



# The Journal of Asia TEFL

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## Book Review

**English Language Education Policy in Asia**, by Robert Kirkpatrick (Eds.), Dordrecht, Springer, 2016, 388 pp., 118.99 € (Hardcover), ISBN 978-3-319-22464-0

Language policy and planning (LPP) in language education reflects the complexity of language and power in modern society, which is reviewed as a form of social control. Taking an ideological perspective, many previous studies have argued that LPP is never neutral in terms of social intents and consequences, therefore LPP research should not focus only on language but on its speakers in specific historical and contemporary contexts. Recently, Terrence Wiley and Ofelia García (2016) published an important article offering a brief summary of the development and trends of language policy and planning research. Their article reiterated the multifaceted essence of language policy and warned us to be aware of the influence of economic neoliberalization on language education. Focusing on the global spread of English and the increasing demand of English language education, Kirkpatrick's new edited book presents a distinctive and timely volume on the developments and challenges of English language education in Asian countries. Given its highly informative nature, it would be a good reference book for policy-makers, curriculum designers, language teachers and graduate students to read for history and facts of English language education policy development in Asia.

Focusing on Asian contexts, the book offers a collection of 16 individual chapters on English language education policies across primary, secondary and tertiary levels in countries and regions including South Korea, Japan, China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam and Timor-Leste. Authors of these chapters have provided well-organised articles to introduce key information of LPP in the target countries. The book is set to provide answers in three domains: (1) the relationship of the spread of the English language and the English language ability for educational, economic, cultural and political equity, and the effects on local/indigenous languages; (2) educational challenges of current English language policies such as teacher education, English learning environment, national curriculums, pedagogies, English proficiency, and evaluation; and (3) approaches to improve English education policies.

The introductory chapter gives an overview of the following chapters. It begins with a brief account of recent trends in language policy research from the top-down conventional approach to the postmodern critical approach adopting bottom-up practices from macro to micro levels. This opening chapter ends with a brief summary of English language policies in the 16 countries to be presented in the following chapters. Nearly all the following 16 chapters are drawn from specific theoretical frameworks to undergird the perspectives chosen in each chapter to help readers understand the competing forces during English language policy formation and development in a particular country.

In particular, Macalister's chapter (pp. 333-344) presents an interesting case on English language education policy in Timor-Leste, a new country established in 2002. Portuguese is favored for nation-building purposes

at the expense of Tetun, a local language, while English and Bahasa Indonesia are used for practical purposes. The Timor-Leste case offers a good example of how one country manages to promote mother tongue education while making efforts to develop an additive multilingualism approach in national language policy planning. In a similar way, Gil's chapter (pp. 49-90) on English language education policies in the People's Republic of China is another excellent article in this book. It presents not only major historical phases of English language policy planning from kindergarten on, but also evolving teaching methodologies as well as popular and official views of English language use in contemporary Chinese society. In addition to these two chapters, all present the most important aspects of LPP in the particular country, therefore readers can expect to get closely relevant and up-to-date information from each chapter in this well-considered book.

To sum, this edited book is well presented and theoretically based and offers a very good combination of chapters on policies and practices in various countries. The only regrettable note is the lack of a discussion or concluding chapter to follow all these interesting cases. Understandably, this would further increase the length of the book, but would certainly help enhance its overall integrity as well as reserve a space to sketch out important agenda in future LPP research in the Asian context as a whole. Clearly, different challenges were met in different countries in the course of promoting English language education while balancing local languages and minority groups. Apart from this, this book is an important volume for its wealth of information on LPP in Asian contexts.

#### **Reference**

Wiley, T. G., & García, O. 2016. "Language Policy and Planning in Language Education: Legacies, Consequences, and Possibilities." *The Modern Language Journal* 100(S1): 48-63.

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