

Comparing English Language Policies in the Philippines, Mali, and Japan : A Systematically Review

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Introduction

English language education policies vary significantly across countries, reflecting their historical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts. In the Philippines, English is deeply embedded in the nation's identity as an official language and a vital tool for global competitiveness. Meanwhile, Mali treats English as a foreign language, secondary to French, which dominates formal education and governance due to its colonial legacy. On the other hand, Japan regards English as a crucial foreign language to enhance international communication and economic engagement. This comparative analysis explores the status of English, the grade levels

it is introduced, the skills emphasized, and time allocation in these three distinct settings, highlighting how each country addresses the challenges and opportunities of English language learning within their unique frameworks.

English Language Learning Policy

The Philippines

The Philippines recognizes English as one of its official languages, alongside Filipino, as mandated by the 1987 Philippine Constitution. English serves as a primary medium of instruction in schools and is also used in government, business, law, and international communication. This policy reflects the country's colonial history under the United States and its integration into the global economy.

The Department of Education (DepEd) implements bilingual education, where English and Filipino are used as mediums of instruction. English is predominantly used in teaching Mathematics, Science, and Technology subjects, while Filipino is reserved for mostly Social Sciences and Humanities. This approach aims to promote functional bilingualism, fostering proficiency in both languages for effective communication and access to global opportunities. The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, or the K-12 program which is the current curriculum, further strengthens English language education by integrating it into all levels of

basic education. Hence, emphasis is placed on English proficiency to prepare students for the global workforce. Additionally, the policy supports the development of English communication skills essential for international employment, especially in industries like Business

Process Outsourcing (BPO) and overseas work like in the Hospitality Field.

Despite the strong emphasis on English, challenges remain, including disparities in access to quality English education, particularly in rural areas. Arguably, the heavy reliance on English may overshadow the development of Filipino and regional languages, potentially undermining cultural identity. For the most part, the English language policy of the Philippines aspires to balance global competitiveness with the preservation of its national and cultural identity, leveraging the country's bilingual advantage to adapt to international and local demands. With that, this integrates English deeply into its education system, ensuring functional proficiency, unlike Mali and Japan, where English is treated as a foreign language with less time and practical analysis.

Mali

Language planning and policy in Mali reflects the country's complex linguistic

landscape, shaped by its colonial history, multilingual society, and evolving global relationships. Mali, a West African nation with a population that speaks over a dozen languages, faces unique challenges in balancing the roles of its various languages, including French (the official language), local languages like Bambara, and foreign languages such as English.

Therefore, Mali's language policy has been heavily influenced by its French colonial past, with French being the official language of government, education, and business. Post-independence, efforts to promote local languages have been made, recognizing the

importance of Bambara and other indigenous languages for cultural identity and national unity. Despite these efforts, French remains the dominant language in formal settings, while local languages are primarily spoken in informal contexts. So, the English language is introduced just to facilitate international relationships.

Japan

Japan's English language education policy is shaped by the Ministry of Education,

Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT). The policy emphasizes the importance of English as a global lingua franca, aiming to prepare students for a more interconnected world. English is introduced as a subject in elementary schools, starting with basic communication skills in the fifth and sixth grades. This is expanded in junior high and high school, where the curriculum focuses on reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The 2020 reforms by MEXT introduced English as a formal subject in elementary schools, with mandatory assessments and increased instruction time. In secondary education, the curriculum incorporates textbooks approved by MEXT, standardized to ensure consistency nationwide. However, a strong emphasis

remains on grammar and translation, often aligning with university entrance exam requirements, which prioritize written over oral proficiency.

Despite these efforts, Japan faces challenges in achieving high levels of English fluency. The policy has been criticized for its reliance on teacher-centered instruction and limited opportunities for practical language use. While native English-speaking Assistant Language

Teachers (ALTs) are often employed in classrooms through programs like the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program, their integration into lessons varies widely depending on individual schools and teachers. Furthermore, cultural factors, such as the traditional emphasis on accuracy over fluency and a tendency toward perfectionism, can hinder students from practicing conversational English. Recent initiatives, such as increasing communicative activities and promoting study-abroad programs, aim to address these issues, but the overall effectiveness of these measures remains a topic of ongoing debate in Japanese education.

Comparison

1.1 English Status in the Country

The Philippines

- English is an official language, widely used in education and other sectors. It serves as a second language for most Filipinos and plays a central role in global competitiveness.

Mali

- However, in Mali, English is used as a foreign language since French is the official language and the language used at school and in other sectors. Because the country has been colonized by France for several years.

Japan

- The status of English in Japan is that of a crucial foreign language, emphasized as a tool for international communication and economic competitiveness. While not widely spoken in daily life, English is highly valued in education, business, and tourism. It is a mandatory subject in schools, and proficiency is often linked to career opportunities and global engagement. However, despite significant investment in English education, Japan struggles with low conversational proficiency due to an exam-focused curriculum and cultural barriers to active language use. Recent reforms aim to improve communicative skills and global competency among students.

1.2 Grade Assigned

The Philippines

- English instruction begins as early as Pre-Elementary Schooling or before entering Kindergarten, as it is integrated into the bilingual education system.

Mali

- English is introduced from junior high school level to university.

Japan

- English is introduced to students at the elementary level, usually in 5th grade. The reason why it was so later compared to the other was due to the other writing systems that Japanese students have to learn.

1. Focused-Skill Differences

The Philippines

- Focuses on all language skills like listening, speaking, reading, and writing to ensure functional bilingualism. English is a medium of instruction for core subjects like Science and Mathematics.

Mali

- English, while important in certain sectors, does not have a formal role in government or education policy. However, English is part of the school curriculum as a foreign language, and demand for English is increasing due to its global economic importance.

Japan

- In Japan, the focus of English education has traditionally been on reading and writing skills, particularly grammar and vocabulary, to prepare students for university entrance exams. Listening is also emphasized to some extent, especially in standardized tests. However, speaking and communicative skills have historically received less attention, leading to challenges in conversational proficiency. Recent reforms aim to balance this by incorporating more interactive and communicative activities, such as group discussions and presentations, especially in elementary and junior high schools

1.4 Time Allocation

The Philippines

- English is allocated substantial time across all grade levels, and integrated into most subjects.

Mali

- French is the official language, while Bambara functions as a lingua franca, widely spoken across the country. Other languages like Songhai, Fula, and Tuareg are regionally significant. English, although not an official language, plays a role as a foreign language taught in secondary and higher education. Its presence in Mali is growing due to

globalization, international relations, and regional influences, especially from neighboring English-speaking countries like Nigeria and Ghana.

Japan

- In Japan, English education starts formally in the 5th grade with about two lessons per week and increases in junior high and high school to four to six lessons per week, depending on the grade level. While time allocation has grown in recent years, much of it remains focused on exam preparation, with limited emphasis on practical speaking and communication skills.

Conclusion

The English language plays diverse roles in the education systems of the Philippines, Mali, and Japan, shaped by each country's history, policies, and priorities. The Philippines is strongly committed to English proficiency, integrating it extensively across educational levels to ensure global competitiveness.

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