

From Language Teacher to Educational Manager: Professional Identity and Neoliberalism in Japan's English Education Industry

Palmer Attias

Department of Curriculum and Teaching, University of Kansas, United States

E-mail: palmerattias@ku.edu, <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-4853-7140>

Cite this article as: Attias, P. (2026). From Language Teacher to Educational Manager: Professional Identity and Neoliberalism in Japan's English Education Industry. *International Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 5(1), 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.33422/ijsfle.v5i1.1461>

Abstract

This study examines how a long-term foreign educator in Japan narrates his professional transition from classroom teaching to educational management within the English language education industry. Drawing on a critical narrative case study approach, the study explores how professional legitimacy, educational commodification, and foreignness were experienced and interpreted across a thirty-five-year career. Data were collected through a semi-structured interview and analyzed using thematic analysis within a narrative inquiry framework. Findings revealed a broader professional legitimacy narrative characterized by five interconnected themes: Escaping the ALT Identity, Becoming a Professional, Education as Product, The Foreigner as Commodity, and Belonging Without Membership. Viewed through the lenses of neoliberalism, critical pedagogy, and Bourdieu's theory of capital, the findings suggest that educational work in Japan increasingly intersects with market-oriented priorities while professional legitimacy remains shaped by nationality, institutional recognition, and social belonging. The study contributes to discussions of professional identity, teacher agency, and neoliberalism in English language education.

Keywords: Professional Identity, Neoliberalism, Narrative Inquiry, Teacher Agency, English Language Education

1. Introduction

Japan's English education industry has expanded considerably over the past several decades in response to increasing demand for English proficiency, internationalization, and global competitiveness (Kanno, 2003; Kubota, 2011). This expansion has created a diverse educational marketplace that includes public school English programs, private language schools, English-medium educational initiatives, and a growing number of educational service providers. Within these settings, educators increasingly occupy professional roles that extend beyond classroom teaching and include curriculum implementation, teacher supervision, sales, client relations, and organizational management.

Scholars have argued that these developments reflect broader neoliberal transformations occurring across educational systems worldwide (Apple, 2012; Ball, 2012; Giroux, 2014). Under neoliberal educational reforms, schools and educational organizations increasingly operate according to market principles emphasizing competition, accountability, efficiency, and consumer choice. As a result, educational work often extends beyond teaching and learning to encompass responsibilities for organizational growth, branding, customer satisfaction, and market performance. Within English language education, these transformations are particularly visible because English itself is frequently positioned as a valuable form of cultural and economic capital linked to social mobility and global opportunity (Kubota, 2011; Pennycook, 1994, 2007).

One consequence of these developments has been the increasing commodification of educational services. Educational programs, scripted/prepackaged curricula, credentials, and institutional identities are marketed to students, parents, schools, and communities as products that deliver measurable outcomes and future global opportunities (Apple, 2012; Ball, 2012). Within Japan's English education industry, teachers may therefore find themselves navigating roles that blur the boundaries between education and business. Responsibilities associated with sales, management, recruitment, customer relations, and organizational accountability increasingly intersect with more traditional understandings of teaching and learning.

At the same time, professional identity in English language education is shaped by factors that extend beyond institutional roles and responsibilities. Questions of legitimacy, authority, nationality, language background, and foreignness continue to influence how educators are perceived and valued within educational organizations (Holliday, 2006; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Pennycook, 2008). For foreign educators working in Japan, professional advancement may involve negotiating both organizational expectations and broader social assumptions concerning expertise, authenticity, and belonging.

Recent scholarship has further demonstrated how English functions as a form of linguistic and economic capital within Japan's increasingly competitive educational marketplace. Educational reforms, English-medium programs, and private language education pathways have expanded opportunities for some learners while simultaneously reinforcing existing social and economic inequalities (Smith, 2021, 2022). Similarly, Kubota and Takeda (2021) argue that Japan's globalization agenda frequently promotes a neoliberal vision of English communication competence that privileges market-oriented language skills over more complex multilingual realities. Within international schooling, English-medium education is increasingly marketed as a premium educational product associated with global mobility, elite university access, and future professional success (Tanu, 2017).

Although scholars have examined neoliberal educational reform, teacher identity, and English language education separately, less attention has been paid to how educators themselves

experience and interpret these processes over the course of their careers in the context of Japanese English education. Understanding these experiences is particularly important because professional identities are not simply shaped by institutional structures; they are actively constructed, negotiated, and narrated through lived experience (Beijaard et al., 2004; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

This study examines the narrative of a long-term foreign educator working in Japan's English education industry who has occupied positions as an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT), university instructor, teacher trainer, educational consultant, and educational manager. Through a critical narrative case study approach, the research explores how he experienced and interpreted his transition from classroom teaching to educational management. His story provides a unique lens through which to examine broader questions concerning professional legitimacy, educational commodification, foreignness, and belonging in contemporary English-language education.

Rather than viewing the participant's experiences as isolated or purely personal, this study positions his narrative within broader discussions concerning neoliberalism, professional identity, and educational reform (Apple, 2012; Ball, 2012; Bourdieu, 1986; Giroux, 2014). Across his career, teaching increasingly intersected with sales, management, organizational leadership, and customer relations. Simultaneously, his narrative illustrates how professional legitimacy was shaped by experience, age, nationality, and perceptions of foreignness within educational institutions (Bourdieu, 1986; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Holliday, 2006).

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, it seeks to understand how one educator narrates his professional transition from classroom teaching to educational management. Second, it examines how broader neoliberal forces become visible through that narrative. By connecting individual experience to structural conditions, the study contributes to discussions of teacher agency, professional legitimacy, educational commodification, and identity within Japan's English education industry.

The following research questions guide this study:

- RQ1: How does a long-term foreign educator in Japan narrate his transition from classroom teaching to educational management?
- RQ2: How are neoliberal educational logics reflected in the participant's experiences across different professional roles?
- RQ3: How does the participant construct and negotiate professional and cultural identities throughout his career in Japan?

Although centered on a single participant, this study is not intended to provide a general account of all educators working in Japan's English-language education sector. Rather, it uses one educator's narrative as a lens through which to examine broader issues of neoliberalism,

professional identity, and educational commodification. By connecting lived experience to larger structural and ideological processes, the study contributes to ongoing conversations concerning the changing nature of educational work in an increasingly marketized environment. To contextualize these issues, the following literature review examines scholarship on neoliberal educational reform, the commodification of education, and the construction of teachers' professional identity.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Neoliberalism and Education

Neoliberalism has become one of the dominant frameworks for understanding educational reform across the globe. Although definitions vary, neoliberalism generally refers to a political and economic ideology that prioritizes market competition, privatization, accountability, efficiency, and consumer choice (Ball, 2012). Within education, neoliberal reforms often emphasize measurable outcomes, standardization, competition among schools, and the treatment of education as a market commodity rather than a public good (Apple, 2012).

Ball (2012) argues that neoliberal reforms have fundamentally altered educational systems by introducing market mechanisms into schooling. Schools increasingly compete for enrollment, teachers are evaluated through performance metrics, and educational success is measured through quantifiable outcomes. In this environment, educational institutions become businesses responsible for producing measurable results while simultaneously satisfying consumer demands.

Similarly, Giroux (2014) argues that neoliberalism reshapes educational institutions according to corporate values. Rather than serving democratic purposes, schools become sites of workforce preparation and economic production. Educational practices increasingly reflect concerns with efficiency, accountability, and profitability rather than critical thinking or social transformation.

Within English as a medium of instruction (EMI) education for example, neoliberal reforms are particularly visible (Bunnell, 2016). EMI schools frequently market themselves by promising global citizenship, elite educational opportunities, and pathways to prestigious universities. As Bunnell (2016) suggests, the global expansion of international schools reflects broader economic and social processes in which education becomes a desirable commodity purchased by families seeking competitive advantages for their children through English language education.

2.2. Commodification and Educational Markets

The commodification of education refers to the process through which educational experiences, credentials, curricula, and identities become products that can be bought, sold, and marketed (Apple, 2012). Educational institutions increasingly rely on branding strategies designed to differentiate themselves within competitive markets. According to Tanu (2017), in growing international school contexts, English-medium instruction, international curricula, and global citizenship narratives often function as forms of commodified symbolic capital marketed as enhanced institutional value.

Apple (2012) argues that commodification transforms relationships between teachers, students, and schools. Teachers become service providers, students become consumers, and schools become businesses responsible for delivering educational products. Educational quality is increasingly defined through market measures rather than pedagogical considerations.

This process is particularly relevant in Japan's English education industry. The growth of private language schools, international schools, and English-medium programs reflects a broader demand for English as a form of economic and cultural capital (Matsumoto, 2023). English proficiency is often linked to global mobility, career advancement, and access to elite educational opportunities. As a result, English education becomes both an educational service and a commercial product (Hiratsuka, 2023).

Research has demonstrated that educational institutions frequently market English-medium programs using discourses of global citizenship, internationalism, and future success (Cho et al., 2022; Tanu, 2017). Such narratives position English not simply as a language but as a gateway to participation in global communities. Consequently, educational programs become closely connected to consumer desires and aspirations that aspire to replicate those of "native English speakers" (Cho et al., 2022; Kubota, 2011).

2.3. Native Speakerism, Raciolinguistics, and Professional Legitimacy

Professional identity within English language education is influenced not only by experience, training, and institutional position but also by broader ideologies surrounding language, race, and legitimacy. Holliday (2006) defines native speakerism as the belief that native speakers of English represent the ideal language user and teacher. Within English language education, this ideology often privileges teachers associated with Inner Circle English-speaking countries while positioning other educators as less authentic, regardless of their qualifications or pedagogical expertise (Holliday, 2006; Kachru, 1985). Pennycook (2008, 2010) argues that such assumptions cannot be separated from the historical expansion of English and the unequal power relations that accompanied it. As a result, professional legitimacy in English-language education is often tied to nationality, linguistic background, and cultural identity rather than to teaching ability alone.

Recent scholarship has also highlighted the complex positioning of ALTs within Japan's English education system. Kobayashi (2023) argues that contemporary ALT policies continue to privilege native-speaker legitimacy while simultaneously relying upon a workforce of privately dispatched ALTs employed under less secure conditions. Similarly, Hiratsuka (2022, 2023) demonstrates how ALT and Japanese teacher identities are shaped through unequal institutional expectations, while Otani (2023) identifies persistent tensions between official discourses of internationalization and the realities of everyday school practice. Together, these studies suggest that questions of legitimacy, professional recognition, and institutional hierarchy remain central to understanding foreign educators' experiences in Japan.

Raciolinguistic theory extends these critiques by examining how language ideologies intersect with racialized perceptions of speakers. Flores and Rosa (2015) argue that language users are evaluated through racialized listening practices in which listeners interpret speech through assumptions about race, language, and belonging. From this perspective, perceptions of competence and authority are shaped not only by linguistic ability but also by broader social expectations about who is considered a legitimate speaker of English. Such dynamics are particularly relevant in international and English-language education contexts, where foreign educators often occupy highly visible roles. Native speakerism and raciolinguistics, therefore, provide useful lenses for understanding how professional legitimacy, authority, and recognition are constructed and negotiated within English education settings.

2.4. Teacher Agency and Professional Identity

Teacher agency refers to the capacity of educators to make informed professional decisions regarding curriculum, instruction, and classroom practice (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015). Agency is often viewed as a fundamental component of professional teaching because it allows educators to adapt instruction to local contexts and student needs.

However, neoliberal reforms frequently constrain teacher agency through increased standardization, accountability measures, and scripted curricula (Apple, 2012; Ball, 2012; Priestley et al., 2015). Teachers may find themselves responsible for implementing externally developed programs rather than designing instruction based on professional judgment. Critics argue that such developments contribute to the deskilling of educators and reduce opportunities for meaningful professional autonomy (Apple, 2012; Eisner, 2002; Greene, 1995).

Professional identity is similarly shaped by institutional structures and social expectations. Teachers continuously negotiate understandings of who they are as professionals in relation to colleagues, institutions, and broader social discourses. Research suggests that professional identity is influenced by factors including experience, organizational culture, status, and recognition (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004).

In EMI education contexts, professional identity may be further complicated by issues of nationality, language, and race. Foreign educators often navigate expectations associated with native-speakerism, cultural authenticity, and institutional representations of internationalism (Holliday, 2006). These dynamics make educational settings particularly valuable sites for exploring the construction of professional identity.

3. Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by critical pedagogy, theories of neoliberal educational reform, and Bourdieu's concept of capital. Together, these perspectives provide a framework for understanding how professional identities are shaped by broader institutional and social forces. Critical pedagogy views education as a social and political process and draws attention to tensions between educational values and market-oriented priorities (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2014). Neoliberal perspectives highlight how educational institutions increasingly operate according to principles of competition, accountability, efficiency, and consumer choice (Apple, 2012; Ball, 2012). These frameworks are particularly useful for examining the participant's experiences as he moved from classroom teaching into educational management within a private English education organization.

The study also draws upon Bourdieu's (1986) concept of capital to examine how professional legitimacy and authority are constructed. Bourdieu argues that access to status and recognition is influenced by the accumulation of cultural, social, and symbolic capital. This perspective provides a useful lens for understanding how age, experience, professional networks, nationality, and foreignness shaped the participant's career trajectory. Together, these theoretical perspectives allow the participant's narrative to be interpreted not simply as an individual story but as a reflection of broader educational, institutional, and ideological processes (Apple, 2012; Bourdieu, 1986; Giroux, 2014).

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This study employed a critical narrative case study design to explore how one long-term foreign educator in Japan constructed and interpreted his professional experiences across multiple roles within the English language education industry. Narrative inquiry is concerned with the ways individuals make sense of experience through storytelling and how those stories reveal broader social, cultural, historical, and institutional realities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Rather than treating experiences as isolated events, narrative inquiry recognizes that people organize and communicate meaning through stories that connect past experiences, present circumstances, and future aspirations (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008; Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

Narrative inquiry was particularly appropriate for this study because professional identity is often constructed and communicated through narrative (Riessman, 2008). Career trajectories are rarely experienced as a series of disconnected events. Instead, individuals develop stories that explain transitions, successes, challenges, and turning points across time (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Examining these narratives provides insight into how identities are negotiated and how larger social structures shape individual experiences. In this study, narrative inquiry provided a means of exploring not only what the participant experienced but also how he interpreted and assigned meaning to those experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008).

The study adopted a critical orientation by situating the participant's narrative within broader discussions concerning neoliberalism, educational commodification, professional legitimacy, and identity construction (Apple, 2012; Ball, 2012; Bourdieu, 1986; Giroux, 2014). Rather than treating the participant's experiences as purely personal or individual, the analysis examined how larger institutional and ideological forces became visible through his account (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). This approach is consistent with critical narrative scholarship that seeks to connect personal stories to broader systems of power, inequality, and social organization (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2014; Riessman, 2008).

4.2. Participant

The participant, referred to by the culturally appropriate pseudonym Daniel, is a 58-year-old Canadian educator who has lived and worked in Japan for approximately thirty-seven years. During this period, he has held a wide range of professional positions, including public school Assistant Language Teacher (ALT), private school homeroom teacher/ALT, university instructor, corporate trainer, educational consultant, ALT teacher trainer, and, currently, educational sales manager for a large Tokyo-based education company.

Daniel's extensive experience across multiple sectors of Japan's English-language education industry made him a particularly informative participant. As a result, his experiences provide a unique perspective on the intersections between education, management, professionalism, and market-oriented reforms within English language education.

The participant was selected through purposive sampling at a large Tokyo-based education consulting company known to the researcher. Narrative inquiry emphasizes depth and richness of experience rather than statistical representation (Riessman, 2008). Daniel was selected because of his extensive professional history, his experience holding multiple educational roles, and his ability to reflect critically on the changes he had observed throughout his career in English-language education in Japan.

4.3. Data Collection

Data was collected through a semi-structured interview lasting approximately one hour at a Tokyo café near Daniel's office. The interview was designed to encourage detailed reflection on the participant's educational and professional experiences across different stages of his career. Questions focused on professional transitions, experiences teaching in Japan, perceptions of professionalism, educational management responsibilities, relationships with schools and teachers, and reflections on identity and belonging.

The semi-structured format provided flexibility to explore emerging topics while maintaining consistency across major areas of inquiry. Follow-up questions were used to clarify experiences, encourage elaboration, and explore significant events in greater depth. This approach allowed the participant to construct his narrative in his own words while ensuring that topics relevant to the research questions were addressed (Seidman, 2019). The interview was conducted in English, audio recorded with the participant's consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

4.4. Data Analysis

The analysis employed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) within a narrative inquiry framework. While thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and meanings, attention remained focused on preserving the coherence of the participant's overall narrative rather than fragmenting the story into disconnected codes.

Analysis began with repeated readings of the transcript to facilitate familiarity with the data. During these readings, initial notes were recorded concerning significant events, recurring ideas, professional transitions, identity construction, perceptions of legitimacy, experiences of foreignness, and references to organizational culture (Maxwell, 2013).

Following familiarization, the transcript was coded inductively to identify recurring patterns and experiences. Codes were compared, revised, and grouped into broader conceptual categories through an iterative process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As analysis progressed, relationships among categories became increasingly visible, allowing themes to emerge from the participant's narrative. Throughout this process, emerging interpretations were continually compared against the transcript to ensure that themes remained grounded in the participant's account (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maxwell, 2013).

Table 1. Progression from individual excerpts to initial codes and broader thematic categories.

Participant Excerpt	Initial Code	Emergent Theme
“Getting the kids and team teachers to respect you as an outside teacher is a little more difficult.”	outsider teacher; lack of legitimacy	Escaping the ALT Identity
“I just sort of looked the part and fell into this position.”	professionalism; recognition	Becoming a Professional
“This role is more sales.”	marketization; commercialization	Education as Product
“They take pictures and put them on their websites.”	symbolic foreignness	The Foreigner as Commodity
“You're always going to be a foreign guy here.”	outsider status; belonging	Belonging Without Membership

For example, excerpts describing limited authority, outsider status, and difficulties establishing credibility as an ALT were initially coded as “outsider teacher,” “lack of legitimacy,” and “limited authority.” These codes were subsequently grouped into the broader theme Escaping the ALT Identity. Similarly, references to management responsibilities, client interactions, professional advancement, and organizational recognition were coded as “professional growth,” “management role,” and “institutional recognition,” which contributed to the theme Becoming a Professional. Throughout the analytic process, codes were continually refined, compared, and reorganized to ensure that emerging themes remained grounded in the participant's narrative while also reflecting broader patterns across the interview.

Five major themes ultimately emerged: (1) Escaping the ALT Identity, (2) Becoming a Professional, (3) Education as Product, (4) The Foreigner as Commodity, and (5) Belonging Without Membership (Table 1). These themes were not treated as isolated categories but as interconnected dimensions of a broader professional narrative concerning legitimacy, identity, and institutional recognition (Riessman, 2008; Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

Consistent with narrative inquiry, interpretation extended beyond identifying recurring topics to examining how the participant organized and made sense of his experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008; Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Attention was given to the ways Daniel positioned himself in relation to educational institutions, professional roles, organizational expectations, and broader social structures. The final themes were interpreted through the theoretical lenses of critical pedagogy, neoliberalism, and Bourdieu's concept of capital.

4.5. Trustworthiness

Several strategies were employed to enhance the study's trustworthiness. First, analytic memos were maintained throughout the coding and interpretation process. These memos documented emerging insights, thematic connections, and evolving interpretations of the participant's narrative. Second, the transcript was reviewed multiple times to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in the participant's words and experiences. Third, themes were continually compared against the full narrative to avoid decontextualizing individual excerpts or imposing interpretations unsupported by the data (Riessman, 2008; Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

Although the study relied on a single interview lasting approximately one hour, the interview generated a rich narrative account spanning nearly thirty-seven years of professional experience across multiple sectors of Japan's English-language education industry. Narrative inquiry prioritizes depth of experience and meaning-making over the quantity of interviews, making an information-rich case particularly valuable for exploring professional identity and career trajectories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). The participant's extensive career history provided detailed reflections on teaching, teacher training, educational management, sales, professional legitimacy, and belonging, producing sufficient data to address the study's research questions.

Follow-up interviews and member checking were initially considered but were not incorporated into the present study. While member checking is often recommended as a strategy for enhancing credibility, some qualitative scholars have questioned its appropriateness in studies employing critical interpretive frameworks. The present study examined the participant's experiences through critical perspectives informed by neoliberalism, native-speakerism, and raciolinguistic theory. As Kvale (2006) notes, "there are many emotional barriers for the interviewees to accept critical interpretations of what they have told the interviewer, as well as limitations of the subjects' competence to address specific theoretical interpretations" (p. 485). Therefore, the finding may extend beyond the participant's own understandings of his experiences and may have encouraged reconsideration of sensitive issues related to professional legitimacy, foreignness, privilege, native speakerism, and belonging rather than serving as a straightforward verbatim validation of the findings. Ultimately, credibility was supported through repeated engagement with the transcript, analytic memoing, reflexive practice, and the continual comparison of emerging interpretations against the participant's narrative account (Maxwell, 2013; Riessman, 2008).

4.6. Researcher Positionality

The researcher has professional experience in Japan's English-language education industry and therefore occupies a position of both familiarity with and proximity to the topic under investigation. This insider perspective provided contextual knowledge of educational

organizations, professional expectations, and institutional practices discussed throughout the interview (Maxwell, 2013). At the same time, this familiarity required ongoing reflexivity regarding potential assumptions and biases.

Rather than seeking to confirm predetermined conclusions regarding neoliberalism, professional identity, or international education, the researcher sought to remain attentive to the participant's own interpretations of his experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Reflexive engagement throughout the study helped ensure that analysis remained grounded in the participant's narrative while acknowledging the researcher's relationship to the field (Finlay, 2002).

4.7. Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, ethical approval for this study was obtained from the University of Kansas Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before the interview. The participant was informed of the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

To protect confidentiality, a culturally appropriate pseudonym was assigned, and identifying information about employers, colleagues, schools, and organizations was removed from transcripts and reports (Maxwell, 2013). Audio recordings and transcripts were stored on password-protected devices accessible only to the researcher. Care was taken to preserve organizational anonymity, given the participant's long history in Japan's English-language education industry.

5. Findings

Analysis of Daniel's narrative revealed what may be described as a professional-legitimacy narrative. Across the interview, Daniel consistently framed his career as a movement away from positions characterized by uncertainty, limited authority, and marginal professional status toward roles associated with recognition, responsibility, and institutional legitimacy. Rather than describing his professional journey simply as a series of job changes, Daniel constructed a story of advancement in which legitimacy was continually sought, negotiated, and redefined.

This narrative was shaped by both personal aspirations and broader institutional forces. As Daniel moved from ALT to educational manager, he encountered new forms of authority, responsibility, and professional recognition. At the same time, his experiences revealed tensions between educational values and commercial priorities, as well as the opportunities and constraints associated with being a long-term foreign educator in Japan. Throughout the interview, legitimacy was connected to age, experience, professionalism, organizational position, and cultural identity.

Five interconnected themes contributed to this broader professional legitimacy narrative: (1) Escaping the ALT Identity, (2) Becoming a Professional, (3) Education as Product, (4) The Foreigner as Commodity, and (5) Belonging Without Membership. Rather than existing as discrete categories, these themes represent overlapping dimensions of Daniel's understanding of his professional development and his place within Japan's English-language education industry. Together, they illustrate how professional authority, educational values, and cultural belonging were continually negotiated across different stages of his career.

5.1. Escaping the ALT Identity

The first theme illustrates how Daniel constructed the ALT position as a professional starting point rather than a long-term destination. Throughout the interview, he repeatedly positioned ALT work as a role characterized by uncertainty, limited authority, and restricted opportunities for advancement. In doing so, he framed subsequent career moves as efforts to obtain greater professional legitimacy and recognition.

Reflecting on his experiences in Japanese public schools as an ALT, Daniel described some placements as difficult and unpredictable environments:

"Some of the schools you would get stuck in sort of like that... some of the schools are really rough in the public schools. Students were throwing things at teachers, fights would break out, and there were days when you wondered whether you even wanted to be there. It could be a very difficult environment to work in."

The language of being "stuck" recurs throughout the narrative and is particularly revealing. Rather than portraying ALT work as a stable professional identity, Daniel constructed it as a temporary position from which one eventually seeks to move beyond. The role was associated with professional limitations rather than long-term growth, reinforcing the idea that career advancement required leaving the ALT position behind.

A recurring feature of Daniel's narrative involved the challenge of establishing legitimacy within Japanese schools. Unlike Japanese teachers whose authority appeared institutionally recognized, foreign educators were positioned as occupying a more uncertain professional space. As Daniel explained:

"Getting the kids and the team teachers to sort of respect you as an outside teacher is a little more difficult. Sometimes the students don't really see you as their teacher, and they don't always make a good connection with you."

Here, legitimacy was not presented as something automatically granted through position or title. Instead, it had to be earned through relationships, persistence, and demonstrated competence. Daniel further emphasized this point when discussing the expectations of new ALTs:

“As an outsider, you have to take time to build up relationships with the kids. Working in schools as an ALT is challenging. Inexperienced or younger ALTs may have difficulty with team teachers who may be less supportive. If you go in as an outsider expecting lots of good things to happen every day, that's not gonna happen. If you walk into the school, and you go, everybody's gonna be sunny and happy. It's sort of optimistic. You know, you quickly learn that that's not reality.”

These reflections and Daniel's frequent use of the term “outsider” reveal a professional role characterized by continual negotiation. Authority was neither immediate nor guaranteed. Rather, foreign teachers or “outsiders” were expected to establish credibility through ongoing interaction with students and school communities.

Taken together, Daniel's account of ALT work functioned as the starting point of a larger professional legitimacy narrative. The ALT role represented a position of limited authority and uncertain status, while later career transitions were constructed as attempts to move toward greater recognition, responsibility, and institutional legitimacy (Hiratsuka, 2023).

5.2. Becoming a Professional

The second theme illustrates how Daniel constructed professional advancement as a process of accumulating legitimacy, responsibility, and institutional recognition. Throughout the interview, management positions were consistently associated with maturity, expertise, and access to professional spaces unavailable during his earlier teaching career. Rather than portraying management as merely a promotion, Daniel framed it as evidence that he had become a legitimate professional in Japan's education sector.

A recurring element of this narrative involved age and maturity. Reflecting on how he obtained his first management role, Daniel explained:

“I just sort of looked the part and fell into this kind of position here, and the other guy left. and then, you know, I was sort of older. I was 27, so you know, when you go meet business clients and stuff, you can't send really young kids, so I just got lucky. That was sort of the change, and then basically I just learned from there as I went.”

This statement reveals that professionalism was not understood solely in terms of qualifications or teaching ability. Instead, legitimacy was associated with personal presentation, maturity, luck, and the ability to navigate professional relationships. Daniel repeatedly suggested that age allowed him to access opportunities that would have been unavailable earlier in his career.

As he moved into management, Daniel described entering social and professional worlds that symbolized increased status and recognition. Reflecting on his experiences working with major organizations, he recalled, “We had really high-end clients at that place where they held the

Tokyo Olympics and things like that.” Similarly, he reflected on attending events with influential individuals:

“The people you go out with seem like the people you see on the news. We would go to really nice restaurants with important people from schools and TV. I don't think regular ALTs would ever get a chance to do anything like that.”

These experiences served as symbolic markers of professional advancement. Daniel constructed these moments as evidence that he had moved beyond the margins of educational work and entered positions associated with influence, prestige, and organizational authority.

At the same time, Daniel did not abandon his identity as an educator. Instead, his narrative revealed an increasingly hybrid professional identity. At one point, he stated:

“When I'm at the office, I'm sort of different. Not a teacher. But when I'm teaching, of course, I still like teaching. I guess it becomes a different skill set. You move between different roles, but I still think of myself as a teacher.”

Yet later, he acknowledged, “Of course, I do like teaching. When the higher-ups send me out to cover a school, I think, I guess I still am one”. Rather than replacing one identity with another, Daniel described moving between multiple professional roles. His narrative suggests that professionalism involves integrating educational and managerial responsibilities rather than choosing between them. This hybrid identity became a central component of the broader narrative of professional legitimacy that ran throughout the interview.

5.3. Education as Product

A third theme concerned the increasing influence of market logics within educational organizations. Throughout the interview, Daniel repeatedly described educational work using the language of sales, products, contracts, and organizational performance. In doing so, he constructed education as something that was not only taught but also marketed, managed, and sold.

When discussing his management responsibilities, Daniel stated, “This role is more sales.” He later reinforced this observation, “They're always talking about sales. They go to their meetings, and it's just sales.” These comments suggest that Daniel perceived a significant shift in priorities as he moved into management. Educational concerns remained present, but they increasingly existed alongside commercial objectives. Rather than describing education and business as separate domains, Daniel portrayed them as deeply intertwined.

This tension became particularly visible when discussing his position within the organization, “It's not so much about education... it's sort of in the middle. “The phrase 'in the middle' captures a recurring theme throughout the interview. Daniel frequently positioned himself between competing priorities. On one hand, he remained committed to supporting teachers and

maintaining educational quality. On the other hand, he was required to consider organizational growth, client relationships, and financial outcomes.

Perhaps the most revealing example emerged when discussing teacher supervision, “The product, the quality of the product will go down if you can't make sure the teachers are doing a good job.” In this statement, teachers themselves become part of the product being delivered. Educational quality is framed in terms of quality control, customer satisfaction, and organizational performance. Daniel's narrative, therefore, illustrates how neoliberal logics become embedded within everyday educational practice.

At several points, Daniel expressed frustration with organizational priorities that appeared to privilege efficiency over educational support. Reflecting on upper management decisions, he observed, “They just want to keep cutting costs but sort of make more money.” By contrast, Daniel repeatedly emphasized the importance of mentoring and supporting teachers; “The new teachers need advice.” These tensions reveal an ongoing struggle between educational values and market-oriented priorities. Daniel's narrative suggests that managerial work increasingly required him to balance commitments to teaching and learning with organizational pressures associated with profitability, growth, and efficiency.

5.4. The Foreigner as Commodity and Belonging Without Membership

The final two themes reveal how foreignness simultaneously served as both an opportunity and a limitation throughout Daniel's career. While his identity as a foreign educator often conferred symbolic value within educational organizations, it did not necessarily translate into full authority, recognition, or a sense of belonging.

Discussing promotional activities and media appearances, Daniel recalled:

“I guess I was the white guy with the suit. It's sort of, ‘Hey, here's the guy who's going to be on TV.’ I don't know if there's any value in it. It's just that they can say, ‘Oh, there's a foreign guy working with us on this project.’ They take pictures and put them on their websites, but they never interviewed me, and they never talked about education.”

Although his presence was considered valuable for organizational visibility, he noted that educational expertise was often attributed elsewhere.

He later returned to this theme: “They never interviewed me at all about education. Instead, they would interview the Japanese guys.” Daniel's narrative suggests a distinction between visibility, expertise, and authority. His foreign identity provided value as a symbol of internationalism, English-language authenticity, and global engagement. However, that visibility did not always correspond with decision-making power, knowledge of English language teaching, or educational authority. In this sense, foreignness functioned as a form of

symbolic capital that organizations could leverage for marketing purposes while maintaining existing institutional hierarchies.

At the same time, Daniel's narrative complicates simplistic understandings of privilege. Although foreignness created opportunities, foreignness also established boundaries. This tension became particularly visible in discussions of cultural capital, belonging, and identity. Reflecting on his place within Japanese society after decades of residence, Daniel stated, "You're always going to be a foreign guy here." He later added, "You're never gonna be Japanese." These comments reveal that professional success did not necessarily result in cultural membership. Despite building a career, raising a family, and establishing long-term relationships in Japan, Daniel continued to position himself as outside the boundaries of full social belonging, even as he acknowledged his cultural capital as a White, native English-speaking male.

Interestingly, considering the above findings, foreignness was not described solely as a professional disadvantage. Daniel suggested that it occasionally provided flexibility within workplace environments:

"I think sometimes the expectations are different as a foreigner in the office, which can be good. There are meetings I don't have to go to and some things I can avoid. But you still have to do your job. I still have to put on a happy face and try not to piss people off. At the office, I still had to fit in."

Yet this flexibility remained tied to outsider status. As he acknowledged, "I still have to be a part of the culture." This statement captures the central tension running throughout the latter portion of his narrative. Daniel described a life characterized by participation without complete membership. He had achieved professional legitimacy, accumulated experience, and established a long-term future in Japan, yet foreignness remained a persistent and defining aspect of his identity.

Taken together, these themes reveal the limits of professional legitimacy. Although Daniel's narrative is fundamentally a story of advancement and recognition, it is also a story of boundaries. Professional authority could be accumulated, responsibilities could expand, and careers could flourish, but full belonging remained elusive. As a result, the narrative concludes not with complete integration but with the revisited ongoing negotiation of identity, legitimacy, and membership within Japanese society.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that Daniel's professional journey can be understood as a broader narrative of professional legitimacy. Throughout the interview, Daniel consistently described a shift away from positions characterized by uncertainty and limited authority toward roles associated with recognition, responsibility, and institutional status. While his experiences

are unique to his own career trajectory, they also reflect larger transformations occurring within Japan's English language education industry. Viewed through the lenses of neoliberalism, critical pedagogy, and Bourdieu's theory of capital, Daniel's narrative provides insight into how professional identities are constructed and negotiated within increasingly marketized educational environments.

6.1. Professional Legitimacy and the Accumulation of Capital

One of the most prominent features of Daniel's narrative was his repeated emphasis on legitimacy, recognition, and professional advancement. The transition from ALT to educational manager was not merely a change in employment but a movement toward positions associated with greater authority and institutional recognition. Throughout the interview, Daniel contrasted the uncertainty and lack of respect in ALT work with the legitimacy associated with management, client relations, and organizational leadership.

Bourdieu's (1986) theory of capital provides a useful lens for understanding this process. Daniel's career trajectory can be interpreted as the gradual accumulation of social and symbolic capital. Professional networks, managerial responsibilities, and organizational trust provided access to opportunities that extended beyond classroom teaching. Experiences working with high-profile clients and participating in professional networks functioned as markers of legitimacy that reinforced his status within the educational field. In this sense, professional advancement was not solely a result of individual effort but also reflected access to forms of capital that became increasingly valuable within educational organizations.

The findings also highlight the relational nature of legitimacy. Daniel repeatedly described professionalism as something that had to be demonstrated and recognized by others rather than simply claimed. Legitimacy emerged through interactions with students, teachers, clients, and organizational leaders. This observation supports existing research suggesting that professional identity is socially negotiated rather than individually possessed (Beijaard et al., 2004).

6.2. Neoliberalism and the Marketization of Educational Work

A second major finding concerns the increasing influence of market logics within educational organizations. Daniel's repeated references to sales, contracts, clients, and organizational growth suggest that educational work is increasingly shaped by commercial priorities. His description of management as "more sales" illustrates how educational professionals may be required to navigate responsibilities that extend beyond teaching and learning.

These findings align with scholarship on neoliberal educational reform (Apple, 2012; Ball, 2012; Giroux, 2014). Neoliberalism encourages educational institutions to adopt market-oriented practices emphasizing efficiency, competition, accountability, and customer

satisfaction. Within such environments, educational success becomes linked not only to learning outcomes but also to organizational growth and market performance.

Particularly revealing was Daniel's description of teachers as part of the “product” delivered to schools and clients. This language reflects broader processes of educational commodification in which teaching, curriculum, and educational services are transformed into marketable commodities. Rather than existing outside economic systems, education becomes increasingly integrated into them. Daniel's narrative, therefore, illustrates how neoliberal reforms become visible in everyday professional practice, shaping not only institutional priorities but also the ways educators understand their own work.

At the same time, Daniel's account reveals tensions between educational values and commercial objectives. His concerns regarding teacher support, mentoring, and classroom quality frequently conflicted with organizational pressures to reduce costs and increase efficiency. These tensions reflect broader concerns raised by critical pedagogical scholars who argue that market-oriented reforms may undermine educational relationships and professional autonomy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2014).

6.3. Foreignness, Symbolic Capital, and Professional Authority

Another significant finding concerns the role of foreignness within Japan's English education industry. Daniel's narrative suggests that foreign identity functioned simultaneously as a source of opportunity and limitation. Organizations benefited from the visibility and symbolic value associated with foreign educators, yet authority and decision-making power were left to the Japanese staff.

Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital is particularly useful for understanding this dynamic. Daniel's nationality and identity as a native English speaker possessed value within educational markets because they could be associated with authenticity, internationalism, and English-language expertise. His recollections of being placed in highly visible promotional roles suggest that foreignness itself functioned as a marketable resource.

These findings also resonate with scholarship on native speakerism and raciolinguistics (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Holliday, 2006; Pennycook, 2008). Native-speaker ideologies often position foreign educators as authentic representatives of English while simultaneously constraining how their expertise is recognized. Daniel's experiences suggest that visibility does not necessarily translate into authority. Instead, foreign educators may occupy symbolic roles that support institutional branding while remaining excluded from other forms of professional recognition.

Importantly, the findings complicate simplistic understandings of privilege. Foreignness provided opportunities for advancement and visibility, yet it also reinforced distinctions

between insiders and outsiders. Daniel's experiences, therefore, illustrate how identity can function as both a resource and a constraint within educational organizations.

6.4. The Limits of Professional Legitimacy

The final finding concerns the relationship between professional success and belonging. Despite decades of residence in Japan, a successful career, and extensive social connections, Daniel continued to describe foreignness as a permanent condition. His reflections suggest that professional legitimacy and cultural membership are not synonymous.

Although Daniel accumulated professional capital and achieved organizational recognition, he continued to perceive himself as existing outside the boundaries of full cultural belonging. His statement that he would "always" be a foreigner highlights the limits of professional advancement as a pathway toward social membership. This distinction between participation and belonging emerged repeatedly throughout the interview and represents one of the most significant contributions of the study.

From a narrative perspective, Daniel's story therefore concludes with an unresolved tension. The pursuit of legitimacy was largely successful within professional contexts, yet complete integration remained elusive. The narrative is not one of full assimilation but of ongoing negotiation between inclusion and exclusion, recognition and distance, membership and foreignness. This tension highlights the complex ways professional identity, nationality, and belonging intersect within international and English language education contexts.

Taken together, the findings suggest that professional identity within Japan's English education industry cannot be understood solely through individual career choices. Instead, Daniel's experiences reveal how broader neoliberal, cultural, and institutional forces shape opportunities, legitimacy, and belonging. His narrative illustrates not only the changing nature of educational work but also the ways educators navigate systems in which professionalism, market value, and identity are increasingly intertwined for sales-driven outcomes.

6.5. Implications for Educational Leaders and Organizations

The findings of this study have several implications for educational leaders and organizations operating within Japan's English language education industry. First, the experiences described by Daniel highlight the importance of structured mentoring and professional development opportunities for early-career educators, particularly newer ALTs. Mentoring programs that support classroom management, relationship building, and professional growth may help address some of the challenges associated with limited authority and outsider status.

Second, educational organizations should critically examine hiring and promotion practices that rely upon assumptions associated with native-speakerism (Holliday, 2006). While foreign

educators may be valued as symbols of internationalization, organizations should ensure that decisions regarding leadership, professional advancement, and expertise are based on demonstrated knowledge, experience, and pedagogical ability rather than nationality or linguistic background alone (Pennycook, 2010).

Third, educational leaders may benefit from adopting broader measures of organizational success that extend beyond sales figures, enrollment growth, and customer satisfaction (Apple, 2012). Daniel's narrative suggests that teacher support, mentoring, educational quality, and long-term professional development are equally important indicators of organizational effectiveness. Greater attention to these areas may help balance commercial pressures with educational values.

Finally, the findings suggest that organizations should create opportunities for foreign educators to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes (Hiratsuka, 2022, 2023; Sakamoto, 2025). Doing so may strengthen professional legitimacy, improve organizational communication, and foster a greater sense of belonging among educators working within increasingly international educational environments.

7. Conclusion

This study explored how a long-term foreign educator in Japan narrated his professional journey from classroom teaching to educational management within the English language education industry. Through a narrative analysis, the findings revealed what was described as a professional legitimacy narrative, in which career advancement involved the continual negotiation of authority, recognition, market value, and belonging. Across the participant's story, movement away from the ALT role was associated with increasing responsibility, organizational status, and professional recognition. At the same time, the narrative revealed how educational work became increasingly intertwined with sales, management, branding, and customer relations, reflecting broader neoliberal transformations within English language education.

Viewed through the lenses of critical pedagogy, neoliberalism, and Bourdieu's theory of capital, the findings suggest that professional legitimacy is shaped not only by experience and expertise but also by access to social networks, institutional recognition, and symbolic forms of value. Daniel's experiences further illustrate how foreignness may function simultaneously as a source of opportunity and limitation within Japan's English education industry. While his identity as a foreign educator provided visibility and symbolic value, it did not necessarily translate into full authority, belonging, or membership. Consequently, the narrative highlights the complex ways professional identity, nationality, and legitimacy intersect within educational organizations.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study focused on the experiences of a single participant and therefore does not seek to represent the experiences of all foreign educators working in Japan. Rather, the purpose of narrative inquiry is to provide a rich and contextualized understanding of individual experience. Second, the findings are based upon retrospective accounts of professional experiences spanning several decades and therefore reflect the participant's present interpretation of past events. Finally, the researcher's own professional experience in Japan's English-language education industry may have influenced aspects of interpretation, despite ongoing reflexive efforts throughout the research process.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes to growing discussions concerning professional identity, neoliberalism, and English language education. The findings suggest that educational organizations should pay greater attention to how market-oriented priorities shape teachers' professional experiences and how legitimacy is distributed within educational institutions. Future research may benefit from examining the experiences of educators across a wider range of organizational settings, including international schools, universities, private language institutions, and educational management positions. Comparative studies involving multiple participants could further explore how professional legitimacy, foreignness, and belonging are experienced across different sectors of Japan's English education industry.

Ultimately, Daniel's story demonstrates that professional advancement does not necessarily resolve questions of identity and belonging. Although he accumulated significant professional legitimacy throughout his career, foreignness remained a persistent aspect of his experience. His narrative, therefore, offers valuable insight into the opportunities, tensions, and contradictions that characterize educational work within an increasingly marketized and globalized English language education context.

References

- Apple, M. W. (2012). *Education and power* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Ball, S. J. (2012). *Global education inc.: New policy networks and the neoliberal imaginary*. Routledge.
- Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(2), 107–128. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2003.07.001>
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste* (R. Nice, Trans.). Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). Greenwood Press.

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Bunnell, T. (2016). *Teachers in international schools: A neglected “middling actor” in expatriate education*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cho, H., Al-Samiri, R., & Gao, J. (2022). *Transnational language teacher identities in TESOL: Identity construction among female international students in the US*. Routledge.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. Jossey-Bass.
- Eisner, E. W. (2002). *The educational imagination: On the design and evaluation of school programs* (3rd ed.). Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Finlay, L. (2002). “Outing” the researcher: The provenance, process, and practice of reflexivity. *Qualitative health research*, 12(4), 531–545.
- Flores, N., & Rosa, J. (2015). Undoing appropriateness: Raciolinguistic ideologies and language diversity in education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 85(2), 149–171. <https://doi.org/10.17763/0017-8055.85.2.149>
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
- Giroux, H. A. (2014). *Neoliberalism's war on higher education*. Haymarket Books.
- Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change*. Jossey-Bass
- Hayden, M., & Thompson, J. (2013). *International schools: Antecedents, current issues and metaphors for the future*. Symposium Books.
- Hiratsuka, T. (2022). Narrative Inquiry into Language Teacher Identity. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003248729>
- Hiratsuka, T. (2023). Professional Identities of Local Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) Vis-à-Vis their Foreign Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs). *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 25, 18 - 31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2023.2282692>
- Holliday, A. (2006). Native-speakerism. *ELT Journal*, 60(4), 385–387. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccl030>
- Kachru, B. B. (1985). Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the outer circle. In R. Quirk & H. G. Widdowson (Eds.), *English in the world: Teaching and learning the language and literatures* (pp. 11–30). Cambridge University Press.

- Kanno, Y. (2003). *Negotiating bilingual and bicultural identities: Japanese returnees betwixt two worlds*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Kubota, R. (2011). Learning a foreign language as leisure and consumption: Enjoyment, desire, and the business of eikaiwa. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 14(4), 473–488. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2011.573069>
- Kubota, R., & Takeda, Y. (2021). Language-in-education policies in Japan versus transnational workers' voices: Two faces of neoliberal communication competence. *TESOL quarterly*, 55(2), 458-485.
- Kvale, S. (2006). Dominance through interviews and dialogues. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12, 480 – 500.
- Litzenberg, J., & Fraser, A. (2026). 'The least stable form of employment': the professional (in) security of English Language Teaching. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 24(3), 7787.
- Matsumoto, Y. (2023). International schools expanding in Japan. *Yomiuri Shimbun*.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Mercer, S. (2023). The wellbeing of language teachers in the private sector: An ecological perspective. *Language teaching research*, 27(5), 1054-1077.
- Otani, M. (2023). Intercultural work relationships between Japanese language teachers and foreign assistant teachers in Japan : the JET program.
- Pennycook, A. (1994). *The cultural politics of English as an international language*. Longman.
- Pennycook, A. (2007). *Global Englishes and transcultural flows*. Routledge.
- Pennycook, A. (2008). *English as a language always in translation*. *European Journal of English Studies*, 12(1), 33–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13825570801900521>
- Pennycook, A. (2010). *Language as a local practice*. Routledge.
- Popham, W. J. (2012). *Instruction that up measures up: Successful teaching in the age of accountability*. ASCD.
- Priestley, M., Biesta, G., & Robinson, S. (2015). *Teacher agency: An ecological approach*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Sage.
- Sakamoto, N. (2025). Visualising Narratives of an ALT: Identity, Reflection, and Team Teaching. In *Weaving stories of language education with narratives of teachers and learners* (pp. 17-46). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

- Seidman, I. (2019). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (5th ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Smith, M. D. (2021). Social Reproduction as Language Policy: The Neoliberal Co-option of English in Global Japan. *Educational Policy*, 36, 1652 - 1678. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904821999840>
- Smith, M. D. (2022). The neoliberal structures of English in Japanese higher education: applying Bernstein's pedagogic device. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 24, 334 - 356. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2022.2102330>
- Sfard, A., & Prusak, A. (2005). Telling identities: In search of an analytic tool for investigating learning as a culturally shaped activity. *Educational Researcher*, 34(4), 14–22. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X034004014>
- Tanu, D. (2017). *Growing up in transit: The politics of belonging at an international school*. Berghahn Books.
- Yoko, K. (2023). "Contemporary standard" English policy and pseudo-diversity among inner and outer circle assistant language teachers in Japan. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijal.12464>