

Original Article

# Relational Authority and Professional Credibility: Narratives of J-1 Filipino Mathematics Teachers in U.S. Classrooms

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## Article History:

Date received: May 28, 2026  
Date revised: August 21, 2026  
Date accepted: September 4, 2026

## Recommended citation:

Taperla, N.R., Padilla, A., Lara, R.J., & Lemana, H., II. (2026). Relational authority and professional credibility: Narratives of J-1 Filipino mathematics teachers in U.S. classrooms. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 4(10), 112-126.  
<https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2026.312>

**Abstract.** The increasing globalization of education has intensified teacher mobility across national borders, placing educators in diverse cultural contexts where assumptions regarding authority, credibility, and professional identity may be challenged. Despite the growing presence of internationally mobile teachers, limited research has examined how J-1 Filipino mathematics teachers construct and negotiate relational authority and professional credibility within U.S. classrooms. Guided by a constructivist narrative inquiry design and Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional framework of temporality, sociality, and place, this study examined how three J-1 Filipino mathematics teachers narrated the construction of relational authority and professional credibility, how turning points, tensions, and critical classroom incidents shaped their evolving professional identities, and how culture, language, and prior teaching experiences influenced these narratives in U.S. school contexts. Data were collected through written narrative responses and analyzed using narrative coding and thematic narrative analysis. Cross-narrative analysis revealed five major themes: disruption of prior conceptions of authority and credibility; critical incidents as catalysts for transformation; relational and instructional adaptation; reconstruction of relational authority and professional credibility; and identity negotiation across time, sociality, and place. Across the narratives, participants moved from relying primarily on positional authority and prior professional experience toward more relational, reflective, and context-responsive approaches to teaching. The findings show that professional legitimacy is not automatically transferred across educational contexts but is reconstructed through critical experiences, relational engagement, instructional adaptation, and reflection. Practically, the findings support structured mentorship and culturally responsive induction that help internationally mobile teachers navigate classroom expectations, communication differences, and professional identity transitions.

**Keywords:** *Narrative inquiry; Relational authority; Professional credibility; J-1 Filipino teachers; Cross-cultural teaching.*

The increasing globalization of education has intensified the transnational mobility of teachers, particularly as educational systems respond to persistent shortages of qualified educators. International organizations have documented continuing global demand for teachers, including in specialized fields such as

mathematics and science education (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2024). In response, schools in the United States and other countries have increasingly relied on internationally mobile educators to sustain instructional capacity. One pathway through which international teachers enter U.S. schools is the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program, which has facilitated Filipino educators' participation in American classrooms (De Oca & Malaga, 2025). Research on Filipino teachers abroad has highlighted both the opportunities and challenges associated with teaching across national and cultural boundaries, including adjustment to unfamiliar educational environments and the reconstruction of professional practices (Avelino, 2026; Bautista et al., 2020; Lorente, 2019). International teaching, therefore, extends beyond occupational mobility and involves complex processes of sociocultural adaptation, professional identity negotiation, and pedagogical adjustment.

Teachers who move across educational systems enter classrooms with professional beliefs, practices, and expectations shaped by prior experiences. These orientations may be challenged when teachers encounter different norms regarding communication, discipline, teacher-student relationships, and instructional practices (Lorente, 2019; Yuan & Lee, 2021). Recent research on mobile teachers demonstrates that the context in which teachers work influences how they understand their professional roles and the strategies they use to construct professional identities (Rosenfeld et al., 2022). Similarly, Liu et al. (2023) found that international teaching experiences can both strengthen and complicate teachers' professional identities, with teacher-student relationships providing an important context for understanding identity development. These findings suggest that professional identity is not simply transferred from one educational system to another but is continually reconstructed through teachers' interactions with new social and institutional environments.

One important dimension of this reconstruction concerns classroom authority. Traditional conceptions of teacher authority have often emphasized institutional position, formal status, discipline, and classroom control. Contemporary scholarship increasingly conceptualizes authority as relational and interactionally negotiated. Wubbels et al. (2021) emphasized that classroom authority develops through trust, reciprocity, fairness, and sustained teacher-student interaction rather than through positional power alone. Similarly, Hendrickx et al. (2022) demonstrated the importance of teacher-student relationships for student engagement, highlighting the role of teachers' interpersonal behaviors and relational practices in classroom interactions. From this perspective, authority is not simply conferred by a teacher's institutional role; rather, it is developed through ongoing interactions in which teachers and students negotiate expectations, relationships, and legitimacy.

Professional credibility represents a related dimension of teacher legitimacy. Traditionally, teacher credibility has been associated with instructional competence, subject-matter expertise, classroom management, and pedagogical clarity (Blazar, 2016; Hattie, 2009; Saphier et al., 2016). More recent scholarship has emphasized that students' perceptions of teaching quality and teacher competence are also shaped by classroom interactions and instructional practices (Fauth et al., 2019). Thus, professional credibility extends beyond teachers' qualifications or technical expertise to include how their competence, trustworthiness, communication, and instructional effectiveness are recognized within the classroom. In mathematics education, this issue is particularly important because teaching mathematics requires conceptual clarity, pedagogical precision, and the capacity to support students' mathematical reasoning (Baumert et al., 2010; Hill et al., 2005). Consequently, mathematics teachers may need to establish professional credibility through both demonstrated instructional competence and meaningful relationships with students.

Although relational authority and professional credibility have each received scholarly attention, these constructs are often examined separately. Research on teacher credibility has emphasized instructional quality and perceptions of teacher competence, whereas scholarship on authority has increasingly focused on relationships, trust, and classroom interaction (Fauth et al., 2019; Wubbels et al., 2021). For internationally mobile teachers, however, authority and credibility may be interconnected dimensions of professional legitimacy that are negotiated simultaneously. Teachers may enter a new educational environment with established credentials and substantial prior teaching experience. However, these forms of professional capital do not necessarily guarantee recognition of their authority or credibility within a different cultural and institutional context.

Cross-cultural adaptation further complicates this process. Teachers transitioning between educational systems must negotiate unfamiliar communication practices, professional expectations, classroom norms, and relationships while drawing on knowledge and values developed in their previous contexts (Nguyen et al., 2020; Yuan & Lee, 2021; Zhang & Wang, 2022). Such adaptation is not necessarily linear. Instead, teachers may

experience tensions, disruptions, and critical incidents that prompt reflection and changes in their professional practices. Research on international teachers suggests that overseas teaching experiences can influence professional identity through interactions between teachers' prior beliefs and the expectations of their new working contexts (Rosenfeld et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2023). These processes indicate that professional legitimacy may be continually reconstructed as teachers interpret and respond to unfamiliar sociocultural environments.

Language and communication may further shape these negotiations. Research on internationally mobile and multilingual teachers has highlighted the influence of language ideologies, accent, and native-speaker expectations on perceptions of professional legitimacy and competence (Faetz, 2018; Ruecker & Ives, 2015). Such factors may become particularly salient when teachers communicate with students, colleagues, administrators, and parents whose expectations about effective communication differ from those encountered in their previous educational contexts. Thus, understanding the professional experiences of internationally mobile teachers requires attention not only to individual adaptation but also to the sociocultural and institutional conditions within which authority and credibility are recognized.

For Filipino teachers, these issues warrant particular attention. The existing scholarship has documented the experiences of Filipino teachers working internationally and has identified themes related to resilience, adaptability, professional transition, and cultural adjustment (Avelino, 2026; Bautista et al., 2020; De Oca & Malaga, 2025; Lorente, 2019). However, the literature remains comparatively limited in examining how Filipino teachers themselves construct and negotiate professional legitimacy within everyday classroom interactions. In particular, limited attention has been given to how Filipino teachers' prior professional experiences interact with new expectations regarding classroom authority, communication, teacher-student relationships, and instructional practice in U.S. schools.

This gap is particularly important in mathematics education. Mathematics classrooms require teachers to demonstrate subject-matter knowledge while simultaneously facilitating conceptual understanding, reasoning, engagement, and classroom interaction (Baumert et al., 2010; Hill et al., 2005). Internationally mobile mathematics teachers may therefore negotiate professional credibility through both their instructional competence and their ability to establish meaningful relationships with students. At the same time, their authority may be influenced by culturally different expectations concerning discipline, communication, participation, and teacher-student relationships. Despite growing research on international teacher mobility, professional identity, and cross-cultural adaptation, limited research has examined how internationally mobile mathematics teachers construct and negotiate relational authority and professional credibility within U.S. secondary classrooms.

A further gap concerns the limited use of narrative approaches to examine how these processes unfold through teachers' lived experiences over time. Existing research provides important insights into teacher mobility, adaptation, identity, and professional relationships, but comparatively less attention has been given to the turning points, tensions, and critical classroom incidents through which internationally mobile teachers make meaning of their professional experiences. A narrative approach provides a means of examining these experiences as temporal, relational, and contextually situated. Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework of temporality, sociality, and place offers an appropriate lens for understanding how teachers' professional meanings develop across time, through relationships, and within particular educational and institutional contexts.

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore how three J-1 Filipino mathematics teachers in the United States narrated their lived experiences of constructing and negotiating relational authority and professional credibility in mathematics classrooms. Specifically, the study addressed three questions: (1) How do J-1 Filipino mathematics teachers in the United States narrate their lived stories of constructing relational authority and professional credibility in mathematics classrooms? (2) What turning points, tensions, and critical classroom incidents shape their evolving professional identity, authority, and credibility over time? and (3) How do these teachers interpret the role of culture, language, and prior teaching experiences in shaping their narratives of authority and credibility in U.S. school contexts? By foregrounding teachers' lived narratives, this study seeks to contribute a contextually grounded understanding of how professional legitimacy is constructed and reconstructed by internationally mobile mathematics teachers. The study is significant because it examines relational authority and professional credibility as evolving forms of legitimacy negotiated through relationships, critical experiences, instructional adaptation, and sociocultural contexts. The findings may inform teacher

preparation, international teacher induction, mentorship, and school-based support for educators navigating cross-cultural teaching environments.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study employed a constructivist narrative inquiry design informed by a critical interpretive lens. Narrative inquiry was selected because it provides an approach for examining how individuals construct meaning from lived and professional experiences across time and within social and contextual settings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The design was appropriate for examining how J-1 Filipino mathematics teachers narrated and negotiated relational authority and professional credibility within cross-cultural U.S. classroom environments. Guided by the three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework of temporality, sociality, and place, the study examined participants' experiences across time, relationships, and classroom and school contexts. The constructivist orientation positioned authority and professional credibility as socially and contextually negotiated rather than fixed attributes. The critical interpretive lens further supported examination of how language, cultural identity, and power relations influenced participants' experiences of professional legitimacy and classroom authority.

### Participants and Sampling Technique

The study used purposive sampling to recruit participants who could provide rich, experience-based narratives relevant to the research questions. The study included three J-1 Filipino mathematics teachers employed in U.S. secondary schools. Participants met the following inclusion criteria: (1) Filipino citizenship and participation in the J-1 Teacher Exchange Program; (2) current employment as a mathematics teacher in a U.S. middle or high school; (3) at least one year of teaching experience in the United States; and (4) willingness to participate in written narrative sharing and follow-up clarification. Individuals who did not meet these criteria were excluded. The sample size was consistent with the depth-oriented nature of narrative inquiry, which prioritizes detailed and contextually rich accounts of lived experiences rather than statistical generalization (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Pseudonyms were used throughout the study to protect participants' identities.

### Research Instrument

The primary instrument was a researcher-developed semi-structured narrative prompt guide consisting of open-ended prompts designed to elicit detailed accounts of participants' lived experiences as J-1 Filipino mathematics teachers in U.S. classrooms. The prompts were aligned with the research questions and informed by Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework of temporality, sociality, and place. The prompts addressed participants' experiences across temporal dimensions, including past, present, and anticipated experiences; social dimensions, including personal, relational, and institutional contexts; and place-related dimensions, including classroom and school environments. The prompts elicited narratives concerning participants' initial conceptions of authority and credibility, cross-cultural disruptions, critical incidents and turning points, adaptive strategies, professional identity, and the development of relational authority and professional credibility. Two experts reviewed the narrative prompt guide to assess its alignment with the study objectives, research questions, and narrative inquiry framework. Minor revisions were incorporated based on their feedback to improve the clarity, coherence, and depth of the prompts. Because the study generated qualitative narrative data, statistical reliability measures were not applicable. Instead, the researchers addressed qualitative rigor through procedures for establishing trustworthiness.

### Data Gathering Procedure

Before data collection, the researchers secured ethical clearance and informed consent. Participants were contacted through professional networks and received an invitation explaining the study's purpose, data collection procedures, the voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality measures. Participants who agreed to participate completed the informed consent process before receiving access to the narrative prompt guide. Data were collected from March 2026 to May 2026 through written narrative responses submitted online via Google Docs. The written format provided participants with time and flexibility to reflect on and articulate their experiences in detail. Participants responded to the narrative prompts based on their lived experiences as J-1 Filipino mathematics teachers in U.S. secondary schools. Follow-up clarification questions were conducted when necessary to address incomplete or unclear responses and to ensure that participants' narratives were sufficiently detailed for analysis. The online procedure enabled participation regardless of geographic location.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

Data analysis followed narrative inquiry procedures guided by Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional framework of temporality, sociality, and place. The analysis focused on how participants organized, interpreted, and assigned meaning to their experiences as J-1 Filipino mathematics teachers in U.S. classrooms.

The analysis proceeded through several stages. First, the researchers repeatedly read the narratives to become familiar with the data and identify significant experiences, recurring tensions, critical incidents, and emerging insights. Analytic memos were maintained to document preliminary interpretations and reflexive observations. Second, each participant's experiences were examined as an individual narrative while preserving the temporal sequence and contextual characteristics of the stories. Third, inductive coding was used to identify recurring concepts related to relational authority, professional credibility, identity negotiation, cultural adjustment, communication, classroom relationships, instructional adaptation, and professional legitimacy. Fourth, thematic narrative analysis was conducted to identify patterns, similarities, and differences across participants while retaining the distinctiveness of individual narratives. Cross-narrative analysis resulted in the identification of major dimensions reflecting participants' initial conceptions of authority and credibility, cross-cultural disruptions, critical incidents and turning points, adaptive and relational strategies, reconstruction of relational authority, reconstruction of professional credibility, identity negotiation, and the role of temporality, sociality, and place. Finally, the narratives and cross-narrative interpretations were examined through the three dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place. This process allowed the researchers to examine how participants' understandings of authority and credibility developed over time, through relationships and interactions, and within particular classroom and school contexts.

Trustworthiness was addressed through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was supported through repeated review of the narratives and careful examination of participants' accounts. Dependability was strengthened through documentation of the research procedures, coding decisions, and analytic processes. Confirmability was supported through reflexive memoing and researcher awareness of potential interpretive influences. Transferability was supported through detailed descriptions of participants' experiences and contexts, enabling readers to assess the findings' relevance to comparable settings.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researchers observed ethical principles throughout the study. The researchers obtained permission to conduct from the Office of the PhD-Math Program Coordinator of UIC Graduate School before data collection. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw without penalty. The researchers obtained electronic informed consent before participation. The researchers protected participant confidentiality by using pseudonyms and removing identifying information about individuals, schools, and locations. Narrative responses and research documents were stored in password-protected digital accounts accessible only to the researchers. Participants were informed that they could decline to answer any prompt they found uncomfortable. The researchers took care to represent participants' narratives accurately and respectfully throughout the analysis and reporting of the findings.

## **Results and Discussion**

The findings are presented and discussed through the narratives of the three J-1 Filipino mathematics teachers, followed by a cross-narrative interpretation of the patterns that emerged across their experiences. Consistent with the narrative inquiry framework of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), the analysis attends to temporality, sociality, and place to examine how participants' understandings of authority, credibility, and professional identity developed through their experiences in U.S. mathematics classrooms.

### **Participant U: From Positional Authority to Relational Care**

#### ***Initial Authority Conceptions and Cross-Cultural Disruption***

Participant U's narrative began with a strong sense of professional confidence rooted in prior teaching experiences within the Philippine educational system, where classroom authority was associated with structure, discipline, and institutional position. The participant entered the U.S. classroom with the expectation that professional preparation, prior teaching experience, and the teacher's institutional role would provide a foundation for classroom authority. Participant U also drew upon prior mentorship and established classroom-management

practices when entering the new context:

*"I was blessed to have a Filipino/American mentor who was so experienced in handling kids, and I applied and learned her style in classroom management. Being teachable and having that willingness to learn classroom management skills was also a plus to gain authority in my classroom; adding to this was my personality of being firm and a little bit strict in my classroom way back when I was teaching in the Philippines."*

However, these expectations were disrupted almost immediately by the participant's experiences in the U.S. classroom. Participant U described the transition as emotionally and professionally destabilizing, particularly because the participant experienced a discrepancy between the credibility previously established in the Philippines and the recognition received in the new classroom context:

*"It was hard and challenging. Even as we were briefed to be ready for how different the students are, rude and ungrateful, I was culturally shocked. I cried on my first day, when that last bell rang, realizing how credible I was in the Philippines, and I exchanged all of it for this kind of student here in the US."*

This experience demonstrates that professional credibility was not automatically transferred across educational contexts. Although Participant U entered the U.S. classroom with established professional experience, credibility had to be reconstructed within a different social and institutional environment. The finding supports Wubbels et al. (2021), who conceptualized classroom relationships and authority as interactionally developed rather than determined solely by formal teacher position. It also illustrates the importance of context in teacher identity development, as previously established professional meanings may be disrupted when teachers encounter different cultural expectations regarding communication, discipline, and teacher-student relationships.

#### ***Critical Incident and the Reconstruction of Authority***

A significant turning point occurred when Participant U encountered a student displaying aggressive behavior. Initially experienced as a serious classroom-management problem, the incident became transformative after the participant learned about the circumstances surrounding the student's behavior:

*"When one of my students came in late to class and picked up a chair and threw it to the whole class. I was standing in front of the classroom giving instruction, shocked, like we were all shocked! Luckily, one of the coaches was nearby and helped calm that student down. I then learned after the incident that the student was bullied during lunch and released his rage to us. I further realized that you cannot really judge your individual student as to where they are coming from."*

The participant further recognized that many students were experiencing difficult family and social circumstances. Rather than interpreting the incident exclusively through the lens of discipline, Participant U began to understand student behavior within the broader context of students' lived experiences. This recognition became a critical moment in the reconstruction of the participant's authority:

*"I realized that these students needed more of my understanding and care. Thus, I stayed in that school for five years, until my visa expired. Every day, I wake up telling myself that there is always that one student waiting for me to show up to be inspired."*

The critical incident therefore functioned as a catalyst for professional transformation. Rather than reinforcing a primarily disciplinary conception of authority, the experience encouraged Participant U to integrate empathy and contextual understanding into classroom practice. This finding aligns with Ladson-Billings (2021), whose work on culturally relevant pedagogy emphasizes understanding students within their cultural and social contexts. The participant's experience further demonstrates that critical incidents can prompt teachers to reconsider previously held assumptions and reconstruct professional identity through reflection.

#### ***Relational Adaptation and Professional Credibility***

Following the initial disruption and critical incident, Participant U gradually shifted toward relationship-building practices. Trust was developed through parent communication, participation in school and community activities, and efforts to demonstrate instructional competence:

*"You have to gain their trust first, and the school that I was assigned to was just a small school, and everybody knew everyone. I have to say, parent contact and being seen with the community - attending games, programs at school, and community gatherings where students can see you- helped me gain my student's trust. And yes, content-wise, I had to show them that I can really teach the subject, and with fun games doing Math."*

The participant's narrative demonstrates that relational authority and professional credibility developed simultaneously. Trust and community engagement strengthened the relational dimension of authority, while mathematical competence and engaging instruction reinforced professional credibility. Participant U later explained:

*"I have become more particular with how individual students learn. I also checked on the demographics of each of my classes just to understand the behavior of each of my students. Good communication with parents truly helps a lot too!"*

These experiences indicate that Participant U's professional legitimacy expanded beyond technical expertise or classroom control to include care, responsiveness, communication, and sustained presence. This extends conventional understandings of teacher effectiveness by demonstrating how professional credibility is recognized within relationships and particular social contexts. The finding also supports Hendrickx et al. (2022), who emphasized the importance of teacher-student relationships for student engagement, while illustrating how such relationships can also contribute to teachers' developing sense of professional legitimacy.

Overall, Participant U's narrative reflects a temporal movement from positional authority toward relational authority. The participant did not abandon structure or instructional competence but integrated these prior strengths with empathy, responsiveness, and relational engagement. Authority consequently became something developed through sustained interaction rather than something assumed from a professional position.

### **Participant S: Redefining Credibility Through Reflective Practice**

#### ***Transition, Displacement, and Initial Uncertainty***

Participant S entered the U.S. classroom under circumstances that immediately challenged assumptions about professional authority. Rather than beginning the school year with students, the participant entered after students had already established routines with a substitute teacher:

*"One thing I learned pretty quickly was that teaching here in the U.S. really pushed me to grow in ways I didn't expect. In my first year, I actually came in late, so the students had already spent about a month with a substitute. That made it challenging because I was stepping into a class that already had routines and expectations in place, and I had to figure out how to come in as their teacher."*

The participant initially experienced a sense of displacement and uncertainty, recognizing that the formal teacher role did not automatically establish classroom legitimacy. Instead of immediately replacing existing practices, Participant S adopted an observational and reflective approach:

*"At first, I felt like I was already behind, especially with classroom management and routines. But I realized it wasn't really about changing everything right away. I had to observe first, see what was already working, and build from there."*

The participant's approach illustrates a process of adaptation in which prior professional knowledge was not simply transferred to the new context but was evaluated and selectively modified. The presence of a mentor further supported this process:

*"What really helped was that the substitute teacher ended up becoming my mentor. He supported me a lot and helped me think through how to transition into the class in a positive way."*

This finding highlights the social dimension of professional adaptation. Participant S's authority developed through observation, mentorship, and interaction rather than through immediate assertion of control. The experience is consistent with Korthagen's (2017) argument that teacher learning develops through reflection on experience and the reinterpretation of professional practice.

### ***Critical Turning Point: Engagement Versus Authentic Learning***

A major turning point occurred when Participant S recognized a discrepancy between visible classroom engagement and actual mathematical learning. Although students appeared actively involved during instruction, assessment results revealed that engagement did not always correspond to conceptual understanding:

*"I think one of the biggest turning points for me happened in my second year and the years after that, when I started noticing that even though students were actively participating and the class looked productive, their assessment results were not always reflecting the level of understanding I expected."*

This realization challenged the participant's earlier conception of effective teaching. Participant S explained:

*"At first, I thought that if students were engaged and the classroom was running smoothly, then I was doing well. But that experience made me realize that engagement alone is not enough. It pushed me to reflect more deeply and ask myself whether my students were truly learning or just participating."*

The experience transformed professional credibility from a concept associated primarily with classroom activity and smooth management into one associated with meaningful student learning. This distinction matters in mathematics education, where visible participation does not necessarily indicate conceptual understanding. The finding complements research emphasizing the relationship between teacher competence and student learning (Baumert et al., 2010; Hill et al., 2005) while extending it to a cross-cultural context in which the teacher was simultaneously negotiating professional legitimacy.

### ***Reflective Adaptation and Reconstruction of Credibility***

Following this realization, Participant S intentionally redesigned instructional practices to promote deeper mathematical reasoning, student accountability, and conceptual understanding. The participant incorporated collaborative and cognitively demanding activities, including vertical board work, peer discussions, and structured mathematical reasoning.

The participant also reconsidered classroom leadership:

*"Since I was already starting the year on my own at that point, I had to implement routines by myself, manage the classroom by myself, and really think about how my routines supported not just behavior, but also academics."*

These changes demonstrate that credibility was constructed through an ongoing cycle of experience, reflection, adaptation, and evaluation. Rather than viewing authority as synonymous with control, Participant S developed a more intentional conception of authority grounded in responsiveness and pedagogical purpose:

*"Over time, I learned that being firm, consistent, and still flexible depending on the situation gave me stronger classroom authority and made me more confident as a teacher in the U.S. I stopped seeing authority as just having control of the room, and I started seeing it as being intentional, reflective, and responsive to what students actually need."*

The participant subsequently began evaluating classroom success through student thinking and demonstrated learning rather than through classroom activity alone:

*"I no longer looked at a quiet or active classroom as the only sign of success. I started looking more at student thinking, student conversations, and whether the learning was truly showing up in their work."*

This finding supports Fauth et al. (2019), who emphasized the importance of teaching quality as perceived and experienced within classroom interaction, and Korthagen (2017), who highlighted reflection as a mechanism of professional learning. Participant S's narrative further suggests that professional credibility in mathematics education is strengthened when instructional competence becomes visible through students' mathematical thinking and learning.

Thus, Participant S's professional identity developed through reflective pedagogical practice. Authority became

associated with consistency, flexibility, and intentionality, while credibility became associated with authentic learning rather than engagement alone.

### **Participant A: Negotiating Identity, Authority, and Resilience**

#### ***Initial Authority and Cross-Cultural Disruption***

Participant A initially relied on structured classroom-management practices developed through prior teaching experiences in the Philippines. Clear expectations, consistent routines, and firm implementation were understood as important foundations of authority:

*"My journey in establishing authority in the classroom began with creating clear and consistent routines and expectations. Simple systems such as bathroom and phone policies played a big role, but what mattered most was being firm and consistent in implementing them."*

However, the participant encountered behavioral and communication patterns that differed from prior experiences. Students were described as more direct and willing to challenge teachers openly, creating difficulties in maintaining professional confidence:

*"My early experiences were challenging. Even after my first full year of teaching, I struggled to fully manage the class. Behavioral issues were something I had not encountered before, and it was difficult to navigate."*

The participant's experience illustrates how culturally situated expectations shape classroom authority. Practices that were previously meaningful within one educational context could not simply be transferred without modification to another. This finding is consistent with Zhang and Wang (2022), who described international teaching experiences as contexts in which teachers negotiate professional identity through encounters with different educational and cultural expectations.

#### ***Critical Incidents, Vulnerability, and Professional Legitimacy***

A particularly significant critical incident involved unsafe student behavior:

*"One of the most stressful moments I experienced was when a student attempted a dangerous TikTok trend in class. While I was busy assisting other students, he put hand sanitizer on his palm, lit it with a lighter, and briefly set his hand on fire."*

The event generated intense emotional distress and heightened Participant A's awareness of professional vulnerability. The incident showed that classroom authority connected not only to everyday teacher-student interactions but also to institutional expectations around safety and professional responsibility. Another critical incident involved students' comments about the participant's accent:

*"Another defining moment was when I broke down in tears in front of my class due to ongoing disrespect and insensitive comments about my accent. I reached a point where I could no longer continue teaching, and I had to step out and compose myself."*

Language therefore became an important dimension of professional credibility. The participant's professional competence was not necessarily diminished by accent, yet comments about linguistic difference affected confidence and perceptions of legitimacy. This finding resonates with scholarship examining the influence of linguistic norms and native-speaker ideologies on teachers' professional identities and perceived legitimacy (Faez, 2018; Ruecker & Ives, 2015). The experience demonstrates that credibility in cross-cultural classrooms can be influenced by factors extending beyond instructional expertise. Language, communication, and cultural expectations can mediate how teachers experience and negotiate professional legitimacy.

#### ***Resilience, Adaptation, and Identity Reconstruction***

Despite these challenges, Participant A gradually developed a more balanced approach that integrated prior strengths in discipline and structure with empathy, flexibility, and relational responsiveness. The participant reflected:

*"I started with the belief that authority is given, but I have learned that it must be earned through consistency,*

*relationships, and mutual respect.”*

This statement captures a central transformation in the participant’s narrative. Authority shifted from something assumed through professional position to something developed through sustained relationships. The participant also described changes in communication and confidence:

*“My experiences with language and communication challenges pushed me to become more confident and intentional in how I express myself. Meanwhile, my background in the Philippines gave me discipline and structure, which I now balance with a more student-centered approach.”*

The participant therefore did not replace the previous professional identity but reconstructed it by integrating existing values with practices developed through the U.S. teaching experience. This process reflects the fluid and socially mediated nature of teacher identity described by Beijaard et al. (2004) and Trent (2018).

Participant A ultimately described authority as influence rather than control:

*“Today, I see my authority not as control, but as influence, built through trust, care, and consistency. My journey reflects growth, resilience, and adaptation, and it continues to shape the kind of teacher I am becoming: one who values both strength and compassion in the classroom.”*

Participant A’s narrative therefore demonstrates that professional identity reconstruction involved linguistic, cultural, relational, and institutional dimensions. Authority and credibility developed through resilience and adaptation while remaining connected to the participant’s prior professional values.

### **Cross-Narrative Interpretation**

The three narratives revealed both shared patterns and meaningful differences in how J-1 Filipino mathematics teachers constructed authority and professional credibility within U.S. classrooms. Although each participant experienced different critical incidents and emphasized different aspects of professional growth, their narratives demonstrated a common movement from initially assumed or positional legitimacy toward relationally negotiated authority and credibility.

### ***Relational Authority as Earned Legitimacy***

Across the three narratives, participants initially entered U.S. classrooms with assumptions that professional position, prior teaching experience, classroom structure, and subject-matter competence would provide a foundation for authority. Their experiences subsequently disrupted these assumptions. Participant U emphasized trust, care, and community engagement. Participant S emphasized consistency, flexibility, and pedagogical intentionality. Participant A emphasized mutual respect, communication, and relational consistency. Despite these differences, all three participants ultimately described authority as something that had to be developed through sustained interaction. This finding supports Wubbels et al. (2021), who conceptualized teacher-student relationships as central to classroom interaction and authority. It also extends the literature by demonstrating that for internationally mobile teachers, relational authority is not simply a classroom-management strategy. It is a developmental process through which teachers reconstruct their understanding of professional legitimacy after entering a different educational culture.

### ***Professional Credibility as Relationally and Instructionally Constructed***

Professional credibility also underwent significant reconstruction across the narratives. Participants initially drew upon professional experience, qualifications, subject knowledge, and classroom-management practices. Over time, however, credibility became associated with broader forms of professional practice. For Participant U, credibility was strengthened through instructional competence, parent communication, community visibility, and care for students. For Participant S, credibility became closely associated with authentic mathematical learning, student thinking, and reflective instructional practice. For Participant A, credibility developed through communication, resilience, consistency, and the ability to maintain professional composure despite linguistic and cultural challenges. These findings suggest that credibility was neither purely technical nor purely relational. Instead, it emerged through the interaction of instructional competence and social recognition. This interpretation is consistent with Fauth et al. (2019) and Kang and Berliner (2018), who emphasized the importance of teaching quality and teacher effectiveness, while extending these perspectives by demonstrating how professional

competence becomes meaningful through relational and contextual processes.

The findings are particularly relevant to mathematics education because Participant S's narrative demonstrates that professional credibility was ultimately connected to evidence of mathematical learning rather than engagement alone. Thus, credibility was constructed through what teachers knew, how they taught, how they related to students, and how effectively students demonstrated learning.

### *Identity Negotiation Across Cultural Contexts*

A third cross-narrative pattern involved the negotiation of professional identity. Participants did not simply replace their Philippine teaching identities with U.S. teaching practices. Instead, they selectively adapted previous beliefs and practices in response to new classroom expectations. Participant U retained firmness and instructional competence while incorporating empathy and community engagement. Participant S developed a reflective and adaptive instructional identity through observation and pedagogical inquiry. Participant A maintained discipline and structure while integrating flexibility, communication adaptation, and student-centered practices. This pattern supports Beijaard et al. (2004) and Trent (2018), who conceptualized teacher identity as fluid and socially mediated. It also aligns with Zhang and Wang (2022), who demonstrated that international professional experiences can become important contexts for identity development. The present findings extend this perspective by showing how identity negotiation among J-1 Filipino mathematics teachers was intertwined with the reconstruction of authority and credibility. Language and communication were particularly important to Participant A, while cultural expectations concerning student behavior and teacher-student interaction influenced all three narratives. These experiences demonstrate that professional identity is not constructed independently of context; rather, it develops through interaction with the social, cultural, and institutional environment in which teaching occurs.

### *Critical Incidents as Catalysts for Professional Transformation*

Critical incidents were central to the development of all three participants. Each participant identified experiences that disrupted prior assumptions and prompted reflection. For Participant U, the aggressive-student incident prompted a deeper understanding of students' circumstances and shifted authority toward empathy and care. For Participant S, assessment results revealed a discrepancy between visible engagement and actual mathematical understanding, prompting a redefinition of professional credibility. For Participant A, unsafe student behavior and accent-related comments generated emotional and professional vulnerability and contributed to subsequent adaptation and resilience. These incidents demonstrate that professional transformation did not occur solely through formal preparation or routine classroom experience. Instead, moments of disruption created opportunities for participants to question existing assumptions, reinterpret their experiences, and modify their practices. Korthagen (2017) similarly emphasized the importance of reflection in teacher learning. The present findings extend this perspective by demonstrating how critical incidents in cross-cultural classrooms can simultaneously reshape pedagogical practice, professional identity, authority, and credibility.

### *Temporality, Sociality, and Place*

The cross-narrative findings strongly reflect Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework of temporality, sociality, and place. **Temporality** was evident in the progression of participants' experiences from initial confidence or uncertainty, through disruption and critical incidents, toward adaptation and reconstructed professional identities. Authority and credibility therefore emerged as processes that developed over time rather than as fixed characteristics. **Sociality** was evident in the central role of relationships with students, parents, mentors, colleagues, administrators, and school communities. Participants' professional legitimacy was continually influenced by how they interpreted and responded to these relationships. **Place** was evident in the importance of the U.S. classroom and school context. Participants entered these settings with professional knowledge developed in the Philippines, but their existing assumptions were reinterpreted through experiences within U.S. educational environments. The meaning of authority, credibility, communication, and teacher-student relationships therefore depended partly on the specific contexts in which participants taught. Taken together, these dimensions demonstrate that the construction of authority and credibility was simultaneously temporal, relational, and contextual. The participants' narratives show that becoming professionally legitimate in a cross-cultural teaching environment involves not simply acquiring new classroom techniques but reconstructing professional meaning through lived experience.

**Table 1.** *Cross-Narrative Synthesis of Relational Authority and Professional Credibility Among J-1 Filipino Mathematics Teachers*

| Cross-Narrative Dimension                        | Participant U                                                                              | Participant S                                                                                 | Participant A                                                                               | Cross-Narrative Interpretation                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Initial Conceptions of Authority and Credibility | Viewed authority as rooted in structure, discipline, and institutional position            | Associated credibility with instructional competence and classroom engagement                 | Relied on consistency, rules, and classroom control                                         | Participants initially entered U.S. classrooms with positional and credential-based assumptions of legitimacy shaped by prior teaching experiences in the Philippines |
| Initial Cross-Cultural Disruptions               | Experienced emotional vulnerability and diminished credibility during classroom transition | Encountered difficulty adapting to pre-established classroom routines and expectations        | Faced challenges related to student behavior, communication styles, and classroom openness  | U.S. classroom dynamics disrupted previously internalized expectations regarding authority, communication, and teacher-student relationships                          |
| Critical Incidents and Turning Points            | Aggressive student encounter prompted empathetic understanding and relational reflection   | Assessment results revealed gaps between engagement and authentic learning                    | Accent-related comments and unsafe student behavior challenged professional confidence      | Critical classroom incidents functioned as transformative moments that reshaped participants' understandings of teaching, legitimacy, and authority                   |
| Adaptive and Relational Strategies               | Built trust through relationship-building, parent communication, and community engagement  | Redesigned instructional strategies to strengthen conceptual understanding and accountability | Integrated empathy, flexibility, and communication adjustments into classroom practice      | Participants negotiated legitimacy through relational engagement, reflective adaptation, and instructional responsiveness                                             |
| Reconstruction of Relational Authority           | Authority evolved through care, empathy, trust, and sustained presence                     | Authority emerged through consistency, attentiveness, and pedagogical intentionality          | Authority became grounded in mutual respect, resilience, and relational consistency         | Relational authority emerged as socially negotiated, interactionally constructed, and continuously developed over time                                                |
| Reconstruction of Professional Credibility       | Credibility became associated with relational engagement and instructional competence      | Credibility shifted toward authentic student learning and cognitive growth                    | Credibility developed through authenticity, communication adaptation, and resilience        | Professional credibility evolved beyond technical expertise toward relationally and socially negotiated legitimacy                                                    |
| Identity Negotiation Processes                   | Transitioned from hierarchical teaching assumptions toward relational pedagogical identity | Developed a reflective and adaptive instructional identity                                    | Negotiated linguistic, cultural, and professional identity within cross-cultural classrooms | Professional identity was continuously reconstructed through interaction, reflection, and sociocultural adaptation                                                    |
| Role of Temporality, Sociality, and Place        | Experiences evolved progressively through classroom and community interaction              | Legitimacy developed through ongoing instructional reflection and relational engagement       | Authority and credibility shifted through repeated experiences within U.S. classrooms       | Participants' experiences reflected the narrative inquiry dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place                                                             |
| Overall Narrative Trajectory                     | Transformation through relational care and empathy                                         | Transformation through reflective pedagogical practice                                        | Transformation through resilience and adaptive identity negotiation                         | Authority and credibility emerged as dynamic, relational, contextual, and evolving constructs within cross-cultural mathematics education                             |

## Overall Narrative Trajectory

Across the three participants, the overall narrative trajectory can be understood as a movement from assumed or positional legitimacy toward relationally negotiated legitimacy. Participants entered U.S. classrooms with professional knowledge and identities developed through prior teaching experiences in the Philippines. Cross-cultural disruptions challenged assumptions regarding discipline, communication, authority, and credibility. Critical incidents then created moments of reflection that prompted participants to adapt their instructional and relational practices. The resulting transformation did not involve abandoning prior professional identities. Instead, participants integrated previously established strengths. These are discipline, structure, mathematical competence, and commitment to students, with new understandings of empathy, flexibility, responsiveness, communication, and relational engagement. Thus, the findings indicate that relational authority and professional credibility were dynamically constructed through the interaction of experience, reflection, relationships, instructional practice, cultural adaptation, and context. These constructs developed progressively rather than being automatically conferred by professional position, credentials, or prior teaching experience.

Table 1 summarizes the cross-narrative dimensions identified across the three participants and illustrates the progression from initial conceptions of authority and credibility through cross-cultural disruption, critical incidents, adaptation, identity negotiation, and reconstruction of professional legitimacy. The cross-narrative analysis demonstrates that although participants experienced distinct challenges, their professional development followed a shared pattern of disruption, reflection, adaptation, and reconstruction. The findings therefore answer the first research question by showing that relational authority and professional credibility were constructed through everyday interactions, instructional responsiveness, and sustained relationships rather than being automatically derived from professional position. They address the second research question by identifying critical incidents and turning points as catalysts for changes in participants' professional identities and understandings of authority and credibility. Finally, they address the third research question by demonstrating how culture, language, prior teaching experiences, and the U.S. educational context shaped participants' interpretations and reconstruction of professional legitimacy.

## Conclusion

This study explored how J-1 Filipino mathematics teachers construct and negotiate relational authority and professional credibility within U.S. classrooms. The findings indicate that these constructs are dynamic, interconnected, and continuously shaped through lived experience. Relational authority and professional credibility did not automatically emerge from institutional position, qualifications, or prior teaching experience. Rather, they developed through interaction, reflection, adaptation, and sustained engagement within specific sociocultural and classroom contexts.

A central contribution of the study is the identification of a developmental trajectory in the construction of authority and credibility. Participants' narratives revealed a movement from initial disruption, in which previously held assumptions regarding teaching, authority, and classroom relationships were challenged, toward gradual reconstruction through relational engagement, instructional responsiveness, and reflective practice. These findings suggest that becoming a teacher in a cross-cultural environment involves more than adapting instructional practices; it also requires the continuous reconstruction of professional identity. Authority and credibility therefore emerged as co-constructed processes shaped by personal agency, classroom interactions, and contextual demands.

The study contributes theoretically by extending constructivist and identity-based perspectives on teacher development. The findings demonstrate that authority and credibility are socially negotiated and temporally developed through critical incidents, reflection, and adaptation. The study also illustrates how language, cultural background, classroom expectations, and sociocultural norms influence perceptions of professional legitimacy. These findings highlight the importance of considering cultural and contextual dimensions when examining teacher identity and professional development in cross-cultural educational settings.

Methodologically, the study contributes to narrative inquiry by illustrating how participants' stories can reveal the evolving nature of teacher experience and professional meaning-making. Examining the narratives through the dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place provided a means of understanding how professional identity, authority, and credibility developed across experiences, relationships, and contexts. The narrative approach

therefore supported a deeper examination of transformation and negotiation that may not be fully captured through approaches focused primarily on measurable outcomes.

Contextually, the study contributes to the limited literature on J-1 Filipino mathematics teachers in U.S. classrooms. By situating the study within mathematics education, the findings show how the disciplinary demands of mathematics teaching, including conceptual clarity, instructional precision, and attention to student thinking, intersect with relational and identity-based dimensions of teaching. Professional legitimacy in mathematics classrooms therefore involves not only pedagogical competence but also relational adaptability, communication, and cultural responsiveness.

The findings have important implications for educational practice and policy. Schools and organizations that recruit internationally mobile teachers should recognize that professional adaptation is a developmental process rather than an immediate outcome of hiring, credential recognition, or orientation. Support systems should therefore extend beyond procedural and technical preparation to include sustained mentorship, culturally responsive professional development, opportunities for reflective practice, and guidance related to classroom communication and teacher–student relationships. Such support may help international teachers navigate unfamiliar classroom expectations while also drawing on the knowledge, skills, and professional strengths developed in their home educational contexts.

For mathematics education specifically, professional development for internationally mobile teachers should connect mathematical and pedagogical expertise with culturally responsive and relational practices. Teachers may benefit from opportunities to examine student expectations, classroom interaction patterns, communication practices, and evidence of student learning while reflecting on how these factors influence their developing authority and credibility. At the institutional level, creating supportive environments for international teachers may also strengthen professional integration and contribute to more inclusive and culturally responsive schools.

Future research may extend these findings by examining larger and more diverse groups of internationally mobile mathematics teachers across different U.S. regions, school levels, and educational contexts. Longitudinal studies could further investigate how authority, credibility, and professional identity develop beyond the initial stages of cross-cultural transition. Comparative research involving Filipino and other internationally recruited teachers may also provide further insight into how cultural, linguistic, institutional, and disciplinary contexts shape the construction of professional legitimacy.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that teaching within a globalized educational landscape is not simply a transfer of instructional knowledge across national borders but a continuous process of professional becoming. For internationally mobile teachers, authority and credibility are not automatically granted; they are progressively negotiated and reconstructed through relationships, experiences, reflection, and identity work. Recognizing this process can help schools, teacher preparation programs, and educational policymakers develop more responsive systems that support international teachers not merely as workforce supplements, but as professionals whose experiences, expertise, and cultural perspectives contribute to increasingly diverse educational environments.

## Contributions of Authors

**Author 1:** conceptualization, proposal writing, data gathering, data analysis, interpretation, manuscript revision

**Author 2:** conceptualization, data gathering, manuscript revision

**Author 3:** conceptualization, data gathering, paper coordination, critical review

**Author 4:** supervision, methodology, validation, interpretation, manuscript revision

## Funding

Not indicated

## Conflict of Interests

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Acknowledgment

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Dr. Henry E. Lemana II, the study adviser and coauthor, for his invaluable guidance throughout this research process. His insightful feedback and expertise were instrumental in shaping this study, and his recommendations helped refine it. Finally, we appreciate the encouragement from our family and colleagues, whose unwavering support kept us motivated throughout the research process.

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