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*Decolonize English at the Age of
Artificial Intelligence: Rethinking
Language, Literature, and Pedagogy*

Decolonizing ELT: Rethinking English Teaching in Multicultural Classroom Through Legendary Story

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Abstract: English Language Teaching (ELT) has become an essential area of study and practice due to the global prominence of English. ELT is not only teaching language but also culture. Most English language materials at the high school level still rely heavily on Western-oriented (Eurocentric) textbooks. The use of local legends and other culturally embedded texts remains significantly underutilized in EFL in Indonesia. The aim of this study is to investigate the implementation decolonization strategy in English language teaching in multicultural classroom through legendary story. The research was conducted at SMA N 1 Ungaran. It was on class XI students. The study used qualitative research. Collecting data was interview, observation and documentation. Data validation for this study performed by triangulation. The result of the study is before learning; the teacher has prepared a learning plan using materials from local sources. In teaching process, teacher use strategies; brainstorming, mind-mapping of legendary story, drafting the use of local terms in English text, peer review and publishing. Through these strategies, students are more active and enthusiastic in learning English. By writing and telling narrative texts based on the legends of their respective villages, they understand English better and remember it more easily. Students are prouder of their local culture.

Key Words : Decolonizing ELT, Multicultural Classroom, Legendary Story

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Introduction

English Language Teaching (ELT) has become an essential area of study and practice due to the global prominence of English. The growing demand for English proficiency stems from its status as the leading language in international trade, diplomacy, and education. Consequently, ELT has evolved to address diverse needs, from teaching English as a second language (ESL) to English as a foreign language (EFL), English for specific purposes (ESP), and academic purposes (EAP) (Kumar, 2024).

English Language Teaching (ELT) is a crucial field for students studying English Language Education, encompassing methods and practices used to teach English as a second or foreign language. It includes various approaches and techniques aimed at improving learners' English skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. ELT also emphasizes intercultural communication and understanding, making it essential in today's globalized

world. Effective ELT utilizes a combination of methods and techniques, emphasizes communication skills, and incorporates cultural understanding to enhance language learning (Wahyudin et al., 2024).

Language and culture are inherently interconnected, each shaping and reflecting the other. In English Language Teaching (ELT), this relationship is particularly significant, as English functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a carrier of diverse cultural meanings and worldviews. At the same time, it is often perceived as transmitting external cultural values that may not align with local realities (Hossain, 2026). ELT is not always ideologically neutral. It often carries with it cultural assumptions, norms, and perspectives embedded in Western culture. This can lead to the marginalization of students' cultural identities and local knowledge in the classroom, especially in multicultural environments.

Multicultural education in English Language Teaching (ELT) has gained significant attention in recent years due to the increasing prominence of English as a global lingua franca. This has led to a growing recognition of the need to transcend the dominance of Anglophone cultures and native English speakers in ELT (Fang & Baker, 2018; Deiniatur & Hasanah, 2024). ELT-induced textbooks are reported to present English as a universal structure rather than as a local and social practice (Alam, 2018; Pennycook, 2010). They also tend to highlight native-like perfection required for English users and learners in their communications with Anglophone users and epistemic activities in English (Nguyen, Marlina and Cao, 2021; (Rahaman, 2024).

The concept of decolonizing ELT emerged in response to this teaching, shifting the paradigm away from Western-centered teaching models toward approaches that value and integrate students' cultural backgrounds. In the context of multicultural classrooms, where students come from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds, the need for decolonization becomes even more pressing. In the broader literature of ELT, decoloniality remains largely underexplored within the Indonesian context, with only a limited number of studies addressing it (Mambu, 2023; Sugiharto, 2023; Rahmaningtyas & Indrianti, 2024). English language learning must shift from being a symbol of Western domination to a tool for expressing local meanings through practice.

Based on preliminary studies it has been found by the researcher that based on initial research, researchers found that most English language materials at the high school level still rely heavily on Western-oriented (Eurocentric) textbooks. The use of local legends and other culturally embedded texts remains significantly underutilized in EFL reading instruction in Indonesia. A recent survey by Lestari and Kurniawan (2024) found that only a small fraction of English education programs incorporate local cultural content into their reading materials. Most curricula continue to rely on decontextualized, Western- based narratives that fail to resonate with students' lived experiences and cultural knowledge. This lack of cultural grounding not only limits student motivation but also undermines the opportunity to connect language learning with national identity and values—an essential component of culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2023; Saiful, 2025). Although the curriculum has begun to incorporate folktales, their use is often limited to a tool for understanding generic text structure, rather than as a medium for decolonizing students' thinking. Students often feel that English is a "distant foreign language" that does not represent their cultural identity. Teachers are often trapped in the Native-Speakerism paradigm (making native speakers the sole standard of language accuracy).

There has been little empirical research examining how legendary stories (local legends) are systematically used to challenge the dominance of Western values in English language teaching at the upper secondary level. Previous research has focused more on improving reading skills than on decolonial critical awareness. There is a lack of practical guidance on how to integrate legends from various regions of Indonesia into ELT that can accommodate multicultural classrooms. How these legends can act as a bridge to prevent students from feeling "alienated" from their own culture while learning English has rarely been explored in depth. In the broader literature of ELT, decoloniality remains largely underexplored within the Indonesian context, with only a limited number of studies addressing it. Research of decolonizing ELT needs to be carried out. This study proposes the use of local

legendary stories as a powerful pedagogical tool for decolonizing ELT. Legendary stories are rich reservoirs of a society's cultural values, history, morals, and worldview. The aim of this study is to investigate the implementation decolonization strategy in English language teaching in multicultural classroom through legendary story.

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Decolonization in English Language Teaching (ELT)

English can be considered as the most significant heritage from the past colonial times. Pennycook (2007) argued that colonialism and ELT are intertwined in three significant ways: historical, political-economic, and cultural. The historical relationship suggests that ELT has promoted English as an imperial language, disseminated English culture globally, and facilitated the production of compliant workers (Quintana, 2025). The decoloniality of English language teaching understood from the preservation of ethnic languages, implies the rescue of native languages, the incorporation of society into the school, and the reconstruction of the identity of non-English speakers.

Katundu (2019) explains that decolonizing does not mean teaching only about their culture, nor isolating the country from the rest of the world, on the contrary, it implies teaching what is beneficial for societies. When Katundu speaks of decolonizing the curriculum, he appeals to understanding the context from its needs and interests and adapting it to bring it appropriately to the school; so that those who are in a formal training process can deconstruct and build from their reality. He also encourages using languages other than English; so learners do not forget that knowledge is produced, consumed, and tested in other languages (Yepez Ramírez, 2023).

Multicultural Pedagogy and Cultural Sustainability

Culture is an integrated whole of the life of a people including their tangible and intangible inventions (UNESCO 2011) such as language, norms, values, customs, religion, socio-political and economic systems, artefacts, ideals and worldviews which bind them as a group and are passed from generation to generation. Multicultural education, therefore, is education that recognizes and incorporates the culture of all peoples. According to Nieto and Bode: Multicultural education is a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism that students, their communities, and teachers reflect. Multicultural education permeates schools' curriculum and instructional strategies as well as the interactions among teachers, students, and families and the very way that schools conceptualize the nature of teaching and learning. Because it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action (praxis) as the basis for social change, multicultural education promotes democratic principles of social justice. UNESCO (2017) emphasized that education is key to realizing all the SDGs. By promoting equity, and justice and building capacities of individuals irrespective of race, class or ideology, multicultural education helps to eradicate poverty and hunger, promote the health of all peoples, and give equal educational opportunities to everyone (Nieto and Bode 2007; Nwokeocha, 2017).

Local Legends as Narrative Text Material

Legends are fully formed narratives that are considered recapitulations of past experiences, showcasing the identity of a people (Gilbas, 2018). Local legends in the site of interest have been a long and integral part of cultural identity as the keepers of the values and traditions of communities that cross over generations (Dela & Mingoy, 2024). The narrative text is a type of text that retells past events that occurred (Mulyanah, 2021; Apoko, 2024). According to Mark and Kathy Anderson (1997), narrative text is a piece of text which tells a story and, in doing so, entertains or informs the readers or listener. Jordan (1999) states narrative is an account or description of events in the past which entails following a time sequence or chronological order (Putri, 2019).

Method

The study uses qualitative research. Qualitative research is a procedure in social, cultural, and philosophical fields that produces descriptive data in form of words or notes related to meanings, values, and meanings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Limbong, 2021). Qualitative research in applied linguistics aims to understand and interpret language, language learning, or use in specific contexts, as well as social phenomena, within natural settings like social and school environments. Qualitative research involves data collection procedures that result primarily in open-ended, non-numerical data, which is then analysed primarily by non-statistical methods. Qualitative research bears significant value in English Language Teaching (ELT) and Applied Linguistics because it offers detailed views into how language is taught and learned. These processes are influenced by various social and cultural factors (Pandey, 2025).

Collecting data use interview, observation and documentation. The sample of research is 36 students in grade XI SMAN 1 Ungaran, Semarang Regency. Data validation for this study is performed by triangulation. The study used for this data is triangulation with triangulation techniques: validation of data on the same source using different techniques: interviews, observations and documentation. After data collection, researchers analysed the data. The study use descriptive qualitative data analysis techniques. It consists of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing/validation of conclusions.

Finding and Discussion

The study found that the integration of legendary stories can be implemented as a decolonization strategy in English language teaching. English teacher Data was collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with an English teacher and 5 student representatives, and documentation in the form of draft narrative texts produced by students. Based on the results of interviews with English teachers, it shows that teacher preparation within the framework of Decolonizing ELT requires a shift in role from mere "language teachers" to "cultural facilitators." Teachers not only teach grammar, but also validate students' local identities as academic material on par with Western literature. Before teach English in the classroom, teachers must deconstruct conventional materials. The teacher replacing examples of Euro-centric narrative texts (such as *The Little Mermaid* or *King Arthur*) with archipelagic or local legend texts that have geographical proximity to students. Teacher's learning plans are linked to students' local culture. Teachers create Decolonization-Based learning implementation plans.

The interview result shows that in English language learning, teacher is not only teach about language but also about culture. The two are inseparable and interrelated. This is in accordance with Hossain (2026) who states that the Language and culture are inherently interconnected, each shaping and reflecting the other. In English Language Teaching (ELT), this relationship is particularly significant, as English functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a carrier of diverse cultural meanings and worldviews. Before learning, the teacher has prepared a learning plan using materials from local sources. It is in line with the concept of decolonizing ELT. Rahmaningtyas & Indrianti, (2024) stated that it emerged in response to this teaching, shifting the paradigm away from Western-centered teaching models toward approaches that value and integrate students' cultural backgrounds. In the context of multicultural classrooms, where students come from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds, the need for decolonization becomes even more pressing.

The observation result, the researched found that the teacher asks students to write down the village/area they come from and one legendary figure they know from the environment where they live. Invite students to have a short discussion: "Why do we always learn about British or American legends? Does our village story have the same value?". After students understand the importance of studying local culture, especially village legends, the teacher and students relate it to narrative text. In the learning activity, students write down legendary stories from their respective villages. The teacher also creates groups if there are students who live in the same village then they are grouped into one group. From the 36 students in a class, there are 8 groups. a group consists of 2 students and another consists of 3 to 4 students.

The teacher's critical question "*Why do we always learn about British or American legends?*" serves as the interventional core. Standard ELT often uses Western narratives (e.g., King Arthur, Robin Hood) as the "neutral" standard for narrative text. By questioning the intrinsic value of these stories compared to local ones. Teacher ask to students to write down legendary stories from their respective villages. Dela & Mingoy, (2024) stated that local legends in the site of interest have been a long and integral part of cultural identity as the keepers of the values and traditions of communities that cross over generations

To ensure the principles of decolonization are implemented, teachers use some techniques; brainstorming through mind-mapping of village legends based on students' collective memories and drafting; teacher allows the use of local terms in English text. In the process of writing village legends, teachers and students discuss how to create sentences with past tense sentence patterns. Teacher also teaches the Generic Structure (Orientation, Complication, and Resolution). After students have finished writing their village legends, Students tell the story of their village legend to other groups. This aims to build multicultural appreciation among students. The final activity of the learning process is to display students' work on the class or school bulletin board with the aim of positioning village stories as equal to stories that are worth exhibiting and preserved like international legends.

The teacher's techniques in the English learning process mentioned above implement multicultural education. The Multicultural education, therefore, is education that recognizes and incorporates the culture of all peoples. According to Nieto and Bode: Multicultural education is a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students (Nieto and Bode 2007; Nwokeocha, 2017). Display students' work on the class or school bulletin board shows that this ELT (English Language Teaching) activity has function eliminate cultural inferiority. Many village legends survive only through oral tradition. When students write them down in English and display them, they are undertaking a formal documentation process. The teacher successfully transformed the English class from a place that could potentially "alienate" students from their cultural roots, into a stage that strengthens the presence of local culture at the institutional level.

During observation, researchers found students' enthusiasm in the learning process. Usually, students are shy or less active in learning, the condition is different because there is curiosity about village stories from other groups. Students are also prouder of their village legend stories, as can be seen from their enthusiasm in reading the stories. During the interview, students also stated that by learning about legendary stories in English, students remembered more English vocabulary and understood the text better. Students also said that writing and telling stories was easier and learning was fun. There was a student who said that he had admitted that he did not know the legend of his village, but through this learning he found out. Students feel more confident speaking because they are "experts" on stories from their own village.

An English teacher explained that in the past, when learning English about narrative texts, students tended to be passive and bored, feeling that the stories were unfamiliar to them. Through learning that incorporated local stories into English, verbal participation increased. Students asked each other about the mystical background or moral values of their friends' village legends. Students also tried to find their own vocabulary because there were local terms that they had to translate into English. There were still challenges, namely specific vocabulary limitations. Students had difficulty finding equivalent words for certain traditional terms in English eg: *kenduri, selametan, babad alas, bau rekso, punden, wiwitan, nyadran*, and traditional food names.

Conclusion

The implementation decolonization strategy in English language teaching in multicultural classroom through legendary story for students XI grade SMAN 1 Ungaran conducted starting with making the teaching plan. English process and In teaching process, teacher use strategis; brainstorming, mind-mapping of legendary story, drafting the use of local terms in English text, peer review and publishing. Through these strategies, students are more active and enthusiastic in learning English. By writing and telling narrative texts based on the legends of their respective

villages, they understand English better and remember it more easily. Students are prouder of their local culture. English material does not have to be from the country of origin of the language but can be from the student's local area.

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