

Recommendations For Policy Implementation Of Teaching English As A Second Language In Vietnam's Education System

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Abstract: The paper comprehensively analyzes the context of policy enforcement to make English a second language in Vietnam's education system. Based on the analysis of the national education policy, international experiences and practical survey results, the paper specifies both favorable conditions and challenges, and accordingly, proposes solutions and recommendations for proper policy implementation. To be more specific, Vietnam has great opportunities owing to political support, developing digital infrastructure, high social demand and experiences from previous projects. However, there still exist several obstacles such as the lack of qualified teachers, inequality among regions, testing pressure and risks of fading national language identity. The paper refers to international models (i.e. Singapore, Malaysia, Rwanda, Philippines, China and India) to draw lessons and make proper adjustments in line with Vietnam's current situation. On that basis, the author proposes some solutions such as English teachers' capacity enhancement, English teaching curriculum improvement, investment in facilities, technological application promotion and creation of a natural English-learning environment. The major research methods include in-depth interview, group discussion, observation and document analysis. In conclusion, it is necessary to approach the education policy of teaching English as a second language from the perspective of education policy analysis to ensure effective, equal and sustainable implementation.

Key words: English, second language, ESL, education policy, education equality, policy recommendations, education system

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization of labor markets and knowledge economy make English proficiency an essential skill (Khan, 2021; Shohamy, 2006). In response, Vietnam is making a strategic shift to make English the second language in its education system (Laotian Times, 2025). This article examines the multidimensional factors influencing this policy shift and offers specific recommendations.

According to Vietnam News (2024) and Bao Quoc Te (2024), the goal of implementing English as a second language in the Vietnamese education system is to improve English proficiency for learners at all levels (equipping students with the ability to use English fluently in study, communication, work and research, towards standardizing English proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for high school and university students), and building a widespread English learning and using environment (increasing the duration and quality of English teaching and learning in schools, encouraging the use of English in extracurricular activities, internal communications, teaching some subjects in English (EMI - English as a Medium of Instruction)). This also aims at international integration and improved competitiveness of human resources (preparing the young generation of Vietnam for regional and global integration, meeting the requirements of the international labor market, and creating a premise for developing global citizens, contributing to enhancing the national position). Other goals include reducing inequality in access to English between regions (i.e. expanding opportunities to access quality English for students in remote, isolated and ethnic minority areas, reducing the gap in foreign language proficiency between urban and rural areas), developing a team of English teachers meeting international standards (i.e. training and fostering English teachers to meet language proficiency standards and modern teaching methods, creating an ecosystem of professional support for teachers regarding materials, technology, advanced learning models), and innovation in English teaching methods and content (i.e. shifting from teaching grammar and vocabulary to developing communication skills and language thinking, and increasing the application of information technology in teaching and testing and assessing English).

2. INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VIETNAM

2.1. *International experiences*

According to LawNet Vietnam (2024) and Ramanathan (2005), the approach of English as a Second Language (ESL) has been applied by many countries in different forms, levels and roadmaps, depending on historical, political, social circumstances and development needs. Below is an overview of typical international models and experiences:

Singapore – Comprehensive and successful bilingual model. Since 1966, Singapore has chosen English as the main language in education, administration and economy, while maintaining the mother tongue (Chinese, Malay, Tamil) as the second language. Accordingly, the entire general education program is taught in English, requiring teachers to have a high level of English and making English exams compulsory in the national examination. To date, Singapore leads the world in non-mother tongue English proficiency (EF English Proficiency Index). English has become a tool for international integration and economic development (Nguyen, T. M, 2024 and Gill, 2005).

Malaysia – Flexible multilingual policy. In terms of policy, English is the second language after Malay and is taught compulsorily from primary school and is the language of instruction for some STEM subjects. The “Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik dalam Bahasa Inggeris” (PPSMI) policy was once implemented but was abandoned due to social backlash. Recently, Malaysia has switched to the “Dual Language Programme” (DLP) model. Lessons from Malaysia show that: There is a need to balance the goal of developing English and preserving the national language. Malaysia once applied the “Teaching and Learning of Science and Mathematics in English” (PPSMI) policy to enhance English in education. Gill’s study (2005) showed that PPSMI helps improve English skills, but also faces opposition due to concerns about the impact on indigenous languages and culture (Nguyen, T. M, 2024).

Rwanda – Quick shift from French to English. Since 2008, Rwanda has been shifting its entire education system from French to English to enhance its integration with the East African Community and the Commonwealth. However, this policy has faced several challenges, such as shortage of English teachers and teaching quality dropping sharply in the early stages. This infers that language change must be accompanied by investment in teachers and training programs (Nguyen, T. M, 2024).

Philippines – Colonial linguistic legacy becoming global advantage. The Philippines applies a bilingual policy (Filipino and English). To be more specific, English is the main language in education, law, and business. In the Philippines, students learn subjects such as science and math in English from elementary school. Media and textbooks are mostly in English. The results of implementing the Bilingual policy are high-quality English human resources, and the rise of the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry thanks to English (Nguyen, T. M, 2024).

China – Model of English as a compulsory skill. China has adopted the policy of English as a compulsory subject from primary to higher education. Accordingly, the National examination system (Gaokao) and University entrance exam both requires English tests. China has deeply invested in coursebooks, technologies and native teachers. However, China has not made English a major teaching language in schools (Nguyen, T. M, 2024).

India: There are more than 20 official languages, of which English plays an important role as a second language in education, business and administration. According to Ramanathan (2005), English language policy helps create economic opportunities, but also leads to educational inequality due to the uneven distribution of English language education quality across regions (Nguyen, T. M, 2024).

Table 1. Comparison of English education policies in some countries

Countries	English teaching model	Major challenges	Experiences for Vietnam
Singapore	Teaching and learning entirely in English + bilingual	Social consensus, good English teacher training	Use radical and steadfast policy
Malaysia	Mixed (native language + English)	Social reaction, constant policy change	Need stability and flexibility
Rwanda	Changing the language of the education system	Lack of English teachers, students lack knowledge	Avoid switching too quickly
Philippines	English as a teaching language	Loss of indigenous language identity	Need to preserve Vietnamese language
China	English as a skill rather than an academic language	Dependence on exams, lots of rote learning	Need to balance actual capacity

3.2. Recommendations for Vietnam

According to British Council Vietnam (2024), when implementing the policy of English as a second language in the Vietnamese education system, English should not be considered a universal “language of instruction” like Singapore if there are not enough necessary resources; Selective bilingualism can be applied to high-quality schools; Ensure that English teachers are competent and continuously supported; Preserve and develop Vietnamese as the main language, while expanding the space for English use in a practical way.

3. Theoretical basis for “English as a second language” approach in Vietnam from the perspective of education policy analysis

It is entirely possible to approach the issue of “English as a second language in Vietnam” from the perspective of education policy analysis. For the following reasons:

3.1. Education policy as a legal framework and overall orientation

Introducing English as a second language in the education system is not only a change in the curriculum, but also involves policy decisions at the national level, including foreign language development strategies, teacher training regulations, output standards, and resource investment, etc. Analyzing education policies helps to understand the goals, priorities, resources and implementation methods of the state in promoting English learning (DTI News, 2025 and Ahmed, 2023).

3.2. Policy analysis contributing to effective and practical analysis of real implementation

Through policy analysis, researchers can examine whether the policy has been implemented as intended, what are the advantages and barriers encountered. This is also a way to identify shortcomings in policy or implementation, thereby proposing appropriate adjustment solutions (Saigon Times, 2025 and Gopinathan, 2000).

3.3. Education policy closely related to various factors

The adoption of English as a second language involves teacher training, curriculum, learning materials, student assessment, infrastructure investment, the role of information technology, and socio-cultural factors. Education policy analysis allows for a comprehensive approach to these factors within a specific legal and action framework (SEA-VET, 2024).

3.4. Policy analysis contributing to more effective policy recommendations

Based on the analysis of current policies, researchers and policy makers can make recommendations to improve the content, implementation methods, and accompanying support policies. This is important for English as a second language policy to be suitable to actual conditions, social needs, and national development orientation (VietnamFact, 2025; Ranta & Meckelborg, 2022).

In general, examining “English as a second language” from the perspective of education policy analysis helps to understand the context, goals and operating mechanisms of the policy, evaluate implementation, identify

difficulties and advantages, and propose solutions to perfect the policy in accordance with the reality of Vietnam. Therefore, this is a very suitable and necessary research perspective when studying this topic.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a mixed research method combining theoretical analysis and practical survey. Specifically, the research method includes:

4.1. In-depth interview

The authors have interviewed 09 experts (from the Ministry of Education and Training and universities), 18 managers and intermediary leaders from 12 universities on real issues encountered in the scenario of education policy implementation in making English a second language in Vietnam's education system.

In-depth interviews allow the authors to collect detailed insights from the stakeholders including English teachers, education administrative officer, experts, students and parents about their experience, awareness and evaluation of the policy (Latha, 2023 and Park, 2020). In this research, the authors identify the major subjects, prepare a semi-structured interview question set focusing on the implementation conditions, favorable conditions, difficulties and policy recommendations. Then, the authors conduct interviews in person or electronically, record and take notes.

The following are interview questions:

Could you share your general opinion on the current policy of making English the second language in Vietnamese education?

In your opinion, what favorable conditions have supported the implementation of this policy in schools?

How do you assess the quality of the current English teaching staff? What specific difficulties do they encounter?

Have current English teaching methods met the requirements of the policy? Are there any areas that need improvement?

In your opinion, are the facilities and English learning materials in schools currently sufficient and appropriate?

Has the policy been implemented evenly across regions, especially in remote areas? How do you view this issue?

What are the biggest challenges in creating an English-speaking environment in schools?

Can you tell us about any successful English teaching initiatives or models that you know or have applied?

In your opinion, what is the role of information technology and online learning platforms in supporting English learning today?

Does the current policy focus on developing the mother tongue and English simultaneously? What do you think about this?

What suggestions do you have to improve the effectiveness of training and fostering English teachers?

In your opinion, how can we reduce the pressure of studying and taking exams for students in the context of learning English as a second language?

How is the coordination between family, school and community in supporting English learning today? What needs to be improved?

What are your expectations for English policy in education in the next 5-10 years? What strategic steps should be prioritized?

4.2. Focus discussion group

The research has used the focus discussion group method to facilitate discussion and mutual feedback among members in one group (such as teachers, students or parents), aiming to find out multidimensional opinions and social dynamics in policy implementation. Each discussion group has 6-10 members with similar characteristics (English teachers in urban areas, secondary students, etc.). Accordingly, the coordinator has used open questions to trigger exchanges of favorable conditions, difficulties and solutions in teaching and learning English.

3. Observation

The research has used the Observation method to directly observe English teaching activities at schools to identify practical conditions, study environment, teacher-student interactions and potential difficulties that have not been revealed in interviews. The authors have chosen various places for observation (urban, rural and distant areas), and identified what to observe including teaching methods, material use, support equipment, English use level

in class. During observation, they have made detailed notes of the real place for observation, behaviors, interactions and context, then analyzed the collected data by comparing it with the data from interviews and group discussion.

4.4. Document analysis

This study uses the document analysis method to study legal documents (laws, government decrees, circulars of ministries and branches related to the implementation of English as a second language in the Vietnamese education system), scientific reports (22 scientific articles, 3 monographs, 2 book chapters discussing the implementation of English as a second language in the Vietnamese education system), other studies directly/indirectly related to the implementation of English as a second language in the Vietnamese education system. The author has synthesized and analyzed the final reports of the Ministries of Education and Training; universities, scientific research organizations on the implementation of English as a second language in the Vietnamese education system, specifically documents from 12 reports.

The author analyzes and compares the legal regulations of Vietnam with other countries on the implementation of English as a second language in the Vietnamese education system, especially countries in the Southeast Asian region. In this study, the author also compares and studies the models of implementing English as a second language in the Vietnamese education system, the regulations on implementing English as a second language in the Vietnamese education system of other countries: China, the US, France, Germany, etc.

5. Findings and discussion

5.1. Favorable conditions

Data analysis reveals that the implementation of education policy in making English a second language in the Vietnamese education system has many favorable conditions after Vietnam carried out Decision no. 1400/QĐ-TTg dated September 30, 2008 by the Prime Minister on approving the Project "Teaching and learning foreign languages in the national education system for the period 2008 - 2020" (Prime Minister, 2008). To be more specific, there have been strong commitments from top management; English can be integrated into national education program reform; the digital infrastructure has been developed, along with several AI-driven language platforms constantly updated; and the need for English learning from parents and the society is increasing.

This result is similar and consistent with the research results of Sung, (2016) and Chung (2022).

5.2. Advantages and opportunities

Data analysis reveals that the implementation of education policy in making English a second language in the Vietnamese education system has many advantages and opportunities. They include experience from the 2008-2020 National Foreign Language Project, diverse international cooperation in education (i.e. cooperation with British Council, Fulbright, ETS, etc.), young population with high technological capacity, regional integration trend through ASEAN and strong global education standards.

This result is similar and consistent with the research results of Enever (2011) and Bokhorst-Heng (2005).

5.3. Challenges and obstacles

Data analysis reveals that the implementation of education policy in making English a second language in the Vietnamese education system still encounters some challenges and obstacles. To be more specific, there is a gap among English teachers' profession in different regions, a lack in English practice environment in distant regions, a lack of resources in public education institutions, program overload and language policy fragmentation, risk of increasing educational inequality, dependence on foreign English standards and tests, risk of "language imposition" causing cultural identity to fade, and negative reactions from a group of English teachers and officials lacking English proficiency

This result is similar and consistent with the research results of Othman, and Mohamad (2022).

6. Policy recommendations

From the above research results, the author proposes: Developing a team of teachers in an equitable direction: prioritizing training in disadvantaged areas; Designing differentiated programs by stage, region and grade level; Building a National English Competency Framework with reference to CEFR but with appropriate adjustments; Applying technology, enhancing AI, EdTech for English practice; Integrating culture, developing bilingualism

and preserving Vietnamese; Improving the effectiveness of monitoring and feedback through the establishment of a multi-stakeholder monitoring mechanism.

CONCLUSION

Making English a second language in the Vietnamese education system is a strategic move to enhance national competitiveness in the context of globalization and deep international integration. Research shows that although Vietnam has many favorable conditions and advantages such as political commitment, developed technology platform, high social demand, there are still many challenges such as regional differences, lack of qualified teachers, pressure from exams and the risk of losing the national language.

Through the analysis of international experiences and domestic practical data, the research gives several specific and possible policy recommendations to support effective, equal and sustainable implementation of ESL policy. Approaching this subject matter from the perspective of education policy not only helps to clearly identify obstacles and potentials in the field, but also serves as a basis for long-term strategical planning for language education in Vietnam, ensuring balance between making English an integration tool and preserving the values of Vietnamese language in the education system and social life.

However, there are still some limitations in the research. Although the study used a variety of qualitative methods to gain a multidimensional approach to the English as a second language policy in the Vietnamese education system, there are still some notable limitations. Firstly, the scope of the survey and the number of participants in interviews and discussions are relatively limited, mainly concentrated in a number of specific localities and universities, so it does not fully reflect regional diversity. Secondly, the study mainly relies on qualitative data, so it has not exploited the quantitative aspect to measure the specific impact of each factor.

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