Understanding and supporting international students learning: Perspective of teachers

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International students are important for creating a multicultural learning environment in their host countries. Most studies on the internationalisation of education have focused on students at the university level and given scant attention to international students in the Australian school sector. This paper reports on a study that utilised a critical interpretive research methodology to investigate the contributions of international students to Australian independent schools and the support they receive from the perspective of schoolteachers. By interviewing 13 Australian teachers who teach international students in several subjects, this paper first reports on the importance of international students to internationalising Australian schools, including improving cultural awareness and competence, introducing culturally responsive teaching strategies and multiple learning styles, and diversifying teaching materials and methods. This paper also identifies supporting programs for international students provided by schools, which include language support; academic support; cultural and social support, and designated international students' EAL teachers. This paper argues that in practising international education in secondary schools, Australian teachers should recognise and acknowledge the contributions of international students to the school's internationalisation and support students by respecting their unique educational subjectivities.

Keywords: internationalisation; international students; Australian independent schools; student supports; teacher teaching and Asia as method

INTRODUCTION

From a Western institutional perspective, internationalisation is defined as the process of 'integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education (Knight, 2004, p. 11). Internationalisation has become an imperative for many universities. The concept of internationalisation is often embedded in the institutions' mission statements and policy documents and perceived as a strength tied to the international ranking of the institution, its success and global outlook (Marmolejo, 2010; Noorda, 2014). At a broader level, the internationalisation of education is seen as the process in which the education sectors reconfigure and respond to globalisation and internationalisation (Rizvi & Lingard 2010).

Australia benefits enormously from the large numbers of international students who choose to study, work and live in Australia. In 2018-19, international education contributed $37.6 billion to the Australian economy and supported more than 240,000 occupations nationwide (DET, 2019). In addition to its economic advantages, international education is fundamental to Australia's endeavours to generate contact with neighbouring countries, reinforce

connections among people and contribute to worldwide harmony and stability. Australia has a reputation as the most multicultural society in the world, and this, plus the process of globalisation, prominently emphasises the requirement of intercultural awareness and aptitudes to support the cultural diversity of this complex society. Enabling local students to develop the skills vital to succeeding in an increasingly interconnected world and workforce, the Victorian Government's Department of Education and Training encourages schools to host international students to deepen cultural enrichment, language learning and introduce global perspectives to their classrooms (DET, 2018). Teachers with foresight stress that young learners need knowledge and skills to preserve society's cultural diversity and live and work in a globalised world.

Most studies on the internationalisation of education have focused on students at the university level. However, there is increasing interest in studying the issue of internationalisation in secondary schools. Such studies seek to investigate the motivation of secondary schools to internationalise and the effect of internationalisation on school culture, values, achievement and overall learning atmosphere (Fielding & Vidovich, 2017; Tudball, 2005). Whilst globalisation has a powerful impact on schools, local contextual factors such as school ethos, school resources, teacher values and parent demographics and expectations play a significant part in shaping how schools engage with internationalisation (Fielding & Vidovich, 2017). Of particular interest are the tensions that may arise in developing and implementing an internationalised curriculum (Rizvi, 2004) and the corresponding changes in teachers' pedagogical practices (Teichler, 2004; Tudball, 2005).

International students are an integral part of the school community. They can offer insights into values, beliefs and attitudes that differ from dominant cultural practices. The number of international students in Australia increased from 267,078 in 2002 to 912,658 students in 2019 (an increase of 342%). The International Education sector experienced its fifth year of double-digit growth in a row between 2015 and 2019. In 2019, 47% of international students enrolled in higher education, 29% in vocational education and training (VET), 15% in English language intensive courses for overseas students (ELICOS), 5% in non-award programs and 3% in primary and secondary schools (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020). School students are a small proportion of Australia's international students, accounting for just over 3.9% ($1.45 billion) of the total export income from international education (Independent School Australia, 2021). In 2019 the Independent School sector enrolled over 7,620 overseas students, approximately 30% of 25,000 international students in Australian schools. Most international students in independent schools (83%) are in their secondary years, with senior secondary accounting for most enrolments (ISCA, 2019). The remaining 17% are in primary schools (ISCA, 2019). The research reported in this article focused on international students in the secondary school sector. It was undertaken to gain a better insight into the needs of international students and identify ways to provide them with proper and sufficient support in Australian schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In a narrow sense, internationalising is perceived partly as the enrolment of non-citizen students who possess different cultural and social experiences from mainstream ones (Carrol & Ryan, 2005). Carrol and Ryan (2005) argue that the meaning of internationalisation of education should not be confined to the economic gains from expanding international students' enrolment. Instead, the lens of internationalisation should be used to re-examine and innovate the existing education system and teaching pedagogies and elevate current school

practices to an international level (Carrol & Ryan, 2005). The literature on schools' internationalisation mainly considers school management, international students' experience and teachers' practices (Hattingh, 2016). Teachers on the front line of international student education are the crucial stakeholders in this endeavour (Hattingh, 2016). Arguably, their daily practices could profoundly impact the international education industry.

In addition to acknowledging the crucial role of teachers, several studies have examined the factors necessary to succeed in international education and whether these elements could enhance international teaching quality (Klein & Wikan, 2019; Lee & Oxelson, 2006). Research on teachers involved in international education can be divided into three main categories: teachers' attitude, teachers' cultural understandings, and teachers' pedagogies and their perceptions of international students' learning styles (Hattingh, 2016), with teachers' attitude significant in determining the direction of their professional practices. Lee and Oxelson (2006) found that teachers who hold positive attitudes toward international students might improve their teaching quality. Reeves's (2006) study suggests that teachers with negative attitudes toward culturally and linguistically diverse students are reluctant to revise their existing teaching material and pedagogies, which could be detrimental to creating an ideal learning environment (Hattingh, 2016).

Teachers in international education settings are expected to mobilise their professional, sociocultural and historical resources. Teachers' cultural competency, the second research category, refers to teachers' ability to interact sensitively with international students (Hattingh, 2016). This ability contributes to effective communication between students and teachers, which is vital in linguistically diverse education settings. Klein and Wikan (2019) point out that teachers with cultural knowledge are more likely to provide social contexts and chances to cultivate international students' cross-cultural competency.

In examining the third category, teaching practices and the perceptions of international students' learning styles, researchers (Bottiani et al., 2018; Lim et al., 2019) propose that an ideal international schoolteacher needs to connect with the learning style of international students. International students' learning styles should not be considered deficient but a possible means for enriching and inspiring teaching pedagogies.

Despite increasing research attention, Chan and Dimmock (2008) note that research on international education in the school sector is still in its infancy. Research is framed by either a humanist—emphasising the authoritative source of knowledge—or reconstructionist— stressing the function of a particular society for the future perspective (Prickarts, 2017). International education is defined as a way of cultivating the Western-oriented mind (Prickarts, 2017). Given that schools in the US, the UK, Canada and Australia have been recruiting large numbers of international students with Confucian cultural backgrounds (Hattingh, 2016), the current framing of international education research may be questionable. As already stated, international education can foster educational innovation and inspire alternative pedagogies. Gopal (2011) argues that it is necessary to undertake research on international education at the individual level of host education institutions' teachers. Niehaus and William (2016) highlight the significance of understanding host teachers' perceptions of international students and education. By exploring teachers' perspectives and identifying both strengths and weaknesses of international education practice, host institutions' intercultural teaching practice could be enhanced, students' learning outcomes could be improved, and international education could be better promoted (Sun et al., 2019).

The current study draws on Chen's concept of Asian as Method to explore international education from the teachers' perspective. By so doing, it seeks to shed light on the poor understanding of international education. The research questions are:
1) What are the contributions of international students to Australian independent schools from the teachers' perspective?
2) How do teachers in Australian independent schools support international students through various programs?

METHODOLOGY

This paper utilised a critical interpretive research methodology to investigate the data that enable researchers to make sense of and interpret the impacts of internationalisation on Australian independent schools from the perspective of schoolteachers.

Asia as method

Western educators will likely see their international students through a Western lens, inhibiting the internationalisation process (Singh, 2009). The analysis of this paper draws on Chen (2010)'s 'Asia as Methods' to examine the mechanism of knowledge creation in sociocultural research. Chen (2010) insists that research on Asian studies move beyond their paralysing Western focus as either a positive or a negative referent and build their standpoints, reference points and research agendas.

In 'Asia as method', Asia is used as an imaginary anchoring point, which enables societies in Asia to become one another's reference points so that understanding of the self can be transformed and subjectivity rebuilt. On this basis, Asia's diverse historical experiences and rich social practices may be mobilised to provide alternative horizons and perspectives. This engagement method can potentially advance a different understanding of world history. (Chen, 2010, p. xv)

'Asia as method' offers a new imagination of study that extends the reference of the West to alternate viewpoints, with Asian history, politics and culture as primary points of reference (Zhang et al., 2015; Zhang & Chan, 2022). In many Asian educational contexts and many studies on these contexts, so-called Western theories are frequently applied in an unquestioned manner, with too little attention paid to where such ideas originated and how they are interpreted in Asian educational contexts. Inadequate attention is also being paid to so-called non-Western educational thinking and practice. At the same time, individuals in certain non-Western settings both question Western knowledge without hesitation and utilize somewhat narrow limited understanding of expertise knowledge and local wisdom. Concepts or ways of thinking are not as straightforward or innocent as they might first appear. These meta-notions of 'West' and 'East' and 'Asian' must be viewed cautiously, owing to their obscure nuances (Zhang et al., 2015).

This research project responds to Chen's invitation to move beyond the Western obsession and instead undertake educational studies in Asia that recognise the complex links between history, geography, culture and knowledge in and about education (Zhang et al., 2015). In other words, it views Asian education studies from an Asian viewpoint—acknowledging how Asian education systems, policies and activities have interpreted Western awareness differently concerning their unique changing societies, contexts and policies (Zhang & Chan, 2022). Employing 'Asia as method' in this research suggests the value of starting where

people are, not where theory or critique would like them to be (Zhang et al., 2015). It also points to the fact that different institutional and personal situations offer different affordances for this sort of research and that these need to be considered. International students are usually subject to time limits for their study period and are usually cash-strapped. The project points to the benefits of dialogues about how to shift away from Western perspectives to perceive international students as 'problems' towards more Asia-centred perspectives to see them as 'assets' to contribute to the internationalisation process from multiple aspects (Ryan, 2011).

Data collection

This study reported in this paper was part of a larger project investigating the internationalisation of Australian secondary schools. The project collected survey and focus group data from school leaders, teachers, and international and local students from several public and independent schools. This paper draws on data gathered from semi-structured individual or group interviews of teachers (N=13) from 4 independent Victorian schools (see Table 1) whose principals expressed interest in participating in this research project. These schools include one boy's, one girl's, and two co-education schools. The teachers taught English, English as an Additional Language (EAL), French, History, and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

Table 1: Research participants' profiles

Name (Anonymous)	Gender	School Type	Teaching Subjects
Gorson	Male	Boy's School	Science
Jasll	Male	Boy's School	French
Wione	Male	Boy's School	English and History
Recheck	Male	Co-edu	English
Tracker	Male	Co-edu	STEM
Liniu	Female	Co-edu	English as an Additional Language (EAL)
Sarsdon	Female	Co-edu	English as an Additional Language (EAL)
Migson	Female	Co-edu	English as an Additional Language (EAL)
Suki	Female	Co-edu	English as an Additional Language (EAL)
Marne	Female	Co-edu	English as an Additional Language (EAL)
Anght	Female	Co-edu	English as an Additional Language (EAL)
Shanyle	Female	Girl's School	English
Louison	Female	Girl's School	English

School teachers were invited to discuss their understanding of international students' contribution to school culture and aspects of supporting international students, including 1) impression of the international students in your class; 2) differences of the international student learning style habits and with the local student; 3) experience or strategies to engage

with international students; 4) providing extra teaching material or special teaching method to support international persons; 5) interactions between local student and international school students in class activities; and 6) suggestions for international students for their success in their school life. All interviews were conducted in a private room in their schools. All sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and sent to each participant for checking. Before beginning the data collection, the researchers received ethics approval from the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee to guarantee that participants were safe, information was confidential, and participation in the study was voluntary.

Thematic analysis

The transcripts were then anonymized and subjected to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic data analysis began with a review of the final transcripts to identify and manage emerging themes. During this step, literal, interpretive readings of the data were based on Saldaña's (2016) affective coding technique. Labelling subjective human experiences, such as values, attitudes, evaluations, judgments, decision-making processes, reasoning and emotions, with codes, was used to research or explore the concept and enactments of character education (Saldaña, 2016). The researchers also used reflexive reading to develop arguments in which they critically reviewed and located their perspectives and theoretical underpinnings during the data analysis process (Seidman, 2006). During this phase, the results of data analysis were juxtaposed with the relevant literature on international students, international education and school education. Repeated patterns were then combined until several main themes were identified. Two main themes and nine sub-themes were identified. The two main themes are international students' contribution to school culture and aspects of supporting international students. Data findings and comparisons with findings from previous studies are presented in the following section.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section sketches out the main findings of the study. Specifically, the first part discusses teachers' perspectives regarding international students' contributions to diversifying Australian independent school culture. The second part identifies the support provided by Australian independent schools to facilitate the well-rounded development of international students.

International students' contributions to school culture

The proliferation of international students in Australian independent schools offers local peers and staff chances for intercultural contact. Such interactions are perceived as an effective way for Australian teachers to re-examine their professional practices (Hattingh, 2016). Based on answers provided in the survey, it is evident that international students' contribution to enriching school culture has been recognised. Generally, teachers acknowledge the positive influence of international students in promoting cultural awareness and competence. By interacting with linguistically diverse students, educators' and students' language diversity and proficiency have been enhanced. International students have also stimulated culturally responsive teaching methods and diversified teaching materials and methods. Teachers point out that international students lead to internationalisation *at home* for non-mobile students and staff. As Teekens (2006) suggests, internationalisation at home can cultivate local students and staff' concepts of self, strangers and otherness and foster cultural, social and personal awareness. Hence, international students could be valuable for both schools and Australians.

Improving cultural awareness and competence

Improving cultural awareness and competence is a dimension international students could contribute to school culture. In the interviews, teachers suggested that international students helped them acquire an up-to-date view of Confucian culture. In this regard, Migson said:

> I think a lot of things that are said about people from Confucian cultures are a bit overstated. Definitely, when it comes to stuff like respect for the elders, which we don't see a lot of, and love of protocol.

For the school culture, international students would actively share their traditions regarding festivals and food. Janthias pointed out the situation in the food stores:

> You'll have so many other students come up and interact with them and sharing a little bit of their culture, like the moon festival and things that we do is important. Yeah, it needs to go both ways as well so that the kids get involved, but the locals also want to engage with our international students too.

Applying culturally responsive teaching strategies

The interview results indicate that most teachers utilised culturally responsive teaching strategies when assisting international students in academic and sociocultural areas. Notably, teachers acknowledged the cultural difference of international students and thus adapted their teaching strategies. For example, teachers found that international students with Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) background tend to be reserved when communicating with teachers; that is, they are more likely to remain quiet in inquiry-based learning. In this regard, teachers said:

> I never ask closed questions, a yes or no, because I'll always get a yes when it comes to understanding. So instead, we always use open-ended questions to make sure that they understand by telling us in their own words what it is that they need to do or what they're doing. (Suki)

> I think also questioning technique in class, that when you ask a question you have to give extra time for them to respond. To formulate their answer and listen carefully and give them time to respond. Don't expect a quicker answer. And also knowing when to stop and to step in and correct a language and when you just let it go. (Anght)

Some teachers provided a safe environment for international students to encourage them to raise their voices. Louison said:

> We have to make sure that we check regularly . . .I teach using a lot of Socratic circles, so the girls have to go away, prepare their notes, come in, and they run a discussion. I'll say to other girls, 'I need you to ask her a question in the Socratic circle to bring her in'. Because the girls themselves have to encourage her to join in as well, not just me. So, I think that enabling that community of trust in a classroom really works, that a chronic method really works quite well for getting every voice. Yeah. I found that one to be quite successful, is very, very good.

Encouraging multiple learning styles

International students come with different learning styles, which may result from' their former education systems or personal experiences. In the current study, teachers have presented their acceptance of these learning styles. For example:

> They (international students) need to be comfortable in their own learning style. We have a range of different learning styles in the classroom and we don't expect everybody to be the same. (Shanyle)

> I think culture really, like they talk and talk, so he just listening, absorbing what is the answer and especially the English teachers in here. (Suki)

In addition, teachers put in an effort to preserve and cultivate international students' unique learning styles. Shanyle noted:

> I recognise that as a valid way of learning . . . making sure that there is that comfort and knowledge and understanding that is the case and that the student is very comfortable in sitting back and simply doing their own work.

The findings show that teachers have a positive attitude toward international students' learning styles and the diversity of their learning styles.

Constructing diversified teaching materials and methods

International students can motivate teachers to innovate their teaching materials. For example, Liniu, an experienced teacher, re-examined existing teaching materials:

> I was reading out of the textbook, too, because it was the audio and the written together provided extra access to the curriculum. And that is the biggest problem, access to curriculum, readability levels of texts. All those traditional things that are creating barriers to progress. because they simply can't . . . they don't get what they've got to get in order to . . . Apart from the fact that they're actually having . . . got the productive language skills to even produce that as well.

Researchers have found that in recognising international students' difficulties because of their knowledge base and language, some teachers use case studies to assist in understanding. By illustration, key concepts would be elaborated, and background knowledge would be demonstrated. As Traker said:

> So, one thing that (we did) this year was taking our study design for business managers and breaking it down and kind of chunking it into smaller concepts. And we worked through it individually with a couple of our international students.

The aspects of supporting international students

As the nucleus of international education, teachers' willingness to participate in international students' supporting programs and their passion for providing international students with necessary aid is critical. The current study found that apart from following school-lead plans, teachers from Australian independent schools are creative in supporting international students. Generally, these behaviours can be divided into five parts: language, academic, cultural and religious support, and collaboration with EAL teachers and others.

Offering language support

Proficiency in the English language is important for international students; thus, language support is viewed as one of the most crucial school services. While certain language ability is required for international students to enrol in schools, most teachers interviewed for this study mentioned the language barriers that international students face in the learning process. Some teachers pointed to a misalignment between students' standardised English language proficiency tests and real-life practices. Therefore, several English-supporting programs have been introduced in independent schools. Sarsdon highlights the creation of extracurricular support:

> So now we have Education Perfect, the online model learning module, but then you have the grammar books. I think they actually do need that kind of thing. They also need a lot of just like general reading, writing and listening practice, a real-world kind of practice.

These English language support models could reflect the hidden expectation of Australian schools. Participating in these programs could help international students adjust to their host countries' academic surroundings. The current study discovered that teachers have innovated various ways to assist international students' English language. For example, Louson and Janias understand the value of vocabulary or glossary for international students.

> I think some of the easiest ways for international students is to give them vocabulary in advance. Give them a time to actually sort of digest if you like, to understand that vocabulary and apply

it before they enter the classroom. So, then they've already got a connection to the learning and I think that's one of the . . . It's simple but it's really successful. (Louson).

I get them to just keep a glossary at the back of their books and write out things or phrases that I might say that are going to help them with a task that they're working on. (Janias).

Science is terminology dense. It is, there's a lot you know, it's like learning a new language . . . I got it (a material) from someone, it was a whole page of definitions. It wasn't just science terms, it defines, compares, contrasts, explains, describes, all those adjectives that we use, that come up in tests, of the way that they all differ, and it's actually got in Chinese characters a translation of that. (Gorson).

Some teachers offered individualised English language support. Teachers encouraged students with good English language proficiency to become involved in local events and further increase their English proficiency by interacting with L1 speakers. Teachers created special methods to communicate with students with lower English language proficiency. As Louson said:

I watched them try to ask questions and we check in with them regularly and we've given them some technology to help transcribe things for them as well. Yeah, I think they try very hard to do well.

Providing academic support

By definition, international students are more inclined to be viewed as students rather than foreigners, meaning that academic problems are, arguably, the main concern for international students (Lee & Ciftci, 2014). Thus improving international students' learning is high on teachers' list of priorities. Teachers in this study suggested that inquiry-based learning is more valued in Australian school settings than in Chinese international students' home country. In addition, cultivating the ability to work in a team is greater in the Australian school setting than in the Chinese system. In the study, teachers demonstrated an advanced understanding of Chinese international students' learning behaviours and generously supported individual students. Shanyle argued that silence, for Chinese international students, could be a productive way of learning:

That's how I perceive silence actually, so I recognise that as a valid way of learning. But making sure that there is that comfort and knowledge and understanding that is the case and that the student is very comfortable in sitting back and simply doing their own work. (Shanyle)

Teachers, such as Shanyle, strove to promote international students by guiding them to find their particular way of learning.

Other teachers encouraged international students to become involved in group work. Louson said:

I think we've got some girls who are silent learners who do very, very well, but others you can see that they haven't covered everything, or they haven't understood everything. And I think that's where we want them to be a bit more collaborative, to have a discussion with other girls and with the teacher. Just helps them to deepen their knowledge.

Giving cultural and social support

Cultural adjustment to a new academic and living environment can be a struggle for international students. The interview data showed that support from teachers can be divided into two parts: psychological support and sociocultural support. Regarding psychological adjustment, teachers said:

They just want to have a good time. If they're seven years old and they're thrown into an environment where their first language is not the language being spoken in class, I can only

> imagine how stressful and difficult that could be in the first few weeks. So, we just spend a lot of time making sure that they're happy and feel nurtured and feel safe and we try and speak as much Chinese as we can. But they're just kids. They're just here to have a good time, find some friends, learn something, be safe, be happy. (Recheck).

> That's something that I've noticed over the years, that I need to make more of an effort as a teacher to get to know these students, to make them feel even more comfortable in my class and connect them with other local students to better foster their language and all the other social skills that come with that as well in being in a new environment. (Janeias).

Clearly, teachers can comprehend international students' feelings and empathise with international students despite their cultural difference.

When considering sociocultural adjustment, teachers tried bridging the understanding between mainstream and international students through extracurricular activities, such as sports, art events, and arranging seating plans. As participants said:

> All of us have had extra classes. I noticed when they had an extra class, when it was her accounting, we had I think maybe three groups of international students mixed with the mainstream children . . . So maybe the warmer the environment, more conducive use to having these kind of friendships. (Sarsdon)

> With my kids in year seven, we've actually got a seating plan now. So, we used to just let the students sit wherever they liked and they'd all gravitate towards each other in their friendship groups. But we've actually positioned the international students in such a way that they're next to really supportive local students to encourage that dialogue and that interaction and that group work between them. So that's something that has been implemented with those students. (Janeias)

Producing designated international students' EAL teachers

In response to the enrolment of linguistically diverse international students, the position of the English language discipline is experiencing radical changes. Rather than viewing English as an isolated subject, English language learning needs to be integrated into other subjects. In the current study, the designation of EAL teachers for Chinese international students was considered a highly effective way of improving learning outcomes. As one teacher said:

> We have a specific EAL teacher who is one of the EAL living-at-home group teachers as well. So, she's very, very useful and she also presents to staff, which has been very, very helpful and exactly those points, so both dealing with the students themselves and dealing with the families for example. (Shanle)

Hence, EAL teachers are perceived as valuable members of the teaching team, able to collaborate with subject teachers to ensure successful education practices. They also play a crucial role in communicating with students and families using their cultural and social knowledge.

Setting other supports

The establishment of school-parent partnerships was a key issue mentioned by teachers. In Australian schools, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School has endorsed engagement with parents. Engagement with parents of international students who participate in Australian schools and whose parents are located overseas—in this case, China is especially important for Australian schools. Teachers acknowledged the meaning of school-parent partnerships and adopted different strategies, such as inviting them to participate in the parents' associations and providing translation services to encourage closer connections between the school and parents. For example:

> I would get on the angle of the kids who have succeeded the most in my experience here at this school understood the motivations of their parents and their parents understood the motivations of the school. If the kids understand why they've made this systematic shift from China to here

to Melbourne, why the parents have made that call, and it's generally so that the kids can have a broader education and greater freedoms and greater this, all of these reasons, when a kid actually at the age of seven understands that, has a proper conversation with his parents, and when the school's had a proper conversation with the parents about, well this is what we're about, and those things match, then everything blossoms. (Recheck)

We have a few parents meet here in greet sort of sessions as well and we invite them to join the parent's association. And then we've had a few, I know Angel who's in admissions, hasn't met with parents of international students on a number of occasions. We have meetings with guardians as well and obviously there's the child safety aspect of things which we meet with them on. But we also try and get them in for different things. Another thing that we have done with some parents is when they meet with us, we've offered things like translation services or we've had a staff member translate for them so that they can feel a bit more comfortable talking to us. The older you get the harder it is to know the language and so, yeah, we try and get them involved in school as much as possible. (Shanle)

These comments reflect the inclusive environment teachers aim to create for international students and their parents. By inviting Chinese parents to join the school programs, parents' voices could be heard, better home-school relations could be established, and ultimately, a supportive learning environment could be formed for Chinese international students.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings from the study reveal teachers' perceptions of international students and present their efforts to innovate their professional practises to accommodate international students. These findings highlight the need to recognise and acknowledge the contributions of international students in cultural, social and professional dimensions. By illustration, teachers showed their understanding of international education and identified international students' individual needs. Despite Chinese students sharing similar cultural backgrounds, teachers pointed to achieving positive results by respecting students' educational subjectivities.

Recognising and acknowledging international students' contributions to teaching practice

While the significance of teachers in developing international education and cultivating international students has been well-documented (Bottiani et al., 2018; Carroll et al., 2005), the findings from this study suggest that teachers' acknowledgement and perceptions of international students' contribution could promote school education to achieve an international level. This study also shows that the Western understanding of learning does not always describe what happens in the Asian context (Blaise et al., 2013). By interacting with international students daily, teachers found themselves grasping the modern version of the Confucian culture. By so doing, teachers' professional practices can be repositioned in the wider vision of international education by looking beyond the West as method and considering Asia as method (Takayama, 2016). This is a possible strategy for alternative knowledge work that recognises Australian international education's ambivalent epistemic location (Zhang & Chan, 2022). This improvement in cultural understanding may be further detected in teachers' professional practices. As Hattingh (2016) concludes, teachers with a higher cultural awareness could lead to desirable results in international education. Moreover, in international education, teachers are expected to establish a benign relationship with students, meaning that they need to provide a channel for cultural communication equally (Klein & Wikan, 2019). Thus, by learning from international students, teachers can master social norms and internalise them with their existing ones (Vygotsky, 1978). In this

way, international students could be considered the tool to scaffold teachers regarding cultural learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Through this process, the teachers would be more capable of providing a school environment that is diverse, supportive and positive (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). As such, international students could be viewed as a cultural asset for international schools as they could profoundly develop school culture.

International students could stimulate culturally sensitive pedagogies and teaching materials in the teaching practice. Such a contribution is rarely mentioned in previous literature. Reportedly, international students are struggling in the host education institution in default of background knowledge. In this respect, Love and Arkoudis (2004) find that international students feel that teachers normally assume that it is students' duty to fill in their knowledge gap when they choose to study overseas. This situation shows the misalignment regarding the perception of internationalising education and implies the necessity to un-silence international students' voices. By re-examining the nuance of teaching materials and innovative pedagogies, the practice of international education could transcend from expanding international students' percentages to creating an advanced education system for the globalised world.

Supporting international students by respecting their educational subjectivities
The current study proposes a novel concept, educational subjectivities, in research concerning international students. Arguably, the formation of international education is situated in a stage where the structure and guidelines are blurred (Chan & Dimmock, 2008). Zhang and Chan (2022) criticised the unproblematic employment of so-called Western theories 'with much too little attention being paid to where these ideas originate and how they are interpreted in Asian educational contexts' (p. 4). International education development mainly follows Western ideologies and emphasises the establishment of Western knowledge (Prickart, 2017). In this regard, the lack of Asian perspectives may lead to ignorance of international students' unique education subjectivities. For example, they may be expected to assimilate into the Western learning styles and abandon their existing learning habits. Such a transformation reflects the narrow view of internationalisation by simplifying it to Westernisation (Scholte, 2008), which may diminish the diversity of the learning environment and belittle international students' cultural and social identities. Therefore, the international students' subjectivity based on their rich cultural values and educational traditions of base entities (Chen, 2010) 'must come under scrutiny' (Kenway, 2015, p.15). In this study, teachers present a positive attitude toward international students' educational subjectivities by preserving their learning habits. Moreover, they acknowledge the importance of integrating different learning approaches into internationalised classes. This enables a movement beyond the limited lens of single-issue identity learning and challenges the solid structure based on Western values and knowledge systems, making new affinities possible (Zhang & Chan, 2022).

However, what is missing here is a clear recognition of dual or multiple educational identities, which may be formed when receiving education in different education systems. Thus, drawing on Zhang et al. (2015) analysis, it would be prudent to consider different Asian student groups as the anchoring point. For example, students from South Korea and Japan, as CHC countries, could be Chinese international students' reference points in practising international education (Zhang & Chan, 2021, Zhang et al., 2021). By so doing, the teacher could support international students by respecting and protecting their cultural-related education subjectivities.

FUTURE RESEARCH

As a part of the consequences of the lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic, Australian schools are experiencing dramatic changes by shifting from face-to-face teaching to digital ones. In this regard, digitalisation in school has become a prominent theme that may challenge the existing practice of international education (König et al., 2020). While the digitalisation initiative could maintain sustainability in school education, the research regarding this course remains small-scale and digital teaching material is viewed as a supplementary tool (Pettersson, 2020). Thus, not only does the question arise as to whether online courses could deliver the same education quality for international students, but also the question arises concerning teachers' competence in balancing students' levels of digital skills and teachers' conception of international students regarding their students' subjectivities (Sangeeta & Urvashi, 2020). As indicated in the findings section above, Australian teachers innovatively support international students in language, culture and academic areas to achieve instructional goals. However,, new approaches were required to integrate technologies and teaching contexts during the school lockdown. For example, the mobilisation of media resources to meet international students' educational needs (Sangeeta & Urvashi, 2020). Teachers may also need to increase the frequency of contact with their students and students' parents to ensure educational progress and create a virtual playground to maintain the social integration of international and Australian students (König et al., 2020).

Despite distance education providing a valuable path to continuing learning and teaching in schools, the practice of international education is influenced by the declining level of student mobility, the low confidence in distance education and the complexity of political relations. As reported by the government, Australian schools lost 8,425 Chinese international students in 2020 (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020). Such a phenomenon could be attributed to the spread of COVID-19, the cancellation of conversational teaching modes and the worsening Australia-China relationship (Mok et al., 2021). Against this backdrop, Asian countries, such as Singapore and Malaysia, have captured this situation as a critical chance to attract Chinese students, arguably increasing market competition (New Oriental, 2020). As Mok et al. (2021) point out, despite the decreasing willingness to study in Australia, the concern about the social environment regarding Asian counterparts is highlighted by international students. Thus, the pandemic's adverse effects may be balanced by using collaborative efforts and creating a safer, more tolerant, and civilised environment for international students.

CONCLUSION

A novel finding of this study is that international students are not considered deficient by the teachers but rather an asset to the school. Various strategies were used by teachers to support international students in language, academic, cultural, and social aspects. This article argues that there is a need to recognise international students' contribution to teachers' professional development, such as the enhancement of cultural diversity, the ability of cross-cultural communication and the stimulation of culturally sensitive pedagogies and teaching materials. It further suggests that respecting international students' educational subjectivity, cultural heritage, and personal character is necessary. These acknowledgements are critical for teacher education. It may, therefore, be necessary to offer training for both the school and relevant teachers to prepare them to grow the internationalised school environment. In this regard, findings from this study may be relevant to the promotion of teachers' professional development and related teaching areas.

Teachers' perspectives of international students and internationalised education, as described in this article, provide insights for future research and praxis in the time of the global pandemic. Considering the internationalisation of education with other factors, such as political relations, economic situation and competitors' movements, would also be an important avenue to explore, given that international education practices are fluid and interdependent. Thus, this article hopes to stimulate the ongoing scholarly inquiry at the junction of international student and internationalised education environment.

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