

# Higher Education in Taiwan: An Observation Through the Perspective of English Language Teaching

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Globalization has developed into an ideological discourse that drives change, because of the perceived immediacy and need to adapt to a new world order. It has a significant impact on the political, social, economic, cultural, and educational aspects. A visible transition has also been occurring in higher education. The world has grown extremely competitive because of the expending of globalization. Universities all over the world have to enhance their competitiveness through Englishization in higher education. Taiwan is experiencing educational reforms in higher education, in a way in which it is similar to other Asian nations, in order to maintain its competitiveness in the world. This article focuses on how globalization exacerbates competitiveness around the world, particularly in the educational sectors. The aim of this study is to review and to define how globalization is affecting higher education and in what way it has an impact on education policy in the context of Taiwan's higher education. The effects of globalization on global citizenship will also be examined, in order to give a full reflection.

*Keywords:* Taiwan, language policy, globalization, bilingual education, English teaching

## Introduction

Globalization has become a prevalent phenomenon in recent decades. It brings different kinds of change in a way in which different groups of people come to interact with one another. The world gradually becomes a single place that everyone is trying to adopt a shared framework. On the other hand, globalization is seen as a process of increasing social interaction and connectivity among people around the world. This process also shows the development of economic, social, cultural, political, environmental, scientific, and technological interdependence in a global scale.

People nowadays frequently use the terms globalization and internationalization interchangeably. Experts believed that globalization is driven by internationalization. It focuses attention on those who deliberately strive to cross boundaries in search of social, economic, political, or cultural benefits, including individuals, groups, and social institutions. In the context of higher education, universities are trying to be more visible world-wide, in order to have more chances to attract international students and to extend their programs across national boundaries. In Taiwan, English language education has its own unique value, because English, as a language, is particularly seen "as necessary for integration into (and gaining a competitive advantage within) increasingly globalized political and economic networks" (Price, 2014, p. 567).

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### **Taiwan and Globalization**

It is noticeable that there is an increasing level of global competition, particularly in the domain of higher education. These competitive drives—socially, politically, and culturally—have made globalization visible ever since. As Law claims, globalization can be seen “as a justification to reform the education systems and curricula” (Law, 2004, p. 258). Hence, educational reforms in terms of English language education have been conducted in recent decades in Taiwan, with good intentions to “promote the teaching of ‘learning to live together’ through understanding and respect for other peoples and cultures, and through renewed concerns for peace, human rights, and democracy” (Law, 2004, p. 256).

Higher education institutions are adopting themselves in the process of globalization. Knight and de Wit (1995) define internationalization as “the process of incorporating an international component into teaching, research, and service responsibilities of an institution of higher education” (p. 15). According to Rubzki (1995), for instance, internationalization should be viewed as “a long-term strategic policy for the establishment of overseas links for the purposes of student mobility, staff development and curriculum innovation” (p. 421).

The government of Taiwan has recognized that globalization has boosted competitiveness among institutions worldwide. Over the years, this recognition led to an increase in the number of higher education institutes in the country. There are currently 164 higher education institutions and this dramatic rise in the numbers hastened Taiwan’s higher education institutes’ internationalization while also escalating competition among them.

Moreover, the Taiwanese government has also implemented a number of improvements, such as boosting university rankings worldwide and having elite universities. The government set a goal for at least one university to rank among the Top 100 universities in the world within the next 10 years in its “World Class University Plan”, which was implemented in 2006. To achieve this goal, the Ministry of Education set out to select several outstanding Taiwanese universities and provide additional funding (Hou, 2011, pp. 180-181).

Since higher education currently places a greater emphasis on the quality and accomplishment of its students, instructors, and instructional leaders, concerns about the effectiveness of international policies aimed at quality assurance and international competitiveness in higher education for both universities and states have emerged alongside internationalization. The use of quality assurance processes and international benchmarking has increased globally. These techniques emphasize output monitoring, measurements and systems of accountability, and auditing. International accreditation emerged and is used to demonstrate the quality standard of local institutions in a highly competitive global education industry. Like other universities throughout the world, Taiwan’s colleges and universities are being urged to pursue international accreditation as part of the emerging international quality evaluation practices.

### **English as a Teaching Medium**

Higher education, as a consequence of globalization, shows a transition, in a way in which the whole process of learning is focusing on “human development”—“quality, identity, and diversity”, rather than “the learning of knowledge and skills that can be utilized” (Le Lievre, 2021, p. 98). In Taiwan, bilingual education—meaning, to use English as a teaching medium—is crucial. In order to educate students, and to help them develop themselves fully, the traditional “monolingual norm” (Carstens, 2015, p. 16) is seen as old fashion, which is not sufficient enough in the trend of globalization. In the domain of higher education, Ken Lau and Chia-Yen Lin come to

suggest that in Taiwan, “Mandarin Chinese continues to be the mainstream medium of instruction and social activities, while English is used rather sparingly and on an as-needed basis” (Lau & Lin, 2017, p. 437).

Bilingual education, in practice, refers to “the systematic” use of two languages for instruction and learning. For instance, as Le Lievre points out, in Montreal, in the classrooms, the “interaction” between French and English is based on “a common underlying proficiency” (Le Lievre, 2021, p. 113). As the trend of globalization develops, societies all over the world do not have so-called, typical “monolingual” populations anymore. It is beneficial for students, if they would be encouraged to speak more than one language. The expansion of foreign language programmes—English programmes in particular—comes to show that the government and the educators are conscious about the importance of preparing the pupils to live in a multilingual and multicultural society. By learning a foreign language, a student can have more chances to have a “dynamic view of cultural difference” (Carstens, 2015, p. 17). In other words, we can say that in Taiwan, to learn English is to have a “foundation for a more equitable and socially tolerant society” (Carstens, 2015, p. 17), because English language can give ways “in the spirit of multiculturalism” (Shih, 2003, p. 101). English language makes us to think objectively, when it comes to issues such as “ethnic identity” (Shih, 2003, p. 101), maintaining our consciousness as a part of global citizenship.

Adapting to the effects of globalization is a challenge for Taiwan. English language teaching must assist the three-part polity’s efforts to promote civic education, namely, local, national, and worldwide. Moreover, it seeks to create both international and local identities, by taking globalization into consideration. As a result, since the late 1990s, the Taiwanese government has made a number of measures to encourage high standards of excellence in higher education.

It is well known that the majority of today’s top universities are found in significant English-speaking nations. To import Anglo-American standards, Taiwan is embracing globalization in higher education, particularly through English language teaching. The goal of education is to help students get ready for being global citizens. Taiwan is experiencing the effects of political, economic, and cultural globalization. Taiwan, similar to many countries around the world, is beginning to see English as a core educational necessity.

It is a fact that language is both an essential tool for communication and a fundamental indicator of identity. Englishization is one of the changes to Taiwan’s educational system brought on by globalization. English instruction was heavily prioritized throughout primary and secondary education in Taiwan as a part of the efforts to globalize the country’s higher educational system.

Regarding to higher education, one of Taiwan’s attempts to commercialize higher education is to offer courses in English, the essential global language. Globalized English is used in several academic disciplines in Taiwanese higher education. Taiwanese universities followed suit by offering degree programs delivered in English to take a share of the lucrative market. As the term “parallelingualism” (Lau & Lin, 2017, p. 438) would suggest, Taiwan uses English more as a tool for international competition than for international identity, so that a balance between English language and Traditional Chinese language can be maintained. The curriculum of higher education in Taiwan has been internationalized by promoting English as the medium of instruction in order to compete with English speaking institutions in the new globalized higher education market.

As we can see, many nations, including Taiwan, frequently perceive greater English proficiency among their citizens, as it is essential for gaining a competitive advantage in the increasingly globalized political and economic realms, markets, and institutions. English language mediates transnational flows of information and financial resources as a result of its widespread use. Because of these factors—political, cultural, financial, so on

and so forth, English language is commonly and favorably described as the global language. That is the reason when we talk about the practice of translanguaging education, English language is essential in terms of promoting bilingualism, interdisciplinarity, and multiculturalism.

### **To Live as a Global Citizen**

The educational system in Taiwan is emerging from a rigid monolith to the one that takes the demands of a global diversity into account. Taiwanese institutions are actively enlisting foreign staffs and students, in order to place a significant emphasis on the pursuit of quality in a way in which it is recognized worldwide.

In order to address global issues and difficulties including fostering sustainable development, international solidarity, and global peace in a highly interdependent globalized society, using English language as a teaching medium provides a way in which it asserts students' ability to understand and to respect other cultures. The development of such a cultural sensitivity is a crucial component of international education, in a way in which students are prepared to live as global citizens, as they are able to see that the concept of culture is not defined as something homogenous. In other words, the common theme of internationalization of higher education emphasizes the significance of building intercultural respect, tolerance, and understanding among people.

Taiwan's government encourages multilingualism in addition to global citizenship through educational reforms. The goal of Taiwan's new English language policy is to encourage the use of this language in all spheres of society. Several actions have been done by various authorities to create the concept of "new Taiwan" (Law, 2004, p. 268). Apart from offering English-taught courses in both undergraduate and graduate programmes, Taiwan has taken other steps to promote global citizenship, such as increasing the number of international students studying there, and encouraging more international exchange programmes and opportunities. Different kinds of scholarship are also provided by higher education institutions, and bilingual policies in the universities have made it easier for overseas students to integrate.

To modernize the educational system, Taiwanese government works to spread understanding of many cultures and customs on a worldwide scale. Students are expected to learn about social interdependence, reciprocal trust, and teamwork since they are taught that the world is one large, interconnected global village. Additionally, it is required that they develop a basic comprehension of and respect for diverse peoples and civilizations (Law, 2004, p. 259). In addition, they will learn about global concerns, conflicts, difficulties, and problems as well as how Taiwanese individuals are linked to and affected by networks like transportation and information.

The cultural understandings are attained via acquiring a second language such as English, which can have good result in terms of a more dynamic and sophisticated understanding of how globalization has affected cultural differences. Education innovations have raised students' knowledge of global citizenship. These innovations contribute to create a more equitable and a more welcoming society. We can have our future generations ready for the obligations of global citizenship by fostering the knowledge of and appreciation for cultural diversity. Taiwan's Englishization programmes push students to speak the language, resulting harmonization. This will also increase mobility while reducing misunderstandings and conflicts.

### **Conclusions**

Politics, economics, and educational systems have all been progressively impacted by globalization. Making higher education systems more globally competitive is one of the main trends of globalization. The system will

be going through reforming and restructuring. Globalization has increased the use of English language around the world. Therefore, English language is seen more than just a foreign language in many parts of the world, including Taiwan, as this language has social and ideological functions in a global way. English language acts as a tool to enable different parts of the world to progress globally. We can say that the Englishization of the system of higher education in Taiwan is a result of the global commoditization of research and teaching.

Taiwan is expanding its concept of citizenship to a global level. The acceptance of cross-national and multi-cultural diversity is a result of globalization and the internationalization of the system of higher education. In an environment where the internationalized curriculum is dedicated to pursuing the idea of global citizenship, this will support cultural variety and will build intercultural understanding, respect, and tolerance. Additionally, it also offers chances for different people to exchange knowledge, eventually to become true open-minded global citizens.

There is a need to establish the citizenship that is global in its scope. More than economically prosperous and politically powerful governments, Taiwan's higher education has become more global and more English-focused. It stands for a dedication to global peace by fostering human harmony and international cooperation.

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