

English Bilingual Education in East Asia: Rationales, reality, risks, and rewards
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RATIONALE: What is the rationale for ‘Learning through English’ (as part of multilingual education)? What is English today? Is it s Lingua franca? Lingua economica? Lingua emotiva? Lingua cultura? Lingua bellica? Lingua academica? Lingua divina? Lingua Frankensteinia? Lingua Tyrannosaura?*

Learning through English can play an important role in progress towards the millennium development goals, as a valuable component of mother tongue based multilingual education.

The reality is that in many places English has also become a kind of ‘local language’—often a third language, with local adaptations--after the mother tongue and national language. Sometimes it is seen as a ‘neutral’ tongue among competing local languages.

RESEARCH; Recent British Council research in relation to Learning through English has investigated: what is happening across the region with regard to policy; what sort of approach Ministries of Education might develop; what are the potential risks and rewards of implementing learning through English; how can risks be minimised, and chances of success maximised.

South Korea (Bax; Lee); There was an initial push for English immersion in all schools which was then deemed unfeasible. Instead a plan emerged for Teaching English in English (TEE). This approach did not diminish the prestige of the Korean language; the number of TEE capable teachers increased from 58% to 80% in 2 years; under TEE all teachers must be trained to ensure equality; there were incentives for schools to replace native teachers with local teachers. The approach has met with a generally positive view from all stakeholders. Contributing factors for success were that it was a) feasible b) had a clearly defined model c) was respectful of local language and culture and was locally owned; d) had clear measurable goals and e) was equitable.

Indonesia (Clegg, J. (2007), and Coleman, H (2009). Indonesia’s International Standard School (SBI) program has seen English become the de facto focus of schools’ development. Criticisms and challenges in the program include the following: English is being introduced too early – Y1, instead of Y4. Teacher competence is low – less than 25% competent (MoNE official), and therefore learning of English and other subjects is negatively affected. There is no clear model for learning through English – even in the same school. English is replacing local languages in the curriculum, with negative effects on the perception of Bahasa Indonesia. There is ‘cultural depositing’ – with inappropriate content, materials, and curriculum imported rather than teaching Indonesian curriculum through English. There is a focus on quantity over quality – the program is demand and profit driven. It includes poorly trained and unqualified native English speakers. There is inequitable funding and disparity between schools is growing.

Recommendations for governments: Learning through English can play an important role in progress towards the millennium development goals as a valuable component of mother tongue-based multilingual education (not English monolingual education). Focus on the method and process with clear educational goals in planning policy, not economic output. Make the quality of education generally the focus for development, not the introduction of English. Clarify which model of learning through English is to be used.

English should be taught in addition to, not at the expense of mother tongues; materials should be locally owned and developed; equity and social inclusivity should be a guiding factor in planning and policy. Funding should be contingent upon merit-based outreach. English should be for all (not just in elite academies) etc.

Other recommended strategies include: restrict visas for under-qualified native speakers. Conduct comprehensive teacher-training not just in English, but in teaching and learning through English (which are very different skills); Defocus from fluency and acculturation to appropriation.

Recommendations for the international English Language Teaching (ELT) sector. Encourage 'English in Development' as a specific branch of ELT, focusing on developing English as a local language. Introduce minimum qualifications for native English speaker teachers (DELTA equiv.)

Inform partner governments about learning through English policies which are harmful or disruptive, through research and dissemination. Invest in local materials. Take principled positions on issues such as the language of instruction – and follow them.

- *References for this paper can be found in the Powerpoint presentation*