IPRPD
International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
ISSN 2693-2547 (Print), 2693-2555 (Online)
Volume 07; Issue no 11: November 2026
DOI: 10.56734/ijahss.v7n11a6

RETHINKING ENGLISH EDUCATION IN THE ERA OF GENERATIVE AI AND GLOBAL ENGLISHES

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Abstract

The advent of generative AI has provoked an ontological crisis in language education, tempting policymakers to equate machine-generated output with human interpretive capacity. This article challenges the premise that such technologies render language learning obsolete, arguing instead that an AI-saturated landscape makes robust humanistic engagement more vital than ever. Addressing the "scholar's dilemma," the paper proposes a structural shift in higher education from traditional silos toward horizontal, cross-disciplinary integration. Because English functions as a global *lingua franca* (ELF) and exerts an algorithmic hegemony over large language models (LLMs), advanced proficiency remains indispensable for critically querying these platforms. We advocate for a pedagogical evolution from the mechanical transmission of referential information (informing) to facilitating imaginative exploration (engaging). Central to this shift is the reclamation of "literature with a small l" as the primary representational material used to cultivate students' "textual power." By prioritizing the interpretive struggle over cognitive offloading—a tension described here as the "Picasso Paradox"—educators can formalize a "fifth skill" (complex critical thinking in English). This framework provides the cognitive foundation for students to navigate an AI-saturated world not as passive users, but as active curators equipped with ethical discernment and epistemic agency.

Keywords

Generative AI; English in Education; The Fifth Skill; Critical AI Literacy; Textual Power

1. Introduction: The Ontological Crisis in Language Education

The public release of ChatGPT in late 2022, followed by the rapid deployment of multimodal models such as Google's Gemini and Anthropic's Claude, catalyzed a profound and accelerating paradigm shift in higher education (Lodge et al., 2023a). These advanced neural networks demonstrate an unprecedented capacity to translate, interpret, synthesize, and generate sophisticated texts across diverse linguistic registers (Kohnke et al., 2023). Consequently, policymakers, administrators, and even some educators are increasingly tempted to equate mechanical, algorithmic output with genuine human interpretive capacity. This perceived equivalence fuels a pervasive skepticism regarding the fundamental necessity of formal language learning in an era where ubiquitous digital assistants can execute complex communicative tasks in mere seconds (Godwin-Jones, 2023).

Navigating this ongoing crisis requires more than simple pedagogical adjustments; it demands a fundamental reassessment of both outdated classroom practices and the internal belief systems held by educators themselves. While institutional support is vital, the primary determinant of whether educators successfully adapt to this shifting technological landscape remains teacher self-efficacy—the foundational psychological framework pioneered by Bandura (1997) and extensively contextualized for education by scholars such as Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001). An educator's internal belief in their own capability dictates their willingness to evolve. Those who harbor deep-seated, systemic resistance to technocratic

advancements will inevitably struggle to remain relevant in a digitized classroom. Conversely, educators who actively raise their conscious awareness can leverage artificial intelligence (AI) as a collaborative pedagogical partner, reducing administrative burdens to redirect energy toward deeper student mentorship. Escapism is no longer a viable strategy; to genuinely preserve the humanities, educators must actively engage with the machine rather than retreat from it.

1.1 The Scholar's Dilemma: The Cross-Disciplinary Imperative

This necessary psychological and pedagogical shift presents a profound *scholar's dilemma*, particularly for those whose foundational academic training is steeped entirely in the humanities. Traditionally, academic progression in language, linguistics, and literature has been a linear, vertical path—progressing deeply but narrowly from a bachelor's degree to a doctorate within a single, isolated discipline. In the past, this siloed approach was the undisputed standard of academic expertise, rewarding hyper-specialization while largely ignoring quantitative or computational methodologies (Tett, 2015). Such rigorous, vertically oriented training inadvertently fosters a natural, underlying psychological resistance to the rapidly evolving fields of computer science and AI.

Generative AI, by its very architecture, dismantles these traditional boundaries. Built upon massive neural networks, it seamlessly synthesizes and correlates information across a vast spectrum of diverse fields. To harness this technology rather than be rendered obsolete by it, human educators must undergo a fundamental paradigm shift: transitioning from compartmentalized thinking to horizontal, integrative cognitive agility. Such boundary crossing is now a recognized pedagogical imperative for successfully navigating complex, technology-driven educational environments (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Fawns, 2022). Institutional policies are beginning to reflect this reality; for example, certain forward-thinking universities in East Asia now require humanities faculty and students to complete foundational coursework in programming and AI applications. Within this newly integrated framework, English remains the vital connective tissue. As the dominant global lingua franca (Jenkins, 2015) and the primary language underpinning the vast majority of AI training data, advanced English proficiency is strictly indispensable for effectively querying and critically analyzing global digital platforms.

1.2 Reclaiming Human Interpretive Agency

Despite its exponential sophistication, generative AI remains fundamentally devoid of human consciousness. It operates as a predictive statistical tool—a stochastic parrot (Bender et al., 2021)—generating remarkably convincing texts while lacking the lived subjective experience and empathetic capacity inherent to human existence. The mandate for modern language educators is thus to leverage AI's efficiencies while simultaneously doubling down on the human touch—the nuanced cultural imagination and critical awareness that algorithms simply cannot organically replicate.

Educators must prioritize deep human engagement over the mere transmission of information. If AI handles basic linguistic mechanics, the human educator must elevate the classroom by focusing on imaginative interpretation. This paper argues that reclaiming imaginative texts and complex cultural discourses is absolutely crucial for cultivating students' critical capacities. This synthesis drives the development of a *fifth skill*—complex critical thinking in English—ensuring students can navigate an AI-saturated world with ethical discernment, intercultural empathy, and profound intellectual agency.

To systematically address this crisis, this article makes three distinct theoretical and pedagogical contributions that collectively represent a structural innovation in language teaching. (1) It bridges the critical gap between generative AI and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), demonstrating how the current algorithmic hegemony necessitates a shift from vertically siloed learning toward horizontal, cross-disciplinary language education. (2) It proposes a foundational pedagogical pivot from *referential informing* to *representational engaging*, reclaiming literature with a small "l" as a vehicle for humanistic inquiry. This approach offers an innovative counter-measure to the cognitive offloading associated with AI-assisted learning. (3) It operationalizes this theoretical shift by formalizing the "fifth skill," a forward-looking framework designed to cultivate students' textual power, critical AI literacy, and epistemic agency. Together, these contributions offer a coherent roadmap for redefining the language classroom, enabling learners to transition from passive consumers of algorithmic output into active, critical curators of global knowledge.

2. Literature Review: English, AI, and Global Englishes

This section situates the present study within three intersecting bodies of scholarship: (1) research on global ELF, (2) emerging work on generative AI in education, and (3) pedagogical and literary theories concerning language, cognition, and meaning-making. Rather than providing an exhaustive or systematic review, this section selectively synthesizes key theoretical contributions and recent developments to establish the conceptual foundation for the argument advanced in this paper.

Navigating the pedagogical disruptions catalyzed by generative AI requires recognizing a parallel paradigm shift occurring within the English language itself. While foundational scholars mapped the language's initial decentralization away from its colonial origins (Crystal, 2003), English is now undergoing a secondary, monumental transition. Driven by generative AI, its global status is shifting into an undeniably algorithmic present where digital tools actively mediate and reshape linguistic norms (Lee et al., 2025). This convergence of technological mediation and linguistic pluralism necessitates a fundamental recalibration of our conceptual frameworks. Grasping such linguistic evolution is an absolute prerequisite for leveraging English as the primary interface for global knowledge production.

2.1 The Democratization of a Global Lingua Franca

A lingering misconception among educators and students is that English strictly belongs to the Inner Circle of native speakers (Kachru, 1985). Historically, English functioned as a hegemonic tool of the colonizer, governed by rigid hierarchies and stark power dynamics (Pennycook, 1998). This historical reality is powerfully mirrored in *The Tempest* when the native character Caliban declares to Prospero: "You taught me language; and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse" (Shakespeare, 1623/2014, 1.2.363–364). This iconic moment illustrates a period when the "ownership" of language remained firmly with the colonizer, leaving the colonized to use the language only as a tool of reactive resistance. In that era, language operated as a one-way street of imperial imposition and localized defiance.

That dynamic has been upended; English now operates dynamically as ELF—the world's primary connective linguistic tissue (Seidlhofer, 2011). In this landscape, the language is no longer a static inheritance but a shared resource constantly being reshaped by its diverse users. Ownership has fundamentally democratized, transcending geographical, political, and cultural boundaries. The mathematical reality of its massive adoption dictates a new philosophical approach: lacking an exclusive owner, English inherently belongs to all its global users, effectively stripping it of its former colonial exclusivity.

2.2 Linguistic Hybridity and the Myth of "Standard English"

Shared ownership is inextricably baked into the language's DNA. English has always been intrinsically hybrid—a porous language thriving on assimilation. Its foundational vocabulary is a complex tapestry resulting from centuries of invasion and exchange: roughly 26% Germanic, 29% French (following the Norman Conquest), and 29% Latin, with the remainder drawn from countless global tongues (Durkin, 2014). This hybridity actively shapes the language today as English absorbs regional dialects and cultural expressions. Colloquialisms like "long time no see"—a direct calque from Mandarin Chinese—illustrate this evolution. The word "amok" (from the Malay/Indonesian *amuk*) was absorbed into English to describe a specific state of frenzied behavior, eventually losing its "exotic" status to become a standard descriptor in global discourse. Future trajectories will be dictated not by London or New York, but by digitally connected populations in India, China, and Indonesia (Graddol, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2020).

As the center of gravity shifts, the notion of a singular "Standard English" dictated by an idealized native speaker is rapidly becoming obsolete (Jenkins, 2015). This traditional preoccupation with nativeness often creates an artificial barrier, prioritizing accent and idiom over the actual communicative success required in global professional contexts. Educators must move away from evaluating students against this mythical metric. An ELF approach prioritizes accommodation skills—the pragmatic ability to negotiate meaning across diverse forms and accents. The native speaker is no longer the definitive referee; the modern standard is characterized by horizontal, peer-to-peer intelligibility across a vibrant spectrum of diverse users.

2.3 The Algorithmic Hegemony of the Generative AI Era

The decentralized nature of English directly addresses existential anxieties regarding AI. The shift toward a globalized, pluralistic English coincides with its new role as the primary "source code" for the current technological revolution. Reductionist arguments, however, suggest that AI's translation capabilities render formal English education entirely obsolete. This is fundamentally flawed and shortsighted; mastering English matters more than ever in the AI age.

While approximately 7,000 languages exist globally, large language models (LLMs) function reliably in just over 95 (Joshi et al., 2020). More critically, an algorithmic hegemony emerges from structural bias: English comprises an estimated 85% of the digital training data utilized to build these generative tools (Bender et al., 2021). This grants English-proficient individuals a distinct, measurable advantage. Because the latent space of these models is so heavily skewed toward English syntax and idioms, prompts in English consistently yield more robust, logically nuanced, and accurate responses. To speak English today is, effectively, to speak the native coding language of the digital brain.

2.4 Educational Integration: Beyond the Surface Level

This reality forces a structural shift for students, moving them from a traditional focus on learning to read toward the more sophisticated demand of reading to learn in a digitized environment. For the modern learner, advanced English proficiency is no longer a localized academic requirement but a cross-disciplinary necessity for accessing and synthesizing global knowledge. However, achieving this level of engagement requires looking beyond surface-level institutional adaptations such as English-Medium Instruction (EMI). While EMI is often implemented to bolster institutional competitiveness (Macaro, 2018), it frequently treats English as a transactional delivery vehicle—a passive pipe for information—rather than a dynamic tool for the critical inquiry these students now require.

In an algorithmic present, mere transactional mastery is insufficient for professional autonomy. A profound model of integration is required—one pairing the analytical rigor of the sciences with the critical power of the humanities. This demands the fifth skill. High-level English proficiency provides the critical vocabulary to navigate and humanize AI tools. By mastering this command, learners can actively engineer complex prompts and evaluate outputs, ensuring they possess the agency to direct algorithms rather than be directed by them.

3. Conceptual Approach and Theoretical Framing

This paper adopts a conceptual and interdisciplinary synthesis approach to examine the evolving role of English education in the era of generative AI. Rather than conducting an empirical investigation, the study aims to critically reinterpret and reconceptualize existing theoretical perspectives by integrating insights from multiple domains, including ELF, AI-assisted learning, critical pedagogy, and literary theory.

The selection of literature is purposeful rather than exhaustive, focusing on influential frameworks and emerging debates that illuminate the shifting relationship between language, technology, and human cognition. Through this integrative approach, the paper develops a coherent pedagogical argument that moves beyond descriptive analysis toward theoretical innovation. Specifically, it seeks to construct a new conceptual framework—the "fifth skill"—as a response to the cognitive, cultural, and epistemological challenges posed by generative AI.

In this sense, the contribution of the paper lies not in empirical generalization, but in theoretical synthesis and pedagogical reconceptualization, offering a forward-looking lens through which language educators may critically engage with AI-mediated learning environments.

4. The Pedagogical Imperative: Active Prompting and Critical AI Literacy

Applying this conceptual lens to the modern classroom reveals that merely granting students access to generative AI is pedagogically insufficient. To effectively cultivate the fifth skill and maintain intellectual agency, educators must restructure how learners interact with these digital tools. This requires a shift from passive knowledge reception toward a paradigm of active, student-led inquiry. Through *active prompting*, learners transform from subservient consumers of algorithmic output into autonomous directors of their own cognitive journeys.

Integrating inquiry-based learning and multiliteracies allows educators to leverage AI as a collaborative cognitive mediator rather than an intellectual crutch. However, navigating this landscape requires a clear-eyed understanding of its inherent risks. Fostering critical AI literacy demands that students learn to actively resist automation bias and navigate the *Picasso Paradox*—strategically utilizing AI to manage extraneous cognitive load while fiercely preserving the uniquely human capacity for original, representational synthesis.

4.1 From Passive Reception to Active Prompting

This technological reality necessitates a fundamental shift away from a unidirectional *push* dynamic. In this conventional framework, knowledge is treated as a static commodity curated by institutions and disseminated to a broad audience regardless of individual context or timing. Brown and Hagel (2005) highlighted the limitations of such front-loading of standardized information, a model famously critiqued as the "sage on the stage" (King, 1993). Traditionally, educators operated like centralized broadcasters, transmitting referential information to largely passive, receptive learners.

In the AI era, this flow must transition to a dynamic, interactive *pull* model where learners access resources organically as cognitive needs arise (Hagel et al., 2010). Engaging meaningfully with LLMs requires dialectical reasoning and rigorous interrogation. Students must take the intellectual initiative to pull nuanced information through precise linguistic prompting. Consequently, student agency is radically transformed: they shift from being a passive passenger in the classroom to an active, autonomous driver. Effective teaching now necessitates relinquishing instructor-led broadcasting to position the educator as a vital facilitator of critical inquiry (Zimmerman, 2002). To utilize generative AI to its fullest capacity within this new paradigm, educators can anchor their practice in four specific teaching approaches.

First, Inquiry-Based and Constructivist Learning—rooted in the idea that knowledge is constructed through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978)—is supercharged by AI. Transitioning into the role of a cognitive mediator (Ouyang & Jiao, 2021), AI efficiently handles the referential groundwork, thereby freeing the cognitive space necessary for students' metacognitive growth and conceptual change (Lee et al., 2026). LLMs facilitate deep inquiry by allowing learners to autonomously pose complex questions and critically analyze responses in real-time, placing the burden of thought squarely on the student (Kohnke et al., 2023).

Second, AI enhances Collaborative Learning and Intercultural Competence. Platforms allow peers to engage in the collective, dialogic interpretation of texts and the co-construction of knowledge (Cress & Kimmerle, 2023). Interacting with global conversational agents—AI-driven personas capable of simulating a wide array of linguistic varieties and cultural perspectives—exposes students to diverse cultural norms. This immersion provides a low-stakes environment for students to navigate non-native nuances, a process that actively builds intercultural empathy and reinforces the ELF approach (Huang et al., 2024).

Third, Critical Digital Pedagogy, rooted in Freirean philosophy (Freire, 1970), emphasizes the active critique of dominant knowledge systems. Because AI tools carry and amplify the cultural and linguistic biases inherent in their training data (Noble, 2018), fostering critical AI literacy has become paramount. This approach empowers students to actively question algorithmic narratives and critique the power structures embedded in global English communication (Velander et al., 2024).

Finally, a Multiliteracies Approach (New London Group, 1996)—which emphasizes the diversity of meaning-making through various linguistic, visual, and digital modes—enables students to engage with multimodal texts through adaptive translingual practices (Tzirides et al., 2024). By embedding these models, educators guide students to strategically utilize AI for analytical feedback, amplifying their own independent, reflective practice (Mollick & Mollick, 2023).

4.2 Navigating the Pitfalls of Generative AI: The Picasso Paradox

Despite its transformative potential, the integration of generative AI involves several critical pitfalls that threaten the educational process: cognitive deskilling, excessive offloading, automation bias (intellectual complacency), and breaches of academic integrity (de la Puente Pacheco et al., 2025). Commercial models are programmed to be obliging, often exhibiting profound sycophancy by apologizing profusely and agreeing with incorrect premises (Kaur, 2025; Perez et al., 2023). Students must therefore possess the critical capacity to challenge the machine as an epistemic authority rather than passively accepting its articulate affirmations as objective truth (Bearman & Ajjawi, 2023).

Beyond the immediate threat of automation bias, this passive acceptance precipitates a deeper structural issue: excessive cognitive offloading (Lodge et al., 2023a). When learners consistently delegate the demanding work of drafting and organizing their ideas to an algorithm, they bypass the productive struggle required for deep, deliberative meaning-making. This habitual outsourcing leads directly to cognitive deskilling, effectively reducing students from active architects of thought to mere proofreaders of machine-generated text (Godwin-Jones, 2023). In the context of global English education, such deskilling severely undermines the cultivation of the fifth skill. If the intellectual struggle of representation is entirely offloaded to the machine, students forfeit the opportunity to develop the nuanced, critical consciousness necessary to produce genuinely original, dialogic work.

Addressing academic integrity in this new landscape requires a nuanced redefinition of authorship, which can be understood through the Picasso Paradox. This concept is adapted from the artistic maxim that

"good artists copy, great artists steal" (Kleon, 2012). In an educational context, the paradox lies in the distinction between technical output and creative agency: AI models can aggregate and "copy" vast amounts of global data with ease, yet they completely lack human intentionality. Humans, by contrast, possess the unique capacity to "steal"—a process of deeply internalizing existing information and transformatively synthesizing it into original thought. Our pedagogical goal, therefore, is to teach students to leverage AI for the former—reducing extraneous cognitive load (Sweller, 1988; Sweller et al., 2011)—so they can more brilliantly execute the latter.

5. The Linguistic Shift: From Informing to Engaging

The profound integration of generative AI into education necessitates an urgent, foundational paradigm shift in language pedagogy. Historically, education heavily prioritized the transmission of factual data. Today, however, AI handles this mechanical transmission with unprecedented, algorithmic speed. If a student needs to verify a date or translate a declarative sentence, an LLM provides the answer instantaneously, rendering fact-recall methodologies entirely obsolete. Because AI has established itself as the undisputed master of *informing*, the modern educator's role must decisively pivot toward the complex art of *engaging*.

5.1 Referential vs. Representational Language

To foster deep engagement, educators must rethink how language and literature are deployed. This requires a precise understanding of the pedagogical distinction between *referential* and *representational* language (McRae, 1991). Referential language is utilitarian, communicating literal, objective facts (e.g., "Water boils at 100°C"). Conversely, representational language actively stimulates the human imagination; it is evocative, symbolic, and deeply subjective, utilizing metaphor and ambiguity to reflect complex human experiences (e.g., the romantic comparison of a loved one to a "red, red rose"). Relying too heavily on referential facts leads to profound student disengagement, as generative models process such language flawlessly.

This dichotomy aligns seamlessly with Kahneman's (2011) dual-process theory. AI operates masterfully as a synthetic *System 1*—it is incredibly rapid, predictive, and retrieves referential information instantly without conscious effort. However, genuine human cognition excels in *System 2*—the slow, deliberative, and complex interpretive thought required to decode representational meaning. While AI effortlessly handles System 1 informing, human teachers remain the irreplaceable, essential masters of System 2 engaging.

5.2 Textual Power: Reclaiming Literature with a Small "l"

A vital strategy for fostering System 2 cognition is the deliberate reintroduction of literature—but crucially, not in its traditional, often intimidating form. Many language departments have marginalized "Literature with a capital L," a term referring to the canonized, high-culture approach that prioritizes the reverent study of classics as fixed artifacts. This traditional model is often perceived by modern students as an impractical pursuit of linguistic perfection or an elitist exercise disconnected from their everyday, digitized reality (Carter, 2007). Consequently, when literature is framed as a static monument to be admired rather than a dynamic tool for engagement, it ceases to be a catalyst for critical thought.

Instead, educators must embrace literature with a small l, treating it as an active analytical *methodology* rather than strict subject content (McRae, 1991). By defining literature broadly as "texts"—from classic poems to digital advertisements—teachers can help students systematically develop *textual power* (Scholes, 1985). This three-tiered cognitive framework, according to Scholes (1985), requires students to: read by accurately recognizing the generic, syntactic, and cultural codes at play; interpret by producing "text upon text," a creative process activated by ambiguity or paradox; and criticize by conducting a rigorous, dialectical interrogation of the underlying themes and biases from which a text is constructed. While Scholes' framework long predates the digital revolution, its focus on reclaiming agency from the text provides a timely pedagogical blueprint for the Generative AI era; it offers the very "human intentionality" required to transform algorithmic outputs back into meaningful, critically-vetted knowledge.

5.3 The Dialogic Advantage: Human Interpretation in a Monologic AI Era

Textual power relies on the irreducible distinction between human cognition and algorithmic efficiency. Drawing upon the seminal theories of Bakhtin (1981), algorithmic discourse is fundamentally *monologic*—it processes data to deliver singular, mathematically probable truths. The humanities, however, are inherently *dialogic*, requiring active, conscious, and often conflicting discourse to generate meaning. While AI excels at

synthesizing vast datasets into a coherent consensus, it lacks the subjective agency required to navigate the "polyphony" of human experience.

The primacy of human intentionality is most visible in texts that rely on extra-linguistic cues, such as minimalist poetry, where spatial imagination transcends algorithmic processing. In Roger McGough's "40 Love" (1971), the typographic structure intentionally mirrors a tennis court, with a wide expanse of blank space representing a physical and psychological barrier. When the raw text of this poem is fed into an AI without its specific layout context, the LLM consistently fails to grasp its emotional weight, processing the gaps only as a grammatical or formatting anomaly.

Similarly, E. E. Cummings's "l(a" (1958) presents a single, narrow column simulating the erratic, downward drift of a falling leaf. Within this vertical descent, Cummings isolates the numeral "1" inside the word "loneliness," creating a visual-linguistic code for the individual experience of isolation. Because an AI prioritizes the statistical probability of the next character over the symbolic potential of spatial arrangement, it remains blind to how the 'leaf' and the 'one' intersect to produce a uniquely human reflection on solitude.

These examples illustrate that language is not merely a vehicle for data, but a profound canvas for shared human experience. While AI excels at probability, it cannot "read" the silence, the spatial tension, or the cultural resonance of representational literature. By placing these dialogic texts at the center of the curriculum, educators ensure that human imagination remains the ultimate arbiter of meaning. For the modern learner, mastering this dialogic ambiguity is not merely an exercise in appreciation; it is the ultimate cognitive safeguard against algorithmic conformity.

6. Cultivating the Fifth Skill: Imagination and Critical Thinking

Building upon this dialogic advantage, it becomes clear that in an AI-saturated educational landscape, the traditional objectives of language education require a profound, structural recalibration. For decades, the foundational pillars of language acquisition have rested securely on four primary skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Brown, 2000). However, as generative AI models demonstrate an increasing, almost frictionless mastery over the mechanical execution of these four domains—translating text in real-time, generating flawless syntax, and mimicking human speech patterns with uncanny accuracy—these traditional metrics are no longer sufficient on their own. To remain relevant, language education must actively move beyond mechanical fluency and rote proficiency to cultivate a fifth skill: the capacity for deep, representational thinking in English, which ultimately equates to robust critical thinking and intercultural awareness (Kramsch, 1993).

6.1 Beyond Mechanical Fluency: Redefining the Boundaries of Language Acquisition

When students rely solely on the traditional four skills in the modern classroom, they are increasingly vulnerable to the dangers of cognitive offloading—allowing the machine to perform the heavy lifting of linguistic synthesis and structural logic. The fifth skill serves as a critical cognitive ballast against this algorithmic complacency. It demands that students do not just passively receive or mechanically produce language, but actively interrogate the logic, cultural nuances, and underlying sociopolitical assumptions embedded within a text (Benesch, 2001).

If the first four skills represent the basic mechanics of a language, the fifth skill represents the critical "consciousness" driving it. In an era where English functions as the dominant global lingua franca of digital networks, this fifth skill ensures that users are not merely transmitting data, but actively negotiating meaning. It empowers learners to recognize when AI-generated outputs perpetuate biases or logical fallacies, ensuring that human intellect remains the definitive governor of algorithmic output.

6.2 Activating Representational Imagination: Lessons from The Little Prince

Cultivating this fifth skill requires directly and intentionally stimulating student imagination—a complex, subjective cognitive arena where generative AI fundamentally cannot compete. The philosophical shift from literal, referential informing to imaginative, *representational engaging* is beautifully illustrated in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's (1943) classic novella, *The Little Prince*. In the narrative, when the stranded pilot draws literal, referential interpretations of a sheep, they are repeatedly rejected by the young Prince. The pilot only succeeds when he draws a simple box with air holes, inviting the Prince to imagine that the exact sheep he desires is hidden inside.

Generative AI functions much like the pilot's initial drawings: it is highly capable of generating a literal, referential "sheep" on demand, perfectly rendering the expected, algorithmic output. However, true meaning-making occurs in the unscripted, invisible space of the box. Educators must therefore guide students

to look beyond the literal output by engaging Kahneman's (2011) System 2 representational thought. The human mind must provide the imaginative capacity to interpret the unseen, bridging the crucial gap between algorithmic data and profound emotional resonance.

6.3 Operationalizing Critical Curation in the Classroom

To operationalize this theoretical shift in the physical classroom, language teachers must position generative AI not as a bypass for student effort, but as a primary object of rigorous critical analysis. For example, educators can implement critical curation assignments where students are tasked with generating initial responses to complex, culturally nuanced prompts using foundational LLMs like ChatGPT or Gemini (Lodge et al., 2023b).

The core of these assignments is not for students to submit the AI's answer as their own, but rather to systematically evaluate, critique, and reconstruct the machine's initial System 1 output. By deliberately interrogating the AI's structural biases and identifying its logical gaps or hallucinations—phenomena arising from the stochastic nature of the model (Bender et al., 2021)—students directly exercise the fifth skill. It is through this rigorous curation that students actively resolve the Picasso Paradox introduced earlier. By evaluating data that the AI has merely "copied" and aggregated from global networks, students perform the uniquely human act of "stealing." They take this raw, referential data and transform it through their own lived experiences, cultural contexts, and dialogic interactions into entirely original, representational thought.

Through this deliberate practice, the classroom dynamic fundamentally changes. The educational endpoint shifts from the mere production of a text to the rigorous, critical curation of it. When students are required to dismantle and reconstruct algorithmic prose, they are forced to articulate exactly why a human perspective is superior to a synthetic one. This process effectively builds their epistemic agency, guaranteeing that they graduate not as subservient operators of technology, but as intellectual masters who govern it (Bearman et al., 2023).

7. Conclusion

Generative AI represents an extraordinary technological leap that excels at informing, but its rise does not signal the obsolescence of language education—it clarifies its true purpose. This article has argued for a structural reconceptualization of English education through three interrelated contributions: bridging generative AI and ELF within an algorithmically mediated global landscape; advancing a pedagogical shift from referential informing to representational engaging through the reclamation of literature with a small "l"; and formalizing the "fifth skill" as a framework for cultivating textual power, critical AI literacy, and epistemic agency. Together, these contributions reposition language education as a fundamentally humanistic enterprise—one that equips learners not merely to use language, but to interpret, critique, and transform knowledge within an AI-saturated world.

To resolve the scholar's dilemma, universities must move beyond individual teacher self-efficacy to enact innovative structural policy changes. Administrators should dismantle traditional silos by mandating cross-disciplinary AI literacy for humanities faculty, while simultaneously embedding rigorous humanistic inquiry into STEM and computer science programs. As higher education integrates sophisticated LLMs into curricula, our institutional imperative is clear: we must empower students to transcend the Picasso Paradox, transforming them from passive consumers into active, critical curators of global knowledge. Future empirical research should investigate the long-term efficacy of these innovative representational pedagogies in digital-first environments, examining how the fifth skill impacts intercultural communication and ethical discernment. Ultimately, while AI can flawlessly generate text, only the uniquely human capacities of cultural context, empathetic discourse, and dialogic imagination can transform that text into true education.

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