

Turning English into the Second Language in Vietnam: A Critical Policy Analysis

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Abstract: This study critically assesses Vietnam's policy of turning English as a second language under Resolution 71-NQ/CP (2025). Based on Spolsky's Tripartite Model and Multi-Level Policy Analysis, this study examines the interplay between national ideology, governance mechanisms and educational practices. The results show that although the policy demonstrates a strong commitment to global integration, regional disparities, limited teacher capacity, and uneven resource allocation reduce implementation effectiveness. Accordingly, the study proposes feasible recommendations: promoting localization strategies, enhancing teacher training, ensuring resource equity, leveraging educational technology and promoting social participation. The study affirms that to achieve long-term success, ESL policy needs to align national vision with context-specific actions at the grassroots level, promoting equity, inclusiveness, and sustainability in education reform.

Keywords: Resolution, disparities, mechanisms, allocation, vision, context-specific actions.

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Introduction

Policy Overview

In March 2025, under Resolution No. 71-NQ/CP issued by the Government of Vietnam, the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) announced an initiative to make English the second language in the general education system. The policy will be implemented in multiple phases: by 2035, general education students will need to achieve English proficiency at levels 1–3; by 2045, the goal is to fully expand levels 4–6 in all schools. Furthermore, the program also aims to introduce English into preschool education for children aged three to five, creating a premise for the long-term language acquisition process. The development of this multi-phase plan shows the Government's strategic orientation in developing English proficiency in a synchronous, comprehensive manner and in line with international integration trends.

Under the authority of MoET, this policy is implemented nationwide in all public general education institutions. It emphasizes professional training to improve teachers' skills, improve the curriculum to suit current realities and ensure students have access to standardized learning materials. By introducing English into the preschool program and gradually increasing the proficiency level at higher levels, the policy aims at a systematic and sustainable English learning path, thereby helping Vietnamese students grasp better learning and career opportunities in the future.

Sociolinguistic, historical, and political context

Vietnam, a rich and linguistically diverse country, is home to 54 ethnic groups, each of which maintains its own language and distinct identity. During the colonial time, French was considered a symbol of knowledge and power, but its influence gradually declined after independence. Entering the period of Doi Moi in This is an open access article under the [CC BY-NC](#) license

1986, the trend of globalization has made English the center of language education in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2014). The Government's policy of valuing English reflects the strategic orientation toward enhancing economic competitiveness and international integration. Consequently, English is increasingly considered a national resource closely linked to the country's sustainable development in the era of globalization.

Although Vietnamese remains the only national language, ethnic minority languages are still protected under the provisions of the Constitution. Therefore, the current policy of promoting English learning is both an effort to reform education and a demonstration of Vietnam's political determination to integrate globally and modernize its education system and the country.

However, implementing the English policy nationwide faces significant challenges, especially in remote areas. While urban students benefit greatly from dynamic learning environments and qualified teachers, many rural schools still lack teachers and inadequate facilities. According to *Hanoi Times* (2025), students in rural areas often struggle to access essential learning materials, making it challenging for them to reach the level of English proficiency needed for global study and career prospects. This disparity may undermine the effectiveness and sustainability of the policy.

The effort to make English a second language is an important step in Vietnam's education modernization strategy. However, for the policy to be effective, comprehensive measures are needed to narrow regional gaps, strengthen the quality of the teaching staff, and ensure that all students, regardless of their circumstances, enjoy fair and effective learning opportunities. Overall, recognizing English as a second language reflects



Vietnam's strategic commitment to enhancing education and global competitiveness.

The following analysis explores the potential effects and challenges of the policy across divergent areas and educational settings.

Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework provides the conceptual basis for analyzing how English language policy is planned, coordinated, and implemented at each level of the Vietnamese education system. This study employs Spolsky's Tripartite model and Multi-level policy analysis (Spolsky, 2004; Hornberger, 2006) to examine the national policy on the recognition of English as a second language.

Spolsky's Tripartite Model

Three interrelated components - Language practice, Language ideology, and Language management –provide a theoretical foundation for this analysis.

Language practice refers to the use of language in school and community life. In the Vietnamese context, this is reflected in the alternating use of English and Vietnamese by teachers and students in teaching and everyday communication. The analysis of practice helps identify the gap between the policy goals of English language teaching and the actual results, which are influenced by the proficiency of teachers and the exposure of students to the language.

Language ideology, in a broad sense, encompasses the social beliefs and values that govern how people approach, evaluate, and implement language policies. In Vietnam, English is often portrayed as a symbol of global integration and social progress, associated with career opportunities and national economic development. Notwithstanding, studies on these ideologies reveal clear divisions among social groups: parents in urban areas often see learning in English as an opportunity for integration, while many rural communities are skeptical about its feasibility due to limited resources and teacher qualifications.

Language management refers to the deliberate actions taken by governments to organize, control, and promote language use in education and public life. In Vietnam, this is reflected in legal documents, curriculum guidelines, teacher capacity development projects, and budget allocation mechanisms for English language teaching. Such management reflects the policy vision of central authorities and highlights the challenges of implementation at the local level, especially in areas where limited resources and oversight mean that policy objectives are sometimes not achieved as expected.

Multi-level policy analysis

While Spolsky's model lays the foundation for understanding the relationship between language practice, ideology, and management, multi-level policy analysis offers a broader analytical lens to examine how policies are interpreted and enacted at different levels of the education system. This approach is particularly relevant in Vietnam, where regional, institutional, and individual differences give rise to varying degrees of success.

National Level

At the national level, language policy focuses primarily on establishing a legal framework, setting long-term strategic goals,

and promoting standardization in English teaching. MoET's 2025 Initiative is a testament to the central effort to establish English as a second language throughout the education system in Vietnam. Measures include curriculum guidance, professional standards for teachers and budget allocation for professional training. Nevertheless, policies at this level still face challenges when applied to local contexts, where socio-economic conditions and infrastructure differ significantly and do not meet the general requirements for long-term development orientation. Nguyen and Hall (2020) argue that the disparity between urban and rural areas in teacher capacity and resources remains a major barrier to unified policy implementation. According to Vietnamnet (2025), MoET reported that the shortage of teachers has reached an alarming level, directly affecting the implementation of the education programs. As of May 2025, the country still lacked 102,097 teachers at all levels of preschool and general education compared to the norm, and recent reports show that this figure may exceed 120,000. This situation has hindered the progress of strategy implementation and failing to meet the level of achieving national competency standards, thereby reflecting a clear gap between planning and practice.

Institutional Level

At the institutional level, the implementation of national policies depends on how individual schools and local education agencies interpret and implement national policy goals. Factors such as school leadership, teacher recruitment policies, budget allocation, and classroom teaching practices all play a decisive role. According to Phan (2022), schools in urban areas often benefit from partnerships with private English centers and access to digital technology, which facilitates the effective implementation of English-medium instruction (EMI). In contrast, rural schools still rely on teachers with limited English proficiency and outdated learning materials, which constrains the quality of instruction (Doan, 2021). Consequently, policy implementation capacity varies significantly across regions. Some educational institutions have sought to adapt flexibly by integrating English-Vietnamese bilingualism, ensuring compliance with regulations while improving student learning outcomes (Nguyen, 2023).

Individual Level

At the individual level, teachers, students, and parents act as active agents who interpret, adapt, and occasionally challenge policy mandates. Research by Do and Tran (2023) shows that teachers with high levels of self-confidence and a clear professional identity are more willing to teach in EMI. Simultaneously, learning motivation and English activities outside the classroom, including social media and entertainment, contribute to shaping students' learning outcomes (Le, 2022). Pham (2021) adds that parents' socioeconomic background influences their attitudes toward English education: urban parents see English proficiency as essential for career and social development, while rural parents prioritize core subjects due to limited facilities. These findings highlight the pivotal role of individual stakeholders in negotiating and implementing policy within the classroom context.

Justification for using Spolsky's Tripartite model and Multi-level policy analysis

The simultaneous application of Spolsky's Tripartite model and Multi-level policy analysis is especially well-suited for studying the English as a second language initiative in Vietnam

because it allows for a detailed analysis of the interactions between policy objectives, actual implementation, and local conditions. In Vietnam's context, where the diversity of socio-economic conditions, school infrastructure, teacher qualifications, and student backgrounds leads to significant variations in learning outcomes, this approach helps clarify the challenges in policy implementation and propose interventions that are appropriate for each region. For example, in schools in large urban areas, typically in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, teachers have easy access to modern educational technologies and support from private English tutors, making the EMI implementation process more effective (Pham, 2021). In contrast, English teachers in rural areas face significant challenges due to limited facilities and teaching resources, with many schools lacking textbooks, projectors, computers, and other instructional technologies (Tạp chí giáo dục, 2025).

By employing these frameworks together, researchers can systematically discover core aspects of policy implementation: linking policy goals to classroom practices, understanding stakeholder beliefs and attitudes, evaluating management and implementation gaps, capturing interactions and tensions across levels, and providing a holistic, context-sensitive lens of English language education in Vietnam.

Linking policy goals to classroom practices

Spolsky's model provides a comprehensive analytical framework that helps researchers systematically link national language policy goals with actual language management practices, beliefs, and strategies. Though **MoET** has set a target of universal EMI across the entire school system, evidence from classroom practice reveals a clear gap between policy and implementation. In rural areas, teachers often lack sufficient English proficiency, while students have few opportunities to be exposed to English outside of school (Nguyen & Hall, 2022). In addition, Le (2022) further observes that in many urban schools, large class sizes-sometimes exceeding 50 students-undermine the effectiveness of EMI instruction. By examining the three components of the model - Practice, Ideology, and Management - researchers can clearly pinpoint the points where policy is reinforced or hindered in the implementation process.

Understanding Stakeholder Beliefs and Attitudes

Language policy is not merely a top-down management issue but also a continuous interaction between ideology and practice. At the national level, English is highly appreciated as a symbol of international integration and competitiveness in the knowledge economy. However, at the local level, the implementation of this policy often encounters persistent challenges, including a lack of qualified teachers, limited learning conditions, or skepticism about the actual value of EMI. Therefore, teachers sometimes have to be flexible when using both Vietnamese and English for teaching to make sure that students can fully understand the lesson, while parents tend to evaluate the importance of English based on their socio-economic status (Doan, 2021). According to Tran (2023), many Mekong Delta parents still consider Vietnamese reading and writing skills to be more vital than English. This indicates that policy implementation depends strongly on human agency and specific context.

Evaluating Management and Implementation Gaps

The integration of theoretical frameworks enables a critical examination of how administrative policies are effectively - or

sometimes inadequately - translated into pedagogical practice. While MoET designs funding and teacher training programs at the national level, implementation capacity at the institutional level – such as staff quality, student numbers, and the availability of teaching materials – is a key factor in determining ultimate effectiveness. A multi-level approach helps MoET identify the causes of policy failures or successes and also points out structural inequalities between urban and rural areas – factors that Spolsky's model tends to overlook. For example, the *Giáo dục Việt Nam* (2024) reported that the Si Ma Cai District Education and Training Department encountered a serious shortage of teachers, especially in subjects like English and IT. In addition, many teachers are massively transferred or resigning, while the number of annual recruitments is too low compared to the target. This makes schools struggle to recruit more human resources to meet the teaching needs of subjects according to the 2018 general education program (Nguyen, 2023). From that reality, efforts to maintain EMI training courses become unsustainable despite centralized investment from the central government.

Capturing Interactions and Tensions Across Levels

The combination of theoretical frameworks offers insights into the complex relationship between the direction of national language policy, institutional implementation capacity, and individual initiative in the education system. A national ideology strongly supporting English teaching and learning can be challenged by local realities such as teacher shortages, inadequate facilities, and unstandardized training programs. This mismatch renders policy implementation inconsistent, increases educational inequality between regions, and impacts student learning outcomes. The gap between policy vision and classroom reality therefore requires flexible policy adjustments based on local context and characteristics (Ngo & Tran, 2023).

Providing a Holistic, Context-Sensitive Lens

The process of establishing English as a second language in Vietnam is a complex process, influenced simultaneously by technical, socio-political and educational factors. Based on Spolsky's model and multi-level analysis, this study examines the interaction between four key components: policy design, social beliefs, classroom practices and management mechanisms. This approach clarifies how macro-level policies interact with micro-level educational practices. Nevertheless, significant differences in facilities and human resources between urban and rural schools remain a major barrier to policy implementation (Yamada, 2019). Acknowledging these differences is a prerequisite for developing long-term strategies towards a more equitable and efficient English education system.

Overall, the integration of Spolsky's Tripartite Model and Multilevel Policy Analysis offers a useful analytical framework for examining English language policy in Vietnam. This approach illuminates the connections between policy goals, social beliefs, and teaching practices, while also revealing structural and contextual challenges that constrain effective implementation. The study aims to develop equitable, sustainable and regionally relevant English language education strategies.

Analysis Using the Three Components

To critically examine the policy of turning English as a second language, this section draws on Spolsky's **Tripartite Model-Practices, Ideologies, and Management**-to highlight both the successes in pedagogical reform and the persistent challenges,

including the misalignment between national policy directives and local school implementation.

Practices

Language practices illustrate real patterns of English use across classrooms, schools, and communities. This is evident in large urban areas such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, where EMI in core subjects, including mathematics, science, and information technology, is increasingly implemented. Students in these schools often have excellent English ability, confidently utilize the language for their academic purposes, and have access to international materials easily (British Council, 2022). Urban teachers are highly qualified and greatly benefit from ongoing training and professional development programs that motivate them to flexibly apply EMI in their teaching. Additionally, urban environments provide various learning opportunities through extracurricular activities, group projects, and online learning platforms, thereby expanding students' language practice and enhancing their learning experiences.

However, in rural and mountainous areas, the implementation of the EMI policy encounters numerous challenges. Specifically, many schools lack highly qualified teachers, teaching materials are limited, and facilities, including digital classrooms and internet connections, are often insufficient. As a result, English instruction remains largely theoretical and falls short of its intended objectives. Students have few opportunities to practice communication, while teachers have to use Vietnamese to ensure students understand the lesson, leading to low EMI effectiveness. Research shows that students in rural areas often have lower English proficiency and low proficiency in practical English use, due to the gap between policy goals and implementation in schools. Key contributing factors include slow policy implementation, limited resources, inconsistent pedagogical methods, and teacher shortages (Tran, 2022).

Aside from formal education, urban intellectuals and students enrolled in advanced and supplemental English courses continue to be the primary users of English in daily life. This creates a clear disparity in access to English across social groups and regions. These practices influence the way English is used throughout the nation and show how local socioeconomic and structural contexts interact with policy goals, like spreading EMI.

Beliefs / Ideologies

The ideological foundation of English policy in Vietnam stems from the notion that foreign language proficiency, especially English, is the driving force for national integration and economic growth, and social development. In urban areas, this belief resonates strongly among the education community and middle-class families, where English is seen as a symbol of opportunity and success in future studies and life. Investing in extra classes at international centers or bilingual programs has become a popular trend supported by many families in big cities, reflecting strong alignment between state policy and social aspirations.

However, in rural areas, the attitude towards policy is more pragmatic and cautious, especially when teachers lack EMI qualifications, infrastructure remains underdeveloped and people's lives depend mainly on agriculture, English appears to be a distant ideal rather than an immediate necessity. Teachers in many rural areas are both under-skilled and under-motivated due to administrative pressures and challenging working conditions (Doan, 2021). This difference in awareness and capacity highlight

the reality that language policy can only be efficient when supported by equal training systems, sufficient resources and sustained social trust across regions.

Management

In pursuit of its vision to establish English as a second language, MoET has implemented numerous short-term and long-term coordinated initiatives across the nation. These measures include:

Curriculum Revisions

MoET has revised the national education curriculum to integrate English into the entire learning process to meet the requirements of integration and fundamental educational innovation. Accordingly, English is not only taught as a separate subject but also becomes the main language of instruction (EMI) in many fundamental subjects such as Mathematics, Science and Technology. The competency-based framework is systematically designed with the formation of communication and thinking skills in English at the primary level to the ability to analyze, research and create at the high school level (MoET, 2018). The highlight of the program lies in the integration of language, culture and academic competence, thereby helping students not only acquire English as a communication tool but also use it as a means to acquire knowledge. This approach marks an important shift towards a more open, globalized, and learner-centered education system.

In fact, the effectiveness of English-medium instruction programs has been well documented in a number of recent studies. According to Dang & Nguyen (2024), students reported significant improvements in their English proficiency after taking EMI courses, with technical vocabulary and speaking skills showing the most significant improvements. They also emphasized that various EMI activities – especially presentations and academic discussions – had a strong impact on the development of learners' language and critical thinking skills.

Teacher Training Programs

MoET has recognized the central role of teachers in maintaining the quality of English language teaching and issued a range of policies to develop long-term teacher capacity. In line with the spirit of Resolution 71-NQ/TW (2025), human resource development - especially the teaching staff - is an important foundation for the sustainable development of education. The Resolution also emphasizes enhancing training quality, expanding lifelong learning opportunities and creating favorable conditions for teachers to continuously develop their professional capacity in response to the demands of innovation and international integration. According to the British Council (2022), initiatives include intensive training, workshops to improve pedagogy and certification programs to standardize language proficiency and pedagogical methods. Dang, Bohlinger, and Ngo (2024) also stated that effective EMI implementation requires teachers to have solid professional knowledge and the capacity to innovate, transform, and engage in continuous self-development. In this context, mentoring systems, learning community networks and continuous professional support are considered important foundations to strengthen teacher capacity and move towards a sustainable education development.

Resource Allocation

MoET has allocated budgets for key activities such as textbook development, digital learning platforms and supplementary materials for teachers to ensure effective and sustainable curriculum innovation. In line with the spirit of Resolution 71-NQ/TW (2025), education is considered a breakthrough field, with priority given to the modernization of facilities and the mobilization of financial resources to ensure comprehensive and sustainable development. Urban schools have been increasingly equipped with multimedia classrooms, high-speed Internet connections and interactive devices, thereby fostering a more engaging, effective, and practical English learning environment. The resolution also highlights the need to prioritize resource allocation for disadvantaged areas and strengthen teacher capacity development to reduce disparities in education quality across regions. In rural and mountainous areas, MoET has implemented a range of support measures, including providing basic equipment, preferential policies and retraining teachers, however, the difference in infrastructure conditions still requires continued synchronous investment in the coming period (Dang & Nguyen, 2024).

Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

MoET has established a multi-layered monitoring and evaluation framework that integrates inspection, assessment, and curriculum compliance reviews to ensure the most effective implementation of the English policy. These mechanisms align with the direction of Resolution 71-NQ/TW (2025), which places a strong emphasis on strengthening the quality assurance system and accountability mechanisms in education. However, empirical evidence shows significant regional differences in the level of monitoring and support. While schools in urban areas benefit from strong investments in human resources, technology, and assessment tools, many institutions in rural and mountainous areas still face shortages, facilities, and specialized quality assurance personnel (Al-Riyami & Dayananda, 2022). This shows the need for flexible monitoring mechanisms and necessary support policies for disadvantaged regions to ensure fairness in the implementation of the national English program nationwide.

Incentives and Support Measures

In addition to improving infrastructure and training programs, MoET also focuses on motivational measures through financial incentives and professional recognition. Teachers with high English proficiency receive allowances, students with outstanding achievements are granted scholarships and schools with exemplary EMI results are awarded certificates and prioritized resources. According to Resolution 71-NQ/TW (2025), the government will strengthen reward mechanisms, provide preferential funding particularly for teachers in disadvantaged areas, and ensure fair and performance-linked remuneration. Pham (2025) found that EMI teachers expressed strong support for government policies because they provide clear incentives and career development opportunities. Moreover, the policies also strengthen teaching motivation and learning effectiveness. Overall, these efforts contribute to the formation of an educational environment that values foreign language proficiency and promotes equality of opportunity nationwide.

Tensions, Gaps, and Unintended Consequences

There are complex tensions between policy goals, stakeholder beliefs, classroom practices, and management

strategies in Vietnam when it comes to English as a second language policy. These issues are divided into three main dimensions including policy–practice gaps, equity challenges, and local adaptations—understanding which is essential to evaluate the policy’s achievements and challenges.

Conflicts between Policy Goals, Beliefs, Practices, and Management

Although EMI is expected to promote integration and enhance global competitiveness, the mismatch between policy orientation and actual classroom capacity still hinders effective implementation.

First, the gap between policy and practice remains significant. Although EMI is compulsory, many teachers in rural and under-resourced schools struggle to implement it effectively due to limited English proficiency. Doan and Nguyen (2020) observe that teachers’ frequent switching between Vietnamese and English and the reduction of content indicate a lack of confidence in teaching entirely in English, thereby reducing the importance that the policy aims for.

Second, the uneven implementation of administrative measures across regions has created tensions between policy goals and management practices. Specifically, **MoET** has revised curricula, expanded teacher training programs and allocated resources more effectively, but the lack of equitable budget allocation and poor monitoring has undermined teaching quality and teacher preparedness, especially in disadvantaged areas (British Council, 2022).

Third, the gap between belief and practice reflects ideological contradictions in EMI implementation. At the national level, policymakers have viewed English as a key driver of modernization and global competitiveness. However, in local contexts—especially in rural areas—the application of Vietnamese remains prioritized over English. While parents and school administrators in urban areas enthusiastically support EMI, rural parents often have to adapt the policy to suit local conditions. This gap between ideology and practice leads to policy implementation being either partial or flexible.

These conflicts clearly highlight that policy effectiveness cannot be achieved through symbolic targets alone, but must also be matched to the actual capacities of teachers, learners and training institutions. Without such alignment, policy can inadvertently create significant differences in uneven outcomes across regions.

Policy–Practice Gaps and Impediments to Implementation

Several interrelated factors have hindered the full implementation of EMI policy in disadvantaged areas. A severe shortage of qualified English teachers remains widespread, with only 35% meeting the national EMI competency standards; many teachers have limited professional skills, and access to advanced training is also very insufficient. Pre-service teacher training programs often do not sufficiently prepare teachers to meet the distinct educational needs of students in rural areas (Do et al., 2022)

Additionally, limited facilities, including textbooks, digital learning tools, and language labs or multimedia classrooms, further undermine the effectiveness of implementation. The curriculum often exceeds students’ current abilities, which creates a cognitive burden, reduces learning motivation, and can negatively affect both

the language and other subjects such as mathematics or science. Inconsistent monitoring and insufficient follow-up support exacerbate these challenges. These realities show that achieving effective EMI policy implementation requires concerted investment in people, resources, and school support mechanisms.

Equity Issues: Who Benefits and Who Loses

This policy has resulted in disproportionate outcomes, with benefits accruing to students in well-resourced urban schools while students in less-advantaged areas gain far less. Specifically, students in large cities benefit numerous good lessons from highly trained teachers, supported by modern digital tools in small class sizes, and intensive English programs, which improve their attainment and prepare them better for university and international opportunities (British Council, 2022).

Conversely, students in rural areas encounter significant challenges. Pham and Tran (2025) reported that teachers often lack advanced EMI skills. In addition, students typically receive only 2–3 English lessons per week, compared to daily lessons in urban schools, and must learn both Vietnamese and English simultaneously without additional support. These differences pinpoint equity gaps in English language education, suggesting that national-level policy goals may inadvertently reinforce socio-economic and linguistic inequalities, and highlighting the need to implement differentiated educational strategies to support disadvantaged groups of students.

Agency, Resistance, and Adaptation

In the current context of limited resources, most teachers in rural areas proactively modify their teaching methods to better suit the abilities of local students. They often simplify lessons, slow down instruction, or switch to Vietnamese when encountering difficult content, aiming to enhance students' comprehension the lesson better despite reduced exposure to EMI (British Council, 2022). Such actions represent constructive adaptive strategies that help narrow the learning gap in practice.

In addition, students adopt various compensatory strategies by using bilingual dictionaries, studying in groups, and attending extra-curricular classes outside of school hours to overcome limited English input. Meanwhile, economic status and educational attainment of families (Holsinger, 2009; World Bank, 2023) continue to affect the ability to support students' learning.

Overall, these practices show that the effectiveness of language policy depends on the combination of leadership from the management level and the self-regulation capacity of the local education community.

Comparative or Regional Reflection

Comparative Overview: Vietnam and Singapore's EMI Policies

When comparing Vietnam's English as a Second Language policy with Singapore's EMI model, it becomes clear that Singapore has achieved remarkable success thanks to the strong alignment between policymaking and teaching practice. This country focuses on systematic teacher training, well-designed curricula and ensuring equitable resource allocation. Its teaching workforce is highly proficient in English, receives continuous professional development, and benefits from modern instructional facilities. The close connection among training, curriculum, and policy has helped Singapore sustain high-quality English education

across all levels over the years (Tan-Chia, Fang, & Ang, 2013; Chew & Wang, 2025).

In contrast, Vietnam has pursued a centralized approach, emphasizing English proficiency improvement as a strategic goal at the national level, yet lacking effective coordination and support at the local level. Although the Ministry of Education and Training has implemented reform policies on curriculum, teacher capacity development and resource allocation, inequalities in teaching capacity, school infrastructure and socio-economic conditions across regions have created significant differences in policy implementation outcomes. Empirical evidence indicates that students in urban areas often achieve much higher English proficiency than students in other areas, benefiting from highly qualified teachers and abundant resources, while students in remote and isolated areas still face many challenges in implementing EMI comprehensively and sustainably (Hanoi Times, 2025; EF EPI, 2024; British Council, 2022).

From this comparison, three core lessons are drawn for Vietnam and other Asian contexts, highlighting that policy effectiveness depends on aligning strategic goals with locally adapted implementation strategies.

Key Lessons from Singapore for Vietnam

Learning from Singapore's experience provides Vietnam with valuable lessons offers valuable lessons in refining its English teaching policy so that the country's major orientations go beyond strategic goals and bring about many practical and equal impacts for all students.

First, the alignment between national goals and local realities is crucial. While central policies, such as the national EMI implementation plan, clearly demonstrate the aspiration to improve international competitiveness, their effectiveness will be limited if they do not take into account differences in local resources. In many rural areas, shortages of qualified teachers, learning support tools, and adequate infrastructure make implementation challenging. Without appropriate policy adjustments, these ambitious goals may remain a formality or lead to unintended consequences, such as increasing inequality in the quality of education.

Second, ensuring teacher quality and professional development is a key foundation for turning policy goals into classroom practice. A good curriculum will not succeed if teachers lack the sufficient English language or pedagogical skills. Singapore's success the value of continuous professional development, mentoring programs, and systematic teacher evaluations is crucial. In Vietnam, sustained investment in teacher training, especially in disadvantaged areas, will help make sure effective implementation of national policy and improve the quality of teaching across the education system.

Third, ensuring equitable resource allocation is critical to reducing disparities across the country's regions and socioeconomic groups. In particular, urban schools tend to have better facilities, smaller classes, and greater access to learning technologies, while schools in rural and minority areas still struggle with educational quality. If policies fail to address these inequalities, existing gaps will continue to widen, undermining both the quality of education and social development. Prioritizing resource allocation to underserved schools in rural and mountainous areas—including textbooks, digital tools, English language support programs, and improved infrastructure—will

give all students the opportunity to enhance their English proficiency and achieve equitable outcomes.

Regional Implications for Language Policy in Asia

These lessons emphasize that succeeding in multilingual, socioeconomically diverse contexts requires a comprehensive approach. Policy ambitions must reflect local realities, be supported by a highly qualified teacher workforce, and allocate resources equitably to achieve equitable and effective outcomes.

The case of Vietnam shows that in multilingual and socioeconomically diverse Asian countries, language policies cannot rely solely on top-down guidance. Effective implementation requires a multi-level, context-sensitive approach combining national strategies with institutional support and acknowledging individuals' proactive roles. Appropriate interventions—including training teachers to meet local needs, adapting local curricula, and targeting resources where they are most needed—are essential for effectiveness and equity. By drawing on the experiences of Singapore and other countries in the region, Vietnam can refine its EMI policy over time, balancing strategic goals with practical realities, thereby fostering comprehensive English development.

Recommendations and conclusion

Targeted Recommendations for Policy Improvement

Study on Vietnam's policy of turning English as a second language has resulted in several main recommendations with the purpose of enhancing effectiveness, ensuring equity, and promoting sustainability. These recommendations are based on Spolsky's Tripartite Model, multi-level policy analysis, and empirical evidence drawn from both urban and rural contexts.

Enhanced Teacher Training

Professional development of teachers plays a pivotal role in the success of EMI implementation in Vietnam. Many teachers in rural and under-resourced areas encounter considerable challenges due to limited training opportunities, insufficient teaching materials, and overcrowded classrooms. Therefore, regionally tailored and flexible training programs are needed to improve their English proficiency and effectively apply the EMI method. Certainly, when teachers receive professional support aligned with local realities, they will become the key force in narrowing the gap between policy and classroom reality. With regular professional support, teachers can proactively innovate their teaching methods, enhance their pedagogical capacity, and gradually translate EMI policy into effective classroom practice. Regular professional development initiatives will help strengthen their expertise, promote equity in education, and ensure the sustainability of policy implementation.

Equitable Resource Allocation

Institutional capacity forms the cornerstone of successful education policy implementation and is a principle that has been emphasized in multi-level policy analysis. In practice, inequalities between urban and rural schools often stem from the unequal distribution of resources. Therefore, the government needs to ensure adequate provision of essential learning materials, digital tools and infrastructure support appropriate to each region. When conditions improve, EMI implementation will be effective, enabling students to develop foreign language skills in a more equitable and supportive learning environment. More importantly,

targeted investment in under-resourced schools will create a ripple effect, enhancing the quality of English education nationwide.

Community Engagement

A key element in linking national vision with local capacity is the active participation of parents, local leaders and ethnic minority communities. When stakeholders are recognized as collaborative partners – through sharing feedback, co-developing teaching practices, and engaging in policy dialogue – educational solutions become more context-sensitive and gain broader social acceptance. This participation not only strengthens trust in EMI but also helps to bridge the understanding gap between community groups from rural to urban areas. In Vietnam, empowering communities in policy planning and monitoring contributes to the transparency, effectiveness and feasibility of EMI initiatives. Consequently, EMI can develop into a comprehensive, sustainable and more responsive educational model that embraces the diversity of learners across the country

Continuous Evaluation and Feedback Mechanisms

To ensure more effective and sustainable EMI implementation, it is essential to establish a well-structured monitoring and evaluation framework that operates regularly and remains closely aligned with educational practice. The data collected from this process not only accurately reflects the learning outcomes of learners but also provides important evidence for adjusting the curriculum, allocating resources appropriately and enhancing teachers' professional capacity across regions. At the same time, applying a data-based feedback mechanism fosters a transparent and accountable culture of governance, where decisions are guided by concrete evidence rather than intuition. When innovative local initiatives are systematically identified, assessed, and scaled up, EMI policy can develop in a more comprehensive, equitable and regionally appropriate direction nationwide. Ultimately, EMI becomes a flexible learning system, capable of adapting to new changes in society and better meeting the diverse needs of learners across Vietnam.

Conclusion

Vietnam's experience illustrates that language planning cannot simply result from top-down administrative decisions. A sustainable policy must rest on the alignment between national strategic vision, institutional capacity, and the agency of those involved in implementation. Its effectiveness depends not on plans written on paper, but on practical investment in people, infrastructure and the ability to adapt to diverse local contexts. At a deeper level, language policy is a socio-political process in which beliefs, practices and power structures constantly interact. When this balance is lacking, implementation risks becoming superficial and may unintentionally reinforce inequalities. In contrast, a multi-dimensional and context-sensitive approach – including teacher development, equitable resource allocation, community engagement, and continuous evaluation – will help maximize both effectiveness and inclusiveness. Vietnam, through its experience, conveys a broader lesson to Asia: linguistic aspirations only gain meaning when grounded in local realities.

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