

NAVIGATING CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: A NARRATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

This study presents a narrative literature review of contemporary issues in English Language Teaching (ELT), focusing on four major themes: Artificial Intelligence integration, translanguaging and multilingual identity, educational policy through the Merdeka Curriculum, and the decolonization of ELT via Global Englishes. Using a qualitative approach, the study synthesizes recent peer-reviewed literature published between 2020 and 2025 from databases such as Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar. The findings reveal that ELT is undergoing a significant transformation toward more flexible, technology-enhanced, and learner-centered pedagogies. Artificial Intelligence is increasingly used to support personalized learning, although concerns related to ethics, academic integrity, and digital literacy remain. Translanguaging is recognized as an effective strategy for leveraging learners' full linguistic repertoires, while the Merdeka Curriculum highlights persistent challenges related to teacher readiness, digital inequality, and professional development gaps. Meanwhile, the Global Englishes perspective challenges native-speaker norms and promotes communicative effectiveness and linguistic diversity. Overall, the study concludes that the effectiveness of current ELT reforms largely depends on teacher capacity, institutional support, and the ability to integrate technological, linguistic, and pedagogical innovations in context-sensitive ways.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, Artificial Intelligence, Translanguaging, Merdeka Curriculum, Global Englishes

INTRODUCTION

The field of English Language Teaching (ELT) has undergone substantial transformation over the past two decades in response to rapid technological advancement, globalization, and evolving educational paradigms. English is no longer viewed solely as a foreign language to be mastered through grammar-focused instruction, but increasingly as a global means of communication that requires learners to develop critical thinking, digital literacy, intercultural competence, and collaborative skills. According to Richards (2015), contemporary ELT has shifted toward more learner-centered approaches that emphasize meaningful communication and the development of twenty-first-century

competencies rather than the mere acquisition of linguistic knowledge.

The emergence of the digital era has further accelerated changes in language education. The integration of digital technologies into classrooms has expanded learning opportunities beyond traditional face-to-face instruction, enabling students to access authentic materials, collaborate online, and receive immediate feedback. More recently, the rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly generative AI applications, has introduced new possibilities for supporting language learning while simultaneously raising important pedagogical and ethical questions. As Luckin and Cukurova (2019) argue, AI has the potential

to personalize learning and enhance educational experiences, provided that it is implemented responsibly and under appropriate pedagogical guidance.

At the same time, increasing linguistic diversity has encouraged educators to reconsider traditional monolingual approaches to English teaching. Rather than separating languages strictly in classroom instruction, recent perspectives acknowledge learners' complete linguistic repertoire as a valuable resource for constructing meaning. García and Wei (2021) explain that translanguaging enables multilingual learners to utilize all of their language resources to facilitate understanding, communication, and knowledge construction. This perspective has become particularly relevant in multilingual countries such as Indonesia, where students commonly use local languages, Indonesian, and English in their daily interactions.

Curriculum reform has also become one of the defining issues in contemporary education. Across many countries, educational policies have increasingly emphasized student-centered learning, digital competence, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities. In Indonesia, these priorities are reflected in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which promotes flexible learning, differentiated instruction, and greater teacher autonomy in designing meaningful learning experiences. As Fullan (2007) notes, however, the success of curriculum reform depends not only on policy design but also on teachers' readiness and their capacity to adapt instructional practices to changing educational demands.

In addition, the growing recognition of English as a global lingua franca has challenged the long-standing dominance of native-speaker norms in English language teaching. Scholars advocating the Global Englishes perspective argue that English education should prepare learners to communicate effectively with speakers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds rather than striving exclusively for native-like competence. Rose et al. (2022) maintain that

English language teaching should embrace linguistic diversity by promoting intercultural communication and intelligibility as primary learning goals.

Therefore, this paper aims to review four contemporary issues that currently influence the development of English Language Teaching, namely the integration of Artificial Intelligence in language education, translanguaging and multilingual identity, educational policy and curriculum reform, and the Global Englishes perspective. By examining these issues, this paper seeks to provide an overview of current trends, challenges, and pedagogical implications for English language teaching, particularly within the Indonesian educational context.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a narrative literature review to examine contemporary issues in English Language Teaching (ELT). A narrative literature review was selected because it enables researchers to synthesize and critically interpret findings from previous studies, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of emerging educational issues and research trends. As argued by Habersang and Reihlen (2025), narrative reviews emphasize interpretative synthesis and conceptual integration, allowing researchers to explain complex educational phenomena from multiple perspectives rather than merely summarizing previous findings.

The literature search was conducted and being selected because they index a wide range of reputable publications in education, applied linguistics, and English language teaching. The search focused on peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2025 to ensure that the review reflected recent developments in the field. The keywords included artificial intelligence in ELT, AI-assisted language learning, translanguaging, multilingual identity, Merdeka Curriculum, teacher professional development, Global Englishes, and decolonizing ELT.

The selected literature was screened using several inclusion criteria. Only peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2025, written in English, and focusing on English Language Teaching or applied linguistics were included in the review. Studies discussing at least one of the four contemporary issues examined in this paper were considered relevant, whereas conference abstracts, opinion papers, unpublished manuscripts, and studies outside the scope of ELT were excluded. Such selection criteria are important to ensure that the synthesized findings are based on credible and relevant evidence (McCall et al., 2021).

The selected studies were analyzed using thematic synthesis, in which findings from different studies were grouped according to recurring concepts and research themes. Following the recommendations of Habersang and Reihlen (2025), this approach facilitates the identification of relationships among previous studies while generating broader conceptual insights. Accordingly, the literature was organized into four major themes: (1) Artificial Intelligence in English Language Teaching, (2) Translanguaging and Multilingual Identity, (3) Educational Policy and the Merdeka Curriculum, and (4) Decolonizing ELT and Global Englishes. These themes were subsequently interpreted to identify current trends, major challenges, and pedagogical implications for English language teaching in Indonesia.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Artificial Intelligence in ELT

The reviewed literature consistently indicates that Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly generative AI tools such as ChatGPT, has significantly transformed English Language Teaching (ELT) by creating more flexible, interactive, and learner-centered learning environments. According to Lo et al. (2024), AI has been widely utilized in ESL/EFL classrooms to support writing instruction, vocabulary learning, and personalized feedback, enabling students to develop language skills more

independently. Similarly, Lai and Lee (2024) found that conversational AI enhances learners' cognitive achievement and learning engagement by providing adaptive learning experiences and immediate feedback tailored to students' language proficiency. Collectively, these findings suggest that AI has shifted from being merely a technological innovation to becoming an important pedagogical resource in contemporary ELT.

Despite these pedagogical benefits, the literature also identifies several challenges associated with AI integration. Lo et al. (2024) reported that concerns regarding academic integrity remain one of the most frequently discussed issues because students may rely excessively on AI-generated content when completing academic assignments. Likewise, Cogo et al. (2024) argued that the increasing use of generative AI raises important ethical questions concerning authorship, responsibility, and the changing role of teachers in language education. In addition to academic integrity, researchers have highlighted algorithmic bias, which may privilege dominant linguistic and cultural norms, as well as data privacy issues resulting from the collection and processing of users' personal information. These findings indicate that successful AI implementation depends not only on technological accessibility but also on responsible pedagogical and ethical practices.

Rather than discouraging AI use, recent studies consistently recommend strengthening AI literacy among both teachers and students. Jeon (2025) emphasized that AI should function as a learning assistant that supports critical thinking and learner autonomy rather than replacing students' engagement. Similarly, Lo et al. (2024) argued that learners should be encouraged to critically evaluate AI-generated responses, understand the limitations of generative AI, and use its outputs responsibly throughout the process. Therefore, effective AI integration should prioritize human-centered learning in which teachers remain the primary facilitators while AI serves as a complementary tool.

Based on the synthesis of previous studies, this review proposes the AIDE (Awareness–Integration–Development–Evaluation) Model as a practical framework for integrating AI into English language teaching. The framework begins with Awareness, where students are introduced to the functions, benefits, limitations, and ethical implications of AI. This is followed by Integration, in which AI is incorporated into learning activities such as brainstorming, drafting, editing, and communication simulations. The Development stage focuses on enhancing students' multimodal literacy through AI-generated text, audio, and visual resources, while the final stage, Evaluation, encourages students to critically assess AI-generated outputs through reflection and independent judgment. This framework complements the recommendations of Jeon (2025) and Cogo et al. (2024), who emphasize that the educational value of AI lies not in replacing teachers but in fostering critical thinking, digital ethics, and responsible technology use in language learning.

Translanguaging and Multilingual Identity

The reviewed literature indicates that translanguaging has emerged as an effective pedagogical approach that challenges the traditional English-only policy in language education. Rather than treating learners' first language as an obstacle, translanguaging encourages students to utilize their entire linguistic repertoire to construct meaning and facilitate communication. According to Cenoz and Gorter (2022), this approach enables multilingual learners to integrate their linguistic resources more flexibly, resulting in richer learning experiences and more meaningful language use. Similarly, Tai and Li Wei (2021) argued that translanguaging creates a more inclusive learning environment by recognizing multilingualism as an educational asset rather than a deficiency.

From a cognitive perspective, the literature suggests that translanguaging supports language learning by reducing learners' cognitive load during complex

language tasks. Tai and Li Wei (2021) found that allowing students to draw upon their first language while learning English facilitates conceptual understanding and enables them to organize ideas more effectively before producing the target language. Likewise, Cenoz and Gorter (2022) emphasized that strategic use of multiple languages promotes deeper comprehension and encourages learners to engage more actively in classroom interaction. These findings indicate that translanguaging contributes not only to language development but also to students' higher-order thinking processes.

Beyond its cognitive benefits, translanguaging also plays an important role in strengthening learners' multilingual identities and cultural awareness. Rather than marginalizing local languages, this approach acknowledges students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds as valuable learning resources. García and Li Wei (2021) argued that recognizing students' complete linguistic repertoire promotes greater confidence, participation, and a stronger sense of belonging in multilingual classrooms. In the Indonesian context, where students commonly communicate using local languages, Indonesian, and English, translanguaging offers opportunities to create more equitable and culturally responsive English language instruction.

The literature further demonstrates that translanguaging can be effectively implemented in productive language skills through carefully designed classroom activities. In speaking instruction, students may initially discuss ideas using Indonesian, local languages, and English before presenting their final responses in English, allowing them to organize ideas while gradually improving communicative competence. Similarly, writing instruction can begin with drafting ideas in students' first language before revising and expanding the text into English with guidance from teachers or AI-assisted learning tools. According to Tai and Li Wei (2021), such scaffolded practices help learners focus on developing

ideas before attending to linguistic accuracy, thereby supporting more effective language production.

Collectively, the reviewed studies suggest that translanguaging should not be viewed as a barrier to English acquisition but rather as a pedagogical strategy that facilitates language learning while preserving learners' multilingual identities. Nevertheless, the literature also emphasizes that teachers should apply translanguaging strategically through gradual scaffolding to ensure that students progressively increase their use of English as their proficiency develops. This balanced approach allows multilingual resources to function as learning support while maintaining the ultimate goal of developing students' English communicative competence.

Educational Policy and Merdeka Curriculum

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia represents a significant shift toward more flexible, student-centered, and competency-based education. This curriculum emphasizes differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and teacher autonomy in designing meaningful learning experiences. In line with this policy, the plan to introduce English as a compulsory subject at the elementary level further highlights the increasing importance of early foreign language exposure. The Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology explicitly positions the Merdeka Curriculum as a framework to strengthen foundational competencies, including language skills, through contextual and adaptive learning (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, 2022).

However, the findings from the reviewed literature indicate that teacher readiness remains a central challenge in ensuring the successful implementation of these policy reforms. Across studies, teachers in Indonesia are consistently reported to face limitations in pedagogical competence, digital literacy, and access to continuous professional

development, particularly in rural and remote areas. This situation aligns with UNESCO's global observation that educational transformation driven by curriculum reform is highly dependent on teachers' capacity to adapt instructional practices and integrate digital technologies effectively (UNESCO, 2023).

A comparison with broader international findings further strengthens this issue. UNESCO (2021) highlights that many education systems undergoing rapid reform experience a persistent gap between policy expectations and classroom realities, especially when teacher support systems are insufficient. In the Indonesian context, this gap becomes more visible due to unequal infrastructure distribution, where schools in urban areas tend to have better access to training and digital resources compared to rural schools. This digital divide significantly influences teachers' ability to implement technology-enhanced learning required by the Merdeka Curriculum.

More specifically, recent discussions on teacher professional development emphasize that one-off training programs are no longer sufficient to support continuous pedagogical adaptation. Instead, sustainable and context-sensitive professional development is required. The literature suggests that many Indonesian teachers still experience fragmented training systems that are not closely aligned with classroom needs. This condition is also consistent with World Bank findings on post-pandemic education recovery, which stress that effective teacher development must be ongoing, practice-based, and supported by collaborative learning structures rather than short-term workshops (World Bank, 2020).

In response to these challenges, this review identifies the need for a more adaptive professional development approach. The proposed SMART-TPD (Adaptive Digital Literacy-Based Teacher Professional Development Model) addresses these gaps by integrating self-paced digital learning, mentoring systems, classroom-based action

research, reflective teaching practices, and technology integration in English language teaching. This model reflects a shift from traditional training toward continuous, practice-oriented professional learning.

When compared with global perspectives on teacher development, this model is consistent with UNESCO's (2023) emphasis on strengthening teacher capacity through flexible and digitally supported professional learning ecosystems. However, unlike conventional centralized training programs, SMART-TPD places greater emphasis on contextual adaptation, particularly for teachers working in resource-limited environments. This makes the model more responsive to the diverse educational conditions found across Indonesia.

Furthermore, the reinforcement of professional learning communities is also essential in supporting curriculum implementation. Collaborative teacher networks enable the sharing of best practices, peer mentoring, and collective problem-solving, which are critical for sustaining innovation in classroom practice. Through these interactions, teachers are able to reflect on their teaching experiences, adapt instructional strategies, and respond more effectively to diverse classroom challenges. This collaborative approach aligns with UNESCO (2021), which underscores that teacher collaboration is a key driver in improving instructional quality and ensuring the sustainability of education reforms.

Overall, the literature suggests that while the Merdeka Curriculum provides a progressive framework for educational transformation in Indonesia, its effectiveness is highly dependent on teacher readiness. Without systematic, continuous, and context-sensitive professional development, there is a risk that curriculum reform will remain at the policy level without fully translating into classroom practice. Therefore, strengthening teacher capacity through adaptive models such as SMART-TPD, supported by collaborative professional learning communities, is essential to bridge the gap

between policy intentions and instructional realities.

Decolonizing ELT and Global Englishes

Traditional English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesia has long been shaped by native-speakerism, where British and American English are positioned as the primary benchmarks of correctness. This orientation has influenced instructional materials, classroom discourse, and assessment practices that often prioritize grammatical accuracy and native-like pronunciation over communicative effectiveness. However, recent scholarship increasingly critiques this narrow orientation and argues that it no longer reflects the global reality of English use in multilingual contexts.

Recent developments in Global Englishes (GE) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) research emphasize that English functions as a dynamic and diverse global resource rather than a fixed system tied to native-speaker norms. This perspective shifts the pedagogical focus from imitation of native speakers toward intelligibility, flexibility, and intercultural communicative competence. Rose et al. (2022) highlight that English language teaching should prepare learners for diverse communicative situations involving speakers from multiple linguistic backgrounds, where variation is the norm rather than the exception.

A comparison with traditional ELT practices reveals persistent structural imbalances in teaching materials and assessment systems. Conventional textbooks continue to privilege Western cultural contexts while marginalizing English varieties from Asia, Africa, and other multilingual regions. Galloway and Numajiri (2020) argue that this imbalance reinforces linguistic hierarchies and limits learners' exposure to the real diversity of English usage globally. In contrast, a decolonizing ELT approach advocates for the integration of multilingual texts, diverse accents, and intercultural communication tasks to better reflect authentic global communication practices.

Assessment practices also remain a critical issue in the decolonization of ELT. Traditional evaluation systems often prioritize native-like accuracy and pronunciation, which may not align with real-world communicative demands. Jenkins (2021) emphasizes that in ELF communication, intelligibility and negotiation of meaning are more relevant indicators of communicative competence than native-like performance. This suggests a need to shift assessment frameworks toward task-based evaluation that values clarity, interactional effectiveness, and communication strategies.

Recent studies further recommend pedagogical reconstruction through exposure to global English varieties and culturally diverse learning materials. Galloway and Numajiri (2020) propose that ELT materials should include texts from different global contexts, enabling learners to develop awareness of English as a pluralistic language. Such exposure not only improves listening flexibility but also fosters critical awareness of linguistic diversity and reduces bias toward native-speaker norms.

In the Indonesian context, where students regularly use local languages alongside Indonesian and English, adopting a Global Englishes-informed pedagogy is particularly relevant. This approach aligns with learners' multilingual realities and supports more realistic learning outcomes by prioritizing communicative effectiveness rather than linguistic perfection.

Overall, the literature suggests that decolonizing ELT requires a fundamental shift in both curriculum design and assessment practices. English should be positioned as a global, diverse, and evolving means of communication rather than a fixed standard tied to specific native cultures. This shift promotes linguistic equity and challenges long-standing hierarchical views of language that privilege native-speaker norms over other legitimate varieties of English. By embracing linguistic diversity and communicative flexibility, ELT can better reflect the realities of global communication

and support learners in developing more adaptive and context-sensitive language skills. Ultimately, this approach prepares students not only for linguistic competence but also for meaningful participation in multilingual and multicultural global settings.

CONCLUSION

This narrative literature review highlights four interrelated developments in contemporary English Language Teaching (ELT), namely the integration of Artificial Intelligence, translanguaging practices, educational reform through the Merdeka Curriculum, and the decolonization of ELT through Global Englishes. The findings indicate a shared shift toward more flexible, inclusive, and learner-centered pedagogy, where technology, multilingualism, and global communicative competence play increasingly important roles. However, the review also reveals persistent challenges, particularly related to teacher readiness, unequal access to professional development, and the gap between policy expectations and classroom realities in implementing curriculum reform. In addition, while AI and translanguaging offer significant pedagogical benefits, their effective use depends on teachers' digital literacy and strategic classroom implementation. Similarly, the Global Englishes perspective challenges native-speaker norms and calls for more equitable and communicatively oriented assessment practices. Overall, the study suggests that the future effectiveness of ELT reforms, especially in Indonesia, depends on strengthening teacher capacity and fostering adaptive, reflective, and context-sensitive pedagogical practices that align technological, linguistic, and policy innovations.

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