

Multilingual Legitimacy in Japanese Eikaiwa: A Conceptual Framework for Teacher Authority

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How to Cite

Arrogante, R. (2025). Multilingual Legitimacy in Japanese Eikaiwa: A Conceptual Framework for Teacher Authority. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Viewpoints*, 1(5), 646–652. <https://doi.org/10.64612/ijiv.v1i5.42>

Research Article



Open-access & Peer-reviewed
Received: 30 May 2025
Available: 30 Aug 2025

ABSTRACT

Native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) have often been preferred over non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) in English language instruction. In Japan's Eikaiwa business, which is made up of private, commercial English conversation schools, this bias is kept alive by marketing and hiring methods that correlate nativeness to teaching excellence. This conceptual paper introduces the Multilingual Legitimacy Framework (MLF) to challenge existing norms in Teaching English as an International Language (TEIL) classroom. The MLF says that legitimacy comes from three things: language skills, teaching experience, and the ability to work with people from other cultures. Identity affirmation, educational impact, and institutional recognition trigger these. It shifts the foundation of authority from native speakers to multilingual and intercultural individuals, establishing a more equitable framework for NNESTs. The framework improves Norton's dynamic view of how to identify language teachers and adds TEIL ideas to Eikaiwa's consumer-oriented setting, which makes Moussu and Llorca's NNEST legitimacy model more complete. In reality, it aids in the development of educators and the transformation of institutions, while also laying the groundwork for subsequent research on multilingual identity and worldwide English Language Teaching policy.

Keywords: Language education, Multilingual pedagogy; Eikaiwa

INTRODUCTION

Teacher identity and legitimacy are fundamental issues in applied linguistics. These ideas affect how teachers see themselves, how they use their authority in the classroom, and how they do their jobs. In English language instruction, especially when the students aren't native English speakers, being a native speaker is typically seen as a sign of legitimacy. This organization favors native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) over non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) (Hiratsuka et al., 2023; Lim & Park, 2022). Native-speakerism affects who gets hired, how authority works in the classroom, and how people see ability. Consequently, the acknowledgment and agency of NNESTs are frequently constrained (Altarawneh, 2023; Matikainen, 2022).

These dynamics are quite clear in Japan's Eikaiwa sector. Nativeness is frequently advocated as an indicator of teaching quality in recruitment, marketing, and institutional branding (Saito, 2012; Hino, 2021). Recent research, however, indicates that NNESTs—particularly those possessing multilingual proficiency—offer unique instructional and intercultural tools. These contributions increase student engagement, encourage inclusion, and lead to better learning outcomes (Phyak et al., 2022; Calafato, 2021; Prosper & Nomlomo, 2016). These teachers use translanguageing techniques, build on what pupils already know in their home languages, and help students become more aware of other cultures. These techniques contest traditional notions of authority and legitimacy

inside the language classroom (Kayi-Aydar & Green-Eneix, 2019; Gort & Hamm-Rodríguez, 2022). Notwithstanding these findings, investigations on the validity of multilingual educators in commercial English institutions remain insufficient. The majority of research on teacher identity concentrates on formal education or tertiary institutions. Consequently, Eikaiwa environments, influenced by unique cultural and market dynamics, remain significantly underexamined (Trojan et al., 2023; Moate & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2020). Teaching English as an International Language (TEIL) also stresses diversity and inclusion. Nonetheless, its ramifications for NNESTs employed in Japanese Eikaiwa contexts remain insufficiently scrutinized.

This conceptual paper presents the Multilingual Legitimacy Framework (MLF) to overcome these deficiencies. The framework delineates authority—the power wielded by instructors in classrooms—and legitimacy—the acknowledgment that confers credibility to this authority. The paper contends that the validity of Eikaiwa instructors ought to be reconceptualized through a multilingual perspective. This involves putting instructors' language skills, cultural understanding, and teaching skills at the front. This change makes TEIL a fairer and more effective model. The MLF shows how multilingual legitimacy can upset established hierarchies, help with employment and professional growth, and change how teachers teach in Japanese Eikaiwa settings.

Language teacher identity (LTI) and professional legitimacy are fundamental concepts in applied linguistics, influencing teachers' self-perception, authority negotiation, and pedagogical practices in the classroom (Norton, 2013; Costa & Norton, 2017). LTI is not seen as static traits, but as a socially placed and changing phenomenon. It is shaped by interactions with students, coworkers, and institutional cultures, along with wider sociopolitical and ideological influences (Gao, 2012; Kayi-Aydar, 2019). This feeling of legitimacy affects teachers' confidence, ability to act, and choices about how to teach. The consequences are evident in classroom dynamics and student results (Miller et al., 2017; Trojan et al., 2023). A long-standing difference between teachers who speak English as a first language and those who don't has a big impact on both LTI and legitimacy. People often question NNESTs' skills and authority because of native-speakerist ideas that give NESTs more influence in recruiting, promotions, and the classroom (Moussu & Llurda, 2008; Lim & Park, 2022; Hiratsuka et al., 2023). These ideologies marginalize NNESTs and limit their pedagogical agency, regardless of whether NNESTs exhibit comparable or higher language and instructional competencies (Altarawneh, 2023; Matikainen, 2022).

Recent research, however, has underscored multilingual competency as an essential source of legitimacy. Teachers with varied linguistic repertoires utilize translanguaging tactics, facilitate learning through students' native languages, and exemplify English as a versatile global resource (Kayi-Aydar & Green-Eneix, 2019; Hino, 2021; Gort & Hamm-Rodríguez, 2022). Multilingual educators contribute to multicultural understanding that promotes inclusive classrooms, facilitates students' identity formation, and contests conventional notions of authority (Phyak et al., 2022; Prosper & Nomlomo, 2016; Skinnari & Nikula, 2017). These behaviors illustrate that legitimacy may be established through instructional skill and intercultural competency rather than exclusively through nativeness.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This research employs a conceptual design based on qualitative theory development. Instead of gathering actual evidence, it amalgamates previous knowledge to develop the Multilingual Legitimacy Framework (MLF), which reinterprets teacher authority within Japanese Eikaiwa contexts. The design incorporates interdisciplinary viewpoints from applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and educational policy. Norton's dynamic model of Language Teacher Identity (LTI), Moussu and Llurda's framework on NNEST validity, and ideas from Teaching English as an International Language (TEIL) are the most important parts of this method. These theoretical foundations are rigorously analyzed in conjunction with neoliberal critiques of commercial language instruction, enabling the framework to address both pedagogical and market-oriented realities.

Literature Selection and Scope

The framework is based on a comprehensive review of academic articles that were published between 2006 and 2024. We chose peer-reviewed journal publications, conceptual papers, and empirical research because they were relevant to native-speakerism, multilingual pedagogy, teacher identity development, and legitimacy discourses in English language instruction. Databases including Scopus, JSTOR, ERIC, and Google Scholar were used to do the searches. Some of the keywords were "native-speakerism," "NNEST legitimacy," "multilingual pedagogy," "Eikaiwa," "teacher identity," and "TEIL." The chosen sources offered a thorough basis for pinpointing

deficiencies in existing legitimacy models and for developing a framework that embodies both theoretical profundity and contextual relevance.

Analytical Procedure

The analytical technique utilized thematic synthesis to discern repeating patterns, inconsistencies, and conceptual deficiencies within the literature. This entailed delineating legitimacy discourses within educational and commercial contexts, emphasizing the pedagogical and intercultural advantages of multilingual instructors, and scrutinizing native-speakerist ideologies inherent in Eikaiwa recruiting and branding. The Multilingual Legitimacy Framework was created through a process of repeated improvement to show how multilingualism, negotiating identity, and neoliberal educational frameworks all come together. The paradigm was confirmed by its congruence with established theories and its relevance to practical Eikaiwa applications, providing a revolutionary perspective for comprehending teacher legitimacy.

Ethical Considerations

This study, being a conceptual article, did not include human subjects and hence did not necessitate official ethical approval. Still, ethical integrity was upheld by strict citation norms, clear recognition of AI-assisted technologies used for language improvement, and critical interaction with a variety of scholarly viewpoints. The author takes full intellectual responsibility for the ideas, interpretations, and contributions to theory that are given. The AI tools Grammarly, ChatGPT, and SciteAI were only used to help with structure, clarity, and finding literature. They did not change the analytical or conceptual content of the paper.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Multilingual Legitimacy Framework (MLF) shows a big change in how teacher authority and legitimacy might be thought of in Japanese Eikaiwa settings. The framework combines research on language teacher identity, NNEST marginalization, and multilingual pedagogy to find three main pillars—linguistic repertoire, pedagogical expertise, and intercultural competence—that make up legitimate authority. These aspects go against the native-speakerist ideas that are common in hiring and branding at Eikaiwa schools. The framework shows that legitimacy is not a set attribute that comes with being native, but a changing idea that is changed by language skills, inclusive education methods, and being aware of other cultures. This new way of thinking fits with TEIL principles and gives a fairer way to recognize and help teachers grow.

The conversation shows how the MLF deals with the neoliberal forces that are built into commercial English instruction. In Eikaiwa schools, legitimacy is often turned into a commodity, with cosmetic signs of authenticity being valued more than real teaching skills. The MLF fights back by recognizing the professional and cultural strengths of NNESTs and giving them useful ideas for how to change their institutions. It promotes hiring policies that include everyone, professional development in more than one language, and teaching methods that help students get involved and establish their identities. The paradigm also offers up new areas of inquiry, such as how students see legitimacy, how institutional narratives create teacher identity, and how multilingual legitimacy shows up in the classroom. The MLF ultimately offers a transformational perspective for comprehending and augmenting teacher authority in the context of globalized, market-oriented English language education.

Eikaiwa Legitimacy Discourses

There is a lot of study on language teacher identity, legitimacy, and multilingual pedagogy, but not much on commercial English conversation schools (Eikaiwa) in Japan. Unlike public schools or colleges, eikaiwa schools are businesses. Neoliberal ideas about making things into goods and consumerism shape them. In this market-driven world, teacher credibility is both socially and financially manufactured. It is packaged and sold to students as part of the service.

Recent research substantiates that Eikaiwa schools systematically advocate for native-speaker status in their marketing and recruitment efforts as an indicator of authenticity and pedagogical quality (Appleby, 2013; Kubota, 2011; Bailey, 2006). For example, Shircliff (2024) demonstrates the commodification of "nativeness" in promotional discourses to enhance the status and attractiveness of Western-looking teachers, whereas Samuelli (2023) recognizes the native-speaker fallacy as fundamental to institutional branding in private language education contexts. Eikaiwa schools are similarly set up to treat students like clients. Learning a language becomes an investment that pays off. A lot of schools put more value on short-term, marketable results than long-term

educational improvement. Legitimacy is more about making customers happy than about teaching in depth. This is similar to what is said in other neoliberal discourses. English competence is linked to ambitions of employability, social status, and lifestyle improvement (Pennycook, 2020; Chen et al., 2020).

Eikaiwa discourses frequently connect with gendered and racist processes. Teachers' professional legitimacy may be linked to the physical expressions of identity. Some instructors are objectified or valorized in ways that reflect consumer desires rather than instructional skill (Appleby, 2012; Tajima, 2018). These interactions further complicate the construction of legitimacy. Teachers navigate not only language hierarchies but also gendered and racialized expectations. When you look at all of these things together, they imply that neoliberal market pressures have a bigger impact on legitimacy in Eikaiwa than teaching skills. Teachers feel that they have to accommodate the needs of their students and their parents. These expectations favor nativeness, fun, and immediacy over multilingual proficiency and inclusive teaching methods. This commodified framing of legitimacy underscores the necessity for a conceptual model. This paradigm ought to reestablish authority on more egalitarian foundations and emphasize teachers' multilingual, educational, and intercultural assets.

Proposed Framework: Multilingual Legitimacy

The Multilingual Legitimacy Framework (MLF) redefines the concept of teacher legitimacy within Teaching English as an International Language (TEIL) classroom. It is especially pertinent for Japanese Eikaiwa institutions. The framework does not base legitimacy on being a native speaker; instead, it bases teacher authority on multilingual ability, pedagogical knowledge, and intercultural sensitivity. The MLF expands current theoretical frameworks in two distinct manners. First, Norton's model of language teacher identity (LTI) stresses that identity is always changing and formed by society. On the other hand, the MLF makes multilingual competency a key resource for negotiating legitimacy. Second, the work of Moussu & Llorca on NNESTs shows how non-native teachers are pushed to the edges. The MLF transcends deficit frameworks by incorporating TEIL concepts and addressing the consumer-oriented, market-driven dynamics of Eikaiwa. The MLF places legitimacy at the crossroads of multilingualism, identity negotiation, and neoliberal educational frameworks. It makes a unique contribution to ideas.

Legitimacy is based on three pillars that are all connected:

1. Linguistic repertory — Teachers use a variety of language resources to use translanguaging tactics, help students understand, and show how to use English in ways that go against the rules for native speakers (Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Kayi-Aydar & Green-Encix, 2019; Hino, 2021). Being aware of pupils' language backgrounds makes them feel more included and makes them see authority figures as more powerful (Gort & Hamm-Rodríguez, 2022).
2. Pedagogical expertise—Lesson design, reflective practice, and classroom management establish authority by displaying professional skill rather than compliance to native-speaker expectations (Calafato, 2021; Chapman et al., 2021; Tishakov & Tsagari, 2022).
3. Intercultural competence: Teachers make sure that all children feel welcome by respecting their cultural identities, encouraging critical discussion, and getting them ready to communicate with people from other countries (You, 2017; Skinnari & Nikula, 2017; Aviña, 2024).

Three ways put these pillars into action:

1. Identity validation—Acknowledging instructors' multilingual origins and professional experience enhances self-efficacy and pedagogical confidence (Miller et al., 2017; Troyan et al., 2023).
2. Pedagogical impact: Multilingual and intercultural practices improve student engagement, identity formation, and learning results (Prosper & Nomlomo, 2016; Gort & Hamm-Rodríguez, 2022).
3. Institutional recognition—Inclusive hiring, professional development, and policy reforms affirm multilingual ability and promote innovative teaching (Lim & Park, 2022; Calafato, 2021).

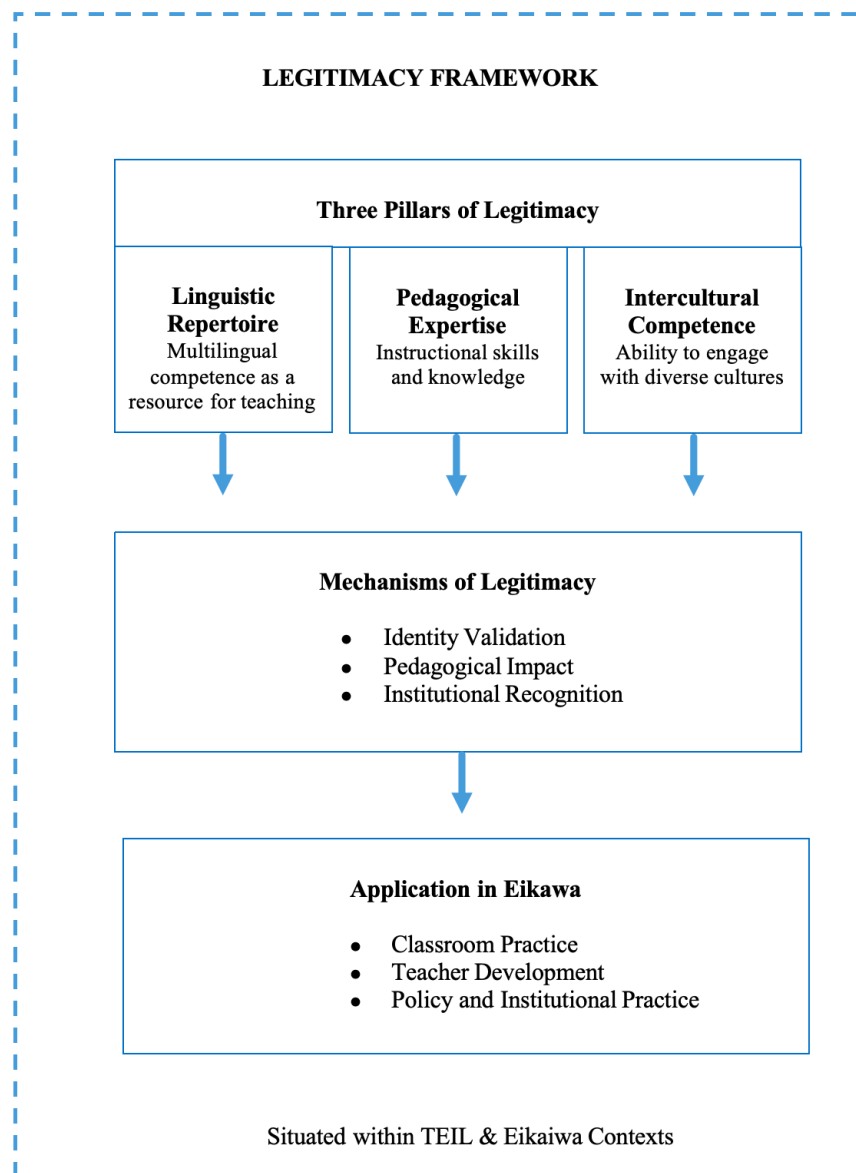


Figure 1. A visual representation of the Multilingual Legitimacy Framework

In Japanese Eikaiwa schools, the Multilingual Legitimacy Framework lays out clear steps for changing both the way schools work and the way they teach. Teachers might enhance their legitimacy by utilizing translanguaging techniques, offering instructional scaffolding, and demonstrating various English dialects. Professional development programs should put multilingual teaching, intercultural competency, and reflective teaching at the top of their lists. This focus gives teachers who don't speak English as a first language more confidence and power. Changes in recruiting methods and marketing techniques at the institutional level might upset established hierarchies. These kinds of reforms move legitimacy from being based on native-speaker status to being based on professional ability. The Multilingual Legitimacy Framework provides two key contributions. In theory, it combines ideas from multilingual competency and Teaching English as an International Language (TEIL) while also looking at the neoliberal setting of Eikaiwa schools. This method improves the present ideas about what makes a teacher legitimate and who they are. The framework delineates strategies to augment teacher authority, foster student participation, and elevate institutional inclusion. It also sets the stage for more study on multilingual teacher identity, classroom legitimacy, and the effects of inclusive teaching methods.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study contends that dominant native-speakerist paradigms in Japanese Eikaiwa contexts insufficiently represent the legitimacy of English language teachers, especially non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) with multilingual and intercultural competencies. The research presents the Multilingual Legitimacy Framework (MLF), redefining legitimacy as a dynamic interaction among linguistic repertoire, educational expertise, and intercultural sensitivity, rather than as a mere function of nativeness. The framework rejects commercialized concepts of authority and presents a more inclusive and egalitarian paradigm for Teaching English as an International Language (TEIL). It fills in the gaps in the theoretical discussions about teacher identity and legitimacy while also reacting to the market-driven reality of Eikaiwa institutions. In the end, the MLF is a powerful way to analyze and improve teacher authority in classrooms that are globalized and have students who speak more than one language.

To make the MLF work, Eikaiwa schools need change their employment methods, marketing stories, and professional development programs to recognize and promote multilingual skills. Teacher training should focus on translinguaging tools, reflective pedagogy, and intercultural engagement to give NNESTs more power and make their classroom experiences better. Institutional policies must transition from a bias for native speakers to inclusive frameworks that recognize varied linguistic backgrounds and pedagogical abilities. Future research ought to experimentally investigate the negotiation of linguistic legitimacy in Eikaiwa classrooms, the students' perceptions of authority, and the impact of institutional branding on teacher identity. These actions will not only break down long-standing hierarchies, but they will also make English language teaching in Japan and other places more fair and effective.

Acknowledgements

The author wished to express their deepest gratitude to the people for the unwavering guidance, encouragement, and expertise that played a vital role in the successful completion of this study.

Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest in the preparation and publication of this research.

Funding

The author funded this study.

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