite difficult.

T5, T6, and T10 have stated that they have not found any particular or significant differences in the adaption to MA teaching approaches among students who are teaching vocals or different instruments. They emphasised that the pupils' experiences and participation in learning traditional instruments are more influential to students' adaption in teaching than the particular instruments or vocal techniques they teach directly [T1; T5; T11]. It should be considered that students in the MA are more likely to practice the teaching approaches with their co-national peers because of the shortage of UK domestic pupils who report interest in learning Chinese instruments [T11]. T11, who was responsible for recruiting and assigning pupils to MA students before the programme began, mentioned that 'we haven't had any requests for learning these instruments [guzheng and pipa], what we recommend

that you do is that you could teach other people on the course'. This means that MA students who teach Chinese instruments may need to practice and implement MA teaching approaches with course peers from the same nationality with the same teaching habits and expectations [T1], which 'adds another layer of complication' [T11].

Despite the various impacts mentioned above regarding how different teaching specialities affect students' adaption to teaching, much of the course material is perceived as 'fairly transferable' by T13; for instance, 'the use of questioning, demonstration and encouraging students to think independently'. This aligns with the finding in Haddon's article (2013), suggesting that students can learn transferable values from a setting that is not necessarily focused on their musical specialities. As T12 noted:

> I actually think you can still transmit a lot between two people… we do have a language, it is the music, so gestures are going to be enough. So, things like whether it's a Chinese instrument, Western instrument or vocal teaching, whether or not the teacher and the student have the same language really well or not, even with those, we could see them as obstacles, but they don't have to be obstacles, really.

These insights from tutors highlighted that MA teaching content is more focused on Western instrumental learning, which poses potential challenges for students teaching traditional Chinese instruments. Cultural and linguistic differences complicate the adaption process, especially in translating Chinese musical terms or symbols. However, some tutors found no significant differences in adapting to MA methods between students teaching vocals and those teaching instruments, emphasising the importance of their pupils' participation. Challenges also arise when MA students teaching Chinese instruments interact with peers who share similar teaching habits. Despite these obstacles, some tutors noted that teaching values are

transferable across different musical specialities, with effective communication playing a crucial role in overcoming linguistic barriers, as T12 specified.

5.4.5 Students' engagement on feedback and marks

Understanding the feedback of individual assessments provided by course staff and making teaching adjustments were considered by all tutors to be a critical pathway influencing students' adaption to teaching. The feedback 'aims to help the student rather than point out the mistakes' [T3], including 'why a particular mark has been [given]' and 'what are the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of writing [or an assessed lesson]' [T2]. For example, as T6 stated, they 'might be encouraging the students, in their feedback, to use more questions; rather than just asking the pupil to keep playing the same thing over again'. From a future-oriented perspective, the tutors stated that their feedback includes recommendations for future actions, such as evaluating the effectiveness of students' questioning techniques and providing specific suggestions for adjustments in future submissions [T5, T6]. Thus, 'all students should read their feedback', T8 stressed, 'it's the students who really read the feedback, respond and reflect on the feedback that really make the biggest progression through the year'.

To ensure fairness, tutors are randomly assigned students each term for marking assignments and providing feedback that 'stand alone [as] individual piece[s]' [T11], so not every tutor has the opportunity to assess the same student's lessons in different terms. This makes it challenging for tutors to provide longitudinal comparative information on the impact of feedback engagement on teaching adjustments of individual students. However, T11 remembered that they once happened to mark the same student twice in different terms and noticed that this student had 'built on a feedback point that you gave them, and you almost want to go, "oh, that's so great to see that you took my feedback on board and I see that you applied it this time"'. Conversely, T7 and T3 felt that some students did not reflect on and develop their teaching as suggested in their previous feedback, so the same suggestions had to be given once again. These perspectives also indicate that the

extent to which students incorporate teaching adjustments based on feedback varies in their subsequent assignments, leading tutors to conclude that students engage with feedback to varying degrees.

While T8 felt that nearly all MA students were seemingly satisfied with the feedback and what they were taught, T2 found it 'difficult to understand or to know whether there is a mismatch between their expectations and the feedback or mark they received'. T2 and T4 observed that Chinese students seemed 'deferential' to their tutors [T4] and were 'not used to challenging their tutors' [T2]. This reflected a cultural norm of respect and non-confrontation, which may lead students to accept feedback without expressing their feelings or seeking clarification [T2]. T6 speculated that the feedback students received might not align with their expectations: they 'probably just want to be told what is right and wrong or given a list of "do this, and it will be right, and you will get top marks", [but] we don't do that so much… we want students to find those things out [with] the tools [given] to be able to do that'. Similarly, T5 pointed out that the feedback approach in the MA programme encourages students to engage in critical thinking and independent problem-solving, which can be unfamiliar or 'too general' for students who are accustomed to passively following instructions pre-MA.

Compared to the importance placed on assignment feedback, T7 and T12 felt that some students may be 'just concerned about their mark' [T7] and are more eager to ask questions 'related to the mark and qualification than necessarily improving their teaching' [T12]. T8 stated that the marking systems between China and the UK are different, and students who are accustomed to the previous marking standards might be shocked to receive a score of 50, as this only represents a passing grade. 'Compared with the marks they are expecting', T6 described, some students 'can be very crushed when they realise the sort of marks that they're getting'; if they failed, then 'they think they've failed something for the first time in their lives':

> It can be very dispiriting in the early stages, getting used to a new marking system… and I've had to deal with that on several occasions and encourage them that they're not going to fail the whole MA because they've failed one part of module 1, that sort of thing. But I can understand because they're used to getting in the 80s [pre-MA], [but] it's a different marking system here. So, I just encourage them as much as possible and make sure they realise how that fits into the degree, and be very honest with them, 'yes, you have failed that section, *but* it can be compensated for and that's a real incentive to make sure that you pass the other sections', or '*but* you can't fail everything', or '*but* if you look at the feedback from this one, and build on that, there are all sorts of really straightforward things you can improve'. Then when they do better in the next one, really make a point of saying 'well done', even if it's *just* a pass instead of a fail, 'well done, you've improved that, that, and that', looking at the positive things that they've done to achieve that.

This also reflects a strong cultural emphasis on exam results and academic achievements in China, where academic success is often viewed as a reflection of personal worth and ability. As a result, failure in exams may negatively impact their self-efficacy, leading to feelings of loss and despair (Dobosz & Hetmańczyk, 2023). Chinese students who were used to rankings and influenced by the social competition and determination of 'one-chance' national examination systems at the end of schooling are likely to compare and compete with their peers based on marks or performance (Marginson, 2011). Thus, failing an exam might be viewed not just as a personal failure but as falling behind relative to others, which can exacerbate negative feelings. Aligned with this idea, T1 was aware that potential competition arises when students share their marks or feedback with each other, although rankings were not applied in the programme:

> We don't give rankings; we don't give such information that 'you're the number one in the cohort', and I understand that is quite common because we often get asked for that, especially by Chinese students… If somebody gets a mark of 55 for a lesson, their lesson could look completely different to someone else who also got 55… It's not about how people rank against each other, it's how they developed themselves.

Therefore, cultural factors continue to play a significant role, particularly for Chinese students who may not be accustomed to challenging their tutors and prefer a specific to-do list (as specified by student participants in Chapter 4) over the independent problem-solving encouraged in the MA programme. This cultural norm can lead to a disjunction of values between students' expectations and the feedback they receive, causing frustration and confusion. Furthermore, the difference in marking and grading systems between China and the UK can also be shocking for some students, as a passing grade in the UK may seem inadequate compared to their previous standards. Potential competition was found, even in the absence of formal rankings, among students who compare and compete with their peers based on marks.

5.5 The perspectives of students' re-adaption and potential support

Regarding students' responsibility for their re-adaptions, nearly all participating tutors indicated that students are primarily accountable for this [T2, T4, T5, T6, T8, T9, T10, T11, T12, T13]. While it may seem 'brutal' to acknowledge this [T8], students, as adults and postgraduates, are expected to engage in independent thinking [T9]. T6 further emphasised that students should have the confidence to apply teaching approaches to their pupils and to 'deal with unexpected situations, rather than saying, "I have learned that, this is what I will do for the rest of my life"'. While it may seem idealistic for the course or the university to offer more support in certain ways, considerations such as 'resources, finance, [and] time' need to be taken into account [T5]. It is crucial that students 'genuinely believe in what they are

learning and teaching', and those who have that 'interest and passion' will 'get interested, [and] excited' and will want to use these ideas in their future careers [T11].

While tutors recognise the importance of asking about students' post-graduation plans for the MA, effectively tracking students' outcomes after graduation poses challenges [T1, T2, T10, T11, T13]. Some tutors expressed concerns regarding students who will be returning to China and facing potential challenges if they are expected to use teaching values that differ from those experienced during the MA course [T2, T6, T8, T11, T10], such as a 'hierarchical pedagogy' with a 'results-driven' learning orientation (Haddon, 2024). In addition, due to the examination-oriented expectations of Chinese parents or institutions, implementing student-centred teaching approaches can be challenging or even result in being 'ostracised' if parents 'want to see the pupil being told/given a lot of "knowledge" and achieving a lot in a short time' [T6]. T8 recalled a conversation in which their student expressed concerns and questions about implementing student-centred teaching approaches in China due to potential parental and student expectations:

> I really need to reflect on that conversation with the student who had some feedback saying 'be more student-centred, leave room for students, ask more open questions', and she was like, 'if I go back to China and I am teaching students in this kind of new way or style of education, in this neoliberal vibe, the parents are going to think I don't know what I'm doing, or the pupils paying me for these lessons are going to think I don't know what I'm doing. It's not gonna work'. And see that conflict—I don't have an answer for it, actually—but this is the style of education that is taught on that course. But maybe that doesn't serve the students or prepare them for their careers in the long run. We know that teaching in that way, sort of building the students' self-efficacy and encouraging them to achieve their best... But if the expectation is that you are the expert, you choose the pieces that we play, you can't reconcile those things very easily. I remember that conversation

really clearly, and I still think about it sometimes because I don't have an answer to the question.

T4 and T13 noted that returnees might find themselves compelled to change something as they strive to find a balance between what they may want to do and what they may have to do, a process particularly relevant to Chinese returnees and the broader context of music education. Within this balancing act, T1 emphasised the importance of reflection and flexibility, stating that 'it does not matter how [students] teach as long as they keep reflecting on how they teach': 'they will have to adapt to what their pupils expect, and I hope they have learned the necessary skills [from the course] to be adaptable to that'. Honestly negotiating with their pupils, parents, or employers is considered a helpful strategy [T11, T12], aligning with a former student respondent's approach in Haddon's (2024) work. In a more future-facing perspective, T9 and T10 believed that students have the potential to revolutionise music education in China by influencing their pupils in ways that both find helpful, provided what they have learned in the UK is brought back and used in their teaching in China.

When asked about potential support for students transitioning to careers, tutors have not yet been informed of any national/institutional support available to their students. They are still exploring where students might access support once they return to China. During the MA, tutors noticed some peer support and solidarity. Students seemed to form 'their little groups' and 'stick together' [T9], particularly in navigating unfamiliar English expressions and terminology in classroom settings [T6, T7, T8, T11, T13]. This could, therefore, be seen as a viable pathway for returning students to build their support network, maintain connections, and seek advice from those with whom they studied [T2, T6, T7, T8, T11, T13]. As stated above, tutors stressed that students are primarily responsible for their own re-adaptions and should be able to exercise independent thinking and confidence in their teaching approaches. Tracking students' employment progress post-graduation is challenging, especially for those returning to China, where they

may face conflicting teaching values. Despite the lack of acknowledged institutional or national support, peer networks formed during the MA could be valuable and practical for returning students.

5.6 Employment interest related to the MA

5.6.1 Students' employment interest perceived by tutors

When tutors were asked if their students had expressed any employment interests, nearly all tutors mentioned a desire among Chinese students to work as music teachers after returning to China [T3, T6, T5, T8, T9, T10, T11, T13]. Some students intended to pursue 'another qualification' or explore different careers [T10] , indicating that the skills acquired through the MA programme were 'transferable' [T11]. This aligns with similar career expectations reported by current student participants (see Section 4.3). Some tutors noted that students had explicitly stated their employment goals of returning to China and working as music teachers in schools [T3, T4, T5, T8, T9, T11, T13]. The desire to '[go] home' and 'to be a music teacher' appeared to be 'common' [T5], 'clear' [T8], and 'general' [T13]. T13 found this career goal 'really nice' as it signified a commitment to the students' 'long term' teaching careers.

However, T4 pointed out that 'if [becoming a classroom teacher] is what they're going to do, then they would probably not get as much preparation from the MA', which focuses on instrumental and vocal teaching as 'a different kind of teaching'. T8 also speculated that some students might have expected performance opportunities, though these are 'not part of the course' and not advertised in the programme's marketing materials, potentially leading to disappointment. Additionally, T6 wondered if, for students aiming to teach in public schools in China, 'you go for a job, and if you get that job, that will be your job for life'. This is described as an 'iron rice bowl' in China, representing a stable, lifelong occupation with guaranteed job security, steady income, and welfare (Wikipedia). While the extent to which students' employment preferences are influenced by the pursuit of an iron rice bowl occupation is unknown, it is a valuable direction to explore further

in the next investigation phase with Chinese returnees, which will be addressed in Section 6.5.

When tutors were asked about students' potential employment interests arising from the course, passing each module, achieving higher marks, and obtaining the MA qualification were perceived as closely linked to their future employment [T2, T7, T12]. However, some tutors [T1, T4, T12] expressed uncertainty regarding specifics due to their limited understanding of the 'differences between students from different countries regarding what they want to do next' [T1]. Considering the significant expenses incurred by Chinese students studying in the UK, T12 noted that 'there must be something that they're looking to achieve through the qualification':

> Maybe the qualification means something when they go back to China; it must mean something because I don't think they would come and spend so much money and try to achieve it. But I'm not that familiar with the job market in China for music teachers [T12].

Similarly, when tutor participants were asked which course content was of interest in relation to students' employment, T1, T4, T5, T8, and T12 were also reluctant to generalise, recognising the diversity of students on the programme. Due to their limited familiarity with 'the job market in China for music teachers' [T12], several tutors were hesitant to provide definitive answers to these questions. T5 noted the increasing number of Chinese students joining the programme 'every year', suggesting that this demographic had made students' expectations 'clearer and more explicit'. They assumed that students might not have 'necessarily expected [the course] to be so theoretical' and 'so based [on] these different pedagogical strategies' [T5]. T7 and T8 observed that some students are curious about aspects involved in practical modules, such as 'the teaching [scenarios] and how to solve them' [T7], as well as experiences gained 'by teaching pupils, interacting with them, and setting up lesson plans for them' [T8]. Some tutors believed that certain students were primarily interested in 'earning a degree' [T2] and passing

assignments [T7]. This was viewed as a 'key' [T8], 'a need', 'an expectation' [T10], and a way that helps them 'to be more competitive in the Chinese job market' [T2]. In this context, some students often focus more on achieving high marks and obtaining the qualification than necessarily improving their teaching skills [T12], which made the 'examination results and that level of progress' [T11] more significant for them [T7, T11, T12]. T10 offered a contrasting perspective on the pursuit of qualifications between China and the UK:

> We do always ask what they're planning to do. I have become aware that in China, from all the students I've talked to, I've asked them what they are doing, and this includes students on other MA courses. I understand that there is a need and an expectation for postgraduate qualifications in order to get a job in China. Whereas in this country [the UK], you don't need any qualifications at all to teach an instrument; it's generally done on an interview basis and your CV, based on what you've done in your life, but not a specific qualification.

These perceptions suggest that the MA teaching staff considers students' employability, and students are directed to several viable ways to improve their professionalism after graduation, such as Career and Placement Services (as detailed in the next section). However, it remains unclear whether students consider this guidance, or how applicable they perceive it to be for Chinese students, given the unique differences in employment contexts [T2, T3, T6, T7, T9, T11, T12]. T3 noted a lack of interest among students in this aspect, suggesting that they may 'already know what they are looking for after graduation, especially those who are returning to China'. Parental influences on students' job applications and preferences were noted by T8, who described an incident where a student's mother assisted with a job application. Exploring how parental expectations, shaped by China's employment context, interact with MA students' employment interests and perceptions warrants further investigation (see Section 6.5.1 for details).

In summary, there is some reluctance among tutors to generalise regarding students' career expectations and the course content that interests Chinese students in the MA programme. Nonetheless, given the increasing numbers of Chinese students studying this MA and their responses to tutors about their career expectations, students' employment intentions become apparent in various ways. For instance, some tutors recognised that specific course content, such as lesson planning and problem-solving within teaching scenarios, appealed to students seeking employment. Additionally, some students focused on academic qualifications and teaching positions in schools, while pursuing further study is also considered relevant in relation to employment.

5.6.2 Tutor perspectives on students' use of the Career and Writing Services

The majority of tutor participants indicated that there could have been more extensive student involvement with these services [All, except T4]. T11 observed that despite significant recommendations from programme staff about these services to students, it could be 'very difficult to keep track' of their usage. T1 pointed out that 'unless students have told [us] that they are receiving support', it was challenging for tutors or teaching staff to gain insights, as this support is confidential. Some tutors perceived that cultural differences [T1] or differing job markets and teaching values between China and the UK, as understood by students, might influence their involvement with the Careers Services or other university services [T2, T3, T5, T6, T7, T9, T12, T13]. Although students were informed about and signposted to the available services related to their employment during the course, T7 worried that they were unclear about their relevance:

> Students were quite confused about that because they didn't know what to do [even though] we tried to explain the value of job advertisements, transferable skills, and all these kinds of things… They were actually thinking about, you know, assignments, so they may not have time to think about getting a job. And again, that seems quite a culture shock for them, especially

> because they told me that the system in China is completely different, and the employment system is a bit different. Also, the websites are a bit different, and they don't think the transferable skills we have in the UK could be used in China.

Regarding students' utilisation of Writing Centre services provided by the university for supporting writing skills, T3 said they 'always put the recommendation to use this service as a note [on written reports]', indicating that some students 'really take advantage' of the support provided by the Writing Centre, which is 'a really good way to improve throughout the year'. However, specific problems with the written English of certain students were identified by T6, leading to questions about whether these students had received any support from the Writing Centre. T11 identified a reluctance among students to use this resource or ask for assistance:

> [For our international students], I think sometimes there's a language problem and almost a hesitancy to ask for that help and support, like from the Writing Centre in the University…, particularly with students who are struggling with writing in English understandably… and we go, 'Did you go to the Writing Centre?' They go, 'No, I haven't been'. We sort of go, 'Why?'… Every time we suggested, 'please go, that's such fantastic support'.

This reluctance may be due to language barriers [T2, T13], the cultural influence of saving face [T1, T5, T6, T8], and a lack of trust built between some students and their former teachers pre-MA [T10]. T2 noticed that some students 'are not comfortable' asking for support, 'especially at the beginning of the year'. T13 also highlighted that the language barrier is 'a really regular thing' for some students, which makes them reluctant to use the English language to seek support. Furthermore, T1, T5, T6, and T8 mentioned that there might be a fear of shame associated with seeking assistance, as it could be perceived as a sign of weakness or an inability to handle challenges independently. For some Chinese students, T8

found that it is ‘much less likely’ that they ‘would come and tell you that … they are struggling compared to an English student or another Western student’. T6 expressed concern that ‘many Chinese students feel that asking for help is an admission of failure and that they ought just to work harder to sort out difficulties for themselves’. The cultural differences and lack of a sufficient level of trust in the teacher-student relationship in the past are also considered by T10 as reasons why students were reluctant to seek help:

> When I ask them questions about what they think might be the area that isn't working or they want to work on, gradually it tends to be a sense that they can start to say a little bit more about areas they [were] worried about, and then they do start to talk about that being told by their teacher [when] they were not doing well enough and the teacher was getting cross, things like that. I think this developed a one-to-one relationship that involves trust from both teacher and student; then students are able to show us the amount of vulnerability.

Therefore, the perspectives of tutor participants indicate that a notable portion of students have not taken advantage of the support provided by the Careers and Placement Services and the Writing Centre. In particular, T7’s viewpoint highlights that understanding the specific support that the university can offer understandably did not receive comparable attention to the primary objectives of completing assignments and gaining the MA qualification. Uncertainties surrounding the available support and limited engagement can be attributed to differences in employment, cultural, and educational contexts between China and the UK.

5.7 Summary of the chapter: Key themes

This chapter explored tutors’ perspectives concerning pedagogical challenges and adaption experienced by Chinese students due to language, cultural, philosophical and educational differences. In addition, challenges such as students’ insufficient

English proficiency, hesitation to seek clarification, limited familiarity with critical thinking and the student-centred teaching style further compound their adaptive difficulties. These challenges seem to relate to a master-apprentice teaching approach, examination-oriented learning motivation and the passive learning habits that students have been taught and developed in China before they studied the MA.

These tutors' viewpoints echoed the aforementioned unfamiliarity and adaptive challenges perceived by Chinese student participants in the previous chapter. Tutor participants presented various factors influencing students' pedagogical adjustments, including students' English proficiency and practice, studying locations, teaching instrument/voice, pupils' learning experiences, engagement with feedback and marks, personality traits, and learning motivations. Teaching developments identified according to students' behaviours in assessed lesson videos, to some extent indicating students' adaptive outcomes, focused on student-centred teaching and questioning techniques. However, scripted teaching preparations among some students prompt reflection on whether these methods align with their regular teaching practice.

Tutors understood the potential conflict for students returning to teach in China between what students learnt in the MA and the expected norm of master-apprentice, competitive and exam-focused pedagogy. Frequent and honest communication between the teacher, pupil and pupil's parents could be a helpful strategy in negotiating cross-cultural pedagogy. Several tutors showed confidence in the re-adaption of their students and believed that they would hold what they had learned in the MA and use that to influence their future students.

Most tutors pointed out that Chinese students aim to become music teachers in China after completing their MA, with some also seeking further qualifications or exploring other careers. Concerns exist about the MA's focus on instrumental and vocal teaching versus traditional pedagogy in China, which emphasises a master-apprentice teaching mode. Additionally, many tutors noted that Chinese students could have engaged more with university support services. Despite recommendations, tracking usage was challenging due to the confidentiality of

support and potential cultural differences. Some mentioned students struggle to see the relevance of services like Careers and Writing Centres due to confusion over their application and a cultural tendency to avoid seeking help. Language barriers and fears of appearing weak contributed to reluctance to use these resources. The varying educational and employment contexts between China and the UK also played a role in the limited engagement. Thus, while support is available, its impact may be limited by these factors.

The subsequent chapter on returnees' perceptions of the pedagogical re-adaption will triangulate the current findings and provide further insight into their views on potential implementations of MA approaches and employability after they obtain the MA qualification and return to teach in China.

Chapter 6: Perspectives on teaching re-adaptions and employability faced by Chinese returnees who studied a UK MA instrumental/vocal teaching course

Using the same qualitative semi-structured interview method described in Chapter 3 and utilised in Chapters 4 and 5, this chapter explores the challenges and uncertainties related to the re-adaption and adjustment of returnees in China. It examines how 13 returnee participants display differing levels of adaptability and their ability to integrate the teaching approaches learned in the MA music education programme into their practices upon returning to China.

The chapter commences by examining how the instrumental music education MA has impacted returnees' teaching practices, with a particular emphasis on student-centred and dialogical approaches. It then delves into the returnees' nuanced views on how these MA teaching concepts might be applied in their teaching context within China. The chapter further examines various factors influencing their teaching re-adaption, such as time constraints and the quality of student participation. Additionally, it explores the interaction between different pedagogical orientations and values across various teaching contexts. The chapter concludes by presenting the returnees' perspectives on China's prevalent 'nei juan' social phenomenon.

6.1 Demographics of returnee participants

The researcher conducted 13 semi-structured interviews with Chinese former music education MA students who had returned to China for at least one year following their UK course. Ethical approval for this research was obtained from the University of York Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee. A purposive sampling and snowballing approach were employed in the recruitment procedure (also detailed in Section 3.2.4). The researcher reached out to Chinese MA Music Education: Instrumental and Vocal Teaching alumni via WeChat and email, explaining the aims and objectives of the study and inviting them to take part in the research. Detailed

information about the research objectives and procedure was provided, and they were invited to participate in individual interviews.

13 returnees, consisting of 12 females and one male, indicated their interest in participating in an audio-recorded Zoom interview. After the interviews, the participants reviewed and confirmed their Chinese interview transcripts. Following this, the researcher translated the interview data into English and sought input from participants to verify the accuracy of the English version, if they wished to do so. The participants' demographic information is presented in Table 4 and in the subsequent text, they are denoted as R1 for returnee 1, R2 for returnee 2, and so on.

Table 4: Demographic information of MA returnee participants

Returnee number, instrument / vocal – the year of the MA study	Employed experiences post-MA at the time of the interview	Current teaching contexts post-MA at the time of the interview	Current teaching roles at the time of the interview
R1: Piano – 2018-19	Full-time in an international school – one year	Full-time in a small-scale private music tutoring organisation – two years	One-to-one piano lessons for children and adults
R2: Guzheng – 2018-19	Part-time in a small-scale private music tutoring organisation – one year	Full-time in an international school – three years to present	One-to-one and small group guzheng lessons for children; extracurricular music classroom teaching for children; concerts preparation
R3: Piano – 2018-19	Part-time in a small-scale private music tutoring organisation – one year	Full-time in an international school – three years to present	One-to-one piano lessons for children; extracurricular music classroom teaching for children; concerts preparation
R4: Vocals – 2015-16	Internship in a bilingual school – one year	Full-time in an international school – five years to present	Choir, ensembles and orchestra facilitation; extracurricular music classroom teaching for children; concerts preparation
R5: Piano – 2019-20	No changing job experiences	Public vocational college – five years to present	One-to-one piano lessons and piano classroom teaching for children
R6: Piano – 2017-18	Part-time in two small-scale private music tutoring organisation – three years	Full-time in a private art school – one year to present	Classroom teaching in music theory and aesthetics for children
R7: Piano – 2021-22	Part-time in a small-scale private music tutoring organisation – one year Internship in a public primary school – five weeks	Full-time in their own private music studio – one year to present	One-to-one piano lessons for children and adult pupils
R8: Guzheng – 2020-21	Part-time in a small-scale private music tutoring organisation	Full-time in an overseas agency – one year to present	One-to-one guzheng lessons for children
R9: Guzheng – 2018-19	Full-time in an international school – one year	Full-time in another international school – one year to present	One-to-one and small group guzheng lessons for children; extracurricular music classroom teaching for children; concerts preparation
R10: Violin – 2018-19	Part-time in a small-scale private music tutoring organisation – one year	Full-time in their own private music studio – one year to present	One-to-one and small group violin lessons for children; concerts preparation
R11: Piano – 2018-19	Part-time in a small-scale private music tutoring organisation – one year Full-time in a private art school – one year	Self-employed at home – one year to present	One-to-one piano lessons for children; concerts preparation
R12: Piano – 2018-19	No changing job experiences	Part-time in a small-scale private music tutoring organisation on weekends – one year to present Full-time in vocational college – one year to present	One-to-one piano lessons for children and music classroom teaching in private college internship
R13: Piano – 2018-19	Full-time in a private primary school – one year	Full-time in an international school – one year to present	Classroom teaching for children; concerts preparation

As shown in Table 4, all 13 participants had obtained their MA qualification and had at least one year of music teaching experience post-graduation. Of these returnees, nine had prior experience in one-to-one instrumental teaching within music tutoring organisations; two transitioned to teaching in international schools, and two others established their own private music studios. Among those with international or bilingual school teaching experience, five had previously worked in private institutions/schools, and over half of the returnees (n=8) initially worked in private institutions upon returning to China. This trend may reflect the varying recognition of UK MA qualifications across different teaching contexts, as discussed in section 6.3.3.

Although the table categorises the 13 returnees by the time elapsed since their MA graduation, it does not fully account for their years of re-adaptive teaching experience. Some returnees secured employment and began teaching immediately after graduation, while others faced delays due to factors such as job searches and travel, leading to interruptions in their teaching careers. Additionally, the returnees' comments may not fully represent the current course content, as the programme has evolved over time. Nevertheless, the table offers a visual summary of the returnees, supporting the analysis of their varied re-adaption experiences.

6.2 The MA influence on returnees' teaching approaches and awareness

This section explores returnees' perceptions of how the MA programme has influenced their teaching approaches and awareness. The findings suggest that the returnees in China have incorporated MA-informed knowledge, including student-centred approaches, dialogical teaching methods, and considerations for pupils' non-musical development and special educational needs, into their teaching practices.

6.2.1 Implementation of the student-centred concept and dialogic approach

Several returnees emphasised the significant impact of the MA programme, which left 'a deep impression' on them [R10], setting them apart from teachers who had

not studied abroad [R1, R7, R11]. R11 believed they distinguished themselves by focusing on fostering students' 'creativity and self-motivation', rather than prioritising specific outcomes. Similarly, R1 noted that their students did not perceive them as someone who 'always talks during the lessons'; instead, the students were 'the ones who are always talking and sharing'. R7's students also remarked that their teacher consistently 'asked questions', creating a relaxed atmosphere that appealed to parents.

The MA programme's module structure, designed to support educators in working with students of varying proficiency levels, led returnees to adopt a broader range of teaching approaches [R1, R2, R3, R6, R7, R9, R10, R12]. Influenced by student-centred teaching and dialogical methods, many returnees shifted away from the traditional master-apprentice model, focusing more on pupils' individual needs [R1, R2, R3, R9, R10, R12]. For example, R11 highlighted that the 'most significant change' in their teaching approach involved adapting to pupils' comprehension, interests, and motivations. They recognised that learning an instrument does not always equate to achieving specific exam levels, as students' goals may shift depending on their age, environment, and available time. Encouraging 'independent thinking' [R5] became a central tenet of their teaching, and the responsibility for learning was shared between teacher and pupil [R1, R4, R10, R11].

Having been introduced to dialogic teaching methods during the MA, some returnees incorporated questioning techniques to foster pupils' understanding. R1 found that students' responses would often 'inspire' them as teachers. For instance, when asked, 'Do you have any images when playing this piece?', students would offer imaginative answers such as 'thunder, bears, and sea waves' [R1]. R7, although not frequently employing questioning, found that using a dialogical approach created a more relaxed teaching environment, meeting parents' expectations and differentiating their methods from other teachers. R1 added that this approach benefits both the teachers and the pupils.

Overall, it is evident that many returnees have embraced student-centred and dialogical teaching approaches in their educational practices.

6.2.2 Changing teaching awareness: appreciation of pupils' non-musical developments

Several returnees highlighted the importance of nurturing pupils' broader qualities beyond just musical skills. R11 highlighted that their teaching goal was 'for the student to persist in learning the piano, enabling them to gain certain (non-)musical benefits along the way'. Similarly, R8 believed that instrumental learning is not only about mastering the instrument but also about fostering essential life skills such as 'perseverance and independent thinking'. R10, a violinist who runs a private studio, echoed this belief, emphasising that their 'primary' motivation was to develop these qualities alongside musical proficiency:

> Learning an instrument may only be a small part of a child's life, but the non-musical benefits they gained will stay with them for life. When recruiting teachers, we emphasise the non-musical qualities and believe that pupils may cry and be upset when encountering technical problems, but with our tactical facilitation and encouragement, they can overcome the negative emotions of facing difficulties.

Additionally, R1 observed that the MA programme placed significant emphasis on addressing the needs of students with special requirements and mental health challenges. Adapting teaching approaches to support pupils' learning has become increasingly important within the context of music education in China (Yang & Welch, 2023). The MA curriculum, which included themes such as music psychology, musicians' health and wellbeing, and inclusive teaching, has 'enriched' the returnees' understanding of instrumental/vocal teaching [R12] and helped them become more open-minded educators [R4]. For example, when teaching children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), R1 considered how to 'take action to help them' rather than strictly adhering to the lesson plan.

The psychological characteristics of children at various developmental stages and their academic progress are crucial factors in their effectiveness in instrumental learning and willingness to engage in communication. R1, R6, and R7 noted that these factors greatly influence teaching success. Specifically, R10 felt that:

> Each child's upbringing context is different; some are well-behaved in kindergarten and will cooperate with whatever you say, with solid interactivity. However, they start to have their secrets and may keep many things in their hearts but are unwilling to say them out loud. As they grow up, they start to think about whether what the teacher said makes sense and may ignore you if you only tell them what to do. It is a short-lived fluctuation [when they] change context and peers, [this] will influence their learning attitude.

As returnees continue prioritising their pupils' needs, enhancing their pedagogical diversity, and adapting their teaching approaches, they face complex challenges. These arise from the clash of evolving educational values and expectations among the returnees, their Chinese pupils, parents, and employers. These challenges are further intensified by limited time and varying levels of student engagement.

6.3 The varying potential of using MA teaching approaches in China

After examining the potential for implementing MA approaches in China, this section delves into the challenges impacting returnees' teaching re-adaption and their ability to apply MA methods. These challenges mainly revolve around time constraints faced by some returnees due to the results-driven nature of education and the quality of pupils' engagement, which is influenced by the teacher-led, transmission-focused learning prevalent in many schools.

6.3.1 The dilemma of time

All returnees noted that time significantly impacts their decisions/potential to employ what they learned in the MA and student-centred facilitation. Returnees predominantly teaching in public and international schools faced the challenge of balancing prescribed curricular demands with prioritising individual pupils' diverse perspectives [R2, R3, R7, R8, R9]. The emergence of time constraints was deemed 'unexpected' [R2] and could be further intensified by the escalated commitment of 'increased energy and time' [R2] necessitated for maintaining classroom discipline [R3], a concern that assumes even more significance when teaching pupils with special educational needs within international schools [R3]. In order to secure the completion of mandated tasks, which is regarded as the prime responsibility for teachers in China [R13], it is easy to fall back into teacher-led approaches in order to economise time and meet job requirements [R3, R13].

Comparable challenges surfaced within the discourse of returnees predominantly engaged in one-to-one instrumental lessons in private music tutoring institutions. However, their challenges mainly revolved around striking a balance between satisfying the expectations of Chinese parents for extensive knowledge dissemination during lessons and fostering pupils' understanding [R1, R6]. R1 noted that 'Some parents may think, "You have been asking questions throughout the lesson, but the amount of knowledge you delivered is low"'; such parents expect teachers to 'tell the pupil everything that might probably go wrong and solve all the potential problems' quickly [R6].

The discernment of 'rapid and tangible learning outcomes' also intrinsically links to the evaluation of teaching efficacy, particularly in dynamic metropolises like Beijing [R1] and Shanghai [R13]. It was observed by R13 that an emphasis on student-centred facilitation, as opposed to teacher-led instruction, can result in slower teaching progress, potentially construed as 'lower teaching efficiency' [R13]. R1, a piano teacher offering individual lessons in Beijing, affirmed that the adoption of student-centred facilitation might 'may not be readily accepted by many parents in China':

> I noted that some parents interrupt the pupil when they hear their child expressing themselves in lessons, 'You are always saying those useless things; go to practice the piece more one time'. So, you see, the parents think that their child's expression of images is 'useless', and their child must say 'useful things', so what are useful things? More repetitive practising as much as possible in a single lesson? This shows that result-driven thinking and control of the child are deeply ingrained [R1].

Balancing student-centred facilitation with 'the speed of showing teaching results' is referred to as 'the most severe difficulty' in post-MA re-adaption [R11]. Parents' varying interpretations and values regarding result-oriented approaches are evident in their investment of substantial time in their child's instrumental music education [R1, R5, R8, R10, R11, R13]. However, several returnees have found a more dynamic attitude: 'Some parents may focus on results but are willing to give time or are open to changing their mindset when they see the teacher's teaching concepts make the child change, happy or progress' [R5]. Nonetheless, with sustained parental commitment to both time and financial investment, an elevation of expectations for their children takes shape, with greater emphasis on the speed of teaching progress [R3, R11, R12, R13]. R13 felt that 'initially, parents may want their child to learn while having fun, but over time, they may develop new expectations, questioning why their child has not reached a higher level like others who have achieved Grade 8 in the same timeframe'. R11 also observed a shift towards exam achievement, with some parents wanting to end piano lessons 'after passing the highest-grade exam'.

Some of the returnees recognised that learning a musical instrument can serve as a 'less competitive' pathway in the Gaokao, thereby enabling them to secure an equivalent national university admission ranking to their peers through presenting graded performance examination certificates instead of exclusively academic subject certificates [R8]. This mindset is reflected in the substantial

engagement of children with extracurricular classes, notably in arts and dance [R1, R2, R4, R10, R11]. It was observed that pupils are involved in many extracurricular activities, consequentially impacting their post-lesson instrumental practice [R10]. R10 felt that 'it is common to see pupils arriving at violin lessons feeling pretty exhausted' due to a lack of sufficient time for rest, relaxation, and practice. This, in turn, impacts pupils' ongoing interest in learning instruments, resulting in 'parental anxiety' [R4]. R5 commented that many Chinese parents perceive the process of piano learning as 'painful', evidenced by their children's apparent reluctance to engage in home practice or the capacity to sustain practice for a limited duration [R11]. R6 mentioned a tendency among some Chinese parents to hold impractical expectations concerning the endurance of beginners engaged in practice, neglecting potential instances of physical or psychological fatigue:

> I met a parent who thought every *Yuan* spent on each lesson must be worthy and that each lesson should have a new piece. If the teacher thought that the former pieces had not yet met the passing standard and needed to be practised for another week to consolidate, the parent would think I was wasting their time and money. I always suggested, 'After the pupil has played for a while, the piece will become increasingly difficult, so we cannot be guaranteed that the child will always pass the former piece; they need time'. But the parents were like, 'So you need to tell the pupil everything that might probably go wrong and solve all the potential problems in advance so that they can learn a new piece perfectly in the next lesson, then you can use the same method to teach them the next one'. So it's a very result-driven idea that 'our children must pass the former piece and have a new piece in each lesson'.

Amidst this high-pressure context prioritising efficiency and results, whether children can truly enjoy learning instrumental music remains uncertain. The pursuit of certification through graded exams and national examination advantages may

overshadow the importance of enjoyment in learning. As stated above, the time dilemma presents three main challenges for returnees implementing MA approaches: first, ensuring sufficient time to meet teaching requirements while fostering pupil autonomy; second, balancing the time allocated by parents for teachers and pupils to reconcile teaching pace with student-centred approaches and parental expectations; and third, guaranteeing that children have enough time for post-lesson practice to support their learning progress. In addressing these challenges, R1 emphasised that 'communication is key'. Resolution depends on reaching a consensus between teachers and parents. While children's happiness in learning instruments is crucial for achieving this consensus [R1, R10, R11], it hinges on individual interpretations of happiness, particularly the balance between enjoyment and exam-related outcomes.

6.3.2 The quality of pupil participation

Several returnees perceived that the format of dialogical facilitation, such as question-and-answer, can be easily duplicated; however, the quality of their pupils' engagement and 'receptiveness' [R12] holds significance [R1, R2, R3, R5, R8, R10]. Except for R4, teaching voice in a bilingual international school lauding student-centred approaches, who reported no difficulties in this aspect, other returnees concurred that this aspect is challenging [R2, R6, R7, R10, R12]. Elaborating on this, R5, giving classroom piano sessions in a public vocational college, noted, 'Initiat[ing] independent thinking among pupils takes time, but I still posed some questions, such as "Have you thought about how you will engage in this course? Discuss it with the classmate sitting next to you"; however, I don't know if they were doing the task'. Similarly, 'the idea of student-centric' has been found as somewhat 'too idealistic' within international primary school education [R3]. R2 said, 'younger pupils may feel confused being asked questions', and 'it might work better with secondary school students' [R3]. Even among secondary students, who have experienced an extended period of examination-focused pedagogy, responses to individual questions appear to be limited [R1]. R10 and R11, focusing primarily on one-to-one piano and violin

teaching, elaborated on the challenge from cultural and educational perspectives. R10 attributed it to 'cultural factors accumulated from our growing educational environment in China… many children grow up with criticism and different social norms or rules'. R11 added that 'children with experience in public primary schools tended to be more stressed and reserved'. This educational context sends a 'communication signal to children that "they should be serious in front of the teacher, with no off-topic conversations, and this is the only correct way in front of the teacher"' [R11].

Chinese parents commit substantial resources, exhibit intense engagement in their children's educational development, and uphold elevated educational expectations (Law, 2014). However, viewpoints articulated by R1, R3 and R7 suggest that children enrolled in public educational institutions encounter a scarcity of receptive listening and opportunities to articulate their perspectives effectively across both academic and familial contexts. This may lead children to construe their voices as inconsequential and 'think, "It doesn't matter whether I speak or not, so I will not speak up"', resulting in limited participation in dialogue [R1].

Social structural factors, such as the hukou system mentioned in section 2.2.2, exacerbate these issues by reinforcing educational disparities between urban and rural regions. Students from lower-tier cities or rural areas may have limited opportunities to engage with diverse and internationalised approaches to music pedagogy, teacher facilitation, classroom discussions or critical thinking. This lack of early exposure to dialogic engagement can further hinder their receptive listening skills when they transition to international academic settings that prioritise discussion-based learning. Some returnees additionally drew attention to an evolving fragility within Chinese youth, rendering them more susceptible to 'abrupt emotional breakdowns' [R12] in recent times compared to how participants viewed comparative peers in their own childhood [R2, R3, R7, R10].

Despite the challenges in pupils' responses to questions affecting the use of the dialogical approach, some returnees demonstrated persistence and a strong commitment to integrating these methods. Beyond employing traditional strategies

like rewards and penalties to boost engagement [R2, R6, R7, R10, R11], R3 emphasised the importance of addressing pupils' emotional needs, which had not received adequate attention:

> Our international school has some pupils with difficulty controlling their emotions; they can't stop arguing with the teacher or easily cry loudly and scream. They wanted to get attention, not just teachers but also classmates, so you could give them some power or responsibilities, such as letting them take charge of monitoring classroom etiquette, and then they would behave well.

Several returnees recognised that the successful implementation and adaption of MA approaches depend on their personal beliefs about pedagogical efficacy and sustained commitment [R1, R7, R10, R11]. R1 stated, 'If you believe this is effective, you will have the confidence to influence your pupils; otherwise, you may revert to time-saving methods'. R11 added, 'It should enrich our teaching toolkits, and I will use it when suitable opportunities arise, such as when asking questions or giving specific praise'. R11 further noted:

> We might be affected by apparent value conflicts, leading us to doubt whether student-centred approaches are achievable. However, some aspects of MA content may reside in our subconscious and subtly influence our pupils in ways we may not fully recognise.

R11, therefore, believes that the use of MA content should not be a mechanical process but rather an organic integration into teaching practice.

6.4 Impact of the MA on employability of returnees

This section presents how the MA programme has influenced the employability of returnees, highlighting overall employment benefits, the perceived value of the MA

qualification, and the role of English language instruction. The findings suggest that returnees' perspectives and attitudes towards these aspects are shaped by contextual factors related to their teaching contexts, the city where they work, and the competitive nature of the employment environment.

6.4.1 Returnee's employment benefits from the MA

With the exception of one participant who could not recall specifics [R8], all other returnees felt and appreciated that the MA considered their employability. In response to the interview question concerning which elements of the MA were deemed conductive to their subsequent employment, two responded with 'all of them' [R1, R13]. Specifically, the student-centred teaching mode [All], questioning technique [R1, R2, R3, R7, R10, R11, R13], critical and reflective thinking [R3; R5; R7; R10], the introduction of Kodály, Suzuki and Orff pedagogies [R3], theoretical knowledge of music psychology [R4; R5; R7], and inclusive teaching [R1, R2, R3, R10] were mentioned as helpful for returnees' employability.

The knowledge acquired in the MA can also be positively utilised by participants who teach traditional Chinese instruments, guzheng [R2, R8, R9], and voice [R4] after returning to China. R8 articulated that, 'What we learned in the MA are teaching approaches that can be widely used in general', so 'the instrument you teach does not affect the use of MA knowledge; in other words, the MA knowledge can be flexibly used in the teaching of any instruments' [R2]. Correspondingly, R4, who teaches voice at a bilingual school, believed that whether it is after returning or during the MA, they 'didn't feel any specific limitations when applying MA teaching approaches to vocal teaching'.

The broader applicability of implementing MA knowledge in guzheng teaching was affirmed by R3 and R9. They described that while 'employers may be sceptical and ask about their decision to study guzheng teaching in a Western country', they felt that 'the MA teaching concepts encompassing pedagogies, teaching approaches, communication skills, and teacher-student relationships can be applied without being limited to any specific instrument' [R9]. The importance of

shaping their own career choice using the MA concepts, coupled with an ongoing commitment to professional advancement, emerged as a salient theme [R1, R4, R5, R8, R11]. The perspective of 'resilience' in confronting challenges, an 'open-minded' disposition toward divergent perspectives [R4], and the attitudes of lifelong learning were regarded as an 'essential' by some participants upon their return to China [R1, R4, R5, R10].

6.4.2 The value of MA teaching approaches and the university ranking

When asked about the correlation between their employability upon returning to China and the value of their MA knowledge, returnees who have participated in international school teaching recruitment reported that their experiences of overseas study were discussed in the interview [R1, R2, R3, R4, R9, R10, R12, R13]. When it comes to their interest in MA teaching approaches, however, several returnees felt that the possible employers were not interested in the MA teaching content during the interview process [R1, R2, R3, R10, R13]; instead, the university's global ranking was more important [R3, R10]. This emphasis has also been reported by those with experience in interviews for a public primary school [R7] and vocational college [R5]. R7 constantly felt 'very sad and frustrated' when they found that 'A primary school teaching position requires the applicants to graduate from the university ranked in the top 100 by QS Global Ranking': '"Does that mean that people who don't graduate from these top universities aren't qualified to teach primary school students?" I don't think so'. In parallel, R10 noticed that the prevailing competitive job environment in China, which 'is likely to be driven by the soaring number of overseas returnees from the UK and other countries, so considering the ranking of overseas universities appeared reasonable'.

In the context of applying to teach in private institutions, the requirement for university rankings has become less stringent, according to some of these participants [R6, R8, R10, R11]. However, employers are perceived as being more concerned about how well potential teachers play their instrument during interviews than how well they teach [R6, R8, R10]. This reflects a higher emphasis on teachers'

instrumental demonstration abilities than on teaching approaches in these private institutions [R6]. R1, who transitioned from an international school to a private institution, described how employers' educational backgrounds impacted on the weight accorded to both their teaching approach and university ranking during the interview:

> My first employer, who was from the UK, was more interested in my specific teaching approaches for handling typical scenarios, such as engaging a student who lacked musical interest or motivation. This made a more lasting impression on me compared to my current employer at a private piano institution, who only asked me to play a piece and review my MA qualification. The private institution seemed more focused on whether I could attract and retain students, leaving the details of teaching methods and benefits to me.

Overall, varying academic qualification requirements across different teaching contexts highlight the highly competitive job market returnees encounter. Notably, the prominence accorded to university rankings assumes an important role as a decisive criterion in the applicant selection procedure. The significance attributed to returnees' teaching approaches appears comparatively diminished, particularly in the context of employment interviews within private institutions.

6.4.3 The values of the UK MA qualification

The value of the UK MA qualification can vary depending on the specific teaching context, such as providing individual lessons in private tutoring institutions or conducting music classes in public vocational colleges and international schools. Several returnees mentioned that having a UK master's degree 'is undoubtedly beneficial' [R4] and brings 'an advantage' [R9], particularly for teaching positions at international schools [R1, R2, R3, R13]. This advantage also extends to roles in private music studios or tutoring institutions [R1, R3, R6, R7, R13]. As R1 stated:

> Suppose you are the owner of this piano institution; applicants with British-educated experience can potentially meet a variety of pupils' educational needs … They could teach children who study at international schools in English, and their demonstration skills are sufficient. They can also teach pupils who hope to have lessons with teachers with overseas study experience or experience a different teaching mode. Also, the MA returnees can cover pupils with specific educational needs. This is undoubtedly an advantage.

Nonetheless, the considerable expenditure on national education (Yang & Welch, 2023) and 'doctoral programmes in China' [R12] have led to noticeable inflation of academic qualifications, especially affecting those seeking music teaching positions in first-tier cities [R5, R7, R8, R11]. The MA qualification assumes a role of enhanced '"packaging" or attractiveness to potential employers or parents in second or third-tier cities' [R11], rather than serving as a primary necessity in first-tier cities with talent clusters [R5, R7]. R11, drawing insights from the context of Shanghai, perceived the acquisition of a UK MA degree as constituting a mere 'threshold' which does not provide 'any particular "bonus" as postgraduate degrees from domestic and overseas are highly common' there.

Possessing a master's degree from the UK does not guarantee securing ideal employment for returnees. Past teaching experience and its relevance to specific institutional demands are equally crucial in determining employability [R3, R4, R10, R11, R13]. As R4 noted, 'when it comes to finding a job, the most crucial factor is your specific ability and whether your teaching experience, approaches, and concepts align with the workplace you're applying to'. Employability depends on 'the nature of the job, the region you teach in' [R5], and 'whom you are competing against for that job' [R11].

6.4.4 The value of returnees' English teaching skills

Some returnees who are employed in international or bilingual schools showed a higher likelihood of English language usage upon returning to China [R2; R3; R4; R9; R13]. Their proficiency in English was considered 'fundamental' [R9], 'essential' [R2], 'critical, and highly valued' [R4]. R2 noted that strong English skills play a vital role in job interviews for international schools, communication with colleagues from overseas and emailing. Furthermore, the ability to integrate subject-specific language in English while instructing in bilingual school settings [R4] and private institutions [R3] is perceived to further enhance their teaching skills.

The advantages of English language skills are seen as particularly relevant in international school settings [R5, R7, R8, R10, R11]. Those teaching in private tutoring institutions and public vocational schools found their reliance on the English language within their teaching to be less identifiable [R1, R5, R6, R7, R8, R10, R11, R12]. R1 and R10, noted that using English appears less feasible due to the predominantly Chinese demographic in the private institutions and public sectors. R11 and R9 felt that using their native language, Chinese, enhances effective communication and facilitates immediate clarification [R11]. Interestingly, the reliance on Chinese language for instruction and explanations extends even to international school settings, as noted by R9, where lessons are supposed to be taught in English. However, R9 explains that they mainly use Chinese except during teaching observations. This practice mirrors the presence of Chinese students in certain international school systems and its consequential influence on the utilisation of English teaching skill by returnees.

However, it is undeniable that the possession of English teaching skills assumes a complementary role, signifying an added competency for a teachers' CV [R8, R12], and also extending the potential for their continuation of professional development [R1]. In educational fields other than instrumental and vocal teaching, R3, R4, R11 and R13 viewed English proficiency and the capacity to engage effectively in English communication as attributes that enhance career prospects and their 'hourly rate' [R13], being perceived as both desirable and advantageous. As

articulated by R1, 'While I don't use much English in my current teaching in the private tutoring institution, my MA English learning experience has facilitated my engagement with academic literature and my preparations for the ABRSM diploma'. R1 also showed self-regulated planning towards their further professional advancement and perceived that it had fostered the cultivation of 'English reading habits and cognitive patterns', thereby enhancing 'self-study potential and employability'.

Therefore, returnees have varied opinions on the value of their MA knowledge, UK MA qualification, and English language proficiency in their teaching roles. These perspectives are shaped by factors such as the specific teaching contexts they are in, the priorities of potential employers, the extent to which pupils use their native language, and the level of employment competition in different regions of China.

6.5 Returnees' career expectations and teaching attitudes influenced by social trends

6.5.1 Returnees' career decisions influenced by parental expectations

Based on the perspectives shared by some returnees [R1, R2, R3, R5, R8], parental expectations have an impact on their career decisions. Many returnees mentioned that their parents prioritise job stability and encourage them to pursue a lifelong career in public schools or higher educational institutions [R1, R3, R5, R7, R8]. For example, R1 noted, 'there is definitely an expectation among my parents that "if you enter a public school, you will have a basic income guarantee"'. Securing a stable teaching position is also considered advantageous 'in the context of finding a life partner' [R2, R8], and parents take 'special pride in introducing your job' [R1]. R5 highlighted how this focus on career stability is often shared by the whole family when they are all in secure employment:

> Most of the people, including my cousins, in our family have 'iron rice bowl' jobs, focusing on civil servants, military personnel, or public university

> teacher, basically they are all from these three fields. So, I am the only person in our family who doesn't have an 'iron rice bowl', so my parents expect me to enter public higher educational institutions. I had this idea before I studied the MA as well.

Some returnees, however, expressed that while their career expectations were influenced by their parents, they have always been driven to follow their own ideas, which their parents have respected and supported [R2, R3, R4, R13]. R3, for instance, received support from their parents to open a private piano studio, even though their parents believed that working in a school would provide more stability. R8 negotiated with their parents regarding career decisions, explaining that in the current employment climate, 'having a "secure" job is not as prevalent here' because 'teachers of any subject [in this city] are not permanent staff members but on a contract basis'. R2 also reflected on the shifting values around employment, observing that working in the civil service with an 'iron rice bowl' was considered a very stable job choice for their parents' generation and even for older generations:

> Everyone says that with an 'iron rice bowl', you will not starve, although you don't earn much, at least you don't have to worry about being unemployed in your lifetime. So they may be more inclined to let their children find a relatively stable job…There is definitely an influence from my family environment… [in terms of] support[ing] me in studying abroad… but my parents have never intervened in my career choices, they have always been very supportive of my studying music because they think this is what I'm interested in.

Unlike the parents who prioritise stable jobs, R10 shared that their family's entrepreneurial background inspired them to pursue more unconventional career paths: what truly matters is 'whether I love and enjoy the job… if I don't like it, then its stability is useless'. Similarly, other returnees, such as R1, R2, and R4, highlighted

how their personal characteristics and interests shaped their career choices. For example, R2 felt comfortable teaching in international school settings and stated that they 'haven't thought about working in a public school'. R4 acknowledged that while their current role does not fit the traditional definition of a stable job, 'everyone has different thoughts and goals related to their career… [it] depends on individual personalities'. After completing the national teaching certification training, R1 realised that music teaching in a traditional classroom setting was not what they truly aspired to pursue:

> I thought of being a music teacher in a public school, but later … I found teaching music in schools was not what I wanted because music classes in public schools are designed to help students understand music, not specialising much in the piano. It is just like [going] to a zoo where there are monkeys, horses, and other animals, but I just want to focus on studying and researching one animal thoroughly … So, finally, I chose one-on-one piano teaching as my career direction.

This reflection indicates R1's self-regulated autonomy, as they actively evaluated their professional context to align with their passion and goals. They also expressed satisfaction and a sense of 'unlimited passion and power' in pursuing one-to-one piano teaching, illustrating their commitment to their chosen path. Parental expectations undeniably influenced the career decisions of many returnees, often emphasising job stability in public schools or higher education. However, despite this influence, some returnees pursued their own career paths with parental support. Personal interests also played a key role in career choices, with R2 and R4 favouring international school environments and R1 opting for one-to-one piano teaching over classroom teaching, as it provided them with greater passion and fulfilment in their career.

6.5.2 Perspectives of the discrepancy between their ideal jobs and reality

When asked about how their current jobs aligned with the expectations they held before undertaking their MA programme, 11 returnees reported a close match [R1, R2, R3, R4, R7, R8, R10, R11, R12, R13], one noted some discrepancy [R9], and two described moderate alignment [R6, R9]. While many hoped to secure stable teaching roles in public schools or higher education institutions (HEIs), commonly referred to as 'iron rice bowl' jobs [R1, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, R10, R12], none had yet attained such positions. Only one participant [R5] had found work in a public vocational college, which, while deemed 'relatively secure', lacked the benefits associated with the traditional 'iron rice bowl'.

Those who reported strong alignment found that their roles remained closely tied to music teaching, meeting the professional expectations they had set before pursuing the MA. However, along their journey to secure lifelong careers, many returnees faced a variety of non-music and external challenges, such as residency requirements for specific cities [R1, R10], limited job openings [R1, R7], the lack of a PhD [R1, R5, R6, R9, R12], insufficient internship experience [R7], and political factors [R8]. On the other hand, some reported less alignment between their current roles and initial expectations frequently reflected in how their MA experiences had either reinforced [R4] or reshaped [R1] their dedication to working in international settings. For instance, R4 maintained a steady interest in seeking roles within more 'globally oriented or bilingual teaching environments', finding the MA programme reinforced their commitment to 'stay on this track without deviating'. In contrast, R1's experience during the MA deepened their passion for one-on-one instrumental teaching:

> After I got the certificate for schools, I found teaching music in schools was not what I wanted because music classes in public schools are designed to help students understand music, not specialising much in the piano... in the end, one-on-one piano teaching is what I want to do.

The differences in returnees' satisfaction and alignment with their career expectations were influenced not only by the perceived value of their MA qualifications but also by the emphasis placed on particular teaching methods and individual preferences. While none of the returnees had yet secured a lifelong 'iron rice bowl' position, the MA programme bolstered their drive to pursue careers in international or one-to-one teaching environments, with the majority expressing contentment with their current roles.

6.5.3 Changed employment values over time

Three returnees perceived a shift in the importance of seeking stable public sector jobs compared to their parents' generation [R2, R3, R7]. For example, R3 observed, 'My dad started as a teacher and later tried entrepreneurship... when my parents were younger, they were more willing to try other less stable jobs'. This change might be influenced by the economic reforms of the late 20th century, known as 'xia hai'[4] (plunging into the sea), which encouraged many to explore private sector opportunities and move away from government roles (Tang, 2018).

R7 noted that their parents' mindset shifted when they realised the drawback of working in the civil services: 'They started to [think] that being a civil servant was not that great because there was more workload than expected, but the salary was only average':

> [They] observed that only young people new to the official organisation have to work on the most challenging task…they look at those new and young people and think, 'They don't make as much money as we do, but they do the most difficult and tough work, which is poor… If my daughter enters the civil system, she'll have a lifelong job, but she will be like these poor but tough

4 'Xia hai' is a Chinese term that translates to 'enter the sea of business', which has a metaphorical meaning, referring to the act of leaving a secure or traditional job to pursue a career in a more uncertain or entrepreneurial field (Wong, 1994, p. 323).

youth with little income every month. Can't we support her to work outside the civil system? At least she can get paid for how much she worked'; they have this idea currently.

R2 and R12 also mentioned that the introduction of employment contracts with varying durations might reduce people's commitment to public sector jobs. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has renewed the appeal of these positions for some [R3]. Despite this, no returnees discussed how digital and technological transformations have impacted employment trends. In summary, while economic reforms and increasing workloads had initially shifted focus away from public jobs, recent economic uncertainties have made these positions attractive again, particularly for younger people seeking stability in a volatile market.

6.5.4 Returnees' perspectives under the recent influence of China's social trends of 'nei juan', 'tang ping' and 'bai lan'

'Nei juan', 'tang ping' and 'bai lan' are terms frequently used by the current generation of Chinese individuals, particularly those born in the 1990s and 2000s (BBC News, 2021). Initially, the concept of 'nei juan' was used in anthropological discourse to describe a lack of radical change or growth within a society or organisation (Liu, 2021). Today, it symbolises 'intense or excessive competition', where individuals strive vigorously across the spectrum of daily life to secure even marginal advantages in society (BBC News, 2021). This pursuit often leads to competing for opportunities and resources with others, resulting in not only mental fatigue or a 'tang ping' [opting out of the competition and laying flat' and 'bai lan' attitude [giving up entirely] (Ni, 2022) but also inefficiencies and resource depletion (BBC News, 2021; BBC News, 2022; Manya, 2021).

In this research, the phenomenon of 'nei juan' was acknowledged by participants. For example, R5 observed that it 'objectively exists' due to the disparity between the number of available positions and the 'vast population of unemployed graduates' in China each year. All returnees expressed feelings of excessive

competition, driven mainly by the societal devaluation of academic qualifications and peer pressure.

The depreciation of academic qualifications, particularly considering the costs of domestic higher education, was cited by R5, R7, R8, and R12 as a factor contributing to intense academic competition. This was evident in job acquisition [R7, R8] and career advancement [R12]. R8, for instance, expressed feeling overwhelmed as they 'struggled to secure a teaching position at a primary school with only a master's degree'. R7 shared a similar experience, leading to reluctance to return to China for employment. R12 also worried that their master's degree might become obsolete without a PhD. However, the pressure to compete by publishing papers, conducting research projects, and organising concerts does not necessarily lead to better one-on-one teaching quality, as pointed out by R12. R10 noted that priorities in being 'nei juan' can differ:

> Some may think that being competitive means only focusing on achievements which make them look 'competitive', but others may have higher standards for their teaching methods, such as using different approaches to motivate students, which might be less apparent than that of the former.

The excessive competitive context has contributed to 'the emergence of a "laying flat" teaching mentality, where individuals seek stable and repetitive jobs without much desire to [develop] teaching progress or advance' [R8]. Those returnees who acknowledge adopting this mentality attribute it to a sense of bleak prospects for career advancement [R2, R3, R9, R13], the pressure of familial responsibilities [R5, R9], the less-than-ideal income [R2, R6] and the similar attitude displayed by their colleagues [R2, R3, R9]. At the point of interview, R3 and R13, who identify with a 'laid-flat' lifestyle, believe that their hobbies and 'life outside of work' [R3] are as important as their professional responsibilities.

R9 and R11 noted that their colleagues' attitudes towards work and teaching influence their own mentality: 'If my colleagues choose to embrace a "laying flat" approach, I tend to adopt a more leisurely attitude as well, even though I personally was about to organise a concert much better than expected' [R9]. R3, who felt 'anxious seeing others working very hard and making significant progress', reflected: 'Why haven't I made as much progress as they have? Should I start working harder like they did?' Meanwhile, R1 and R7 distanced themselves from both 'nei juan' and 'laying flat,' although their efforts to improve teaching quality sometimes made their colleagues feel as if they were competing:

> Personally, I don't think either of the two words suits me, maybe because I am a relatively hardworking person, so I'm the 'nei juan' person that my colleagues joked about. Of course, I don't want to 'juan' [compete and compare] with others but stopping learning will make me 'go downhill'. I won't know the latest teaching approaches, grade examination information, or the use of newly released teaching-aid apps. However, many teachers are actually laying flat and teaching with their existing knowledge. This may work in the short term, but they will be left behind the times, including their teaching approaches, cognition, communication skills, and even proficiency in playing piano and demonstrating [R1].

Chinese anthropologist Xiang (2020) pointed out that homogenisation is a prerequisite for the emergence of 'nei juan', where everyone appears to lock onto a single pursuit or objective, crowd onto a single track, and live solely for that one goal. This collective mindset also exerts a profound influence on people's attitudes, leading to frequent social comparisons and the drive to outperform peers across multiple dimensions (Xiang, 2020). During the interviews, no participants explicitly admitted to having completely given up or having adopted a state of 'bai lan'. However, the varying attitudes and rationales expressed by returnees reflect a spectrum of values and priorities within competitive contexts. Returnees such as R3,

R7, R10, and R12 argued that the decision to engage in 'nei juan' or adopt a 'laying flat' approach depends on 'individual judgment', which stems from their knowledge, personalities, experiences, and education [R12]. Several returnees [R1, R3, R4, R5, R8, R10, R11, R12] emphasised the importance of finding and adhering to their own goals and pace:

> To have a clear plan for one's life goals, including what we want at each stage and what is realistically achievable [is important]. As long as you know it is the thing you prioritised, there won't be too much of a problem, even in the face of intense competition. People's different attitudes toward work help you to understand the societal situation, and then you can adjust your behaviour and make targets and decisions accordingly [R5].

Overall, the participants experienced pressures and frustrations stemming from the intense academic and peer competition prevalent in the 'nei juan' trend. Nevertheless, they made decisions to either immerse themselves in or withdraw from this competitive context, influenced by factors such as career advancement prospects, family responsibilities, or personal motivations. This reflects a dynamic and diversity of career aspirations shaped by their beliefs and social employment experiences.

6.6 Summary of the chapter

This chapter supports previous research findings concerning returnees' teaching re-adaption, employability, and career orientations. Many returnees expressed a desire to implement the student-centred pedagogy they encountered during their MA studies. However, they often find themselves negotiating between that and the more traditional result-driven and teacher-led approaches predominant in China. This tension is influenced by social expectations, educational norms, and competitive pressures. Additionally, the results also suggest that multiple complex factors

influence returnees' ability to re-adapt and establish their careers upon returning to China. These factors include:

- Teaching contexts: Returnees navigate different educational environments that either support or challenge their newly acquired pedagogical approaches.
- Result-driven and exam-focused pedagogy: In China, there is an entrenched focus on results and exam performance, which can conflict with the more student-centred approaches that many returnees learned during their UK MA studies.
- Value of UK MA qualifications: The UK MA qualification's perceived value can vary, influencing returnees' perceptions of their employability, particularly in relation to their English teaching ability.
- Competitive social trends: Social pressures such as 'nei juan' (intense competition) and the changing economic landscape in China further affect returnees' career decisions and adaptability.

The next chapter will detail the potential support reported by returnees, which will provide further insight into returnees' re-adaptability influenced by changing social trends in China.

Chapter 7: Perspectives of returnees on employment interests, their use of university services and support during and post their UK MA study

This chapter presents the perspectives of returnees regarding the MA content of interest, their employment, and their use of two university services: Careers and Placements and the Writing Centre, while pursuing their UK MA studies at the University of York. This is followed by findings concerning the professional support that is available to returnees to enhance their teaching professionalism upon their return.

7.1 The MA content of interest to returnees' employment during the MA

7.1.1 Returnees' perspectives on the content that interests their employment

Apart from one participant, R8, who mentioned being unable to recall, all other returnees believed that the MA programme considered their employment prospects. Including a relevant 'career development' seminar was seen as a straightforward way to demonstrate this consideration within the course by R2. However, two returnees described the course's impact on their employment prospects as affecting them 'very rarely' [R7] or 'not to a great extent' [R11]. They emphasised the need for 'more content [related to] how students could choose their future careers' [R11] and hoped that 'the course can make more arrangements for the employment development of graduates' [R7]. In addition, returnees provided specific insights into which aspects of the MA programme they found most beneficial to their career development. These areas of interest ranged from exposure to the English language used by lecturers [R13] to pedagogical methods and teaching techniques [R1, R3, R4, R7, R12], as well as course structure and module content [R3, R5, R7].

When asked which course content was of interest in relation to their employment during the MA, R1 and R13 emphasised that they found 'everything' [R1] and 'all of them' [R13]. R13 highlighted the significance of 'the words [in English] used by the MA lecturers and their feedback', particularly for those aspiring to work in international schools. R7 mentioned that more specific career-focused questions

could have been asked by their MA supervisor, such as 'Which content in this MA programme will help you in applying for your future job?' This was perceived as helpful [R7] because this invited students to 'start thinking about their plans' and to specifically focus on related curriculum and resources suggested by their supervisor. In addition, the exposure to various pedagogies such as Kodaly, Orff and Suzuki was also regarded as 'innovative' [R9], implying that these could add new insights of relevance for their continuing professional development [R1, R3, R4, R7, R12]. R2 expressed the importance of recognising 'different types of learners' and utilising 'questioning techniques' as 'helpful' skills for future teaching endeavours. The inclusion of student-centred teaching concepts was also deemed 'essential' [R2] and 'etched in their minds' [R3].

Some participants perceived the course structure and module content as appealing for employment prospects and conducive to their cognitive growth [R3; R5; R7]. Specifically, R5 was drawn to the fact that 'the course is divided into three terms to explore how to teach pupils with different levels'. This was seen to align with a prominent Chinese Confucian concept: 'different pupils require different teaching methods' [R5], emphasising the importance of tailored teaching approaches. R3, on the other hand, appreciated the combination of the theoretical and practical modules. They noted that 'some practical modules were easier to start with', allowing them 'to apply their acquired knowledge in practical teaching scenarios'. R5, although initially perceiving their 'MA lessons and essay results' as 'average at that time', believed that 'the knowledge [gained from] this course still had a subtle and constant impact' on them after graduation:

> When writing essays [for theoretical modules], we can find the topic of interest and then find literature around that, so you will feel that some articles will inspire you on your chosen topic in depth. Then, you will instinctively think about applying what you have read to your teaching practically and making it more accessible for your students.

Throughout their MA studies, returnees noted aspects that cultivated their employment and that they found advantageous. As stated above, some were attracted to the English language employed by the MA teaching staff and the specific questions that encouraged them to contemplate their forthcoming career development. In addition, participants perceived the teaching pedagogies endorsed within the MA programme as conducive to their career prospects, encompassing student-centred teaching, dialogical approaches, and varied international pedagogies. Furthermore, the integration of both practical and theoretical components within the course was appreciated by some returnees (n=3), who believed that this combination helped them develop valuable thought processes applicable to their professional endeavours. The balance between theory and practice allowed them to engage with abstract concepts while also gaining practical experience that they could directly translate into their teaching careers.

7.1.2 Returnees' perspectives on their use of Careers and Placements during and post-MA

The majority of returnees (n=11) did not utilise the Careers and Placements services during their MA studies or seek its support post-graduation. When asked about their reasons, several returnees cited a lack of awareness about the services offered [R5, R6, R8, R11, R12, R13]. Others, including R2, R3 and R10, acknowledged that while they did not use the service, it might have been relevant to their specific career goals, particularly those planning to work in China [R2, R3, R10]. Some returnees felt that the Careers and Placements services was unnecessary because they already had 'a job lined up' [R1], or deemed it less relevant [R7]. R9 used the Careers and Placements service but found the guidance somewhat 'general' and not entirely 'relevant to music education'. In contrast, R4 stood out as the sole participant who reported a positive experience with this service, expressing satisfaction with the support received:

> The volunteering experience was great, and they conducted a pre-service orientation session that provided me with many valuable guides. These guides included how to interact with students in school and approach them post lessons and emphasised the importance of avoiding physical contact, among other things. I found these guidelines very detailed, but such a level of explanation is only sometimes found [in China]. The Careers [and Placement service] also helped me with CV writing, which I found very beneficial.

R4's experience highlights that the Careers and Placement Service can be valuable in enhancing employability prospects. However, it also suggests a need for increased student engagement with these services, as reflected in the perspectives of tutor participants detailed in section 5.6.2.

7.1.3 Returnees' use of the Writing Centre

Eight out of 13 returnees mentioned not using the Writing Centre services during their MA studies [R5, R6, R10, R11, R12, R2, R7, R8]. Despite the programme having provided information about this at multiple times during the academic years, some were not aware of the services during their course [R5, R6, R10, R11, R12]. Others believed that the assistance offered could not address their generic academic needs as 'quickly and conveniently' as resources available on platforms such as YouTube or other media channels [R7]. R8 considered using the Writing Centre's service but found that 'making an appointment was challenging, especially when everyone [was] approaching deadlines'. They perceived the guidance provided within the MA programme as adequate and felt hesitant about seeking additional support [R8].

For the five returnees who did use the Writing Centre's services, they found assistance in areas such as 'essay structure', 'grammar', 'formatting' [R3], 'APA referencing skills and ways of finding literature' [R4], and 'vocabulary' [R13]. Despite this, some returnees felt the assistant lacked specificity for music education compared to the more tailored guidance they received from MA teaching staff [R3, R8, R13]. For instance, R13 valued the Writing Centre's help in improving their

academic writing, noting that the focus was primarily 'on grammar and fundamental aspects of writing'. Therefore, more than half of the participants (n=8) did not utilise the Writing Centre's services. At the same time, those who used it believed it assisted at a generic academic writing level but preferred more subject-specific guidance.

7.2 Perceived support for returnees' continued professional development after returning to China

Several returnees emphasised the importance of networking with fellow Chinese peers from their MA [R1, R2, R3, R4, R9, R10, R11, R12], as well as with their 'overseas' peers [R4] and teaching staff [R1, R4]. Maintaining these connections was seen as beneficial for ongoing professional development upon returning to China. Returnees used these networks to exchange ideas teaching strategies [R1, R10, R11, R12], teaching materials [R1, R2, R4, R9, R12] and adapting to the teaching context in China [R10, R11].

R11 mentioned that they continued to stay in touch with their former MA classmates through social media, recognising the potential for shared challenges experienced upon returning home. Specifically, they discussed 'issues' and 'contradictions' 'between the MA teaching mode and the teaching orientations in China' with other returnee peers [R10]. R1 recognised a pressure placed on school class teachers in China to cover a wide range of subjects, which differed from the more specialised focus of one-on-one teaching. Furthermore, R1 and R4 maintained contact with the MA staff and expressed gratitude for the support received from the teaching staff even after completing their studies and returning to China. R4 appreciated the 'timely and helpful responses' they received from the programme founder when seeking guidance on literature-related questions. However, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, R5 who did not come to the UK for in-person MA studying felt a lack of connection with their peers:

> Since I didn't take this course in the UK, I needed a stronger connection with my coursemates and tutors. It's a bit of a shame. If I had come to the UK, I would have had more robust bonds with them.

Some major-related and psychological support returnees received from their workplace, especially from international school contexts, are perceived. R1 noted the training needed for preparing the teaching certificate focusing on school music teaching and perceived that they have 'benefited from psychology and pedagogy in general'. R9 additionally mentioned receiving a yearly 'subsidy for continuing professional development' from their international school, which they used to attend 'a musical opera training programme'. In addition, R2 noted 'stress management websites, telephone counselling service and related training' that were provided by their workplace and felt 'less hierarchical' in communicating with their managers or leaders in international school teaching contexts:

> When you communicate with them, they are compassionate and understand you from a teacher's perspective, and they also pay more attention to teachers' mental health. They will ask you, 'Do you feel stressed recently?' … However, based on my childhood experience as a student in public schools, I don't know if they can also provide such support. So, in international schools, they are more concerned about your teaching status and welcome your questions and arguments.

Another returnee also teaching in an international school, R4, emphasised teamwork and mutual support when they encounter challenging situations:

> Difficulties exist. Our school has multiple grade levels and activities… [and] each student is unique in learning styles, thoughts, and so on; as I mentioned earlier, it's a constant learning process. Having a good teaching team is also crucial. In our programme, everyone supports and helps each other. We

attend classes together, learn from one another, and provide support. This is beneficial.

Some returnees also stated individual pathways for improving their teaching since returning to China. These include observing experienced teachers [R3], participating in conferences [R3, R6, R13], enrolling in supplementary job preparation training [R9, R12] or pursuing additional teaching qualifications [R10], and accessing practical teaching strategies online [R1, R3, R5, R11]. For instance, R3 expressed their enjoyment of attending 'conferences [like] the China Music Education Conference', which provides a platform for 'scholars in music education to present their teaching and research achievements'. Some found value in online resources, such as 'live-streaming courses' [R3] and 'teaching strategies' [R1] shared by educators on platforms such as 'TikTok' [R5]. Nevertheless, they emphasised the significance of maintaining a 'critical' [R1] and 'reflective' [R5] mindset when engaging with information on these streaming platforms, a mindset developed during their MA studies:

> [Some online resources] might suggest using multiple teaching tools in lessons, but they don't explain the reason for [doing so]. They just provide you with strategies, such as 'use audio-visual videos or images in lessons alongside learning Baroque dance videos'. These practical strategies don't have critical thinking, so although it will make your lesson more varied, these methods do not necessarily help to facilitate independent thinking. Of course, these solutions are useful, but if you can combine them with guiding students' independent thinking, you will use them more effectively. Therefore, as a teacher, you need to change your thinking first so that you can use these direct methods shared by online bloggers more effectively [R1].

As mentioned, returnees have access to a range of support upon their return to China. They can connect with fellow MA graduates and teaching staff, observe

other teachers teaching, attend conferences, and use online teaching resources. These methods of support are perceived to aid some of them in exchanging teaching ideas and addressing the challenges encountered while also keeping them connected with the assistance provided by the MA teaching staff. From an individual perspective, the channels that returnees have explored to enhance their teaching skills are diverse and can be influenced by the support offered by their employers in different teaching contexts (for example, the yearly subsidy mentioned by R9 and the psychological support mentioned by R2 in their international school teaching contexts). Furthermore, some of the teaching content from the MA, such as critical and reflective thinking, has been retained and organically applied by returnees like R1 and R5 in their self-improvement journeys.

7.3 Summary of the chapter: Key themes

Returnee participants highlighted their interests and experiences regarding their MA programme, specifically focusing on the balance between practical and theoretical course modules and their interactions with university-provided services.

Most returnees noted that the MA programme's combination of practical and theoretical modules was instrumental in shaping their professional outlook and providing a well-rounded education. However, only a few utilised the Careers and Placement services and the Writing Centre. The limited use of these services stemmed from a belief that they did not sufficiently address subject-specific career needs or academic requirements.

For enhancing teaching professionalism upon returning to China, returnees engaged in various strategies:

- Maintaining Networks: They continued to connect with MA peers and tutors to exchange teaching strategies and materials, and to discuss challenges and solutions relevant to their teaching contexts in China.
- Observing and Learning: Some engaged in observing experienced teachers, participating in conferences, and utilizing online teaching resources to refine their approaches and stay updated with current practices.

- Workplace Support: A few returnees in international schools benefited from specific support such as professional development subsidies and psychological support, which contributed to their overall teaching efficacy.

These methods were viewed as effective in advancing their teaching capabilities and addressing the challenges faced in the Chinese education system.

Chapter 8 General discussion

8.1 The expansion of students' conception of learning and teaching in the first adaption, and their adaptabilities

Haddon's (2019) investigation found that accepting, adapting to, and using different thinking patterns, teaching modes, and communicative ways was challenging for international students studying on various MA Music programmes in a UK university. This was also found by the student and tutor participants in this current study, with a larger sample from the MA Music Education than Haddon's research, highlighting the initial difficulty of adopting critical, interactive and student-centred teaching approaches due to linguistic barriers and educational and philosophical differences (Chapter 5). Adapting to and overcoming these challenges necessitated time and effort because the independent learning and reflective thinking advocated in the one-year taught MA Music Education focusing on instrumental and vocal teaching programme contrasts with the passive reception of knowledge and rote memorisation that many Chinese students were used to from their previous education in China.

Within the constructivist paradigm, social interaction and collaboration with others provide opportunities for learning and understanding, thus playing a crucial role in constructing one's knowledge and behaviours (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Tensions caused by students' attempts to manage linguistic, cultural, and educational differences, both in terms of their learning and teaching, tend to be more overwhelming in the initial phase of adaption and knowledge construction (Chapters 4 and 5). This can be seen as an initial interaction and comparison that students experienced between their prior educational experiences and the new educational contexts, raising their awareness of how their previous context has shaped or at least influenced their learning and teaching habits. Based on the descriptions from some student participants three months after enrolment, and observations from some tutors about those who have completed the year-long training requirements, these students have been able to navigate teaching differences and transition between different teaching modes, provided they actively

engage in courses and respond to assignment feedback (Section 5.4.5). More specific adjustments related to teaching adaptions mentioned by student participants in the context of transitioning teaching habits and modes are discussed in detail in Section 8.1.1. This transition represents an expansion of students' conceptions of learning (Haddon, 2019) with even more specific spectrums in describing the dynamic of students' adaptability and the nuanced differences influenced by internal and external factors in their teaching practice. Aimed at achieving student-centred teaching objectives, students' observations of their tutors/lecturers' teaching practices and their perceptions of the relationship with MA tutors/lecturers, are perceived as influential to their teaching adaption (Section 8.1.3).

8.1.1 Adaptive dimensions

In this research, the adaption identified by student participants after entering the MA context aligned with Haddon's findings (2019), indicating a transition from teacher-directed technical instruction to a more progress-oriented and diverse approach, emphasising critical thinking and alternative perspectives in learning and teaching. In exploring the dynamic range of teaching behaviours within music education, Gaunt (2017) introduced several 'continuums' that provide valuable insights into the adaptive dimensions observed among educators when confronting teaching variations and challenges. According to the student perspectives in the present research, adaptive aspects can be identified as transitions between teacher-directed versus student-centred approaches, emphasis on correction versus facilitation in transmission, the prevalence of teacher-talk versus questioning-led instruction, and the focus on product- versus process-oriented teaching.

From students' perceptions, the MA programme's student-centred approach contrasts sharply with the more traditional, teacher-directed instruction that many students were accustomed to. This aligns with Zheng and Haddon's (2023) findings, which suggest that moving towards a more student-centred approach in music education encourages critical thinking and a broader appreciation of pupils' interests. In the present research, some initial resistance and confusion were

reported by students who struggled to effectively shift from a directive role to a facilitative one, as this involves letting go of the need to pursue or control learning outcomes and instead focus on empowering others to take more initiative (Section 5.4.5). During the adaptive process, they would find that the available lesson/teaching time becomes limited when trying to balance the roles of instructing and facilitating (Section 5.4.2). This issue was similarly reported by returnees as a practical challenge encountered after their MA study, particularly when they attempted to apply the student-centred approach and questioning technique in their home country (see Section 6.3.1).

Additionally, the students' openness and reliance on MA approaches were perceived to be influenced by the learning rapport with MA course tutors. A different set of adaptive dimensions included perceptions of the tutor-student relationship, ranging from hierarchical to relatively equal dynamics, and the extent of tutor guidance perceived, ranging from direct to less direct guidance fostering autonomous learning (Section 8.1.3). As detailed in the next section, students' individual characteristics and the dynamic of students' past cultural and educational experiences can also impact their adaptability within each spectrum or relevant category, thereby providing multiple dimensions for interpreting variations in students' adaptability.

8.1.2 Factors affecting adaptabilities of students in the first adaption

As Valmisa (2021) noted, an individual's adaptability is connected to flexibility, reliance on or placing trust in something, being open to change, and maintaining a consistent balance and reflection during adaption. Such characteristics were demonstrated in Chapter 4 when students discussed their approaches to coping with adaptive challenges. While cross-cultural adaption represents a multifaceted process, shared influencing factors aligned with existing literature can be found in this research. This includes demographic characteristics (Mahmood & Burke, 2018), the pre-MA educational experience (Brooks & Waters, 2011) and the potential influence of the study abroad service agencies, students' career and learning

expectations, students' instrument types and majors, and external influence from the pandemic (Brooks & Waters, 2011).

In this research, students' demographic characteristics, such as personality traits, openness and flexibility, are important factors that influence their adaptability. Consistent with the findings of the literature (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Mahmood & Burke, 2018), students with more outgoing characteristics were reported by tutors (e.g. T5, section 5.2.3) as tending to seek guidance when confronted with challenges and demonstrated a commitment to implement the new approaches, making it easier for them to adapt to the new context. Their openness to the new approaches advocated in the MA and different levels of willingness to practice these approaches and engage with assignment feedback appears to be correlated with their intercultural adaption (Chapters 4 and 5). However, some students admitted that they rehearsed the teaching video submission and pretended to be student-centred in order to pass assignments (e.g. S7; S8, section 4.5.3). The behaviour of these students indicates an exam-oriented adoption of new pedagogies rather than a genuine integration, reflecting students' varied learning depth. Distinctions between genuine and superficial engagement with the new pedagogical approaches can be further understood through the lens of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as mentioned by Vansteenkiste et al. (2006). Those students in the present research appear to be motivated extrinsically by the desire to pass assignments, leading to surface learning [T1] and exhibiting the desired behaviour temporarily to achieve perceived desires without truly integrating the new knowledge into their practice. Despite evidence supporting the superficiality of surface learning, it has its place in certain educational contexts for efficient mastery of foundational knowledge, such as memorising times tables or learning the basics of a foreign language (Lublin, 2009). A strategic approach that combines surface learning for foundational elements with deep learning for long-term retention and comprehensive understanding has been associated with high academic success (Entwistle, 2000). However, Entwistle (2000) cautions that these are analytic categories derived from research findings, and it is incorrect to pigeonhole any

student entirely into one category. The deep learning approach is generic, while the processes needed to develop it vary between subjects and specific learning contexts. As certain approaches mentioned in the present research result from an interaction between the student and the intercultural MA learning context, as well as their individual pupils in their one-to-one teaching, this complexity suggests that while surface learning has utility, fostering deep learning tailored to subject-specific processes and contextual interactions is crucial for a comprehensive educational strategy. Furthermore, being pedagogically flexible was shown by some student participants who perceived confidence in adapting to the teaching differences [e.g. S2; S6, section 4.4.4], which was also highlighted by tutors in Chapter 5. While gender, age and marital status have also been identified as influential factors in the literature review on the adaption process of international students, these variables were not taken into account in this research. This decision stems from the fact that all student participants involved in the initial data collection were female, belong to the same age group, and were unmarried.

In addition, factors such as pre-MA experiences play important roles in students' adaption in the present research. Students' backgrounds from cities in China with varying levels of music education development can be an important factor that influences their openness to teaching approaches and repertoire chosen (Chapter 4). The pre-exposure to student-centred and questioning teaching techniques within their own instrumental/vocal learning can also influence their acceptance, with those exposed to questioning teaching characteristics from former teachers displaying higher acceptance attitudes and readiness to implement MA approaches (e.g. S2, section 4.4.1). Specifically, students' prior experiences with examination-oriented instruction or passive learning habits can be influential as some felt compelled to resort to rote teaching approaches in order to prepare their pupils for exams. Such reliance on rote techniques not only reinforces examination-focused concepts but also limits opportunities for creativity and reflective practice, which were emphasised during their MA studies (Chapter 4). This is understandable in light of the adaptive pressure they face and the extensive time spent entrenched

in their original cultural and pedagogical practices, especially when contrasted with the comparatively brief duration of the MA programme.

The literature review in Chapter 2 mentioned that education agency services played a role in supporting students' overseas immigration. According to Yang et al.'s (2022) investigation, these services were categorised into the provision of host countries and programmes, document preparation for studying, visa and accommodation application, and guidance alongside students' decision-making process. The role of agent consultants who participated in Yang et al.'s (2022) research was perceived as communicating and exchanging information, tracking application statuses, counselling, and following up and completing application materials and paperwork. Although the student participants in this research did not mention how study abroad agencies specifically assisted them in applying for this MA, some students' insufficient understanding of the course content pre-MA (Section 4.3, S3, S9) suggests that they had limited depth in independently comprehending the programme within the decision-making process in selecting the MA course. While the services provided by agencies may have facilitated students' progress in their study abroad application, overreliance on the information provided could lead to neglect in thoroughly familiarising themselves with the programme they are about to undertake. This, coupled with inadequate preparation for the cultural or pedagogical differences they are going to experience, has, to some extent, impacted students' adaptability and subsequent learning outcome achievement.

This study identified students' career and learning expectations, including motivations to escape competitive employment in China, obtain an MA degree, and enrich their teaching approaches, which internally influenced their adaptive mindset and adaptability (Chapters 4, 5 and 6). In addition, the majors taught by students, such as Western instruments, Chinese instruments, or voice, also potentially influence their adaptability when encountering to the MA pedagogical approaches. The differences in teaching instruments and teaching voices impact the challenges students encounter when adapting to a non-touch policy with their pupils during the

MA course and implementing student-centred facilitation (see Section 5.4.4). These differences influence how effectively they can consider and apply alternative teaching approaches and questioning techniques.

Externally, emerging research suggests that the pandemic has made international students especially vulnerable and that efforts to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus have hit this group disproportionally hard (Fischer, 2021). In the present research, the travel restrictions brought by the pandemic hindered some students' ability to pursue their educational goals abroad fully (Chapters 4 and 5) and negatively affected students' academic and sociocultural adaption (Schartner, 2022). The transition to online learning because of social distancing measures exacerbated feelings of loneliness among some students who studied the MA remotely. Some have struggled with limited access opportunities for practising MA teaching approaches with pupils of different nationalities and social interaction, leading to increased difficulties in their adaption (Chapters 4 and 5).

However, perspectives from tutor participants highlighted their commitment to accessibility by employing a hybrid format to accommodate students from various locations, crafting remote online learning packages, and integrating interactive tools like Padlet (Chapter 5). This increases the remote learning accessibility, which is also perceived as accelerating students' academic and financial progress toward graduation (Chapter 4.3). Some student participants also acknowledged the advantages of remote access and flexible learning schedules, enabling them to pursue education from their home country during the pandemic without the necessity of physical relocation, as also mentioned by Yu, Du and Zhou (2023).

8.1.3 The role of overseas tutors in shaping students' pedagogical adaptive experiences

In Section 5.4.4, several tutors expressed satisfaction upon understanding that some students perceived their relationships with MA course tutors as more egalitarian than with their previous lecturers and instrumental/vocal teachers (Section 4.4.3). Tutors T2, T3, T5, and T8 highlighted their intention to foster a collaborative

classroom in lectures or facilitation contexts in tutor group sessions where knowledge is shared and built together despite the top-down and hierarchical relationship between educators and students. For instance, T8 highlighted the importance of creating a knowledge-sharing dynamic in tutor group sessions while acknowledging the distinctive roles that educators and their students have, respectively. This perception of equality aligns with some tutors' intentions but contrasts with those who see their role distinctly as facilitators and mentors and who resist the notion that the power dynamic in the student-teacher relationships is unavoidable (Section 5.4.3).

Reflecting on S13's insights from Section 4.4.3, it appears that the awareness and understanding of power dynamics in IVT teacher-student relationships are important yet ignored aspects pre-MA. S13 noted that their prior IVT learning experiences focused more on musical corrections, certificates, and results than the development of reflective student-teacher relationships, suggesting a lack of awareness regarding the implicit power dynamic involved. Burwell (2023) further explores this, arguing that the complexity of power dynamics in IVT contexts can render them ambiguous for students lacking relevant knowledge. Additionally, it raises the question of whether Confucian cultural principles exacerbate the power imbalance by promoting deference and respect for teachers in IVT contexts. The tradition of classical music education draws on a network of hierarchies, including standards of skill, attitudes of perfectionism, and competition for performance platforms, within a meritocracy where power and authority are perceived as deserved (Burwell, 2016). This, along with the physical and social isolation of the studio in one-to-one IVT, leaves students vulnerable, partly due to their long-standing affective investment in music and the trust and deference granted to the teacher and the practice. There is potential for mismanagement, particularly as teachers and students may be more or less conscious of the dynamic power, student perceptions, cultural implications and expectations deriving from prior learning contexts, and students and teachers may be more or less able to recognise, receive/ offer sensitive and effective support.

Moreover, cultural influence and students' expectations of hierarchical relationships complicate this dynamic further. Students from educational backgrounds that stress respect for authority may struggle to engage in course contexts that encourage open dialogue and questioning (see Section 4.4.3). This creates a paradox where some students feel less empowered pre-MA, yet are satisfied with a less hierarchical relationship with their MA tutors while simultaneously feeling stressed and uncomfortable with more participatory approaches, such as classroom-based discussion (see Section 4.4.3). Navigating this complexity requires sensitivity to cultural influence in expectations and perceptions of power dynamics (Section 5.4.4). Interestingly, while Western education emphasises individualism focusing on mental development, valuing personal insight, creativity and inquiry, this is differentiated with the Confucians' focus on diligence and persistence (Wang, 2023). As Ford (2020) suggests, recognising that core values embedded in learning outcomes and assessment criteria are often Western rather than universal is an important step towards making educational practices visible and open to critical examination, rather than leaving them habitual and unquestioned. Thus, an environment that balances respect for students' cultural backgrounds with the promotion of inclusive and interactive learning experiences might be supportive. This entails recognising power dynamics, understanding students' learning expectations shaped by their cultural values, and developing culturally responsive teaching.

8.2 Re-immersion and employment challenges for returnees

8.2.1 Implementation of the student-centred mode: different teaching contexts and effects of educational policies

The literature review identified challenges that international students could experience after they graduate and return to work in their home country. More relevantly, according to Haddon's (2024) findings in relation to Chinese returnees who studied this UK MA programme, their re-adaptive challenges are delineated in relation to 'the influence of educational conditioning on pupils, results-driven

parental expectations and examinations, teacher flexibility and reflection, employers and families' (p. 166). These challenges were also found among the participants of this current study. Returnees referred to pedagogical challenges such as the emergence of time constraints and the response of pupils when they tried to implement the MA concepts, challenges with student-centred facilitation (which was deemed unexpected and could be further intensified by the escalated commitment to examination preparation), classroom discipline maintenance, and less flexible teaching tasks required by their employers or institutions.

Generalising the perceptions of returnees is impossible due to the difficulties in adequately representing the diversity within the population, particularly when considering the annual updating of the MA course content, the uneven economic development between Chinese cities and rural areas, variations in returnees' understanding of their teaching contexts, varied professional expectations influenced by individual and social contexts, and the accessibility to peer support (Chapters 6 and 7). It can be speculated, though, that the student-centred and dialogical approaches appear to be the prime influential MA pedagogical ideas that returnees are likely to implement for the achievement of their desired music teaching outcome. This allows the transition of their teaching awareness from solely relying on teacher-centred ideas to an MA-informed approach by considering pupils' non-musical benefits and accommodating pupils' specific needs. This, taking an optimistic perspective in achieving desirable music educational outcomes, enhances their potential to employ different teaching approaches and broadens the range of pupils they can effectively facilitate after returning to China (Chapter 6).

However, returnees' teaching contexts can vary the influence and implementation of student-centred education because of the curriculum, classroom size and the reception of their students, influencing their re-adaption upon returning to China. The student-centred application in public school settings can be perceived as more difficult by some returnees in this research because of the classroom size and increasing needs brought by classroom etiquette management. The extent to which their students engage in student-centred instruction or independent thinking

facilitation mentioned by some returnees is perceived as uncertain, given the need to form a balanced school classroom learning environment for active thinking and passive following (Zhang & Leung, 2023).

Compared to this, returnees teaching in international schools seemed to experience fewer adaptive difficulties than those teaching in public sectors or music training organisations elsewhere (Chapter 6), which aligned with Haddon's (2023) findings. This may be due to the International Baccalaureate (IB) or other Western curricula applied in international schools prioritising similar teaching concepts as the UK MA course, such as student-centred teaching approaches, critical thinking, creativity and individualised attention. However, the extent to which student-centred approaches are applied may be variable given the result-driven social values.

In private music tutoring institutions, returnees also recognise that when dealing with pupils and parents who prioritise results and exams, utilising student-centred facilitation may be perceived as less effective in achieving rapid and noticeable outcomes within a limited timeframe compared to a teacher-led approach. This issue needs to be considered and negotiated: whether to prioritise student-centred approaches to focus on pupils' thoughts and foster independent learning, or to fall back into teacher-led approaches to save time and fulfil job requirements and result-driven orientations.

Combined with the challenges aforementioned by returnees, a lack of alignment and parallelism between the evolving teaching aspiration of returnees and the pedagogical orientation in China is identified. The present research findings suggest that the value that school administrators or employers place on student-centeredness or teaching autonomy also impacts the implementation of student-centred education (Chapter 6). This association appears linked to the employers' educational backgrounds and the impact of national policies, such as the ongoing educational reformation since 1999 and the recent policy of 'Double Reduction' prioritising aesthetic education and aiming at alleviating exam-related tension (Yang & Welch, 2023). However, it remains difficult to ascertain the actual impact or support of educational reforms and policy interventions acting within school and

instrumental/vocal teaching contexts. As acknowledged in the literature review chapter, studies in China emphasise that the country is responding to globalisation with curriculum reforms and the implementation of student-centred learning principles and educational practices. Nevertheless, reliance on self-reported data and teachers' perceptions neither addresses in-depth how student-centred education is being implemented (Zhang & Leung, 2023) nor specifically examines how China's own cultural and educational traditions influenced this implementation. This indicates that understanding of the extent to which the educational reformation policy has affected students' learning expectations, attentiveness or participation, thereby impacting their teaching work, is underdeveloped.

S13 in this present research was optimistic about the recent Chinese government's 'double reduction' policy aimed at reducing homework and tutoring, which could ease the pressure on school-aged pupils (Section 4.5.4). However, instead of emphasising the optimised outcomes that the 'Double Reduction' policy is supposed to achieve, Liu (2022) speculated that this policy could aggravate the uneven distribution of educational resources. This is because of its economic impact on after-school tutoring and adjustment challenges for finding alternative support, such as online platforms or AI-driven educational resources, without relying on private tutoring. Moreover, with a strong focus on achieving high scores in standardised tests such as the Gaokao, the emphasis placed by students and their parents on exam results may further hinder the adoption of student-centred approaches that prioritise holistic development and critical thinking over memorisation, repetition and test preparation.

This heightened anxiety among Chinese students and their parents may lead to an intensified focus on exam-oriented subjects driven by the pursuit of a competitive edge within the fiercely competitive educational environment (Zuo & He, 2023). Among the returnees in this study, only R9 briefly noted the 'double reduction' policy's impact on decreased enrolment in arts programmes of their international school. However, as this is an ongoing nationwide educational reform, the full and practical impact of this policy on music education and school students

still needs further investigation. Overall, while there may be growing recognition of student-centred education in China and the willingness to implement it, overcoming these cultural, structural, societal, and political barriers will be essential for widespread adoption and effective implementation.

8.2.2 The effects of study abroad on returnees' employment: university ranking

All three groups of participants in this study acknowledged the positive significance of obtaining a UK MA degree for enhancing graduates' employment prospects upon returning to their home country. Some returnees feel frustrated in their job interviews because they had been judged by certain employers for not having studied in one of the QS top 100 universities in the world (Chapter 6.4.2). This value judgement was viewed by some returnees as biased, as employers might unconsciously equate high university rankings with individual competence and rely on university league table rankings to filter out candidates. To aim to recruit employees from universities with top rankings does have value, as it may reflect higher quality education and resources and more influential alumni networks (Hazelkorn, 2011). However, returnees' working experiences, the evidence of leadership, social mobility and diversity can also be critical issues that need to be taken into account (Chapter 6).

The present research also shows that perceived employers placed varying emphasis on the ranking of graduates' universities due to their specific recruitment priorities (Chapter 6). For instance, some returnees applying to teach at more client-facing music studios noted that the emphasis on university rankings has become less strict; instead, their instrumental demonstration skills might be more valued (Chapter 6.4.2). In addition, effective communication skills with colleagues, as well as pupil and parent clients, were also perceived by some returnees as important in job interview situations where they might be asked to give a demonstration lesson (Chapter 6.4.4). This becomes critical considering the shift and dynamic of parental expectations and motivation mentioned by some student-teacher participants and the potential challenges pupils can have alongside the shortage of time allocated for

music training (Chapter 6.3.1). These more specific teaching considerations mentioned by returnees in different teaching contexts suggest that a blanket judgment based on university league tables cannot be applied across music education subjects and all teaching contexts in the recruiting process. This shows the complexity of determining the direct correlation between the necessity of emphasising university rankings and different teaching contexts. However, future research could focus on investigating and comparing the university rankings of newly hired graduates in certain teaching contexts and other applicants who were screened out during the same recruiting period. This would help to determine whether the university ranking is a significant influencing factor in the hiring process.

8.2.3 The value of MA qualification in affecting returnees' employability

Rather than viewing employability as an 'ability', Darni (2023) conceptualises it as a 'process of transitioning from university to work' (p. 149). Apart from navigating linguistic, cultural, philosophical, and pedagogical differences (Chapter 5), students from China studying in the UK need substantial financial investment and will face emotional uncertainties due to their adjustment to university protocols and the academic expectations of a new learning environment (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). Obtaining an MA qualification to enhance their employability has emerged as a motivator for student and returnee participants in the present research. However, qualification inflation, where the minimum qualifications for jobs rise over time (Collins, 2011), combined with re-immersive challenges, may restrict returnees' ability to integrate and apply their MA knowledge in their home country's labour market. This is why critically reconsidering the value of the MA qualification in affecting employability in the context of international students transitioning to the labour market is necessary. If they return home, they may struggle to convert their acquired knowledge into a form that is readily accepted by their home culture, such as the challenges to apply the student-centred teaching (section 8.2.1). Instead of exploring how the MA knowledge they received can be useful to the music development of their future pupils and society in general, students who have

foreseen these re-adaptive challenges might limit themselves in perspectives of relying on reading scripts or other exam-oriented preparation in order to pass the assessments (Chapters 4 and 5). On the other hand, if they keep searching for jobs in the host country with the MA qualification, they may find that the transition to the overseas labour market is also challenging, as it may not allow them to attain the same level of value and respect as domestic employees due to the extra consideration of work authorisations and immigration fees (Darni, 2023).

The present research has acknowledged that the MA degree can create opportunities for some students and returnees (Chapters 4 and 7). For example, some student participants believed their commitment and contribution towards the MA qualification could bring them more opportunities and provide them with more career options (Chapter 4). When interviewing for jobs that require overseas instrumental/vocal teaching experience, such as at international schools or facing international clients, some returnees perceived that their MA qualification was valuable. However, the optimistic outlook for the MA degree's benefits might be constrained if the challenges in transitioning to the workforce and the trend of qualification inflation are overlooked (Darini, 2023).

Additionally, from a social constructivism paradigm, students can have individual dispositions and interpretations towards similar learning experiences, which means that the MA learning cannot equally benefit each student with the same outcomes. This is why some tutor participants in Chapter 5.7 noted that students are the primary group responsible for the re-adjusting and employment process after returning home. This acknowledges the autonomy and agency of students in understanding the effects of the qualification and acquired learning resources, their own cultural reintegration, and an active role that students can take in the process of enhancing their employability. Future research could examine the long-term career paths of Chinese music education graduates with UK MA degrees to determine their employability in both the UK and China. It could focus on investigating how these graduates can apply their knowledge in their home country and assess the impact of qualification inflation on the value of their degrees.

8.2.4 Returnees' career satisfaction

The majority of returnee participants expressed satisfaction with their current jobs (Chapter 6) because their career choices related to their educational degree and prior instrumental/vocal 'major' specialisation, which can be shown as a major factor influencing one's career satisfaction (Eun, Sohn & Lee, 2023). In addition, the self-regulated perceptions from some returnees showed how they manage themselves to achieve specific careers (Sections 6.4.4 and 6.5.1). However, they were frustrated by additional requirements unrelated to music teaching when they attempted to apply for their ideal lifelong careers (Chapter 6). Those with classroom music teaching experience who opted to continue their preferred one-to-one piano teaching (such as R1, section 6.5.1) indicated that they chose these roles as a compromise to their preferred secure stable employment in schools. This suggests that stable job opportunities can initially be influential to returnees' job-seeking attitudes and motivations; however, it may also influence their career satisfaction if graduates need to work in fields not entirely related to their overseas learning experiences. In addition, some returnees perceived that they need to balance teaching requirements, student-centred autonomy, and parental expectations of their pupils while also contending with the impact of the pupils' school learning contexts (Chapter 6). This aligns with the idea that graduates might have to accept teaching positions with requirements that are not fully aligned with their qualifications due to the competitive job market (Ryu & Jeong, 2021), students' learning backgrounds and varied responds to student-centred facilitation, and cultural and social differences.

The support and resources available for returnees were indicated to be influential on their career satisfaction, and addressing support issues were identified as a frequently chosen strategy for enhancing job satisfaction in Baker's (2007) research. Peer support, alumni networks and other specific institutional support related to their field of study and psychological well-being were mentioned in the present study, though those employed in international schools appeared to have access to more tangible support from their institutions (Section 7.3). Tutors and

returnees pointed out a lack of recognition of nationwide influential support for Chinese music educators, particularly considering the diversity of regional and contextualised differences among music students and educators in China. This suggests the limitation of potential for returnees to enhance their career satisfaction through obtaining relevant and professional support.

Overall, the perceived compromises and a lack of national support in the present research aligned with the idea that young graduates might settle for more attainable options over their ideal teaching and career choices when they are faced with real-world challenges (Gottfredson, 2005). Creed and Gagliardi (2015) suggested that the level of career compromise is linked positively to career distress and negatively to self-perceived career satisfaction, employability and well-being. The present study, however, did not specifically measure the extent of how many compromises each returnee made, which results in difficulties in reaching conclusions about the specific impact of their compromises on their job satisfaction. Future research could focus on examining the relationship between career compromise and outcomes of returnees in specific music teaching contexts and could assess the effectiveness of the available support pathways in enhancing their career satisfaction.

8.3 Factors influencing student agency

8.3.1 Emergent student agencies

Students' agency is informed by past personal and pedagogical experiences, future orientations, and present engagement and actions (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Given that Chinese international students' pedagogical actions and thinking patterns have long been influenced by Confucianism (Chapter 4, section 4.2), their actions, which were seen by tutors as demonstrating agency, include adopting more proactive attitudes towards assessment feedback (Chapter 5), accessing and using available resources and writing support, and taking initiative in their career decision-making (Chapter 7).

One significant form of agency identified in the present research is the needs-response agency, defined by Hopwood (2010) as the relationship between an individual's or group's needs and the capacity or agency to respond to those needs, either on their own or through external support. This type of agency is evident in students' intention to work on and adapt to cultural, linguistic, and educational differences explored in Chapters 4 and 5. For example, the viewpoints of Chapter 4, section 4.4.2 highlight important aspects of student agency in adapting to student-centred approaches and refining questioning techniques. Students such as S12 demonstrated proactive engagement and reflection by initially focusing on increasing the number of questions in their individual teaching, realising the importance of systematic and varied questioning after exposure to Socratic methods. This refinement can signify a student agency responding to MA teaching demanding and questioning techniques through a reflective approach. However, it could be argued that 'student-centred' can have different interpretations depending on the context and that the mentor-friend approach is more nuanced than merely utilising questions (Liu & Haddon, 2024). Educators could be encouraged to reflect on how these understandings and approaches are formed, whether there are universal understandings of concepts, consider their expectations in applying them, and evaluate the resultant outcomes observed in their pupils.

Another form of agency observed is the agency for becoming (Tran & Vu, 2018), particularly relevant to returnees who actively engaged in constructing their career paths. The returnee participants emphasised the importance of setting realistic and individual life goals to facilitate better adjustments and informed career decisions in a competitive society. For instance, eight returnee participants highlighted the importance of having individual and realistic life goals and perceived that this can help with better re-adjustments and career decision-making in an ever-changing and excessively competitive society (Section 6.5.4). R1's commitment to maintaining and enhancing their English proficiency and professional skills by preparing for the ABRSM diploma, despite not using English frequently in their current role, also exemplifies this form of agency.

While the agency for becoming (Tran & Vu, 2018) observed among returnees reflects proactive engagement in career planning and reflection, a potential concern raised is the sustainability of this agency. Tran and Vu (2018) describe 'becoming' as the process of continuous personal and professional development, where individuals actively shape their identities and futures. R1's commitment to improving English proficiency and professional skills raises questions about whether there is long-term support and sources of agency available to maintain such efforts once they achieve certain results, such as the qualification of the ABRSM diploma. Another concern is whether these emergent agencies relating to pedagogical adaption and career objectives are motivated by future personal earnings or educational growth. Marginson (2014) notes that while higher education's impact is often perceived as a conflict between enhancing personal earning capability and education for knowledge, many students desire both, seeking to balance career aspirations with personal income and educational growth. This dual pursuit is encapsulated under the concept of student self-formation, where vocational programmes contribute to the individual's development of skills, knowledge, talents, habits, and aspirations (Marginson, 2014). However, the concern arises when China's societal hyper-competition skews this balance, pressuring students to prioritise career success or parental expectations over educational values. Concepts, such as 'nei juan', 'laying flat' and 'bai lan', discussed in section 6.5.4, are more accurately viewed as consequences of this hyper-competition, highlighting the intense pressure within the system. This tension reflects the challenge for institutional systems and career guidance in balancing professional and personal growth for students. While ideally, both should be integrated, it is reasonable to acknowledge that external pressures might necessitate prioritising one over the other, thus influencing the sustainability of the personal agency emerged during students' MA study or post-MA.

8.3.2 Impact of institutional support on student agency

Luong et al. (2023) point out that the agency of students studying abroad not only depends on their subjectivity and potential to adapt, but is also influenced by the

availability of institutional support, particularly related to language and cultural knowledge. Corresponding support within the MA, such as designed curriculums specifically for international students focusing on music terminology, and the tutor perspectives (Chapter 5), showed that students' adaptive and past pedagogical habits were considered in the MA curriculum. The smaller group sessions included in the MA can also potentially offer students opportunities to co-construct teaching activities with their peers and tutors, engaging in classroom-based discussion, which seems to enhance student agency. However, the limited interaction with peers from different cultural backgrounds might result in fewer opportunities for students to recognise and reflect on cultural and pedagogical differences, thereby influencing the effectiveness of cross-cultural teaching adaption (details in section 8.3.3).

Gaining a UK MA qualification and using it as a career booster has been acknowledged by students, tutors and returnees as the key motivation for students' decision to pursue this programme. In order to help with the achievement of students' career aspirations, tutors asked students in supervision meetings about career expectations, and the university invited all graduates to use the Career and Placement Services. This should have agentively facilitated their awareness of personal strengths and prepared them with the skills and knowledge for future employment (Luong et al., 2023): drawing on R4's viewpoints on the use of relevant support during their MA pre-Covid (Section 7.2.1), it appears that the services have been perceived to have a noticeable impact on their career development. Nevertheless, this career-related support might not be perceived as fully catering to the specific career context in China. However, considering the university's dedication to providing global career information to all graduates (Coombe, 2014), it seems impractical to anticipate exclusive support for international students with specific employment needs catering to a certain cultural context. This indicates a potential mismatch between the perceived general support of students and returnees and their expectations, suggesting a need for a more explicit connection between the career guidance, the course content, and institutional support considering cultural, contextual and subject-specific differences.

It is worth noting that none of the students and returnees mentioned any prior experience with training or support similar to the UK Careers Services before their UK MA study. These may potentially suggest that students may lack similar experiences before they came to study in the UK because the potential for enhancing students' career readiness and improving the quality of employment services appears underexplored in China (Luo & Zhang, 2022). Thus, the absence of similar support in their past learning experiences might be a reason why students are reluctant to be agentively involvement in the host university's support. Unfortunately, the existing knowledge on music-specific career support and its impact on graduates' agency is limited in both the UK and China. Significant issues were highlighted by Qiao (2023) in China's university employment guidance system, including insufficient collaboration among stakeholders and limited tailored career advice pathways. A 'wait-and-see' approach to career planning during their studies were reported, suggesting potential uncertainty or a readiness to adjust career aspirations over time (Qiao, 2023). Nevertheless, the student participants in the present research, having only studied three months of the MA, appear to have well-defined career expectations, predominantly aspiring to roles in instrumental or vocal teaching, or school music teaching. This clarity and confidence in their career plans may also possibly affect their inclination to agentively seek additional employment support (Section 5.8). As stated above, the engagement with relevant institutional supports varied among students and graduates, leading to differing levels of actual positive impact and promotion of their agency. Future research could investigate the impact of institutional support systems, particularly those addressing language barriers and career preparation, on students' adaptabilities and agency. Longitudinal studies to track career trajectories of international MA graduates in music education, observing and examining the changing of their student agency and career aspirations and decisions over time, will also contribute to understanding this area.

8.3.3 Peer interaction and agency

Students' instrumental teaching practice involved in peer learning modules can be viewed as a formal peer collaboration embedded in MA curriculums, which intentionally brings students together to observe, discuss and reflect on their experiences and understandings as both pupils and teachers. This practice is considered important for highlighting the role of observational learning in Bandura's (1974) concept of 'vicarious learning', where learners develop by observing or imitating the behaviour of others. However, it is essential to consider the contexts in which peer learning occurs, specifically with co-national peers, because of the pre-dominance of Chinese students studied in the programme. Some tutors observed that some students might overly rely on their native language, which might reduce the incentive to develop the host country's language skills, although the sharing of the same language and educational experiences can positively aid in navigating unfamiliar English expressions/terminology in classroom settings (Chapter 5). In addition, Hendrickson, Rosen and Aune (2011) found that international students who reported more networks with individuals from the host country claimed to be more satisfied. This suggests the effectiveness of the MA peer-learning practice can vary depending on whether students are paired in teaching exercises with peers, from the same country or host/other countries. However, the effectives of multi-cultural peer learning practice may vary or even be undermined, given the tendency of students replying on their native language and co-national peers.

Tutors and returnees have mentioned the informal alumni network, such as retaining contact with fellow Chinese MA peers and teaching staff, as re-adaptive support for returnees. This is perceived as helpful in exchanging ideas of adaptive teaching strategies and teaching materials (Chapter 7) and shows that students would benefit from peer support beyond their one-year MA study. However, tutors' perspectives indicated that keeping track of contact information and staying in touch with all graduates can be difficult. As diverse pedagogical practices of graduates within China (Haddon, 2024) and various teaching contexts are mentioned by returnee participants in the present research, it is worth considering if there are

universal concepts or mutual understandings that graduates had from their distinctive teaching experiences upon their return. Furthermore, not all returning students can equally benefit from the resources necessary to maintain the alumni networks; those students and graduates who chose to pursue their master's degree online due to the pandemic, such as R5 (Section 7.3), felt a lack of connection with their peers. Therefore, the effectiveness of peer interaction and emergent agency can vary based on factors including the diversity of the peers engaged, the context in which peer interactions occur and any external barriers, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Future research can investigate strategies to support accessible and effective peer activities and alumni platforms for returning music education graduates.

8.3.4 Impact of technological tools on agency

The use of technological tools has supported some students to complete their MA and adapt to the learning and teaching demands, particularly by overcoming geographical and language barriers. Translation software has proven invaluable for non-native speakers, facilitating comprehension of lecture content and assisting with vocabulary acquisition necessary for lesson video assignments. However, an overreliance on translation tools has raised concerns among tutors. They have observed that excessive dependence on these tools may hinder the development of students' capability to use subject-specific terminology independently. This observation aligns with Saz, Lin and Eskenazi's (2015) research, which indicates that while the abundant use of translation can increase accuracy in the short term, it may negatively affect accuracy and fluency in the long run. Their findings suggest that students who rely heavily on translation software may struggle to internalise and accurately use new terminology without assistance, potentially leading to a declined confidence in their linguistic competence over time. Saz, Lin and Eskenazi highlight (2015) that moderate use of translation tools can be beneficial, suggesting the need to strike a balance in the use of technological tools, ensuring that they serve as supplementary aids rather than primary crutches. However, it is crucial to recognise

that the educational landscape is constantly changing, with continuous improvements in artificial intelligence (AI) and translation technology. The quality and contextual accuracy of these tools are steadily increasing, potentially mitigating some of the concerns about translation accuracy, comprehension and productivity (Grájeda et al., 2024) and but raising concerns about students' long-term dependency and self-regulation.

In response to pandemic-induced travel restrictions, the MA course implemented a hybrid teaching mode, blending online and offline teaching to facilitate remote learning. While the hybrid mode aimed to provide flexibility for students unable to attend the course in person, the hybrid approach might have posed challenges in maintaining engagement and interaction within the programme. For example, the limited engagement in activities such as Padlet, mentioned by T9 in Section 5.2.3, suggests that some students may not be maximising the resources at their disposal. In addition, as discussed in the previous section, the online remote learning could have hindered the opportunities for and within peer interactions, which could have been supportive in students' adaption and returnees' re-adaption. This finding aligns with Almahasees et al.'s (2021) study, which found that while faculty and students recognised the advantages of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, they also perceived it as less effective than traditional face-to-face learning. Several challenges associated with online learning were also pointed out, including issues with adapting to online education, particularly for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, a lack of interaction and motivation, technical and internet problems, and concerns about data privacy and security (Almahasees et al., 2021). Despite these challenges, Almahasees et al. noted that online learning offers advantages such as money-saving, convenience, flexibility, and more opportunities for promoting self-learning.

However, considering the limited engagement noted by tutors and the dependent and passive learning habits of some Chinese students, several questions arises: does online learning promote students' agency and self-learning ability? How do they perceive the self-learning activities involved in online learning? Do they have

any relevant experiences pre-MA? Do they find self-learning challenging and feel that receiving teacher-led knowledge transmission would be relatively easier? These are critical issues that warrant further investigation. Addressing these questions could provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of online learning environments and help educators develop strategies to foster greater independence and active participation among students studying remotely and internationally. Understanding students' previous backgrounds relating to online learning and its influence on student agency can help support the diverse needs of overseas learners and enhance their overseas educational experience.

8.4 Summary of the chapter

This chapter has explored the key findings concerning the student, tutor, and returnee participants. The discussion was framed around three overarching themes: the expansion of students' understanding of learning and teaching during their initial adjustment, the re-immersion and employment challenges encountered by returnees, and the elements shaping both student and graduate agency. This chapter also refers back to the research findings included in Chapters 4 to 7 for an in-depth analysis of these specific themes and categories. The final chapter will draw the thesis to a close by providing its limitations and implications, and offering recommendations for future research.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

Chapter 9 summarises insights into the perceptions surrounding pedagogical differences, adaptions, re-adaptions, and the employability of students across the three participant groups involved in the UK MA IVT programme. The chapter begins with a recapitulation of the research questions and key findings, followed by the implications of these results, the study's limitations, and recommendations for future research.

9.1 Summary of the research questions and main findings

This thesis makes an important contribution by revealing and interpreting the experiences of Chinese international students and returnees who studied a UK MA in instrumental and vocal teaching, investigating these from the perspective of cross-cultural teaching adaption and re-adaption. Three qualitative interview studies with 13 Chinese postgraduate students who had commenced the course for three months, 13 MA staff/tutors, and 13 Chinese graduates who had completed the course and returned to teach music-related subjects in China, were conducted to investigate the perceptions of students and returnees' learning and teaching adaptions and employability. Findings answered the overarching research question and three groups of ancillary research questions, focusing on different periods and participant groups in the UK or China context:

- *The overarching research question*

  What are the perceptions of Chinese students, course tutors, and returnees regarding students' pedagogical adaptions after enrolling in a UK MA course and returnees' readaptions after returning to China to teach?

- *The first group: Chinese students' perspectives*

  1a) How do UoY IVT MA Chinese students who have recently started the MA perceive their pedagogical experiences and approaches before and after commencing study in the UK?

1b) What are their views on the pedagogical differences or difficulties that occur within their IVT during their MA course?

1c) How do they adapt to or deal with these differences and difficulties?

- *The second group: MA tutors' perspectives*

  2a) What are the views of UoY IVT MA tutors on the students' pedagogical difficulties in their MA studying and teaching?

  2b) What are the reasons for these perceived difficulties?

  2c) How might students' adaptions be viewed by MA tutors?

  2d) What are the views of MA tutors on how the students' learning and teaching experiences during their MA studies impact the career development and employment interests of graduates returning to China?

- *The third group: Chinese returnees' perspectives*

  3a) How does the UoY IVT MA influence the pedagogical perceptions and practices of returnees, particularly in the implementation of student-centred and dialogical teaching approaches?

  3b) What are the views of returnees on the potential application of MA teaching concepts in the Chinese instrumental and vocal teaching context?

  3c) How do varied pedagogical orientations and social values affect graduates' readaption within different teaching contexts as experienced by returnees?

  3d) How do Chinese graduates who have completed their MA and returned to teach in China perceive the impact of their MA learning experiences on their employability, particularly in terms of their UK MA degree, the ranking of the university, and their English teaching skills?

The following three sections will each summarise the conclusions of this research based on the research questions outlined above.

9.1.1 Chinese students' perspectives

Findings concerning the perceptions of students' past teaching and learning habits and the initial pedagogical adaption among the 13 Chinese students were illustrated specifically in Chapter 4.

Conclusions addressing research question 1a: How do UoY IVT Chinese students who have recently started the MA perceive their pedagogical experiences and approaches before and after commencing study in the UK?

- Before the MA programme, students primarily used teacher-directed transmission approaches due to limited encouragement for student self-expression in their prior educational contexts. The habitual teacher-dominated style was embedded and reinforced by exam-oriented teaching contexts and a lack of explicit and influential IVT training in China. Some students described their prior education as a form of 'spoon-feeding' that lacked the development of students' independent thinking and creativity.
- Students' previous teaching practices were shaped by their former IVT or music teachers, and were seen as markedly different from the teaching mode they need to adopt during their MA studies. This contrast is largely attributed to differing teaching values and priorities, resulting in confusion and challenges in transitioning and adapting to these differences.
- Some students reported difficulties in accessing relevant IVT training in China. Those who had undertaken national teaching qualification exams found that training to be overly theoretical and general, and it omitted provide practical guidance for IVT instruction. Additionally, students with part-time IVT experience observed that their employers prioritised client satisfaction, ensuring that pupils and their parents were pleased, rather than emphasising IVT educational training.
- Students lacked formal training in instrumental and vocal teaching (IVT) and experience in independent reflective teaching pre-MA. None of the participants, even those with undergraduate degrees in music education, had

received professional IVT training before commencing the MA programme. They reported beginning their teaching careers informally by emulating and adopting the teaching habits and approaches of their former teachers. Some students indicated that imitating their pupils' mistakes and demonstrations was a specific teaching approach they commonly used, even though they had not considered the underlying reasons for employing this approach. After undergoing training in reflective teaching tasks during the MA, such as recording and reviewing their teaching videos and writing reflective lesson commentaries, some students felt dissatisfied with their previous teaching habits and perceived their former lessons as being teacher-directed and filled with excessive teacher talk.

- Many students anticipate gaining exposure to new teaching approaches from abroad through the MA programme. Aspects such as English-based curriculums, the university's ranking, the UK MA's shorter one-year duration compared to programmes in China, and the implementation of online and remote learning during the pandemic are key factors that drew students to this programme.

Conclusions addressing research question 1b: What are their views on the pedagogical differences or difficulties that occur within their IVT during their MA course?

- One of the most significant differences in teaching concepts and approaches that students need to adapt to is the transition to a student-centred teaching mode recommended by the MA programme, along with developing a mentor-friend relationship with their pupils. This contrasts with the teacher-centred teaching habits they previously experienced. Students noted that adapting to this different teaching mode requires them, as IVT teachers, to reflect on and transform their methods of communication and guidance from an instructing approach to an interacting manner. However, considering the individuality and diversity of their musical education backgrounds, the extent

to which they had previously experienced or been exposed to student-centred approaches before going abroad potentially influenced their openness and receptivity to adapt to this teaching philosophy after enrolment.

- For some students, the difficulty of adapting to a student-centred approach arises from the need to engage in more frequent interactions with their pupils through questioning. This method is viewed as requiring considerable teaching flexibility, skill in question formulation, and the ability to provide immediate responses and constructive feedback to their pupils. Due to potential interruptions in the teaching pace caused by questions asked and the varied capability of their pupils to respond to these questions, the pressures of these adjustments, particularly when conducted in English, caused some students to feel uncertain and overwhelmed.
- Some students were surprised and challenged by the MA course's suggestion to avoid physical contact with pupils, a practice they found effective and common in China. A few students mentioned the cultural difference, noting that privacy concerns in the West differ from those in China. They acknowledged the efficiency of physical guidance in immediate correction but this could be adapted by using non-contact methods like demonstrations and teaching tools. Both instrumental and vocal teachers faced adaptive challenges, as physical corrections were standard in their previous contexts. Despite recognising the importance of adapting to the MA requirements, some participants expressed intentions to continue using physical contact, with adjustments such as seeking consent from the pupil first.
- Students observed a contrast between their experiences with MA teaching staff and their former tutors in China, affecting their understanding of the student-teacher relationship and their teaching adaptions. There were also challenges due to the lack of perceived specific guidance and the cultural discomfort associated with answering questions asked by MA teaching tutors in the classroom-discussion based tutor group sessions.

- Adapting to critical thinking, referencing, and academic writing styles also posed difficulties, revealing differences between Chinese and Western educational expectations.

Conclusions addressing research question 1c: How do students adapt to or deal with these differences and difficulties?

- The reflective training in the MA programme, involving lesson video submissions and reflective commentaries, made some students realise that under the previous teacher-directed transmission, they were passively following their former teachers. The process prompted participants to reconsider their teaching approaches, but many felt unprepared and nervous, sometimes adopting strategies to meet assessment criteria.
- Some students exhibited a reflective mindset and flexibility in adapting to pedagogical differences. They noted that the choice between teacher-directed and student-centred approaches in instrumental teaching depends on the context, believing student-centred approaches to be more suitable for Western contexts than in China. One student suggested that these modes are not mutually exclusive and can be integrated by adjusting facilitation and communication styles. Some students proposed combining both modes for different purposes, recognising the challenges and the need for pedagogical proficiency to achieve this balance.

Conclusions addressing research question 1d: How do they perceive the influence of pedagogical adaptions on their teaching development and employment?

- Students planned to return to China for employment after their MA but faced uncertainties in career paths. Given their observation that the values and standards of music education in China are converging with international and Western pedagogies, several participants were optimistic about applying the pedagogical approaches learned during their MA programme once they return to China. Many aimed for teaching positions in public sectors but were

concerned about needing a PhD and integrating MA pedagogies into societal expectations and traditional values in China.

9.1.2 MA teaching staff and tutors' views

Conclusions addressing research question 2a: What are the views of MA IVT tutors who facilitate Chinese students on the students' pedagogical difficulties in their MA studying and teaching? What are the reasons for these perceived difficulties?

- Language barriers are seen by tutors as challenging for students, affecting their confidence and ability to reach their potential in teaching practice and assignments.
- Chinese students face challenges in adapting to Western educational practices due to cultural and philosophical differences. Tutors identified these challenges as crucial, especially in developing critical thinking and reflective teaching skills.
- All tutors indicated that learning to teach in a student-centred manner was challenging for students accustomed to a master-apprentice style. This transition required adapting their ingrained teaching habits, heavily influenced by their own learning experiences. The shift from dictating instructions to facilitating was viewed as particularly difficult.
- Concerns remained about the representativeness of students' assessed lessons, as some tutors found that there were students who heavily rehearsed their lessons for exam-oriented preparation.
- Tutors observed that some students asked questions merely to comply with course requirements rather than to genuinely engage with their pupils. This poses a challenge, compounded by the habitual teaching methods ingrained in Chinese educational backgrounds.
- Students teaching Chinese instruments face additional challenges due to cultural and linguistic differences. Adapting MA teaching approaches to traditional instruments is difficult because these MA methods often rely on

Western pedagogical principles, which are unfamiliar to students trained in traditional ways of developing techniques and Chinese musical terms.

Conclusions addressing research question 2b: What are the reasons for these perceived difficulties?

- Tutors expressed concern over varied linguistic challenges, influenced by factors such as English proficiency, personality, and social engagement. Students with higher proficiency and outgoing personalities communicated more actively and those with more exposure to different English-speaking contexts could adapt better.
- Many students are nervous about speaking English, which impacts their ability to engage interactively with their pupils. This challenge extends to using pedagogical techniques, as students often struggle with English, resulting in lower marks. Some students may use command-like language due to direct translations from Chinese and struggle with standard music terminology, relying on long explanations or incorrect vocabulary. Students' overreliance on translation tools and scripting lessons further hinders their teaching flexibility and spontaneous communication. Peer group translation, however, provides valuable support.
- Many Chinese students preferred socialising within their co-national groups, limiting opportunities for English language practice. However, efforts from the programme to form diverse groups within the course faced demographic challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated language difficulties by reducing immersion opportunities for those who study remotely.
- Tutors perceived that Chinese students often struggle with critical thinking and independent learning due to a background of hierarchical and teacher-led education. This reluctance to question and offer alternative perspectives stems from cultural norms that emphasise respect for authority and conformity. The transition to critical and reflective thinking, required in the MA programme, is difficult and may lead to anxiety. Additionally, the

hesitance of some students to seek help, influenced by cultural norms, exacerbates these difficulties. The one-year duration of the MA programme presents a challenging timeframe for overcoming these academic differences.

- Tutors noted that the less hierarchical MA environment contrasts with the students' previous experiences in China. Techniques such as questioning strategies and encouraging dialogue contributed to this perception. Additionally, using the first names of tutors and sharing similar experiences and challenges can break hierarchical barriers. However, transitioning to this less hierarchical relationship can be challenging for students accustomed to a more authoritative teaching style and passive learning habits. MA tutors aimed to create a collaborative learning environment despite inherent role distinctions. Several tutors expressed satisfaction upon realising that some student participants perceived their relationship with their tutors as more equalised, aligning with the tutors' intentions.

Conclusions addressing research question 2c: How might students' adaptions be viewed by MA tutors?

- MA tutors emphasised that understanding and acting on assessment feedback is crucial for students' adaption to teaching. They highlighted the importance of framing feedback as a tool to help students improve, rather than as criticism, by providing recommendations for future progress. However, tutors noted that cultural factors, such as Chinese students' deference to authority and their unfamiliarity with independent problem-solving, could affect their engagement with feedback.
- According to MA tutors, learning to ask questions was an important aspect of students' adaption to student-centred teaching, representing a shift in their MA learning experience. Tutors observed that this skill develops gradually, with some students requiring more time to refine it. They also noted instances where students began practising with questioning as a teaching

technique but needed further practice to become more confident and effective.

- Despite initial difficulties, students who engaged with feedback and adapt their questioning techniques showed strong progress. Tutors emphasised that effective questioning could promote long-term pupil reflection and independence, although varied pupil engagement in responding to questions might create additional barriers to students' refinement of this technique.
- The MA course was perceived as focusing more on instrumental learning, providing more instrumental teaching samples than vocal ones, which may affect students' familiarity with and learning from the provided example. This could also present challenges in adapting to new pedagogies for students teaching voice and traditional Chinese instruments.
- A few tutors found that adapting to safeguarding responsibilities and non-touch policies is easier for students teaching instruments, who can use demonstration without physical contact, unlike vocal teachers who often rely on touch for techniques like diaphragm control.
- Some tutors found no differences in adapting MA methods between students teaching voices and instruments, emphasising the importance of pupils' cultural background and engagement. They also highlighted that many teaching values are transferable across different musical specialities, with effective communication helping with overcoming these challenges.
- Students' unfamiliarity with the UK's higher education marking system, where passing grades may seem inadequate compared to Chinese systems, can also be demoralising. Despite the absence of formal class rankings, some students may still compare marks, influencing their perception of success and failure within the assignments.

Conclusions addressing research question 2d: What are the views of MA tutors on how the students' learning and teaching experiences during their MA studies impact the career development and employment interests of graduates returning to China?

- Tutors noted that passing modules and obtaining higher marks are closely linked to future employment prospects. However, they expressed uncertainty regarding specifics due to a limited understanding of different countries' job markets and students' motivations for studying in the UK. Despite the MA's efforts to enhance employability, it remains unclear how applicable students find this guidance, given the specific employment contexts in China. Parental influence on job preferences was also noted as a factor by one tutor, warranting further exploration.
- Nearly all tutors reported that Chinese students expressed a desire to work as music teachers upon returning to China, aligning with current students' career expectations. Tutors speculated that some students might seek stable, lifelong employment, which students themselves referred to as the 'iron rice bowl'.
- Tutors found that some students mainly sought degrees and qualifications to enhance their competitiveness in the Chinese job market, while specific course elements like lesson planning and problem-solving were of employment interest to students.
- Concerns arose for Chinese students returning to a results-driven, hierarchical education system that contrasts with the student-centred MA approach, potentially causing conflicts with parental and institutional expectations. Tracking post-graduation outcomes is difficult, but tutors suggest reflection, flexibility, and peer support networks formed during the MA as crucial for students' re-adaption and potential influence on music education in China.
- No formal national or institutional support for students transitioning between their UK degree and future career has been identified, highlighting the importance of peer connections for ongoing support.
- Tutors emphasised that students are primarily responsible for their re-adaptions on return to China or working elsewhere, recognising the necessity for independent thinking and confidence in handling unexpected situations

post-MA. Despite idealistic views on increased support from the course or university, practical considerations such as resources, finance, and time limit this possibility. Tutors highlighted the importance of students believing in what they are learning and teaching, noting that those with genuine interest and passion will be more likely to engage with and apply these ideas in their future careers.

- Many tutors observed limited student engagement with the University's Careers Service and Writing Centre, speculating that this is due to perceived differences in job markets and educational systems that might confuse students about the relevance of these services. Students' lack of confidence to seek help in their second language may also contribute to their reluctance to use these resources.

9.1.3 Chinese graduates and returnees' views

Conclusions addressing research question 3a: How does the MA influence the pedagogical perceptions and practices of returnees, particularly in the implementation of student-centred and dialogical teaching approaches?

- Several returnee participants highlighted the profound impact of the MA, which set them apart from teachers who had not studied abroad by fostering a shift towards student-centred and dialogical teaching approaches, emphasising creativity, self-motivation, and varied teaching methods tailored to students' needs.
- Instead of pursuing specific outcomes, some returnees noted that the MA learning experiences enriched their understanding of inclusive teaching. They considered themselves to be more focused and appreciated the development of pupils' qualities, such as persistence in learning, independent thinking, mental health, and inclusive teaching.
- The student-centred teaching mode, questioning techniques, critical and reflective thinking, and various pedagogies such as Kodály, Suzuki, and Orff were noted as beneficial to their employability. Returnees also emphasised

the MA's role in fostering career resilience, open-mindedness, and a commitment to lifelong learning.

Conclusions addressing the research question 3b: What are the views of returnees on the potential application of MA teaching concepts in the Chinese instrumental and vocal teaching context?

- Returnees face significant time constraints in implementing MA programme techniques and student-centred facilitation, balancing curricular demands with individual pupil needs, especially in public and international schools. These constraints undermine some teachers' confidence in persisting with student-centred teaching methods, leading them to revert to teacher-dominated approaches to satisfy job requirements and meet parents' expectations for rapid and tangible results.
- Several returnees noted that while dialogical facilitation, such as question-and-answer, can be easily implemented, the quality of pupil engagement and receptiveness remains crucial. Additionally, Chinese parents' high educational expectations on exam subjects and children's limited opportunities to express themselves in school education contribute to pupils' unfamiliarity with dialogue.
- Some returnees felt that the focus on learning efficiency of some Chinese parents often undermines the joy of learning, as they prioritise progress and exam achievements. This dilemma necessitates a delicate balance between teaching autonomy, parental expectations, and adequate practice time, with effective communication between teachers and parents being crucial for resolving these challenges.
- This MA knowledge proved adaptable across different teaching contexts, including traditional Chinese instruments like guzheng and vocal instruction.

Conclusions addressing research question 3c: How do varied pedagogical orientations and social values affect graduates' readaption within different teaching contexts as experienced by returnees?

- Returnees noted that their employers' emphasis on MA content varied in different teaching contexts. For those applying to international schools, the university's global ranking often overshadowed employers' interest in specific MA teaching approaches. Similarly, in public primary and vocational college job interviews, applicants faced frustration over university ranking requirements. However, private institutions placed less emphasis on university rankings but focused more on instrumental performance skills than teaching approaches. This reflects a competitive job market where university prestige and performance skills are major hiring criteria while teaching approaches receive less attention.
- Returnees reported that this competitive environment, coupled with a depreciation of academic qualifications and societal pressures, has significantly influenced their career outlooks. Some have adopted a 'laying flat' mentality due to bleak career prospects, familial responsibilities, or inadequate income. Conversely, others strive to balance personal goals with professional demands, reflecting a spectrum of responses to competition and career challenges.
- Returnees emphasised networking with peers and teaching staff from the MA programme for ongoing professional development in China, finding these connections valuable for exchanging teaching strategies and adapting to the local context. They maintained contact through social media and discussed challenges, including differences between MA teaching modes and Chinese educational expectations.
- Those who teach in international schools perceived more accessibility to major-related and psychological support, such as professional development subsidies and stress management resources. Returnees improved their teaching by observing experienced teachers and attending conferences,

supplementary training, and online resources, emphasizing a critical and reflective mindset developed during their MA studies.

Conclusions addressing research question 3d: How do Chinese graduates perceive the impact of their MA learning experiences on their employability, particularly in terms of their UK MA degree, the ranking of the university, and their English teaching skills?

- 11 returnees found their current employment aligned with their aspirations. Although many had hoped for stable positions in public schools or higher education, challenges such as city residency requirements, job vacancies, and political considerations impacted their career paths.
- The MA programme experience has reinforced the determination of some students to pursue careers in international schools or one-to-one teaching roles, with most expressing satisfaction with their current jobs.
- Returnees' career choices in this research were influenced by parental expectations, with many reporting pressure to pursue stable roles in public schools or higher education due to their perceived security and prestige. However, some students perceived that they did not receive parental intervention in their career choices; on the contrary, they received parental support to follow their own career paths based on personal interests, such as starting a private piano studio.
- Employment values have evolved, with recent trends showing a renewed interest in public sector stability due to economic uncertainties and the COVID-19 pandemic. Returnees observed a shift in the value of public sector jobs compared to their parents' generation. Influenced by economic reforms and the 'xia hai' policy (detailed in Chapter 6.5.3), many moved from government roles to private enterprises. Civil service jobs might be viewed as less attractive due to high workloads and modest salaries, leading to a preference for private sector jobs that offer better pay for effort.
- Returnees employed in international or bilingual schools in China viewed English language proficiency as crucial, with many describing it as

'fundamental' and 'essential' for job performance and communication. English skills enhanced their ability to integrate subject-specific terminology and were valued in international school interviews and interactions. However, returnees working in private tutoring or in public vocational schools find English less relevant due to the predominantly Chinese student demographic. Nonetheless, English proficiency remains a valuable asset, enhancing career prospects and professional development. The varying importance of English reflects diverse teaching contexts, employer priorities, and regional job market competitiveness.

- The majority of returnees neither engaged with the University Careers Service during their MA studies nor sought its support post-graduation. Reasons for this included a lack of awareness about the services, a belief that the services did not cater to specific career needs in China, and pre-existing job commitments. Only one student reported a positive experience, highlighting the benefits of volunteering experiences and CV writing support.
- Similarly, eight out of 13 returnees did not use the Writing Centre despite repeated information given by programme staff about its availability and benefits. Reasons included a preference for quicker online resources and difficulty in making appointments near deadlines. Those who did use the Writing Centre found it helpful for general academic writing support, such as essay structure, grammar, and formatting but noted a lack of specificity for music education compared to the support offered by the MA teaching staff.

9.2 Implications and recommendations for students, returnees and institutions

Chapters 4-7 presented the findings of this study, while Chapter 8 offered a triangulation of the primary findings across the three participant groups, highlighting several emerging issues. The following points summarise the main implications of this study and offer practical recommendations for addressing these issues:

1. For the Chinese international students who have been enrolled in their MA for only three months, varying levels of adaptability and perceptions have emerged when facing challenges related to language, culture, teaching/learning approaches, and student-teacher relationships. Their experiences and perceptions of pedagogical adaptions are dynamic, involving excitement, anxiety, and encouragement to negotiate differences, thereby achieving a transition in learning and teaching. The characteristics and educational background variables of these students are closely linked to their academic, pedagogical and personal adaption and professional development. Thus, it is essential to recognise that studying IVT in this overseas programme brings these differences and challenges, and cross-cultural learning and teaching are complex and demanding.

   Recommendations: Higher education institutions should provide structured orientation programmes that specifically address these challenges and offer workshops on academic expectations, cultural differences, and communication strategies. Teaching staff should integrate culturally responsive pedagogy, explicitly discussing and scaffolding different learning and teaching styles to ease the transition for international students.
2. Students' engagement with tutor feedback, as well as their observation and imitation of their MA tutors' teaching behaviours, can enhance their pedagogical adaption. It is recommended that tutors persist in employing and explicating the interactive teaching approaches advocated by the course.

   Recommendations: Tutors should not only continue using interactive teaching approaches but also explicitly articulate the pedagogical rationale behind them, embedding formative feedback sessions where students can actively discuss and reflect on received feedback and explaining the marking criteria and its potential differences with their previous experiences.

3. Considering the student demographics involved in the MA programme from the perspectives of students, tutors and graduates, the increased enrolment in UK higher education and the attractiveness of certain programmes to Chinese international students have resulted in cohorts predominantly consisting of Chinese students. This composition seems to restrict the beneficial effects of peer learning during MA studies, thereby impeding their pedagogical adaption.

   Recommendations: To ameliorate the challenge posed by the high concentration of Chinese students in certain MA programmes, students need to first recognise the advantages and disadvantages of being among a demographic of co-national international students in an overseas programme. Additionally, they could actively engage with peers from diverse regional backgrounds in China through MA peer groups and collaborative internships or workshops. Tutors can continue to introduce their expectations and the importance of peer support/interaction on pedagogical adaption within the MA programme, emphasising that this may differ from some students' previous learning models. Graduates could contribute by organising alumni networking events focusing on establishing mentorship programmes focusing on specific employment pathways or teaching contexts, as detailed in Chapter 8. These recommendations are likely to maximize the positive effects of peer learning, thereby supporting Chinese students in their pedagogical adaption and re-adaption during their MA studies and after returning to China.
4. For Chinese students intending to return to their home country after graduation, understanding the competitive landscape of the domestic job market and the different values of MA pedagogies, their UK teaching experiences, MA qualification, and English instructing ability is crucial. The rising number of study-abroad returnees and domestic graduates in China's rapidly evolving environment presents challenges for meeting their lifelong career expectations. Awareness of these challenges, adapting strategically to

various teaching and social contexts, and managing expectations are essential for navigating these challenges effectively. From the perspective of personal agency facilitation, it is the responsibility of the students themselves to ensure they are adequately prepared to manage these challenges based on individual aspects of career decisions and development.

Recommendations: Higher education curricula should clearly demonstrate their alignment with the demands of the international job market. Additionally, career planning modules and other support initiatives should be more integrated into the curriculum, enabling students to develop a career plan that starts earlier, progresses continuously, and remains focused.

5. Findings show that career aspirations motivate students to pursue the UK MA programme and return to China. While Career and Placement Services are available on campus and are signposted by teaching staff, many Chinese students/ graduates have not fully utilised the support. Students might be confused about the relevance of the services offered, as they are primarily focused on assignments. Additionally, the demands of their teaching practice during the MA course may limit their availability for securing a more formal placement in a school, or they might not perceive such a placement as necessary.

   Recommendations: Institutions should increase the visibility and accessibility of career services by embedding career guidance sessions within the academic curriculum rather than as optional services. Tutors should actively highlight the practical benefits of placements and career services, possibly integrating short-term school placements as credit-bearing components of the programme. Career services should consider navigating employment pathways both in the UK and China.

6. The Career and Placement service may not be perceived by graduates as fully addressing the specific career contexts in China, thus explaining students' reluctance to engage fully with the support offered. This suggests a need for institutions to foster a more explicit connection between promoting the

benefits of the available services and course content. Nonetheless, a realistic issue that may arise is the potential difficulty in tailoring the Career and Placement Services to cater specifically to the diverse and complex job markets in China while maintaining a universal approach that serves all international students. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that the Careers and Placement Service needs to support students from a multitude of countries, not just China.

Recommendations: Universities should establish partnerships with alumni and employers in China to create a bridge between UK-based career services and the realities of the Chinese job market. Career advisors should work closely with faculty to ensure alignment between course content and employment opportunities, offering dedicated career panels featuring Chinese returnees to provide first-hand insights. Additionally, universities should facilitate virtual career networking events to help students build professional connections before graduation, easing the transition into the job market.

9.3 Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

9.3.1 Focus-related limitations and future directions

This qualitative interview study generated findings with nuanced participants' experiences, answering the research questions from the perspectives of students, MA teaching staff, and returnees. While certain themes overlapped across the three groups during data analysis, they corroborated each other, affirming the relevance of the themes to the research questions. Examining the perspectives of new students, tutors, and returnees, who are essential participants in the study, aids in a concentrated focus on international students' pedagogical adaptions and re-adaptions. Future research can build on the findings of this qualitative interview study by investigating more specific impacts of MA pedagogies in China. For example, including interviews with employers, Chinese pupils and pupils' parents to investigate the specific impacts of MA pedagogies would enhance insights into how

pedagogical differences are perceived by different groups and may reveal additional factors influencing the effectiveness and mechanisms of pedagogical re-adaption. Additionally, by addressing ethical challenges through obtaining consent from children and their parents, future studies could consider incorporating a wider range of participant perspectives to support a more balanced view.

Another limitation is the absence of data triangulation through the analysis of video recordings of student-teachers in action. This study relied solely on the self-reported experiences from interviews, which means the data is subject to participants' personal biases and recollections. Incorporating video data could provide a more objective and comprehensive understanding of the teaching practices and adaptions being reported, thereby strengthening the reliability of the findings. This highlights an area for further research, where future studies could utilise video analysis to corroborate and expand upon the interview data.

Moreover, the study did not address the potential imbalance in the representation of singers, instrumentalists, and student-teachers of Chinese traditional instruments. This imbalance is due to the fact that Chinese students enrolled in the UK MA are more likely to teach Western instruments than singing or Chinese traditional instruments. Consequently, this limited diversity in the sample may have influenced the findings and their relevance to all types of music educators. Future research could aim for a balanced representation of different instrumental and voice teachers to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the pedagogical adaptions and challenges faced by Chinese MA students and returnees. Addressing this imbalance in future studies would also allow for an exploration of how various pedagogical backgrounds of teaching different instruments or voices uniquely impact the processes of pedagogical adaption and re-adaption.

Furthermore, additional empirical work on the initial pedagogical adaption in UK HE music education programmes could be undertaken. The findings from this study are specific to the interviewed participants studied in a particular UK MA context, making it challenging to apply them universally. Given the contextualised differences across programmes in the UK and the annual course updating, the

findings cannot be generalisable to all Chinese international students, teaching staff and returnees from different cultural backgrounds or geographical regions. Future research could expand the regional scope by investigating students' pedagogical adaptions across other UK MA institutions, and vary the data collection approaches and enlarge the sample size to improve the breadth and depth of participants' perceptions.

9.3.2 Methodology-related limitations and future directions

The research explored the perspectives of MA students, teaching staff, and graduates using qualitative interview data. Using qualitative interviews as the sole data collection method to investigate multiple perspectives in the present PhD project offers several benefits and limitations. The key advantages include their ability to elicit rich, detailed, and in-depth information, providing an opportunity to explore participants' thoughts, feelings, and perceptions in a nuanced and detailed manner (Chapter 3). Interviews offer flexibility, allowing researchers to adapt their questions based on participants' responses and clarify misunderstandings, which reduces the risk of misinterpretation. They also facilitate participant engagement by building a personal connection and empowering participants to share their experiences. Additionally, interviews can capture the teaching contexts in which experiences and perspectives are situated, offering a better understanding of the research topic, and can be tailored to suit different participant groups, allowing for the collection of diverse perspectives within the same case study. However, qualitative interview data can be prone to subjectivity and bias (Robson & McCartan, 2016), as the data were collected through self-report, which can be influenced by individual subjectivity and can vary based on participants' recall and articulation abilities. Despite this, the consistency of views across different participant groups lends credibility to the findings. Gathering data from multiple perspectives and at different times helped validate the results, enhancing the robustness of the study.

In addition, the study's scope was constrained by the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted the feasibility of a longitudinal investigation into participants' re-

adaption after returning to China post-MA. The interviews were conducted with three independent groups of participants at three different times and therefore the research was limited in its ability to establish causal relationships focusing on the individual pedagogical and adaptive perceptions. The unpredictable timing of securing teaching positions for graduates, exacerbated by the pandemic, complicated efforts to effectively track and analyse long-term adaption processes. Future studies could narrow the investigating scope and consider longitudinal designs by including observations to capture real-time adaption behaviours, or utilise focus groups to facilitate group discussions and uncover collective insights. This could thus incorporate multiple data collection methods and support the discovery of causal links between individual perceptions of each adaptive stage.

9.4 Final remarks

In the final section of T.S. Eliot's (1943) poem – Little Gidding, he delves into the cyclical nature of life, illustrating how beginnings and endings are intricately connected:

> What we call the beginning is often the end
> And to make an end is to make a beginning.
> The end is where we start from.

Eliot suggests that what we perceive as a beginning often signifies the end of a previous phase, such as starting a new job marking the conclusion of a former career chapter. Conversely, every ending sets the stage for a new beginning, with each conclusion naturally leading to the inception of another phase. Eliot emphasises that endings and beginnings are part of a continuous cycle, where each transition flows into the next. This perspective highlights the dynamic and interconnected nature of our experiences, where every phase of closure simultaneously ushers in new opportunities for growth and transformation.

The poem reminds me of the many positive experiences involved in conducting this PhD research. From participants' perspectives, it becomes clear that so-called completions or goals are merely waypoints on an ever-evolving learning and teaching journey across cultures. Meeting the language standards for the UK MA and securing the chance to study in the UK does not signify the end of all challenges. Pedagogical, cultural, and linguistic adjustments still lie ahead, waiting to be embraced and conquered by international students. Likewise, adapting to the pedagogical training, fulfilling the assessment requirements of the MA and earning the qualification does not ensure future triumphs in the workplace. As graduates, they will encounter new hurdles and must continually readjust as they navigate the shifting currents of their careers. These insights highlight that each milestone is but a step in the ongoing path of personal and professional growth, where continuous learning and adaption are the keystones of enduring success. However, not all beginnings and endings proceed smoothly; similarly, students' adaptability and experiences in new learning and work environments vary. My thesis represents but a single fragment in a larger mosaic, but I genuinely hope it contributes to a deeper understanding of Chinese students' adaption and re-adaption in cross-cultural teaching and learning and encourages further research in these areas within higher education music contexts and beyond.

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Appendix A: Sample interview email invitation

Email invitation for MA students:

My name is Xin Liu (Grace), I'm a second-year PhD student supervised by Dr Liz Haddon, studying music education in the Department of Music at the University of York. I would like to invite you to take part in my PhD research project, focusing on the exploration of Chinese music postgraduate students' intercultural and pedagogical adaptions during and after studying in the UK. I am very looking forward to listening to your personal teaching experiences, your thoughts on the MA course and the written feedback reports, your employment expectations, and any pedagogical concerns you may have in the UK. Your identity information and ideas will be anonymous and will not be reported to your course tutors (please find the detailed information in the Information Page attached in the email).

This PhD research project has been reviewed and officially approved by the Department of Music and the Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee at the University of York. Ethical sections that have been specifically approved include ethical considerations of the researcher (me), the comfort of participants, the anonymity and confidentiality of participants and their data, the general data protection, the data analysing methods and data reporting.

What do you need to do to take part?

1. Read all the attachments relating to the research, including the information page and the sample document (the deadline for expressing interest in taking part is 1st March, which means that you need to contact the researcher before 1st March).
2. Sign and submit your consent form to the researcher
3. Arrange and attend an interview with three sections (50-60 minutes for the whole interview) with the researcher and answer some questions I have prepared for you. We will communicate in Chinese Mandarin or English if you prefer during the interview.
4. Receive your interview transcript, which I will make, and check the information

This PhD investigation is only applicable to Chinese students studying the MA in Music Education: Instrumental and Vocal Teaching in 2021-22. The deadline for contacting the researcher to express interest in taking part is 1 March. Please now read these attachments and return the consent form to **Grace by email** [redacted]

Appendix B: Information sheets and Consent form

Information Sheet

The exploration of Chinese music postgraduate students' intercultural and pedagogical adaptions during and after studying in the UK.

Hello,

My name is Xin Liu, a PhD student supervised by Dr Liz Haddon, studying music education in the Department of Music at the University of York. I am a postgraduate student who has completed the MA Music Education: Instrumental and Vocal Teaching programme in 2020 and have undertaken my PhD research in the same department in the UK. During my master's studies, I was very interested in studying teaching approaches used by student-teachers in different socio-cultural contexts involving students moving from one culture to another during the process of their higher education studies and post-degree, and to investigate factors that affect them. So, I would like to invite you to take part in my PhD research project, focusing on the exploration of Chinese music postgraduate students' intercultural and pedagogical adaptions during and after studying in the UK.

Before agreeing to take part, please read this information sheet carefully and let me know if anything is unclear or you would like further information. Please also read the information about General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that is provided on a separate sheet. (Link: https://www.york.ac.uk/education/research/gdpr_information/)

_____

Purpose of the study

The study is investigating in what ways do intercultural music pedagogical differences affect the adaption of Chinese MA music education postgraduates during and after studying in the UK.

Who can take part?

I would like to recruit current MA student-teacher participants (Group 1: current students) whose nationality is Chinese and who are currently students on the MA Music Education

course, and tutor and supervisor participants working and supporting the current students (Group 2: tutor-participants). I would also like to recruit former Chinese MA student-teacher participants who have graduated and started teaching in China (Group 3: The former/graduated student group).

What would this mean for you?

If you would like to take part in the study, you will be invited to take part in a semi-structured interview with the researcher, based on a face-to-face or online setting according to your preference. Before attending the interview, you need to have read this information page about the research and sign the consent document.

The whole interview will last about 45 to 90 minutes. All interviews will be audio-recorded for the purpose of transcription, translation and analysis after securing permission from participants. You could pause at any time to ask me to clarify any questions or any other information you may not fully understand. Your data will be anonymous and will not be linked to your personal information and identity.

After the interview, you will be able to receive your interview transcription and to check if all the information represents the thought and ideas that you shared in the interview. You will be also allowed to provide any thoughts and advice about the interview you have attended, which will be helpful for further improvement of interviewing questions and the research inquiring process.

Participation is voluntary

Participation is optional. If you do decide to take part, you will be given a copy of this information sheet for your records and will be asked to complete a consent form. If you change your mind at any point during the study, you will be able to withdraw your participation during the study without having to provide a reason. You will be able to withdraw your data until six weeks after you attended the scheduled interview. After that time, it would not be possible to withdraw your data as it will have been included in the analysis, anonymised and incorporated into the written report.

Anonymity and confidentiality

The data that you provide (e.g. your experiences shared during the interview and your teaching videos) will be assigned codes to represent respondents. Any information that

identifies you will be stored separately from the data for the purpose of member checking. To protect others, you will be asked not to disclose any information that can be matched with other people's identities during the interview. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time during data collection and up to six weeks after the data is collected.

Storing and using your data

Data will be encoded and stored securely and anonymously on a password-protected laptop computer that only the researcher can access. The folder including your interviewing data or teaching video will be kept encrypted and will be destroyed once the final thesis has been submitted and papers have been published (up to about ten years after the end of the study).

Please indicate on the consent form attached with a tick if you are happy for this anonymised data to be used in the ways listed.

Questions or concerns

If you have any questions about this participant information sheet or concerns about how your data is being processed, please feel free to contact Xin Liu (Grace) by email [redacted]). If you are dissatisfied with the responses you receive, please contact her supervisor, Dr Liz Haddon [redacted] and if you are still unhappy please then contact the University's Data Protection Officer at [redacted]

I hope that you will agree to take part. If you are happy to participate, please complete the form attached and send it to the researcher and keep this information sheet for your own records. Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Xin Liu

Research consent form for interview

Chinese music postgraduate students' pedagogical adaptations within instrumental/vocal teaching (IVT) during and after studying in the UK

XIN LIU (Grace)

Please tick each box/type 'YES' if you understand and agree with the following statements

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information provided and I understand that this will involve me taking part as described in the information page. ☐
2. I agree to participate in this research project. ☐
3. I understand that my data will not be identifiable, and the anonymous data may be used in publications and presentations. ☐
4. I understand how my data will be stored. ☐
5. I give permission for an audio recording to be made. ☐

The printed name of the former student participant:

Date:

Appendix C: Interview/Word document interview schedules for students

Section 1: Basic teaching backgrounds (5-10 min)

Teaching background & experiences

- What musical instruments are you teaching and for how long have you been teaching them? If they mentioned two or more instruments, what is the main instrument they teach?
- Do you give 1-1 or group lessons?
- Do you teach in a private studio/for a teaching agency/give instrumental/vocal lessons in a school? Or another context? (What were the context for you teaching as an instrumental/vocal teacher in China?)
- Are you studying the MA in the UK and teaching in the UK? If so, are you also teaching Chinese students online? Or are you studying the MA from China? If so, are you teaching in China face to face or online?
- What levels of piano pupils have you taught?

Participants' potential expectations

- Why did you choose to study abroad for a master degree？
- Why York? Did you get information about this course and apply for the MA through an agent? Or how else did you find out and decide on it?
- Did you know about any of the teaching skills that will be taught in the MA before you came to the UK?
- Were there any aspects of your teaching that you wanted to develop through the MA course?
- What were your career aims for after you completed this course?

Section 2 Participants' teaching experiences in China before studying in the UK (20-25 min)

- Could you please describe the instrumental/vocal lessons that you taught in China? (How did you teach when you were in China?) [Any mentioned pupils need to be related to their learning levels]

- Were there any other specific teaching approaches you used?
- What aspects influenced your teaching? (The influence could be seen in your teaching approaches, your general teaching styles, and your lessons?)
- How do you think you learnt to be an instrumental/vocal teacher? [preferably focus their answer on instrumental teaching]
- How did your instrumental/vocal teacher teach you?
- Could you describe what makes a good music teacher and good instrumental/vocal lesson in China from your perspective?
- Do you think that parents and employers in China also value these teaching elements? If yes, could you please explain that and make an example from your teaching experiences? If not, what do you think are the teaching elements they (parents and employers) value?
- Have you communicated with Chinese parents about their children's learning expectations and musical developments in the instrumental/vocal lesson? If so, could you please describe that and how about your feelings? Examples and the level of the involved pupil needed
- Have you communicated with Chinese employers about your pupil's learning expectations and musical developments in the instrumental/vocal lesson? If so, could you please describe that and how about your feelings? Examples and the level of the involved pupil needed
- Have you ever experienced any conflict of ideas (about your pupils' musical development and expectations) when communicating with your pupils' parents or your employers? How about your feelings? What do you think is the reason for the conflict?
- Have you ever been trained in China before undertaking a teaching position? If yes, please describe the employment/training structures or methods? How do you think these training methods affect your teaching?
- Have you taught pupils preparing for Music Grade Examinations in China? If yes, do you think the teaching elements you previously mentioned (from parents, employers, and your perspectives) would be different? Have you

ever felt that music exams, parents of these pupils or employers affected your teaching? [Any information related to parents, employers and pupils' perception needs an example]

- Is there anything you want to add about your experiences or understanding of the Chinese context?

Section 3 Participants' teaching experiences in the UK after studying the MA for a term AND reflecting on the provided teaching video (20-25 min)

- Could you please describe the instrumental/vocal lessons that you taught in the UK after studying the MA? (How did you teach when you were in the UK?) [Remember the level of pupils]
- What are your pupils in China learning? Were there any differences of the learning content in these two contexts? How do you think the difference that affects your teaching in the UK?
- Have you read the markers' reports from your MA assignments, especially from your teaching videos and commentary? [i.e. have they read the full report, not just the mark]
- How do you understand the mark and the feedback in relation to your assessed lesson video?
- Have you read the assessment criteria? What do you think about it?
- How well do you think the assessment criteria align with the teaching reality in China?
- Have you thought about any improvements to your teaching after reading the feedback and looking back to your teaching video? If so, could you describe the measures that you may take, or you are planning to take?
- How representative do you think your Module 2 video is of most of the teaching you do?
- Were there any **pedagogical** differences (such as student-teacher rapport/relationships, nonverbal/verbal communication, your role as the teacher, lesson planning, self-reflection, or other aspects in the assessment

criteria) in preparing your instrumental/vocal teaching in the UK and your previous lessons in China?

- Were there any **pedagogical** challenges/difficulties OR anything that you did not expect in your teaching in the UK? Do you think these difficulties or unexpected content have influenced you? How? And how have you dealt with these challenges/difficulties?
- Have you thought about any improvements related to these differences and difficulties? If so, could you describe the measures that you may take, or that you are planning to take?
- Have you thought about the use of the teaching concepts that you learned in the UK or the improvements that you made if you return to China? In what ways - can you say more about this?
- Have you been inspired to improve teaching skills through the other aspects of the course? (Supervisions, VLE learning content, lectures, tutor groups, peer learning groups, written works), and how have you made improvements?
- Is there anything you want to add about your experiences or understanding of the UK context?
- Do you have any other comments about the Chinese context?
- Is there anything else you want to add?

Appendix D: Interview/Word document interview schedules for tutors

1. Could you please briefly tell me about your teaching role in the MA Music Education course?
2. How long have you been teaching on the MA course?
3. What would you consider to be the challenges for Chinese MA Music Education students regarding their i/v teaching during the taught course?
4. What would you consider to be the challenges for Chinese MA Music Education students regarding their assessed lesson videos and commentaries, during the course? (Perhaps specify the difficulties found in specific teaching contexts, such as tutor groups, lectures, writing tutorials, peer learning groups and so on).
5. How do you become aware of these challenges? (Prompts: Influences from cultural differences, pandemic, social, family and personal aspects?)
6. What do you think has contributed to this?
7. Can you relate these (if you haven't already done so) to their prior experience as i/v teachers/learners before the MA?
8. Have these difficulties mentioned in Q4 changed, developed or been overcome as the time they have been studying in the MA has increased?
9. Do you have any insights into whether these challenges continue for these students when they've completed the MA and returned to China?
10. Do you think that there are any differences in the adjustment of those teaching Chinese traditional instruments as opposed to those teaching Western instruments?
11. Do you think that there are any differences in the adjustment of those teaching instruments as opposed to those teaching vocal?
12. Do you think the factors of instruments or vocals they teach will have an impact on their re-immersion after they return to China?
13. How representative do you think their assessed lesson videos are of most of their own teaching in general?
14. What factors might affect the representativeness of these videos?

15. When giving formal feedback to Chinese students for their assessed lessons and commentaries, what are the most prevalent areas within the marking criteria that you comment on?
16. Does the feedback to Chinese students differs from that given to others?
17. Do you think that the given feedback is also what Chinese MA students expect and value?
18. Have students reported/discussed any of the above/mentioned difficulties with you? How would you help them?
19. If the answer is no, what factors do you think are preventing them from reporting the difficulties?
20. Apart from the challenge caused by their English proficiency, have you felt any difficulties in helping/facilitating their academic learning related to IVT?
21. Have you felt any difficulties in facilitating their own i/v teaching? (Prompts: Perhaps specify the difficulties found in specific teaching contexts, such as tutor groups, lectures, writing tutorials, peer learning groups, marking process and so on)
22. Have you noticed any peer misunderstanding/competition/pressure in relation to IVT perceived by Chinese MA students on this MA course?
23. What do you think about the influence of homogenous/co-nation groups on Chinese students' IVT adaptions within this MA course? Positively and negatively?
24. Many Chinese students who participated in this research described their initial struggles and concerns about using questioning and dialogue as an instrumental/vocal teaching strategy; however, some reported confidence, do you have any comments on these different opinions shared by MA Chinese students?
25. What factors do you think are influencing their opinions or adaptabilities? (Similar to Q5 and Q6, but hope to hear varied ideas)
26. What do you think about the idea of a hierarchical teacher-student relationship in China and a relatively equal relationship with MA tutors that some Chinese student participants in my research have mentioned?

27. As a programme tutor/teaching assistant/supervisor, are you aware of a sense of tutors having a fundamental power over Chinese students in the MA due to this hierarchical relationship?

28. When and how did you become aware of this?

29. Have you done/considered to do anything to soften this power?

30. How might this power be considered by students returning to China in terms of their i/v teaching, do you think?

31. What makes a good i/v teacher from your perspective?

32. Do you think that these characteristics are aligned with what Chinese MA students think?

33. Have they discussed any potential difficulties of re-immersion in Chinese culture with you?

34. Have you noticed any influence of Chinese MA students' parents on their employment choices?

35. Whether the employment influence from their parents continue for Chinese students when they've completed the MA and returned to China?

36. Do you think that their IVT approaches might be influenced by their future pupils, pupils' parents and employers after they return to teach in China?

37. Where might students receive support for their teaching once they get back to China?

38. Do you think the university is responsible for their pedagogical re-immersion into China?

39. Who do you think is responsible for it?

40. Is employment considered as part of the taught part of the course?

41. How do Chinese MA Music Education students appear to engage with IVT content related to employment?

42. What content do you think is of employment interest to Chinese MA students on the course?

43. Do you think students make use of any other opportunities in the university to help their adjustment and their employability, like the careers service, or Open Door or anything else?

44. Is there anything else you would like to add? Thank you very much for your time and attention

Appendix E: Interview/Word document interview schedules for returnees

1. On returning to China, what kind of work have you been doing?
2. Have you been working as a teacher? What kind of work – 1-1, private lessons, 1-1 or group in a school, or classroom teaching? How many days a week do you work?
3. How long did it take you to get a job once you returned? Why?
4. Did you have to formally apply for the job, and have an interview/trial period?
5. Have your Chinese employers been interested to hear about your MA study?
6. [But if you were interviewed and got a job, what was needed for the job that didn't relate to the MA?]
7. Is this aligned with what your career plans were before starting the MA Music Education: Instrumental and Vocal Teaching? Did your ideas change as you went through the MA? If so, why?
8. What influenced your career choices/expectation?
9. Did any pressure/influence or expectation from your family or Chinese society (e.g. orientations of iron rice bowl/finding a lifelong job or any other policies or cultural/social norms) affect your career choices? If so, in what ways?
10. Do you think the orientation from China's society (if you mentioned any) about how people perceive work and careers/jobs is changing in China? If so, what do you think is changing, and why?
11. Do you think your UK MA qualification has any particular status in China? If so, what particular status is/are, and why? If no, why not?
12. Can you describe the practical/educational/cultural value of your overseas MA qualification in the job application process?
13. Do you think the values (if you mentioned any) are changing in China? If so, what do you think is changing, and why? What influences this?
14. Do you think having completed a Music MA degree in English language may have any impact relating to status or to the expectations of employers?
15. If so, what were the impact(s)? and how did this affect you?

16. Is this going to be seen to be an enhancement/desirable ability for career prospects in China or elsewhere? If yes, in what ways?
17. Have your Chinese pupils/their parents been interested to hear about your MA study?
18. Have you encountered any challenges when explaining/clarifying the skills you have acquired in the MA to your employers/pupils/pupils' parents? What were the challenges?
19. Were these challenges because of the differences in language, orientation or other factors? What were they, and how did you deal with them?
20. Have you discussed any of the MA pedagogical approaches with your pupils/employers? If so, what do they think of using these approaches in China?
21. Have your Chinese pupils/their parents/employers asked you to teach using ways you have used in the MA, or have they asked you not to teach like this?
22. Have you been able to continue to use the teaching approaches that you explored in the MA now you are back in China? If yes, which ones, and how have you used these? If no, why not?
23. If you are teaching Chinese instruments or Chinese traditional singing, have you been able to use any MA teaching concepts/approaches now you are back in China? If yes, what are these? How have you used these? If no, why not?
24. What do you think have been the biggest challenges in your instrumental/vocal teaching in China after your MA study?
25. How have you tried to overcome these?
26. Has anything else been a challenge in your adaption to returning to China since your MA study?
27. Do your pupils who study in public schools have different behaviour in lessons compared to students in other types of schools?
28. What do you think are the priorities for teachers, students and parents?
29. What do you think are the teaching priorities of the institution/s you are working with? (e.g. higher educational institutions, public schools, international schools or music training organisations)

30. Do you think instrumental/vocal teaching is changing in China? If so, what do you think is changing, and why?
31. Have you felt your employment environment is 'nei juan' or 'tang ping'?
32. If so, can you explain this further and give details?
33. How was it affect your teaching/work?
34. Has 'nei juan', 'tang ping' or/and 'bai lan' been your attitude? Why?
35. How are you feeling about this attitude?
36. Did you feel that your classmates were prone to being 'lying flat' or 'nei juan' when you were studying for your MA?
37. If you experience this feeling, did you have it while studying for your MA as well as afterwards?
38. If so, what do you think about having had this feeling in the MA, what caused it, and how did you deal with it?
39. Do you think that students' future employment was considered as part of the taught part of the MA course?
40. What content do you think was of employment interest to you on the course while studying for the MA?
41. What content on the course do you think was supportive/helpful to you in your subsequent employment after your MA study?
42. How did you engage with IVT content related to employment while studying for the MA?
43. Did you make any use of support/service from the University while studying for the MA?
44. Did you make any use of the University Careers Service while you were a student?
45. Did you make any use of the University Careers Service after your course ended?
46. Have you taken any more courses or done anything else to develop your instrumental teaching skills? If so, what has this involved, and how has it developed your work?
47. Has anyone given you support since you returned to China (parents, other

teachers, employer, coursemates, the MA course tutors) to help you develop your teaching, or to help you adjust to being back in China?

48. Is there anything you want to add?