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Traversing Self and Other: The Professional Identity of Immigrant English Teachers

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Abstract: The professional identity of immigrant English teachers (IETs) in Australia is profoundly shaped by their lived experiences and systemic positioning as the marginalized "Other." Misrecognition stemming from non-native accents, linguistic varieties, race, culture, and foreign qualifications often situates IETs in deficit-based frameworks compared to white native English-speaking teachers. Employing hermeneutic phenomenology and narrative inquiry, this long-term study examines how IETs navigate systemic barriers and discursive contestations to reconstitute their professional identities informed by their lived experiences over time. Drawing on concepts of *self and the Other*, power, dialogism, and hybridity, the findings reveal that IETs employ critical reflection and agentive strategies to challenge dominant discourses of nativeness and non-nativeness. Despite persistent structural inequities, they demonstrate hybrid professionalism and envision themselves as cosmopolitan educators. The study calls for inclusive policies and practices that recognize IETs' multilingual and multicultural expertise across migration, settlement, and professional practice phases. Educational institutions must recognize and normalize intercultural capabilities and intersectional understandings of diversity to foster inclusive teaching environments. Beyond education, these findings underscore the broader relevance of addressing systemic barriers for immigrant professionals across sectors. Further research is needed to examine the long-term impacts of such inclusive practices on professional integration, development, and contributions to multicultural educational landscapes.

Keywords*:* Immigrant teachers, NNESTs, professional identity, othering, agency, hybrid professionals, dialogism, Narrative Inquiry

Introduction

Immigrant professionals in Australia face systemic barriers that undermine their inclusion, professional opportunities, and sense of professional identity. Challenges such as the devaluation of foreign qualifications, lack of professional support, discriminatory hiring practices, and systemic racism significantly impact their lives and careers (Bolaji & Imonitie, 2025; Colic-Peisker, 2002; Collins & Reid, 2012; Cruickshank, 2022; Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007; Udah & Singh, 2018; Yip, 2023; Nigar, 2024; Nigar et al., 2024b, 2024c). For immigrant

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English teachers (IETs), these obstacles are compounded by native-speakerism, which privileges native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and marginalizes non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) based on race, accent, and cultural identity (Holliday, 2006, 2018; Dovchin, 2020, 2021; Flores & Rosa, 2023; Nigar et al., 2024b). The inequities IETs face underscore systemic exclusion within Australia's education sector, which marginalizes multilingual and multicultural expertise while upholding monolingual, monocultural, and mononormative standards premised on Australian Standard English (ASE) (Guo, 2015, 2018; Sultana & Dovchin, 2022). This study explores how IETs navigate these systemic barriers to reclaim their professional identities and contribute to inclusive education, investigating the following research question:

> How do immigrant English teachers in Australia navigate systemic barriers and discursive practices during migration and settlement to reconstitute their professional identities, and what are the implications for inclusive education?

In this research, we argue that while systemic inequities impede the professional recognition of IETs, these educators negotiate and reconstruct their professional identities by leveraging their translingual and transcultural capabilities and dispositions (Lee & Canagarajah, 2019). Drawing on the concept of *hybrid professional becoming*—developed through a doctoral study on how IETs shaped their professional identities through lived experiences (Nigar, 2024)—and supported by related findings (e.g., Nigar et al., 2024a, 2024b, 2024c), this study underscores how IETs transcend static categorizations. By imagining themselves as cosmopolitan educators, they foster intercultural capabilities and contribute significantly to the professional landscape. This research aims to enrich discussions on professional recognition, equity, and inclusion by demonstrating how IETs challenge native-speakerism and enhance educational practices through their unique perspectives.

The professional identities of IETs are significantly shaped by systemic barriers, including de-skilling, linguistic hegemony, and exclusionary credentialing. Many IETs face professional misrecognition, stemming from the devaluation of their foreign qualifications, and discriminatory English language requirements compared to those for teachers from BANA countries (Britain, Australia, and North America). This often forces IETs to obtain additional certifications, despite their extensive experience and expertise (Nigar, 2024; Nigar et al., 2024b). Language assessments like IELTS have been critiqued for prioritizing migration policy over authentic skill evaluation, leading to psychological stress and an erosion of confidence among IETs (Hamid et al., 2019; Shohamy, 2001; Mirhosseini et al., 2025; Nigar et al., 2024b). These challenges echo findings in Canada, where the devaluation of immigrant skills and racialized hiring practices further marginalize immigrant professionals, hindering their employment opportunities and professional growth (Guo, 2015, 2018; Kumar, 2020).

Native-speakerism entrenches such inequities by favoring NESTs and marginalizing NNESTs based on racialized perceptions of linguistic and cultural identity (Flores & Rosa, 2023; Holliday, 2006, 2018). This ideology perpetuates the notion that NNESTs are less capable, reinforcing discriminatory hiring practices and undermining professional recognition (Faez, 2018; Lee & Canagarajah, 2019; Nigar et al., 2024b). These systemic barriers undermine the confidence, agency, and professional legitimacy of IETs, particularly women, who face compounded discrimination due to the intersectionality of race, gender, and linguistic identity (Gowan, 2023; Guo, 2015, 2018; Nigar, 2024). The National Anti-Racism Framework Scoping Report (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2022) confirms racial bias in recruitment and emphasizes the need for cultural competency training to promote inclusivity.

Despite systemic inequities, IETs adopt strategies to reconstitute their professional identities, demonstrating critical reflection and agency. Mentorship is a vital mechanism for bridging cultural divides and supporting professional growth, helping IETs navigate the

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Australian education system (Cruickshank, 2022; Peeler & Jane, 2005; Yip et al., 2024; Nigar, 2024). Additionally, networking and leveraging community resources enhance their professional agency and create pathways for integration (Kumar, 2020; Nigar, 2024). Dialogic negotiation is pivotal in enabling IETs to redefine their roles, as they incorporate their multilingual and multicultural expertise into their teaching to challenge native-speakerist ideologies and enrich educational environments (Lee & Canagarajah, 2019; Nayar & Wright St.Clair, 2020; Nigar et al., 2024b). Kostogriz (2005) underscores the value of Bakhtin's dialogical philosophy in ESL education to address cultural domination and xenophobia, aligning with Janfada's (2023) notion of dialogic appropriation, which advocates for translingual pedagogies to promote inclusivity.

The concept of hybrid professional becoming encapsulates the dynamic and fluid nature of IETs' identity formation. By reconciling their aspirations with socio-political discourses, IETs imagine themselves as cosmopolitan teachers who foster intercultural capabilities, contributing to inclusive and equitable educational practices and potentialities (Nigar et al., 2024 b, 2024c; Gowan, 2023). Sultana and Dovchin (2022), drawing on Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, highlight how spatial and temporal dynamics influence identity and language practices, revealing the relational and fluid nature of meaning-making. This process reflects strategies employed by immigrant professionals in Canada, who navigate systemic barriers through cultural negotiation and community engagement (Kumar, 2020).

The exclusionary practices faced by IETs have significant psycho-emotional implications, including diminished confidence, mental health challenges, and loss of professional identity. Persistent professional misrecognition and systemic exclusion exacerbate these challenges, leaving many IETs grappling with feelings of inadequacy and (self-) marginalization (Gowan, 2023; Miller, 2008; Nigar, 2024; Nigar et al., 2024b). These impacts are compounded for women IETs, whose experiences are shaped by intersecting barriers of race, gender, linguistic cultural, and religious identity, necessitating systemic reforms in credential recognition and employment (Dogutas, 2025; Guo, 2015; Dwyer et al., 2024). As Gowan (2023) emphasizes, the exclusion and identity conflict experienced by ethnic professionals underscores the need for culturally safe and inclusive work environments.

Teacher identity is inherently shaped by socio-cultural interactions and workplace dynamics. Olsen (2008) conceptualizes teachers as dynamic individuals whose identities evolve with their professional roles and cultural contexts. For IETs, this involves reconciling their backgrounds with the demands of teaching in predominantly monolingual settings. By resisting native-speakerist biases and leveraging their lived experiences, IETs redefine their professional identities as cosmopolitan educators who enrich classroom environments with unique perspectives (Nigar, 2024; Nigar et al., 2024b, 2024c). The inclusion of diverse perspectives is vital for fostering educational equity, as highlighted by Dwyer et al. (2024), who call for systemic reforms to address the underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse teachers.

Understanding the migration and settlement experiences of IETs is essential for fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion within Australian education. Their integration into the workforce enriches professional practices, enhances students' intercultural capabilities, and addresses global teacher shortages (UN [United Nations], 2024; OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development], 2024). However, achieving this requires targeted interventions to dismantle native-speakerist ideologies, address professional misrecognition, and prioritize cultural competency in credentialing processes (Dwyer et al., 2024; Gowan, 2023). These efforts align with international recommendations for inclusive education and reflect the transformative potential of hybrid professional identities in shaping equitable educational futures.

The challenges IETs face highlight deeply entrenched systemic barriers within the Australian education system that marginalize immigrant professionals. Despite these obstacles, the resistance, agency, and creativity demonstrated by IETs in reclaiming their professional identities underscore the transformative potential of inclusive and equitable educational practices. By integrating dialogic and translingual approaches, as emphasized by Kostogriz (2005), Janfada (2023), and Nigar et al. (2024c), educators and policymakers can foster environments that celebrate cultural and linguistic diversity. Such approaches are crucial for addressing systemic inequities, challenging exclusionary norms, and leveraging the unique strengths IETs bring to the classroom, ultimately enriching educational outcomes for all learners.

The Relational Self: Self and the Other, Power, Dialogism, and Hybridity

The concept of "self and the Other" functions as a binary logic to identify people by separating who they are not (Butler, 1986; Hegel, 1977). This framework promotes opposites such as man/woman, homosexual/heterosexual, black/white, West/Orient, rich/poor, native/non-native, or, as in this study, NESTs/NNESTs. The Other is conceived as inferior and excluded from the authoritative group through ideological powers. The epistemological mechanism is "othering," which categorizes groups, while "otherness" is produced in the translation of differences, such as between colonizer and colonized (Spivak, 1985). In this binary logic, people are viewed as "fixed, complete, and immutable" (Tillman & Scheurich, 2013, p. 360). Bauman (1990) describes this notion:

> woman is the other of man, animal is the other of human, stranger is the other of native, abnormality the other of norm, deviation the other of law-abiding, illness the other of health, insanity the other of reason, lay public the other of the expert, foreigner the other of state subject, enemy the other of friend. (p. 8).

The self/Other binary struggles to essentialize, homogenize, enfeeble, exclude, and/or assimilate the Other. Systemic and discursive exercises at macro and micro levels form subjectivities in the interplay of multiple powers (Foucault, 1975). For Foucault (1975), power is executed through "coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behavior" to produce "subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies" (p. 138). Power normalizes discourses on non/nativeness, gender, race, class, and religion. These truth statements legitimize the institutional practices of power holders to sustain order (Foucault, 1975), rendering one group normal and legitimate and the other abnormal and illegitimate (Bauman, 2013a). Nevertheless, these same discourses produce subjects who are resistant (Foucault, 1990) and dialectically generate agency (Butler, 2011; Gramsci, 1971), allowing individuals and/or groups to transcend and resist power relations (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

In TESOL, the native/non-native binary English speakers ideologically originates in colonialism (Pennycook, 1998) and perpetuates unequal practices. This belief, known as native-speakerism, privileges the English language and English teaching methodologies associated with native-speaker teachers and Western cultures (Holliday, 2006, 2018; Nigar et al., 2024b). It dichotomizes practitioners, commodifies English, and promotes a deficit model for learners. This neo-colonial process (Pennycook, 2007) privileges the self and marginalizes the Other, perpetuating linguistic racism and cultural stereotypes (Dryden & Dovchin, 2024; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Mahboob & Szenes, 2010;Nigar, 2024). Meighan (2022) calls this "colonialingualism," which is "subtractive and detrimental to multilingual, multicultural learners' identities and heritages; endangered, Indigenous languages and knowledge; minoritized communities; and our environment" (p. 146).

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The essentialist logic of the self/ Other binary proposes a collective self with a "stable, unchanging, and continuous" core (Hall, 1990, p. 223). This marginalized identity represents a "one true self" (Hall, 1990, p. 223) that may shape IETs' identities through the NEST/NNEST binary. However, in a globalized world, an immigrant professional's identity is a "movable feast" (Hall, 1990, p. 277) that shifts with cultural norms (Bhabha, 1994). Rather than being immutable, it "signifies the constant renewal of identity through creative hybridity and transformation under the very conditions of dispersal and difference" (Ang, 2005, p. 84).

We also draw on Bakhtinian notions to further explore the complexities. Bakhtin's (1981) concept of dialogic exchanges emphasizes the dynamic and evolving nature of identity, which evolves through continuous dialogue with oneself and others. This study uncovers that IETs resisted the monologic (Bakhtin, 1981) dichotomization of their identity. Their responses were a *psychic excess* (Butler, 1997) and relational (Nigar, 2024) against repeated homogenized name-calling, such as "NNEST". The essentialized self redressed "it-self" in the translational journey, "becoming" decentralized in dialogic exchanges (Bakhtin, 1984).

Furthermore, Bakhtin's (1981) notion of hybrid consciousness evolves through discursive narratives. Bakhtin (1981) categorizes this narrative hybridity as either "organic" or "intentional". Organic hybridity is subconscious, while intentional hybridity is a deliberate, agentive, relational, and potentially subversive form. Organic hybridity reflects the nuanced ways cultures intertwine, often creating an illusion of cultural purity (Werbner, 2015). Intentional hybridity is a deliberate and dialogic process that generates new meanings through the interaction of differing voices, resulting in a double-accented consciousness—for instance, an IET simultaneously experiencing agency and deficit (Werbner, 2001; Nigar, 2024; Tran, 2024). Unlike the subtle evolution of organic hybridity, intentional hybridity fosters a dynamic cultural exchange where traditions and perspectives challenge each other (Young, 1995).

In the context of IETs' professional identity, both forms of hybridity are significant. Motha et al. (2012) illustrate this with teachers who either unconsciously develop a hybrid English comprising various accents and dialects or consciously challenge and resist the essentializing expectations of "native-like" pronunciation. This framework of organic and intentional hybridity offers a lens for understanding the transcultural movement among teachers, aiding them in transcending the "shadowy status" of their profession (Papastergiadis, 2015, p. 260) and providing a valuable perspective on the complexities of their identities.

The binary logic of self and the Other marginalizes identities in TESOL, perpetuating linguistic racism and inequities (Dryden & Dovchin, 2022; Nigar et al., 2024b). Through Bakhtin's (1981) concepts of dialogic and hybrid consciousness, IETs exercise agency by resisting, appropriating, negotiating, and innovating within these frameworks. By embracing hybridity, they redefine their roles and challenge native-speakerist ideologies, thereby enriching multilingual education.

The Study

A hermeneutic phenomenological narrative inquiry study conducted in diverse Australian English language teaching sectors provided the data (Nigar, 2020). The sixteen participants were migrant NNESTs who had migrated to Australia as international students or partners/family members (Table 1). They worked in adult English, English for Academic Purposes, and high schools in Melbourne, Sydney, and Adelaide with two to forty years of experience (see tables below for details on origin, employment, and immigration background).

Table 1. Participants' profile

Pseudonym	Country of origin	Teaching experience in Australia	Teaching experience outside Australia	Qualifications and/or registration in Australia
Becca	Slovakia	ELICOS (English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students): language centres (private)	N/A	TESOL ([Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages] postgraduate)
Carlos	Brazil	ELICOS: language centres (private and university centres)	Private English language centre	TESOL (Cert) Cert IV in Training and Assessment (TAA)
Janaki	India	Migrant English education: (TAFE, Technical and Further Education)	International primary school (UAE)	VIT registration TESOL (higher education)
Frida	Philippines	Migrant English education: language centres (TAFE) ELICOS: language centres (private)	Private English language centre	CELTA TAA
Hien	Vietnam	Migrant English education: language centres (private)	University	TAA
Jasha	USSR (specified by Jasha)	Migrant English education (TAFE) ELICOS (universities and private centres)	High school	TESOL (postgraduate)
Jigna	India	Migrant English education: (TAFE) ELICOS (universities)	Polytechnic	Initial teacher Education (ITE) VIT registration TAA
Laura	Philippines	Migrant English education: language centres (TAFE) ELICOS: language centres (private)	High school	VIT registration TESOL (cert)
Ling Ling	China	Independent high school	N/A	ITE VIT registration
Mahati	India	Migrant English education: language centres (neighbourhood house)	Universities Various schools (India and Uganda)	VIT registration TESOL (postgraduate)
Mandy	Philippines	ELICOS: Language centres (private)	N/A	TESOL (postgraduate)
Natalie	Bangladesh	ELICOS: language centres (private, TAFE, universities) Migrant English education: language centres (TAFE/AMES)	International schools (K-12) university	Postgraduate in Applied Linguistics (AppLing) TESOL (postgraduate)
Oksana	Russia	ELICOS (high school) Language centres (private)	Universities	Med (TESOL) ITE NESA [NSW Education Standards Authority] registration

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Quang	Vietnam	Govt. High school	Language centre	Postgraduate (AppLing) ITE NESA registration
Raphael	Israel (kibbutz)	Migrant English programs: TAFE	N/A	ITE VIT [Victorian Institute of Teaching] registration
Thi	Vietnam	ELICOS: language centres (private)	Language centres	Med (TESOL) CELTA

Data collection occurred from March 2019 to March 2020 through written narratives, semi-structured interviews, and follow-up enquiries and communications. Participants responded to narrative prompts about their pre-migration, settlement, and Australian professional practice for 30 minutes weekly for four months. Several participants were subsequently interviewed to expand on their written narratives. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and edited for clarity.

Data were analyzed for predominant relational themes of self and Other, power relations, and the extension of identity beyond the binary. One of the researchers was a participant in this study. The analysis examined how teachers reconceptualized their professional identities and how these were shaped by socio-cultural structures. The first and the second researcher were present during analysis, where their interpretations were crucial to the hermeneutic circle (Churchill, 2018), which uses pre-understanding to illuminate the research. This author-participant navigated the dual roles of researcher and participant, remaining conscious of how her beliefs and assumptions might influence interpretation. The author participant's insider perspective and emic role helped elicit data from other participants.

The research (project ID 19107) received ethical approval from the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee. Prior to signing the consent forms, all participants provided informed consent, understanding that their participation was voluntary and their anonymity would be fully protected.

Migration: A Site of Translation

Migration, mobility, and culture (Inghilleri, 2016) significantly influenced the professional identities of IETs, compelling them to "translate" their socio-cultural and professional practices to renegotiate new contexts. Their professional, social, cultural, and symbolic capitals were severely diminished during this process, described by Mahati as "the worst time of my life" (Collins & Reid, 2012, p. 45). The sacrifices were often profound, as Oksana explained: "I sacrificed my academic career … my husband sacrificed his professional life … and it was for nothing". Consequently, many IETs experienced helplessness and significant professional identity marginalization throughout their migration to Australia (Nigar, 2024; Nigar et al., 2024b).

Arriving in Australia over a forty-year span, the sixteen IETs in this study reflected diverse socio-historical trajectories, migrating as international students, spouses, or with family. Despite their differences, they were united by their multilingualism, their roles as English teachers, and their shared desire for and investment in English that was rooted in their professional identities even before migrating (Nigar, 2024; Nigar et al., 2024a). Their move was shaped by a mix of educational, familial, political, lifestyle, and economic factors that made Australia their "dream destination" (Janaki). For some, it marked a pivotal moment: "So in

2002 Australia it was!" (Mahati). For others, it was personal: "It was a matter of the heart … My partner is Australian" (Frida). Practical goals, such as overcoming "financial crises" (Becca), or the professional aspiration to "live in a country" as a "user and teacher of English" (Hien), were also key motivators. Others sought stability and "a better future" (Quoc), while for Jasha, it was a pragmatic necessity: "…it was time to leave—for many reasons, personal and political."

Together, these narratives reveal how IETs' investment in English, intertwined with personal and structural realities, shaped their migration journeys (Dwyer et al., 2024; Kostgriz & Peeler, 2007; Nigar, 2024). Their sacrifices underscore the challenges of professional identity constitution, requiring them to translate both their linguistic capital and lived experiences into a new sphere.

Throughout Migration: An Agonizing Journey

For many IETs, the skilled migrant programs were debilitating, often involving years of navigating multiple visas to settle in Australia. Participants like Ling Ling, Becca, Jigna, Mandy, Quoc, and Thi eventually migrated as international students. Becca, already a postgraduate, spent seven years completing General English (GE), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), HR Management, and a Master of TESOL before she could apply for migration, a journey she reflects on:

> I studied General English … then another eight weeks of EAP and then two years of HR management … While I was studying, I was also working as a mule in a coffee shop. The fact that I spent so long on a student visa living a student life really helps me to relate to my students. Finally, after seven years of prolonging this crazy existence, I mustered up enough courage to do what I'd been kind of dreaming of … doing a Master of TESOL and starting a career as an English teacher. (Becca)

Becca's journey reflects a blend of organic and intentional hybridity and her double consciousness (Bakhtin, 1981): "I'm not an Aussie; I'm not from an Anglo-Saxon background". Her organic hybridity emerged in her relentless pursuit of fluency: "I was obsessed ... carrying a dictionary everywhere, reading every sign, leaflet, or book, and avoiding Slovak as much as I could". Her intentional hybridity was evident in her critical reflections, self-agency, and years of study, including English for Academic Purposes courses and TESOL qualifications, to realize her dream. Despite being terrified in her first master's class— "Will my English be good enough?"—Becca's persistence, skill-building, working in various roles, and cultural immersion demonstrated the agency and fluidity required to achieve her professional goals.

Quang, though a qualified English language teacher who completed his initial teacher education in Australia, repeatedly took the IELTS because his prior postgraduate degrees did not meet the required four years of higher education in Australia. He questioned the logic of re-testing:

> I think that's fair enough, but we had other means to show our English proficiency… with the IELTS results we got to enter teaching, finishing the course, and completing all the practicums, I think we've proven we can communicate in English … So, why do we have to sit for the test again? (Quang)

Notably, while teacher registration bodies may accept alternative tests like the ISLPR (International Second Language Proficiency Ratings), the migration assessment body AITSL [Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership] exclusively accepts IELTS scores (AITSL, 2021; NESA, 2017). Refusing to give up, Quang demonstrated resistance, persistence, and appropriation. He "volunteered to teach English to adults" and invested relentlessly to meet

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the test requirements. Through these efforts, he organically reconceptualized his professional identity, realizing from his practicums, "that I was not an inferior but an equal practitioner".

The economic, cognitive, and temporal demands of credentialing posed significant offshore challenges. Laura took the IELTS test "four times" over two years, including a "review" costing her three months' salary. Motivated by the organic desire "to get married and start a family" with her Australian partner, she engaged migration agents and invested further in test preparation, and document translation and gathering. Despite initial setbacks, Laura persisted until she succeeded. Yet, her professional identity still reflects the double consciousness of NNESTs: "I imagine still being a global language teacher … but I will always consider myself as a non-native".

Jigna encountered immense obstacles from policy changes, systemic marginalization, and a lack of institutional support, compounded by personal hardships such as "a divorce and the demise of my father." These barriers, along with employment discrimination, prevented her from applying for teacher registration for a decade, even "after finishing [her] degree and with a VIT under [her] belt." She persisted through "a few odd jobs in restaurants and call centres", networking, receiving mentorship, gradually building credentials in adult education and ELICOS (English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students), and volunteered as a tutor. Her breakthrough "came through a recommendation [at a TAFE] from a fellow teacher [Natalie]", whom she met while juggling roles as a CRT (casual relief teacher) and aged care worker.

The IELTS remains the only English language requirement for migration by AITSL (AITSL, 2021; NESA, 2017; VIT, 2022), which mandates either a four-year degree from a BANA country or an IELTS score with "at least 7.0 in Reading/Writing and 8.0 in Speaking/Listening, in one single IELTS test taken in a 24-month period" (AITSL, 2021, p. 3). This policy framework racializes language, privileging white Englishes and exacerbating discrimination against NNESTs (Shuck, 2006; Nigar, 2024). Whether the teachers came as students, spouses, or families, they had to meet such visa requirements at least twice, first for temporary and then for permanent residency.

In their new country, IETs had to reconstruct themselves socially, culturally, professionally, and emotionally. Amid this displacement, they reshaped their identities by translating and negotiating unfamiliar cultural conditions (Tomlinson, 1999). Despite feeling disorientated—Jigna described it as appearing "imbecile"—they resisted and persisted through hybrid practices and consciousness (Werbner, 2001; Nigar, 2024). Through critical reflection and dialogic hybridity (Nigar, 2024), they reconstituted their professional identities by engaging in resistance, appropriation, and negotiation, thereby amplifying their agency and imagination in the face of marginalizations and discrimination (Lee & Canagarajah, 2019; Gowan, 2023; Nigar, 2024; Nigar et al., 2024b).

Early Days of Settlement: Lost in the Dark

Upon arrival, teachers had to translate their professional interests, desires, and goals to meet Australia's different requirements for entering the profession (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007). Race, culture, and language discrimination made settlement practically and affectively taxing. During this phase, IETs were neither professionally recognized nor supported, nor were they appreciated for their qualifications (See also Miller, 2008, Collins & Reid, 2012; Yip et al., 2024; Nigar, 2024), experience, and English language proficiency, forcing them into unskilled work and a "drop" in social status (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Colic-Peisker, 2005; Dryden & Dovchin, 2022). Reflecting on his diminished professional status, Quang nostalgically stated, "I do not get as much compared to what I felt when I was in Vietnam". After 11 years in Australia, Oksana lamented her inability to regain her professional status she held in Russia:

> I sacrificed my academic career by coming here, and I regret this. Now, my husband regrets coming here as well because he sacrificed his professional life. Moreover, this sacrifice was for nothing. We desperately want to go back to Europe, but our children grew up here and did not want to move, so we will wait until they grow up, and then we will be free to go home. (Oksana)

Despite these challenges, Oksana demonstrated an organic hybrid consciousness, acknowledging, "My casual English has developed a lot in daily communication." She also exercised agency through intentional hybridity, critically reflecting on her experiences and pursuing professional learning and volunteering opportunities, including participating in this study (see Nigar, 2024). She shared,

> I came to Australia on a student visa, graduated from two universities here and am still studying at Sydney Uni (in my last two years of a part-time PhD candidacy)." In 2012, she secured a permanent contract as a high school preparation teacher in Sydney College of English and noted, "Job interviews were easy and were conducted in the most relaxing and friendly atmosphere. I loved the people who interviewed me and they liked me, too, as I got the jobs I applied to. (Oksana)

Similar to Colic-Peisker's (2005) study on European immigrants in Australia, these teachers experienced the symbolic violence of a forcible status translation, shifting from "hero to zero" (Dovchin & Dryden, 2022, p. 365). However, for Oksana, her "Europeanness" offered no "emotional compensation for the loss of status" (Colic-Peisker, 2005, p. 622). Instead, she navigated her professional identity through tertiary hybridity, integrating professional practices and ongoing identity development as a continuous process shaped by a cosmopolitan imagination (Nigar, 2024).

Reconstituting Professional Identity

Reconstituting a professional identity in Australia was an arduous, often demoralizing journey. After migrating, many IETs faced significant barriers to re-entering their profession, with delays ranging from several months (Becca and Hien) to years (Natalie, Janaki, and Quoc) to over a decade (Jigna). Struggling to find jobs of a similar status to their white, native-speaking counterparts, they were forced into low-wage work, often without proper rights. They were consistently misrecognized as deficient English speakers and inferior teachers, leading to the devaluation of their qualifications and experience (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007; Miller, 2008; Nigar, 2024). This mirrors Colic-Peisker's (2005) findings where highly educated immigrants were relegated to "semi-skilled and unskilled jobs" (p. 629). These teachers worked in hospitality, cleaning, childcare, aged care, call centres, taxis, and community services, and this experience in exploitative industries damaged their professional identity, self-esteem, and spirit. Raphael, who arrived forty years ago, reminisced:

> In those days, I wanted a job. It did not matter what job I did… I went and applied for a job as a train conductor … my first job in Melbourne…I was willing to do some very, very low-paid work. I was studying and playing music, making a living. I was a taxi driver for ten years. (Raphael)

However, Raphael critically reflected on these experiences and pursued teacher education in EAL and music while building a career in the adult migrant sector. This dialogic trajectory resonated with his lived experiences across time, space, bodies, and relational connections as a migrant, as well as his deep bond with his refugee Jewish mother (Nigar, 2024).

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Other teachers shared similar stories of struggle. Becca worked "temporary gigs" in hospitality for seven years. Frida felt "discouraged" after working internationally "since graduating from university", while a lack of Australian experience prompted Mandy to "apply for any kind of job." Mahati's work in a grocery shop remains a nightmare she calls "the worst time of my life," and Natalie endured racial insults at a call centre. Some, like Natalie, Frida, and Janaki, were misrecognized as refugees and directed towards inappropriate skills programs. In the absence of systemic support (Nigar, 2024), some teachers took the initiative. They sought information on student loans like FEE-HELP or HECS-HELP (Study Assist Australian Government, 2022), self-funded short courses (Frida, Natalie, and Laura), built networks, navigated cultural norms (Hall, 1990) and gained experience through volunteer teaching.

Despite systemic and discursive barriers, these IETs sustained their "desire" for English, reconstituting their professional identities by hybridizing their practices and consciousness (Nigar et al., 2024a, 2024b, 2024c). Concurrently, they navigated feelings of inferiority, fear, and self-marginalization, particularly early-career teachers. Nevertheless, they persevered through this contextual ambivalence to find their place in the educational landscape (Nigar, 2024).

Increased Systemic Barriers to Professional Transition

Most teachers found it difficult to locate English language programs, accreditation bodies, and further qualifications. Some chose the wrong program, which delayed their professional transition to a stable job. Oksana and Quang completed the Master of Applied Linguistics (MAppLing) before their teacher education course, while Natalie rejected such offers in favour of MAppLing. Misinformation deterred teachers from pursuing English language teaching. Natalie was mocked and discouraged from pursuing teaching English in Australia because "it's in fact ridiculous to teach English as an NNEST in Australia". Even one of her Master of Applied Linguistics academics in Melbourne steered her toward teaching adult migrants in TAFEs or community centres, while her NEST peers were aligned with ELICOS in a prestigious university-affiliated language centre, the university pathway programs. Janaki similarly noted, "A friend of mine took me to meet an EAL teacher and she told me I would find it hard to find work." Thi confessed, "I couldn't even differentiate between these work sectors, so how could I know where to look for work?" The poor systemic support for these teachers resulted in a prolonged professional transition, identity formation, emotional and psychological toll and even self-marginalization in some cases (Cruickshank, 2022; Yip, 2023; Nigar et al. 2024b).

To succeed, Australian qualifications and experience were essential. Most teachers had to complete multiple qualifications to meet industry-specific requirements. Despite fulfilling these criteria, Oksana, Jigna, Natalie, and Quang faced unemployment but refused to give up. Instead, they adopted innovative strategies, explored alternative avenues for professional identity development, and pursued sector-specific courses like ELICOS. They also familiarized themselves with Australian job-seeking protocols, including resume writing and selection criteria. Jasha recalled the challenges of the 1990s: "… it was quite a pain in the neck to try to explain what my degree is about … 'A teacher of English.'" To teach English in Australia, they all needed a postgraduate degree or certificate. Mahati shared her experience:

> After I completed my initial teacher education, I learned to write a resume and how to address the selection criteria, but when I did that, I didn't get a single response. Not even a call for an interview! I was told (by other family friends) to go to Centrelink and tell them that I needed a job and help with my resume. (Mahati)

This underscores the systemic barriers driven by ASE and its monologic principles of language, culture, values, knowledge, and identity that immigrant teachers face when transitioning to professional roles in Australia (Yip, 2023; Nigar, 2024; Nigar et al., 2024b; Dwyer et al., 2024). Despite their qualifications and efforts to meet local requirements, they encountered significant challenges in achieving recognition and securing employment, highlighting the need for greater support and resources to navigate professional pathways and the job market.

Mature immigrant teachers pursuing Australia-specific teaching qualifications faced different kinds of significant difficulties in their studies and transitioning between TESOL sectors. Except for Ling Ling, all the teachers were mature students. Similar to other immigrant teachers (Cruickshank, 2022), Natalie had her first child while working part-time and attending evening classes. Janaki, too, "did not drive … had a young family … worked part-time and attended evening classes at university to complete my Graduate Diploma in TESOL". Lacking family support, eight qualified immigrant schoolteachers in Australia were constrained to teaching EAL and English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) due to employment discrimination rooted in native-speakerism and native speaker saviourism and insufficient transitional support (Holliday, 2018; Nigar, 2024). This exclusion was shaped by intermingled discourses of native speaker saviourism and (neo-) liberal multiculturalism, which demand assimilation into dominant norms while disregarding their linguistic and cultural diversity (Nigar, 2024; Nigar et al., 2024b). They struggled to find other jobs, or found them challenging, as Mahati explains: "On my first teaching round (English) at … Secondary College[s] …, I was shocked that here I was, an Indian (with an Indian accent) teaching English to native speakers (I was teaching Year 7 and Year 9 students)". Despite attending job interviews for over a decade, Jigna was finally employed as a high school teacher, due to her lack of substantial Australian teaching experience. However, high school teaching has long been identified as a skilled shortage (Department of Education, 2022).

Some teachers, like Jigna, found it difficult to renew their teaching registration because they had to sit for the required English language test again, sometimes with increased requirements. This process negatively affected their professional identity at the intersection of pain, professional education and politics (Mirhosseini et al., 2025). Hamid (2016) observed that "work and migration impacts test-takers' lives and life chances" (p. 472). After meeting migration and higher education language requirements, they had to pass the English language test multiple times to meet the expected standards (NESA, 2017). When permitted, Janaki and Mahati had to prove that their higher education was conducted in English abroad to register as teachers in Australia. Other teachers, such as Quang, Jigna, and Laura, had to meet stringent English language requirements. Jigna, in particular, faced the challenge of passing English language tests to meet new teacher registration standards, which differed from the requirements of her initial teacher education entry at that time. She persisted and succeeded in achieving the necessary scores: "an Academic module with an overall score of 7.5, comprising the following skill areas":

Speaking – 8.0
Listening – 8.0
Reading – 7.0
Writing – 7.0 (VIT, 2022, para. 7)

Similar to findings in an Australian case study by Hamid et al. (2019), some teachers in this study experienced significant economic and psychological costs due to repeated IELTS failures. These strict gatekeeping mechanisms for overseas teachers negatively impacted NNESTs' professional identity and morale, echoing findings from other studies on immigrant non-native professionals (Jensen et al., 2011; Van Ngo & Este, 2006).

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Despite meeting country-specific criteria, most immigrant teachers found it harder to find employment in mainstream schools and the ELICOS sector than in the TAFE/community sector (see Nigar et al., 2024b). Almost all made a sector switch, much like the Australian qualified schoolteachers (e.g., Jigna, Jasha, Mahati, Janaki) who taught English to adult migrants in TAFE. Although they were relationally "othered" in professional contexts, these teachers critically reflected, exercised, and amplified their agency. They practiced, reconceived their identity, underwent "hybrid professional becoming", and envisioned themselves as cosmopolitan English teachers.

Overall, the process of migration distinctly influenced IETs' professional identity at both discursive and intersectional levels. Monologic Discourses of "othering" shaped the relationships between self and other, dictating exclusion and resistance. The data show that they were often literally and metaphorically read as *texts*, subject to Australia's monolingual monocultural, and standardized socio-cultural and professional practices. This so-called "epistemic violence" (Spivak, 1988) left their sense of self and professional identity unrecognized, ignored, and depreciated, undermining their cultural identity. Migration amplified the "plight of the 'burnt ones', the destitute others who have been displaced from their homelands" through cultural transformation of the 'Other' (Papastergiadis, 2013, p. 2). Despite these myriad challenges, including systemic barriers, cultural adaptation, and professional marginalization, immigrant IETs demonstrated agency, relationality and fluidity in reconstituting their professional identities. They navigated new educational and professional landscapes, often at great personal and economic cost, to fulfill their aspirations. Their journeys highlight the need for more inclusive policies and support systems to recognize and value the diverse experiences and qualifications of immigrant teachers, ultimately enriching the educational landscape of Australia (Nigar, 2024; Nigar et al., 2024a, 2024b, 2024c). Educational institutions should prioritize cultural competency, focusing on Indigenous knowledges and intersectional understandings of diversity and equity, while systematically documenting and critically analyzing to support non-White teachers, address systemic barriers, and implement inclusive policies for their retention and professional development, and empowerment (Faez, 2018; Dwyer et al., 2024).

Discussion: The Relational Self in Migration

This study highlights how IETs in Australia reconstitute their professional identities amidst systemic barriers and power relations shaped by native-speakerist ideologies and monologic constructs of language and culture. Drawing on Bakhtin's (1981) concept of hybrid consciousness and dialogism, the analysis reveals that IETs resist marginalization and navigate professional challenges by employing organic and intentional hybridity, demonstrating agency in overcoming exclusionary binaries of self and Other (Butler, 1986; Hegel, 1977). Hybrid consciousness, as a double-accented awareness, emerges through the interplay of competing voices that challenge dominant discourses, enabling IETs to negotiate their lived experiences across time, space, and relationships.

Bakhtin's (1981) notion of hybrid consciousness provides a critical lens for understanding how IETs reconcile their transnational histories with the realities of migration. This dialogic process occurs through two interconnected mechanisms—organic and intentional hybridity. Organic hybridity reflects the subconscious blending of cultural and professional practices over time, allowing IETs to adapt to new educational contexts. For instance, Becca's reflections on her pursuit of English fluency—"I carried a dictionary everywhere… I would read every sign, leaflet, or book, avoiding Slovak as much as I could"—demonstrate how organic hybridity subtly reshaped her linguistic and professional identity. Similarly, Mahati's narrative of "the worst time of my life" during settlement captures her initial struggles with

embodied "otherness." Over time, her teaching experiences across India, Uganda, and Australia organically enriched her intercultural practice, enabling her to transcend rigid binaries of native/non-native.

In contrast, intentional hybridity involves deliberate and agentive actions to resist essentialized expectations and reclaim professional legitimacy. Becca's decision to pursue a Master of TESOL, despite her fears—"Will my English be good enough? Am I qualified to teach it?"—exemplifies this critical resistance. Her conscious engagement with formal education, volunteer teaching, and cultural immersion reflects a dialogic negotiation of identity that directly challenges native-speakerist ideologies (Kostogriz & Doecke, 2007). Similarly, Quang's repeated attempts to meet stringent IELTS requirements highlight intentional hybridity as a strategic response to systemic exclusion. His reflections—"These practicums were the first steps in helping me realize I was not an inferior but an equal practitioner"—underscore how intentional hybridity fosters agency and professional reconstitution despite structural constraints.

The systemic barriers encountered by IETs are deeply embedded in power relations that position them as "Other" based on race, linguistic background, and cultural differences. Structural mechanisms such as VIT registration, English language proficiency requirements, and prolonged practicum mandates reinforce the monologic regulation of SAE, perpetuating epistemic violence (Spivak, 1988). Jasha's struggles in the 1990s—"…it was quite a pain to explain what my degree is about… A teacher of English"—illustrate how these exclusionary processes delegitimize IETs' qualifications and lived experiences. Similarly, Oksana laments, "I sacrificed my academic career by coming here… and it was for nothing", reflecting the emotional and professional toll of systemic misrecognition.

Nevertheless, through dialogic resistance, IETs challenge the binaries of self and Other and embrace hybrid consciousness to reconstitute their professional identities. According to Kostogriz (2002), identity emerges through interactions with others, enabling "new selves to emerge". This is evident in Mahati's internal and external dialogues of "otherness," where her rich transnational teaching repertoire allows her to critically respond to systemic categorization. As Bakhtin (1981) articulates, dialogue involves *the coexistence of socio-ideological contradictions*, where past, present, and future experiences converge to form new meanings. For IETs, this dialogic interplay enables them to transcend marginal positions, as exemplified by Becca and Quang, who consciously reimagine themselves as cosmopolitan educators through reflective and agentive practices. Their deep, personal understanding of navigating different cultural contexts enable them to create the kind of student-centered, engaging, and supportive classrooms that help all students thrive, echoed in research by Bicer et al. (2020) and Tran et al. (2024).

The concept of hybrid consciousness also reveals the transformative potential of IETs' transnational experiences in challenging native-speakerist ideologies and enriching the educational landscape. Their ability to integrate diverse linguistic and cultural practices underscores the value of their multilingual expertise. Yet, systemic exclusion persists, as seen in Quang's frustration with repeated IELTS requirements—"We've proven we can communicate… so why do we have to sit for the test again?"—which highlights the racialized and monologic underpinnings of language policies (Shuck, 2006; Dryden & Dovchin, 2022). Such gatekeeping mechanisms reinforce structural inequities, positioning IETs in marginal roles despite their qualifications and global perspectives.

The study underscores the need for systemic reforms to recognize and support IETs as legitimate professionals. Inclusive policies that value diverse varieties of English, provide targeted professional development, and address discriminatory hiring practices are essential for fostering an equitable educational environment. Recognizing IETs as hybrid professionals with transcultural expertise challenges monologic constructs of professionalism and embraces

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dialogic coexistence, thereby enriching multilingual education. By leveraging hybrid consciousness, IETs demonstrate the agency to resist exclusionary norms, reimagine their professional roles, and contribute to a more inclusive educational landscape.

Holistically, this analysis highlights how IETs' journeys reflect a dynamic negotiation of identity shaped by dialogic exchanges and hybrid consciousness. Their experiences illustrate the complexities of professional identity reconstitution within power-laden contexts of migration and native-speakerism. By embracing hybridity—both organic and intentional—IETs resist misrecognition and assert themselves as cosmopolitan educators capable of transcending systemic barriers. Recognizing their contributions is crucial for addressing Australia's teacher shortage, fostering equity, and advancing intercultural education. The study advocates for dialogic encounters that normalize coexistence, ensuring that IETs are valued as legitimate teachers whose lived experiences and hybrid identities enrich educational practice both locally and globally.

Way Forward

This study explores how IETs in Australia navigate systemic barriers and power dynamics, reconstituting their professional identities amidst native-speakerist ideologies and monologic views of language and culture (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007; Nigar & Kostogriz, 2019; Yip et al., 2024; Yip, 2023; Dwyer et al., 2024; Nigar, 2024; Nigar et al., 2024b, 2024c). Their lived experiences highlight the urgent need for inclusive policies that recognize IETs as legitimate, hybrid professionals whose transcultural and multilingual expertise enriches Australia's educational landscape while addressing teacher shortages and retention issues (see Nigar et al., 2024a, 2024b).

Drawing on Bakhtin's (1981) concept of hybrid consciousness, the findings illustrate how IETs engage in *dialogic encounters* where competing voices, histories, and linguistic awareness intersect. As Bakhtin (1981b) states, identity formation emerges through "a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance… within two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated… by social differentiation" (p. 358). Ling Ling's reflection— "I'm not a proper English teacher, nor a language teacher"—epitomizes this double-accented hybrid consciousness, revealing both the tensions and opportunities inherent in negotiating the binaries of nativeness and non-nativeness. Aligned with Levinas's (1987) notion of ethical responsibility to the Other, the study urges educators and policymakers to transcend assimilationist paradigms. The Other's *alterity* embodies a "surplus of vision" (Bakhtin), requiring ethical engagement that avoids erasure or reduction to sameness. As Kostogriz and Doecke (2007, p. 1) contend, dialogical ethics demand a transformation of educational spaces into arenas of *mutual recognition*, where IETs' contributions are valued and transformative encounters foster normalized coexistence.

The findings highlight four systemic challenges and offer practical solutions to address workforce inequities and inclusion:

Lack of Workforce Diversity

Despite Australia's multicultural demographics, IETs represent only 10% of the teaching workforce (Thomson & Hillman, 2019).

Solutions

- ✓ Collect workforce data on INNESTs.
- ✓ Offer scholarships and create pathways for teacher education.

- ✓ Establish transnational agreements for teacher training equivalency.

Lengthy Transition into Teaching

Bureaucratic hurdles delay IETs' professional entry and force many into underemployment.

Solutions

- ✓ Ensure consistency in eligibility and English language requirement criteria across state teacher registration boards and the migration assessment body, AITSL.
- ✓ Streamline visa processing, registration pathways, and qualification recognition.
- ✓ Develop on-arrival job-readiness programs to support immediate integration.
- ✓ Implement blind recruitment practices to minimize biases.
- ✓ Exempt specific supervised practicum requirements for experienced teachers and/or place them directly in schools to meet the requirements.

Discriminatory Language Requirements

Linguistic tests disproportionately target NNES IETs compared to NES IETs, while exempting native speakers from BANA countries.

Solutions

- ✓ Replace test requirements for English-educated and/or English teaching experienced candidates with qualitative interviews led by culturally and linguistically competent educators.
- ✓ Eliminate test requirements for English-educated candidates, using qualitative interviews conducted by interculturally experienced teachers.
- ✓ Promote Global Englishes as legitimate linguistic models.
- ✓ Provide intercultural training for staff and students.

Lack of Information and Support

IETs often lack clear guidance, mentorship, and stable employment opportunities.

Solutions

- ✓ Develop mentorship programs connecting IETs with experienced educators.
- ✓ Centralize accessible platforms for professional information.
- ✓ Ensure permanent teaching contracts to secure professional stability.

Overall, this study challenges entrenched native-speakerist ideologies that marginalize IETs as the "Other," instead advocating for their recognition as hybrid professionals who embody dynamic, transcultural identities. By fostering dialogical ethics (Kostogriz & Doecke, 2007), educational institutions can reimagine classrooms as spaces of mutual recognition, where linguistic and cultural diversity is valued as a resource rather than framed as a deficit. Beyond education, these findings hold broader significance for immigrant professionals across sectors, as dismantling systemic barriers through inclusive policies can ensure diverse expertise is both recognized and harnessed for societal progress.

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In today's culturally superdiverse educational landscape, engaging with IETs' hybrid consciousness emerges as a precondition for ethical professional becoming. Drawing on Bakhtin's (1981) concept of dialogism and Levinas's (1987) ethics of responsibility, educators and policymakers are urged to embrace the Other's *alterity* and *surplus of vision* (expanded perspective). Moving beyond practices of rejection and assimilation, transformative dialogic encounters—where languages, cultures, and histories interact—can foster relational coexistence, empowering IETs to negotiate their professional identities freely. Such recognition not only addresses Australia's teacher shortage but also contributes to building a more equitable, inclusive, and globally responsive education system.

Finally, valuing IETs' hybrid contributions and ethical alterity enriches intercultural discourse, paving the way for collective growth and shared transformation in English language education and beyond.

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