

# Teacher Recruitment, Selection and Retention in International Education: A Critical Case Study of the Confucius Institute X

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**Abstract:** Teacher recruitment and selection are critical to educational quality, particularly within international and cross-cultural contexts. This study examines the challenges of teacher recruitment, selection, and early-stage retention in international education through a reflective case study of Confucius Institute X, a joint initiative between a Chinese and a European university. Drawing on the author's first-hand experience as a teacher candidate, the study adopts a qualitative, reflective case study approach to explore how institutional priorities, standardized selection criteria, and limited induction support shape recruitment outcomes. Guided by distributed leadership theory and human capital theory, the analysis reveals a mismatch between formal recruitment standards and the practical demands of cross-cultural teaching. The findings highlight that insufficient assessment of cultural adaptability and a lack of structured mentoring and induction programs contribute to teacher adjustment difficulties, reduced teaching effectiveness, and potential negative impacts on student engagement. The study argues that international education institutions should adopt a holistic recruitment framework that integrates cultural responsiveness into selection criteria and provide systematic post-recruitment support. The study concludes with implications for educational leadership, emphasizing the importance of inclusive recruitment practices, targeted induction programs, and ongoing mentoring to enhance teacher effectiveness and sustainability in global education settings.

**Keywords:** Confucius Institutes, international education, cross-cultural adaptability, teacher recruitment and selection, educational leadership.

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## 1. Introduction

Teacher recruitment and selection play a vital role in improving the quality of education and student achievement [2]. Teachers are not only the transmitters of teaching content, but also key players in cultivating classroom culture, promoting student well-being, and promoting the overall development of students. Therefore, educational institutions must ensure that the recruitment process selects candidates who are not only qualified, but also able to adapt to different cultural environments and have the corresponding cultural literacy.

According to Stronge [12], Effective teachers have a positive and lasting impact on students' academic performance and lives. Therefore, it is crucial to select effective teachers for schools or institutions and build a high-quality teaching staff. These recruitment practices usually include posting recruitment notices, screening resumes, interviews and teaching demonstrations and so on - each of which is designed to select candidates who can meet the expectations of the school or institution. Today, in an increasingly globalized education landscape, cross-cultural teaching environments bring new challenges to teacher recruitment. Research shows that teachers in multicultural classrooms often face language communication difficulties, conflicts in teaching methods, and insufficient understanding of students' cultural backgrounds [14]. For example, international institutions such as Confucius Institutes provide Chinese language and cultural education overseas.

This study explores the challenges of teacher recruitment and selection in international education settings using a Confucius Institute (hereafter referred to as "Confucius Institute X") as a case study. Drawing on the author's own

experience as a candidate in the selection process, the author reflects on how institutional priorities, interview procedures, and candidate expectations influence the final outcome. The case highlights key issues regarding candidate cultural adaptability and support mechanisms in global education recruitment.

The core research questions of this study are:

What are the main challenges of teacher recruitment and selection in international education settings?

How do selection criteria and candidate adaptability affect student learning and institutional performance?

What implications can we draw from the experience of Confucius Institute X to guide future leadership and recruitment practices?

The study is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the relevant literature and introduces the theoretical framework underlying this study. Section 3 outlines the research methods. Section 4 presents the main findings of the case. Section 5 explores its implications for educational leadership and mentoring practices. Section 6 concludes with reflections and suggestions for future research.

## 2. Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

Distributed leadership is an influential theoretical framework in educational leadership that advocates shared responsibility among multiple parties, including school leaders and teachers [11]. Distributed leadership helps ensure that the recruitment process is inclusive, targeted, contextual, and consistent with institutional values. Based on this view, we can conclude that recruitment is not just the responsibility of the principal or administrator, but also requires the participation of other personnel, such as experienced teachers

and others who understand the school culture and teaching goals.

Becker's Human capital theory further emphasizes the importance of investing in people who possess knowledge, skills, and attitudes that contribute to long-term organizational effectiveness [1]. In the field of education, recruiting teachers who have both professional knowledge and a willingness to advance in their careers is essential to delivering the highest level of student learning. This means that the recruitment process should assess not only the candidate's academic credentials and teaching ability, but also their potential for development and fit with the school culture.

The importance of cultural responsiveness in teacher selection is also being highlighted in a growing body of research, especially in international and multilingual classrooms. Teachers who teach in different cultural contexts must demonstrate sensitivity to cultural norms, student backgrounds, and different teaching styles [5, 10]. For example, in Confucius Institutes, Chinese teachers must bridge large cultural and pedagogical differences to effectively engage students in non-Chinese settings. These requirements complicate the recruitment process, as institutions must assess traits such as flexibility, openness, and cross-cultural competence that are not always easily captured on a resume or transcript.

Mentoring and orientation programs are essential to supporting new teachers, especially those entering unfamiliar teaching environments. Research suggests that structured orientation programs can significantly improve teacher retention and classroom effectiveness [7]. Such programs should include cultural orientation, peer mentoring, classroom observation opportunities, and ongoing professional development. Unfortunately, many institutions either underinvest in these supports or assume that qualified teachers will naturally adapt, leading to premature burnout or underperformance.

Leadership also plays a key role in developing recruitment strategies and support systems. Effective educational leaders recognize the importance of inclusive recruitment practices and commit to the long-term development of teachers. According to Harris and Jones [6], good leaders foster collaborative environments in which mentoring is not a remedial measure but a proactive strategy for building professional capacity.

In summary, contemporary literature emphasizes that teacher recruitment, selection, and retention need to go beyond academic qualifications and experience certification to include a comprehensive assessment of candidates' adaptability and cultural integration potential. In addition, educational leaders must implement systematic mentoring mechanisms to support teachers' success in international teaching environments. These insights provide valuable perspectives for analyzing the case of Confucius Institute X.

### 3. Methodology & Context

Confucius Institute X is an educational institution jointly established by a Chinese university and a European university. Its mission is to promote Chinese language and culture through language courses, cultural activities and teacher exchanges. Most teachers are selected through a centralized recruitment process jointly organized by the Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban) and Chinese universities, which includes application review, psychological testing, and interviews (including language proficiency, Mandarin

knowledge, and teaching ability).

This study uses a reflective case study approach based on the author's personal experience as a participant in the teacher selection process at Confucius Institute X. The case study approach is particularly effective for understanding complex and contextual phenomena in education [15], especially when the researcher has insider knowledge and first-hand observations.

Data for this study was collected through reflection and recall during the recruitment process and after recruitment. These reflections included observations of interview formats, evaluation criteria, interactions with interviewers, and informal conversations with other candidates. The purpose of the study was not to evaluate the institutions themselves, but to explore broader themes and challenges in international teacher recruitment. The names of all individuals and institutions have been anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

The strength of this study is the deep personal insights into the recruitment process. The authors' dual roles as applicants and researchers provide a unique perspective on how institutional structures, cultural expectations, and individual cognitions influence recruitment outcomes. At the same time, the limitations of this study are that it relies on a single narrative and does not include the perspectives of institutions or students. The findings of this article are intended to help education leaders, policymakers and others understand the practical realities of cross-cultural teacher selection. Although this study is context-specific, the themes it reveals—such as the importance of cultural adaptability, mentoring, and inclusive assessment criteria—are broadly relevant to international education contexts.

## 4. Key findings from the case of Confucius Institute X

### 4.1. Recruitment & Selection Practices

The recruitment process of Confucius Institute X can be summarized as follows: 1. Publish a recruitment notice; basic recruitment requirements include: no restrictions on majors, bachelor degree or above, Mandarin level of Grade 2A or above, English level of 425 points in College English Test Band 6 or equivalent; 2. Resume screening; 3. Psychological test; 4. Interview. The interview process includes Chinese interview (mainly to examine the level of Mandarin language knowledge and teaching demonstration), English interview (mainly to examine foreign language ability and cross-cultural adaptability), and Chinese talent show. The recruitment process focuses on the candidate's language ability, teaching experience, and cultural adaptability.

However, the actual recruitment process of Confucius Institute X relies too much on standardized qualifications, test scores, and applicants' past teaching experience, and lacks methods to judge candidates' real interpersonal skills and cultural adaptability. This excessive emphasis on quantitative indicators may inadvertently overlook the necessary qualities that contribute to effective teaching in a diverse classroom [3].

### 4.2. Challenges Identified

One prominent challenge that teachers face in integrating into the European educational environment is cultural differences. Teachers often encounter differences in classroom norms, teacher-student relationships, and educational expectations. These differences can lead to initial difficulties and hinder the establishment of an effective

learning environment [13]. When the author talked with other Chinese teachers after taking up the post at Confucius Institute X, at least three teachers mentioned that they experienced “culture shock” when they first came to European countries and encountered challenges such as language barriers, unfamiliarity with European classroom norms, and teacher-student relationships that were very different from those in China during the teaching process.

In addition, the lack of a comprehensive induction training program exacerbates the difficulties faced by new teachers in adapting. The induction training content of Confucius Institute X mainly focuses on familiarizing themselves with rules and regulations and teaching content, and how to use smart learning platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Mooc, and Loomen. However, there is a lack of comprehensive cultural adaptability induction training content. Without structured support, teachers may find it difficult to cope with the complexity of cross-cultural teaching, resulting in reduced job satisfaction and potential staff turnover.

### **4.3. Impact on Student Learning**

The fit between teacher capabilities and student needs is essential for academic success. If teachers lack cultural sensitivity or fail to adjust their teaching methods, students may feel less engaged and motivated to learn. Poyonova et al. emphasized that cultural sensitivity among teachers is essential to creating an inclusive and effective learning environment, which helps to increase student engagement and motivation [9]. In Confucius Institute X, leaders tend to let new teachers start teaching from the primary learning stage of A1.1, so that teachers can accompany the original students to improve their Chinese learning level step by step during their tenure of at least two years. However, since some new teachers are still in the adaptation stage of life and work or lack cross-cultural teaching experience, they fail to adjust their teaching methods in time. In addition, A1.1 is mostly boring language knowledge learning, which leads some students to give up at the beginning because they feel that “Chinese is difficult to learn/boring”.

## **5. Discussion: Implications for Educational Leadership**

### **5.1. Key Implications for Recruitment Practice and Leadership Strategy**

One of the most important implications for educational leadership is the need to incorporate cultural responsiveness into the teacher selection process. When educators are required to teach in multicultural or multinational settings, traditional criteria such as subject knowledge and certification may be less important. Stronge emphasized that excellent teachers must possess not only teaching skills but also interpersonal sensitivity and adaptability [12]. This suggests that recruitment models should incorporate strong cross-cultural competency assessment methods that include not only language proficiency but also cultural awareness and responsiveness to student diversity.

Another important implication involves providing comprehensive support mechanisms for new teachers, especially those entering unfamiliar and foreign teaching environments. Research consistently shows that teachers are more likely to succeed and stay in the teaching workforce after receiving structured induction and mentoring [7]. Fantilli and McDougall found that novice teachers who

receive guidance and support show greater teaching confidence and resilience [4]. These support mechanisms may include mentor-teacher pairings, peer observation opportunities, regular reflective teaching meetings, and local cross-cultural adaptability training. This not only helps new teachers quickly adapt to unfamiliar teaching environments and replace possible “culture shock” with a fulfilling work life, but also provides a strong guarantee for new teachers to quickly adjust their teaching strategies.

In addition, leadership must ensure that recruitment standards are consistent with actual teaching outcomes and learners’ needs. The mismatch between recruitment standards and actual classroom challenges often leads to teachers who may have formal qualifications but are actually ill-prepared. According to Leithwood et al., when leaders collaborate with teachers, students, and administrators, the recruitment process will become more responsive and effective [8]. Therefore, leadership strategies should go beyond bureaucratic compliance and adopt a theoretical framework of Distributed leadership. Leaders should integrate feedback from students, faculty, staff, and school administrators in the decision-making process to adjust the recruitment process. Continuous evaluation based on feedback from all levels of the school ecosystem allows the recruitment process to better match institutional goals and learner needs.

### **5.2. Reflection on Mentoring & Coaching in Teacher Selection**

Looking back on my experience at Confucius Institute X, I participated in the selection process both as a teacher candidate and as an observer, and I have several insights into guidance and support. While the demonstration lessons and language proficiency assessments were relatively rigorous, there was a distinct lack of criteria related to cultural adaptability or psychological preparation for cross-cultural teaching. This oversight undoubtedly limited the effectiveness of the selection process, as candidates were evaluated based on technical abilities without sufficient consideration of the soft skills necessary for cross-cultural teaching.

In addition, new teachers often lacked ongoing guidance or support for cross-cultural adaptability after joining the institution. As a result, some new teachers experienced difficulties in classroom management, communication with local faculty and staff, and adapting to students’ cultural expectations. And they spent a lot of time and energy looking for solutions. If these problems are not solved in a timely manner, they may affect teachers’ teaching effectiveness and students’ learning outcomes.

Based on my findings, I would advocate for the integration of cross-cultural training and ongoing support mechanisms. Guidance on cross-cultural adaptability should be formalized and extend to the first few weeks after joining the institution. Leaders can develop specific modules on cross-cultural communication, classroom strategies for multilingual learners, etc. that are applicable to the local area. This will transform the teacher selection process to a more holistic model—one that combines selection with strategic support—leading to greater teacher retention and success in improving student learning outcomes.

## **6. Conclusion**

The case study of Confucius Institute X highlights the

multifaceted challenges of teacher recruitment and selection in international education settings. The findings emphasize that the recruitment process must incorporate cultural competency assessments and structured support systems to ensure successful teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes. Education leaders must recognize the critical role of comprehensive recruitment strategies that not only consider teaching qualifications but also assess interpersonal skills and cross-cultural adaptability. And continuous feedback from multiple parties in the school or institution is needed to adjust the recruitment process. In addition, the implementation of targeted induction training and mentoring programs can significantly improve teacher integration and teaching outcomes.

Future research should explore the long-term impact of these strategies on teacher retention and student learning outcomes to promote the development of global education management practices.

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