

English language education in Indonesia: Towards a new era

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Overview

- Historical development
- The traditionalists vs. the globalists
- Transcending the traditionalist and globalist spectrum
- The pluricentric movement
- Towards post-method pedagogy
- Decolonial- and Global-South-inclined English language education
- Conclusion



Historical Development

The image features a stack of vintage correspondence, including envelopes and letters, some with postage stamps. The items are arranged on a wooden lattice background. The text 'Historical Development' is overlaid in white, centered on the image. The background is a dark, muted color, possibly a wooden lattice or a similar textured surface. The overall tone is historical and nostalgic.

English as the First Foreign Language

- early 1900s: French abolished in the *Europesche Lagereschool* (European primary schools), replaced with English
- Officially taught at Universitas Nasional: English language program in 1949
- **The Ministry of Education and Culture's Decree No. 096/1967** stipulated the designation of English as the first foreign language to be officially taught in secondary schools, ahead of French and German
- **Presidential Decree No. 28/1990** as a compulsory subject at all levels of secondary schools (Grades 7-12) under the administration of the Ministry of Education and Culture: SMP, SMA, SMK

Important, But Not So Much

Not so important that it would be made a second language the way it is in Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore, or the Philippines.

Not that important, insofar as it would be made an official language alongside Indonesian

Monocentric English: Native-speakerism



A prevalent ideological view which, according to Holliday (2005), requires the adherence to the native speakers norm and the use of the native speaking English varieties as a teaching and learning model.



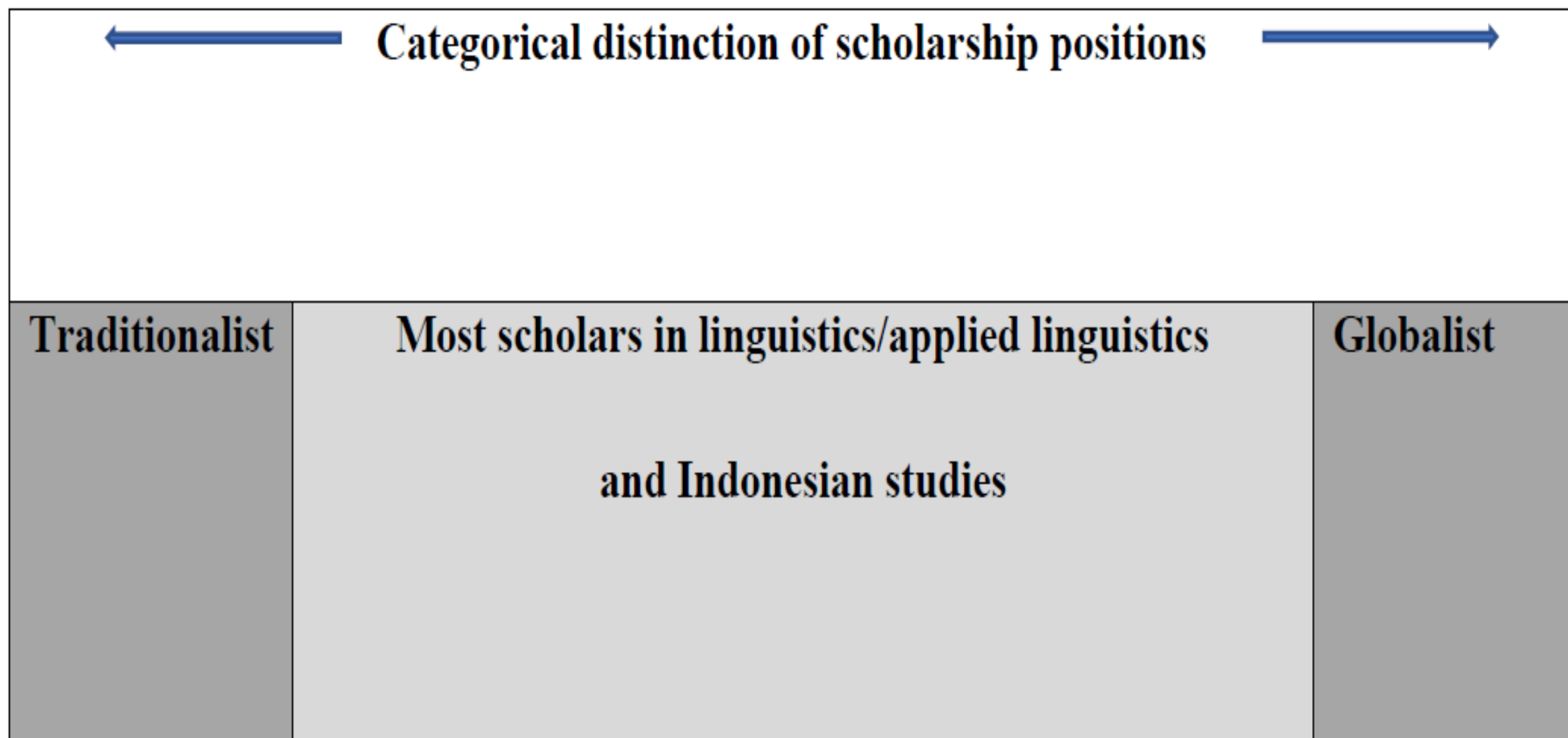
'Standard English' developed in the UK: 'British English' (BE), characterised by the publication of *Samuel Johnson's A Dictionary of the English Language* in 1755.



'American English' (AE): marked by the publication of *Webster's Dictionary* in 1828.

The traditionalists vs the globalists

Figure 1. Categorical Distinction of Scholarship Positions in Indonesia



The globalists

The “globalists” refers to a group of educationists (including experts in linguistics and applied linguistics) who argue for English given its importance for global communication.

Scholars such as Dardjowidjojo (2000, 2003b, 2003d), Huda (1994, 2000), and Lauder (2008) viewed the inclination for English as part of a natural sociolinguistic process within the society.

Lowenberg (1991) argued for increasing the status of English into additional language

Ariatna (2016) argued for altering the status of English from a foreign into a second language.



The traditionalists

the “traditionalists” refer to those scholars who argue against English being given a favourable treatment. They perceive English to be a threat, arguing that the widespread knowledge of English would bring a negative impact on Indonesian culture, values, and behaviour.

Gunarwan (1998) : the negative impact of foreign languages such as English.

Alwasilah (1997, 2012, 2013) maintained the need to regulate English through a deliberate language planning where English would be given a secondary role behind Indonesian.

English teaching = linguistic imperialism project

- Alwasilah (1997) questioned the heavy emphasis on foreign language education. Repeating the argument which had widely circulated since the 1970s, Alwasilah also saw the continued dominance of English as akin to linguistic imperialism once postulated by Phillipson (1992), hence Indonesians running the risk of having their culture polluted by “liberal western values”. He asserted the need to bolster the feelings of nationalism.



Counterargument

Huda (2000), viewed Indonesian language planners as placing too much emphasis on what he called the “emotional” dimension of language planning

Dardjowidjojo (2003): the apprehension about the negative impact of cultural influence drawn from foreign language teaching was underpinned more by cultural chauvinism, rather than an objective, rationale attitude.

Lauder (2008): “The idea that western values pose a threat is not so much a criticism of the west but rather the worry that local values are not strong enough or good enough. Modernization is not the same as westernization” (p. 18).

Warranted apprehension

Alwasilah (1997, 2012, 2013): not only was Indonesia not ready in terms educational infrastructure, it also suffered from a lack of qualified and competent teachers



Children's language acquisition because children are not cognitively mature, "confused by a barrage of linguistic input. This linguistic confusion does not lead to effective learning" (Alwasilah, 2012, p. 7).



"As a matter of fact, we are still dragging our feet in improving our first language education, which is much more urgent to fix. Character building and critical thinking are first and foremost developed through the first language" (p. 17).



Alwasilah's concern and those of others are reasonable given the fact that in their effort to teach a local content subject, schools opted for English and dropped indigenous languages from the primary school timetable (Hadisantosa, 2010). *Rintisan Sekolah Berstandar Internasional* [International Pilot Project State-run School] (RSBI) and *Sekolah Berstandar Internasional* [International Standard School] (SBI).

Transcending the Traditionalist and Globalist Spectrum



English in a more positive light

- Some studies such as Munandar (2022) might show evidence of Indonesians continuing to view English as a manifestation of the Western culture. However, more studies have provided evidence to the contrary, showing an apparent ideological shift.
- For Stockton (2018), the strong influence of the Muslim majority population has meant the creation of “a nationalist recultured English stripped of Western liberal values, or an Islamic English with its own culture and values” (p. 145).

The pluricentric movement



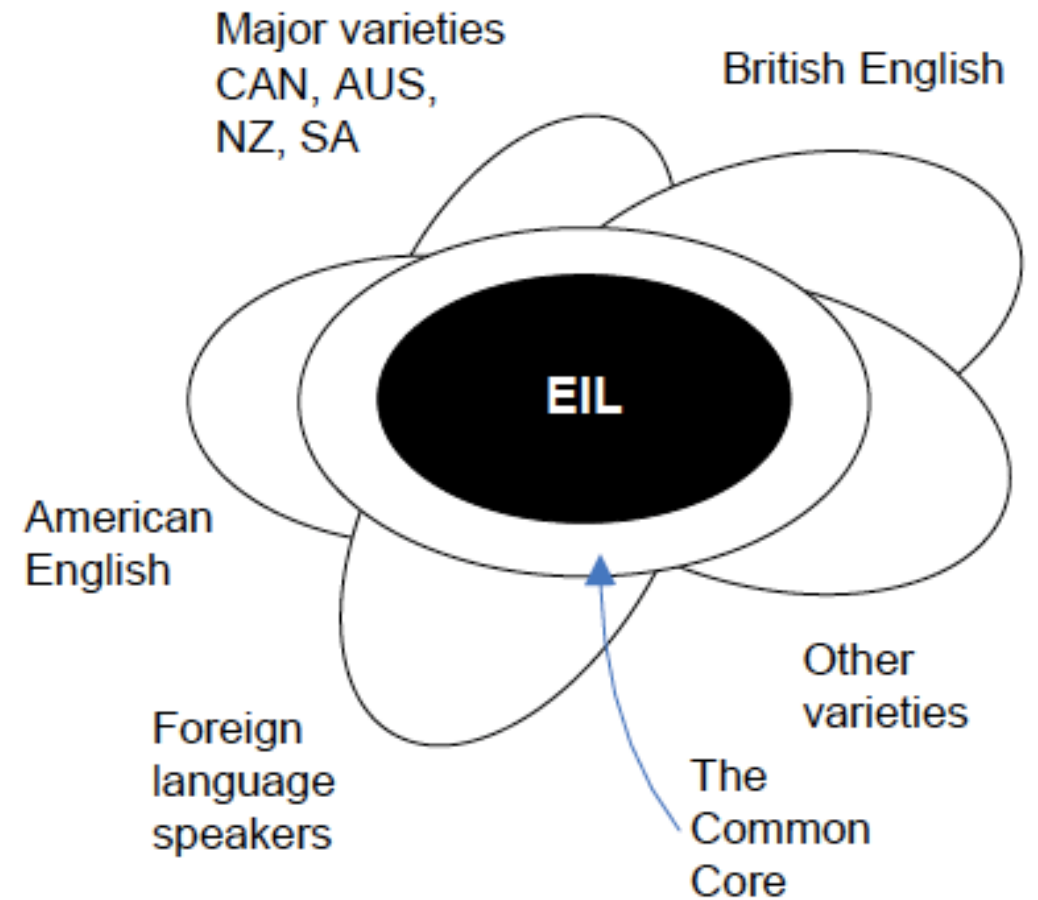
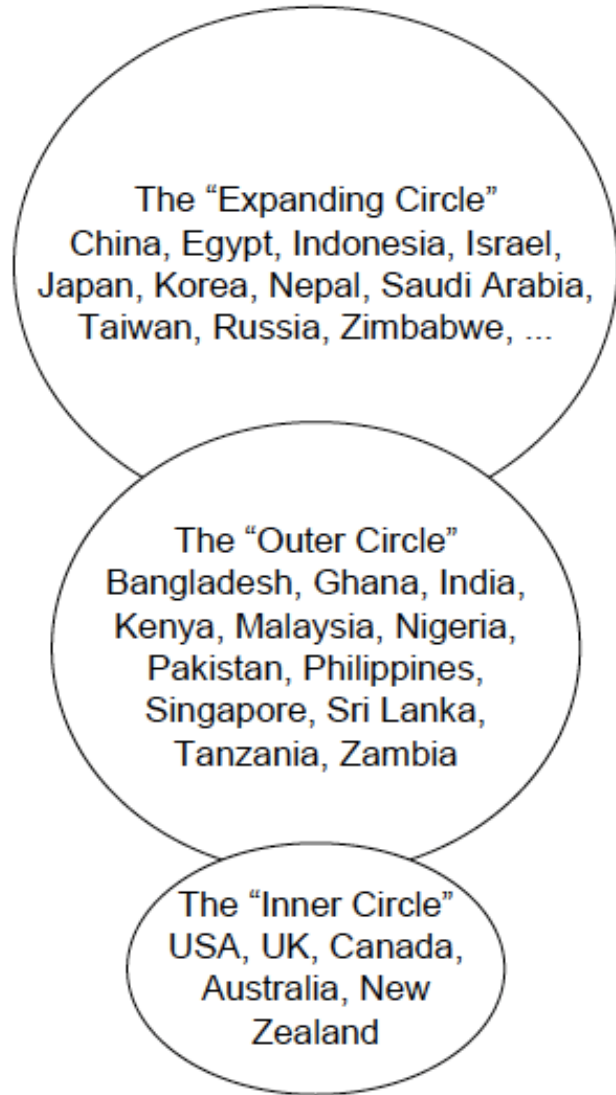
Earliest detection

Embracing a pluricentric approach means moving away from native-speakerism



As early as the turn of the millennium, Dardjowidjojo (2000) observed a shifting paradigm from accuracy to fluency, noting the emergence of World Englishes. It might be premature for a shifting paradigm to pluricentric English to take place in the ensuing decade, given that mainstream scholarship continued to see English as a foreign language (e.g., Mistar 2005; Hamied & Musthafa, 2019). But signs of a paradigm shift appeared, nonetheless, with Lauder (2008) introducing Kachruvian circle (Kachru, 1992) and Modiano's model (Modiano, 1999).

Kachruvian circles & the Modiano model



World Englishes

Mukminatien (2012) argued against the imposition of native speakers' lingua-cultural norms in pedagogy, teaching materials, and assessment, highlighting their irrelevance to the needs of students and their multilingual realities.

Triyoko and Kidwell (2023) exposed students to diverse varieties of Englishes from Outer and Expanding Circles through podcasts and found students' positive impression on the varieties and an increased sense of intercultural awareness.

Indonesian English? Indonesian Englishes?

- Coleman (2017) detected the emergence of Indonesian English several years ago, while interest in it has increased in the past few years, marked by the publication of a corpus-based study (Endarto, 2020) and a book-length study on the issue (Endarto, 2024).
- There are reasons to argue that it might be premature to designate the non-native English linguistic features as “Indonesian English”. Zein (2025), Zein, et al. (2020), and Marlina (2025) argue that the existence of Indonesian English as an endormatively stabilised, categorically distinct indigenised linguistic variety remains doubtful.
- Hamied (2012), Hamied and Musthafa (2019), and Zein, et al. (2020) think the superdiverse context of Indonesian suggests varieties of English spoken by Indonesians are likely to be as varied as varieties of Indonesian. There is the potential emergence of Indonesian Englishes, rather than Indonesian English, in decades to come.

English as international language (EIL)

Those adopting the EIL perspective have been concerned by the continuing dominance of the native-speaker norms.

Hasanti and Manara (2021) found teachers' preference of the "English" English, or English varieties spoken in the Inner Circle countries

Manara (2016) argued for flexibility and openness towards different Englishes in communicative settings.

Zacharias (2018) showed how teacher candidates could develop their convictions about the English language and about being an English teacher under the EIL paradigm after engaging in a series of writing tasks.



English as a lingua franca (ELF)

Studies have shown that an ELF perspective is necessary for Indonesia to be able to successfully communicate with other nations (e.g., Sakhiyya 2018; Zein, 2018b). As Sakhiyya (2018) argues, “... it is not realistic either to require our learners to acquire native-speakers like pronunciation, and not plausible to require them to spend so much time in pursuing this unattainable and irrelevant goal. It is these linguistic reasons that urge the adoption of ELF approach” (p. 2).

Zein (2018a) argues that Indonesia is currently transitioning from an EFL to ELF perspective. Kirkpatrick (2018) supports the argument, declaring that ‘the time is right’ for Indonesia to officially acknowledge ELF and to use it as a basis for curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment.



Global Englishes

- Seeks a unified theory: attempts to reconcile World Englishes, EIL, translanguaging, and ELF (see Galloway & Rose, 2019)
- inclusive and equitable approach to English language teaching by valuing linguistic diversity and promoting effective communication (Kusumawati, 2025)

Marlina, 2025, p. 531

- “Despite some favourable views towards the monocentric approaches to English and ELT, the pluricentricity of English and its pedagogical implications have been seen in a positive light. Some practitioner- researchers from Indonesia have even shared some examples of classroom practices that provide exposure to different varieties of English through podcasts, promote local Indonesian cultures through locally- published ELT textbooks and an educational software, prompt critical reflections...”





Towards post-method pedagogy

Methods are no longer as important

More diverse teaching
approaches: CLT, TBLT,
Project-based learning

Looking beyond methods:
language identity, learner
autonomy, inclusion



Post-method pedagogy (Lie, 2025, p. 332)



- “Exercise professional knowledge of English as well as Bahasa Indonesia and indigenous languages
- Analyze learners’ needs, motivation, and autonomy and use their understanding to maximize learning opportunities for their students and mentor their personal transformation into motivated and autonomous language learners
- “Theorize what they practice and practice what they theorize.” This means they can negotiate the widely accepted principles and practices with their own beliefs and values.”



Kurikulum Merdeka

Mandates teachers to engage students in real-life problems and explore solutions in project-based learning activities

Provides room for teachers to exercise teacher autonomy, freeing them from methods-related restrictions

Decolonial- and Global South-inclined English language education

English and critical literacy (Sakhiyya & Sumarni, 2025)

English literacy for
character building
and inculcating
Pancasila values

Addressing literacy
myths dominated
by native-speaker
English



English and critical literacy (Sakhiyya & Sumarni, 2025)

- English literacy for character building and inculcating *Pancasila* values
- Addressing literacy myths dominated by native-speaker English

English as a Southern language

English as language of the Global South: a tool for linguistic, cultural and political resistance of the Southerners (Hamid, 2023)

A decolonial- and Global South-inclined English language education transcends the neo-liberalist, neo-imperialist discourse (Sugiharto, 2025)

Global South and locus of enunciation (Sugiharto, 2025, p. 78)

- “As language education practice is always ideological and never value-free but is always entangled with the geopolitics of knowledge, locus of enunciation is of paramount importance. The notion can lead us to direct our future ELT practices by rethinking and appraising the current dominant ELT discourse in light of the prevalence of vibrant local discourses, through which the construction of non-Western paradigms of language education is made possible. Epistemologically, for instance, **we not only simply resist and appropriate knowledge emanating from the dominant discourse, but rework and repurpose it by virtue of students’ and teachers’ locus of enunciation.**”





Conclusion

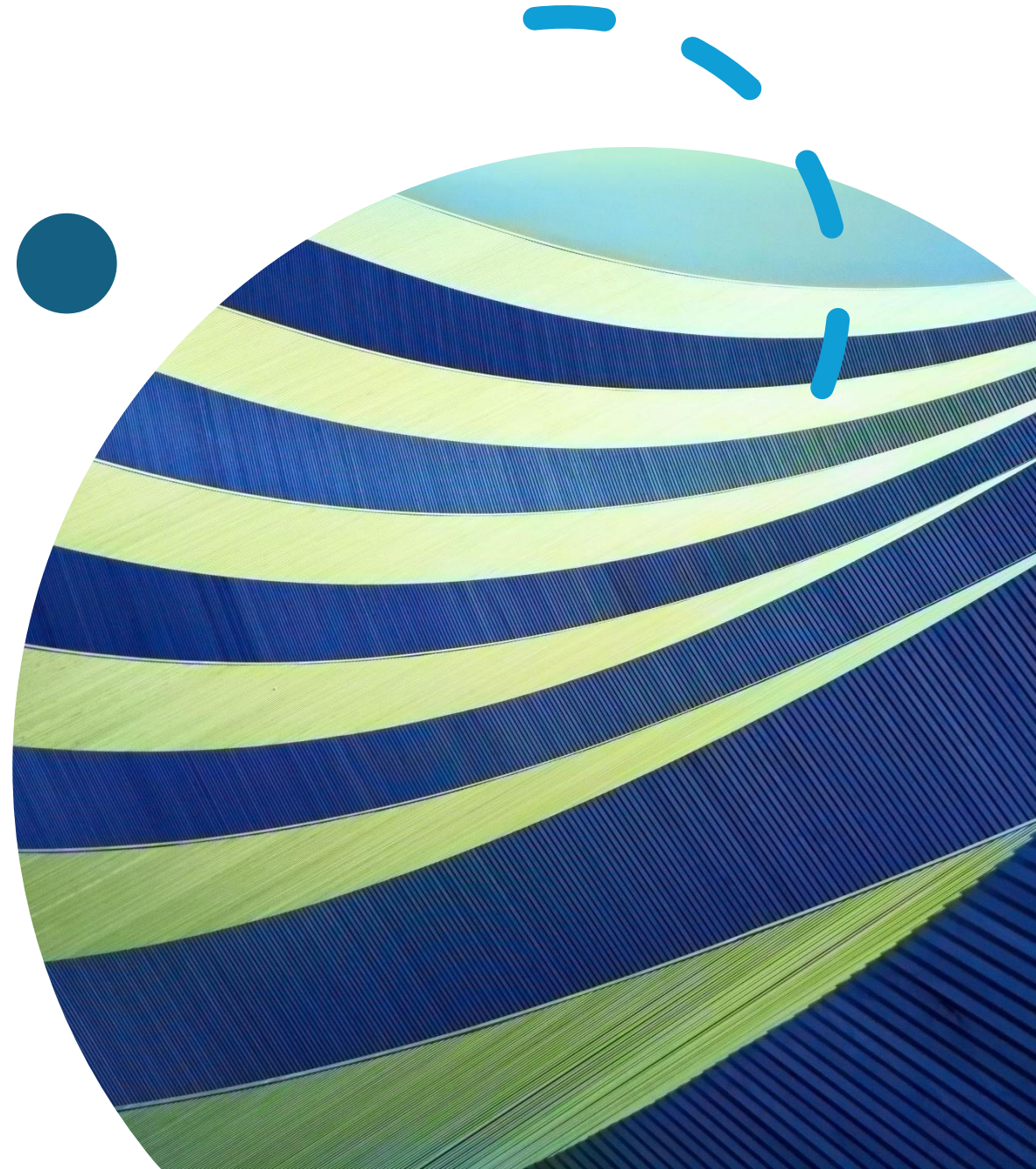


Conclusion

ELE in Indonesia is entering a new era, breaking away from an old paradigm associated with monocentric English

Pluricentric English in Indonesia is multifurcated: World Englishes, EIL, ELF, Global Englishes

New era of English in Indonesia is also characterised by post-method pedagogy and decolonial-and Global South-inclined English language education



Key Readings

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