

English Bilingual Education in East Asia: Rationales, Reality, Risks, and Rewards.

By Danny Whitehead

The last decade has seen a growing number of developing and developed countries adopt policies of English Bilingual Education (EBE) in the national education system. In East Asia, the movement has been particularly strong, seemingly in contradiction to a growing body of empirical research which questions the rationale for EBE, and indicates negative performance and learning indicators in EBE programmes. The British Council has undertaken a large-scale research project across East Asia in order to investigate:

- What is happening across the region with regard to EBE policy and planning?
- What sort of approach might ministries of education develop towards EBE?
- What are the potential rewards of implementing an EBE approach?
- How can risks be minimised, and chances of success maximised?

The British Council has taken a comprehensive and holistic approach to EBE through research which was conducted in five countries: Indonesia, Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The study reveals crucial factors relevant to current developments in the fields of language and literacy in early education and the role of mother tongues and languages of wider communication in development and universal early education; as such, the research will be of great relevance and interest to stakeholders working towards MDGs 2 and 7. The research also draws together thematic issues affecting the countries, and provides an intriguing and challenging perspective on current thought, practice, and policy, and future implications for all stakeholders.