

# Lost in translation: is Taiwan's bilingual policy in graduate school a myth?

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study intended to bridge this gap by investigating the perspectives of international students regarding Taiwan's bilingual education policy and its impact on their willingness to enroll in graduate programs in Taiwan. Additionally, the comparisons among international students from diverse backgrounds were examined.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Employing a qualitative research design, the study included nine participants from three countries, with each country contributing three students. Three sessions of semi-structured interviews were conducted, supplemented by the analysis of 15 documents from 8 organizations and universities.

**Findings** – Results indicated predominantly negative views toward Taiwan's bilingual education policy, with little impact reported by two participants and none by others. Furthermore, themes derived from document analysis deviated from participants' viewpoints.

**Originality/value** – A focus on students from southern Asia, which was the major source of international students in Taiwan, becomes critical. In the same vein, little literature has been found concerning graduate students' perceptions toward bilingual education policy, which should be thoroughly explored as well.

**Keywords** Bilingual education, Bilingual 2030 policy, English as a medium of instruction (EMI), Higher education, The case study

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Owing to widely acknowledged globalization and internationalization, the concept of English as a lingual Franca has received much attention, especially in countries in Asia-Pacific region, so as to bolster the communicative competencies and even nations' competitiveness (Lin, 2023). While particular countries in Asia-Pacific areas, such as Singapore and Malaysia, are considered successful models of implementing national bilingual education, other non-English speaking countries, such as China and Korea, do see the necessity to adopt such nationwide educational policy, largely influenced by their robust emphasis on ethnicity.

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To cope with this global phenomenon, the Taiwanese government announced *Blueprint for Developing Taiwan into a Bilingual Nation* at the end of 2018 and envisioned that Taiwan would be a bilingual country by 2030 (National Development Council (NDC), 2018). Under this idea, four general policies principles as well as objectives have been offered, including (a) strengthening citizens' English competence to meet their needs, (b) shortening resources discrepancies of municipal and rustic areas by using digital technology, (c) balancing the development of bilingual education policy and mother tongue culture and (d) producing competing advantages for younger generations (NDC, 2018; Wang *et al.*, 2023). With the implementation of bilingual education, it is hoped that talented people from Taiwan can be equipped with global communication skills and global perspectives (Lin, 2023; NDC and MOE, 2020).

Different from western countries, having experienced decades of historical development and diverse cultural cultivation (Airey, 2009; Lambert, 1974; Garcia and Woodley, 2014), the implementation of Taiwan's bilingual education policy, especially focusing on English as a medium of instruction (EMI), content and language integrated learning (CLIL) and immersive learning (IL), has stirred controversies and encounter challenges (Liang, 2022). When it comes to the debates and concerns, four major issues can be summarized and addressed. First, there are research papers reporting positive effects and perceptions toward EMI and CLIL approaches in elementary, secondary and college settings (Chung and Lo, 2023; Kao, 2022, 2023; Lai, 2023; Lan, 2022; Pan *et al.*, 2023; Tien, 2023). However, tens of thousands of people, including several educational institutions, scholars, in-service teachers, parents and students, launched a petition, appealing to cease the implementation of the 2030 bilingual education policy (United Daily News, 2023). Second, Taiwanese teachers' workloads and pressure have become far heavier than ever (OECD, 2018). Due to the implementation of bilingual education, teachers have been required to attend several workshops to enhance English proficiency, and the standards of English proficiency certificates have been set for teachers to obtain so that they can become qualified bilingual teachers (NDC and MOE, 2020; Xu, 2023). In view of this, the quality assurance of teachers' lecturing can barely be guaranteed (Xu, 2023). Third, students' learning difficulties and helplessness have been observed in EMI classes (Tien, 2023). Largely reported learning difficulty falls into the notion of limited vocabulary sizes, causing the learning objectives to be distorted by overly and busily taking care of unfamiliar words (Feng, 2023; Tien, 2023). Fourth, positive results reported from some previous studies can simply be recognized as partially significant since other independent variables might have played a role, such as computer-mediated structured whiteboard (Lee, 2023) and multimodal input (Lai, 2023). Besides, claiming the positive effects by revealing the students' or even the administrators' perceptions has made the research results less convincing (Huang, 2023; Tien, 2023).

Although there is no lack of ample scientific research addressing the efficacy or perceptions toward EMI and CLIL (Gu *et al.*, 2021), current and genuine phenomenon of bilingual education in Taiwan has remained controversial and pandemonious (Xu, 2023). Such chaotic circumstances imply the feasibility and possibility of examining the issue from an alternative perspective since there is limited existing literature exploring the relations between bilingual education and international students in graduate programs (Huang, 2023). To bridge the gap and draw inspiration from Huang's (2023) study, the present study endeavored to investigate the impacts of bilingual education policy on international students' motivation to enroll in Taiwanese EMI graduate programs. In addition, international students' perceptions of Taiwan's bilingual education policy will be explored. Furthermore, comparisons among the international students' responses will be completed to shed light on the future improvements in Taiwan's educational policy. Specifically, the present study sought to examine and answer the following three research questions.

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- RQ1. What are the international students' perceptions toward Taiwan's bilingual education policy? Higher Education Evaluation and Development
- RQ2. To what extent, the international students' motivation to enroll in Taiwan's EMI graduate program is affected by Taiwan's bilingual education policy?
- RQ3. What are the differences among international students' perceptions and motivation toward Taiwan's bilingual education policy?
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## Literature review

### *Development of bilingual education policy in Taiwan*

According to *Blueprint for Developing Taiwan into a Bilingual Nation by 2030*, publicized by the National Development Council in 2018, the premier of Executive Yuan announced to the press in August 2018 that the bilingual nation policy was hoped to be implemented in 2019. On September 19th, the Ministry of Education (MOE) further informed and instructed that a bilingual nation was the short-term goal; while English as the official language was the long-term goal. Therefore, two policy objectives were made to reach the vision of bilingual nation. For one thing, deepening citizens' English proficiency can be done by completing digital English learning platforms. On the other, increasing national competitiveness can be done by offering better job opportunities to boost Taiwan's economic development. Within two policy objectives, three strategies were developed. For the first strategy, digital and integrated platforms for English learning and translation should be built. For the second strategy, mutual strategy should be taken. In this strategy, governmental officials should be able to use both Mandarin Chinese and English to cope with tasks, and official documents should be presented in a bilingual manner. Individual strategy is the last one. Many substrategies have been proposed, including education modes, tourism patterns, working environment and cultural events (NDC, 2018).

In fact, bilingual education policy has been designed with many objectives in several stages. In other words, the goal of 2030 bilingual education will be achieved gradually (NDC, 2018). In 2020, NDC and MOE issued a project, called *2030 Bilingual Nation Policy (from 2021 to 2024)*. In this project, four principles, which are instruction, evaluation, orientation and application, should be embedded in strategic planning so as to reach the goal. Besides, deepening citizens' English proficiency, boosting nation competitiveness, cultivating more bilingual professionals and extending international communicative competence and global perspectives. Explicitly, six general key performance indicators were presented, including setting exemplary schools for bilingual education, promoting English as an instruction in and below high school level, enhancing teachers' English teaching competence and human resources, intensely recruiting foreign professionals, enhancing citizens' English learning proficiency and building autonomous English learning and evaluating systems. Limitations were reviewed in this issued project, and corresponding solutions were proposed. Most importantly, detailed procedures, budget management and risk control were presented in an attempt to concretize such a vision (NDC and MOE, 2020).

Although the bilingual nation policy bore good intentions, more than 5,000 people appealed to cease the implementation of such policy and inappropriate funds in just two days (Chien, 2023). On July 25th, 2022, NDC and MOE publicized the *2030 Bilingual Education Policy (from 2021 to 2024) (first modification)*, proposing five perceived difficulties and relevant solutions. To begin with, satisfying the industries' needs for people with special skills should be emphasized. Next, strengthening younger generations' global competitiveness is critical. Then, Taiwan's existence and value should be seen by the world. What's more, developing governmental systems that can match with global competitiveness is important. Finally, both Mandarin Chinese and English should be

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highly valued; therefore, the term “nation” was erased due to the concept of multiculturalism. Based on the perceived difficulties, the need analysis has been reexamined, and the budget for the implementation has been reevaluated. A new version of the 2030 bilingual education policy was, then, created (NDC and MOE, 2022).

#### *Beliefs of bilingual education policy*

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Thus far, many studies have been explored the perceptions toward the 2030 bilingual education policy. Tien (2023) explored college students’ perceptions toward the implementation of EMI. A total number of 86 college students from a private school participated in the study. The study adopted a mixed-method design. Both questionnaires and online one-on-one interviews were utilized. According to the results, the participants believed that EMI teaching helped with their future studies and work. Besides, their overall English proficiency, including listening, reading, speaking and writing was enhanced. However, the participants reported that they had difficulty understanding professional terms, overcoming speaking anxiety and developing comprehensive listening competence. In this study, even though students’ perceptions were revealed, the results were somewhat illogical. In Kao’s (2023) investigation, 422 in-service elementary and junior high school teachers were surveyed regarding their perspectives on native language use, non-verbal behaviors and meaning-making signs. The study, employing both questionnaires and classroom observations, uncovered that both elementary and junior high teachers approved of the benefits of CLIL. The conclusion was made to underscore the need to promote awareness of this impactful strategy. In this study, results were less convincing because of the reliability of the usage of an online questionnaire and the inclusion of observing three in-service teachers. Lan (2022) interviewed four international students to explore their perspectives on EMI in Taiwan. To capture the dynamism of the interviewees, three semi-structured interviews were carried out, and the intervals were nearly one year. The results indicated that the participants opposed the use of English-Mandarin translanguaging practices in their classrooms. The finding emphasizes the importance of understanding the needs of international students in Asia before enforcing undesired policies. In this study, the selection of the participants did not match the major sources of international based on the MOE database. Besides, the participants’ levels were not presented.

Based on the reviewed literature, there is room to perfect the existing studies and contribute to the existing literature. Hence, international students’ perceptions of bilingual education policy can be further expanded and investigated by drawing attention to graduate students from southern Asia.

#### *Impacts of bilingual education policy*

When it comes to the effectiveness of bilingual education policy, many studies have focused on the instructional effects of EMI or CLIL. Take Pan *et al.*’s (2023) study as an example. The study aimed to explore the impact of the EMI on elementary school students’ engineering learning and English proficiency, as well as examine their experiences with EMI. Using a true experimental design with pretest and posttest measures, thirty students in a winter camp were randomly assigned to two groups: EMI and semi-EMI. The EMI group received engineering instruction in English, while the semi-EMI group had English-based materials but Chinese lectures. In addition, a focus interview protocol was adopted to record the participants’ EMI learning experiences. The quantitative results showed that the participants improved significantly in engineering and English under the EMI model. For the qualitative results, it was suggested that having a positive attitude helps students do well in EMI learning. In this study, both groups received EMI instructions more or less, which effects could not be claimed without the application control group. Chung and Lo (2023) attempted to

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confirm these arguments with test-based evidence. Enrolled on a voluntary basis, participants in an engineering course chose either a Chinese-medium instruction (CMI) or an English-medium instruction (EMI) section, engaging in pre- and post-assessments for English proficiency and midterm/final exams. Statistical analyses revealed both sections made significant gains in English listening but showed losses in reading. The EMI section outperformed the CMI section significantly in listening and reading tests. However, no significant differences were found in English-written midterm and final exams. It was concluded that the parallel-instruction model, offering both CMI and EMI sections for students to choose, was suggested. In this study, the connection between results and conclusions was weak. Apart from that, the maturation effect was not solved. In addition to paying attention to the instructional effects, [Huang \(2023\)](#) interviewed 15 academic staff and administrative leaders from a public and a private university in Taiwan. This study tried to discover the relationship between EMI and structural inequalities. The results indicated that in the public university case, EMI strategies are shaped by state, managerial and academic logics. In contrast, EMI practices in the private university of technology case are mainly influenced by market and managerial logics, facing challenges from academic logic. Additionally, parts of the results showed that most of the participants perceived the necessity of bilingual education policy, but challenges would be there. The administrator of the private commented that international students' contacted them for the purpose of enrolling in their school due to the bilingual education policy even if there were no competent teachers to take the responsibilities. In this study, the results were less convincing because students' perceptions were revealed to compare and contrast the results of the administrators'.

In terms of the gaps found in the reviewed literature, a focus on students from southern Asia, which was the major source of international students in Taiwan, becomes critical. In the same vein, little literature has been found concerning graduate students' perceptions toward bilingual education policy, which should be thoroughly explored as well.

## Method

The design of the present study will be a qualitative study. With this design, the meaning of the examined phenomenon will be discovered via understanding the participants' experiences ([Merriam, 2009](#), p. 5). The present study will adopt a case study design since it is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" ([Yin, 2008](#), p. 18).

### *Research context and participants*

According to MOE statistics in 2022, the top three sources of international students were from Vietnam ( $n = 1,687$ ), Malaysia ( $n = 1,402$ ) and Indonesia ( $n = 1,329$ ) in terms of MA programs. As a result, the participants were MA students from the three countries, enrolling in Taiwan's MA programs. In addition, students from all departments were welcome. To recruit the participants, a snowball sampling strategy was taken. Informed by [Schoch \(2020\)](#), the present study included three international students from each country, totaling nine participants, so as to gain sufficient data and compare them. The participants were recruited from three different universities, located in the central and southern parts of Taiwan. The participants' demographic information was summarized in [Table 1](#).

### *Data collection method*

Two data collection methods were devised to triangulate the research findings. First, a semi-structured interview technique was designed to obtain participants' responses. Informed by [Carspecken \(1996\)](#), three topic domains were pinpointed, shaping the formulation of key

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interview questions for each area. Subsequently, additional follow-up questions were developed based on the leading questions, as seen in [Appendix](#). After finalizing the interview protocols, an expert in qualitative research methods was consulted for a thorough review. Following several adjustments, the interview protocol was finalized. The researcher utilized a smartphone to record participants' responses for further analyses. Second, documentary analysis will apply to support the research findings. Informed by [Billups \(2021\)](#), documents produced through collaboration between NDC and MOE, and those distributed to school administrators will be collected.

### *Data collection procedure*

A meticulous data collection procedure was formulated to guarantee the seamless and dependable execution of the main study. Since there were two different methods used in the present study, different steps were included and separated. For the procedures of conducting a semi-structured interview protocol, there were five steps. In the beginning, as the researcher received recommendations from potential participants, the researcher contacted the potential participants for willingness to be interviewed. Next, informed consents were given to the interviewees as long as they agreed to participate in the present study. For the third step, the researcher contacted the interviewees, making sure that they all knew their rights and would show up for the interview based on the appointments. Fourth, the interview sessions began. Each participant was interviewed three times so as to capture the dynamism of human participants, and each interview session lasted around 30 min. The whole interview sessions began from November 27th, 2023 to December 10th, 2023. For the last step, all the recordings were transcribed into written forms and sent to the interviewees for the purpose of assuring that they conveyed their ideas clearly during the interviews. The last step was completed on December 16th, 2023. For the procedures of the document collection, the researcher searched for open documents online. Additionally, the researcher searched for a list of model schools in terms of bilingual education. Based on the list, the researcher carefully selected the representative universities and downloaded the files from their schools' websites. The collected documents were further analyzed to facilitate the findings from the interview data.

### *Data analysis procedure*

In light of the exploratory nature of the qualitative study, the data analysis procedures were developed in the hope of comprehensively answering research questions. For the data collected from the semi-structured interviews, [Carspecken's \(1996\)](#) reconstructive analysis approach was applied. Through this approach, transcriptions were repeatedly examined before the meaning field analysis. The meaning field analysis represented the initial coding

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Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Country	School area	Years of study
Vicky	Female	Vietnam	Central	2
Vera	Female		Central	3
Vincent	Male		Central	2
Mary	Female	Malaysia	South	2
Mandy	Female		South	2
Megan	Female		South	2
Ian	Male	Indonesia	Central	2
Irene	Female		Central	2
Ivy	Female		South	1

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**Table 1.**  
Demographic  
information of the  
participants

**Source(s):** Table by the author

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process, producing highlighting texts and latent themes for further analysis. The reconstructive horizontal measure was performed for a deeper-level analysis. Objective, subjective, normative and identity validity claims at the horizontal level and foregrounded and backgrounded claims at the vertical level were completed. In accordance with the meaning field analysis and horizon analysis, a coding scheme was generated, subsequently developing into themes to profoundly understand international students' underlying meanings. For the documentary analysis, informed by Billups (2021), a table was devised to systematically analyze the obtained documents. Common themes were identified and synthesized. Applying the table, it helped the researcher effectively identify the convergence and divergence of the documents with the research findings. To compare and incorporate interview data and document data, both of them were read and discussed comprehensively and meticulously before the findings were made.

### *Trustworthiness*

To validate the instruments used in the present study, three measures were taken. For one thing, questions in the interview protocol, the coding results and the peer debriefing processes were judiciously inspected by an expert in the qualitative field. Besides, member checking was completed by sending transcriptions of the interviews to the participants. For the third measure, a pilot study was carried out from October 26th to November 7th. Three participants in MA programs were recruited, including a Korean, a Hongkonger and an American. The results of the pilot study showed that the data collection tools used in the present study were effective in terms of obtaining valuable data for future analysis.

### **Findings**

In the light of participants' responses, themes were generated from the coding process so that research questions were comprehensively answered. To answer research question one, two themes were identified, including a successful policy in dreams and blurred positioning of the policy. To answer research question two, both empty role and negligible impact were identified as themes. Comparisons were completed so as to answer research question three. Besides, four themes were identified after the analysis of collected documents. Those themes were digital platform construction, English proficiency, global perspective and budgeting management.

### *Perceptions of bilingual education policy in Taiwan*

To begin with, the participants generally had negative viewpoints toward the implementation of bilingual education in Taiwan. The first theme discovered from the participants' responses was crafting an impractical policy in everyone's dreams. Most of the participants replied that they noticed this heated issue and many slogan-like subheadings. They commented that the whole policy looked like a big picture with big dreams, but its success only happened in dreams as well. Vincent's responses were presented in the following as a piece of evidence.

I have heard something about the bilingual education policy. Maybe, it's too soon to say whether it will work or not, but I will still say that it will fail. There are many slogans-like stuffs or wordings, but I don't see many different measures taken in response to that policy. Yeah, words can be written beautifully, but words do not equal to success. (Interview 2)

Additionally, Irene further supported with the idea of the impractical implementation of bilingual education. She stated that she was aware of this phenomenon, and bigger pictures of many creative policies were promoted. However, she observed that many people in Taiwan

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opposed this policy, leading to the impossibility of achieving success. Her responses were displayed in the following.

I have been here for two years, and I have heard a lot about changes of educational policies. I know they can be seen as efforts of the government, but they have been too frequent but not correlated. For me, the government is like selling irresponsible dreams. And you know . . . there are pieces of news on TV, and I think many people do not like the bilingual education policy. So, how will there be effects of even success? (Interview 3)

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The second theme was obscure positioning in terms of participants' perceptions toward the bilingual education policy in Taiwan. Six out of nine participants revealed that many measures taken to facilitate this policy were clueless. Those measures were believed to be not related or effective in terms of promoting bilingual education policy, causing many people in Taiwan to feel confused and lost in direction. Mary's responses were selected and shown in the following.

I know that the government wants to promote the bilingual education policy by establishing and constructing digital learning platforms. But, I don't see the point. There are so many platforms out in the markets, so there is no need for the government to have their own platforms. If those platforms are not effective in helping learning, what's the point to make more platforms? Why doesn't the government offer more chances and funds for the schools to manage more international programs? It seems to me that the government only knows how to dream big without actually knowing what to do. (Interview 2).

Furthermore, increasing credits of digital literacy and Taiwanese courses in high school contributed to this theme. Since the main focus of the policy was enhancing citizens' English proficiency, promoting other different courses in school made the participants feel chaotic in terms of the whole implementation process. Most importantly, the overall English competence of high school students was not solid; hence, recklessly adding credits made the students feel uncertain about their goals in the current stage. Megan's responses were provided in the following to support the descriptions.

During the class, the professor talked about this issue as well. I think this policy is inconsistent. The government wants to add one-credit Taiwanese course to high school setting, but it doesn't make sense. Without extra efforts for learning English, where does the effects and success come from? Or . . . the government wants to show that Taiwanese people can learn English on their own, without the government's supports? (the participant laughed) (Interview 2)

### *Role of Taiwan bilingual education policy as the motivator*

When it comes to the exploration of whether international students were attracted by the policy to enroll in Taiwanese graduate programs, two themes were identified. In the first place, seven out of nine participants stated that the policy had no impact on or did not inspire their inclination to pursue overseas studies in Taiwan. Additional factors, including the local culture and the community, emerged as primary explanations. Ian's responses were showcased below.

I didn't know anything about the policy when I was still staying in my country. For sure, I didn't come to Taiwan because of that. I think it might be good for me to study abroad because Taiwan's culture is good. People are nice here. Studying abroad may help me gain some valuable experiences, and Taiwan is a good choice, and it is affordable. I mean . . . people and the whole society are more open-minded. (Interview 3)

Similarly, the other two participants disclosed that their decisions were not influenced by the policy. Nonetheless, they strategically mentioned it so that they hoped they could be selected. According to Carspecken's (1996) idea, all the participants demonstrated strong control of



charismatic power since they stayed true to their personalities. Vera’s responses were presented in the following to bolster the interpretation.

I don’t think I came here because of the policy. I did search for the information so that I used it in my interview for some advantages. Of course, I did not really need it. But, that’s not the reason that I wanted to come. I think maybe because I have heard that people are nice here, and they tend to accept different kinds of people. I also like the food culture here. (Interview 3)

In addition, during her interview, Ivy mentioned the policy, noting that some professors held unfavorable opinions about it. Her reflection and concerns about potential negative consequences highlight the inconsistency between the government and in-service educational practitioners. Her responses were presented in the following.

I tried to say something about my understanding of the bilingual education policy, hoping that this would give me more chance. Some professors did not look happy, and I was afraid that I used the wrong strategies. Frankly speaking, studying abroad may just add some experiences to my profile so that I can get some good jobs in another country. Taiwan is a good place with many universities that are easy to get in and get out. That’s my real intention, and I believe many of my classmates have same thoughts, too. (Interview 2)

### *Comparisons of perceptions and motivations among international graduate students*

To answer research question three, the interview data collected from the participants were subsequently categorized based on their diverse nationalities. In terms of perceptions toward Taiwan bilingual education policy, the participants from three different countries had negative viewpoints. All participants lacked positive outlooks due to the frequent changes in policy details. For the issue of constructing digital platforms, the participants from Malaysia and Vietnam criticized the purposelessness of such efforts; while the others from Indonesia expressed their concerns of the relevancy between English proficiency and the uses of platforms. In terms of motivation affected by the implementation of the policy, only two participants, one from Vietnam and the other one from Indonesia, unveiled that they strategically mentioned their understanding of the bilingual education policy during the interviews. Overall, although the participants were recruited from three different countries, responses were consistent, highlighting the robustness and reliability the findings. [Table 2](#) summarizes the descriptions.

### **Results of document analysis**

Online documents issued by MOE, NDC and universities were analyzed. A total number of 15 documents were collected. Among them, three were from government organizations, six were from public universities and five were from private universities. To ensure a balanced representation of school types, three public and three private schools were chosen. [Table 3](#) summarizes the information of collected documents.

Theme	Vietnam	Malaysia	Indonesia
Negative perspectives toward digital platforms	Purposelessness of constructing digital platforms	Purposelessness of constructing digital platforms	No relevancy to English proficiency
Negligible impact	One student mentioned the policy for interview purposes	No influences	One student mentioned the policy for interview purposes

**Table 2.**  
Comparisons among  
international graduate  
students

**Source(s):** Table by the author

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Document source	School type	Numbers of document	Publication year
National Development Council	Government Organization	1	107
National Development Council and Ministry of Education		2	2020, 2022
National Taipei University of Education	Public	1	2022
National Chung Hsing University		2	2022
National Chiayi University		3	2022
Fu Jen Catholic University	Private	2	2023
Tunghai University		2	2022
Chang Gung University		1	2021

**Table 3.** Information of collected document

**Source(s):** Table by the author

By applying [Billups' \(2021\)](#) approach, four themes were discussed and summarized in [Table 4](#). The first theme was the construction of digital platforms. This theme diverged from the comments gathered during the interviews, as none of the participants identified a connection between digital platforms and the enhancement of English competence. The second theme was the heightening of English proficiency; however, most participants did not find any difference after the implementation of the policy. Besides, some participants found it hard to comprehend the decision of decreasing the English courses from the secondary settings. As evident in the interview data, Mandy emphasized the significance of starting English education in elementary schools to establish the groundwork for proficiency, while acknowledging the need for additional efforts.

If young students can start to learn English earlier, like in the elementary schools, they will have better foundations. I know Taiwan has done that in schools, but many different policies are there, which means that more efforts should be done. I see that many students go to . . . go to cram schools. If the schools' education is complete, there is no need to go to cram schools. (Interview 2)

Themes	Codes	Convergence with findings	Divergence with findings
Digital platform construction	Online platforms for course recordings Online platforms for self-learning Online platforms for autonomous learning		1. Pointlessness 2. No connection
English proficiency	Enhancing students' listening, reading, writing and speaking ability Rewards for students' passing English proficiency tests Rewards for teachers' lecturing in English		1. No difference 2. Credits in high school
Global perspectives	Transnational collaboration International activities		1. A two-way approach 2. Individual Intentions
Budgeting management	The establishment of bilingual education centers Reward systems Funds sources for teachers, students, employees		1. Wrong use of money on digital platforms

**Table 4.** Document analysis results

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To cultivate global perspectives was the third theme generated from the analysis of the documents. Among the participants' responses, only Vicky contributed to the theme, asserting that the development of global perspectives should be two-way. Merely having international students enroll in Taiwan's school might not help much since those students came to Taiwan to fulfill their own purposes instead of dedicating themselves to foster a foreign country. Her responses were displayed in the following.

It is difficult to understand that with international students in classes, everyone needs to speak English. But, I . . . I am here to wish to learn Chinese. I think people need to go out and see the world, so they know the meaning of learning English or being international. I heard from my friends in Taiwan that due to the manipulation of political ideology, people are locking themselves in their own places. This is not international. Many people are traveling around, but the degree of internationalization is scarce. (Interview 3)

Budgeting management was the fourth theme discovered from the analysis of the documents. The utilization of grants, without doubt, played a major role in implementing Taiwan's bilingual education policy. Nevertheless, this theme was found to be divergent from participants' rejoinders. The majority of participants expressed disagreement with the government's endeavors in constructing digital platforms. This divergence underscores the complexity and varied opinions surrounding the implementation of digital initiatives within the context of bilingual education policy.

## Discussions

### *Uncovering the bilingual education policy: perceived incompetence and immaturity from imaginative missteps*

In light of the findings in the present study, international graduate students had negative viewpoints toward Taiwan's bilingual education policy. This lines up with Lan's (2022) findings, indicating undesirable perspectives from four international students. In fact, the emptiness found in the proposal of bilingual education policy leads to perceived incompetence and immaturity of such implementation of the policy. As evident in the findings, skillful but not honest wordings are not able to cover the truth that the reckless promotion and operation of this policy may contain political goals. In the same vein, significant and comprehensive investigations do not reach a conclusion, making the implementation of bilingual education of less convincing in terms of its promising prospects by 2030. This reflection echoes with public demands of the cessation of this policy (Chien, 2023). To resolve the issue, a thorough and extensive scope of studies on learners' need analysis can be performed to provide implications to policy makers and scholars alike.

Grounded in the practices of doing research, many scholars can be encouraged to conduct transnational studies and have chances to achieve on-site investigations if the government can recognize the fact and provide grants to them. In this perspective, the objective of internationalization begins with numerous and meaningful interactions and collaborations transnationally. This idea matches with participants' responses that internationalization is in its essence two-way and requires more effort. Another major issue that mirrors the incompetence and immaturity is the construction of digital platforms. According to participants' comments, digital platforms are not relevant to fostering citizens' English proficiency, proving that funds and efforts are indeed shallow. Moreover, a short interview with an in-service English teacher serving in a vocational high school was conducted on December 18th, 2023. The interview data revealed that scholars who are responsible for the management of those digital platforms expect to have more registration rates so that they would use the numbers to claim the relative effectiveness. Hence, the effectiveness of the application of digital platforms appears to be more of a conceptual idea or imaginative notion,

echoing participants' responses that implementing the policy out of the government's imagination. In brief, the implementation of the bilingual education policy in Taiwan has been perceived as incompetence and immaturity from imaginative missteps.

*Can advocates motivate themselves to enroll in the bilingual education program?*

The results of the present study showed that most participants were not affected by the bilingual education policy with respect to their willingness to register the graduate programs in Taiwan. This contradicts Huang's (2023) findings, indicating that many students from southern Asia want to study at Taiwan universities due to the policy. Different inclusion of the participants resulted in dissimilar results. However, forthrightly interviewing intentional students can provide more insights than interviewing administrators and less biased interpretations can be generated. Indeed, it is easy to claim efficacy without personally engaging in the program themselves. Moreover, the bilingual education policy's effectiveness is hindered by a lack of personal accounts from government officials or school administrators participating in bilingual programs. Skepticism is fueled further by officials opting to send their children abroad for education. To provide a more accurate assessment, longitudinal studies should focus on advocates enrolling in Taiwan's bilingual programs. Their experiences can serve as powerful examples, showcasing the tangible benefits of the policy, particularly when officials lead by example. This resonates with the need for thorough examinations before implementing policies affecting everyone, aligning with the recognized significance of Academic Excellence Initiatives (AEIs) in achieving world-renowned university status (Salmi, 2016), which is a crucial objective involves attracting more international students. Understanding students' perspectives and encouraging advocates to undergo firsthand experiences in bilingual programs can significantly contribute to changing public perceptions positively.

### **Conclusion**

This study aimed to investigate the perceptions of international graduate students regarding Taiwan's bilingual education policy and whether the policy influenced their decisions to enroll in graduate programs in Taiwan. The findings indicated a prevailing negative viewpoint on the policy, and it was reported that its implementation did not impact their willingness to enroll in Taiwan's graduate programs. Two significant implications emerged from the results.

First, considering the perplexing positioning of the policy, it is suggested that its implementation should be grounded in concrete evidence rather than assumptions. Large-scale need analysis studies could provide foundational insights for refining the policy. Second, recognizing the government's role in policymaking, it is emphasized that insights derived from sincere studies should be critically examined. Instead of offering unwarranted praise, maintaining open channels of communication is essential for academic excellence (Hou, 2023).

While the study provides valuable insights, there are three notable limitations that point toward future directions. First of all, including participants with diverse cultural backgrounds is recommended for a more comprehensive contribution to policymaking. Second of all, employing multiple approaches and methods, such as observation and learning journals, can enhance data triangulation and yield more comprehensive implications. Third of all, delving into the perceptions of governmental officials and school administrators would provide in-depth insights for meaningful comparisons. To foster progress, sharing negative results with advocates of bilingual education policy can stimulate constructive dialogues and lead to a more nuanced understanding of the truth.

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## Appendix

### Example of the interview questions

#### Topic 3: Motivation of enrolling Taiwanese MA programs

Leading question: Please try to recall the journey of deciding to pursue graduate studies and share the stories that happened during that time. (請您試著回想當初決定攻讀研究所的心路歷程,請分享那時發生的故事。)

Follow-up questions:

- (1) Before deciding to pursue graduate studies, what was your understanding of Taiwan's implementation of bilingual education policies?(在決定攻讀研究所前,您對於台灣推行雙語教育政策,有什麼了解呢?)
- (2) When deciding to pursue graduate studies, what was your understanding of Taiwan's implementation of bilingual education policies?(在決定攻讀研究所時,您對於台灣推行雙語教育政策,有什麼了解呢?)

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- (3) After deciding to enroll in graduate school, did your understanding of Taiwan's implementation of bilingual education policies change in any way?(在決定入學研究所後,您對於台灣推行雙語教育政策的了解,有什麼改變呢?)

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