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Developing, Negotiating, and Articulating Identities: An Autoethnographic Study of a Filipino English Language Teacher in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Expatriate teachers often face challenges related to social integration and limited access to local professional networks, which in turn shape their beliefs about legitimacy, professional status, and identity formation in their host countries. This analytic–evocative autoethnographic study traces the professional identity (re)construction of a Filipino English-language teacher in Thailand between 2015 and 2022. Drawing on reflective journals, memos, and dialogues with a critical friend, the study explores how identity was negotiated across incidents of marginalisation and transformation. Using raciolinguistic perspectives and identity-in-practice frameworks, the analysis identified three key themes: (1) linguistic gatekeeping and racialisation, (2) identity repair through research and reflective practice, and (3) pedagogical activism as resistance. The findings show that teacher identity is continually (re)shaped at the intersection of race, nationality, and institutional power, and that critical reflexivity and professional agency function as forms of repair and reclamation. This study contributes to language teacher identity (LTI) research by theorising the lived experiences of a Global South educator in a raciolinguistically stratified context and advancing autoethnography as a decolonial methodology for examining teacher identity and agency in unequal transnational spaces.

Keywords: autoethnography; language teacher identity; professional identity formation; raciolinguistic ideologies; transnational language teacher

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Introduction

Language teacher identity (LTI) is not a fixed construct but evolves continuously through professional and personal experiences, peer interactions, and pedagogical strategies (Barahona & Ibaceta-Quijanes, 2020; Li, 2022; Pennington & Richards, 2016; Yazan & Lindahl, 2020). Barkhuizen (2016) defined LTI as fluid, constructed, and negotiated in different contexts, and thus multiple (p. 25). Thus, personal experiences, including family environment and personal beliefs, significantly shape a teacher's identity (Ulla, 2024). They influence values, pedagogical beliefs, and teaching approaches and inform professional decision-making. A teacher's identity in the classroom is both a projection of their personal life experiences and a reflection of their institutional role (Pennington & Richards, 2016).

Similarly, professional experiences shape teacher identity. Teaching practices, interactions with colleagues, and engagement with different methodologies provide opportunities for growth, reflection, and adaptation within the educational landscape (Pennington & Richards, 2016). For example, flexible teaching approaches allow teachers to align their practices with their beliefs, reinforcing their evolving professional identity. Conversely, when institutional constraints or prescribed curricula prevent such alignment, teachers may experience dissonance, frustration, or a diminished sense of professional authenticity. This misalignment can hinder reflective growth, erode motivation, and lead to identity tension as teachers struggle to reconcile their pedagogical values with imposed expectations.

Furthermore, teacher mobility, a phenomenon driven by globalisation, further complicates LTI formation. Teachers may move to foreign countries or participate in international training programmes (Rosenfeld et al., 2022). Cultural and sociocultural environments shape the identities of expatriate (expat) teachers, influencing their perceptions, experiences, and professional growth. However, expat teachers often struggle with social integration and gaining entry into local professional networks, which affects their perceptions of legitimacy, professional status, and identity formation. Romanowski and Nasser (2015) note that 'expatriates living outside their home countries face varying degrees of conflict while engaged in teaching, researching, and questioning ideas and theories outside familiar boundaries' (p. 658). While teaching abroad broadens teachers' pedagogical perspectives and enhances their professional identity, it also creates tensions as they reconcile pre-existing beliefs with the realities of their new working environments. These contextual factors may impact various aspects of their identity, including language-related and context-related aspects of identity, teaching skills, and a sense of belonging within their educational environment.

In the context of Thailand, the country hosts over 20,000 Filipino teachers who teach English in public and private schools, language centres, and universities (Ulla, 2018). These professionals must navigate an educational context distinct from that of their homeland. Studies on expat language teachers (Savski & Vencer Comprendio, 2022; Seo, 2024; Sherman, 2023; Ulla, 2021) have examined issues related to race, language, and identity in teachers' professional and social lives. These studies explore how expat teachers navigate linguistic hierarchies, racial biases, and cultural adaptation in their host countries. However, few studies have explored how Filipino teachers' experiences of teaching English in Thailand inform and shape their professional growth and identity formation.

Drawing on theoretical perspectives that emphasise LTI as fluid, context-dependent, and continuously reconstructed (Barkhuizen, 2016; Pennington & Richards, 2016; Yazan & Lindahl, 2020), this autoethnographic study examines how a Filipino English language teacher in Thailand (re)constructed, negotiated, and articulated their professional identity. It employs personal narratives and reflective accounts to capture how the teacher navigated interpersonal tensions, institutional expectations, and adapted to the culture. The following questions guided this study:

1. How do raciolinguistic and institutional hierarchies in Thailand shape a Filipino English teacher's professional identity?

2. How does the teacher exercise agency to negotiate and reclaim professional legitimacy within these constraints?

Language Teacher Identity (LTI)

Teacher identity in language education is widely understood as a dynamic and evolving construct shaped by personal experiences, social interactions, and institutional contexts. Rather than being a fixed or solely introspective trait, it is a process of continuous negotiation, storytelling, and relational engagement. Barkhuizen, in a recent interview with Uştuk et al. (2024), described teacher identity as 'a process of narrating or storying our teacher lives' (p. 2), emphasising that it is formed through moments of becoming, being, and imagining oneself as a teacher, across both aspirational and disillusioning experiences. This narrative construction is deeply relational, emerging through ongoing interactions with learners, colleagues, administrators, and policymakers. Even those who influence teachers indirectly, such as curriculum developers, textbook authors, and national policymakers, contribute to the evolving narratives that educators construct about their professional selves.

Over the past two decades, the study of LTI has gained prominence within the teacher education literature (Fairley, 2020; Yazan & Lindahl, 2022), with scholars recognising that identity is shaped within and across sociocultural and institutional contexts (Barkhuizen, 2016; Pennington & Richards, 2016). Central to LTI research is the understanding that teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and values, often rooted in personal histories and life experiences, significantly influence their pedagogical choices and classroom practices (Pennington & Richards, 2016; Ulla et al., 2024). They do not merely respond to professional expectations but also interpret and negotiate their roles through the lens of their upbringing, educational experiences, and social positioning. Institutional norms, prevailing methodologies, and interpersonal dynamics in communications with students and peers further mediate these identity constructions, reinforcing the idea that LTI is constantly reconstructed within the lived realities of teaching.

Sociocultural factors complicate LTI, as teachers often navigate tensions between their cultural norms and the expectations of their teaching contexts. These negotiations can be mediated through reflective practices, such as journaling, peer discussions, and participation in professional development, which support teachers in aligning personal beliefs with institutional demands (Barkhuizen, 2016; Li, 2022). Such practices are critical in diverse, transnational teaching environments, where teachers must continuously adapt their roles and pedagogical approaches to new cultural and institutional landscapes.

Building on this perspective, recent scholarship has emphasised the multifaceted nature of LTI, especially for teachers whose racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds deviate from dominant norms in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Studies by Charles (2019), Eslamdoost et al. (2020), and Kayi-Aydar (2019) have extended the discussion by highlighting how race, ideology, and systemic power dynamics complicate identity construction. Charles (2019) investigated the identity construction of Black teachers of English working in South Korea, using critical race theory and narrative inquiry to explore how racialised identities intersect with notions of native English speaker (NES) status. The voices of Jamie and Nancy, two experienced Black American teachers, reveal these educators' dual roles as cultural ambassadors and racialised subjects navigating systems of privilege and marginalisation. This study highlights how the teachers' racial identities influenced their pedagogical

relationships and approaches, enabling them to make deeper cultural connections with students. The findings challenge dominant, white-centric conceptions of the NES in TESOL, supporting the call for a broader, more inclusive understanding of professional legitimacy in English language teaching.

Eslamdoost et al. (2020) examined how EFL teachers in Iran navigated identity conflicts within a politically and culturally charged educational system. Drawing on Bamberg's three-level positioning analysis, they delineate how teachers construct their identities amidst contradictions between personal pedagogical beliefs and state-imposed curricula. The narrative reflections of two participants engaged in an online discussion demonstrate how ideological pressures, such as the representation of Western cultures or religious constraints, shape and often constrain the performance of professional roles. Eslamdoost et al. identify such tensions not merely as individual struggles but also as reflections of systemic issues that require institutional support and reform. The study thus extends the LTI literature by foregrounding the political dimensions of identity work and the need for tailored professional development in restrictive sociopolitical environments.

Expanding the discussion to include Hispanic teachers in the United States, Kayi-Aydar (2019) explored the professional identity formation of Paloma, a Spanish-language teacher and doctoral student, through a narrative inquiry framework. The study highlights how Paloma's identity was shaped by linguistic discrimination and marginalisation, which weakened her sense of agency. However, her academic journey allowed her to reframe these experiences and cultivate resilience and renewed professional purpose. The study underscores the value of narrative sharing as a pedagogical and reflective tool in teacher education, particularly for addressing subtle forms of racism and promoting inclusive identity development.

It is evident that LTI research has increasingly recognised identity as relational, political, and embedded in discourse. Studies grounded in raciolinguistics (Flores & Rosa, 2015) and identity-in-practice frameworks (Moonthiya & Stevenson, 2024) demonstrate how teachers construct meaning and legitimacy through their participation in institutional practices. Yet, much of this scholarship has focused on Western or native-speaking expatriates (Sherman, 2023; Wright, 2024), with limited attention to Southeast Asian teachers working across regional borders. While Filipino English teachers constitute one of the largest expatriate teacher groups in Thailand, their identity struggles, rooted in both postcolonial and regional racial-linguistic hierarchies, remain underexplored.

Teacher Mobility and Transnational Teaching

LTI is challenged as teachers move abroad and face new cultural, linguistic, and institutional expectations (Rosenfeld et al., 2022). Expatriate teachers may struggle to integrate into new sociocultural environments, leading to isolation, diminished sense of belonging, and diminished professional confidence (Romanowski & Nasser, 2015). They may encounter cultural norms that conflict with their beliefs about pedagogy and classroom management, requiring them to renegotiate their teaching approaches (Seo, 2024). Their competence and credibility may also be questioned. Linguistic hierarchies in the host country can marginalise non-native expatriate English-speaking teachers, positioning them as less qualified than their native-speaking counterparts (Ruecker & Ives, 2015). This disregard for their professional worth compels them to explicitly establish their legitimacy through their teaching practices and professional interactions.

Despite such obstacles, transnational teaching offers opportunities for professional development and the evolution of teacher identities. Exposure to unfamiliar student populations, cultural outlooks, and educational practices allows teachers to broaden their pedagogical repertoire and deepen their understanding of their professional roles (Rosenfeld et al., 2022). Through these cross-

cultural experiences, teachers may construct hybrid identities that blend elements of their home and host cultures (Sherman, 2023). Yet cultivating these hybrid identities is not as simple as teachers must negotiate competing cultural values, institutional expectations, and shifting notions of professional legitimacy.

When teachers cross national and cultural borders, their identities and positionalities become sites of tension, especially within hierarchies that distinguish between native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). Both groups must navigate complex sociocultural dynamics that can simultaneously confer privilege and impose marginalisation. Sherman (2023), for instance, critically examined the identity work of Western expatriate EFL teachers in South Korea, highlighting how cultural misunderstandings, racialised expectations, and institutional pressures complicated their perceived status as 'ideal' language teachers. Rather than portraying expatriate teachers as culturally neutral agents of English instruction, Sherman showed how their identities were embedded within historical legacies of colonialism and racialised privilege. Although such teachers may benefit from structural advantages in the EFL market, this comfort, the study underscored, can simultaneously limit their intercultural engagement and contribute to the reproduction of neocolonial dynamics in educational settings. Sherman called for Western scholars to approach non-Western theoretical frameworks with humility and critical self-awareness, introducing the notion of 'theoretical expatriation' and advocating for deeper epistemological shifts in TESOL research.

Kiss and Medgyes (2019) interrogated the professional challenges faced by NESTs through a mixed-method study involving 79 participants across 24 countries. Their findings challenged the dominant assumption that NESTs universally enjoy privileged status within the global ELT profession. Despite their perceived marketability, many NESTs reported experiences of marginalisation, including pay discrepancies, institutional alienation, and cultural dislocation. Kiss and Medgyes' presentation of the experiences of NESTs and NNESTs contributes to the ongoing debate surrounding the native/non-native binary and highlights how privilege operates: often inconsistently and unequally, and depending on local sociolinguistic and cultural factors. A balanced research agenda that moves beyond simplistic binaries could critically address the structural inequities that affect both NESTs and NNESTs.

Wright (2024) shifted the focus to the trajectories of NNESTs, examining how they navigated and reconstructed their identities as transnational teachers at critical identity junctures such as relocation, adaptation, and transformation. In narrative interviews, the participants recounted struggles with linguistic discrimination, particularly accent and nationality, that not only shaped their professional identities and self-worth but also catalysed identity growth, enabling them to develop professional agency and resilience. Wright's emphasis on the lived experiences of NNESTs has enriched the literature on transnationalism in ELT, pointing to the need for policies and institutional practices that recognise diverse teacher identities beyond the native-speaker norm.

Filipino Teachers as Expatriate Teachers

The growing number of Filipino teachers working abroad, particularly in Thailand, offers a rich opportunity for examining LTI shaped by transnational mobility. As expatriate educators, these teachers navigate complex intersections of race, language, and cultural adaptation in their host country (Ulla, 2021). Despite their high levels of English proficiency, Filipino teachers are often positioned as inferior to Western native speakers, largely due to entrenched linguistic hierarchies and racialised biases (Savski & Vencer Comprendio, 2022). This marginalisation complicates their professional identity construction as assumptions about race and language proficiency can undermine classroom authority, regardless of a teacher's credentials or experience (Seo, 2024).

The need for cultural adaptation intensifies this identity negotiation. Teaching in Thailand requires Filipino educators to adjust to social norms and educational expectations that may differ considerably from those in the Philippines (Sherman, 2023). These differences shape classroom practices, communication patterns, and relationships with students and colleagues. As Ulla (2021) observes, Filipino teachers often draw on personal resilience and adaptability to navigate these cultural complexities and ultimately view their overseas teaching experiences as professionally transformative. However, this adjustment process is not without its challenges.

Recent scholarship has begun to foreground the intersectional nature of these challenges, highlighting how race, gender, linguistic capital, and professional legitimacy converge to shape the identity formation of Filipino English language teachers in transnational contexts. Ulla's (2021) study of 56 Filipino EFL teachers in Bangkok highlights the aspirations and structural obstacles involved in teaching abroad. Many of the participants cited improved economic prospects and career development as motivations for migration, but they also reported persistent cultural dissonance, language-related stigma, and restricted access to institutional support. These findings reflect broader power dynamics in English language teaching (ELT) and underscore the need to interrogate how NNESTs navigate and resist marginalisation in their professional trajectories.

Choe (2016) examined identity construction among Filipino ESL teachers working with Korean learners in the Philippines. She identified both negative aspects of identity, such as internalised feelings of inadequacy due to non-nativeness and perceived lack of cultural capital, and more empowering narratives through which teachers reframed their linguistic identities as accessible and pedagogically effective. Notably, these educators positioned themselves within a global ELT market that often privileges 'nativeness' while still asserting their unique relational and linguistic competencies.

Despite the growing body of literature on LTI, few studies provide emic, narrative-based analyses of how Filipino teachers in Thailand negotiate their professional identities amid structural inequities. Transnational identity research is geographically and racially imbalanced, focusing on Western or East Asian contexts and thereby overlooking the lived experiences of Filipino educators in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, quantitative and interview-based studies underrepresent autoethnographic accounts that centre on insider perspectives and emotional labour. Addressing these gaps will enable a more nuanced understanding of how identity-in-practice intersects with raciolinguistic gatekeeping in Global South teaching contexts.

In response, this study examines how a Filipino English-language teacher in Thailand (re)constructed, negotiated, and articulated his professional identity within institutional and racially hierarchical contexts. Using an analytic–evocative blend of autoethnography enriched by critical friend dialogue, the research demonstrates how professional identity was reshaped through experiences of exclusion, reflexivity, and pedagogical activism. Methodologically, it highlights the researcher's subjectivity while maintaining reflexive rigour. Theoretically, it bridges raciolinguistics and identity-in-practice to conceptualise identity repair as resistance, and practically, it offers insights for educators and institutions in Thailand and the Philippines seeking to cultivate more equitable and critically engaged English-language-teaching environments.

Autoethnography as a Research Approach

This study adopts analytic autoethnography to explore the lived experiences of a Filipino English-language teacher teaching in Thailand from 2015 to 2024. Autoethnography values the self as a legitimate site of knowledge and inquiry, situating personal experiences within their cultural, institutional, and political contexts (Canagarajah, 2012). It enables the researcher to theorise from

the inside how identity, power, and professional legitimacy are lived and negotiated across time and place.

In this article, I (Mark), a Filipino expatriate language teacher, present my professional journey through this lens, drawing on a range of concrete data sources and reflexive practices that render the process transparent and auditable. I have been living and teaching in Thailand since 2015; I arrived with more than eight years of professional experience across secondary and tertiary institutions. My positionality as a racialised, non-native English-speaking educator in a predominantly Western-oriented ELT market provided both the focus and the interpretive lens for this inquiry.

I collected data documenting my teaching experience in Thailand from various naturally occurring and reflective sources, including journals and memos written within 24–48 hours of key incidents and teaching events. Additionally, I reviewed selected personal correspondence and social media posts retrospectively, as they captured emotional and professional reflections in real time. Episodes were selected based on thematic salience and identity-relevant tensions that marked critical junctures in my professional trajectory. I included experiences that exemplified encounters with institutional or policy gatekeeping (such as the TOEIC requirement), workload and salary inequities reflecting raciolinguistic hierarchies, moments of exclusion or belonging within professional communities, and transitions from marginalisation to agency as I moved from secondary to tertiary teaching. These inclusion criteria ensured that each episode represented a meaningful site of identity negotiation and transformation.

The data analysis had three iterative stages. First, I carried out narrative reconstruction, retelling each episode in a scene–tension–resolution format to capture both the emotional and contextual dimensions of experience. Second, I performed thematic coding, using inductive and theoretical approaches to identify recurring motifs such as identity threats, legitimacy work, and raciolinguistic ideologies, agency, and repair. Third, I engaged in theoretical linking, interpreting the coded data through frameworks of raciolinguistics (Flores & Rosa, 2015), NEST/NNEST ideology (Ruecker & Ives, 2015), and identity-in-practice (Moonthiya & Stevenson, 2024). This multi-layered process connected personal stories to broader sociolinguistic and institutional structures, ensuring that the narrative was not just evocative storytelling but rather could be subjected to critical and theoretical interpretation.

Throughout the research process, Lucas served as a critical friend (Costa & Kallick, 1993), providing sustained, dialogic engagement that enhanced the analytical depth and validity of the study. From December 2024 to June 2025, we maintained regular communication through social media messages to share experiences, exchange reflective memos, and review narrative drafts and emerging themes. We also met in person in March 2025 to discuss key interpretations and finalise analytic decisions. As a fellow expatriate language teacher based in Hong Kong, Lucas brought an external yet empathetic perspective that was both informed and comparative. His vantage point as an educator in another Asian context enabled him to identify patterns, highlight systemic issues, and draw attention to aspects of my narrative that might otherwise have remained unexamined.

In his role as a critical friend, Lucas asked probing and clarifying questions, challenged interpretive assumptions, and collaboratively analysed selected narrative segments. When interpretive disagreements arose, we revisited the raw data and theoretical frameworks to reach mutual understanding. These sustained exchanges, together with his annotations on drafts, recorded feedback, and analytic reflections, constituted an audit trail that ensured transparency, coherence, and reproducibility of interpretation. Beyond methodological scrutiny, Lucas acted as a co-participant in the meaning-making process, prompting deeper reflexivity and offering alternative lenses through which to situate my experiences within broader discourses on race, language, and

transnational teaching. His constructive feedback helped me navigate the fine balance between personal narrative and academic rigour, reinforcing the theoretical coherence and methodological integrity of this autoethnographic work.

To further enhance the study's credibility and reflexivity, I employed several strategies: (1) triangulation of narrative, documentary, and visual data; (2) reflexive positionality memos written after each analytic cycle to document evolving insights and biases; (3) peer debriefing with colleagues in TESOL and identity research; (4) thick description to capture cultural and institutional specificity and allow reader resonance (Ellis, 2004); and (5) the application of resonance and coherence criteria to assess the authenticity and analytic depth of the narrative. These measures ensured that the study not only highlighted the researcher's lived experiences but also demonstrated methodological rigour, reflexivity, and theoretical integration.

In the following section, *Mark* presents his experiences as a Filipino language teacher, highlighting how his racial and national identity shape his professional positioning and influence how he is perceived within Thailand's language education system. He explores the tensions, challenges, and possibilities that arise when an educator occupies multiple marginalised positionalities in an international teaching context and illustrates how identity is both imposed and self-fashioned within the constraints and possibilities of transnational academic space.

Episode 1. Linguistic Gatekeeping and Racialisation

I came to Thailand in 2015 after a year-long stint as an English-language teacher–trainer at Yangon University of Education in Myanmar. Thailand was not my first choice after my contract ended in Myanmar. In fact, it was my third option as I had received job offers in Vietnam and Indonesia. However, a close friend teaching English at a secondary school in Bangkok encouraged me to join her, emphasising that they needed another English teacher. Her persistence and the convenience of securing a job quickly led me to apply. My online interview was brief and to my surprise, they hired me the same day. A week later, in September 2015, I boarded a plane to Thailand, ready to embark on another chapter of my professional journey.

I arrived in Bangkok early in the morning and instead of taking time to settle in, I went straight to the school, eager to meet the department head and get a sense of my new work environment. The department head welcomed me and conducted an initial onboarding, outlining the teaching expectations, school policies, and necessary documents for processing my work permit. I also met my friend and other English teachers from different countries. I thought that their various accents and skin colours indicated that the school must have a pleasant working environment.

Everything seemed to be going smoothly until the department head mentioned that I would have to take an English proficiency test – the TOEIC. During my work in Myanmar and the Philippines, I had never been required to take such an exam. Curious, I asked him why it was necessary. His response was matter-of-fact: because I was Filipino, and English was not my first language.

This assertion took me aback. At that time, I already had a master's degree in English-language teaching and several years of teaching experience. I had assumed that my qualifications would be sufficient evidence of my proficiency. After all, English is the primary medium of instruction in Philippine schools and universities. I politely explained this to the department head, but he insisted that the requirement was non-negotiable and that of the Ministry of Labour, not the school. The TOEIC score, he explained, was necessary to secure my work permit to teach in Thailand legally. What unsettled me more was discovering that two other newly hired teachers, who happened to be English speakers from the US and Australia, were not required to take the test. When I asked why

they were exempt, the response was simple: their passports granted an automatic assumption of linguistic superiority. Despite feeling disheartened by the evident raciolinguistic biases, I complied with the requirement as I was already there and had signed the contract. I could no longer back out because I needed the job. I booked the exam, paid the fees, and waited for the test date.

Over the next four months at the school, I confronted further instances of unequal treatment that shaped my understanding of structural inequity. An implicit hierarchy among foreign teachers was evident, not just in the administrative policies but also in daily interactions. In my school, those of us who were non-white or spoke English as a second or foreign language were often excluded from certain school events and meetings. Our workloads were noticeably heavier than those of our native-English-speaking counterparts. For instance, I was assigned 22 teaching hours per week, whereas my white colleagues were assigned 16 to 18 hours. Furthermore, their salaries were substantially higher, although their qualifications were comparable to or weaker than mine. Although these observations reflect my situated experience in one Thai institution, they resonate with broader, documented patterns of raciolinguistic inequality in global ELT.

These inequities weighed on me. I also struggled to come to terms with my experiences at the school. I had always considered myself a dedicated educator, committed to my students' professional growth. However, I found my enthusiasm fading as the weeks passed. As my motivation dwindled, so did my investment in my students' academic progress. Once a meticulous and thoughtful process, lesson planning became an afterthought. I began going through the motions, standing in front of the classroom but feeling utterly disconnected from the teaching experience. Sometimes I went to class with a headache and a hangover. I knew that I was being unfair, not only to myself but also to my students, who deserved an engaged and passionate teacher.

Episode 2. Identity Repair Through Research and Reflective Practice

I realised that I did not want to teach in a high school setting, particularly under these conditions. My previous experiences, teaching at a university in the Philippines and working as a university teacher–trainer in Myanmar, had provided me with rich opportunities for professional growth through research, collaboration, and intellectual engagement. However, I felt stagnant in my current role. At times, I considered returning to the Philippines, where I could teach at a university again. Yet, I was fully aware that teaching in Thailand afforded me opportunities that many Filipino teachers long for, like more stable employment, better compensation, and a level of professional respect, which are often difficult to get back home. In the Philippines, an oversaturation of teaching graduates and a scarcity of job openings, particularly in public institutions, leave many aspiring teachers unemployed or underpaid. Those who do find work often face overwhelming workloads and salaries that barely cover basic living expenses. Every time I thought about this, I was reminded that many Filipino professionals wished to be in my position, but their circumstances restricted them. This internal conflict left me questioning my capabilities as an educator and my long-term aspirations.

After much contemplation, I made a decision. I submitted my resume to a university in Bangkok, hoping to transition into a position that aligned more closely with my academic and professional goals. Fortunately, they hired me, and I began teaching at the university in February 2016. The move marked not just a shift in employment but a profound turning point in my personal and professional identity. Although I still had to submit proof of my English proficiency, I did not question the requirement as I knew by now that it was not an institutional policy.

Nevertheless, the experience and challenges I encountered while teaching in the secondary school weighed on me. Even after transitioning to university teaching, I found myself constantly

negotiating my place within the teaching landscape. I had to continually assert my credibility in both academic and professional settings, often working twice as hard to gain the same recognition as my native English-speaking colleagues. I needed to prove to management that, beyond teaching, I could conduct and publish research. This necessity drove me to immerse myself in research. Most English teachers can teach English, but not all are engaged in or passionate about research and publication. I thought that excelling in this area would make me indispensable in academia. I believed that being productive in research and publication was the one path that could distinguish me from other English teachers at the university.

Reflecting on this journey, I recognise how my experiences in Thailand shaped my evolving identity as a language educator. Although my transition to university teaching resolved many of the frustrations I faced in my early months in Thailand, the broader issues persisted. I know that my experience was not unique. Countless non-native English-speaking teachers, particularly those from the Global South, must be grappling with similar situations. Many of my Filipino colleagues have shared stories of being overlooked for promotions, denied leadership roles, or subjected to heightened scrutiny compared to their white counterparts. Some have even faced difficulties in securing contracts despite their qualifications, simply because of the passport they hold.

Episode 3. Pedagogical Activism as Resistance

Recognising these realities has not only shaped my teaching philosophy but also reaffirmed my dedication to addressing these disparities through research, advocacy, and meaningful engagement with my students and colleagues. This conviction is why I consciously discuss language hierarchies in my classroom, challenging the notion that native speakers are inherently superior teachers. I also encourage my students, many of whom are multilingual, to embrace their linguistic diversity rather than view it as a deficiency. Through my research, I acknowledge and serve as the voice of non-native English-speaking teachers, shedding light on the structural discrimination that pervades the profession; I fight a silent, bloodless battle against systemic inequalities.

My career in Thailand has been an experience of both struggle and growth. It has pushed me to confront uncomfortable truths about the English-language-teaching industry while solidifying my commitment to promoting an inclusive and equitable educational landscape.

Discussion

This autoethnographic narrative has illuminated the multifaceted nature of LTI through the experiences of a Filipino educator navigating Thailand's raciolinguistic hierarchies, institutional structures, and cultural contexts. The themes emerging from the narrative – racialisation, linguistic domination, professional marginalisation, and resilience – echo findings in the literature on transnational teaching (Seo, 2024; Sherman, 2023; Wright, 2024) and offer nuanced insight into the intersectional dynamics of LTI in Southeast Asian contexts (Savski & Vencer Comprendio, 2022; Ulla, 2021).

The conflict between assumed linguistic legitimacy and institutional gatekeeping mechanisms lies at the core of this transnational experience. Insisting that Mark take the TOEIC despite his advanced degrees and extensive teaching experience exemplifies what Flores and Rosa (2015) described as raciolinguistic ideologies: belief systems that link language capacity not to measurable competence but to racialised and national categories. However, the TOEIC itself warrants deeper interrogation. Beyond functioning as a measure of English proficiency, it operates symbolically as what Rosa and Flores (2017) called an enactment of the white listening subject, a system that rewards linguistic

performances aligned with white, middle-class Anglophone norms while positioning racialised speakers as perpetually deficient. In this sense, the TOEIC becomes a white-matching object (Rosa & Flores, 2017), reinforcing the ideological association of linguistic legitimacy with whiteness. Its widespread institutional use naturalises these hierarchies under the guise of neutrality, masking how standardised testing practices reproduce racial and linguistic inequality within transnational ELT contexts.

The fact that Western colleagues were exempted from the TOEIC requirement by virtue of their passports underscores this ideological bias. Here, whiteness operates as an unmarked credential, one that automatically confers linguistic authority and professional legitimacy. The TOEIC, therefore, is not merely an assessment tool but a gatekeeping mechanism that codifies and legitimises existing racial orders within educational institutions. This process aligns with what Ruecker and Ives (2015) described as the rhetorical construction of privilege, wherein institutional systems and recruitment practices perpetuate the symbolic capital of whiteness while systematically devaluing the linguistic repertoires of educators from the Global South. Mark's heavier workload, lower pay, and exclusion from school activities further demonstrate how institutionalised biases sustain inequities that privilege whiteness and Westernness as proxies for quality and professionalism in ELT (Charles, 2019; Savski & Vencer Comprendio, 2022). These experiences mirror broader trends reported in studies of NNESTs teaching abroad (Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Wright, 2024) and reveal how raciolinguistic ideologies are materially enacted through administrative policies and professional hierarchies.

This raciolinguistic positioning has affective consequences. Mark's introspection about reduced motivation, emotional withdrawal from teaching, and feelings of inadequacy underscores the psychological toll of persistent inequity. These affective reactions are consistent with Yazan and Lindahl's (2020) view of identity negotiation as emotional labour, a process through which teachers suppress, modify, and reinterpret their professional identities to meet the expectations of externally imposed norms. The identity dissonance that emerges from this labour undermines teacher well-being and erodes pedagogical engagement, as evidenced by Mark's disengagement during his early teaching experience in Thailand. From this perspective, the TOEIC does not simply test language. It also regulates belonging. It delineates who is recognised as proficient and who must constantly prove proficiency, performing epistemic violence within global ELT systems, in which knowledge, legitimacy, and linguistic value remain tethered to white epistemologies and colonial histories of English.

The narrative also reveals agency, resistance, and transformation within these constraints. The move to university-level teaching was an act of reclamation, driven by aspirations for professional growth and a more equitable environment. This transition exemplified what Barkhuizen (2016) describes as identity work, an agentic process through which teachers reconstruct their professional selves in response to contextual demands. At the heart of this process lies identity-in-practice (Moonthiya & Stevenson, 2024), the notion that teachers' identities are enacted and understood through everyday professional engagement, such as teaching, designing lessons, conducting research, and mentoring learners. These practices are not only performative but also formative, shaping how teachers see themselves and how others see them. Through research productivity, reflective practice, and critical pedagogy, Mark converted marginalisation into praxis, transforming his struggle into both scholarly inquiry and pedagogical activism aimed at unsettling the racialised hierarchies that underpin global English language teaching.

Mark's deliberate investment of time and effort in research and publication to gain professional credibility exemplifies how identity-in-practice is both enacted and recognised. This practice-based engagement serves as a site for identity construction, where professional aspirations are translated into visible actions. His sustained academic efforts align with Canagarajah's (2012) notion of voice

in academic settings as both personal and political, a strategic negotiation of recognition, status, and legitimacy in institutional contexts.

An important finding from this study is that Mark's practices went beyond identity formation. His determination to involve students in critical discussions of language hierarchies and linguistic diversity is a milestone example of pedagogical activism. In transforming personal struggle into classroom dialogue and scholarly research, Mark illustrates praxis (Freire, 1970), the intersection of reflection and action that pursues social justice. This critical pedagogy not only emancipates the students but also repositions the teacher as a change agent capable of challenging dominant discourses within the profession.

Based on Mark's reflective narrative, it can also be argued that autoethnography is a space of resistance. By centring personal experiences as authoritative knowledge, Mark resisted mainstream and dominant positivist paradigms in educational research that undermine subjective, affective, and locally situational ways of knowing. Autoethnography enables the theorisation of everyday experiences (Canagarajah, 2012), especially those of marginalised teachers whose voices are often excluded from mainstream academic discourses. Including a critical friend takes the analysis much further, allowing for dialogic and reflexive engagement with broader institutional discourses (Costa & Kallick, 1993). It is important to note that these observations are based on Mark's personal and institutional experience as a Filipino teacher in one Thai educational setting. Although they cannot represent all Thai schools or all expatriate teachers' experiences, they exemplify broader, well-documented structural patterns in the global ELT industry. Framing them as situated yet illustrative rather than universal truths illustrates how systemic hierarchies are reproduced across contexts.

This study presents a rich and critical exploration of LTI through autoethnography, but it is not without limitations. First, its autoethnographic nature means that the findings are context-specific and grounded in a single teacher's experiences—namely, Mark's. While this situatedness offers depth, it cannot fully capture the wide range of experiences among other Filipino or Global South teachers in Thailand or other transnational settings. The highly personal, reflective account privileges subjectivity, which, although a methodological strength, could be perceived as lacking in empirical breadth or objectivity by audiences unfamiliar with or resistant to qualitative, narrative, or critical paradigms.

Second, the research is situated within the Thai language education system and reflects only the experiences of one Filipino teacher. This scope excludes comparative insights from other non-Western expatriate teachers in Thailand or elsewhere in Southeast Asia who may share or diverge from similar experiences.

Third, while issues such as raciolinguistic ideologies, institutional marginalisation, and identity negotiation are deeply theorised, the study does not directly engage policymakers or institutional actors. The absence of institutional voices limits the ability to contrast individual experiences with administrative intentions or to offer a dialogue between policy and practice.

Conclusion

This study has shown how the lived experiences of a Filipino language teacher in Thailand reflect the complexities of LTI within raciolinguistically stratified and transnational teaching contexts. The autoethnographic account demonstrates that professional identity is continually reconstructed at the intersection of race, nationality, language ideology, and institutional structure. Mark's experiences expose how systemic bias in English language teaching, manifested through discriminatory hiring, unequal workloads, and racially coded assumptions of linguistic legitimacy,

profoundly affects teacher motivation, self-image, and professional growth. Yet through research productivity, reflective practice, and critical classroom dialogue, Mark reclaimed his legitimacy and enacted a more inclusive, socially engaged vision of language education.

This study advances our understanding of LTI from a non-Western, NNEST perspective but also reveals the need to interrogate the policy environments that sustain these inequities. Educational and labour policies in Thailand, for example, often operate under raciolinguistic assumptions that conflate English proficiency with nationality or whiteness. The requirement for standardised tests such as the TOEIC for certain nationalities but not others exemplify how policy implementation embeds structural discrimination within official hiring systems. Such policies fail to protect teachers from raciolinguistic bias; they legitimise unequal treatment and undermine the goals of fairness and meritocracy in education. A critical policy review is thus necessary to ensure that laws and administrative procedures align with principles of equity and inclusivity rather than perpetuate colonial and racial hierarchies.

At the policy level, reforms should move beyond symbolic commitments to diversity and instead dismantle systemic barriers that privilege native-speaker status and Western credentials. Ministries of education and labour must review recruitment guidelines, accreditation processes, and salary structures that institutionalise linguistic and racial hierarchies. Policies must prioritise demonstrable teaching competence, pedagogical expertise, and intercultural awareness over nationality or accent. Mechanisms for redress should be institutionalised so that teachers facing discrimination have access to transparent and just avenues for resolution.

Theoretically, this study extends LTI research by integrating raciolinguistics, postcolonial theory, and critical pedagogy, thus emphasising that identity formation is both personal and political. It affirms autoethnography as a legitimate method for theorising lived experience, challenging positivist paradigms that erase subjectivity. Practically, it advocates for teacher education programmes that incorporate critical identity work, anti-bias training, and reflexivity, enabling teachers and administrators alike to recognise how their practices reinforce or resist inequity.

Building on these insights, future research and practice should continue to address structural inequalities in transnational English language teaching. Policy reforms must prioritise competence and experience over nationality or accent, and eliminate discriminatory requirements such as standardised language testing for experienced NNESTs. Future research should further decolonise LTI by centring voices from the Global South and engaging with postcolonial and indigenous perspectives. Comparative and collaborative autoethnographies involving non-Western teachers across Southeast Asia, as well as intersectional studies on race, gender, sexuality, and class, are needed to deepen understanding of LTI in diverse contexts. Practically, teacher education should support reflective and identity-based practices, and institutions should recognise autoethnography as a powerful tool for professional development. Empowering marginalised educators to promote critical language awareness in their classrooms will further position pedagogy as a space for resistance and transformation.

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