



Expatriate Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers in China: Exploring Their Quality of Life

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ABSTRACT

The problem and the aim of the study. The quality of life (QoL) of expatriate non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) in China is a critical yet underexplored issue, despite their increasing presence in international education. Limited attention to their well-being may affect teacher retention, performance, and institutional stability. This study aimed to evaluate the QoL of NNESTs working in China through the WHOQOL-BREF framework, focusing on four domains: physical health, psychological well-being, social relationships, and environmental factors.

Research methods. This study employed a mixed-method approach, utilizing the WHOQOL-BREF survey alongside an open-ended qualitative question. A total of 156 expatriate NNESTs across various regions of China participated in the study. Quantitative data were collected using the WHOQOL-BREF instrument and analyzed via t-tests, Kruskal-Wallis tests, and regression analysis. In addition, participants responded to an open-ended question, and responses were thematically coded to explore contextual experiences influencing their QoL.

Results. Findings indicate that expatriate NNESTs in China experience a moderate overall quality of life, with the highest domain score reported in physical health ($M = 58.61$), followed by environment ($M = 56.49$), psychological well-being ($M = 52.86$), and the lowest in social relationships ($M = 49.52$). Participants expressed high satisfaction with environmental aspects of life in China, particularly safety, convenience, and financial savings potential, with those in smaller cities reporting better living conditions and greater financial benefits due to lower living costs. However, physical well-being was challenged by heavy workloads and inconsistent access to healthcare. Psychological health was affected by work-related stress and social isolation, while language barriers and cultural differences hindered social integration. Marital status significantly influenced social well-being ($p = 0.020$), with married teachers experiencing better integration. Qualitative insights underscored collegial support as a protective factor, while also highlighting concerns related to limited professional development, healthcare communication, and racial discrimination.

Conclusion. The study underscores the importance of institutional policies and support systems in enhancing NNESTs' QoL. Structured orientation programs, healthcare access, and social integration initiatives are recommended to improve well-being and retention of expatriate educators. Improving QoL among NNESTs can contribute to sustainable teacher recruitment and the overall effectiveness of international education in China.

KEYWORDS

expatriates, non-native English-speaking teachers, quality of life, teachers' well-being, teachers' health, international education, China

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INTRODUCTION

International frameworks, such as UNESCO's Education 2030 Framework for Action [1] and the Strategy for Teachers [2], underscore the pivotal role of teachers in delivering quality education and fostering sustainable learning environments. These documents highlight that teacher well-being is not only vital for effective teaching but also for the resilience and sustainability of education systems. Reinforcing this idea, UNESCO's Strategy on Education for Health and Well-being [3] calls for broad support for teachers' physical, mental, and emotional health, recognizing the interconnectedness of teacher well-being and student outcomes. Collectively, these global commitments draw attention to the importance of researching educators' quality of life (QoL), especially within transnational and culturally diverse teaching contexts.

In recent years, the globalization of education has led to a significant increase in expatriate teachers working abroad, particularly in international schools. The international school sector is expanding rapidly, with over 14,000 schools worldwide and nearly seven million students enrolled. Asia is at the forefront of this growth, with China hosting 1,106 international schools, followed by India (923) and the UAE (784) [4]. Despite policy shifts, such as the introduction of the Patriotic Education Law affecting international schools, China remains a major destination for expatriate teachers, creating a consistent demand for foreign educators.

Expatriate teachers face unique challenges that can significantly impact their well-being. These challenges extend beyond professional responsibilities and include social, psychological, physical, and environmental factors. Cultural adaptation is often a demanding process, requiring teachers to navigate unfamiliar social norms, language barriers, and different educational practices [5; 6]. Social isolation is another concern, as establishing meaningful relationships in a foreign country can be difficult [7; 8]. Additionally, environmental factors such as air pollution, traffic congestion, and housing conditions can contribute to stress and impact overall well-being [8; 9]. In the context of China, these challenges are especially emphasized because of the combination of linguistic barriers, hierarchical workplace structures, and environmental concerns, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive understanding of expatriate teachers' quality of life (QoL).

Existing research on expatriate educators in China has predominantly focused on native English-speaking teachers, with studies examining institutional support, cultural adjustment [6], pedagogical challenges, job satisfaction, leadership issues [10], and the role of social networks [11]. Up to now, far too little attention has been paid to expatriate non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) and their quality of life, despite their significant presence in the global teaching workforce. Most existing studies focus on professional barriers, such as linguistic insecurity, discrimination, and identity negotiation [12; 13], rather than on overall well-being. While expatriate NNESTs bring unique strengths, such as empathy for language learners and a deep understanding of cross-cultural communication [14], little research has explored how their experiences shape their QoL, particularly in China.

This gap is significant, as research on QoL in cross-cultural settings highlights the importance of cultural adaptation, social support, and work-life balance. Successful adaptation has been linked to higher QoL, as it reduces stress and enhances a sense of belonging [15]. Social support—whether from host communities or fellow expatriates—plays a crucial role in mitigating isolation and improving well-being [16]. However, in China, expatriates face unique environmental and cultural challenges that can negatively impact their QoL [17]. For expatriate NNESTs, additional linguistic and professional challenges may further complicate their experiences, making it essential to investigate their QoL in greater depth.

Despite the growing number of expatriate NNESTs in China, no study has specifically examined their QoL using a validated framework such as the WHOQOL-BREF. Most studies on expatriate teachers tend to focus on job satisfaction or workplace factors, but they often miss the bigger picture of well-being, such as physical health, mental resilience, and how well teachers adapt to their environment. This study fills that gap by exploring the quality of life of expatriate NNESTs in China using both quantitative (WHOQOL-BREF) and qualitative (open-ended responses) methods, giving a fuller picture of their experiences.

Research Aims and Questions

This study seeks to examine the QoL of expatriate NNESTs in China by addressing the following research questions:

1. What is the quality of life of expatriate non-native English-speaking teachers in China, as measured by the WHOQOL-BREF survey?
2. What are the key factors influencing their quality of life, as revealed through open-ended responses?

Using a mixed-methods approach, this study offers a deeper look into the quality of life of expatriate NNESTs in China. The results will provide valuable insights for policymakers, schools, and support organizations aiming to improve the well-being and long-term success of expatriate teachers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design and Participants

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to assess the quality of life (QoL) of expatriate non-native English-speaking teachers in China. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of QoL across four domains: physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and environmental factors.

Participants were recruited from K-12 educational institutions across China. Initially, 165 responses were collected, but 9 were excluded due to incompleteness or nationality discrepancies, leaving a final sample of 156 participants. The sample represented educators from diverse regions, including Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The majority of participants were male (61.5%), with a significant proportion aged 25-44 (86.5%). Most were either single (47.4%) or married (36.5%). Regarding professional background, 60.9% held a bachelor's degree, and 34.6% had a master's degree. The majority (61%) reported at least three years of domestic teaching experience, while 64.3% had over three years of international teaching experience. Half of the participants had lived in China for more than five years.

Data Collection Instruments

The primary instrument for quantitative data collection was the WHOQOL-BREF, a widely used 26-item questionnaire developed by the World Health Organization [16]. It assesses QoL across four domains: physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and environment. Additionally, the instrument includes two items measuring participants' overall QoL and satisfaction with health.

Participants rated their experiences on a five-point Likert scale, with scores transformed to a 0-100 scale, where higher scores indicate better QoL. The reliability of the instrument in this study was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which indicated good internal consistency: overall reliability ($\alpha = 0.75$), physical health ($\alpha = 0.71$), psychological health ($\alpha = 0.80$), social relationships ($\alpha = 0.76$), and environment ($\alpha = 0.63$).

To supplement the quantitative data, an open-ended question was included to capture additional insights. Participants were asked to describe their experiences in China and how various factors influenced their QoL. This qualitative component allowed for a deeper exploration of factors such as social, cultural, and work-related influences beyond the scope of standardized survey measures.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted via an online survey distributed through Google Forms. A chain referral sampling method was employed, where initial participants were encouraged to share the survey with other expatriate teachers within their networks. This approach facilitated a diverse and representative sample from various educational institutions across China.

The survey was anonymous and voluntary, with informed consent obtained before participation. Participants were assured of confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

The structured questionnaire was followed by the open-ended question, which allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences in greater depth.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the WHOQOL-BREF were analyzed using SPSS Statistics 27. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, were calculated to summarize QoL scores across the four domains, as well as overall QoL and health satisfaction. This analysis provided a general overview of participants' quality of life, consistent with the descriptive results presented in Table 1.

To examine relationships between QoL and demographic variables, Kruskal-Wallis tests were used, as they are more suitable for non-parametric data. This method was applied to assess group differences in the QoL domains across variables such as marital status, age, international teaching experience, and duration of stay in China. The findings were consistent with the results presented in Table 2 and Table 3, where significant differences in social relationships were observed across marital status groups.

To identify key predictors of overall QoL, multiple regression analysis was performed, with the four QoL domains (physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and environment) as predictor variables and overall QoL as the dependent variable. The analysis controlled for potential confounders such as age, gender, and teaching experience, ensuring robust findings on the relative influence of each domain.

The qualitative data from the open-ended question were analyzed using thematic analysis following an inductive coding approach. Initially, responses were read and re-read to ensure familiarity with the data. Open coding was then applied to identify key themes, which were grouped into broader categories aligned with the WHOQOL-BREF domains. Themes emerging from the analysis included work conditions, cultural adaptation, social relationships, personal health, and racial discrimination. Participant quotes were integrated to illustrate key themes and provide a richer understanding of expatriate teachers' lived experiences. This qualitative analysis complemented the quantitative findings by offering contextual depth, as illustrated by the results presented in the qualitative findings section.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical protocols were strictly followed to ensure participant privacy and data security. Participants provided informed consent before participation, and all responses remained anonymous and confidential. Data were securely stored, and access was restricted to authorized researchers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Quality of life (QoL) is a multidimensional concept encompassing physical, psychological, social, and environmental well-being. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines QoL as an individual's perception of their position in life within the context of their culture, goals, and expectations [18]. This definition underscores the subjective and culturally embedded nature of QoL, making it especially relevant for expatriate populations adjusting to new environments.

For expatriate teachers, QoL is shaped by both professional and personal factors, including job satisfaction, social integration, access to healthcare, and environmental conditions [19]. The WHOQOL-BREF framework categorizes QoL into four domains: physical health, psychological well-being, social relationships, and environmental conditions [20]. These domains provide a useful structure for examining how expatriate teachers in China experience well-being and navigate challenges. Despite growing interest in expatriate teachers' adjustment, existing research primarily focuses on native English-speaking teachers (NESTs), overlooking the unique experiences of expatriate non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). This study seeks to address this gap by investigating how NNESTs experience QoL within China's diverse educational landscape.

China has emerged as a key destination for expatriate teachers due to the expansion of international and bilingual schools. However, expatriate teachers' experiences vary based on nationality, institutional policies, and labor regulations [21]. While some enjoy competitive salaries and professional development opportunities [22; 23], others face significant barriers related to contract enforcement, cultural adaptation, and job security [24; 25].

A critical but underexplored issue is the differential treatment of expatriate teachers based on nationality. NNESTs often experience hiring discrimination, lower salaries, and visa restrictions, despite possessing comparable qualifications and teaching experience [26]. Schools frequently prioritize NESTs for hiring even for subject teaching positions, assuming they provide superior language instruction [27; 28]. This structural bias limits NNESTs' job opportunities, career growth, and overall QoL, affecting their long-term professional and personal stability.

Beyond employment disparities, expatriate teachers' physical and environmental conditions significantly impact their QoL. Key factors include housing quality, pollution levels, access to healthcare, and adaptation to climatic and infrastructural differences. Research on expatriates in other contexts shows that adequate housing and healthcare access enhance QoL, whereas environmental stressors, such as pollution and limited medical services can contribute to physical and psychological strain [8; 29]. In China, expatriate teachers often report difficulties navigating local healthcare systems, further complicating their adaptation process. Despite these challenges, institutional support can mitigate adaptation difficulties. Teachers who receive employer assistance with housing, healthcare, and work-related integration tend to experience lower stress and a smoother transition [6; 30].

Psychological resilience, social networks, and job meaningfulness play critical roles in expatriate teachers' well-being. Resilient teachers develop adaptive coping mechanisms, such as cognitive reframing, social integration, and institutional mentoring, which help them navigate cultural and workplace-related stressors [31]. The U-curve theory of expatriate adaptation [32] suggests that expatriates initially experience culture shock before gradually adjusting. However, support systems and institutional policies strongly influence how quickly and effectively teachers reach the adjustment phase. Schools that provide structured onboarding, mentorship, and mental health support report higher teacher retention and well-being [6].

Experiencing meaningful work is also linked to higher life satisfaction [33]. Teachers who perceive their roles as professionally fulfilling tend to report greater well-being and resilience. However, this effect varies based on individual career goals. Cai et al. [33] note that the positive impact of meaningful work is strongest among teachers who do not view teaching as a lifetime career. This finding underscores the importance of aligning professional expectations with institutional support mechanisms to enhance expatriate teachers' QoL.

Despite the increasing number of expatriate teachers globally, limited research has explored their overall quality of life (QoL) beyond job satisfaction and workplace conditions. Existing studies often focus on native English-speaking educators or expatriates in other professions, neglecting the unique challenges faced by non-native English-speaking expatriate teachers (NNESTs). These teachers encounter specific obstacles related to cultural adaptation, social integration, and institutional support, all of which significantly affect their well-being.

To date, no study has applied the WHOQOL-BREF framework to assess the QoL of expatriate NNESTs, particularly in China. Most existing research on expatriate teachers relies on job satisfaction or professional adjustment measures, which overlook broader dimensions of well-being, such as physical health, psychological resilience, and environmental adaptation. This study fills this gap by using WHOQOL-BREF, complemented by qualitative insights from open-ended responses, to offer a comprehensive view of the factors influencing expatriate NNESTs' QoL.

This research contributes to the field by filling a critical gap in understanding how expatriate NNESTs experience life and work in China. The findings will offer valuable insights for policymakers and educational institutions seeking to enhance expatriate teachers' well-being, improve institutional support systems, and foster a more sustainable expatriate teaching workforce.

RESEARCH RESULTS

This section presents the results of the study, which assessed the quality of life (QoL) of expatriate non-native English-speaking teachers in China using both quantitative and qualitative data. The findings are organized into two parts: quantitative results based on the WHOQOL-BREF, which explores four QoL domains (physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and environment), and qualitative insights from an open-ended question that captures participants' personal experiences and factors influencing their QoL. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses are presented first, followed by a thematic analysis of the qualitative data.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and summarizes the scores for the four domains of the WHOQOL-BREF: physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and environment, along with the overall quality of life and satisfaction with health.

Table 1

Domain Scores and Overall Quality of Life (n=156)

Domain	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Physical Health	28.57	82.14	58.61	11.1
Psychological Health	25.0	79.17	52.86	11.94
Social Relationships	16.67	75.0	49.52	16.18
Environment	31.25	75.0	56.49	8.6
Overall QoL Rating	1	4	3.22	0.83
Satisfaction with Health	1	4	3.0	0.89

The physical health domain showed a mean score of 58.61 (SD = 11.1), indicating moderate physical well-being among the participants. Similarly, psychological health had a mean score of 52.86 (SD = 11.94), reflecting moderate psychological health. In contrast, the social relationships domain scored a mean of 49.52 (SD = 16.18), suggesting that many participants experience challenges in social integration and relationships. The environment domain, with a mean of 56.49 (SD = 8.6), reflects a generally positive perception of the living environment. The overall quality of life rating had a mean of 3.22 (SD = 0.83), indicating a generally favorable but not overly high rating of quality of life, with participants expressing moderate satisfaction. Satisfaction with health was also moderate, with a mean score of 3.0 (SD = 0.89), indicating that, on average, teachers are somewhat satisfied with their health.

The Kruskal-Wallis test was used to assess differences in WHOQOL-BREF domain scores based on marital status. The findings are summarized below.

Table 2

Summary of Kruskal-Wallis Test Results for Domains Across Marital Status

Domain	Test Statistic	Df	P-value	Decision
Physical Health	6.093	5	0.297	Retain the null
Psychological Health	9.392	5	0.094	Retain the null
Social Health	13.360	5	0.020	Reject the null
Environmental Health	9.600	5	0.087	Retain the null

The social health domain revealed significant differences across marital status groups ($p = 0.020$), with married expatriates reporting better social integration compared to their single counterparts ($p = 0.006$). However, no significant differences were found for physical, psychological, or environmental health across marital status groups, suggesting that these factors were relatively stable regardless of marital status.

Several Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted to examine the relationship between various demographic variables and the four domains of QoL. While the majority of the tests yielded non-significant results, the variables age, duration of stay in China, and international teaching experience showed the strongest non-significant trends, suggesting a potential relationship with QoL domains, though no significant differences were detected (p -values > 0.05). These findings, presented in Table 3, suggest that while no statistical significance was reached, certain demographic variables may still influence QoL in subtle ways. The decision to focus on these specific variables was made due to their stronger statistical values and closer proximity to significance, even though the null hypothesis was retained.

Table 3

Summary of Kruskal-Wallis Test Results for Domains Across Other Variables

Physical Health	Age	7.373	5	0.194	Retain the null
Psychological Health	Age	2.127	5	0.831	Retain the null
Social Health	Age	0.850	5	0.974	Retain the null
Environmental Health	Age	3.224	5	0.665	Retain the null
Physical Health	Duration of Stay in China	3.479	4	0.481	Retain the null
Social Health	International Teaching Exp.	4.140	4	0.387	Retain the null

Qualitative Analysis of Quality of Life Among Expatriate Teachers in China

This section presents the qualitative findings from the open-ended responses of expatriate non-native English-speaking teachers in China. The analysis identified several key domains that influence teachers' perceptions of their quality of life. These domains include financial stability, work environment and career development, social and cultural integration, health and well-being, work-life balance, safety and infrastructure, and discrimination and race. Direct quotes from the participants are provided in their original form to reflect their perspectives accurately.

Financial Stability

A significant number of teachers expressed that financial stability was a major factor influencing their quality of life in China. The lower cost of living, combined with attractive salary packages, allowed many to save money and meet personal financial goals.

One participant stated, *"Compensation is very nice comparing to living costs, my main goal was to pay back my student loan and leave after one or two years, but money is tempting so I am doing my 5th year now, maybe one more and leaving somewhere with more foreigners and more open society with better quality of life"*.

Several participants noted that while salaries in some schools may be relatively modest, the significantly lower cost of living in China enabled them to save a substantial portion of their income. This financial advantage was frequently mentioned as a key reason for choosing to work in China, as it offered the opportunity to pay off debts or send financial support to families back home. As one teacher explained, *"Living costs are low, it's my first international teaching job. I don't have a high-paying job in China, but compared to salaries in my home country, it's great."* Many teachers highlighted that, in contrast to their home countries, the ability to save and support loved ones financially was one of the major benefits of teaching in China.

Work Environment and Career Development

The work environment and opportunities for career growth were also key themes. While some teachers found the lack of professional development opportunities frustrating, others appreciated the financial benefits that compensated for the absence of training and promotions.

One teacher commented, *"Western holidays are not always with a day off, we had to work on Christmas... I worked in 4 schools, and none had a SEN specialist"*. This response highlights the lack of professional support, which impacts job satisfaction and well-being.

Another teacher described a more positive work environment: *"Good and approachable Principal and Coordinator make job much easier, workload is fine, pay is decent. The only 'problem' for me is sometimes slow local HR for something that in my homeland we see as a simple task".*

Social and Cultural Integration

Social integration and the ability to form connections within the local community were pivotal to many teachers' quality of life. Some teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of a social life or the limited interaction with other foreigners.

One participant reflected, *"Before covid there were more foreigners including teachers, it was more fun and hanging out together, but now all of that is gone. What made me stay during covid was that I got better pay in a bigger city because many schools were desperate to hire teachers..."*. The disruption in social networks during the pandemic was a major issue, as the teacher noted that their social life and career prospects had been influenced by these changes.

Conversely, others appreciated the ability to explore China and its culture. A teacher shared, *"China is a beautiful place to travel, rich culture and very easy to travel, an experience that stays forever with you, country is developing fast. Learning Mandarin is must, everything is easier even if you speak just a little bit, colleagues or students helped me to learn some basics"*.

Health and Well-being

Health insurance and access to healthcare were noted as essential aspects of quality of life. However, some teachers emphasized frustration regarding lack of clear communication about their rights and benefits. One participant shared: *"Schools should have more information for teachers about taxes, I didn't know anything, they didn't explain to me my rights or how they pay tax for me. I learnt last year that I have right to apply for tax refund, it made me feel so upset..."*.

Moreover, the lack of adequate support systems for health and well-being was also mentioned: *"Some schools don't offer sick days, they deduct everything from salary, sometimes I have to push myself to go to work while I am feeling sick"*.

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance emerged as an area of concern for many teachers. Several teachers emphasized the need for more time off and the difficulty in balancing personal life with work obligations. One teacher mentioned: *"No extra work or mandatory team building activities should be allowed during weekends or holidays, even if paid for extra work (we have private lives). Everyone should have at least 2 weeks paid leave during summer"*.

Another pointed out: *"It makes me angry when local leadership changes something in the last minute or gives us some short notice to prepare a play or show and they knew this for a long time...staying overtime is so painful but for locals that's just another way to show how they work hard, and they never complain. I want my free time to relax and be disconnected from work"*. This points to frustration over a lack of respect for personal time and work planning along with poor communication.

Safety and Infrastructure

Many teachers noted that the safety and infrastructure in China contributed to their positive experience. For example, one teacher shared: *"China is a mix of modern life, cool experiences, and safety, with traffic being the main thing to be careful about. Cameras are everywhere and even as a girl I feel safe almost at any time during the night if I am walking home alone. Affordable public transportation and e-bikes make everything easier"*.

Others appreciated the convenience of daily life in China: *"Online payment is convenient, online shopping as well-very fast and cheap. Transportation is amazing, the infrastructure is developing and it is so easy to travel"*. However, some teachers expressed concerns about privacy. As one teacher noted, *"People often point at me and take pictures or videos without asking for permission, which makes me feel anxious in public"*.

Discrimination and Race

Racial issues and experiences of discrimination were brought up by some teachers, particularly non-white expatriates. One teacher highlighted how racial discrimination affected their career opportunities: *"As an Asian, people speak to me Mandarin so often because they think I am Chinese, sometimes this is funny but sometimes can be annoying. I faced many rejections for job applications because of my nationality..."*. Another teacher mentioned the challenges of being a non-white expatriate: *"If you realize your advantage and privilege of being white in China you can make a decent money"*. This statement underscores the role that race, and nationality play in the work environment.

The qualitative analysis reveals that expatriate non-native English-speaking teachers in China experience a mixed quality of life, shaped by financial benefits, professional development challenges, cultural integration, work-life balance, safety, and experiences of racial discrimination. The responses indicate that while financial stability and the convenience of living in China are appealing, issues such as limited career growth, work-life imbalance, and discrimination affect overall well-being. The findings underscore the importance of addressing these challenges to improve the quality of life for expatriate teachers in China.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore the quality of life (QoL) of expatriate non-native English-speaking teachers in China, focusing on the four WHOQOL-BREF domains: physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and environment supplemented with an open-ended question for additional comments. The findings indicate that while many expatriate non-native English-speaking teachers are generally motivated by financial factors, they face significant challenges related to work-related stress, cultural adaptation, and social integration. These insights contribute to the growing body of research on expatriate teachers, shedding light on the quality of life of an often-overlooked group in international education.

Participants identified work conditions as a key determinant of physical health, with workload and institutional support shaping their well-being. Many teachers reported exhaustion due to demanding schedules, a finding consistent with previous studies [24; 34], which highlighted the high workloads of expatriate teachers. However, some respondents noted successful adaptation strategies, suggesting that personal coping mechanisms and institutional policies play a crucial role in mitigating burnout. Future studies should explore these individual and organizational interactions in more depth.

Another significant concern was access to healthcare. Several respondents described difficulties navigating China's healthcare system due to language barriers and bureaucratic complexities, a challenge well-documented by Zhang and Peltokorpi [35]. One participant noted, *"I avoided seeing a doctor for weeks because I didn't know how to explain my symptoms in Mandarin."* This highlights the need for bilingual medical resources and institutional guidance in international schools. Schools could provide comprehensive health orientation programs to support expatriate teachers as suggested in previous research [36; 37].

Psychological well-being was largely influenced by work-related stress and feelings of social disconnect. Teachers reported high levels of stress due to unpredictable work environments and cultural barriers, which aligns with Chen [38], who found that expatriates often struggle with unclear institutional expectations.

A major challenge was loneliness and lack of social support, particularly among teachers who found it difficult to integrate into local communities. This finding is consistent with Ward and Kennedy [16], who demonstrated that expatriates in China often experience sociocultural adaptation difficulties. One participant noted, *"It's hard to make friends outside work when you can't speak the language."* The ability to acquire proficiency in the local language and foster intercultural awareness has been identified as a key strategy for overcoming linguistic and cultural challenges as reported in a study of expatriate non-native English-speaking teachers in Turkey [39]. Given the significant impact of social integration on psychological well-being, schools should invest in structured social support initiatives, such as language exchange programs, networking events, and mentorship systems for expatriate teachers.

The Social Relationships domain highlighted cultural integration as a major challenge, particularly due to language barriers and differing social norms. This aligns with Black and Gregersen [15], who emphasized that successful cultural adaptation is essential for expatriates' well-being.

Interestingly, collegial support emerged as a protective factor. Some respondents reported positive relationships with local colleagues, which eased their transition. This supports Liu and Shaffer's [17], argument that social capital plays a critical role in expatriate adjustment. One participant shared, *"My Chinese colleagues helped me with setting online accounts on my phone and even taught me how to use Chinese apps."* These findings suggest that schools should implement mentorship programs pairing expatriate teachers with local colleagues, fostering mutual cultural understanding.

The Environment domain highlighted positive experiences related to convenient transportation and affordable, fast online shopping. Teachers in smaller cities reported lower living costs and found it easier to adapt. However, safety concerns also emerged, with participants expressing discomfort from unwanted attention, such as being stared at or having photos and videos taken without permission. This phenomenon aligns with Stanley's [40] description of the 'foreigner paradox,' where expatriates are both welcomed and scrutinized.

Some participants emphasized the need for a better work-life balance in China and fewer instances of last-minute overtime. This finding aligns with Diener and Suh [41], who argued that work-life balance significantly contributes to subjective well-being. Moreover, cultural and linguistic barriers continued to present difficulties. One participant remarked, *"I still don't understand why my students avoid answering questions and many of them just stay quiet without intention to engage in discussions."* These findings suggest that while expatriate NNESTs benefit from professional stability, their long-term adaptation depends on effective cultural integration strategies.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study contribute to the literature on expatriate teachers by emphasizing the importance of institutional and environmental factors in shaping QoL. While much of the research on expatriate teachers has focused on native English-speaking teachers (NESTs), this study underscores the unique challenges faced by NNESTs, particularly in cultural adaptation and social integration.

From a practical standpoint, the study highlights the need for structured institutional support, such as pre-departure cultural orientation programs, language training, and accessible healthcare guidance. Moreover, there is a need for social integration initiatives, including mentorship programs and professional networking opportunities.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences, and self-reported data may introduce social desirability bias [42]. Future studies could use longitudinal methods to assess changes in QoL over time and triangulate self-reported data with interviews or observational research.

Future research could explore several key areas to deepen understanding of expatriate teachers' quality of life. One important avenue is the role of institutional support in easing adaptation. Investigating how cultural orientation programs, language training, and workplace mentoring impact expatriate teachers' well-being could provide valuable insights. Longitudinal studies would be particularly useful in tracking how these factors influence adjustment over time. Comparative research is also needed to examine the experiences of expatriate non-native English-speaking teachers in China in relation to those in other countries. Identifying both universal and region-specific challenges would help clarify the extent to which national education policies shape teachers' quality of life.

CONCLUSION

This study provides critical insights into the quality of life of expatriate non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) in China, an often-overlooked group in international education research. The findings indicate that while many expatriate NNESTs experience financial stability, they face significant challenges related to workload, social integration, healthcare access, and cultural

adaptation. Institutional support, such as structured orientation programs and language training can play a crucial role in enhancing their well-being.

Beyond practical implications, this study contributes to the broader discourse on expatriate teacher well-being by emphasizing the importance of contextual factors in shaping quality of life. Future research should explore longitudinal changes in adaptation, cross-country comparisons, and the influence of individual characteristics on well-being. As China's international education sector continues to grow, prioritizing the needs of expatriate teachers will be essential for fostering a stable and motivated workforce.

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