English as a Subject in Basic Education (ESBE) in ASEAN: A Comparative Study

Subhan Zein
Foreword

Around the world through our ‘English Language Teaching in Education’ global programme the British Council supports Governments, Ministries of Education, universities, schools and individual teachers to improve the standards of the teaching, learning and assessment of English where it is taught as a mandatory or elective subject in formal education systems.

Our support is delivered through research and insight, stakeholder engagement, capacity building and continuous professional development, assessment, curriculum and resources. Everything we do is designed to bring about positive and sustainable improvements to the teaching, learning and assessment of English using evidence based, inclusive approaches and appropriate, context led educational technologies.

“English as a Subject in Basic Education (ESBE) in ASEAN: A Comparative Study” is regional-based research report funded by the British Council. It is a key element of our ‘English Language Teaching in Education’ programme in East Asia, which aims to bring transformational change in English language policy and practice. The overall purpose and impact of this research monograph is to contribute to education systems that support inclusive, quality teaching, learning and assessment of English.

This research monograph specifically focuses on English as a subject in basic education (ESBE) in the education systems of the member states of Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). The member states are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. The term ‘ESBE’ is used in this monograph to cover the teaching of English as a subject in basic education, which encompasses primary and secondary education in public schools. The monograph takes a comparative approach to the policies and practices concerning ESBE in all ASEAN member states.

The principal researcher, and author of this monograph is Subhan Zein. Subhan Zein, PhD teaches at Australian National University (ANU). He is the author of Language Policy in Superdiverse Indonesia (Routledge, 2020). He is Asia TEFL Director of Research Publications, and has recently been named Australia’s Top Researcher in English Language and Literature.

I would like to sincerely thank Subhan Zein, and all research team members, for producing this comprehensive, insightful research paper. Drawing on official documents, published studies and extensive qualitative and quantitative research data, this monograph provides deep insight, description and analysis of English as a subject in basic education (ESBE) in the education systems of the ten ASEAN member states.

Improving English language provision in basic education is an objective which requires whole system change, involving change at the level of education policy, school leadership, teacher education, teacher development, and support for the development of curriculum, teaching materials and resources and assessment systems. This research monograph covers all these areas and includes detailed policy, practice and research recommendations.

I highly recommend this research monograph to teachers, academics, teacher educators and policy makers concerned with understanding and improving the quality of English language teaching, learning and assessment in ASEAN.

Alison Barrett MBE
Director Education & Society, East Asia
British Council
This welcome monograph provides much-needed research on English as a subject in basic education (ESBE) in the education systems of the ten Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states. The cultural, ethnic, political and economic diversity of the region has led to considerable differences in the status and role of English in the region. Drawing on official documents, published studies and research data, considerable insights are provided into English in diverse contexts. Different concepts of ESBE are explored together with challenges in implementation, issues concerning teachers and teacher education, and the role of ESBE in regional integration. English is discussed in relation to national languages, indigenous languages and other foreign languages. The research is current and includes a discussion of the increased use of educational technologies. Valuable research directions and policy recommendations are given. Teachers, scholars and policy makers will find well-presented data and theoretically grounded interpretations, making this an important resource for understanding the complex dynamics of English in education systems in ASEAN.

Azirah Hashim
Professor, Universiti Malaya, Malaysia, Senior Fellow/Alexander von Humboldt Fellow, Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies, University of Freiburg, Germany

This research-based monograph is densely packed with descriptions and analyses of ESBE in ASEAN countries. I strongly recommend the book to students, teachers, academics, teacher educators and policy makers. The methods used to collect and analyse data in this book are clearly described. The book may help teach students and language education scholars on how to triangulate policy documents, statistics, published studies and research data in looking into policy issues and how to report them in a compact publication like this one. In addition to an insightful discussion on language ideologies, the book also contains an enlightening examination of the problems in implementing ESBE throughout the ten ASEAN nations, including concerns relating to ESBE instructors and teacher education, as well as the function of ESBE in the context of ASEAN integration. In a nutshell, this book is a comprehensive resource for anyone interested in English language education in ASEAN.

Fuad Abdul Hamied
Former President of Asia TEFL, Professor of language education at Indonesia University of Education, Indonesia, Executive Director of AsTEN (Association of Southeast Asia Teacher Education Network) Teacher Education Quality Assurance Agency
About the author

Subhan Zein, PhD teaches at Australian National University (ANU). He is the author of *Language Policy in Superdiverse Indonesia* (Routledge, 2020) and *Country Profiles: English as a subject in basic education (ESBE) in Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam: Recommendations for policy and research* (British Council, 2022). He is Asia TEFL Director of Research Publications and Principal Investigator of the British Council’s English across ASEAN Education Systems Scoping Research (2020-2021). He has recently been named Australia’s Top Researcher in English Language and Literature.

He is the lead editor of *English for Young Learners in Asia: Challenges and Directions for Teacher Education* (Routledge, 2022), *Early Language Learning Policy in the 21st Century: An International Perspective* (Springer, 2021), *Early Language Learning and Teacher Education: International Research and Practice* (Multilingual Matters, 2019) and *English Language Teacher Preparation in Asia: Policy, Research and Practice* (Routledge, 2018), and he is also the editor of *Teacher Education for English as a Lingua Franca: Perspectives from Indonesia* (Routledge, 2018). His works have appeared in refereed journals including *Language Teaching, Professional Development in Education, Journal of Education for Teaching: International Research and Pedagogy, International Journal of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education and Applied Linguistics Review.*
I heard an announcement that my research project proposal was accepted for the British Council's *English across ASEAN Education Systems Scoping Research* in early December 2020. From mid-December 2020 to late January 2021, I worked with a number of people to collect data for the project. Then I began the solitary, intensive process of writing this monograph, which formally ended on 30 March 2021. Though the monograph is a sole-authored work, it is by no means an individual's contribution. There are a number of people who assisted me in the completion of the research project reported in this monograph, and I would like to thank them accordingly.

My thanks are due to all my research team members: Associate Professor Le Van Canh, Dr Sovannarith Lim, Professor Marilu Rañosa-Madrunio and Associate Professor Juliana Othman who represent Vietnam, Cambodia, the Philippines and Malaysia, respectively. I am grateful for their contributions to this study, as they managed to collect data in their respective countries of expertise amid their busy schedule while facing the day-to-day challenges associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. They provided me with feedback on my analysis of overall data. Further, I benefitted from their comments on parts of various chapters concerning their countries of expertise. In some circumstances where data concerning various research questions was lacking or ambiguous explanations were found, I also asked for their responses, hence their being additional participants in this study. Special thanks goes to Dr Khin Khin Aye not only for all the tasks she did above but also for her meticulous, useful feedback on all chapters in this monograph. Her willingness to assist me beyond her duties in this project while facing the uncertain, highly dramatic moment of her nation (Myanmar) transitioning to another military rule is exemplary.

I also would like to thank consultants who assisted me in this project, Dr Kristof Savski and Associate Professor Noor Azam Haji-Othman. They provided input on Thailand and Brunei Darussalam and helped connect me with participants in the two countries. The input I received from Dr Sue Garton was also useful and I am grateful for her assistance.

I would like to thank my research assistant, Ke Ma. I am grateful for her undying support and contributions to this study in terms of interview transcriptions, checking references and conducting literature review. Her flexibility and strong commitment to contributing are two important factors in the overall management of the project.

Several people were involved in the collection of photographs included in this monograph. They are (in the alphabetical order of their countries): 1) Sotheavy Lim (Cambodia); 2) Souksakhone Sengsouliya (Laos); 3) Koay Kia Hooi (Malaysia); 4) Daw Mya Lai Win, Daw Seint Seint, Daw Myint Myint Khine and Daw Cho Cho Lwin (Myanmar); 5) Marilou A Morta and Mary Ann Jabson (The Philippines); 6) Katharine Sornsaensuk and Sonthida Keyuravong (Thailand); and 7) Le van Canh (Vietnam). I would like to sincerely thank them for their dedication, especially those who, without complaining, provided me with the photographs at the last minute. I also would like to thank Associate Professor Pornapit Darasawang for her input on English contact hours in basic education in Thailand.

Next, I would like to thank all respondents who participated in this research project. Their names are listed in the alphabetical order of their countries: 1) Brunei Darussalam: Associate Professor James McLellan (Universiti Brunei Darussalam) and Associate Professor Noor Azam Haji-Othman (Universiti Brunei Darussalam); 2) Cambodia: Sopean Chan (Director, Department of Primary Education), Vuthy Chea (Deputy Director, Department of Secondary Education), Tola Leang (Teacher Trainer/Educator, National Institute of Education) and Dr Sovannarith Lim (Royal University of Phnom Penh); 3) Laos: Dr Souksakhone Sengsouliya (Teacher educator, National University of Laos) and Manoly Dongvan (Foreign Language Resource Centre, Ministry of Education); 4) Indonesia: Professor Didi Sukyadi (Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia), Professor Emi Emilia (Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia), Ms Hanifah Utami (Direktorat Jenderal Guru dan Tenaga Kependidikan); 5) Malaysia: Dr T Vanitha Thanabalan (Head of Assessment and Evaluation of English Language Teaching Centre), Professor Zuraidah Mohd Don (Department of Applied Linguistics, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia), Saiful Azlan (Special Officer, Ministry of Education), Dr Juliana Othman.
I also would like to express my gratitude to representatives of a few organisations who participated in this study: 1) SEAMEO RELC: Dr Alvin Pang (Dean), Dr Marie Yeo (Senior Language Specialist) and Dr Joel Meniado (Language Specialist); 2) SEAMEO SEAMOLEC: Cahya Kusuma Ratih (Research and Development Manager) and Fazhar Restu Fauzi (Interim Deputy Director for Programme); 3) UNESCO: Kyungah Bang (Programme Officer). They have provided useful data for this study.

Finally, my gratitude goes to the British Council. I would like to thank Colm Downes and Kathleen Zhong who gave me this invaluable opportunity to contribute to the academia in a research project which I am passionate about. Without their trust, collegial support and useful suggestions, this project would not have been possible. I also thank Faith Luo for assisting me with the finance matters of the project.

Attempts have been made to ensure the accuracy of information contained in this monograph. Any shortcomings that remain are mine alone.
### Glossary

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of South East Asian Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEC</td>
<td>ASEAN Economic Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASTEN</td>
<td>ASEAN Teacher Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELF</td>
<td>English as a Lingua Franca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMI</td>
<td>English as a Medium of Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESBE</td>
<td>English as a Subject in Basic Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTB-MLE</td>
<td>Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBMMBI</td>
<td>Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia dan Memperkukuh Bahasa Inggeris [To uphold Bahasa Malaysia, to strengthen the English language policy]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEAMEO RELC</td>
<td>South East Asia Ministers of Education Organization Regional Language Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEAMEO SEAMOLEC</td>
<td>South East Asia Ministers of Education Organization Regional Open Learning Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPN21</td>
<td>Sistem Pendidikan Negara Abad ke-21 (SPN21) [National Education System for the 21st Century]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TESOL</td>
<td>Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Chapter 1

Introduction to ESBE in ASEAN education systems
1.1. Introduction

The English across ASEAN Education Systems Scoping Research is a regional-based study funded by the British Council. It is one of the thematic priorities of the British Council’s work in English as a subject in formal education, which aims to bring transformational change in English language policy and practice.

This monograph reports on the findings drawn from the English across ASEAN Education Systems Scoping Research study, which was conducted from December 2020 to March 2021. The focus of the study was English as a subject in basic education (ESBE) in the education systems of the member states of Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). The member states are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. The term ‘ESBE’ is used in this monograph to cover the teaching of English as a subject in basic education, which encompasses primary and secondary education in public schools. Although there are some overlaps, the study reported in this monograph did not focus on English a medium of instruction (EMI), which is found in public and private schools across ASEAN nations. Rather, the study focused on the teaching of English as a subject in primary and secondary schools in the public education sector. There are no fixed, universal years of basic education in this study, because every ASEAN nation has its own system specifying how long basic education spans. For example, basic education is nine years in Cambodia, but it is 12 years in other countries such as Malaysia, Myanmar and Singapore. Details of the length of basic education in each ASEAN nation as well as hours of English instruction are provided in Chapter 4.

This monograph takes a comparative approach to the policies and practices concerning ESBE in all ASEAN member states. Readers seeking a brief, individual analysis of ESBE policies and practices in ASEAN member states are welcome to refer to another research monograph of mine. It covers eight ASEAN member states (i.e. Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam) (Zein, 2022).

This chapter introduces the reader to ESBE in ASEAN. It starts with an overview of ASEAN, English and ESBE. It continues with a description of sociolinguistic situation in ASEAN, particularly examining the status and use of English within ASEAN member states’ diverse linguistic ecologies. The chapter then outlines the objectives of this research study. Finally, it provides an overview of the monograph.

1.2. ASEAN, English and ESBE

In order to understand ESBE within ASEAN it is first necessary to examine the ASEAN context and the place of English in the Southeast Asian region.

ASEAN is a regional inter-governmental organisation of Southeast Asian nations, founded on 08 August 1967. It currently comprises ten Southeast Asian nations, namely, in order of their joining: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Singapore (all 1967), Brunei Darussalam (1984), Vietnam (1995), Laos and Myanmar (1997), and Cambodia (1999). Originally founded as an umbrella organisation which aims to promote peace and stability, ASEAN also aspires to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development as well as to promote collaboration and mutual assistance among its member states (ASEAN, 2021).
Geographically speaking, ASEAN member states are located in Southeast Asia. Other countries surrounding ASEAN member states are Australia, China, East Timor, Hong Kong, India, Papua New Guinea and Taiwan.

A region of tropical climate, Southeast Asia has a total area of around 4.5 million km². Indonesia holds the largest land area of 1,904,569 km² while Singapore has the smallest land area of 724 km². The total population in Southeast Asia nearly reaches 700 million people. Indonesia is the most populous member state with a population of around 270 million people, while Brunei Darussalam is the least populous with a population of less than half a million people. Life expectancy in Southeast Asia is fairly high, with Singapore and Thailand having the two highest levels of life expectancy for both males and females. Further, Southeast Asia is a region of extreme contrasts, home to some of the world’s most economically advanced and globally competitive nations. Brunei Darussalam and Singapore are among the wealthiest nations in the world, with a GDP per capita of $31,086 and $65,233, respectively. However, Southeast Asia is also a region where one finds some of the least developed nations in the world (e.g. Laos, Myanmar) (see Table 1.1).
With the exception of Thailand, all ASEAN nations in Southeast Asia share a common history of direct colonial subjugation. Even so, the colonial experience is not uniform, neither is it homogenous. Brunei was colonised by the British; Malaysia, Myanmar and Singapore were colonised by the British and the Japanese; the Philippines by the Spanish and the Americans; Indonesia by the Dutch, Japanese, British and Portuguese; and Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos by the French. Further, major religions and faiths of the world are predominantly found among ASEAN member states. Islam is the dominant religion in Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia; Catholicism flourishes in the Philippines; Buddhism prospers in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand; and folk religions influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism are central in Vietnam. Each of the ten ASEAN nations is also linguistically diverse, making Southeast Asia one of the most linguistically diverse places in the world. It is estimated that in Southeast Asia there are 1,476 languages, which constitute nearly two-thirds of the total 2,341 languages in Asia (see Table 1.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASEAN</th>
<th>Land area (km²)</th>
<th>Population (2021)</th>
<th>GDP Per Capita (2020)</th>
<th>Life expectancy (2020)</th>
<th>Main religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brunei Darussalam</td>
<td>5,765</td>
<td>437,479</td>
<td>$31,086</td>
<td>77.64</td>
<td>Islam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>181,035</td>
<td>16,718,965</td>
<td>$1,643</td>
<td>72.69</td>
<td>Buddhism</td>
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<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>1,904,569</td>
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<td>7,275,560</td>
<td>$2,534</td>
<td>70.79</td>
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<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>331,338</td>
<td>32,365,999</td>
<td>$11,414</td>
<td>78.78</td>
<td>Islam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>676,577.2</td>
<td>54,409,800</td>
<td>$1,407</td>
<td>70.81</td>
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<td>Philippines</td>
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<td>Thailand</td>
<td>513,120</td>
<td>69,799,978</td>
<td>$7,806</td>
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<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>331,210</td>
<td>97,338,579</td>
<td>$2,715</td>
<td>79.85</td>
<td>Folk religion</td>
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</table>

Table 1.1. ASEAN member states basic statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member State</th>
<th>Main/Official Language(s)</th>
<th>Total Languages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brunei Darussalam</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>Khmer</td>
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<td>Indonesia</td>
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<td>Laos</td>
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<td>Malaysia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>Burmese</td>
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<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Filipino, English</td>
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<td>Singapore</td>
<td>English, Mandarin, Tamil, Malay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 1.2. Languages in ASEAN member states
ASEAN has made English an official working language for communication among its member states. This has been done particularly to anticipate the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015, which set a major milestone in the Southeast Asian economic integration agenda, offering market opportunities of US$ 2.6 trillion or the seventh largest in the world (ASEAN, 2021). There are nearly 1,500 individual living languages and 12 official languages in ASEAN, but its member states have opted for a language that is ‘non-native’ to the region instead (i.e. English). Article 34 of the 2009 English Charter reads, “The working language of ASEAN shall be English”. In what is probably one of the most intriguing language policies, English has now become the official language of ten nations which are not English-speaking nations as traditionally defined. Kirkpatrick (2017:08) explains, “Possible reasons for its universal acceptance as the sole working language include its apparently relatively ‘neutral’ status and the perception of English being crucial in the drive for modernisation and participation in globalisation.” The argument that ASEAN has chosen English as its working language because of its neutral status may be subject to questioning given the historic colonial ties among some of ASEAN member states, which were once colonies of either the United Kingdom or the United States. However, as data from this study later shows, it is undeniable that ASEAN member states put a premium on English because they consider it as the language of globalisation. ASEAN seems to have officially endorsed English as its working language because of its use as an effective means of communication among its member states and as a means of preparation to participate in the global world (cf. Kirkpatrick, 2017; Sagoo, McLellan and Wood, 2013). The official endorsement of English not only paves the way for intra-regional mobilities of information, goods and human labour facilitated through the ASEAN infrastructures, but also accentuates the need to incorporate English into ASEAN member states’ respective education systems. In the past two decades, English has become a regular feature in the educational curricula of ASEAN nations. Language policies across ASEAN member states vary but they tend to show commonality. As data from this study shows, ASEAN member states have the same status planning in that they officially value English highly. All ASEAN member states make English as the first foreign language, or the most important language after their national languages. ASEAN member states also tend to prioritise English as the most important foreign language subject in the curriculum. Consequently, across ASEAN member states it is common to find English in formal education. ESBE has permeated the mainstream education systems of ASEAN nations where the English language is included at two levels of basic education: primary and secondary. Language education policies on ESBE (henceforth ESBE policies) are observed in ASEAN in the past two decades. In Vietnam, for example, English was a minor foreign language compared to Russian, but an ‘English language fever’ meant that a 12-year, national, well-funded educational initiative began in 2008 to promote English in primary schools (Canh, 2007). In Cambodia, Laos and Thailand, the national languages (i.e. Khmer, Lao, Thai) largely remain the only languages of literacy and instruction at all levels of education (Kosonen, 2014), but the teaching of English in primary education is fast gaining traction in that the language is introduced as a compulsory subject in grades 5, 3 and 1, respectively (Kirkpatrick, 2017). Even in Myanmar, where a previously implemented ‘closed-door policy’ meant the exclusion of English in its primary timetable, in 1981 the government made it a compulsory subject from kindergarten onwards. The Myanmar government has also introduced English to grade one of primary school and institutionalised it as a medium of instruction for teaching science and economics in secondary schools (Fen, 2005; Kirkpatrick, 2017). Nowadays, with the exception of Indonesia, all ASEAN nations officially include English in the primary curricula, and all unanimously incorporate English into the secondary school curricula. Prior to delving into aspects pertinent to ESBE appearing in subsequent chapters, it is necessary to understand the sociolinguistic situation in ASEAN. Complete understanding of language education policies requires understanding of the sociolinguistic situation where the policies are implemented. The sociolinguistic situation in ASEAN is discussed in the following section.
1.3. Sociolinguistic situation in ASEAN

The international spread of English has been regularly described in terms of three concentric circles, comprising Inner Circle, Outer Circle and Expanding Circle (see Kachru, 1985, 1992). Inner Circle includes countries such as the UK, USA, Canada and Australia where English is used as a native language; Outer Circle includes former colonies such as India and Singapore where English is used as a second language; and Expanding Circle includes countries such as Egypt and Japan where English is mainly learnt as a foreign language. Although it is used widely, this Kachruvian model has been criticised for: 1) its reliance on geographical location and focus on the history of the spread of English, rather than its use and identification by speakers of the language (Jenkins, 2009); 2) its failure to consider the grey areas between the Inner and Outer Circles, and between Outer and Expanding Circles (Jenkins, 2009); and 3) its inadequacy to recognise the increasing importance of English in Expanding Circle nations (Kirkpatrick, 2007).

Despite the limitations, Kachruvian circles have served as “the most useful and influential model of the spread of English” (Jenkins, 2009:18). The Kachruvian circles are also useful to broadly categorise ASEAN nations in terms of sociolinguistic differences, rather than other categorisations (e.g. in terms of politics, geography) which are not relevant to the purpose of this study. The following sections describe the sociolinguistic situations in ASEAN nations belonging to two Kachruvian circles: Outer and Expanding Circles. The sections describe the linguistic ecology of each ASEAN member state while examining the status of English, its use in society and how it is included in basic education.

1.3.1. ASEAN Outer Circle nations

This section provides an overview of the sociolinguistic situation across ASEAN nations where English has an official or semi-official status and serves a functional purpose in the administrative, educational and social domains. The nations are Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore.

In terms of Kachru’s (1985) three-circle classification, these nations may be categorised as ASEAN Outer Circle nations. The nations are historically linked in that they were colonies of English-speaking countries, with Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore being colonised by Great Britain and the Philippines by the United States. Further, the categorisation as ASEAN Outer Circle nations is apt to their norm-developing nature. This is a term which, following Kachru (1985), refers to nations where norms of English are developing into distinct, localised linguistic varieties (cf. the categorisation of ASEAN Outer Circle countries in Kirkpatrick, 2012; Low, 2020). In ASEAN norm-developing nations, indigenised varieties of English have emerged and nativised. They have also endonormatively stabilised in that there is a common linguistic homogeneity, and new linguistic forms have been codified. Therefore, we have come to know Brunei English (McLellan and Haji-Othman, 2012), Singapore English (Leimgruber, 2011), Malaysian English (Hashim and Tan, 2012) and Philippine English (Dayag, 2012). In this study, these indigenised varieties refer to shared features among different varieties spoken by the multi-ethnic people living in Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines. They do not mean, for example, that Malaysian English is a single variety, as variations exist given the first language of the Malaysian people, their educational background, socio-economic status, etc.
One of the most prominent ASEAN Outer Circle nations is the Kingdom of Brunei Darussalam. Brunei, located in the north of the island of Kalimantan (also called Borneo), is by no means a homogenous society. It has an estimated 15 living languages, three of which are endangered (Eberhard, et al., 2019). A nation of less than half a million people, Brunei is multi-ethnic. Malays constitute around two-thirds of the population, followed by Chinese at around 11 per cent. Around six per cent of the population consists of indigenous peoples of Brunei including Belait, Bisaya, Dusun, Kedayan, Murut and Tutong, as well as those indigenous to Kalimantan, which are part of the Bruneian citizenry, namely Iban, Mukah and Penan (Eberhard, et al., 2019; Jones, 2009). The rest consists of a mix of other nationalities such as those from India and the Philippines as well as Western expatriates. The diverse population of Brunei is united by the national language, Standard Malay, which was officialised by the Bruneian Constitution in 1959. The designation of Standard Malay as the official language means that it sits on top of Brunei’s linguistic ecology over other varieties including Brunei Malay, Kedayan, Kampong Ayer and Bazaar Malay (Abdullah, 2004; Sercombe, 2014).

English is the \textit{de facto} second language in Brunei, one with a very strong position in society and a massive presence in the linguistic landscape (Coluzzi, 2011). English is also used pervasively in the mass media and is the preferred language of inter-ethnic communication, particularly among the educated elites (Jones, 2012). The bilingual education policy embraced by Brunei means that both Standard Malay and English are designated as the media of instruction in public schools. English is also taught as a subject (Jones, 2009; Haji-Othman, 2005). Further, an indigenised variety of English, called Brunei English, has developed in Brunei. An increasing number of Bruneians have come to recognise Brunei English as distinct from neighbouring Southeast Asian Englishes (McLellan and Haji-Othman, 2012).
Malaysia consists of around 32 million people. The nation has two parts separated from each other by the Natuna Sea: Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Kalimantan. These areas prove to be a highly diverse linguistic ecology. They are home to 133 living languages, 95 of which are endangered and 13 dying (Eberhard, et al., 2019). The largest ethno-linguistic group in Malaysia, the Malays, represent around 68 per cent of the population, which means that Malay is the largest spoken language in the nation. The Malays are followed by the Chinese (about 25 per cent) who speak Chinese linguistic varieties (e.g. Cantonese, Fuzhou, Hakka, Hainan, Hokkien, Mandarin) and the Indians (about seven per cent) who speak a variety of Indian languages (e.g. Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu). Others are indigenous populations speaking indigenous languages (e.g. Dusun, Iban, Kadazandusun) (Eberhard, et al., 2019; Hashim, 2009; Haji Omar, 2012). The Malays were the backbone of the Malaysian society in its early foundation, and the Malaysian government through the Constitution of 1957 stipulated Standard Malay as the official and national language. English was made the second official language after Malay.

Nowadays, the government of Malaysia officialises the use of Standard Malay as the medium of instruction at both national primary and secondary schools (Haji Omar, 2012; Kosonen, 2017). In society, English is held positively among the younger Malaysian generation, as it is in education. English holds a prominent role as it is an important subject and is used as a medium of instruction in some selected schools. Malaysia experimented with an EMI policy from 2003 to 2012. However, the policy was reverted due to complaints and harsh criticisms from teachers and students in rural areas who experienced difficulties using English for teaching and learning (Pillai and Ong, 2018; Idrus, et al., 2019). Finally, Malaysian English as a distinct indigenised variety of English emerging in Malaysia has been identified in the literature. It has been recognised as encompassing all the sub-varieties of Englishes spoken by Malaysians (Hashim and Tan, 2012).
The Philippines is an archipelago consisting of 7,641 islands with a territory encompassing 300,000 km². About 106 million people in the Philippines are speakers of 183 individual living languages, which makes the nation the second most linguistically diverse in the ASEAN region after Indonesia. Unfortunately, 28 of the languages in the Philippines are endangered while 11 others are dying (Eberhard, et al., 2019). Several languages such as Bicol, Cebuano, Illongo, Ilocano and Tagalog are spoken by millions of people while the rest are spoken by less than a million people. Many of the languages of the Philippines serve as regional lingua francas for inter-ethnic communication in respective areas, but only one is designated as the national language. According to the Constitution of 1987, Filipino, which has its linguistic basis in Tagalog, is the national and official language (Kosonen, 2017).

The Philippine Constitution also stipulates English as a second official language. English is learnt as a subject in formal education, and as an official language it is also used as a medium of instruction. Along with Tagalog, English used to be one of the two media of instruction in education. However, the implementation of the Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education policy means that English remains as a subject while being retained as a medium of instruction along with Tagalog and 19 indigenous languages (Raños-Madrurinio, et al., 2016). Meanwhile, the Philippines also has an indigenised variety of English, called Philippine English. According to Dayag (2012:91), Philippine English “is a legitimate nativized variety of English. It is the language used by Filipinos in controlling domains such as science and technology, the judiciary, the legislature, bureaucracy, higher education, scholarly discourse, and the like.”
Singapore has a population of nearly six million people living in an area of around 728 km² situated between Indonesia and Malaysia. A metropolitan city-state, Singapore has 24 languages, nine of which are endangered and two dying (Eberhard, et al., 2019). Overall, there are three main ethnic groups in Singapore: Chinese, Malays and Indians, which constitute 74.3 per cent, 13.5 per cent, and 9.0 per cent of the total population, respectively (Department of Statistics, 2020). The largest ethnic majority, the Chinese, is by no means homogenous, as they speak different varieties of Chinese such as Cantonese, Hakka, Hokkien, Hainan and Mandarin (Eberhard, et al., 2019). Within such a sociolinguistic situation, English plays an important role. The Constitution of 1965 recognises the functional allocation of Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and English in the local linguistic landscape and therefore designates them as four official languages. Of these languages, English is the dominant language of the nation, serving as language of administration and lingua franca in inter-ethnic communication. English is also an important school subject and is the sole medium of instruction in basic education (Low, 2020; Tan, 2014). Finally, like other ASEAN Outer Circle nations, Singapore also has an indigenised variety of English, called Singapore English. It consists of two forms: Standard Singapore English and Colloquial Singapore English, known as Singlish. Standard Singapore English is mostly used by educated Singaporeans in formal contexts, while Singlish has become the actual home language of a notable portion of children who enter formal education (Wee, 2014; see also Wee, 2018).
This section provides an overview of the sociolinguistic situation in Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam.

Of those countries, only Thailand was not colonised. What unites the nations together is the fact that none officially designates English as a second language. This is true even in Myanmar, which was once a colony of Britain. In Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, English is mainly learnt as a foreign language in schools and is generally used in relatively limited domains such as tourism, trade and international joint ventures, although the depth and range of use varies considerably (Kirkpatrick, 2017; Low, 2020). Further, these nations are norm-dependent (see Kachru, 1985), meaning that they depend on the norms originally produced by the English ‘native speakers’ of the Inner Circle (e.g. UK, USA). Unlike ASEAN norm-developing nations, which reproduce and develop their own ‘Englishes’ and are known as Outer Circle nations (see Section 1.3.3), norm-dependent ASEAN nations have no categorically distinct varieties of English. For this reason, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam are categorised as ASEAN Expanding Circle nations.

1 Assertions have been made with regard to the presence of “Thai English” (Trakulkasemsuk, 2012), “Myanmar English” (Aye, 2020) and “Indonesian English” (Endarto, 2020). However, it is doubtful whether these are categorically distinct indigenised varieties of English and whether they have endonormatively stabilised. In order for indigenised varieties of English to be recognised as distinct, they have to be endonormatively stabilised (see Schneider, 2003). More evidence is needed to identify whether they have emerged as distinct localised varieties of English the way other ASEAN English varieties such as Singapore English and Brunei English have (see Low, 2020; Zein, Sukyadi, Hamied and Lengkanawati, 2020, on brief discussion on Indonesian English). The most that can possibly be said about them is that they portray unique features of English, at least phonologically (see Aye, 2020, for discussion on Myanmar English).
Cambodia is an ethno-linguistically diverse nation with a population of nearly 17 million people. There are 27 living languages in Cambodia, seven of which are endangered and six others dying (Eberhard, et al., 2019). The main ethnic group is Khmer, which makes up around 90 per cent of the Cambodian population. Minority ethnic groups include the Cham, Chinese and Vietnamese, although they remain larger in size in comparison to small indigenous communities living in the remote highlands of the country. The Khmer language as the mother tongue of the largest ethnic group is designated as the national and official language, as stipulated by the Constitution of 1993 (Eberhard, et al., 2019; Kosonen, 2017). Khmer is also the main medium of instruction in basic education, although indigenous languages such as Brao, Bunong, Kavet, Krung and Tampuan may be used as media of instruction in Grades 1-3 in schools in north eastern Cambodia where most indigenous communities reside (Kosonen, 2007; Lim, 2021).

Within the complex linguistic ecology of Cambodia, English used to be forbidden and learnt in secrecy (Pit and Roth, 2003). However, the situation became more favourable towards English in the 1990s after Cambodia opened up to the world following the arrival of international aid after the post-war general election (Kosonen, 2019; Tweed and Som, 2015). Accordingly, Cambodian language policy stipulates the place of ESBE. The Cambodian government made English compulsory in secondary schools in 1997 (Pit and Roth, 2003). English in Cambodian basic education means that it holds an integral place in the primary and secondary curricula, being taught to students from Grade 4 of primary school onwards (Ang, Anderson and Chhum, 2015; MoEYS, 2015a).
The Republic of Indonesia is the most linguistically diverse nation in the ASEAN region and the most populous with nearly 270 million people. Second in the world only after Papua New Guinea, the linguistic ecology of Indonesia consists of 707 individual living languages by one count (Eberhard, et al., 2019) or 718 languages as surveyed by Indonesia’s language planning agency, the Badan Bahasa (Badan Bahasa, 2019). Unfortunately, records show that 265 of these languages are endangered and 75 of them dying (Eberhard, et al., 2019; see also Zein, 2020, Chapter 5). The main language of the nation is Indonesian, locally known as Bahasa Indonesia, which serves as the national language. Indonesian is also the official language in public services, government administration and is used as medium of instruction in education. Major indigenous languages such as Javanese, Sundanese, Batak and Balinese have the official role as media of instruction in the first three years of primary education. This is in stark contrast to regional lingua francas (RLFs) such as Tukang Besi, as well as small, locally used indigenous languages such as Towei, both having no official role as media of instruction (Zein, 2020).

Within Indonesia’s complex linguistic ecology, English is one of the “foreign languages” along with Arabic, French, German and Mandarin (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Mistar, 2005). The status of English as a foreign language remains in basic education as per the Revised 2013 Curriculum, although recent assertions have been made for the status of English as a second language (Ariatna, 2016) and a lingua franca (Jayanti and Norahmi, 2014; Zein, 2018a, 2018b). In Indonesia, ESBE is officialised at secondary level, but not at primary level. For decades leading to 2013, English was part of primary education. The policy then stipulated English as a local content subject, allowing schools to teach English depending on local needs (Zein, 2017a). However, the implementation of the Revised 2013 Curriculum means that English is removed from the primary curriculum and may only be taught as an extra-curricular subject, a policy which remains to the present day.
Laos, populated by around seven million people, is a highly diverse linguistic ecology. It is estimated that there are 85 living languages spoken throughout the country, 26 of which are endangered and five dying (Eberhard, et al., 2019). Lao is the majority ethnic language and there are nine other indigenous languages spoken by more than 100,000 people, each constituting around two per cent of the national population (Kosonen, 2007). The Laos People’s Democratic Republic (PDR) socialist government stipulates Lao as the language in education and it has been reluctant to allow the use of indigenous languages as media of instruction – an issue widely critiqued in the literature (e.g. Cincotta-Segi, 2011; Kosonen, 2007, 2009, 2017). Within such linguistic and educational contexts, French and Russian used to play an important role in Laos society. However, English has surpassed them both. English is now considered as the most important foreign language in Laotian society and the most preferred in education (Achren and Kittiphanh, 2020; Kounnavongsa, 2015). It is of no surprise that the government has made English compulsory in basic education. ESBE has become a regular feature in Laos basic education, as language policy allows children to learn English as early as Grade 3 (Achren and Kittiphanh, 2020; Low, 2020).
Myanmar is a nation with less than 55 million people. It has a highly complex sociolinguistic profile with 120 living languages spread across the country. At least 16 of these languages are endangered and four dying (Eberhard, et al., 2019). The most important of the languages is Burmese, the mother tongue of the Bamar ethnic group, which makes up around two-thirds of the population. Other ethnic groups include Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine and Shan. As the language of the ethnic majority, Burmese is also the national language and official language in public administration and education (Fen, 2005; McCormick, 2019). In the past couple of years, indigenous languages such as Kayan, Mon, Sgaw and Shan are also taught and used as media of instruction in basic education in respective areas (Myan-4). Within such a complex linguistic ecology, English plays a unique role. Ever since it was taught in missionary schools from the 1830s, English was the medium of instruction in English schools and Anglo-Vernacular schools during British colonisation (1824–1948). But the institutional role of English has been lost since independence and it weakened during military dictatorship of the nation (1962–2011). Unlike other former British colonies in ASEAN (e.g. Singapore, Brunei Darussalam) which make English a second language, the military rulers “Tatmadaw” of Myanmar implemented a ‘closed door policy’ which limits the use of English. Nowadays, English is firmly integrated within Myanmar’s basic education. English is compulsory from Grade 1 onwards. Meanwhile, English was initially used for teaching maths and science subjects in grades 9 and 10 (Fen, 2005; Kirkpatrick, 2017; Sercombe and Tupas, 2014) and now it is used for teaching those subjects in grades 10, 11 and 12 according to the new Basic Education curriculum (Myan-4).
The Kingdom of Thailand, with a population around 70 million people, is widely assumed to be an ethnically and linguistically homogenous country. However, Thailand is actually ethnically and linguistically diverse. There are 73 individual living languages in Thailand, 21 of which are endangered and six others dying (Eberhard, et al., 2019). Thai is the predominant language spoken by a great majority of the population (86 per cent) while minority indigenous peoples speak languages such as Akha, Kuy, Pattani Malay and Phu Thai. As the national language, Standard Thai is heavily promoted as the medium of instruction in basic education while several indigenous languages have been taught as subjects in schools; for example, Kuy and Northern Khmer as well as Pattani Malay using Thai script (Kosonen, 2007, 2017). Within such a complex linguistic ecology, English holds an important role. Ever since it was promoted as the most prestigious foreign language during the reign of King Rama V (1868–1910), English has continued to be popular in Thailand in the domains of education, media and tourism (Darasawang, 2007; Pechapan-Hammond, 2020; Snodin, 2014). There was an attempt to make English an official second language in 2010, but this failed to manifest for what appeared to be the fear of Thailand being construed as a colonised country and the need to foster Thai national identity (Baker and Jarunthawatchai, 2017; Darasawang and Watson Todd, 2012). Now English is well established within the Thai basic education system, as it has been made a compulsory subject from primary schools onwards (Sermsongswad and Tantipongsanuruk, 2015).
With a population of around 98 million people, Vietnam stands as the third most populous nation in ASEAN. It is estimated that 109 living languages are spoken in Vietnam. Forty-one of Vietnam’s languages are endangered and six others dying (Eberhard, et al., 2019; Kosonen, 2017). A great majority of the population are Kinh people (87 per cent), while the rest comprise various ethno-linguistic communities such as Khmer, Hmong and J’rai (Benson and Kosonen, 2012; Phan, Vu and Bao, 2014). The Constitution of 1992 stipulates that Vietnamese is the national and official language. The Constitution is a legal standing for the officialisation of Vietnamese as the main medium of instruction at all levels of education, although many other written policies endorse the use of minority indigenous languages in education (Benson and Kosonen, 2012; Kosonen, 2013; see Lo Bianco, 2001, for discussion on the Vietnamese alphabet, chữ quốc ngữ). Within such a complex context, English is in the ascendancy. It has surpassed French, Russian and Chinese as the most preferred foreign language in Vietnamese society (Kirkpatrick, 2011; Kirkpatrick and Liddicoat, 2017). The popularity of English has seen the language integrated into the basic education curriculum. Starting as an elective subject in 1996, English has now been officially made compulsory at primary level. Vietnamese children can learn English as a subject from as early as Grade 3 (Canh and Do, 2012).
1.4. Objectives of the study

The research study reported in this monograph focuses on ESBE in ASEAN member states’ basic education systems. The overarching goal of the study is to examine aspects pertinent to how ESBE is implemented across educational curricula of the ten ASEAN member states considering their complex sociolinguistic situations. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To investigate the perspectives of participants of English and ESBE policies
2. To explore policies on ESBE and future educational reforms concerning English across ASEAN member states
3. To examine how ESBE is implemented at pedagogical level across ASEAN member states and the challenges faced
4. To investigate the professional preparation and development of ESBE teachers in ASEAN
5. To explore the role of ESBE in ASEAN integration

Research questions were formulated to tackle these research objectives. They are presented in Appendices 1–4.

1.5. Overview

This monograph is structured as follows. First, it outlines the methodological procedures employed to gather and analyse data in this study (Chapter 2). Then it examines findings which shed light on the role of ideologies in policies on ESBE in ASEAN (Chapter 3). It triangulates policy documents, statistics, published studies and research data concerning the placement of ESBE in ASEAN basic education curricula and its impact on multilingualism (Chapter 4). The monograph also discusses the challenges confronting the implementation of ESBE across ten ASEAN nations (Chapter 5). It analyses issues concerning ESBE teachers and teacher education (Chapter 6). It also explores the role of ESBE in the context of ASEAN integration (Chapter 7). Finally, it signposts future research and offers policy recommendations (Chapter 8).
Chapter 2

Research methods
2.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the research methods of this study. It consists of five main sections. Section 2.2 is an outline of the research team comprising individuals involved in collecting and analysing data in this study as well as in designing and managing the research project. Section 2.3 provides information regarding the design of the study, while Section 2.4 provides information relating to participants of this research study. Section 2.5 focuses on an overview of the preliminary research procedures undertaken prior to collecting data. In Section 2.6, processes relating to data collection are described. This is followed by the final section, which deals with data analysis processes.

2.2. Research team

There are several individuals who assisted me in the various tasks of this research study. They held a role either as a research team member, consultant, adviser or research assistant.

The first research team member is Dr Juliana Othman. She was primarily responsible for collecting data from participants in Malaysia. Dr Othman is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Education, Universiti Malaya, Malaysia. An applied linguist and teacher educator, Dr Othman has held administrative posts as Head, Department of Language and Literacy Education (2015–18) and Deputy Director of the Centre for the Initiation of Talent and Industrial Training (2013). She has been involved in language education at various levels for the past 25 years. She is the lead author of Professional Development through Mentoring: Novice ESL Teachers’ Identity Formation and Professional Practice (Routledge, 2019) and has published in reputable refereed journals including Asian Englishes, Asia Pacific Journal of Education and Journal of Asia TEFL. Dr Othman has headed several internal and external research projects, including those from the Ministry of Education, University Malaya and University Science Malaysia, and is well acquainted professionally with policy makers at the Malaysian education ministry.

The second research team member is Professor Marilu Rañosa-Madrunio. Representing the Philippines, Professor Rañosa-Madrunio’s main role was to collect data from participants in the country. An applied linguist, Professor Rañosa-Madrunio is Dean of the University of Santo Tomas Graduate School. She is a leading figure in English language studies in the Philippines, having held long-time leadership positions in the Linguistic Society of the Philippines (LSP) and the Philippine Association for Language Teaching, Inc. (PALT). Currently, she serves as a member of the Board of Advisers of the LSP. In 2016, she worked closely with the British Council Philippines in the project Joint Development of Niche Programmes (JDNP) in Higher Education and developed a PhD by research programme for Architecture and Built Environment in partnership with the University of Reading, UK, which is now in its third year. Professor Rañosa-Madrunio has published in internationally recognised publications on various topics, from World Englishes, Philippine English, English language education and English sociolinguistics to forensic linguistics.

Dr Khin Khin Aye is the third research team member. Dr Aye’s main role was to collect data from participants in Myanmar. She is a Senior Lecturer at HELP University, Malaysia, while maintaining a role as Adjunct Researcher at Swinburne University Sarawak. She has considerable experience in terms of teaching, assessment, curriculum design and teacher education. She was Associate Dean at Swinburne Sarawak. Her achievements include design, development and implementation of an MA (TESOL) course, which conforms to the Australian Tertiary Education Quality and Standard Agency (TEQSA) and Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). She has conducted research on contact linguistics and World Englishes. She has also researched Myanmar English and Malaysian English, quality assurance, blended learning and the impact of Myanmar’s nation building on education in general and English language education in particular. Her research studies have appeared in The Handbook of Asian Englishes and Language Education and Nation-Building: Assimilation and Shift in Southeast Asia, among others.

The fourth research team member is Associate Professor Le van Canh. He was primarily responsible for collecting data from participants in Vietnam. Dr Canh is currently working as senior researcher at ULIS Vietnam National University, Hanoi. He has been involved in English language teaching and teacher education for more than 40 years and is also a frequently invited plenary speaker at both international and national professional conferences. His publications focus on English language teacher education as well as language-in-education policies in Vietnam. He is the lead editor of Building Teacher Capacity in Vietnamese English as a Subject in Basic Education (ESBE) in ASEAN: A Comparative Study
English Language Teaching: Research, Policy, and Practice (Routledge, 2020) and one of the editors of Situating Moral and Cultural Values in ELT Materials: The Southeast Asian Context (Springer, 2017). Dr Canh’s research studies have appeared in reputable referred journals such as RELC Journal, The Journal of Asia TEFL and TESOL Journal, among others.

The fifth research team member is Dr Sovannarith Lim. Dr Lim represents Cambodia. In this study he was primarily responsible for collecting data from participants in the country. He used to be affiliated with the Royal University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia and is an accredited secondary school teacher, currently working for the Department of Education in the state of New South Wales, Australia. Dr Lim has been teaching English as a school subject, English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) and Academic English to a wide range of learners across various age groups (from secondary to tertiary levels) in both Cambodia and Australia. Dr Lim’s articles have appeared in peer-reviewed journals, such as Asian Englishes and RELC Journal, while his book chapters are included in Situating Moral and Cultural Values in ELT Materials: The Southeast Asian Context (Springer) and English Language Teacher Preparation in Asia. Policy, Research and Practice (Routledge).

There are also scholars who played a consultancy role in this study. The main consultant to the study is Associate Professor Noor Azam Haji-Othman who represents Brunei Darussalam. Dr Haji-Othman is currently Dean of Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Brunei Darussalam. Dr Haji-Othman has published extensively in Malay and English and is the lead editor of Springer’s The Use and Status of Language in Brunei Darussalam. The second consultant is Dr Kristof Savski who represents Thailand. Dr Savski has worked as Assistant Professor at the Prince of Songkla University, Thailand since 2016. He has published in reputable refereed journals such as Language Policy, Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development and The Journal of Asia TEFL. Both Dr Haji-Othman and Dr Savski were two of the main interview respondents for Brunei Darussalam and Thailand. They also provided contact details of key stakeholders in their respective countries and assisted with liaison with the stakeholders.

Associate Professor Sue Garton of Aston University, UK served as an adviser to this study. She is the lead editor of The Routledge Handbook of Teaching English to Young Learners, Palgrave’s International Perspectives of English Language Teaching and co-editor of Early language learning and teacher education: International research and practice. Dr Garton has consulted widely around the world, including undertaking research projects for the British Council, such as Investigating Global Practices in Teaching English to Young Learners. She provided input to the interview questions and to this project report.

Ms Ke Ma is a research assistant in this study. She graduated with a master’s in Applied Linguistics from the University of Queensland, Australia. Currently, she works as an education agent, recruiting international students for Australian tertiary institutions (Go8 and others), as well as a Mandarin teacher. Her review of Sociocultural Theory and the Pedagogical Imperative in L2 Education: Vygotskian Praxis and the Research/Practice Divide appeared in Humanizing Language Teaching (August issue, 2020). In this study, Ms Ma assisted in the transcription of interview recordings and completed other duties such as liaising with research team members, conducting literature review, storing digital data and checking all references. She also helped with writing structures of basic education in three ASEAN member states.

I, Subhan Zein, am the Lead Researcher/Principal Investigator in this study. As Lead Researcher/Principal Investigator, I was responsible for a number of tasks and duties. These included: 1) liaising with research team members, consultants, adviser and British Council representatives on various issues and tasks pertinent to this study; 2) compiling and incorporating data provided by research team members and consultants in the development of the project proposal; 3) identifying the tasks entailed in project stages such as data collection and analysis as well as directing the processes involved; 4) formulating interview questions; 5) collecting data from participants in Indonesia, Laos, Brunei Darussalam, Singapore and Thailand; 6) analysing data collected in those countries; 7) triangulating findings from those countries with those gathered from Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Vietnam to analyse the whole data. I was also responsible for writing up this present monograph as well as country profiles, which are published as a separate monograph.
2.3. Designing the study

This study is qualitative in nature, as it “relies mainly on the reduction of data to words (codes, labels, categorisation systems, narratives, etc.) and interpretative argument” (Benson, 2013:01).

A case study was the chosen method for the overall design of the study. The choice was not mere convenience. In language policy research, as suggested by Fishman (1994:97), “the choice between methods should definitely be made on technically substantive rather than on trendy salvational grounds”. Each ASEAN member state has distinct economic and political systems, and each is shaped by unique social, cultural and religious values that make up the fabric of social life. Indeed, the diversity within ASEAN is great. Nonetheless, each member state serves as a case: a bounded, integrated system, or “a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (Merriam, 1998:27). Each ASEAN member state is a case with boundaries not only in geographical sense; in other words, it is not merely established by the borders which surround their political territory. It is more to do with the commonalities which unite them as a bounded system. As discussed in Chapter 1, all ASEAN member states have agreed on making English their working language as an effective means of communication. All member states also have strong status planning on English, although some might be stronger than others depending on parameters such as policy engagement and resources. Importantly, all have endorsed ESBE policies. ESBE is present in all ASEAN member states. These boundaries make each of the ASEAN member states an integrated, bounded system. Further, the examination of multiple ASEAN member states in this research makes it a multiple case study.

In each of the cases, the study focuses on a few aspects. First, it examines language ideologies in the implementation of language policies. Language ideologies are a reflection of language attitudes in society, and as such they may have wide-ranging consequences for questions concerning the status of a language and policy implementation (Spolsky and Shohamy, 2000; see also Palviainen and Huhta, 2015). This issue is specifically examined in Chapter 3, and its impacts are discussed in the remaining chapters throughout the monograph. Second, language policies are not just textual, and therefore this study attempts to “understand, illuminate and influence policy-shaped/policy-shaping texts, discourses and practices” concerning overt and covert policies (Hornberger, 2015:13). This is reflected in the discussion of the inter-relationship between ideologies and ESBE policies (Chapter 3), the enactment of the ESBE curriculum (Chapter 4), the mismatch between policies and practices (Chapter 5), the top-down policies on teacher education (Chapter 6), and the context of ASEAN Integration and English varieties (Chapter 7). Third, the study has the practical dimension of ESBE, but it is not devoid of context, hence it analyses “socio-cultural and ecological contexts of language learning and teaching” (Harklau, 2011:178). This is particularly relevant to the discussion of the multilingual context in which ESBE is implemented in each ASEAN member state (Chapter 4), the socio-cultural challenges surrounding its implementation (Chapter 5), as well as the teachers who implement ESBE and the teacher education processes involved (Chapter 6). Finally, the study also seeks to find answers to Spolsky’s (2017) question: “What is the most desirable policy for any particular group?” This question is addressed in Chapter 8, which offers ideas for the modification of existing policies or the creation of new ones.

As an intensive, holistic description of cases, this study attempts to maintain distinctive attributes of a case study: 1) particularistic, 2) descriptive, 3) heuristic, 4) interpretivist (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2002). The study is particularistic because it focuses on the particular situation concerning language education policies on ESBE and how they are implemented in the classroom. It is descriptive because it attempts to yield a rich description of ESBE language education policies and practices. Further, the study is heuristic because it illuminates the reader’s understanding of ESBE language education policies in ASEAN member states. Research team members and I also maintained an interpretivist approach to this study, as we allowed the focus of the research to emerge during data collection and analysis, rather than attempting to test a set of hypotheses.

While the four attributes above are true to any single case study, this study also maintains a fifth attribute befitting a multiple case study: comparative. It has been suggested that in comparative case studies “selected cases must demonstrate enough commonality to allow for comparison” (Mills, Durepos and Wiebe, 2010:175), and the boundaries regarding ESBE policies in ASEAN member states set out earlier prove this point. From the detailed study of particular member states with various attributes as described above, I attempted to compare policy documents in conjunction with events, ideologies and practices to discover similarities, contrasts or patterns across all individual cases within ASEAN.
2.4. Research participants

Purposive sampling was used for the collection of data in this study. This is because participants had to meet criteria suitting the purpose of the study (Merriam, 1999; Yin, 2002).

First, participants should be people who were involved in policy-making or who had consulted language education policies in a specific ASEAN member state. It was thought that top government officials or leaders of a unit or section in a ministry of education would be ideal participants. Those involved in language policy-making related to language assessment and curriculum development would also be ideal. Second, participants should be those who had been involved in various aspects concerning research and practice of English language education in an ASEAN member state. For this purpose, participants could be academics based in a university or teacher educators in inter-governmental organisations such as SEAMEO RELC.

After specifying the criteria above, my research team members and I identified potential key participants for this study. I listed names of potential research participants in Indonesia, Laos and Singapore, as I would be responsible for collecting data from these countries. Research consultants suggested names of potential participants in Brunei Darussalam and Thailand to me, as I would be interviewing participants from those countries, too. My research team members listed potential research participants in their respective countries of expertise: Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Vietnam.

British Council staff provided me with formal letters intended for the participants. I distributed the letters to my research team members, and we then sent out the letters to the participants to formally invite them to participate in this research. In other situations, my research team members and I approached potential participants via email, WhatsApp message, phone call or through our professional contacts, and this was then followed up with a formal letter. In the letter, we explained the purpose of the study, its scope and expected data collection period, as well as the voluntary nature of participation in this study. In a way, the letter served as a kind of consent form which provides information on how the research was to be conducted, detailing specifically what was required from participants for the conduct of the study (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017; Marshall and Rossman, 2010). Upon gaining participants’ consent, we arranged interview dates with them.

In total, there were 35 participants who took part in this study. Thirty of them represented ten ASEAN nations. They were mainly key policy makers and prominent teacher educators. Overall, they had knowledge about policy-making and the conditions of English language education in their respective countries. There were also representatives of inter-governmental organisations who took part in this study. Three of them were affiliated with SEAMEO RELC, two with SEAMEO LEC and one with UNESCO.

In line with research ethic procedures, participants’ identities are kept confidential. I undertook procedures to protect each subject’s privacy, as suggested in the literature (e.g. Check and Shutt, 2017). These included saving all interview records and creating special identification codes for participants. All interview data was collected and digitally stored by my research assistant. To report on data involving participants, I do not refer to their names. Rather, I use codes to identify national or organisational affiliation. For example, “Mal-1” means the first participant from Malaysia, “Viet-2” means the second participant from Vietnam, and “Camb-3” means the third participant from Cambodia. RELC-1 means the first participant who is affiliated with SEAMEO RELC.

2.5. Preliminary research procedures

Preliminary research procedures were completed prior to collecting and analysing data from this study. These are described in the following sub-sections.
2.5.1. Outlining structures of ESBE in ASEAN

The first procedure was to outline the structures of English language teaching in basic education systems in ASEAN countries. This was a highly complex process given the particularities of English instruction in each individual basic education system in ASEAN.

Research team members, consultants, my research assistant and I wrote an outline of how English is structured in basic education in our respective countries of expertise. In doing so, we considered issues as to whether English is taught as a subject, is used as a medium of instruction or both. We identified the levels at which English is present in primary and/or secondary schooling, whether as a subject, a medium of instruction or both. Next, we specified the number of hours allocated to English and the frequency of instruction at different levels of primary and or secondary schooling. Finally, we all worked on describing the policy reforms surrounding the decision on making English as a subject and/or medium of instruction in basic education.

I then collected the outlines from all ASEAN Member states and identified common patterns of the teaching of English as a subject in basic education systems in Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. The patterns make up the data which informs my writing of sections on sociolinguistic situation in ASEAN and ESBE structures. These are included in Chapters 1 and 4.

2.5.2. Arranging interviews

The second procedure was arranging interviews. I realised that ASEAN countries differ greatly in their management of education and therefore the times when my research team members are most busy during an academic year vary from one to another. For example, Vietnamese, Malaysian and Indonesian universities usually have January as their busiest period, since during this month they hold examinations and students submit final assignments. In Brunei Darussalam, the situation is very different. Universiti Brunei Darussalam starts their academic year in January and does not have the examinations and final assignment submissions until May.

Considering this issue, I ensured that all interview arrangements were kept as flexible as possible without necessarily following a rigid schedule, on the conditions that all data collection processes were completed by the fourth week of January 2021. Following the acceptance of the proposal of this study, I informed my research team members to contact their participants to arrange interviews at times that were mutually convenient. This means that some of my research team members started collecting data as early as mid-December 2020 while others were not able to do so until mid-January 2021. In general, my research team members and I were flexible in our approach to completing this assignment. We also accounted for the different policies implemented by ASEAN member states with regards to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. In some cases, my research team members would be able to conduct face-to-face interviews, while in others this would not be possible, and so online interviews were planned instead. Thus, our interview arrangements were determined by the availability of participants as well as the need to maintain health protocols.

2.5.3. Formulating interview questions

Following the completion of interview arrangements, I formulated interview questions to address the research objectives described previously.

To do so, I divided each of the research objectives into relevant foci. Following procedures outlined in research methods sources (e.g. Cohen, et al., 2017; Fody, 1993), I then translated these foci into specific research questions. In an attempt to address the first research objective, I formulated interview questions that focused on: 1) the beliefs and attitudes towards ESBE; and 2) motivations for teaching ESBE.

In terms of the second research objective, I formulated interview questions which covered: 1) recent educational policies on ESBE; 2) future policy agendas on ESBE; and 3) bilateral or multilateral policies across ASEAN countries which affect ESBE.
To address the third research objective, I formulated interview questions which focused on: 1) the implementation of ESBE; 2) challenges to learning, teaching and assessment; 3) the role of educational technology in ESBE; 4) how ASEAN nations deliver ESBE while coping with the Covid-19 pandemic; and 5) ESBE in relation with mother-tongue education.

The fourth research objective was addressed through interview questions focusing on: 1) policy on initial teacher education (pre-service); 2) policy on continuing professional development (CPD); 3) identification of gaps between initial teacher education and continuing professional development for primary and middle-school education; 4) the extent to which the ASEAN Teacher Framework is implemented; and 5) teacher education initiatives for teaching English along with mother-tongue education.

To address the fifth research objective, I formulated interview questions which focused on: 1) how ESBE is envisioned in terms of ASEAN integration; 2) perceptions about native and local varieties of English; 3) teacher education for preparing teachers with a pluricentric orientation; 4) policy directions concerning pluricentric English.

All interview questions are available in Appendices 1–4.

### 2.5.4. Refining interview questions

It was not possible to conduct a pilot study due to the limited time available for the data collection from the time this project was granted funding (04 December 2020) to the projected date of its completion (30 March 2021). Therefore, it was vital to undertake a phase of interview question refinement. In this study, refining interview questions helped ensure that the questions were clearly worded. It yielded the benefits identified in the literature (e.g. Cohen, et al., 2017; Fody, 1993), including reducing bias, specifying too-general questions, and preventing potential misunderstanding.

To begin with, I distributed interview questions to my research team members and adviser. I requested them to examine the questions and provide suggestions to address unclear, ambiguous or confusing parts. I also asked them for suggestions for improvement based on their areas of expertise and knowledge of a specific ASEAN country or more.

My research team members and adviser highlighted words or phrases which were unclear or inappropriately placed. They identified terms which might need to be rephrased. They also took account of the specific challenges or issues in specific ASEAN countries. Then, they informed me which questions needed to be removed, modified or added. I amended the questions based on their advice.

### 2.6. Data collection

Data collection for the purpose of this case study took place between mid-December 2020 and the fourth week of January 2021. The data collection upheld Cohen, et al’s (2017:385) principle of methodological eclecticism in case studies in that they may embed one type of research in another and they may use a different set of data collection techniques. This found evidence in that embedded within the case study is documentary research where collection of policy documents was conducted in addition to data gathered from spoken and written interviews.

Policy documents in this study are “texts with authority, issued by categories of people charged juridically with the control of public resources” (Lo Bianco and Aliani, 2014:03). They function in terms of projection and enactment. Policy documents have a projective character in that they envision future contexts for which the realisation is contingent upon their enactment; that is, whether and how the text being endorsed is acted upon (Gee, 1994). As such, policy documents are “projective in that they form part of a process of education reform and offer a vision of what education can and/or should contribute and they are enactive as they are formulated to guide actions in order to achieve the envisioned reform” (Liddicoat, 2009:189). The policy documents in this study made up data relevant to ESBE policies and future directions for English language learning, teaching and assessment in ASEAN countries. Key statistics available from relevant ministries were included as part of policy documents.
My research team members and I possessed most policy documents relating to English language learning, teaching and assessment in basic education in ASEAN nations. We also managed to obtain other relevant policy documents that we did not have during the time of data collection. Most policy documents and statistics are available online, while in rare cases they are in print and are not distributed to the general public. Nonetheless, we did not experience difficulties with procuring these documents and statistics because we had access to stakeholders working in various ministries. They helped us obtain those documents and statistics. In cases where policy documents are not available in English (i.e. Indonesian, Lao, Thai, Vietnamese, Khmer), we translated them into English. Research team members had all published studies, policy documents and statistics in PDF forms and they sent them to me for archiving purposes.

While policy documents were secondary, the main data of this study came from interviews. Indeed, interviews are a common data collection technique in case studies (Cohen et al., 2017; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2002). My research team members and I conducted spoken interviews with participants. I gave flexibility to my research team members regarding ways to conduct their interviews. In places where the spread of Covid-19 virus had been curbed, interviews were done face-to-face as per local health protocols. However, for health reasons and others, my research team members and I also conducted interviews through Zoom, Skype or telephone. This was also practical in my case given my residency in Brisbane, Australia, while the participants whom I needed to interview were located in Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Laos, Singapore and Thailand.

Spoken interviews lasted around one hour. My research team members and their interviewees had the freedom to choose their language of interviews. Some conducted the interviews in their shared mother tongue, while others in English. All interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format. The format allowed us to ask questions pertinent to the research objectives without being restricted to a certain order. It also allowed us to ask probing questions on the part of the interviewers (my research team members and I) to encourage participants to open up while retaining freedom as they expressed their opinions (Marshall and Rossman, 2010). However, this did not inhibit participants from adding points, asking questions and commenting on interviewers’ statements. The lively interactions allowed the interviewers to generate perspectives that would otherwise remain concealed, which added rich description of the generated data (Ho, 2006). As such, the interviews gave rise to the dual function of interviewing in qualitative studies: 1) interviewing as data collection; and 2) interviewing as social practice. Interviewing was not merely a form of “data mining” where its purpose was mainly to collect data concerning the perspectives and lived experiences of participants when prompted to do so (Brinkman and Kvale, 2015:57). In some cases, there were instances where my research team members and I did not treat interviews as a means of data collection but as a social practice for which we generated data with the participants. Here “respondents are not so much repositories of knowledge – treasuries of information awaiting excavation – as they are constructors of knowledge in association with interviewers” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004:141).

Some participants found it inconvenient to be interviewed through Skype or Zoom, hence opting for an email interview instead. For example, a teacher educator specified her needs in advance and responded to my interview questions via email. There were also instances where spoken interviews were delayed, and so all data collection did not complete within the designated time (mid-January 2021) and had to wait until the end of January 2021. For this reason, email interviews were conducted, with my research team members and I sending out interview questions to participants via email and they responded to us afterwards. There are instances where email interviews allow research participation at the participants’ convenience in terms of place, time and cost (e.g. Chen and Hinton, 1999); however, the choice of email interviews in this study was not simply practicality. Email interviews were useful because they were unobtrusive, and they encouraged honesty and openness. They also afforded participants flexibility to reflect on their experiences and allowed them a democratisation of exchange (Boshier, 1990; James, 2007). The opportunities to reflect on experiences and modify any information were gained, as my research team members and I conducted a process of data checking. In several cases where responses were incomplete or statements were unclear or ambiguous, my research team members and I contacted the participants. We asked for explanation or completion of responses. The participants also used the process to further reflect on their responses, sometimes clarifying misunderstanding which occurred in our communication. This in turn provoked participants to “reflect deeper about their professional lives in a way which they might not have done” (James 2007:971).

All spoken interviews were digitally recorded. Each research team member submitted their interview recordings to my research assistant and I in a digital format (MP4). All interview recordings were stored in a safe computer hard drive along with written interview responses to ensure safety and confidentiality of data (Check and Shutt, 2017).
2.7. Data analysis

The timeline for data collection and analysis in this study was set at the beginning of the project, but the actual data collection and analysis was iterative. As suggested by literature (e.g. Cohen, et al., 2017; Marshall and Rossman, 2010; Saldana, 2009), this refers to the fact that analysis commenced during the data collection phase (which began as early as early mid-December 2020) rather than after the completion of data collection (at the end of January 2021). There were processes of going back and forth as data was collected, and verifications were required at times. Thus, although there is clear identification of data analytical phases involved in this study, the undertaking was by no means linear.

In general terms, data analysis began as soon as my research team members and I completed the collection of policy documents and statistics concerning English language learning, teaching and assessment of all ASEAN member states. There were also opportunities for me to read published studies that my research team members shared with me. My research team members and I highlighted common themes drawn from the policy documents for each individual ASEAN member state. I then developed a comparative analysis of all themes.

While this was underway, my research team members and I collected interview data. In terms of spoken interviews, we transcribed the interview recordings. In cases where spoken interviews were in the shared mother tongue of the research team members and interviewees, English translations were made available. All research team members submitted their transcriptions and translations of the transcriptions to my research assistant and me. In terms of email interviews, all written documents were collected by my research team members and I. All data was stored safely for archiving. Third, we moved to the data verification stage. My research team members and I verified our transcriptions of spoken interviews and translations with our participants to ensure the accuracy of data. This allowed the participants to identify whether there were errors in the transcriptions. It also allowed them to clarify and add information as they saw fit.

Afterwards, my research team members and I reread interview transcriptions and highlighted key research findings. We then triangulated them with published studies, policy documents and statistics to generate common themes in our respective countries. Each of my research team members then wrote a 1,500-word report summarising the common themes and submitted it to my research assistant and me. I compared them with my comparative analysis of all themes which I conducted earlier. I continued by rereading all interview transcriptions, and not just those whose transcriptions were generated from the interviews I conducted. In this analysis of overall data, my focus was to identify participants’ sense-making of policies and practices, their reactions to them and the meanings they generate as a consequence. I identified codes which were important for analysis. I gathered the codes together into categories and compared them. This process allowed for the categorisation and grouping of “similarly coded data into categories or ‘families’ because they share some characteristics – the beginning of a pattern” (Saldana, 2009:08).

Thus, the research reached a stage where all categories were grouped together as patterns. They were conceptualised as overall themes of the study (Saldana, 2009). I further compared the themes I had generated with the themes my research team members had developed for individual ASEAN member states as well as my overall analysis of policy documents. This allowed me to conceptualise common themes which make up the main chapters of this monograph. They are: 1) the inter-relationship between ideologies, policies and ESBE (Chapter 3); 2) the structure of ESBE in ASEAN curricula and impact on multilingualism (Chapter 4); 3) the ESBE implementation and the challenges which ASEAN member states face (Chapter 5); 4) ESBE teachers and teacher education (Chapter 6); 5) ESBE, ASEAN integration and English varieties (Chapter 7). I then wrote the chapters and submitted them to my research team members. They commented on issues that needed addressing and asked me to clarify the written expression in this monograph. I addressed their comments, rectified errors and clarified my writing. Then data validation processes took place when I showed samples of my analysis to participants, and they provided opinions about the appropriateness of the analysis. These procedures were useful not only to add quality to the ethical dimension but also to improve the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Cho and Trent, 2006). This was followed by the final step, writing up this monograph. During the intensive process of writing, I undertook ongoing consultation and verification with my research team to ensure the appropriateness of my analysis.

Such analysis processes proved the complexity of the multiple case studies reported in this monograph. Blommaert’s (2013:139) statement was meant for ethnography in language policy, as he argued that language policy research should focus on “dynamic, layered and vertically ordered processes” instead of “a static, synchronic and horizontally imagined snapshot of current language-political states”. However, there is a justification which makes his assertion relevant to this study. The constant comparison and contrast I conducted in examination of policy documents and data concerning events, ideologies and practices related to ESBE in all ASEAN member states were complex processes in a multiple case study, even more so when I conducted them in consideration of my research team members’ advice which developed in an iterative manner. The processes demonstrate the dynamism, multi-layered and vertical ordering in the analysis of ESBE policies and practices in ASEAN education systems.
Chapter 3

Ideological contestation and ESBE language education policies
This chapter examines findings that highlight the ideological contestation involving ESBE language education policies in ASEAN. It starts with a discussion on ideologies about English, focusing on the prestige of the language, its role in globalisation and its function as the language of science dissemination. The chapter continues with an analysis of ESBE policies across ASEAN nations, elaborating on major policy changes related to English and the ideological motivations underpinning ESBE policies. The next section discusses the inseparable relationship between ideologies and policies, and how they affect ESBE and the teaching of English as a medium of instruction (EMI). The final section draws parallels of major themes discussed throughout the chapter.

3.2. Ideologies about English

Language ideologies may be defined as a system of beliefs, perceptions, values, ideals and aspirations concerning the nature of languages as well as their structure, value, use, acquisition and development. These language ideologies are rarely value free; they are often related to economic, political, cultural and religious values. They interact in complex and dynamic inter-relationships. Hence, in the classroom, as it is in real life, value-laden language ideologies play a central role in framing our attitudes towards a language and its speakers, and in shaping our understanding of the world as something meaningful (cf. Silverstein, 1979; Woolard, 1998; Woolard and Schieffelin, 1994).

In this study, data suggests that there are certain ideologies about the value and use of English and what the language means to ASEAN citizens in the context of ESBE. A Cambodian participant labelled English “the language killer”, citing its detrimental impact on indigenous languages (Camb-3) (see Chapter 4 for discussion on English and multilingualism). Meanwhile, an academic based in Brunei welcomed the move towards English for ASEAN integration as something positive to avoid “colonial and Western connotations” associated with the language (Bru-1) (see Chapter 7 for discussion on English and ASEAN Integration).

Although English may be perceived as having “killer” impact and “colonial and Western” associations, there are prevalent ideologies which view English in a more positive light. A great majority of the participants in this study reported on the pervasive ideological views which consider English as considerably important. These ideologies are reflected in welcoming, encouraging attitudes which peoples in their respective nations exhibit. From Laos to Brunei Darussalam, from Indonesia to Myanmar, ASEAN stakeholders participating in this study stated that their countrymen generally had “great” and “very positive” attitudes towards English and considered it “very important”. A Singaporean teacher educator who had trained teachers across ASEAN stated, “I can say that in the past few decades, there has been increased awareness in the perception of these groups of people in terms of English language learning in basic education” (Sing-1). Much of this heightened awareness is attributed to a strong ideological view which associates English with prestige and aspiration for success. A teacher educator from the Philippines commented:

“... if general attitudes and beliefs of the stakeholders, we already know that... English has a prestige status. Whether or not you’re in basic education or outside education, so really it is the language of aspiration. So they perceive ... because they perceive English as of higher value, of course studying it in formal education is what is desired.” (Phil-3)

The prestige attached to English is an ideological view that is not exclusive to the Filipino society, nonetheless. Data drawn from participants from other ASEAN nations such as Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos and Singapore also suggests the high value associated with English. Participants highlighted how English “is very important” and “valuable” as a means of increasing status in society. In this respect, English has become “a way of securing economic advancement, elevated status and prestige and trans-national mobility” (Singh, Kell and Pandian, 2002:53–54). If the replacement of national languages with English as a medium of instruction is of any indication, there is a fair chance that in nations where EMI was (and has been) prevalent, such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Myanmar, English has been valued more highly than Malay, Indonesian and Burmese, respectively. Nearly a decade ago Coluzzi (2012:128) stated that Standard Malay was “hardly ever used in Brunei and that it enjoy[ed] a lower status than English” in both Malaysia and Brunei, indicating how ASEAN national languages were perceived lower than English. Findings from this present study demonstrate that nowadays English has become so
valuable that the prestige attached to it might have surpassed the values of ASEAN nations’ national languages. Findings are indicative of a situation where in all member states of ASEAN, “English is really of higher value because it is associated with of course economic gains, it has economic value…” (Phil-3). This confirms that within the ASEAN’s linguistic ecology, English has the highest Q-value, a term which Dutch sociologist Abram de Swaan (1993) coined to explain the communicative potential of a linguistic variety. The communicative potential of English is so high among other languages that are native to the Southeast Asian region that ASEAN nations cannot do without introducing it to the basic education curricula (see Chapter 4).

Another shared ideology pertains to the role of English in the global economy. Participants such as those from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar and Vietnam believe that English holds a central importance in the emerging abilities of ASEAN citizens to successfully participate in the world economy characterised by globalisation. Phrases such as “international cooperation”, “globalisation”, “international competition” and “knowledge-based economy in the global world” have been associated with the language. ASEAN member states share the same globalist outlook in the fulfilment of global imperative where mastery of the language is needed to take part in the global economy (cf. Low and Ao, 2019; Tupas, 2018; Zein and Stroupe, 2017). As later shown in this chapter, language education policies which promote English in basic education in ASEAN can be seen as what Lo Bianco (2003) calls “a needed response to globalisation”.

The importance of English in the global world is undeniable, according to a Malaysian respondent, who argued that the “English language is an international language and has been accepted as the language for communication in all areas” (Mal-1). Malaysia, a former British colony, back in the 1970s used to reduce the role of English to promote Bahasa Malaysia (Malay) on the grounds of nationalism (Yamaguchi and Deterding, 2016) and allowed the decreasing value of English in society much of the time until the 1990s (Tan, 2013). It enacted a controversial policy which changed the medium of instruction for teaching Mathematics and Science from Bahasa Malaysia to English in 2003 (Gill, 2005), but reverted the policy in 2012 (Kosonen, 2017). In 2016, it endorsed a Dual Language Programme (DLP) policy. The DLP policy is limited in that it has only been implemented in 379 national primary and secondary schools. Analysis of policy documents suggests that, unlike previous years where Malaysia took radical changes, nowadays it seems to be moving gradually with EMI. In the selected DLP-based schools, English is retained as the medium of instruction for the teaching of Mathematics (30 minutes, five times per week) and Science (30 minutes, three to four times per week). This is corroborated by Mal-2 and Mal-3 who argue that the DLP policy, along with the ESBE policy (see details in Chapter 4), are indicative of Malaysia’s commitment to preparing its citizens with English proficiency. In particular, they see the ESBE policy as instrumental; it is an important means to accelerate Malaysian citizens’ capability to compete globally.

Contrary to Malaysia, Brunei does not have shifting attitudes towards English. In fact, ideologies about English are stronger than ever in Brunei in the way the government has made the language part of its meta narrative for developing a young Brunei workforce to become successful global citizens in the 21st century (Jones, 2012; Haji-Othman, 2005). A Bruneian respondent explained:

“I believe generally parents, students and teachers are very positive in the use of English in general in Brunei, so specifically with regards to ESBE in the education system, the general attitude is also very positive. The Brunei government has always instilled the idea of good command of English and the use of English for national development and international connections.” (Bru-2)

Similar commentaries on the importance of English in the global world have also been gathered from Vietnamese and Laotian participants. A Vietnamese participant made an important remark: “… English must be instrumental to the creation of new generations who can integrate socially and participate in global economies. English is a must to the new generations of the citizens” (Viet-1). Meanwhile, a Laotian teacher educator stated: “… as far as I know, English is perceived to be a very important international language” (Laos-1). The participants’ comments reiterate various assertions appearing in the literature. With regards to the importance of English in Laotian society, Kounnavongsa (2015:65) stated, “Lao PDR’s socio-economic development goals are linked to increased integration into ASEAN, and so knowledge of English, the official language of ASEAN and the global lingua franca, will afford its citizens future educational and employment opportunities.” Similarly, Canh (2019:01) noted that Vietnam serves as a case in point where the global commodification of English has developed in response to the need for “national economic development, modernisation, and participation in the global economy”. In Vietnam, English which was once “a minor foreign language” (Vu and Burns, 2014:07) has contributed to the emergence of a phenomenon called “English language fever” (Le, 2007:172).

Participants’ views that English is crucial to the rapidly changing global economy is a testament to the prevalence of a neo-liberalist ideology and how it has permeated the
mainstream ideological views about English in the ASEAN region. Hamid (2016:270) argues that neo-liberalist ideology “constitutes the main plot of the global political narrative of language”. The neo-liberalist ideology dictates language policies worldwide in that governments prepare citizens with proficiency in languages of global importance (e.g. English). What Hamid argues as taking place on an international scale is echoed in Asia where ideological views concerning the importance of English competency are gaining traction (Hamid and Kirkpatrick, 2016). Hamid and Kirkpatrick maintain that such views are part of the meta-narrative for achieving global competitiveness, sustaining economic growth and supporting national development. Data from this study provides evidence for Hamid and Kirkpatrick’s contention, suggesting that among ASEAN nations there is an apparent rhetoric of socio-economic mobility, modernisation and globalisation associated with the English language. ASEAN nations share the same globalist outlook when it comes to the role of English in their respective post-colonial societies because of the global imperative to acquire the language for economic and communicative purposes (cf. Tupas, 2018; Zein and Stroupe, 2017).

In moves that resemble those of other regions in the world, ASEAN nations have embraced English on the assumption that it is the language needed for economic development and global communication. This argument holds true in the case of primary English instruction in Asia in general (Butler, 2015a; Hu and McKay, 2012; Kaplan, Baldauf and Kamwangamalu, 2011) as well as in individual countries such as Japan (Butler, 2009), South Korea (Butler, 2009; Kang, 2012), Taiwan (Butler, 2009; Chen and Hsieh, 2011) and China (Butler, 2015b). Findings from this study highlight how neo-liberal ideology has become part of the circulating ideologies about English in the ASEAN region as well as the language policies developed in response to them (see Section 3.3).

Despite this, it is inaccurate to suggest that neo-liberalist ideology is the central, or even the only, ideological factor contributing to the rise of English in the ASEAN region. Ideologies are fluid; they interact and mix with each other in a complex and dynamic manner, often developing as joint forces for the occurrence of worldwide phenomena (cf. Eagleton, 2007; Vološinov, 1973). Evidence for this argument can be drawn from data in this study. While unanimously underscoring the importance of English in globalisation, participants of this study also linked it with the significance of English as the modern language of knowledge and science. This is evident in commentaries collected from various participants in this study. A Myanmar respondent made this clear: “… teachers, parents, students and all stakeholders realise the importance of English, as they believe that it is the passport to better quality education and English plays an essential role for learning throughout their life.” (Myan-1)

The comment above might be expected as it was made by a policy maker whose country was once colonised by Great Britain. Nonetheless, a similar view is shared by other participants whose countries were not colonised by Great Britain. Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos were colonised by France, and this shared French colonialisation experience means a shared ideological construct. English was perceived unfavourably in previous years; it was seen as “the language of the enemy” (Nguyen, 2012:263). In Laos PDR, English was “previously regarded as a language of colonialism and imperialism”, but this started to change in 1986 after the government decided to encourage market-oriented systems, private enterprise and foreign investments (Appleby, Copley, Sithirajvongsa and Pennycook, 2002:329; see also Sithirajvongsa and Goh, 2004). In Vietnam, an apparent ideological shift has occurred after the Vietnamese Communist party introduced the đổi mới (economic reforms) in 1986. The đổi mới opened space for normalisation of Vietnam–US relations, allowing for an emphasis on international relations and a market-oriented economy (Nguyen, 2012). In Cambodia, English has become increasingly important and more popular. This has been attributed to two major events. These were the establishment of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), which assisted with the country’s post-war general election in 1993, and the formal membership of Cambodia in ASEAN in 1999 (Clayton, 2006; Kosonen, 2019; Tweed and Som, 2015).
The opening of former Francophone countries to the international world has resulted in changing attitudes towards English. Participants from these countries confirmed their nations’ readiness to leave out the language of their former colonial masters and move towards English, which they considered as “the language of science”. For example:

“As we already know, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos were once Francophone, but today English is the leading language. Before the elderly used to say that only documents in French were of good quality [in terms of knowledge], but now they begin to understand that it is no longer the case. If we look around the world, among the top ten countries pioneering in INNOVATION, RESEARCH or SCIENCE, France is perhaps ranked 6th or 7th. It means that most SCIENTIFIC TERMS are from countries using English. Most new technical terms are in English. That is why I think it is very important.” (Camb-2, emphasis original)

“English is a language in which the knowledge and the intelligence of the world is stored. And the many quality education system or education programmes are conducted in English, so that’s the reason to explain why Vietnamese people prefer to select English to learn as their foreign language.” (Viet-3)

Such commentaries find reinforcement if we consider the fact that Indonesia, which was once mainly occupied by the Netherlands and Japan, has also prioritised English over Dutch and Japanese. In an attempt to dispel anything which carries symbolic colonial ideologies, the founding fathers of Indonesia unanimously agreed to remove Dutch and Japanese from the school curriculum. They saw English as the language of the global superpowers of the 1950s and 1960s; the US and the UK. They also considered English to be the language of the future, one which could offer better prospects for Indonesians to advance in terms of education. Therefore, they selected English as the first foreign language in the curriculum, making it compulsory in secondary education (Dardjowidjojo, 1998, 2000; Sadtono, 2007; Zein, et al., 2020). Findings from this study
confirm how English is seen as a language that could help Indonesian citizens to “participate in global education” and “acquire knowledge and skills”, as attested by Ind-1 and Ind-2. The fact that ASEAN nations that were once colonised by non-English-speaking countries turn to English suggests both its importance and hegemony in terms of knowledge and science acquisition. This echoes assertions made earlier in the literature; some explanations have been offered in Ammon (2001). Whatever the reason, the case of English being the language of science and technology might be purely accidental. Kaplan (2001:19) argued “the spread of English in the registers of science and technology is essentially a coincidence of the confluence of a number of political and economic forces during the last half of the 20th century.” Whether it is truly coincidental or not, the labelling of English as “the language of science” has considerable ideological strength far beyond the power of ASEAN nations to avoid it. As findings from this study show, rather than circumventing English or ignoring the need for English literacy, former Francophone countries (and Indonesia) have instead stressed the importance of embracing English to master science and technology. Overall, ASEAN nations collectively agree that to enhance the general capacity of their citizens and ensure mastery of science and technology they would be better off with English than without it.

3.3. ESBE and language education policy reforms

Given the strong ideological views attached to English, policies which stipulate ESBE are common among ASEAN nations. Findings from the study suggest that most ASEAN nations have developed language education policy reforms of which ESBE is an integral part. However, the reforms are by no means uniform.

Three Outer Circle countries – Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia and Singapore – are at the forefront of groundbreaking ESBE policies in the ASEAN region. The fact that English already has an official status in these countries may have cemented political bargaining for ESBE in the educational curricula. However, findings from this study suggest that Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore are also visionary in their effort to make English well integrated within their education systems. Each of them already has a nationwide bilingual policy which includes mastery of English. Each also has distinctive national aspirations which serve as another ideological underpinning for rationalising ESBE policies.

Brunei, which is at the forefront among the ASEAN nations in terms of bilingual policy implementation (Kirkpatrick, 2010:35), has a general nationwide policy direction called Vision 2035. Bru-2 explains that English is instrumental to this policy because by 2035, Brunei wants to achieve:

“1) The accomplishment of its educated and highly skilled people as measured by the highest international standards; 2) A quality of life that is among the top ten nations in the world; 3) A dynamic and sustainable economy with income per capita within the top ten countries in the world.”

An education policy “introduced in 2008” is supportive of Vision 2035 (Bru-2). This policy is called Sistem Pendidikan Negara Abad ke-21 (SPN21) (National Education System for the 21st Century). My reading of the SPN21 policy document suggests that the policy was created to prepare Brunei citizens to meet the social and economic challenges of the 21st century. For this reason, the SPN21 policy emphasises soft skills and character building, as well as opportunities developed for technical and vocational education at tertiary level. It also stipulates that English is compulsory in the 12 years of basic education, “comprising of seven years of primary education (including pre-school year) and five years of secondary education” (Bru-2). This policy continues the traditions developed through Brunei’s longstanding bilingual policy, called Dwibahasa [lit. Two Languages]. Endorsed in 1984 and fully implemented in 1993, the Dwibahasa policy stipulated the mastery of Malay and English (Sercombe, 2014). The concept of bilingualism encapsulated in the policy is “a means of ensuring the sovereignty of the Malay Language, while at the same time recognising the importance of the English Language” (Brunei Government Publication 1984:04). Although it could give the impression of placing equal weighting to both languages, the reality shows that the Dwibahasa policy gives greater emphasis to English (Jones, 2012). The SPN21 also emphasises English. However, as Haji-Othman, McLellan and Jones (2019) argued, it is meant to ensure a “smoother transition” from pre-school to primary and secondary education in a developmentally appropriate setting – something missing in the Dwibahasa policy.

Scholars consider the SPN21 as an important move indicating the growing awareness of the Brunei government of the importance of proficiency and competency in English as a must-have 21st century skill (Jones, 2012; Haji-Othman and Sharbawi, 2015). The SPN21
policy requires that English be used as a medium of instruction to teach maths, science, social studies and information and communications technology (ICT) from as early as Grade 1. The SPN21 policy also increases the hours of ESBE up to five hours per week in primary education and between three and four hours in secondary education (see Chapter 4). Parents tend to choose English-medium pre-schools and kindergartens to ensure better opportunities for their children to acquire the language prior to attending primary school. Nowadays, some of Brunei’s new generations, especially the elites, have shifted to using English predominantly (Jones, G., 2012 Haji-Othman, 2005). Having said that, appropriate preparation for English in the education system through SPN21 is expected to fully support Brunei’s ambition to become one of the top ten nations in the world by 2035.

Singapore also aspires to improve its international standing. Singapore’s Ministry of Education (Sing MoE) has made its bold ambitions evident through the Framework for 21st Century Competencies (21st CC) and Student Outcomes. Among others, the Framework aims to produce learners who “possess broad worldviews by staying well informed and self-directed in the use of information” and are able to “explore and evaluate real-world issues and multiple perspectives as well as gather and synthesise information from diverse print, non-print and digital networked sources” (Sing-1). These goals are within Singapore’s reach given the presence of its Bilingual Education Policy. The policy “entails using English as the medium of instruction (MoI) in all schools to teach all subjects except the ethnically assigned mother tongue languages (MTLs), i.e. Mandarin, Malay and Tamil” (Sing-1).

Thus, English is taught as a subject to students as early as Grade 1 of primary education. It is also the medium of instruction for the teaching of mathematics, physical education, arts education and social studies. English is used as a medium of instruction to teach these subjects as little as once per week (e.g. social studies) and as many as eight times per week (i.e. mathematics). In the way it aligns a language education policy with a broad, nationwide visionary education project, Singapore seems to be looking ahead for a progressive future through English in a systematic manner. This assertion is not far from the truth, as Sing-1 stated that Singapore had already revamped its English language provision in 2020. It projected an evaluation and a revamp within five years’ time, preceded by a mid-term review which takes place “on the second or third year”.

Ambitions to reach international standards were also voiced by Malaysian participants. They described Malaysia’s aspiration to perform well in international assessments such as Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). ESBE policy is thus meant to enhance Malaysian citizens’ English proficiency, so that they perform better in these assessments while increasing Malaysian academic profile at international level. Mal-3 commented, “...Malaysia has to, you know, reach international standards, we’ve got to make ten per cent of the education systems in the world. So that is Malaysian vision for, for itself in the future.” To achieve this, Malaysia has enacted a number of policies. One of them is the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB), launched in 2013. The second shift of the MEB stipulates that “every child in the country should master the Malay language and English as well as learn an additional language” (Mal-1). Malaysia has also followed up the MEB with the English Language Roadmap 2015–25, which:

“... provides the framework for the execution of plans proposed by the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013–25, for the future of the English language education reform in Malaysia. The goal of the English language reform is to bring about transformation of the English language education system from pre-school right up to tertiary education, including teacher education.”

(Mal-2)

Malaysia’s seriousness in preparing its citizens with English proficiency can be seen in another policy which aligns the curriculum, teaching and learning, materials and assessment with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Educational policy makers consider the CEFR as representing international standards in the description and measurement of language proficiency levels for various stages of education. Mal-2 adds that future policies on English in Malaysia would work under the framework to “ensure the smooth delivery of the CEFR-aligned curriculum and assessment from pre-school to post-secondary education in day-to-day teaching and learning.”

The Philippines is different from the other Outer Circle ASEAN nations. Unlike Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia and Singapore, the Philippines places more emphasis on situating English within the broad context of its linguistic ecology. Findings from this study demonstrate evidence of the interplay of ideologies about English as found in other ASEAN nations, but what is more prominent in recent years in the Philippines is the need to maintain linguistic diversity. More than a decade ago, in 2009, the Department of Education issued DepEd Order No. 74 entitled Institutionalizing Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education, which altered the policy of languages of instruction in basic education. English and Filipino used to be the dual media of instruction, but since 2009 onwards the mother tongue has also played a role. As a result, the mother tongue, Filipino and English have been used as the media of instruction in what the Philippines established as
the Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) policy (Rañosa-Madrunio, et al., 2016). The choice of English is of paramount significance given the presence of other foreign languages such as Spanish (as the language of its former colonials) and Arabic (which plays an important role in the southern part of the country).

On the other hand, the decision to focus on the mother tongue does not mean the abolishment of English. Analysis of policy documents suggests that English remains a strong component of the curriculum, as it is used as the medium of instruction to teach mathematics, science, MAPEH (music, arts, physical education, health) since Grade 1 of primary schooling. The length of instruction to teach these subjects varies from 1 x 75 minutes per week to 5 x 60 minutes per week. Moreover, the teaching of English as a subject has also received significant attention with additional time allocated to it. ESBE is offered straight through from Grade 1 of primary school to Grade 12 of secondary school. Between 150 and 250 minutes per week are allocated to English at primary level, and between 180 to 240 minutes are offered for English as a subject at secondary level (see details in Chapter 4). This indicates how the Philippines government values English as an indispensable component of Filipinos’ linguistic repertoire, as attested by participants such as Phil-1 and Phil-2. For others such as Phil-4, English has truly become a tool to prepare Filipino learners for “the future by giving emphasis to college and livelihood readiness and developing their 21st century skills. These 21st century skills include critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity and information literacy”.

When it comes to developing ESBE policies in six Expanding Circle ASEAN nations, there are no ideological motivations to reach international standards as found in Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia and Singapore. The six Expanding Circle ASEAN nations (Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam) tend to foreground their ESBE policies on the crucial need to prepare citizens with English to enable them to compete globally (see Lo Bianco, 2003 on language education policies as a response to globalisation). This is a resounding motive voiced by participants from these nations.

Of the six Expanding Circle ASEAN nations, Vietnam is of particular interest. The nation introduced the đổi mới in 1986, allowing for reforms in various sectors including education to emerge. Prior to the đổi mới, foreign language education had been mainly conducted in upper secondary schools, but since 1986 it has been conducted from lower secondary schools (Canh and Do, 2012; Nguyen, 2012). Then, in 1996, it introduced English as an elective subject at some schools for Grade 3 students or above. This changed in 2008 when Vietnam’s Prime Minister announced Decision No. 1400/QĐ-TTg Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System, Period 2008 to 2020, which serves as a legal standing for Vietnam’s National Foreign Languages (NFL) policy. The NFL policy plans for gradual introduction of foreign languages in primary schooling from 20 per cent initially to 70 per cent in 2015 and 100 per cent in 2020. The overarching goal of the policy is that “by the year 2020 most Vietnamese youth whoever graduate from vocational schools, colleges and universities gain the capacity to use a foreign language independently” (MOE, 2008). It is hoped that the ability to master foreign languages will enable Vietnamese citizens to “be more confident in communication, further their chance to study and work in an integrated and multicultural environment with a variety of languages” (MOE, 2008). Projects associated with these educational goals received a budget of half a billion US dollars, an amount probably worthy of Vietnam’s ambition to become an industrialised and modernised country by 2020 (Nguyen, 2012).

Participants of this study stated that Vietnam’s NFL policy was not meant to cater for English only, as it was meant to include “foreign languages” (cf. Kirkpatrick and Liddicoat, 2017, 2019). However, in reality most schools choose to teach English over other foreign languages (including French). As Viet-3 attested, 99 per cent of foreign language learners in Vietnam learn English, a statement which differs little from the literature. Vang (2004) reported that the number stands at “98 per cent”, while Canh (2007) suggested that 90 per cent of university students, regardless of their majors, selected English over other foreign languages such as Chinese, French, Japanese and Korean. It is not surprising that for many schools and teachers the NFL policy is interpreted as a legalisation for teaching English as a compulsory subject. According to Viet-3:

“The main ESSP policy in Vietnam is, from grade 3 to grade 12, the English subject is compulsory. Actually, not the English subject as the compulsory subject, but foreign languages is (sic) a compulsory subject, and English learners account for 99 per cent of the foreign languages (sic) learners in Vietnam. And for grades 1 and 2, English is currently introduced as a subject to help learners to develop the love and interest in learning English, not to learn actually, but to develop the interest, their interest in learning English. At the same for grades 3–5, pre-school in Vietnam, also English is introduced to learners of the younger ages.”

The exact numbers at any level of education notwithstanding, students’ preference of learning English to other languages is remarkable given that nearly three decades earlier the spread of foreign language learning was relatively more even. Thinh (1999) reported that in
In 1995 only 73.3 per cent of high school students studied English, while others were learning other foreign languages, namely Russian (16.1 per cent), French (3.1 per cent) and Mandarin (0.5 per cent). Nowadays, the numbers have considerably changed, with English dominating the educational landscape and showing “a reasonable prospect” that it “will continue playing its role as the most important foreign language in Vietnam” (Nguyen, 2017:35).

Myanmar, in addition to being a complex linguistic ecology, experiences ongoing political tensions which have made it a fractured nation. While issues concerning language education and nation building are ongoing (Aye and Sercombe, 2014), language policy initiatives such as UNESCO’s language education and social cohesion have been offered in the moment of transition (Lo Bianco, 2016). The end of Tatmadaw military ruling in 2011 paved the way for English to play an increasingly important role, although the recent February 2021 coup d’état has made the current situation unpredictable. The fact that Myanmar ranks 82 (out of 88 nations) in terms of non-native-speaker English proficiency in the EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) (2020) highlights the crucial need for improving English language teaching.

Figure 3.2. A primary English textbook used in Myanmar

An influx of foreign companies and tourists into Myanmar has also reasserted the need for English as a lingua franca (Paw, 2015). Further, there is a need to advance Myanmar on a par with other ASEAN countries now that the ASEAN integration is effectively in place. Participants underscored the importance of catching up with the education level of other ASEAN nations, although none expressed the notion that it aspired to reach international standards (cf. Paw, 2015). It seems that participants saw the two goals as gradual, rather than contradictory. As Paw (2015:104) stated, “[t]he current broad objective of Myanmar education is first to catch up with education standard of the ASEAN region and then to attain quality education which is of international standards to develop the human resources needed for economic development of the state”.

To achieve levelling up with other ASEAN nations, the currently implemented Myanmar National Education Strategic Plan (2016–21) has strengthened the place of English in basic education. In Myanmar’s current education system, where basic education lasts 12 years, policy documents show that the English language is made a medium of instruction for the teaching of mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics for Grades 10, 11 and 12 of secondary schools. The length of instruction is uniform across the grades, that is 5 x 45 minutes per week. In terms of ESBE, participants maintained the integral place of English within the curriculum. Myan-1 provided a written comment:

“ESBE policies in Myanmar are that English is taught starting from primary-level education and that it is the medium of instruction for science and mathematics subjects at the high school level. (In Basic Education Law, Myanmar and English are the medium of instruction.)”

English holds a strong position in Thailand. In 1996, it was made a compulsory subject in primary schools (Baker, 2008; Wongsothorn, et al., 2002). In Thailand’s new National Language Policy, English is the de facto primary foreign language, being designated as the “principal language of commerce” ahead of Chinese, Japanese and Korean (Warotamasikkhadit and Person, 2011:36). At national level, English is seen as instrumental to globalisation, and ASEAN integration and policy reforms have been made to meet this demand (see Baker and Jarunthawatchai, 2017; Sermsongsawad and Tantipongsanuruk, 2015). Participants of this study reported that in addition to making English compulsory, Thailand also established other policies to support ESBE in basic education. Two of the most important ones are: 1) the use of the CEFR as an official language proficiency band-scale; and 2) the establishment of Human Capital Excellence Centres (HCECs) throughout the nation. With regards to the first policy, Thai-1 commented that the Thailand Ministry of Education stipulated that by the end of
Grade 9 “students should have reached A2 proficiency”. With regards to the second policy, she stated that the Ministry, through the Office of Basic Education Commission (OBEC), has launched 183 HCECs in 183 primary schools and 42 HCECs in 42 secondary schools throughout the country. The HCECs “are not only CEFR standard test centres but also training centres for English teachers” (Thai-1).

Laos is one of the francophone countries in the ASEAN region where English continues to play an increasingly important role. French as the language of the colonials held a central importance in Laos between the 1910s and World War II. So did Russian, which briefly occupied an important role in the 1970s and 1980s (Kounnavongsa, 2015). However, English has surpassed French and Russian in terms of popularity and perceived importance. The shift towards a free-market economy associated with globalisation, increase in foreign investment, the official membership of Laos in ASEAN in 1997 and the anticipated integration into the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015 are among the reasons for the growth of English in Laos and its inclusion in basic education (Achren and Kittiphanh, 2020; Kounnavongsa, 2015). Consequently, ESBE was made compulsory starting in lower secondary school (Grades 6-9) in 1997. More recently, ESBE has featured as an integral component in basic education starting from Grade 3 of primary school towards the final year of secondary school (Achren and Kittiphanh, 2020; Low, 2020). Laos-2 confirmed this:

“English is a foreign language that is introduced from primary education grade 3 since the year 2010. All students from grade 3 have to take English as one of the compulsory subjects and students are assessed in grade 9 and grade 12.”

In Indonesia, attitudes towards English have generally been positive and the aspiration for improving English proficiency has always been high for reasons such as globalisation (Dewi, 2014; Hamied, 2012; Zein, 2019), although national language policies are not always consistent (cf. Alwasilah, 2013; Lauder, 2008; Zein, 2020). There was a time when an EMI policy was implemented in basic education based on the Regulation of Ministry of National Regulation No. 78/2009, but this faced much academic resistance (see Sakhhiya, 2011; Zacharias, 2013). The policy itself was abolished by a Constitutional Court Decision in 2013. Nowadays, EMI is implemented only in selected private secondary schools and several universities while ESBE is officialised in public secondary schools (Hamied and Lengkanawati, 2018; Sukyadi, 2015). ESBE is currently absent at primary level in Indonesia. From 1993 to 2013, ESBE was part of primary schooling. The Ministry of Education and Culture Decree No. 60/U/1993 and the Ministry of National Education Decree No. 22/2006 on The Structure of National Curriculum stipulated English as a local content subject. Considering local needs, primary schools had the flexibility as to whether to include English in the timetable. A great majority of schools did offer English instruction, succumbing to pressure from parents who sent their children to study in schools which taught English. This policy gave freedom to schools to start teaching English earlier than Grade 4 for up to 2 x 35 minutes per session (Zein, 2017a). However, the Revised 2013 Curriculum regulates that English may only be offered as an extra-curricular subject, rather than a local content subject. This means that English is only offered outside school hours and has very low status in the curriculum. Most schools did not see a reason for offering English instruction any more. They have opted for offering boy/girl scout and local arts as extra-curricular lessons, rather than teaching English. As a result, the number of primary schools which offer English has decreased considerably and the hours allocated to English in lower secondary school have reduced (see Chapter 4).

In Cambodia, the teaching of English used to be forbidden, particularly during the Khmer Rouge regime (1975–79). Even following the end of the regime, the language was learnt in secrecy, unlike French, which is a traditionally important foreign language due to the nation’s historic colonialisation ties with France. Other foreign languages such as Russian, Vietnamese, German and Swedish were also promoted by the Cambodian government. However, the number of students learning French and other languages has been in decline, whereas English has become increasingly more popular (Mab, 2015; Pit and Roth, 2003; Saroeun, 2015). The popularity of English in society has been in line with educational reforms. English was accommodated as a subject in the formal educational curriculum in 1989, but it was not until 2014 that the Cambodian Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) officialised its compulsory status in basic education (MoEYS, 2015a). Scholars (e.g. Tweed and Som, 2015) view this policy as a strategic response of the Cambodian government to the 2015 ASEAN Integration, which requires the use of English as a working language among the ASEAN members. Nowadays, English is indispensable in the basic education curriculum. It is designated as “a subject for communication, research, work, critical thinking development and creativity” (MoEYS, 2015a:07). Cambodian participants maintained the central role of ESBE in basic education, although they voiced concerns with its quality (see Chapter 5).
3.4. From ideologies to policies to ideologies

ASEAN member states’ language education policy reforms outlined in the previous section have been underpinned by various language ideologies. These include the perception of English as an important language in the global economy, the perception of English as the language of science and the need to achieve international standards through English. As such, language education policies are ideologically grounded. However, the relationship between ideologies and language policies is never linear or unidirectional. While policies may be ideologically grounded, findings from this study suggest that language education policies could also perpetuate ideologies. They may lead to the shaping or appropriation of widely held beliefs about language. This is exemplified by a statement of an Indonesian respondent:

“I think most students, parents and teachers believe that ESBE is very crucial in preparing their future generations to become active participants in this high-tech global world. They believe that ESBE is a key that will open the windows they need in order for them to be able to become a productive world citizen in the future.” (Ind-1)

Thus, what was once believed as English being an important language in the global world is further amplified once parents know that ESBE policy is vital in the preparation of future generations as citizens of the global world. In other words, ESBE policy perpetuates and sharpens the ideological view concerning the importance of English for globalisation.

Similarly, ESBE policies also corroborate language acquisition ideology which associates early language learning with success. Studies suggest that worldwide language education policies often have language acquisition rationale, which underscores that success in language acquisition is attributed to early language learning (e.g. Enever, 2018; Johnstone, 2018; Zein, 2021). Although the validity of such assertion is questionable, especially in foreign language contexts (see Baldauf, Kaplan, Kamwangamulu, 2010; Kaplan, et al., 2011; Kirkpatrick, 2011, 2012a, 2012b), countries around the world do not shy away from implementing the policies. ESBE policies can be seen within this ideological context. How such ideology is deeply ingrained in the ASEAN region can be seen in the data collected from participants in this study. For Mal-2, ESBE as a means of reform of the Malaysian education system aimed to “provide our young people from all social backgrounds, school leavers and graduates with the language proficiency to communicate and compete successfully in the social and professional contexts”. She and other participants (e.g. Mal-3, Myan-2, Myan-3) shared the belief among parents and other stakeholders in the importance of early introduction to English through ESBE in order to enable children to “master the language and be proficient users”. Mal-2 stated:

“Pupils need a strong foundation before they proceed to the next level of education. It is important that children be given the tools, the ability and the knowledge to acquire the skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing at an early age. This will ensure that by the time they are ready to be part of the nation’s workforce, they will have adequate competence to function effectively in an English environment at their workplace, be it locally or internationally.”

This is similar to findings in previous studies which demonstrate the prevalence of language acquisition ideology in the broader ASEAN context (Zein, 2017b); for example, Indonesia (Zein, 2017a), Vietnam (Canh and Do, 2012) and Thailand (Pechapan-Hammond, 2020).

Policies also perpetuate ideologies which are already held firmly in society. This can be seen in the cases of Brunei Darussalam and Singapore. Participants from Brunei and Singapore had already held English in a highly positive regard; and when asked about their impression on English-related policies, they did not differentiate ESBE and EMI. ESBE and EMI are principally different in that the former is the teaching of English as a subject, whereas the latter is the use of English as a language of instruction to teach other subjects. However, participants from Brunei and Singapore were not concerned about the pedagogical differences. The strong ideological value attached to English seems to be so prevalent in Brunei and Singapore that two different policies (i.e. ESBE and EMI) are deemed similar. It is likely that this ideology has occurred because ESBE and EMI are seen as complementary with each other. Sing-1 stated that in Singapore “we see both ESBE and EMI as being similar and related.” Similarly, a Brunei participant stated: “Because the education system of Brunei has been predominantly in English, i.e. many subjects are taught in English, I do not think Bruneians make a distinction between ESBE and EMI!” (Bru-2).

Further, findings from this study demonstrate that there are two countries which plan to make ESBE a stepping-stone towards EMI: Malaysia and Vietnam. Malaysia has
recently launched a programme which focuses on the enhancement of English as a medium of instruction in pre-school. Mal-1 stated: “A total of 50 per cent (600 minutes) of teaching and learning in the pre-school has been directed to be in the English language.” This policy would have repercussions in the future. It is likely that the new Malaysian generations within the next ten to 20 years are familiar with EMI, receiving instruction in Malay and English in all national schools or at all levels of education. Vietnam is heading towards the same directions. Viet-3 stated:

“The future priority is the use of English as the medium of teaching other subjects, like teaching mathematics in English, and also this is not yet a policy priority, but we are going to propose to the government of Vietnam to develop a school system in which English is the language of teaching the curriculum of Vietnam, the general K12 curriculum of Vietnam. So, two school systems, one school system teaching the national curriculum in Vietnamese, and the other is national curriculum in English.”

What these findings suggest is that Malaysia and Vietnam seem to perceive ESBE as a bridge towards EMI. Malaysia’s previous experience with EMI was not particularly successful, with mounting criticisms regarding its implementation (see Gill, 2014). Nowadays, as stated earlier, the nation has abolished EMI programmes and only continues with the Dual Language Programme policy in selected schools.

Further, a number of participants in this study did not hold positive perceptions about EMI. Although they overall perceived ESBE positively, they tended to view EMI in a dimmer light. Data suggests that there is a strong ideological opposition when it comes to EMI programmes. Participants from Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam in particular expressed this view. A participant from Vietnam viewed EMI as “a hindrance to learning”. Others commented in a similar tone:

“Generally speaking, students, parents and teachers have a good attitude towards ESBE, as most of them believe that English can bring more opportunities for their education. However, at the basic education level, EMI is not very much appreciated, as most teachers do not have English proficiency to conduct in English as the medium and English is a barrier to learn content subjects for most students.” (Myan-2)

“I think they do believe ESBE positively, as stated above. But I don’t think they believe EMI positively too. Many of them often say, “How can the students understand the materials if they are explained in English?”” (Ind-2)

In Thailand, ESBE is seen as a means of providing equal access to English to all students. It has the inclusive spirit, which ensures educational reforms concerning English can reach all students, regardless of their socio-economic background. On the other hand, as attested by Thai-3, EMI programmes:

“... are seen as a sort of status symbol, since it is mainly urban middle-class parents who can afford to enrol their kids in them. This is particularly true of international schools, a historic form of elite education which operates largely outside the regular educational systems (often following curricula from other nations, preparing students for enrolment in education abroad).”

The discourse of elitism in Thailand resounds in Indonesia where EMI policy was seen as an ideological manifestation of elite domination. The fact that only rich national schools were allowed to implement EMI reveals social injustice. Zacharias (2013:95) states that while EMI guidelines “may work well for students from a small dominant elite group who are well placed to acquire English, it presents enormous challenges for the majority of Indonesian students and their teachers who live in rural areas where English is rarely used”. There are no studies discussing EMI in countries such as Cambodia and Laos, but those conducted in Malaysia show that there have been strong ideological views against EMI. For example, Gill (2014) describes the strong resistance expressed by various members of Malaysian society to the EMI programme, a movement which led to its scrapping. Gill cites reasons such as the EMI programme disadvantaging certain groups of students, the varying levels of English proficiency of the teachers and students, the limited training for teachers, and the failure of the programme to enhance learners’ proficiency. These are in addition to the nationalistic ideology purporting the idea that the Malay and Chinese languages and cultures would disappear if the EMI programme was to continue. There are no studies in Malaysia, however, which suggest a similar opposition to ESBE.

What findings from this study, in conjunction with literature, suggest is that ideologies about English are generally positive and views about ESBE are overall more favourable than EMI. The differing ideological views about ESBE and EMI are difficult to grasp. However, a possible explanation lies at the unreadiness of some nations in terms of pedagogical infrastructure. In ASEAN nations where pedagogical infrastructure is not ready, negative sentiments regarding EMI have developed. The negative sentiments do not arise in Brunei and Singapore, which are generally more ready in terms of pedagogical infrastructure, but they arise in ASEAN member states where pedagogical constraints surrounding ESBE are
have suggested relates to their ideals and aspirations (Lo Bianco, 2000, 2005, 2009). The bulk of what participants concerning languages are part of public discourse (Lo Bianco and Aliani, 2013:03). This shows that pedagogical infrastructure unreadiness of those nations when it comes to implementing policies of great magnitude such as those of EMI. Indeed, literature focusing on EMI in Asia (e.g. Murray and Scarino, 2014; Fenton-Smith, Humphreys and Walkinshaw, 2017) shows that pedagogical infrastructure unreadiness is a repeated theme to explain the failure of many EMI programmes and/or the emerging public dissatisfaction with the poor implementation of the programmes. EMI programmes tend to fail because of a combination of factors related to pedagogical infrastructure unreadiness, including: 1) teachers are not proficient in English; 2) teaching materials are not readily available; and 3) problems with assessment; and 4) lack of teaching facilities. When the issue of pedagogical infrastructure unreadiness combines with nationalistic views against English-only instruction and the discourse of elitism surrounding EMI, the negative sentiments against EMI soar.

Further, the requirements to implement ESBE might have been seen as less rigorous than that of EMI. For example, it may be understood that teachers of EMI classes are supposed to have much higher proficiency than those teaching in ESBE classes. Academics, practitioners and policy makers across ASEAN member states may develop an understanding that ESBE is more feasible than EMI given the less rigorous requirements and despite the pedagogical infrastructure unreadiness. Thus, there is less pressure to implement ESBE policies than to implement EMI policies. Moreover, those holding nationalistic ideology may think that ESBE poses less challenges than EMI does because the former requires less contact hours than the latter. In ESBE classes, more curricular hours may be devoted to other subjects or languages aligning with the nationalistic ideologists’ views. This is different from EMI classes, which require more contact hours to be allocated to subjects being taught in English. Further, ESBE is ideologically inclusive. As findings from this study show, ESBE is always seen as a universalist intervention of education which gives opportunity to all. EMI, on the other hand, is seen as ideologically favouring the elites.

Finally, findings from this study further shed light on the relationship between ideologies and policies. Ideologies generally stimulate language policy, which may appear as text; that is, when language policy exists in official documentation, laws or regulations. Language policy may also appear as discourse when discussions on issues concerning languages are part of public discourse (Lo Bianco, 2000, 2005, 2009). The bulk of what participants have suggested relates to their ideals and aspirations about English, the policy texts which have been formulated to accommodate EMI and ESBE in the ASEAN curricula, and the public discourses circulating in ASEAN societies. All these constitute what Lo Bianco and Aliani (2013) call the intended policy, which concerns with what policy statements assert or declare as the aim of the policy and the problem they intend to address. In addition, there are two other policies. One is the implemented policy, which deals with the actual implementation of the intended policy (see Chapters 4 and 5). Two is the experienced policy, which is concerned with “the actual experience in the form of communicative behaviour in schooling” which “encompasses a wide range of activity, from realisation and full enactment, through half-heartedness and formulaic implementation, all the way to subversion and transgression” (Lo Bianco and Aliani, 2013:03).

It is when policies are actually implemented and experienced that ideological views may emerge, and they may differ from those ideologies about the intended policies. In other words, ideologies emerging from implemented policy and experienced policy may differ from those associated with policy as texts and discourse. This is evidenced by findings from this study. Data shows that while ideologies about English are overall positive and views about ESBE are more favourable than EMI, there are diverging ideological views about the implemented and experienced ESBE policies. A participant of this study reported on her observation of how Vietnamese parents did not perceive ESBE entirely positively:

“… there is a gap, a discrepancy across different areas, because in certain areas, such as in remote or rural areas, we can see that parents, for example, they still perceive English as a subordinate subject. For example, I went to the suburban area in Hanoi, and when I talked to the parents and I realised that they took English not very seriously, still considering it as one of the subjects that is similar to, for example, PE or art education.” (Sing-1)

In other contexts, ESBE is perceived negatively simply because students are not academically challenged. Participants stated that the education system in Cambodia placed no stakes on English and this had contributed to somewhat lax attitudes among students. Camb-1 commented: “...whether they pass or not pass the tests, they will move on to the next level. It’s the system. They can move on to the next level without much problem. Then they wouldn’t pay much attention.”

On the contrary, negative attitudes among students and teachers have developed due to perceived difficulties in acquiring and teaching the language, as seen in Thailand. A former Thai TESOL President stated:

“A large number of students, especially those living in the rural areas, have negative attitudes toward...
ESBE as they feel it is too difficult for them. They have (almost) no chance to use English outside of the classroom in their daily life. They find English classes boring and demotivating due to the hard lessons they have to learn and difficult assignments they have to complete. They also find the tests for all skills too challenging and too hard to pass.” (Thai-1)

Having said that, another respondent, Thai-3, noted the ambivalence of attitudes within the Thai society. He stated: “... the overall attitudes can be characterised as ambivalent, on the one hand associated with declarative statements regarding the importance of English, and on the other being a source of anxiety, particularly for learners that don’t have much exposure to it outside the classroom.” Anxiety is also observed in Singapore, as Sing-1 stated: “I would say the views are not negative but rather there is apprehensive [sic] when one cannot attain the standard of EL [English Language] to progress to the next level of study.” Similar ambivalence can also be seen in the diverging attitudes between primary and secondary teachers. According to Thai-1, the former group of teachers tends to find “English difficult to teach and learn themselves. Some of them have negative attitudes towards English as they do not [sic] enough confidence to teach English ...”. The latter, on the other hand, “have more positive attitudes toward English, as they graduate with the English major. They have more skills and confidence to teach English ...”

3.5. Concluding remarks

This chapter has examined the interplay of ideologies in ESBE policies across ASEAN member states. ASEAN is a region of extreme socio-economic contrasts encompassing a wide geographical area. The spectrum of social contexts across ASEAN nations is too wide and too complex to make an exact, uniform ideological generalisation. However, the discussion throughout the chapter has led to some commonalities across ASEAN member states. First and foremost, the chapter shows that ESBE has become indispensable in the language education policies of ASEAN post-modern states. ESBE in ASEAN has indeed become part of what Spolsky (2004:220) calls a “tidal wave of English that is moving into almost every sociolinguistic repertoire” throughout the global language ecology.

The chapter has also demonstrated that ESBE policies are not developed in a vacuum. Indeed, a language education policy is "not just the formal realisations of government action, but also its public discourses. Social and economic forces and prevailing language attitudes and ideologies constitute a kind of language planning that accompanies and impedes or sustains its more formalised alternative" (Lo Bianco, 2003:288). This chapter has discussed the prevailing ideologies about and attitudes towards ESBE policies. Members of ASEAN share common ideologies about English such as its prestige, its importance in globalisation and its function as the language of science, which are all in interplay in the creation of ESBE policies. For all ASEAN nations, English is not merely an effective means of communication but also an index of globalisation and economic mobility, which must be present if they are to succeed in the 21st century. This is what Hamid (2016) has conceptualised as English being entangled in “the neo-liberalist ideology” or what Kirkpatrick and Liddicoat (2017:157) call “a prevailing ideology of pragmatism” in that language education policies are primarily framed for “the purpose of economic development”. The ideological view of English being framed as language for development
is indeed a popular view among ASEAN nations (see Appleby, et al., 2002 for the case of Laos; and Draper, 2012a for Thailand) and other nations in the world (see Coleman, 2011).

Such an ideology may be popular and may be the most powerful factor, but it rarely acts in solitude. As findings from this study show, the fluidity and dynamism of ideologies mean that they mix and interact as joining forces for social actions. Ideologies intertwine with one another and permeate social life. They even make up the social fabric of life (cf. Eagleton, 2007; Vološinov, 1973). Language ideologies may or may not be stated explicitly, but either way they emerge as the underpinning motivations for language policies (cf. Ager, 2001). This explains why other ideological views which perceive English as a language of high prestige and “the language of science” could mix with the neo-liberalist ideology to stimulate ASEAN nations to develop ESBE policies. Findings from this study demonstrate that ASEAN nations tend to view ESBE policies as being underpinned by these joint ideological forces.

The complex and dynamic interplay of ideology finds further evidence in this study. Data shows that the three ideological factors above join forces with another ideological motive: internationalisation. This is found in Brunei Darussalam, Singapore and Malaysia where high national aspirations mean that they endeavour to be internationally recognised and to become among the top nations in the world in terms of welfare and education. They have made English instrumental to the process. In the cases of Brunei, Singapore and Malaysia we would understand why “the prevailing ideology of pragmatism”, which Kirkpatrick and Liddicoat (2019:157) have noted, is “often accompanied with agendas of modernisation and internationalisation”.

On the other hand, this study yields no findings to show that other ASEAN nations aspire to reach similar goals. Data from this study demonstrates that Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam show three similar joint ideological views pertaining to English, but not one which directly aims to reach international standards. In these nations, English is mainly perceived as a prestigious language which serves a role as a scientific nation, and which is also vital for citizens to take part in globalisation. Although their ideological views are relatively similar, their levels of policy engagement differ. Findings from this study suggest that some ASEAN member states are more politically proactive than others. Countries such as Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar wish to keep up with other ASEAN members, and they do it by making ESBE a regular feature in their education systems. They are also currently developing various measures to support it in ways which are relatively similar to the Philippines (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6 for details). Thailand and Vietnam have also developed various strategies to support their respective ESBE policies, most notably through the adoption of the CEFR (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6).

Meanwhile, Indonesia is the exception, as it is yet to establish nationwide language policy directions. Different ministerial orientations in the nation have seen considerable changes in ESBE in the past three decades. From English being made a local content subject with an optional status in primary schools (1993–2013) (see Lestari, 2003; Zein, 2017a) to the complete removal of English from the primary school timetable (2013–present), Indonesia has always been in stark contrast with other ASEAN member states, which seem to be enthusiastic about preparing children with English competency from an early age. Data from this study shows that the nation has not formulated educational policies to make it part of the top nations in the world the way Brunei Darussalam and Singapore have. Neither has it made English integral in the primary curriculum by conceptualising an English Language Roadmap like Malaysia, developing a National Foreign Languages policy like Vietnam, or formulating a National Education Strategic Plan like Myanmar. This situation seems to reflect the ongoing stance of the government with regards to English. The Indonesian government appears to maintain what Lauder (2008) calls a “love and hate” relationship with English, demonstrating hesitancy about whether to fully promote it or to prohibit it entirely. It is likely that the ongoing hesitancy about English is related to the absence of nationwide education policies that provide a roadmap for the nation in the long term. Reiterating my assertion earlier (Zein, 2020, Chapter 6), Indonesia would benefit from an overhaul of the education system where language is made an integral part (cf. Alwasilah, 2013; Dardjowidjjo, 1998; Hamied, 2015; Hamied and Musthafa, 2019). As ASEAN’s biggest market of English language education and the most diverse linguistic ecology that currently faces a great risk of language endangerment (see Chapter 4), Indonesia would be better off if it pays heed to scholarly recommendations for policy-making.

All this suggests that there are varying levels of responsiveness for each individual government to develop a visionary ESBE policy. Nations may have shared the same ideological motivations, but their levels of policy engagement vary. Some may be more visionary, and
therefore more proactive, than others. These differing levels of policy engagement indicate not only how inseparable ideologies are from policies, but also how fluid ideologies are when translated into policies. All policies always reflect certain ideologies, but not all ideologies can be translated into policies (cf. Liddicoat, 2013; Lo Bianco, 2010; Spolsky and Shohamy, 2000).

Finally, this chapter has shown that although there are common ideologies, diverging ideologies stay afloat when it comes to the implemented and experienced policies. In the way that implemented and experienced policies could be notably different from the intended policies (Lo Bianco and Aliani, 2013), the implemented and experienced policies could engender new ideologies which may be contradictory to those ideologies motivating the intended policies. The new ideologies may challenge previously held ideologies when the policies were mere texts and discourse. This shows the circularity of relationship between ideologies and policies, as ideologies lead to policies which then engender new ideologies.
Chapter 4

ESBE in the ASEAN curricula and multilingualism
4.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the structures of English as a subject in basic education (ESBE) in ASEAN basic education curricula and its impact on multilingualism. Whenever the term ‘ASEAN basic education curricula’ is used in the chapter, it refers to the current primary and secondary education curricula implemented by ASEAN nations. The chapter examines triangulated findings from policy documents, published studies and interview data on the inclusion of English in ASEAN basic education curricula as it relates to national languages, indigenous languages and foreign languages other than English. The chapter specifically examines how these are addressed by ASEAN Outer Circle nations. It continues with a similar examination in ASEAN Expanding Circle nations. Finally, the chapter critically analyses common themes emerging in the two sections to draw out policy and research directions.

4.2. ESBE in ASEAN Outer Circle nations’ curricula

4.2.1. Brunei Darussalam

In Brunei Darussalam there is a prevalent ideological propagation which prioritises the Malay culture. Findings from this study show that the ideological propagation leads to a strong emphasis on Standard Malay as the medium of instruction in basic education. Bru-2 explained: “None of the indigenous languages are taught in the national curriculum, only the official language (i.e. Bahasa Melayu or Malay) as a subject and/or medium of instruction. In my research, I found that MoE sees the languages have no currency beyond the traditional speech groups, and they are only spoken languages without standard varieties.”

In absolute Malay Islamic monarchy Brunei, Arabic as the language of Islamic propagation is held dearly. The Brunei government makes allowance for the teaching of Arabic in certain secondary schools, although its narrow range of uses means that it is limited to greetings, ritual activities and official ceremonies (Sercombe, 2014). Bru-2 stated: “Arabic is closely linked to Islam, the official religion of Brunei. But this is not taught as a compulsory subject.” Further, data generated from this study suggests that the teaching of other foreign languages is optional. Bru-1 stated there are “options for French and Mandarin in some schools, especially in the private sector”, while according to Bru-2: “These ‘international languages’ are part of the ‘creative skills’ in the new education system, SPN21 ...”

On top of these foreign languages, there is English. The language holds a special place in the Brunei basic education curriculum. Progressing from the Dwibahasa policy (implemented from 1984 to 2009), Brunei’s current policy, the SPN21, reaffirms the compulsory status of ESBE in basic education (Haji-Othman and McLellan, 2014; MoE, 2013). In the early years of its launch, many viewed SPN21 as a policy which places more emphasis on English (Jones, G, 2012) and this seems to be accurate given that English is held even more strongly in the curriculum in recent years (Haji-Othman, McLellan and Jones, 2019). The position of EMI in the Brunei education curriculum has become more robust. As Bru-2 stated: “… in Brunei, at least 80 per cent of the subjects are taught entirely in English from Year 4 onwards...” Meanwhile, hours allocated to English in ESBE have increased. ESBE in Brunei provides flexibility to pre-school education and follows a funnel model in primary education. The implementation of the funnel model in primary education means that the Brunei curriculum allocates more hours of instruction to English to students in lower grades and less hours in higher grades. Set at a uniform spread of 30 minutes of instruction across the primary education, English instruction allocated to lower primary (Grades 1–3) stands at eight lessons per week and decreases to seven lessons in higher primary (Grades 4–6). In secondary education, however, Brunei enacts a reverse funnel model. This means that more hours are allocated to higher grades than lower ones. The frequency of instruction at lower secondary schools (Grades 7–8) increases from five lessons per week to six in higher secondary schools (Grades 9–11). Details of English as a subject in Brunei basic education are available in Table 4.1.
Table 4.1. shows how English has become a dominant feature in Brunei education. Its presence in the curriculum increases crowdedness in the basic education curriculum, which has already emphasised key learning areas of SPN21. Core and compulsory subjects in the basic education curriculum include Standard Malay, mathematics, science, social sciences and humanities, arts and culture, technology, Islamic religious knowledge and Malay Islamic monarchy, and health and physical education, while Arabic, French and Mandarin are elective subjects (SPN21, 2019). The incorporation of English and these other languages means there is no room in the curriculum for indigenous languages.

Given this curricular allocation and the fact that in Brunei “the aims of the ruling group mean working towards homogenising or coercing the citizenry of Brunei into a single Muslim Malay community” (Sercombe, 2014:38), unsurprisingly Standard Malay is heavily promoted to the extent that Brunei’s own variety of Malay, called Brunei Malay, is overlooked (Jones, 2009; see also Haji-Othman, et al., 2019). Further, the promotion of Standard Malay has undermined learning achievement, as students who speak minority languages (and those who speak Brunei Malay as the language of the home) have found it difficult to understand the language of instruction, not to mention the contents of the curriculum (Jones, 2009; Kosonen, 2017). Unsurprisingly, too, there are no mother-tongue instructions for indigenous populations in Brunei (Kosonen, 2017). Some scholars think that Brunei Darussalam is the one and only ASEAN nation which officially proscribes indigenous languages (e.g. Jones, 2009; Kosonen, 2017). Others do not share the view, however (e.g. Haji-Othman, 2005). Haji-Othman, et al. (2019:322) do not believe that English has directly contributed to a declining role of Brunei’s minority indigenous languages; rather, it serves “as an additional overlay to an already complex multilingual ecology.” It is difficult to ascertain the exact impact of English on indigenous languages in Brunei without specific research into the topic. One thing certain is the urgency of such research given the unknown relationship between English and Brunei’s indigenous languages at a time when three out of Brunei’s 15 individual living languages are endangered (Eberhard, et al., 2019).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Education</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>ESBE</th>
<th>Length of instruction</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>8 x per week</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>30 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>8 x per week</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>30 minutes</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>30 minutes</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>(11)</td>
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<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>6 x per week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1. English as a subject in Brunei basic education

Table 4.1. shows how English has become a dominant feature in Brunei education. Its presence in the curriculum increases crowdedness in the basic education curriculum, which has already emphasised key learning areas of SPN21. Core and compulsory subjects in the basic education curriculum include Standard Malay, mathematics, science, social sciences and humanities, arts and culture, technology, Islamic religious knowledge and Malay Islamic monarchy, and health and physical education, while Arabic, French and Mandarin are elective subjects (SPN21, 2019). The incorporation of English and these other languages means there is no room in the curriculum for indigenous languages.

Given this curricular allocation and the fact that in Brunei “the aims of the ruling group mean working towards homogenising or coercing the citizenry of Brunei into a single Muslim Malay community” (Sercombe, 2014:38), unsurprisingly Standard Malay is heavily promoted to the extent that Brunei’s own variety of Malay, called Brunei Malay, is overlooked (Jones, 2009; see also Haji-Othman, et al., 2019). Further, the promotion of Standard Malay has undermined learning achievement, as students who speak minority languages (and those who speak Brunei Malay as the language of the home) have found it difficult to understand the language of instruction, not to mention the contents of the curriculum (Jones, 2009; Kosonen, 2017). Unsurprisingly, too, there are no mother-tongue instructions for indigenous populations in Brunei (Kosonen, 2017). Some scholars think that Brunei Darussalam is the one and only ASEAN nation which officially proscribes indigenous languages (e.g. Jones, 2009; Kosonen, 2017). Others do not share the view, however (e.g. Haji-Othman, 2005). Haji-Othman, et al. (2019:322) do not believe that English has directly contributed to a declining role of Brunei’s minority indigenous languages; rather, it serves “as an additional overlay to an already complex multilingual ecology.” It is difficult to ascertain the exact impact of English on indigenous languages in Brunei without specific research into the topic. One thing certain is the urgency of such research given the unknown relationship between English and Brunei’s indigenous languages at a time when three out of Brunei’s 15 individual living languages are endangered (Eberhard, et al., 2019).

2 The SPN21 curriculum recommends 25–30 minutes for one teaching period and two periods (50–60 minutes) is set for each lesson. Schools have flexibility to decide their own lesson length; hence, many primary schools choose 30 minutes for each lesson and one hour per lesson is the choice of most secondary schools.

3 A small percentage of students (15 per cent) enrol in the four-year General Secondary Education Programmes.
Brunei’s jiran [neighbour], Malaysia is also Malay-dominated with more than two-thirds of the population being Malays. The Malaysian government endorses Standard Malay as the national language. It officialises the use of Standard Malay as the medium of instruction at both national primary and secondary schools (Kosonen, 2017) and, as participants of this study have suggested, it places emphasis on the language despite the fact that few people, even ethnic Malays, speak it as their first language (Haji Omar, 2012; Lewis et al., 2016). Mal-1 explained:

“The Malay language is the national language in Malaysia. As such, Malay language is taught as the main subject in all types of schools in Malaysia. It is also the instructional language used to teach other subjects in the National Type schools (Sekolah Kebangsaan).”

Although it has mainly focused on the Malay language, the government of Malaysia guarantees the use, teaching and learning of any language (David and Govindasamy, 2007; Kaplan and Baldauf, 2003). Therefore, Malaysia has also attempted to accommodate the languages of the second and third largest ethnics in the nation, the Chinese and the Indians. For this reason, Malaysia has developed what participants called ‘Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (SJK)’. This refers to ‘vernacular schools’, which are supported by community groups; for example, Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina (SJK C), which uses Mandarin as a medium of instruction, and Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil (SJK T), which uses Tamil as a medium of instruction (see also Hall, 2015). However, the heavy concentration of Malay in public schools has prompted Chinese and Indian students to study in independent schools which offer Mandarin or Tamil as a medium of instruction. This situation has made some scholars argue that the Malaysian education system actually perpetuates ethnic segregation, even though the political rhetoric is that Malay-medium schools cater for all ethnic groups (Stephen, 2013; David and Govindasamy, 2003).
Malaysia may have undergone “a flip-flop journey” in terms of repositioning Malay and strengthening English (Gill and Shaari, 2019), but it continues to cement the latter nonetheless. Data from participants suggests that the Malaysian government has juggled its language education policy by endeavouring to ensure that Malaysian citizens were sufficiently competent in English in order to be able to compete with other nations in the global economy. This has become more evident in recent years in that Malaysia also implements new policies to promote English in the curriculum. In addition to the English Language Roadmap 2015–25 policy, Malaysia also enacts the Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia dan Memperkukuh Bahasa Inggeris (MBMMBI) policy. The MBMMBI policy “focuses on the efforts to improve students' proficiency in Bahasa Malaysia (BM) and English to produce citizens who are proficient in BM and English so that they can communicate effectively and compete in the international arena” (Mal-2). As Mal-2 suggested, transforming the English curriculum with regards to ESBE is one of the “strategies of the MBMMBI”.

Nowadays, English as a subject is present in the curriculum from the first grade of primary school to the final grade of secondary school. The Malaysian curriculum allocates 30 minutes of instruction in all grades of primary education and 40 minutes in all grades of secondary education. It implements a reverse funnel model at primary level, with frequency of instruction increasing from six lessons per week in Grades 1–3 to seven lessons per week in Grades 4–6. At secondary level, the frequency of instruction is steady at six lessons per week throughout all grades. More details can be found in Table 4.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Education</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>ESBE</th>
<th>Length of instruction</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>6 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>6 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>6 x per week</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>7 x per week</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>7 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>7 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lower Secondary</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>6 x per week</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>6 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>6 x per week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>6 x per week</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>6 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>6 x per week</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2. English as a subject in Malaysia basic education

In the past, only major ethnic languages such as Mandarin and Tamil were taught in schools. Hashim (2009, 2014) argued that Malaysia’s language policy should cater for indigenous languages. She stated:

“The main challenge for any policy chosen is that it should, apart from maintaining the national language, Malay, also ensure the maintenance and preservation of the other languages. Ideally, there should be a common national school system which accommodates the varying preferences of all the different ethnic groups, and all schools within this system should be funded by the government. All Malaysians should be given access and opportunities regardless of their ethnic backgrounds.” (Hashim, 2009:48) Years after Hashim’s suggestion, the promotion of English has occurred while there is an increased interest in indigenous languages, as Mal-1 attested. Nowadays, indigenous languages such as Iban, Bidayuh, Kadazandusun and Semai are taught as subjects (see Kosonen, 2017). These languages, offered as subjects to primary school students from Grades 3–6, are part of what participants called the Pupil’s Own Language (POL) policy. As explained by Mal-1: “These languages are taught in basic education as part of the requirements of the policy for vernacular schools. It is also related to the use of the mother tongue as a means of communication in these schools.” However, problems remain because languages such as Iban, Bidayuh, Kadazandusun and Semai are only a selected handful of Malaysian indigenous languages. We
do not know about other languages because sources are scant when it comes to the wide-range description of Malaysian minority indigenous languages/dialects (see Coluzzi, 2017). What this study has identified needs to be followed up by further research in that we have no data on how the 95 Malaysian languages which are endangered and 13 which are dying (Eberhard, et al., 2019) are preserved in the basic education system.

4.2.3. The Philippines

The Philippines is the only ASEAN Outer Circle nation with a national multilingual education policy. For decades prior to 2009, English and Filipino were used as media of instruction, a policy which deprived most Filipinos from studying through languages they spoke at home (Kaplan and Baldauf, 2003; Kirkpatrick, 2012a). The year 2009 ended this linguistic privileging as the Philippines adopted a policy of Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). The MTB-MLE policy is grounded on the realisation of increasing disparities in learning achievement, the improved results gained by pupils in L1-based educational pilots, and the intense language policy discourse on language and education (Kirkpatrick, 2012a; Rañosa-Madrunio, et al., 2016; Tupas and Lorente, 2014).

Findings from this study show that under the MTB-MLE the Philippines has catered for 19 languages. These are Aklanon, Bicol, Chabacano, Cebuano, Hiligaynon, Ilocano, Ivatan, Kapampangan, Kinaray-a, Maguindanaoan, Maranao, Pangasinense, Sambal, Surigaonon, Tagalog, Tausug, Waray, Ybanag and Yakan. These languages are mainly regional lingua francas rather than mother tongues, but they have a standardised orthography which qualifies them as media of instruction. The languages have been accommodated in the curriculum as media of instruction. They have become part of the Philippines’ shift from a dominant Bilingual Education Policy (1974–2009) to MTB-MLE policy (2009–present) (see also Geronimo, 2013; Martin, 2015; Dekker and Young, 2007; Rañosa-Madrunio, et al., 2016). Even though in the MTB-MLE policy EMI remains in place, as it is used to teach core courses (e.g. science and maths) from Grades 4 to 12 (Rañosa-Madrunio, et al., 2016), the policy “veers away from the Bilingual Education Policy” (Rañosa-Madrunio, 2015:123). The reason is because in the MTB-MLE policy the emphasis is no longer bilingualism in Filipino and English but includes “literacy in the mother tongue” (Phil-2). The mother tongues are regional and indigenous languages which “have been used in government schools as “transitional languages” for initial instruction and early literacy up to primary Grade 3” (Kosonen, 2009:32). Although concerns have been voiced with regards to the policy being used to promote “Tagalog imperialism” (Martin, 2015:116; Rañosa-Madrunio, 2015:120), some scholars believe that it provides “a sound platform from which students may successfully transition to a second language, such as the national language, Filipino, and the international language, English” (Martin, 2015:116).

Figure 4.2. An English classroom deserted during the pandemic in the Philippines
The MTB-MLE policy has emerged from intense public discourse, and it is probably the Philippines’ best response to the current challenge of preserving the nation’s highly diverse linguistic ecology. A policy maker working for the Philippines Department of Education (DepEd), Phil-1, stated:

“Well, actually, if you look at the experiences of the mother tongue-based multilingual education and knowing that we are a country with multiple languages, and English with most of our learners is really a foreign language to them because there are lots of places that DepEd is dealing with or addressing because we are for the whole country and we deal with learners from all walks of life …”

The impact of the MTB-MLE policy has been argued as positive in that it has reduced prejudice and suspicion among multilingual children in conflict-laden areas (Igcalinos, 2016, in Young and Igcalinos, 2019). Nevertheless, the MTB-MLE policy has created problems; for example, for students whose mother tongue is not Tagalog/Filipino because they have to master English and Tagalog/Filipino in order to progress academically (Tupas and Lorente, 2014). Further, problems with work to revitalise threatened languages or revitalisation planning (Zein, 2020) persist in that the policy caters only around one-ninth of the Philippines’ 183 languages. Scholars such as Martin (2015:116) have acknowledged the limitation of the MTB-MLE policy given that it cannot accommodate languages which do not have orthography systems, but even some languages with orthographies are not included either. Statistics show that 28 languages in the Philippines are endangered while 11 others are dying (Eberhard, et al., 2019). Unfortunately, there is no data indicating how the troubled languages are accommodated in the education sector.

The issue with revitalisation planning is ongoing while focus on English as a subject in the curriculum remains strong. Rañosa-Madrunio (2015:123) stated that the MTB-MLE “does not completely abrogate the use of English, for such reform recognises English as the language of wider communication”. Nowadays, EMI and ESBE are accommodated in the curriculum, as Phil-1 attested:

“… the current situation is that we have English as a medium of instruction from Grade 4 onwards, and since Grade 1 we have English as a subject. In Grade 1, it comes on the 3rd quarter and it’s purely oral because of the mother tongue-based multilingual education.”

The current basic education curriculum in the Philippines retains the New Secondary Education Curriculum (NSEC), which adds 20 minutes of instruction per lesson to its former 40 minutes per lesson allotment. Thus, one lesson of English in secondary education in the Philippines lasts for 60 minutes. This shows an increase from the 30 minutes per lesson allocated in primary education. This increase in length of instruction compensates for the decrease of frequency of instruction from early years of primary education to the final years of secondary education, as the Philippines implements a reverse funnel model in terms of frequency of instruction. Further details of hours allocated to English as a subject are available in Table 4.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Education</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>ESBE</th>
<th>Length of instruction</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>5 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>5 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>5 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>5 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>5 x per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>5 x per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Secondary</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>4 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>4 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>4 x per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Secondary</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>4 x per week</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>3 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>3 x per week</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3 English as a subject in the Philippines basic education
4.2.4. Singapore

Singapore, labelled as the ASEAN nation that “has privileged English the most” (Kirkpatrick, 2012a:335), heavily promotes English in the curriculum. Indeed, Singapore aims to reach “English-knowing bilingualism” (Low and Pakir, 2018). It is of no surprise that findings from this study demonstrate that Singapore cements EMI and establishes the place of English as a subject in the Singaporean education timetable where it is taught from Grade 1 of primary school to Grade 12 of secondary school. As Sing-1 suggested, this policy aligns with the recently launched English Language Syllabus 2020, which is meant to support the Ministry of Education’s Framework for 21st Century Competencies and Student Outcomes. Having said that, the allocated hours of instruction for English as a subject in the Singaporean timetable doubles that of Malaysia and Brunei. Setting a uniform spread of 30 minutes of instruction per lesson, Singapore implements a funnel model in the timetable. It allocates 17 lessons per week to students of Grades 1 and 2 and 13–15 lessons per week to students of Grades 3–6. While the length of instruction increases to 35 minutes in secondary school, the frequency nearly halves to eight lessons per week. Table 4.4. provides more details of English as a subject in Singapore’s school timetable in basic education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Education</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>ESBE</th>
<th>Length of instruction</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>17 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>17 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>13-15 x per week</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>13-15 x per week</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>13-15 x per week</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>13-15 x per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Secondary</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
<td>6-8 x per week</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
<td>6-8 x per week</td>
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<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
<td>6-8 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upper Secondary</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
<td>6-8 x per week</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
<td>6-8 x per week</td>
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<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
<td>6-8 x per week</td>
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Table 4.4. English as a subject in Singapore basic education

Singapore’s path to English-knowing bilingualism is marked by “paradoxical debates surrounding the issues of language maintenance and shift, identity and the transmission of values, equity and meritocracy, as well as balancing between local versus global linguistic norms and standards” (Low and Pakir, 2018:41). Findings from this study show that Singapore has attempted to address the debates by officialising mother-tongue education policy for Malay, Tamil and Mandarin aimed for individual ethnic communities (see also Low and Pakir, 2018; Pang, 2009). Sing-1 stated: “... besides English, we also teach mother tongue languages (MTLs) (i.e. Malay, Tamil and Mandarin) in our mainstream schools.” This policy seems to have been well grounded in the context of multicultural, multi-ethnic Singapore where 24 languages co-exist. Indeed, the Singaporean curriculum seeks to produce: “Empathetic communicators who possess the values, dispositions and skills to listen actively to different perspectives; communicate confidently, effectively and sensitively while collaborating with others to work towards shared goals; and balance an appreciation of the Singapore spirit with multi-ethnic and multicultural sensitivities” (MoE, 2019). The policy is generally welcomed because these mother-tongue languages are seen as carriers of historic cultural identities and are deemed important for sustaining additive bilingualism (Ng, 2014). However, it may still be far from resolving the debates and from striking a good balance in that most ethnic communities receive education in a language other than their languages of the home. Scholars suggest that there are a number of other languages which could have been offered in the education system, including Cantonese, Hakka, Hainan, Hindi, Malayalam, Punjabi and Teochew (Lim, 2015; Low and Pakir, 2018). Meanwhile, nine of Singapore’s 24 languages are
endangered and two others are dying (Eberhard, et al., 2019), hence the issue of revitalisation planning (Zein, 2020) remains. Questions also arise as to which standards and norms should be adopted in the education system given the emergence of Singapore’s local variety of English, Singlish (Low and Pakir, 2018; see also Jain and Wee).

### 4.3. ESBE in ASEAN Expanding Circle nations’ curricula

#### 4.3.1. Cambodia

In Cambodia, Khmer is undoubtedly the most important and dominant language. It is Cambodia’s national language, used as the language of government administration as well as the main medium of instruction in education. English and French are two foreign languages taught as school subjects. Article 24 of Education Law stipulates that English and French have become part of “the fundamental educational programmes of general education in accordance with the learners’ needs” (Kingdom of Cambodia, 2007).

Nonetheless, English has surpassed French in terms of popularity. Echoing previous studies (e.g. Sitha and Visal, 2015), this study shows that Cambodians generally embrace the belief that better employment prospects are viable through English rather than other languages such as French. This ideology is reflected in the curriculum where English is designated as a subject to enable Cambodian citizens’ abilities to communicate, research, work and develop critical thinking and creativity (MoEYS, 2015a).

Currently English is not taught in the first three years of primary education. It is taught to Grades 4–6 students who are subjected to two classes of English instruction (2 x 40 minutes) and lower secondary school students (Grades 7–9) who receive four4 English instructions (4 x 50 minutes) (MoEYS, 2015c). Overall, the Cambodian education system implements a reverse funnel model where more hours of English instruction are allocated to students in higher grades of basic education. While this policy remains in place, new policy initiatives such as New Generation Schools (NGS), which aims to develop school autonomy while increasing hours of instruction from 30 hours to 34 hours per week, are currently being piloted (Donaher and Wu, 2020). Details are provided in Table 4.5.

However, some participants have viewed the inclusion of English in the Cambodian basic education system with caution. The fact that English has become an integral part of the curriculum means the reduction of hours that could have been allocated to indigenous languages. For this reason, Cam-1 stated:

“\[In basic education, English is \ldots I might have an extreme idea about English because I believe English is the language killer. There are some examples from other countries. Look at Indonesia, they just take back English from their primary schools. If you study English, you might forget your own language. It might kill your own language and, as you can see now, the way that people speak Khmer, it is not like the Khmer language. It is like the English language now. I think English should be learnt better if they \ldots I would say that \ldots if they would learn at upper secondary school from grades 10, 11 or 12, rather than start at the beginning, both languages are not acquired, not the basic level of Khmer language itself. Putting it into the primary school and lower secondary school would just kill our language.\]

The statement might be premature in terms of providing an exact, definitive answer to the question whether English adversely affects minority indigenous languages in Cambodia. An issue of this depth requires specific research of its own.

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4 Lower secondary school students learn English and French as their foreign languages, referred to as ‘living language’ 1 or 2 (MoEYSa, 2015:12). Practically speaking, students receive four 50-minute hours of instruction.
However, the statement is worth pondering in light of Cambodia’s Multilingual Education National Action Plan (MENAP) policy. Along with the Philippines, Cambodia is one of the few ASEAN nations which has developed multilingual education policies to cater for minority indigenous languages. Endorsed in 2007, the MENAP policy provides room for an increasingly conducive environment for the use of minority indigenous languages in education. Prior to 2007, there was no explicit language education policy which provided support for the use of minority indigenous languages in education. But this changed with the MENAP policy, as the government has allowed local authorities to choose the media of instruction in certain minority areas (Kosonen, 2017, 2019; MoEYS, 2015b).

The impact of the MENAP policy has been seen as positive and the progress towards multilingual education has been “remarkable” (Kosonen, 2019:222). Nevertheless, the policy has also been criticised for what many see as the implementation of a transitional early-exit model where minority indigenous learners’ mother tongues are only used as media of instruction until the end of Grade 3, after which Khmer is used exclusively. Such a model is considered insufficient for the cognitive development of the learners and further learning (Benson, 2011; Benson and Kosonen, 2012). Moreover, the MENAP policy may have been developed without proper study on linguistic vitality. It has allowed vigorous languages such as Brao and threatened languages such as Krung and Kavet to be used as media of instruction, but it is unclear whether it has attempted to specifically address the revitalisation of other threatened languages given that there are seven Cambodian languages which are endangered and six which are dying (Eberhard, et al., 2019) or whether it also caters for three large non-dominant languages, namely Cham, Chinese and Vietnamese (Kosonen, 2017).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Education</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>ESBE</th>
<th>Length of instruction</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>2 x per week</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>2 x per week</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>2 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lower Secondary</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>4 x per week</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>4 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>4 x per week</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5. English as a subject in Cambodian basic education

for their living language 1 and two 50-minute hours of their living language 2. This makes up the total instruction hours of foreign languages to six.
4.3.2. Laos

Laos has no specific language policies which regulate the use of minority indigenous languages in education, even though its Constitution stipulates that the government ought to give special attention to “ethnic groups” living in “ethnic group areas”. This constitutional ruling makes little impact, however, and many have interpreted the Education Law of 2000 which stipulates the use of Lao in education as a regulation to use Lao only (Kosonen, 2007). Even participants of this study subscribed to this point of view. Laos-1 explained: “Yes, yes. Actually we have different ethnic groups, but any other indigenous groups and their languages are not accepted. We use Lao (in education).” Laos-2 reiterated: “In Lao PDR, Lao is an official language and it is the only instructional language used in the curriculum, teaching resources and in the teaching, learning process.”

There are recent efforts to promote the use of indigenous languages in society, with the National Socio-Economic Development Plan promoting the use, learning and teaching of 20 indigenous languages which already have orthographies (NSEDP, 2006). Further, measures such as priority deployment of teachers to non-dominant language communities are currently implemented to improve the participation of minority indigenous children (Achren and Kittiphanh, 2020:670). However, it is unknown how these efforts have prevailed in terms of preserving 26 endangered and five dying languages out of 85 living languages in the Laos linguistic ecology (Eberhard, et al., 2019).

While the present state of language maintenance in Laos is unfavourable, foreign languages seem to prosper. Findings from this study show that in the Laotian society where “Chinese is booming” (Laos-1), “French, Japanese, Korean” are “selective [sic] foreign languages starting from grade six” (Laos-2).

On top of these languages, English continues to be dominant. English in Laos has been taught as a compulsory subject in basic education starting in lower secondary school (Grades 7–9) since 1997. More recently, English has featured in primary education as well. Similar to Vietnam, Laos does not introduce English in Grades 1–2, but it starts English instruction from Grade 3 of primary school towards the final year of secondary school. Despite the official policy, some schools have taken a step further. Schools in urban areas succumb to parental pressure and start introducing English from Grades 1 and 2 (Achren and Kittiphanh, 2020; Kirkpatrick, 2017). Up to three sessions of instruction (45 minutes each) are allocated to primary school students. More time is allocated in secondary schools (50 minutes), with frequency of instruction ranging from two to five times per week (cf. Bouangeune, Sakigawa).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Education</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>ESBE</th>
<th>Length of instruction</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>2-3 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>2-3 x per week</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>2-3 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>2-3 x per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Secondary</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>2-5 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>2-5 x per week</td>
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<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>2-5 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upper Secondary</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>2-5 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>2-5 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>2-5 x per week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6. English as a subject in Laos basic education
and Hirakawa, 2008; Siphong, 2008). More details are presented in Table 4.6.

This curricular arrangement might change in the immediate future, however. The Laotian government is currently undertaking reforms to improve English language teaching in basic education. Laos-2 stated: “... in general education, English curriculum, teaching materials are revised from primary to secondary education”. Even so, the nationalistic agenda of the Laos socialist government remains stronger in that the emphasis on Laos surpasses that of English. The Laos Ministry of Education and Sports (2015:79) has stated that although students can start learning to speak English in primary school, it “would be preferable for them to have consolidated their understanding of how to read in Lao before they start learning how to read in English.”

### 4.3.3. Indonesia

In 1994, the *Wajib Belajar 9 Tahun* [The 9 Years Compulsory Education] was endorsed in Indonesia. This means basic education encompasses six years of primary school and three years of lower secondary school. The policy received further strengthening in the Law No. 20/2003 on National Education and Government Regulation No. 47/2008 on Basic Education. In 2016, a policy aimed to expand the scope of basic education in Indonesia from nine years to 12 years was piloted with the hope for a nationwide implementation in 2019. However, a nationwide implementation is yet to materialise. The implementation is left up to local governments. In *the Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah* [Medium Range National Development Plan] 2020–24, basic education consists of 12 years (up to higher secondary school), but it is not yet clear whether and when it is going to be officially endorsed at a national level. Therefore, basic education in Indonesia remains nine years. As such, ESBE is officialised at lower secondary level, but not primary level.

As discussed in Chapter 3, there is ongoing policy hesitancy about the idea of promoting English in basic education in Indonesia. For about two decades (1993–2013), English was made optional in primary schools. This policy saw an unprecedented number of primary schools introduce English and a soaring interest in the subject (Lestari, 2003; Zein, 2017a).

However, this situation changed in 2013 when the Curriculum 2013 was enacted, and more recently in 2017 when the Revised Curriculum 2013 was implemented. At the time of writing, the current Revised 2013 Curriculum remains in place. It has completely removed English from the primary school timetable, although some participants such as Ind-1 are not certain whether there is “policy or regulation that hinders the introduction of English at primary level”. The truth is, as attested by Chodidjah (2019), “there are no more hours officially allocated to English in the six years duration of primary education” (see also Zein, 2017a). This has made some schools resort to introducing English outside school hours as an extra-curricular activity. However, most schools cannot accommodate English because they retain popular programmes such as boy/girl scout and local arts (Chodidjah, 2019). Furthermore, the hours allocated to secondary school students have been reduced. The previous curriculum, the *Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan* (KTSP), stipulated six hours of instruction per week. However, nowadays, those studying in junior high school (i.e. SMP, Madrasah Tsanawiyah) only receive 4 x 40 minutes of English instruction per week. Details are provided in Table 4.7.

This curricular arrangement has come under renewed interest in local pedagogy. Educationists such as Alwasilah (1997, 2013) believe that primary education should focus on social, cultural and religious values to nurture children’s character; it should not expose them to foreign cultures such as those associated with English. Consequently, the hours formerly allocated to English are reserved for subjects meant to develop Indonesian students’ character. This results in more hours allocated to subjects such as *Religious and Character Education, Craft and Entrepreneurship, and Pancasila and Citizenship Education* (see Zein, 2020:175–8). Perhaps the wariness of educationists such as Alwasilah is reasonable given that English in Indonesia has also been associated with the discourse of linguistic imperialism (Sugiharto, 2013, 2014; Zein, 2020). The teaching of English in primary schools has actually worsened multilingualism (Zein, 2019). Previously when English was optional, many primary schools decided to drop indigenous languages from their timetable and replace them with English. Hadisantosa (2010:31) noted that “... with (the) emerging and mushrooming demand for English, schools then drop the local language in order to give more time to the English teaching.”
Table 4.7. English as a subject in Indonesia basic education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Education</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>ESBE</th>
<th>Length of instruction</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Secondary</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>4 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>4 x per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>4 x per week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, the dropping of indigenous languages from the primary timetable cannot be solely attributed to English because the primary curriculum overall has always been crowded with the emphasis on the Indonesian language. Nowadays, an increased emphasis on Indonesian is even more evident with more teaching hours allocated to the subject. Ind-1 explained:

“National language is introduced in primary education because it is our constitutional obligation. What makes Indonesia a nation is because we all speak Bahasa Indonesia. It is our national identity and the tool of national integration, in addition to the tool of our formal national communication.”

Findings from this study reiterate previous studies (Sugiharto, 2014; Zein, 2019, 2020) which highlight how indigenous languages could be introduced in schools. According to Ind-1, indigenous languages such as “Javanese, Sundanese, Cirebonese, Balinese, etc.” are part of local education administered by local governments under the policy of decentralisation of education. Local governments have the latitude to organise the teaching of indigenous languages as school subjects. Ind-1 explained:

“Vernacular languages are introduced in primary schools because they are parts of our national culture. We have … vernacular language that could enrich our national language. Vernacular languages [are] also the mother tongues of many Indonesian children that would facilitate them when learning national and foreign languages.”

The current curricular allocation still provides space for other foreign languages, although their status is not compulsory. As Ind-1 explained: “Some primary schools may introduce Arabic or Mandarin. In secondary education, foreign languages other than English such as Arabic, German, French, Japanese and Korean are also introduced.”

Figure 4.3 A primary English textbook used in Indonesia
Given the current curricular arrangement, it remains unclear how ESBE unravels in Indonesia. A participant signalled that the situation might change in a not-too-distant future given that at the moment “the Ministry is also in the process of creating the English curriculum, which includes the teaching of English from grade 1” (Ind-2). Meanwhile, a representative of the Direktorat Jenderal Guru dan Tenaga Kependidikan (Dirjen GTK) stated that in future policy, “[t]he lesson hours for English subject must be increased in the learning process at schools” (Ind-3). However, no specific plans have been divulged. The Director General of Basic and Secondary Education of Indonesian Education Ministry did not respond to invitations to participate in this study.

4.3.4. Myanmar

Myanmar, also known as Burma, is the only ASEAN nation which has been subjected to military subjugation for such a long time. A military regime which ruled from 1988 ended in 2011, and Myanmar briefly enjoyed the fresh air of democracy, before unfortunately returning to another military dictatorship recently in February 2021. Thus, Myanmar is not only a complex linguistic ecology with 120 living languages spread across the country but also a fractured nation with ongoing political uncertainty. Any discussion of language education policy in Myanmar must take account of such a political situation in a conflict-laden nation where languages, religions and identities are important tenets of social cohesion (see Aye and Sercombe, 2014; Lo Bianco, 2016; Wong, 2017).

Given such a situation, “a number of so-called ‘ethnic education systems’ have arisen in parts of the territory of Burma” where ethnicities such as the Mon, Kachin and Karen develop their own schools (McCormick, 2019:249). The teaching of non-dominant indigenous languages such as Mon, Kachin and Karen in such ethnic schools are therefore expected (Kosonen, 2017). Meanwhile, for nationality reasons, the Myanmar government has continued to cement the place of Burmese in basic education. Burmese as the national language has become the default policy by which the government endeavours to retain unity in a nation where the Burmese and other indigenous ethnicities (e.g. Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine, Shan) are not always in harmony (McCormick, 2019; see also Aye and Sercombe, 2014). Participants of this study maintained that Burmese as the main language is used as a medium of instruction in the government system of education and that indigenous languages are used in ethnic education systems. Myan-3 explained:

“Burmese is the main language … and in … ethnic specific areas, schools can use Karen (Kayin) if they have teachers who can speak Karen and they can use Karen or Kachin or Mon because I know very well because … we have a number of projects in those areas. There are ethnic schools, and they emphasise on their mother tongues in the primary level. There are Karen schools, and then after the primary level, they will join government school.”

Previous studies show that indigenous languages are not used in the national public education system. However, findings from this study show that the situation has become more conducive in recent years. Myan-1 stated that indigenous languages “are not included in the basic education curriculum. They are taught as a co-curriculum subject at the low primary level education.” Despite this, “[e]ven in the primary sector of the government itself, they would encourage mother-tongue education and “they would encourage it as classroom language” (Myan-3). There are no official language policies regulating the use of indigenous languages in Myanmar, but the previous democratic Myanmar government (2012–20) seems to have attempted to develop an inclusive policy approach to languages. It seems to have endeavoured to accommodate indigenous languages in basic education, provided teachers and education infrastructure are available. Myan-2 explained:

“Myanmar nationality languages are taught at basic education schools depending on the availability of teachers and resources with the arrangements of the state and regional governments. Myanmar nationality languages are encouraged to teach at school and textbooks on Myanmar nationality languages are published by the Ministry of Education.”

These are surely encouraging signs. However, the situation concerning the preservation of 16 endangered and four dying languages in Myanmar (Eberhard, et al., 2019) remains unknown. There is no information concerning endeavours to revitalise threatened languages through education, whether under Myanmar’s previous democratic government or the current Tatmadaw military ruling.

Meanwhile, in the Myanmar basic education system the place of English is unrivalled. Myan-1 stated: “At the moment, no other foreign language is taught other than English in basic education.” Myanmar is currently
implementing the National Education Strategic Plan (2016–21), which reasserts the place of English in basic education. In Myanmar’s current basic education system, ESBE is compulsory from grades 1–6 of primary schooling where children receive up to 5 x 40-minute instruction per week. Further, English is also compulsory for students in grades 7–12 of secondary schooling with 45-minute instruction delivered five to six times per week. In addition, at the high school level, EMI has been stipulated to take place in the teaching of mathematics and science subjects including physics, chemistry and biology in grades 10–12. These instructions are provided weekly for an academic year consisting of 36 weeks (Myan-4). Details of hours of instruction allocated to English in basic education in Myanmar can be seen in Table 4.8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Education</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>ESBE</th>
<th>Length of instruction</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>3 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>3 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>3 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>5 x per week</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>5 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>6 x per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>6 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8*</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>6 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9*</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>6 x per week</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>5 x per week</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>5 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>6 x per week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8. English as a subject in Myanmar basic education

4.3.5. Thailand

Thailand is an ethnically and linguistically diverse kingdom which has 73 individual living languages (Eberhard, et al., 2019). Standard Thai, a modified linguistic variety of Central Thai, has been used as the standard, official language by the government for nearly 100 years. It was officially declared as the national language of the kingdom on 24 June 1940 (Prapasapong, 2009). The language is prestigious and highly respected in society and is therefore seen as “a symbolic pillar of official policy promoting Thai identity and national identity” (Draper, 2019:230). It is heavily promoted in education and used as a medium of instruction in public schools (Kosonen, 2017).

With regards to the Standard Thai and indigenous languages, findings generated from this study demonstrate a contrasting situation from the Thailand of the past. Language ideologies in Thailand have shifted towards pluralism. Thailand has moved away from its policy in the 1940s and 1950s when the promotion of Standard Thai was rigorous and “students were practically not allowed to speak their own languages in school” (Prapasapong, 2020) to the 2000s when it did not prohibit the use of indigenous languages. Nowadays, contemporary Thailand government “promotes bilingual and multilingual education for the youth of ethnic groups whose mother tongue is different from the Thai language” (Thai-2). This continues a tradition where “some schools teach local languages as additional subjects. Sometimes they use their local language as the medium of instruction, together with...”

---

5 The new curriculum is currently under development and information provided in this table comes from the new syllabi made available on the Myanmar Ministry of Education website. Adjustments are still being made. For example, * indicates that the current teaching hours allocation for different subjects of Grade 8 and Grade 9 and syllabi follow that of grades 6 and 7.
Standard Thai, as they deem appropriate” (Prapasapong, 2009:105). Thus, several indigenous languages such as Kuy, Northern Khmer and Pattani Malay have been taught as subjects in schools. Efforts to preserve indigenous languages as such have received considerable assistance from international organisations such as UNESCO (Kosonen, 2007).

Although these movements are welcomed, they barely set a conducive environment to the preservation of Thailand’s indigenous languages through the education sector. Prapasapong (2020) admits that language policy in Thailand takes account of indigenous languages, but does not see them as important as Standard Thai. Consequently, “some local languages have gradually died out or become less popular” (Prapasapong, 2009:105). What Prapasapong lamented more than a decade ago warrants heeding in contemporary Thailand where a total of 27 languages are currently threatened. Twenty-one out of Thailand’s 73 languages are endangered and six are dying (Eberhard, et al., 2019).

This critical situation is ongoing while the promotion of foreign languages in Thailand is currently taking place. Data from this study suggests that European languages such as French and East Asian languages such as Chinese, Korean and Japanese are quite popular at higher levels of education. Despite their popularity, they cannot compete with English, which has become the main foreign language in the nation. Thai-3 elaborated:

“At present, English is the only compulsory foreign language in Thai basic education. While the curriculum is actually generic when it sets standards and allocates hours to ‘foreign languages’, practically the entire language teaching infrastructure of the nation is focused solely on English. Thus, only a limited number of schools (mostly higher-ranked schools in urban areas) provide any other foreign languages. Mostly, other languages offered are either European (esp. French) or East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean).”

To promote English, Thailand has enacted a new National Language Policy which cements its status in basic education. The policy has retained the status of English as a compulsory subject in primary school, which was first stipulated in 1996. Nowadays, English is compulsory at both primary and secondary levels of education and hours of instruction have increased. Previously English was only taught for one hour per week in grades 1–3 and two hours in grades 4–6 (Sermrongswad and Tantipongsanuruk, 2015). In recent years, the hours of instruction have increased considerably. Thai-3 notes that the hours officialised by the government are the minimal hours allowed in the school timetable whereby schools have some flexibility in terms of implementing the policy. Consequently, the Thai government decrees that English may be taught as a subject for approximately five hours per week in the first three grades of primary education and two hours per week in the final three grades. This suggests the implementation of a funnel model where more hours of English instruction are allocated to lower grades than higher grades of primary education. This does not apply to all levels of basic education, however, since the length of instruction at lower secondary education remains at one hour and frequency of instruction is steady at four times per week. More details can be seen in Table 4.9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Education</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>ESBE</th>
<th>Length of instruction</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>5 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>5 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>5 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>2 x per week</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>2 x per week</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>2 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lower Secondary</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>3 x per week</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>3 x per week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.9. English as a subject in Thailand basic education
4.3.6. Vietnam

Similar to Thailand, Vietnam also places emphasis on its national language, Vietnamese. The language is the official language of the nation, the language of wider communication around the country and the official language in education (Diep and Thanh, 2009; Kosonen, 2017). The Vietnamese government encourages people who do not speak Vietnamese to learn the language. As Diep and Thanh (2009:109) stated: “Encouragement for ethnic minority people to learn Vietnamese” is one of the focuses of Vietnam’s language policy.

However, Vietnam’s policy is also one which supports minority indigenous languages. Diep and Thanh (ibid) maintain that Vietnam’s language policy also focuses on: “1) Respect for the equality of languages; and 2) Support for ethnic minority peoples to promote their languages and cultures.” For this reason, Vietnam has employed three education models which include national and minority indigenous languages. The first model divides teaching into Stage 1 where a minority language is used as the sole medium of instruction in Grades 1, 2 and 3 and Vietnamese is introduced in Grade 3; and Stage 2 where Vietnamese is the sole medium of instruction in Grades 4 and 5. In the second model, the minority language is taught as a subject and languages with non-Roman script are taught from Grade 1 to Grade 5, while those with a Roman script from Grade 3 to Grade 5. In the third model, minority indigenous languages are used as media of instruction in Grades 1 and 2; and Vietnamese is taught as a subject in all grades. Starting from Grade 3, Vietnamese becomes the sole medium of instruction (Diep and Thanh, 2009). Despite the policy rhetoric, Vietnamese continues to be the main language of instruction at all levels of education (Kosonen, 2017). Further, there is no clarity as to how basic education has attempted to address language endangerment in Vietnam given that 41 of its languages are endangered and six others dying (Eberhard, et al., 2019).

While the curriculum has accommodated Vietnamese and minority indigenous languages, it has also attempted to include foreign languages. Findings from this study show that foreign languages are optional. Viet-2 stated: “Yes, there are others, but they are optional rather than compulsory. As I know that we have English, Chinese, Russian, French, mostly, in some schools, we have Korean or Japanese, that sort of things.” Viet-2 and Viet-3 elaborated on the rationale for the inclusion of Chinese, Russian, French, Korean, Japanese and German, stating that it has been attributed to “historical, geographic, economic factors”, “the matter of the needs of the learners” and “sometimes even political factors”.

Bilateral relations between Vietnam and countries which speak those foreign languages might develop well, as Viet 3 attested. Yet, these pale in comparison with the need to introduce English in basic education. Vietnam has specifically developed a National Foreign Language (NFL) policy which strengthens the place of English in the curriculum. Data drawn from this study suggests that the Vietnamese government has made considerable efforts to advance English language education in the nation. Viet-1 elaborated:

“The Government in fact made one step ahead by introducing the 2018 curriculum. Accordingly, English is officially introduced as a compulsory subject from primary school level to the high school level. Particularly, English is taught right from Grade 1. It means that Vietnamese pupils learn English from Grade 1 to Grade 12. In reality, however, English is an optional subject for grades 1 and 2 but both the curriculum, textbooks and expected learning outcomes are approved as required. Hence, the introduction of English into the high school curriculum in general and the primary school curriculum in particular is an advance of the 2018 general education curriculum with a regionally appropriate pathway. It also guarantees equality in education.”

It is unknown how the new curriculum impacts the models of education for indigenous languages, but it is certain that the place of English in the curriculum is more robust. In the curriculum, the length of instruction allocated to English increases from 40 minutes in primary education to 45 in secondary education. Flexibility is given in primary education where schools can teach English from two to four times per week. However, frequency of instruction is fixed in secondary education where schools can teach English three times per week. Details are available in Table 4.10.
Previous studies have demonstrated that ASEAN nations are currently undergoing some kind of “language revolution” where developing forms of bilingualism involving English and national languages are emerging while concerns about minority indigenous languages are mounting (e.g. Kirkpatrick, 2012a, 2012b; Kirkpatrick and Liddicoat, 2017, 2019; Tupas and Sercombe, 2014; see also Kosonen, 2017; Kosonen and Young, 2009; cf. Jones, 2003).

This chapter argues that to properly understand the language revolution, it is necessary to examine the sociolinguistic situation within the broad landscape of ASEAN educational curricula. Data from this study suggests that there exists a certain quadrangular sociolinguistic situation within the curricular landscape of ASEAN nations. The sociolinguistic situation is generally composed of a group of national languages, indigenous languages, English and other foreign languages (e.g. Arabic, French, German, Mandarin, Korean, Japanese). Findings generated from this study suggest that the language revolution in ASEAN captures more than the diverging policy directions involving English and mother-tongue education. In the way that there is a complicated sociolinguistic contestation between English, ASEAN nations’ national languages, indigenous languages and other foreign languages, the language revolution is much more dynamic and complex than a description of attempts to reconcile English and mother-tongue education or those which develop forms of bilingualism that include both English and national languages (cf. Jones, 2003; Tupas, 2018). Standing in contrast with the stampede towards English and the increasing prominence of global languages such as Mandarin and Arabic are national and local efforts among ASEAN member states to reverse or decelerate the processes. Further, the decreasing vitality of minority indigenous languages has caused concerns about language endangerment at a time when the promotion of national languages has taken place at large scale. Data from this study indicates how most ASEAN nations struggle to accommodate languages from different categories in basic education curricula. Choices have to be made where an element of sociolinguistic situation is “sacrificed”; for example, in Myanmar basic education where other foreign languages are not accommodated or in Brunei where indigenous languages have no place in basic education. Overall, ASEAN nations grapple with the multilingual realities encompassed by their individual sociolinguistic situations.

Various studies have also observed a trend in which the promotion of the national languages and English has disadvantaged indigenous languages (see Kirkpatrick, 2012, 2017; Kirkpatrick and Liddicoat, 2017, 2019; Kosonen and Young, 2009; Kosonen, 2017; Tupas and Sercombe, 2014a; Kosonen and Young, 2009). It is easy to resort to the linguistic imperialism argument which stresses the dominance of English to the extent that it reduces the role of indigenous languages (see Phillipson, 1992, 2009; cf. Kirkpatrick, 1998; Ferguson, 2006). However, it may be

### Table 4.10. English as a subject in Vietnam basic education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Education</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>ESBE</th>
<th>Length of instruction</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>2-4 x per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>2-4 x per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>2-4 x per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>3 x per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>3 x per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>3 x per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>3 x per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>3 x per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>3 x per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>3 x per week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4. Concluding remarks
oversimplistic to argue that the threatened linguistic and cultural diversity occurring in ASEAN and the social inequalities associated with it are solely attributed to the increasing emphasis on English in ASEAN basic education curricula.

Findings from this study suggest that the marginalisation of indigenous languages is attributed to a few factors. For one, it occurs because language policies have been developed in a way that retains the place of national languages in the curricula. ASEAN nations tend to promote their national languages for national unity and social cohesion. Accordingly, they develop language policies as a vehicle for nation building and for cementing a shared sense of national identity through a common language. This argument has developed as part of the broader discourse where language education policies emphasise monolingualism and encourage assimilation (cf. Kirkpatrick and Liddicoat, 2017, 2019; Kosonen and Young, 2009; Kosonen, 2017; Tupas and Sercombe, 2014a; Kosonen and Young, 2009).

Second, English comes to the equation. Spolsky’s (2004) assertion that independent states cannot do without English in the post-modern era finds evidence in this study. Data from this study demonstrates that all ASEAN Outer and Expanding Circle nations introduce English in basic education. Even in Indonesia, which has removed English from primary education, English is taught in secondary schools. There are suggestions made in the literature regarding the need to postpone English language education until secondary level in order to ensure the preservation of indigenous languages in ASEAN (e.g. Kirkpatrick, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2017). Kirkpatrick (2017:21) argues “the trend to introduce English earlier and earlier into the curriculum was not only unnecessary but also had a serious effect on the cultural and linguistic diversity of ASEAN”. However, data from this study demonstrates that ASEAN member states wish to include English in basic education, regardless. They have created ESBE policies while grappling with the repercussions in terms of the preservation of linguistic and cultural diversity, with some being more ready than others, some more resourceful than others. For many participants of this study, the argument that modern nation states cannot do without English is not an overstatement. In the eye of an outsider, a UNESCO representative who has been dealing with multilingual education in the Asia Pacific region for many years, the push for English is “inevitable” and “it is not possible” to stop governments from endorsing ESBE policies. There is a strong motivation to promote English on the part of some ASEAN nations as they aspire to reach international standards. However, in other nations there is a fear of missing out. According to the UNESCO representative, ASEAN nations fear lagging behind in terms of global competitiveness “if they don’t introduce English as early as possible.”

Third, there is a perpetual struggle in ASEAN basic education curricula in that other foreign languages fight for curricular space against English. Though the struggle is usually won by English, there are cases where hours are allocated to other foreign languages. When this happens, it minimises, or even denies, curricular space for indigenous languages. The curricular space of other foreign languages is constrained by English, but even so their presence further constrains indigenous languages. Kirkpatrick and Liddicoat (2019) have observed the relatively small proportions of learners of other foreign languages compared with English, but they have predicted the decelerating rate of English-only foreign language education in the future. If Kirkpatrick and Liddicoat are correct, it proves the assertion made in this study regarding the ‘leftover’ status of indigenous languages. As findings from this study show, in ASEAN, indigenous languages only have very limited curricular space, receiving only what is left from national languages, English, and other foreign languages. Whether hours of instruction allocated to other foreign languages increase or decrease in the future, it does not matter. Indigenous languages would only be given the remaining curricular space left from national languages, English and other foreign languages. Unless there are radical ideological changes, this situation is likely to persist.

In a nutshell, the marginalisation of indigenous languages in ASEAN is not solely attributed to English. It is an outcome of a complex process which involves national languages, English and other foreign languages. English adds complexity to what is already a highly complex educational curricula in ASEAN. The teaching of English in ASEAN basic education generally goes in parallel with the promotion of national languages in a process which benefits both but undermines indigenous languages and constrains other foreign languages (cf. Tupas and Sercombe, 2014; Kirkpatrick and Liddicoat, 2017, 2019).

This leads to the third argument of this chapter that while the components of the sociolinguistic situation in ASEAN educational curricula are usually acknowledged in the literature, they are seldom considered together (cf. Tupas, 2018). Encouraging signs are evident from this study because there is an emerging trend which supports linguistic diversity. In ASEAN, there is increased awareness of and appreciation towards multilingualism and pluralism. This may not have been found in all contexts, but even in Brunei, where a Malay monolingual culture is predominant, awareness of linguistic diversity is causing a ripple (see Haji-Othman, et al., 2019). In general, within ASEAN basic education curricula there has been greater diversity in the accommodation of national languages, indigenous
languages, English and other foreign languages. This is a phenomenon, which, given the data from this study, I am optimistic about. In addition, there are continuing scholarly advocacies on multilingual education as well as ongoing work of relevant organisations such as UNESCO to support minority communities. Therefore, it is likely that future ASEAN governments would be more aware of mother tongue-based multilingual education and thus promote it in their societies (cf. Kirkpatrick and Liddicoat, 2017, 2019).

Despite reasons to be optimistic, what has been done remains too little. Across all ASEAN nations there are hundreds of indigenous languages which are either endangered or dying. My compilation of Ethnologue data (see Eberhard, et. al., 2019 for details) shows that there are 511 endangered and 128 dying languages in the broad sociolinguistic sphere of ASEAN. The total languages that are threatened (639) make up nearly half of the total individual living languages in the region (1,476), as can be seen in Table 4.11. Thus, the priority of language education policy reforms in ASEAN needs to be to counter language loss. Revitalisation planning must be on the agenda of ASEAN nations.

### Table 4.11. Threatened languages in ASEAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASEAN Country</th>
<th>Total number of languages</th>
<th>Endangered languages</th>
<th>Dying languages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brunei Darussalam</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>707</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Philippines</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,476</strong></td>
<td><strong>511</strong></td>
<td><strong>128</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The difficulty is considerable given the typical bias held by policy makers against minority indigenous languages. A UNESCO representative who participated in this study stated that her organisation had conducted enormous advocacy, knowledge sharing and capacity building for ASEAN policy makers on the importance of Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education. However, she noted the “bias” and “stereotype” against minority indigenous languages and Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education. Her work has therefore focused on efforts to “break this bias and misunderstanding ... [and] stereotype.” The bias reflects the pervasive ideologies enmeshing language education policies in Southeast Asia in general where minority indigenous languages are typically seen “as symbols of backwardness, anti-modernism and anti-nationalism; and as instruments of potential national disunity and disintegration” (Tupas and Sercombe, 2014:02; see Zein, 2020, Chapter 5, for the case of Indonesia).

Overcoming the ideological bias requires first and foremost work on prior ideological clarification (Fishman, 1991; Kroskrity, 2015) to truly understand what stakeholders think about national languages, indigenous languages, English and other foreign languages. It then continues with work relevant to shifting language ideologies, focusing on aspects which could examine the impact of the inclusion of English in the curriculum (Appleby, et al., 2002; Zein, 2020). Relevant questions include: How can languages develop a complementary rather than competitive relationship? How can education be developed to prevent language endangerment? When should English be best introduced in basic education? What is its relationship with national languages, indigenous languages and other foreign languages? How is the relationship reflected in the curriculum? What is the curricular allocation of English, national languages, indigenous languages and other foreign languages in comparison with other subjects? When should the national language work alongside the mother tongue? How can foreign languages other than English be accommodated in the curriculum? What are the political, economic, cultural, religious and social interests pertaining to the incorporation of languages in basic education? How can language education be developed in a way which minimises divide between the privileged elite and the rest?
Further research which can address these questions is urgently needed. Answers to the questions are pertinent to the development of a comprehensive set of language education policies which tackle the common concern faced by ASEAN nations. That is, how to appropriately and effectively integrate English into existing educational curricula where national languages are promoted, preservation of indigenous languages is ensured and other foreign languages are accommodated (cf. Zein and Stroupe, 2017; Low, 2020; Low and Ao, 2018; Kirkpatrick, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2017; Kirkpatrick and Liddicoat, 2017; Tupas, 2018; Tupas and Sercombe, 2014).

The fourth argument of this chapter is that understanding the sociolinguistic situation in the educational curricula also has theoretical implications. This study has partially proven Spolsky's (2004) theory of the forces which drive language policy in independent nation states. It has attested to the existence of English, national languages and minority indigenous languages. However, this study differs from Spolsky because rather than being a driving force of language policy, the actual sociolinguistic situation is the map by which the forces are in interplay. The sociolinguistic situation describes the existence of English, national languages, indigenous languages and other foreign languages in ASEAN. Each of these four components is a driving force of language policy in independent nation states. Further, the addition of other foreign languages as another driving force suggests the complexity of language policies in post-modern independent states. National languages, English and indigenous languages struggle to find space in ASEAN ESBE curricula, and so do other foreign languages. ASEAN member states grapple with introducing foreign languages other than English in their basic education curricula. Languages as diverse as Arabic, French, German, Mandarin, Korean and Japanese have been introduced into the curricula for various political, social, economic, religious and cultural reasons, but the introduction has not been without difficulties.

Finally, findings show that there is no unified pattern of how English is taught in the ASEAN basic education curricula. To allocate hours and frequency of instruction to English, ASEAN Outer Circle nations implement a funnel model over the long period of basic education while others use a reverse funnel model. Either way, the increase or decrease in hours and frequency of instruction is slight. In terms of length of instruction, the increase ranges from five minutes (Singapore) to ten minutes (Malaysia, the Philippines). Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines tend to provide more exposure to English in primary than secondary education; nonetheless, practices vary. Similarly, there is no uniform practice of ESBE in ASEAN Expanding Circle nations. This can be seen in the fact that Cambodia does not introduce English in the first three years of primary education, whereas Laos and Vietnam make English instruction in the first two years of primary education optional. Meanwhile, Myanmar and Thailand teach English from the first grade of primary school to the final grade of secondary school.

There is no data drawn from the study to explain why practices vary. However, greater exposure to English in lower grades of basic education in ASEAN may be indicative of two things.

First, it may reflect the prevailing ideology of early second language acquisition among ASEAN nations (see Chapter 3). Policy makers across ASEAN nations may think that allocating more hours to English in primary education is essential because they consider early childhood as an important stage for successful language acquisition. Numerous research studies have suggested that this ideology is scientifically unsubstantiated without strong instructional infrastructure and effective pedagogy (see Pfenninger and Singleton, 2018 for review; cf. Zein, 2017c). Nonetheless, as in the case of early language learning policies worldwide, most countries are reluctant to use research findings to inform policies. Countries would carry on with introducing a foreign language in the early years of basic education despite research studies suggesting the contrary (Zein, 2021).

Second, greater exposure to English in lower grades of basic education may reflect the pervasive ideology which equates English with basic skills of the 21st century. This is relevant given that three ASEAN Outer Circle nations (Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore) have developed educational reforms aimed to accelerate progress, so that within 20 years' time they could be among the top ten nations in the world in terms of welfare and education. Conversely, in Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, more hours of English instruction are provided in higher grades of basic education than lower grades. The political rhetoric in these ASEAN Expanding Circle nations highlights the importance of English as a basic skill of the 21st century, but in lower grades of basic education the nations tend to allocate hours to other subjects. Their education curricula tend to prioritise subjects which emphasise national and cultural development. This means that although English is considered highly important in these nations, it is worth investigating as to whether they truly think of it as a basic skill of the 21st century. There seems to be ideological contestation persisting in these nations in that a subject that is aimed to prepare students for the global world (i.e. English) is in competition with subjects which aim to serve national development agendas. Some instructional hours, which could have been allocated to English, would have to be sacrificed in order to accommodate such subjects.
Chapter 5
Implementing ESBE: challenges abound
5.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the implementation of English as a subject in basic education (ESBE) across ASEAN nations and the challenges constraining the implementation. First, the chapter discusses the unfavourable learning environment, covering a number of factors which make teaching and learning English challenging. The chapter then examines issues concerning assessment. Third, the chapter analyses the context in which educational technologies and online education are implemented in ESBE, particularly in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. The chapter then discusses transition from primary to secondary education and how it affects the delivery of ESBE in ASEAN nations. The chapter ends with a critical analysis of the themes emerging throughout the section and draws concluding points.

5.2. Unfavourable learning environment

Various educational reforms have been conducted in ASEAN nations in the past two decades, and yet they do not eradicate problems overnight. Challenges are found in many situations, accumulating to create a kind of unfavourable learning environment. An unfavourable learning environment is a set of circumstances which impede learning, such as unconducive culture of learning, low student motivation, teachers’ poor language proficiency and methodological competence, and large classroom size and limited educational facilities (cf. the notion of teaching English in difficult circumstances as posited by Michael West, 1960; see also Kuchah, 2018). Findings from this study demonstrate that the situation is not the same in all ASEAN nations, but there are relatively similar pedagogical aspects that combine to create an unfavourable learning environment in instructed context as far as ESBE is concerned.

First, data shows that ESBE is undermined by lack of student participation. Such minimal participation does not originate from students’ inherent psychological traits such as lack of willingness to communicate (WTC) (McCroskey and Richmond, 1987). Rather, it is shaped by a learning culture, referring to preconceived, culturally rooted ideas about how learning should be. Learning culture relates to beliefs about how knowledge (and language in any case) can and should be acquired. Data obtained from participants from Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam shows that the learning culture in ASEAN emphasises teacher-centred learning. There is a pervasive belief in many contexts in ASEAN where teacher-centred learning is expected and that rote learning, repetition and student passiveness should characterise pedagogy. In such a learning culture, the authority of teachers as the purveyor of knowledge is usually unquestioned, and students are limited to being mere recipients of knowledge. This learning culture is not exclusive to Brunei and Malaysia, but is common across ASEAN contexts, including Cambodia (Saroeun, 2015), Indonesia (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Nur, 2004), Laos (Kounnavongsa, 2015), Myanmar (Sein, 2015), the Philippines (Raïosa-Madrunio, 2015), Thailand (Sermsongswad and Tantipongsanuruk, 2015) and Vietnam (Canh, Nguyen, Minh and Barnard, 2019). Various participants in this study expressed a similar concern about the pedagogical approaches which characterise the learning culture. Sein’s (2015:99) statement represents an enduring concern particularly in Myanmar:

“... observations of language classes reveal that very few teachers make use of the activity-based methodology. Instead, they spend most of the time teaching by reading aloud and spelling and providing students with Myanmar meaning of words and sentences in the textbook which students are expected to copy in their exercise books and memorise and regurgitate when demanded.”

One might expect that given the educational reforms on English language education in Asia, such a learning culture might have been minimised. Bru-2 shared his experience of teaching in Brunei schools in the 1990s where he was “observed several times by inspectors, who all praised and indeed encouraged the pairwork and groupwork activities (with all the ‘noises’ that entailed)”. However, in some contexts, the learning culture could be perpetuated by educational administrators. Bru-1 explained: “Teacher-dominated classrooms with largely silent students are the norm, and these are encouraged. School principals and Ministry inspectors react negatively towards classrooms where there is noise caused by students engaging with the subject matter, e.g. in groupwork and pairwork.”

Such a learning culture could be so prevalent that Mal-3 felt the need to express her opposition in open forums involving Malaysian teachers. In a defence of her choice of textbook and an attempt to promote learning autonomy, she cited the Malay proverb, Macam katak bawah...
tempurung [Like a frog under a coconut shell]. This refers to a situation where people are closed-minded, so that they are unable to accept and learn new ideas. She feared that over-controlling students could result in their experiencing macam katak bawah tempurung. She stated: “I was out there. During training, you all need to talk to them that’s where it is, we, we need to engage teachers. Do not control our students to the extent that they macam katak bawah tempurung. Do not do that to our students. Do not.”

These findings suggest that teacher-centred learning persists in most contexts in ASEAN. This stands in contrast with other contexts in Asia which have experimented with Western methodological approaches that focus on learner-centred learning, increased communication and student interaction, the employment of information and communications technology (ICT), and the use of task-based and communicative activities such as role play and group work. For example, in some contexts such as Taiwan (Chung and Huang, 2009) and Hong Kong (Mok and Ko, 2000), student-centred learning and more communicative approaches have become increasingly common. These contexts demonstrate a cultural learning shift where certain teaching approaches or methodologies coming from one educational context are imported to another and then modified, reshaped and refined to meet local needs in that context (see Zein, 2017d).

Thus, in the wide scope of ASEAN, although language education policy reforms are underway, cultural learning shift may not occur in all situations. All stakeholders might agree that English language education aims to develop students’ communicative skills, but many may not share the same approaches which would promote communication. As findings from this study show, there is a culture of learning that may curtail communicative approaches and does not promote interaction or learning autonomy. Some preconceived, culturally rooted ideas about learning might work to the detriment of language education policy reforms which aim to promote communicative competence in English. These ideas might even be perpetuated by educational authorities or promoted by government agents.

This interpretation, however, must be treated with caution due to the fact that ‘communicative’, ‘teacher-centred’ and ‘student-centred’ are largely Western-imported ideas. Indeed, English language education policy reforms in ASEAN may have been inspired by Western-imported methods or approaches; for example, the advocacy for Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Genre-based Curriculum in ASEAN nations (e.g. Goh, 2015; Rañosa-Madrunio, 2015; Widodo, 2016). Thus, ASEAN academics’ and practitioners’ understanding of ‘communicative’ approaches and the need to embrace ‘student-centred’ learning instead of ‘teacher-centred’ learning is informed by scholars advocating Western origin methods such as CLT and TBLT. However, in the Post-Method era (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, 2006), subscribing to the so-called ‘methods’ may not be appropriate given that “methods are based on idealised concepts geared toward idealised contexts” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003:29). ASEAN is highly diverse and local contexts within the region dictate different learning environments and teaching approaches which may not meet the characteristics of ‘communicative’ or ‘student-centred’ as advocated by methods of Western origin. Indeed, in the ASEAN region, there are cases where teacher-centred learning does not hinder communication and can actually bring joy in the classroom (see Tin, 2013, for the case of Myanmar). In the case of Myanmar, for example, “promoting teaching which combines direct instruction and specific interactive classroom practices can effectively and sensitively bring about change while building on a local pedagogical culture of whole-class teaching” (Borg, Clifford and Htut, 2018:84–5). This suggests that further research is needed to investigate the relationship between learning culture and communication in ASEAN. A localised approach to communication which suits the ASEAN context is necessary to examine how and to what extent learning culture promotes or inhibits communication in the English language classroom.
Second, an unfavourable learning environment in instructed context could occur when student motivations are low. Findings from this study demonstrate that the difference between learning in urban and rural areas could be significant and that it could negatively affect pedagogy. Where learners in one area may be more motivated, it may not be the case in others. Data from participants demonstrates that many learners in rural areas are generally not motivated due to a lack of perceived need for English. This happens in Thailand where there is an influx of foreign students and the need to communicate in English arises. Thai-2 stated: “Students are not motivated enough to learn English. They do not pay enough attention to the English lessons and sometimes fail the tests.” This point echoes findings from previous research in rural Thailand (e.g. Draper, 2012b). Low motivations are even found in Brunei, which generally has more encouraging attitudes towards English. Bru-2 elaborated:

“There is certainly to be a difference in motivation among students in urban and rural parts of the country, and much of this, I believe, has to do with their environment and the need for or use of English in those environments on a daily basis. Students in urban areas will tend to use more English in daily lives, and will almost certainly have more opportunities to use the language outside of the English classroom. In relation to this then, teachers in the urban schools perhaps wouldn’t need to motivate their students to practise the language. Whereas outside of the urban centres, teachers would probably have to push their students harder to practise using English.”

In Cambodia, the issue with low motivation is well noted in the literature (e.g. Saoreun, 2015; Pit and Roth, 2003). Findings from this study suggest that low motivation in Cambodia has emerged and is closely associated with parents’ lack of trust in public education. A number of educational reforms have been undertaken in the country, but their efficacy has been put under scrutiny. Chansopheak (2009:131), referring to an education reform to overhaul Cambodian primary education, stated: “… while the reform was successful at improving enrolment rates in some provinces, it generally was not successful at raising the quality of primary education”. Camb-1 provided an explanation as to how this issue enmeshes ESBE:
“Based on my own perspective, they (parents) place a high emphasis on English proficiency for their kids. But they wouldn’t turn to public schools, they wouldn’t expect public schools to offer that good knowledge of English, so they prefer to put all those responsibilities onto the private institution. Both parents and students think that English is an important subject, it is the official language of ASEAN, and it is international. They would not put emphasis on public schools, so that also causes a big challenge for us because students do not come to English class in public schools (with as great interest as) they do in private schools. They just simply take it for granted. They do not care much because they don’t pay attention to English subject in public schools, so it’s hard for us to teach.”

Next, socio-economic disparities are a great factor closely associated with low motivation among students studying in unfavourable learning environments. In places where many students study under difficult circumstances due to poverty, ESBE has been adversely affected to the extent that motivation is low and student retention is typically unsatisfactory. Participants stated that it was common for English teachers in primary and secondary schools to find students missing from classes because they had to work or help their parents on the farm. For teachers, this is a challenging situation which often adversely impacts pedagogy. Myan-4 stressed the commonality of this issue in poverty-stricken areas in Myanmar. A similar situation is found in the Philippines. Phil-1 stated: “Yes, and the more you want to stay when you see these learners struggling to learn, these learners who cannot even change their clothes. They come to you the whole week with the same clothes.”

Lack of motivation among students is also associated with fear of failure. In Chapter 3, I mentioned that diverse geographical spread and fear of failing educational policies could make up an ideological factor which affects policy implementation. Findings in this chapter prove this, demonstrating that lack of motivation can occur due to apprehension and fear of failure, as noted in Singapore by a Singaporean participant. A similar observation in the Singaporean context is also documented in Goh (2015). Likewise, the fear of failure is closely related to low motivation among students in Vietnam. Viet-3 observed the recurrence of such an issue in the Vietnamese context where students feared that they would not succeed in studying English if the goal is to achieve native-like competency (see also Chapter 7). Fear of failure could also combine with the perception of uninteresting delivery of English lessons. This is found among students in Thailand, as Thai-1 observed: “They have almost no chance to use English outside of the classroom in their daily life. They find English classes boring and demotivating due to the hard lessons they have to learn and difficult assignments they have to complete.”

Third, another dimension of unfavourable learning environments relates to pedagogical logistics. Participants voiced concerns about pedagogical logistics including large numbers of students in the classroom; the absence of basic facilities such as electricity, lighting and fans; the poor condition of classroom facilities such as desks and whiteboards; and the absence of modern technological equipment. These are challenges which Sing-1 called “those of a universal nature, meaning that they exist in many nations”. The findings echo previous reports in ASEAN nations including Cambodia (Tweed and Som, 2015), Thailand (Sermsongswad and Tantipongsanuruk, 2015), the Philippines (Martin, 2015) and Myanmar (Paw, 2015). In these contexts, the absence of basic facilities and poor classroom conditions conspire with large numbers of students, which could range between 50 and 70, to make learning environments unfavourable. For example, Phil-1 stated: “… when you teach in the public schools even here in Manila, with 50 students, very small classrooms and the noisy surroundings and the heat, you just imagine.” Similarly, teachers in Indonesia could teach large classes in various schools, as Ind-1 observed: “… they mostly teach big classes and sometimes they teach in many different schools. No wonder if most teachers test mostly grammar, vocabulary and reading skills.”

Large classes could also hinder the implementation of new approaches to teaching, as shown in Vietnam where project-based learning has been introduced. Participants suggested that teachers were confident of its usefulness. However, the implementation has been constrained by large classroom sizes. Viet-2 explained the situation in Vietnam:

“Here’s an example, the introduction of projects as a method of teaching and a method of assessment has been seen as very transformative and this and that. However, in reality we can see that how come a class of 50 students be assessed through projects throughout the semester, not alone, every unit. So that’s another problem as well. We have only 45 minutes in the classroom, so it’s almost out of the question for most of the teachers.”
5.3. Problematic assessment

Assessment is a big part of ESBE in ASEAN because all member states require satisfactory completion of English studies in basic education, although standards of completion vary. Test-driven pedagogy in English language education has been a resounding issue in all ASEAN member states; for example, Vietnam (Dung, 2015), Cambodia (Mab, 2015; Saroeun, 2015), Thailand (Sermsongswad and Tantipongsanuruk, 2015) and Laos (Kounnavongsa, 2015). In some contexts, completion of English subjects makes up a compulsory requirement for students to move up to higher grades, while in others it is not compulsory. Whatever the context may be, data from this study suggests that assessment is often ineffective because inappropriate approaches have been implemented.

In countries such as Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and Indonesia, teachers struggle to move away from traditional assessments. In these nations, there is a prevalent understanding that assessment means popular traditional tests which are paper-based and are written in multiple-choice format. Teachers only focus on reading and grammar; they assess receptive skills, rather than productive skills. They usually conduct summative assessments at the end of an instructional unit such as a semester or quarterly term through evaluation against some criteria. Further, participants suggested that in these countries there was a prevalent belief that teaching is only meant for testing and that assessment is more important than teaching. For example, Bru-1 provided written evidence:

“There is still something of a cart-pulling-the-horse mentality in which assessment is prioritised over teaching – so much so that at times very little actual teaching takes place – it is all assessment/testing, with ritual formulaic classroom practices of whole-class reading aloud from textbook.”

Such a practice has shaped students’ perceptions and beliefs about language assessment. They believe that participation in English classes is merely to pass exams, rather than to learn the language. For example, participants from Vietnam and Thailand have confirmed this, which resembles findings from previous studies in these countries (e.g. Phuong and Nhu, 2015; Sermsongswad and Tantipongsanuruk, 2015). As Sermsongswad and Tantipongsanuruk (2015:49) stated, students “need English for the entrance examination to higher levels of education, but they will focus mainly on form and accuracy. So they learn English for the examination, not for communication.” The greater emphasis on grammar and reading, as discussed in Section 5.2 means that teachers find it difficult to assess productive skills. This is common across ASEAN. For example, Ind-2 explained the situation in Indonesia: “In assessment, teachers might find it difficult in assessing productive skills such as speaking and writing.”

In other ASEAN member states such as Brunei, Laos, Indonesia and Cambodia, assessment is often contextually constrained. Participants from Laos confirmed that teachers are constrained in that they feel obliged to adhere to the curriculum. The high respect they pay to educational authorities and the curriculum they have created means that teachers refrain from implementing innovative approaches. Laos-1 explained how teachers resort to using paper-based assessment because of this:

“Why I said that because most teachers respect the curriculum, they know that what is an interesting area according to the curriculum for them to teach and follow, so they try to do assessment, how can I say, corresponding/responding to the curriculum, mainly by paper and a pen … Yeah, paper-based assessment.”

The problem may also be due to a professional culture in which policies are dependent on educational authorities; and when they are reluctant, changes do not occur. Bru-1 explained this situation in Brunei: “Assessment is more problematic: authorities (MoE) are reluctant to move on from traditional assessment modes – e.g. retaining the Cambridge GCE O and A levels which have long been abandoned in the UK in favour of GCSE.” In Cambodia, professional culture has been quite limiting when institutions are not supportive of innovations to incorporate new assessment approaches. Camb-1 stated:

“We kind of try to incorporate portfolio or formative assessment ... but the school does not accept this kind of portfolio assessment, because what they get used to is monthly tests and semester tests ... they said we kind of get used to the system and it is hard to change ... the school only needs the monthly tests and semester exams and the scores from these tests. They wouldn’t accept quiz, homework and assignment ...”

Even when new language education policies have been put in place, the move away from traditional assessment is not as easy as one would have expected. Thailand and Vietnam have recently endorsed policies which encourage teachers to depart from traditional assessments. The governments of Thailand and Vietnam have accommodated the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as part of their national foreign language policies.
In conjunction with the use of the CEFR, new forms of assessment such as portfolio and communicative assessment have been introduced. In Vietnam, these new assessment forms are meant to change the ideology which favours traditional assessments. However, what Dung (2015:58) calls “test-oriented attitude and practice” remains. Viet-3 explained:

“For example, recently there was a policy saying that we shouldn’t have 15-minute test or 45-minute test for secondary school students. But then, when I talked to my students, they said that these practices still remain in the classroom for some reasons. And although we were trying to shift from summative to formative assessment, but as I can see, many people still bring their mindset of summative assessment ... no matter what kind of test you are using, you are still assessing the students in the old way.”

This situation is closely associated with the over-emphasis on the teaching and testing of grammar and structure. Participants stated that teachers rarely develop activities which aim to motivate students and develop the four macro-skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and the three micro-skills (grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation). The impact of this teaching approach is the limited communication skills commonly found among Vietnamese students, a situation which is also familiar in Myanmar (Paw, 2015) and Cambodia (Pit and Rith, 2003). As with the Vietnamese context, Phuong and Nhu (2015:110) attested:

“... the paradox... is that the tests do not motivate the students or develop all four major language skills, but focus only on grammar and structure. This is the major reason why many students who are successful on their English tests cannot communicate in English, and some students who try to speak English outside the classroom do not perform well on the tests”.

In Thailand, there is a mismatch between policy and practice. Where policy requires more communicative approaches to assessment, local teachers are more comfortable with traditional assessments. Thai-3 stated that teachers were used to administer the national-level O-NET tests in grades 6, 9 and 12 with questions which “consist of multiple-choice items exclusively and mainly focus on reading and grammar”. This is in stark contrast with foreign teachers such as those from the Philippines who were comfortable with more communicative assessments. This has created a new situation where pedagogical practices affect policies because new teaching arrangements will be made as a consequence. Thai-3 stated: “English instruction will be divided in two sub-streams, one focusing on test-taking skills in reading and grammar (taught by local teachers) and another focusing on oral skills (taught by non-local teachers).”

In the past decade, the use of educational technologies and online education in English language education has been encouraged in the ASEAN region in parallel with the plans for ASEAN integration. The ASEAN Secretariat has an ICT Masterplan (ASEAN Secretariat, 2020), while the McKinsey Global Institute report has highlighted the inseparable relationship between English and the ICT in Southeast Asia (Woetzel, Tonby, Thompson, Burtt and Lee, 2014). The vital role of educational technologies and online learning in the English language classroom in ASEAN has been underscored, for example, in Singapore (Ho and Gwee, 2015), as well as in promoting writing activities among adolescents in urban Malaysia (Tan, Ng and Saw, 2010) and in enhancing the quality of English language teacher education in Vietnam (Phuong and Nhu, 2015). As Ho and Gwee (2015:33) argued, “to prepare students for the demands of the 21st century workplace, it is imperative to integrate technology with traditional ways of learning the English language, i.e. balancing multimodal literacies with print-based academic literacies.”

Data from this study demonstrates that all participants agreed on the importance of educational technologies to support ESBE. Most participants asserted the need to move to blended learning where face-to-face classroom teaching is systematically combined with some form of online learning using educational technologies. However, findings show that there are discrepancies among ASEAN nations in terms of the availability of educational technologies and online education and how to incorporate them into ESBE. Three ASEAN Outer Circle nations have made online learning part of their educational reforms: Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia and Singapore. It is unknown whether and to what extent the gap is narrowing, but findings show that other nations are trying to keep abreast. Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore have explicitly included blended learning in their language education policies. As participants suggested, blended learning is explicitly stated in Brunei’s SPN21, Malaysia’s English Language Roadmap and Singapore’s new curriculum on English
Language Learning. Bru-1 stated: “Blended learning became the desired goal – it was already part of the MoE's policy goals under the SPN21 (System of Education for the 21st century) to implement online and distance learning to complement face-to-face classes.” Similarly, Sing-1 explained that Singapore is “adopting blended learning and will implement it with the infrastructure and society being now prepared. While we had initially wanted all secondary students to have one laptop or tablet each by 2028, we will ensure that they will by 2021.” In Malaysia, the English Language Roadmap 2013–25 places an emphasis on “leveraging ICT to scale up quality learning across Malaysia” (Mal-2). This is in line with Malaysia’s plan to ensure “provision of digital infrastructure to all areas in the country” where “internet accessibility is to reach 100 per cent to every school in the nation by 2025” (Mal-1).

Other ASEAN nations, namely Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, have developed measures to support blended learning, too. For example, these nations provide laptops and other ICT tools to selected schools. The measures, as shown below, might not have not been as rigorous as those developed in Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore due to what participants reported as “lack of funding”. Accordingly, schools in various contexts in Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam have incorporated online learning tools to complement face-to-face teaching with the limited budget allocated to them.

Further, there are no indications as to whether the measures to support online learning have been uniformly implemented nationwide. This is because, as participants suggested, the discrepancy is quite wide, especially for teachers and learners in rural areas who may not have digital equipment such as laptops. For example, Camb-2 reported: “I can really say much about that ICT use in teaching English, but the percentage of teachers using a laptop is low.” Ind-2 stated that many students in Indonesia “face problems, even those in big cities because not all students have a laptop at home or even a handphone. This has caused a gap between those with facilities and those without the facilities.” Lack of digital infrastructure is acknowledged by Ind-3, and she added that often the problem is exacerbated by the fact that “there are no qualified practical instructors or tutors at school, thus the programme is forced to run on itself with limited resources.” But even so, what is also missing is a shift in terms of mindset and transformation of motivation. Ind-3 stated:

“A digital mindset and the teacher’s motivation that is built from the ground up gradually towards the top, as well as the support from the centre government through a strong policy review in order to encourage teacher professionals in a sustainable manner.”

Vietnam used to be struggling financially, but recent reforms to achieve the status of an “industrialised nation by 2020” have seen the situation improving in the technological sector. Viet-2 admitted that the availability of “digital devices such as laptops or smartphones” had been a “problem” in his nation. However, speaking of a recent educational survey, he stated that “the rate of local people using digital devices is favourable for us to implement online learning.”

Providing equal access to online learning has been an important goal for ASEAN nations. However, constraints relating to socio-economic discrepancy have hampered its implementation. In Myanmar, this is certainly the case. Myan-2 explained:

“... we know that the desire is always there. It is just that it is sometimes very challenging to meet those desires, in an equal way and in an equitable way because we would see the gap between urban area, for an example, Yangon school and the rural school. And even in Yangon, we would see the difference between international schools and public schools. So, the level of English of the children there is different.”

Even in relatively advanced Singapore, socio-economic discrepancy is evident with the existence of low-income communities. Sing-1 stated that in such circumstances, “the Singapore community ... stepped up with private individuals doing their part to refurbish donated laptops and giving them to students in financial need and with companies such as telecommunication companies providing free internet access to families in need.”

The most frequently cited issue across ASEAN nations is the availability of stable, fast and widely accessible internet connections. Connectivity is a major issue found in Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. For example, in Vietnam, Viet-1 stated, “many schools faced three types of challenges. First is the transmission of network system,” something which Viet-3 concurred: “You see that the infrastructure of internet access and digital access in many areas of Vietnam is very limited ...” Camb-2 explained the situation in Cambodia: “If we think about smartphones, many are using one, but the issue is with INTERNET SERVICE as it is SLOW in many areas ...” (emphasis original). Thai-2 stated that in Thailand: “The major constraints involve the teachers’ lack of skills to teach online and the shortage of the internet in some remote areas.” In Indonesia, lack of internet access has constrained the work of teachers in developing creative assessment procedures. Ind-1 reported: “Some creative teachers could use information technology available around them. However, most of them still teach and assess their students in a conventional way as not all areas in Indonesia are covered by internet.
connection.” In the Philippines, there is an urgent need to equip ‘Generation Z’ or digital natives “who have acquired literacy in the use of media technology and social media” (Rañosa-Madrunio, 2015:121). However, data shows that most areas in the nation are greatly affected by the inaccessibility of reliable internet. Phil-1 stated: “... as I’ve said, in most of the areas in our country, internet and even electricity is not stable, even in cities, there are times, like what happens now, internet is not really stable.”

Even in more developed ASEAN Outer Circle nations, equal access to internet connection remains an issue. In the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, Brunei and Malaysia began a rapid transition to work from home. They implemented strategies such as using online submission, communicating online through WhatsApp and Telegram, and implementing virtual learning through Google Classroom. However, the implementation of these strategies was not entirely smooth. This is made evident by comments from Malaysian and Brunei participants:

“The main challenge is accessibility to the internet and, for some, digital devices.” (Mal-2)

“There were technical issues such as lack of access to the internet or even lack of devices such laptops and tablets.” (Bru-2)

As it turns out, the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated and accentuated the need for online education across ASEAN nations. Southeast Asia was among the first regions to report cases of Covid-19 outside China. Covid-19 cases spread among ASEAN nations at varying rates, reaching various geographical locations in different times. Thus, some ASEAN nations such as Thailand, Singapore, Cambodia and Vietnam detected cases of Covid-19 in their jurisdictions as early as January 2020 while others such as Brunei Darussalam only reported their first cases in March 2020. Nonetheless, they rapidly undertook various health measures to curb further spread and ensure the health and safety of their citizens. Education was inevitably affected by the situation and ASEAN nations swiftly implemented drastic measures towards online learning. This was common across ASEAN nations. In the words of Bru-2:

“While ‘blended learning’ has been a long-term objective of Brunei’s aim towards becoming a ‘smart nation’, the pandemic has forced us to adopt it sooner than we thought. In a way, the pandemic became a catalyst for online teaching and blended learning in Brunei ...”

Data from this study suggests that all ASEAN nations implemented various pedagogical changes to cater for online education. Most changes made by governments of ASEAN nations have been abrupt while teachers have sporadically experimented with online materials and digital media to facilitate teaching. Brunei tackled the pandemic by implementing various strategies resulting from a combination of top-down policies and bottom-up measures. While the central government formulated a broad nationwide guideline as to what the education sector should do, schools and teachers interpreted the guideline through a wide range of initiatives. Bru-1 explained:

“The schools in Brunei are under the direct orders of the Ministry of Education, and they follow the instructions strictly. With the first case of Covid-19 in Brunei, MoE ordered schools to close down and to go online ... Schoolteachers were resourceful enough to print out weekly bundles of lesson materials for parents to collect at an appointed time, and for students' works to be submitted weekly as well to complete their assessments, to support the online lessons.”

Similarly, Bru-2 reported: “Teachers used various strategies such as weekly collection or submission of photocopied teaching materials and students’ work, constant communication with parents and students via WhatsApp, Telegram and so on. Soft copy teaching materials would be sent via email or WhatsApp.”

Much like Brunei, Malaysia also accelerated its shift to online learning due to the pandemic. Mal-1 attested: “What has changed drastically is the mode of delivery in the education system at all levels. Online teaching and learning has become the norm. Both educators and students are now engaged in this mode.” In terms of strategies, Malaysia attempted to provide “internet access and a virtual learning environment via Google Classroom and the DELIMA platform for all schools as well as maximising the use of ICT for distance and self-paced learning” (Mal-2). Malaysia continues with its learning platform, MoE-DL, which “provides links to Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams of teaching and learning, digital textbooks, teaching and learning (PdP) videos (EduwebTC/CikgooTube)” (Mal-2). The MoE-DL also has links to “applications to help PdP, such as Edpuzzle ... Quizizz ... and Kahoot” (Mal-2).

According to Mal-2: “Options are also given to teachers and students to communicate via digital mobiles using WhatsApp and Telegram, which has led to hybrid learning. WhatsApp and Telegram, for example, are used by teachers to give students homework, conduct activities, projects and for other communication tasks.”

Singapore employed different strategies. Sing-1 reported that Singapore implemented home-based learning for “around two months (07 April–01 June 2020)”. She explained that during this period all subjects were conducted:

“... through an online conference platform, such as Google Meets and Zoom. These were conducted for all students except those who had issues at home
that prevented them from learning through the online platforms or needed internet and technological support. During this time, MoE and schools supported as many students as they could by loaning out over 20,000 digital devices and over 1,600 dongles to students in need. The schools decided on which students needed them the most … Teachers of all subjects had to adapt by digitising their lessons and materials or innovating new pedagogies and tools to teach their classes and engage them. Each teacher had their own preferred approaches, but MoE and NIE supported them with suggested recommendations.”

The pandemic also pushed Indonesia to resort to online delivery. In April 2020, Education Minister Nadiem Makarim announced a policy for halting face-to-face teaching. In support of the nationally implemented #dirumahaja [#juststayathome] movement, Makarim urged schools to transition to complete delivery of online education. As a consequence, according to Ind-2, teachers “use online learning, and give the materials online. Some of them whose students cannot get access to the internet write a summary of the teaching materials and they copy it, and give it to the students.” There is no data indicating how uniform the practice was, but Ind-1 suggested that teachers and lecturers used various digital learning tools and apps. He and his colleagues, for example, made use of “available learning management system (LMS) such as SPOT or Spada, email, Telegram or WhatsApp; the students could access them any time they want. In another time we teach the students live through Zoom, Webex or other platforms.” Further, Ind-2 reported on home visits, a popular strategy implemented in areas with zero internet coverage:

“Teachers from school will do home visit to individual student home. However, as the gap between the number of students and that of teachers is so wide, home visit is not efficient in terms of students’ coverage. In this situation students experience a great learning lost. This learning lost takes not only for English, but for all subjects taught in primary and secondary schools.”

Figure 5.2. Secondary students learning English in Thailand during the pandemic
Thailand also implemented home visits, “especially in the rural areas” (Thai-3). Such a strategy, according to Thai-3, allowed teachers to “travel to the students’ homes, give assignment to them, and collect the assignments later. In these schools, teachers have very limited chance to adapt to online teaching because of their students’ limitation.” In other areas of the country where internet coverage was viable, online learning was implemented. Thai-2 and Thai-3 reported on teachers’ initiatives to conduct online learning. Thai-2 stated: “We implement online learning, remote learning via various channels to make sure that every student can access education.” Thai-3 said:

“I have seen many big schools implementing online tools, such as Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams or Zoom as a platform for online teaching. In these schools, the teachers can adapt themselves well and I think they can survive this disruption. It should be noted that these schools are well equipped with technology, the teachers are IT literate, and the students are ready for change. Many teachers exchange IT tips via social medias, and they share platforms with each other.”

Thai-1 and Thai-2 also reported on additional support provided to teachers. Thai-2 stated that the government of Thailand had promoted online learning “by providing free online courses through several resources. Recently, we have sent 36 Thai teachers to take Finland online courses of three prestigious Finland universities. Those teachers will play significant roles after finishing the programmes.” Meanwhile, Thai-1 recounted: “Supervisors from the Ministry have conducted some workshops to enable teachers to teach online in a more effective way. They also provide worksheets and instructional materials for the teachers to use in their online classes.”

The Philippines developed different strategies to deliver education during the pandemic. Phil-3 explained that some schools attempted to provide digital equipment to students, but the outreach was limited. She stated that some city mayors such as “Yorme” and “Vico” had “a tablet project” where they lent iPad tablets to help students learn. However, many parents “will not take it” because the schools usually say: “If you lose that, you will pay five thousand.” One very common strategy across different subjects in the Philippine education sector was “self-learning module” which went in parallel with radio and television programmes. Phil-3 stated: “… so the pandemic disrupts education delivery, how do they adapt? In public schools, it’s modular, then very little online delivery.” She added: “… the dominant thing in public schools is modular... Modular approach or print materials are still used because the internet access is limited”. Phil-1 elaborated:

“We are using the self-learning module now and the radio-based, and the TV-based... Yes, in this pandemic, our main source of teaching and learning is really the self-learning module. In cases where mixed or blended learning is applicable, then students have this blended learning, the online and the offline. But our main source is really the self-learning module because... internet is not really stable. So, our main source really is the self-learning module. Our learners learn through modules. Unless required, unless doable, we resort to blended learning where they also meet with their teachers, sometimes virtually. And, of course, we have a regular TV programme and regular radio programme. They are just supplemental to the basic material, which is the self-learning module.”

In Vietnam, participants reported on various measures to support online learning in parallel with the plans of the Ministry of Education Training to collaborate with the Ministry of Information and Communication “towards the goal of providing internet access to 100 per cent schools nationwide” (Viet-1). Participants reported that teachers employed “crossword games, interactive games like Kahoot or Quizizz on the internet to spice up their lesson” as well as “different platforms such as Zoom” and “Facebook in order to create interaction, group work”, even though it “took a few months for people to explore different functions and how to integrate and bring a whole new world of learning from the internet with students” (Viet-2). However, participants such as Viet-2 and Viet-3 also noted the challenge that immediately arose after the introduction of online learning. They reported that students were distracted easily, deviating from the original purpose of using online platforms for language learning. Viet-2 stated:

“But then there was problems [sic] with distractions, because students were very distracted on the internet. We had no way to control whether they were actually focusing on our lesson or not. So that was another thing. Not to mention that when it comes to high school or primary students, we need to... their use of the internet should be controlled, and I’ve learnt that some students went to Youtube, watching harmful content or dangerous things when they were learning English, and I have received some complaints from parents about the lack of control over their use of technology. So that’s worrying.”

Viet-3, an academic, thought that with the transition towards online education, assessment procedures should follow. He suggested the need for recognising online education and the assessment results generated from it:

“So right now, MoET [Ministry of Education and Training] is planning to accept results of online learning... all 100 per cent accept all the online
learning, you see. So, we think that because, not only because of Covid-19, but because the need for the insufficient number of English teachers in Vietnam, we are proposing to the policy makers to accept online learning for the schools in remote areas in Vietnam which don’t have enough teachers, so that the one teacher in one area in one school can teach for the classes in the faraway location.”

Viet-3’s proposal might find a favourable response in the immediate future because Viet-2, speaking on behalf of the Vietnamese government, stated “we are considering recognising online learning results.”

Myanmar navigated through the pandemic by introducing a set of measures which made use of online, television and radio channels. Participants such as Myan-1, Myan-2 and Myan-3 stated that teachers in Myanmar had been using “home-based learning materials”, “digital platforms”, “TV channels” and “FM radio” to teach students. The country also experimented with a strategy which no other ASEAN nations implemented: using DBE (Department of Basic Education) boxes to deliver lessons. The DBE boxes, which can run on solar power, contain “teacher training content or teaching aids for teachers in the form of video, short stories, poems and illustrated materials for learners …” (Development Media Group, 2020). Myan-1 elaborated:

“Online/remote learning for the students has been implemented. In order to ensure equitable access, especially for students with no access to the internet, we have used DBE box and DBE stick. They were sent to the Township Education Office and students can learn lessons from the DBE box/stick through offline learning. We also broadcast lessons from TV Education Channel and FM radio. We have arranged the zero data service when students and teachers use the Myanmar Digital Education Platform … I overheard that DBE box was distributed to 240 townships and they will provide more. These boxes are set up in basic education schools where there are [sic] no internet connection. The DBE box means small computers and the data/lessons can be installed and we can use zero data service as if we use data near this box the WiFi is there and everyone who are near the box can learn lessons offline. So I can say that it is effective in all areas including conflict ones.”

The country also maximised its cooperation with international organisations to improve the quality of online education. Myan-3 explained that Myanmar had collaborated with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) to improve online learning:

“And the ministry coordinated some sort of home-based learning activities with the help of development partners working on the curriculum, like JICA, and with the help of UNICEF. However, the home-based learning support is not reaching to all the townships. It is a kind of trial project, I think, only about 60 townships when we have more than 300. And even so, again, we may not have the tracking system on how far, ah, how far the home-based learning reach children and communities.”

Laos also resorted to online education during the pandemic. During the period of “locked down of the whole country”, Laos delivered some “teaching online” to those who had access to the internet (Laos-2). It also tackled the problem related to lack of internet access by developing new initiatives using television. Laos-2 stated that English lessons have been “conducted through TV programme and it is now still showing in the educational channel.” Laos-1 added:

“… online learning between the teacher and the students in the class personally would not happen that way, but we have like the Ministry of Education will deal with this matter, the Ministry will set up like responsible people to provide online learning for English subject, the Ministry will have teachers of English to teach very short time, yeah, and then the teaching video will be posted, like YouTube and national TV programme. That means all children can access to the channel and learn English as they like.”

Cambodia also experienced a lockdown, which significantly disrupted educational delivery in the nation. Camb-1 explained that when the government closed down schools:

“… most of the students were going back to their hometown. And they are in the province; some stayed in the remote area, so the connection was very bad. The challenge that we faced was when we asked them to do online class, many asked for permission to be absent. It was very difficult to get connected online.”

Teachers developed some strategies to counter the problem. Camb-1 explained that prior to the pandemic they had been using “PowerPoints” and “projector” to teach. During the pandemic teachers had transformed these previously prepared materials into PDF files. Camb-1 stated: “We sent them the PDF that they can use as extra materials or reference because we have a lot of PDF books … and our lessons are prepared in PowerPoints so we can just send and upload them there.” Recording lessons was another strategy developed by the government through
foreign assistance. The efficacy of the strategy in terms of delivery of English lessons, however, was limited. Camb-3 explained:

“… for Covid-19 we also have many development partners such as UNICEF and World Bank who help support the (video) recording of Khmer and math lessons. And now we begin to record applied science and social science lessons. And I want them to support us also with the recording of English lessons, but they don’t. The Minister said we need to find ways to record English lessons as well, we are working on recording the lessons for the English subject, which we will disseminate once they’re done …”

5.5. Transition: from primary to secondary education

ESBE, which encompasses both primary and secondary education, is a complex period of education. Roughly during the final two years of primary education (Grades 5 and 6) and the first two years of secondary education (Grades 7 and 8), there is a moment of educational transition. By the same token, this is also a period when a student transitions from being a child to an adolescent.

On the one hand, a moment of educational transition means that there is an issue of curricular contents. Logical progression, coherence and cohesion of curricular contents must be ensured as students move from one level of education to another (see Graves, 2008, 2016). As Graves and Garton (2017:445) stated, it is important to consider “the overall design and progression of the curriculum, i.e. how curriculum content is organised and progresses over time in order to lead to the kind of learning aimed for ...” Thus, ensuring unity and a smooth transition of curricular contents between primary and secondary education is indispensable, otherwise students are impacted by disjointed curricula.

On the other hand, there are biological, psychological and social changes involved during the period in which learners are within the ESBE timeframe. Early adolescence comprises various social, psychological and biological transitions exemplified by the onset of puberty and moving from primary to secondary school (Steinberg, 2016). Research suggests that not all young people thrive during adolescence, as indicated by an increase in mental health problems, particularly among girls (Costello, Copeland and Angold, 2011), and a decline in academic motivation, which tends to be more prominent among boys (Dotterer, McHale and Crouter, 2009).

Data from this study demonstrates that ESBE is problematic in terms of transition. Findings from this study show that all ASEAN nations experience difficulties in terms of assisting students to learn English effectively in the transitionary years of primary and secondary education. No nations have clearly addressed the issue of transition from primary to secondary education in their language education policies.

The major issue about transition concerns the unclear directions about how students should progress from primary to secondary education. This is a common issue found in Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar6, the Philippines and Vietnam.

A lack of transition direction usually combines with inconsistent assessment procedures. This is shown by data from the Philippines and Myanmar participants. Phil-3 spoke about the Philippine context: “… according to what I’ve heard, there’s no clear procedure in the DepEd on how young learners will transition. In fact, there is a huge amount of data which reveals that even if they failed, even a non-reader, will be ‘passed’ by DepEd.” Data from Myanmar participants suggests that participants were not aware of any transitionary issues, but this was merely because “the assessment is very flexible”, so that “rarely any student fail any exam.” Socio-economic disparities could also exacerbate transition. Myan-3 cited high numbers of drop-outs of primary school graduates who were unable to continue to secondary schools. The high drop-out rates were “not because of English. It is because of socio-economic backgrounds of the students.” Myan-2 stated, “we have not conducted any research in that area.”, suggesting an urgent need for research into the topic.

In Malaysia, curricular contents may well be integrated with assessment criteria which have been adapted from the CEFR. Mal-3 shared her experience in formulating Malaysia’s English Language Roadmap and the modification of the CEFR. Recounting various vignettes, Mal-3 highlighted her effort in matching Malaysia’s

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5. Myan-4 adds that although there are no specified policy directions on transition, there is a subject called “Life Lesson” which indirectly addresses biological changes during primary and secondary years, how to protect self against harm and sex education.
“curriculum framework” with the CEFR, so that it works in a way which progresses in terms of difficulty “from pre-A1 up to form five, which is B2–C1, every single level spelt out the four skills …” However, it is unclear how this is related to the transition of curricular contents from primary to secondary education. Many teachers may not fully grasp the issue of transition, and so they may find difficulty when translating the curriculum into pedagogical practice. Mal-3 often found teachers misinterpreting curriculum content with the CEFR prescribed levels or criteria to the extent that she had to advise them: “If you’re testing students speaking A2, you should test them at A2, you don’t test them to C1 … This is a real story … Some people do not know that, that a topic for primary school should be appropriate for them.”

Findings from this study also suggest that unclear transitionary directions mean that there is a lack of connection between the contents of the primary curriculum and that of secondary curriculum, which echoes previous studies in the ASEAN region (e.g. Phuong and Nhu, 2015; Paw, 2015). For example, Phuong and Nhu (2015:105–6) point out that the curriculum in Vietnam “lacks continuity throughout different grades, resulting in students learning the same functions or points in different grades in some cases.” The misalignment of curricular contents between primary and secondary education is equivalent to the lack of continuity of materials to be covered at both levels of education, as found in many ASEAN nations. This is a case most evident, for example, in Brunei Darussalam. Bru-1 stated: “In terms of curriculum for ESBE, there is a lack of … continuity: the secondary syllabus recycles much of the (structural) material covered at primary level.” In Indonesia, the situation is rather complex in that English is not part of the primary education curriculum. This situation means that students in English can be categorised into three groups: 1) a small number of students who receive English instruction as an extra-curricular subject; 2) a great majority of students who, during primary school years, do not study English at all; and 3) a group of students who do not study English formally during primary school years but do it through private courses. Although they have different educational backgrounds, all students would go to secondary school and learn English as a compulsory subject. They would cover the same curricular contents and study the same materials. Given the situation, Ind-2 suggested that the Indonesian Ministry of Education should “create a curriculum which takes into account what students have gained before they enter secondary school.”

Similarly, participants in Laos, Thailand and the Philippines admitted that ESBE had been undermined by a lack of alignment between the primary and secondary curricular contents. In Laos, there have “not really” been measures or activities to help facilitate transition, even though curriculum reforms are currently undertaken (Laos-1). Laos-2 stated: “As the new primary curriculum is developed, there will be a need to ensure alignment between the new last year of primary and the existing first year of lower secondary.” A similar issue is also found in Thailand where “[n]o specific attempts have been made to prepare for the transition. The teachers use test, assignment or classroom-based activities to determine whether the students pass the standards and indicators or not” (Thai-3). In the Philippines, Phil-2 stated: “… in my point of view … our curriculum is very weak when it comes to addressing the needs of our learners in the basic ed [education]”. “Lack of integration” has been cited as an issue, and this, according to Phil-2, is exacerbated by the fact that the curriculum does not include contents which reflect learners’ life in the 21st century. According to Phil-2, the curriculum in the Philippines does not address contents such as “English in social media. There isn’t something like that. There’s no course that you can evaluate on how to differentiate fake news or whatsoever.”
How primary and secondary curricula are not seamlessly integrated is also illustrated in the Cambodian context. Cambodia has received foreign assistance in English language education, including in the design and development of primary and secondary education curricula. Various projects have been undertaken and yet they show no integration. Camb-1 explained:

“In the curriculum we start from Grades 4 to 12. But they are like chunks in the curriculum; they are not linked together; they are not structured from the beginning to the end. That is, for 4-5-6 it’s prepared by some organisation or donor; and for 7-8-9 by another organisation, for 10-11-12 by former British Council for the EFC [English for Cambodia] textbook. So it seems that there’s no consistency from the beginning. That’s because they are donors. What they care is to get things done for their part. It seems that there’s no collaboration, no consistency from one level to another level. That’s why it’s very difficult to continue smoothly from primary to lower and upper secondary schools.”

The ramifications of unclear transition are massive in terms of pedagogy. Participants from the Philippines and Vietnam voiced different concerns about the impact of unclear transition. In the Philippines, the direct impact of unclear transition is the inability of teachers to teach English in an integrated manner. Phil-3 stated that English teaching in basic education in the Philippines is “not integrated … it is not seamless”, which she suspected “maybe, it goes with the curriculum too.” Phil-2 elaborated on the issue:

“… an English teacher is more into teaching English rather than literacy and numeracy. Teaching the competency. And then, when they teach the competency, they teach it in a segmented manner. It seems that when they teach the competency in reading, it’s just reading. It’s not even closer to that reading since you can utilise that in doing research, in doing your report. It’s always segmented, like finding the main topic, that’s it. But you can’t link it to the next higher competency, especially when it comes to writing. Isn’t it that the competency in writing goes with how to write a topic sentence; for example, it is linked to a real-life application … “

In Vietnam and Indonesia, the absence of integrated transitional curricular contents and assessments has created another problem: it segregates students in terms of their language proficiency. Viet-2 stated that some teachers in Vietnam:

“… taught English in a very laxing way, without worrying about any test or exam. And that’s the reason why there was no quality control in terms of what the outcome may be at the end of the primary level. So when transitioning to the secondary level, we have two groups of students: one, which is already very good at English, knowing almost everything required when they get to secondary school. But another group knowing almost nothing about English. So, in a class, they may be mixed-ability class, and the teachers are burdened with the task of what to do with these two completely different groups of students.”

Likewise, participants from Indonesia expressed a concern about transitioning from primary to secondary education. Both Ind-1 and Ind-2 highlighted that secondary education is where teachers mostly find mixed levels of abilities in English, which often confound teachers. Ind-1 stated:

“For primary schools that do not offer English whether as intra- or extra-curricular subject, the teachers would be worried that their students will not be able to follow an English lesson because it is a new subject for them and they do not have any basic knowledge about it at all. The teachers are worried that their children will not perform well in junior high schools. For primary schools that offer English, the teachers might also be worried about their students’ English lesson progress because they know that in secondary school English lesson is more complicated and advanced than what they gave to their students in primary schools. The teachers also might think of their students’ ability in comprehending subjects other than English because many of the materials in the subjects are conveyed in English.”

Further, there is a second dimension of transition; that is one related to the biological, psychological and social changes during basic education. There is no data emerging on this issue from other ASEAN nations, but that from Singapore highlights the importance of taking this dimension into account. Consistently ranked in the world’s top two in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in the past few years, Singapore is probably the most advanced nation in the ASEAN region in terms of education. And yet, it also experiences challenges in terms of transition. While curricular contents may not be a cause of concern for educational authorities in Singapore, there are other issues worth considering. These are related to biological, psychological and social factors involved in learning. Sing-1 stated:

“Transition challenges can range from being in a different and larger environment to making new and more friends, and learning new and more subjects. There will be some content preparation carried out by teachers and is also reflected in the syllabus, but that is not our focus. We are more focused on the
emotional and mental wellbeing of the students, especially those with special needs, and this is a concern to teachers on both sides of the transition, the parents and even policymakers ... thus, transition is part of our education and learning process that presents many opportunities of teaching that which may not normally present themselves in the classrooms or homes, such as coping with uncertainties, which is especially important in this new era of crises and disruptions, finding a sense of place and belonging in a new environment, and dealing with emotional changes.”

What the Singapore participant has described above underscores the importance of investigating the second dimension of transition. There is a need for further research to investigate the issue in Singapore as well as other ASEAN nations.

Finally, data from this study suggests the inter-relationship between transitioning from primary to secondary education and teaching materials.

Participants from Brunei Darussalam and Cambodia highlighted the inter-relationship between teaching materials and the primary and secondary curricula. They maintained that coursebook contents should reflect smooth continuity between the materials covered in the primary education and those in the secondary education. However, in the majority of cases this is absent. In a written response, Bru-1 lamented such an absence in Brunei:

“There is no scope for taking a longer time to cover a prescribed teaching unit (chapter of a textbook), because of the obligation to cover the syllabus in time for the next monthly test, and all classes in the same year, even though streamed, must remain in tandem.”

Camb-1 stated that part of the problem is that Cambodia has been using the same textbook called “English for Cambodia (EFC) for a long time”. He stated: “We just want to improve how we can help our trainees just to make some changes to EFC so that it meets the current situation, rather than doing the same thing, which is a little bit outdated.” This means that students learn “the same things”. He stated:

“We train them, we scaffold them in this way. The transition will be very hard, it’s hard for them to catch up with the new scaffolding. I have looked into primary schools’ and lower secondary schools’ textbooks and I couldn’t see anything that teaches students how to learn independently or any contents that broaden students’ critical thinking, so it would be very difficult for them to learn something new when we do not train them how to learn independently, how to broaden their critical thinking skill.”

In Vietnam, the problem with teaching materials does not stand in a vacuum, because according to Viet-2, it is closely related to the issue of transition. In Vietnam, this is in fact “the main issue with transition between primary to secondary school” (Viet-2). Some schools in Vietnam have “streamed students into different classes depending on the students’ competence of English” (Viet-2) and this causes further problem in terms of teaching materials. Viet-2 stated that the educational reforms in Vietnam are underway in that “textbooks are still in the process of being revised.” With this situation in mind, curriculum developers and textbook writers are challenged by the fact that there are two groups of students, one with very good levels of proficiency and another with lower levels of proficiency. Thus, educational authorities and teachers have to decide whether and how “to reconcile between two groups of students, with one kind of textbook like that.”

**Figure 5.4. A secondary English textbook used in Vietnam**
Transitioning from primary to secondary education has also become more challenging due to the difficulty in finding locally appropriate teaching materials. Those participants from Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines have expressed the same concern in this regard. Sing-1 stated in Singapore there is a “lack of teaching materials that are contextualised to our local context.” Similarly, Phil-2 lamented the situation in the Philippines in the form of “materials that are not localised enough, materials that present wrong input.” For teachers in the Philippines, this has been an ongoing dilemma due to a constraining policy which requires them to use the materials imposed by the Department of Education. Phil-2 stated:

“For example, the problem with materials, when you are a good teacher, and you know that it is a problematic material, of course, you will not use it. There is a problem. But now, the answer of DepEd teachers is simply those materials, that’s what we were given. So you no longer have the ability to say: ‘This is wrong. I cannot do this because this is wrong’… “

To find appropriate, locally produced teaching materials is also complicated when curriculum developers and teachers have to select ones that match locally adopted forms of imported educational policies such as the CEFR. In Malaysia, educational stakeholders had questioned Mal-3 about her recommendations of using international books. She retorted: “Tell me, which book produced by us that are CEFR aligned?” She argued that in the future, locally produced materials should be a priority in Malaysia. She stated:

“… we have to give our … we have to build capacity in anything we do. We … cannot lie to our people and say the CEFR alignment. It is not so much books you have to release the CEFR aligned. So we came up with selection criteria which tell people which books to choose for our students … make sure that [CEFIR] level is at your level … it is not above your level. So, if you are primary one, then the book chosen will be appropriate for primary one, which means a pre-A1 going towards A1 and so on, so it will be appropriate for them.”

5.6. Concluding remarks

ASEAN consists of some of the most developed nations in the world, but there are some which are lagging behind economically. In ASEAN nations such as Singapore and Brunei Darussalam, educational facilities are world class, but in other contexts they are quite limited. Given these differences, as well as other context-bound differences, all ASEAN nations have undergone educational reforms in English language education (see Chapter 3). However, findings from this study show that these have achieved different levels of success, at different paces and with different resources and constraints. Chapter 4 has shown difficulties that ASEAN nations face in terms of introducing English into the basic education curricula given the multilingual realities they live in. Data in this present chapter adds to the level of difficulty in that the implementation of ESBE is bound to multiple challenges, ranging from unfavourable learning environments to inappropriate assessment procedures, from difficulties in implementing online learning to problems in ensuring smooth transition in basic education. The chapter has shown complex interplays between policies, pedagogical practices and institutional constraints. These challenges are all interlinked, creating a multidimensional picture of ESBE which all ASEAN nations participate in.

To understand ESBE in ASEAN holistically we cannot take a uni-dimensional approach. Indeed, any educational reforms cannot be seen from one side; for example, from purely a methodological perspective (see Ouyang, 2000, for the case of China). However, there is an urgent need to take a localised approach to English language education reforms, much like localised TESOL pedagogies have been promoted (see Canagarajah, 2005; cf. Ramanathan, 2006). Chapter 3 has shown how ideologies are in interplay in the creation of ESBE policies across ASEAN nations, while Chapter 4 has demonstrated how ESBE policies are translated into local curricula which attempt to accommodate English alongside national languages, indigenous languages and other foreign languages. This chapter shows the urgency to leave out the tendency to adopt a Western-based TESOL realm as ‘standards’ models, and seek out localised approaches to English language education reforms which underpin ESBE instead. As Ramanathan (2006:144) argues:

“All realms of current west-based TESOL – teacher-observations, teaching skills, methods and materials, assessment and placement, second language acquisition, research methods – invite readings and interpretations that run counter to sedimentising strains so that these domains are not presented or assumed to be established ‘standards’/universalist models, but ones that … have to be understood as shifting, localised domains” and “that take very different forms in diverse contexts … ”
Delving into the local would help us better grasp the significance of various facets associated with English language education reforms in ASEAN.

First and foremost, doing so would help us understand why there is a certain learning culture which underpins English language pedagogy in ASEAN. The prevalence of a learning culture which emphasises teacher-centred learning as appearing in many contexts in ASEAN highlights the centrality of the teacher as a figure of authority in the classroom. The teacher is understood as someone who deserves obedience, respect and attention, one resembling the Confucian perspective of the teacher in China or the role of the Guru in India. To enhance our understanding of ESBE in ASEAN, it is necessary to examine the role of the teacher within the local context of the learning culture in which English language pedagogy is situated. This is best subjected to further research.

Second, a localised approach to English language education reforms would offer some explanation to the problems enmeshing the domain of assessment. A localised approach would help us understand the resistance of teachers to Western-imported assessments (as observed in Vietnam and Thailand), as well as the reluctance of teachers to contradict authorities and implement innovative assessment approaches (as observed in Laos). In this respect, new assessment approaches which consider the local context may be needed in ASEAN. Further, the appropriation of the CEFR in Malaysia and Thailand, which, according to Savski (2020) is a form of recontextualisation of the assessment policy to suit “the national language plus English” bilingual policy agendas of the two nations, can also be seen in light of the localised approach. In parallel with the neo-liberalist ideology closely associated with globalisation as discussed in Chapter 3, ASEAN nations such as Malaysia and Thailand have sought to implement an assessment policy of ‘international standards’ (i.e. the CEFR). The two nations have selectively recontextualised the CEFR, although this may have been done without carefully considering the plurilingual/pluricultural agenda of the Council of Europe (see Savski, 2020). The recontextualisation of the CEFR may be seen as a localised approach to the assessment of teachers’ language proficiency pioneered in the ASEAN region by Malaysia and Thailand (see sections 6.3 and 6.4 for further discussion on ASEAN teachers’ English proficiency), although the strong emphasis on English means negligence of the spirit of the CEFR to build plurilingualism in which proficiency in the target language (i.e. English) should go hand in hand with other languages.

Third, a localised approach would give us a vantage point to understand the prominent role of educational authorities in the ASEAN region. This is common across ASEAN nations. The prominence of a learning culture which emphasises teacher-centred learning cannot be separated from the fact that it is encouraged by educational authorities, as seen in the case of Brunei. Although policies have been implemented, changes may not occur if educational authorities are reluctant to implement new approaches to pedagogies, as observed in Cambodia, Brunei and Vietnam. Sometimes educational authorities also have a hand in imposing prescribed materials, which may not be relevant to current policies or recent theories in language pedagogy, as found in the Philippines.

Fourth, using a localised lens would shed light on the urgent need for locally produced teaching materials that can support the curricula to ensure proper transition from primary to secondary education. The importation of internationally produced materials has caused concerns, for example, in terms of lowering students’ motivation in that “the materials and textbooks … are mostly irrelevant to their lives and sometimes too difficult” (Sermsongswad and Tantipongsanuruk, 2015:49). This has resulted in scholarly suggestions to produce teaching materials that suit the ASEAN context, for example, that of Kirkpatrick (2012a, 2012b). Findings from this study provide evidence for Kirkpatrick’s contention of the need to produce locally produced, culturally appropriate teaching materials.

Further, just how inseparable teaching materials are from the curriculum (Graves, 2008, 2016) is highlighted from this study in Section 5.5. Kirkpatrick (2012a:40) argues that ASEAN curricula need “to include topics of regional and local cultures that are relevant for lingua franca users in these contexts; it is a cross-cultural course based on ASEAN” and “the curriculum must therefore be designed to allow students to be able to engage critically in discussions about their own cultures and cultural values and interests in English”. Kirkpatrick’s argument is relevant to the main argument of Section 5.5; that is, a well-aligned curricula which could ensure smooth transition from primary to secondary education. Findings from this study demonstrate that policy directions are unclear in terms of transition, showing how this situation is reflected in the misalignment of curricular contents in primary and secondary education. A localised approach to solving the curricular misalignment would see the adoption of Kirkpatrick’s suggestion. Interest in learning other Southeast Asian languages may be low, as Thai-3 observed in the case of Thailand: “There is little awareness in Thailand at present about the importance of exposure to other ASEAN languages … to achieving regional integration … ”. Similarly, little interest in other ASEAN languages has been observed in the Malaysian context, which is why Hashim (2014:469) has suggested: “Neighbouring languages should not, one would hope, be ignored as cross-border small businesses may develop and worker mobility be encouraged like in the European Union. The
foreign language segment may play a bigger role in a new policy. It may be unrealistic to hope that more ASEAN languages would be adopted in the basic education systems given the low economic engagement among ASEAN member states themselves (see Section 7.2). However, what is more realistic is the use of English for incorporating ASEAN-related materials into textbooks. As Thai-3 has suggested: “English is a neutral instrument” and it is believed to be useful to convey curricular contents and teaching materials related to ASEAN cultures (see also Kirkpatrick, 2012a, 2012b, 2014a, 2014b, 2016). More culturally appropriate contents from Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos, for example, could be produced and juxtaposed with the cultures of their neighbours in Vietnam, Indonesia, Singapore, etc. in a way that ensures proper transition from primary to secondary education.

Moreover, a localised approach to the curriculum would also shift attention to seeing the ASEAN basic education curricula as one cohesive whole that fits the local context. Findings from this study show that even though basic education consists of primary and secondary schooling, both have been seen (and treated) as if they were separate. This is the root of the problem concerning curricular misalignment whereby curricular contents in primary education are not aligned with that in secondary education. This might have been due to a historically shared experience among post-colonial ASEAN nations where in the early years of formulating education structures primary education and secondary education were seen as separate. This happened prior to the 1990 United Nations’ International Declaration on Education for All. Following the Declaration, policy changes started to appear, as one of the resolutions of the Declaration is that countries are required to broaden the scope of basic education. As a consequence, countries around the world started to adopt this resolution by including primary and secondary education together as part of basic education. In Indonesia, for example, this happened in 1994 when primary education (six years) and lower secondary education (three years) were merged as basic education. A similar structure is found in Cambodia. In other ASEAN member states such as Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore, basic education consists of 12 years (from the first year of primary education to the final year of secondary education).

Across ASEAN, although primary education and secondary education are structurally seen as one unit, the curricular contents do not show much unity. Findings from this study demonstrate that English curricular contents do not connect well in primary and secondary education. It is unknown how ASEAN nations would attempt to address this issue. Indeed, to investigate the issue is a task of such a magnitude it requires research on its own. Such research would seek to find answers to curricular aspects which Graves (2016:88) has identified in deciding the scope and sequence of curriculum. These include decisions about:

“... what should be taught over the entire span of the programme; how the content will be divided (e.g. into courses); what should be emphasised in each course; how the courses will complement or build on each other; and how they will be levelled and sequenced. In effect, the programme needs to be organised from a vertical perspective, i.e. how different courses for one level or group of students complement each other, and from a horizontal perspective, i.e. how courses are levelled and sequenced, and how they build on each other over time.”

In deciding the scope and sequence of the curriculum, attention must also be paid to the biological, psychological and social changes involved during the transitional period of basic education. In the context of ESBE, English language lessons take place in basic education where a child grows into an adolescent. English language lessons must be seen not only as a means of building competency in the global language, but also as a tool of socialisation leading to personal growth. During the transitional years of basic education, adolescents’ individual characteristics, including language skills and behaviours, as well as the availability of support resources, are critical for success. Adolescents’ ability to adapt to the new situation in secondary school depends on these. ESBE must be framed within this transitional perspective. It should be designed in such a way which enables learners to learn English and grow personally. This may be seen as a form of focused intervention in transitional years, which Serbin, Stack and Kingdon (2013) view as critical to academic success, particularly for those who are at risk or vulnerable. As Serbin, et al. (2013:1,345) have argued, “focused interventions to prepare for the transition to secondary schooling carried out during the primary school years particularly could benefit some of the most vulnerable youth”.

Finally, a localised approach to English language education reforms means a more nuanced process of investigating the adoption of educational technologies and online education. It seeks to investigate commonalities while acknowledging the discrepancies which occur in the provision of educational technologies and delivery of online education. Findings from this study suggest that some ASEAN nations are more ready than others in terms of equipping students with educational technologies and online education. The processes in which educational technologies are used have been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. It is also the pandemic which has underscored and accelerated the need for online education in ASEAN nations. Abrupt changes have been
made, and some pedagogical interventions seem to be more sporadic than they are systematic. Nonetheless, these are not concerning, given that most countries around the world struggle to deliver education, not to mention to survive at all. Evidence from this study shows that teachers and schools employed various tools at their disposal to find alternatives to face-to-face teaching. Those who were lucky with internet access could manage using WhatsApp, Telegram, Zoom, Webex, etc., to support learning. However, a more encouraging fact is that teachers undertook home visits, used DBE box or resorted to using television and radio, when online education is not viable due to lack of internet access. This demonstrates their resilience and commitment to providing the best quality of education despite an unfavourable learning environment.

Taking a glass-half-full perspective, we can see the pandemic as a precursor for accelerating strategies in delivering online education. In consideration of the learning culture in the ASEAN region, it is highly unlikely that online education would take over face-to-face education completely. Face-to-face education would remain. Sing-1 observed the urgency for human interaction entailed in face-to-face education, hence valuing the reopening of schools. She stated: “The decision to reopen schools was pivotal, as we recognised that learning is mainly a human endeavour, so while teaching and learning through technologies real-time was needed for that moment, it cannot be the main driver nor should it be.” Participants suggested that all the strategies with online education were temporary; for example, Phil-1 stated that the strategies were “just interim for the purpose of coping up with the pandemic and also in line with our basic education continuity plan”. On the other hand, there are no signs that ASEAN nations would remove online education entirely. Several nations have already planned to make online education inherent in basic education, and therefore there are no reversing courses. What is more likely to happen is an increased role of blended education in post-pandemic ASEAN. It is highly likely that online education becomes more integral in ESBE in ASEAN basic education in the upcoming years. Internet connectivity may require an overhaul in order to provide equitable access to all citizens in the ASEAN region, but as far as ESBE is concerned all ASEAN nations would be compelled to maximise how the two modes of delivery (i.e. face-to-face and online education) can be implemented to ensure effective English language pedagogy. How and to what extent pedagogical techniques that utilise educational technologies and make use of online delivery could be incorporated into future basic education are issues warranting further research. Sing-1 already questioned the issues in her statement:

“Teaching face-to-face cannot be wholesale transposed to teaching digitally. Classroom management is something that must be rethought and transformed. How do we really keep students from turning off their camera and doing other things? How do we keep discipline in a virtual classroom or maintain security against hackers? Materials would also have to go beyond just being digitised but be really of a digital nature. But that has to go back to how well teachers know their students and what works best for the diverse classroom.”
Chapter 6
ESBE teachers and teacher education
This chapter examines findings relevant to ESBE teachers in ASEAN and areas of interest in language teacher education at both pre-service and in-service levels. First, the chapter discusses English teaching as a profession and the challenges that teachers encounter in their career. Second, it focuses on the broad area of ESBE teachers’ capacity. The next section examines findings pertinent to policies developed by ASEAN nations to tackle the issue concerning teachers’ language proficiency. Fourth, the chapter discusses various policies aimed at developing teachers’ capacity through measures or reforms at pre-service level. Next, the chapter examines various professional development (PD) programmes and activities developed at in-service level. The chapter then discusses external collaborations relevant to English language teacher education for ESBE teachers in the ASEAN region. The final section critically analyses major issues emerging in the chapter and provides concluding remarks.

Findings generated from this study show that English language teaching in ASEAN is a highly challenging profession. There are various aspects which make English teaching a difficult professional endeavour.

Data from this chapter shows that a certain professional culture constrains one from pursuing a career in English language teaching. A Brunei case exemplifies this. Of the Brunei context, Bru-1 stated: “... there is a residual cultural reluctance which may prevent young Bruneians from making ESBE their career path – family and society pressure may make them feel that it is better to aim for a government office job, or for teaching in the Islamic religious education sector.” In Brunei where teaching is generally regarded as a respectable profession and the English language is highly valued, it seems that English language teaching is not seen as a secure or prestigious career.

English teaching as a profession may not even be attractive to a great number of prospective university students. Participants of this study noted that many young people in their countries were not interested in becoming English teachers for reasons such as low salaries and limited incentives. Myan-3 stated that in Myanmar: “There is not much attractiveness for people to join teacher education institutions.” Camb-1 explained the situation in Cambodia:

“The most challenging is about the candidates. It’s really difficult to find students who are really qualified for the programme. That’s because the ones who are better (in English), they are able to look for better jobs, and would not apply to be a teacher. So that’s the problem because there are not a lot of incentives of [sic] being a teacher ... For that challenge we need to change mindset so that people would just value the teaching career. Right now the teaching career is not valued. Another is that – not just from the government but from the candidates themselves – once they got into the programme they should not consider that the programme is their last choice. When we ask them why they apply for this programme, they usually say they have no choice. We need to change that kind of perspective.”

Another reason which makes English teaching a highly challenging profession, and is thus less appealing to prospective university graduates, is workload. A number of participants of this study underscored that English language teaching is a profession which has a heavy workload. In addition to a busy teaching load, teachers are often burdened by administrative tasks. Thai-1 spoke about Thai teachers: “Teachers have other duties and workloads to achieve. They have a lot of administrative jobs to do at school as well.” Teachers may also be professionally constrained because they have other responsibilities related to assessment. Of Indonesian teachers, Ind-1 stated: “Developing testing instrument could be no problem, but marking and grading them would be time consuming.” Viet-2 spoke of teachers in Vietnam: “They are overloaded with so many things, and many of them didn’t even have any motivation for profession [sic] development.”

An interplay of these factors makes it difficult for universities to attract the brightest students to join programmes related to English language teaching. This is a common issue stressed by participants in Cambodia, Indonesia and the Philippines. For example, Ind-1 explained the situation in Indonesia:

“Those attending education departments are mostly not the best students in their secondary schools and economically they mostly come from middle to lower socio-economic background. Some education department students chose their subjects a second
Findings generated from this study suggest that the capacity of ESBE teachers in ASEAN is limited. This echoes previous studies such as those conducted in Cambodia (Saroeun, 2015; Tweed and Som, 2015), Laos (Kounnavongsa, 2015), Myanmar (Paw, 2015), Vietnam (Canh and Do, 2012; Nguyen, 2011; see also Canh, et al., 2019), Indonesia (Asriyanti, Sikki, Rahman, Hamra and Noni, 2013; Zein, 2015, 2017e) and Thailand (Sermsongsawad and Tantipongsanuruk, 2015). Participants agreed that many teachers did not have suitable teaching qualifications to teach in basic education, particularly in primary schools. One of the reasons is because most pre-service education institutions offer courses for teaching English in secondary schools. In a great majority of cases, qualifications relevant to teaching English to young learners (EYL) are the exception, rather than the norm. Thai-3 observed that evidence is seen in the fact that English instruction is offered for many hours, but there are only limited numbers of qualified teachers who have been recruited. This has resulted in many teachers of other subjects being assigned to teach English, an issue commonly found in other ASEAN nations such as Vietnam, Indonesia and Myanmar. Of the Thailand context, Thai-3 stated:

“A key challenge, particularly in less-developed areas outside major cities, is the lack of qualified teachers of English. This can be seen as a consequence of the amount of hours devoted to English instruction, which is quite large considering the lack of presence of English in local language repertoires – the result being that teacher recruitment is difficult ... I have personally encountered cases where teachers of other subjects with very little ability in English were assigned to teach English classes at primary level due to staff shortage.”

One dimension of English language teaching capacity is language proficiency. This can be broadly defined as the ability to use the English language fluently and intelligibly in a range of complexities suitting the discourse where a conversation takes place. However, this is a general scope of language proficiency. In the context of classroom teaching, attention must be paid to English-for-teaching, which means “[t]he essential English language skills a teacher needs to be able to prepare and enact the lesson choice after non-education department.

In the Philippines, “resignation” among English teachers is common. The situation in the nation is very complex in that “the policies of DepEd have many effects on the teacher’s life” (Phil-2). Phil-2 stated that many teachers experience “burn out” and resign, and they eventually “transfer to the call centre industry” because they are “having a hard time.”

This situation is in stark contrast with Singapore where teaching, whether English or else, is a highly regarded profession (NCEE, 2016). Data from this study suggests that the nation only looks for the brightest minds to become teachers and it does not seem to find difficulties in attracting prospective teacher candidates. Instead, it seems that the difficulty lies in selecting the best candidates from many eligible ones. Sing-1 explained:

“For the languages, there is a need to have a good proficiency with academic results that reflect this. Singapore only selects from the top 30 per cent of a cohort, and if selected, they are interviewed by a panel of MoE, NIE and school partners to assess their attitudes and aptitudes, such as a love of children/young people, a desire to fulfil a mission, to answer a calling, having an interest in teaching ... With such a heavy investment, the requirements of becoming a teacher are weighty. We do not take such a professional for granted, especially when we see that teachers are nation-builders who are moulding the future, i.e. our children, of our nation into good, active and contributing citizens. To have a high-quality teaching workforce and a bright future for the nation, we need to ensure our teachers have the best preparation and continued support throughout their education and teaching career.”

In some cases, those who are already English teachers may not have the right mindset. Ind-1 stated that a major challenge in Indonesia “is the mindset” of the teachers. He specified:

“Some teachers became teachers not because they love teaching and children but because no other jobs they could do. So they teach only to fulfil their obligation. They do not perform to the highest performance when teaching and would easily give up when facing a problem, and will not try to do continuous professional development.”

6.3. Teachers’ capacity

Findings generated from this study suggest that the capacity of ESBE teachers in ASEAN is limited. This echoes previous studies such as those conducted in Cambodia (Saroeun, 2015; Tweed and Som, 2015), Laos (Kounnavongsa, 2015), Myanmar (Paw, 2015), Vietnam (Canh and Do, 2012; Nguyen, 2011; see also Canh, et al., 2019), Indonesia (Asriyanti, Sikki, Rahman, Hamra and Noni, 2013; Zein, 2015, 2017e) and Thailand (Sermsongsawad and Tantipongsanuruk, 2015). Participants agreed that many teachers did not have suitable teaching qualifications to teach in basic education, particularly in primary schools. One of the reasons is because most pre-service education institutions offer courses for teaching English in secondary schools. In a great majority of cases, qualifications relevant to teaching English to young learners (EYL) are the exception, rather than the norm. Thai-1 spoke about the situation in Thailand: “Many teachers cannot use English or teach English effectively because they do not major in English or do not have first-hand experience with using English. They sometimes don’t understand what they have to teach.” Thai-3 observed that evidence is seen in the fact that English instruction is offered for many hours, but there are only limited numbers of qualified teachers who have been recruited. This has resulted in many teachers of other subjects being assigned to teach English, an issue commonly found in other ASEAN nations such as Vietnam, Indonesia and Myanmar. Of the Thailand context, Thai-3 stated:

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in a standardised (usually national) curriculum in English in a way that is recognisable and understandable to other speakers of the language” (Young, Freeman, Hauck, Garcia Gomez and Papageorgioum, 2014:05). It is certainly true that teachers across ASEAN nations have ‘differing levels of proficiency’ (Low, 2020:152) and these may even vary across areas, districts or even schools in each ASEAN nation. However, as a general description, teachers’ English language proficiency is a common issue of concern across ASEAN nations. This concern has been voiced by scholars in the region prior to the 2015 ASEAN Integration (e.g. Fen, 2005; Nguyen, 2011; Saroeun, 2015; Sermsongswad and Tantipongsanuruk, 2015) as well as those post-integration (e.g. Archer and Kittiphanh, 2020; Aye, 2020; Zein, 2017e).

Findings from this study show that even six years post the 2015 ASEAN Integration participants reported that a great majority of English teachers in ASEAN had limited proficiency. Lack of proficiency is a common issue in Thailand, as reported by Thai-3: “Results of nationwide testing of qualified English teachers also indicated a general lack of proficiency – A1 or A2 on the CEFR were the most common results.” What Thai-3 reported is parallel with a 2009 Thailand educational ministry report, which indicates that “31.7 per cent of the teachers had basic English proficiency, 64.4 per cent had intermediate proficiency, and only 3.9 per cent had advanced proficiency” (Sermsongswad and Tantipongsanuruk, 2015:48). Similarly, Myan-2 reported that the biggest challenge faced by teachers in Myanmar was “language proficiency”. A similar case is found in Vietnam. Referring to the national requirement of teachers to reach a C1 level of the CEFR, Viet-3 stated: “For the pre-service English teachers in education in Vietnam, many of the programmes haven’t reached C1 level yet. That’s the problem.”

Other ASEAN nations have undergone massive educational reforms, and consequently their educational outcomes have gone from strength to strength. Despite this, it does not mean that ESBE teachers demonstrate strong English language proficiency. For example, Malaysia’s higher education system is ranked 25th in the world, but its English proficiency index has dropped in the past decade. Malaysia ranked 9 (high) in 2011, 13 (high) in 2012 and 11 (high) in 2013, but in the past three years it ranked 22 (high) in 2018, 26 (high) in 2019 and 30 (moderate) in 2020 (English First, 2020). There is no direct correlation between Malaysia’s English language proficiency index and teachers’ overall proficiency. However, participants of this study admitted the issue concerning teachers’ language proficiency. Mal-2 stated: “... although our current ELT educational system may be sufficient there was a need for English language teachers and students to improve their level of spoken English, in terms of accuracy, fluency and pronunciation.”

Some participants thought that teachers’ lack of knowledge and skills in English was closely related to language proficiency. This is observed by participants from Indonesia and Laos. Ind-1 spoke about English teachers in Indonesia: “Challenges faced by teachers in teaching could be of many kinds: First is the teachers’ own knowledge and skills in English. They will not feel confident or enjoy being teachers if their English is under the standard ... ” Of Laotian teachers, Laos-1 stated: “Could be the first factor that we face, difficulties or challenges in teaching English, because knowledge and expertise of English language by teachers is quite limited ... they are not proficient in English.”

Figure 6.1. Learning English in an affluent, urban primary school in Myanmar

Another dimension of English language teacher capacity is pedagogical competence. This refers to the ability to perform various teaching-related tasks including managing the classroom, giving clear instructions, integrating language skills and creating appropriate teaching materials. Pedagogical competence includes skills to draw on teaching methods and develop various techniques suiting curricular demands, classroom circumstances and the needs of the students (see Harmer, 2007; Scrivener, 2005). Various participants of this study stated that
Teachers experienced various difficulties in teaching because they had limited pedagogical competence. Thai-1 reported that “ESBE primary teachers” in Thailand “lack effective and appropriate teaching methods and skills. Students’ English proficiency is therefore usually very low.” Myan-2 stated that the second biggest challenge faced by Myanmar teachers is “effective teaching methodology and techniques”. She added that training was urgently needed to help teachers “to update their pedagogical skills that can make their classes more interactive and that can improve students’ 21st century skills.” In Laos, observations slightly differed because Laos-1 stated that teachers’ pedagogical competence was “OK”, whereas Laos-2 suggested the contrary. She stated: “The primary teacher workforce is quite weak, both in content knowledge and pedagogical skills. Without improving teacher performance, student learning is unlikely to improve.” Studies in the Laos context tend to support Laos-2’s observation (e.g. Achren and Kittiphanh, 2020; Kounnavongsa, 2015). A similar observation is made in Vietnam. Viet-3 stated that teachers’ issue with poor pedagogical competence can be traced back to the limited teacher preparation at pre-service level: “And also the teaching skills, many of the teaching programmes and ITE programmes haven’t been upgraded or updated with the new trends in English education and the new national English curriculum of Vietnam, many of them.” Viet-2 concurred: “I could see that there are many other limitation [sic] in the classroom as well.”

As far as areas of pedagogical competence are concerned, studies have identified various issues that teachers are weak at. These include integrating language skills (Sermsongswad and Tantipongsanuruk, 2015; Zein, 2017e), creating appropriate teaching materials (Asriyanti, et al., 2013; Canh and Do, 2012; Nguyen, 2011), classroom management (Zein, 2017e) and giving classroom instruction (Asriyanti, et al., 2013; Nguyen, 2011; Zein, 2017e). It is reported that teachers also relied on using grammar translation methods (Nguyen, 2011) and struggled at promoting learner autonomy (Saroeun, 2015). For example, Saroeun (2015:24) spoke about Cambodian teachers:

“Most teachers of English in Cambodia are not very familiar with the latest trends of teaching methodology and pedagogy such as a communicative teaching and learning approach, task-based learning approach, project-based learning approach, cooperative language learning approach, and so on. They cannot effectively implement these approaches to benefit student learning and are unsure about how to conduct their teaching so that students are actively and productively involved in the learning processes. Therefore, most English teachers still use the grammar translation method to teach students with unsatisfactory learning outcomes in which most students become passive learners who rely heavily on their teachers without furthering their own reading and research ... Moreover, most teachers of English have not set good examples for students in reading or conducting research, and do not help them to create reading habits or educate their students about the importance of reading to achieve the major goal of becoming lifelong, independent learners.”

Findings from this study add to the currently existing literature, as a number of participants voiced a concern with assessment. Participants suggested that teachers had limited ability in terms of designing appropriate assessment procedures. Myan-2 noted that what made up the third major problem among teachers in Myanmar was “effective assessment methods”. The problem with assessment is also relevant in the context of ASEAN nations currently undergoing educational reforms in assessment such as Thailand and Vietnam, which are using the CEFR, as well as the Philippines which is implementing the MTB MLE policy. Of Thai teachers, Thai-1 stated: “Also, the tests they make usually lack validity and reliability, as they do not have enough knowledge and skills to prepare an English test.” A similar comment is made by Viet-2 about teachers in Vietnam: “... one of the major problems is that the teachers themselves are not trained or are prepared enough for the new policies or new ways of assessment or teaching. That’s the first thing.” Phil-2 acknowledged the difficulty that teachers in the Philippines faced in terms of assessment:

“In our basic education, our teachers do not really know how to assess. Assessment is something that we have a difficulty in. We are really weak in terms of assessment. That means when we assess, it’s the usual pen and paper – knowledge retention that we are testing and then maybe it’s the way we conduct the testing since that’s the way we still teach.”
The previous section demonstrated that teachers across ASEAN nations have limited English language proficiency. Findings presented in this section show that some ASEAN nations have developed policies aimed at improving teachers’ English proficiency, while others have not.

Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam are three ASEAN countries that have adopted the CEFR for setting the standards of teachers’ English language proficiency. This is relevant to the language education policy reforms undertaken in each nation, as explained in Chapter 3.

Thailand has set the standards of teachers’ English proficiency at levels B1 and B2 of the CEFR. According to the Council of Europe (2001:24), both B1 and B2 refer to “Independent User”, but they have different criteria as presented below:

Thai-1 stated: “English primary school teachers are required to have the proficiency level of B1, and English secondary school B2. Teachers of other subjects need to have the proficiency level of A2.” These levels of proficiency, however, are not rigid because teachers are allowed to use language proficiency measurements other than the CEFR. Thai-3 further explained it:

“At present, the requirement of the government is that English teachers achieve a proficiency score equal to B2 on CEFR, which they can show by taking any suitable standardised test (even TOEIC). However, this applies only to new teachers – many of those already in the educational system fall far below this requirement – when teachers were recently tested nationwide, many ended up around A2.”

Thai-2, representing the Office of the Basic Education at the Thai Ministry of Education, stated that her Office had initiated tests at Thailand’s Human Capital Excellence Centres (HCECs) throughout the nation. She stated that “[l]arge numbers of Thai teachers teaching English took the internationally English proficiency test”.

Recent policies in Vietnam and Malaysia have stipulated a requirement for teachers to attain a C1 level of the CEFR. Specifically, Vietnam requires a C1 level for English teachers at upper secondary school (Grades 10–12). A B2 level is required for those teaching at primary (Grades 1–6) and lower secondary levels (Grades 7–9). According to the Council of Europe (2001:24), a C1 of the CEFR refers to the level of “Proficient User”. The level is explained in Table 6.2.

### Table 6.1. Levels B2 and B1 of the CEFR (Global description)

<table>
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<th>Level</th>
<th>Criterion</th>
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| B2 (Independent User) | • Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation.  
• Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party.  
• Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. |
| B1 (Independent User) | • Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.  
• Can deal with most situations likely to arise while travelling in an area where the language is spoken.  
• Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest.  
• Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. |

Of the situation in Thailand, Thai-1 stated: “English primary school teachers are required to have the proficiency level of B1, and English secondary school B2. Teachers of other subjects need to have the proficiency level of A2.” These levels of proficiency, however, are not rigid because teachers are allowed to use language proficiency measurements other than the CEFR. Thai-3 further explained it:

“[l]arge numbers of Thai teachers teaching English took the internationally English proficiency test”. She believed that the testing “is a positive sign that we are waking up to the problem of Thailand’s poor English language standards and attempting to rectify the situation.”
A Malaysian participant stated: “Based on the English Roadmap (2015–25), the proficiency standard set for English language teachers is C1 on the CEFR framework” (Mal-2). Similarly, Viet-3 explained the requirement of English proficiency in Vietnam: “So for teachers of pre-service education, we requested all the English teachers to graduate to have the English proficiency of C1 level of the CEFR, that’s the English proficiency.” In Vietnam, the implementation does not seem to be rigorous, as studies have suggested. For example, Dudzik and Nguyen (2015) reported on the results of 2013 tests in which 83 per cent of ESBE teachers at primary level were ranked below the B1 level and 87 per cent of those at secondary level were below the B2 level.

For some participants in Vietnam such as Viet-2, a C1 level of proficiency, however, is deemed inadequate in that it only measures one’s general English proficiency, rather than their ability to use English in the classroom. Viet-2 expressed her dissatisfaction regarding the issue, highlighting the need for what Freeman (2017) calls “English-for-Teaching” or a form of English used by the teacher for classroom teaching (see also Young, et. al., 2017). Viet-2 stated:

“… to be honest, as I mentioned earlier, the English that they could use in their daily life and the English they should use in the classroom are very different. I’ve seen several teachers whose English was very normal but they could use it very powerfully and clearly effectively inside the classroom. I as a teacher, as a recruiter, appreciate it much more. So that’s the reason why when I test them in terms of their English competence, I normally give them two tests, the first one is their English in the classroom and the second one is their ability to use English in the classroom. And sometimes, I’m invited to some panels to recruit teachers at high school levels, and I always care about these two kinds of English as well. Unfortunately, as I can see for most situations, people just care about the former and do not pay enough attention to their ability to use simple, or facilitate their use of English inside the classroom.”

Unlike Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam, Brunei Darussalam and Singapore do not use the CEFR. Rather, they use the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary or Advanced Level to set English teachers’ language proficiency standard. As Bru-2 explained: “For teachers, they would have to have at least a credit in English language as a subject and Malay language as a subject, usually at GCE ‘O’ Level minimum Credit C6.” For those wanting to become English teachers, Singapore stipulates a Grade B in English Language at the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level or a Grade B3 in General Paper (English) at the Advanced Level. Having either of these of proficiency levels, among other sets of requirements, exempts one from undertaking the recently implemented English Language Entrance Proficiency Test (EL EPT). Nowadays, the EL EPT is a required test for those wanting to teach English in basic education in Singapore. It consists of: 1) a speaking component in which candidates are required to introduce themselves, read a passage, present a soliloquy and perform a dialogue with the interviewer; and 2) a writing component in which candidates are required to write an article of 200-300 words and an essay of about 450 words (Singapore Education, 2021).

Participants from the Philippines confirmed that the nation does not set a minimum level of proficiency for English teachers. However, they stated that the Philippines’ Department of Education has a required language proficiency test for those wanting to teach in basic education. Phil-1 stated:

“DepEd has it. It has an English language proficiency test and then it also has a Science proficiency test. The new teacher will take those
two tests during their first three years of teaching. So that is upon acceptance and then, while in the service, they already have an assessment of their performance. They call it Strategic Performance Management System, SPMS.”

Participants, however, cast doubt about the quality of the English language proficiency test. For example, Phil-3 stated: “... the tests are not so good, like the English Language Proficiency Test for all teachers, whether you are an English teacher or not an English teacher [it doesn’t matter].”

Meanwhile, other ASEAN nations, namely Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia and Myanmar, do not stipulate requirements of minimum English proficiency for those wanting to teach ESBE. Representing Laos, Laos-1 stated: “As far as I know, we don’t have that requirement for Lao teachers who teach English in primary schools.” Myanmar does not have specific English language requirements, but it requires prospective teachers at pre-service education to meet certain minimum requirements to complete their studies. Myanmar is in a state of transition, as it attempts to stipulate minimum requirements for teaching and learning of all subjects, and not just English. Therefore, as Myan-2 stated: “The minimum English language proficiency requirement is not specified for new qualified teachers. However, only those who have a certain score in the matriculation examination can join the education degree colleges”. The admission requirements for education degree colleges are specified by Myan-4. She stated:

“Students need to get at least 400 out of the total 600 marks in the Matriculation exam with at least 60 out of 100 in English and Mathematics. They are to pass the entrance written examination, which tests their basic knowledge and proficiency in English, and an interview, which assesses their attitudes towards teaching.”

Indonesia, which does not require a minimum English proficiency, allows high degrees of latitude to universities to determine the appropriate level of proficiency. Ind-2 explained that prospective teachers wanting to graduate for pre-service education “are required to get a TOEFL score at least 525.” Ind-1 concurred. In addition, there are also additional tests such as a “P TESOL, created by TEFLIN” as well as “Uji Kompetensi Guru [Teachers Competence Test] and PLPG” (Ind-2). Some teachers wishing to reach higher professional ranks usually enrol in master’s and doctorate degrees, and in that respect they are required to achieve a “525” and “550” in TOEFL, respectively (Ind-1).

6.5. Policies on pre-service education for English teachers

The previous sections have established the need for preparing ESBE teachers in terms of language proficiency and pedagogical competence. Findings presented in this section demonstrate that ASEAN nations have developed various policies to prepare ESBE teachers at pre-service level.

Singapore relies on the National Institute of Education (NIE) as “the only accreditation board for teachers” in the nation to prepare prospective English teachers (Sing-1).

Prospective teachers attending the NIE “may learn the content in one of two ways: either enter a degree or Bachelor programme before coming to NIE to learn how to be a teacher or ... coming straight to NIE for their full content and teaching qualifications.” Sing-1 stated that the Singapore government through the NIE has developed policies to work in tandem with the Bilingual Education Policy and the MoE Framework for 21st Century Competencies and Student Outcomes. These are the NIE Teacher Education Model for the 21st Century (TE Model)
and the Values, Skills and Knowledge (VSK) Model. Sing-1 explained:

“These models are the underpinning framework and philosophy to all our teacher education programmes. These underlie the future-ready teacher of the 21st century who must possess the right knowledge, skills and values to navigate the uncertain future … Recently, we have articulated our Value-Based Education (VBE), which has its root in the VSK Framework and offers a holistic and integrated approach to values education that aims to nurture positive values, social and relational skills, and build the teacher personhood of our pre-service teachers. This is embodied in NIE’s VBE Expanding Environment approach, which expands perspectives of pre-service teachers from “Myself” to “My Community” to “My Nation, Singapore” and finally to “My World” and are each explored in their respective courses.”

In addition, all students are required to attend a course called “Communication Skills for Teachers (CST),” which aims “to equip them with the essential written and oral communicative skills. Tips to care for their voices were also shared via introduction to phonetics to equip them with tools to verify pronunciation of words in dictionaries and online tools”. According to Sing-1, once they teach in a primary school, prospective teachers are required to “adopt the Strategies for English Language Learning and Reading (STELLAR) approach … towards literacy development, positioned as a national curriculum.”

Central to pre-service education for English teachers in Singapore is teaching practicum. According to Sing-1, NIE has made practicum “an integral training required for all student teachers in teacher education to ensure that they are exposed to the expectations and demands of the teaching profession.” Sing-1 further explained:

“For the four-year undergraduate programme, student teachers spend up to 22 weeks in schools. In the first year of study, undergraduates participate in a two-week-long school posting termed as School Experience … At the end of the second year, student teachers take on a five-week Teacher Assistantship, where they are required to pen down their reflections weekly. They will be provided opportunities to teach independently. At the end of the third year, student teachers undergo a five-week Teaching Practice 1 where their lessons are observed by a NIE supervisor and a school senior teacher. Teaching Practice 2 takes place in term two of their final year and last ten weeks.”

Sing-1 also stressed the importance of digital technology to help with teacher preparation. She mentioned the use of an app at NIE: “The Well-Said app is one of the many ways that NIE support language-teachers who aspire to deepen their communicative skills enabled by technology.” She commented further that a true challenge for English language teachers in Singapore is to assist learners to become “digital natives”. She argued that teachers need to be “digitally proficient experts”. This means teachers have to be:

“… able to use and source for digital tools, information and affordances that can help in their daily lives and in lifelong learning while being critical thinkers with the vast amount of information that comes with this. EL teachers will need to embody this and to impart it to students, especially a large part of that digital information being in English.”

Finally, Sing-1 stressed the importance of providing continuing professional development for teacher educators. She stated:

“To ensure that teacher educators are kept abreast and ahead of the developments in technological enhancements, NIE published a guide, Learning and Teaching @ NIE: Principles for Education Teachers for the 21st Century, for faculty members to devise diverse instructional approaches that are enabled by learner-centred environments.”

Brunei Darussalam employs both local and expatriate teachers to teach English in basic education. Bru-2 stated that all teachers must be employees of the Ministry of Education, or they may be employed directly by individual private schools while maintaining registration with the Ministry. Prospective teachers, according to Bru-2, “have to submit proof of a good teaching qualification; for example, a Bachelor of Education degree in various subjects, or a Diploma in Teaching in addition to a first degree.” Furthermore, local prospective teachers wanting to teach ESBE, according Bru-1, are required to possess a bachelor’s degree in English language such as “English Language and Linguistics”. Bru-2 implied that most ESBE teachers are those who have graduated from bachelor’s degree in education who may not have undertaken courses relevant to English language teaching; and therefore, he stated: “If I could change anything in the current ITE arrangements, I would re-introduce bachelor’s degree in education in very specific subjects only, including in English language teaching.” Following the implementation of the “Melbourne Model” applied to language teacher education in Universiti Brunei Darussalam, local prospective teachers who have completed a bachelor’s degree could enrol “for a Masters of Teaching (MTeach) at the main local university’s Institute of Education. The aim is to develop content subject knowledge first, then focus on pedagogy during the MTeach, which includes practicums” (Bru-1).
Meanwhile, there are a number of foreign, expatriate teachers who teach ESBE in Brunei. These foreign teachers are mostly recruited through the agency of the Centre for British Teachers, CfBT, although not all are of British nationality (Bru-1). The foreign teachers at primary level, as cited from the CfBT (Education Development Trust, 2021), are required to:

- Hold a degree from a university in Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, United Kingdom, South Africa.
- Hold Qualified Teacher Status/teacher accreditation (PGCE, Bed, DipT, etc.) A TEFL cert with degree is not sufficient.
- Have a minimum three years’ relevant classroom teaching experience post-qualification with experience of teaching Key Stage 1 and/or Key Stage 2.
- Be under 55 years old at the time of arrival in Brunei Darussalam.

While the recruitment of foreign teachers continues, it is expected that future policies in Brunei would focus on development of a competent well-trained cohort of Bruneian ESBE teachers, gradually reducing the overdependence on foreign teachers (Bru-2).

The government of Malaysia is claimed to have been “successful in achieving its aspiration of making the teaching profession as the profession of choice since 2013”, which marked the first year of the Malaysia Education Blueprint implementation (Mal-4). This can be seen in the fact that interest in becoming teachers has risen significantly, as “[a]pplications into the Institutes of Teacher Education (Institut Pendidikan Guru, IPG) has exceeded the number of places offered annually” (Mal-4). Accordingly, the government has raised the requirements for those wanting to enrol in pre-service education for English teachers. Anyone wishing to undertake a bachelor’s degree in Teaching English as a second language (TESL) “must get at least grade B in English” and “at least a distinction in any five subjects” and “at least a credit in Bahasa Malaysia and History” (Mal-4). Those seeking graduation from the degree must also “undergo a Teacher Eligibility Test which consists of three components: Teaching Personality Inventory, Self-Validation Index and Physical Fitness Test” in order to “ensure that only candidates with the appropriate personality are recruited” (Mal-4). Further, the government of Malaysia stresses quality assurance, requiring all pre-service education institution to adhere to “the framework endorsed by MOA (Malaysian Qualification Accreditation). All curriculum framework designed for teacher training in the country follows the criteria set by MOA” (Mal-1). Malaysia has also enacted a new policy called Program Tambah Opsyen (PTO) TESL. According to Mal-2, PTO TESL is a practicum-specific programme dedicated to “teachers of English in the primary and secondary levels who are non-option but degree holders”. She further added: “The course consists of nine modules which include English proficiency and pedagogical knowledge to teach English as a second language. Participants will also need to complete a ten-week Professional Practice (Praktikum) component.” The Malaysian government has also implemented measures which allow the integration of English with technology and online education. According to Mal-4, the government has started it with the introduction of:

“... a flexible mode of education, namely the Massive Open Online Course (MOOCs). This has been one of the initiatives taken in implementing the online learning in Malaysia that creates a more globalised online learner globally ... The online course is aimed at encouraging online and permanent learning pursuits among Malaysians through diversification of classroom experience and unlimited open access participation via online.”

Future plans of pre-service education for English teachers in Malaysia include the integration of English with the IR 4.0 on higher education. As Mal-4 suggested, English is made central to the plan of the Malaysian government to “revamp the process of teaching and learning students that mainly focuses on the theme of Knowledge, Industry and Humanity”. There are four main aspects of the revamp, namely “redesigning of learning spaces, incorporation of English as a Subject in Basic Education (ESBE) in ASEAN: A Comparative Study
21st century pedagogies, applying a fluid and organic curriculum, responding to innovations and new areas of knowledge, and incorporation of the latest learning and teaching technologies” (Mal-4).

Participants from Vietnam suggested that the implementation of the Vietnamese National Foreign Language Programme leads to higher requirements for English teachers. Teachers are required to demonstrate sufficient pedagogical competence. Viet-3 stated that teachers:

“… should qualified [sic] enough to satisfy the implementation of teaching, the delivery of the new curriculum in Vietnam. We also have introduced the English language teachers’ framework of competences so that English teachers should be trained to satisfy the standard in such a framework.”

Participants also highlighted a number of areas of concern at pre-service level. One area of the greatest concern is the absence of a well-developed practicum programme which can provide teachers with “sufficient experience of teaching before they officially become an English teacher at a school” (Viet-3). Viet-2 stated that the practicum was inadequate because it “lasted for only a few weeks.” She added: “I don’t think that it’s going to be effective enough for them, so if there is one big thing I could do to shake up the whole curriculum, I would do that.” Viet-3 lamented the fact that “mentoring” as part of the practicum “is not required in ITE programmes”. Viet-3 stated that:

“… for the practicum, for the teachers, they should be provided with the opportunities to observe real English classes, opportunities to teach at the school, not just for a few hours but more than that. And also, they need the comments and support from more senior in-service English teachers.”

Viet-3 argued that the practicum could make use of educational technologies. He stated:

“So, if possible, so the teachers, the ITE, the pre-service teachers should be provided with the digital practicum programmes; for example, actual, real classes of K12 classes, and they observe online or digitalised programme. So subject like that, added to the current ITE programme, so that they don’t have to go to the school to observe, but they still have the experience of the observation of real classes but digitalised. I think that is a very good thing.”

This suggestion is in line with what Viet-1 stated:

“I have to say that after the year of 2020, people will have to take it more seriously. We do have a course called ‘Technology in the classroom’. It is remotely related to what you said about digital learning. It’s not the same, but still, but it’s the closest we could think of when it comes to technology. As I said, so far people have been thinking about technology as a means, rather than the content itself. But when it comes to digital learning and how we can actually make full use of it, and I do think that it’s a very important topic after this year, and digital literacy is of course something that people should integrate in the teacher education curriculum.”

Other participants highlighted that there was lack of integration of pre-service curriculum. Participants such as Viet-2 and Viet-3 confirmed the crowdedness of the curriculum. In the words of Viet-2, the curriculum is a “kind of a mixed bag of so many things” where one could find a number of courses, which are not directly relevant to English language teaching but have been made “permanent fixture in the curriculum.” Viet-2 elaborated:

“… they [prospective teachers] learn about the Vietnamese Ho Chi Minh ideology and about philosophy ... Then there is another group of subjects, which many people believe to be the basic foundations, including, for example, educational studies, logics and that sort of things. And that again, represents another strand of philosophy. And then more and most recently, we could see that apart from the current and traditional subjects such as ELT methodology, we have new courses for the teachers as well, most recently has been proposed that sketch notes, or the ability to present ideas using images should be included in the curriculum as well, and that represents AGAIN another strand of philosophy when it comes to teaching. So I think that, you know, at my faculty right now, we have a mixture of different philosophies – you mean, educational philosophies. So the multiplicity should be integrated into the current curriculum. And one of the best ways to do that is to introduce students to the real teaching context as soon as possible. Unfortunately, due to various constraints, we haven’t been able to do it yet ...” (emphasis original)

Meanwhile, Viet-1 stressed the importance of “age psychology”, referring to the psychological knowledge about children which is important “to guide learner learning”. He stated:

“The minister has actually demanded universities of education to develop separate training programmes for primary school teachers. I mean primary school English language teachers. These departments will offer courses in age psychology. In the past, there was only one programme that trained English language teachers for all levels of education. With a separate department that is
specifically assigned to train primary school teachers, trainee teachers will certainly be taught age psychology … For example, the skill that helps children to be psychologically confident in learning English, with simple grammar and familiar sentences, rather than the standard grammar structures as defined in the competency framework.”

Further, English-for-teaching (Freeman, 2017) is suggested as an important course in pre-service education. In accordance with his lamentation over the fact that the national policy emphasises the CEFR but neglects English-for-teaching (see Section 6.4), Viet-2 stated:

“You have to adjust it according to the level of the students, because I’ve been to classes where teachers used English at C1 level to give instructions to students who are learning at A2 level … So … they [prospective teachers] need to be trained in how to use classroom English appropriately for the students. Finally, I think that language of English here should be understood in the broad term, which covers also, for example, real objects, body language, in order to add to your instructional language … And that’s the reason why in conclusion I think that teachers should be trained in terms of how they can use English effectively and appropriately, and clearly in the classroom.”

The explanation above is the reason why Viet-1 proposed a course on English-for-teaching. He stated: “Also, there has been a course which I design for the National Foreign Language project, which focuses on classroom English as well.”

Participants from the Philippines suggested that the nation had no nationwide policy which sets the guidelines for pre-service education offering courses in English language teaching. Phil-2 stated that the policy, is called “PSG”, which is an abbreviation of “Programme Standard Guidelines”. The PSG is the only policy which “sets the requirement of the curriculum of all teacher training institutions,” including those who major in “English” or who have “secondary major in English”. Phil-2 added, “if there is one that is specific to English, it seems like we don’t have it, I don’t know if there is one.” Phil-1, representing the Philippines’ DepEd, did not state a specific policy on pre-service education for English teachers either. However, she used the term “policy” to refer to a broad guideline which requires Teacher Education Institutions to equip “our teachers with the basic English content and pedagogy and we really would want them to focus on basic literacy”. She suggested that the focus should be things such as “teaching beginning reading”, however “most of the universities do not offer that beginning reading.”

Furthermore, Phil-1 advocated the inclusion of “critical thinking and reasoning skills” in the pre-service education curriculum. Reflecting on the results of the National Assessment Test where students performed poorly, she suggested that pre-service education include “the development of critical thinking and all those process skills”. Phil-1 also emphasised the importance of practicum. She stated:

“For me, it’s like in an ideal situation but actually when they come to the field, you know, because they do not do practice teaching in the far-flung areas, and so when they come to the far-flung areas, they see these kinds of students who really do not even know how to hold their pencils. It’s really difficult because it’s 180 degrees different from their practice teaching. So if TEIs have not exposed these teachers into this kind of situation, these new graduates will really do not have a structure of the kind of situation in the outside world. Since most of the practice teaching are done in laboratory schools, they are ideal classrooms, they are ideal schools.”

Thailand has developed a national policy on pre-service education for English teachers. Participants such as Thai-3 stated that “teaching is a licensed profession”. This means that prospective teachers “must hold a teaching licence issued by the Teachers’ Council of Thailand in order to be eligible to teach at the basic education level” (Thai-3). He explained that the teaching licence requires a Bachelor of Education (four-year programme), which has changed from an initial length of five years. A “Graduate Teaching Licence (two-year programme) from an accredited teacher education institution” may also be used in order to obtain the teaching licence.
As with the curriculum of pre-service teacher education, participants suggested the need for more practical components. Both Thai-1 and Thai-3 suggested a larger emphasis on practicum. Thai-1 stated: “Professional experience is a key component of teacher education programmes.” Thai-3 elaborated:

“Personally, I think the current ITE courses are very compartmentalised, which do not adequately prepare pre-service teachers to survive in the real teaching contexts. The fact that many ITE let the students enter the schools when they are in Year 4 makes them surprise [sic] when they enter the real teaching. Many of them find out that they do not want to be a teacher when they are in Year 4, which is too late. Thus, I would change ITE to more field-based and attempt to help them develop their teacher identities along the way in teacher education.”

It is also suggested that training for teacher educators be provided. Thai-1 stated teacher educators who act as supervisors “need to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to provide the best possible supervision.”

Participants from Myanmar highlighted that a policy on pre-service education for English teachers was being developed. Myan-3, for example, stated: “So far, I don’t think we have a comprehensive teacher policy. It is just in the foundation stage, with initial bodies being formed, like the Teacher Task Force.” One of the changes made in the policy is the upgrade of the two-year diploma programme to “a four-year degree programme” (Myan-1). Other initiatives are part of the currently developed policy such as the TREE [Towards Results in Education and English] Project. According to Myan-3, the Tree Project:

“... works in the education degree colleges, but it might have some relations with the basic education schoolteachers, state schoolteachers that you mentioned because TREE’s ... TREE’s one of the mandates is to promote the English skills through the practicum work, practicum ... we know, the teaching practice part, and then, there teacher educators will be looking at student teachers and then they will be working with the basic education schools.”

Myan-1 stated that a number of initiatives have been established by the government to support pre-service education for English teachers. She explained:

“In pre-service teacher education, two Universities of Education (UOE) and 25 Education Degree Colleges (EDC) produce basic education teachers. Teacher educators from these UOE’s and EDC’s have continuous professional development programmes such as English proficiency and pedagogy training in collaboration with the British Council annually. We hold ICT workshops and have developed ICT framework and established e-library in collaboration with Strengthening pre-service Teacher Education in Myanmar (STEM) project. The curriculum development workshops, ICT workshops and other webinars are held through teleconferencing or digitally. The internet access in EDC’s has been provided by STEM donors and MPT.”

An area of great concern for Myanmar participants is related to teacher educators. Myan-1 lamented the fact that the government had provided funding for the capacity building of English teachers, “but not particularly for English teacher educators”. Both Myan-1 and Myan-2 maintained that pre-service education for English teachers had been weak because there were a number of issues concerning teacher educators. Myan-1 stated:

“The weaknesses of current ITE provision, I think, are that some of the teacher educators do not have required qualifications (only in EDC’s) such as master’s degrees and their attitude has to be changed. We have changed their organisation structure. Now they are promoted to the professor and associate professor levels ... If I could change anything about the current ITE provision ... I would like to change the attitude of some of the teacher educators so that they will have a positive attitude
Ind-1 stated that “in terms of quality, ITE still has a lot to do, the content of Indonesian ITE is subjected to critique. Secondary English teaching only. Ind-1 elaborated: Bachelor's degree in English education is intended for pre-service teachers and prospective teachers available yet, citing the numbers below:

“Number of teacher educators in pre-service teacher education sector: 1,986 teacher educators in Education degree colleges. Number of student teachers studying there, for first year and second year students: 10,780, and pre-service primary teacher training: 12,629. Number of Basic Education Schools in Myanmar: 50,557 including 1,530 monastic schools and 1,265 private schools and 27 practising schools, so public schools 47,775. Number of students studying at different levels in these schools: about 9.7 million.”

Meanwhile, the current policy on pre-service education for English teachers in Indonesia is broad, as suggested by participants of this study. Ind-2 stated: “The policy is that the teachers should have a bachelor’s degree of English education, to become an English teachers [sic].” This is broad due to the fact that it tends to generalise teachers of primary and secondary education when in fact the bachelor’s degree in English education is intended for secondary English teaching only. Ind-1 elaborated:

“The preparation of primary ESBE teachers is not the responsibility of the government because ESBE in primary education is not compulsory. What we have at the moment is primary school teachers for classroom teachers prepared by PGSD (Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar) [Primary school English teacher] programme. No formal education for primary ESBE teachers. In the past, subjects related to English For Young Learners are popular, but not any more now. I believe that teachers teaching primary ESBE are not formally prepared. They can be graduates of secondary ESBE but being trained by the schools of Yayasan [foundation] to teach English at primary level.”

The content of Indonesian ITE is subjected to critique. Ind-1 stated that “in terms of quality, ITE still has a lot to do, especially in improving the students’ competence in literacy as based on PISA score and EF data, Indonesian students’ English competence are still left behind even ASEAN countries.” Participants further suggested the need for practical components in pre-service education. Similar to participants from other ASEAN nations, participants from Indonesia also emphasised the importance of practicum. Ind-2 stated: “The weakness is that probably the courses to do with teaching practicum and courses to do with teaching learning practice and assessment should be extended and the credit should be added.” Ind-1 explained that practicum has been at the core of a new teacher education policy called the Program Pendidikan Guru (PGP) [Professional Education Programme]. Consisting of 24 credits, the PPG allows teachers to “have teaching practicum exam at school, which proctored [sic] by teachers from schools and a teacher from the university.” According to Ind-1, the completion of the PPG requires candidates to undertake an online written test. The outcome of the test would determine whether one “could hold a professional teacher certificate or not.” Ind-1 further explained that the current arrangement of the PPG allows entry from candidates majoring in education or non-education programmes such as biology education. Ind-1 argued that this arrangement may have impact on the lowering of interest in universities which offer pre-service education for English teachers. He stated: “Prospective students will not be interested to attend English education departments because there is no difference between education and non-education graduates when they want to be teachers. They all should go to PPG programs and are treated the same.” (See also Widiati and Hayati, 2015, for analysis of the PPG.)

A critical issue related to the implementation of the PPG is raised by Ind-1. The PPG is organised by the Direktorat Jenderal Guru dan Tenaga Kependidikan (Dirjen GTK) [Directorate General of Teachers and Teaching Professionals]. According to Ind-1, the current implementation of the PPG by the GTK “is difficult to organise in an ideal one”. Ind-1 explained the reason:

“The Curriculum, credit and training period are all reduced almost a half. Final score is not decided by trainers, but by GTK. Whether someone passes the PPG programme or not is decided by a national test organised by an agent, not by the university that organised the programme. The budgeting standard should also follow the one decided by GTK, no tuition for the university, and the role of the university is quite limited. Maybe the government does not trust education universities, although [it was] the government itself which appointed universities that can organise PPG programmes.”

Ind-1 also noted the non-transparent nature of intake recruitment of the PPG participants. He stated that the recruitment had been politically based, rather than quality based:
“PPG intake recruitment is not merit based, but based on the political will of the regency and provincial government. If they care about education, they will allocate the budget, and collaborate with universities. Because the candidates are decided by local governments, their quality was quite varied. Those recruited were not the best candidates. Universities do not have the power to admit or reject candidates, but function as a tailor, just do what the central and local authorities ask to do ... Therefore, although at the beginning PPG is meant to improve quality of teachers, in reality those attending PPG programmes are mostly not the best education university graduates.”

The non-transparency of the PPG arrangement is reminiscent of the sort of bureaucratic intrusion commonly found in in-service training programmes. A study by Zein (2016) shows that bureaucracy intrusion in PD programmes and activities is prevalent. This often means that government institutions are embroiled in controversies such as nepotism causing a non-transparent process of selecting training participants. It is also of no surprise that the bureaucratic issues concerning the PPG are reminiscent of the sort of problems enmeshing another government-based training policy (i.e. teacher certification), such as the pervasiveness of document fraud (Triyanto, 2012 in Widiati and Hayati, 2015).

Ind-1, Ind-2 and Ind-3 also stressed the importance of “digital literacy.” Ind-2 stated that universities should “support digital literacy for teachers”. She used her university as an example, as it had offered “courses to do with ICT-based teaching or technology in EFL teaching.” Ind-1 also emphasised that “some English education departments do not have sufficient learning supports such as language laboratories, library, IT infrastructure and international networking which could enhance the students’ learning.” He urged the government to assist such English departments and provide training which enables prospective teachers to “prepare module, narrated Powerpoint, videos and upload them to the learning management system (LMS) used by the universities.”

There is no data suggesting that Cambodia has developed a nationwide policy on pre-service education for English teachers, but Cambodian participants focused on digital literacy at pre-service level. Camb-1 stated that training on digital literacy had been made available, but the scope of the training remained “limited”. Camb-1 underscored the increasing importance of digital literacy for teachers, not to mention English teachers, particularly post-pandemic. Cambodian participants also highlighted the importance of having practical components in pre-service education. To do so, according to Camb-1, it is necessary to “reduce the number of subjects they need to study.” Camb-1 implied that removing subjects such as “Civics and Citizenship Education, Philosophy, Literature Studies, Global and General Knowledge, Khmer Literature, Administration” was necessary to provide more space in the pre-service curriculum for more practical components such as practicum. He stated that at his university students undertook a practicum “for around one month” after the completion of “the first semester or 14 weeks or three months or so”. But he considered the current practicum was too short, stating:

“Maybe next year we’re not sure whether we’re going to keep it as a one-month practicum. After the practicum is the second semester, which is a little bit longer, about 17 weeks. Then after that, they will have an exit examination. So it means we have assessment process along the way just to make sure that after they graduate they are kind of high quality.”

Participants from Laos noted the absence of policy on pre-service education for English teachers. Laos-2 stated: “The pre-service teacher training curricula is being reviewed to better align with school curricula.” As such, assistance to pre-service education institutions has been limited. Laos-1 stated: “If you mean the workshop and training for pre-service teachers, I would say that we don’t have that provisions made by the government.” Individual schools, however, are given freedom to recruit new prospective teachers to teach in schools. In doing so, the recruiting schools must provide mentoring for the new teachers. Laos-1 stated: “It depends on schools where new graduates have been recruited in, the concerned schools manage a supporting programme themselves. It may not be as a formal version, instead it is like senior colleagues share or transfer related knowledge or experience with those newly recruited colleagues.”
6.6. Policies on in-service education for English teachers

The previous section identified policies on pre-service education for English teachers. Findings presented in this section focus on the in-service sector. The findings highlight that ASEAN nations have endeavoured to improve the quality of English teachers through various PD programmes and activities.

Data drawn from Vietnamese participants highlights the importance of needs-based professional development; that is, in-service education which tackles the needs of teachers at the local level. Viet-2 argued that regarding specific questions relating to what content needs to be given to teachers, how to deliver it, how much and how often, teacher educators should “put them [teachers] in the centre”. This means that “teachers could be actually the focus of our training.” She argued that “needs-based training is very important, rather than, as I said, turning that into another prescribed or determined course.” Viet-2 elaborated:

“I think that, if their professional development – for example, is continuing professional development compulsory or not? – I think yes and no. Yes, because in terms of number or quantity, they have a lot of opportunities to do that. But in terms of quality, I mean relevant [sic], I do doubt it. Because most of the time, for example, just yesterday, I saw a teacher at the primary school having to write lesson plans very carefully. When I look at the lesson plan, I can see that they were very much superficial. It’s always about, you know, when teachers should stand up, when teachers should sit down, when to smile and that sort of things. And I think that it brings rigidity to lesson plans. And I talked to that teacher and she said that she didn’t enjoy it at all. It killed her passion of teaching. So was that professional development? Yes, but was that effective or relevant to him or her? No! So I have to say that, you know, sometimes the meaning, the intention was good, but the implementation was horrible, and it is very much counter-productive.”

Data generated from this study demonstrates that there is also an urgent need for practical-oriented in-service teacher training. It is suggested that the training be focused on teaching methodologies and techniques which match the local context of Vietnam. Viet-3 commented:

“For example, we are going to train what the teachers actually use in the classroom, and the new updated teaching methodologies, which are practical and easy to be used, to be applied in the classroom, not something popular in the world but not applicable in the case of the classroom in Vietnam, which is multi-levelled, and students of multi-level of English proficiency in large-size classroom.”

An innovation has been made regarding the implementation of the 5:3:7 matrix for “teacher continuing professional development” (Viet-2). According to Viet-2, this matrix would allow teachers to “spend five days for self-study on the system, three days face-to-face learning with the professor and seven days to complete the post-training programme on that system.” Monitoring of teacher’s progress is viable because there are “tracking tools” which check every teacher’s development through “their provided ID”. This training matrix might prove effective because there is a belief that in-service education solely conducted online is not effective. A blended mode of in-service training is preferred, according to Viet-2. She stated:

“No I have to say that, teachers, most, but online learning alone for continuing teacher development, I believe is not effective, because as I said, it requires a lot of autonomy from the teachers ... so the better way is to combine it with some online or direct training. And I have to say that, by direct training, I actually conducted inside the classroom. And the reception has been very positive. Mostly on the in-classroom observation, rather than the online learning.”

In Thailand, participants highlighted the compulsory nature of in-service education. Thai-3 stated: “In-service teachers are required to participate in at least one teacher professional development annually when they are evaluated their performance.” According to Thai-3, the “results” of the annual PD “are used for promotion” and to renew teachers’ “teaching licence.” Participants suggested that a number of programmes have been developed to help improve teachers’ quality. A centrally organised PD has been established, called the “Teacher Professional Development Institution (TPDI)” (Thai-3). Thai-3 stated that the TPDI, operating under the Teacher Council of Thailand, is open:
... for universities and private institutions to submit proposals for providing teacher professional development. After the proposals are approved, they open for teachers to enrol. These CPD programmes are compulsory for teachers. The programmes are both face-to-face and online, depending on the proposals.

Moreover, Thai-2 stressed the importance of HCEC in conducting PD activities. She stated:

“The HCEC plays significant roles as training centres for teachers. Therefore, all teachers are able to access quality professional development courses at the locals without travelling to Bangkok. English teachers are not only developed in terms of their English proficiency but also digital literacy to continue their profession. OBEC will also encourage Professional Ethics of Teaching Profession through offering trainings for all teachers.”

Participants from the Philippines also maintained that in-service education was compulsory for English teachers in the nation. Called “the CPD programme”, the in-service education allows teachers “to earn units for every three years” (Phil-3). According to Phil-3, this means that teachers:

“... have to attend conferences or teacher training programmes, but those 15 units are easy to earn because that is 15 units in three years. So that is a conference, for example, 15 units, 15 CPD units. So if you only attend one conference, you attend a workshop of 15, you are done. You don't have to attend the year after, because they did it 15 a year ...”

While this has been conducted at national level, the arrangement gives no recognition to any CPD developed through international partnerships. Phil-3 stated that the Philippines authorities “will not give you CPD points” even if the speakers in the PD programmes are internationally recognised scholars such as “Suresh Canagarajah” and “Daniel Davis”.

Another problem lies in the fact that teachers have been overburdened by additional administrative duties which do not belong to their job description or tasks that are “not really intended for the teachers” (Phil-2). Data shows that often teachers had to complete duties which were actually...
within the domain of teacher supervisors, but they were forced to do them nevertheless. This is shown in the interview excerpt involving my research team member from the Philippines and our respondent (Phil-2):

“Interviewee Yes, so the supervisors rely on the teachers [to do things] that should’ve been handled on the supervisory level?

Phil-2 Yes. So it is heavily relied on the teachers. The teacher will collect, the teacher will also distribute. The teacher will assess, everything will be unto the teacher. That’s why there is a burnt out. If you’re really a teacher, you’ll feel burnt out.”

Similar to participants from other ASEAN nations, participants from the Philippines also stated their preference of needs-based professional development. Phil-2 stated: “Since DepEd is too vast, one size fits all. So if the training is one size fits all, then it will be come one, come all. So it isn’t. What if that’s not what the teacher needs?” Having a needs-based PD is argued as useful for ensuring the practicality of its orientation. Participants were against PD that is “too research based”, or “too scholarly that’s inaccessible to ordinary teachers” (Phil-3).

Participants argued that teachers were not going to benefit much from such PD programmes. Participants also stated that if PD incorporated online education, it needed to be flexible, using asynchronous and synchronous modes. Phil-2 stated that these modes had been implemented in the Philippine Normal University: “There’s another hybrid like in our graduate school, that’s pure online, however in the undergrad that’s asynchronous and synchronous online.”

Finally, a major issue related to the provision of PD is raised by participants. They were concerned that provision of PD cannot match the sheer number of teachers which require training. As a policy maker who works at the Philippines' DepEd, Phil-1 described how she had not reached all schools in her jurisdiction:

“I have been in DepEd Central Office for 15 years but up to now, I have not reached all the schools because it’s quite impossible. We’re talking about 48,000 schools and they are all over the country. Some of them are very remote and we’re talking about 17 regions, 225 divisions and we’re talking about 700,000 teachers to be trained, face to face and one by one when we do training. It is not just one day, it’s ten days or even more, depending on the need of the teachers.”

Participants from Myanmar noted a number of issues related to the provision of in-service education for ESBE teachers. One of the problems is the lack of systematicity of the current provision, as stated by Myan-3: “I don’t see very structured, very systematic CPD provision ...” Another problem is that Myanmar does not have “sufficient facilities including digital facilities for good learning environment” (Myan-1). Participants also noted that the CPD had not been made integral into the professional appraisal system of the Ministry of Education. This makes it difficult for related processes of evaluation, promotion or relocation of teachers. Myan-1 elaborated:

“The weaknesses of the current CPD provision are that our CPD provision is not recognised as credit points or number of hours for their performance. Although we provided CPD programmes, we cannot take them into consideration for performance and we have started prioritising the CPD activities for each year in terms of hours. We would like to change the promotion and transfer system totally based on their performance or CPD activities.”

An issue of great concern noted by Myanmar participants is the sheer amount of training that needs to be conducted. They underscored that the number of teachers to be trained far exceeded the opportunities available to them or the teacher educators who could train them. Myan-3 explained:

“... the trainings may not be optimal when there are about 450,000 teachers to train ... And the time that they have on training can also be limited ... Yes ... shortage and then overload because these teachers - they have to train student teachers who will be teaching in basic schools. However, they also need to provide training and help in the basic education curriculum reform. And then, there are also lots of things going on in the teacher education sector itself. So, they are very busy. And I understand that around 1,700 teacher educators are employed in those 25 institutions and the number is becoming lesser and lesser.”

The large number of teachers in Myanmar means that delivery of training is often conducted through a cascading system. This allows a group of teachers to be trained, and upon completion they will train other teachers. A major issue is highlighted in terms of this scheme of training delivery. Myan-3 stated: “And I think, ah, teacher themselves, when they get training whether it is for new curriculum or to continue teaching during the pandemic, training may not be adequate or sufficient, especially when trainings are done in a cascading manner.”

Data generated from participants in Myanmar shows that a national policy which caters for professional development activities of ESBE teachers has recently been developed. Myan-1 stated:

“... the Continuous Professional Development Frameworks for teacher educators and basic education teachers (two different frameworks) have been developed and for basic education teachers, they have developed CPD modules which will be linked to TCSF and promotion. For teacher educators, I have had three meetings with my principals for prioritisation and we defined number of hours per year for CPD activities which will be linked to their promotion.”
Myan-1 also stressed the importance of CPD for teacher educators, saying that their capacity building “is very important and they must be lifelong learners. Their attitude to learning through their life is very crucial as they educate the student teachers who would become basic education teachers, who are qualified and have global citizenship education”. She considered important aspects to be included in the training are “ICT training and learning management system” and programmes which help them “to be able to use digital devices and integrate ICT and technology into their teaching.”

In Singapore, a nationwide policy has made in-service education compulsory. It has been made integral to the professional appraisal system of the Singapore Ministry of Education. For example, PD packages are related to leave schemes, etc. Sing-1 explained:

“... teachers have 100 hours per year to devote to professional development. MoE has also made provision for various schemes and programmes, particularly professional development packages and leave schemes, teachers’ work attachment programme and the Management and Leadership in Schools programme and Leaders in Education programme. These programmes are respectively offered by NIE, AST and other organisations, such as the Science Centre, which allows for teacher work attachment and conducts workshops for teachers.”

The Singapore government has made PD a continual process which places emphasis on “a lifelong learning mindset” (Sing-1). According to Sing-1, the nation focuses on “the six priority areas of Assessment Literacy, Inquiry-based Learning, Differentiated Instruction, Support for Students with Special Educational Needs, e-Pedagogy, and Character and Citizenship Education.”

The way Singapore has made in-service education integral to the professional appraisal system is apparent in their PD tracks. The nation has created the Teaching Track, the Leadership Track and the Specialist Track, each having specific duties, roles and experiences to prepare them for a career progress with greater responsibility. Sing-1 explained:

“MoE also allows for teachers to flexibly switch between tracks at any time of their career, as long as they meet the standards and requirements of the track. The Teaching Track is for teachers who aspire to make a direct impact on students in classrooms, and whose interest is to further develop and deepen the pedagogical capability of the whole teaching force. Teachers with more experience mentor those with less, who serve to further develop the entire profession’s capacity. The Leadership Track is for teachers with the potential to be leaders at schools or MoE HQ. These are identified early in their career and groomed for various school leadership positions. The Senior Specialist Track is for teachers who are disposed towards more specialised areas where deep knowledge and skills are prerequisites to breaking new ground. They become a strong core of the teaching fraternity who possess deep knowledge and skills in specific areas, such as curriculum, planning, educational programmes and educational technology.”

In-service education for English teachers in Cambodia faces a major challenge in terms of delivery. Rather than voicing concerns about PD contents, participants of this study mentioned a few problems which had hampered the implementation of PD. The opportunity to attend PD training itself is very limited, as participants, namely Camb-1, Camb-2 and Camb-3 have noted. According to Camb-2, there are “limited CPD opportunities for every teacher” and “headteachers are prioritised to attend PD events” but opportunities are “also limited.” Another issue of concern is nepotism in the selection of PD participants. Camb-1 stated: “And as you know in Cambodia about information dissemination. Nepotism still exists so it’s very difficult for other people to get a chance to be selected and study that programme. That’s why it’s not very effective.”

Camb-2 also noted that another challenge was unrealised cascade training from headteachers who had received PD training. He stated:

“For continuing training, let’s called [sic] it INSET, it’s very rare for the English subject teachers. Their training opportunity was when they were in PRESET ... There is training but for headteachers. That is, for example, at a school there are two or three English teachers, and their headteacher has the priority to receive training. And the Ministry has instructed that when they [headteachers] go back, they must share what they learn from the training with other teachers. We can see that the percentage of teachers implementing this instruction is small. Some say they are happy to do it, so they organise it through a technical subject meeting. Others, however, KEEP it to themselves and do not disseminate the knowledge. So we can see that our training [programme] is still limited; it’s not broad yet.”

In Indonesia, ongoing teacher training is developed by “the centre for teacher training and development of language in the Ministry of Education” (Ind-2). This has developed in line with the implementation of decentralisation of education, which has allowed schools to have greater authority to organise in-service teacher training. Ind-2 stated:

“I think each school, especially in big cities, has a budget for in-house training and they can invite a lecturer as a resource person. They are also
involved in research and different programmes organised by the Ministry of Education. Moreover, different units in the Ministry of Education also organise different programmes to train teachers and to make teachers keep up with their professional development. Some teachers are also involved in research or community services conducted by university lecturers.”

Ind-1 added that in most cases in-service education is implemented by members of the Masyarakat Guru Mata Pelajaran (MGMP) [Subject Matter Teacher Society]. Ind-1 stated:

“In this society they share information such as workshops, trainings, seminars and further education opportunities. If universities organise activities related to continuous professional development and want in-service teachers to be involved, what we did was contacting MGMP. Often when they establish a professional organisation, they invite university lecturers to become one of the advisory board members.”

How and to what extent these in-service programmes have been conducted in alignment with those programmes developed by the Direktorat Jenderal Guru dan Tenaga Kependidikan (Dirjen GTK) [Directorate General of Teachers and Teaching Professionals] remain elusive. A representative of the Dirjen GTK stated that a programme focusing on strengthening the competence of English teachers through the Professional Enhancement Programme “has been initiated by PPPPTK Language (One of the technical units in Ditjen GTK) in collaboration with the Temasek Foundation that started in 2015” (Ind-3). She explained that the programme “gives a training to 50 tutors at the Institution of Education Quality Assurance (LPMP) and PPPPTK in SEAMEO RELC for six weeks.” However, there is no information about the connection with other training programmes which have been held or the follow up of the programme to achieve a wider national outreach. Moreover, most of the currently implemented PD programmes could benefit from more practical orientation to teacher training. Ind-2 stressed the importance of practical components of effective PD, which needs to include “the concept of the English language itself”, lesson planning and its implementation in the classroom, “assessment”, “teachers’ understanding of the curriculum and syllabus”, “approaches to the teaching of English”, and “basic principles and the stages of the learning process.”

Similar to the problem faced by other ASEAN nations, Indonesia also struggles to provide training to a massive teaching workforce. Both Ind-1 and Ind-2 stated that a huge challenge lay in the considerable number of teachers in need of training. Ind-1 stated:

“... supports have been given by both government, communities and universities through staff development programmes such as webinars, trainings, workshops and consultancy. However, as schools, teachers and students are so many, the sources deployed are just not enough and the gap between schools for the rich and schools for the poor is widened.”

Malaysia has undergone a massive reform of in-service education for English teachers in line with the Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia dan Memperkukuh Bahasa Inggeris (MBMBBI) policy and the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) policy. According to Mal-1, in-service education for English teachers in Malaysia is “envisioned in the MEB 2013-25 – shift 4 focuses on continuous professional development.” She stated that “ESBE teachers” had “to build their competence through programmes offered by MoE and any other external service providers.” Mal-1 also mentioned a few in-service programmes which had been undertaken, as follows:

“Malaysia Teacher Training Institution adheres to the framework endorsed by MQA – Malaysian Qualification Accreditation. All curriculum framework designed for teacher training in the country follows the criteria set by MQA. We do send our teachers for specialist courses conducted by SEAMEO RELC and we recognise the certificates. The master’s programme by RELC, for example, is accepted as a postgraduate course in Malaysia.”

There are also other programmes which focus on in-service education for English teachers. One of the programmes is called “Professional Up-Skilling for English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT)” (Mal-2). According to Mal-2, Pro-ELT is “a programme that aims to enhance the proficiency of English language teachers ... Pro-ELT provides refresher courses, both online and face to face to assist teachers to achieve the CEFR minimum level, C1.” Another programme is called Program Peningkatan Kemahiran Bahasa Inggeris di Sekolah (PPKBIS). Of the PPKBIS, Mal-2 stated:

“PPKBIS, which is the English Language Enhancement Programme in Schools, is an initiative of the MEB 2013-25. PPKBIS focuses on student outcome and, thus, the impact of the initiative is measured through student performance in the SPM English Language paper. The programme is targeted at ‘hotspot’ schools which performed below the national average, that is, 77 per cent based on the 2012 SPM English result as the baseline. PPKBIS has been ongoing since 2014 and in 2015 English Language teachers in secondary hotspot schools were involved in the School Support Plan (SSP) programme. Through SSP, teachers were given direct support whereby they were equipped with knowledge and skills to ensure continuous enhancement of student performance.”
Laos is currently undertaking reforms to improve in-service education for ESBE teachers. Participants of this study confirmed the development of a national plan which could focus on the training of English teachers at primary and secondary levels. Laos-2, for example, stated:

“According to this plan, besides reviewing English curriculum and teaching materials, master trainers are also being trained to prepare to give the training for PAs and local teachers. Each year, there is a government budget to give the training for local teachers. For instance, the training was conducted for primary English teachers in the year 2019 and for secondary English teachers in the year 2020 in the remote area in the southern part of Lao PDR.”

Laos-1 stated that the government had a limited number of participants who could join in-service training annually. He stated: “Every year, there are quotas (government recruitment numbers) for receiving government officials in the field of English Education and ICT for schools.” He added that the National University of Laos had been at the forefront of providing training for teachers. He stated:

“... every year, the National University of Laos will have a, how can I say, TESOL conference and the university invites teachers from primary, secondary schools across Laos to join at the university. This is a great opportunity for them to have some idea exchanges and to learn from others, from lecturers, invited lecturers ...”

Further, Laos-1 highlighted the importance of having practical training; for example, “how to teach English together” and “how to make a lesson plan.” It is unclear how much practical in-service training for ESBE teachers there has been, but its implementation, according to Laos-1, is a cause of concern. Laos-1 stated that often teachers did not implement what they had learnt in training:

“They gain some lessons, some materials from there, but I can say that they don’t use that much, I mean with their students, like, OK, bring the PowerPoint projector in the classroom. No. Or show them, show their children or the students about YouTube videos, not that much, umm, no.”

Brunei Darussalam has made in-service education for ESBE teachers compulsory. This is a national policy which goes parallel with the SPN21 policy on improving the quality of English language education in the nation. Bru-1 stated: “Ministry (MoE) offers many opportunities for CPD, as does the CfBT. These are obligatory for those wishing to be confirmed in their teaching position or promoted.” According to Bru-2, in-service training is conducted through clusters and that a minimum of “100 hours” of CPD is required. He stated:

“In-service teachers would have regular workshops within their academic clusters, or even at national level, as professional development. As a general rule (under Brunei government Civil Service), teachers are required to achieve at least 100 hours of training or professional development.”

Bru-2 also stated the increasing importance of training which focuses on online education, particularly in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. He stated: “Given recent developments with Covid-19, as part of their training, I would include online teaching design, online teaching preparations and delivery, online assessment and testing, and use of learning management system (LMS).”
6.7. External collaborations

Findings in this section show that collaborations with external organisations or institutions have been implemented across ASEAN nations. Participants cited a number of organisations or institutions which have assisted their nations in the development of English language education and in the training of English teachers. These include CfBT, the British Council, the US English Fellow Program, China’s English Language Institute and Australia’s BEQUAL, among others. Participants also highlighted partnerships which had been developed with universities overseas.

Brunei has received assistance from other countries, in particular the UK through CfBT. Bru-2 stated: “I do know CfBT works closely with the MoE, and it recruits teachers from Britain, Australia, New Zealand and even Canada to teach in Bruneian schools.” Universiti Brunei Darussalam in particular has developed “many partnerships at both undergraduate and master’s levels, in terms of research collaboration, two-way student exchanges, inbound and outbound” (Bru-1). These include activities such as sending top students to study at reputable UK universities “to pursue CertEd qualifications”. Similarly, Thailand universities have established partnerships with other institutions overseas, mostly focusing on “teacher education programmes”. Thailand has also received assistance from the British Council. Thai-1 stated: “There was a programme called Boot Camp co-organised by the Ministry and the British Council.” According to Thai-3, the programme focuses on “developing teacher’s knowledge of communicative techniques”.

Indonesia has established collaborations with other universities overseas. Ind-1, working at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI), stated that his institution had “exchange practicum with ASEAN education universities through SEA Teachers and SEA TVET.” UPI has “established ASEAN Teacher Education Network (ASTEN) which tries to standardise English language teacher education in ASEAN. We have already set up the guideline, trained the assessors that would accredit [sic] teacher education institutions in ASEAN.” UPI also collaborates “with some universities in Malaysia for practicum through sandwich programme and lecturer exchanges.” In Myanmar, the British Council developed the “EFFECT project from 2014 to 2017 including extension” (Myan-2). The EFFECT project, lucratively funded at £4.2 million, “aims to improve English language competence, pedagogical competence, access to and technical knowledge of internationally recognised materials and resources, and training competence” (Aye, 2020:362–3). Myan-2 also stated that Myanmar had “had native speaker American volunteer teachers helping us for two years (six batches) from Peace Corp Myanmar.” The nation is currently “working together with native speaker TREE facilitators who are EDC based to improve Initial Teacher Education for ESBE teachers since 2019” (Myan-2). Meanwhile, Laos has received assistance from China, USA and Australia. Laos-1 stated: “We have some volunteers from English language institute from China.” He added that Laos had received some “volunteers from American embassy”. The nation had also been assisted by Australia through the BEQUAL project, which helped with “developing textbooks, updating textbooks for Grades 3, 4 and 5 in primary schools.”

Singapore through NIE has set up partnerships with overseas institutions. Sing-1 explained: “The partnerships are more for the partner organisation/university to further CPD for their teachers instead. Examples are the China Scholarship Council that sponsors 20 EL teachers for the MA (Applied Linguistics) annually.” Other institutions from around the world that have developed partnerships with NIE are University of South Australia, Beijing Normal University, Griffith University, Nagoya University, Linköping University, University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, University of Waikato, Queen’s University, Seoul National University, PH Zürich and Stockholm University.

Meanwhile, Malaysia has organised various external collaborations; for example, with SEAMEO RELC. Mal-1 stated:

“We have a joint agreement with Singapore through SEAMEO RELC. Our ESBE teachers do get the opportunity to further their studies in their programmes. We do send our teachers for specialist courses conducted by SEAMEO RELC and we recognise the certificates. The master’s programme by RELC, for example, is accepted as a postgraduate course in Malaysia.”

Cambodia has also established collaborations with foreign institutions. The institutions which have assisted Cambodia range from “CSBC” which helped “develop teacher guide” and “textbooks during the 1990s”, “VSO (Volunteer Service Overseas)”, “Peace Corps” and “Japan”, which provides “support as well regarding the teaching of English” (Camb-2). The British Council has also assisted Cambodia. Camb-2 implied that he regretted the fact that the cooperation with the British Council had come to an end. He stated: “The last time we had the British Council help, the teaching and learning of English improved very quickly.” He appreciated the in-service training that the British Council conducted, even though “it was not nationwide”. It was cascading training, which allows the transfer of knowledge and skills from former training participants to teachers. Camb-2 explained:

“Headteachers from all schools (lower and upper secondary schools) came to receive the training, and when they went back, they conducted workshops in their respective schools – all of them. I could see that at the time the teaching of English was good.”
Another foreign institution which has assisted Cambodian teachers and teacher educators is the US Embassy through its English Fellow Programme (see also Tweed and Som, 2015 for discussion on the US English Fellow Programme in Cambodia). Camb-1 elaborated:

“It’s a programme that sends an English fellow to NIE [National Institute of Education]. The fellow organised the training, a kind of professional development programme. They finished last year. And then from there we have no more. We also have a fellowship programme from Brunei, but also partnered with the US. They come to help train our trainers as well as do the co-teaching with us.”

Myanmar has received assistance from foreign institutions, but some programmes have been discontinued. Myan-2 voiced this concern: “In Basic Education, English language teachers had short training (only three- or five-day training) provided by the British Council until 2018. Recently, we do not have fund provision particularly for English and English teachers at Basic Education.” Given the current national security issue in Myanmar, it is unknown how external institutions could provide assistance to the nation.

The Philippines through the Philippine National University has established a number of partnerships with overseas institutions, particularly universities in the ASEAN region. Phil-2 explained:

“When PNU looks for partnership, this component would most of the time be through exchange of ideas, exchange of faculty, exchange of students, exchange of resources, so English would automatically be included. Most of our partners are Southeast Asian countries because PNU is the lead of what is called National Network of Normal Schools, and then ASEAN teachers, ASTEN, ASEAN Teacher Education Network.”

Phil-2 stated that PNU has conducted training for teachers in Cambodia where PNU staff “will train them in English”. The university also has “many partnerships in Australia.”

Data from this study demonstrates that all ASEAN nations welcome the possibility of developing external collaborations with interested parties. In particular, participants had a welcoming, encouraging attitude towards opportunities to develop partnerships and collaborations with foreign institutions from the UK such as the British Council. Participants from Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, for example, expressed such an interest. Mal-1 stated: “A partnership with the UK in building teacher capacity in teaching English language and enhancing their proficiency will be much needed. The British Council has been very supportive with MoE. Further collaboration effort should be established.” Of the potential collaboration between Indonesian institutions with the British Council, Ind-2 stated: “We are really eager to set up partnership, as long as we have the same background knowledge and the same concept about teaching, learning and language.” Ind-1 added: “The British Council should function as an agent that connects Indonesian and British institutions, initiates and facilitates the collaboration.” Thai-3 explained that the Thai government had “already set such partnerships up, and I can imagine that they would be interested in pursuing this matter further.”

Participants from Laos, Cambodia, the Philippines and Myanmar also articulated a similar sentiment. Asked about whether his institution, National University of Laos, would like to set up a partnership with British institutions such as the British Council, Laos-1 stated: “Yeah, that would be great. If you have … like, connection plan with my institution, we welcome …” A participant from Cambodia, Camb-1, commented: “If they want to help us, we will be very happy. You know English belongs to … actually English is now World Englishes, but it originated in the UK, so if the British Council comes to help us, we would be very happy” Of English language teaching in the Philippines and a potential collaboration with the British Council, Phil-1 commented: “It is doing good but we need support. I know British Council has different modalities in teachers’ training and they have lots and lots of materials and we appreciate them sharing them with us.” Myan-2 stated: “Currently, our teacher educators are trained by one TREE facilitator at each EDC; we would like to set up partnership with UK institutions such as the British Council to send more trainers for English proficiency, pedagogy and assessment.”

Meanwhile, participants from Brunei and Singapore were diplomatic in making statements, although they seemed to be open for possible collaborations. Bru-1 stated: “I am in no position to advise one way or the other. I am sure there are specific areas in ‘professional development’ where British Council could provide … short courses or targeted training for current MOE teachers.” Sing-1 stated: “As mentioned, collaboration and learning the best practices of others is desirable and much needed. It would be best to have a good and meaningful discussion with institutions such as the British Council on how we may benefit each other.”

Further, data drawn from the study suggests a number of areas which deserve attention in language teacher education programmes at pre-service and in-service levels if external collaborations or partnerships are to be set up. One area of interest is overseas experience. Laos-1 argued that collaborations with external organisations or institutions are necessary because they would open possibilities for teachers to study overseas, whether through short-term courses or postgraduate degrees. He stated: “At least teachers should be sent or should be encourage [sic] to live in the good environment where people use English so that they can, you know, they can start to speak out. When they speak out, they feel confident …” Even if ESBE teachers do not get the opportunity to study overseas, external collaborations could provide ESBE teachers with some cultural knowledge. Ind-1 stated: “Collaboration with UK
universities is very important because our ITE will get not only language but also cultural experience when exposed to English and UK culture in the collaboration.”

Other areas such as critical thinking and literacy are highlighted by participants from the Philippines. Phil-1 stated that she would like future external collaborations to “focus on language teaching, critical thinking, reasoning skills” as well as “literacy” for “higher levels comprehension or higher grades.”

For teachers in Vietnam, what is most important is a focus on pedagogical competence, as Viet-1 argued. Viet-1 stated that future external collaborations should focus on “teaching methodology”. That is, “when teaching English language, how to use body language, how to exploit possible means to increase the effectiveness of foreign language learning.” In Cambodia, Camb-1 argued that it is important to focus on pedagogical competence, too. He stated that future external collaborations could help teachers “with new methods, teaching methodology, which they believe would be very effective in their country and that would be very effective in Cambodia as well.” Similarly, Myan-2 argued that it was important for future external collaborations to develop training which focuses on “upgrading their [Myanmar teachers’] pedagogical skills for teaching the English language to engage their students in learning.” Three other areas warranting attention, according to Myan-2, are: 1) improving the English proficiency of the English language teachers to be able to do the learning throughout their life; 2) being able to use English as a medium of instruction for content subject high school teachers; and 3) conducting workshops or training on the language assessment in the basic education.”

What participants from ASEAN nations expected in terms of the areas above are in alignment with what SEAMEO RELC offers. As an organisation under the Southeast Asia Ministers for Education Organisation (SEAMEO), SEAMEO RELC is dedicated to “the development of language education in the region and the promotion of international cooperation among language professionals” (RELC-2). RELC-2 stated that the “area of specialty of SEAMEO RELC is in providing in-service language teacher (mainly teachers of English) professional development courses/programmes”. Scholarships to each SEAMEO member country are provided by SEAMEO RELC, albeit in “a limited number”. RELC-2 stated that the in-service education conducted by his organisation:

“… may be described as a multilateral education project, as in each of our regular course enrolments the class is comprised of English language teachers from the various SEAMEO member countries and they’ll share their teaching experience and best classroom practices with one another in class. The courses they attend at RELC aim to update their professional knowledge of language teaching, learning and assessment, and equip them with pedagogical skills and strategies that will help them to be more effective as an English teacher, especially those involved in ESBE.”

Section 6.6 has identified the experience of participants regarding cascading training to improve teachers’ pedagogical competence and the need for its calibration. This sits well with what SEAMEO RELC has conducted. RELC-2 explained SEAMEO RELC can only conduct a “limited” scale of “teacher professional training and development”. Therefore, “[at the end of their course, we always encourage them to share their learning with their colleagues (e.g. through conducting cascading workshops to spread their knowledge to their colleagues).” Participants from SEAMEO RELC, including RELC-1 and RELC-2, asserted the need for such a model to be developed more widely in the ASEAN nations. This is in line with SEAMEO RELC’s future plans where they will deliver courses which “include a wider range of delivery modes: face-to-face, blended and online. One major advantage of conducting our courses online is that we can have a bigger class enrolment to reach out to more teachers from the region.”

Participants also suggested the need for training on online teaching. For example, Camb-1 looked forward to having teacher education programmes which focus on “online teaching because you know we are not good at ICT at all. If they could send experts in ICT to help us with English teaching, that would be very much welcome.” SEAMEO RELC has trained teachers to deliver lessons online. RELC-2 recounted his experience in conducting online training for teachers during the pandemic:

“Last year, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the programme was offered fully online, as the participants could not come to Singapore for face-to-face sessions. Because many schools shifted to online teaching, the course/module was redesigned focusing on training EFL/ESL teachers to teach fully online. Participants were taught how to design and implement lessons online using varied digital tools. They were also trained how to develop and administer online assessments using available technologies in their own contexts. Participants were evaluated through online micro-teaching and a capstone project where they demonstrated their skills and competencies in designing, developing, implementing and evaluating online instruction and assessment.”

Another organisation within the ASEAN region which may also help enhance teachers’ professionalism in delivering online lessons is SEAMEO SEAMOLEC (henceforth SEAMOLEC). According to LEC-1, SEAMOLEC in-service training focuses “on the development of learning media that teachers may use both in the classroom or distance learning settings.” The organisation also aims to “assist teachers to be able to select and develop digital learning media then design its integration into their teaching and learning.” SEAMOLEC has “launched programmes for ASEAN nations such as RETRO that stands for Regional Training Online, SEA SMILES that stands for SEAMOLEC Mini Lecture Series for Southeast Asian and some international webinars” (LEC-2). Although it has been delivering training
programmes through “English as the language of instruction” (LEC-2), participants from SEAMOLEC admitted that their work had not provided a large scale of assistance to ESBE teachers in ASEAN because they were not focused on English language teaching only.

As LEC-1 described, in the past few years SEAMOLEC had organised “at least four special programmes focused in [sic] English Teaching only”. These are “English for Business (EFB) in 2012 using Social Learning Network Edmodo, Twinning Digital Class (TDC) in 2016 using BigBlueButton Video Conference, English Storytelling for Entrepreneurs (ESE) in 2018 using MOOC, and Citizen Journalism (CJ) in 2019 using MOOC”. Having said that, SEAMOLEC is open to further collaborations with ASEAN nations and foreign institutions. LEC-2 stated that he and his colleagues at SEAMOLEC “are very welcome to build any collaboration with institutions that relate to SEAMOLEC such as the British Council … we will always invite institutions, both state and private to work together and build better teacher quality in Southeast Asia.”

While overall attitudes towards external collaborations are positive, participants made cautionary remarks about how the collaborations should be conducted. Some participants regretted the attitudes of foreign collaborators in the past who seemed to have underestimated local scholarship and expertise. This view is shared, for example, by participants from Vietnam and Cambodia:

“Most of the time, I could see that foreigners, or when educators from overseas come to us, they always came with a mindset that we didn’t know anything. So that’s the reason why we’re trying to bring it from a very, you know, practical way, like it was … for a short course or something like that. But when it comes to Vietnamese side, we’ve been approaching teacher education from the very academic way, so there is a clash between different kinds of approaches.” (Viet-2)

“The other reason is that they [foreign institutions] are like fish out of water; they do not know our culture. The way they teach is based on what they know and what they believe, but they do not understand Cambodian situation or culture, and probably because of this they would not be able to arouse any interest (among the learners) in learning the language.” (Camb-1)

This explains why it is necessary for foreign collaborators to truly understand the local context through appropriate needs analysis, as argued by participants. Viet-2 stated: “It’s very important for them to know what we already know, what we do or what we truly want.” Participants hinted at conducting such needs analysis through involvement of local actors, rather than having pre-set beliefs and ideas of what teachers need or want. Speaking of the Indonesian context, Ind-1 stated: “CPD needs analysis can be done by universities, MGMP [Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran: Subject Matter Teacher Society] and BC [British Council].” Having said that, ASEAN nations and foreign collaborators need to bring together different areas of expertise and perspectives of teaching where understanding of local context is of paramount importance. Viet-2 argued:

“And both sides, when they collaborate with each other, they need to put themselves into different perspectives; for example, both the mentors and mentees, the learners and the teachers, rather than, you know, as I mentioned earlier, it’s about lecturing, it’s about brainwashing, it’s about teaching, it’s about trying to impose our ideas on certain ways without knowing the local context.”

Effective ways of scaffolding instruction according to different types of audience are also deemed necessary. Failure to do so may result in a situation where involving foreign collaborators does not necessarily bring benefits. Camb-1 recounted an experience related to this:

“We have certain examples. We have Peace Corps, the volunteers from the United States, who come and help people teach in the provinces, and it didn’t work with the students in the classroom, but it worked with the trainers. It worked with the teachers, but it did not work with the students. I mean it seems that the bridge, the transition between the Peace Corps volunteers and the students is very far, but between the Peace Corps volunteers and the teachers is very close. So, putting foreigners in primary schools and lower secondary schools will just be terrible.”

Another participant from Cambodia commented on the importance of scaffolding instruction by foreign collaborators to improve language teacher education. He maintained a three-pronged approach to assist local teachers and teacher educators, focusing on language, pedagogy and digital technology. Camb-3 stated:

“First of all, if the British Council wants to help with the practice of the teaching of English in primary education, as I mentioned above, they can help with building the capacity of my teachers so that they can teach the subject. Second, for those who already have the [language] ability to teach, [BC] can help provide IDEAS to them by, for example, giving them ‘teaching visits’ so that when they come back, they know how to develop [their teaching] further. And [BC] can help with the provision of more resources, to help the teacher teach English in the classrooms … we need to have resources. Now for digital [technologies] we already have a centralised centre in Sisowath [High School] that provides support to all schools nationwide. So if we have [ICT materials/resources] we can ‘throw’ them in. For instance, we can have teachers from the UK teaching English, whose lessons can be
recorded as a model. We can then give the lessons to the centre who will broadcast them [to the students].”

So far data on collaborations with British and American institutions has been dominant, but there is little data on collaborations with ASEAN’s closest neighbours, Australia. Studies have shown that Australia also has interest in Asia, although it may not be exclusive to ASEAN (see Hamid and Kirkpatrick, 2016; Lo Bianco, 2000, 2013; Lo Bianco and Slaughter, 2016, 2017). For decades, Australia has indeed developed what Lo Bianco (2000) calls “an economically motivated Asia literacy”. Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese and Mandarin Chinese are four Asian languages that have been selected on the basis of economic and geo-political interests. These languages are officially endorsed by the Australian government to be taught in primary and secondary schools. As Salter (2013:09) has suggested, “The subtext of this inclusion is that Asia literate knowledge is all that is needed to invert reliance on Asia and assert Australia’s economic dominance”. Of the prioritised Asian languages, only one is the language of an ASEAN member state (i.e. Indonesia). Indonesian has been one of the four priority languages for decades, although the current situation is dire given the continuing decline of enrolment in the education sector (Hill, 2016). Vietnamese is a language of growing population in Australia, but it has never been officially endorsed by the government. Other languages belonging to ASEAN member states such as Burmese, Filipino, Malay and Thai may be taught at various educational levels in Australia, but they are not given official endorsement either. Overall, in Australia’s effort to strengthen ties with its Asian neighbours and attain higher economic supremacy, it has been limited in its scope of prioritising only one language of an ASEAN member state. Given the large emphasis on the size of the national economy and geo-political significance in relation to Australia, the “ideology of social pragmatism and interventionism” (Lo Bianco, 2008:347) which underpins Australia’s policy directions may remain. Indonesian seems set to retain its place in the Australian curriculum for years to come. It is difficult to see whether Australia would provide an ample space for other ASEAN languages in the education curriculum.

6.8. Concluding remarks

ASEAN member states have held English in high ideological regard (Chapter 3), they struggle to implement ESBE in response to the complexity of multilingualism (Chapter 4) and they also face various challenges in its implementation (Chapter 5). This chapter has examined various issues and challenges which ASEAN member states encounter in terms of the domain of English teaching as a profession and the domain of teacher education that the teachers need in order to embark upon and/or advance in the profession.

However, given the repetitive failure of the four prioritised Asian languages to meet targets in a number of areas such as enrolment and proficiency level (Lo Bianco, 2013; Lo Bianco and Slaughter, 2016, 2017), it may be time to rethink the course of Australia’s language education policy. Perhaps a different policy which reflects the true spirit of linguistic and cultural diversity of modern Australia could be set up in a different way. If attaining economic goals and geo-political significance is what Australia is truly aiming at, it might work on a different strategy. Australia might achieve the goals through its very own asset: the English language. Clearly strengthening the English proficiency of its ASEAN neighbours has never been the main focus of Australia’s long history of language policy, but it may be a useful way to exert influence in the region. Helping its ASEAN neighbours to improve their English proficiency might be a more effective and efficient way for Australia to communicate with Asia (cf. Lo Bianco and Slaughter, 2016). It may also prove more strategic for Australia to gain political influence and economic benefits in the region, which is also the seventh largest economy in the world. In the ASEAN region, Australia’s impact is quite limited. Australian organisations’ influence has been relatively smaller than that of American or British organisations, and Australia’s variety of English (i.e. Australian English) is less known than American or British English. At a time when Australian institutions such as the IDP heavily invest in promoting English while helping international students studying in English-speaking countries, it is worth investigating how Australia could redirect its language education policy. Turning inward, research may be conducted to investigate how Australia promotes Asian (and ASEAN) languages domestically through other means. Turning outward, it would be interesting to examine how Australia could focus on collaborations with ASEAN member states to enhance the quality of English language education in the region. It would also be interesting to evaluate how this strategy could contribute to greater engagement and attainment of Australia’s economic and geo-political goals.

The issues and challenges related to teachers and teacher education discussed in this chapter revolve around one language education policy goal, called personnel policy (Kaplan and Baldauf, 1997, 2003). According to Kaplan and Baldauf (2003), personnel policy is one of the dimensions which determine the direction of language education policy. They stated:

“No matter what the duration of instruction, a planning issue that needs to be addressed is the
teacher cadre which will deliver the instruction. There is a need for a group of teachers trained in language pedagogy and reasonably fluent in the target language. There are essentially three problems in this context: the source of teachers, the training of teachers and the reward for teachers (Kaplan and Baldauf, 1997:130).

Thus, personnel policy answers questions such as “Who will teach? What pre-service and in-service training will be provided? How will the teachers be compensated?” (Kaplan and Baldauf, 2003:57). Section 6.2 of this chapter adds another aspect to the concept of personnel policy: status. The status of teachers cannot be separated from personnel policy because how high or low teachers are perceived in society is equivalent to the level of prestige of the profession and in turn determines its attractiveness. The more attractive teaching is, the higher chances it has to attract the best prospective teachers to fill in the workforce, or for quality teachers to remain in the profession. The employment of the best prospective teachers and quality in-service teachers is more likely to lead to the success of language education policy. The reverse is true. Thus, in language education policy, it is necessary to examine the status of teachers and how it can be elevated to help create conditions for success. Raising salaries and providing incentives are two among many. When planning reforms on teacher education at pre-service and in-service levels, we cannot leave out the issue of status. It must be part of the central agenda for improving teacher quality.

Data from the study shows discrepancies in terms of the status of English teachers across ASEAN nations. ASEAN nations such as Singapore and Malaysia have been relatively successful in building a certain professional culture which views English teaching in high status. In Malaysia and Singapore where English teaching is now seen as a highly regarded profession, attracting the brightest minds to fill in the gap in the teaching workforce may not be that difficult. This is evidenced by participants’ statements regarding an increased interest in the English teaching profession in the two nations. The same, however, cannot be said about other ASEAN nations. There are always exceptions where English teachers in certain schools are well-remunerated and enjoy high prestige, but the cases of Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam from this study show a general depiction of quite low prestige attached to the English teaching profession. A great majority of English teachers in these nations, as per the majority of teachers of other subjects, work in adverse conditions with limited teaching facilities. They have a huge workload. Sometimes they are required to perform duties outside their job description and receive pressure from their superiors. In most situations, they also receive low salaries and poor incentives. Resignation and burn out among English teachers are not uncommon, as found in the Philippines. These factors have made English teaching an unattractive profession, one with a relatively low status. Even in Brunei Darussalam where wages are generally higher than in other ASEAN countries, there is societal pressure which may inhibit one from pursuing a career as an English teacher. This suggests an ideological conflict between the status of English as a language and the status of English teachers. While the English language is seen as prestigious, the English teaching profession may not be. This study has shown that there are various issues which may constrain one from being an English teacher or from seeing it as an attractive profession, even though they may perceive the English language in high regard. Explanation of how this phenomenon has occurred is beyond the scope of this study. It requires examination in future research.

Further, this chapter has examined teacher education as an important aspect of personnel policy. One issue of great concern relates to ASEAN ESBE teachers’ limited capacity. This is notably seen in terms of language proficiency. Findings from this study demonstrate that a great majority of ESBE teachers in the ASEAN region have limited English language proficiency. Scholarship (e.g. Dudzik and Nguyen, 2015; Dung, 2015) suggests the importance of creating a common regional proficiency assessment framework for the ASEAN region, but no such attempt has been made. What data from this study shows is that several ASEAN nations have set up their own framework which works nationally. They have attempted to tackle the issue concerning the limited English language proficiency of their teachers through various national-level policies such as by adopting the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary and Advanced Levels as well as the CEFR. For example, Thailand requires a level of B1 of the CEFR for primary English teachers and a B2 for secondary English teachers, whereas Malaysia requires a level of C1 for English teachers at any levels. Findings suggest that the implementation of these policies has been unsatisfactory. Participants such as RELC-1, who had extensive experience with training teachers across ASEAN nations, did not believe that purely adopting Western-based frameworks such as the CEFR would yield ultimate success. Indeed, various reports indicate that a majority of the teachers consistently perform below expectations, even though participation continues to increase, as in the case of Thailand.

However, perhaps the issue is not so much about adopting the frameworks themselves, but how to develop frameworks which could treat the issue of English language proficiency in a holistic manner and be contextually relevant to ASEAN. The implementation of policies adopting the CEFR and the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary and Advanced Levels itself is an encouraging development. It marks a significant departure from previous practice where teachers’ English language proficiency was unregulated. Even so, using a Western-based framework may not be suitable to the adoption of a localised approach to English language education in ASEAN, as suggested in Chapter 5. Take the CEFR as an example. The
CEFR itself has been widely criticised in academia (e.g. Figueras, 2012; Hulstijn, 2007, 2011). First, data from this study has shown how the implementation of CEFR-based policies is marred by various issues. The CEFR has been perceived as setting unrealistic expectations on students and teachers. The fact is a great majority of teachers cannot reach the required levels of proficiency. Teachers also often misinterpret the curriculum with the CEFR prescribed levels or criteria. Other teachers struggle to assess students according to the CEFR levels while many tend to assess students in old-fashioned ways and disregard new assessment reforms associated with the CEFR. Second, the CEFR is ontologically problematic. Hulstijn (2007) argues that the CEFR descriptors do not cater for learning diversity along the proficiency continuum. A question arises “whether it is necessarily true that a learner who is placed at the B2 level of overall production must also have attained the B2 level on all the linguistic competences scales, or whether it is possible for a learner to be situated at different levels on different scales” (Hulstijn, 2007:663–4; see also Hulstijn, 2011; Figueras, 2012). Third, the CEFR is underpinned by the monolingual ideology where adherence to the native speaker norm is considered essential. It thus makes little (or no) alignment with new approaches that focus on pluricentric ideology and are against native speakerism; for example, English as a lingua franca (see Chapter 7). As McNamara (2014:231) argues:

“... the growing awareness of the nature of English as a lingua franca communication overturns all the givens of the communicative movement as it has developed over the last 30 or 40 years. The distinction between native and non-native speaker competence, which lies at the heart of the movement, can no longer be sustained; we need a radical reconceptualisation of the construct of successful communication that does not depend on this distinction.”

Fourth, there is no connection between the CEFR and Southeast Asia Teachers Competency Framework (SEA-TCF). According to the Teachers’ Council of Thailand (2018), ASEAN nations have recently launched SEA-TCF as a framework of reference for teachers in Southeast Asia. There are elements of SEA-TCF encompassing teachers’ continuous professional development, community engagement, knowledge base of teaching and developing learner autonomy, which are not included in the CEFR. Purely adopting the CEFR means leaving no space for the SEA-TCF. It shows negligence to one of the policy recommendations which the ASEAN itself has officially endorsed.

Importantly, the CEFR has little to do with English proficiency for teaching. Having high language proficiency according to the CEFR such as a C1 level does not make one a good teacher. A C1 level of the CEFR is not sufficient to tackle the high complexity and dynamism of classroom teaching. Participants of this study suggest the importance of branching out English language proficiency into a two-pronged approach which views it in terms of general English and English-for-teaching. General English proficiency deals primarily with appropriate use of the language apt to a discourse, whereas English-for-teaching focuses on the use of appropriate register of English for classroom purposes.

It is suggested that teachers need to attain certain levels of English proficiency which enable them to successfully carry out teaching in the classroom at a level that is easily understandable by the students (Freeman, 2017; Young, et al., 2014). What Freeman (2017) and Young, et al. (2014) advocated as English-for-teaching needs to be understood within the broader concept of classroom discourse. Walsh (2006, 2011, 2013) argues that teachers need to demonstrate abilities in classroom discourse. This allows them to develop “a detailed, up-close understanding of their local context by focusing on the complex relationship between teacher language, classroom interaction and learning” (Walsh, 2013:01). As Walsh has suggested, classroom discourse includes features such as control of the interaction, speech modification, elicitation and repair. The employment of these features would help teachers to promote Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC), which refers to “teachers’ and learners’ ability to use interaction as a tool for mediating and assisting learning” (Walsh, 2006:130). It is hoped that the promotion of the CIC will result in the creation of a more dynamic and engaging classroom where learners are actively involved in the learning process. Participants such as Viet-2 and Phil-3 may be aware of the importance of English-for-teaching which extends beyond mere general English proficiency and leads to the promotion of CIC. However, none of the ASEAN nations which have developed policies on English language proficiency (i.e. Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) attempt to address the issue. Meanwhile, other ASEAN nations (i.e. Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines) have not made specific policies on language proficiency; and thus effort may need to focus on building awareness in these nations. All in all, whether ASEAN nations wish to develop their own specific proficiency framework or adopt a regional-based one, a comprehensive understanding of what English language proficiency for teachers entails is needed. Further research is warranted to investigate the issue in alignment with teaching frameworks which have been developed at regional level such as the SEA-TCF (Teachers’ Council of Thailand, 2018). Doing so would help us understand the issue of English language proficiency in a manner that is contextually relevant to ASEAN.

When it comes to another dimension of teaching capacity, pedagogical competence, studies show that ESBE teachers in ASEAN struggle in a number of areas such as classroom management (Zein, 2017e), giving classroom instruction (Asriyanti, et al., 2013; Nguyen, 2011; Zein, 2017e), integrating language skills (Sermongsawad and Tantipongsanuruk, 2015; Zein, 2017e), creating appropriate teaching materials (Asriyanti, et al., 2013; Canh and Do, 2012; Nguyen, 2011) and reliance on using grammar
translates methods (Paw, 2015; Nguyen, 2011). This study has added to the literature by highlighting that teachers’ ability in terms of assessment is a cause of pedagogical concern, too. A pedagogical issue of great concern is teachers’ ability to deal with children in a psychologically appropriate manner. Some ASEAN nations have attempted to address it. Nations such as Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei have been rigid in their requirement of teachers’ pedagogical competence. Singapore and Malaysia have even added psychological disposition towards children as an important element of prospective teachers’ qualifications in basic education. Myanmar has attempted to address the issue of pedagogical competence through the development of the Teacher Competency Framework, which is near completion. Other nations, however, have not made a similar attempt.

To tackle the challenges above, participants from all ASEAN member states repeatedly stressed the importance of practical orientation in teacher education for ESBE teachers. This applies to both pre-service and in-service levels. At pre-service level, participants underscored the importance of providing prospective teachers with the opportunity to learn about their profession through teaching practicum. Suggestions to extend the length of the practicum and to introduce it much earlier during the duration of pre-service education have been put forward. Also, participants suggested courses which bring little relevance to teaching be removed from the pre-service education curricula in order to accommodate other courses which focus on the development of pedagogical competence. At in-service level, similar suggestion to provide more practical components for teachers has been made. Data suggests that teachers need to learn more about aspects as varied as lesson planning, assessment, curriculum and syllabus, child psychology, stages of learning process, classroom management, critical thinking and reasoning, and literacy, among others. In this respect, it is necessary that the training at pre-service and in-service levels does not prescribe certain teaching methods such as Communicative Language Teaching. Rather, it needs to adopt principles of the Post-Method pedagogy such as maximising learning opportunities, facilitating negotiated interaction, fostering language awareness, integrating language skills and contextualising linguistic input, and be delivered in a way that matches the local context (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, 2006; Ramanathan, 2006).

Further, English language teaching capacity has traditionally been understood within the broad framework of language proficiency and pedagogical competence; however, this study suggests that digital competence is also crucial. Given that a large part of digital information is in English, English learners nowadays (and in the future) will have greater exposure to the digital technologies and online media. Accordingly, participants of this study reiterated the need for provisions to train teachers to improve their capacity in terms of using digital technologies and using online tools to teach. Data suggests that digital competence, understood as the abilities to use digital technologies and online tools for various teaching-related purposes, has become an essential element requiring greater attention during pre-service and in-service education for English teachers. In the way that ASEAN nations have made English and digital literacy important 21st century skills (Chapter 3) and that teachers’ implementation of blended learning using digital technologies would become more inherent in post-pandemic ESBE in the ASEAN region (Chapter 5), digital competence should no longer be seen as a separate skillset. Rather, it should be seen as an inseparable construct of teacher capacity along with English language proficiency and pedagogical competence.

This means that English teacher capacity consists of the three constructs: English language proficiency, pedagogical competence and digital competence. Such is the holistic understanding insofar that attempts to improve teachers’ language proficiency and pedagogical competence in language teacher education must go hand in hand with digital competence.

An excellent example of how this new paradigm could be embraced was given by Viet-2 in the form of the 5:3:7 training matrix (see Section 6.6). The matrix allows prospective teachers or in-service teachers to have three days of face-to-face meetings with teacher educators. These three days can be spent on focus group discussions or teaching demonstrations. On the other hand, teachers can spend the other five days and seven days online, whether synchronously or asynchronously. They can spend these times for online discussions or self-study involving activities such as reading literature, creating a wiki, working on teacher professional development quizzes, analysis of teaching excerpts and videos, writing online reflections and creating digital teaching stories, among others. Adopting the matrix means assurance to teachers’ digital competence in that their use of digital technologies is inherent in their professional development. This is one of the ways in which blended teacher education can work at both pre-service and in-service levels. Adopting the matrix may require adjustments to the local contexts of different ASEAN nations, but it is an important way in which digital technology is integrated in language teacher education while promoting teacher autonomy in the process.

Another aspect which can be added to Kaplan and Baldauf’s conception of personnel policy is teacher educators. If Kaplan and Baldauf are concerned about the teaching workforce, an immediate question must be asked: who educates the teaching workforce? This is a missing link in the conception of personnel policy and in the literature of English language teacher education in general where discussion on teacher educators remains peripheral (cf. Walsh and Mann, 2018). Findings from the present study are conclusive in highlighting the importance of teacher educators. Across ASEAN contexts, teacher educators require a significant upgrade, both in terms of attitudes and pedagogical skills, to enable them to train
prospective teachers and support English language education reforms in the nations. Calls to enhance the professionalism of teacher educators have been made in the ASEAN region, such as in Myanmar (Borg, et al., 2018) and Cambodia (Zein and Haing, 2017), but it is not clear whether this issue has been taken up in other nations. If we want to address the issue of personnel policy on ESBE, we must first be prepared to develop programmes which aim to improve teacher educators.

Further, a localised approach to teacher education for English teachers is in line with what has been previously discussed in Chapter 5 as a localised approach to educational reforms in ESBE. It shows that ASEAN nations at the local level struggle with providing adequate training. From the Philippines to Myanmar, from Indonesia to Cambodia, there are too many teachers who need training. The numbers of teachers who need training are massive compared with the numbers of teacher educators and the available training opportunities. Meanwhile, those graduating as prospective teachers remain marginal to fill in the huge gap in the teaching workforce. Solving this issue of teacher recruitment is as important as addressing the problem related to training delivery. Findings from the study suggest that nepotism still exists with regards to selection of training participants, and often the process is not transparent to the extent that those selected to join training are not the best possible candidates. ASEAN nations having this issue such as Indonesia, the Philippines and Cambodia need to find ways to solve it. In specific cases such as Indonesia, better coordination between different government institutions providing teacher training is needed, while work to ensure wider national outreach of training programmes is necessary.

Finally, findings from the study suggest the importance of establishing cooperation with foreign organisations or institutions wanting to contribute to the development of English language education in the ASEAN region. ASEAN nations are interested in forging new ways of improving the capacity of English teachers. Participants unanimously agreed that cooperating with foreign parties would considerably assist them in enhancing teachers’ capacity in various facets of English language proficiency, pedagogical competence and digital competence.

As much as foreign parties are encouraged to bring in their skills and expertise in a plethora of aspects of English language education, ASEAN nations do not wish a cooperation which creates an asymmetrical relationship; they do not wish to be subservient to the foreign parties. Several participants were critical about how foreign parties perceived and treated them in the past and demanded a more equal relationship. At a time when the discourse of linguistic imperialism associated with the English language remains a hot topic (see Phillipson, 1992, 2009), it is important to ensure a symmetrical relationship between ASEAN nations and foreign parties wishing to contribute to the improvement of English language education in the region. Terms such as “foreign aid”, “assistance” and “donor” would only preserve the status of the foreign parties as superior and ASEAN nations as inferior. In other words, the terms may only extend the asymmetrical relationship which has often developed as a result of the involvement of the foreign parties, hence perpetuating the discourse of linguistic imperialism (cf. Coleman, 2011). A more neutral approach is necessary. Rather than as “donors”, participants of this study were more interested in seeing foreign parties as “partners” and “collaborators”. Therefore, “external collaborations” has been used as the title of section 6.7 to indicate the sort of relationship which ASEAN nations wish to develop with foreign parties. Another way in which a more symmetrical relationship can be developed is through greater acknowledgement of local scholarship. Participants wished that their knowledge of local context and cultures as well as expertise were appreciated in various processes pertinent to the design, development and delivery of language teacher education programmes. To advance the argument further, they wanted processes related to designing, developing and delivering teacher education programmes as ones which allow exchange of ideas between two mutually benefitted parties in a relationship that is symmetrical and respectful. This is another dimension of a localised approach to language teacher education to suit a localised approach to educational reforms in ESBE as advocated in Chapter 5.
Chapter 7

ESBE, ASEAN integration and English varieties
7.1. Introduction

This chapter brings together analyses of findings relevant to ESBE, ASEAN integration and English varieties. It first discusses the role of English for ASEAN integration as background which situates ESBE across ASEAN nations. Then it focuses on the varieties of English as they relate to the education system that ESBE is part of. The final section is a critical analysis of common themes emerging in this chapter.

7.2. English, ESBE and ASEAN integration

Scholarship has highlighted how the officialisation of English as the working language of ASEAN would bring its member states closer while posing challenges to English language education (see various papers in Bigalke and Sharbawi, 2015; Stroup and Kimura, 2015). Chapter 4 has identified the challenges relating to the placement of English in ASEAN curricula, Chapter 5 has recognised pedagogical-related challenges which emerge due to the implementation of ESBE, and Chapter 6 has shed light on numerous issues confronting ESBE teachers and teacher education. Findings from this chapter demonstrate the importance of ESBE for ASEAN integration, and vice versa. The majority of participants welcomed the presence of ESBE in support of the plans of ASEAN nations to integrate at regional level. They believed that ESBE and ASEAN integration are mutually beneficial. It is maintained that the officialisation of English as the working language of the ASEAN would promote ESBE as well as greater use of English among citizens of ASEAN nations. Conversely, they also considered ESBE useful for ASEAN integration in that it prepares younger generations within ASEAN nations for future integrational purposes.

Laotian participants are among ardent believers in the importance of English for ASEAN integration. Departing from previous ideologies which saw English as the language of the enemy the way the previous Laos PDR government embraced it prior to 1986, participants from Laos underscored the importance of English for opening up to other members of ASEAN. Laos-2 stated: “English is the official working language of ASEAN. That is English is crucial for Lao PDR to communicate with different countries in ASEAN.” Further, Laos-1 saw the potential of having English in basic education: “Yes, I think English plays a big role for ASEAN integration. In terms of basic education, English is very helpful for the partnership work, because I expected to have that primary schools in ASEAN member countries can get together, can have a space to have some idea exchange or learn from each other about basic practices, to learn from different contexts.”

Participants from other nations maintained that the need for ESBE was because their countries wish to remain on a par with other ASEAN member states. This view is expressed by participants from Thailand, Myanmar and Indonesia. Thai-1, for example, saw English as playing “a significant role in basic education to enable and prepare Thai learners to communicate and compete with learners from other nations in the ASEAN community.” He also stated that English is “a major tool for Thailand’s basic education to fulfill the needs of new and future generations in terms of their potentials [sic] without anyone being left behind.” Thai-2 concurred. She stated: “If we can strengthen English proficiency for Thai students to meet ASEAN standards, they can become future generations for Thailand and ASEAN countries.” Meanwhile, Myan-3 spoke about English for the Myanmar people: “We do say English is really important for our … students, for teachers so that we can integrate better with ASEAN community and beyond … we should have quality English, quality curriculum, and with teachers who can really teach the curriculum.” Furthermore, Ind-1 admitted that focusing on English for ASEAN integration was necessary for Indonesia because “English competence and language literacy of our young generation is left behind their cohorts in ASEAN countries.”

Participants from Malaysia and the Philippines also expressed support for ESBE and ASEAN integration. Malaysian participants saw ESBE and ASEAN integration as mutually beneficial. Mal-2 argued that “the increasing global mobility” went in a parallel fashion with “development in ASEAN” in highlighting the value of English and promoting ESBE. On the other hand, Mal-1 viewed ESBE as allowing future generations in Malaysia to look ahead: “A good command of the language is crucial for the country’s growth in education, economy and social wellness. The future generation will have to look at opportunities outside the country and they need a good grasp of the international language.” Moreover, participants from the Philippines unanimously agreed on the importance of ESBE for ASEAN integration. For example, Phil-1 stated: “It’s very important and it should play a vital role. All of us really advocate English because it’s the international language.” Even so, Phil-1 thought that English language education requires systematic planning in that it affects the teaching of the mother tongue. She stated: “It’s just that we really need to think twice or thrice with early kids – kids from K [Kindergarten] to 3 [Grade 3] or even in the elementary, because if we really would want them to develop their cognitive skills, which is related to
speech and their reasoning skills, which is also related to speech, and the best way for these young kids to learn is really through a language that is familiar to them.” Phil-1’s statement can be seen as a direct response to EMI, rather than ESBE, given that her response to ESBE, and that of other Filipino participants, remains positive (see Chapter 4 for further discussion).

Participants from Brunei Darussalam were also very supportive of English for ASEAN integration. Bru-1 explained that ESBE and EMI teachers found it “motivating” to teach English in the context of the language being made ASEAN’s working language. Bru-2 mentioned a number of initiatives that demonstrate how “the Brunei government has given its full support to ASEAN development, in this case through the specific development of English language training in ASEAN.” These include The Brunei–US English Language Enhancement Project (ELEP), which was “led by UBD to support ESBE teachers from all across ASEAN” and the partnership between “UB and FPT University in Da Nang, Vietnam” (Bru-2). Bru-2 also explained how Brunei has encouraged participation of its prospective teachers to teach English in other ASEAN nations. He stated: “Additionally, third year UBD students, who are given intensive training in teaching, have been sent to Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam to teach English in rural community schools since 2010.” Indeed, data from participants suggests that Brunei aspires to play a stronger role in promoting English for ASEAN integration. This aspiration seems to reflect the kind of leadership role they have demonstrated as well as the expertise they have shared with other ASEAN member states (see Haji-Othman and Sharbawi, 2015). Such an aspiration is also within reach given that Bruneians are now “among the most proficient throughout the whole ASEAN region – on a par with Philippines, ahead of Malaysia and not far behind Singapore” (Bru-1).

The data has hitherto suggested that participants are optimistic about the role of English in ASEAN. Some optimism has also been expressed in the literature. For example, Stroupe and Kimura (2015:07) stated:

“The further integration of the ASEAN Member States and the development of the AEC (ASEAN Economic Community) will have far-reaching effects, not only throughout Southeast Asia, but certainly beyond as a regional community is developed that may rival those in Europe and North and South America.”
Findings from this study show a similar tone of optimism. Participants argued that ASEAN integration had great potential to build strong organisational partnerships such as that of the European Union (EU). For example, Ind-1 stated:

“ASEAN can be integrated like EU if all ASEAN citizens have the same common ground, that is they can communicate and understand among each other in all aspects of life including politics, economy and culture. This common ground will only take place when we have a vehicle for it, namely lingua franca language, which is English.”

Unfortunately, it appears that ASEAN integration remains the exclusive discourse of the elite. Data drawn from the participants suggests that ASEAN integration remains a political rhetoric which has not fully spread across other domains of life such as culture, economy and education. Ind-1 made this explicit: “I guess that ASEAN integration is still circulating among the elite leaders of ASEAN countries. It has not reached the grassroot level such as primary and secondary education.”

It is of no surprise that ASEAN integration is not known by the large populace in each of the ASEAN nations. For many of them, the reason to learn English has nothing to do with ASEAN integration. Rather, it is more related to the socio-economic imperative where the language is strongly attached to success in the workforce in the face of global competition. This view is voiced by participants such as Camb-1:

“For me, no matter if English is the official language of ASEAN or not, it would not change the importance of English in Cambodian society. People in Cambodia study English not because of the ASEAN integration. People in Cambodia study English because English is the survival skill. If you know English, you can find a better job, so that’s what people expect from learning English. And that’s true. A lot of people in Cambodia survive and earn a better living due to a better English ability … To me it didn’t help … it didn’t improve English learning in Cambodia. The drive of English learning in Cambodia is from the international (community), not the ASEAN integration.”

What Camb-1 described above finds evidence in the fact that there are companies from other ASEAN nations based in Cambodia, but none would hire Cambodians if they only spoke English and Cambodian. Camb-1 provided an example that if the companies “are Thai, they prefer Thai language. If you learn Thai, you can work with Thai (company). Thai companies would not use English in Cambodia. They would recruit Cambodian people who know Thai …” Similarly Myan-4 stated:

“I feel it will remain at the elite level given the proficiency level of people at the grassroot level and lack of urgency or needs to use English in normal domains. It is normal for international business entities (and diplomats) to use the local language of the country they invest [in] to show intimacy and to employ those who can use their language and the local language to work well with the local community.”

The two statements are interesting because they contradict the majority of the data in this study and scholarly assertions which suggest that ASEAN nations push themselves to learn English in order to communicate with each other. Despite the contradiction, the statements may be best understood from two points of view.

First, it proves Ind-1’s argument that ASEAN integration remains a political rhetoric belonging to the elite. It is a rhetoric which stays at the political level, but it has not deeply touched other domains of life among the citizens of ASEAN nations. This can be traced back to the initial formulation of ASEAN itself, which was mainly a regional political pact between five nations: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Having common “non-aligned” and “non-interference” foreign policies, these early members of ASEAN feared communist influence internally and internationally. They also expected economic aid from the US and the UK and hoped for a revitalised regional cooperation (Hagawara, 2003; Jones, L, 2012). Even at political level, as Capie and Evans (2003:45) stated, in the early years of its inception ASEAN member states did “not seek to create a political union nor [did] the institution have any supranational authority. Rather, ASEAN [was] an example of “sovereignty-enhancing regionalism” where most decision-making powers continued to reside in the various national capitals.” In 1984, the early members of ASEAN immediately accepted another member (Brunei Darussalam) whose cultural associations and political interests were close to them. However, they waited for several years to accept membership of Francophone countries which had communist tendencies (Laos, Vietnam) and countries which used to be run by Tatmadaw military rulers (Cambodia, Myanmar). However, once these new countries were able to demonstrate their commitment to ASEAN’s declaration of peace and neutrality, they were formally accepted. ASEAN’s commitment to peace and stability has remained strong in the aftermath of various crises such as the Gulf War, the 1997–8 economic crisis, and the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Thus, while it has aimed for an economic integration through the AEC, ASEAN’s impact has remained largely political (see also Jones, L, 2012; Lee, 2011).

Second, Camb-1’s statement indicates that the need for English among ASEAN nations depends on cultural distance. The farther cultural distance is between ASEAN nations, the greater the need for English. On the contrary, the closer the nations are culturally, a common language spoken in either nation is preferred. The fact that Thai companies prefer Cambodians speaking Thai could be traced to the cultural intersections between the two...
nations. Thai people are present in Cambodia along with a group of other Tai peoples such as Lao, Thai Phuan, Nyaw and Shan. Although those speaking Thai in Cambodia only make up less than 0.01 per cent of the population, Thai culture is relatively close to Cambodian culture (Cambodia Intercensus, 2013). The distance between Thai culture and Cambodian culture is definitely closer than, for example, the one between Indonesian culture and Cambodian culture, or between Filipino culture and Cambodian culture. Given the inter-relationship between culture and identity, there may also be an issue of solidarity, where Thai companies would prefer to hire Cambodians who are descendants of the Tai peoples or are able to speak the Thai language, rather than Cambodians who only speak English and Khmer. Thus, the need to speak Thai between people from Thai companies and local Cambodians is greater, than, say, people from Thai companies (which invest in the Philippines) and local Filipinos. In the case of the latter, the use of English is more likely. Another example involving Singapore and Myanmar can be cited here. Singapore and Myanmar may be said to have relatively distant cultures, in comparison with, for example, Myanmar and Thailand. Singapore investment in Myanmar continues despite the recent military coup (Vice, 2021), and, as such, the need for English as a lingua franca between peoples of the two countries is asserted.

The two points above may explain why there is currently little interest among ASEAN nations to learn each other’s languages and cultures, as discussed in Chapter 5. ASEAN nations prefer English as a neutral language which can be used to communicate among themselves. However, it does not mean that serious attempts have been made to learn each other’s cultures through English either, not to mention the need to directly learn the languages and cultures. Ind-1 spoke of an ambition of the Indonesian government to make Indonesian an international language. In what has been argued as a “premature” language policy, attempts to elevate the status of Indonesian to become an international language persist (see Zein, 2020, Chapter 3). However, Ind-1 believed that the “ambition to make Bahasa Indonesia the world or at least ASEAN lingua franca ... could be a failure.” Citing that Indonesian is “spoken only by Indonesians and Malaysians,” Ind-1 was sceptical about the prospect of the language to be spoken by citizens of other ASEAN nations. He stated: “I am not sure whether our colleagues from Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand are willing to use Indonesian as ASEAN lingua franca. I am doubtful about this.”

The two points may also explain the lingering notion of ESBE as being useful for ASEAN integration, but without concrete and systematic actions being undertaken by the majority of ASEAN nations. In his remark prior to the officialisation of the ASEAN integration, the Secretary General of ASEAN, Lê Lương Minh stated: “With the diversity in ASEAN reflected in our diverse histories, races, cultures and belief systems, English is an important and indispensable tool to bring our Community closer together” (ASEAN, 2013). Further, the second Article of the ASEAN Charter also aims to inculcate “respect for the different cultures, languages and religions of the peoples of ASEAN while emphasising their common values in the spirit of unity in diversity”. However, it has been six years since ASEAN integration was officially declared and it remains unclear how ASEAN nations would make this spirit of unity in diversity tangible through the teaching of English in the education system.

Data from this study suggests that most ASEAN nations have not created policies which make ESBE integral to plans for ASEAN integration. This is evidenced by commentaries by participants from Laos, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, the Philippines and Brunei Darussalam.

Sing-1 stated that Singapore has “not focused on ASEAN integration” as its “policies are applicable for the region and internationally.” It is of no surprise, as Sing-1 previously explained, that teaching materials contextualised to the local context of Singapore are absent (see Chapter 5). This may also refer to the absence of ASEAN-related materials in Singaporean textbooks. A similar situation is found in Malaysia. Chapter 5 has shown how the nationally endorsed textbook which aligns with the CEFR, Pulse, is internationally imported. Findings from this present chapter corroborate this. Of Pulse, Mal-4 stated: “Sadly, the new CEFR-aligned textbooks do not have ASEAN or Malaysian content. It’s very British.” Mal-4 explained that the reason was due to the sudden introduction of the Malaysian CEFR-aligned syllabus, which resulted in a situation where “local textbook writers were not prepared to produce local CEFR aligned books.” Indonesia does not have specific plans to make ESBE an integral part of ASEAN integration either. For Ind-1, the “2013 Curriculum does not reflect the spirit of ASEAN integration”. One of the examples, according to Ind-1, can be seen in the dwindling motivation to offer English in the curricula in that “there is a decrease of academic learning time [in secondary school] from four [teaching] hours a week in the previous curriculum to two [teaching] hours a week in 2013 Curriculum.” Further, there is no content relevant to ASEAN integration in the current curriculum, the revised 2013 Curriculum, and nor is it available in coursebook materials. This is parallel with Widiati and Hayati’s (2015) research which points out that curricular contents relating to ASEAN integration remain absent in teacher education in Indonesia. Widiati and Hayati therefore maintain the importance of incorporating content relevant to ASEAN integration. In Laos, “[t]here are not really specific policy directions to prepare local ESBE teachers for ASEAN integration”, although there are directions to include ASEAN-related materials in textbooks (Laos-2). Laos-2 stated that curriculum revision was underway, and “some” ASEAN-related materials had been included in textbooks. In Cambodia, there are no specific policies on ESBE in relation to ASEAN integration, and little ASEAN-related materials are included in textbooks.

Camb-4 stated that teaching materials are written to “develop the learners’ communicative abilities and it appears that the assumption is the learners need to be able to use English to talk about their culture and local
contents.” Camb-4 explained further:

“As far as I can tell, there are no official pronouncements that the development of the textbooks being in use is (even in part) responding to ASEAN integration. Non-Cambodian cultural contents are minimally present in the textbooks used in Grades 4–9. Textbooks for Grades 4–6 almost exclusively deal with local topics and contents. Textbooks for Grades 7–9 see some inclusions of non-Cambodian topics such as ‘visiting Vietnam’ and ‘visiting Thailand’, but these are minimal at best.”

Specific language policies on ESBE in relation to ASEAN integration are not found in the Philippines and Brunei either, but textbook writers have taken the initiatives to include ASEAN-related materials. In the Philippines, understanding culture is one of the core components of ESBE, allowing learners to learn language through different types of literature and literary expression and exposing them to different cultures of the world in addition to one’s own. Phil-4 stated that ASEAN-related materials are included “especially for the Junior High School level (Grades 7–10)” and that “[c]ontents are systematically presented.” She also explained: “Language lessons are merged with the literature component such that for Grade 8, the focus is on Asian literature. Topics covered include music, culture, food of ASEAN countries” such as “Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia.” The inclusion of these materials, as Phil-4 attested, “is an initiative from textbook writers” rather than a national language policy prescribed by the Philippine government. In Brunei, efforts to include ASEAN-related materials have taken place in the form of ‘ASEAN corners’. Bru-2 stated that ‘ASEAN corners’ are “mainly in the form of a mini-library which students have access to in the classroom” and they “have been set up or encouraged to be set up, to support the ASEAN integration efforts.” Meanwhile, ASEAN-related materials are introduced by some textbook writers. Bru-2 stated: “I believe ASEAN contents are included in some of the teaching materials, if at least to give some general introduction and key facts about other ASEAN countries to the students.” Bru-2 also commented that “I do not believe the inclusion of ASEAN materials is due to Brunei’s ‘national language policy’.” Rather, it would be the Ministry of Education’s initiative in trying to live up to the government’s expectations or commitment to ASEAN integration.”

Two nations, Myanmar and Vietnam, are currently transitioning to the development of ESBE curricula which include ASEAN-related materials. In Myanmar, Myan-2 explained: “Not particular policy directions yet, but we are participating in the ASEAN competitions and the teachers and students from basic education have joined the different training of ASEAN. They have been selected and awarded for ASEAN scholarship and awards.” Myan-4 stated that “curriculum development is still on progress on 01 February 2021” and that materials related to ASEAN are included. For example, over the span of basic education, English teaching materials in basic education cover

“Thailand” and “Laos” and their respective “currencies”, “nationalities”, “capitals” and “flags”. Myan-4 explained:

“Looking at the English textbooks, they start with the introduction of local cultures as the contexts of teaching and learning the English language. Possibly aiming to understand Myanmar culture first and heritage-localised approach. This is observed in all subject textbooks. As I informed, culture about the ASEAN countries is observed in English, Geography and Social Studies subject. We can see effort has been made towards ASEAN integration.”

In Vietnam, the government has worked to ensure that Asian cultures are incorporated into the curriculum and teaching materials. Viet-2 stated:

“Most recently, I work with several coursebooks and coursebook designers and I could see that they are intentionally integrating a lot of ASEAN/Asian cultures and content into their coursebook. And it actually has been specified in the new curriculum as one of the major contents, the Asian cultures, Asian nations. So I do believe that the role of English language learning, in times of integration nowadays will be appreciated even much more.”

Furthermore, scepticism arises as to whether ASEAN integration would actually stimulate greater use of English among citizens of ASEAN nations. There are economic and political reasons which might prevent this vision from materialising.

In terms of economy, the idea that the use of English could be reinforced among citizens of ASEAN nations through ASEAN integration might work if there is strong economic engagement. However, there seems to be little economic engagement between ASEAN nations themselves. Investment data from the ASEAN Secretariat shows that foreign direct investment (FDI) in ASEAN rose from $147 billion in 2017 to $155 billion, with Cambodia, Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam demonstrating rapid investment trajectory and reaching new investment records (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019). However, an overwhelming majority of the FDI inflows have come from outside ASEAN: the European Union, Japan, Hong Kong (China), India and South Korea. The ASEAN Secretariat (2019:xviii) stated that “Singapore remained the largest regional investor and Indonesia the largest recipient of such investment”.

Meanwhile, the intra-ASEAN FDI inflows, referring to the amounts of investment among ASEAN members, remain relatively low. The FDI inflows were $22,134.5 million in 2014 and $22,232.2 million in 2015, both accounting for 17 per cent and 18.4 per cent of the total FDI inflows in those given years (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016). This low percentage of intra-ASEAN FDI inflows indicates relatively low economic engagement among ASEAN members themselves. This can be understood given the fact that the AEC “is not an EU-type economic integration in Southeast Asia” and implementing its agenda faces various technical
and political difficulties (Yong, 2011:95). What the available data shows is that on the grounds of economy alone it is difficult to rely on greater engagement among the ASEAN members themselves, let alone greater use of English. If anything, greater use of English might be expected from engagement with those outside ASEAN instead, as they have contributed to the largest shares of FDI inflows and can only use English as a lingua franca with ASEAN member states.

Second, when economy and politics blend, language policy may be in jeopardy. Ind-1 spoke about the leniency of the current Indonesian administration, which makes no specific policy on the language use of foreign expatriates and investors. Fearing that having such a language policy may work to the detriment of foreign investment in Indonesia, the incumbent Joko Widodo government has created a regulation which “makes it easier for foreign workers to work in Indonesia” (Ind-1). As a consequence, there are “every week hundreds of foreign workers” who “arrive at the airports and go to many different parts of Indonesia, mostly do not speak English nor Indonesian” (Ind-1). This indicates an ambivalence of the Indonesian government. Neo-liberalist ideology may be instrumental in the creation of policies which cement the position of English in the education domain. Indeed, Indonesia is one of the ASEAN nations which places English in secondary schooling curriculum given its socio-economic imperative for competition in the global world (see Chapter 3). However, the Indonesian government does not seem to mind what language is used by foreign workers and investors, as long as it does no harm to investment. The Indonesian case suggests that while neo-liberalist ideology may reinforce language policy, it may also become a contributing factor to the elimination of other policies which strengthen language in other domains (i.e. economy and trade). This shows a paradox of language policy.

In terms of politics, data drawn from this study shows that the discourse of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992, 2009) across the ASEAN region remains present. Bru-1 stated that ESBE and EMI are effective means “to focus on English as the working language of ASEAN” and “to escape earlier colonial and Western connotations”. This implies that the discourse of English for ASEAN integration, which is welcomed by many, is also seen as a respite from what was previously known as English being associated with an imperialist agenda. This is one interpretation which, however, does not negate the fear of some ASEAN citizens who think that ASEAN integration might actually be used as a tool for another imperialist agenda. Participants inferred that caution must be made when pushing the agenda of ASEAN integration in that the discourse of linguistic imperialism may come to the fore. A critical comment was made by Camb-1:

“There are also some other commonwealth countries trying to push English into ASEAN countries such as the British Council and the English Fellow programme under the State Department of the US. ACE and IDP, I mean Australian Development Program also push English...

And to what I believe, I think it’s a new kind of imperialism because when you learn the language, you don’t just learn the language. You also learn about their culture and value, and you learn to appreciate their things. For example, American cars are better than Japanese cars. It’s like things belonging to the West are much better than things which belong to the East.”

The caution is realistic in light of Phillipson’s (1992, 2009) argument that the spread of English in the world represents a linguistically imperialistic project, which necessarily imparts English language culture to its second language learners. However, as Kirkpatrick (2008:357) argues: “The reasons why English has become the global language are numerous and complex and better explained by a close empirical examination of local conditions and contexts than by theories that attempt to identify an overarching reason for its spread.” Kirkpatrick’s argument finds evidence in a number of scholarly assertions (e.g. Brutt-Griffler, 2002; Davies, 1996; Fishman, 1996). For example, Davies (1996) argues that Phillipson’s linguistic imperialism theory fails to acknowledge the very fact that English was rejected (before being re-introduced) in post-colonised nations such as Burma, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Malaysia. Further, Fishman (1996:639) asserts that even in former British and American colonies, English is not a reflection of externally imposed hegemony as much as it is “a part of the everyday discourse of various now substantially autonomous societies, all of whom are essentially following their own common sense needs and desires”.

It is exactly Fishman’s assertion which matches the bulk of the data in this study. As discussed in Chapter 3, ASEAN member states have created ESBE policies simply because they need English. There is a neo-liberalist ideology pertaining to globalisation, but at the same time there are also ideological factors pertaining to success in early acquisition as well as the need to achieve international recognition. None of these are meant to serve an outsider’s imperialistic agenda. Further, there is no data to suggest that ASEAN member states are transforming English from a means of exploitation into a means of resistance, as Brutt-Griffler (2002) found in many contexts in Asia and Africa. Interestingly, there is no data either to suggest that ASEAN member states are being steered by an outsider for any political gains, or, in the words of Kirkpatrick (2008:343), that they have “been forced to under colonialism or tricked into it by their once imperial masters after independence”. It is unknown whether other Western-based organisations (e.g. US Department, Australia’s IDP) express a similar commitment, but a British Council representative recently confirmed the commitment of his organisation to promoting English language education alongside the rich variety of languages included in each ASEAN member state’s linguistic ecology (Downes, 2021). The commitment is
important in consideration of Phillipson’s criticism, and may well serve a counter-argument to his theory. My position is that to fairly assess the state of affairs, it would be best to see what projects may be developed to realise the commitment. It would be interesting to see how the British Council or other Western-based organisations develop projects which would not only promote English but also endeavour to preserve the richness of ASEAN linguistic ecology. ASEAN should be a linguistic ecology in which national and indigenous languages can develop alongside English and other foreign languages in a stable and mutually reinforcing manner. Only then can the linguistic ecology provide a strong foundation for success in language learning. Collaborations between ASEAN member states and Western-based organisations are very much needed to realise this ideal.

7.3. ASEAN integration and varieties of English

The traditional approach to English language teaching is associated with the monolingual ideology. This ideology is reflected in native speakerism which views the acquisition of native-like proficiency as the ultimate goal of language learning, hence requiring anyone learning English to subscribe to the standards of English as used in the Kachruvian Inner Circle nations such as the USA, UK and Australia. This is advocated in cognitive theories in second language acquisition (SLA) such as those pioneered by Eric Lenneberg and Noam Chomsky, which have been incorporated into teacher education programmes around the world for many decades. However, scholars such as Firth and Wagner (1997), Seidlhofer (2004) and Kirkpatrick (2010) have argued that a reorientation of SLA approaches is necessary. They suggest a move away from the cognitivist to the socio-cultural approach. A new approach to English language teaching means that there is a great need to adopt a social-cultural perspective of SLA where the ability to use the language successfully and effectively is the ultimate goal.

Scholarship has argued that a new approach to English in the ASEAN region is needed. A number of studies in the ASEAN context have postulated that there is a need for recognition of “local” pragmatic forms in English as a lingua franca communication. Indeed, English has been understood as the lingua franca of ASEAN nations. Kirkpatrick (2010, 2014a) argues that ELF is the most appropriate perspective for the use of language among ASEAN citizens. Among others, Kirkpatrick (2014) argues that mutual intelligibility should be the target of language learning, rather than imitation of native speaker’s speech; and that intercultural competence should be the target, rather than mastery of the target culture. These views are reflected in other studies conducted in Cambodia (Lim, 2020), Malaysia (Hashim and Leitner, 2016) and Indonesia (Zein, 2017). Kobayashi (2017) has even suggested that well-trained ELF users who teach in ASEAN member states such as Malaysia are appropriate models for international language learners.

Data from this study suggests that an understanding in line with such a socio-cultural approach to English language teaching is currently emerging. ASEAN integration requires a wholesale reform involving all ASEAN nations to the extent of English being “acquired by the whole people, educated and layperson, of ASEAN”, as argued by Ind-1. Further, Ind-1 asserted: “To acquire this, we need to move beyond the present ELT [English Language Teaching] practices. We have to have a model of ELT for ASEAN countries which can be applied massively in all ASEAN countries.”

The new model suggests that it is not necessary to adhere to the native speaker norms. This echoes findings from the literature (e.g. Kirkpatrick, 2010, 2014a, 2014b). The majority of the participants in this study believed that native speakerism should no longer dictate English language education in ASEAN. For a great number of participants of this study, the move towards ASEAN integration as well as the use of English as a lingua franca in the ASEAN region where English is not natively spoken means that new ways of understanding English should be favoured. For example, participants from Thailand unanimously agreed that, given the impossibility to reach ultimate attainment or reaching a native-like competence, following the native speaker standards was not practical, neither was it desirable. Thai-1 reasoned that “It is not possible to communicate like native speakers.” This means that students and teachers “should learn communication strategies and use English as a lingua franca. I think any variety of English can be taught, although we still do not have our own English variety.” Thai-3 also supported this view. He provided a written statement:

“No, because successful communication depends on mutual adaptability rather than conformity to a fixed norm. While it could be argued that written (standard) English originates from ‘native speaker’ contexts and that, therefore, one must internalise some of that norm in order to be literate, I believe that standard English (as a heterogeneous set of resources) is now more of a global resource (though it is obviously by no means power-neutral, being entangled in relationships of global neo-colonialism and local inequality).”

Other participants such as those from Malaysia, Laos, the Philippines, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam and Vietnam expressed similar views. For example, Mal-1 stated: “There is no need to speak native, like native speakers.” Viet-3 stated: “... so standard [native speaker] English, no we don’t
have to follow.” Sing-1 stated: “I think we should not emphasise the importance of native English-speaking teachers.” Participants from the Philippines expressed their opposition against monolingual ideology which underpins native speakerism. Phil-3 stated:

“... our standard answer to that is in the World Englishes. I'm still into the multilingual paradigm, it really can't be on the monolingual paradigm, especially in ASEAN, because ASEAN itself is an entire multilingual paradigm. In ASEAN itself, the English language is the lingua franca ... It's already the default.”

Some participants maintained the importance of knowing native English-speaking varieties, but not to fully adhere to them. For example, this view is articulated by Bru-2: “I do not think it is necessary for learners and teachers to follow exactly how native speakers use English, but it is important for both teachers to teach students to be aware of native standard and non-standard usage.” Similarly, Laos-2 stated: “In my opinion, as being an English teacher, we need to be aware of how native speakers use English.” However, this does not imply the necessity to adhere to native speakers. Laos-2 argued: “They [teachers and students] don't need to prepare themselves for having English speaking like native speakers.” The reason for this, according to Laos-1, is because “English has become a business language of the world” and that “[p]eople from different parts of the world can be different in English speaking like native speakers.” Laos-1 further articulated his view:

“In this, I mean Lao teachers and students should not really act or speak like native English speakers (if they could they freely do) but if they find it hard to imitate that they can just learn how to speak in general styles and free-like accents to the native English speakers (I mean that I don’t expect high that Lao people will know all idioms or slang of English, including speaking styles and speaking accents).”

In Brunei Darussalam, the Ministry of Education continues to hold the “belief that a British model of English was desirable, ignoring the fact that local teachers could not possibly be expected to deliver this” (Bru-1). Bru-2 explained the situation in Brunei:

“The model taught in the schools is British English. Arguably the most important public examination that Bruneian students have to take is the Brunei-Cambridge GCE O Level examination. Therefore, in terms of ESBE Brunei students are trained throughout their primary and secondary schools to use British English leading up to their exam in Year 11. Of course, Bruneian students do not all speak British English with a British accent, and in fact they do not need to pass the O Level exam.”

However, both participants from Brunei, Bru-1 and Bru-2, expressed a different view, as they did not subscribe to native speakerism. Bru-1 explicitly stated: “I do not think it is necessary for learners and teachers to follow exactly how native speakers use English, but it is important for both teachers to teach students to be aware of native standard and non-standard usage.”

The resistance against native speakerism is not exclusive to participants representing ASEAN nations. Those who represented regional institutions such as SEAMEO RELC also held an opposing stance against native speakerism. RELC-1 stated: “I don’t think there is a need for anybody in the ASEAN region to adhere to any norms of the native speakers.”

The opposition against native speakerism is because intelligibility is key. Findings from this study show parallels with scholarship (e.g. Kirkpatrick, 2010, 2014a, 2014b; Kobayashi, 2017) which highlights that the ability to use language successfully in lingua franca contexts is the most important thing, rather than the acquisition of native-speaking norms. This is so because, as participants of the study argued, achieving intelligibility and avoiding misunderstanding should be at the centre of communication of English users in the ASEAN region. This can be accomplished without one adhering to certain native-speaking standards or norms. Viet-3 stated that the reason for one to learn English in Vietnam is not to be able to speak like native speakers, but the “reason why we learn English is to communicate for better work, learning, experience, sharing in English.” He further stated:

“... as long as we can do to minimise that, miscommunication, I mean not only personal, normal communication, but also in writing, in speaking, in reading, in listening as well, communication in general, so as long as we can make communication through, we can make it happen.”

Those representing SEAMEO RELC also held a similar view. RELC-1, reflecting on her experience training teachers from various ASEAN nations, stated:

“I think intelligibility is the most important thing. As long as people can communicate with each other and can do it well, that’s enough. In fact, I have students from nine different nationalities, and they can get along, they make ways to understand and be understood by each other.”

For Malaysia, intelligibility is the most important thing because it aligns with the goal of Malaysian education itself, which is to perform academically well in internationally standardised tests such as the PISA. Mal-1 explained this line of reasoning as follows:

“The policy now is to develop communicative competence among our students. The use of CEFR is a guiding factor for this purpose. As long our
focus is to get our students to perform well in international assessments such as PISA, we need to ensure that we develop competence in the language.”

Various commentaries above are in line with an emerging view which has circulated in the academia; that is, it was necessary to recognise different varieties of English. These include indigenised varieties of English which have gone through a stable process of endonormatisation such as Asian Englishes. Participants of this study highlighted the importance of providing exposure to learners of different varieties of English such as Brunei English, Malaysian English, Philippine English and Singapore English. Mal-1, for example, stated: “We need to be aware of the different varieties of the language ..." Bru-2 stated: “Indeed, it is very important for learners and teachers in Brunei to be fully aware of the many varieties of English.” Ind-1 maintained that teachers should not only know “one native speaker model of English” such as “British” or “American English”. Rather, as Ind-1 asserted, teachers also needed to know other “English varieties spoken in the world” which may include “Australian” and “Indian English”. Thai-2 stated that “21st century learners of English need to be linguistically and pragmatically equipped to be able to communicate with native and non-native speakers of English from various regional and cultural backgrounds.” Laos-1 argued, “because English accent, you cannot judge whether which one is better than the others. If you are a true English educator or teacher, you should be okay or accept variety of English.” Moreover, Viet-3 stated:

“Yeah, it is important of the different varieties of English, and from my personal experience, people from different countries speak different Englishes, like English in India, English in Singapore, English in Japan, Philippines, etc. We should know about that, the learners should be aware of that. So they will see that English in Vietnam could be something like Vietnamese-speaking English, not speaking Standard English like American English or British English. Because the students in Vietnam right now are a little bit reluctant to speak to foreign people using English because they think that their English is not good. But the purpose is that communication comes through, not just beautiful English.”

For some participants such as Sing-1, acknowledging different varieties of English is vital. She went on to argue that the awareness of different varieties “is a must.” The reason is, according to Sing-1, because “languages carry along with them cultures and this also applies to the various varieties of a language. The ability to codeswitch effectively according to situational appropriateness between different varieties of English is an essential competence to have.” Other participants of this study agreed. Thai-3 maintained that what is important is for students to “engage in authentic communication”. He explained:

“... what is centre stage is their ability to use language to perform actions, not worrying about the specific means they use to do so. Those with a specific cultural allegiance may end up modelling themselves after a particular variety, but for others I see no sense in attempting to impose an artificial homogeneity where none is needed.”

Participants also maintained that acceptance of different ways of speaking English should be upheld. The expansive spread of English means that local varieties would emerge inevitably; and as long as intelligibility is maintained, it should not be a cause of concern. The problem is when local varieties have emerged but they have been influenced by indigenous languages so much that intelligibility no longer exists. This means that although local varieties must be recognised, it should not justify the presence of local expressions which may only cause confusion. In other words, indigenised varieties of English are acceptable as long as there are no local expressions which may impede intelligibility. This understanding can be gained from a comment made by Camb-1:

“And what we need to be careful is just about the comprehension — whether we understand each other. When we talk about World Englishes, what we care about is the basic structure, language, grammar rather than doing some crazy things. For example, in Cambodia we use the word ‘open’ to mean ‘turn on’ — to ‘open light’. So unless you make such a kind of mistake, then it would not be intelligible at all if you do such a kind of thing.”

When asked to clarify as to why ‘open light’ was not intelligible, Camb-1 responded: “People from different cultures would not understand that”. He added other examples such as “open car” and “open salary”, which might be understandable among Cambodian speakers of English, but are not understandable among speakers of English from other language backgrounds.

Another topic of interest drawn from this study is the presence of indigenised varieties of English in the ASEAN region, such as Brunei English, Filipino English and Singapore English.

Participants provided supportive views of the emergence of these varieties, even though their views might be in contradiction with national language policies. It has been shown earlier that participants from Brunei do not think it is necessary to adhere to native speaker norms, even though the Brunei government clearly requires the use of British English in teaching and assessment. Policy makers representing the Brunei Ministry of Education view British English highly to the extent that they “still see any suggestion of ‘Brunei English’ or even ASEAN English, as of lowering standards” (Bru-1).

In the Philippines, there has been some reservation against explicit teaching of English varieties. Martin (2014), for example, argues that both Standard American English
and Philippine English should be used in the Philippine English language teaching landscape. Data from this study does not highlight the need to teach “native” English, but it underscores the importance of introducing learners to local ‘non-native’ varieties of English. In this respect, participants argued that Filipino English deserved much wider recognition. An interview excerpt involving Phil-1 shows this:

Phil-1: “That’s what I was advocating. You don’t need to be sounding like native speakers because we are just ...

Interviewer: But we don’t really have a hard and fast rule or policy on this that our teachers should use ...

Phil-1: No, we don’t have. And if you ask me, I will not advocate. I’d rather prefer Filipino English.”

In Singapore, there has been a collective awareness of Singlish, and appreciation towards the variety has grown. There used to be strong resistance against Singlish and its use in the broader context of Singaporean society. As Sing-1 reported, Singlish as a variety that many Singaporeans use, whether as a first or second language, had crept into the classroom to the extent that teachers used it when teaching. However, it is claimed that the Speak Good English Movement has helped eradicate such resistance. Launched in 2000 as a tool to promote the use of Standard English, the Movement, according to Sing-1 has “since aimed to not only encourage Singaporeans to speak and write Standard English but also to recognise that Singlish is the marker of cultural identity.” Sing-1 states that the Movement “has changed its understanding that Singlish is not broken English and seeks to help all Singaporeans know the difference between the two varieties of Standard English and Singlish while improving their overall proficiency of Standard English.” For Sing-1, the great challenge for Singapore now is to recognise that even “as Singapore develops our own norms, we do not lose our international intelligibility and lose our competitive edge.” This is important because Singapore’s language education policy has been framed within the broader goal of internationalisation (see Chapter 3). Those involved in language policy-making are thus confronted with the challenge related to “the level of English proficiency and the potential limits on academic achievement” (Sing-1). As Sing-1 stated, two questions are of relevance:

“Is our proficiency of Standard English equivalent to those of English-speaking countries? If so, how can we ensure that all our students are proficient in or are becoming proficient in Standard English so that we eventually equalise the achievement levels throughout the nation?”

Findings from this study further suggest that many learners might have actually been exposed to different varieties of English without studying them formally. Ind-1 stated: “... in the era of social media, people can interact with whoever they find in online platform, beyond races and nationalities.” Viet-2 observed how students might actually be “aware of” the issue of different varieties of English. He reasoned that “because of the extension of the internet, they are exposed to varieties of English.” He continued that “the attempts to learn these varieties come from the mass media mostly, rather than from the formal education.”

This situation only underscores the urgency of the matter. Participants argued that introducing learners to ASEAN varieties may actually be more useful pedagogically for learners in the long term. It might even be more strategic to introduce learners to ASEAN varieties of English than the varieties found in the Inner Circle nations. This is given that “[r]esearch, especially by Prof David Deterding, has shown that Asian/ASEAN varieties of English can be more intelligible internationally than British or US models” (Bru-1). Participants such as those from Indonesia maintained that learners need to be introduced to different varieties through ESBE because refraining from doing so might cause issue in their communication experience. Ind-1 explained: “If it [is] not introduced to those varieties, it is quite possible that a person will be able to communicate easily with someone from Britain, but will come to a halt when communicating with someone speaking other varieties.”

Importantly, participants also advocated the idea of incorporating ideas which view English from global perspectives into teacher education. Thai-3 stated: “If I could design in-service programmes, I would include Global Englishes for Language Teaching because it is an ELT paradigm that aims to prepare learners for the sociolinguistic reality of English users outside of the classrooms.” Further, an authority on World Englishes, Sing-1, argued that introducing different varieties of English in the classroom required a different mindset. Rather than the native speakers, she argued that “we need to embrace speakers of English with a multilingual background” as teachers. She maintained that this view was “in line with both the Kachruvian Three Circles of English and the more recent English as a Multilingual Lingua Franca paradigms”.

Some participants argued that the process of learning varieties of English in ESBE should start from the nearest local varieties. This view is upheld by participants such as Laos-1 who stated that he “would like Laotian students to learn English together with learning different cultures.” The best way to do it, according to Laos-1, is by introducing learners to English varieties in the ASEAN region and the cultures associated with them. He stated: “It’s better to learn the cultures from the neighbouring countries. For example, ASEAN, ASEAN, yeah, ASEAN, first.”

A different approach, however, is offered by Ind-1 and Bru-2. A teacher educator of prominent reputation in the Indonesian context, Ind-1 argued that it is important to start with the varieties recognised in the Inner Circles prior to attempting to those at Outer Circles. He asserted:
“For Indonesia, the students should be introduced first to British English as the foundation, then American English, then Australian English. This is to anticipate students who want to study for degrees in those countries. At a later stage of their education, they could be introduced to other varieties like Indian, Singaporean and EU English varieties.”

Furthermore, Bru-2, an associate professor at Brunei’s largest university, expressed a similar view by framing it in the Brunei context. He stated: “Given Brunei’s historical links with Britain, it would be apt to maintain the teaching of British English as a model for students to learn.” He maintained that this should be the core of teaching, which, as learners develop cognitively, can be followed by other varieties. He stated: “As they [learners] grow older, they should be made aware of other varieties such as American English, or other ‘Englishes’, including local varieties (albeit non-standard, such as Singlish) as part of their general knowledge.”

Data from the study also suggests that the idea of introducing learners to different varieties in ESBE should not stop at the varieties themselves. Rather, participants maintained that it needs to be elevated to a level of repertoire adjustment. This means that learners should be taught the skills to be able to adjust their linguistic repertoire in the way that they could employ various registers in different communication contexts. Phil-3 elaborated:

“You draw all your linguistic repertoire. So you don’t target a specific language. That is not possible because it can be changed. What you do is you draw from your linguistic resources. So you are able to communicate using whatever language is needed in a given context. That should be the definition of language proficiency today. It’s not a static concept. It’s, according to Canagarajah, an ability to shuttle between communities of practice. So if you’re in this context, pull it out. If you’re here, pull out this one. It’s not proficient if you use the same register, the same variety in all contexts.”

Having said that, participants emphasised that it is not necessary to have an exhaustive knowledge of varieties of English in the ASEAN region. This means that “one must be careful not to expect too much detailed metalinguistic knowledge” (Thai-3). As Thai-3 stated: “I would not expect even highly proficient users to be able to recite a list of characteristics of Singaporean English, also because any such described variety is a highly idealised non-entity.” Rather, what is needed by teachers and students are “key competences needed for success in English as a lingua franca” (Thai-3). These include the sort of “awareness that differences exist and that this is normal, backed up by enough knowledge about the kinds of differences one might encounter in intercultural communication to enable them to adapt to interlocutors” (Thai-3). Parallel with Thai-3’s contention is Sing-1’s approach called, “Listener-dominated norms” (see Low, 2015). In a nutshell, this approach underscores that:

“... it is important for speakers to be understood by their listeners. And therefore speaking a variety of English that is understood by the listeners is of utmost importance. I believe that Standard English that is internationally intelligible should be upheld in schools and teacher education institutes.”

Although the urge to introduce different varieties of English in ESBE has been quite strong, field observation shows quite a different view. Participants from Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam highlighted that awareness of English as a lingua franca and World Englishes had permeated the scholarly world in the ASEAN region, but it had just started to gain traction. It may take some time before this awareness can be fully internalised by the large populace of the ASEAN region. Thai-1 stated that in Thailand “parents, school administrators and many stakeholders still believe that students should follow native speakers (particularly British and American) when they communicate in English.” Similarly, Camb-1 stated that local people in Cambodia “just say that they want to sound like American; it sounds good or whatever.” Vietnamese participants also made a similar observation. According to Viet-3, people in Vietnam might be using British English or American English, but “we [the government] don’t request any particular English programme to be BE or AE. No information relating which English be taught at the school.” Although Viet-2 agreed with the idea of exposing students to different varieties of English formally, he implied that time might be needed for it to make an impact in the near future. He stated:

“Nowadays, for example, when I talk to textbook designers, they still think that they always pick American or British English only, and they consider any other variety of English is the sub-standard, or something that should be eliminated in coursebook. So I don’t think that in a foreseeable future, we’ll see any clear attempts to introduce new varieties of English in formal education, but in informal education, I do think that students will enjoy learning English from different sources.”

While the resistance against native speakerism makes up the bulk of the data in this study, not all participants expressed their agreement. Two participants insisted on adhering to the native speaker norms, explicitly making their preference of one certain variety of English clear. For example:

“If we prepare our teachers for ASEAN integration, we would like to have native speakers ... Yes, because though it is natural that varieties of English appear when English is widely used in a certain community, we should still follow the native speaker model. For me, the British English needs to be
taught in Myanmar as I prefer ‘standard’ English though there are debates about the definition of ‘standard’ English.” (Myan-2)

“I would choose a range of varieties, but, again, there must be a one kind of variety which is more dominant than others. And personally, I prefer British English.” (Viet-2)

Other participants did not seem to mind about the variety of English to be used as a model of teaching in ESBE. Whether it is British English or American English, it does not matter as long as intelligibility is ensured. Mal-3 is among one of the proponents of this notion. She stated:

“What kind of English, I’m in favor of good English. If you speak English, your English should be of the level of people, so that people can understand you. So wherever it is a bridge with accented British English or American English, the most important thing is comprehensibility … to me, doesn’t matter, whatever. Because no matter what you all be influenced by your own mother tongue. So yeah, the standard of English must be good enough for our students, so that our students are exposed to good English. I’m not talking about British, American accent that is. But they have to be exposed to different accents.”

A similar view is expressed by Camb-2. Of the Cambodian context. Camb-2 stated that “for speaking” he was “not very concerned” about different English varieties which he thought “deal with accent” and he termed as “AMERICAN STYLE”, “UK STYLE” “and now we have SINGAPORE STYLE” (emphasis original). What is important, according to Camb-2, is that “we should have general directions on the use of written form or we could include in the curriculum regarding [writing] FORMAT”.

7.4. Concluding remarks

Scholarship has primarily focused on the role of English for ASEAN integration and how this brings pedagogical implications (e.g. Bigalke and Sharbawi, 2015; Stroupe and Kimura, 2015). This study has extended the discussion in that it not only focuses on English and ASEAN integration but also how ESBE is situated. In this chapter, ESBE is discussed in the background of ASEAN integration and its relationship with English varieties.

Participants might welcome the presence of ESBE in support of the ASEAN integration plans, and they might even perceive ESBE and ASEAN integration as mutually beneficial. However, this does not erase the fact that ASEAN integration remains the exclusive discourse of the political elite. ASEAN remains a politically active regional organisation which is now transitioning to develop some economic reforms through an agenda of integration. The AEC aims to encourage investment, trade and economic partnerships among ASEAN nations. However, questions must be raised about the economic integration, given that the majority of FDI inflows come from outside ASEAN and that trade and economic partnerships drawn from intra-ASEAN investment remain relatively minimal. It is difficult to see higher mobility involving ASEAN citizens in various economic initiatives if there is little economic engagement between ASEAN nations. Less mobility means less interactions among citizens of ASEAN nations, hence less opportunities to use English as a lingua franca. Instead, greater use of English as a lingua franca may be achieved between citizens of ASEAN nations with those outside ASEAN given their largest shares of FDI inflows. Citizens of ASEAN nations may communicate in English with technical specialists, investors and expatriates from the European Union, Japan, Hong Kong, China, India and South Korea who come to and work in ASEAN nations as part of investment deals. This proves the point that there is little economic urgency that could stimulate the use of English as a lingua franca among citizens of ASEAN nations on a wider scale.

Such a limited economic urgency foregrounds the unreadiness of most ASEAN nations to design and develop ESBE in terms of curricular contents and teaching materials to best suit ASEAN integration. Given that there is limited economic engagement among them, ASEAN nations do not seem to see the urgency to design and develop ESBE to match the needs of ASEAN integration. Findings demonstrate that most ASEAN nations have not specified policies which tackle ASEAN-related materials while those nations which have attempted to include materials relevant to other ASEAN nations only do it by including their neighbouring countries. For example, textbooks in Myanmar include materials related to Laos and Thailand while those in Cambodia have limited content about visiting Vietnam and Thailand.

Presumably these nations are politically, economically and culturally close to each other, and therefore interactions between them are common. However, in the majority of the cases, the materials included in the textbooks remain limited to topics related to geography and travelling. There is limited evidence that broader cultural understanding is developed through English textbook materials. Further, other than geographical information containing countries, nationalities, flags and capitals of ten ASEAN countries, there are no culturally embedded materials related to more distant nations such as Brunei Darussalam, Singapore and the Philippines. All this points to the argument that the discourse of ASEAN integration has not
fully reached the grassroots level such as ESBE, which involves primary and secondary education. ESBE remains relatively distant from the discourse of ASEAN integration. An overhaul must be made if participants’ aspiration to make ESBE an important stepping-stone to prepare younger generations for future integrational purposes is to be realised.

Much as ASEAN integration remains the discourse of the elite, so does awareness of English varieties and the role of English as a lingua franca (ELF). Findings from this study show that the great populace of the ASEAN still hold the traditional views about native speakerism and English varieties. In what was an initial scholarly endeavour to bring awareness of World Englishes and ELF to the broader consciousness of academics within the ASEAN region (e.g. Deterding and Kirkpatrick, 2006; Low and Hashim, 2012; Kirkpatrick, 2010), a recent consciousness-raising movement has attempted to bring this to the consciousness of teachers and teacher educators (e.g. Kirkpatrick, 2014a, 2014b; Kobayashi, 2017; Zein, 2018a, 2018b). Data from this study suggests a continuation from the current consciousness-raising movement. The majority of teacher educators and policy makers participating in this study embraced pluricentric approaches to English. They maintained that the English language should not be understood or used in the way it had been done traditionally. While subscribing to the view that the monolingual ideology and native speakerism should no longer be upheld, they have also advocated it to their professional network. What RELC-1 has done with her teaching training programmes at SEAMEO RELC and Thai-3 with his course Global Englishes for Language Teaching suggests how awareness of pluricentric English steadily but surely reaches the broader teaching workforce. Passing the torch is still ongoing and, as Viet-2 suggested, time is all that is needed for greater awareness of pluricentric approaches to English to arrive at the consciousness of the general populace. Once this stage is complete, it would build a holistic understanding of the sociolinguistic reality of ASEAN where indigenised varieties of English have emerged, in line with the understanding of the dilemma concerning the introduction of English in the ASEAN curricula as far as multilingualism is concerned (see Chapter 4).

The shift towards pluricentric approaches to English is expected to raise awareness of the indigenised varieties of English, which could make up part of one’s linguistic repertoire and be part of their plurilingual competence. Thus, the next step would be to adopt multicultural models in basic education in ASEAN which embrace pluricentric approaches to English in the ASEAN classroom. I call for pedagogical practices that could utilise indigenised varieties of English in the full development of one’s linguistic repertoire and leave behind the monolingual ideology which only emphasises standard ‘native speakers’ English. Such a holistic understanding is a prerequisite to the development of educational reforms within ASEAN which do not exclusively concern one variety of English, but varieties of English within the broader sociolinguistic context of the Southeast Asian region.

The movement would lead to the question about recognition of the indigenised varieties of English currently growing in the region and the sort of linguistic model to be adopted for teaching and learning in ESBE. Although recognition of indigenised varieties of English has constituted the bulk of the data in this study, there remains underestimating ideological views about their legitimacy. There exist segments within the ASEAN populations which overlook the legitimacy of indigenised English varieties such as Singlish and Malaysian English. Further, data is inconclusive as to which English variety should serve as a linguistic model for teaching and learning. Suggestions have been made that a lingua franca core should be adopted. A lingua franca core comprises phonological features which have been empirically shown to be important for intelligibility in lingua franca situations (Jenkins, 2000). In the ASEAN context, various studies have identified what need to be included as part of the ASEAN lingua franca core (e.g. Deterding and Kirkpatrick, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2010, 2011, 2014a). The suggestion to adopt a lingua franca core might appeal to participants who do not mind about the models to be adopted for teaching and learning. However, the argument of other participants that a certain non-native-speaking variety of model should be used instead cannot be entirely dismissed, as much as the preference of a couple of participants of a certain native-speaking variety. What participants have maintained would need to be juxtaposed against assertions concerning the linguistic model in the ASEAN nation. For example, scholars such as Kirkpatrick (2014b) argued that “The native speaker of English is not the linguistic target. Mutual intelligibility is the goal,” while others such as Kobayashi (2017) asserted that “The native speaker of English is not the only linguistic target. Mutual intelligibility is nothing less than a goal.” Meanwhile, Camb-2’s assertion that actions should not be taken to promote certain varieties of English is worth pondering:

“In my opinion we should not issue such specific policies [on which varieties of English should be used as model] because, if these policies are issued, they will first of all discriminate [against other varieties]. And secondly, it will run against the spirit of free markets, and thirdly there will be a lack of competition.”

This dilemma is far from resolved. Only comprehensive research involving a greater number of participants from all ASEAN nations could shed some light. In such research, the involvement of policy makers is encouraged, as much as learners of ESBE themselves. The latter leads to another issue of interest, which is whether English varieties and a linguistic model should be introduced to students of ESBE who are predominantly early learners of English. This issue is not part of the data drawn from the study, but, in consideration of Ind-1’s suggestion of gradual introduction of English varieties where some varieties may only need to be introduced to learners who are planning to study overseas at tertiary level, the issue warrants scholarly investigation. Questions about whether and when English varieties and a linguistic model should be introduced to ESBE learners, as much as how much of these should be introduced, need to be part of future research.
Chapter 8
Policy recommendations and research directions
8.1. Introduction

This chapter draws on findings presented in Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 to provide policy recommendations and research directions. First, the chapter focuses on ESBE and the multilingual reality of the ASEAN region. Second, the chapter focuses on recommendations relevant to ensuring smooth transition for ESBE from primary to secondary education. Third, the chapter focuses on blended teaching and learning. Fourth, the chapter focuses on recommendations relevant to improving the capacity of ESBE teachers. Fifth, the chapter provides recommendations for ASEAN integration and English varieties.

8.2. Focus on ESBE and multilingualism

This study has shown that each of the ASEAN nations faces language endangerment at varying levels of concern. This is evident given that: three out of Brunei’s 15 individual living languages are endangered; 95 out of 133 Malaysian languages are endangered and 13 are dying; 28 out of 183 languages in the Philippines are endangered while 11 others are dying; nine out of Singapore’s 24 languages are endangered and two others are dying; seven out of 27 Cambodian languages are endangered and six are dying; 26 out of 85 languages in Laos are endangered and five are dying; 265 out of 707 languages in Indonesia are endangered and 75 are dying; 16 out of 120 languages in Myanmar are endangered and four are dying; 21 of Thailand’s 73 languages are endangered and six are dying; 41 out of 109 languages in Vietnam are endangered and six are dying (see Table 4.11). It is recommended that ASEAN nations develop policies which ensure the revitalisation of endangered languages within their respective linguistic ecology. Their plans to include English and other foreign languages may continue, but it needs to be done in a way which ensures the preservation of indigenous languages. For this reason, ASEAN nations should conduct research into linguistic vitality to assess the level of preservation of indigenous languages in a certain region.

Such research must be aligned with other research that focuses on prior ideological clarification to examine what stakeholders think about national languages, indigenous languages, English and other foreign languages. The British Council is encouraged to provide assistance to ASEAN nations in such research through a joint partnership with UNESCO which has conducted research and programmes on mother-tongue education. Foregrounded by the principle to develop complementary relationship between different languages and to prevent language endangerment, the research should focus on the following concerns:

- What are the national education priorities in each ASEAN nation?
- How are these priorities reflected in the delivery of academic subjects in the basic education curriculum?
- What is the curricular allocation of English, national languages, indigenous languages and other foreign languages in comparison with other academic subjects?
- When should English be best introduced as a subject in basic education?
- How many teaching hours can national languages, indigenous languages, English and other foreign languages be taught in basic education? For how many times per week?
- What curriculum model is best implemented to cater for national languages, indigenous languages, English and other foreign languages?

Answers to these questions could be developed for accommodating English in ASEAN basic education curricula alongside national languages, indigenous languages and other foreign languages.
8.3. Ensure smooth transition from primary to secondary education

This study has identified that all ASEAN nations face difficulties in terms of assisting ESBE students to transition from primary to secondary education. Recommendations have been developed accordingly.

First, it is recommended that ASEAN nations develop policies to tackle the lack of unity, connection and progression between ESBE curricular contents and teaching materials in primary education and secondary education. ESBE curricula and teaching materials in ASEAN must be overhauled in terms of content and structure to ensure unity, connection and progression. Specific considerations must be placed on the following:

- What should be taught over the span of basic education, e.g. which macro-skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), micro-skills (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation), genres and language for socialisation skills?
- How can the content be divided into modules or units of work? What are they organised around (e.g. specific themes or topics, projects)?
- How can the units of work be sequenced in a way that they build on each other and show progression from primary to secondary education?
- How can the elements within the units be interwoven, so that they show unity and connection?
- How can teaching materials best be designed to reflect the unity, connection and progression of the curricula?

Second, it is recommended that ASEAN nations redesign curricular contents, teaching materials and pedagogy in a way that ESBE facilitates psychological and social transition of learners. English lessons in primary education must be framed within a transitionary perspective and designed in such a way which enables learners to learn English and grow personally. For learners in the final year of primary education, English lessons must be developed in ways which provide them with opportunities to build competency in the global language while developing skills for socialisation and personal growth. This strategy would enable them to adjust to a new environment in secondary education.

ASEAN nations are encouraged to seek expert assistance on the redesign of curriculum and teaching materials from the British Council as well as academics with expertise in curriculum design and materials development.

8.4. Focus on blended teaching and learning

This study has demonstrated that ASEAN nations look forward to returning to face-to-face delivery of education but they may not want to remove online education entirely. It is suggested that ESBE be designed in ways which can promote blended learning more effectively and efficiently. Strategies must be developed to ensure that English lessons can be delivered via two modes of delivery (i.e. face-to-face and online education). It is recommended that ASEAN nations develop training which can help teachers to conduct online lessons synchronously and asynchronously. ASEAN nations are advised to cooperate with the British Council and other regional institutions such as ASTEN and SEAMEO RELC to organise training on blended teaching and learning. Cooperation with SEAMEO LEC which can help in the development of learning media and the delivery of lessons in online settings is encouraged.

It is recommended that training on blended teaching and learning focus on helping teachers to use a wide range of learning management systems (LMS) such as Cambridge LMS, Blackboard and Moodle. Focus can also be placed on digital literacy training, which can enable teachers to utilise communication tools such as WhatsApp, Line and Telegram for teaching and learning as well as platforms such as Zoom, Google Classroom, Webex and Microsoft Teams to deliver lessons. Additional training may be provided to help teachers utilise digital applications such as Kahoot, Quizizz, Grid Diary and Memrise, to assist learners using these apps to learn English. Specific focus on classroom management is necessary, particularly to tackle issues concerning students deviating from the tasks and doing other things, maintaining discipline in a virtual classroom and maintaining security against cyber intruders and hackers.
Given that internet connectivity is highly uneven across various regions in ASEAN, it is recommended that ASEAN Education Ministries work together with relevant Communication and Technology Ministries and the ASEAN Secretariat to solve the issue. It is high time that they collaborated towards the development of an ASEAN-based internet system which covers all ASEAN member states. The system needs to include all internet facilities including email, list servers, USNET/Newsgroups, File Transfer Protocol, Internet Relay Chat, Gopher facility and the WWW. The establishment of an ASEAN-based internet system would not only help accelerate economic integration of the AEC, but also facilitate the use of the internet for blended teaching and learning of all academic subjects across the education sector (cf. ASEAN Secretariat, 2020).

8.5. Improve the capacity of ESBE teachers

This study has generated several recommendations to help improve ESBE teachers in the ASEAN region.

One is that ASEAN nations should develop policies which can tackle the issue concerning English language teaching as a profession of low status. It is suggested that ASEAN nations increase the status of ESBE teachers through measures such as: 1) increasing their salaries; 2) providing bonuses and incentives; 3) reducing their workload; 4) ensuring that they only work on duties within their job description; and 5) providing mental health assistance and emotional support in the workplace. ASEAN nations currently undergoing educational reforms need to include the suggestions above high in their agenda.

Second, ASEAN nations should develop policies which can address the difficulties in terms of providing a qualified and competent English teaching workforce. It is recommended that ASEAN nations develop workforce mapping which outlines the numbers of currently active English teachers, their age range and their location distributions. These numbers are then compared with the numbers of schools which need English teachers and the number of teacher education institutions which offer pre-service education for English teachers. ASEAN nations then need to estimate how many teachers are already in the profession, how many more are needed and in how many years could prospective teachers be produced to meet the demand. These are then juxtaposed with the number of in-service training opportunities currently available. Strategies to meet these supply and demand numbers then need to be put in place.

Third, ASEAN nations should ensure that teacher education for English teachers at both pre-service and in-service levels are practically oriented. The practical components should not be delivered as a form of prescription where certain teaching methods (e.g. Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Language Teaching) are adopted. Rather, practical components should be delivered in a way where teacher education adopts principles of the Post-Method pedagogy. These include principles such as maximising learning opportunities, facilitating negotiated interaction, fostering language awareness, integrating language skills and contextualising linguistic input. It is recommended that teacher educators incorporate these principles in the training at pre-service and in-service levels and deliver them in a manner which matches the local context.

It is recommended that ASEAN nations reform teaching practicum in pre-service education by lengthening its duration and placing it earlier during teaching candidacy. It is also necessary to remove courses which are not directly relevant to English teaching from the pre-service education curriculum to ensure the accommodation of courses related to teaching methodologies, assessment, and digital literacy. Pre-service education also needs to include courses which develop prospective teachers’ abilities to create contextually appropriate teaching materials and to design coherent and comprehensive curriculum. There is also a great need for the inclusion of courses relevant to child psychology and child language acquisition.

A recommendation is also made with regards to the inclusion of practical components in in-service education by including practical contents on lesson planning, assessment, curriculum and syllabus, stages of learning process, classroom management, critical thinking and reasoning, and literacy. ASEAN nations facing issues related to the non-transparent selection of in-service training participants should also address them immediately to ensure equitable delivery of training to all eligible teachers.

It is recommended that training on language proficiency be developed to tackle both ESBE teachers’ general English proficiency as well as English-for-teaching. Focus must be paid on the development of teachers’ abilities to use English appropriately in the classroom. The ultimate goal is for teachers to employ suitable classroom discourse features, namely control of the interaction, speech modification, elicitation and repair, in a wide range of pedagogical circumstances and to meet various students’ needs. Training also needs to focus on activities which can help teachers employ their classroom discourse features to promote Classroom Interaction Competence (CIC).

ASEAN nations wanting to develop their own specific language proficiency framework are encouraged to conduct research which could treat the issue of English language proficiency in a manner that is holistic and contextually relevant to ASEAN. The research needs to investigate the alignment between the language proficiency framework and teaching frameworks which have been developed at regional level such as the Southeast Asia Teachers Competency Framework (SEA-
To improve the teaching capacity of English teachers, it is recommended that serious actions be taken to improve the quality of teacher educators at pre-service level. It is recommended that the British Council play a more active role in the training of teacher educators who teach in pre-service education. Content related to Post-Method pedagogy, pluricentric approaches to English and digital competence, including the use of learning management systems, could be part of the training. It is also recommended to include content which could change the negative attitudes of more experienced teacher educators, so that they have positive outlook towards life, teaching and learning, and can impart on these to prospective English teachers.

Finally, three areas of research relevant to English language education and ESBE teachers are outlined. First, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between learning culture and communication in ASEAN. It is important to explore how and to what extent learning culture promotes or inhibits communication in the English language classroom in the ASEAN context. Second, it is necessary to examine the role of the teacher within the local context of learning culture in which English language pedagogy is situated. Third, scholars are welcome to examine the ideological conflict involved in the English teaching profession. They may focus on how the English language is perceived highly, but the English teaching profession may not be.

8.6. Focus on ASEAN integration and English varieties

This study has developed recommendations focusing on ASEAN integration and English varieties.

First of all, it is recommended that ASEAN nations develop curriculum and teaching materials which include culturally appropriate contents relevant to the ASEAN context. English lessons must be designed as a pathway for learners to learn about their ASEAN neighbours through English, so that ESBE can become a stepping-stone for prospective English teachers.

Second, ASEAN nations must confront the underestimating ideological views concerning the legitimacy of indigenised varieties of English currently growing in the region and come to recognise them. Status planning which can acknowledge and promote the role and function of an indigenised variety is recommended.

Third, ASEAN nations must think of a linguistic model which best serves the purpose of teaching English in basic education. Research must be undertaken to investigate whether it is best to employ a lingua franca core, a certain native variety of English, adopt an indigenised variety of English, or not to promote any variety at all. It is also important to explore whether ASEAN nations need to introduce English varieties gradually, starting from the varieties in the Inner Circle to those in the Outer and Expanding Circles. It is recommended that such research involve foreign parties which have interest in English language education in the ASEAN region such as the British Council, the US State Department, Australia’s IDP and scholars who have conducted research on pluricentric English in the region.

Finally, in their work with ASEAN nations, foreign parties including the British Council are expected to play a partnership and collaborative role. Local scholars have expressed their interest in establishing collaborations with foreign parties, but they need to be done in ways which stimulate respect and engagement. It is recommended that foreign parties play an active role in the development of such collaborations which can acknowledge, appreciate and promote local knowledge and expertise.

TCF. Collaborations with foreign parties such as the British Council and SEAMEO RELC are highly recommended.

The British Council could play a significant role in the facilitation and delivery of in-service training programmes to tackle the three constructs of teacher capacity: language proficiency, pedagogical competence and digital competence. It is recommended that a training matrix occurring in a blended mode be adopted to tackle the three constructs of teacher capacity. This would ensure the use of online and digital technologies while maximising the time spent on face-to-face training. For example, a 5:3:7 training matrix could be adopted where the pre- and post-training can be conducted online while the training itself can be conducted face-to-face. This would allow three days of face-to-face meeting, which can be spent on group discussions, workshops and teaching demonstrations; and five days (pre-training) and seven days (post-training) spent online to undertake online discussions or self-study involving activities such as reading literature, creating a wiki, working on teacher professional development quizzes, analysing teaching excerpts and videos, writing online reflections and creating digital teaching stories, among others. To organise these, it is suggested that the British Council collaborate with SEAMEO RELC, SEAMEO LEC, SEAQIL, ASTEN and teacher groups at the local level (e.g. MGMP in Indonesia). Needs analysis must consider which groups of teachers need training, what kinds of training must be developed and what content to be delivered. This is done in accordance with selecting the trainer partners.

To improve the teaching capacity of English teachers, it is recommended that serious actions be taken to improve the quality of teacher educators at pre-service level. It is recommended that the British Council play a more active role in the training of teacher educators who teach in pre-service education. Content related to Post-Method pedagogy, pluricentric approaches to English and digital competence, including the use of learning management systems, could be part of the training. It is also recommended to include content which could change the negative attitudes of more experienced teacher educators, so that they have positive outlook towards life, teaching and learning, and can impart on these to prospective English teachers.

Finally, three areas of research relevant to English language education and ESBE teachers are outlined. First, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between learning culture and communication in ASEAN. It is important to explore how and to what extent learning culture promotes or inhibits communication in the English language classroom in the ASEAN context. Second, it is necessary to examine the role of the teacher within the local context of learning culture in which English language pedagogy is situated. Third, scholars are welcome to examine the ideological conflict involved in the English teaching profession. They may focus on how the English language is perceived highly, but the English teaching profession may not be.

8.6. Focus on ASEAN integration and English varieties

This study has developed recommendations focusing on ASEAN integration and English varieties.

First of all, it is recommended that ASEAN nations develop curriculum and teaching materials which include culturally appropriate contents relevant to the ASEAN context. English lessons must be designed as a pathway for learners to learn about their ASEAN neighbours through English, so that ESBE can become a stepping-stone for prospective English teachers.

Second, ASEAN nations must confront the underestimating ideological views concerning the legitimacy of indigenised varieties of English currently growing in the region and come to recognise them. Status planning which can acknowledge and promote the role and function of an indigenised variety is recommended.

Third, ASEAN nations must think of a linguistic model which best serves the purpose of teaching English in basic education. Research must be undertaken to investigate whether it is best to employ a lingua franca core, a certain native variety of English, adopt an indigenised variety of English, or not to promote any variety at all. It is also important to explore whether ASEAN nations need to introduce English varieties gradually, starting from the varieties in the Inner Circle to those in the Outer and Expanding Circles. It is recommended that such research involve foreign parties which have interest in English language education in the ASEAN region such as the British Council, the US State Department, Australia’s IDP and scholars who have conducted research on pluricentric English in the region.

Finally, in their work with ASEAN nations, foreign parties including the British Council are expected to play a partnership and collaborative role. Local scholars have expressed their interest in establishing collaborations with foreign parties, but they need to be done in ways which stimulate respect and engagement. It is recommended that foreign parties play an active role in the development of such collaborations which can acknowledge, appreciate and promote local knowledge and expertise.

To improve the teaching capacity of English teachers, it is recommended that serious actions be taken to improve the quality of teacher educators at pre-service level. It is recommended that the British Council play a more active role in the training of teacher educators who teach in pre-service education. Content related to Post-Method pedagogy, pluricentric approaches to English and digital competence, including the use of learning management systems, could be part of the training. It is also recommended to include content which could change the negative attitudes of more experienced teacher educators, so that they have positive outlook towards life, teaching and learning, and can impart on these to prospective English teachers.

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First of all, it is recommended that ASEAN nations develop curriculum and teaching materials which include culturally appropriate contents relevant to the ASEAN context. English lessons must be designed as a pathway for learners to learn about their ASEAN neighbours through English, so that ESBE can become a stepping-stone to prepare younger generations for future integral purposes. Content relevant to cultural understanding, tolerance and harmony are also necessary. Thus, in terms of coverage, curriculum and teaching materials need to ensure the inclusion of content relevant to all ASEAN nations, and not just neighbouring countries. The coverage should be ensured in a logically progressive manner throughout the whole span of basic education.

Second, ASEAN nations must confront the underestimating ideological views concerning the legitimacy of indigenised varieties of English currently growing in the region and come to recognise them. Status planning which can acknowledge and promote the role and function of an indigenised variety is recommended.
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### Appendices

**Acronyms:**

ESBE: English as a Subject in Basic Education  
EMI: English as a Medium of Instruction  
FUQ(s): Follow-up questions

**Appendix 1**

Interview questions intended for policy makers in ASEAN member states

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1  | What are the main ESBE policies in (your country)?<br>
FUQ(s): Why is it necessary to introduce ESBE in basic education in (your country)? What are the motivations? What are the future policy priorities for ESBE in terms of curriculum and assessment? |
| 2  | With the pandemic disrupting education delivery around the world, what policy changes have been made for (your country) to adapt to the situation and continue teaching ESBE?<br>
FUQ(s): Do you implement online or remote learning? How do you ensure equitable access, particularly for students with no access to online learning? What future policies are planned for equitable digital access to online ESBE learning? |
| 3  | What is the current policy that guides initial teacher education (ITE) or pre-service education for local ESBE teachers? Please explain.<br>
FUQ(s): What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current ITE provision? If you could change anything about the current ITE provision, what would you change? What future policies are planned for digital ITE training for ESBE teachers? |
| 4  | What is the current policy that guides continuing professional development (CPD) or in-service level education for local ESBE teachers?<br>
FUQ(s): What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current CPD provision? If you could change anything about the current CPD provision, what would you change? What future policies are planned for digital CPD training for ESBE teachers? |
| 5  | How do you envision ESBE (in your country) in terms of ASEAN integration? i.e. In what way do you see English play a role in basic education to prepare future generations in (your country) for ASEAN integration? |
| 6  | Are there national and regional policy directions to prepare local ESBE teachers for ASEAN integration? If so, please explain. |
| 7  | What measures has (your country) taken to implement the ASEAN’s Southeast Asia Teachers Competency Framework?<br>
FUQ(s): What are the challenges? |
| 8  | Do you think it is important for ESBE learners and teachers in (your country) to be aware of different varieties of English?<br>
FUQs: Do you think it is important for ESBE learners and teachers to follow how native speakers use English? Why or why not? What model of English variety do you think needs to be taught in (your country)? Are there policy plans concerning this issue? Please explain. |
### Interview questions intended for teacher educators in ASEAN member states

#### Teacher educators

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>FUQ(s):</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>What are the general beliefs and attitudes of students, parents and teachers in regard to ESBE in basic education (your country)?</td>
<td>Do they perceive ESBE positively? How do these beliefs and attitudes stand in comparison with EMI?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>What are the challenges faced by teachers in terms of teaching and assessing ESBE?</td>
<td>Are these challenges similar to those teachers who teach and assess EMI? How have the teachers been prepared to overcome these challenges? What sort of support has been given to ESBE teachers in term of teaching and assessment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>What are the challenges faced by ESBE teachers in preparing students to transition from primary to secondary education?</td>
<td>What measures or activities that have been put in place to facilitate the transition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>With the pandemic disrupting education delivery around the world, how do teachers in (your country) adapt to the situation and continue teaching ESBE?</td>
<td>Do you implement online or remote learning? What are the constraints in implementing online or remote learning? How do you ensure equitable access, particularly for students who do not have access to online learning? How are teaching materials prepared?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Do you have minimum English proficiency requirements for new qualified teachers? If so, what are they? How are they assessed?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>What is the policy that guides initial teacher education (ITE) or pre-service education for ESBE teachers?</td>
<td>What are the strengths and weakness of the current ITE provision? Has the ITE delivery met the specific needs of ESBE teachers? How has ITE supported digital literacy for ESBE teachers? If you could change anything about ITE provision, what would you change?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Have you established partnerships with overseas institutions to improve ITE for ESBE teachers?</td>
<td>How would you like to set up partnership with UK institutions such as the British Council to improve ITE for ESBE teachers in (your country)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>How do in-service teachers keep up with professional development?</td>
<td>Is there a national CPD programme for ESBE teachers? If so, what does it consist of? Is it compulsory? Or is there alternative provision? If you could design an in-service programme for English teachers, what would you include in it? Have you implemented both face-to-face and online CPD provision for ESBE teachers? If so, how?</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Question</td>
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</table>
| 9  | At both pre-service and in-service levels, what are the main challenges in preparing local ESBE teachers in primary and secondary education?  
FUQ(s): Are there gaps between preparing primary and secondary ESBE teachers in terms of provision of contents, teaching materials, etc.? How are teachers selected for training? How do you ensure all teachers, especially those who really need training, receive it? |
| 10 | Have you established partnerships with overseas institutions to improve CPD for ESBE teachers? If so, what are they?  
FUQ(s): How would you like to set up partnership with UK institutions such as the British Council to improve CPD for ESBE teachers in (your country)? |
| 11 | How do you envision ESBE (in your country) in terms of ASEAN integration? i.e. In what way do you see English play a role in basic education to prepare future generations in (your country) for ASEAN integration?  
FUQ(s): Have you established partnerships with overseas institutions to prepare ESBE teachers for ASEAN integration? If so, what are they? How would you like to set up partnership with UK institutions such as the British Council to prepare ESBE teachers for ASEAN integration? |
| 12 | Are there national and regional priorities or policy directions to prepare local ESBE teachers for ASEAN integration?  
FUQ(s): Does the government plan to recruit foreign English teachers for various backgrounds? Or to train local ESBE teachers overseas? Please explain. |
| 13 | Do you think it is important for learners and teachers in (your country) to be aware of different varieties of English?  
FUQs: Do you think it is important for learners and teachers to follow how native speakers use English? Why or why not? What English variety do you think needs to be taught/promoted in (your country), both in schools in teacher education? Please explain. |
| 14 | Other than English, what other languages are taught in basic education in (your country)?  
FUQ(s): Why do these languages deserve inclusion in basic education curriculum? Are there policies to train teachers to use different languages in the classroom so that English can be taught alongside (name national or indigenous languages in your country) in the curriculum? Please explain. |

**Appendix 3**

Interview questions intended for SEAMEO RELC representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>SEAMEO RELC has done a lot in terms of improving the professionalism of English language teachers in ASEAN. Could you please elaborate on a few initiatives or activities relevant to this endeavour?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2  | What were the motivations behind the establishment of the ASEAN’s Southeast Asia Teachers Competency Framework?  
FUQ(s): How is the Framework related to minimum English proficiency requirements for new qualified teachers? What are SEAMEO RELC’s views on minimum English proficiency requirements for new qualified teachers? |
| 3  | In your observation, how do ASEAN countries implement the framework?  
FUQ(s): Which ASEAN countries do it well and which ones don’t? Which approaches do they do to implement it? |
| 4  | How does SEAMEO RELC view the key professional development needs of ESBE teachers in ASEAN? Please explain. |
| 5  | How has SEAMEO RELC initiated multilateral policies across ASEAN countries which affect ESBE? Please explain. |
| 6  | What are SEAMEO RELC’s future plans in relation to the improvement of teacher education across ASEAN nations? Please explain. |
| 7  | How does SEAMEO RELC envision its role in terms of English for ASEAN integration? Please explain. |
### Appendix 4
Interview questions intended for SEAMEO SEAMOLEC representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>SEAMOLEC has contributed much in terms of improving the professionalism of teachers in ASEAN. Could you please elaborate on SEAMOLEC’s recent professional development initiatives, programmes or activities which are relevant to ESBE teachers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>How does SEAMOLEC contribute to the implementation of the ASEAN's Southeast Asia Teachers Competency Framework? FUQ(t)s: And how does that relate to ESBE teachers? i.e. How does SEAMOLEC develop activities/programmes which support English language teachers in formal education in implementing the Teachers Framework?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>How does SEAMOLEC view the key professional development needs of ESFE teachers in ASEAN? Please elaborate on this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>SEAMOLEC has conducted open and distance learning (ODL) training for teachers. How has this been implemented for ESBE teachers in the ASEAN region? FUQ(t)s: How has this changed following the pandemic which affects delivery of education worldwide? e.g. more emphasis on online education? What are SEAMOLEC’s strategies to anticipate the changing needs of education during the pandemic?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>How has SEAMOLEC initiated multilateral policies on teacher training which affect ESBE across ASEAN nations? Please explain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>What are SEAMOLEC’s future plans in relation to the improvement of teacher education across ASEAN nations? Please explain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>How does SEAMOLEC view potential partnerships with UK institutions such as the British Council in terms of improving the professionalism of ESBE teachers in ASEAN?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>How does SEAMOLEC envision its role in terms of English for ASEAN integration? Please explain.</td>
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</table>

### Appendix 5
Interview questions intended for UNESCO representative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>What has UNESCO done in terms of supporting basic education in ASEAN countries?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>How does UNESCO view mother tongue education in basic education in the ASEAN region?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>How does UNESCO view the inclusion of English as a subject in basic education in the ASEAN region? Please explain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>How does UNESCO view the teaching of English as a medium of instruction in the ASEAN region? Please explain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>How does UNESCO view the professional development needs of language teachers in ASEAN? Please explain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Does UNESCO have plans to initiate multilateral policies across ASEAN countries which simultaneously affect ESBE and mother tongue education? Please explain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>How does UNESCO envision its role in terms of English for ASEAN integration? Please explain.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>