

Singapore bilingualism: A model or a myth?

Rahmani, Rebecca Emma

Anastasia, Jessie

Yap, Vivian Aurelia

Winata, Violeta Gracia

Anastasia, Jessica

Chien, Yu Fang

Salim, Jocelyn Odelia

National Chengchi University, Taiwan



ISSN: 2243-7703
Online ISSN: 2243-7711

OPEN ACCESS

Received: 13 May 2025

Revised: 18 June 2025

Accepted: 8 July 2025

Available Online: 10 July 2025

DOI: 10.5861/ijrse.2025.25205

Abstract

This report paper explores the complex relationship between bilingual education, cultural heritage and national development through a comparative case study of Singapore and Taiwan. To begin, we traced back the ideological roots of Singapore’s bilingual policy. It was first introduced after its independence in 1965 to promote the usage of English for economic competitiveness and “Mother Tongue” languages for persevering cultural identity. This report paper looks into the development of the policy, highlighting its successes in global integration and the consequences that come after it - particularly the marginalisation of dialects. Taiwan’s “Bilingual 2030” policy, aimed at boosting English proficiency, is then analysed in comparison, gaining attention to its own challenges in protecting local dialects and indigenous languages. This paper looks into whether Singapore’s bilingual model could be applied to Taiwan, considering Taiwan’s democratic system and rich cultural diversity. In the end, it suggests that Taiwan should adopt a more balanced bilingual policy—one that not only supports global communication through English but also protects and promotes its local and indigenous languages.

Keywords: bilingual education, language policy, cultural preservation, Singapore, Taiwan

Singapore bilingualism: A model or a myth?

1. Introduction

Bilingual education, defined as the use of two languages for instruction across a range of subjects in the school curriculum, has become increasingly important in today's globalised and multilingual societies. According to Baker (2001), bilingual education is not a monolithic concept but a diverse and flexible framework that may serve various goals—economic development, cognitive advancement, national integration, and cultural preservation. But in practice, bilingual policies tend to reflect cross-cutting national priorities, namely the tension between encouraging a common national identity and preserving linguistic diversity. This paper investigates that very tension by using Singapore as a comparative case for Taiwan, both of which have implemented assertive bilingual education policies with markedly different political and cultural contexts. Both of which have pursued assertive bilingual education policies with rather different political and cultural settings. Singapore's bilingual model of education, introduced after independence in 1965, has been widely praised as a strategic success for English as an engine for global competitiveness and relegating "Mother Tongue" languages (Mandarin, Malay, Tamil) for maintaining ethnic heritage. However, no such model has been trouble-free—particularly, the cultural loss of dialects, differential access to language ability, and the increasingly pervasive disconnection between young generations with their heritage languages.

In this paper, we focus on Taiwan's current push toward bilingualism, particularly its "Bilingual 2030" policy aimed at enhancing English proficiency across society. This recent initiative is marked by an aggressive top-down approach, echoing Singapore's strategy. However, Taiwan's complex linguistic heritage—including Mandarin, Hokkien, Hakka, and over a dozen indigenous languages—presents a vastly different cultural landscape. Taiwan's current policy raises urgent questions: Is the pursuit of global language proficiency coming at the cost of local language survival? Can Taiwan avoid repeating Singapore's missteps in balancing modernisation with cultural identity?

Through analysis of Singapore's bilingual heritage—its ideological roots, successes, tensions, and criticisms—this paper aims to learn lessons that can be exported by Taiwan in developing a more culturally sensitive and forward-looking language policy.

Research Questions:

- How has Singapore's bilingual education policy both succeeded and failed in achieving its goals?
- What can Taiwan learn from Singapore's experience as it grapples with the threat of heritage language loss?

2. Historical Evolution of Bilingual Education in Singapore

Before the 1960s, schools in Singapore used the MTL (Mother Tongue Language) as the main language to teach. Singapore's bilingual education system is separated based on language and ethnicity such as Chinese-medium schools, Malay-medium schools, Tamil-medium schools, and English-medium schools. So, for instance, if there are students of Chinese ethnicity then, they study in Chinese-medium schools. While the mother tongue would strengthen individual value and sense of cultural belonging, the problem is there are different curriculum standards and unequal job opportunities for non-English speakers. Therefore in the 1960s, the Singapore government introduced the bilingual education policy.

2.1 1960s: Introduction of Bilingual Education Policy

In the early 1960s, the government required all students to learn both English and their Mother Tongue

Language (MTL) such as Chinese, Malay, or Tamil. At that time, English was introduced as a second language. After Singapore gained independence in 1965, the government began to focus more on promoting English as the main language of instruction to support economic development. However, most schools were still vernacular schools, where English was taught only as a second language. By the late 1960s, with stronger government support, more English-medium schools were established, and English was increasingly used to teach core subjects, while MTL continued to be part of the curriculum. According to the National Library Board, mathematics and science were taught in English even in vernacular schools, while civics and history were taught in MTL at English-medium schools. This approach gradually developed until MTLs became compulsory as second languages and were made examinable in the PSLE in 1966 and the Cambridge School Certificate in 1969.

To support this, the government also supported and invested in teacher training. The Teachers Training College began upgrading teacher qualifications. By the early 1970s, in order to support the bilingual policy, only university graduate teachers were allowed to enter the Certificate in Education program. This helped prepare teachers to be capable of teaching English, even if they are from vernacular school backgrounds, while also fluent in their Mother Tongue Language. These changes marked the beginning of the shift toward English-medium education, which became more dominant in the 1970s.

2.2 1970s: Emphasis on English and Standardization-Speak Mandarin Campaign

In the 1970s, the government continued their efforts in strengthening the use of English language, while working to standardized Mother Tongue Language use, especially the Chinese community. They focus on Mandarin because the Chinese community is the majority of Singapore's population. Based on the "Integration versus segregation: ethnic minorities and urban politics in Singapore" paper, it states that the ethnic Chinese made up around 76% of Singapore populations. Besides, the government focuses on Mandarin because the government aims to replace various Chinese dialects such as Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese with standard Mandarin. One most important step was "Speak Mandarin Campaign" that was launched by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew that start in 1979. This campaign includes teacher training programs. Mandarin language teachers were trained to use communicative teaching methods, rather than focusing only on characters or grammar. Communicative training included role play activities and task-based learning.

2.2.1 Role Play

Students learned through real life situations that were done in groups. For example, in a scenario where one asks for directions and the other responds in Mandarin. This method is supported by Noor Hanim Rahmat, Mok Soon Sim, Lau Suk Khin, and Fan Pik Shy in their study "Experiential Learning in Mandarin Classrooms: The Case for Simulation", which states that simulations activities allow learners to gain "hands-on" experience in the form of experiential learning. Such activities help create a positive environment.

2.2.1 Task-Based Learning

Students were given tasks like conducting surveys among classmates in Mandarin. This method is supported by Chao Yang, Xin Wei, and Lifan Xue, in their experiments that compare two groups of learning Mandarin, one using task based language teaching (TBLT) and another using traditional grammar focus called control group. After one semester, students in the task-based group were 25% more proficient compared to 10% more proficient learners in the control group. The experiment also found that TBLT significantly improved student motivation, with TBLT scoring 4.5 compared to 3.2 for the control group. These experiments show how communicative methods help students use Mandarin naturally and support Singapore bilingual education policy goals. Additionally, the government also introduced the Special Assistance Plan (SAP) in 1979. It offered both English and Chinese as working languages to develop bilingual students who were strong in Chinese language and culture.

2.3 1980s: Adjustment Curriculum and Streaming

To continue supporting the goals of the Speak Mandarin Campaign, in the early 1980s, the Ministry Education officially banned other Chinese dialects in the classroom and Mandarin is the only Chinese subject. To support students from non-Mandarin speaking homes, the Ministry of Education introduced different learning levels from low to high tier study class. For instance, lower tier like EM3 stream, where subjects were taught in simpler or basic Mandarin.

2.4 1990s: Refinement of Streaming and Flexibility

The streaming system was introduced by the Ministry of Education in the 1990s to help with students different academic abilities, especially in learning language. It group students based on three streams based on their proficiency:

- **EM1:** for students with high or strong language abilities. The curriculum is faster paced.
- **EM2:** for students with moderate language abilities, curriculum with difficulty adjustment.
- **EM3:** for students with low language abilities. The curriculum is more simplified.

The goal of this streaming is to ensure all students progress effectively in bilingual education without being left behind or overwhelmed. This streaming was seen as a strength of Singapore's education system. Tharman Shanmugaratnam supported this approach by noting, "In contrast to the Singapore system, US standards do not acknowledge that students learn at different rates". Minister for Education Ong Ye Kung also states that streaming helped reduce dropout rates.

2.5 2000s: Curriculum Reforms and Reduce Labeling

After years of implementing EM1, EM2, EM3 in the 1990s, the Ministry of Education was concerned about student labeling, especially the low language abilities of students. Therefore, there were curriculum reforms in the 2000s to reduce such stigma while still supporting bilingual education. The Ministry of Education merged EM1 and EM2 into a single stream. This allows more flexibility in learning languages. Additionally, interactive teaching methods using digital platforms and e-learning are introduced to enhance language acquisition, make bilingual education more engaging.

2.6 2010s: Promotion and Enhancement

2010s marked a new phase in Singapore's bilingual education policy, focused on promoting language use beyond the classroom and enhancing teacher quality. The Lee Kuan Yew Fund for Bilingualism was established in 2011 to support a variety of language initiatives including the development of heritage based educational resources, children's books in MTL, and support for community learning projects. To support the teacher quality in bilingualism, National Institute of Education (NIE) provides service training for Mother Tongue teachers. Service training in NIE includes workshops, teachers learn to apply the practical in class, and they provide coaching sessions for the teachers.

2.6.1 Workshop

Teachers attended workshops on the use of code-switching, learning when and how to mix Mandarin and English to support student understanding.

2.6.2 Practical Applications

Teachers learn to apply code-switching in the classroom. For example, using English to explain difficult

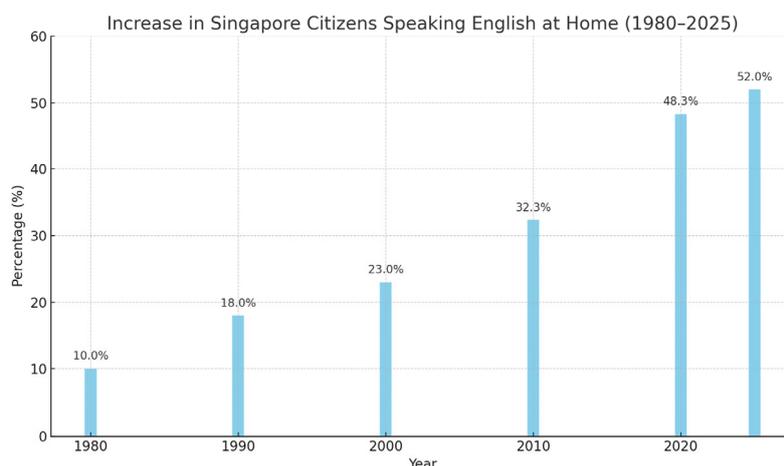
Mandarin words before continuing the lesson in Mandarin.

2.6.3 Coaching

NIE provides feedback and observe the real lessons, allowing teachers to reflect on their lessons, applying the code switch strategy, and improve. This highlights how code-switching became a key method to increase the students ability in language learning. In their study, “Teacher Code-switching in Singapore Primary Schools: a Corpus-based Study” Gwee and Susan Bee found that code-switching helps with curriculum access and classroom management, making lessons more engaging and accessible. Their findings highlight the effectiveness of NIE’s teacher training services.

3. Enhancing Bilingual Education in a Changing Singapore (2020–2025)

From 2020 to 2025, Singapore’s bilingual education policy has changed a lot to keep up with modern times, new technology, and the global world. In the past, all students had to learn English as their main language in school, while also learning their own Mother Tongue Language (MTL), like Mandarin, Malay, or Tamil. This basic rule is still there, but the government has added new ideas and made the system more flexible and interesting. In 2020, people started getting worried because more and more families were using English at home—almost half of Singaporean homes were mainly English-speaking.



Education Minister Chan Chun Sing warned, “If we do not do anything, we will start to lose our bilingualism edge,” and encouraged everyone to work harder on learning MTL. After that, the Ministry of Education (MOE) made some improvements for students of all levels. By 2021, they started using fun technology like augmented reality (AR), animated videos, and Tamil reading pens to help young children learn MTL. They also improved the Mother Tongue Support Programme (MTSP), so students who were struggling could get special help, like one-on-one guidance. In 2022, the Conversational MTL program was expanded to cover more primary and secondary students, especially those who don’t speak it at home. Preschools added more fun language activities like songs, stories, and pretend-play to help kids learn both languages more naturally from a young age. One big change happened in 2023, when 35 schools tried out a new MTL curriculum for Primary 1 students. It used hands-on learning, cultural stories, and tech tools like the Tamil e-reading pen. Minister Chan said that MTL should become “more than just a subject, but a living language”, which means kids should really use it in daily life, not just study it for exams.

In 2024, this new curriculum was used in all primary schools. Also, MOE changed the rules for who can take Higher Mother Tongue Language (HMTL). Starting in 2026, Secondary 1 students can qualify for HMTL just based on their MTL scores, without needing high PSLE results overall. Prime Minister Lawrence Wong supported this idea, saying that bilingualism helps Singapore stay connected to the world. In 2025, even more updates are

coming. Two MOE kindergartens will start giving kids more MTL time each day—going from 1 hour to 1.5 hours. Also, a new reading program called MTL SOAR (Mother Tongue Languages – Structured Oral and Reading) will give Primary 1 and 2 students an extra 30 minutes of reading time focused on MTL. This program will slowly expand to other levels by 2029. On top of that, some secondary schools will start offering French and German as extra languages (but not for exams), showing that MOE wants students to be ready for a more global future.

Experts agree that these changes are a good step. Prof Eddie Kuo from SUSS said, “Malays have the highest bilingual literacy... which helps entrench their mother tongue”. At the same time, Dr Susan Xu Yun warned that MTL could become “just a subject” if students don’t feel personally interested or connected to the culture. A Tamil mother also shared that her son now enjoys reading Tamil books and even talks to his grandparents in Tamil, thanks to MTL SOAR. Overall, Singapore’s bilingual policy has grown from just keeping the language alive to making it something students use, enjoy, and connect with through technology, culture, and real-life experience.

4. The Pillars of Singapore’s Bilingual Policy Success

Singapore’s bilingual education policy has been widely regarded as a success, and its effectiveness can be attributed to a combination of historical context, strategic policymaking, and societal factors. Here’s an in-depth analysis of why the policy has worked well:

4.1 Strong Political Will and Clear National Vision

Right after Singapore became independent, the leaders—especially Lee Kuan Yew—believed that learning two languages was super important for building the country. They wanted English to be the language everyone could use to connect with each other and the world, while still keeping the Mother Tongue Languages (Mandarin, Malay, Tamil) so people wouldn’t lose their culture and values. Lee Kuan Yew said, "If you are bilingual, you have binocular vision, then you see the world in 3-D." He meant that knowing two languages helps you see things from different points of view and adapt better. Because the government was very clear about this, schools, families, and everyone else worked together to make bilingualism happen.

4.2 Systematic and Well-Structured Education Framework

Singapore made sure that every student learns both English and a Mother Tongue Language in school. English is used to teach most subjects, and students also have to learn their MTL. This way, everyone gets a good base in both languages. The Ministry of Education keeps updating the curriculum and teaching methods to keep up with changes in technology and society. For example, the EdTech Masterplan 2030 helps students learn more with digital tools. There’s a platform called Student Learning Space (SLS) where students can find online lessons and resources for all their subjects, including MTLs. This helps students learn better and makes sure teaching is the same quality in all schools.

4.3 Teacher Specialization and Support

Good teachers are really important for learning languages. Singapore trains special Mother Tongue Language teachers at places like the National Institute of Education. They learn how to teach the language well and understand the culture. To get more people to become MTL teachers, the government offers scholarships. For example, the Chinese Language Teacher Training Sponsorship (CLTTS) is a 4-year program that pays for tuition and gives money every month to people who want to teach Chinese in primary schools. There’s also a \$2,000 bonus for preschool teachers who finish special MTL training. This makes sure teachers are well prepared.

4.4 Early Childhood Emphasis

Singapore knows kids learn languages best when they’re young, so they start teaching bilingualism in preschool. MOE Kindergartens include MTL learning in fun ways through programs like the Starlight Literacy

Programme and HI-Light Programme. They use songs, stories, and games that connect to Singapore's culture. For example, PCF Sparkletots has a "One Mother Tongue Language (OneMTL)" program where kids learn through singing, acting, and puppets. They also make e-books in Chinese, Malay, and Tamil to make reading fun and familiar. This is all part of the Nurturing Early Learners (NEL) Framework, which helps kids love their MTL and build good language skills from the start.

4.5 Parental and Societal Reinforcement

Parents really help make bilingual education work. Studies show that 93.7% of Singaporean parents believe it's good for kids to learn two languages early. Most parents think English is important for school and jobs, but they also want their kids to know their Mother Tongue to keep family culture and talk to older relatives. Even though more families speak English at home now, many parents still help their kids practice MTL by reading books and talking in the language. Outside the home, TV, community activities, and cultural events also support bilingualism, so it's part of everyday life.

4.6 Economic and Social Relevance

Being bilingual helps Singapore in lots of ways. English lets Singaporeans work with people all over the world and do well in business and technology. This attracts big international companies. Knowing Mother Tongue Languages, especially Mandarin, is useful too because China's economy is growing fast. Speaking Mandarin opens many business doors. Some research says that English is the biggest factor for higher pay, and just being bilingual doesn't always add more money benefits. But knowing MTLs still helps with culture, talking to older family members, and keeping Singapore's unique identity.

4.7 Flexibility and Reform

Singapore's education system keeps changing to improve. The Ministry of Education looks at the bilingual policy regularly and makes updates. One big change starting in 2026 is that Secondary 1 students can get into Higher Mother Tongue Language (HMTL) classes based just on how well they do in their MTL, without needing high overall PSLE scores. This helps students who are good at languages but not in every subject. For students who find MTLs hard, there are support programs. The Mother Tongue Support Programme (MTSP) helps Primary 3 and 4 students in small groups to improve speaking, listening, and reading skills. These lessons are taught by trained teachers. This shows the system cares about helping all students succeed. Singapore's bilingual policy works well because it's planned carefully, supported by leaders, teachers, and parents, and changes when needed. Kids start learning two languages early, and there are programs to help everyone. Being bilingual helps Singapore stay connected with the world and keep its culture alive. This balance is why the policy is so successful.

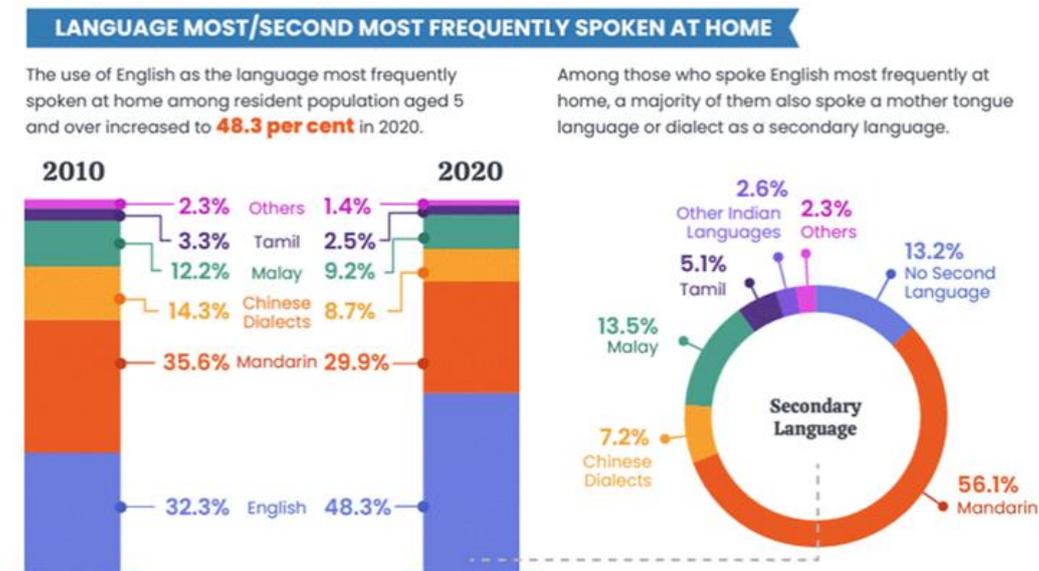
5. Unintended Consequences of Singapore's Bilingual Education Policy

Singapore's bilingual education policy, introduced in 1966, requires students to learn English alongside a designated Mother Tongue language based on their ethnic group. This policy was designed to promote national unity in a multiracial society and to equip citizens with English skills necessary for economic development and global competitiveness. While the policy has achieved many of its goals, it has also led to unintended negative consequences, especially in terms of cultural disconnection and the disappearance of heritage languages.

5.1 Decline of Chinese Dialects and Generational Disconnect

One of the most visible impacts of the bilingual policy is the rapid decline of Chinese dialects such as Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, and others. In 1980, 81.4% of Chinese Singaporeans spoke dialects at home, reflecting the linguistic diversity within the Chinese community. However, the government's Speak Mandarin Campaign, launched in 1979, aimed to unify the Chinese population by promoting Mandarin as the common Chinese language. This campaign actively discouraged the use of dialects in schools, media, and public spaces.

As a result, by 2020, the use of Chinese dialects at home had dropped dramatically to just 11.8%. This shift has created a cultural gap between generations. Older Singaporeans, who grew up speaking dialects, often find it difficult to communicate fully with younger family members who primarily speak Mandarin or English. This language barrier weakens cultural bonds and disrupts the transmission of cultural knowledge, stories, and traditions that are embedded in dialects.



5.2 Rise of English and Marginalization of Heritage Languages

Alongside the decline of dialects, English has risen to become the dominant language in Singapore. English is the main method of instruction in schools and is widely used in business, government, and daily life. While Mandarin usage peaked in the early 2000s due to government efforts, it has since faced a decline, and dialects continue to fade. Similarly, Malay and Tamil, which are the official Mother Tongue languages for the Malay and Indian communities respectively, have also suffered in relevance and everyday use. Many parents prioritize English for their children because they believe it offers better educational and career opportunities. This practical choice, however, often comes at the expense of ethnic language proficiency. Students may struggle to maintain their Mother Tongue languages due to limited usage outside the classroom, leading to a growing detachment from their cultural roots. Over time, this trend risks the gradual loss of linguistic and cultural diversity within Singapore.

5.3 Language Ability and Social Inequality

Another unintended consequence of the bilingual education policy is the unequal access to language learning resources, which reflects broader social inequalities. Higher-income families often have the means to provide their children with additional support such as enrichment classes, private tuition, and a language-rich home environment. These advantages help students excel in their Mother Tongue languages and maintain cultural connections. In contrast, lower-income families may lack the resources to support language learning outside of school. Their children might face greater challenges in Mother Tongue exams and have fewer opportunities to engage with their heritage languages and cultures. This disparity turns language ability into a marker of social privilege and contributes to cultural inequality. It also means that some groups may become more disconnected from their ethnic identities over time.

5.4 Criticism of Fixed Race-Language Link and Loss of Cultural Diversity

The bilingual policy enforces a fixed link between race and language, which has drawn significant criticism. For example, Chinese students are required to learn Mandarin as their Mother Tongue, even if their families

speak other dialects like Cantonese or Hokkien. Similarly, Indian students are expected to learn Tamil, regardless of whether their home language is Punjabi, Hindi, or another Indian language. This rigid system does not reflect the linguistic reality of many Singaporeans, who may speak multiple languages or identify with different cultural groups. It limits personal choice and fails to accommodate the country's rich diversity. Critics argue that this approach risks erasing minority languages and dialects, which are carriers of unique cultural traditions, histories, and ways of thinking. Many cultural advocates and academics suggest that the bilingual policy, while useful in the past, needs to evolve. They call for more flexible language policies that support multilingualism and protect heritage languages. Such policies would help preserve cultural diversity while still preparing Singaporeans for global participation.

5.5 Expert Views on Singapore's Bilingual Education Policy and Its Consequences

Dr. Mukhlis Abu Bakar from the National Institute of Education highlights that while Singapore's bilingual policy has been effective in promoting English proficiency, it needs to be reinterpreted in light of the current sociolinguistic landscape where English dominates almost all domains of communication. He argues that the traditional model, where English is the medium of instruction and the Mother Tongue is treated as a second language subject is insufficient to keep young Singaporeans connected to their cultural roots. He calls for expanding the role of Mother Tongue languages in education to nurture balanced bilinguals who are proficient and culturally grounded in both languages. Scholars advocate for more flexible, additive bilingual pedagogies that validate students' home languages and dialects alongside English and official Mother Tongues, promoting multilingualism rather than compartmentalized bilingualism. In response to these challenges, the Ministry of Education has introduced initiatives to strengthen Mother Tongue language learning. For example, from 2025, a structured reading programme called MTL Soar will be progressively implemented in primary schools to increase early exposure and engagement with Mother Tongue languages. Additionally, from 2026, more students who perform well academically will be allowed to study their Mother Tongue at higher levels, aiming to raise proficiency and cultural connection.

6. Comparative Case Study: Applicability to Taiwan

6.1 Taiwan's Complex Language Ecosystem

Taiwan is a country with a lot of languages, but Mandarin Chinese is definitely the most dominant, used in schools, government, and the media. Still, local languages like Hokkien, Hakka, and Indigenous languages are really important to people's cultural identity. Since Taiwan became more democratic in the 1990s, there's been a shift in how the government handles language. They've tried to protect local languages while also preparing people to compete globally. This essay looks at Taiwan's recent bilingual education policy (the 2030 plan), the challenges it's facing, and what it means for culture and identity. It also compares Taiwan's experience with Singapore's language policy to see what they might learn from each other. The language situation in Taiwan is an expression of colonial influence, migrations, and political changes over time. The imposition of Mandarin as the main language was much forcefully carried out by the KMT government after its rise to power in 1949. The local languages included amongst others:

- Hokkien (Taiwanese): About 70% of the population speak it, mostly the elderly and southerners.
- Hakka: About 15% speak this. The language is more distinctly heard in places like Miaoli and Hsinchu.
- Indigenous languages: About 2%, are part of the Austronesian family but many are now endangered.

During those times (especially from 1949 to 1987), the state actually went ahead to make Mandarin the sole "official" language. Our local languages could not be used in schools or official media. Consequently, most of the young generation grew up speaking only Mandarin.

6.2 Language Policy After Democratization

Language planning started to change in Taiwan after martial law came to an end in 1987. The government thus began to realize the importance of local languages with respect to the identity of Taiwan. Some important changes were:

- **Mother Tongue Education (2001):** Elementary school children can take courses in Hokkien, Hakka, or Indigenous languages.
- **National Languages Development Act (2017):** Local languages were all made equal in law to Mandarin.

Even with these good intentions, the policies haven't been super effective. There aren't enough teachers, resources are limited, and some students just aren't that motivated to learn these languages. Plus, Mandarin still dominates in daily life, so it often seems more "useful."

6.3 The 2030 Bilingual Policy: Goals vs. Reality

In 2017, with expansion regarding bilingualism in Taiwan, Tsai Ing-wen announced a goal from Taiwan's perspective to become fully bilingual in Mandarin and English by 2030. As per her policy, improving English language education and raising bilingual school teaching are viewed as some primary means to make Taiwan more competitive in the global economy.

Implementation Challenges:

- **Teacher Preparedness:** Teachers do not have enough English proficiency and training for content-subject-bilingual teaching, which brings ineffective instruction and potential confusion for the students.
- **Curriculum Design:** The policy was rolled out very fast, at the expense of piloting or curriculum preparation, thereby schools implement teaching of varied quality.
- **Student Readiness:** Students, especially those in rural or underprivileged areas, have difficulty with instruction in English-medium, sometimes at the expense of their comprehension and academic performance.
- **Cultural and Linguistic Tensions:** The focus on Mandarin and English might further marginalize heritage languages which in their turn exacerbate the decline of Hokkien, Hakka, and indigenous languages.

The policy has faced significant backlash from educators, parents, and students. Many argue that the bilingual plan has created additional burdens without delivering promised benefits. Critics also highlight that bilingual education requires more than language proficiency; it demands pedagogical expertise and culturally sensitive approaches, which are currently lacking.

6.4 Why Taiwan? The Significance of This Case

A bilingual policy and its challenges in Taiwan present the opportunity to study language planning in a multilingual society. The policy is a test case with respect to:

- **Cultural Preservation:** To maintain linguistic diversity and thereby cultural heritage, local languages should be protected.
- **Pragmatic Globalization:** Allowing citizens to have English skills for international competitiveness.

Taiwanese experiences, therefore, seem to highlight the difficulty of attempting to implement a top-down

language reform without sufficient consideration to grassroots realities and environmental aspects such as teacher education and community formation.

6.5 Comparative Perspective: Singapore's Language Policy

Singapore's language policy, while having parallels with Taiwan's problems, is quite different both in approaches taken and in results achieved. The Speak Mandarin Campaign, established in 1979, had the pure intention of eliminating Chinese dialects in preference for Mandarin to unify the Chinese population to facilitate economic development.

Outcomes and Challenges:

- Might of Mandarin: The campaign indeed was successful in increasing the use of Mandarin at the expense of other dialects such as Hokkien, Teochew, and Cantonese, which have all seen a steep decline.
- English as the Lingua Franca: English has emerged as the language of education, administration, and business, working as a neutral lingua franca among very distantly related ethnic backgrounds.
- Cultural Identity Issues: But so much that benefits were realized, with dialects dwindling, language barriers became generational, and fears about the loss of cultural heritage began to be voiced by many communities.

Singapore's pragmatic language policy prioritized economic development and social cohesion but sacrificed some linguistic diversity. Taiwan faces a similar dilemma but with the added complexity of balancing three key languages, Mandarin, English, and local heritage languages.

6.6 Language, Identity, and Generational Gaps

Language relates to cultural identity and intergenerational relations in a very profound way. Improper transmission of heritage languages in Taiwan means improper transmission of knowledge of culture and traditions. The preference for Mandarin and English among younger populations reflects social changes but arguably endangers the unique cultural makeup of Taiwan. The Singapore experience affirms language policies can create identity and social cohesion but potentially alienate the elders and create a window of cultural pluralism. Both these societies vividly demonstrate the need for language policies that are sufficiently inclusive to embrace diversity as well as satisfy practical ends.

7. Crossing Borders: The Viability of Singapore's Policy in Taiwan

With globalization, bilingual education has become an essential tool for promoting international competitiveness as well as the preservation of culture. Singapore is often cited as a model, with a top-down language policy oriented toward English and respective mother tongues. However, it is difficult to simply adopt this model in Taiwan. The multilanguage scheme in Taiwan, consisting of Mandarin, Taiwanese Hokkien, Hakka, and Indigenous languages, is representative of rather complicated histories and identities. This paper examines whether the Singapore-style bilingual system can be brought into Taiwan with due consideration of the linguistic, educational, and sociocultural differences.

7.1 Feasibility of Implementing Singapore's Bilingual Policy in Taiwan

Institution of Bilingual Education - Bilingualism in Singapore is institutionalized, with English as the language of governance and commerce, alongside mother tongues. Taiwan may expand bilingual education, with Mandarin and Taiwanese being languages of culture while English is promoted for international communication. In fact, Taiwan's "Bilingual 2030" policy initiative aims at increasing English fluency pursuant to this approach.

Functional Differentiation between Languages - In Singapore, English carries professional and academic standards, while the mother tongue stands personal and cultural. Taiwan may consider Mandarin and Taiwanese for cultural domains, yet for business and higher education, English dominates, in tandem with its focus on international trade.

Thinking of Bilingualism beyond the "Global Language" Paradigm - Bilingualism should not factor English only as a tool of global mobility. Instead, it should accommodate local and indigenous languages' preservation and promotion. This wider view accords language more than just a means of economic activity, making it a concern for identity, culture, and community membership. Taiwan, therefore, may build a more inclusive bilingual model through the balancing of global communication and local language revitalization.

7.2 Limitations and Challenges of Applying Singapore's Policy to Taiwan

Top-Down Imposition of "Official" Mother Tongues - Singapore's top-down approach to enforcing English would face resistance in Taiwan, due to its democratic system and strong cultural identity tied to local languages like Taiwanese and indigenous languages.

English-Dominated Academic Resources and Exam Standards - Shifting to an English-dominated academic environment in Taiwan would require significant investments in resources and training, potentially increasing educational inequality between students with varying levels of English proficiency.

8. Conclusion

After going through the research, it could be concluded that the bilingual education policy that is currently being implemented in Singapore could not be directly implemented in Taiwan due to the vast difference of structural governance, cultural diversity, etc. Although, to say that it would definitely not succeed would also be partially wrong because it would still be possible to implement the policy if Taiwan decided to implement the policy adapting in accordance with Taiwan politic, social, and cultural difference. Different countries would have different needs, so it is fair to conclude that some changes are necessary as well, especially when dealing in terms of education where it is a considerably major aspect in a country's society.

9. References

- "About SCCL." Nanyang Technological University Singapore, Seetha Lakshmi. "Mastering the Mother Tongue." Singteach, 2009. <https://singteach.nie.edu.sg/2009/07/01/issue19-languageed/>
- Baker, C. (2001). Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism. In Multilingual Matters, Bilingual Education and Bilingualism (Third Edition). Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Chan, Amanda. *Tongue-Tied: An Empirical Analysis of Bilingualism and Income in Singapore*. Princeton University DataSpace, 2018. <https://dataspace.princeton.edu/handle/88435/dsp01k930c0766>
- Chan, Chun Sing. "Speech by Minister for Education at the MOE Work Plan Seminar." Ministry of Education Singapore. Accessed May 5, 2024. <https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/speeches>
- Channel NewsAsia. "New Primary 1 Mother Tongue Curriculum Trialled in 35 Schools." *CNA*, April 2023. <https://www.channelnewsasia.com>
- Chen, C.-Y. (2024). *Taiwan's bilingual policy and English language teaching: Quality and challenges in higher education* [Research report]. Taiwan Fellowship. https://taiwanfellowship.ncl.edu.tw/files/scholar_publish/2362-oxwwggeccgsxonz.pdf
- Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA). "Who is eligible for the Mother Tongue Language Training Bonus?" *AskGov*. Last updated December 2024. <https://ask.gov.sg/ecda/questions/cm4mgs6tv00maptrnrbt1s133>
- Educare Tutoring. "The Bilingual Policy in Singapore: Opportunities, Challenges, and Implications for Cultural Heritage and Cognitive Development." *Educare Tutoring*. Last modified December 31, 2024. <https://www.educaretutoring.sg/post/the-bilingual-policy-in-singapore-opportunities-challenges-and-im>

plications

- Gwee, Susan Bee Yen. "Teacher Code-Switching in Singapore Primary Schools: A Corpus-Based Study." National Institute of Education, 2015.
<https://repository.nie.edu.sg/entities/publication/33d470d3-80f1-4f4b-8c13-4b0465f1fac5/details>
<http://www.ater.org.tw/journal/article/9-10/topic/02.pdf>
- Huang, Y.-H. (2022). Taiwan's bilingual nation policy 2030: Concerns and perceptions. *European Journal of Language, Literature and Linguistics*, 8(3), 45-58.
<https://oapub.org/lit/index.php/EJLLL/article/view/363/0>
- Kajee, J. (2023). A critical discourse analysis of Taiwan's Bilingual Nation 2030 policy and its implications for identity. *Journal of Research and Innovation in Higher Education*, 7(1), 87-102.
<https://rihe-journal.com/index.php/rihe/article/download/46/40>
- Kim, Heejung, Andrea D. Flores, Erika K. Sánchez, and Laura M. Gutiérrez. "Parental perceptions of bilingualism and home language vocabulary." *Frontiers in Psychology* (2023).
<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1059298/pdf>
- Kuo, E. (2024, September 5). Is there a future for Chinese dialects in Singapore? ThinkChina - Big Reads, Opinions & Columns on China.
<https://www.thinkchina.sg/society/there-future-chinese-dialects-singapore>
- Kuo, Eddie. "Mother Tongue Education Still Crucial in Multilingual Singapore." *The Straits Times*, August 12, 2024. <https://www.straitstimes.com>
- L Van Grunsven. "Integration Versus Segregation: Ethnic Minorities and Urban Politics in Singapore." PubMed, 1992. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12157772/>
- Li, Lingbo, Min Li, Rui Liu, Yujie Chen, and Xiaolu Wu. "Family language policy and bilingual parenting in multilingual Singapore: latent profiles and its predictors." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 44, no. 1 (2023): 107-124.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01434632.2022.2056190>
- Lin, Tzu-Pin (2020). The future of bilingual education in Taiwan: building a local model
 Ministry of Education Singapore. "Bilingual Education." Accessed May 2024.
<https://www.moe.gov.sg/education/education-system/bilingual-education>
- Ministry of Education Singapore. "Conversational MTL Programme Expanded." Press release, July 2022.
<https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/press-releases>
- Ministry of Education Singapore. "Introduction of MTL SOAR Reading Programme." *MOE News*, 2025.
<https://www.moe.gov.sg>
- Ministry of Education Singapore. "Tamil Reading Pen and E-Learning Tools in Pre-Schools." *ICT Resource Bulletin*, 2021. <https://ict.moe.edu.sg>
- Ministry of Education Singapore. Speech by Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Minister for Education, at the Committee of Supply Debate, 9 March 2005. Government of Singapore, 2005.
<https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/2005030902.htm>
- Ministry of Education, Republic of China (Taiwan). "The Ministry of Education (MOE) led a delegation to Singapore to exchange experiences in promoting digital learning." Ministry of Education Republic of China (Taiwan) Website. Last modified September 16, 2024.
<https://english.moe.gov.tw/cp-117-39729-bf1b9-1.html>
- Ministry of Education, Singapore. "Chinese Language Teacher Training Sponsorship." *Ministry of Education, Singapore*.
<https://www.moe.gov.sg/careers/teaching-scholarships-sponsorships/moe-teaching-sponsorships/chinese-language-teacher>
- Ministry of Education, Singapore. "Learning support in primary schools." *Ministry of Education, Singapore*. Last modified February 24, 2025. <https://www.moe.gov.sg/primary/curriculum/learning-support>
- Lee, S.-H. (2023). Taiwan's bilingual 2030 policy: Challenges for higher education faculty in implementing EMI. *Doctoral dissertation*, Kent State University.
https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/ws/send_file/send?accession=kent1698745277136929&disposit

- [ion=inline](#)
- Ministry of Education, Singapore. "MOE Kindergartens - First Flight." *Ministry of Education, Singapore*.
<https://www.moe.gov.sg/-/media/files/mk/first-flight-14.pdf>
- Ministry of Education, Singapore. "Nurturing Early Learners (NEL) Framework." *Ministry of Education, Singapore*. <https://www.moe.gov.sg/preschool/curriculum>
- National Development Council. (2021). *Bilingual 2030: Blueprint for developing Taiwan into a bilingual nation by 2030* [Policy document]. Executive Yuan, Taiwan.
<https://ws.ndc.gov.tw/Download.ashx?u=LzAwMS9hZG1pbmlzdHJhdG9yLzExL3JlbGZpbGUvMC8xNDUzNC9hODg1MTBkMC04YmQxLTOxZGEtYTgzZC1jOTg0NDM5Y2U3ZmMucGRm&n=QmlsaW5ndWFsIDIwMzAucGRm&icon=>
- National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University. Language Development Centre for Research in Child Development.
<https://www.ntu.edu.sg/nie/centre-for-research-in-child-development/language-development>
- Ng, C. H. (2015). *Understanding the bilingual policy in Singapore through the lens of translanguaging*. *Ritsumeikan Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*, 30, 15–29.
https://www.apu.ac.jp/rcaps/uploads/fckeditor/publications/journal/RJAPS_V30_Ng.pdf
- Ng, C. H. (2018). The bilingual education policy in Singapore: Implications for academic and language development. National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University.
<https://repository.nie.edu.sg/server/api/core/bitstreams/8e85a9aa-a1d7-46c9-bcd9-4ba816174931/content>
- Ng, C. H. (2022). *Language ideologies in Singapore's bilingual policy: Between ideology and reality*. National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University.
<https://repository.nie.edu.sg/server/api/core/bitstreams/9d30c8f6-2804-4ea3-9b98-b3c2f289fd9d/content>
- Noor Hanim Rahmat, Mok Soon Sim, Lau Suk Khin, and Fan Pik Shy. "Experiential Learning in Mandarin Classrooms: The Case for Simulation." Ewa Publishing, January 2015.
<https://www.ewadirect.com/journal/ahr/article/view/20563>
- PCF Sparkletots. "Mother Tongue Language (OneMTL)." *PCF Sparkletots*.
<https://www.pcf.org.sg/sparkletots/curriculum/mother-tongue-language/>
- Prime Minister's Office. "National Day Rally 2024 Speech by PM Lawrence Wong." Prime Minister's Office Singapore. August 20, 2024. <https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/National-Day-Rally-2024>
- Sidney, J. (2024). Implementation and challenges of the 2030 bilingual policy in Taiwan: International students' perspectives on EMI courses. *Unpublished master's thesis*, Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages, Taiwan.
https://c030.wzu.edu.tw/datas/upload/files/2024%E7%95%A2%E6%A5%AD%E8%AB%96%E6%96%87/1110209507_Jennifer_Sidney.pdf
- Sim, Cheryl. "Bilingual Policy." Singapore Infopedia, 2016.
<https://www.nlb.gov.sg/main/article-detail?cmsuuid=82fbbca5-e8e2-40cc-b944-fbb2bd2367>
- Singapore Department of Statistics. *General Household Survey Reports, 1980–2020*. Accessed April 2025.
<https://www.singstat.gov.sg>
- Tamil Murasu. "Helping My Son Speak Our Language Again: The MTL SOAR Effect." *Tamil Murasu*, October 2024.
- Tan, T. (2023, November 20). *More students expected to take Higher Mother Tongue from 2026 under new PSLE scoring system*. The New Paper.
<https://www.tnp.sg/news/singapore/higher-mother-tongue-more-students-2026>
- The Straits Times. "10 quotes from Mr Lee Kuan Yew's 'awesome' 1977 speech in Parliament." *The Straits Times*. Last modified March 26, 2015.
<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/10-quotes-from-mr-lee-kuan-yews-awesome-1977-speech-in-parliament>
- TODAY Online. "Can Bilingualism Survive the Rise of English at Home?" Interview with Dr. Susan Xu Yun.

TODAY Online, July 2023. <https://www.todayonline.com>

Wang, L.-M. (2023). Navigating Taiwan's Bilingual 2030 policy: Teachers' perspectives on bilingual education and English medium instruction. *Journal of Multilingual Education Research*, 14(2), 45-67.

<https://research.library.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1211&context=jmer>

Yak, Jessie, Lim, Siew Yeen. "Speak Mandarin Campaign." Singapore Infopedia, 2013.

<https://www.nlb.gov.sg/main/article-detail?cmsuuid=226f348a-2170-4719-9f45-ef57755e8cb8>

Yang, Chao, Xin Wei, and Lifan Xue. "Application and Effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language." Ewa Publishing, January 2025.

<https://www.ewadirect.com/journal/ahr/article/view/20563>

