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Navigating Cross-Cultural Dilemmas in Teacher Preparation: Lived Experiences of an International Faculty Member in the US

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Abstract

While existing research often centers on general faculty experiences, few studies explore how international faculty navigate classroom challenges and develop resilience through reflective practice. This qualitative single-case study investigates the lived experience of an international faculty member teaching in teacher education program at a U.S. research university. Guided by three research questions, the study examines the major difficulty he faced in preparing preservice teachers, the strategies he employed to construct resilience, and how this resilience influenced his identity development. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and blog reflections. Findings highlight persistent issues with teacher candidates' professional dispositions as a central challenge. The participant drew on reflective practice to address these challenges, build resilience, and reshape his professional identity. The study underscores the critical role of reflection in connecting resilience to identity and affirms the importance of professional dispositions in teacher preparation. It also illustrates the unique contributions international faculty bring to teacher education.

Keywords

reflective practice; resilience; identity development; international faculty member; professional dispositions

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1. Introduction

International faculty represent a minority group in U.S. higher education, often navigating unique challenges that stem from their linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Foote et al., 2008; Gahungu, 2011; Hu & Chen, 2021). For faculty who hail from countries where English is a second or foreign language, these challenges manifest acutely in their teaching experiences. Adverse situations such as language barriers, cultural misalignments, and institutional expectations frequently lead to conflict and stress. These challenges, if unaddressed, can result in serious consequences, including psychological disorders, depression, physical health issues, and diminished enthusiasm for teaching (Bell et al., 2012; Bobek, 2002; Dunham, 2002).

Teaching is inherently complex, requiring not only the ability to adapt pedagogical strategies to meet diverse student needs but also the capacity to deliver knowledge effectively and foster meaningful learning experiences. For international faculty, these responsibilities are often magnified by differences in language proficiency, classroom behaviors, academic standards, and course expectations (Alberts, 2008; Collins, 2008; Cooksey & Cole, 2012; Gahungu, 2011; Kim et al., 2014; Skachkova, 2007). These categories represent persistent challenges that complicate the professional experiences of international faculty in U.S. institutions. This complexity is further heightened for international faculty teaching in teacher education programs, where expectations extend beyond content delivery to include modeling professional disposition and reflective practices, and preparing teacher candidates to teach in diverse school contexts.

The significance of international faculty extends beyond their teaching roles. Scholars have highlighted their contributions to diversity and multiculturalism on campuses, noting that their experiences, perspectives, and global networks enrich academic environments and foster cross-cultural understanding (Foote, 2013; Moody, 2004; Robison, 2003). Despite their value, international faculty remain an “invisible minority” on U.S. campuses (Foote et al., 2008; Gahungu, 2011), a status compounded by the limited empirical research focused on their professional and personal experiences. This invisibility is particularly evident in the field of teacher education, where little research examines how international faculty contribute to or are challenged by the cultural, ethical, and instructional demands of preparing teachers. As the number of international faculty in the United States continues to grow (Kim et al., 2011; McCalman, 2007), and as higher education institutions increasingly emphasize diversity, there is an urgent need to investigate how these individuals navigate their teaching roles in teacher education and develop their professional identities. Such exploration can illuminate the interplay between resilience and identity development, offering critical insights for supporting international faculty in their professional journeys.

This study examines the lived experiences of a Chinese faculty member teaching in a teacher education program at a U.S. research university. By focusing on his teaching-related challenges, coping strategies, and the factors contributing to his resilience and identity development, this research provides a nuanced understanding of how international faculty adapt to and thrive in challenging academic environments, particularly within the demanding context of teacher education programs.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by resilience theory and sociocultural identity theory, providing a comprehensive lens to examine the lived experience of an international faculty member in U.S. higher education. Resilience is defined as both a critical personality trait and a dynamic capacity that enables individuals to develop coping strategies, navigate adversity, and maintain equilibrium between personal and professional commitments (Masten, 2001, 2018, 2025; Vallés & Clarà, 2023). For teacher educators, resilience holds particular significance as it sustains their ability to thrive despite institutional challenges while aligning personal values with professional goals (Zhang & Luo, 2023). Within this study, resilience theory serves as a framework to uncover the adaptive processes that contributed to the participant’s ability to navigate cross-cultural teaching challenges successfully.

Complementing this perspective, the study draws on identity theory through Vygotsky’s sociocultural lens, which conceptualizes identity development as an ongoing, mediated process shaped by cultural tools and social interactions (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995; Wertsch, 1985). From this viewpoint, identity transformation occurs as individuals internalize new patterns of sociocultural activity within specific institutional and cultural contexts. These processes are influenced by intersecting factors, including language, professional norms, and individual agency (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007; Marginson & Dang, 2017). For international faculty, this entails negotiating between inherited pedagogical identities and the demands of new educational environments, with resilience strategies serving as crucial

mediators in this adaptive process. This framework highlights how international faculty leverage cultural tools and social interactions to reconstruct their professional identities while adapting to cross-cultural academic settings.

The integration of these two theoretical perspectives allows for a nuanced examination of how the participant engaged in reflective practice and resilience-building strategies to reconstruct his professional identity. This dual framework illuminates the cyclical relationship between resilience and identity—whereby adaptive coping strategies facilitate identity transformation, and evolving professional identities, in turn, reinforce resilience. Such an approach is particularly valuable for understanding how international faculty navigate the tensions between institutional expectations, cultural differences, and personal growth in academic settings.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Cultural Differences in Classroom Behaviors

Shin and Lee (2022) outlined three approaches to defining international faculty, one of which involves identifying individuals based on the country where they obtained their degree or education. For the purpose of this study, “international faculty” refers to faculty members who are non-American-born and who completed their undergraduate education outside the United States (Kim et al., 2011). International faculty encounter significant challenges rooted in cultural differences, particularly in navigating roles, communication styles, and classroom dynamics in U.S. higher education. Misunderstandings related to religious beliefs, informal social norms, and cultural expectations can result in incivility, stereotypes, and difficulties in addressing sensitive topics (Alberts, 2008; Collins, 2008; Gahungu, 2011; Ghosh, 2017). For example, students often struggle initially with understanding accented English or adapting to unfamiliar teaching styles, though many eventually value competence over linguistic perfection (Duru & Akinro, 2020; Herget, 2016; Hsu, 2014; Wang, 2000). However, when students display a lack of patience or effective communication, these barriers become more pronounced.

These dynamics underscore the intricate relationship between language, cultural adaptation, and teaching expectations. Understanding how international faculty navigate such challenges is essential for identifying strategies that foster resilience, inclusivity, and professional identity in classroom settings.

3.2 Challenges and Coping Strategies

International faculty employ both personal and institutional strategies to cope with the challenges they face, which are crucial for fostering resilience and maintaining professional identity. First, faculty often rely on personal efforts to overcome teaching-related difficulties. These include improving communication through clear speech and written materials (Alberts et al., 2013), fostering rapport with students to establish credibility (Ndiangui et al., 2024; Zhang, 2014), and incorporating cultural perspectives into teaching practices (Gahungu, 2011; Hejri et al., 2023). Many also adopt student-centered teaching approaches and integrate technology, such as handouts and digital tools, to enhance learning outcomes (Gahungu, 2011). These proactive strategies demonstrate the faculty's capacity to build resilience through adaptation and innovation.

Secondly, institutional mechanisms, including orientation programs, mentorship, and peer collaboration, play a vital role in facilitating international faculty's transition to U.S. academia. These programs address challenges related to citizenship, course design, and academic standards, providing essential support for professional development (Alberts, 2008; Gahungu, 2011). However, research often overlooks the contributions of mentors and colleagues, highlighting a gap in understanding how institutional support enhances resilience and identity formation. Addressing this gap is essential for identifying effective institutional practices.

3.3 Reflective Practice in Building Resilience

The concept of reflective practice is grounded in the philosophy of John Dewey, who defined reflective thinking as an intentional and structured process of examining one's beliefs and experiences in relation to the evidence that supports them and the outcomes they may produce. In *How We Think*, Dewey (1998) argued that educators have a responsibility to critically engage with their ideas and actions, rather than rely solely on habits or established practices. This ongoing cycle of inquiry enables teachers to make informed decisions and adapt to the evolving needs of their students and learning environments.

Reflective practice serves as a powerful tool for fostering resilience and supporting identity development. Techniques such as journaling, peer feedback, and self-assessment enable international faculty to address classroom challenges, refine their teaching philosophies, and navigate cultural adaptation (Han, 2016; Longhurst et al., 2019; Machost & Stains, 2023). Reflective practices not only enhance teaching effectiveness but also help faculty integrate personal experiences with broader pedagogical goals. For instance, Han (2016) demonstrated how journaling allowed an international faculty member to reflect on and adapt to classroom dynamics in a diversity course, enhancing resilience. Similarly, LaPrade et al. (2014) highlighted how reflective practices in online teaching improved adaptability and student engagement. These findings suggest that reflection is a crucial strategy for building resilience and fostering professional identity in international faculty.

3.4 Resilience and Identity Development in Cultural Adaptation

Resilience is a pivotal factor in cultural adaptation and identity development for international faculty. Defined as the capacity to navigate adversity and maintain a balance between professional and personal goals, resilience facilitates identity transformation in challenging environments (Bobek, 2002; Gu & Day, 2013). Studies on diverse populations, such as African Americans, LGBTQ individuals, and K-12 educators, have established resilience as a key driver of identity development (Miller & MacIntosh, 1999; Meyer, 2010; Pearce & Morrison, 2011). However, research on this relationship within the context of higher education remains limited.

Foreign-born Asian faculty often face dual challenges of cultural adaptation and identity negotiation, balancing the expectations of their native culture with those of U.S. academia. Stereotypes, discrimination, and challenges in asserting teaching credibility further test their resilience (Kim et al., 2014). These experiences highlight the importance of resilience in maintaining a sense of self and achieving professional success in an unfamiliar academic environment.

3.5 Gaps in the Literature and Purpose of the Current Study

The literature highlights significant gaps in understanding how international faculty identify and address teaching challenges in U.S. academia. While much of the research focuses on general faculty experiences or student perspectives, there is limited exploration of how international faculty recognize and navigate specific classroom difficulties, such as cultural misunderstandings, language barriers, and academic expectations. Moreover, existing studies often lack detailed accounts of the faculty's reflective processes and strategies for resilience-building, underscoring the need for more nuanced, qualitative research in this area. Guided by resilience and identity theories, this study sought to address the following three research questions:

RQ1: what major difficulty did the international faculty member encounter in pre-service teacher preparation in the US?

RQ2: what strategies did the international faculty member use to construct his resilience?

RQ3: how did resilience construction influence the international faculty member's identity development?

4. Research Methodology

This study employs a single-case design to explore the lived teaching experiences of a Chinese faculty member at a U.S. university, justified by its alignment with qualitative research traditions for in-depth, context-rich inquiries (Franklin et al., 2014; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). The design enables a holistic examination of challenges, coping strategies, and resilience, using interviews and blog prompts to capture nuanced data within the U.S. higher education context. Purposefully selected as a critical case, the participant offers theoretical insights into international faculty experiences. Methodological rigor, including triangulation and prolonged engagement, ensures trustworthiness (Franklin et al., 2014; Kratochwill & Levin, 2015). While generalizability is limited, the study's depth and transferability provide valuable contributions to understanding academic resilience and cross-cultural adaptation.

4.1 Participant and Context of the Study

Jack (pseudonym) was selected for this case study due to his extensive teaching background and international experience. He earned undergraduate and master's degrees in China, where he also worked as a professor, before completing a doctoral degree in teacher education at a Western U.S. university. During his doctoral studies, he served as a teaching assistant for four and a half years and a research assistant for one year. After graduation, Jack became an assistant professor and is now an associate professor at a southeastern U.S. university, classified as a Research 1

institution (Carnegie Classification, 2016–2017). By the time of this study, Jack had spent thirteen years in the U.S., drawing on his multicultural background to enrich his teaching. Motivated by family considerations, he chose to establish his career in the U.S., where his bicultural perspective continues to shape his contributions to teacher education.

4.2 Data Sources

To ensure validity, this study used multiple data sources (Yin, 2018): three interviews and four blog reflections. Interviews allowed in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives (Patton, 2002) and provided opportunities for clarification (Creswell, 2014a). Conducted via Skype for convenience and flexibility, the interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented with notes. The first addressed background and bicultural teaching challenges, the second focused on coping strategies, and the third confirmed findings and explored emotional experiences. Four blog reflections on Google Blogger complemented the data. As Hookway (2008) noted, blogs offer insight into social processes and fit participants' schedules, capturing identity and teaching experiences. The blog prompts were intentionally designed to align with and support the study's three research questions. The first prompt focused on challenges Jack encountered in teacher preparation, addressing the first research question. The second and third prompts explored Jack's strategies for building resilience and how these strategies shaped the participant's evolving professional identity, corresponding to the second and third research questions, respectively. The fourth prompt, which centered on job retention, also provided insights relevant to both resilience and identity development.

4.3 Data Collection

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to participant recruitment. The participant was contacted via email to schedule an interview and was provided with the study's purpose, procedures, and a consent form. The participant was informed of the right to withdraw at any time, and a pseudonym was used to ensure confidentiality. The in-depth interview employed open-ended questions to encourage the participant to respond in their own words (Creswell, 2014a).

Data were collected in three phases. In Phase One, Jack completed Interview #1, answering 12 open-ended questions about demographics, teaching experience in both his home country and the U.S., bicultural identity, and classroom challenges, including language and cultural differences. He also posted his first blog reflection on his experience as a graduate assistant. In Phase Two, Jack responded to seven open-ended questions that focused on teaching challenges and coping strategies. He also shared educational experiences in his home country and how they contrasted with those in the U.S., followed by a second blog reflection on cultural experiences. In Phase Three, a follow-up interview and two additional blog reflections were conducted to confirm findings and explore Jack's identity development. To enhance validity, researchers asked clarifying and confirming questions at the beginning and end of interviews, and Jack was invited to add or revise his responses as needed.

4.4 Data Analysis

The researchers transcribed three interviews and four blog reflections, analyzing the data using Naeem et al. (2023) six-phase thematic analysis: familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and writing. Researchers first immersed themselves in the data, then generated initial codes using In Vivo and Descriptive Coding, guided by research questions (Saldaña, 2016). Open coding allowed codes to emerge naturally (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017), and annotations were made on printed transcripts. Codes were then organized into categories and subcategories, with particular attention to coping strategies and resilience. Researchers reached consensus on three key themes and developed a thematic map to visualize relationships.

To ensure validity, the study employed triangulation, member checking, and thick description (Creswell, 2014a). Triangulation was achieved through interviews and blog reflections (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2011). Member checking occurred via a follow-up interview and blog comments, allowing the participant to clarify findings (Creswell, 2014b). Thick descriptions captured the participant's experiences and resilience development, offering contextual depth and supporting transferability.

5. Findings

The findings will be presented verbatim, capturing the participant's exact words to preserve the authenticity and integrity of the international faculty member's lived experiences. Table 1 summarizes the three major themes identified in the case study, with associated codes and representative participant quotes.

5.1 Major Dilemma in Teaching: Students' Professional Disposition Issues

One of the most pressing and persistent challenges Jack faced in his role as a teacher educator was the issue of students' professional dispositions. This theme emerged as a central concern throughout the study, illustrating the complexity of promoting professionalism in diverse and often challenging classroom contexts. Despite national standards emphasizing the importance of ethical and professional behavior in teacher preparation, Jack consistently encountered candidates who struggled to meet these expectations.

Table 1: Themes, Codes, and Illustrative Quotes

Theme	Codes	Illustrative Quote
1. Major Dilemma in Teaching: Students' Professional Disposition Issues	Professionalism, disposition challenges, misconceptions about teaching	"I have observed recurring issues semester after semester, where there is a noticeable lack of maturity and sound judgment."
2. Strategies for Resilience Construction	Reflective practice, cultural capital, Confucian values, adaptation	"I designed a disposition analysis project where students had to examine real cases and think about preventative strategies."
3. Identity Development through Resilience	Bicultural identity, role transformation, professional growth	"Teaching here has shaped who I am—not just as a teacher, but as someone who constantly negotiates between two worlds."

Each academic year, Jack encountered a significant and recurring challenge: addressing the professional disposition issues of certain teacher candidates. Statewide disposition standards mandate that all candidates must adhere to specific professional behaviors essential for their development as qualified teachers. These behaviors include maintaining confidentiality, demonstrating maturity and sound judgment, adhering to policies, exemplifying honesty and integrity, and accepting constructive criticism positively. Despite most teacher candidates meeting these standards, Jack consistently encountered at least one candidate annually with serious disposition issues, necessitating time-consuming and complex rectification.

Recognizing the critical role teachers play in shaping the future, Jack firmly believed that professional dispositions were as crucial, if not more so, than mastering content knowledge and pedagogical skills. He observed a shift in student demographics from his time as a part-time instructor during his Ph.D. program, where there were more Hispanic students, to his current experience with an increased presence of African American students. Many teacher candidates entered the program with misconceptions about the teaching profession, often viewing it as an easy job with acceptable pay. Additionally, some came from backgrounds that had not sufficiently prepared them for the professional behaviors required in teaching, leading them to underestimate the importance of professional dispositions.

During the first interview, Jack reflected on these challenges:

"I have observed recurring issues semester after semester, where there is a noticeable lack of maturity and sound judgment. These issues are often compounded by prejudice and defiance directed towards me due to my foreign identity and accented spoken English."

Jack also noted significant differences in classroom dynamics between his home country and the U.S. In his home country, where Confucianism is prevalent, the authority of the teacher is a well-established norm (Gu, 2006), and Jack rarely encountered disruptive behaviors or defiance in the classroom. During the first interview, he also shared that,

"Teaching in my home country was an experience in which I could enjoy my role as an authority figure, and students almost always respected me as their instructor and even moral mentor. But here in the U.S., even though I clearly stated my rules—such as a no-technology policy—during the first week of class, I often faced disturbances such as students playing on their phones, chatting loudly, or confronting me rudely, and these inevitably interrupted the flow of my instruction."

These insights were reinforced by Jack's first blog reflection and his responses to the open-ended questions collected in Phase One and Two, where he revisited and expanded on these classroom challenges, reflecting more personally on how they affected his sense of professional identity. He wrote about his frustration with repeated behavioral issues and his ongoing effort to reconcile cultural expectations from his Confucian background with the more informal student-teacher dynamic in the U.S. He noted:

"Sometimes I feel like I am constantly negotiating my role—not just as a teacher, but as someone who is trying to earn respect in a system that doesn't necessarily value the same professional norms I was trained in."

The integration of interview and blog data as well as responses to open-ended questions illustrates how these dilemmas are not isolated incidents but deeply felt and recurrent challenges that shape Jack's professional outlook. These experiences underscored the cultural and personal biases Jack had to navigate while striving to maintain high professional standards in his teaching. This added complexity made it increasingly challenging for him to address issues of professional dispositions effectively, as he had to balance enforcing standards with understanding the diverse cultural backgrounds and expectations of his students.

5.2 Strategies for Dealing with the Dilemma

Confronted with persistent issues surrounding teacher candidates' professional dispositions, Jack recognized the need for more effective and sustainable solutions. This theme explores the strategies Jack employed to respond to disposition-related dilemmas, highlighting his evolving efforts to balance accountability with growth-oriented support.

Jack's dedication to fostering professional growth in his teacher candidates required him to continually adapt his strategies, ensuring that he could support their development while also preserving the integrity of the teaching profession. Jack understood that mishandling these disposition issues could jeopardize both his reputation and the candidates' future careers. Initially, he adopted a strategy involving face-to-face discussions and reflective essays. During the second interview, Jack noted,

"When I identified a candidate violating the disposition standards, I would have a direct conversation and ask them to write an essay reflecting on their behavior or attitude. This approach aimed to provide a buffer, allowing candidates to critically reflect on their actions without immediately facing formal disciplinary action."

However, this method proved insufficient, particularly when candidates exhibited recurring problematic behaviors. For example, two teacher candidates repeatedly failed to follow the university supervisor's guidance and school policy during her senior practicum. Despite discussing the issue and requesting a reflective essay, the candidates continued to disregard the policy, demonstrating the ineffectiveness of this approach.

Recognizing the need for a more impactful strategy, as noted in his journal reflection in Phase Two, Jack developed a comprehensive disposition analysis project. He systematically reviewed the institution's records of submitted disposition infractions and selected 40 cases that represented a diverse range of infractions across all the disposition standards. To ensure confidentiality, he redacted all sensitive information. Jack then designed the professional disposition analysis project, which required each teacher candidate to first individually analyze each of the 40 cases. Based on their analysis, the candidates were asked to reflect on the importance of professional dispositions by describing any similar scenarios they had encountered and outlining their resolutions about professional dispositions for the rest of the semester.

The project also included a collaborative component. Candidates worked with their peers to prepare a group PowerPoint presentation that included several key elements: a final group sorting of the cases after resolving any disagreements, a justification for their categorization of each case, bar graphs indicating the frequency distribution of the 40 cases according to the seven disposition standards, and an analysis of whether the cases were related to university courses or practicum classrooms. Finally, each group conducted two in-depth case analyses, which included an overview of the case, identification of the root cause of the disposition infraction, and a proposed preventative approach that they would adopt if they were the instructor.

To provide a thorough learning experience, Jack divided the disposition analysis project into two semesters, with each semester focusing on the analysis of 20 cases. This approach allowed candidates to engage deeply with the material, fostering a greater understanding of the importance of professional dispositions and preparing them for the complexities of the teaching profession.

The positive impact of the disposition analysis was immediate. During the second interview, Jack noted that,

"The teacher candidates began to understand the gravity of professional dispositions and their significance in their future careers. Engaging in this thorough analysis and reflection process allowed them to develop a deeper appreciation for the standards they were expected to uphold."

One example of the project's effectiveness involved a candidate who initially exhibited disruptive behaviors in class. Jack enforced a no-phone policy, but the student persistently used her phone and showed an unacceptable attitude. After re-emphasizing the significance of professional dispositions and administering a mid-point pledge, the student's attitude improved, although the phone issue persisted. By spring, however, the candidate showed significant improvement, which Jack attributed to the bi-weekly disposition analysis presentations. The candidate's clinical supervisor also noted her "massive improvement in attitudes and behaviors," highlighting the broader effectiveness of Jack's methods.

5.3 Resilience and Identity Development

As Jack refined his strategies for addressing professional disposition issues, another theme emerged—his own resilience and evolving professional identity. This theme explores how Jack's capacity to adapt, reflect, and grow in response to adversity not only shaped his teaching practices but also strengthened his identity as a committed, culturally responsive educator.

Resilience was a cornerstone in the development of Jack's professional identity, particularly as he navigated the complexities of teaching in diverse educational environments. His initial teaching experiences during his doctoral program provided a critical foundation for his growth as an educator. These early challenges were instrumental in building his self-efficacy and prepared him for the transition to a full-time faculty role at an institution with a more diverse student population. One reflection from Jack's journal captured this growth:

"During my early years of teaching, there were moments of intense struggle—times when I questioned my competence and my path. However, each instance of overcoming these doubts and adapting to the unique needs of my classroom strengthened my belief in my capabilities as an educator."

This foundational resilience became a key component of Jack's professional development and his ability to handle increasingly complex teaching contexts.

The demographic shift from the institution where he obtained his doctoral degree to the current institution brought with it a new set of challenges. Jack encountered significant cultural differences and varying expectations regarding classroom behavior, which contrasted sharply with his previous teaching experiences. These challenges often led to frustration and self-doubt, especially when he faced disruptive behaviors and defiance—issues that were rare in his earlier teaching contexts. However, rather than becoming discouraged, Jack's resilience proved pivotal. He engaged in reflective practice, continually assessing and adapting his teaching strategies to better align with the needs of his students. As Jack noted in another journal he wrote,

"The shift to a more diverse classroom environment was an eye-opening experience. It pushed me to step out of my comfort zone and reassess my teaching methods. Reflecting on what worked and what didn't become a daily practice that not only improved my instruction but also deepened my connection with my students."

This reflective practice exemplified how Jack's resilience allowed him to transform challenges into opportunities for growth, ensuring his teaching remained effective and responsive.

Over time, Jack's persistence and adaptability led to noticeable growth. By implementing innovative strategies—such as a comprehensive disposition analysis project—he improved classroom dynamics, increased student engagement, and found teaching more rewarding. This progress reflected his professional growth and ability to thrive in a challenging academic environment.

Jack's increasing confidence was closely tied to his resilience. Overcoming obstacles reinforced his belief in his capacity to create a positive learning space, which in turn positively influenced student responses. During the third interview, Jack shared that students nominated him for the Outstanding Teacher of the Year and Outstanding Student Service Awards—both of which he won.

Student support played a vital role in sustaining Jack's resilience. He shared feedback from teaching evaluations, including one student who wrote, "I hate how there were students who disrespected him in class as he is the best teacher we have had in this program," and another who said, "I hope all teachers could have even HALF the amount of

dedication and professionalism that he has.” These affirmations strengthened Jack’s commitment to his teaching philosophy and highlighted the value of professional dispositions. His journey reflects how resilience and reflection shape an evolving professional identity in diverse educational settings.

6. Discussion

6.1 Reflective Practice as a Catalyst for Resilience, Identity Transformation, and Professional Growth

Reflective practice, introduced by Dewey (1998) as reflective thinking, plays a pivotal role in fostering self-awareness, adaptability, and professional growth for both teacher candidates and teacher educators. In this study, reflective practice also functioned as a mechanism for resilience-building and identity development, particularly when examined through the lens of resilience theory (Masten, 2001, 2018, 2025; Vallés & Clarà, 2023). Jack’s reflections—drawn from interviews and blog entries—reveal how persistent challenges related to students’ professional dispositions served as recurring stressors. Yet rather than succumbing to frustration or disengagement, Jack engaged in structured reflection to identify root causes and reframe his approach to classroom management and student expectations.

This aligns with resilience theory’s emphasis on adaptive processes and metacognitive strategies that help individuals maintain personal and professional equilibrium in the face of adversity (Zhang & Luo, 2023). Jack’s cultural background, rooted in Confucian educational values, initially clashed with U.S. classroom norms. However, through reflection, he integrated his moral framework with new teaching expectations, enabling him to sustain high standards while remaining responsive to students’ diverse needs. His use of cultural capital—articulated in his blog reflections—demonstrates how resilience can be supported by one’s sociocultural identity and experiences (Longhurst et al., 2019; Seitova, 2019).

Sociocultural identity theory (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995; Holland & Lachicotte, 2007) provides a complementary lens to understand Jack’s evolving professional identity. Through social interaction and reflective engagement, Jack internalized new norms and gradually reshaped his identity from that of a moral authority to a more adaptive and culturally responsive educator. This transformation held particular significance in teacher education, where faculty are expected to model reflective practices for teacher candidates. Rather than following a linear path, the process was iterative — shaped by institutional expectations and the participant’s individual agency. Through reflective practice, he created a space to navigate and reconcile the tensions between his cultural identities.

Jack’s case highlights the dual role of reflective practice—as a strategy for immediate problem-solving and a catalyst for long-term identity development. It provides a framework for continuous professional refinement that benefits both faculty and teacher candidates who witness and adopt these reflective habits (Liu et al., 2025; Mulryan-Kyne, 2021). Ultimately, Jack’s case exemplifies the transformative power of reflective practice in shaping resilient, effective educators (Han, 2016; LaPrade et al., 2014) and affirms the theoretical link between resilience and identity within the complex realities of cross-cultural teaching.

6.2 Significance of Professional Disposition in New Teacher Preparation

The findings highlight professionalism as a foundational element in preparing new teachers to navigate complex classrooms. Despite its importance, teacher education over the past two decades has often emphasized knowledge and accountability while neglecting professionalism in teacher preparation (Carlile, 2023). This omission has left many teacher candidates unprepared to view professionalism as central to their role. In response, national standards such as NCATE (2002) and INTASC (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2011) have emphasized dispositions alongside pedagogy and content knowledge, underscoring professionalism as key to ethical teaching practice.

Research shows that unprofessional behavior, more than content or pedagogical shortcomings, frequently drives principals’ decisions not to renew contracts (Nixon et al., 2010), reinforcing calls to prioritize professionalism in teacher preparation (Dottin, 2009; Nixon et al., 2010). Jack’s innovative disposition analysis project operationalizes these standards through a culturally grounded framework. Drawing from Confucian values, the project engaged candidates in analyzing 40 real-world disposition infractions, identifying root causes, proposing prevention strategies, and reflecting on the broader implications of professional conduct.

This structured approach, combining individual reflection with collaborative problem-solving, fostered notable growth in candidates’ professional behaviors. Its implementation within a teacher education program underscores the need to instill professional mindsets early, as teacher candidates are forming their identities and philosophies. By aligning with NCATE and INTASC standards and addressing gaps in current policy and practice, Jack’s work exemplifies

how professionalism can be meaningfully integrated into teacher education. His efforts affirm the urgent need for teacher preparation programs to embed professionalism systematically, equipping future educators to meet the ethical and relational demands of today's classrooms.

6.3 International Faculty's Contributions to Teacher Education

International faculty contribute significantly to teacher education, particularly in addressing teaching quality in research universities, where teaching often receives less emphasis than publishing (Dong & Wang, 2024; Hoult et al., 2025). This study highlights how the participant navigated linguistic challenges, including accented speech, cultural references, and language barriers, findings that align with prior research (Alberts, 2008; Alberts et al., 2013; Gahungu, 2011; Seagren & Wang, 1994). However, unlike the predominantly critical focus of earlier studies, the faculty member in this research viewed his international background as an asset rather than an obstacle, leveraging his native cultural knowledge as part of a hidden curriculum to enrich his teaching (Foote, 2013).

The participant's experiences also reinforced the importance of a sense of worth and belonging, which are vital for international scholars' success in adapting to their academic environments (Antoniadou & Quinlan, 2018). His commitment to his professional role further underscored the relationship between identity and resilience in navigating dual cultural contexts. To thrive, international faculty must develop a strong and optimistic self-concept, feel valued, and establish a sense of belonging in their academic institutions (Antoniadou & Quinlan, 2018). These elements are crucial for building a relevant and adaptable professional identity, enabling international faculty to succeed in cultural immersion and academic contributions.

Despite their growing presence, the contributions of Asian faculty in teacher education remain underexplored. Research often focuses on issues such as linguistics and diversity, overlooking the unique perspectives and values they bring to teacher preparation. This study bridged that gap by emphasizing the roles of Asian faculty in enriching teacher education through diverse cultural perspectives. Incorporating these perspectives not only broadens the scope of teacher education but also equips future educators with the skills to navigate and thrive in multicultural classrooms.

7. Limitations, Future Directions, and Conclusion

7.1 Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it focuses on a single participant—a Chinese international faculty member in teacher education at a U.S. research university. While offering valuable insights, the findings may not be generalizable to other international faculty from different Asian cultures. Future research should examine faculty experiences across diverse Asian countries to explore how cultural backgrounds shape teaching and integration.

Second, the participant was male, limiting the study's ability to address gender dynamics. Female Asian faculty may face distinct challenges related to cultural accommodation, classroom interactions, and student dynamics. Future studies should explore how gender intersects with teaching practices and faculty acculturation.

Third, the study took place in a southern U.S. state, where local values and cultural norms may have uniquely influenced the participant's experiences. Faculty in other U.S. regions may encounter different contextual challenges. Future research should consider regional differences to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how international faculty adapt and contribute to teacher education across diverse educational environments.

7.2 Future Directions

Future research should extend the findings of this study by investigating the experiences of international faculty across diverse cultural and geographic contexts. Comparative studies could elucidate how cultural, institutional, and regional factors influence teaching practices and professional identity development. Gender dynamics should also be explored more thoroughly to uncover specific challenges and strategies for male and female international faculty.

Longitudinal studies would provide a deeper understanding of how faculty navigate cultural and professional transitions over time, capturing the evolution of their integration into U.S. academia. Additionally, examining the broader impact of international faculty on teacher preparation practices could highlight innovative approaches to incorporating diverse cultural perspectives into education. Addressing these areas will further enhance teacher preparation programs and contribute to a more inclusive and effective educational framework.

7.3 Conclusion

This study underscores the critical roles of reflective practice, professionalism, and the unique contributions of international faculty in advancing teacher education. The findings from this study illustrate how reflective practice fosters professional growth, adaptability, and enhanced teaching outcomes. By addressing gaps in training, Jack utilized culturally informed strategies to integrate professionalism into teacher preparation, aligning with national standards and navigating the ethical complexities of modern classrooms. Jack's ability to leverage his cultural background and foster identity-building highlights the significant value international faculty bring to teacher education. His approach demonstrates how international experiences can effectively overcome linguistic and cultural barriers while promoting professional development. Integrating reflective practice, cultural perspectives, and professionalism within teacher education provides a holistic framework for preparing educators who are skilled, ethical, and culturally responsive. By building on these findings and addressing the limitations identified, future research can contribute to the development of inclusive, dynamic teacher preparation programs that harness the full potential of diverse faculty contributions.

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