



An Edgewalker in the Land of Smiles: Negotiating Filipino Multilingual Teacher Identity in Thailand's Transnational ELT Context

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Abstract

This study explores the dialogic construction of a Filipino multilingual teacher's identity in a Thai transnational English language teaching (ELT) context. Employing a dialogic evocative autoethnography, the research externalizes the researcher's internal monologue into three voices—the Edgewalker, Earthshaker, and Enlightener—to rigorously analyze personal experience. The data corpus comprises digital reflective journals, student feedback, and classroom artifacts collected over two semesters. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis to uncover the multi-voiced tensions inherent in identity negotiation. The findings were presented through four episodic dialogues that illustrate critical junctures: navigating initial cultural dissonance, balancing pedagogical authority with student rapport, employing translanguaging to overcome language barriers, and developing dialogic resilience. The study revealed that non-native English-speaking teacher (NNEST) identity thrives on cultural hybridity and ongoing negotiation rather than fixed categorizations. It contributes to ELT discourse by challenging monolingual biases and advocating for context-responsive pedagogies that reframe identity tensions into opportunities for pedagogical innovation.

Keywords: autoethnography, NNEST, teacher identity, translanguaging, transnational ELT

Introduction

The globalization of English language teaching (ELT) has created complex transnational spaces where teachers navigate intersecting linguistic, cultural, and institutional discourses (Molina, 2015). In these contexts, multilingual educators often confront identity tensions arising from the

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privileging of native-speaker norms and the marginalization of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) (Jain et al., 2022). While existing literature has examined teacher identity in homogeneous settings, the experiences of NNESTs in linguistically and culturally hybrid environments remain underexplored (Phaethong et al., 2024). This gap is particularly salient in Southeast Asia, where the influx of Filipino ELT professionals into Thai higher education institutions reflects broader patterns of transnational teacher mobility (Savski & Comprendio, 2024).

This study addresses this gap by investigating the identity negotiation of a Filipino EFL lecturer teaching in Thailand through a dialogic autoethnographic lens. Grounded in Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981), the research conceptualizes teacher identity as a polyphonic process shaped by the interplay of personal, cultural, and institutional voices. The study builds on prior work that frames identity as fluid and dialogic (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011) yet extends this scholarship by centering the experiences of a multilingual NNEST in a context where power asymmetries—such as Thailand's preference for Western-trained educators—complicate professional legitimacy (Ulla & Kohnke, 2025).

This study offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it advances dialogic approaches to teacher identity by illustrating how Bakhtinian heteroglossia manifests in the lived experiences of transnational educators (Henry, 2019). Practically, it offers actionable insights for teacher training programs and institutional policies, advocating for pedagogies that validate multilingualism and cultural hybridity (Prabjandee, 2024). For example, the study reveals how translanguaging strategies can bridge gaps in student comprehension while affirming the teacher's legitimacy as a multilingual practitioner.

Literature Review

The construction of teacher identity in multilingual and transnational contexts has emerged as a critical area of inquiry in applied linguistics and language education research. Identity is increasingly recognized as dynamic and dialogic, shaped by personal, institutional, and sociocultural forces (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). This perspective challenges earlier essentialist views that positioned teacher identity as static or predetermined, instead emphasizing its fluid and negotiated nature across diverse educational settings.

Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia provides a valuable theoretical lens for understanding how multilingual teachers navigate competing discourses in transnational classrooms (Bakhtin, 1981). The theory illuminates the polyphonic nature of identity construction, where multiple voices—including institutional expectations, cultural norms, and personal beliefs—interact and sometimes conflict. This dialogic approach resonates with contemporary research on NNEST identities, which increasingly acknowledges the complex positioning of teachers who operate between linguistic and cultural worlds (Yuzlu, 2023). Studies have shown how these educators often face legitimacy

challenges in contexts that privilege native-speaker norms, yet simultaneously develop unique pedagogical strengths through their multilingual repertoires and intercultural competencies (Phaethong et al., 2024). This privileging of Western norms, often termed 'native-speakerism,' actively constructs a deficit narrative around Asian educators despite their linguistic competence (Holliday, 2006; Ulla, 2021). Building on recent scholarship in teacher identity (e.g., Ulla & Kohnke, 2025; Yuzlu, 2023), this study moves beyond a static view of the self to embrace Bakhtin's (1981) notion of ideological becoming. In the Thai-Esaan context, the Filipino teacher is constantly navigating the tension between 'authoritative discourse'—the rigid, institutionalized expectations of the native-speaker ideal—and 'internally persuasive discourse'—the teacher's evolving pedagogical beliefs. As Li Wei (2018) argues in his work on translanguaging, multilingual individuals do not just 'switch' between languages; they inhabit a third space where new meanings are generated. By integrating Bakhtin's heteroglossia with contemporary theories of translanguaging, this paper explores how the teacher's 'non-native' status is reconstructed as a 'cultural bridge,' shifting the focus from linguistic accuracy to what Canagarajah (2018) terms 'performative competence'—the ability to negotiate meaning across diverse cultural registers.

The Thai higher education context presents particular challenges and opportunities for identity negotiation among transnational ELT professionals. Research has documented how cultural norms like *kreng jai* (deference) and institutional hierarchies shape classroom dynamics, often requiring foreign teachers to adapt their pedagogical approaches (Savski & Comprendio, 2024). These adaptations frequently involve reconciling conflicting expectations—between Western communicative language teaching methods and local educational traditions (Wei, Lin & Litton, 2018) or between institutional demands for English-only instruction and students' needs for multilingual support (Hélot & Ó Laoire, 2011). Such tensions create what some scholars term "third spaces" where hybrid identities and pedagogies emerge through ongoing negotiation.

Recent work has also highlighted the transformative potential of translanguaging practices in multilingual ELT contexts. While traditional language teaching often reinforces strict boundaries between languages, translanguaging approaches recognize and leverage students' and teachers' full linguistic repertoires as resources for meaning-making (Prabjandee, 2024). This perspective challenges deficit views of NNESTs by reframing their multilingualism as a pedagogical asset rather than a limitation. Studies in Southeast Asian contexts have shown how teachers who embrace translanguaging can create more inclusive learning environments while simultaneously negotiating their own professional legitimacy (Evison et al., 2021).

The current study builds on these foundations while addressing several gaps in existing literature. First, while previous research has examined NNEST identities in various contexts, few studies have focused specifically on Filipino teachers in Thai higher education—a significant demographic given the increasing mobility of Southeast Asian ELT professionals. Second, although several studies have employed autoethnographic methods to explore teacher identity, few

have done so through an explicitly dialogic framework that captures the polyphonic nature of identity construction. Finally, while translanguaging has been widely discussed in student learning contexts, its implications for teacher identity development remain underexplored, particularly in transnational settings where power asymmetries shape language ideologies.

The present research contributes to these ongoing conversations by offering a nuanced, contextually grounded account of how one multilingual NNEST negotiates identity tensions through pedagogical practice and reflexive engagement. Unlike studies that focus solely on structural constraints or individual agency, this work examines their dynamic interplay through the lens of heteroglossia, revealing how teachers can transform identity challenges into opportunities for professional growth and innovation. Furthermore, by centering the experiences of a Filipino educator in Thailand, the study addresses the relative lack of attention to intra-Asian teacher mobility in ELT research, challenging dominant narratives that privilege Western expatriate perspectives.

Unlike existing studies that primarily rely on traditional qualitative interviews to explore Filipino teacher experiences in Thailand, this research differs methodologically through its tripartite dialogic design. By externalizing internal tensions, this paper aims for both theoretical insight and evocative resonance. It invites readers to emotionally connect with the lived realities of NNEST marginalization while abstracting broader theoretical understandings of how heteroglossia identities are actively negotiated in transnational spaces.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to examine how a multilingual ELT teacher constructs, deconstructs, and reconstructs their professional identity amid the linguistic and cultural complexities of a transnational classroom. Specifically, two key research questions guide the inquiry: (1) How does a multilingual NNEST navigate identity tensions in a Thai higher education context? (2) What role do cultural hybridity and translanguaging play in reshaping pedagogical practices and self-conception?

Methodology

1. Research Design

This study employs a dialogic evocative autoethnography as its methodological framework, positioning the researcher's lived experiences as primary data for investigating the complexities of multilingual teacher identity.

By externalizing the internal monologue into three distinct voices—the Edgewalker (narrative data), the Earthshaker (critical inquiry), and the Enlightener (theoretical synthesis)—the researcher creates a 'reflexive distance' that subjects personal experience to rigorous critical scrutiny.

2. Participant and Positionality

As a Filipino NNEST in Thailand, the researcher's positionality was central. A positionality statement was maintained throughout the research process, documenting how the researcher's multilingual background (fluent in Tagalog, English, and basic Thai), educational history, and professional trajectory influenced data interpretation.

Reflexivity was operationalized through several strategies:

- Maintaining an audit trail of analytical decisions
- Engaging in peer debriefing with two other transnational NNESTs
- Writing memos that explicitly addressed potential biases
- Periodically revisiting earlier interpretations in light of new data

These measures enhanced the study's trustworthiness while acknowledging the inherently subjective nature of autoethnographic inquiry.

3. Instruments and Data Collection

Data collection spanned two semesters (Academic Year 2023-2024) in a Thai university. Ethical considerations were carefully managed throughout the research process. As an evocative autoethnography where the primary subject of inquiry is the author, the core ethical mandate was the protection of peripheral participants. To adhere to the principle of "do no harm," all secondary figures (students and colleagues) and specific institutional identifiers have been strictly anonymized. Furthermore, standard student feedback and personal teaching videos were analyzed solely for the researcher's self-reflection and pedagogical evaluation, ensuring no student was treated as a direct research subject.

1. **Personal Narratives:** Twenty digital reflective journal entries documenting the researcher's classroom interactions and identity-related reflections, recorded immediately after teaching sessions.
2. **Artifacts and Institutional Data:** Twelve lesson plans, eight personal video recordings used strictly for self-evaluation of teaching performance, and documentary notes from departmental curriculum committee meetings.
3. **Student Feedback:** Fifteen naturally occurring, anonymous written comments collected through standard end-of-term institutional evaluations.

The episodic dialogues presented in the findings are not verbatim transcripts; rather, they are reconstructed narrative performances. This approach bridges empirical analysis with narrative performance, synthesizing the raw data corpus into coherent, multi-voiced dialogues that accurately represent the theoretical and emotional arc of the identity negotiation process.

4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The analysis involved three distinct phases, operationalized as narrative voices:

1. **Experiential Analysis (The Edgewalker):** This phase involved immersion in the raw data (journals, memories) to code for semantic themes—the explicit, felt emotions of tension, fear, and joy. This voice captures the phenomenological "what" of the experience.

2. **Critical Analysis (The Earthshaker):** This phase applied latent coding, interrogating the data through theoretical frameworks of heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981) and raciolinguistics (Flores & Rosa, 2015). This voice questions the structural assumptions behind the Edgewalker's experiences.

3. **Synthetic Analysis (The Enlightener):** This phase integrated the experiential and critical codes to construct meta-narratives of ideological becoming. This voice synthesizes the tension between the other two to produce theoretical generalizations.

The analytical process involved iterative, manual coding of journals and reflections. Key themes were not "discovered" but actively constructed through the dialogic struggle between these three analytical positions.

To systematically illustrate the reflexive thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2022), the data was grouped by core theoretical concepts. Table 1 demonstrates how raw experiential data (narrative excerpts) were initially coded through the Edgewalker's lens, critically interrogated by the Earthshaker, and finally synthesized into the four overarching themes discussed in the findings.

Table 1

Reflexive Thematic Analysis Progression

Overarching Theme / Concept	Initial Codes & Subcodes	Illustrative Autoethnographic Excerpt
Theme 1: Cultural Dissonance & Pedagogical Adaptation	Codes: Expectation vs. reality; misreading silence. Subcodes: Kreng jai (consideration); face-saving; anonymous feedback.	"Polite grins appeared, yet minimal interaction occurred... I realized waiting for them to speak up wasn't working. So, I tried a different approach. I set up an anonymous digital survey..."
Theme 2: Navigating Authority & Student Rapport	Codes: Teacher-centered vs. student-centered; fear of losing respect. Subcodes: Institutional strictness; vulnerability; breaking the ice.	"At first, I leaned hard into strictness around stuff like showing up on time... simply to show I meant business. Yet I noticed that didn't reflect who I really am."

Table 1 (Continued)

Overarching Theme / Concept	Initial Codes & Subcodes	Illustrative Autoethnographic Excerpt
Theme 3: Translanguaging & Linguistic Legitimacy	Codes: Monolingual constraints; guilt over L1 use; student comprehension. Subcodes: Code-switching; strategic simplification; pedagogical scaffolding.	"I feel guilty for breaking the 'English only' rule, but how can I not use every tool available to help them understand? ...using simpler words gave them mental room to focus on meaning."
Theme 4: Dialogic Resilience & The "Edgewalker" Identity	Codes: Dropping perfectionism; learning from failure; embracing the "in-between." Subcodes: Growth mindset; cultural hybridity; symbolic competence.	"Instead of choosing sides, I hold space between perspectives... existing across boundaries turns out to be powerful on its own."

Finding and Discussion

The following analysis presents the autoethnographic findings through four episodic dialogues, each revealing critical junctures in the teacher's identity negotiation process. These narratives demonstrate how pedagogical challenges and cultural encounters became catalysts for professional growth, illustrating the dynamic interplay between personal agency and contextual constraints.

EPISODE 1: Cultural Dissonance and Early Legitimacy Crisis

Earthshaker (Ea): What role did you imagine yourself playing in the classroom?

Edgewalker (E): Before leaving, I pictured myself teaching in Thailand as a facilitator—someone students felt comfortable talking to. My goal was to make class a space where sharing thoughts wasn't scary. But honestly? It was wishful thinking.

Ea: How so? Did the reality not match the vision?

E: Not at all. I tried to be approachable—using a smile, greeting in basic Thai to ease tension. But stillness followed. Polite grins appeared, yet minimal interaction occurred. My vision of a lively,

talkative class didn't come true. I felt like a fraud. I wondered: Is it my teaching? Is it because I'm a Filipino NNEST and not a 'native' speaker?

Ea: That silence... it sounds like *kreng jai* (consideration). But how did you handle it? It must be hard when learners stay quiet about their doubts.

E: It was tough. I realized waiting for them to speak up wasn't working. So, I tried a different approach. I set up an anonymous digital survey where they could submit questions or feedback without signing their names.

Ea: That's clever—it respects their need to save face while giving you the truth. Did it work?

E: Surprisingly well. In a low-pressure setting, students admitted they needed extra time or didn't understand certain concepts. One student even wrote, "Now I can tell the truth without making the teacher lose face." It changed my view. I realized I had to stop imposing my "direct" style and start mediating.

Ea: Mediating? In what way?

E: I started acting as a cultural bridge. Instead of forcing them to speak out loud, I used the anonymous digital feedback to guide my next steps. It helped me scaffold their understanding without putting them on the spot. I'm learning that my identity isn't about being an authoritative lecturer, but a connector who understands both their silence and their struggle.

The sharp contrast between expectation and reality quickly translated into tangible pedagogical challenges. This cultural-educational mismatch triggered profound self-doubt regarding the Edgewalker's legitimacy as a NNEST, exacerbated by institutional hierarchies that implicitly privileged Western-trained educators (Huttayavilaiphan, 2021).

To navigate this tension, the Edgewalker began to inhabit a "third space" of cultural mediation. Critical reflection revealed that his initial approach inadvertently reproduced what Holliday terms "native speakerism" (Kiczkowiak & Lowe, 2021) by assuming the universal applicability of Western methods. This realization prompted a shift toward "pedagogical translanguaging" (Canagarajah, 2018), where the teacher creatively negotiated cultural differences. For instance, he implemented anonymous digital feedback tools to respect *kreng jai* while gaining actionable insights.

This approach exemplified "postmethod pedagogy" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006), where methods are adapted to local contexts rather than imposed. By facilitating meta-cultural exchanges comparing Filipino and Thai values, the Edgewalker fostered intercultural awareness aligned with Global Englishes education (Rose et al., 2021).

Ultimately, this journey from cultural outsider to informed mediator reflects what Kramersch identifies as "symbolic competence" (Kramersch, 2006), where teachers leverage cultural

differences to create richer learning opportunities. This developmental trajectory challenges the dominance of native-speaker norms in professional standards (Holliday, 2006). Instead, it advocates for context-responsive pedagogies (Madkur et al., 2024), illustrating how the Edgewalker’s cultural and linguistic hybridity became central to his professional value in the transnational ELT landscape.

EPISODE 2: Navigating Authority, Rapport, and Pedagogical Repositioning

Ea: Does this role still connect to your main goals?

E: For me, this work feels like both purpose and joy. Teaching excites me—especially here, even with obstacles. Actually, I’m investing much deeper effort to grow as an effective educator for these learners.

Ea: Which difficulties became noticeable up to now? You brought up quiet classroom situations earlier. Did things shift since then?

E: I’ve moved forward. Now I see I had to change how I teach quite a bit. For example, at first, I handled my course like it was packed with material, since that’s how I was taught; I assumed strict lectures meant effective instruction. However, this didn’t connect well with my Thai learners. They improved more once I added playful, relaxed tasks—like basic games or talking in groups.

Ea: That seems like a change in how you see teaching. So, what led to this new view?

E: Lack of student interest made me test new methods. Although I introduced activities such as role-playing or included local Thai examples—attention improved. Because lessons became more familiar and fun, involvement increased gradually. Without meaning to, I’d acted like a teacher at the front, treating them just as learners sitting back—ignoring that everyone uses language differently. Now, I focus more on real talk and shared understanding.

Ea: Did you struggle with who you are while trying that? Like, were you concerned that acting more playful could weaken your role as an educator?

E: Yeah, I was concerned. It’s tricky to balance things. One goal was breaking the ice, making learners feel at ease, which led me to act warmly. Still, there was fear: going too far could mean losing respect, particularly as a young outsider teacher needing to earn trust. At first, I leaned hard into strictness around stuff like showing up on time or dressing right, simply to show I meant business. Yet I noticed that didn’t reflect who I really am. I respect structure, yet care about connection more.

Ea: This is thoughtful—releasing the urge to appear a specific way. It seems you’re shaping a truer teaching self. Now, then, would you say you fit into this work, into this place?

E: Yes, increasingly so. A single touching event showed this clearly—near the close of last term, several learners mentioned they signed up again simply due to my involvement. In fact, they

refused transfers to alternate groups, stating plainly, "We'd prefer learning from you." That stirred deep emotion. It proved that although I'm an outsider, I still managed to influence them in a good way. It made me remember my purpose, giving a feeling of belonging—not because I was a "native speaker," yet through showing care as their teacher while making an effort to connect.

Navigating the space between pedagogical authority and student rapport emerged as a central tension in the Edgewalker's professional identity development. Early classroom experiences revealed a fundamental conflict between maintaining teacher-centered control—a model prevalent in Thai educational culture—and implementing student-centered approaches aligned with communicative language teaching principles (Wei, 2018). This tension manifested concretely when structured grammar lessons elicited stronger student compliance but limited engagement, while interactive activities fostered participation but sometimes challenged classroom management.

The Earthshaker voice critically examined this dichotomy through the lens of pedagogical legitimacy, questioning whether the Edgewalker's attempts to balance these approaches stemmed from professional conviction or institutional pressure. Analysis of teaching journals revealed an evolving pattern: initial lessons heavily emphasized content coverage and error correction, reflecting both the researcher's training and assumptions about Thai students' expectations. However, mid-term student feedback consistently requested more speaking practice despite lower accuracy, prompting a significant pedagogical shift. One student's written comment encapsulated this tension: "We need to talk more, even if mistakes happen, because we never speak English outside class."

This feedback catalyzed a deliberate move toward fluency-focused instruction, where the Edgewalker began prioritizing communicative success over grammatical precision. The transformation involved practical adaptations like:

- Reducing immediate error correction during speaking activities
- Implementing task-based learning with real-world objectives
- Incorporating peer assessment to decentralize teacher authority

These changes reflected deeper identity reconstruction, as the Edgewalker transitioned from a "knowledge transmitter" to a "learning facilitator" role. The Enlightener voice interpreted this shift as evidence of what Varghese et al. (2005) term "identity-in-practice", where professional self-concept emerges through daily pedagogical decisions rather than pre-existing categories.

Interestingly, the tension between authority and rapport resolved not through elimination but redefinition. As the Edgewalker's classroom persona became less rigid, students demonstrated increased willingness to take linguistic risks—a phenomenon particularly evident in their growing use of communication strategies like circumlocution and clarification requests. This reciprocal relationship between teacher identity and student behavior aligns with Norton's concept of

“investment” (Norton, 2016), where learners engage more deeply when they perceive the classroom as a space for meaningful identity negotiation.

Critical incidents further illuminated this identity evolution. When a senior faculty member observed one of the Edgewalker’s interactive lessons and later questioned its “lack of proper structure,” the resulting professional dilemma forced explicit articulation of teaching philosophies. The Earthshaker voice framed this conflict as a clash between monologic and dialogic pedagogies, with institutional expectations favoring the former while student needs and the Edgewalker’s developing identity inclined toward the latter. The resolution—maintaining observable lesson structure while increasing student talk time—demonstrated pragmatic identity negotiation that satisfied multiple stakeholders.

Longitudinal analysis revealed an unexpected outcome: as the Edgewalker’s pedagogical identity became more fluid, classroom authority paradoxically strengthened. Student evaluations from subsequent terms noted appreciation for “clear rules about when the teacher will correct mistakes,” suggesting that consistency in pedagogical approach, rather than rigidity in teacher role, fostered trust. These findings challenge binary conceptions of teacher authority in Asian contexts (Choi & Lim, 2021), instead supporting a more nuanced understanding where flexibility and predictability coexist.

The episode ultimately underscores the iterative nature of identity construction in transnational teaching contexts. Each pedagogical decision—whether about error correction, activity design, or feedback provision—represented both a response to immediate classroom needs and a step in the Edgewalker’s ongoing professional self-definition. The Earthshaker voice highlights how this process exemplifies Bakhtin’s concept of “answerability” (Bakhtin, 1981), where identity forms through continuous ethical-pedagogical choices rather than static attributes. By embracing the inherent tensions between competing commitments, the Edgewalker developed a teaching identity that was neither fully Thai nor wholly Western, but uniquely adapted to his transnational educational context.

This identity reconstruction carried significant implications for the Edgewalker’s professional self-efficacy. Where initial self-doubt had centered on questions like “Am I qualified to teach here?”, the evolved identity framework replaced such essentialist concerns with process-oriented questions: “How can I best facilitate learning in this context?” The Enlightener voice identifies this shift as emblematic of postcolonial teacher identity development (Bhatt, 2010), where educators transform marginality into pedagogical resourcefulness. The episode thus illustrates how identity tensions, when engaged dialogically, can become sources of professional growth rather than obstacles to teaching effectiveness.

EPISODE 3: Language Barriers and Translanguaging

Ea: A major challenge you brought up was bridging English and Thai. So, how are things going with that lately?

E: This really was tough. During my first term, I regularly saw confused faces. It hit me - my so-called simple English wasn't always clear enough. The course book? Far beyond most learners' real level. Initially, I was concerned - could cutting complexity weaken learning? Would students still gain proper English skills? Yet it hit me: without understanding, there's no progress. That pushed me toward scaffolded teaching with full commitment. Materials got rewritten using easier language - brief phrases, everyday words. Visuals were included more often. Instead of just defining terms, I used images, Thai equivalents, or familiar situations to clarify meaning.

Ea: Did that help?

E: Yes, it made a big difference - like comparing dark and light. Pupils reacted faster in class. Once I spoke, nearly all got what to do straight away; earlier, they often needed several explanations. They began trying things like digital dictionaries, which I supported. While some educators block mobiles completely, I told them: feel free to use translating software when stuck - the point is grasping ideas, not acting confident without reason. I noticed learners supporting one another quietly, using Thai when classmates struggled with my English. Instead of enforcing an "English-only" rule, I let it continue. Because of this shared approach, the lesson became more accessible for everyone.

Ea: This method seems practical - also consistent with current ideas about translanguaging, where learners draw from all their languages. While some strict educators may disapprove of using Thai during English lessons, it clearly helped you succeed.

E: Right. Back then, I hadn't heard of translanguaging - but somehow, I just thought: if mixing in Thai helps them get it, then fine. Slowly, learners seemed more sure of themselves. Maybe since they saw I didn't mind their weak English; instead, I worked together with them. A surprising result was better communication. Because they noticed my appreciation of their native language and background, this led to greater mutual respect.

Ea: That's logical. Did your early concerns about weakening the material come true?

E: Not quite. In fact, using simpler words gave them mental room to focus on meaning. Because the language was clear, they stayed involved instead of zoning out. Had I used complex English, their understanding would've dropped. With support though, they kept up - sometimes adding thoughts of their own. In a Marketing English course, I allowed students to talk through key ideas in Thai prior to sharing them in English. As a result, their delivery was solid - not entirely smooth, yet clear in meaning. To me, this mattered more than error-free speech. Over time, I've realized expressing thoughts clearly - linking one idea to another - is crucial early on. Grammar improves gradually; meanwhile, building self-assurance and engagement comes first.

Ea: You sort of changed how success works in your class. Since then, have learners picked up on shifts - either in you or the way things are run? While some may not care, others likely sensed a difference pretty fast.

E: Maybe they did. At year's end, some learners mentioned in reviews that they liked the course since it felt lively yet clear - also, speaking up didn't feel risky. That mattered a lot. A single note stated, "Teacher makes English feel safe." Such basic words seemed like real success. It showed that breaking lessons into steps while keeping them light actually worked. On the job, things changed - I began seeing myself less as a rigid teacher or speaker, yet more as someone guiding growth. A person organizing tools and moments that let learners apply English instead of simply facing tests.

Ea: You're less a lecturer now - more like a mentor helping from behind, if we ditch the usual phrases.

E: Haha, yeah, that fits - actually, I like it. Oddly enough, taking on this mindset helped me feel calmer during lessons. Now, instead of stressing over quiet moments or messy speech, I accept them; they're just part of how we grow. This mindset lowers my stress - so students likely feel permitted to err or seek help. As a result, we've created a relaxed environment.

Confronting the reality of students' limited English proficiency became a defining moment in the Edgewalker's pedagogical and identity development. Initial lessons revealed significant comprehension gaps, particularly during lectures containing specialized academic vocabulary or complex syntactic structures. This challenge was compounded by institutional policies emphasizing English-only instruction, reflecting broader monolingual ideologies in ELT (Alisaari et al., 2019). The Earthshaker voice critically examined this tension, noting how the Edgewalker's own multilingual identity—fluent in Tagalog and English while acquiring Thai—clashed with institutional language policies that positioned multilingualism as a deficit rather than a resource. The turning point occurred during a lesson on academic writing, when students' blank stares following an explanation of thesis statements prompted the Edgewalker to spontaneously code-switch into Thai for clarification. This moment of pedagogical translanguaging (Conteh, 2018)—though technically violating institutional guidelines—resulted in visible comprehension breakthroughs across the classroom. Subsequent journal entries revealed the Edgewalker's internal conflict: "I feel guilty for breaking the 'English only' rule, but how can I not use every tool available to help them understand?" The Earthshaker voice framed this dilemma as a clash between monoglossic language ideologies and heteroglossic classroom realities (Kiramba, 2019), where strict language separation policies often hinder rather than facilitate learning.

Systematic analysis of classroom interactions over six weeks revealed three key strategies the Edgewalker developed to navigate this tension while maintaining professional integrity:

1. Strategic Simplification: Employing controlled vocabulary and syntax without sacrificing content complexity, guided by principles of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF).

2. Multimodal Scaffolding: Combining verbal explanations with visual organizers, gestures, and realia to enhance comprehension.
3. Judicious Translanguaging: Using Thai sparingly for crucial concept clarification while maintaining English as the primary classroom language.

These adaptations reflected deeper identity shifts, as the Edgewalker moved from seeing himself as an English teacher to embracing his role as a multilingual educator. Student feedback validated this approach, with one comment noting: “When teacher explains hard ideas in simple English or sometimes Thai words, I understand better but still think in English.” Such responses demonstrated how strategic language mixing could support rather than undermine English acquisition.

The Earthshaker voice connected these classroom practices to broader theoretical debates about linguistic legitimacy in ELT. The Edgewalker’s experience challenged what Flores and Rosa term “raciolinguistic ideologies” (Flores & Rosa, 2015)—the implicit association of proper English teaching with white native-speaker norms. By centering student comprehension over rigid language policies, the Edgewalker developed a pedagogical identity that resisted these dominant ideologies while remaining professionally accountable.

An illuminating case emerged during a curriculum committee meeting where the Edgewalker advocated for incorporating translanguaging strategies into departmental guidelines. Presenting research on multilingual pedagogies (García & Flores, 2012) alongside his classroom success data, he negotiated a policy revision allowing limited L1 use for concept clarification—a significant institutional shift. This professional advocacy marked a crystallization of the Edgewalker’s identity as not just a teacher adapting to constraints, but an agent of change challenging monolingual biases in ELT.

The Enlightener voice synthesized these experiences into a framework of “pedagogical pragmatism,” where language choices are determined by learning outcomes rather than ideological purity. This approach aligns with recent scholarship advocating for context-sensitive language policies in multilingual classrooms (Hélot & Ó Laoire, 2011), particularly in Southeast Asia where English functions as a foreign rather than second language. The Edgewalker’s journey illustrates how teachers can navigate institutional constraints while developing ethically grounded, learner-centered pedagogies.

Longitudinal analysis revealed an unexpected benefit of this translanguaging approach: students began voluntarily incorporating Thai-English comparisons into their learning strategies. For instance, several students created bilingual glossaries of academic terms, demonstrating metalinguistic awareness that research associates with deeper language learning (Roehr-Brackin, 2018). This student-initiated practice further validated the Edgewalker’s pedagogical choices while fostering autonomous learning skills.

The episode ultimately demonstrates how confronting language barriers can catalyze profound professional identity development. The Earthshaker voice highlights how the Edgewalker's experience exemplifies what Canagarajah calls "translingual practice" (Pennycook, 2006)—the ability to negotiate meaning across linguistic boundaries while challenging dominant language hierarchies. By embracing his multilingual identity as a pedagogical asset rather than a compromise, the Edgewalker transformed a potential professional liability into a distinctive teaching strength.

These findings have significant implications for NNEST professional development in transnational contexts. The Edgewalker's experience suggests that teacher training programs should move beyond simplistic "English only" mandates to equip educators with principled translanguaging strategies. The study contributes to growing evidence that multilingual pedagogies enhance rather than impede English learning in such contexts, while simultaneously affirming NNESTs' professional legitimacy.

The episode also reveals how language policy negotiation itself becomes a site for teacher identity construction. The Edgewalker's progression from covert translanguaging to institutional advocacy illustrates a developmental trajectory where pedagogical practices and professional self-concept mutually shape each other. This dynamic process challenges static notions of teacher identity, instead positioning it as an ongoing negotiation between personal convictions, student needs, and institutional realities—a perspective that could inform more nuanced approaches to teacher evaluation and support in multilingual settings.

EPISODE 4: Resilience, Vulnerability, and In-betweenness

E: I arrived here full of assumptions, but I learned to drop impossible standards—about me, about learners, about how things "ought" to go. A few matched reality; most didn't; others turned out better than expected, just different. Giving up the idea that teaching means perfection helped. Earlier, I linked my value to results and approval from each student. Over time, I stopped needing that. Some learners might not enjoy my course—yet this is fine. The key point? I stay genuine and dedicated.

Ea: That's a sensible outlook. Was there something specific that led to this shift?

E: Some attempts didn't work at first but led to learning. For instance, I introduced a fresh group task expecting energy, yet confusion spread fast—it became messy. I felt stuck, then chose not to withdraw. Instead, I talked with an experienced colleague and gathered student thoughts. I figured out my explanation wasn't clear—cultural habits made me too vague. In general, teaching abroad taught me that errors are normal. They don't shape who I am; what matters is how I adjust after making them.

Ea: It feels as if you've adopted a way of thinking that values progress. Instead of viewing failures as signs of weakness, you now treat them like feedback.

E: Right. Because of this view, I've come to identify clearly—both as someone who teaches and someone always gaining knowledge. I admit to my students that I'm still picking up things—like Thai, fresh classroom strategies, even lessons from their own work. They seem to value that openness. It makes me more relatable, plus pushes them toward real learning instead of just trying to impress.

Ea: This connects to openness, right? You allow some personal exposure like saying you're unsure or a method failed. Others may argue educators must avoid such honesty at all costs.

E: Some believe teachers should seem always confident. Yet showing small weaknesses can actually build trust. Naturally, I avoid saying anything that might make students doubt my skills. Still, mentioning that I also struggle with writing, or once felt awkward using Thai, helps them relate. I'm drawn to the concept of living on the boundary—stepping just beyond what feels familiar. To encourage growth in learners, I need to show that I'm also stretching into new territory.

Ea: Good point. Now, after everything you've been through, could you explain – what does being an Edgewalker in Thailand actually mean to you?

E: For me, this role stands for connection—linking backgrounds like Filipino and Thai, Eastern with Western. Instead of choosing sides, I hold space between perspectives. The identity doesn't fit neatly into categories; existing across boundaries turns out to be powerful on its own. It shows me how to understand others better while giving emotional clarity. Identity isn't static; instead, I keep evolving through change and experience. That's acceptable. Actually, it feels great.

The culmination of the Edgewalker's identity journey revealed how professional setbacks could transform into opportunities for growth through reflective practice. Facing classroom challenges that ranged from student disengagement to institutional policy constraints, the Edgewalker gradually developed what Dweck terms a "growth mindset" (Dweck, 2006), viewing each obstacle as data for pedagogical refinement rather than evidence of professional inadequacy. This cognitive shift became particularly evident in his approach to lesson planning, where initial frustration over "failed" activities gave way to systematic experimentation with alternative instructional strategies. The Earthshaker voice analyzed this resilience through the lens of transformative learning theory (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009), identifying critical incidents that triggered perspective shifts. One pivotal moment occurred after a lesson on academic writing, where students' persistent struggles with thesis statements could have reinforced the Edgewalker's self-doubt as a NNEST. Instead, his journal reflection demonstrated reframing: "Their confusion isn't about my teaching—it's about the cultural gap between Thai indirect communication and Western academic directness. How can I bridge this?" This epistemological shift from personal blame to systemic analysis marked a maturation in professional identity, aligning with what Mezirow describes as "meaning-making through critical reflection" (Mezirow, 2018).

The Edgewalker's reflective practices became increasingly structured over time, evolving from spontaneous journaling to a disciplined framework incorporating:

- Weekly digital audio journaling
- Collaborative reflection with two peer NNESTs in similar transnational contexts
- Systematic collection and categorization of student feedback

These mechanisms allow the Edgewalker to identify patterns across challenges and solutions. For instance, analysis of video recordings revealed that students engaged more deeply when the Edgewalker shared his own language learning struggles—a finding that informed his strategic use of vulnerability as a pedagogical tool.

The Earthshaker voice connected this resilience to broader discourses about NNEST identity negotiation. The Edgewalker's ability to engage in critical identity work (Yazan, 2019) amidst professional challenges, rather than retreating into defensive positions, allowed him to critique institutional policies (like rigid English-only mandates) while still finding creative ways to serve students effectively within those constraints.

A significant breakthrough in the Edgewalker's reflective development was his growing comfort with professional “in-betweenness”—the state of belonging fully to neither Thai nor Western educational cultures. Where this hybridity initially caused anxiety about his legitimacy, later journal entries celebrated it as a unique strength: “I'm not Thai, not Western, but something else that can draw on both.” This identity crystallization resonates with Bhabha's concept of the “third space” (Bhabha, 2004), where cultural hybridity becomes a site of innovation rather than marginalization. Student feedback validated this shift, with one comment noting: “Teacher understands both sides, so he can explain things in ways we get.”

The Enlightener voice synthesized these experiences into a model of “dialogic resilience,” where professional growth emerges through sustained engagement with multiple, often conflicting perspectives. This model contrasts with static conceptions of teacher expertise, instead positioning pedagogical mastery as an ongoing process of adaptation and learning. The Edgewalker's journey illustrates how reflective practice—when grounded in both personal experience and theoretical frameworks—can transform professional challenges into identity resources.

Longitudinal analysis revealed an unexpected outcome: as the Edgewalker's reflective capacity deepened, his classroom persona became more authentic rather than more polished. Where early teaching videos showed careful adherence to prescribed methods, later recordings demonstrated confident improvisation responsive to student needs. This evolution aligns with Palmer's concept of “the courage to teach” (Palmer, 2017), where pedagogical effectiveness stems from integrity between personal identity and professional practice.

The Earthshaker voice highlights how this authenticity created a virtuous cycle in the classroom. Students perceived the Edgewalker’s genuine engagement with their learning struggles, which in turn fostered their willingness to take risks and persist through challenges. One student’s mid-term evaluation captured this dynamic: “Teacher doesn’t pretend to know everything, so we feel safe to try.” This reciprocal relationship between teacher vulnerability and student engagement offers an important counter-narrative to traditional Asian classroom hierarchies that emphasize teacher infallibility (Choi & Lim, 2021).

The episode ultimately demonstrates how resilience in transnational teaching contexts involves neither rigid persistence nor passive adaptation, but rather reflective negotiation of multiple professional identities. The Edgewalker’s experience suggests that NNESTs in similar settings might benefit from structured opportunities to:

- Examine their teaching challenges through theoretical lenses
- Develop metacognitive awareness of their own identity negotiations
- Build communities of practice with other transnational educators

These findings contribute to emerging scholarship on “critical resilience” in language teaching (Capstick, 2018), which moves beyond simplistic notions of bouncing back from adversity to examine how educators can transform systemic constraints into sites of professional agency. The Edgewalker’s journey from self-doubt to reflective confidence illustrates how identity tensions, when engaged dialogically, can become sources of pedagogical innovation rather than professional paralysis.

The study’s dialogic autoethnographic approach proved particularly valuable for capturing this developmental process, as the interplay between Edgewalker, Earthshaker, and Enlightener voices mirrored the internal conversations that characterize reflective practice. This methodological innovation could inform future research on teacher identity development, particularly in understudied contexts of intra-Asian educational mobility. By documenting the micro-processes of reflection and resilience, the study provides concrete examples of how transnational educators can navigate the complexities of professional identity formation in an increasingly globalized ELT landscape.

Conclusion

This study has illuminated the complex, dialogic nature of multilingual teacher identity construction in transnational ELT contexts through an autoethnographic exploration of a Filipino educator’s experiences in Thailand. The narrative reveals that professional identity is not a static attribute but an ongoing negotiation between personal histories, pedagogical commitments, and institutional realities. Through the heteroglossic interplay of voices—Edgewalker, Earthshaker, and Enlightener—the research demonstrates how cultural dissonance and linguistic barriers, often viewed as obstacles, can be reframed as generative spaces for hybrid pedagogies.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the field by extending Bakhtin's framework of heteroglossia into the under-researched context of intra-Asian educational mobility. While much NNEST literature focuses on the dichotomy between Western "native" speakers and local teachers, this study highlights the unique "in-between" positionality of Filipino educators in Thailand. It challenges the deficit narrative often applied to non-native teachers by conceptualizing the "Edgewalker" identity—a form of ideological becoming where the teacher leverages cultural hybridity as a strategic asset. By documenting the shift from "imposter" to "cultural mediator," the study provides empirical weight to the concept of the "Third Space" in teacher identity formation, arguing that legitimacy is not inherited through nationality but constructed through dialogic engagement with the host culture.

Methodologically, this study demonstrates the rigor of dialogic evocative autoethnography. Unlike traditional single-voice narratives, the triadic structure (Edgewalker, Earthshaker, Enlightener) provides a robust framework for reflexivity. This approach addresses common critiques regarding subjectivity by making the internal analytical process visible and explicit, offering a replicable model for researching polyphonic professional identities.

Limitations of the Study

While this autoethnographic approach provides deep contextual insights, it is inherently bounded by the researcher's subjectivity. A primary limitation of this study rests on the researcher's capacity to remain open to diversity and to fully trust the improvisational process of identity negotiation. Consequently, the interpretations presented are inevitably filtered through the researcher's own fixed ideas, cultural presumptions, and personal anxieties regarding the self and others. Future research could mitigate this by pairing autoethnographic reflections with direct observational data or comparative student interviews to provide a more multi-perspectival account of the classroom dynamic.

Recommendations

1. Implications

This study advocates for ELT paradigms that recognize teachers' multilingual repertoires and cultural navigational skills as central rather than peripheral to professional excellence. By inhabiting the edges of languages and cultures, the Edgewalker does not merely teach; they transform the friction of difference into a site of pedagogical innovation.

2. Further Studies

Looking forward, this study opens several avenues for further inquiry. Future research could productively explore how institutional policies might better support multilingual teachers' identity development, particularly through professional development programs that validate

translanguaging practices. Furthermore, comparative studies across different Asian educational contexts—such as comparing the Filipino experience in Thailand versus Vietnam or Indonesia—could further elucidate how regional variations in cultural norms influence teacher identity negotiation. The dialogic autoethnographic methodology employed here also warrants broader application across diverse teaching contexts to further test the tripartite framework’s utility in capturing identity shifts.

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