



Taiwan's Bilingual Policy and English Language Teaching: *Quality in Higher Education*

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台灣雙語政策與英語教學：高等教育質量

Taiwan's Bilingual Policy and English Language Teaching: *Quality in Higher Education*

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執行摘要

本研究項目調查了台灣的 2030 雙語政策與高等教育中的英語教學 (ELT)，並聚焦於兩個主要目標。首先，本研究評估了台灣 2030 雙語教育政策在高等教育中的實施情況。其次，本研究識別了自政策實施以來出現的主要挑戰和機遇，特別是關於英語授課 (EMI) 和英語教學 (ELT)。本研究旨在提供關於該政策達成目標的效果以及其與實現優質教育目標的一致性的見解。研究結果和討論為其他考慮推廣雙語政策的機構或國家提供了參考。

自 2018 年以來，台灣政府積極推動 2030 雙語政策，並制定了 2024 年和 2030 年的具體目標，包括「25-20-20 到 2024 年」及「50-50-50 到 2030 年」的指標。這些目標著重於實現英語能力達到 CEFR B2 水平，並在高等教育中擴展 EMI。儘管這些目標代表了提升台灣民眾英語能力的雄心壯志，但本研究的結果顯示該政策面臨顯著挑戰，可能無法在 2030 年前完全達成。

本研究採用了質性研究方法，使用半結構式訪談，並結合次級資料進行三角驗證，通過主題分析進行分析。研究結果顯示，雙語教育政策加劇了城市地區（如台北）與農村地區學生之間的既有不平等。獲得優質英語教學和資源的機會仍不均衡，進一步使來自富裕家庭的學生受益，而貧困學生卻被忽視。此外，對 EMI 質量的擔憂也非常突出，許多教師和學生缺乏必要的英語能力來有效應對課程材料，導致學科專業知識的價值被貶低，教師的英語能力比他們的學術資格更受重視，進一步影響教育質量。

關於「雙語教育」的定義及其目標的模糊性也引發了爭議，令人擔憂該政策是否適當地針對台灣背景進行設計。許多學者質疑該政策對所有學科領域和英語水平的適用性。此外，該政策的政治和社會學影響也需要重新考慮，以確保更具包容性和公平性的方式推進。

為了解決這些挑戰，本研究建議台灣應考慮將重點從 EMI 轉向高等教育中的專門用途英語（ESP）。ESP 提供了一種更具針對性和實用性的方式來提升特定學術和職業背景下的英語能力，這可能更符合台灣當前的能力。此轉變或可為其他非英語母語國家在高等教育中促進英語能力提供參考模式。

總之，儘管台灣 2030 雙語教育政策旨在提升英語能力，但它遇到了重大障礙。該政策擴大了教育不平等，並引發了對教學質量的擔憂。採用更現實的策略，例如推廣 ESP，可能會更好地支持台灣的雙語願景，而不會在提升教育質量或加劇現有差距的情況下。

關鍵詞: 雙語政策、英語教學、高等教育、優質教育、台灣



Executive Summary

This research project investigates Taiwan's 2030 bilingual policy and English language teaching (ELT) in higher education, focusing on two primary objectives. Firstly, it assesses the implementation of Taiwan's 2030 bilingual education policy in higher education. Secondly, it identifies the key challenges and opportunities that have emerged since the policy's inception, particularly concerning English Medium Instruction (EMI) and English language teaching (ELT). The study aims to provide insights into how well the policy achieves its aims as well as aligns with the goal of achieving quality education. The findings and discussion offer reflections for other institutions or nations considering promoting bilingual initiatives.

Since 2018, the Taiwanese government has actively promoted the 2030 Bilingual Policy with specific targets for 2024 and 2030, including the '25-20-20 by 2024' and '50-50-50 by 2030' benchmarks. These goals focus on achieving English language proficiency at the CEFR B2 level and expanding EMI within higher education. While these targets represent ambitious efforts to improve English proficiency among Taiwanese citizens, the findings of this study suggest that the policy is facing significant challenges and may not be fully achievable by 2030.

A qualitative research method was employed, using semi-structured interviews and triangulated with secondary sources, which were analysed using thematic analysis. The results reveal that the bilingual education policy has exacerbated existing inequalities between students from urban areas, like Taipei, and those from rural regions. Access to quality English instruction and resources remains uneven, further disproportionately benefiting students from well-off backgrounds while leaving disadvantaged students behind. Furthermore, concerns about the quality of EMI are prominent, with many educators and students lacking the necessary English proficiency to engage effectively with course materials. This has led to the devaluation of subject matter expertise, as educators are judged more on their English language skills than their academic qualifications, further impacting the quality of education.

The ambiguity surrounding the definition of 'bilingual education' and its objectives has also sparked debate, raising concerns about whether the policy is appropriately tailored to Taiwan's context. Many scholars question whether the policy's focus on EMI is suitable for all academic fields and proficiency levels. Additionally, the political and sociological implications of this policy need to be reconsidered to ensure a more inclusive and equitable approach.

To address these challenges, this research suggests that Taiwan shall consider shifting its focus from EMI to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in higher education. ESP offers a more targeted and practical approach to improving English proficiency within specific academic and professional contexts, which may be more aligned with Taiwan's

current capabilities. This shift could serve as a model for other non-native English-speaking nations facing similar challenges in promoting English proficiency in higher education.

In conclusion, while Taiwan's 2030 Bilingual Education Policy aims to enhance English proficiency, it has encountered significant obstacles. The policy has widened educational inequality and raised concerns about the quality of instruction. A more realistic approach, such as promoting ESP, may better support Taiwan's bilingual aspirations without compromising the quality of education or exacerbating existing disparities.

Keywords: Bilingual Policy, English Language Teaching (ELT), Higher Education, Quality Education, Taiwan



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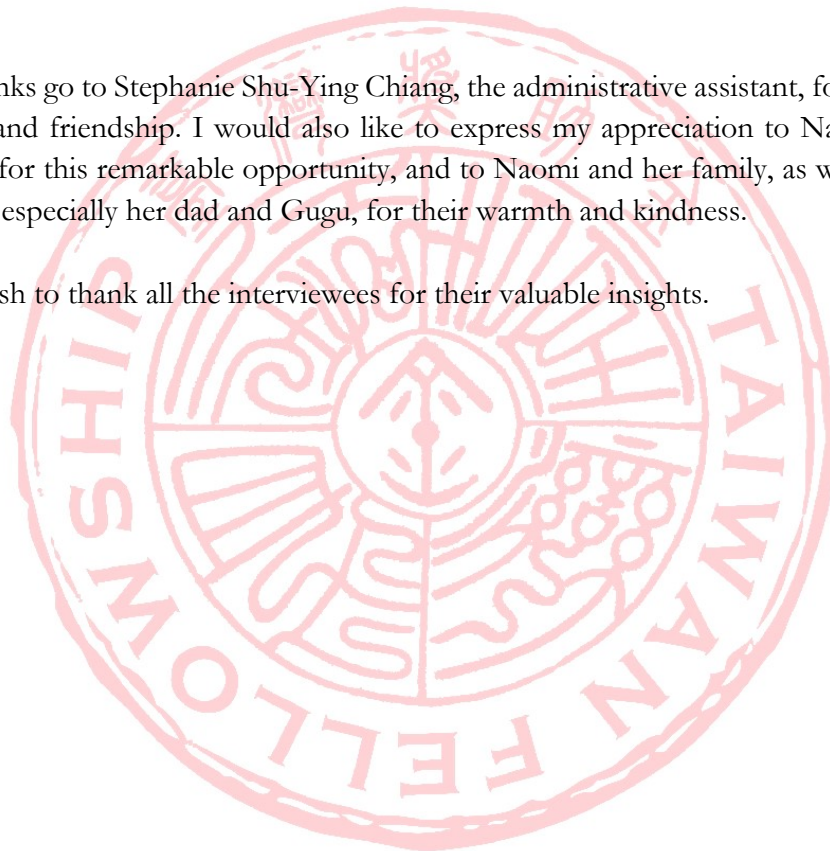
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1 Introduction

In today's interconnected world, English has become a dominant global lingua franca, essential for international communication. In response to this trend, Taiwan has embarked on a bilingual policy aimed at enhancing English proficiency among its citizens. Launched in 2018 by Taiwan's Ministry of Education (MOE), the 2030 bilingual policy represents a significant commitment to integrating English into the educational framework from an early age. The policy was expanded in September 2021 with the 'Program on Bilingual Education for College Students,' which aims to develop advanced English skills amongst university students and prepare them for global professional environments. This initiative emphasises English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and English in the Workplace (EWP) within higher education institutions (Ministry of Education, 2021).

The strategic plan includes two key milestones: '25-20-20 by 2024' and '50-50-50 by 2030.' The former targets at least 25% of sophomores in exemplary institutions achieving Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) B2 proficiency and 20% of sophomores and first-year graduate students completing over 20% of their credits through EMI. The latter aims for 50% of sophomores to reach CEFR B2 level and 50% of sophomores and graduate students to complete more than 50% of their credits through EMI, aligning with international standards and industry demands.

From 2021 to 2024, the Forward-looking Infrastructure Development Program (前瞻基礎建設特別條例) was expected to receive subsidies to promote bilingual education in higher education and foster a supportive English-learning environment (National Development Council, 2017). However, the effectiveness of the 2030 bilingual education initiative has sparked significant debate. The Taiwanese government's 'Blueprint for Developing Taiwan into a Bilingual Nation by 2030' aims to strengthen English as a major language for Taiwan (Ferrer & Lin, 2021). Despite these ambitious goals, many scholars view the policy as overly optimistic and potentially problematic (Chang, 2023; Liao, 2022; Her, 2022; Huang, 2023; Tsai, 2010). Critics argue that the policy's rationale is questionable, particularly following its rebranding from '2030 Bilingual National Policy' to 'Bilingual 2030 Policy,' which shifted the focus to educational values and global competencies (National Development Council, 2021). Additionally, concerns have been raised about the English proficiency of teachers and students, given that most Taiwanese speak Mandarin and Taiwanese (Chang, 2010; Chen, 2013; Kloter, 2004). Taiwan's commitment to a full-scale bilingual education is intended to cultivate bilingual talents who can integrate Taiwan into the global community. However, there remains significant scepticism about the practical implementation of this policy. *Is it really necessary to implement bilingual education and EMI across the nation? What does bilingual education truly mean to the government?* These questions highlight the need for a deeper examination of the policy's goals and its impact. As the '25-20-20 by 2024' deadline approaches and the 2030 goal nears, it is crucial to assess the progress and identify strategies for the most benefits of the nations.

Why Taiwan is interesting as a case study?

Taiwan's ongoing bilingual education policy, officially known as the '2030 Bilingual Policy', provides a compelling case study for several reasons. Firstly, Taiwan's unique historical context of language transformation highlights the complexity of its current policy. The island has experienced significant shifts in language policy, from the promotion of Japanese during the colonial era to the Mandarin-centric policies of the post-war period. It appears as if the current policy represents a significant departure once again from these precedents, aiming to position English as a crucial component of national identity and education. Secondly, the policy's evolution from being initially labelled English as the Second Official Language to Bilingual Education 2030 is another concern. Despite reflecting on an ongoing debates and adjustments in response to public and political feedback, this name changes and the policy's focus on English over other national languages offer insights into the challenges of implementing bilingualism in a context where multiple languages are integral to cultural and social identity. Moreover, it appears that Taiwan's approach to bilingual education highlights broader issues related to educational equity and socio-economic disparities. By emphasising English proficiency, the policy may exacerbate existing inequalities in educational outcomes and socio-economic status. In essence, it is no doubt that Taiwan's bilingual policy is not just about enhancing language skills but is deeply intertwined with national identity, historical legacies, and socio-economic dynamics. It is thus undeniable to be sceptical whether the politicians have thought this through before implementing the policy. These factors hence make Taiwan's case particularly interesting for examining the broader implications of bilingual education policies in diverse contexts.

Main research question and objectives

Regarding puzzles in the Taiwanese case and concerns raised by previous studies, this study's main research question is:

To what extent has Taiwan's 2030 Bilingual Education Policy achieved its intended goals in higher education?

This research question is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Taiwanese case and address the main research objectives, which are:

- 1 To evaluate the progress of Taiwan's 2030 Bilingual Education Policy in higher education.
- 2 To identify key challenges and opportunities associated with the policy's implementation and English language teaching (ELT) that have emerged since the policy's inception.

By addressing these objectives and concerns, the study aims to assess both the effectiveness and scope of the policy's implementation and to highlight areas of success and areas requiring improvement, while also reflecting on the broader implications of the policy for Taiwan's educational system.

2 Taiwan's Bilingual Policy

2.1 Evolution of Taiwan's Language Education and Policy

Language education in Taiwan has undergone significant transformations, with both education and policy evolving along distinct lines. In December 2018, the Executive Yuan (行政院) approved a blueprint drafted by the National Development Council to develop Taiwan into a bilingual nation by 2030. The aim was to raise the level of English proficiency among the public and enhance the country's overall national competitiveness (Financial Supervisory Commission, 2019). Around the same time, on December 25, 2018, the Legislature passed the National Languages Development Act, and the Ministry of Culture introduced the Development of National Languages Act, which came into effect on January 9, 2019. This Act established a framework for preserving, revitalising, and ensuring the equal development of Taiwan's ethnic minority languages and sign language, guaranteeing these languages are passed down to future generations (Ministry of Culture, 2019). The Taiwanese government has indeed overseen significant language education reforms, focussing on enhancing language proficiency and adapting to both local and global needs. However, critics argue that the bilingual policy conflicts with the National Languages Act, as English is not recognised under this Act; and thus lacks any legal status. This has led to debates questioning the legitimacy of labelling Taiwan's initiative as a 'bilingual policy'.

Language education in Taiwan has experienced significant transformations over time, influenced by various political and social changes. Historically, Taiwan has undergone two major language shifts. The first foreign language introduced was Japanese during the colonisation period (Tsurumi, 1977). This situation persisted until the promulgation of the Taiwan Education Rescript in 1922 (Heinrich, 2013); however, this initiative had limited success, particularly outside elite circles. The second, more successful transformation occurred with the promotion of Mandarin Chinese as the primary language of instruction and administration after the Nationalist government's arrival (Kloter, 2004). The 1951 China Handbook, published during the Kuomintang (KMT) rule, noted that Chinese was the only written language, while the spoken language consisted of various dialects. Despite these changes, local languages such as Taiwanese and Hakka persisted until now, albeit in a diminished form.

Taiwan is currently undergoing a third language transformation, led by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). By the late 2010s, English had become the focal point of language education, despite its lack of deep historical or cultural ties to Taiwan. The DPP's bilingual policy aims to establish Taiwan as a bilingual nation by 2030, marking the first time a language policy has been initiated by a local government rather than an occupying force. This policy is distinct in its scope and ambition and has the potential to bring about significant changes to Taiwan's linguistic landscape, cultural identity, and societal structure. It is interesting to note that the Development of National Languages Act, passed in December 2018, seeks to safeguard Taiwan's linguistic diversity. This law officially recognises Taiwanese, Hakka, 16 Indigenous languages, and Taiwanese Sign Language as national languages. Because English is notably absent from this list, questions about its role in Taiwan's emerging bilingual policy are being raised. The Act aims to protect the rights of all ethnic groups to education, communication,

and public services in their mother tongues, ensuring that all Taiwanese can use their native languages with pride. This context explains why the promotion of English under the new bilingual policy has sparked scepticism.

Despite undergoing multiple rebranding efforts, including from ‘English as a Second Language’, to ‘Bilingual Nation 2030’ and to ‘Bilingual Education 2030’, criticisms have yet remained obvious. Many scholars (Her, 2020; Liao, 2022) emphasise that these name changes reflect attempts to soften public criticisms, but the ultimate goal remains the same, to elevate English proficiency across the nation. This raises critical questions, *Is it truly necessary for all Taiwanese citizens to speak English for Taiwan to remain globally competitive? What is the government’s true motivation behind incorporating English into the national language policy?*

2.2 Taiwan’s Bilingual Education Policy

According to the Bilingual 2030 plan published by the National Development Council and the Ministry of Education (2021), Taiwan seeks to leverage English to enhance its citizens’ competitiveness in the global labour market. It appears that this initiative aims to equip the younger generation with the skills needed to excel internationally by combining English and Mandarin. Driven by globalisation, advancements in international trade and global economic development, the policy aims to meet international standards. However, despite these ambitious goals, there is growing scepticism about the effectiveness and implications of this bilingual policy and bilingual education, with critics raising concerns about its feasibility and potential impact on Taiwan’s linguistic landscape (Rigby, 2021; Lin, 2022).

The 2030 Bilingual Education policy faces areas of ambiguity. To begin with, the policy’s core vision remains unclear and has led to varied interpretations across the educational landscape. In October 2022, during the Judiciary and Legislative Affairs Committee’s review of the ‘Bill on the Establishment of the Bilingual National Development Centre,’ mother tongue and English were identified as the policy’s two central languages. However, the definition of ‘mother tongue’ is ambiguous. While many scholars and citizens consider Mandarin Chinese (華語) the mother tongue, also known as a national language (國語), others argue it should be Taiwanese (台語). This unresolved question has created confusion about the true meaning of bilingualism. The 2030 Bilingual Policy now renamed ‘2030 Bilingual Education,’ explicitly positions the policy as an international language initiative centred almost exclusively on English. In official documents, the term ‘English’ appears more than 500 times, while other languages receive little to no mention (Her, 2023). Some scholars (Chang, 2022; Liu, 2020; Liao, 2022) argue that this disproportionate focus on English undermines Taiwan’s linguistic diversity and fails to reflect true Taiwan’s National Language Act key goals. In this regard, it is understandable why critics, including legislators, academics, and experts, have voiced concerns that the policy prioritises English at the expense of local languages, questioning the legitimacy of the term ‘bilingual.’

Efforts to promote English in Taiwan are not new. In fact, Lai Ching-Te, the current president, launched a 10-year plan during his tenure as mayor of Tainan to make English the city’s second official language. Although this goal was not achieved during his Tainan term, his efforts has

been constantly promoting and laid the groundwork for the national policy of 'English as the Second Official Language,' which was later rebranded as 'Bilingual Nation 2030' (Her, 2023; Liao, 2022). Both President Lai and former President Tsai Ing-Wen have advocated for a greater role for English in Taiwan. Some Taiwanese, particularly those educated abroad, support this view, arguing that Taiwan lags behind regions like Hong Kong and Singapore in English proficiency (Hsu, 2007). However, many scholars assert that comparing Taiwan to these regions is problematic, as Hong Kong and Singapore's high English proficiency is rooted in their British colonial histories, which is something Taiwan lacks (Liao, 2022; Liu, 2022). Nevertheless, amongst criticisms, the '2030 Bilingual Education' policy has continually been being promoted. To fulfil the policy's goals, the Taiwanese government collaborates with the British Council with its aims to strengthen citizens English language proficiency towards B2 level.

In 2020-2021, the Ministry of Education (2021), together with the British Council, conducted a survey for an international comparative assessment. The survey revealed that around 17 percent of Taiwan's grade 12 students have reached the CEFR at B2 level, and about 4 percent are at C level, or 21.4 percent of all students in total. To put it differently, one-fifth of grade 12 students already have the basic ability to take EMI courses under the condition of bilingual education in higher education. Because of this, the Taiwanese government to set its aims of achieving '25-20-20' by 2024 and '50-50-50' targets in higher education by 2030.

The '25-20-20' target by 2024 aims for at least 25 percent of all sophomores in higher education to reach at least the CEFR B2 level in listening, speaking, writing, and reading, and 20 percent of sophomores and master's degree students should complete at least 20 percent of their credits through all-English courses. Looking ahead to the '50-50-50' target by 2030, the goal is for 50 percent of all sophomores to achieve at least B2 proficiency in all four skills, with 50 percent of sophomores and master's students completing 50 percent of their credits in all-English courses. As the 2024 academic year has already arrived, it is interesting to assess how well the Taiwanese government and Ministry of Education have progressed toward meeting these targets.

The policy outlined five key areas of implementation: 1) expanding human resources for bilingual education, 2) advancing internationalisation in compulsory education, 3) easing regulations to allow for flexible mechanisms, 4) encouraging dynamic teaching methods with a focus on everyday English use, and 5) leveraging digital technology to support personalised learning. Whether the bilingual education policy will succeed, it is essential to first understand the English Language Teaching (ELT) background and current situation in Taiwan.

2.3 English Language Teaching (ELT) in Taiwan

Since 1968, English has been a compulsory subject in Taiwan's secondary education and was introduced into primary education in 2001. Many primary schools in Taipei start teaching English for students since Year 1, whilst primary schools in other provinces start teaching English at Year 3 as the government suggest (Chen, 2013). English is a crucial subject in national exams at all levels, and students need strong test scores to enter top high schools and universities. As a result, English teaching in Taiwan has consistently emphasised on traditional method, including test-taking strategies and linguistic knowledge, such as vocabulary, grammar, and

reading comprehension. Despite the Ministry of Education's (MOE) endorsement of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in the 1998 Nine-year Compulsory Education Curriculum Guidelines, English classes in primary and secondary schools have largely remained focused on exam-driven activities (Chen et al., 2020). Taiwan shares a common concern with many other Asian countries on their learners' communication skills.

In the late 2010s, Taiwan's English education underwent significant changes with higher education. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses were introduced, and English-medium instruction (EMI) gained popularity, driven by the internationalisation of higher education (Chen et al, 2020; Lau & Lin, 2017; Wu, 2023; Yeh, 2023). Most interestingly, the growing presence of international students and faculty made English as a lingua franca (ELF) communication a reality in academic settings, fostering a learning environment where English was increasingly used as an academic tool. Numerous ESP and EMI workshops were held, not only for higher education researchers, language experts, and instructors but also for primary and secondary school teachers (Tsou, 2017). These initiatives promoted the idea of using English as a communication tool in global contexts, laying the foundation for curriculum development and classroom practices.

In 2017, several major cities, including Tainan, launched projects aimed at enhancing English education at the compulsory levels. Tainan's experimental bilingual project, based on the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach, focused on connecting language and content learning from the early years of formal education (Curran & Chen, 2021; Huang & Tsou, 2023). As the first of its kind in Taiwan, the project attracted local and international attention for its implementation (Chen et al, 2020; Graham et al., 2021). Two years later, the 2019 new Curriculum Guidelines for 12-year Compulsory Education replaced the 1998 guidelines, emphasising competencies over skills and promoting interdisciplinary integration in curriculum design and classroom practices. Since 2020, the MOE and local education bureaus have organised workshops for in-service teachers, while universities have provided training for pre-service teachers to implement the new curriculum. Continuous monitoring, evaluation, and adjustments will be necessary for these national policies to achieve their long-term goals. It appears as if the government has tried to promote and prepare English language learning at all levels. However, the preparation and readiness for bilingual education have faced substantial criticism.

Many linguists and subject-matter experts (Chang, 2022; Ngangbam, 2022; Her, 2022; Liao, Liu, 2022) have expressed concerns about the quality of instruction across various courses. Most specifically, since the government promotes bilingual education and EMI. These concerns include the necessity of using EMI in all subjects, the adequacy of teachers' English proficiency, and the effectiveness of student learning within a bilingual education framework. Questions about whether EMI enhances or diminishes the quality of content delivery and overall educational outcomes remain critical, particularly as Taiwan strives to balance bilingualism with maintaining high standards of education.

2.4 English Medium Instruction (EMI) and Quality in Higher Education

Since the Taiwanese government officially promoted bilingual education, English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) has gained significant momentum in higher education (Graham & Yeh, 2023; Gupta & Lin, 2023). Taiwan's higher education system, backed by strong political support, is well-positioned for bilingual development (Tien, 2023). Currently, almost 5 percent of all EMI courses in higher education are offered nationwide (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Despite the government's efforts, only around 20 percent of Grade 12 students achieve CEFR B2 proficiency, which is known as a recommended minimum level required to effectively engage in EMI courses (Li et al., 2024). This presents a significant challenge since 80 percent of Taiwanese Year 12 students remain below this threshold. While students often excel in receptive skills like reading and listening, they struggle in productive skills like writing and speaking (Li & Wu, 2018). This gap in proficiency creates obstacles for students when it comes to writing reports, participating in discussions, and comprehending complex subject matter in English, which is no different from the situation in many non-native English-speaking nations in Asia (Tsai, 2010; Lin et al., 2010).

Many scholars widely agree that without a solid B2-level proficiency, it is difficult to deliver effective instruction and promote deep learning in EMI environments (Li & Wu, 2018; Li et al., 2024). The current paper thus builds on this assertion, highlighting that both learners' and teachers' language proficiencies are under scrutiny. More specifically, the current research questions whether EMI is really a necessary or suitable tool for enhancing English language proficiency in the Taiwanese case.

In addition to student readiness, some experts (Ministry of Education, 2020) highlight that first-year university students, particularly those in specialised fields that lack experience with EMI courses in their high school education, will require preparatory English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction tailored to their disciplines. At the same time, although a large number of educators are capable of delivering EMI courses, more comprehensive training programmes, teaching assistants, and resources are needed to equip them fully. This implies that both the educators and learners have not yet been fully prepared for this policy design.

3 Method

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilising both primary and secondary sources through the framework of thematic analysis. The triangulation technique was applied to enhance the study's reliability and validity by integrating various methods, types of informants, and data sources. This approach allows for the identification of similarities and differences across different data points, reducing bias and increasing credibility (Shenton, 2004). Apart from the primary data collected from empirical research in Taiwan, secondary sources were also utilized. The secondary data were predominantly drawn from government official sources, such as the Ministry of Education, and published academic papers.

Data collection

The primary data for this research were gathered through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, conducted from May to July 2024. Purposive and snowball sampling methods were employed to select participants, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives. Interviews continued until data saturation was reached, indicated by the repetition of responses and no emergence of new information.

In addition to primary data, secondary data were collected from official government sources, such as the Ministry of Education, and published academic papers. The triangulation technique was also employed to compare and integrate findings from both primary and secondary sources.

The participant group consisted of 16 key informants, including 1 NGO activist, 6 English language professors, 3 university lecturers from non-language faculties, 3 parents of primary and secondary school students, 1 university student, and 3 Taiwanese citizens who studied overseas in native English-speaking countries (NES), including the UK and the US.

Ensuring data anonymity is a fundamental aspect of any data protection framework. The names of all interviewees were kept confidential. In compliance with data protection legislation, this paper guarantees that all published data and interviewee identities remain undisclosed. Therefore, it is confirmed that no personal information or identifying details of any interviewee are revealed in the published material.

4 Findings & Discussion

This section reveals and discusses the key issues surrounding Taiwan's bilingual education policy in light of its 2030 goals. The findings highlight challenges related to educational inequality, education quality, and the perceived ineffectiveness of EMI. The discussion also addresses the underlying motives behind the policy and its potential political implications. The findings point to two main contrasting perspectives. Parents of Taiwanese students and citizens who studied overseas in native English-speaking countries are more likely to be hopeful about the benefits of the bilingual education policy. They expect improvements in their own English language proficiency and/or that of their children, expecting this to lead to a better future. On the contrary, experts, scholars, and linguists are more sceptical. They express curiosity and concern about the policy's impact on future generations. These concerns can be categorised into four main themes.

4.1 Educational Inequality

One of the most significant concerns regarding the bilingual education policy, highlighted by many scholars, is its potential to exacerbate educational inequality. While the government envisions a bilingual Taiwan, the reality is that this policy may create a wider gap between affluent students, particularly those in Taipei, and those from less advantaged areas. The ability to access high-quality English education is more readily available to students from well-off families, especially in urban centres, whereas those in rural areas are left behind. This unequal

distribution of resources results in unequal educational outcomes, favouring students from more privileged backgrounds who have the financial means to supplement their English education outside of the school system.

Despite concerns and uncertainties about the policy, parents still hope for the best for their children. Many have faith in the government's promises and believe that English proficiency is crucial for the future human development of the next generation. However, if the current bilingual education policy continues to produce significant negative effects and leads to inadequate educational outcomes, this faith may wane. No Taiwanese interviewed informants preferred a policy that would harm their educational progress. As a result, many parents, especially those with enough financial support, are turning to private tutoring and after-school programmes to supplement their education. Unfortunately, this solution is out of reach for families with limited financial resources. This highlights that the bilingual education policy further deepens the divide between the privileged and the disadvantaged citizens.

Consequently, the findings confirm that the policy risks reinforcing existing socioeconomic disparities rather than levelling the educational playing field.

4.2 Diminishing Quality of Education

The introduction of EMI across Taiwan's higher education institutions has also raised concerns about the overall quality of education. First, many learners and educators do not possess the necessary English proficiency to effectively engage with EMI. Significant numbers of students and teachers struggle to reach the B2 level, which hinders their ability to comprehend and deliver course content at a satisfactory level. This proficiency gap diminishes the education quality, as students are not able to fully grasp subject matter taught in English, and teachers cannot effectively convey their knowledge.

Second, there is an element of discrimination within the system, as experts who are highly qualified in their respective fields are being judged based on their English language skills rather than their subject matter expertise. This practice is unfair and overlooks the critical role that these experts play in their disciplines. By placing disproportionate emphasis on English proficiency, the policy undermines the value of their contributions and may discourage talented educators from continuing their work in academia.

Third, the policy's push for EMI has resulted in a lower quality of educational content. In many cases, students are not receiving the depth and rigour of instruction they would otherwise get in their native language. The government's focus on English has led to unnecessary interventions that compromise the content, leading to a diluted educational experience. As a result, it is likely that if the EMI courses are still being promoted, students will receive less value from their education, and the overall quality of academic instruction is being diminished.

4.3 Inequity of EMI Implementation

Despite the government's ambition to create bilingual Taiwan by 2024, evidence suggests that the majority of Taiwanese citizens, even in Taipei, still lack the ability to communicate confidently and fluently in English. This highlights the impracticality of the 2024 target, as most people in Taiwan do not possess the necessary language skills to engage with EMI.

As Taiwan reaches the 2024 milestone, it is clear that the '25-20-20' target was not achievable. The 2024 '25-20-20' goal aimed for at least 25 percent of all sophomores in higher education to attain CEFR B2 proficiency in listening, speaking, writing, and reading, and for 20 percent of sophomores and master's students to complete at least 20 percent of their credits through all-English courses. However, only a small group of university students are able to communicate fluently in English and reach the B2 proficiency level, while the majority of students lag far behind.

The gap between the policy's goals and the current level of English proficiency underscores the inequity of the EMI approach. Many scholars have criticised the policy, questioning the focus on the 2024 achievement and raising concerns about the rationale behind the bilingual education initiative from the beginning. Similarly, the 2030 bilingual education policy should be reconsidered and revised. With the majority of students falling short of the milestone, it is evident that educators are also facing similar challenges. This raises important questions about the viability and sustainability of the policy in its current form.

4.4 Political Implications of the Bilingual Education Policy

A deeper analysis of the bilingual education policy raises questions about its true motive. Some scholars have speculated that the policy may be driven by political motivations rather than purely educational objectives. One hypothesis is that the policy seeks to move away from the dominance of the Chinese language, perhaps as a step towards distancing Taiwan from its historical and cultural ties with mainland China. The push for English could also be seen as an attempt to align more closely with Western nations, particularly the United States, and to signal Taiwan's independence and global positioning.

There is also the possibility that the policy is aimed at strengthening Taiwan's international reputation by demonstrating that it is capable of producing bilingual citizens who can compete on the global stage. However, these political undertones may not align with the practical realities of the education system. The government must clarify its objectives and ensure that any actions taken prioritise the well-being and development of its students rather than political manoeuvring.

In summary, while the bilingual education policy aims to create a more globally competitive Taiwan, it has inadvertently created new challenges related to educational inequality, diminished educational quality, and inequitable EMI implementation. Furthermore, the policy's potential political motivations raise questions about its true purpose and whether it genuinely serves the educational needs of Taiwanese students. To move forward, the government must address these

concerns, reevaluate its approach, and ensure that its actions are aligned with the goal of providing high-quality education for all.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study aimed to assess the extent to which Taiwan's 2030 Bilingual Education Policy has achieved its intended goals in higher education while also identifying key challenges and opportunities that have emerged during its implementation. The findings reveal that, to date, the policy has faced significant obstacles in realising its goals, particularly regarding English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) and improving the overall English proficiency of the Taiwanese. Despite the ambitious targets set for 2024 and 2030, the policy's implementation has been uneven, with many intended outcomes still unmet.

To begin with, Taiwan's goal of establishing bilingual education in higher education remains far from achieved. The majority of citizens do not possess the required English proficiency to comfortably engage with EMI in academic settings. Even in Taipei, where resources for English education are more abundant, most individuals are not confident in using English fluently. These findings reflect a broader national challenge of insufficient language proficiency, of both educators and learners, which has hindered the policy's effectiveness. Moreover, as many scholars have pointed out, it is not merely a question of whether the 2024 EMI goal can be achieved, but whether the policy itself should have been implemented in the first place. The widespread concerns and criticisms highlight the need for a more sustainable and realistic approach to English language teaching and learning and bilingual education in Taiwan.

Secondly, the challenges of educational inequality have been exacerbated by the policy. Students from rural areas have significantly less access to high-quality English instruction and resources, compared to urban counterparts. This disparity has widened the educational gap, with well-off students benefiting more from the policy while disadvantaged students fall further behind. This hence has led to criticisms about whether the policy inadvertently deepens social inequality.

Thirdly, concerns over the quality of education have arisen as a result of the emphasis on EMI. Many teachers and students are not fully equipped to meet the required English proficiency standards, most specifically CEFR B2 level, which undermines the educational experience. Since bilingual education has been introduced, instructors are likely to be evaluated more for their language skills than their academic expertise. This focus risks overshadowing the importance of disciplinary knowledge, as some content is lost in translation or compromised in pursuit of EMI conduct. As a result, students may not be receiving the full educational experience in their respective fields, particularly when instruction in their native language could offer deeper comprehension and academic rigour.

Furthermore, the lack of clarity surrounding the 'bilingual education' term has contributed to confusion and debate. Some interpret bilingual education as English and Mandarin instruction, while others argue it should include local languages, such as Taiwanese. This ambiguity has

fuelled ongoing debates among scholars and practitioners regarding the policy's true intent and long-term viability. A clearer definition of bilingual education is necessary to address these concerns and ensure alignment between policy goals and educational outcomes. Most specifically, a clear status of over-promoting English language status shall also be explained.

Finally, political and sociocultural factors play a significant role in shaping the policy's reception and implementation. There are concerns that the policy may be more politically driven than educationally focused, leading to resistance from educators, policymakers, and the public. Hence, reassessing the political motivations behind the policy, as well as its impact on local languages, will be crucial in refining its objectives and ensuring a more sustainable approach.

To conclude, Taiwan's 2030 Bilingual Education Policy, while ambitious in its aims to enhance EMI and English proficiency, has encountered significant barriers, particularly related to educational inequality, quality of instruction, and the clarity of its definition. Moving forward, the government must carefully reconsider the policy's goals and approach to ensure that it fosters inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education for all.

5.2 Recommendations

Despite the challenges, there are opportunities for Taiwan to adjust its approach to bilingual education. First and foremost, one potential solution is to perhaps shift the focus from EMI to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in higher education. Given the current limitations in English proficiency among students and educators, ESP may provide a more practical and targeted method for improving English skills in specific academic and professional contexts for students in higher education. This approach would allow students to develop the language competencies they need within their chosen fields, rather than enforcing a blanket EMI policy that does not seem to match the current Taiwanese case nor suit all disciplines or levels of English language proficiency.

The current research paper emphasises that promoting ESP would not only enhance students' language skills but also align more closely with Taiwan's long-term goals of international competitiveness without compromising the quality of education or exacerbating educational inequality. Moreover, this shift could serve as a model for other non-native English-speaking nations that face similar challenges in promoting English proficiency in higher education.

To conclude, while Taiwan's 2030 Bilingual Education Policy represents an ambitious effort to enhance English proficiency and EMI in higher education, it has encountered significant obstacles in achieving its goals. The policy has created new challenges related to educational inequality and the quality of instruction. To address these issues, Taiwan should consider shifting its focus towards ESP as a more realistic and effective approach. This adjustment would allow the country to improve English language proficiency without undermining the educational experiences of its students and educators, offering a path forward for Taiwan's bilingual aspirations. Nevertheless, since there is no way of turning back from the bilingual education policy, a better clarification of 'bilingual education' term and motives behind this policy implementation shall be revised and clarified.

5.3 Limitation

This research project was conducted during a three-month period in Taiwan (May–July 2024), which limits the depth and scope of data collection. Future studies may reveal different findings, depending on the chosen research framework, and additional longitudinal research would be beneficial in understanding the long-term impact of the bilingual education policy. Furthermore, this study focusses primarily on higher education, and further exploration of the policy’s impact on other educational levels and sectors is necessary to gain a comprehensive understanding of its outcomes.



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Appendix

2030 Bilingual Policy — Image/National Development Council’s 2030 Bilingual Policy Vision Explanation

[What Happened to Taiwan’s 2030 Bilingual Policy? | by 丁盈瑄 Ding Ying Xuan | Medium](#)

