

Chapter 11

Language Policy in English as a Medium of Instruction Schools: A Multilingual Approach

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores language policies in international schools with English as the primary medium of instruction. As international education in Asia becomes a popular choice for many students and families, issues of language equity and multilingualism intersect with policy design. This chapter advocates for the decolonization of international education by shifting from a restrictive and monolingual lens to embracing linguistic diversity through a multilingual lens. The chapter discusses various models for English language support and home language support, and then examines the challenges of language policy design. Finally, the chapter suggests ways instructional leaders can craft more inclusive language policies, providing examples from various international contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Between 2013 and 2023, Asia has experienced a 59.6% rise in its number of international schools and, as such, is the continent with the most international schools. In fact, 57% of the world's international schools are in Asia, compared with 18% which are in Europe (ISC Research, 2023). These schools are classified as international schools in part due to their use of English as the or one of the primary languages of instruction. The vast majority of these schools use European and North American curriculums (ISC Research, 2023). These institutions often maintain problematic and contextually inappropriate language policies which center English as the language of knowledge, communication, and socio-cultural power.

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Some institutions implement restrictive language policies in the name of academic success. Many stakeholders believe that students with high proficiency in the English language will be able to become more competitive university and career candidates after their education (Cummins, 2000; Vavrus, 2002). As such, implementing restrictive language policies heightens the prestige of the European language of instruction while allowing for the diminishment of a student's native language, cultural identity, and community ties. Furthermore, this can lead to the demotivation of less proficient students who are being assigned future value based on their current foreign language ability and foreign language sophistication in a secondary school environment (Cummins, 2000).

The mission of this chapter is to firstly explore the trends in language policies in international schools including philosophy statements, approaches to English language support, and approaches to home language support. The chapter will then examine the negative impacts of linguistically restrictive policies. Finally, it will suggest more inclusive language policy approaches and reform. The adoption of promising approaches can enable international schools to establish language policies that foster inclusivity, cultural sustainability, and multilingualism.

BACKGROUND

With the rise of international education in Asia, schools with Eurocentric models of education have become the norm. These institutions perpetuate a linguistic hierarchy, positioning English as the language of power that leads students to perceive other languages, such as their home language, as less valuable. As such, the propagation and increasing credibility associated with Eurocentric ideologies of education as a trend in international educational contexts advances a type of colonialism through education. Though likely unintentional, Veronelli asserts that this action continues the racist colonialist hierarchy that elevates European languages as superior and more valuable when compared to non-European languages (Rosa & Flores, 2017). This is especially pertinent to this chapter for Asian-based institutions but is not limited to Asian students. The dominant beliefs around English and English medium instruction grant a high level of prestige to the English language and users with a high level of proficiency. This phenomenon is expounded by Asian countries due to their desire to strengthen their innovation and economic activity with the markets in Europe and the Americas (Hu & Lei, 2013). Due to international schools in Asia, which focus on English language teaching, being one of the fastest growing markets in Education, research must be undertaken and investigated to challenge this growth in the market in order to be sustainable and in the best interests of students (HM Government, 2013). Other locales will also be explored as supporting evidence for this paper as there is a lack of plentiful research for Asian high school settings, even though China is the world's largest English language teaching market (Kumaravadivelu, 2016). It is crucial to challenge this trend and undertake research in Asian high school settings, considering international schools' significant growth and influence in the region.

However, the majority of the research that has been done inside Asian contexts has been completed on university students, and a majority of the research in international schools has taken place in Europe or North America, which extends the reach of globalized educational colonization through decontextualized research application. This colonizing concept is central to restrictive language policies, which dictate how English is taught to speakers of other languages (Jimenez-Silva et al., 2016). This can also be defined as any institutional policies or even practices, intentional or unintentional, which punish

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