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Language Policy in English-Medium International Schools: Transparency, Policy Cycle, and Implications*

Clayton Lehman¹

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Abstract

Although many international schools sincerely seek student well-being, many school leaders and owners fail to grasp how language is a crucial factor contributing to student well-being. While many international schools seek outside endorsement to reflect their efforts toward student well-being, endorsement often fails to ensure the realization of intentions expressed in school policy, including a school language policy. Developing and implementing a formal written language policy can provide transparency and allow schools to formulate, implement, review, and revise a planned approach for language use throughout the school community, including instruction, assessment, and academic and social discourse. This cross-sectional study reports findings on language policy transparency and policy cycle completion in 1,633 English-medium international schools in 2020 and 1,892 in 2023 within countries in East and Southeast Asia. These findings reveal that while schools authorized, affiliated, or accredited by the Council of International Schools, International Baccalaureate Organization, and Western Association of Schools and Colleges were statistically more likely to have language policies compared to non-affiliated schools, only about four percent of the schools in 2020 and six percent in 2023 displayed a formal written language policy on their website. Further, only about two percent of the schools in 2020 and 2023 displayed a formal written language policy showing the review date within three years, possibly reflecting the completion of a policy cycle. Considering most students attending English-medium international schools are non-native English speakers, these findings should sound an alarm concerning student well-being in English-medium international schools worldwide.

Keywords: International schools, language policy, policy cycle, policy transparency

1. Introduction

The international school marketplace continues to expand worldwide, and while some schools faced closure during the COVID-19 pandemic, new schools entered the marketplace. According to recent data reported by International School Consultancy Research (ISCR, 2023a), there are now approximately 13,190 international schools worldwide, and considerable growth in the international school sector has occurred in Asia (Kim, 2019). Additionally, attending many international schools in Asia continues to increase, sometimes costing \$20,000, \$30,000, \$40,000, or more in yearly tuition and fees (Blake, 2019: 2023). ISCR (2023b) has reported that approximately 6.5 million students attend international schools worldwide. From the post-World War II years to today, the number of local students attending international schools has increased

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¹ Dr., Independent Researcher, 0000-0002-7347-5205, clwale@yahoo.com

substantially, with some entities reporting that enrollment of local students exceeds 80% of the international school population (Bunnell, 2014; ICEF Monitor, 2020; ISCR, 2019). It should be noted that many international schools using English as the medium of instruction are often comprised entirely of local students. Further, the demographics of many expatriate communities have been experiencing considerable change in recent years, and many expatriate students attending English-medium international schools are from non-native English-speaking countries (Lehman, 2020a).

An English-medium school is defined as a school where the instructional language is English (Gibbons, 2007). While there is much debate concerning the definition of the term international school (Elerian & Solomou, 2023; Hayden & Thompson, 1995; James & Sheppard, 2014; Pearce, 2023), ISCR (2023c) states that it reports data on English-medium international schools if schools use English as a medium of instruction in a country that does not list English as an official language or uses a curriculum that is not part of the host country's school system. Whether English is the only medium of instruction or is one of the mediums of instruction, international schools should carefully consider how language is taught and used within the community (Elerian & Solomou, 2023). Although many English-medium international school communities sincerely seek the well-being of the students, many international school leaders and owners fail to grasp how language is a crucial factor contributing to student well-being. Without an organized approach to language learning and use, there is the potential that student academic, emotional, and social well-being in English-medium international schools worldwide is at risk.

Within many English-medium international schools, one can see signage or hear administrators and teachers stating “English only.” While this statement reveals a policy, it is nothing more than an announcement or language use statement, which places most of the burden of responsibility upon the students. Because most students attending English-medium international schools are non-native English speakers, teachers in English-medium international schools are teachers of the English language (Crisfield, 2017). Therefore, schools must provide teaching staff with professional development to develop the knowledge and skills to be teachers of the English language (Lehman, 2021). English only without the appropriate support structures and language-specific professional development can affect student well-being, academically and socially, as they are positioned in a sink-or-swim linguistic environment (Carder, 2008; Krashen, 1981). Policymakers in English-medium international schools must realize the difference between teaching in English and teaching English (Lehman, 2021).

Cooper (1989) discussed how language-in-education or acquisition planning differed from governmental language planning. While acquisition planning via language policy in education almost always originates from the school leadership, implementation occurs at multiple levels. It should be noted that there is a distinguishable difference between policy-making and planning (Kennedy, 1982), with language planning involving more than just policy development (Das Gupta, 1973). Allowing stakeholders to see the language policy contents and that it experiences periodic evaluation is essential for having a well-informed school community. Therefore, policy transparency is critical to language-in-education planning or acquisition planning. An organized approach to language learning and use within an English-medium international school can help ensure students' academic, emotional, and social well-being by developing and implementing a transparent, formal written language policy.

1.1. Language Policy

A policy is a statement of what a governing body “intends to do or not to do” (Birkland, 2014: 203). According to Baldauf (1993: 83), “Language policy represents the decision-making process, formally stated or implicit, used to decide which languages will be taught to (or learned by) whom

for what purposes”. Ricento and Hornberger (1996) argued that a school language policy should detail what, how, and why. In many English-medium international schools, implicit language policy dominates the landscape, and the general assumption is made in many school communities that the school is English-only since a formal language policy was never developed, adopted, and implemented addressing the which, whom, what, how, and why of language use in the school community. When a school creates a language policy, puts the contents of the policy in writing, makes the policy transparent to the school community, and implements the policy, a formal written language policy is then in place. In addition to the which, whom, what, how, and why, as stated earlier, the where is also of critical importance, as in where students are to use one language or another or have the freedom to choose. In essence, a formal written language policy in an English-medium international school should address which, whom, what, how, why, and where of language within the school community.

Most English-medium international schools fail to specify more than one or two of the criteria mentioned above of language policy. Many schools stop at deciding which language to use without considering the other criteria, often becoming an implicit policy or a language use statement instead. Some schools announce a language policy without engaging in meaningful language planning. Resources are available to schools detailing steps for language policy development in schools. For example, the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO, 2012) provided a meaningful guide with reflective guiding questions to help schools develop or improve a school language policy. Regardless of the amount of reflection and effort in development that may take place, without implementation of the language policy, these announcements are merely statements of policy and will "not be sufficient to achieve successful goals" (Kennedy, 1982: 265).

1.2. Policy Cycle

Many school officials think issuing a policy statement is the end of the policy process (Darling-Hammond, 1990); however, there are subsequent actions that a policy should proceed through before completing a process known as a policy cycle. Anderson (2003) stated that a policy cycle includes problem identification and agenda setting, formulation, adoption, implementation, and evaluation. Sometimes, school leaders, owners, and organizations complete only the first few stages of the cycle, never implementing and evaluating the policy (Kennedy, 1982). Hall and McGinty (1997) encouraged viewing policy as the transformation of intentions as the policy extends beyond formation and progresses through implementation and evaluation, thus completing the policy cycle and repeating the cyclical process. Language policy should be considered as a continuous process (Cummins, 2001; Rubin, 1971).

1.3. Policy Transparency

After exploring the literature, the researcher concluded that studies reporting website usage for language policy transparency in schools were non-existent. However, research has been performed to measure the use of school websites for providing access to other critical information that can affect student well-being, such as policy protecting student privacy via the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Protection of Pupils Rights Amendment (PPRA). FERPA and PPRA are federal laws in the United States enacted in 1974 and 1978 to protect student privacy in schools receiving funding from the United States federal government. The U.S. Department of Education's Student Privacy Policy Office (SPPO, 2022) investigated 1504 school district websites (376 each year) over four years to see how they presented information concerning student privacy (FERPA & PPRA) and found that only 50% and 28% of schools posted the school's FERPA and PPRA policies on their websites (SPPO, 2022). The study further differentiated how the policies were posted, whether primary content on the website (less

than 20%) or in documents that could be downloaded from the website (54%), such as student handbooks. SPPO (2022) further found that only nine percent of the school websites reviewed in the study provided navigation options to where information could be found concerning study privacy. The results reported by SPPO (2022) demonstrate that many public school districts in the United States fail to provide transparency or bury information critical to student well-being even though the information is tied directly to United States federal law.

Often, transparency of policy is associated with accountability. Discussing the various meanings of transparency, Ball (2009: 303) stated one meaning of transparency as being "open decision-making is synonymous with transparency". However, the transparency of policy in this study focused on transparency as being part of open decision-making by a ruling body in a school community in the best interests of the school community. While the SPPO (2022) findings focused on accountability, the current study was conducted to uncover practices of language policy transparency of decision-making by the school's governance. Policy transparency can promote trust by giving the school community members access to information (Androniceanu, 2021). In its guidelines for making the school language policy a working document, IBO (2008) suggested that the language policy steering committee or school consider how it will communicate the contents of the language policy to the whole school community.

Policy transparency can create an informed community and promote stakeholder engagement. Studying citizen engagement with policy in the United States, Porumbescu, Belle, Cucciniello, and Nas (2019) found that as policy understanding increased, citizen engagement increased through co-production, which demonstrates links between policy transparency, understanding, and engagement with the contents of the policy. However, prior research on teacher knowledge of language policy in English-medium international schools in East Asia by Lehman and Welch (2020) found that of 387 participating teachers, 61.5% knew there was a policy, 13.4% knew there was not a policy, and 25.1% did not know if their schools had a language policy. In another study comparing teacher knowledge of language policy in English-medium international schools in and outside of East Asia, Lehman and Welch (2022) found comparable results, with 67.8% knowing their school had a language policy, 10.4% not having a policy, and 21.8% not knowing if there was a policy in their school. Lehman and Welch (2020, 2022) also compared participant responses of those who reported a language policy in their schools and found that only 42.2% and 33%, respectively, reported following the language policy consistently. The above data shows that teacher knowledge and co-production of school language policy should raise concern since teacher and student well-being is directly tied to which, whom, what, how, why, and where of language use within the school community.

Parent knowledge of language policy is crucial for a well-informed school community. Measuring parent knowledge of language policy in a single English-medium international school in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, by asking if there was knowledge of a rule that students should only speak English when at school, Lehman (2020a) found that 58% of 131 participants answered yes, 14% answered there was not a rule, and 28% did not know if there was a rule that students should only speak English when at school. The researcher reported being on the language policy steering committee, which developed a formal written language policy for the school that was submitted to the IBO for continued authorization and to the Council of International Schools (CIS) as an artifact for accreditation. However, the policy was never implemented nor posted on the school website or made available to the students, teaching staff, or parents of the school community.

Policy transparency is easily achievable by utilizing the school's website, which is already an established tool for communicating information to the school community. Policy transparency via a formal written language policy on a school website can enable stakeholders to be informed and increase the co-production of policy content. When communicating critical information to school

community members, school websites should have a search option, use accessible language, provide language translation options, and be user-friendly (Hawes, Morrisey & Rodriguez, 2014; SPPO, 2022).

1.4. Authorization, Affiliation, and Accreditation

Many English-medium international schools pursue outside endorsements as a means to seek legitimization in an often competitive market (Gross, 2023). These endorsements often occur via authorization, affiliation, or accreditation. According to ISCR (2018), parents view authorization and accreditation as indicators that schools are operating at a high level. However, Gross (2023: 11) pointed out that one of the multiple reasons for seeking affiliation was the "simple marketing strategy of keeping up with the Joneses, "which can cast a negative shadow on outside endorsements. Three commonly sought-after endorsements for English-medium international schools in East and South East Asia are the CIS, IBO, and Western Association of Schools Colleges (WASC). These authorizing or accrediting entities will send a team to evaluate the school's application; however, during the COVID-19 pandemic, evaluation visits were often conducted virtually (CIS, 2020; IBO, 2022; WASC, n.d.). Schools often submit artifacts to demonstrate their efforts and justify their application as part of obtaining authorization, affiliation, or accreditation. A language policy is a document often submitted as an artifact; however, it may not be required.

1.4.1. Council of International Schools (CIS)

Many English-medium international schools are members of the CIS. However, membership is not the same as having CIS accreditation, yet some schools with only membership status often display the CIS logo. CIS (2023a) expects its members to "Fulfill the promises stated in their guiding statements, contracts, and promotional materials", and "nurture a culture of care in which the education, safety, and well-being of students and others are paramount". CIS (2023b) explains how core membership standards help schools reflect critically on how schools provide for and evidence student well-being, high-quality learning and teaching, purpose and direction, and global citizenship. CIS (2023c) states that "accredited schools have been verified as delivering high-quality international education". CIS (2023c) further asserts to parents that with CIS accreditation, the school "has a clear purpose and direction, focuses on the quality of teaching and student progress, prioritizes student safeguarding and well-being".

1.4.2. International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO)

All schools offering one or more IBO programs must have a written language policy (IBO, 2008). IBO provides schools with information on how to develop a language policy and how to proceed through and complete the policy cycle. A critical component of language policy that IBO recommends to schools is forming a language policy steering committee, which should comprise a diverse representation of the school community. IBO requires that the language policy steering committee meet at least twice a year to review the language policy, make recommendations for revisions as determined, and conduct a full review every three years unless significant changes have been made in the interim (IBO, 2014).

1.4.3. Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)

WASC is a United States accreditation entity based in California that provides accreditation services to international schools outside the United States. According to WASC (2021: 1), through its philosophy statement, the primary goals of accreditation are to reflect "to the stakeholders and public that the school is a trustworthy institution of learning" and "the improvement of the school's

programs and operation to support student learning". WASC (2021: 1) states that part of its mission is to support schools seeking accreditation with rigorous self-evaluation and peer review to ensure schools are "doing everything possible to support high achievement and well-being for all students through a continuous improvement process". Under the requirements of the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA) in Thailand, WASC stated, "necessary evidence will be observed and may be collected; for instance, assessment data, assessment rubrics, report progress, achievement test results, interviews, homework and work assignments, language policy and assessment policy, etc." (WASC, 2018: 42).

1.5. Language Policy and Student Well-being

Leaders of English-medium international schools should ensure that their schools have a formal written language policy that addresses which, whom, what, how, why, and where of language use within the school community and that the policy has been implemented with appropriate support structures. Structures of support for language policy implementation include professional development to ensure teachers are provided with knowledge and training for implementing the policy. Often, support structures are lacking in English-medium international schools. For example, studying language-specific professional development for working with English language learners in English-medium international schools in East Asia, Lehman (2021) found that less than half of the more than five hundred teacher and administrator participants reported their schools provided medium, high, or very high levels of professional development for working with English language learners. English-medium international schools have an ethical duty to ensure that professional development for working with English language learners is provided to the teaching staff, including teaching assistants (Lehman, 2020b).

Teachers will choose to follow, alter, or create language policies in their classrooms, which can be helpful or harmful to the students (Menken, 2008; Throop, 2007). Therefore, school leadership and owners of English-medium international schools are responsible for ensuring school staff understand the contents of the school language policy and receive the training needed to successfully implement the language policy within the parameters defined inside the policy. Studying teacher adherence amongst participants who reported having a language policy, Lehman and Welch (2020, 2022) found that considerably less than half consistently followed the language policy. The findings of Lehman and Welch's (2020, 2022) studies revealed that most teacher participants in English-medium international schools were altering or recreating language policy within their classrooms.

Most English-medium international school students learn and use English as a second or additional language. While many of those students have the language ability in English to communicate and negotiate their social standing within the school community, some students lacking communicative ability are less fortunate. Because each student's language ability is unique to that student, students must be provided with a linguistic environment that ensures their well-being, both academically and socially. In a small-scale study of preschool-aged students at an English-medium international school in China, Lehman (2017) found that due to an implied English-only policy and policy confusion, some students did not report bullying behavior due to a lack of English language ability. Overall, the academic and social well-being of English language learners in English-medium international schools often hinges on whether English development teachers and classroom teachers have a firm understanding of their respective roles (Shoebottom, 2009) and stakeholder knowledge, buy-in, and adherence to a school's formal written language policy.

1.6. Aim of the Study

The researcher worked in international schools in China, South Korea, and Vietnam; further, the researcher visited other international schools in those countries. In all those schools, the researcher never saw a language policy in the written form displayed inside or outside the school that gave specific information about how language was taught and used within the school community. Additionally, the researcher never saw a language policy made available to parents when touring a school or enrolling their child or children in a school. There is the possibility that some schools may have a language policy stored in a location, such as a Google Drive or Microsoft Platform; however, these are usually not accessible to all members of the school community. For example, when the researcher was an English as an Additional Language (EAL) Coordinator at an international school, a language policy existed in a folder on Microsoft SharePoint; however, the teachers and some administrators were unaware of its existence. Further, access to Microsoft SharePoint at that school was unavailable to parents and students. Therefore, the researcher views the most accessible point of access to share information with the whole school community and prospective members as the school's website.

This research study examined language policy transparency and policy cycle completion in English-medium international schools in East and Southeast Asia. The researcher developed the following research questions to guide the study:

- What percentage of schools have a formal written language policy on their website?
- What percentage of formal written language policies posted on school websites reflect evidence of completing a policy cycle?
- How much more likely are schools authorized, affiliated, or accredited by the CIS, IBO, and WASC to display a formal written language policy on their website than those not affiliated with these entities?
- What is the overall trend in language policy transparency on English-medium international school websites?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

The researcher employed a cross-sectional design to study language policy transparency in English-medium international schools utilizing school websites and policy cycle completion by viewing language policy content uploaded to the school websites. When conducting cross-sectional research, data are collected at one point in time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this study, the researcher collected two sets of data at two different points in time. While most of the data were collected from the same subjects, the second set contained additional subjects that were not identified previously, were new schools, or were reclassified due to a change in entity affiliation. Additionally, some subjects from the first data set were not included in the second due to school closures. All data were observational data. Most of the data were gathered using the subjects' websites, and some data were triangulated with the websites of the entities offering authorization, affiliation, or accreditation services. Although the researcher studied and tracked individual subjects, to protect the anonymity of the individual subjects, the researcher chose not to report individualized findings.

2.2. Sampling

The researcher used the websites for the following entities to generate a listing of English-medium international schools in the countries and city-states listed in Table 1.

- CIS
- Google Maps
- IBO
- International Schools Advisor
- International Schools Database
- International Schools Review
- WASC

Table 1*Countries, City-states, and Number of Schools by Year*

Country	Schools 2020	Schools 2023
Brunei	7	7
Cambodia	53	64
China	316	462
Hong Kong	116	121
Indonesia	154	160
Japan	212	236
Laos PDR	8	11
Malaysia	171	178
Mongolia	6	8
Myanmar	28	32
Papua New Guinea	18	19
Philippines	96	99
Republic of Fiji	4	4
Singapore	83	83
Solomon Island	1	1
South Korea	71	86
Taiwan	49	58
Thailand	170	181
Timor	1	1
Tonga	1	1
Vanuatu	1	1
Vietnam	67	79
Totals	1633	1892

In 2020, the researcher identified 1633 English-medium international schools in the countries and city-states documented in Table 1. Later, the researcher identified 1892 English-medium international schools in the exact locations in 2023.

2.3. Data Collection Process

All data gathered originated from online sources, primarily the subjects' websites. There were two sets of data collected. For the first set, the researcher collected data from the websites of 1633 English-medium international schools during January, February, and March of 2020. The second set of data collection occurred between January and March of 2023, in which 1892 school websites were examined. Subjects added in the second data set were primarily identified via Google Maps, International Baccalaureate, International Schools Advisor, and International Schools Database. Using the definition of what constitutes an English-medium international school as given in the introduction, the researcher decided to include each subject. Most subjects' websites were presented in English or provided a language option. Some websites were presented only in the host country's language. For these websites, the researcher used Google or Bing Translate to navigate the website using English.

The researcher developed and maintained a listing of school names and websites organized by country and city-state. When examining the websites, the researcher noted affiliation or non-affiliation with CIS, IBO, and WASC. Affiliation claims were cross-referenced with CIS, IBO, and WASC websites. If a school listed an affiliation with one of those entities but was not listed on the affiliation website, that school was deemed not affiliated with the claimed entity. After documenting affiliation or non-affiliation status, the researcher searched the website for a language policy. The website for each school identified, examined, and cataloged during the first data collection was viewed again during the second set.

While some schools claimed to have a language policy, often, the language policy was nothing more than a language use statement. For example, a school may state that English is the medium of instruction. The researcher classified this as a language use statement since it only stated the obvious and provided no details beyond English being the medium of instruction. If the policy provided more information beyond a language use statement that revealed information relevant to the IBO (2012) or the what, how, and why put forth by Ricento and Hornberger (1996), the policy was documented as a formal written language policy. The researcher downloaded or electronically captured all language policies and language use statements to analyze them and make cross-comparisons. At times, schools used different names for what constitutes a language policy. These names were sometimes presented as an EAL or English as a Second Language (ESL) policy.

2.4. Data Analysis

The researcher used Google Sheets to perform Pearson chi-square tests with a confidence number of .05. The Pearson chi-square test can analyze the frequencies of non-parametric nominal data (McHugh, 2013; Salkind & Frey, 2020). All Pearson chi-square tests used 2x2 contingency tables, and all Pearson chi-square tests except the last one measured data within a single set. The final Pearson chi-square test evaluated the two data sets to capture a picture of the overall trend of language policy in English-medium international schools between the two points in time.

2.5. Ethics Committee Permission

Ethical approval was not pursued since data was collected from online websites open to the public. The researcher did not reveal the individual identity of the subjects. No living things were used in the study. For these reasons, the study does not have an ethics committee document.

3. Findings

3.1. Findings in 2020

In 2020, the researcher identified 1633 English-medium international schools. Of those 1633 schools, 60 (3.67%) displayed a formal written language policy on their website. Of those 60 policies, 36 had a date within three years, five had dates greater than three years, and 19 were undated. Additionally, ten schools had a language use statement posted on their website. Table 2 presents the number of schools by affiliation, with language policies and language use statements. One school stated that a language policy was available upon request.

It should be noted that some schools had more than one affiliation. For example, while the researcher identified 60 formal written language policies, the number of schools listed in Table 2 to have a formal written language policy on their school website is 69. The researcher considered the difference between 60 and 69 to be insignificant in the outcomes of the findings, considering the numbers involved. However, this non-distinction is a limitation of the study. The researcher

points out that when comparisons were made, the category of non-affiliated schools was placed at a disadvantage. This holds for the second set of findings in 2023.

Table 2

Number of Schools with a Formal Written Language Policy or Language Use Statement in 2020 out of 1633

Affiliation	Total Number	Schools with a Formal Written Language Policy	Schools with a Language Use Statement
CIS	189	8	1
IBO	500	44	2
WASC	250	6	4
Non-affiliated	907	11	5

Each affiliation listed in Table 2 contained schools with a formal written language policy on their websites. Additionally, fewer schools displayed a language use statement. While some revealed a policy or statement, the overall number was small compared to 1633.

Table 3 presents the results of Pearson chi-square tests in posting a formal written language policy on the school website in 2020 between English-medium international schools affiliated with CIS, IBO, and WASC and schools not affiliated with those entities.

Table 3

Pearson Chi-square Tests 2020 for Language Policy between Affiliated and Non-affiliated Schools

Year	Group 1	<i>n</i>	Group 2	<i>n</i>	χ^2 (1, <i>N</i> =)	Test Statistic	<i>p</i> Value
2020	CIS	<i>n</i> =189	Non-affiliated	<i>n</i> =907	χ^2 (1, <i>N</i> =1096)	8.374	<i>P</i> =0.004
2020	IBO	<i>n</i> =500	Non-affiliated	<i>n</i> =907	χ^2 (1, <i>N</i> =1407)	49.397	<i>P</i> <0.001
2020	WASC	<i>n</i> =250	Non-affiliated	<i>n</i> =907	χ^2 (1, <i>N</i> =1157)	1.908	<i>P</i> =0.167

Table 3 shows statistically significant differences between CIS and non-affiliated schools and IBO and non-affiliated schools in posting language policies on school websites in 2020. However, there was no statistically significant difference between WASC and non-affiliated schools.

3.2. Findings in 2023

In 2023, the researcher identified 1892 English-medium international schools. Of those 1892 schools, 115 (6.08%) displayed a formal written language policy. Table 4 presents the number of schools by affiliation, with language policies and language use statements.

Table 4

Number of Schools with a Formal Written Language Policy or Language Use Statement in 2023 out of 1892

Affiliation	Total Number	Schools with a Formal Written Language Policy	Schools with a Language Use Statement
CIS	239	20	13
IBO	712	84	11
WASC	297	21	13
Non-affiliated	891	16	13

Of those 115 policies, 45 had a date within three years, 33 had dates greater than three years, and 37 were undated. Additionally, 41 schools had a language use statement posted on their website. One school stated that a language policy was available upon request, and another school claimed to have a password-protected language policy. Once again, it should be noted that some schools had more than one affiliation.

Table 5 presents the results of Pearson chi-square tests in posting a formal written language policy on the school website in 2023 between English-medium international schools affiliated with CIS, IBO, and WASC and schools not affiliated with those entities.

Table 5

Pearson Chi-square Tests 2023 for Language Policy between Affiliated and Non-affiliated Schools

Year	Group 1	<i>n</i>	Group 2	<i>n</i>	χ^2 (1, <i>N</i> =)	Test Statistic	<i>p</i> Value
2023	CIS	<i>n</i> =239	Non-affiliated	<i>n</i> =891	χ^2 (1, <i>N</i> =1130)	26.393	<i>P</i> <0.001
2023	IBO	<i>n</i> =712	Non-affiliated	<i>n</i> =891	χ^2 (1, <i>N</i> =1603)	67.687	<i>P</i> <0.001
2023	WASC	<i>n</i> =297	Non-affiliated	<i>n</i> =891	χ^2 (1, <i>N</i> =1188)	20.541	<i>P</i> <0.001

As seen in Table 5, there were statistically significant differences in the posting of language policies on school websites between the affiliated and non-affiliated schools in 2023.

3.3. Overall Comparison of 2020 and 2023

A Pearson chi-square test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in the posting of a formal written language policy on the school website between the years 2020 (Group 1: *n* = 1633) and 2023 (Group 2: *n* = 1892), χ^2 (1, *N* = 3525) = 10.736, *p* = 0.001).

Table 6 uses data from Tables 2 and 4 to show the overall trend in English-medium international schools using the school's website for language policy transparency by affiliation status.

Table 6

Language Policy Transparency by Affiliation and Year

Affiliation	2020 Total	With LP	Percentage with LP	2023 Total	With LP	Percentage with LP
CIS	189	8	4.2%	239	20	8.4%
IBO	500	44	8.8%	712	84	11.8%
WASC	250	6	2.4%	297	21	7.1%
Non-affiliated	907	11	1.2%	891	16	1.8%

While each affiliation status experienced an increase in the percentage of schools demonstrating language policy transparency, non-affiliated schools increased the least.

4. Discussion and Results

In both data sets, the authorized, affiliated, and accredited schools were more likely to have a formal written language policy on their websites. While the percentage of schools displaying a formal written language policy increased slightly from 2020 to 2023, less than 10% of the schools in 2023 displayed a policy. These results should raise concern about the role of outside endorsements in the international school marketplace, as they could significantly affect student well-being.

While the number of schools having a formal written language policy increased from 2020 to 2023, the percentage of schools displaying a policy dated within three years decreased. In 2020, 60% of the 60 website language policies reflected a date revealing the policy had been reviewed. However, only 39% of the 115 language policies in 2023 had a date reflecting being reviewed within three years. It should be noted that most language policies were on websites of schools that the IBO authorizes to offer one or more of the IBO programs. When considering the total number of schools in 2020, only 2.2% of the 1633 schools had a formal written language policy with a date reflecting the policy experienced some form of review. In 2023, only 3.2% of the formal written language policies had a date that reflected the policy experienced some form of review. While the researcher chose to use a window of three years, language policy steering committees in schools authorized by IBO must meet at least twice each year to review the policy and perform a complete review every three years (IBO, 2014). The data revealed that many language policies are not completing a policy cycle. These results should raise concern about the role of outside endorsements in the international school marketplace, as they can impact on student well-being.

Overall, authorized, affiliated, or accredited schools were statistically more likely to have a formal written language policy displayed on the school's website than non-affiliated schools. While schools authorized by IBO were the most transparent, each affiliation status experienced an increase in the percentage of language policy transparency using the school's website. Whereas 50% and 28% of schools posting FERPA and PPRA policies on their websites (SPPO, 2022) were tied to federal law in the United States, English-medium international schools are under little obligation to be transparent. Only 3.7% in 2020 and 6.1% in 2023 of English-medium international schools posted language policies on their websites. Overall, the lack of transparency resides with the school leadership and owners, and the researcher raises the concern of ethical practice by many school leaders and owners.

Using data from Table 2, only 6.2% in 2020 and 10.0% in 2023 of English-medium international schools that were authorized, affiliated, and accredited by the CIS, IBO, and WASC had a formal written language policy on their website. These data cast doubt and suspicion on the rigor and pursuit of student well-being claimed by many schools and entities offering authorization, affiliation, and accreditation (CIS, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; IBO, 2008, 2014; WASC, 2021). While it may be the case that some schools are pursuing the "simple marketing strategy of keeping up with the Joneses" (Gross, 2023: 11), school leaders and owners, evaluation teams, and entities offering authorization, affiliation, and accreditation services are underserving many English-medium international school communities. With many parents viewing authorization and accreditation as indicators that schools are operating at a high level (ISCR, 2018), the researcher raises the potentiality of a high rate of fraud occurring within the marketplace of English-medium international schools in East and Southeast Asia.

A notable limitation of the study was the researcher's decision to use website transparency to explore language policy transparency in English-medium international schools. Another important limitation of the study was the researcher's decision-making process based on IBO (2012) and Ricento and Hornberger (1996) as a basis for differentiating between what constituted a formal written language policy versus a language use statement. While the assumptions for the Pearson chi-square tests were not violated (McHugh, 2013), additional limitations could apply to the overall 2020 and 2023 data comparison. These limitations include additions, attrition, and affiliation changes in the 2023 data set.

5. Conclusion

Language policy transparency using school websites is severely lacking in the English-medium international school marketplace. Very few schools are posting language policies on their

websites, and even fewer schools are showing evidence that their language policy has experienced the completion of a policy cycle. While authorized, affiliated, or accredited schools are statistically more likely to have a language policy on their website than those without, the percentage is under 10%. While some schools may have an alternative way to communicate their language policy to the school community, many schools do not. Therefore, there is a possibility that many schools are not communicating and implementing an organized approach to language instruction and language use within the school community, which can place student well-being for many students at risk.

The data showed that most schools were not using their websites to display a language policy. Because policy transparency using the school's website is relatively easy, the lack of language policies casts doubts on whether many schools have a language policy. The lack of a formal written language policy can reveal that a school has not engaged in critical self-evaluation of which, whom, what, how, why, and where concerning language instruction and use within the school community. Without an organized approach to language learning and use within the school, school staff are not working consistently and cohesively, and students may be subjected to a sink-or-swim learning environment (Carder, 2008; Krashen, 1981). A sink-or-swim learning environment can negatively affect students' academic and social well-being at school. It could further affect student well-being at home since the parents are paying considerable amounts of money for school tuition and fees (Blake, 2023), sometimes based on their perceptions that the school is a quality school due to school advertisements touting the school's affiliation(s) and/or endorsement(s).

The researcher encourages school community members, including teachers and parents, to ensure the school leadership and owners pursue developing, implementing, and reviewing a formal written language policy. The researcher suggests that school leadership and owners ensure that a formal written language policy is communally developed and that the policy is implemented with the necessary support structures to make the implementation successful. This includes creating policy buy-in amongst the community and professional development for all teaching staff members, including teaching assistants. Further, the researcher suggests that school leadership and owners make the formal written language policy transparent to the whole school community. The researcher suggests schools place the formal written language policy as primary content and label it as a language policy on the school's website. The researcher suggests that agencies providing authorization, affiliation, or accreditation services that purport to focus on student well-being ensure that a formal written language policy is developed, implemented, reviewed, and revised as needed regularly.

The researcher suggests further research into policy transparency in international schools. Additionally, the researcher encourages further research into authorization, affiliation, accreditation entities, and auditing mechanisms and practices. While the researcher focused on CIS, IBO, and WASC, numerous other entities offer endorsement services, and the researcher suggests that future research expand the scope of policy transparency investigation to include other entities that provide authorization, affiliation, and accreditation. The researcher further suggests that research be conducted into accountability practices amongst agencies and schools. Lastly, the researcher suggests research into language policy formation, implementation, review, and policy cycle in international schools.

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Ethics Committee Permission

Ethical approval was not pursued since data was collected from online websites open to the public. The researcher did not reveal the individual identity of the subjects. No living things were used in the study. For these reasons, the study does not have an ethics committee document.