

## A SCOPING REVIEW OF LANGUAGE PROGRAMS AND POLICIES IN ASEAN COUNTRIES

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### ABSTRACT

Understanding the socio-economic and cultural impacts of successful language programs on communities is crucial for informed policy decisions. This study aimed to identify the challenges faced by all ASEAN countries and understand the respective policies and programs they are implementing to address these challenges. We conducted a scoping review, reviewing 178 pieces of literature from various databases and websites, based on the identified inclusion criteria. The researchers used profiling and thematic analysis to pinpoint six language-related issues in the ASEAN countries, as well as the implementation of 24 language programs and policies. The study emphasizes the importance of government involvement in language program success, leading to recommendations for a comparative analysis of language education policies, qualitative investigations into stakeholder perspectives, long-term tracking of program outcomes, and in-depth case studies of both successful and unsuccessful programs. Further research should investigate the specific strategies governments employ for successful language program implementation, such as budget allocation, balancing language promotion, and curriculum improvements. Although this study contributes to the broader discourse on language policy, it emphasizes the significance of tailored strategies to address challenges and enhance language education in the ASEAN region.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language serves a dual role, extending beyond mere communication to become the foundational tool we use to navigate and understand various situations in our daily lives. Language policy, at the heart of the educational system, sets the vocabulary for knowledge dissemination across various educational levels (Hornberger, 2002). This policy not only shapes how we communicate but also influences the depth and accessibility of education for students.

In a broader societal context, language policy involves deliberate decisions by governments or authorities regarding the intersection of language and social life. Within

the educational domain, the position and characteristics of language are integral aspects of intentional choices made by governments, often referred to as language-in-education policy or acquisition planning (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2002). The intertwining of language and education underscores the pivotal role language policy plays in shaping the learning experience and accessibility for students.

Moreover, a diverse array of actors, including members of governing bodies, administrators, teachers, parents, and even young children, actively implement policies as social practices (Hornberger & Johnson 2007). According to this perspective, the process of policy implementation differs from establishing laws at federal or state levels, requiring "creative processes of interpretation and recontextualization" (Ball et al., 2012).

As McCarty (2011) pointed out, policy is "overt and covert, top-down and bottom-up, de jure and de facto," influenced by context, culture, beliefs, and values. The metaphor of an onion aptly illustrates this perspective on policy, with numerous contextual layers that actors may choose to enforce, oppose, or reinterpret (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007). According to this viewpoint, policy-making research proves beneficial not only for specific policy enactments but also for various scales of implementation and diverse contexts.

A successful language policy, as noted by Spolsky (2005), should incorporate appropriate behavior, acceptable language attitudes, and acceptable views (Civico, 2021; Ricento, 2002).

When designing and implementing language policies, it is critical to consider a society's diverse linguistic and cultural realities, as these policies serve as essential instruments for nation-building. Recognizing the importance of language in identity formation and advocating for inclusive language laws contributes to the development of more harmonious and cohesive communities. Furthermore, language policies and practices can promote or restrict language teaching. Thus, various factors, such as the policy's characteristics and the extent of its sufficient support, comprehension, value, and effective implementation, determine the desirability of having such policies to enhance language learning. Even when policies aim to promote languages, they may not consistently be well-conceived, accepted, funded, or implemented (Wiley & García, 2016).

Furthermore, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) acknowledges the importance of language in identity formation as an integral component of its initiatives to create a more cooperative and interconnected educational landscape. This aligns with its overarching objectives of regional integration and mutual understanding, prompting the implementation of inclusive language policies (Spolsky, 2005).

On August 8, 1967, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) officially came into existence. The Founding Fathers, comprising Adam Malik of Indonesia, Narciso R. Ramos of the Philippines, Tun Abdul Razak of Malaysia, Sinnathamby Rajaratnam of Singapore, and Thanat Khoman of Thailand, convened at the Department of Foreign Affairs in Bangkok, Thailand, to sign the ASEAN Declaration. This marked the organization's inception, with the primary goal of fostering regional cooperation and

integration among member states, covering economic, social, cultural, and political aspects.

Over the years, ASEAN has expanded its membership. Brunei Darussalam joined on January 7, 1984, followed by Vietnam on July 28, 1995, Laos and Myanmar on July 23, 1997, and Cambodia on April 30, 1999. Currently, there are ten member states within ASEAN. In 2011, Timor-Leste applied for membership (Xinyi, 2023). During the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summits and Related Summits in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, ASEAN leaders announced the acceptance of Timor-Leste as the 11th member in principle. Additionally, ASEAN leaders granted Timor-Leste 'observer status,' enabling its participation in all ASEAN meetings, including summit plenaries. This status will continue until Timor-Leste fulfills the objective criteria-based Roadmap, at which point it can attain full membership (ASEAN Secretariat, 2022).

Education, not only drives social and economic development but also elevates ASEAN's global and regional commitments by promoting lifelong learning based on the principles of equity, inclusion, and quality (Agustin & Montebon, 2018; ASEAN Secretariat, 2020). In other words, the key determinant of ASEAN's aspiration is to provide quality education (Das & Narayanan, 2023), wherein these countries aim to develop students to reach their highest learning potential (Klomkula & Theppavaramethib, 2021).

The fundamental functions of higher education institutions (HEIs), which include instruction, research, extension, and even production, reflect the ongoing collaborations and partnerships among ASEAN countries. According to Quitoras and Abuso (2021), some examples of these functions include faculty members' ability to deliver instruction to students, engagement in extension work or community service, outreach programs, and others. Additionally, the internationalization of higher education over the last two decades has transformed the education sector into a globalized, interconnected, knowledge-based society. Particularly, ASEAN countries strategize aspects of education, such as a) the development of teachers and administrators; b) collaboration on curriculum and assessment; c) enhancement of teaching and instruction; d) encouragement of educational research; e) facilitation of educational opportunities; and f) development of educational management (Klomkula & Theppavaramethib, 2021).

On the other hand, Maliwat (2021) said that there is no question that nationalism and globalization remain major driving forces in language policy among Southeast Asian countries, especially that the role of English is likely to become more prominent as economic factors drive the need for a workforce that is able to navigate an increasingly interconnected world. For instance, ASEAN countries such as the Philippines actively engage with other nations, sharing their expertise in English language instruction. The aim of this program is to provide English language proficiency training, teaching pedagogies, and cultural exposure experiences (Agustin & Montebon, 2018). However, while this universal language is used because of the so-called internalization, there are cases when languages in Southeast Asia still face numerous languages, and since these concerns affect the areas of academia and even diplomacy, they can be solved depending on continued dialogue among the nations in this region of Asia (Maliwat, 2021). Khalid

et al. (2019) said that while it is true that these ASEAN countries committed to paying attention to academic relations and knowledge exchange opportunities with partners in other countries, particularly in the same region, these countries are in fact competing with each other, and less developed countries in the ASEAN region are far behind in the race to globalization and transformation of the education industry. This explains why, despite each country having its own unique policies and programs, there is a lack of consolidation and standardization across them, particularly in the language domain. Again, with ASEAN's initiative, it is still critical to investigate the policies and strategies (e.g., programs) enacted by each country and determine what it lacks to achieve such goals (Khalid et al., 2019).

The metaphor of an onion, with its layers of context, effectively encapsulates the nuanced approach required for successful policy-making within ASEAN's educational initiatives (McCarty, 2011; Ball et al., 2012). This interconnectedness underscores the pivotal role of language policies in shaping education and fostering unity across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts within the ASEAN community.

The the framework of ASEAN and its educational initiatives, the intricate relationship between language policy and programs becomes particularly apparent. The organization's mission to promote regional cooperation and integration across economic, social, cultural, and political dimensions significantly influences the effectiveness of educational initiatives within ASEAN member nations. Language, the fundamental instrument of communication and understanding, greatly influences the depth and openness of education, aligning with ASEAN's educational objectives. Governments' intentional choices about language policy, also known as language-in-education policy, are not only essential in the educational sphere, but they also serve as vital tools for nation-building, including within the framework of ASEAN. As language policies aim to foster the development of peaceful and cohesive communities (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007), ASEAN's inclusive ethos is evident in its consideration of the diversity of linguistic and cultural realities.

Despite the literature summarized and cited, several studies discuss language programs and policies implemented by ASEAN countries based on their diverse goals and initiatives (Agustin & Montebon, 2018; Das & Narayanan, 2023; Khalid et al., 2019; Klomkula & Theppavaramethib, 2021; Maliwat, 2021; Quitoras & Abuso, 2021). However, there is still insufficient data on the specific language programs and policies implemented by these ASEAN countries. Furthermore, despite acknowledging the creation of these language programs and policies, the identification of the challenges or problems faced by each country during the development process remains inadequate.

While there is a need to propose recommendations for language programs and policies, it is essential to identify the challenges faced by all ASEAN countries and understand the respective policies and programs they are implementing to address these challenges.

We specifically sought answers to the following questions:

1. What language-related challenges have ASEAN countries encountered?

2. What language programs and policies have the ASEAN countries implemented to address such challenges?

## 2. METHOD

To review the available literature on the language programs and policies implemented in all ASEAN countries, the researchers utilized a scoping review. This type of review, as outlined by [Sharma and Goyal \(2023\)](#), is distinct and particularly useful for mapping literature on evolving or emerging topics as well as identifying gaps ([Mak & Thomas, 2022](#); [Sharma & Goyal, 2023](#)). It serves as a preliminary step before undertaking further research or conducting a different type of review ([Mak & Thomas, 2022](#)). Furthermore, this review employs a methodological typology that deviates from conventional research classifications such as quantitative, qualitative, and mixed. This study used the process, which involves steps such as stating the research design, identifying the search strategy, conducting screening, and coding, and analyzing the data. [Sharma and Goyal \(2023\)](#) mentioned an important process known as the 'inclusion criteria', which we added to the process.

For the inclusion-exclusion criteria, the researchers included in this review focused exclusively on studies related to language programs and policies implemented by the ten (10) ASEAN countries: Thailand, Lao PDR, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, Brunei Darussalam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia. While a scoping review can encompass various types of literature ([Sharma & Goyal, 2023](#)), the researchers specifically considered peer-reviewed journal articles and reviews. Experts in the field rigorously evaluated these materials to ensure their quality and credibility.

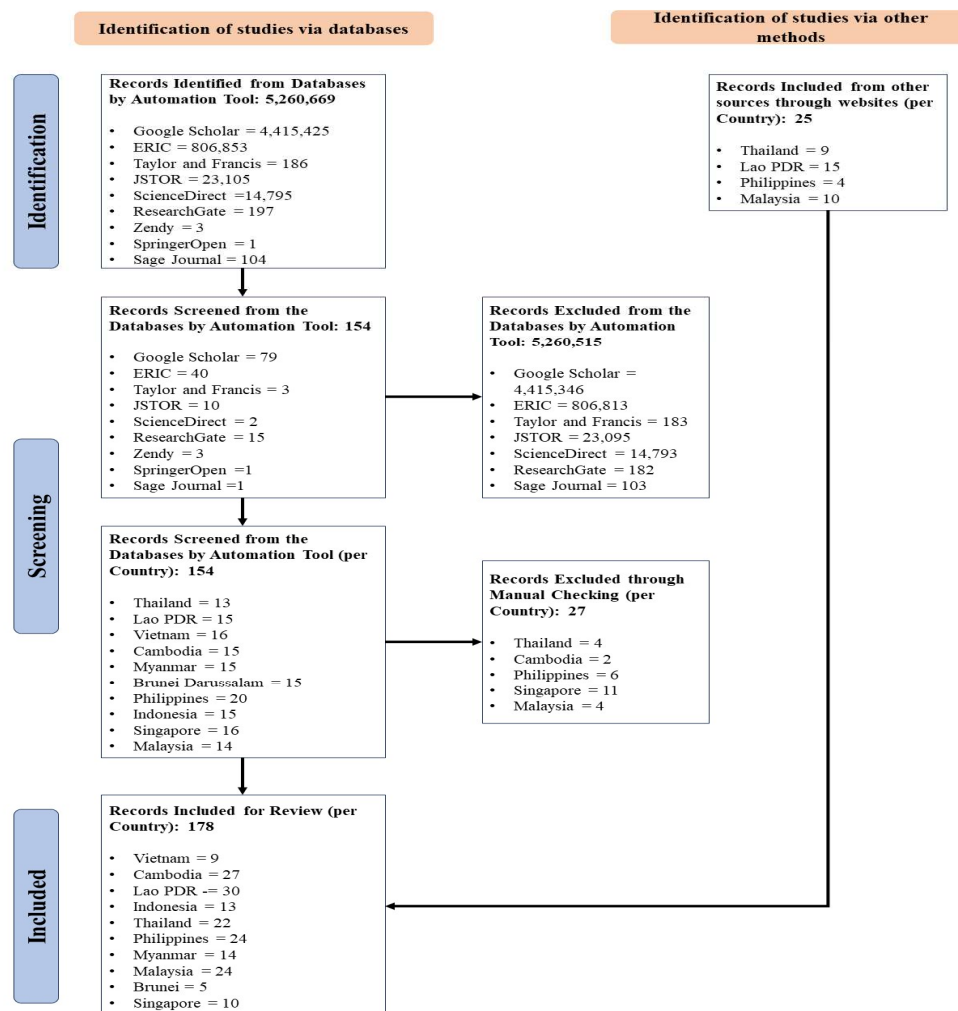
Conducting this research encompassing an entire class, the researchers organized themselves into ten groups, with each group assigned to study an ASEAN country. [Mak and Thomas \(2022\)](#) recommended that conducting a scoping review should involve a team effort rather than a single individual, which this task division aligns with. Consistent with this collaborative approach, each group conducted comprehensive searches across various databases, including Google Scholar, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Taylor and Francis, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, ResearchGate, Zandy, SpringerOpen, and Sage Journal. We selected these databases due to their widely recognized credibility and inclusion of open-access journals.

Based on the PRISMA flowchart, the researchers screened 178 pieces of literature related to language programs and policies in ASEAN countries (Figure 1). Specifically, the automation tool identified a total of 5,260,669 records from nine (9) databases, with the majority coming from Google Scholar and ERIC.

Moreover, automation tools excluded the remaining records for common reasons, resulting in only 154 articles undergoing screening. Automation tools, which did not encompass the language programs and policies of the respective countries during the search, filtered out these exclusions based on criteria like lacking full-text or open access, rendering them irrelevant. Thus, 5,260,515 records were excluded. We then manually checked and categorized these screened articles by ASEAN country. There

are 13 articles found that cover Thailand, 16 in Vietnam, 15 each in Lao PDR, Cambodia, Myanmar, Brunei Darussalam, and Indonesia, 20 in the Philippines, 16 in Singapore, and 14 in Malaysia. However, a manual check excluded 27 articles, specifically four from Thailand and Malaysia, two from Cambodia, six from the Philippines, and 11 from Singapore. We removed these as they had no connection to any implemented language programs or policies. Upon searching the website, we found 25 records specifically related to language programs and policies implemented in Thailand ( $f = 9$ ), Lao PDR ( $f = 15$ ), the Philippines ( $f = 4$ ), and Malaysia ( $f = 10$ ).

We reviewed 178 pieces of literature, covering nine (9) articles from Vietnam, 27 from Cambodia, 30 from Lao PDR, 13 from Indonesia, 22 from Thailand, 24 from each of the Philippines and Malaysia, five (5) from Brunei, and ten (10) from Singapore. We then coded and thematized these articles, ensuring they addressed the research questions effectively.



**Figure 1.** Using the PRISMA Flowchart to Screen Articles for Review

Researchers employed a thematic analysis, following Popenoe et al.'s (2021) process, to analyze various language-related challenges or problems among ASEAN countries. This method was chosen because it provides steps for conducting a general literature review, closely aligning with the process conducted in scoping revisits. In this

study, the researchers employed an analysis to tackle the first research question (SOP 1), coding and thematizing the language-related issues faced by the ASEAN countries. Conversely, the researchers profiled all the mentioned language programs and policies to address the second research question (SOP 2). We defined and supported these programs and policies by examining how each concerned ASEAN country has implemented them.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1 Problems Encountered by the ASEAN Countries in Terms of Language**

##### **3.1.1. Insufficient Support from the Government and other Private Agencies**

Schools are receiving insufficient funding. Besides government support, certain institutions implementing specific language programs receive funding from others, such as partner agencies. However, the lack of funding raises concerns. This issue hampers the teaching and learning process, despite the program's implementation. For instance, in Vietnam, even though they are implementing an English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) program, they struggle because they lack support from foreign partner institutions for advanced and high-quality implementation (Nguyen & Phuong, 2019).

The government's financial support is noticeably inadequate in Cambodia, causing similar problems (Kaing et al., 2017). To make this problem even more clear, Doeur (2022) says that communicative teaching strategies aren't working as well as they could because of internal factors like not having enough technical knowledge and external factors like not having enough money, time, or space in the classrooms. This concern as a lack of political will, emphasizing that without government action or initiative, nothing will happen. Lao PDR identifies the absence of political will as a significant concern. Despite recognizing the need for sustained primary field research in remote communities of Laos, the government has not made any tangible progress. Consequently, these communities remain less documented (Enfield, 2010).

There are insufficient teaching and learning materials. If there is a major concern among ASEAN nations regarding insufficiency, it is the shortage of materials for teaching and learning a certain language. In Cambodia, for instance, there is a lack of instructional materials and classrooms (Kaing et al., 2017), even if Cambodians need English proficiency to study in higher education institutions, either in Cambodia or abroad. This is especially crucial when instructions and course materials are in English, enabling engagement with the international community after graduation and fostering competitiveness in the ASEAN job market. However, according to Lim and Keuk (2018), high schools in Cambodia have not adequately prepared students for communication in English.

Similarly, in the Philippines, even if the goal is to develop effective reading comprehension as a crucial skill for students, fostering knowledge growth and self-confidence in the classroom, challenges arise in reading lessons. Key informants have identified issues with the Department of Education's selection of reading instruction books, deeming them inadequate and hindering students' learning abilities. Furthermore,

the delay in obtaining materials for teaching Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTBMLE) teacher's guides is a persistent issue (Alegada et al., 2014). Teachers emphasize the lack of credible references or instructional resources to support the use of the mother tongue in the classroom (Abano et al., 2014). This scarcity places an undue burden on teachers during the transition, impacting their ability to effectively implement changes. One teacher's frustration highlights the critical need for accessible resources, questioning how grade one teachers can be champions of change without adequate materials and references. This unified concern underscores the urgent call to address resource deficiencies to empower educators and enhance the learning experience for students. In other words, having effective teaching or instruction is contingent upon appropriate and sufficient teaching resources.

The military and conflicts have made it difficult to prioritize education. The challenges in Myanmar's education system are evident not only in the poor physical and internal structure of academic buildings, but also in the lack of adherence to traditional teaching methodologies and the absence of teacher training and other professional development programs (Hayden & Martin, 2013). Digging deeper into the issue of insufficient teacher capacity reveals that over 50 years of military rule have weakened the education system in Myanmar. Presently, the government is making efforts to improve the country's education system (Ulla, 2017). The ongoing education reform primarily focuses on teacher training. The Ministry of Education, responsible for hiring, placing, and promoting qualified teachers in the country, has been providing pre-service and in-service teacher training since 2004. However, some trainers themselves lack formal training, raising questions about the effectiveness of some of these teacher training programs (Ulla, 2017).

In Cambodia, despite government efforts, ineffective teaching practices persist in public schools, creating a similar scenario. The legacy of the Pol Pot regime and civil conflicts link these challenges. The obstacles include large class sizes, the expectation for innovative teaching without adequate training or resources, a lack of contemporary teaching tools, low English proficiency among teachers, an outdated curriculum, insufficient infrastructure, and student apathy (Boy & Water, 2023).

Essentially, the primary responsibility of the government is to protect its citizens, fulfill their needs, and support them in various ways. However, under different circumstances, the government may struggle to meet these responsibilities. One reason for this shortfall is the insufficient funds at their disposal, and unquestionably, their financial status significantly affects their capacity to serve the people.

Although private agencies often play a crucial role in assisting the government with economic matters, this is not always the case. Some private agencies are reluctant to collaborate, while others lack the capability to form partnerships with governmental bodies. Consequently, the lack of support from both the government and private agencies impedes the successful implementation of various programs. Neglecting the goals of these programs results in inefficiencies.

### 3.1.2. Disparities in English Learning Opportunities Based on Social Status and Institutional Affiliation

**Affordability Issues with Tuition Fees.** In Vietnam, [Nguyen \(2023\)](#) highlighted that the tuition for EMI classes is twice as much as the classes under Vietnamese as Medium of Instruction (VMI) classes. Since the university's EMI courses are not sufficient, students must pay for private English classes, making it costly for those from low-income households. As a result, EMI classes are only available and affordable for students from high-income backgrounds.

There are inequitable curriculum disparities between Private and Public Schools. According to [Kaing et al. \(2017\)](#), Cambodian students face unequal opportunities to learn English due to differences in English classes offered by a "broad range of private schools and NGOs," as opposed to a full English-medium curriculum offered by "a few elite schools." Furthermore, despite an increasing number of private preschools offering bilingual English or Chinese programs, most Cambodian preschools still implement Khmer-medium instruction ([Wright & Boun, 2016](#)).

[Lin et al. \(2022\)](#) also stated that English is compulsory in Grade 4, yet many public schools in Cambodia fail to include it in their curriculum, resulting in a predominantly Khmer-speaking environment for most Cambodian children. Social stratification, especially affecting students from less privileged and rural backgrounds, exacerbates this phenomenon, further widening the gap in acquiring a proficient command of the English language. Furthermore, Cambodian students, along with their parents, often decide to pursue English private tutors (EPT) to help improve their English communication competencies. Surprisingly, students from higher-income families quit EPT because most parents prioritize core subjects rather than elective subjects like English, which may not affect their children's national exam.

Public universities have more prestige than private universities. To enroll in EMI classes, a student needs to meet a required average in the National Higher Education Entrance Examinations (NHEEE) when applying for EMI programs in both public and private universities. Private universities require students to have at least 13 out of 30 NHEEE admission scores, whereas public universities set a higher requirement of at least 21 out of 30 NHEEE admission scores ([Nguyen et al., 2017](#)).

As a result, a widespread belief exists that public universities hold more prestige than private universities, and graduates from public institutions enjoy better employment prospects. Furthermore, [Nguyen et al. \(2017\)](#) added that "in Vietnam's higher education, the majority of universities (approximately 75%) are public, with only a small percentage (about 25%) being private." Private universities typically charge higher tuition fees, while public universities receive funding from the government. Given this scenario, entering public schools can be challenging due to the higher admission scores, yet students may feel compelled to do so because private institutions charge higher tuition fees.

The cost of English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI) is higher than that of Vietnamese instruction. Consequently, students from less privileged backgrounds end up paying double the regular tuition fees solely to access EMI. This situation forces

students from low-income households to select Vietnamese as their medium of instruction (VMI). In contrast, students from more privileged backgrounds have the choice between EMI and VMI. Therefore, despite some students' determination to learn English, their social status often restricts their opportunities to do so.

Similarly, another situation exists in Cambodia, illustrating the challenges of attaining proficiency in the English language. If bilingual education was available in private schools, Cambodian students could benefit. However, the lack of bilingual education in public schools deprives students from low-income households of this educational advantage. Socio-economic factors and unequal access to the English-medium curriculum influence these disparities in English language education in Cambodia.

The distinction between public and private universities in Vietnamese higher education fosters a perception of prestige, linked to historical reputation and funding disparities. For instance, people often view some public institutions as offering superior education due to their higher admission standards and government funding. This perception significantly influences students' choices, despite the intense competition for entry. However, this paradigm raises questions about equitable access to quality education and the actual correlation between perceived prestige and educational excellence.

### 3.1.3. Negative Attitude of Students Towards English Learning

**Inadequate Level of Language Among Students.** In Vietnam, it is evident that students face challenges in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) across various areas, including understanding lectures, reading, and writing in English for academic skills, and completing tasks in EMI courses (Nhung Le, 2016). Some Vietnamese students struggle to cope with learning English (Tien et al., 2020). This difficulty is particularly pronounced among adult learners attending English classes, who often come unprepared, merely attending school to learn without fully considering the benefits and challenges they may encounter.

**Predominantly extrinsically motivated students.** While Malaysian students realized the importance of English for their future endeavors, this realization came because they were intrinsically motivated. In other words, their motivation is not internal but rather external factors or demands. According to Thang et al. (2011), motivation from external factors alone does not always result in improved English performance. However, it still depends on social relationships such as family, community, workplace, or institution because this affects the decision-making of every Malay learner by language choices, which translates when they go to school.

Students often face humiliation because of incorrect pronunciations in English classes. While in some cultures it is common for students to tease their peers over mispronunciations of English words, it is essential to recognize that in Malaysia and similar countries where English is not the first language, regional differences in language are normal. However, students face significant obstacles during their English classes due to peer humiliation and annoyance over mispronouncing words. Some

students have affirmed that the discomfort arising from these negative instances persists (Zulkefly & Razali, 2019). While addressing this challenge, some teachers tolerate such behavior to the point where it impedes students' interest in learning English in the classroom (Thang et al., 2011).

**Pressure on Achieving Proficiency.** The challenges related to the development of EFL learners' speaking abilities carry special significance in the Philippines, where English is taught as a second language. In the Philippine context, the historical importance of English as a learning medium and the pressure to achieve proficiency may exacerbate students' anxiety. Additionally, in the Philippines, where societal expectations and the perception that English proficiency is crucial for both academic and professional success exert extra pressure on students, Sokip's (2020) emphasis on motivation concerns and the fear of making mistakes in speaking skills becomes especially pertinent. The Philippines' sociocultural background significantly influences how students feel about learning English and their motivation to do so. Nakhalah (2016) conducted a study on speaking challenges, such as shyness, anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence, which may align with the societal emphasis on "hiya" or shame in the Philippines, thereby impacting students' willingness to communicate in English, particularly in public or in the classroom. Furthermore, Ahmed (2015) observed that grammatical difficulties and psychological variables contribute to students' failures in English classes. This observation is relevant in the Philippines, where high failure rates may stem from the perception of English as a challenging subject and the complexities of English grammar.

People often view learning English as just a matter of compliance. Teachers in Indonesia generally concurred that the most significant challenge they face in teaching pupils is their lack of motivation to learn the language. Three factors, according to the majority, could explain this situation: first, the students' limited vocabulary; second, the fact that English is not their mother tongue; and third, the fact that they are learning the subject merely to fulfill exam requirements and receive a grade. A similar scenario exists in Thailand, where Thai students grapple with finding relevance and purpose in learning English, resulting in a lack of motivation (Tang, 2020). The study revealed that students who do not perceive immediate benefits from learning English are less likely to actively engage in language learning activities. Many students fail to see the practical application of English in their daily lives, leading to a lack of motivation to learn the language.

There is less time available for English learning. One of the issues that Indonesian students encounter. This difficulty can be attributed to the limited time allocated to English language practice. According to the students' statements, speaking English was difficult due to insufficient practice time during English class. Students expressed the need for extended English class time, emphasizing that learning and practicing the language require dedicated time. Sofiana et al. (2019) found that students struggle with the pressure to study subjects beyond their designated learning limits. These results underscore the various obstacles students face in education and emphasize the necessity of providing targeted assistance for language learning and overall academic progress. Students' lack of motivation to study English stems not only from inadequate learning

resources but also from limited time and practice opportunities. Consequently, it becomes a significant challenge for teachers to guide instruction effectively and encourage students to actively participate in language learning.

**Pessimistic Views Regarding English Tests.** While countries strive to achieve high scores in English assessments, the situation differs in other nations, such as Myanmar. According to Shohamy (2001), assessments, testing, and evaluations often carry a negative connotation, being associated with feelings of anxiety, stress, pressure, or fear of failure among students. Luo (2021) adds another perspective, suggesting that students may develop pessimistic views due to the perceived purpose of English language teachers.

Low self-confidence and self-esteem hinder the use of the English language. Low self-confidence is another prevalent negative attitude toward English learning in Thailand. Thai students often struggle with feelings of inadequacy when using English. The study emphasized that low self-confidence can significantly impact students' language acquisition and overall proficiency, potentially stemming from limited exposure to authentic English-speaking environments and a fear of making mistakes.

Furthermore, anxiety about speaking English or being self-conscious is another prevailing negative attitude among Thai students. Jindapitak and Teo's (2013) research revealed that Thai students frequently encounter communication anxiety when utilizing English. Many learners experience anxiety when verbally communicating in English, primarily because they worry about pronunciation, grammar, and potential judgment from peers or teachers. These concerns may hinder their willingness to practice and improve their English language proficiency. The study highlighted the need to address learners' anxiety through supportive and inclusive learning environments.

Therefore, these attitudes can significantly impact students' language acquisition and proficiency, underscoring the importance of addressing these challenges in English learning within the educational context in Thailand. Targeted interventions and pedagogical strategies can achieve this by enhancing student motivation, confidence, and engagement with the English language.

English proficiency falls below satisfactory levels in a specific country. Whether learned as a second language or as a foreign language, English, as an international language, sets a standard for non-native speakers to adhere to. However, Students' performances in the English language are less satisfactory compared to those in other Southeast Asian countries. One reason for this is the students' lack of motivation to learn the language (Xaypanya et al., 2017). The authors suggest that the use of the Lao language plays a positive role in the explicit learning of the English language. However, English teachers are concerned about the predominant use of the L1 (first language), as it could "deprive learners of valuable input in the L2", especially for learners with low proficiency. Teachers train their students to deduce the meaning of words by examining their context, avoiding frequent use of L1 to prevent overreliance, which is considered implicit teaching.

Moreover, students' differing perspectives on the English language learning process contribute to the low proficiency in their performances. As said, learning the English

language requires dedication, patience, and determination to fully grasp the concepts taught. Various factors influence students' learning and performance in using the English language in Southeast Asian countries. Identified as non-native speakers, some truly perceive English as a 'difficult language' to learn, leading to negative reactions toward the learning process.

Motivating students to learn English should be a priority. Through numerous engaging activities and exercises related to the language, teachers can inspire their students to eagerly learn and foster a positive attitude towards language acquisition. It's crucial not to pressure them, given that they are non-native speakers.

### **3.2.1. English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI)**

English Medium Instruction (EMI) refers to the use of the English language to teach academic subjects (excluding English itself) in countries where the majority's primary language is not English. In other words, this practice involves using English as the primary language for teaching and learning academic subjects in educational institutions. The goal of this language program is to develop students' English professional capability, increase their knowledge of different academic disciplines, and prepare them to participate in the international community. This is considered an innovation because it extends to learners from all educational levels, particularly students in universities and higher-education institutions (Nguyen & Phuong, 2019).

Moreover, it is becoming a growing global phenomenon, especially in higher education in ASEAN countries such as Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Brunei. These countries view English as an instrument rather than a subject, whereas mastery of the English language is regarded as a by-product of gaining academic knowledge in content courses (Alfehaid, 2018). Thai educational institutions view the use of EMI as a crucial tool for equipping graduates with professional skills and English language proficiency. The government supports this initiative, indicating that Thai higher education institutes (HEIs) aim to produce more competent graduates who can compete in the ASEAN Economic Community and the wider international market, achieved through EMI. Consequently, all international colleges in Thailand, as well as international programs of faculties of HEIs, are employing EMI as an internationalization strategy to implement their course curriculum (Alfehaid, 2018).

However, countries like Brunei, Cambodia, and Vietnam implemented EMI because of new language programs, policies, or curriculum changes. For instance, Vietnam launched the National Foreign Language Project 2020, demonstrating its commitment to reforming foreign languages, specifically English, in teaching and learning in tertiary and higher education between 2008 and 2020 (Ahn, 2022), including secondary and high schools (Truong, 2021). This project requires EFL learners to master vocabulary size for English communication. Cambodia's education policy in the Cambodian Education Law 2007 does not have a clear mandate for a language of instruction in higher education, the Policy for Higher Education Vision 2030 and the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports (MoEYS) Strategic Plans 2014-2018 promote English as the medium of instruction (EMI) in universities throughout the country. Moreover,

universities in Cambodia still widely use Khmer as a medium of instruction, while those with fewer resources offer English as a foreign language (EFL) instead. It's noteworthy that the movement towards English in Cambodia is generally perceived as non-threatening to the Khmer language (Chan, 2015 in Kaing et al., 2017), and the growing influence of English in Cambodian higher education confirms previous studies on the global spread of English (Kaing et al., 2017).

Furthermore, in Brunei, with the implementation of the Sistem Pendidikan Negara Abad Ke-21 (SPN 21), the medium of instruction for mathematics and science shifted from Malay to English (Haji-Othman et al., 2019). This signifies a change in the language used to deliver instruction for certain subjects, particularly mathematics and science, from Malay to English, and it shows that the shift has implications for both students and educators and is a key aspect of the broader language-in-education policies in Brunei.

The success and adaptability of English Medium Instruction (EMI) programs in different countries hinge on factors such as local context, integration into broader educational reforms, and sustained support from governments and educational institutions. While EMI cultivates language proficiency and global competitiveness, careful implementation is crucial to avoid diminishing the significance of local languages and cultural diversity. Collaboration among governments, teachers, and learners is pivotal for the effectiveness and sustainability of EMI initiatives, emphasizing a balanced approach that values both linguistic diversity and the advantages of English proficiency in a globally connected world.

When considering the implementation of EMI in other ASEAN countries, a nuanced approach is essential, considering each nation's unique context, educational goals, and language dynamics. Some ASEAN nations, like Thailand and Vietnam, have observed positive outcomes, but the universal applicability of EMI remains questionable. A comprehensive assessment of the existing education system, language policies, linguistic diversity, teacher readiness, and socio-economic factors is crucial. We must thoroughly examine potential socioeconomic disparities and their impact on educational inequalities, and ensure adequate training, resources, and a well-designed curriculum that effectively integrates EMI. In the end, the decision to adopt EMI should align with broader national educational objectives and the specific needs of each country's educational objectives.

### 3.2.2 English for Teaching Mathematics and Science (ETeMS)

English for Teaching Mathematics and Science (ETeMS) was initially implemented in Malaysia in 2003 (Rashid et al., 2017). In 2002, significant changes were made to the language policy, leading to the re-introduction of English as the medium of instruction for teaching science and mathematics from primary to tertiary levels in the country. This decision was driven by rapid changes in science and technology, the pressure of the global economy, and a decline in English proficiency that could hinder Malaysia's goal of being a technologically advanced nation. According to Rashid et al. (2017), the main objective of this policy is to facilitate students in learning of mathematics and science

through its significant lingua franca, English, to equip them for competition in the era of globalization and to improve the country's human capital standards. However, the policy has not effectively addressed the issue of improving English proficiency among graduates from public universities. Following the controversy surrounding ETeMS, the Malaysian government opted to gradually reintroduce the teaching of mathematics and science in the national language, starting in 2012. This shift indicates a recognition of the need to balance the emphasis on English with the importance of preserving and developing proficiency in the national language.

It appears that the initial policy was driven by a recognition of the globalized nature of science and technology, where proficiency in English is considered essential. However, the challenges in improving English proficiency among graduates and the subsequent reintroduction of teaching in the national language suggest a reevaluation of the policy. It underscores the complexities involved in language policies, where a balance between global and national language needs must be struck to effectively prepare students for the demands of a rapidly evolving world.

### **3.2.3 English for Education College Trainers (EfECT)**

One program aimed at improving the quality of education through its teachers in Myanmar is the English for Education College Trainers (EfECT) project by the British Council Myanmar, funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the British Council. The project's goal was to enhance education quality by providing language proficiency and methodology training across primary, secondary, and tertiary schools in Myanmar. Executed over two years, from August 2014 to August 2016, the first year (August 2014–August 2015) focused on elevating the language proficiency of all state teachers, emphasizing speaking, listening skills, and basic grammar. The second year (September 2015–August 2016) concentrated on various child-centered teaching methodologies, incorporating classroom observations and teaching assessments.

Accordingly, participating teachers in the EfECT program underwent language proficiency training for two hours every day, except Wednesdays and Fridays, when the program lasted for only an hour. In a week, they completed a total of eight hours of training. This study aims to explore the teacher trainees' perceived confidence in using the English language, their views on the teacher training program, and the challenges encountered. The objective is to provide insights for further teacher training in Myanmar.

Ulla (2018) revealed that teachers held a positive view of the program as they learned student-centered teaching methodologies from their trainers. They also perceived a significant improvement in their confidence to use the English language for both communication and classroom instruction since joining the teacher training program. However, it's essential to note that the findings are limited and may not represent the perceptions of all teacher trainees in the program.

Fortunately, this language program and policy have had a significant effect on the teachers in Myanmar. This impact is particularly noteworthy considering that the

country is still in the process of updating its curriculum and education system to align with other nations that are gradually improving the quality of education. The training's influence extends beyond the teachers themselves; it also affects the application of teaching methodologies and communication. This is considered a good start because the role of teachers is crucial in a school setting—they are the ones relaying and harnessing information for students.

### 3.2.4 English as a Subject in Basic Education

English as a subject in Basic Education (ESBE) is a key element of our 'English Language Teaching in Education' program in East Asia, which aims to bring transformational change in English language policy and practice. The overall purpose and impact of this research monograph are to contribute to education systems that support inclusive, quality teaching, learning, and assessment of English (Zein, 2022). In 1997, English became a mandatory subject in lower secondary school grades 6 to 9. The recently implemented policy in preparation for ASEAN integration has led to the teaching of English in early primary school classes. Laos-1 states that the basic school starts teaching English as a foreign language in Grade 3. The current curriculum in Laos does not teach English for the first two years of elementary school. Nevertheless, the curriculum continuously allocates time for English, starting in the third grade of elementary school. Students in Grades 4–6 of elementary school are required to get 45 minutes of English education two or three times a week, according to the curriculum. English education lasts up to 50 minutes for secondary school students (Grades 7–12) two or five times a week (Zein, 2022).

However, the existence of such a policy is much desired, given that Laotian ESBE teachers' pedagogical competence remains low. Indeed, since English became an integral part of secondary education in the 2000s (Sithirajvongsa & Goh, 2004) and continues to be a compulsory subject in primary education today, the literature has frequently cited the issue of Laotian teachers' pedagogical competence.

In order to reinforce the successful implementation of English as a Subject in Basic Education (ESBE) in East Asia, particularly in Laos, the government should prioritize comprehensive support for teachers to enhance their pedagogical competence. The current policy mandating English education from early grades reflects a proactive approach, but the persistently low pedagogical competence among Laotian ESBE teachers poses a significant challenge. Collaborative efforts with educational institutions and international organizations can provide valuable insights and resources to uplift the standard of English language teaching. Additionally, the government should allocate sufficient resources to ensure that teachers have access to updated teaching materials, technology, and continuous training opportunities. The government should integrate regular assessments and feedback mechanisms to monitor and enhance teacher performance. By placing a strong emphasis on teacher capacity building, the government can fortify the foundation of ESBE, thereby fostering a more effective and sustainable English language education system in Laos.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

A language program's and policy's success or failure is heavily dependent on the government. This can be seen in three ways: (a) their generous budget allocation (for things like learning and teaching materials, capacity-building activities, teacher salaries, research, and documentaries), (b) their careful balancing act between English and their native languages, and (c) their efforts to improve curricula so that teaching and learning English is welcoming and safe for all students, even in countries where it is a foreign language.

As a result, inefficiency, reflection on the speakers' competency, and unavoidable bad comparisons with other countries can result from ignoring these issues. Adapted and accepted in a variety of contexts, the majority of language programs and policies see successful implementation. As a result of this achievement, it has been well-received and recognized in many fields, including but not limited to: pedagogical competency, global educational standards, independence and lifelong learning, languages, societies, economies, and international relations. Furthermore, there are certain ASEAN nations that take a proactive approach, with strong government support, to resolve language challenges. This is especially true when language policies and programs aim for a high-level, cookie-cutter approach to teaching languages, rather than focusing on students' individual needs, the relevance of their coursework, and the integration of language skills into various academic and occupational settings.

This study highlights several language-related issues that all ASEAN countries must address. First, language education must be more accessible, especially for students in public schools. Second, students must participate in a variety of language programs' activities and exercises. Third, local languages should be taught alongside English to promote policies that preserve and celebrate linguistic variety. Finally, everyday communication in English should be encouraged to boost language development. In addition, although ASEAN countries have achieved success with various language programs and policies, there are still several areas that require attention: a) The need for clear communication of program objectives, such as linguistic proficiency, cultural preservation, global competitiveness, and social inclusion, b) Strategic allocation of funds, with a focus on course materials, capacity development, educator salaries, and grants and scholarships, recognizing the importance of language programs, c) Adoption of a balanced educational approach that emphasizes commonly spoken languages while also preserving indigenous languages, d) Ongoing improvement of the curriculum to promote diversity and create a supportive learning atmosphere.

Based on reviews of different studies regarding ASEAN countries' language programs and policies, the following areas could be considered by future researchers:

1. Conduct a comparative analysis of language education policies and their effectiveness in different ASEAN countries. This could entail investigating how different governments allocate resources, support language learning, and develop curricula, as well as how these factors impact language proficiency and international competitiveness.
2. Investigate the perspectives and experiences of language program stakeholders, such as teachers, students, and policymakers. This could involve gathering qualitative data

through surveys, interviews, or focus groups to understand how government policies affect language education in practice.

3. Conduct a study that delves deeper into specific language-related challenges in ASEAN countries. Highlighting challenges related to the proficiency levels of teachers and the impact of language policies on diverse ethnic minorities in language learning could provide more subtle insights.
4. Implement a longitudinal research project to track the outcomes of language programs over time and assess their effectiveness. This could involve measuring proficiency levels, employment opportunities, and global connectivity for individuals who have completed language programs under different government policies. By analyzing long-term trends, researchers could gain a comprehensive understanding of how government decisions impact language program effectiveness and proficiency.
5. Undertake case studies of successful and unsuccessful language programs within specific countries. By examining the unique circumstances, challenges, and outcomes of these programs, researchers can identify key factors that contribute to success or failure, especially in relation to government policies and support.
6. Explore the specific strategies employed by governments in different countries that have led to successful language program implementation.
7. Conduct case studies of countries with effective language policies, analyzing the allocation of budgets, the balance between promoting local languages and English, and the improvements made to curricula.
8. Investigate the socio-economic and cultural impacts of successful language programs on communities, providing valuable insights.

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