



MODULE CODE: EDCE7021

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT: 3

STUDENT NAME: Wenrui Yin

STUDENT NUMBER: 2319170

RESEARCH TITLE: The Implementation Efficacy of Public
English Policies in Chinese Universities: A Qualitative
Analysis of Teachers' Perspectives

WORD COUNT: 10,497

Doctorate in Education (EdD)

Contents

Table of Figures	4
Table of Tables	5
Chapter One: Introduction	6
1.1 Background of the Study	6
1.2 Structure of the dissertation	7
Chapter Two: Literature Review	8
2.1 Introduction	8
2.2 Historical Evolution of Public English Education Policy in China	8
2.3 Curriculum Ideological and Political Education	10
2.3.1 Conceptual Development and Implementation	10
2.3.2 Pedagogical Complexities	10
2.4 Challenges in CIPE Policy Implementation	11
2.5 Problem Statement and Research Aims	13
2.6 Research significance and scope	14
2.6.1 Theoretical and practical significance	14
2.6.2 Research Scope	15
Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology	17
3.1 Introduction	17
3.2 Research Design	17
3.2.1 Epistemology and research method	17
3.2.2 Ontology	18
3.2.3 Research approach	18
3.2.4 Research strategy	19
3.2.5 Theoretical Framework: An Integrated theory of Teacher Agency and Policy Implementation	19
3.2.6 Reflexivity	21
3.3 Research Methods	21
3.3.1 Sampling strategy	21
3.3.2 Data collection instrument and data collection process	22
3.3.3 Data Analysis	23
3.3.4 Ethical Considerations	24
Chapter Four: Research Findings	25
4.1 Introduction	25
4.2 Research Findings	25
4.2.1 Professional Identities and Policy Interpretation	25

4.2.2 Institutional Contexts and Structural Constraints	28
4.2.3 Implementation Strategies and Teacher Agency	31
4.3 Student Responses and Implementation Feedback	34
4.4 Future Orientations and Professional Development	35
Chapter Five: Discussions	38
5.1 Introduction	38
5.2 Discussion of the research findings	38
5.3 Contributions to the field	41
5.4 Reflection on limitations and reflections on data collection	42
Chapter Six: Recommendations and implications for future research	44
6.1 Recommendations	44
6.2 Implications for future research	1
6.3 Final reflections	1
References	2
Appendix A: Interview Guide	11
Appendix B: Consent Form	13

Table of Figures

Figure 2-1: Integrated Ball-Priestley Theoretical Framework	20
---	----

Table of Tables

Table 3-1: Participant Overview	22
Table 4-2: Coding table for teachers' professional identities and policy interpretation	25
Table 4-3: Coding table for institutional contexts and structural constraints	28
Table 4-4: Coding table for implementation strategies and teacher agency	32
Table 4-5: Coding table for student responses and implementation feedback	34
Table 4-6: Coding table for future orientations and professional development	36
Table 5-7: Stakeholder Recommendations and Rationale	45

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Contemporary curriculum models emphasise local flexibility and position teachers as change agents (Priestley and Drew, 2019), a shift that has led to adoption of learner-centered models (Priestley and Biesta, 2013), and an advocacy for teachers to play an active role in curriculum changes and implementation (Sinnema and Aitken, 2013).

Teacher agency has therefore become vital in the implementation of education reforms (Tao and Gao, 2017) with the success of educational reforms heavily influenced by teachers' participation (Priestley *et al.*, 2015). The level to which teachers may enact their agency may have significant effects on effectiveness of reforms in education (Leander and Osborne, 2008), teachers' well-being, professional development, and academic gains (Back, 2019).

This study adopts Priestley *et al.*'s (2015) definition of teacher agency as the capacity of teachers to purposefully act in their professional settings that emerge from a dynamic interplay between environmental contexts in which teachers operate and personal factors like knowledge, goals, experiences, and beliefs. As such, teacher agency is not an innate attribute in teachers. Rather, it develops as the teachers interact with their environment (Jenkins, 2020).

The role of teacher agency in curriculum reforms has gained significant research interest, yet most of the existing studies have been conducted in WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic) contexts (for instance Miller and Gkonou, 2018; Vähäsantanen, 2015) and mostly at the tertiary educational levels. Few studies (e.g Hu and McKay, 2012) explore the implementation of public English policies in Chinese Universities and cite economic imperatives as core motivators for the enactment of these policies, yet there is still a large research gap on how teachers in China mandate these policies at the classroom level. According to Gil (2016), publish English curriculum in China has been significantly transformed in the last decade, which represents a change from a focus on exam and standardisation to holistic learner development including ideological shifts (Gao, 2018).

Xu (2021) argues that the current curriculum changes in public English education in China tends to reflect the broader role of China in the global development, and her positioning as a global economic powerhouse, as evident by the development of the China's Bridge and Rail Initiative (BRI). Li *et al.* (2024) contend that the recent shifts reflect the role of English in global development. Therefore, the shift towards public governance since 2013 tries to balance communicational capacity and ideological and cultural development of the learners (Li *et al.*, 2024; Liu *et al.*, 2023). Recent studies (e.g Li *et al.*, 2024) underscore that unlike the traditional changes in the public English curriculum in China, the current changes have moved away from test focus towards enhancing learners' intercultural communication, which aligns to China's BRI project. The change has led to the implementation of the Curriculum Ideological and Political Education (henceforth CIPE) as a central policy focus that has fundamentally transformed English education in China (Xin *et al.*, 2024).

According to the Ministry of Education, China (2020), the most fundamental change in English education curriculum is the 2020 revision of College English Teaching Guidelines. Then guideline introduced three core changes. The first change was a shift from instrumental to humanistic orientation and an emphasis on practical communication (Chen *et al.*, 2023). The second change is the introduction of the three level requirements that include the basic, improving, and developing goals that accommodate the proficiency of various learners across China. The final change integrated English for general, specific, and intercultural communication as core curriculum components (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Recent studies (for instance Lei and Medwell, 2022) confirm the complex nature of these reforms and the challenges faced during curriculum reforms. Lei and Medwell (2022) found that despite the comprehensive nature of new curriculum standards, many English teachers expressed uncertainty about reform implications and confusion about new professional development demands. This could indicate significant gaps between policy design and teacher preparedness.

1.2 Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation is divided into six major chapters. After this background, the next chapter reviews the existing relevant literature while the third chapter presents and

discusses the research methods and methodologies. Chapter four and five respectively presents and discuss the research findings. Finally, chapter six presents research recommendations.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The chapter reviews core literature on implementation efficacy of public English policies in Chinese Universities with a focus on the implementation efficacy of CIPE, a higher education reform specifically in China that directly integrates moral guidance and political values into subject specific courses (Ministry of Education, China, 2020). The interest and focus on China is informed by extant research focussed on the developed Western countries (Miller and Gkonou, 2018; Vähäsantanen, 2015) while the unique Confucian culture of China offers a different learning context by shaping learners' attitudes, learning practices, and communication (Hu *et al.*, 2025; Shi, 2006) with the context therefore offering emerging knowledge in this research area. The chapter offers a brief evolution of public English education in China to the recent development and implementation of the CIPE (Ministry of Education, China, 2020). Based on the contextual understanding, challenges to efficient CIPE implementation in China are discussed.

2.2 Historical Evolution of Public English Education Policy in China

According to Li *et al.* (2024), public English education in China has evolved over three phases that reflect China's socio-economic and educational needs. The early phase that started in early 1980s to 1990s focused on utilitarianism and efficient rationality and positioned English language as a tool for economic modernisation of China since it was believed that English would open China for technology transfer, trade, and knowledge transfer (Hu and McKay, 2012). Wu (2021) also stated that this period was characterised by efficiency benchmarks and emphasis on learners' test scores. However, Priestley *et al.* (2015) argued that this shifted the focus from holistic language proficiency to test scores, yet the focus on instrumental education at this stage acted as a benchmark for further curriculum changes.

The early phase was followed by the middle phase between early 2000s and 2010s and integrated public governance into public English curriculum (Yan and He,

2012a). The College English Curriculum requirements (2007) was one of the hallmarks of this phase and encompassed a dual tracking system that include English for general and specific purpose (Yan and He, 2012). During this phase, there was advocacy for autonomy in China's universities (Yu et al. 2022), yet the implementation of this phase was derailed by institutional disparities between the well-funded elite universities and the poorly funded regional universities (Larivière et al. 2021). Well-funded elite universities were able to effectively implement reforms during this phase unlike the regional universities (Lei and Medwell, 2022). The findings underscores that institutional context, and precisely resource availability directly influence the implementation efficacy of public English curriculum reforms in China. This realisation led to the emergence of a differentiated public English curriculum reform implementation in China.

The start of the new phase of public English education in China commenced in 2013 and has been ongoing. This new phase has been marked by the integration of public governance principles and ideological goals into English education and aligns to the launch of regional and global development projects like the BRI (Li *et al.*, 2024). In view of this, Li et al. (2024) underscore that the College English Teaching Guidelines (2020) repositioned English both as a practical skill and a means to transmit humanistic and social values to the learners. This phase aligns English education with national identity and promote both cultural confidence and linguistic competence (Wang *et al.*, 2023). The guideline introduced the three-tier objectives system with an aim to accommodate the different needs of China's higher education institutions while maintaining national coherence, yet limited resources hindered full implementation (Jia and Ericson, 2017).

At the same time, CIPE mandated the integration of socialist core values into the English language education, and further complicated the teachers' ability to balance ideological content and communicative ability of the learners (Zhou and Wang, 2025). The dual mandates of the latter reform has highly influenced English pedagogical practices in China, creating challenges and opportunities in curriculum enactment (Wu, 2021). A study by Zhang *et al.* (2025) suggested that teachers are usually under-prepared for the integration of cultural theory and intercultural communication in their class setups, hence the need for a more advanced professional development for the teachers. This explains why the current study

explores the implementation efficacy of public English policies in Chinese Universities by understanding teachers' qualitative perspectives.

2.3 Curriculum Ideological and Political Education

The concept of CIPE represents a fundamental reconceptualisation of ideological education in Chinese higher education (Liu and He, 2022). Unlike traditional political education courses that operate as discrete curriculum components, this initiative requires the systematic integration of socialist core values throughout all disciplinary teaching (Sun and Wang, 2023).

2.3.1 Conceptual Development and Implementation

CIPE emerged from recognition that traditional separated approaches to political education proved insufficient for comprehensive value transmission (Liu and He, 2022). According to Sun and Wang (2023), CIPE demands that teachers need to integrate ideological and political contents and integrate them into their respective teaching areas. In the context of English education, however, it has been argued that this integration may present certain challenges since traditional English teaching drew from global materials that may conflict with local cultural values (Xin *et al.*, 2024).

Liu *et al.* (2022) analysed university textbooks and concluded that Chinese English textbooks are dominated by Anglo-American cultural concepts. The monocultural bias in the existing curriculum may conflict with the demands of the Chinese government to integrate local cultural values and ideologies (Liu *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, Deng and Wang (2023) and Kearney (2010) also reported that using English language learning materials that are developed by non-native speakers may immerse learners into the language, yet this may also undermine the local cultural values. In view of this, Chinese teachers must develop the capacity to extract and share only the relevant ideological and cultural values and concepts to the learners.

2.3.2 Pedagogical Complexities

Existing studies (e.g Feng and Bai, 2021; Liu and He, 2022) show that implementation of CIPE faces certain complexities. Firstly, teachers face resource constraints in institutions where CIPE ambitions exceed institutional resource capacity (Hu *et al.*, 2024). According to Zhang *et al.* (2025), limited resources negatively influence teachers' capacity to implement the policy. Secondly, Deng

and Wang (2023) report the challenge of inadequate teaching materials, with only 37.62% of surveyed learners noting that their institutions have adequate learning materials to implement CIPE. The inadequate teaching and learning materials increases teachers' workload pressures (Liu et al., 2024), since teachers spend additional time to develop own materials or adapt materials to meet socialist and linguistic goals. Finally, the demand for organic CIPE integration lead to authenticity dilemmas (Wang, 2021) since teachers face the challenge of ensuring the course remains authentic while also integrating ideological and political concepts (Li, 2021). The tension reveal that integrating CIPE into the public English policy demand skilled teachers and teacher agency.

2.4 Challenges in CIPE Policy Implementation

China has a different context due to the need to integrate political and cultural ideologies in the English curriculum, and these cause challenges in CIPE integration (Liu, 2015). A comprehension of the challenges forms a benchmark for a good understanding of how teachers may leverage their agency to ensure smooth CIPE implementation in the country.

Liu (2015) identified heavy workload in some institutions in China as a primary challenge to effective and efficient CIPE implementation. Studies have shown that teachers in universities in China are overworked with separate studies showing either 52 hours per week (Liu, 2015) or an average of 51.64 hours weekly (Sha and Chang, 2025) both of which exceed the legal maximum of 44 hours per week. A similar study reported that 92.6% of English teachers in China reported that they teacher larger classes (in terms of number of learners), with class sizes ranging between 30 and 50 learners (Ministry of Education, China, 2020). Teachers in China face a wide range of demands including institutional service, curriculum development, and guiding learners (Zhang and Shin, 2015; Xu, 2017). The new CIPE guidelines and integration of ideological and political concepts further complicate teachers' work. A report by Tao and Gao (2017) on Teaching and Teacher Education underscore that heavy workloads limit teachers' innovation. Sha and Chang (2025) report that this may lead to health and mental challenges for teachers as teachers are overworked. Moreover, Zhang *et al.* (2023) reported that limited resources especially in regional universities may lead to constrained agency

as teachers lack the capacity to develop innovative ways to implement the demanding CIPE policy.

A second challenge facing CIPE implementation is the contradictions in assessments. While CIPE emphasizes ideological and political competence (Ministry of Education, China, 2020), CET-4 and CET-6 assessments still focus on linguistic proficiency and not the broadened CIPE goals (Yang, 2015). The contradiction leads to what Ball (1994) framework christened as the conflict between the contexts of policy production and implementation context. Accordingly, Yang (2015) argued that while teachers face the pressure to implement the comprehensive CIPE policy, they are aware that their success is determined by learners' language proficiency metrics. Wang (2022) reported that the pressure for the learners to perform in the CET-4 and CET-6 tests limit teachers from focussing on the innovative ideological and political aspects of the new curriculum. However, the studies did not explore the limitations and challenges in the context of CIPE implementation and teacher agency in China. In the current study, the researcher explores the implementation efficacy of public English policies in Chinese Universities from the perspective of teachers.

Thirdly, the stratified nature of China's higher education in regards to funding mechanisms influences implementation capacity (Gruijters, 2022; Larivière I. 2021), and this may impact CIPE implementation. While the elite 985/211 universities benefit from superior funding, have smaller class sizes, and ensure teachers' professional development (Wang and Cheng, 2014), regular universities are faced with larger class sizes, limited funding, and limited teachers' professional development (Du, 2016), which lead to differential outcomes in policy implementation and educational inequalities (Yeung, 2013). Gruijters (2022) and Yu *et al.* (2022) argued that teachers in elite institutions are able to leverage their agency and explore innovative methods to integrate ideological and political concepts into CIPE implementation. However, teachers in resource-constrained regional universities may fail to afford the basic compliance needs ((Yeung, 2013). Institutional stratification makes China's context unique and may influence teacher agency, and has therefore formed the focus of this study.

Finally, CIPE integration creates cultural mediation challenges (Chen and Ping Gu, 2024). According to *Liu et al.* (2022), English teaching materials are rooted in the Western cultures that oftentimes conflict the Chinese culture. Therefore, inserting Chinese ideologies and politics into the content may be inadequate since a meaningful integration requires pedagogical approaches that create a link between value transmission and language learning (Wei and Xin, 2024). Currently, CIPE implementation is disconnected from substantive pedagogical changes due to inadequate depth and a lack of exploratory practice, which creates uncertainty in CIPE implementation rather than resistance to the aims of the policy (Wei and Xin, 2024). The phenomenon aligns to what Priestley *et al.* (2015, p. 35) ‘constrained agency’, where institutional contexts limit teacher agency, yet effective CIPE integration demands a progressive agency, a clear strategy on how English may serve and meet ideological needs.

2.5 Problem Statement and Research Aims

Reforms of the English education curriculum in China sets ambitious targets that encompass ideological education, intercultural competence, and holistic development, yet face a persistent implementation gap (Yan and He, 2012a; Yan, 2012). Teachers are faced with the challenges of juggling ideological goals, intercultural communication, exam preparation, and language proficiency that are in the current reforms (Ministry of Education, 2020). A number of systemic constraints that impede curriculum changes including poor evaluation, limited teacher development, and the Gaokao exam system have been identified (Yan, 2015; Yu, 2023). At the same time, work pressures and heavy workloads negatively impact teacher agency even when teachers have positive attitudes towards curriculum changes (Wang, 2022).

The integration of the ideological concepts as suggested in CIPE (Zhou and Wang, 2025) is highly challenging with research showing that the CIPE resources are scarce and demand that teachers need to develop the ideological content (Deng and Wang, 2023). A research by Li and Guan (2020) cite a lack of ideological knowledge by the teachers. Similarly, institutional disparities and stratification (Tang and Yang 2008; Law 2014) imply that elite universities are well-resourced,

can innovate, and effectively implement English curriculum reforms better than other colleges.

In view of this, the overarching aim of this research is to explore the implementation efficacy of public English policies in Chinese Universities through a qualitative analysis of teachers' perspectives. The research explores three objectives:

- i) Explore how university teachers in China interpret, adapt, and implement public English policies in the context of their universities.
- ii) Explore the factors that either facilitate or limit an effective implementation of CIPE reforms in universities in China, and
- iii) Explore how teachers in regional and elite universities in China negotiate the competing demands of CIPE implementation in their institutions.

2.6 Research significance and scope

2.6.1 Theoretical and practical significance

The current study has both theoretical and practical significance. From a theoretical point of view, while most studies have explored the implementation of public English curriculum reforms especially in regards to its influence on learner outcomes (see for instance Hu *et al.*, 2025; Zhou and Wang, 2025), there are limited studies that have explored the role of teachers and teachers' agency in public English curriculum reforms. The current studies (Hu *et al.*, 2025; Zhou and Wang, 2025) have also failed to document teachers' lived experiences in public English curriculum reforms. At the same time, most of the existing studies have been conducted in WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic) contexts (for instance Miller and Gkonou, 2018; Vähäsantanen, 2015) and mostly at the tertiary educational levels leaving a theoretical gap in the context of universities in China. The current studies uses qualitative insights from teachers in universities in China and complements the existing quantitative studies (e.g Chen and Gu, 2024; Sun and Wang, 2023) and therefore offer context-specific insights.

The research offers vital insights into the role of teachers and teacher agency in public English curriculum reforms especially in universities in China where recent changes in the English curriculum integrates pedagogical and ideological concepts (Ministry of Education, China, 2020). The study adopts Priestley et al.'s (2015)

ecological model and Ball's (1994) policy cycle theory to demonstrate that teachers act as active agents rather than passive players in public English curriculum reforms in China. The research therefore demonstrates a recontextualisation of national policies via adaptive processes and professional interpretation.

Recent research (Tao and Gao, 2021) position teachers as primary agents and enablers of curriculum reforms. The study also underscores that teachers' beliefs and professional development mediates implementation efficacy of public English curriculum reforms (Tao and Gao, 2017), and this should be further explored in the unique context of China's higher education where these reforms integrates ideological and pedagogical concepts. Tao and Gao (2021) further reported that as opposed to top-down policy implementation, curriculum reforms can be effectively achieved through teacher facilitation and support, and this has been explored by comparing the differing support and facilitation to teachers in elite vs regional universities in China.

The research also offers practical recommendations to the policymakers, teachers, and university administrators on how to make CIPE integration in universities in China efficient through teacher support, training, and autonomy. This is presented in detail in section 5.2 of the study.

2.6.2 Research Scope

The scope of the study is universities in China and precisely elite and regional universities in China. Firstly, China has been selected because it falls within the scope of the under-studied contexts - most studies have focussed on WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic) contexts (for instance Miller and Gkonou, 2018; Vähäsantanen, 2015). Secondly, China's public English curriculum reforms from 2013 is unique since it integrates ideological components, which departs from the experiences of other countries from the West (Ministry of Education, China, 2020). This informs the research interest in China. Finally, the study covers elite vs regional universities in China because of the differential university funding in the country (Law, 2014; Yu et al., 2022) and the established influence of resource endowment on curriculum reform implementation. A comparison of well-resourced elite universities vs poorly funded regional

universities gives an insight into how resources and teacher support influence efficacy of implementation of CIPE in China.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the choices of the research methods and methodologies used for data collection and analysis to meet the research aim and objectives. The chapter has two major sections. The first section is the research design that include the research philosophy (epistemology and ontology of the research, research approach, research strategy, reflexivity, and theoretical framework. The second section of the research is the research methods section that include sampling, data collection methods, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Epistemology and research method

The research used an interpretivist-qualitative stance. Interpretivism recognises that social reality is context-specific and multiple (O'Donoghue, 2018), and emphasised teachers' own understanding of experiences and meanings of public English policy and curriculum implementation in China (Pervin and Mokhtar, 2022), which aligns to Priestley *et al.* (2015) ecological model that frame teachers as active agents and Ball's (1994) policy theory that puts emphasis on context and practice.

Interpretivism enabled the researcher to seek depth through dialogue with the University teachers and allowed the teachers to share their adaptive strategies and interpretations (Thanh and Thanh, 2015). This aligns with the first research objective that explores teachers' policy interpretation and the third research objective on how teachers' negotiate curriculum demands thereby foregrounding teachers' voices (Pham, 2018). The method helped the researcher to capture the complex socio-cultural factors (since education is predominantly psycho-socio-cultural that makes qualitative research essential) (Gichuru, 2017), is flexible, and helped to explore emergent issues (Pham, 2018). It also generated context-specific insights rather than surface-level patterns (Gichuru, 2017).

However, a limitation of the interpretative-qualitative research is that the findings are not statistically generalisable and may be subjective thereby reflecting researcher bias (Pham, 2018). While an alternative positivist-quantitative-surveys were initially considered due to their inability to explore an in-depth teachers'

experiences and knowledge in regards to teachers' agency in English curriculum implementation (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020).

3.2.2 Ontology

In regards to ontological perspective, this study is grounded on a constructivist ontology. Constructivists argue that social realities like teacher agency in implementation efficacy of CIPE in China is socially constructed through human interactions and should not be perceived as a fixed reality and is objective and quantifiable (Creswell, 2014). In the context of this research, this implies that the implementation efficacy of public English policy implementation in China is not a linear process. Rather, it is recontextualised as teachers negotiate between the directives given by the government and the ministry of education in China and the realities in schools where teachers implement these policies (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This aligns with the three aims of the study that focus on teachers' agency in CIPE integration, the factors that either facilitate or constrain CIPE implementation in China, and the how teachers in regional and elite universities in China negotiate the competing demands of CIPE integration in the universities. However, constructivist ontology has the limitation that the findings may not be generalised since reality is specific to different contexts and is subjective and may therefore lack an objective truth (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

3.2.3 Research approach

In line with interpretivist-qualitative research, an inductive approach was adopted to allow theoretical insights to emerge from the data rather than imposing pre-existing hypotheses (Creswell, 2014). Due to the limited research on CIPE implementation in China as established in chapter one (O'Donoghue, 2018), induction was appropriate to capture un-anticipated meanings, practices, and tensions in public English policy enactment (Creswell, 2014). However, this approach risks drawing broad conclusions from small samples (O'Donoghue, 2018). An alternative deductive approach was initially considered due to its ability to draw conclusion from larger samples and address the limitation of induction (Creswell, 2014) but was rejected due to its rigidity and the design to test existing theories (Kumar and Ujire, 2024).

3.2.4 Research strategy

The research used a qualitative case study. Case studies are appropriate when a research aims to explore a phenomena within its real-life context (Yin, 2009). China was selected as the case study context because the reforms in the English curriculum is state-led, the country has a unique ideological centrality in CIPE (Ministry of Education, 2020), and stratification in higher education funding that shape policy implementation (Law, 2014; Yu *et al.*, 2022). The merits of a case study strategy is the ability to capture context-specific policy implementation across Chinese institutions (Yin, 2009), yet the strategy may limit generalisation since the collected data may only be relevant to the research context (Yin, 2009). While the research could have used a survey, surveys could dilute the theoretical coherence and analytical depth by considering a wide range of study contexts (Bryman, 2016).

3.2.5 Theoretical Framework: An Integrated theory of Teacher Agency and Policy Implementation

In this study, Priestley et al.'s (2015) ecological model and Ball's (1994) policy cycle models are integrated to provide a comprehensive framework to explore and understand the efficacy of implementation of public English policy in China from the perspective of teachers.

According to Ball's theory, policy implementation is influenced by three different contexts (Ball, 2015). The first context is the national and global discussions that directly influence implementation of a policy (the context of influence) (Ball, 2015). The second context refers to emergence of policy ambiguity and contradictions (what Ball called the context of text production) (Ball, 1994). The final context is the influence of teachers' own interpretation and how they implement policies (the context of practice) (Ball, 1994). Based on these contexts, the theory suggests that policy implementation should consider the various stakeholders (Hatcher and Troyna, 1994), e.g. teachers in the context of CIPE. Ball's theory therefore appreciates the role of structural factors on policy implementation (Yan and He, 2012a) and is therefore relevant for this research. However, Ball's model present policy as a linear and may ignore the complex environment of policy implementation (Jann and Wegrich, 2017).

Priestley *et al.* (2015) ecological model also suggests that teacher agency influences policy formulation and implementation. Priestley and Drew (2019), however, argued that teacher agency is influenced by the complex environment within which teachers operate. The model therefore enhances an understanding into how teachers who operate in environments like universities in China are able to navigate the top-down policy implementation environment (Jia and Medwell, 2022; Leijen *et al.*, 2020). However, the model puts more emphasis on teacher agency and ignores the broader systemic issues like availability of resources that may influence policy implementation (Zhang and Wright, 2017).

An integrated model of Ball (1994) and Priestley *et al.* (2015) presented in figure 2-1 below is used in the study to explore the implementation efficacy of public English policy in universities in China. This model considers a wide range of factors that include teacher agency that can influence CIPE implementation efficacy in China and how university teachers may leverage professional, institutional, and personal factors to negotiate a better CIPE integration in China's universities.

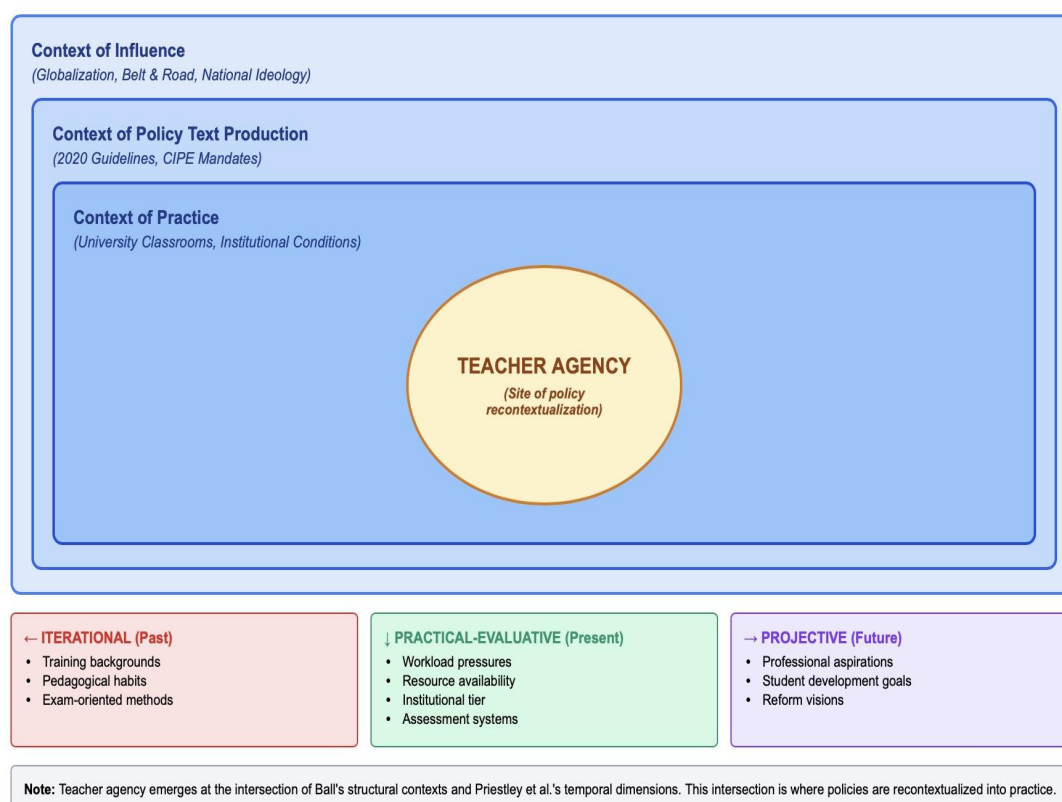


Figure 2-1: Integrated Ball-Priestley Theoretical Framework

Source: Author

The integrated model, despite its merits may also fail to consider the adverse influence of the cultural and political factors on CIPE integration. The model also puts more emphasis on the need for teacher agency on CIPE implementation but fail to capture the influence of systemic issues and resistance that may impede CIPE policy implementation in China. Systemic issues are relevant to China due to the segregated funding model used in the country (Wang and Cheng, 2014). Yet still, the integrated model as presented in figure 2-1 above offers a more comprehensive model that can be used by researchers to understand the complex and evolving nature of public English education policies in China. The acknowledgement of teacher agency into the new model further makes it more relevant to this research.

3.2.6 Reflexivity

Bryman (2016) argued that a researchers' interpretation of the research findings is influenced by their own personal position to the research. As a researcher, my past as a teacher of English in a local institution in China could have influenced the research process. With this awareness, I constantly reflected on how my own personal experiences during my teaching practice could influence my interpretation of the data. I used reflexive memo writing during the coding process to enhance analytical transparency and bracket my assumptions. While my knowledge as an insider influenced sensitivity to the research context, my reflexive practice mitigated conformation bias and boosted research credibility.

3.3 Research Methods

3.3.1 Sampling strategy

Participants to the research were purposively sampled to allow the researcher to gain access to information-rich participants rather than statistical representation, the sampling process was simple, and less time taking (Rai and Thapa, 2015). However, purposive sampling lacked sample randomness and could introduce sample bias (Obilor, 2023). While simple random sampling could have been used to increase representativeness, a simple random sampling would risk engaging teachers with limited policy implementation experiences and weaken the study's analytical depth (Rai and Thapa, 2015).

A sample of six teachers (three each from elite and non-elite institutions) were selected to enable comparison across institutional tiers. While the sample size ($n=6$)

is modest, it follows the principle of information power (Malterud *et al.*, 2016), whereby a smaller, information-rich sample can yield valid insights when the study has a focused aim, dense data collection, and strong theoretical framing. Further, existing literature suggests a minimum of 12 samples data for saturation in qualitative studies (Braun and Clarke, 2016; Fugard and Potts, 2015; Guest *et al.*, 2006), yet a sample of six was selected due to the constraint of time, finances, and depth of the knowledge of the participants that enabled information saturation with the limited sample.

The inclusion criteria for the sample included: (i) aged 18 years and above to ensure express consent from the participants and avoid sampling vulnerable groups (see consent form in appendix B), (ii) sound mind, (iii) at least five years of experience to ensure in-depth knowledge of the research area, (iv) either from elite or regional university in China for variability, and (v) express willingness to take part in the research to avoid coercion in line with research ethics. Table 3-1 summarises the characteristics of the research sample.

Table 3-1: Participant Overview

Participant	Institution Type	Experience	Role Focus
X1	Elite (985)	15 years	Senior faculty, curriculum design
X2	Elite (985)	12 years	Associate professor, research-focused
X3	Elite (211)	8 years	Teaching-research balanced
X4	Regional	10 years	Frontline teaching, large classes
X5	Regional	14 years	Mid-career, administrative duties
X6	Regional	7 years	Junior faculty, CET-focused

3.3.2 Data collection instrument and data collection process

Semi-structured interviews conducted online and lasted between 30 and 40 minutes each were used to collect data. Semi-structured interviews were selected due to their flexibility to probe the research participants and acquire in-depth data (Bryman, 2016), is effective in exploring subjective issues like the implementation efficacy of public English policies in Chinese Universities (Brown and Danaher, 2019), and aligned with an interpretivist study by foregrounding teachers' voices and meanings

(Bryman, 2016). However, interviews relied on self-reported data and could only be used to collect data from a small sample of sis teachers since it is time consuming that limited the generalisability of the findings of the study (Brown and Danaher, 2019). While an alternative survey method could have been used to collect data from larger samples, surveys were rejected due to their inflexibility and inability to collect deep-seated and detailed contextual data on the implementation efficacy of public English policies in Chinese Universities (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021).

Teachers were firstly accessed through university administrators who acted as gatekeepers in each university. Interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese which allowed participants to articulate nuanced views without language barriers (Adams, 2015). Each interview lasted between 30 and 40 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or via secure video conferencing platforms depending on participants' availability. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

The interview guide was aligned with the integrated framework and piloted with two teachers for clarity (Adams, 2015). Following the pilot, one key amendment was made: questions specifically targeting Curriculum Ideological and Political Education (CIPE) were added to ensure comprehensive data collection on teachers' responses to this core policy mandate. The interview protocol is attached in appendix B of this research.

3.3.3 Data Analysis

A thematic data analysis process using the procedure in Braun and Clarke (2006) was used in this research. In the first stage, the researcher familiarised themselves with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts (Braun and Clarke, 2021). In the second stage, the researcher manually generated the initial codes to remain close to the meanings from the participants' responses. The codes were then collated into potential themes that reflected the patterns of adaptation, constraint, and agency (Braun and Clarke, 2021). To ensure distinctiveness and coherence, each of the emerging themes were reviewed against the dataset (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). As Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested, the researcher then defined and named the themes in relation to the research aims and objectives, and analytically reported the

themes and their relationship to the existing literature. Coding table for each of the research objectives are presented in the next chapter to demonstrate an overview process of data analysis procedure. Thematic analysis was selected because it is compatible and flexible and allowed themes to emerge automatically from the data, yet heavily relied on the researcher judgement (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). While grounded theory could have been used to generate the theory (Braun and Clarke, 2021a), thematic analysis was deemed better to achieve the analytical goals of the research (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

3.3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was secured prior to data collection in line with the guidance of Brown *et al.* (2020). Participants received detailed information sheets and signed consent forms to ensure that no participant was coerced into this research (consent form attached in appendix B) (Bridges, 2017). Given the political sensitivity of CIPE, anonymity was carefully protected by assigning pseudonyms (e.g X1 to X6) to the participants and removing identifiable details (e.g., institutional names, personal names, phone contacts, and emails) (Cohen *et al.*, 2017; Hammersley, 2017). The data collected in the study that included transcripts and recorded audios were saved in my student drive that is maintained by the university. The drive is password protected and ensured that the data was not accessed by any unauthorised personnel (Ramrathan *et al.*, 2017). Finally, all the participants were given express rights to withdraw from the study without jeopardising their safety (Head, 2020). Moreover, in line with research ethics, they were given contacts for whistleblowing and report any unethical issues that arise during the study (Head, 2020).

Chapter Four: Research Findings

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss the findings of the research from an in-depth interview of six teachers from elite and regional universities in China regarding the implementation efficacy of public English policies in universities in China. The findings are structured around the integrated Ball (1994) and Priestley *et al.* (2015) frameworks.

4.2 Research Findings

4.2.1 Professional Identities and Policy Interpretation

The research has established that teachers' professional identities influence implementation efficacy of public English curriculum reforms specifically CIPE reforms) in universities in China. The emerging themes (academic identity, pragmatic identity, and identity tensions and ambivalence) are summarised in table 4-2.

Table 4-2: Coding table for teachers' professional identities and policy interpretation

Major Theme	Commonly Agreed Responses (cited interviews)	Contrasting Responses (cited interviews)
Academic Identity	Many teachers (X1, X2 X3) embraced CIPE as an intellectual challenge, seeing it as an extension of scholarly work. Respondents with research-focused backgrounds reported integrating ideological content naturally into lessons (X1 and X3).	A few academic-oriented teachers still viewed CIPE as external: one (X4) described it as a bureaucratic add-on that distracted from core content.
Pragmatic Identity	Teachers (X4, X5) emphasized functional English skills and compliance, focusing on workload management. They described CIPE as a requirement to fit around existing courses without sacrificing learning outcomes.	Some pragmatically-oriented teachers nonetheless integrated content (e.g. X1's approach shows blending strategies, opposing a purely separate model).
Identity Tensions & Ambivalence	Several interviewees (X6, X4, X5, and X2) reported ambivalence: valuing CIPE's goals but feeling burdened by extra work. Teachers described fluctuating attitudes, indicating a mix of appreciation and frustration within the same person (X2 and X4).	In contrast, some teachers (e.g. X3) maintained a consistent stance (either fully embracing or resisting CIPE) rather than vacillating

The research has established that teachers' professional identities shape public English policy implementation in public universities in China. However, the research further shows that the influence is more complex than has been reported in past studies and revealed by institutional categories. While institutions influenced teachers' professional identities, the findings also indicate that irrespective of institutional tiers, teachers also form distinct identities that do not align to institutional contexts. For instance, teachers with deep self-awareness and confidence in their teaching roles perceived CIPE as a professional challenge and not an external imposition irrespective of their institutional categories. This is evident from teachers from elite universities (X1, X2, and X3), with X1 noting that,

In universities in China, CIPE is a public English curriculum design challenge. From my training, I was inducted to find intellectual links between unrelated content areas, and therefore, my concern with CIPE is not in the implementation but rather how to make it pedagogically sound.

The challenge in how to implement CIPE was echoed by X2 and X3. Yet, the academic framing of CIPE was not unique to teachers from elite universities. While

X3 reported a similar professional engagement, X5 (a regional university teacher) reported an unexpected academic interest. X5 stated,

CIPE is intellectually stimulating. The integration of CIPE has forced to gain research interest on the relationship between cultural transmission and language pedagogy, and this has been my research area in the past five years. Equally, my learners positively respond to the substantive content.

Therefore, for both elite and regional university teachers, integration of CIPE into the public English education curriculum extends their research interests.

Further, the complexity of teachers' professional identity was evident from the emergent theme of pragmatic identity and teachers' survival strategies. Pragmatic teachers were preoccupied with managing competing demands while also protecting instructional objectives. Teachers' pragmatic orientation was evident across elite and regional universities, yet this manifested differently based on the teachers' institutional contexts. For instance, a teacher from a regional university (X4) stated,

I primarily focus on learners' functional English competence. While I need to integrate CIPE, I do not compromise the basic learning outcomes. I face the challenge to find an integration strategy that enable me to integrate ideological concepts of CIPE while also meeting the basic communicational goals of the English curriculum.

Similarly, while X2 noted that their elite institutions offered the needed support, time was finite, and this creates the challenge to integrate CIPE with other traditional curriculum demands. Accordingly, X2 said,

I face the challenge of balancing traditional curriculum and CIPE's ideological concept demands within the finite time. Therefore, the challenge is a strategic management of the curriculum and not a philosophical alignment.

Therefore, for both elite and regional university teachers, CIPE is a manageable add-on rather than a primary focus. The research further shows an existing tension in the teachers' professional identity, and therefore, the integration of CIPE into the public English curriculum in China occurs through a negotiation and not a clear

identity-based responses. X2, X4, and X6 expressed contradictory feeling towards CIPE that defied simple categorisation. For instance, X6 said,

I appreciate that CIPE integrates language proficiency and cultural elements. Yet, this creates the challenge of the demand to meet and additional workload and larger classes amidst resource strain.

Evidently, this research finds that in integrating CIPE into the public English curriculum in China, university teachers constantly negotiate between the practical constraints and their professional identities.

4.2.2 Institutional Contexts and Structural Constraints

The data from the in-depth interviews reveal that institutional contexts influence the efficacy of the implementation of English policy in public universities in China, through in more complex ways. While the availability of resources created possibilities for some teachers by enabling some strategies, teachers still expressed agency within these structures. An important and unique contribution of this study that departs from extant literature is that even elite and well-resourced universities experienced their own pressures while regional and poorly funded institutions became more creative. Table 4-3 summarises a coding table for institutional contexts and structural constraints.

Table 4-3: Coding table for institutional contexts and structural constraints

Major Theme	Commonly Agreed Responses (cited interviews)	Contrasting Responses (cited interviews)
Elite Support and Expectations	Elite-university teachers (X2, X1) reported formal CIPE support: working groups, funding, and training. They described institutional messages framing CIPE as scholarly work (X2).	Even within elite institutions, some teachers (X5) felt constrained by high expectations (need to publish), suggesting support also implied pressure (X5).
Regional Resource Constraints	Regional teachers (X4, X6) highlighted lack of guidance, large classes, and heavy workload. They often described implementation as a personal burden rather than shared, citing minimal PD support.	Despite constraints, some regional respondents (X2) noted that the lack of resources meant more autonomy, allowing experimentation, contrasting the view of helplessness.
CET-4 Testing Pressure	- Many regional teachers (X6, X4) pointed out CET-4 pass rates as the primary accountability measure. They felt obligated to focus on test prep over non-tested CIPE content.	A few respondents suggested CET-4's influence was overstated: one teacher (X3) felt motivated to integrate CIPE to improve students' critical thinking, showing a different view.
Diverse Assessment Expectations	Elite teachers (X1, X2) reported that with different student goals (e.g. academic English, graduate study), they had more curricular flexibility.	Even in elite settings, some noted students still cared about test scores (X3), meaning CIPE integration was sometimes constrained by lingering exam concerns.

From table 4-3 above, four themes (elite support and expectations, regional resource constraints, CET-4 testing pressure, and diverse assessment expectations) emerged from the thematic data analysis.

The research shows that institutional support differ significantly between elite and regional universities in China, yet the influence of this resource variance on the implementation efficacy of CIPE in the country is more complex than as has been reported in past studies. Availability of resources in elite universities enable CIPE implementation in these universities, yet the research shows certain limitations, creating a need for teachers to express agency in CIPE implementation.

X1, X2, and X3 widely reported elite university support in CIPE implementation in these universities, yet the use of the support resource s varied between teachers

based on their personal and curriculum priorities. This show agency and discretion in CIPE implementation in elite universities. For instance, X3 stated,

Seed funding and CIPE working groups was established in our institution to support the implementation and make it more efficient. We were also allowed time to attend training and workshops. The heads of departments emphasised the scholarly significance of CIPE and the training sessions.

Both X1 and X2 confirmed institutional support to facilitate CIPE implementation. Yet, teachers from elite universities also reported increased work pressures that constrained their agency in CIPE implementation. According to X2,

We are expected to produce innovative and national competitive CIPE models. The pressure to publish materials on CIPE and implementation strategies is immense. The success of the strategy does not end with a university-level compliance rather, its academic impacts.

Therefore, while elite universities offered substantial resource facilitation, this also led to demanding performance outcomes.

On the other hand, resource constraint in regional universities was widely reported by X4, X5, and X6. However, the research shows that resource limitation only shaped but did not limit CIPE implementation since teachers in these institutions developed creative strategies amidst the limited resources. According to X4,

The institutional only offered minimal CIPE guidance and did not offer significantly material (collaboration, training, or workshop) support. There are limited professional development opportunities, we deal with large classes, and workload is high as compared to our elite counterparts.

This view was supported by X5 who added that teachers from regional universities have limited capacity to innovate due to long working hours. The teacher noted,

The integration of CIPE made me question where I will get an additional time to prepare learning materials. The institution did not offer any support to this respect. We were challenged to figure this out.

Despite the resource limitations, the teachers in the regional universities became more creative, for instance, by joining informal networks or leveraged peer support to compensate for the resource limitation.

In addition to this, the respondents also expressed the influence of assessment pressures (CET-4 dominance in the regional institutions) and other competing priorities as core factors that influenced efficacy of the implementation of English policy (CIPE) in public universities in China. Regional institution teachers consistently identified CET-4 pass rates as primary accountability measures that constrained CIPE implementation. This created professional dilemmas about time allocation and curricular priorities. X6 noted that,

Department evaluations focus heavily on CET-4 pass rates. Students and parents measure our effectiveness by these scores. CIPE isn't tested, so time spent on ideological content appears to detract from measurable learning outcomes.

Therefore, teachers felt caught up between policy compliance and professional effectiveness.

Finally, diverse assessment was cited by X1 and X2 while X3 had a divergent view. Elite institution teachers reported more diverse assessment expectations that created space for CIPE integration, although this did not eliminate tension between competing priorities. X1 argued that,

Our students aren't primarily focused on CET-4—they're pursuing academic English competence for graduate studies or international opportunities. This allows more curricular flexibility and makes CIPE integration pedagogically coherent rather than externally imposed.

This view as shared by X2, yet X3 noted that some learners in elite universities also care about test scores. This finding implies that the efficacy of the implementation of CIPE in both elite and regional universities in China is sometimes affected by learners concern about test scores.

4.2.3 Implementation Strategies and Teacher Agency

In regards to the implementation strategies and teacher agency, four major themes emerged from the table as summarised in table 4-4.

Table 4-4: Coding table for implementation strategies and teacher agency

Major Theme	Commonly Agreed Responses (cited interviews)	Contrasting Responses (cited interviews)
Embedded Integration	Teachers like X1 and X3 redesigned content units to weave in ideological themes (their quotes describe units on social and business issues). These respondents found that integrating CIPE with language tasks enhanced coherence and student interest.	In contrast, some educators preferred not to fully integrate (e.g. X6), keeping CIPE topics distinct, highlighting that not all pursued deep embedding.
Compartmentalized Strategies	Many teachers (X6, X5) reported isolating CIPE content into short activities (e.g. cultural talks) at set times. This allowed them to comply with policy while retaining focus on language skills.	However, others disagreed with separation: for example X1 argued that compartmentalization feels artificial and less effective, advocating full integration.
Collaborative Adaptation	-Teachers like X2 and X4 formed informal CIPE groups or networks to share materials and strategies. They credited these collaborations with making implementation more manageable and higher quality.	In contrast, some teachers (e.g. X3) tackled CIPE development largely on their own, noting an absence of such collaboration in their context.
Iterative (Gradual) Approach	Respondents (X3 and X2) reported an iterative approach: experimenting with integration each term and refining based on outcome. They described this as turning compliance into ongoing professional development.	Conversely, some felt pressure for immediate change (X5) and tried to apply comprehensive CIPE strategies from the start, indicating less gradual adaptation.

Teachers across elite and regional universities developed strategies to integrate CIPE into their public English learning goals, a strategy that demanded adequate preparation to produce pedagogically sound outcomes. For instance, X1 reported,

To implement CIPE into my English teaching, my argumentative writing texts integrated Chinese social issues like poverty alleviation, technological innovation, and environmental protection. This allows my learners to meet the twin goals of the traditional English curriculum and CIPE demands.

X5 developed a similar strategy and reported that,

My own developed thematic units combined cultural and skill concepts. For example, our business English unit explores Chinese

entrepreneurship models and innovation strategies. Students develop professional communication skills while learning about Chinese economic achievements.

While the strategy demands extra preparation, teachers who adopted the strategies reported a higher coherence.

Moreover, the theme of compartmentalised compliance strategy was evident from the interviews. For instance, other teachers (e.g X6 and X2) facing time pressures or philosophical concerns, developed strategies that separated CIPE content from language instruction while maintaining administrative compliance. These strategies helped to meet CIPE mandate with limited disruptions.

In addition, adaptive responses and constraints was evident in both the elite and non-elite university teachers. In regards to collaborative adaptation, several teachers (e.g X3 and X4) developed informal collaboration networks to share resources and strategies, demonstrating agency through collective action. For instance, X2 reported that,

Three of us formed an informal CIPE working group. We share materials, discuss integration challenges, and divide curriculum development responsibilities. The peer review helped to improve quality while collaboration enhanced implementation efficiency.

Similarly, X4 reported that their social media-based collaboration facilitated CIPE implementation and helped to reduce the negatively impact of lack of institutional support. However, evidence from X5 also indicate gradual CIPE implementation.

Each semester, I test different CIPE integration approaches and implement them gradually. While some approaches work better, I try to what work best for the learners, and this makes CIPE implementation feel like my own professional development.

This was also supported by X2, X3, and X6 showing that CIPE implementation should be gradual rather than instantaneous.

4.3 Student Responses and Implementation Feedback

Table 4-5 summarises the major codes and themes from the interviews on student responses and implementation feedback.

Table 4-5: Coding table for student responses and implementation feedback

Major Theme	Commonly Agreed Responses (cited interviews)	Contrasting Responses (cited interviews)
Student Engagement (meaningful)	When content was embedded, students were enthusiastic (X1, X4). Teachers noted improved participation and interest when CIPE topics aligned with student interests or career goals.	Some students initially doubted CIPE relevance (X6), but adjusted when integration became coherent.
Student Resistance (superficial)	Respondents (X6) observed clear resistance to CIPE when lessons felt forced; students explicitly challenged trivial activities.	Others reported that after initial resistance, students adapted or even enjoyed CIPE once it was meaningfully connected (e.g. X3).
Integrated Assessment	Teachers like X2 introduced projects evaluating both language and cultural learning (project presentations with multi-faceted rubrics).	A few teachers still relied on standard language tests, largely ignoring ideological content in evaluation (X4 noted continued focus on English scores).
Persistent Time Constraints	Many (X3) cited lack of preparation time as limiting CIPE quality. Teachers reported that workload and immediate compliance expectations hindered long-term improvement.	A few described creative time-saving methods (X1 used student presentations as CIPE content, saving prep time), suggesting not all struggled equally.

Themes of engagement with meaningful integration, resistance to superficial implementation, integrated assessment approaches, and ongoing implementation challenges. Teachers (X1 and X4) reported positive student responses when CIPE content was meaningfully integrated with language learning objectives, regardless of institutional context. According to X1,

When CIPE content connects to their academic or professional interests, students respond enthusiastically. The learners are enthusiastic to learn and develop vocabulary that resonate with the Chinese culture.

However, it has been reported that learners reject superficial patterns. According to X6,

My learners questioned the objectives of their English learning when I tried to add brief Chinese cultural elements. The learners felt that the content was not integrated but obligatory. In retrospection, I developed more coherent approaches.

Additionally, X2 and X3 evaluated the implementation of CIPE through a wide range of measures that encompassed learners' cultural competence, learner engagement, and language outcomes. For instance, X3 stated that CIPE should be evaluated based on learners' language and cultural competence. The teacher noted that,

The final assessment on the new curriculum include testing cross-cultural communication, language content, and cultural competence. An efficient integration means competence in all the areas.

However, while teachers across elite and regional universities have been creative, the research has established that they face challenges in CIPE implementation. According to X5,

Preparing CIPE materials demand time that is limited for me. The administration expect instant compliance and this conflicts with both thoughtful integration and pedagogical needs.

The same sentiments were shared by X2 and X3 suggesting an existing tension between policy demand and classroom limits in CIPE integration in universities in China.

4.4 Future Orientations and Professional Development

From table 4-6, it is evident that teachers' future orientation and professional development influences CIPE integration. The themes (need for targeted PD/support, need for collaboration, gradual and realistic outlook, and emphasis on teacher agency) emerged from the data.

Table 4-6: Coding table for future orientations and professional development

Major Theme	Commonly Agreed Responses (cited interviews)	Contrasting Responses (cited interviews)
Need for Targeted PD/Support	Teachers (X4, X5) asked for CIPE-specific training and resources, not just generic ideology seminars. They emphasized strategies for teaching culture through language, indicating a demand for pedagogy over indoctrination.	A few felt existing training was adequate or were uncertain how more PD could be implemented (X6 remained skeptical about institution's capacity to provide quality CIPE training).
Desire for Collaboration	Several (X5) envisioned sharing materials and assessment tools across universities (X5). Informal support networks (X4) were valued, and teachers hoped to formalize these into resource exchanges.	Conversely, some educators believed CIPE was too context-specific for broad collaboration, preferring to adapt personally (X1 noted unique contexts may limit transferability).
Gradual, Realistic Outlook	- Many (X3, X1, and X2) endorsed a long-term, incremental approach to CIPE, learning over multiple semester. They viewed CIPE as an ongoing process integrated with professional growth.	Others (X5) felt pressured to make rapid progress due to top-down mandates, showing some expected faster implementation.
Emphasis on Teacher Agency	Teachers (X1, X3) stressed preserving professional judgment: compliance should not override pedagogical choices. They asserted that effective CIPE depends on teacher expertise in course design.	In contrast, a minority position (X6) accepted strict policy directives as given, indicating less demand for autonomy.

Teachers across contexts (across elite and regional universities) expressed desires for enhanced institutional support that would facilitate more effective implementation. According to X4,

I hope our institution will provide specific training for CIPE integration rather than general political education.

Similarly, X5 supported the view by suggesting that,

We need pedagogical strategies, not ideological instruction. Professional development should address how to teach culture through language, not why culture matters.

Additionally, X2, X4, and X5 envisioned expanded collaboration opportunities that would improve implementation quality while reducing the individual burden. X2 suggested the need for formal cross-institutional networks for CIPE curriculum development while X3 noted that universities should organise benchmarking sessions where teachers may learn the most effective models. The implication for this finding is that while teachers already have ad hoc collaboration frameworks, they prefer the establishment of institutionalised collaboration frameworks (e.g resources banks and conference) to lower individual burden.

Teachers widely agreed that an efficient CIPE integration demands balancing professional well-being, pedagogical needs, and policy requirements (X3, X4, and X5). Teachers also reported the need for gradual CIPE integration. Accordingly, X5 stated,

Integration of CIPE should be treated as a multi-year professional development and not a change to achieve within a semester. I develop competence gradually, build on my successes and failure, and ensure the strategy is sustainable.

The significance of professional autonomy was reported by teachers across elite and regional universities. For instance, X1 said,

For effective CIPE integration, teachers need to be proficient in both Chinese culture and language pedagogy. Compliance with the policy should not be prioritised over effectiveness of the pedagogy, curriculum coherence, and learner needs. Sustainable implementation preserves teacher agency while addressing policy requirements.

In sum, sustainable CIPE implementation balances teachers' well-being and autonomy with ideological aims of the curriculum.

Chapter Five: Discussions

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the research findings. The chapter has three major sections: a discussion section that compares the research findings to the findings of other existing studies, research contributions section that outline the major conclusions of the research, and methodological limitations.

5.2 Discussion of the research findings

The findings of the current study on the professional identities and policy interpretation aligns with the findings of Priestley *et al.* (2015) since both studies place emphasis on teacher agency as an emergent and dynamic capacity. Like Priestley *et al.* (2015), this study identified that teachers who identified with academic roles perceived CIPE as a professional challenge, which shows that the integration of ideological and cultural concepts in the English language curriculum is both pedagogically enriching and intellectually stimulating. The finding also supports the study by Tao and Gao (2021) who reported that teachers with strong professional identity (defined as teachers who perceived themselves as competent and knowledgeable in the subject area) only embraced policy reforms if the reforms align to their personal values. However, teachers with pragmatic identities viewed CIPE as an unnecessary addition to the English curriculum that supports the findings of Vähäsantanen (2015) who argued that teachers who work in high pressure areas usually prefer functional outcomes to ideological content. Uniquely, this study also finds that what can be termed ‘high pressure’ workplaces for the teachers is synonymous to the less-funded regional universities in China. Beyond poor funding, limited resources, and a lack of teacher support to enhance efficiency of curriculum change implementation, high pressure workplaces are also characterised with a prioritisation of test scores over a mastery ideological and cultural concepts. This makes such environments challenging to work in for teachers who perceived themselves as competent and knowledgeable in the subject area and demand agency and autonomy in decision making.

However, unlike the previous studies (e.g Tao and Gao, 2017; Vähäsantanen, 2015), the current study explicitly reports that these findings depend on the study contexts with many teachers who took part in the study expressing ambivalence towards CIPE, which suggests a tension between institutional pressures and professional aspirations. This is clearly evident in the differences in the responses of teachers from regional and elite universities in China. The finding is in tandem to Ball's (2015) assertion that policies are not just implemented without being recontextualised by teachers who negotiate professional identities within their institutional contexts. This research therefore reinforces Ball's (1994) Policy Cycle Theory, specifically the iterative and dynamic nature of English policy implementation where teachers' classroom realities, institutional roles, and professional histories influence their policy interpretation. The nature of contextual realities is more important to this study. While a cross-country comparison is out of the scope of this research, it is important to note that the tiered system of funding universities is unique to China, and produces different outcomes. Therefore, teacher agency and its influence in the outcomes of CIPE implementation efficacy must be analysed within this context. A multi-country comparison in future studies may help give deeper insights into the influence of institutional environment on the efficacy of CIPE integration into public English education.

Moreover, the findings of this study also align to the findings of most studies (e.g Lei and Medwell, 2022, Larivière *et al.*, 2021) on the effects of institutional constraints on English policy implementation in China. As per the current study, elite institutions offer teachers the needed support for policy implementation, a finding that affirms the suggestions of Larivière *et al.* (2021) who reported that resource-rich institutions are well-placed to implement new policies. However, unlike the past studies (e.g Larivière *et al.*, 2021), this study challenges the assumption that institutional support guarantee smooth policy implementation. Even teachers in elite universities faced the pressure to innovate and publish, a suggestion that institutional support may lead to increased work pressure due to higher performance expectations (Chen *et al.*, 2023). The findings confirm Ball's (1994) assertion that the context of an institution may influence policy implementation. However, it is important to note that influence of institutional environment for well-resourced institutions does not include resource limitation but rather performance

expectations from the management. This clearly varies from the less funded regional universities in China.

In contrast, the study revealed that even teachers in regional universities that are resource strained showed significant agency by developing innovative measures for CIPE implementation amidst the constraints. This aligns to the findings of Priestley *et al.* (2015) who argued that teacher agency does not imply a teachers' response to institutional support but also how teachers adapt to their working environment. The ability of the regional teachers to collaborate and form networks supports the suggestion that teachers' agency is a socially embedded process. Therefore, this research suggests that while institutional support may shape policy implementation, the support does not deterministically define policy implementation across both the elite and regional universities in China. Teacher agency allows teachers to adapt and innovate even when resources are limited, and this influences the implementation efficacy of public English policies.

The tension between ideological goals and prioritisation of language proficiency testing in standard tests like the CET-4 is widely explored (Gao, 2018; Lei and Medwell, 2022). This study confirmed that regional teachers face the challenge of the need to focus on ideological integration or learners' scores in the standard tests, a challenge that is consistent with the findings of Zhou and Wang (2025) who noted that adverse effect of the test-driven culture in China. Teachers reported that they prioritise test scores over ideological education to minimise conflict between learner and institutional expectations but compromise the broader targets of the CIPE framework. The phenomenon as established in this research can be explained by Ball's (1994) Policy Cycle Theory precisely the context of policy practice where the conflict between institutional pressures (learner's test scores) and policy aims (ideological education) lead to the emergence of what Ball (1994) called the policy recontextualisation. This refers to a situation where policies are adapted to fit institutional constraints.

However, CIPE concepts were integrated more effectively by elite teachers who faced little pressure on learner tests score demands. This aligns to Yan and He's (2012) suggestion that resource availability and institutional autonomy enable an implementation of a more ideologically driven and complex curriculum changes.

This study therefore suggests an extension of Ball's (1994) Policy Cycle Theory by suggesting an integration of how institutional constraints shape policy implementation especially in a unique context like China where non-elite institutions still prioritise test scores.

The study has an important theoretical implications. The study extends Priestley *et al.*'s (2015) Ecological Model of Teacher Agency by underscoring that the ideological objectives embedded in English language policies complicate the interplay between structural constraints and teacher agency. Based on the study, teacher agency is not only shaped by institutional resources and support but also by the ideological concepts integrated in CIPE. At the same time, teachers' professional identities that is shaped by the teachers' roles as educators influence their interpretation and enactment of English policy implementation. The study therefore suggests that while Priestley *et al.* (2015) only focussed on individual and institutional interaction, the model ignores the influence of the ideological objectives in CIPE in influencing policy implementation. The research therefore suggests an extension of the Priestley *et al.* (2015) model to integrate how the ideological dimension of CIPE especially in the context of China impact teacher agency on policy interpretation and implementation.

5.3 Contributions to the field

The first conclusion of this research is that institutional factors such as funding, resource availability, and teacher support during CIPE implementation interact with teachers' academic and professional identities to influence the implementation efficacy of CIPE implementation in China. Teachers with strong academic identities perceived the integration of CIPE as a learning opportunity and integrated ideological content in meaningful ways. However, teachers with pragmatic identities, especially those in resource-limited universities prioritised test scores over ideological content, and viewed CIPE as a burden. The conclusion is consistent to the conclusions of Priestley *et al.* (2015) who reported that teachers' professional identity influenced educational policy implementation.

An important conclusion of this study is the complex understanding of teacher agency in ideological education in China. While previous research like Ball (1994) explored teacher agency within content-based or technical reforms, the study

extends the theory and integrated ideological education into the framework of teacher agency and public English policy implementation. The study concludes that even in resource-strained institutions, teachers expressed agency by innovatively developing mechanisms like gradual implementation and informal collaboration when integrating CIPE in their practice.

Finally, institutional support and resource availability directly influences the implementation efficacy of public English education reforms in both elite and regional universities in China. Teacher confessions demonstrate that while teachers in lowly funded and poorly resourced regional universities suffer heavy workloads, resource strain, and large class sizes, teachers in elite universities enjoy vast resources, which support implementation of English curriculum reforms. Similar conclusions have been drawn by Gu and Wang (2017) and Larivière *et al.* (2021) and Yu *et al.* (2022) who emphasised the role and importance of resources and influence of resource disparity in the implementation of curriculum reforms. The research therefore adds to the extant literature on the role of teacher agency and resources on curriculum reform implementation.

5.4 Reflection on limitations and reflections on data collection

This qualitative research is limited by the sample size as only six teachers from two institutional types (elite and regional) were interviewed that limited research generalisability (Bryman, 2016). In the process of data collection, it was evident that unlike surveys where multiple respondents could submit survey forms at the same time or focus groups where many people could be interviewed at the same time, the data collection process took longer time. However, it was also evident that interviewing well-informed participants provided high quality and detailed data and enabled the researcher to achieve data saturation even with a small sample.

Secondly, self-reporting introduces potential social desirability and limits direct verification of enacted practices (Creswell, 2014). A direct contact with familiar research participants limits the type of information that the participants may share. An online interview and audio-recording instead of video-recording enabled the researcher to acquire insightful and accurate data as the participants to divulge information without the fear of being victimised.

Finally, the current study relies on data from elite and regional universities in China that limits generalisability (Yin, 2009). In the process of data collection, I noted that while this categorisation covered the nuances of differences in financing and the effects on implementation efficacy of CIPE in China, I also noted that varied contexts e.g rural vs urban universities, local vs international universities or cross-country comparison could have been considered to get an in-depth data and enhance the quality of the findings.

Chapter Six: Recommendations and implications for future research

6.1 Recommendations

To the frontline educators/teachers, the research recommends the need to develop collaborative networks across elite and regional schools to address the challenges of resource constraints in CIPE implementation. It is also suggested that teachers should incrementally integrate CIPE and adjust teaching strategies over time while also putting emphasis on learners' language proficiency.

For the university administrators, it is recommended that there is need to offer targeted professional development and provide the tools and skills that will enable the teachers in universities in China to effectively integrate CIPE in public English education. Education administrators across elite and regional universities should organise workshops and training to create awareness on how teachers may integrate language proficiency, preparation for exams, and ideological concepts. University administrators should also allocate time and teaching resources to facilitate the development of curriculum and ensure that teachers have innovative support without adversely impacting their core teaching goals.

Finally, national policymakers should provide clear guidance to the teachers on how to balance exam-oriented curricula and CIPE framework. A dynamic approach that allows teachers to adapt CIPE content without the burden of an increased workload and an overwhelming external pressure will enhance policy pragmatism and long-term effectiveness.

The table below summarises the stakeholder recommendation rationale.

Table 5-7: Stakeholder Recommendations and Rationale

Stakeholder	Focus	Actionable Recommendations	Rationale (from findings)
University Administrators	Institutional Support	Allocate dedicated time and funding for CIPE training and curriculum development.	Teachers reported minimal institutional support. Even at elite universities, formal support often came with heavy publishing/innovation expectations. Structured PD and resources would make implementation more manageable.
	Professional Development	Provide interdisciplinary teaching materials integrating ideological content. Reduce individual workload (e.g., adjust class sizes or hire teaching assistants).	
Teachers	Professional Collaboration & Development	Form or join communities of practice (online or face-to-face) to exchange CIPE resources (lesson plans, materials, activities). Actively participate in relevant PD (workshops, webinars) and share outcomes with colleagues. Advocate internally for collaborative PD opportunities.	Collaborative networks eased CIPE workload. Teachers without peer support struggled more. Peer-sharing and joint training improve capacity and spread effective practices.
	Iterative Implementation & Well-being	Adopt a gradual, iterative approach: pilot CIPE strategies each term and refine based on feedback. Balance workload by pacing changes, viewing integration as ongoing professional growth (learning from successes and failures) rather than one-time compliance.	
Polymakers	Clear Policy Guidelines & Autonomy	Issue explicit CIPE implementation guidelines (e.g., curriculum frameworks, exemplar lesson plans) that still allow teacher flexibility. Involve teachers in policy feedback to refine directives. Emphasize teacher discretion in adapting CIPE to student needs.	Teachers expressed confusion over expectations and a need for clarity. They also stressed that policies should therefore guide (not micromanage) and respect teacher expertise and local context.

6.2 Implications for future research

In view of the above research limitations, it is recommended that future researchers should expand the sample, adopt focus groups or observations to enhance data variability and generalisation (Creswell, 2014). Secondly, due to the limitations of self-reported data, future researchers should adopt classroom observations and experiments to reduce the effects of social desirability biases on research outcomes (Bryman, 2016). Finally, in view of the limitations of single case studies, future comparative studies across university levers, countries, and different cultural contexts will help to test the global applicability of the research findings (Yin, 2009).

6.3 Final reflections

Undertaking this study has challenged my longstanding assumption of the role that teachers play in educational policy implementation. It has helped me uncover and appreciate the role of context in policy formulation and implementation. Irrespective of context, teacher agency is needed for an efficient educational policy implementation. Institutions also need to provide teachers with the necessary support to enhance efficient policy implementation.

References

- Adams, W.C. (2015) 'Conducting semi-structured interviews', *Handbook of practical program evaluation*, pp.492-505.
- Adeoye-Olatunde, O.A. and Olenik, N.L. (2021) 'Research and scholarly methods: Semi-structured interviews', *Journal of the American college of clinical pharmacy*, 4(10), pp.1358-1367.
- Alharahsheh, H.H. and Pius, A. (2020) 'A review of key paradigms: Positivism VS interpretivism', *Global academic journal of humanities and social sciences*, 2(3), pp.39-43.
- Back, M. (2019) 'World language teachers performing and positioning agency in classroom target language use', *Theorizing and analyzing language teacher agency*, pp.101-120.
- Ball, S.J. (1994). *Education reform: A critical and post-structural approach*. Open University Press.
- Ball, S.J. (2015) 'What is policy? 21 years later: Reflections on the possibilities of policy research', *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education*, 36(3), pp.306-313.
- Biesta, G. and Tedder, M. (2006) 'How is agency possible? Towards an ecological understanding of agency-as-achievement', *Learning lives: Learning, identity, and agency in the life course*, 2006, pp.132-149.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. Sage Publications.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), pp.77-101.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2016) '(Mis) conceptualising themes, thematic analysis, and other problems with Fugard and Potts'(2015) sample-size tool for thematic analysis', *International Journal of social research methodology*, 19(6), pp.739-743.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2021a) 'One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis?' *Qualitative research in psychology*, 18(3), pp.328-352.

- Bridges, D. (2017) *Philosophy in educational research: Epistemology, ethics, politics and quality*. Cham: Springer.
- Brown, A. and Danaher, P.A. (2019) 'CHE principles: Facilitating authentic and dialogical semi-structured interviews in educational research', *International journal of research & method in education*, 42(1), pp.76-90.
- Brown, C., Spiro, J. and Quinton, S. (2020) 'The role of research ethics committees: Friend or foe in educational research? An exploratory study', *British Educational Research Journal*, 46(4), pp.747-769.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods (5th Ed.)*. Oxford University Press.
- Chen, S., Zhang, L.J. and McNaughton, S. (2023) 'The structure and characteristics of Chinese University English teachers' identities: Toward a sustainable language pedagogy', *Sustainability*, 15(15), pp. 1-18.
- Chen, Y. and Ping Gu, Y. (2024) 'Exploring the Role and Methods of Ideological and Political Education in Promoting International Understanding and Cultural Respect', *Cultura: International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology*, 21(3), pp. 492-509
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2017) 'The ethics of educational and social research', In *Research methods in education* (pp. 111-143). Routledge.
- Creswell, J.W. (2014) *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. 4th edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Deng, S. & Wang, X. (2023) 'Exploring locally developed ELT materials in the context of curriculum-based value education in China: challenges and solutions', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14: 1191420. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1191420>
- Du, L. (2016) 'Education, social stratification and class in China', In *Handbook on class and social stratification in China* (pp. 161-177). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Feng, J. and Bai, Y. (2021) 'On the integration of ideological and political education into college English teaching', *Curriculum and Teaching Methodology*, 4(3), pp.1-5.

- Fugard, A.J. and Potts, H.W. (2015) 'Supporting thinking on sample sizes for thematic analyses: a quantitative tool', *International journal of social research methodology*, 18(6), pp.669-684.
- Gao, Y. (2018) 'China's fluctuating English education policy discourses and continuing ambivalences in identity construction', In *Intercultural communication in Asia: Education, language and values* (pp. 241-261). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Gichuru, M.J. (2017) 'The interpretive research paradigm: A critical review of is research methodologies', *International Journal of Innovative Research and Advanced Studies (IJIRAS)*, 4(2), pp.1-5.
- Gil, J. (2016) 'English language education policies in the People's Republic of China', In *English language education policy in Asia* (pp. 49-90). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Gruijters, R.J. (2022) 'Trends in educational stratification during China's great transformation', *Oxford Review of Education*, 48(3), pp.320-340.
- Gu, M., & Wang, Q. (2017) 'Teaching Large Classes in Chinese High Schools: What Do Teachers Say and Do?' *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 40(2), 145-157.
- Guest, G., Bunce, A. and Johnson, L. (2006) 'How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability', *Field methods*, 18(1), pp.59-82.
- Hammersley, M. (2017) 'Research ethics', *Research methods and methodologies in education*, pp.57-67.
- Hatcher, R. and Troyna, B. (1994) 'The 'policy cycle': a Ball by Ball account', *Journal of education policy*, 9(2), pp.155-170.
- Head, G. (2020) 'Ethics in educational research: Review boards, ethical issues and researcher development', *European Educational Research Journal*, 19(1), pp.72-83.
- Hu, G. and McKay, S.L. (2012) 'English language teaching in China: A research agenda', *Language Teaching*, 45(2), pp.255-278.

- Hu, H., Li, F., & Luo, Z. (2024). 'The evolution of China's English education policy and challenges in higher education: Analysis based on LDA and Word2Vec'. *Frontiers in Education*, 9, 1385602. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1385602>
- Hu, R. and Zainol Abidin, M.J. (2025) 'Confucianism, collectivism, and communication: Cultural barriers and enablers of English proficiency in Chinese higher education', *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(4), pp. 1452-1465.
- Jann, W. and Wegrich, K. (2017) 'Theories of the policy cycle', In *Handbook of public policy analysis* (pp. 69-88). Routledge.
- Jenkins, G. (2020) 'Teacher agency: The effects of active and passive responses to curriculum change', *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 47(1), pp.167-181.
- Jia, Q., & Ericson, D. P. (2017) 'Equity and access to higher education in China: Lessons from Hunan province for university admissions policy'. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 52, pp. 97–110. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2016.10.011>
- Kearney, E. (2010) 'Cultural immersion in the foreign language classroom: Some narrative possibilities', *The Modern Language Journal*, 94(2), pp.332-336.
- Kumar, S. and Ujire, D.K. (2024) 'Inductive and deductive approaches to qualitative research', *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research*, 13(1), pp.58-63.
- Larivière, V., Ni, C., Gingras, Y., Cronin, B. & Sugimoto, C.R. (2021). 'The institutionalized stratification of the Chinese higher education system'. *Quantitative Science Studies*, 2(1), pp.327–347. https://doi.org/10.1162/qss_a_00104
- Law, W. W. (2014). 'Understanding China's curriculum reform for the 21st century'. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 46(3), 332–360.
- Leander, K.M. and Osborne, M.D. (2008) 'Complex positioning: Teachers as agents of curricular and pedagogical reform', *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 40(1), pp.23-46.
- Lei, M. and Medwell, J. (2022) 'The changing role of Chinese English-as-foreign-language teachers in the context of curriculum reform: Teachers' understanding of

their new role', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, p.904071. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.904071.

Leijen, Ä., Pedaste, M. and Lepp, L. (2020) 'Teacher agency following the ecological model: How it is achieved and how it could be strengthened by different types of reflection', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 68(3), pp.295-310.

Li, F. & Guan, C. (2020). 'The integration of socialist core values with College English teaching under the concept of "Ideological and Political Theory Teaching in All Courses"'. *Creative Education*, 11, pp. 2416–2423. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2020.1111180>

Li, M., Wang, H., & Zhang, L. (2024). 'Computational analysis of China's English education policy evolution: From testing-oriented to intercultural competence'. *Educational Policy Analysis*, 18(2), 45-67.

Li, Y. (2021) 'Exploration and Practice of the Organic Integration Mode of Ideological and Political Education and College English Teaching in the New Era', In *7th International Conference on Humanities and Social Science Research (ICHSSR 2021)* (pp. 132-135). Atlantis Press.

Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (1985) *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE.

Liu, B. (2015). 'A Study of University Teachers' Working Time'. *Open Education Research*, 21, 56–62. <https://doi.org/10.13966/j.cnki.kfjyyj.2015.02.006>

Liu, W. and He, C. (2022) 'Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education: Research Focuses and Evolution', *International Education Studies*, 15(5), pp.28-35.

Liu, X., Xiantong, Z. and Starkey, H. (2023) 'Ideological and political education in Chinese Universities: structures and practices', *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 43(2), pp.586-598.

Liu, Y., Chen, X., & Wu, S. (2024). 'EFL teacher agency in curriculum reform: Challenges and opportunities in developing regions of southern China'. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 126, 104-118.

Liu, Y., Zhang, L. & May, S. (2022), 'Dominance of Anglo-American cultural representations in university English textbooks in China: a corpus linguistics analysis',

Language, Culture and Curriculum, 35(1), pp. 83–101.
doi:10.1080/07908318.2021.1941077.

Maguire, M. and Delahunt, B. (2017) 'Doing a thematic analysis: A practical, step-by-step guide for learning and teaching scholars', *All Ireland journal of higher education*, 9(3), pp. 3351-33514.

Malterud, K., Siersma, V.D. & Guassora, A.D. (2016). 'Sample size in qualitative interview studies: Guided by information power'. *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13), 1753-1760.

Miller, E.R. and Gkonou, C. (2018) 'Language teacher agency, emotion labor and emotional rewards in tertiary-level English language programs', *System*, 79, pp.49-59.

Ministry of Education, China (2020) *Guidelines for College English Teaching*. Beijing, China: Higher Education Press.

Obilor, E.I. (2023) 'Convenience and purposive sampling techniques: Are they the same', *International Journal of Innovative Social & Science Education Research*, 11(1), pp.1-7.

O'Donoghue, T. (2018) *Planning your qualitative research thesis and project: An introduction to interpretivist research in education and the social sciences*. Routledge.

Pervin, N. and Mokhtar, M. (2022) 'The interpretivist research paradigm: A subjective notion of a social context', *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 11(2), pp.419-428.

Pham, L.T.M. (2018) 'Qualitative approach to research a review of advantages and disadvantages of three paradigms: Positivism, interpretivism and critical inquiry', *University of Adelaide*, 6, pp.34-47.

Priestley, M. and Biesta, G. (2013) 'Introduction: The new curriculum', *Reinventing the curriculum: New trends in curriculum policy and practice*, pp.1-12.

Priestley, M. and Drew, V. (2019) 'Professional enquiry: An ecological approach to developing teacher agency', In *An ecosystem for research-engaged schools* (pp. 154-169). Routledge.

Priestley, M., Biesta, G. & Robinson, S. (2015). *Teacher agency: An ecological approach*. Policy Press.

Rai, N. and Thapa, B. (2015) 'A study on purposive sampling method in research', *Kathmandu: Kathmandu School of Law*, 5(1), pp.8-15.

Ramrathan, L., Le Grange, L. and Shawa, L.B. (2017) 'Ethics in educational research', *Education studies for initial teacher education*, pp.432-443.

Sha, X. and Chang, Y. (2025) 'Occupational health and performance among chinese university teachers: A COR theory model of health-promoting leadership and burnout', *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*, 15(7), pp. 1-23.

Shi, L. (2006) 'The successors to Confucianism or a new generation? A questionnaire study on Chinese students' culture of learning English', *Language, culture and curriculum*, 19(1), pp.122-147.

Sinnema, C. and Aitken, G. (2013) 'Emerging international trends in curriculum', *Reinventing the curriculum: New trends in curriculum policy and practice*, pp.141-163.

Sun, W. and Wang, H. (2023) 'Discussion on the Curriculum Organization and Teaching Method for Curriculum Ideological and Political Education', *Frontiers in Educational Research*, 6(23), pp. 50-56.

Tao, J. and Gao, X. (2017) 'Teacher agency and identity commitment in curricular reform', *Teaching and teacher education*, 63, pp.346-355.

Tao, J. and Gao, X.A. (2021) *Language teacher agency*. Cambridge University Press.

Thanh, N.C. and Thanh, T.L. (2015) 'The interconnection between interpretivist paradigm and qualitative methods in education', *American journal of educational science*, 1(2), pp.24-27.

Vähäsantanen, K. (2015) 'Professional agency in the stream of change: Understanding educational change and teachers' professional identities', *Teaching and teacher education*, 47, pp.1-12.

Wang, H., Xu, T., & Zhang, M. (2023). 'A mixed method study on Chinese primary school EFL teachers' preparation, affecting factors and support needed to implement intercultural foreign language teaching'. *PLoS ONE*, 18(4), e0284146. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0284146>

Wang, J. (2021) 'Research on the Organic Integration of Ideological and Political Education and College Students' Innovation and Entrepreneurship', *Curriculum and Teaching Methodology*, 4(6), pp.74-79.

Wang, L. (2022). 'English teacher agency in educational reform: Survey evidence from 353 high school teachers'. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 45(4), 289-308.

Wang, Q. and Cheng, Y. (2014) 'Reflections on the effects of the 985 Project in mainland China', In *How world-class universities affect global higher education: Influences and responses* (pp. 103-114). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Wei, W. & Xin, Y. (2024). 'Ideological and Political Education in the Curriculum: Insights for solving the 'silo phenomenon' of values education'. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. Available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4897874> [Accessed 25 September 2025].

Wu, H. (2021) *China's Outward-Oriented Higher Education Internationalization*. Springer Singapore.

Xin, Z., Ganapathy, M. and Khan, A. (2024) 'Evaluation of Curriculum Ideological and Political Education in Chinese Higher Education: A Systematic Review', *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 13(1), pp. 2602-2620.

Xu, B. (2021) 'Understanding education on China's Belt and Road Initiative: a cultural political economy approach', *Beijing International Review of Education*, 3(1), pp.56-71.

Xu, S. (2017) 'Dilemmas in implementing China's national curriculum reform for university English education', in *Dilemmas in curriculum reform*. London: Routledge, pp. 193-210.

- Yan, C. & He, C. (2012a) 'Constraints on teacher agency: The case of English curriculum reform in mainland China', *Journal of Educational Change*, 13(3), 321-342.
- Yan, C. (2012) "'We can only change in a small way': A study of secondary English teachers' implementation of curriculum reform in China", *Journal of Educational Change*, 13(4), pp.431-447.
- Yan, C. and He, C. (2012) 'Bridging the implementation gap: An ethnographic study of English teachers' implementation of the curriculum reform in China. *Ethnography and Education*, 7(1), pp.1-19.
- Yang, H. (2015) *Teacher mediated agency in educational reform in China*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Yeung, W.J.J. (2013) 'Higher education expansion and social stratification in China', *Chinese Sociological Review*, 45(4), pp.54-80.
- Yin, R. K. (2009) *Case study research: Design and methods* (Vol. 5). Sage Publications.
- Yu, N, Dong, Y & de Jong, M. (2022) 'A helping hand from the government? How public research funding affects academic output in less-prestigious universities in China', *Research Policy*, vol. 51, no. 10, article 104591.
- Zhang, C. and Wright, J. (2017) 'Teacher agency: A two-level ecological model', *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 25(4), pp.143-166.
- Zhang, Q., & Shin, J. C. (2015). 'The tension between teaching and research in China: A comparison of research universities and teaching universities'. In *Forming, recruiting and managing the academic profession* (pp. 271-290). Springer.
- Zhang, Q., Liu, Y., & Peng, J. (2023). 'Unpacking EFL teachers' agency enacted in nested ecosystems in developing regions of Southern China'. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 43, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2023.100775>
- Zhang, T., Wang, Y. & Jiang, Z. (2025). 'EFL teachers' agency in Chinese universities against the backdrop of "Curriculum Ideology and Politics"—an

ecological perspective'. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 12:1178, pp. 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-05526-z>

Zhou, J. and Wang, L. (2025) 'The Strategies of Ideological Education in Chinese English Textbooks: An Integrated Study of Intercultural Communication and Multimodal Discourse Analysis', *SAGE Open*, 15(3), pp. 1-14.

Zhou, M. (2020). 'Educational inequality in rural China: A case study of English language teaching resources'. *Comparative Education Review*, 64(2), 231–250. <https://doi.org/10.1086/707773>

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Title of Study

The Implementation Efficacy of Public English Policies in Chinese Universities: A Qualitative Analysis of Teachers' Perspectives

Purpose

This interview aims to explore university English teachers' perspectives on the implementation of national public English policies, particularly the Curriculum Ideological and Political Education (CIPE) mandate. Questions are designed to investigate teachers' professional histories, institutional contexts, teaching practices, and future orientations.

Section 1: Background Information

- Could you briefly introduce your teaching background (years of experience, courses taught, institutional type)?
- How would you describe your professional identity as a university English teacher?

Section 2: Understanding of Policy

- How do you understand the objectives of China's recent public English policies, including CIPE?
- In your view, what are the main expectations these policies place on university English teachers?

Section 3: Iterational Dimension (Professional History & Identity)

- How have your past training and professional experiences shaped the way you approach CIPE?
- Do you feel your professional background prepared you for integrating ideological elements into English teaching? Why or why not?

Section 4: Context of Practice (Institutional Environment)

- What kind of institutional support (e.g., workload allocation, training, materials) have you received for implementing CIPE?
- How does your institution's assessment system (e.g., CET pass rates, diversified evaluation) influence your teaching priorities?

Section 5: Practical-Evaluative Judgements (Teaching Practices)

- How do you decide when and how to integrate CIPE content into your English teaching?
- Can you describe a specific example of how you have integrated CIPE into your classroom activities?
- What challenges or dilemmas have you encountered (e.g., balancing language objectives and ideological requirements)?

Section 6: Projective Dimension (Future Orientation)

- Looking ahead, what are your goals for improving or adapting CIPE implementation in your teaching?
- What kind of support or changes would make CIPE integration more effective in your context?

Section 7: Closing Questions

- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience of implementing public English policies or CIPE?

Note:

- The guide was piloted with two teachers to ensure clarity. Minor amendments were made following feedback, such as rephrasing technical terms into plain language and

reorganising questions to move from general to specific themes.

- This final version reflects those revisions.

Appendix B: Consent Form

Research Title: The Implementation Efficacy of Public English Policies in Chinese Universities: A Qualitative Analysis of Teachers' Perspectives

Researcher: Wenrui Yin

Statement	Please Tick (✓)
I have read and understood the information sheet for this study.	☐
I have had the opportunity to ask questions and received satisfactory answers.	☐
I understand that participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without consequences.	☐
I consent to the interview being audio-recorded.	☐
I understand that my responses will be anonymised and treated confidentially.	☐
I agree that anonymised data may be used for research and publication purposes.	☐

Participant's Name (printed): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date:
