

# The advantages and disadvantages of language policies in Asian countries and regions and their impact on English education in China

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**Abstract.** Asian countries show diversity in language policy, with each country having its own unique language policy reflecting its historical, cultural and social background. This paper utilizes the systematic review methodology, discusses the advantages and disadvantages of language policies in some Asian countries and analyses the impact of these policies on English education in China. Firstly, through comparative research, this paper reviews the language policies of major Asian countries, including the setting of official languages and the protection of linguistic diversity in language education policies. Secondly, it summarizes the advantages of Asian countries' language policies, such as promoting national unity and protecting local languages and cultures. At the same time, it also analyses the shortcomings, such as language discrimination, cultural conflict and other problems. Finally, the paper discusses the influence of language policies in Asian countries on English education in China, including the impact on the enlightenment of the development of English education. The purpose of this paper is to provide a reference for understanding the language policies of Asian countries and to provide heuristics for the reform of English education in China.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Research background and significance

In the context of globalization nowadays, language policy has become one of the important issues that governments pay attention to. Asia is one of the regions with the most significant linguistic diversity in the world, and the diversity and complexity of language policies in Asia have attracted much attention. These language policies not only reflect the historical, cultural and social background of each country, but also directly affect the language use and education within the country. The study of language policy can help Chinese TESOL educators better understand the language background and learn different students' needs, in order to formulate more scientific and reasonable teaching programs, improve teaching effects, and cultivate more talents. At the same time, it can promote China's TESOL education to be in line with

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international standards, and improve international influence and competitiveness. At the same time, with the promotion of the "Belt and Road" Initiative, economic and cultural exchanges between China and Asian countries along the route have become increasingly close, and the demand for English has increased, which is conducive to promoting exchanges and cooperation in Asia and even the world [1].

China is an Asian country, hence its TESOL curriculum should consider the policies and language cultures of various Asian regions in order to cultivate outstanding talents who can adapt to different cultures. Numerous scholarly investigations have examined the linguistic regulations of Asian nations and examined the benefits and drawbacks of these policies. The growth of English education in China has drawn a lot of attention due to China's strength and rising international stature, but the impact of other Asian nations' language laws on English education in China is more significant. Few studies, nevertheless, have thoroughly examined the precise effects of language laws in Asian nations on Chinese English education, including how these laws influence teaching strategies, student knowledge of English, and the direction of English education.

## **1.2 Research purpose and method**

This study aims to investigate the benefits and drawbacks of language policies in Asian nations and areas from a multicultural standpoint, as well as to thoroughly examine the effects of these policies on English instruction in China. This will serve as a source of information for comprehending the linguistic regulations in Asian nations. This research helps to examine how language regulations in Asian nations impact English education in China and learn about the experiences and sources of inspiration behind the reform of Chinese English education.

This study utilizes the systematic review approach, reviews recently published research papers and official policies, and summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of language policies in typical Asian countries. Finally, it also concludes the specific impact of these different language policies on TESOL education in China.

## **2 The advantages and disadvantages of language policies in Asian countries and regions**

### **2.1 The advantages and disadvantages of Singapore's language policy**

Singapore has become better integrated into the international community and accelerated its internationalization process by promoting "Standard English" and the "Speak Good English Movement". "Standard English" has also improved the ease of trade, investment and talent exchange between Singapore and the rest of the world, creating favourable conditions for the country's economic development. At the same time, by strengthening the standard of English teaching in schools, Singapore has trained generations of talents with high English proficiency and international competitiveness. Li Ming's *Research on Singapore Language Policy* puts forward that "In 2011, the Ministry of Education established the Singapore English Academy to provide teacher training, improve the teaching level of teachers, comprehensively improve the quality of English teaching in schools, and strengthen students' ability in writing and communication in English" [2]. The government successfully promotes the formation of a national identity, narrows the language gap, promotes social harmony and stability, and lays a solid foundation for Singapore's long-term development by strengthening the use of Standard English.

Singapore's language policy also has some shortcomings and challenges in the process of implementing the "Speak Good English movement", and the most important one is that this

policy is unrealistic for the ideal of building a purist society. Language policy and planning can address or disregard the linguistic diversity of a region [3]. Language is a constantly developing and changing thing, and the concept of "Standard English" has led to the suppression and exclusion of linguistic diversity, which is out of step with the development of age. With the advance of globalization, the emergence of language varieties and the more frequent integration of English with other languages means that traditional "Standard English" cannot fully adapt to today's diverse linguistic environment. In Singapore, while the Ministry of Education requires schools to teach the "correct" version of English, the demand for American English has grown with the increasing influence of American culture and media. This makes teaching languages more difficult and puts strain on the Ministry's finances and resources to employ instructors who are qualified to meet the wide range of language needs. The upkeep of "Standard English" will get more and more expensive.

## **2.2 The advantages and disadvantages of Malaysian language policy**

The Malaysian government implemented the policy of "the status of national language remains unchanged, the status of English is promoted, and tolerance towards minority languages" under the premise that the status of national language remains unchanged. The unity and cohesion within the country are strengthened, and the national identity of Malaysians is promoted, thus maintaining the stability and development of the country. According to the latest research of Han Yating and Yang Min in 2023, they concluded that "Malaysia's English environment is better than other Asian countries, and thanks to the promotion of the government, a good language environment is conducive to language learning" [4]. The promotion of the status of English has enhanced the international competitiveness of Malaysians and provided them with more opportunities and resources in the fields of international trade, scientific, technological innovation and education, helping them to better communicate, cooperate and compete with other countries in the world. At the same time, it is also conducive to the development of English education, promoting students to better contact with and understand international knowledge and culture, and improving the level of education.

However, Malaysia's English policy could lead to language inequality, "Malaysian universities offer access to proficient English speakers, given they largely operate in English" [5]. This has further widened the gap between native English speakers and non-native English speakers in the country, affecting education and employment opportunities for some people. In addition, the "unchanging status of the national language" in the policy will marginalize other languages and cause cultural inequities, challenging the cultural identity of certain regions or groups.

## **2.3 The advantages and disadvantages of Thailand language policy**

Thailand's language policy has undergone a transformation, from the promotion of a single Thai language to the acceptance of multiple languages. In 2021, the *National Language Policy Action Plan (2021-2022)* organized by the Royal Academy of Thailand was approved by the Cabinet, which is the first comprehensive national language policy in the history of Thailand. The plan covers the status, education, communication and other aspects of existing languages in Thai society, aiming to promote Thai society's acceptance of linguistic and cultural diversity, and promote the harmonious coexistence of people of all ethnic groups at home and abroad and sustainable development of the country [6]. The Plan also stipulates that Thai as the national language is the highest status language of the Thai language. English continues to be the first foreign language, and Chinese and neighbouring languages (Burmese, Cambodian, Lao, Malay) as the second series of foreign languages. Thailand is the first

country in the world to include Chinese teaching in its national education system, and Chinese education in Thailand has formed a complete system from kindergarten to university [7]. Thailand attaches great importance to English education, conforms to international development, improves the national English level, and promotes international exchanges and cooperation. According to Yi Hongbo's *The Enlightenment of Thai Language Policy on Foreign Language Education Policy in China*, it can be understood that "for Thai English, relevant linguists have called it 'Thai English', and have made in-depth analysis and research on this English variant. It also summarizes the characteristics and nature of Thai English under the influence of second language acquisition [8]. At the same time, the synchronized development of relevant policies and systems has promoted the self-development of schools and educational management institutions, improved the quality and efficiency of education, and provided students with a better learning environment and resources. In addition, strengthening foreign language education is conducive to promoting international cultural exchanges, enhancing mutual understanding and friendship among ethnic groups, and enhancing Thailand's international image.

However, Thailand's overemphasis on English instruction may cause other indigenous languages and ethnic traditions to be marginalized and neglected. This will undermine people's sense of identification and the ability to pass down local culture, as well as increase the risk of language loss for some ethnic minorities and geographical areas. Rather than concentrating on raising the calibre and efficacy of English education, the government will heedlessly expand the amount of English instruction provided. Hence, if the level of English education falls short of expectations, educational resources will be wasted and students learning will be impacted.

## 2.4 The advantages and disadvantages of ASEAN countries' language

**Table 1.** Language statistics of ASEAN countries.

Member state	Join Date	Official national language	Working language
Malaysia	1967	Malay, English	English
Indonesia	1967	Indonesian	English
Thailand	1967	Thai, English	English
The Philippines	1967	Filipino, English	English
Singapore	1967	Malay, Mandarin, Tamil, English	English
Brunei	1984	Malay, English	English
Vietnam	1995	Vietnamese	English
Laos	1997	Lao	English
Burma	1997	Burmese, English	English
Cambodia	1999	Khmer (Cambodian), English	English

ASEAN countries are composed of more than 300 ethnic groups, more than 1,000 languages and dozens of religious beliefs, making it a truly multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural region [9]. Different ethnic groups have different languages, most of which belong to one of the four major language families: Indo-European, Sino-Tibetan, Austronesian (also known as Malayo-Polynesian) or South Asian and Dravidian. The language status of the 10 ASEAN countries is shown in Table 1. It can be seen from Table 1 that among the 10 member countries, 7 have listed English as one of their official languages, which shows that globalization has promoted the influence and development of English in Southeast Asia [10]. In its language policy, ASEAN encourages language learning and exchange among its member states to promote regional cooperation and integration. English is designed as a working language to help members communicate and integrate internationally. Multilingual education based on mother tongue is gaining increasing

attention in Southeast Asian countries, and some countries have formulated and implemented relevant policies to facilitate the exchange and understanding of different cultures and languages.

However, the dominance of English in ASEAN is detrimental to the development of other languages and cultures. Its language policy is also immature, and the main and official languages remain controversial. In the field of education, the effect of multilingual learning is not obvious, and the process of learning other languages is not smooth due to the influence of English.

### **3 The influence of language policies in Asian countries and regions on China's TESOL curriculum**

The analysis of Singapore's language policy in this article summarizes several points of inspiration for English teaching in China. First of all, English teaching should be strengthened to improve students' English proficiency, cultivate talents with international outlook and cross-cultural communication skills, and enhance international competitiveness. At the same time, teachers' training should be emphasized to improve their teaching level and professionalism. In line with the development trend of globalization, English education should intermingle with other languages and cultures, and respect and tolerate linguistic diversity while promoting standard English.

Malaysia's language policy also brings a lot of inspiration. A balance should be struck between Mandarin and English teaching to ensure that students master the national language and promote national identity, while also meeting the needs of international exchanges. The fairness and inclusiveness of the language policy should also be considered to avoid language inequality and cultural marginalization. Attention is paid to the rational allocation of educational resources to improve the efficiency of education and reduce management costs.

From Thailand's language policy, this paper distills a few points in favour of the development of English language teaching in China. The content and form of English teaching should be constantly adjusted according to the needs of national development and changes in the international situation. Students should be guided to learn new knowledge to cultivate the spirit of innovation and practical ability to adapt to the development needs of the present society. It is essential to strengthen foreign language teaching, promote international cultural exchanges, enhance inter-ethnic understanding and friendship, and improve international image. While promoting English, it is necessary to respect and protect the languages of various ethnic groups, safeguard linguistic diversity, and enhance people's recognition and inheritance of their native cultures.

Drawing on ASEAN's experience, China should strengthen regional language education exchanges and cooperation and promote regional integration. Encourage multi-language learning, respect and protect the languages and cultures of all ethnic groups, and promote linguistic diversity. Meanwhile, China should avoid English monolingualism, balance the relationship with other languages and cultures, and avoid suppression. Exploring a multilingual education model suitable for China and promoting cultural exchanges are of critical importance. Emphasizing English education is important, China needs to improve English proficiency and develop an international outlook and intercultural communication skills.

### **4 Conclusion**

Language policies in Asian countries and regions have attracted much attention due to their diversity and complexity, which directly shape national language application and education

systems. Through literature analyses, this paper provides an in-depth look at the language policies of Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and the ASEAN regions, summarizing their strengths and weaknesses in promoting national unity, preserving local cultures and facilitating international exchange. These analyses not only provide references for understanding the language policies of Asian countries, but also reveal the far-reaching impact of diverse language policies on English language education in China.

At the same time, the impact of Asian countries' language policies on English education in China is not only limited to changes in teaching methods and learning awareness, but also involves the adjustment and optimization of the country's overall education system. In the future, as the process of globalization advances and international exchanges become more and more frequent, China, while drawing on the language policy experiences of its Asian neighbours, needs to formulate a language policy that meets its own developmental needs in accordance with its national conditions, to contribute more strength and wisdom to the country's educational reform and cultural inheritance.

## Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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