

The Paradox of Achievement: English Language Education in Vietnam

English Language Education (ELE) in Vietnam has undergone significant changes in the last forty years. As the country becomes more deeply integrated into the international community, English proficiency has become an increasingly important skill. The amount of time, money, and resources poured into ELE is reflective of national policies expanding its use in both public and private sectors, where it is not uncommon to see students study the language for a decade or more.

Despite this emphasis, the current situation suggests a paradox: Vietnamese students invest substantial time into ELE, yet struggle to achieve fluency. This gap between policy and student outcomes has become an important topic of discussion in ELE circles across the region and beyond.

Thus, the focus of this paper will analyze and synthesize the existing literature across three key areas. First, it will explore the top-down policy-making environment, discussing how centrally mandated policy and curriculum development impact and influence student outcomes. Second, to further expand on policy, a specific analysis of the existing policies and conversations concerning how assessment is crafted and executed will be explored. Lastly, a review of the current methodology and pedagogical approaches that impact the current state of ELE in Vietnam will, hopefully, illuminate a path toward approaches that might improve student outcomes.

Primary author: ELLIOTT, Ryan (US Department of State)

Presenter: ELLIOTT, Ryan (US Department of State)

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