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Reimagining English Language Classrooms in Multilingual and Multidisciplinary Contexts: Narratives of Identity, Technology, and Community

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Abstract

English classrooms are changing. They are no longer limited to books and rules. In today's connected and multilingual world, teaching English must include more voices, tools, and ideas. This paper argues for a new model of English education that draws on three main paths: storytelling, interdisciplinary learning, and multilingual practice. Stories bring human experience into lessons and affirm identity. Links across subjects make English useful for real-world issues like science, history, and community life. Using many languages values what students already know and supports fair learning. The paper also looks at new technology, including generative AI. These tools create new chances but also raise concerns about trust, skill, and ethics. By joining these approaches, classrooms become more open, creative, and just. English then moves beyond tests to become a tool for growth, voice, and active citizenship.

Keywords: *English pedagogy, multilingualism, storytelling, interdisciplinary learning, generative AI*

1. Introduction

English language classrooms are never still. They are living spaces where teachers and students meet, share, and grow. Every lesson brings not only words but also ideas, values, and choices. In South and Southeast Asia, this is even more true. English is linked to many local tongues and cultures. It also connects with many fields of study, from science to arts to sports.

English works as a tool for speech and writing. But it also acts as a gate to higher study, jobs, and civic life. Students often see it as a way to enter global spaces. Yet, this is not simple. English classrooms can raise hard questions. Who owns English in classrooms with many tongues? Some say no one owns it. Others see it tied to history and power. The question is not simple. It asks us to see English as both shared and contested.

GYANBODH
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September- October: 2025

Should English reflect a student's own culture and voice? Many argue yes. Language is not only grammar or words. It carries memory, value, and pride. When English ignores this, students may feel unseen. When it affirms identity, they feel strong and included.

How do we keep learning fair when students use many languages? This is a daily challenge. Teachers must choose texts, tasks, and rules with care. They balance fluency in English with respect for home tongues. Policy makers must also plan with this in mind.

These concerns are not small. They shape teaching, exams, and teacher training. They shape how parents see schools and how states set goals. Canagarajah (2005) warns that English can exclude if seen as the only valued code. Pennycook (2007) shows that English also shifts meaning when used in new places. Both views tell us that English is never neutral. It is always linked to power, culture, and choice.

English is never neutral. It is tied to culture, history, and power. These dynamics are now changing with new digital tools. Generative AI is one key example. It alters how we write, read, and share ideas. This challenges old ideas of authorship and learning.

In such spaces, teachers are not only guides. Students are not only receivers. Both act as makers of knowledge. They create, question, and share in new forms. They use prompts, edit outputs, and compare voices. They may build stories, poems, or essays that mix human and AI work. This brings new skills but also new doubts.

There are issues of trust, skill, and ethics. Can we trust machine-made words? How do students learn to question them? What counts as fair work, and what counts as copying? Teachers must guide students to use AI with care, not as a shortcut. They must also show how human judgment remains central.

These shifts ask for new ways of teaching. Old rules and strict subject lines are not enough. English classrooms must open itself to many voices and many paths of knowing. A student may learn by story, by fieldwork, or by home tongue. A class may mix science, history, art, and sport into English study.

Stories can link personal life with shared life. They show how language holds memory and meaning. Work across fields shows English as useful beyond textbooks. Using many tongues proves that ideas can move across languages without loss. These three paths, storytelling, cross-field learning, and multilingual practice can reshape English classrooms.

GYANBODH
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Issue: 5
September- October: 2025

Used together, they make the class more open, fair, and creative. They turn English into more than a subject. They make it a shared space for identity, knowledge, and voice.

They also help both teachers and students see English not only as a subject but as a shared space for growth, identity, and civic life.

2. Literature Review

A growing body of research from interconnected fields provides the foundation for reimagining English language teaching. Key insights from multilingualism, multiliteracies, and narrative inquiry challenge traditional approaches and point toward more inclusive pedagogies.

Multilingualism and Translanguaging

Research has long challenged one-language methods in English learning. Many argue for using the full range of student languages. García and Wei (2014) call this *translanguaging*. They see it as the flexible and shifting use of more than one tongue. In class, it can help students understand better and feel their identity is valued.

Hornberger (2009) adds to this view with the *Continua of Biliteracy*. This model shows how learners use skills across oral and written forms, listening and speaking, and local and broad settings. It proves that language use is not fixed. It shifts across tasks, people, and places.

These ideas go against the old claim that languages must stay separate. Instead, they see language as linked and open. Cummins (2000) also supports this claim. He states that knowing more than one language is not a problem. It is a strength. When used in English learning, it gives students more tools to think, read, and share.

Multiliteracies and Multimodality.

The New London Group (1996) called for a new way of teaching literacy. They argued that old print-based methods were not enough. Classrooms now face more cultural and language diversity. Students also use many channels of communication, not only books.

This *pedagogy of multiliteracies* asks teachers to expand what counts as literacy. It says that learning should include many kinds of texts, genres, and forms. Lessons should draw on print, but also digital media, visuals, and other modes of meaning. This view treats literacy as broad, active, and social.

Kress (2010) pushed this idea further. He stressed the role of *multimodality*. Meaning, he said, is built from the mix of words, images, sounds, and even body moves. In classrooms, this means

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students learn not just from reading but from design, speech, sound, and gesture.

These ideas fit well in today's English classes. Students move between phones, screens, and books every day. They read, watch, and listen at once. Multiliteracies and multimodality help teachers use these tools in smart ways. They also give learners more paths to show what they know and how they think.

Narrative Inquiry in Education.

Stories carry power in learning and teaching. They show how people live, act, and make sense of their world. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe *narrative inquiry* as a way to study life through the stories people tell. In this view, a story is not just a tale. It is a form of knowledge. It shows how teachers and students feel, think, and grow.

In classrooms, stories do more than share facts. They open up the human side of education. They capture joy, struggle, hope, and doubt. Barkhuizen (2013) notes that stories give insight into the emotional, social, and moral sides of language teaching. They help us see what numbers and tests often hide.

For teachers, stories serve as tools for reflection. They help teachers look back at practice and rethink choices. For learners, they affirm voice and identity. Sharing a story can make a student feel heard and valued. It also builds trust and empathy between people in class.

Narrative inquiry does not only collect data. It also shapes practice. By using stories, education becomes more personal and ethical. It moves beyond rules and skills to include lived experience. This human link makes narrative inquiry a strong base for rethinking English education.

Interdisciplinary Approaches.

Learning should connect different subjects. This is called an interdisciplinary approach. It helps students think more critically. It also boosts creativity (Repko et al., 2016). Students learn to solve complex, real-world problems. These problems are rarely confined to one subject.

In an English class, this means looking beyond classic books. Teachers can use topics from science or history. They can bring in issues from civics and art. For example, students could read articles about climate change. They could analyze political speeches. They might write stories inspired by scientific discoveries.

This method shows English as a practical tool. It is not just a separate subject. English becomes

GYANBODH
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Volume: 2
Issue: 5
September- October: 2025

a skill for understanding many parts of life (Moje, 2008). It helps students see how writing and reading apply to the wider world. This makes learning more engaging and relevant for them.

Technology and AI in Language Learning.

New technology is changing how we learn languages. Tools like generative AI are a major shift. These tools can design lessons for individual student needs. They can give feedback on writing in seconds. This is called personalized learning (Luckin, 2017). It allows students to learn at their own pace.

But there are serious concerns with this new technology. Using AI without careful thought is risky. One big worry is data privacy. What happens to the information students type into an AI system? Another concern is algorithmic bias. An AI might be trained on data that is not fair or balanced. This could lead to unfair suggestions or grades for some students.

There is also a fear that AI could harm learning. If students use AI to write their essays, they may not learn the skills themselves. This challenges academic integrity. It can also reduce a student's independence and critical thinking (Holmes et al., 2022; Selwyn, 2022).

Because of these challenges, schools need a new focus. We must teach students how to use technology responsibly. This is called critical digital pedagogy. It means students learn to ask who made a tool and why. They learn to check an AI's work for bias or errors. Teachers become guides in this process. They help students use technology as a helper, not a replacement for thinking.

This paper brings together these different ideas. It connects research on AI with work on multilingual learning. It also links technology to interdisciplinary studies and the power of stories. Often, these topics are studied alone. Our goal is to combine them. We propose a complete approach to teaching English. This method uses many languages, connects to other subjects, values personal stories, and uses technology wisely. It aims to create a more effective and thoughtful learning environment.

3. Theoretical Framework

The ideas above form our core framework. We use three lenses for analysis: Narrative Pedagogy, Identity Theory, and a Multiliteracies Approach. Together, they show the classroom as a human, identity-shaping, and multimodal space.

1. **Narrative Pedagogy:** This framework sees stories as the core of education. Facts

GYANBODH
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Issue: 5
September- October: 2025

matter, but they are not enough. Learning grows from the lives that teachers and students carry into class. A story holds more than words. It holds memory, emotion, and meaning. Stories are a strong way to build and share knowledge. Teachers who tell stories about their work see their practice in new light. They reflect, notice patterns, and find ways to improve. Stories let them grow as both people and professionals. Students also gain from sharing their own stories. When they speak of family, culture, or daily life, they learn to value their voice. They see how their past links to the present. They also find confidence in shaping their future.

This exchange of stories makes learning more human. It turns the classroom into a place of trust and care. Facts then join with feelings, and skills join with values. The result is learning that shapes both the mind and the person. It connects personal history to academic content. Stories can build a stronger community within the classroom. They help everyone feel seen and understood. This approach values each person's unique journey (Barkhuizen, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In practice, this means making time for personal sharing. It means using stories as texts to be studied and discussed. It recognizes that emotion and experience are vital parts of learning.

2. **Identity Theory in Education:** This perspective focuses on who we are in the classroom. It uses Norton's (2013) idea of "investment." This means identity is not fixed or simple. A person's sense of self is dynamic and can change. A student is not just a student. They are also a friend, a family member, and part of a community. These different identities are all present in the classroom.

   These identities are shaped by outside forces. Social norms, cultural background, and school rules all have power. They influence how students see themselves and how they are seen by others. For example, a student might feel more or less confident based on their language background.

   Identity is never fixed. It is always being shaped and reshaped. This process takes place not only in big events but also in the smallest moments of classroom life. Every answer a student gives, every question they dare to ask, is part of how they define themselves as learners. Each attempt to speak up, even with hesitation, becomes a step in building confidence and voice.

GYANBODH
An International Multidisciplinary Peer Reviewed Journal
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Volume: 2
Issue: 5
September- October: 2025

Teachers also move through this ongoing negotiation. When a teacher experiments with a new method, they are not only testing pedagogy. They are also rethinking who they are as professionals as guides, facilitators, co-learners. Their choices shape how students see them, and also how they see themselves.

The classroom, then, is more than a site of knowledge transfer. It is a dynamic arena where identities are constantly in motion. Roles are taken up, challenged, and revised. Students shift between being listeners, creators, or leaders. Teachers shift between being authorities, mentors, or partners in dialogue.

This perspective reminds us that learning is inseparable from identity. To understand how a student learns is also to understand how they are becoming, how they negotiate belonging, confidence, and purpose. Education, in this sense, is not only about skills or facts. It is about the evolving sense of self that emerges through practice and interaction.

3. **A Multiliteracies Approach:** This framework argues that English class should go beyond books and essays. Reading novels and writing essays are still important, but they are not enough on their own. Students today live in a world shaped by many forms of communication. Messages reach them not only through print but also through screens, sounds, and images. They move daily between text messages, social media posts, news clips, and online videos.

   To succeed in this world, students need more than basic reading and writing skills. They must be able to read meaning in a film, question an image, or judge the truth of a viral post. They must learn how sound, design, and visual choices affect how people think and feel. They also need to know how to produce these forms of communication themselves and how to create a short video, design a slideshow, or craft a digital story that reaches others.

   This wide set of skills is known as being multiliterate. It means having the ability to work with many forms of meaning-making, not only with traditional print. English classrooms that embrace multiliteracy open doors for students. They connect school learning with the real ways that people now share knowledge and culture.

   The main goal is to teach students to be critical thinkers. They should learn to analyze all types of messages. They need to ask who created a message and why. They should

GYANBODH
An International Multidisciplinary Peer Reviewed Journal
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Volume: 2
Issue: 5
September- October: 2025

also learn to create their own multimodal texts. This means they can combine words, pictures, and sound to share their ideas.

The classroom should feel like the real world. Learning experiences must be relevant and engaging. Students might make a documentary instead of writing a report. They could analyze advertising or social media posts. This approach helps students become active citizens. It gives them the skills to communicate effectively in a complex, digital society (New London Group, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). They learn to use their voice and understand the voices of others.

These three frameworks work together. They create a complete picture for changing English classes. Narrative Pedagogy brings in the human element. It ensures that personal stories and experiences are valued. This makes the classroom more engaging and meaningful for everyone. Identity Theory helps us understand the student behind the story. It shows why a student might be eager to learn or hesitant to participate. It reminds teachers that each student brings a unique background. This knowledge helps in building a supportive environment where all students feel they belong.

The Multiliteracies Approach connects these personal stories and identities to the wider world. It gives students modern tools to express themselves. They learn to analyze media and create their own content. This makes their learning relevant to life outside of school.

When combined, these ideas make classrooms more inclusive. They honor each student's voice and background. They also make classrooms transformative. They help students develop critical skills for the future. They shift the focus from just passing tests to building understanding. This approach prepares students not just for exams, but for active participation in society. It creates a learning space that is both personally supportive and academically challenging.

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1. Teacher and Learner Identity in Multilingual Contexts

Classrooms with many languages are spaces where identity is always changing. Students bring their home languages and cultural knowledge to class. An "English-only" approach can make students feel their background is not valued. This can limit their participation and sense of belonging. A better method is translanguaging (García

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Volume: 2
Issue: 5
September- October: 2025

& Wei, 2014). This approach welcomes all languages a student knows. It allows students to use their full language abilities to learn. For example, students might discuss ideas in their home language before writing in English. This shows that all their knowledge is important. It helps them see English as another tool for communication, not a replacement for their identity. When students feel respected, they become more invested in learning (Norton, 2013). They participate more actively and take more risks. The classroom becomes a place where they can be themselves while learning.

4.2. Narrative Pedagogy as a Humanizing Practice

Stories help us understand the human side of learning. Grades and tests only show part of a student's progress. Stories show the whole journey. When students share experiences about their lives, they become real people to their classmates. Teachers who share their own challenges and successes build trust. This practice creates empathy and strengthens the classroom community. It also gives teachers deep insight into student growth. This kind of understanding cannot be measured by a standardized test (Barkhuizen, 2013). For instance, a story about helping their family can show a student's resilience. A story about a cultural tradition teaches others about their world. This makes learning personal and meaningful for everyone.

4.3. Technology and Generative AI in English Classrooms

AI tools like chatbots are powerful but require careful use. They can give instant feedback on grammar and help brainstorm ideas. This can support students who need extra help. However, there are significant risks. Students might let the AI do the thinking for them. This can lead to passive learning and dishonesty. The teacher's role is now more important than ever. Teachers must become guides for responsible technology use (Selwyn, 2022). This means having open conversations about when AI is helpful and when it is a shortcut. Students should learn to check AI suggestions for bias and errors. The goal is to use AI as a helper, not a replacement for their own voice and critical thinking.

4.4. Interdisciplinary Engagement

English class should not be isolated from other subjects. Connecting English to science, history, and art makes it more relevant. Students can see how language is used in the

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Volume: 2
Issue: 5
September- October: 2025

real world. For example, they can read and analyze environmental reports. They can write letters to local leaders about community issues. They can create a podcast about a historical event. These activities do more than teach writing. They teach students how to use language to understand and influence the world around them (Moje, 2008). This approach builds critical thinking skills and civic awareness. It shows that English is a tool for action, not just a school subject.

4.5. Sustainability and Community Engagement

English learning can connect to bigger global goals, like sustainable development (UNESCO, 2017). Teachers can include topics like environmental protection in their lessons. More importantly, learning can extend into the local community. Service projects are a powerful way to do this. Students might use English to create a campaign for a local park cleanup. They could interview community elders and write their stories. These projects make learning authentic. They bridge the gap between the classroom and the real world. Students learn that their English skills can make a difference. They start to see themselves as capable members of their community.

5. Implications

- For Teachers: The role of teachers is changing and needs to be moved from being the main expert to a facilitator of learning. Students' stories and languages should be used in lessons. The teachers also need to learn about digital tools so that they can guide students to use them wisely and ethically.
- For Learners: Learners need to see English as more than a grade. It is advisable to use it to ask questions, share one’s identity, and solve real problems. English learners need to be an active participant in learning. they should learn to use technology as a tool for creating, not just consuming.
- For Institutions: The institutions should support teachers with training and resources by creating flexible curricula that connect different subjects and provide ongoing training on multilingual methods, storytelling in teaching, and new technologies.
- For Policymakers: Policy makers should create rules that support the use of multiple languages in school. programs that connect schools with their communities should be

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Volume: 2
Issue: 5
September- October: 2025

funded and also research on the safe and fair use of AI in education should be encouraged.

6. Conclusion

The way we teach and learn English must change. The old focus on rules and single texts is not enough. The world we live in is connected, fast moving, and multilingual. Our classrooms need to reflect that reality. English cannot stand apart from other subjects or ignore the languages that students already speak.

A modern English classroom is a living space. It is open to many voices and many ways of learning. It is a place where students can speak, write, and create with purpose. They can bring in stories from their families, cultures, and communities. They can explore their own identity while learning about others. This makes the classroom a site of real dialogue.

New tools also shape this space. Students learn how to use technology like AI in smart and responsible ways. They see how English connects to science, history, and social life. They use their skills not only for grades but to take part in issues that matter in their world.

This approach rests on a few simple ideas. Storytelling makes learning personal and human. Links across subjects show that English is part of a bigger whole. Multilingual use values the voices that students already carry with them. Critical work with technology teaches them to question, create, and act with care.

Together these ideas build a stronger classroom. Students grow as people and as thinkers. They learn to be active, caring members of their communities. They prepare for a world full of change and complexity. The aim is not just to pass tests. The real aim is to use English as a tool for building futures with meaning and fairness. When teachers and students share this goal, the classroom becomes a center for growth, justice, and hope.

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Volume: 2
Issue: 5
September- October: 2025

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