English in multilingual Asia: challenges and opportunities for multilingual education

AN INVITED PANEL
Panelists

- **Khaing Phyu Htut** (British Council, Myanmar)
- **Andy Kirkpatrick** (Griffith University, Australia)
- **John Knagg** (British Council)
- **Naashia Mohamed** (Maldives National University, Maldives)
Many Asian education systems are introducing English as a subject of study or a language of instruction in the early years of primary education or even in early childhood education.

This is mostly due to parental pressure to start earlier and teach more English.

How are Asian education systems coping with these demands and subsequent changes?

This panel discusses the role of English in education in Asian contexts in which English is not the first language of learners.
Session outline

- **Introduction**
  - Andy Kirkpatrick

- **Key questions about the role of English**
  - All panelists

- **Questions and comments from the floor**
The ASEAN Charter lists, as one of the 14 principles listed in Article 2, the need to have ‘respect for the different cultures, languages and religions of the people’s of ASEAN....in the spirit of unity in diversity’.

BUT, Article 34 of the ASEAN Charter states that ‘The working language of ASEAN shall be English’.
Introduction

How can the promotion of English as the sole working language be married to the need to respect ASEAN languages, cultures and religions?

What are the implications for language education policy and practice?

English is being introduced earlier and earlier into the primary curriculum in most countries. But is this successful? Is it at the expense of local languages?
Introduction

How can language education policy ensure children learn their L1, their national language and English?

How can language education policy ensure that English does not displace local languages from the school curriculum?

Can L1s, the national language and English be taught ‘additively’ so children graduate from school at least trilingual?
In which contexts should English be
- studied as a subject (EaS)
- used as a language of instruction? (EMI)

What real examples in Asia support the use of English as a language of instruction?
What examples cast doubt on this approach?
What does research say about the early introduction of English in schools of non-English speaking countries?

What is the appropriate age to:

- introduce English as a subject or
- use English as a language of instruction

Might delaying the introduction of English in schools be good even if parents request it?
Theme 3: Mother tongue, national and international languages

What is the appropriate balance of
- the first language,
- the national/official language/s, and
- English

in education systems which promote multilingual education?
Theme 4: Teachers

What challenges do Asian teachers face in order to provide good quality English education?

What is the proficiency of teachers in English?

What is teachers’ capacity to teach English/teach in English?
Questions and comments from the floor