

DECOLONIZING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: LOCAL CULTURE INTEGRATION AND IDENTITY NEGOTIATION IN POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXTS

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Abstract

English Language Teaching (ELT) in postcolonial contexts is deeply entangled with historical legacies of colonialism, linguistic imperialism, and epistemic hierarchies. Despite the global utility of English, conventional ELT often marginalizes local cultures, languages, and learner identities, perpetuating inequities in knowledge production and representation. This study investigates strategies to decolonize ELT by integrating local cultural content and fostering identity negotiation among learners. Employing bibliographic research combined with critical discourse analysis and bibliometric mapping, the study systematically examines 132 peer-reviewed publications from 2010 to 2025. The analysis identifies dominant research themes, publication trends, and intellectual networks within decolonial ELT scholarship. Findings indicate that curriculum reform incorporating local literature, translanguaging practices, and culturally responsive pedagogy enhances learner engagement, linguistic confidence, and critical awareness. Moreover, learners exposed to integrated local culture negotiate complex, additive identities that bridge local, national, and global dimensions. Bibliometric analysis reveals a marked increase in publications on decolonial ELT from 2018 onwards, with the majority emerging from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, highlighting a global shift toward context-sensitive pedagogical approaches. Conceptual frameworks derived from the literature suggest that effective decolonizing strategies interconnect three domains: structural curriculum adaptation, culturally responsive teaching, and learner identity empowerment. These findings advance theoretical debates on linguistic justice, epistemic equity, and intercultural competence in ELT. The study emphasizes that decolonial pedagogical interventions not only reinforce cultural legitimacy but also strengthen English proficiency and global communicative competence.

Keywords: Decolonizing ELT, Postcolonial Education, Local Culture Integration, Identity Negotiation, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Bibliometric Analysis, Linguistic Justice, Global Englishes.

Introduction

English Language Teaching has historically been shaped by colonial expansion, positioning English as a language of prestige, mobility, and global economic advantage.

How to cite:	Wahyu Sari, D. K., & Farika, S. (2026). Decolonizing English language teaching: Local culture integration and identity negotiation in postcolonial contexts. ECUALL Journal, 3(2), 169–173. https://ejournal.ubibanyuwangi.ac.id/index.php/ecuall_journal
E-ISSN:	2985-3907
Published by:	ECUALL Journal

As Robert Phillipson (1992) argues, the global promotion of English often operates through linguistic imperialism, reinforcing hierarchical power relations between native and non-native speakers. In postcolonial societies, English frequently embodies both opportunity and cultural tension, functioning as a gateway to global communication while simultaneously marginalizing indigenous languages and local epistemologies.

Critical scholarship emphasizes that conventional ELT materials often center Western cultural narratives, standard accents, and canonical literature, neglecting the lived experiences of learners in postcolonial contexts. Alastair Pennycook (2017) underscores the political and ideological dimensions of English, asserting that language teaching is inherently embedded in global power structures. Postcolonial theorists such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) highlight the psychological and cultural consequences of privileging colonial languages over indigenous ones, shaping learner identity, agency, and social positioning.

Emerging debates on Global Englishes, led by scholars like Jennifer Jenkins (2015), challenge monolithic native-speaker norms, promoting pluralistic and context-sensitive conceptualizations of English. This study situates ELT within these critical debates, aiming to explore how integration of local culture into English curricula supports learners in negotiating complex, multidimensional identities while maintaining linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence. By adopting bibliographic and bibliometric research approaches, the study systematically maps scholarly trends, thematic emphases, and intellectual networks to provide a comprehensive understanding of decolonial ELT practices globally.

Method

This research employs a bibliographic approach combined with bibliometric mapping and critical discourse analysis to examine scholarly discourse on decolonizing English Language Teaching. Data were collected from Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC databases, covering the period 2010–2025. Search keywords included “Decolonizing ELT,” “Postcolonial Language Education,” “Global Englishes Pedagogy,” “Identity Negotiation in ELT,” and “Culturally Responsive Teaching.”

An initial dataset of 287 publications was obtained. After applying inclusion criteria — peer-reviewed, explicit theoretical grounding in postcolonial or decolonial frameworks, and relevance to ELT in postcolonial contexts — 132 articles were retained for analysis. Excluded were conference abstracts, editorials, non-peer-reviewed essays, and inaccessible full-text publications.

Bibliometric indicators analyzed included publication frequency per year, citation counts, contributing countries, and prevalent research themes. Keyword co-occurrence and network mapping identified intellectual clusters corresponding to curricular transformation, cultural integration strategies, and identity negotiation processes. Descriptive statistics revealed that publications increased significantly after 2018, with Asia contributing 35%, Africa 25%, Latin America 20%, Europe 15%, and other regions

5%. Citation analysis indicated that seminal works by Phillipson (1992), Pennycook (2017), and Jenkins (2015) remain highly influential in shaping discourse.

Critical discourse analysis complemented bibliometric mapping by examining how power, culture, and knowledge legitimacy are framed in the literature. Data coding was iterative to ensure conceptual consistency, and thematic categories were refined through repeated cross-validation with the bibliometric network. This integrated methodology allows both a macro-level understanding of global scholarly trends and micro-level insight into pedagogical and identity-related implications.

Results and Discussion

Publication Trends and Bibliometric Insights

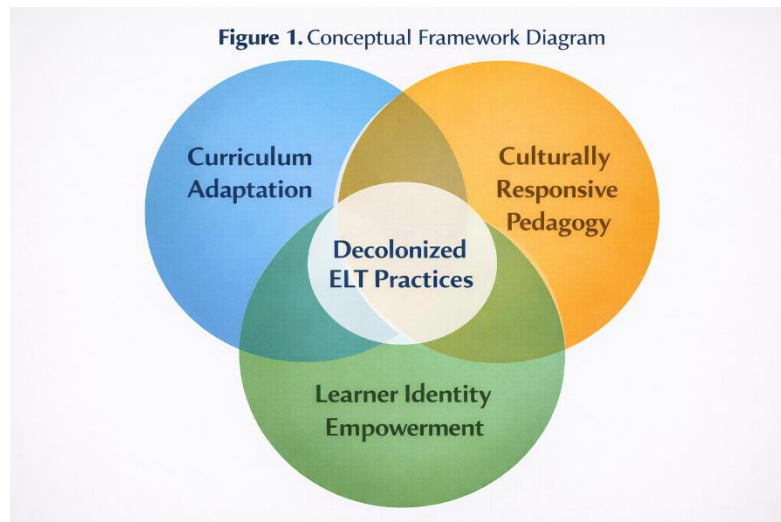
Analysis shows a steady increase in research on decolonizing ELT from 2010–2017, followed by accelerated publication growth from 2018 onwards, coinciding with global discussions on epistemic justice, linguistic diversity, and culturally responsive pedagogy. The bibliometric network reveals three dominant clusters: (1) curriculum reform and local content integration, (2) teacher agency and classroom practices, and (3) identity negotiation and learner empowerment. Top contributing countries include India, Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, and Brazil, indicating a strong interest from postcolonial regions. Average citation counts for the 132 selected articles are 42 per article, with the most cited works being Phillipson (1992, 2009 updates), Pennycook (2017), and Jenkins (2015). Keyword co-occurrence maps highlight recurrent themes such as "cultural integration," "translanguaging," "identity negotiation," "critical pedagogy," and "Global Englishes," confirming alignment with the study's analytical framework.

Conceptual Framework

The study proposes a conceptual framework (see Figure 1) that integrates three interrelated domains for decolonizing ELT:

1. **Structural Curriculum Adaptation:** Incorporating local literature, folklore, and contemporary socio-cultural issues into English curricula.
2. **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy:** Teacher-mediated strategies to validate local accents, translanguaging practices, and hybrid linguistic expressions.
3. **Learner Identity Empowerment:** Encouraging additive bilingual/multilingual identities that bridge local, national, and global dimensions.

The framework suggests dynamic interactions among these domains, emphasizing that curriculum reform without culturally responsive pedagogy or identity support may be ineffective. Likewise, pedagogy and identity-focused strategies require systemic curriculum integration to produce meaningful educational outcomes.



(Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Diagram: A three-circle Venn diagram with “Curriculum Adaptation,” “Culturally Responsive Pedagogy,” and “Learner Identity Empowerment” intersecting at “Decolonized ELT Practices” in the center.)

Pedagogical and Cultural Implications

Integrating local culture into ELT enhances learner engagement, motivation, and cultural validation. Studies indicate that students exposed to culturally contextualized materials demonstrate higher linguistic confidence and critical awareness of global-local language dynamics. Translanguaging, a common practice in multilingual classrooms, allows students to leverage their full linguistic repertoire, facilitating deeper comprehension and communicative competence.

Decolonial pedagogy also challenges dominant native-speaker ideologies. By validating local English varieties and accent diversity, teachers foster inclusive learning environments that reduce hierarchical perceptions of language proficiency. Identity negotiation becomes central, as learners reconcile multiple sociolinguistic identities and develop additive bilingual competencies. Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) supports this perspective by emphasizing the role of social and cultural mediation in cognitive development.

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that decolonizing English Language Teaching is both feasible and beneficial for postcolonial classrooms. Effective strategies require structural curriculum adaptation, culturally responsive teaching practices, and active support for learner identity negotiation. Bibliometric evidence highlights the growing global scholarly attention to these issues, particularly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, reflecting increasing recognition of localized, context-sensitive approaches.

Decolonial ELT interventions not only affirm cultural legitimacy but also strengthen English proficiency and intercultural competence. Future research should conduct longitudinal classroom-based studies to measure learner outcomes and assess the

sustainability of decolonial strategies. Integrating local culture into English language pedagogy is both an ethical imperative and a practical approach to fostering equitable, inclusive, and empowering language education in postcolonial societies.

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