





Reimagining ELT through Locality, Inclusion, and Critical Engagement

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The construction and distribution of knowledge in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) have long reflected global hierarchies of power. ELT has become a global enterprise—one that too often reproduces hierarchies of knowledge, language, and power. Dominant paradigms still privilege Western epistemologies, native-speaker norms, and instrumentally framed “best practices” that marginalize local, experiential, and embodied ways of knowing. These epistemic imbalances shape whose voices are heard, whose pedagogies are legitimized, and how professional identities are formed. In response to these dynamics, reimagining ELT through the lenses of locality, inclusion, and critical engagement becomes both a pedagogical and political imperative.

In this editorial note, we want to underscore this imperative by exploring how local knowledge is often exported to global academic forums without due attention to the sociohistorical contexts in which it is produced. Our emphasis lies not only on the importance of contributing to international academic discourse but also on preserving the cultural and pedagogical integrity of local practices. Around the world—and notably across Latin America—teachers, researchers, and local publishers are challenging the ELT *statu quo*. They insist that ELT must speak to the lived realities of communities, draw on diverse ways of knowing, and foster social transformation rather than mere linguistic proficiency. We deem the role of local journals to be worth highlighting in sustaining alternative narratives—those rooted in teacher experience and shaped by community engagement—which often go unrecognized in dominant models of knowledge production.

Publishing, we believe, is not merely about prestige or professional advancement; it is an act of intellectual activism ([Quintero, 2019](#)). Teachers who document their practices engage in a form of resistance to homogenizing trends in ELT. However, even local knowledge must navigate institutional regulations and publication standards that often echo the norms of global academic gatekeepers. This tension reveals how publishing becomes a site where local agency and external expectations collide, raising critical questions about how knowledge is shaped, valued, and disseminated.

This concern aligns with a Freirean perspective on teacher education, where pedagogy is understood not as a technical transmission of content but as a dialogical and transformative act. Education is embedded in broader historical, cultural, and political processes, and teachers are not mere implementers of a curriculum but agents who can “reword the world” ([Freire, 1992](#); [McLaren, 2003](#); [Pennycook, 2001](#)). As [Quintero-Polo et al. \(2022\)](#) note, teacher education must go beyond the instrumental to foster reflexivity as critical awareness and social agency. When teachers engage with their local realities through research, they create knowledge that is not only practical and possible ([Kumaravadivelu, 2003](#)) but also socially responsive.

These arguments are especially urgent within the geopolitical dynamics of global ELT. For decades, English has been promoted as a “global” language, often under the banner of development or modernization. Yet, as scholars

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like [Phillipson \(1992\)](#) and [Kumaravadivelu \(2006\)](#) remind us, the global spread of English is entangled with colonial legacies and neoliberal agendas. Globalization has reinforced the dominance of native-speaker norms, communicative methods, and Western cultural frameworks in ELT, creating pressure for local teachers and institutions to conform.

The tensions between global norms and local realities generate complex professional landscapes for ELT educators, particularly in postcolonial contexts such as Colombia. Teachers must navigate identity conflicts, unequal access to resources, and the burden of legitimacy in a field where native-speakerism still holds symbolic capital. However, these same tensions also open a space for counter-hegemonic practices—for local communities to reclaim agency, challenge dominant paradigms, and define professionalism on their own terms. As [Canagarajah \(2005\)](#) argues, local knowledge must be critically transformed through negotiation and imaginative application. Furthermore, [Quintero & Bonilla \(2020\)](#) highlight the role that individual and collective social actors play in transforming tacit knowledge into shared knowledge. This transformation is visible in Colombian teacher education programs that are increasingly embracing socially oriented initiatives. By positioning educators as critical actors and knowledge producers, these programs move beyond transmissive models and instead nurture teacher agency, pedagogical reflection, and context-responsive practice.

In this light, reimagining ELT involves recognizing the epistemic value of teacher narratives, the transformative potential of local publishing, and the ethical necessity of critical engagement. It requires dismantling inherited hierarchies of language, knowledge, and identity—and replacing them with practices that affirm plurality, community, and care. In other words, we argue for an ELT that is dialogic rather than transmissive, locally situated rather than universally prescribed, and ethically driven rather than market-led. Reimagining the field along those lines requires concrete commitments:

- **Valuing teacher research.** Practitioner inquiries—classroom-based, context-specific, and often collaborative—must be recognized as scholarship in its own right.
- **Supporting local publishing ecosystems.** Journals, presses, and digital platforms rooted in the Global South are essential for diversifying the disciplinary conversation.
- **Reframing professionalism.** Authority in ELT cannot hinge on birthplace or accent. Instead, it should rest on reflective practice, community engagement, and a commitment to equitable learning.

The collection of articles featured in *Volume 27, No. 1* reflects a dynamic and evolving landscape in Applied Linguistics to ELT, where language education is no longer approached as a neutral or technical endeavor. Instead, the issue offers a timely convergence of research that foregrounds critical, localized, and inclusive perspectives on English language teaching, challenging longstanding assumptions about who language education is for, what purposes it serves, and how it can be more equitably enacted.

A first strand that runs through many of the contributions is the emergence of critical and justice-oriented approaches. Whether through ecolinguistics (Awal), peace-oriented applied linguistics (Quintero-Polo & Guerrero-Nieto), ethnography of language policy for plurilingualism and inclusion (Quinn), or the intersection of housing insecurity and digital access (Penton Herrera & Young), these studies assert that ELT must confront broader social realities. Language teaching is repositioned as a tool not only for communication but for ethical engagement, sociopolitical awareness, and community resilience.

Complementing this shift is a second thread: attention to underrepresented geographies, communities, and identities. From the Amazonian language reclamation efforts (Mejía *et al.*) to the lived realities of Deaf students navigating trilingual literacies (Velásquez Hoyos *et al.*), to the affective responses of outreach learners (Tiuso *et al.*), these articles insist on a pedagogy rooted in the specificities of place and personhood. In doing so, they challenge the dominance of standardized, decontextualized models of English education and call for a more grounded and pluralistic view of language learning.

For a final thread, a strong pedagogical concern for teacher development and reflective practice binds other studies. The complexities of materials design in rural Colombia (Aguilar Cruz *et al.*), the role of formative mentoring in building teacher identity (García & Rolong), and the assessment literacy of in-service teachers (Giraldo & García)

highlight how English educators navigate institutional tensions while striving to maintain pedagogical integrity. These inquiries emphasize that meaningful teacher education must move beyond technical training and toward a holistic model of critical professionalism.

Taken together, the articles in this issue offer a compelling snapshot of applied linguistics to ELT as a field undergoing a critical turn—one that centers inclusion, locality, and agency. Rather than adapting teachers and learners to inherited models, these works invite the profession to rethink its assumptions and reorient itself toward transformative, contextually embedded practices that honor diversity in all its forms

We trust that readers will find in these pages not only empirical insights but also inspiration. The articles point toward an ELT community capable of resisting monolithic norms, honoring multiple voices, and mobilizing language education for social good. If the field is to serve all learners—and truly live up to its transformative potential—we must keep reimagining it through locality, inclusion, and critical engagement.

