



## Chapter 14

# Diverse Voices, Empowered Minds: The Transformative Power of African Teachers in Global Classrooms

Yvonne *TIANDEM-ADAMOU* 

*College of Liberal Arts - Department of English  
Wenzhou- Kean University   
Wenzhou, China*

### Introduction

English language education fosters cross-cultural communication and understanding in an increasingly interconnected world (Fang, 2016). As the global demand for English language teachers rises, educational institutions in China are diversifying their faculty, recruiting individuals from various cultural backgrounds to enrich students' learning experiences (Johnson & Wang, 2020b). This trend has led to the inclusion of African teachers in English-medium instruction (EMI) contexts, where they bring unique perspectives and expertise to the classroom.

The concept of an African teacher in Chinese EMI contexts refers to an educator from an African country who is employed to teach subjects or courses conducted in English within Chinese educational institutions (Mkabela & Wadesango, 2018a). Depending on their expertise and qualifications, these teachers are typically hired to teach a range of subjects, including English language and literature, as well as other academic disciplines such as Science, Engineering, Business, and Humanities.

These educators play a crucial role in supporting the internationalisation of Chinese higher education and fostering global competencies amongst students. They contribute to



Chinese students' academic success and cultural enrichment by providing high-quality instruction, mentorship, and guidance. Moreover, African teachers in Chinese EMI contexts serve as cultural ambassadors, facilitating intercultural exchange and promoting mutual understanding between Africa and China (Smith & Silva, 2011).

African teachers in EMI contexts typically possess a strong command of English, often acquiring their language proficiency through education in English-speaking countries or rigorous language training (Nkomo & Chachage, 2017). Additionally, they bring diverse cultural perspectives to the classroom, enriching the educational experience for Chinese students and challenging preconceived notions (Dube, 2019). Their expertise spans various academic disciplines (Moyo, 2016).

Despite their qualifications and expertise, African teachers encounter numerous challenges when transitioning to teaching in China. Culture shock is a common experience as they adapt to a new language, customs, and social norms (Chinwe & Nwachukwu, 2018). Teaching in an EMI context presents further challenges, including language barriers, differing educational philosophies, and classroom management issues (Li & Gao, 2019). African teachers may often feel isolated within the academic community and face heavy workloads and high expectations (Amoako, 2020). For instance, finding yourself in environments where cultural norms and practices differ significantly from what you are accustomed to can lead to feelings of isolation as you navigate unfamiliar social dynamics and expectations. Moreover, the hierarchical structures within academic institutions in China may differ from those in African countries, making it challenging for African teachers to integrate seamlessly into the academic community, leading to feelings of isolation and frustration.

The prevalence of one-sided narratives about Africa and Africans also exacerbates these challenges (Adichie, 2009). Often perpetuated by media and popular culture, these narratives shape perceptions and attitudes towards African teachers, leading to biases and misconceptions (Mkabela &

Wadesango, 2018b). Students may question their qualifications and competence, and cultural misunderstandings can arise in the classroom (Huang, 2017). Hence, African teachers may face biases and discrimination based on racial or cultural stereotypes.

In many cases, they may be subjected to microaggressions or be treated differently by colleagues and students, contributing to isolation and marginalisation within the academic community; being excluded from social gatherings and networks or overlooked when seeking leadership positions because of cultural differences or other misconceptions (Amoako, 2020). These teachers often have to prove their competency by working extra hard to show that they can teach effectively. Sadly, there have been cases where some African teachers are considered a threat rather than an asset, leading to sabotage and back-stabbing (Moyo, 2016), others being assigned heavier workloads, evening or night classes, or higher expectations than their colleagues, possibly attributable to assumptions about their capabilities based on race or nationality (Smith & Silva, 2011). Some African teachers may even be exoticised or burdened with representing an entire continent, contributing to feelings of isolation and marginalisation (Mutongi, 2017a), as others struggle to navigate the academic bureaucracy and administrative processes because of language barriers, which exacerbated feelings of isolation and frustration (Dube, 2019).

Addressing these issues requires challenging ingrained stereotypes, promoting cultural awareness, and fostering inclusivity in educational settings (Johnson & Okpala, 2016a). Education should empower students to critically engage with societal norms and systems of domination, promoting dialogue and reflection (Freire, 1965). The chapter addresses the urgent need to reevaluate pedagogical approaches in teaching content related to Africa without perpetuating misconceptions about the continent, its cultures, and its people. It examines the impact of racial homogeneity in China on biases against African teachers and suggests measures to address these challenges. By utilising their unique perspectives, African teachers contribute to cross-cultural understanding and social transformation in Chinese educational institutions, ultimately enriching the

academic experience for all stakeholders. The chapter begins by establishing the historical and cultural context of bias against African teachers, providing a foundation for understanding the root causes of these biases. The chapter then examines why the persisting societal prejudice and misconceptions of African teachers, focusing on the influence of China's racial homogeneity and how it shapes perceptions.

The discussion moves on to the common bias and attitudes towards racial diversity in educational settings, highlighting the specific microaggressions that African teachers face. This leads to examining the effects of bias on African teachers in classrooms and the impacts of bias on teacher-student relationships, showcasing how these prejudices devalue African teachers' competencies.

Finally, the chapter proposes measures to curb discrimination and bias against African teachers, offering practical solutions to address these issues. It concludes by discussing the transformative impact on students, emphasising how recognising and valuing the contributions of African teachers can enrich the educational experience and promote cross-cultural understanding.

### **Historical and Cultural Context of Bias against African Teachers in China**

To understand the prevalence of stereotypes, it is crucial to acknowledge the historical and cultural context that shapes perceptions in Chinese society. Li (2019) points out that China has historically been influenced by limited exposure to diverse cultural representations, leading to a reliance on external media sources for information about different racial and ethnic groups. With the rise of globalisation and the proliferation of international media, including television, film, and the Internet, Chinese audiences have gained access to a wide range of cultural content worldwide. Therefore, the reliance on unfounded sources may perpetuate stereotypes, as media representations often oversimplify complex identities.

Western media, in particular, plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of African individuals globally. Scholars like Chen (2017) highlight that media representations focus on sensationalised narratives, reinforcing stereotypes about language proficiency, cultural competence, and the teaching abilities of African individuals. Such portrayals may contribute to misconceptions amongst Chinese students regarding their African teachers (Hao, 2018).

Another prevalent misconception relates to language proficiency. Some Chinese students may assume that African teachers are not native English speakers, impacting their confidence in the teacher's ability to communicate in English effectively. This assumption is challenged by Wang and Zheng's (2020) examination of language proficiency amongst African teachers, which found that many possess native-like fluency. Similarly, misconceptions about cultural competence arise from media representations that often need to be more concise about the cultural backgrounds of African individuals. Therefore, students may erroneously believe that African teachers need a deeper understanding of Western culture. However, research by Liu et al. (2018a) showcases African educators' diverse cultural experiences and backgrounds, debunking the notion that they are culturally isolated. One key research finding is the rich cultural diversity amongst African educators. Contrary to stereotypes that portray them as culturally isolated, the study highlights African educators' varied backgrounds and experiences, encompassing different countries, languages, and traditions. This diversity enriches the educational environment and challenges monolithic perceptions of African identity (Liu et al., 2018a).

Furthermore, Liu et al.'s (2018b) research highlights the importance of recognising and celebrating the cultural diversity of African educators. By acknowledging their unique backgrounds and experiences, educational institutions can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for these educators. This benefits the educators and enhances the overall learning experience for students, who benefit from exposure to diverse perspectives and cultural traditions. Hence, there is a

need to move beyond simplistic narratives and stereotypes when discussing African educators (Liu et al., 2018b).

### **Why the Persisting Societal Bias and Misconceptions of African Teachers?**

Despite the evolving global landscape, misconceptions about African individuals persist in various societies, including China. Sadly, the existing colonial structures and systems continue to influence contemporary society and remind us that despite the end of formal colonial rule, the underlying power dynamics and hierarchies established during the colonial era persist, shaping political, economic, and social relationships on a global scale (Andrews, 2021). Hence, the impact of colonial legacies perpetuating unequal power dynamics between former colonisers and colonised nations is a reality in many countries, including China. In addition, Andrews (2021) reminds us not to forget how colonialism contributed to creating social inequalities that endure today, contributing to ongoing racism, discrimination, and cultural marginalisation. Hence, there is a need for decolonisation efforts that challenge existing power structures, dismantle systems of oppression, and promote equity, justice, and self-determination for marginalised communities. Meanwhile, historical narratives, shaped by centuries of colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, have had a lasting impact on the perceptions of African individuals. Historical injustices have also contributed to negative stereotypes, portraying African people as inferior or subservient (Jules, 2024; Adams & Bell, 2016). Unfortunately, these deeply ingrained historical biases lay the foundation for the misconceptions that persist in societies, including China, affecting the way that African individuals, including teachers, are perceived.

In discussing why bias persists in global communities, it is essential to see how people's emotions have been used to manipulate or silence them. Regarding politicking, the psychological aspects of using negative emotions (anger, fear, loudness) to marginalise certain societal groups are still

efficient. Ahmed (2004) examines how emotions are often used as tools of social control, with marginalised individuals and communities being pathologised or stigmatised for expressing emotions that deviate from societal norms. Exploring “affect alienation” refers to how individuals may be estranged from their emotions or experiences caused by social pressures or cultural expectations. We should remember that the cultural politics of emotion play a significant role in shaping identity, subjectivity, and belonging, with certain emotions being valorised or vilified depending on one’s social position (Ahmed, 2004). Thus, many African teachers may be marginalised for expressing emotions that deviate from societal norms.

Likewise, the role of media in shaping public perceptions and the influence of media extends across borders. Adorno’s fundamental critique of the culture industry argued that mass-produced cultural products, such as films, music, and advertisements, perpetuated capitalist ideology and reinforced existing power structures. Thus, mass culture’s standardised and formulaic nature stifled creativity and critical thinking, leading to a homogenisation of taste and a commodification of human experience (Adorno, 2001).

In the context of African individuals, media portrayals have been historically characterised by limited and exaggerated stereotypical roles. This includes exaggerated stereotypes or marginalisation, creating a distorted image that may influence Chinese students’ expectations and assumptions about African teachers (Emodi & Samason, 2018). Emodi and Samason (2018) further note that if media representations predominantly depict African individuals in limited roles or emphasise negative stereotypes, it can reinforce the belief that African teachers may lack the qualifications, language proficiency, or cultural competence expected of educators.

This influence can lead to biased expectations and assumptions about the capabilities of African teachers, contributing to the challenges that they face in educational settings. Moreover, Gilliam et al. (2016) found that overrepresenting negative images in media can create and

perpetuate implicit biases. Thus, this influence extends to educational settings, potentially leading to the manifestation of biases and misconceptions that African teachers must navigate. Understanding the characteristics of students in the EMI context in China is essential to shed light on the challenges that African teachers often face.

It is essential to note that Chinese students in EMI contexts often come from diverse backgrounds, environments, and age groups. Understanding their characteristics is crucial for educators to effectively engage with them in the classroom and tailor their teaching approaches to meet their needs. Chinese EMI students primarily come from mainland China, although international students from other countries may also study in EMI programmes. Mainland China's students may come from various provinces and regions with cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic characteristics (Li & Gao, 2019). The environment in which these students grow up can vary widely depending on factors such as urban or rural upbringing, socio-economic status, and access to educational resources. Urban students may have greater exposure to international influences and English-language media, while rural students may face more limited resources and opportunities (Wang & Zheng, 2020). Chinese EMI students encompass a wide range of age groups. Some students may pursue undergraduate or postgraduate degrees, often driven by high expectations from their families, teachers, and society. They may feel significant pressure to excel academically and succeed in their studies (Qiu & Fang, 2022). They are also known for their diligence and perseverance in their studies and are willing to put in the time and effort required to master complex academic concepts and achieve their goals (Li & Gao, 2019). Still, while Chinese EMI students are studying in English-medium programmes, their proficiency levels in English may vary. Some students may be highly proficient English speakers, while others may struggle with language barriers and require additional support to improve their language skills.

Understanding the nature of Chinese students in EMI settings and recognising and challenging the typical stereotypes

experienced by African teachers is crucial for fostering a more inclusive learning environment where students can appreciate the diversity and expertise that African teachers bring to the classroom.

### **The Influence of Racial Homogeneity on Perceptions of African Teachers**

The influence of racial homogeneity on perceptions of African teachers in Chinese society is a significant aspect that warrants exploration. This homogeneity, primarily characterised by the dominance of the Han ethnic group, contributes to limited exposure to racial diversity, potentially leading to misunderstandings and misconceptions. Understanding this influence is crucial for addressing African teachers' challenges in Chinese educational settings.

Notably, China's societal structure is marked by racial homogeneity, with the Han ethnic group comprising most of the population. This demographic homogeneity can result in limited exposure to people of diverse racial backgrounds, including African individuals. Li (2019) highlights how limited exposure to cultural diversity can lead to reliance on external sources for information about racial and ethnic groups, perpetuating stereotypes and misconceptions. Likewise, the lack of meaningful interactions with African individuals in a racially homogeneous society can contribute to misunderstandings. Without first-hand experience, some Chinese students may rely on limited and potentially biased sources of information about African teachers. Hence, Liu et al. (2018a) emphasise the impact of limited interactions on the development of stereotypes and note the importance of personal encounters in challenging and dispelling misconceptions. Furthermore, the lack of exposure to diverse racial and ethnic groups can lead to generalisations and reinforce existing stereotypes. Sue et al. (2007) emphasise that generalisations often arise from limited interactions and reliance on stereotypical portrayals. In the context of African teachers in China, these generalisations can contribute to

misconceptions about language proficiency, teaching abilities, and cultural competence.

### **Common Bias and Attitudes towards Racial Diversity in Educational Settings**

Meanwhile, EMI universities in China are becoming popular destinations for foreign English teachers, including African educators. The impact of societal attitudes towards racial diversity on educational environments remains a complex and influential aspect that significantly shapes the experiences of African teachers in China. These dynamics are crucial for addressing African educators' challenges in societies where racial diversity may not be adequately recognised or celebrated.

In societies where diversity is celebrated and promoted, students are more likely to embrace and value the contributions of educators from different racial backgrounds. Hong and Lan (2014) highlight the positive impact of multicultural education in fostering a sense of belonging amongst students and enhancing their appreciation for diversity. In such environments, African teachers may find a more inclusive atmosphere that recognises and celebrates their unique contributions (Yin & Li, 2019). However, African teachers in a homogeneous Chinese society often face stereotypes, misconceptions, discrimination, and bias. Understanding the impact of these challenges is crucial for addressing misconceptions and fostering cultural understanding.

Language barriers contribute to misunderstandings, particularly in societies like China, where there may be a need for more specific and nuanced terminology for discussing race and ethnicity. Chinese may need more vocabulary for sensitive discussions about racial identity. Li (2019) emphasises the challenges in cross-cultural communication when specific terms for discussing race are absent, making it difficult to engage in nuanced conversations. African teachers may encounter challenges in gaining recognition and respect in countries where racial diversity is not adequately recognised or celebrated. Societal attitudes that do not prioritise diversity can contribute

to biases and misconceptions. Burgess et al. (2017) suggest that negative societal attitudes may lead to the undervaluing of contributions made by African educators, creating barriers to their professional advancement and recognition

Negative societal attitudes towards racial diversity can manifest in discriminatory practices within educational environments. Pager and Shepherd (2008) demonstrate how implicit biases can result in unequal treatment. Consequently, African teachers may need help in accessing resources, opportunities for professional development, and fair evaluations, contributing to an environment that hinders their ability to establish themselves as valued academic community members. In addition, in some instances, African teachers may face explicit challenges to their qualifications or ability to teach effectively because of their racial background (Mkabela & Wadesango, 2018b). Likewise, students may harbour misconceptions about the proficiency of African teachers in English or doubt their competence in conveying Western cultural nuances (Johnson & Okpala, 2016a).

Unfortunately, this scepticism is unfounded, as Johnson's (2019) examination of African teachers' qualifications demonstrates the contrary. Johnson's research highlights that African teachers frequently possess the credentials and expertise required for effective teaching in these contexts. The findings shed light on the misconception that race correlates with qualifications or teaching competence. Through a rigorous analysis of the qualifications of African teachers, Johnson reveals that many educators in this demographic hold relevant degrees, certifications, and experience in English language teaching. Furthermore, they often demonstrate proficiency in English and possess pedagogical skills that align with international teaching standards. By debunking this scepticism, Johnson's research highlights the importance of recognising and valuing the qualifications and expertise of African teachers. It challenges implicit biases and stereotypes that may undermine the credibility and effectiveness of these educators in the eyes of students, colleagues, and administrators.

It is worth noting that discrimination and bias in the classroom can have a profound impact on the well-being and self-esteem of African teachers. These cumulative negative interactions may lead to frustration, isolation, and self-doubt, leading to emotional tolls and a challenging work environment, potentially compromising the teachers' passion and dedication to their profession (Smith & Silva, 2011). The emotional toll resulting from discriminatory experiences poses a vital challenge for African teachers in maintaining their passion for teaching. Feelings of frustration and isolation may lead to burnout and hinder their ability to provide effective and supportive learning environments for their students.

Meanwhile, in the absence of nuanced discussions about race, students may need more than oversimplified or stereotypical perceptions of African teachers. Language barriers limit the depth of communication, potentially leading to misunderstandings and reinforcing existing biases. Chen (2017) highlights the role of language in shaping perceptions, emphasising that the lack of vocabulary can contribute to reliance on stereotypes. When there is a need for open discussions about race and diversity, challenging preconceived notions that students hold becomes difficult. Hence, effective communication is critical in dispelling stereotypes and fostering understanding to emphasise the limitations of language barriers (Smith & Silva, 2011; Zhao & Zhang 2021; Hong & Lan, 2014). Examining these biases is essential to shed light on the experiences of African teachers and the challenges that they face in educational settings. Moreover, it highlights the need for cultural awareness and inclusivity in academic institutions to create supportive environments for all teachers. Finally, addressing these biases is crucial for promoting equity and diversity in the teaching profession and fostering positive teacher-student relationships.

### **Microaggressions in Education Settings**

Most importantly, microaggressions are a prevalent issue faced by African teachers in China. Microaggressions, a concept introduced by Pierce (1978), refer to subtle, often unintentional,

verbal or nonverbal slights, insults, or derogatory messages directed at marginalised groups. These seemingly innocuous actions can significantly impact the recipients, contributing to feelings of exclusion, invalidation, and psychological distress. In China's English-medium instruction settings, microaggressions against African educators can manifest in various ways. One typical example is the assumption of linguistic incompetence based on race. African educators, particularly non-native English speakers, may face scepticism or disbelief regarding their language proficiency solely because of their race (Amoako, 2020). Colleagues or students may express surprise or make comments implying that their English skills are inadequate despite their qualifications and experience.

Another manifestation of microaggressions is the exoticisation or fetishisation of African educators based on racial stereotypes. Colleagues or students may overly focus on aspects of their physical appearance, culture, or background, treating them as novelties rather than respected professionals. Smith and Silva (2011). This can create feelings of objectification and discomfort, as African educators are reduced to simplistic caricatures of their identities. Furthermore, microaggressions can occur through subtle exclusion or marginalisation within the academic network or social community. Despite their qualifications and contributions, African educators may sometimes be overlooked for opportunities such as committee memberships, research collaborations, or leadership roles (Moyo, 2016). These subtle forms of discrimination can undermine their sense of belonging and professional fulfilment, creating barriers to their advancement and success in the academic field.

Research by Sue et al. (2007) emphasises that these microaggressions can take various forms, including insensitive comments or questions based on racial stereotypes. For instance, African teachers may be subjected to remarks questioning their language proficiency, teaching abilities, or cultural competence, creating an uncomfortable and unwelcome classroom atmosphere (Li & Gao, 2019).

## **Effects of Bias on African Teachers in Classrooms**

The experiences of discrimination and bias faced by African teachers in Chinese classroom settings constitute a multifaceted challenge that demands thorough scrutiny (Rao, 2010). These subtle or overt encounters contribute to a complex web of factors that profoundly influence African educators' well-being and professional fulfilment. The psychological toll of experiencing discrimination and bias can significantly impact the mental and emotional health of African educators (Mkabela & Wadesango, 2018a). Constantly facing microaggressions, stereotypes, and prejudices can lead to feelings of stress, anxiety, and even depression. Moreover, the emotional labour required to navigate these challenges while maintaining professionalism can be exhausting and draining. Furthermore, the impact on job satisfaction and sense of belonging cannot be overstated (Mutongi, 2017b). Feeling marginalised or undervalued within the academic community can erode morale and diminish the motivation to excel in one's career. African educators may struggle to establish meaningful connections with colleagues and students, exacerbating feelings of isolation and alienation. In addition, discrimination and bias may hinder African educators' professional advancement and career prospects (Amoako, 2020; Bodomo, 2012). Opportunities for promotion, research collaboration, and professional development may be limited or overlooked because of systemic biases within academic institutions. This stagnation can impede personal growth and hinder the ability to reach one's full potential in education.

The intersectionality of race, nationality, and language proficiency adds layers of complexity to the experiences of African educators (Johnson & Okpala, 2016a). Non-native English speakers may face additional challenges in proving their language proficiency and overcoming linguistic biases. Moreover, African educators may also grapple with cultural differences and expectations, further complicating their integration into the academic community. The lack of institutional support and resources to address issues of discrimination and bias can exacerbate the challenges faced by

African educators (Li, 2019; Johnson & Wang, 2020a). Without proper mechanisms to address these issues, educators may feel powerless to advocate for themselves or effect meaningful change within their institutions.

## **Impacts of Bias on Teacher-Student Relationships**

The impacts of discrimination and bias on teacher-student interactions and relationships, particularly for African teachers in Chinese classroom settings, are profound and multifaceted. Moreover, these challenges pose significant barriers to establishing rapport, trust, and effective communication, essential to a conducive learning environment. Most importantly, teacher-student relationships are crucial in fostering positive learning outcomes. Discrimination and bias can impede the ability of African teachers to establish rapport and trust with their students (Bessong, 2019). Moreover, scepticism or resistance stemming from students' misconceptions may create a barrier that hinders the development of a positive and supportive teacher-student dynamic.

Also, some students may approach African teachers sceptically because of preconceived notions about language proficiency, cultural competence, or teaching abilities. For instance, students may be reluctant to accept guidance, question the teacher's qualifications, or refrain from forming a meaningful connection (Li & Gao, 2019), impacting the potential for open communication and collaboration within the classroom. Furthermore, the lack of trust and rapport resulting from discrimination and bias can directly impact student engagement. Students may be less willing to participate actively in classroom activities, contribute to discussions, or seek help when needed. Hence, Fredricks et al. (2004) highlight the importance of student engagement in the learning process, emphasising that a positive teacher-student relationship is a crucial determinant of students' motivation and willingness to invest in their education.

Understanding that compromised teacher-student interactions result in the potential inhibition of inclusivity and

collaboration within the learning environment. When students feel disconnected, or harbour scepticism towards their teachers, the classroom atmosphere may become less welcoming and supportive, thus inhibiting the creation of a collaborative space where diverse perspectives are valued, limiting students' language development and overall educational experience (Howard, 2018). For instance, offering cultural competence training for teachers and students, awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes, and implementing inclusive pedagogical practices are essential. Doing so establishes better student-teacher relations, as stated by Howard (2006), highlighting the effectiveness of culturally responsive teaching in breaking down barriers and fostering positive teacher-student relationships.

### **Devaluing African Teachers' Competency**

The challenges in gaining trust, respect, and recognition as competent educators for African teachers in Chinese universities are multifaceted and deeply rooted in prevailing stereotypes and biases. Overcoming these hurdles necessitates continually demonstrating expertise, dedication, and effectiveness in the classroom and building solid relationships with students, colleagues, and administrators. The prevailing stereotypes and biases contribute to an environment where African educators may encounter doubts about their language proficiency, teaching abilities, and cultural competence. Wang and Zheng (2020) highlight the additional scrutiny and scepticism that African teachers may face compared to their white counterparts in Chinese universities. This increased scrutiny poses a unique challenge that requires intentional efforts to address misconceptions and prove competence.

Moreover, African teachers must consistently demonstrate their expertise and dedication to overcome preconceived notions. Studies indicate that African teachers may need to go above and beyond to showcase their qualifications and commitment to effective teaching (Johnson, 2019). This ongoing demonstration is essential for dispelling stereotypes and earning the trust and respect of students, colleagues, and administrators. Hence, building solid relationships with

students, colleagues, and administrators is crucial for African teachers to dispel misconceptions and gain recognition. Howard (2006) emphasises the significance of positive teacher–student relationships in challenging stereotypes.

In addition, seeking support from colleagues and engaging in professional development opportunities are vital components of overcoming challenges and gaining trust and recognition. Also, collaborative efforts within the academic community can help to challenge biases and stereotypes collectively. Sleeter and Milner (2011) further emphasise the importance of professional development addressing cultural competence and diversity to enable educators to navigate challenges effectively.

To supplement these individual efforts, implementing inclusive pedagogical practices within the classroom can also contribute to dispelling misconceptions. These may include implementing group projects where students work collaboratively with their peers, including African teachers, can foster mutual respect and understanding amongst students (Johnson & Wang, 2020b). Incorporating interactive learning activities, such as debates, role-plays, and case studies, can encourage active participation and engagement from students, regardless of their cultural background (Li & Gao, 2019). Organising cultural exchange activities, such as guest lectures, cultural festivals, or language exchange programmes, can allow students to learn from African teachers and gain a deeper appreciation for diverse cultural perspectives (Mkabela & Wadesango, 2018a). Encouraging open communication and feedback between students and teachers can create a supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and concerns (Amoako, 2020).

Undoubtedly, incorporating diverse perspectives into the curriculum and creating a culturally responsive learning environment can positively impact students' perceptions of their teachers (Gay, 2010). Inclusivity in teaching practices can further support the efforts of African educators in gaining trust and recognition. We must recognise the importance of administrative support in addressing African teachers'

challenges. Capper et al. (2018) highlight the need to acknowledge African educators' unique contributions at the institutional level. Thus, encouraging diversity initiatives, recognising the value of diverse perspectives, and providing avenues for professional growth contribute to a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. In sum, gaining trust, respect, and recognition as competent educators for African teachers in Chinese universities requires a multifaceted approach. By addressing stereotypes, African teachers can navigate these challenges and contribute to a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

### **Measures to Curb Discrimination and Bias on African Teachers**

Improving the conditions of African teachers in EMI contexts in China requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses not only educational initiatives but also political and public actions. These measures must include implementing and enforcing anti-discrimination policies within educational institutions and broader society, which is essential (Bodomo, 2012). These policies should explicitly prohibit discrimination based on race, nationality, or ethnicity and provide mechanisms for reporting and addressing incidents of prejudice or bias against African teachers. Equally important, providing cultural sensitivity training to students, faculty, and staff can help to raise awareness of diverse cultural perspectives and reduce implicit biases (Mkabela & Wadesango, 2018a). This training should include modules on intercultural communication, cultural competence, and strategies for promoting inclusivity in the classroom and workplace (Davis & Stevenson, 2006).

Promoting diversity and inclusivity has become a must for many workplaces in today's society. Hence, promoting diversity and inclusion initiatives within educational institutions and government agencies can create a more welcoming and supportive environment for African teachers (Johnson & Okpala, 2016b). This can include initiatives such as diversity hiring programmes, multicultural events and celebrations, and

establishing support networks for minority faculty and staff. Also, advocacy groups and organisations can play a crucial role in raising awareness of the challenges faced by African teachers in EMI contexts and advocating for policy changes to address these issues (Mutongi, 2017a). These groups can also provide a platform for African teachers to voice their concerns and share their experiences with policymakers and the public.

Government support is essential in addressing systemic issues affecting African teachers in EMI contexts (Li & Gao, 2019). This can include funding professional development programmes, research grants, and initiatives to promote international collaboration and exchange in education. Moreover, launching public awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about African teachers can help to shift public perceptions and attitudes (Johnson & Wang, 2020b). These campaigns can utilise various media platforms, including television, radio, social media, and community events, to reach a broad audience and promote positive representations of African educators.

Engaging with local communities and stakeholders is critical in fostering understanding and support for African teachers in EMI contexts (Amoako, 2020). This can involve organising community forums, town hall meetings, and other events to facilitate dialogue and collaboration between African teachers, students, parents, and community leaders. By implementing these political and public actions, China can create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment supporting African teachers' success and well-being in EMI contexts.

### **The Transformative Impact on Students: Realising the Value of African Teachers**

Despite the challenges that African teachers may encounter in some global classrooms, the transformative impact of African teachers on students in Chinese EMI universities goes beyond academic learning. Understanding how cultural practices and social class intersect and shape individuals' life chances and

opportunities within society is essential. Through the lens of cultural capital, Bourdieu (1984) contends that cultural capital plays a central role in the reproduction of social inequality, as dominant cultural norms and practices are often privileged and valorised within society. Those with cultural capital that aligns with dominant cultural norms are more likely to be accorded social status and prestige. In contrast, those whose cultural capital deviates from the norm may face marginalisation or exclusion (Bourdieu, 1984). It is therefore necessary to explore how cultural connection, authentic language use, diverse teaching approaches, positive role modelling, and transformative learning experiences contribute to awakening students' consciousness to realise the value and expertise of their African educators.

Firstly, cultural connection plays a significant role in transforming students' perceptions of their African teachers. It is evident that when students perceive that their teachers share a linguistic background or have similar language learning experiences, they are more likely to feel a sense of belonging and trust. Consequently, African teachers who can effectively bridge sociocultural and linguistic gaps and engage with students personally foster more robust connections, positively influencing students' attitudes towards their educators (Gürsoy, 2018). Therefore, through sociocultural connections, students can gain a more nuanced understanding of the diverse backgrounds and experiences that African teachers bring to the classroom. Besides, when students acknowledge their African efficacy, it challenges common stereotypes and fosters a more inclusive and empathetic learning environment.

Secondly, African teachers who use authentic language and local dialects offer students exposure to the linguistic diversity of the English language. It is important to note that embracing diverse linguistic styles and accents helps students to develop a deeper appreciation for the global variations of English beyond the traditional Western-centric perspectives. Additionally, African teachers use unique and diverse teaching approaches through their teaching methodologies, informed by their cultural experiences and backgrounds, to provide students

with alternative ways of learning and understanding course material (Hill & Pinderhughes, 2016). Hence, this diversity of approaches enhances students' critical thinking skills and encourages them to embrace various perspectives.

Thirdly, African teachers are positive role models for students, especially those without significant exposure to educators from diverse racial backgrounds. More importantly, seeing someone from a marginalised racial group succeed as an educator can inspire students to pursue their academic goals and overcome challenges. Still, African teachers' successes and contributions challenge societal biases and reinforce the idea that racial or ethnic backgrounds do not limit excellence in education (Howard, 2018). Most of all, students who view their African teachers as role models are likelier to have higher self-esteem, are gritters with a positive mindset, have increased motivation to learn, and have a broader outlook on their potential.

Fourthly, transformative learning experiences facilitated by African teachers can challenge students' stereotypes and biases. This could be achieved by encouraging open discussions about race, identity, and diversity; African teachers can create spaces for students to critically examine their beliefs and assumptions (Ladson-Billings, 2019; Palmer, 2020). For instance, through meaningful and respectful dialogue, students gain a deeper appreciation for the complexities of race and ethnicity, leading to a more profound understanding of cultural diversity.

Fifthly, students' perspectives on meaningful dialogue about race and ethnicity are crucial in fostering a deeper understanding of cultural diversity and challenging stereotypes and biases. Research by Adams and Bell (2016) highlights the transformative potential of such dialogues in expanding students' perspectives and promoting inclusivity in educational settings. Engaging in meaningful and respectful dialogue allows students to confront their preconceptions and biases about race and ethnicity. By actively listening to diverse perspectives and sharing their own experiences, students gain a deeper

appreciation for the complexities of these issues (Adams & Bell, 2016). This process of self-reflection and critical engagement encourages students to question stereotypes and assumptions, paving the way for more inclusive and empathetic interactions.

Sixthly, transformative learning experiences through dialogue broaden students' understanding of cultural diversity. Through exposure to diverse viewpoints and lived experiences, students develop a more nuanced understanding of the social, historical, and political contexts that shape race and ethnicity (Adams & Bell, 2016). This expanded awareness fosters empathy and solidarity across cultural boundaries, contributing to a more inclusive and interconnected learning community.

Lastly, meaningful dialogue about race and ethnicity empowers students to challenge stereotypes and biases in the classroom and their everyday interactions. Students become agents of change in their communities by critically examining societal norms and structures perpetuating inequality and discrimination (Adams & Bell, 2016). This activism and advocacy for social justice create a more equitable and inclusive society for all. By engaging in respectful and transformative conversations, students deepen their appreciation for cultural diversity and empower themselves and others to challenge stereotypes and biases, ultimately fostering a more just and equitable learning environment.

### **Implications: embracing African teachers' unique perspectives**

The experiences of African teachers in Chinese EMI contexts highlight the pervasive impact of misconceptions, discrimination, and bias on educational spaces. By critically analysing the historical and societal influences contributing to these challenges, institutions can create a more supportive and empowering environment for African teachers. This transformation is essential to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in global classrooms. Recognising African teachers' expertise and contributions has profound implications for students and society. We must begin by changing our mindset

and mentalities to embrace inclusive practices. Thiong'o's (1986) concept of decolonising the mind offers profound insights into challenging colonial mentalities and reclaiming indigenous ways of knowing and being. He advocates for a radical re-evaluation of education, language, and culture. By recognising the role of colonisation in shaping mentalities and worldviews, we can work towards creating more inclusive, equitable, and decolonised educational systems that honour diverse ways of knowing and being.

Likewise, students who realise their African teachers' significant support and guidance develop increased respect, appreciation, and cultural sensitivity (Chen, 2019). Transforming students' mindsets challenges preconceived notions about race, ethnicity, and teaching abilities, potentially leading to a more inclusive and empathetic learning environment (Barcus & Grace, 2019; Li, 2019). Furthermore, embracing African teachers' unique perspectives and teaching approaches enriches language education as students gain exposure to authentic language use and diverse pedagogical strategies, fostering critical thinking, open-mindedness, and creativity (Chen & Hsueh, 2020; Emodi & Samason, 2018). For these reasons, appreciating diverse voices in classrooms advances teaching and learning and prepares students for the complexities of a globalised world. Students become active agents in fostering a more equitable and compassionate world by challenging stereotypes and advocating for equal opportunities.

### **A Pedagogic Reflection: Experiencing Bias and Promoting Diversity and Inclusivity in Learning Spaces**

This reflection begins by sharing a personal experience as an African teacher in China. Then, it proceeds to explain why it is essential to promote an accurate conception of African teachers to foster diversity and inclusivity in global learning spaces and in China. The aim is to reiterate the need to teach Africa without transmitting or reinforcing negative stereotypes about the continent, its cultures, and its people.

In general, many African teachers in the Diaspora will relate to the challenge that I share here as they try to navigate global workspaces of learning and contribute to creating and sharing knowledge. As an African teacher navigating the halls of EMI universities in China, I have encountered a myriad of challenges, but none as profound as the biases and discrimination that have plagued my professional journey. One such moment stands out vividly, a poignant reminder of the uphill battle that individuals like myself face, striving for recognition and advancement in a foreign land.

The culmination of years of dedication, hard work, and a commitment to excellence led me to apply for a coveted leadership position within my department. With a résumé adorned with qualifications, experiences, and a passion for education, I embarked on the application process with unwavering determination. Little did I know that the harsh reality of bias and favouritism would soon mar my journey. The moment of reckoning arrived when the position was announced, and I eagerly awaited the outcome, confident in my abilities and suitability for the role. However, what transpired shattered my expectations and left me grappling with a sense of injustice and disillusionment. Despite being a qualified candidate amongst my peers, I was informed that the position had been awarded to someone with significantly less academic achievements and experience.

At that moment, the weight of disappointment threatened to engulf me as I struggled to comprehend the rationale behind such a decision. Was it biased? Discrimination? Favouritism? The answers remained elusive, leaving me to confront the harsh reality of systemic barriers that often hinder the progress of individuals from marginalised backgrounds. Nevertheless, amidst the darkness, a flicker of resilience ignited within me – a determination to defy the odds and forge ahead despite the obstacles in my path. It was a turning point – a moment of introspection that fuelled a newfound resolve to challenge the status quo and strive for change. In the aftermath of the ordeal, I refused to be defined by the limitations imposed upon me. Instead, I channelled my energies into effecting positive

transformation within the academic landscape, advocating for inclusivity, diversity, and equal opportunities.

My journey serves as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit – a reminder that in the face of adversity, we possess the power to rise above and transcend barriers, emerging more assertive and more determined than ever. Though the road may be fraught with challenges, each obstacle serves as a stepping stone towards greater heights of achievement and fulfilment.

As I navigate the intricate web of academia, I do so with a renewed sense of purpose and conviction – a beacon of hope for those who dare to dream beyond the confines of societal expectations. In the pursuit of excellence, there are no boundaries – only endless possibilities waiting to be explored. Furthermore, our collective efforts can pave the way for a future where meritocracy triumphs over prejudice and every individual is allowed to shine.

My experience in higher education allowed me to reflect critically on creating more inclusive and culturally sensitive learning spaces, which is essential for promoting accurate conceptions of African teachers and fostering a positive educational environment. As an educator committed to fostering inclusive and culturally sensitive learning environments, I am deeply aware of the importance of promoting accurate conceptions of African teachers and cultivating a positive educational atmosphere in EMI contexts in China. Reflecting on my experiences and interactions with African colleagues, I recognise the transformative power of creating spaces that celebrate diversity, challenge stereotypes, and promote mutual respect and understanding.

One of the most inspiring aspects of my journey as an educator has been the opportunity to collaborate with African teachers and witness the richness of their cultural perspectives and pedagogical approaches. Through personal anecdotes and examples, I have seen how African teachers bring unique insights, experiences, and knowledge to the classroom, enriching the educational experience for students

and colleagues. From engaging storytelling sessions to thought-provoking discussions on global issues, African teachers have consistently inspired curiosity, critical thinking, and empathy amongst learners.

However, despite their invaluable contributions, I have also observed African teachers' challenges in navigating cultural differences, language barriers, and stereotypes in EMI contexts. Personal anecdotes shared by African colleagues have shed light on moments of misunderstanding, discrimination, and isolation that they have encountered in their professional journey. These stories are powerful reminders of the importance of creating supportive and inclusive learning environments where all educators feel valued, respected, and empowered to thrive.

To enrich this reflection further, it is essential to acknowledge cultural sensitivity and empathy's role in building meaningful connections and fostering a sense of belonging amongst diverse learners and educators. By actively listening to the experiences and perspectives of African teachers, engaging in open dialogue, and challenging our biases and assumptions, we can create spaces that honour and celebrate the diversity of voices and experiences within our academic community.

Moreover, pedagogic reflections should emphasise the need for ongoing professional development and training programmes focused on cultural competence, intercultural communication, and inclusive teaching practices. By equipping educators with the knowledge, skills, and resources to navigate diverse cultural landscapes sensitively, we can create transformative learning experiences that promote cross-cultural understanding, empathy, and collaboration. Overall, the need to develop inclusive and culturally sensitive learning spaces for African teachers in EMI contexts in China is not just a professional obligation but a moral imperative. Through personal anecdotes, examples, and reflections, African teachers can inspire meaningful change, challenge stereotypes, and cultivate a positive educational environment where diversity is celebrated and all voices are heard.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has illuminated the transformative impact of African teachers in Chinese EMI universities, offering insights into the multifaceted dynamics of cultural exchange, educational practice, and social change. Through the lens of Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and an interdisciplinary approach, we have elucidated how African teachers' cultural connection, authentic language use, diverse teaching approaches, positive role modelling, and transformative learning experiences contribute to a student's educational journey.

African teachers play a vital role in shaping students' perceptions and experiences in the classroom by fostering trust, belonging, and cultural understanding. Moreover, their presence challenges stereotypes, inspires academic excellence, and promotes equity and inclusivity in educational spaces. Recognising and celebrating African teachers' expertise enriches language education and contributes to broader societal goals of diversity, equity, and social justice.

As we seek to overcome misperceptions of Africa in this globalised era, it is imperative to decolonise education on Africa, as highlighted earlier in Part I of this edited book, while utilising student-centred, active pedagogic strategies for confronting misconceptions as explored in Part II and centring African views and experiences in teaching Africa, as suggested in Part III. This multifaceted education-based approach's potential to dismantle stereotypes about Africa is enhanced by encouraging Africans to participate in teaching and learning about Africa, including in non-African institutions. Through the presence of African teachers in higher education classrooms, students enrich and diversify their learning while cultivating competencies and sensitivities concerning Africa, its people, values, and cultures. Engaging and empowering African teachers while fostering intercultural dialogue and understanding amongst students can create more inclusive, equitable, and compassionate learning environments that prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of a diverse and interconnected world.

## Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge Nubia Moreno's invaluable feedback which enriched this chapter.

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