

Is English the Gateway or Gatekeeper? Exploring the Impact of English-Only Policies in Asia

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Keywords

Language policy
English proficiency
Academic impact
Systematic literature review
Asia

Article History

Received 2025-01-11

Accepted 2025-04-16

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Abstract

As far as studies on the English-only policy (EOP) are concerned, there is a notable concentration of research focusing on Asia. To better represent this region and gain a comprehensive understanding of how EOP is applied in diverse educational contexts, this study aims to examine the roles, benefits, challenges, and recommendations associated with EOP implementation in Asian schools. Through a systematic literature review, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied, and 38 journal articles from the ERIC database covering 15 Asian countries were screened for review. The findings indicate that the role of EOP in education across Asian countries primarily centers on preparing students for international opportunities and addressing challenges in teacher training. The benefits of EOP implementation include improving language proficiency and enhancing student engagement. However, several challenges were identified, such as the marginalization of local languages and cultural education, excessive demands in enforcing EOP, and increased difficulties for students with limited English exposure. The review also presents several recommendations for strengthening and improving EOP in educational institutions: enhancing classroom practices, language strategies, and assessment; promoting cultural relevance, motivation, and engagement; developing communication strategies for effective language acquisition; supporting teacher training, curriculum development, and community involvement; and expanding EOP-related studies as a direction for future research. While EOP aligns with global standards by fostering English proficiency and cultural awareness and preparing students for globalization, it also presents significant challenges, including over-reliance on the English language, which can hinder learning and potentially alienate students who struggle with it. It is important to note that only 15 out of 49 Asian countries were represented in the review. This suggests a gap in the literature, as studies on EOP in the remaining countries are either limited or absent—highlighting a valuable area for future research.

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, English proficiency is increasingly seen as essential for accessing professional opportunities and participating in global communication (Batista, 2020). It is often a critical qualification for career success, with many employers prioritizing English skills. This emphasis is mirrored in academic institutions, where English dominates global academic discourse. Many universities highlight English as the primary medium for research and instruction to remain competitive.

However, ESL (English as a Second Language) learners face significant challenges, as language barriers can hinder their comprehension of academic content and classroom participation (Macedo, 2017). Kunle's study (2023) highlights how the lack of a standardized medium of instruction creates difficulties for students. While some lecturers use English, others do not—even though course materials are in English. This inconsistency hampers students' comprehension during independent study and negatively affects their academic progress.

To address these issues, many educational institutions have implemented policies like the English-Only Policy (EOP) to enhance language proficiency and promote academic success (Amoakohene, 2017), especially as English is increasingly regarded as a global lingua franca (Sartori, 2023). The EOP mandates the exclusive use of English as the medium of instruction within schools, aiming to create an immersive English-language environment that accelerates students' language development (du Buisson, 2017). Interestingly, the application of this policy varies across the world.

For instance, in Somalia, Kunle (2023) posits that utilizing English as the medium of instruction at the University of Burao aims to enhance communication skills for both students and lecturers. This argument likely stems from the understanding that English is crucial for accessing global knowledge and participating in international academic discourse. It was also noted that all books and learning materials are written in English, suggesting that an English-medium instruction policy could directly support students' engagement with these resources during independent reading (Kunle, 2023). This context implies that the adoption of EOP in this setting is driven by the practical need to engage with predominantly English-language academic materials and to develop proficiency for broader academic and professional opportunities. However, Kunle's (2023) study also highlights that some lecturers use English in class while others never do, indicating inconsistent implementation of any potential EOP. This reflects the complexity of enacting a uniform language policy within an institution.

The scenario in Mexico reveals additional layers of complexity. Rosales and Gonzalez (2020) found that a significant majority (68%) of undergraduate students in their study favored English-only instruction primarily because they believed it offered better opportunities to practice the language and facilitated learning. This preference aligns with the "immersion benefits" previously mentioned, where students perceive maximum exposure to English as advantageous for language acquisition. However, a substantial 32% of students preferred limited use of their first language (Spanish) for purposes such as clarification, understanding instructions, and feeling more secure (Rosales & Gonzalez, 2020). This suggests that even among those who support English-only instruction, there is a recognized need for L1 support in specific pedagogical situations.

Furthermore, Izquierdo et al. (2021) shed light on the significant challenges in implementing English language policies—including potential English-only approaches—in rural Mexican schools. These challenges include a) Limited English proficiency among generalist teachers, wherein generalist teachers, who often lack formal L2 preparation and competence, are required to teach English despite not being adequately trained; b) lack of formal L2 training, wherein few generalist teachers in rural areas have undergone L2 teacher education that could equip them for effective English instruction, c)

Sociocultural barriers wherein learners in rural communities may not see English as practically relevant, leading to apathy toward L2 instruction. Parents and stakeholders might also view the policy as unrealistic in such contexts, and d) Instructional challenges wherein teachers may lack pedagogical knowledge specific to L2 teaching and rely on limited strategies that are not conducive to effective learning.

Straubhaar (2020), while focusing on a U.S. context involving Mexican newcomer students, also discusses the challenges created by standardized testing and pressure for English proficiency. These pressures often conflict with the allowance for students' L1 use. Thus, Straubhaar argues for more balanced approaches that acknowledge and leverage students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds to promote better learning outcomes.

In Europe, strict English-only policies, particularly where English is the medium of instruction for students with diverse linguistic backgrounds, have had notable impacts on both teachers and students. Debreli and Oyman (2016) provide insights into teachers' perspectives, noting that while institutions may enforce an EOP, some teachers implicitly allow limited L1 use to ensure comprehension and foster a positive learning environment. This tendency to "pretend" adherence to the policy while making pragmatic adjustments illustrates the tension between policy and classroom realities. Teachers recognize the pedagogical value of occasional L1 use for scaffolding, especially for students with lower L2 proficiency. Furthermore, the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach, as discussed by Marti and Portoles (2019) in the Spanish context, is also affected by rigid English-only principles. CLIL teachers—many of whom lack native-like English proficiency or specialized training in teaching content through a foreign language—struggle to provide extended explanations in English. This can hinder lesson flow and compromise student understanding if the language barrier is too high. The authors also note that monolingual ideologies, such as the "target language only" rule prevalent in teacher training, can prevent teachers from recognizing the value of students' L1 as a learning tool in CLIL settings. This resistance to L1 incorporation, even when pedagogically beneficial, demonstrates the complexities and potential drawbacks of strictly enforced English-only approaches in multilingual European classrooms (Marti & Portoles, 2019).

In sum, the cases discussed above illustrate that the implementation of English-only policies is far from straightforward. It is influenced by factors such as the local linguistic landscape, the proficiency levels of both students and teachers, the availability of resources and training, sociocultural contexts, and prevailing educational philosophies. While EOP may be promoted to maximize exposure to English, its effectiveness and impact vary significantly across educational contexts, often leading to calls for more flexible and context-sensitive bilingual or multilingual approaches. Also, although the reviewed articles illustrate EOP implementation in various countries, there remains a notable concentration of studies outside Asia. To better represent this region and gain a comprehensive understanding of how EOP is applied in diverse educational contexts, this study aims to examine the roles, benefits, challenges, and recommendations associated with EOP implementation in Asian schools. Specifically, this study seeks to address the following research questions: (1) What roles does the English-Only Policy (EOP) play in Asian schools? (2) What are the perceived benefits and challenges of the English-Only Policy (EOP)? and (3) What strategies are recommended to enhance the effectiveness of the English-Only Policy (EOP) as a language policy?

METHODS

The researchers conducted a systematic literature review (SLR) to evaluate studies from recent years regarding the English-only Policy (EOP), identify its positive and negative impacts, and

recommend ways to strengthen and improve the policy. The Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) database was utilized to locate studies about this policy. ERIC was chosen for its reputation as a widely recognized online repository that provides access to a comprehensive collection of education-related literature. Additionally, it is a user-friendly database that simplifies navigation and offers automation tools, such as advanced search filters and sorting options, to streamline the screening of journal articles.

The term 'English-only policy' was used to search for a broad range of studies on the topic. Table 1 outlines the criteria used for screening, which included journal publication type and demographics. Although the year of publication was initially considered, it was excluded as a screening criterion to capture a broader perspective and to ensure that the search did not overlook studies that may offer valuable insights, regardless of their publication date. Besides, limiting the search to more recent studies would have significantly reduced the number of available articles, given the limited availability of recent studies specifically focused on the English-only policy, particularly in the Asian context. This decision was made to avoid excluding older yet still relevant studies that could provide an important contextual or historical understanding of the topic (Liberati et al., 2009). Thus, only peer-reviewed journal articles available in the specified database were included, with a focus on those that were full-text or open-access. Furthermore, the researchers concentrated on journal articles addressing the EOP within the Asian context, specifically those conducted in countries within this region.

Table 1. Inclusion-Exclusion Criteria Used in the Screening Process

| Parameters | Inclusion Criteria | Exclusion Criteria |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Journal Publication Type | Journal articles found in the ERIC database must be peer-reviewed, published articles with full-text or open access. | Articles that are not peer-reviewed or are not published in reputable journals. |
| Demographics | Journal articles should focus on EOP in an Asian setting. | Articles that do not specifically address EOP in an Asian context. |

The researchers utilized a Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart to depict the progression of articles from the initial search to those included in the review (Figure 1).

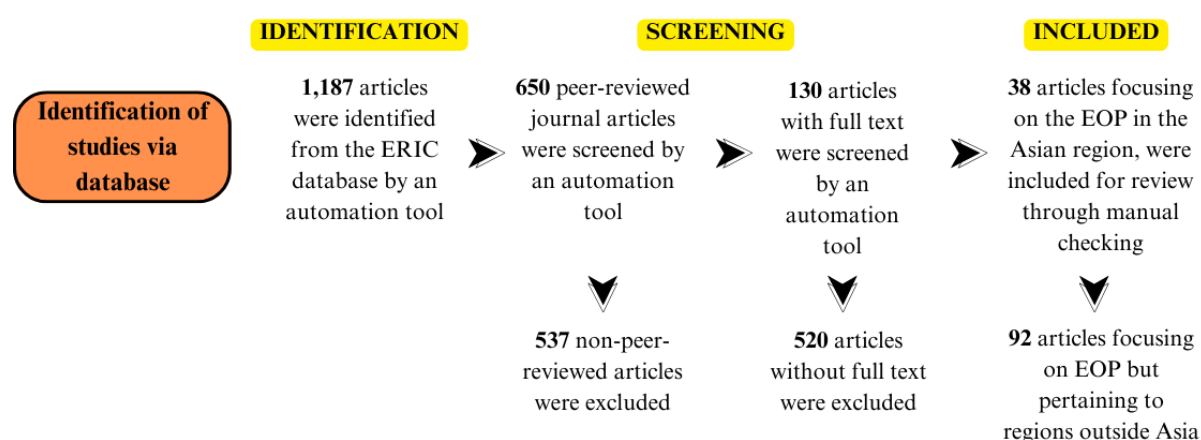


Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart Showing the Screening of Articles

The initial search yielded 1,187 articles. Using an automation tool, the researchers screened these articles to identify those that were peer-reviewed and had full-text access. Of the initial set, 650 peer-reviewed articles were identified, while 537 were removed for not meeting the peer-reviewed criterion. Among the remaining articles, 130 had full-text access, whereas 520 were excluded due to the lack of full text. Later, the researchers manually reviewed the remaining articles, focusing on topics directly related to the English-only policy (EOP) within the Asian context. This process resulted in the inclusion of 38 articles for review and the exclusion of 92 articles, most of which addressed EOP but were not specific to the Asian region. Finally, Microsoft Excel was used to create a matrix to analyze the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations from studies conducted in various Asian countries.

Here, the researchers employed thematic analysis to examine 38 journal articles covering 15 Asian countries, including Bangladesh (Hossain & Pratt, 2008; Kung, 2017), China (Lei, 2021; Wei, 2007; Wang, 2009; Lehman, 2017), Indonesia (Ardhian et al., 2021; Irwansyah, 2018; Utami & Kuswandono, 2023), Iran (Mayni & Paramasivam, 2021; Pouriran, 2023), India (Saxena, 2009), Japan (Adamson et al., 2012; Nakayama et al., 2010; Noguchi, 2019; Okumura, 2017), Malaysia (Sidhu et al., 2010; Yahaya et al., 2009), Nepal (Dawadi, 2021; Subedi, 2018; Saud, 2020), Oman (Al Balushi, 2020), Pakistan (Awan et al., 2018), Saudi Arabia (Al-Wossabi, 2016), South Korea (Lee & Lee, 2023; Lee, 2011), Thailand (Mongkolhutthi, 2022; Thongwichit & Ulla, 2024), Turkey (Ataş, 2023; Gursoy et al., 2017; Karabulut & Dollar, 2022; Karakas, 2019; Kosar, 2020; Öztürk & Çubukçu, 2022; Sahan & Sahan, 2021; Uzun & Kilickaya, 2017), and Vietnam (Duyen, 2019; Vu et al., 2023). Following the framework outlined by Clarke and Braun (2013), they coded the findings by identifying key themes and patterns related to the research questions. The analysis specifically focused on the roles of EOP in Asian schools, its benefits and challenges, and strategies recommended to enhance its effectiveness as a language policy. Codes were organized based on similarities and differences, allowing related findings to be grouped into broader themes.

FINDINGS

The Role of EOP in Education Across Asian Countries

Preparation for International Opportunities. English proficiency has become essential in the global workforce, opening doors in business, science, technology, and communication. As the global lingua franca, English facilitates international collaboration, contributing to economic growth, particularly in countries where proficiency is prioritized. However, the implementation and impact of English-only policies (EOP) vary significantly depending on national contexts and local educational frameworks. Countries like China, Nepal, and Turkey emphasize English for its practical benefits, such as improving career prospects and academic opportunities, but each country adopts different methods based on their unique needs and educational priorities (Wei, 2007; Saud, 2020; Sahan & Sahan, 2021).

For example, in China, English is primarily seen as a gateway to higher education and better career opportunities, reflecting the country's ambition to enhance its global competitiveness. On the other hand, in Nepal, English plays a vital role not only in education but also in facilitating migration for economic reasons, showcasing a more utilitarian view of the language. The introduction of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in both countries has led to improved language proficiency and career prospects, but the results differ. In Nepal, the benefits are often seen in terms of communication and migration, while in China, the focus is more on higher education and access to international markets (Saud, 2020). The contrast between these approaches reveals the diversity in the adoption of EOP, with implications for how educational systems align language learning with broader economic strategies.

Further research could explore how these differing national goals influence the long-term effectiveness of EOP in various sectors, especially in terms of workforce readiness and international mobility.

Addressing Challenges and Solutions in Teacher Training. The challenges of implementing English-only policies in classrooms are not limited to students but also deeply affect educators. In Iran, for instance, there is significant resistance from teachers who, while supporting the broader goals of EOP, raise concerns about the lack of training to effectively teach a second language (Mayni & Paramasivam, 2021). Similarly, in South Korea, professors struggle to balance the demands of EMI with their academic responsibilities, revealing a gap in targeted professional development programs that could support instructors in managing these dual expectations (Lee & Lee, 2023). These challenges are not unique to any one country, as evidenced by Malaysia's struggles with language barriers in science and mathematics instruction. Teachers report difficulties in delivering content effectively, indicating that language proficiency alone is insufficient for effective teaching and highlighting the need for more comprehensive support structures (Al Balushi, 2020).

In contrast, countries like Japan and Turkey have developed more robust teacher training programs to address these challenges. In Japan, specialized teachers with high English proficiency have been effective in improving student outcomes, suggesting that the presence of qualified instructors is crucial for the success of EMI (Okumura, 2017). Similarly, in Indonesia and Turkey, teacher professional development programs focus on advanced training in assessment and integrating students' L1 with English, indicating a more balanced approach that respects both the need for English proficiency and the value of the student's first language (Utami & Kuswandono, 2023; Uzun & Kilickaya, 2017). These programs underscore the importance of ongoing professional development to ensure teachers can effectively navigate the demands of EMI. However, as many countries face financial and logistical constraints, there is a need for further research on how these training programs can be adapted or scaled to better support teachers, particularly in regions with fewer resources or where the transition to EMI is still in its early stages.

Benefits and Challenges Associated with EOP Implementation in Asian Countries

Improve Language Proficiency. The implementation of the English Only Policy (EOP) has been shown to have numerous benefits in English Language Teaching (ELT), especially in enhancing language proficiency, fostering inclusivity, and encouraging innovative teaching practices. By promoting English language skills, the policy aids in developing reading habits and cultural understanding, contributing to both cognitive and academic growth (Sidhu et al., 2010). Moreover, EOP encourages students to utilize their full linguistic repertoire, strengthening both first (L1) and second (L2) language writing skills. This approach results in improved coherence, task achievement, and accuracy, particularly in written expression (Karabulut & Dollar, 2022).

However, the benefits of EOP are not without their challenges. While the policy fosters language development, it also requires teachers to adapt teaching materials, modify textbooks, and incorporate new strategies to meet diverse student needs. This collaborative teaching approach can enhance instructional effectiveness but demands significant effort and resources (Utami & Kuswandono, 2023). Furthermore, research could explore how EOP policies affect language acquisition outcomes in different academic subjects, particularly in countries with varied levels of English exposure, and whether the benefits outweigh the resource demands in the long term.

Enhance Students' Engagement. Integrating local cultural elements into English instruction has been found to enhance student engagement by connecting lessons to students' heritage. This approach not only strengthens students' connection to the material but also respects cultural diversity,

as seen in practices incorporating Islamic values or other traditions (Irwansyah, 2018; Duyen, 2019). This balance between cultural preservation and English instruction is a critical aspect of the EOP debate, especially in multilingual contexts. Flexible language policies that incorporate native languages, like Japan's selective use of Japanese in Self-Access Learning Centers (SALC), also foster inclusivity and improve comprehension of complex topics, leading to higher student participation (Adamson et al., 2012).

While translanguaging practices, which involve using students' L1s, provide scaffolding mechanisms that improve learning outcomes, they also raise questions about whether the full implementation of EOP could reduce the value placed on students' native languages (Thongwichit & Ulla, 2024). Further research is needed to evaluate the impact of such bilingual or multilingual approaches on long-term language development, as well as their effects on the preservation of Indigenous cultural identities in education systems that prioritize English.

Marginalization of Local Languages and Cultural Education. While the benefits of English education are significant, prioritizing English through EOP can inadvertently marginalize local languages and cultural education. In Taiwan, despite the prominence of Chinese culture in foreign language education, there is a competitive tension between Chinese and English instruction, potentially undermining cultural education (Subedi, 2018). In Nepal, societal pressures to emphasize English often come at the expense of preserving indigenous knowledge, reflecting a disconnect between national educational objectives and classroom practices (Subedi, 2018).

Countries like South Korea and Turkey also grapple with the implications of English dominance in education. South Korea's selective textbook content, which is largely centered on English, raises concerns about the lack of balanced multicultural perspectives, while in Turkey, the reliance on traditional English as a Foreign Language (EFL) models reinforces native speaker norms, potentially sidelining local linguistic and cultural nuances (Lee, 2011; Karakas, 2019). The use of Tarzanish, a blend of Turkish and English, in Turkey's English-dominant environments shows how practical linguistic adaptations have emerged in response to the pressures of EOP, but these adaptations often highlight the tension between global linguistic trends and local language preservation. Research into how countries balance English proficiency with the protection of local languages would be beneficial to understanding whether educational policies are truly inclusive or whether they lead to the erosion of cultural identities.

Excessive Demands in Implementing the EOP. Implementing a strict EOP often places excessive demands on both teachers and students. In Japan, for example, teachers experience increased workloads and stress due to administrative duties and inadequate training, undermining their confidence and teaching effectiveness (Okumura, 2017). The Teacher Certification Renewal System (TCRS), which pressures teachers to meet English proficiency requirements without adequate support, further exacerbates these challenges (Nakayama et al., 2010). These demands are not unique to Japan, as other countries with strict EOPs face similar struggles, leading to resistance from both teachers and students. In Japan's SALC, for instance, students found it difficult to engage in an environment that excluded native language support, highlighting the need for more balanced and supportive approaches (Adamson et al., 2012).

As countries continue to implement or strengthen their EOPs, further research is needed to examine the long-term effects of such policies on teachers' well-being and professional development. Moreover, the implications of teacher burnout and resistance could lead to a rethinking of EOPs, especially in regions where teachers are already under significant pressure to meet high expectations without sufficient resources.

Increased Difficulties for Students with Limited English Exposure. EOP policies can disproportionately affect students who have limited exposure to English. In China, for example, these policies sometimes prevent students from communicating effectively with foreign teachers on sensitive issues such as bullying, leading to feelings of isolation and discrimination (Lehman, 2017; Wang, 2009). Similarly, in Iran, students and teachers often prefer using Farsi to clarify complex concepts, indicating a strong need for bilingual support at the elementary level (Mayni & Paramasivam, 2021). This trend is also seen in Vietnam, where translanguaging reduces student anxiety and improves comprehension, ultimately fostering gradual English proficiency and confidence (Vu et al., 2023).

Thailand's translanguaging pedagogy, which integrates students' existing language skills, similarly addresses knowledge gaps and enhances proficiency, showing the potential of bilingual or multilingual approaches to mitigate the challenges of English immersion (Thongwichit & Ulla, 2024). Turkey also demonstrates the benefits of combining English with native languages to support critical thinking and collaboration, improving L2 writing skills (Karabulut & Dollar, 2022). These examples suggest that a more flexible approach to language learning—one that incorporates both L1 and L2—may better serve students who face language barriers, leading to more equitable and effective learning environments. Further research into the comparative success of these bilingual or translanguaging practices could provide insight into how EOP policies could be adapted to support all students better.

Recommendations for Strengthening and Improving EOP in Educational Institutions

Improving Classroom Practices, Language Strategies, and Assessment in EOP Settings.

Effective language strategies are integral to optimizing classroom practices in EOP (English for Occupational Purposes) settings. The balance between L1 (first language) and L2 (second language) use is a critical consideration for language acquisition, as it can enhance students' comprehension and retention (Al Balushi, 2020; Öztürk & Çubukçu, 2022). While some studies emphasize the importance of minimizing L1 usage to promote full immersion in L2, others advocate for a more balanced approach. For instance, Awan et al. (2018) suggest that strategically using L1 can help clarify complex concepts, making the learning experience more accessible for students. However, there is a contrasting view that over-reliance on L1 could limit students' exposure to the target language and impede their ability to think in English, ultimately affecting fluency. This difference in approach raises important questions about how best to balance the two languages for effective language learning.

The integration of critical thinking in lesson plans is equally important, as it encourages students to engage with the material on a deeper level (Awan et al., 2018). This approach aligns with the perspective that language acquisition is not merely about mastering vocabulary and grammar but also about developing cognitive skills that enable learners to use the language in real-world contexts. However, embedding critical thinking may be challenging in EOP settings where students often have specific, practical learning goals (such as technical skills) rather than broader academic development. Teacher training that incorporates real-world applications is essential to bridging the gap between theory and practice (Karakas, 2019), and this shift could further refine classroom practices.

Promoting Cultural Relevance, Motivation, and Engagement. Cultural relevance plays a pivotal role in motivating students and increasing engagement in language learning (Kung, 2017; Wei, 2007). Integrating local cultural contexts into lesson plans can make the material more relatable, allowing students to draw on their own experiences while learning a second language. However, while cultural relevance increases motivation, there are concerns about the potential homogenization of content. For example, while focusing on local contexts may engage some students, it may alienate

others who are more interested in global, professional contexts. Balancing local cultural elements with international standards can ensure that EOP programs remain inclusive and globally relevant.

The role of intrinsic motivation in language learning is particularly pronounced in EOP, where students are often learning the language for career advancement or professional development. Wei (2007) argues that the intrinsic motivation of learners in bilingual or international settings is highly influenced by the degree of cultural relevance in the material. However, the challenge lies in ensuring that the content resonates with learners from diverse cultural backgrounds. The findings suggest that multilingual learners may experience a disconnect if the material is not culturally tailored, raising questions about how curricula can be designed to cater to both local and international learners.

Moreover, developing inclusive educational policies that account for linguistic diversity is crucial for fostering equitable learning environments (Ardhian et al., 2021). While policies that reflect the needs of diverse linguistic groups can improve student engagement, the process of policy development often overlooks minority languages and dialects. Hossain and Pratt (2008) argue that community involvement in policy-making can help address this issue, yet challenges remain in ensuring that the voices of marginalized linguistic communities are heard. Future research could explore how community-driven policies can be implemented effectively in multilingual societies and how such policies influence the overall success of EOP programs.

Language and Communication Strategies for Effective Language Acquisition. A key aspect of language acquisition in EOP settings is the implementation of bilingual education policies and communicative strategies that promote fluency in both the target language and the native language (Saxena, 2009; Al-wasabi, 2016). Bilingual education models have shown promise in promoting fluency in both languages, but debates persist about the relative benefits of immersion programs versus bilingual programs. While immersion programs promote faster acquisition of academic English, they may fail to respect the multilingual realities of learners, which can hinder comprehension (Kosar, 2020; Öztürk & Çubukçu, 2022). On the other hand, bilingual education allows students to continue developing their first language while acquiring a second, which may be more beneficial for the long-term retention of both languages.

Moreover, the effective use of L1 in the classroom, particularly when introducing complex concepts, remains a debated issue. Mayni and Paramasivam (2021) advocate for L1 use as an essential tool for introducing challenging topics in EOP classrooms. However, some researchers argue that excessive reliance on L1 might impede the process of thinking in the target language, thus affecting fluency. Lei (2021) highlights the importance of intercultural communication strategies to help students build confidence in their second language. This contrast points to the ongoing need for more nuanced strategies that combine L1 support with immersion in L2 contexts to encourage both linguistic and cultural fluency.

Supporting Teacher Training, Curriculum Development, and Community Engagement. Teacher training, curriculum development, and community engagement are interrelated elements that significantly impact the effectiveness of EOP programs. As Kosar (2020) notes, professional development for teachers should focus on improving their understanding of curriculum alignment and multilingual education. Teachers are often tasked with navigating complex classroom dynamics where students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds. This diversity requires educators to adapt their teaching strategies to meet the varied needs of students, ensuring both academic success and cultural inclusion.

Moreover, involving the community in policy-making ensures that educational frameworks reflect the local linguistic and cultural landscape (Hossain & Pratt, 2008; Ardhan et al., 2021). While community involvement is often touted as beneficial, there can be tensions when different linguistic groups have conflicting needs or perspectives. The challenge, therefore, is not just about engaging the community but finding a way to integrate the diverse perspectives into a cohesive curriculum that benefits all students. Future research could examine the processes through which community involvement can be optimized to foster truly inclusive educational environments.

Also, multilingualism is an essential factor in EOP, as many students speak multiple languages, which influences their language proficiency and learning styles (Karakas, 2019; Gursoy et al., 2017). Teacher training programs must address the specific challenges posed by multilingual classrooms and equip educators with the skills necessary to teach effectively in these diverse environments. However, a potential limitation of current training programs is that they often focus more on language mechanics than on how to teach cultural nuances and professional language use across various multilingual contexts. Investigating the effectiveness of professional development in these areas could provide valuable insights for future curriculum enhancements.

Future Research Directions by Expanding EOP Studies. Future research in EOP should expand into areas such as bilingualism, translanguaging, and language policies to better understand their impact on language learning outcomes (Karakas, 2019; Karabulut & Dollar, 2022; Thongwichit & Ulla, 2024; Gursoy et al., 2017). Bilingual education and translanguaging pedagogy are gaining traction as effective strategies for language acquisition in multilingual settings. However, more research is needed to explore how these approaches can be effectively integrated into EOP curricula, particularly in contexts where students' first languages may not align with the dominant language of instruction.

Additionally, research should investigate how language policies can be refined to support the multilingual needs of students. While some studies focus on the role of bilingual education in enhancing language outcomes, there is limited research on how different language policies influence EOP programs, particularly in multilingual countries. Future studies could explore the impact of various language policies on student outcomes, identifying which policies best support bilingual and multilingual learners in professional contexts (Karakas, 2019).

DISCUSSION

The implementation of English-only policies (EOP) across various Asian contexts has garnered significant attention, particularly regarding the balancing of economic and educational goals with linguistic challenges. From a research perspective, the varying success of EOP is rooted in its dual role of preparing students for a globalized economy while addressing specific local educational needs. EOP's integration, particularly through English Medium Instruction (EMI), has been seen as a response to the increasing demand for English proficiency, especially in countries with emerging economies. The policies contribute to academic and professional prospects for students, particularly those in countries like Turkey, Malaysia, and Indonesia, where English is perceived as essential for career progression. However, it is crucial to consider that these policies are not without their complexities, especially when imposed on populations where English is not the L1.

Research indicates that in countries such as Iran and South Korea, the challenge lies in effectively implementing EOP due to the necessity of L1 for comprehension and communication. This highlights the tension between the goals of English proficiency and the need for accessible education, particularly in subject areas where English proficiency is still developing. From a teaching perspective, while full immersion is idealized, the reality of EOP implementation requires a nuanced approach that

recognizes the importance of L1 in understanding complex concepts. The complexity of this issue is reflected in the experiences of educators in countries like Malaysia, where the transition to EMI is met with both institutional and personal obstacles, particularly in terms of inadequate teacher training and limited resources.

As researchers, it becomes clear that teacher training is pivotal in mitigating these challenges. Studies suggest that teachers who are well-prepared through professional development opportunities—such as higher education programs and in-service training—are better equipped to handle the demands of EMI. This is particularly important in regions where the transition to EMI may be abrupt or inadequately supported. Further research into teacher preparedness reveals that educators must not only be linguistically competent but also pedagogically skilled in managing the intricacies of teaching a second language. This finding reinforces the need for systemic support, particularly in areas where English proficiency is still developing at both the teacher and student levels.

From a student perspective, the implementation of EOP frequently results in mixed outcomes. The pressure to learn English often exacerbates anxiety, especially for students who have limited exposure to the language. While some students thrive under the immersive conditions created by EOP, others struggle, which can lead to disengagement and frustration. This is particularly evident in countries such as Vietnam, where bilingual education is still considered essential for student success. The use of translanguaging pedagogy in various countries, including Thailand and Japan, illustrates how students benefit from the strategic use of L1 to bridge gaps in their understanding of content. Researchers must continue to explore how such pedagogies can be effectively integrated into EOP frameworks to support students' learning while maintaining the integrity of English proficiency goals.

Furthermore, from a cultural standpoint, the emphasis on English under EOP raises concerns regarding the potential marginalization of indigenous languages and cultures. Research shows that students in countries like Taiwan and South Korea sometimes face the dilemma of balancing the expectations of EOP with the preservation of their native linguistic heritage. This underscores a critical aspect of EOP that researchers must address: the potential cultural cost of prioritizing English at the expense of local languages. Thus, future research must explore ways to integrate indigenous languages into the curriculum, even in contexts where English is the medium of instruction, in order to ensure that students' cultural identities are not lost in the push for global competitiveness.

While English proficiency remains the central aim of EOP, it is vital for researchers to acknowledge the multifaceted nature of language learning in these environments. The effectiveness of EOP is not solely based on the improvement of students' English skills but also on the broader educational and cultural contexts in which it is implemented. From a pedagogical standpoint, integrating bilingual strategies, particularly translanguaging, can be a key strategy in enhancing comprehension and engagement. By offering students access to both their L1 and L2, teachers can create more inclusive learning environments that cater to a diverse student population. This approach ensures that English learning is not a barrier but a bridge to deeper understanding and broader educational opportunities.

Moreover, the effectiveness of EOP hinges on the flexibility of its implementation. Rigidity in policy that enforces English-only instruction without regard for local linguistic and cultural contexts can alienate students and hinder learning. From a policy perspective, it is crucial to consider how educational frameworks can be adapted to accommodate both English proficiency goals and the linguistic needs of students. Researchers must advocate for flexible policies that balance the advantages of English proficiency with the preservation of linguistic diversity.

Therefore, the use of English-only policies (EOP) in different Asian countries shows how global educational goals and local language needs are closely connected. While EOP can create more opportunities for students, its success depends on finding a balance between economic goals and local cultures. Educators and students face challenges, such as not having enough training and the stress of learning in English, which highlights the need for more thoughtful approaches, like using students' first language to help with learning. Policymakers and researchers need to work together to make flexible plans that focus not only on English skills but also on keeping local languages and cultures alive. In the end, the success of EOP depends on finding a balance between promoting English and respecting local languages, ensuring that students' learning experiences are enriched without losing their cultural identity. This ongoing conversation is key to creating language policies that help students succeed in a global world while respecting their local traditions.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of EOP offers numerous benefits, such as enhancing English proficiency, fostering cultural awareness, and preparing students for the demands of globalization. However, it also presents challenges, particularly when an over-reliance on English hinders learning for students who are not yet proficient, leading to feelings of alienation. In order to ensure the success of EOP, it is essential to develop adaptable and inclusive policies that balance language acquisition with cultural relevance and student engagement. This can be achieved by integrating local knowledge, languages, and cultural practices into the English curriculum, which would not only strengthen students' cultural identities but also equip them with the global communication skills necessary for success in a multicultural world. Furthermore, continuous teacher training and ongoing research are critical for addressing the evolving needs of diverse learners and ensuring that educational frameworks remain effective. In Asian contexts, this balanced approach becomes even more crucial. By incorporating bilingual strategies and promoting cultural relevance, EOP programs can help students reduce language anxiety and develop intercultural skills. Teachers, administrators, and students all have essential roles in creating an environment that nurtures both language proficiency and cultural competence. Additionally, involving the community and conducting research on translanguaging and EMI programs will help foster a more inclusive and effective learning environment. Future research should consider comparative studies of English-only policies across different regions, examining their implementation, effectiveness, and the unique ways in which they are adapted to diverse cultural and educational contexts.

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