

Control Yuan member Peter Chang (彭昌) on Friday last week issued a report instructing the Ministry of Education to investigate why four universities that are receiving special funding to offer more English-language courses have failed to do so.

Less than 1 percent of these schools' expenditures have gone toward improving English courses, while the offerings of such courses had either remained the same or declined, and none had a metric to determine course quality or screen students for their English-language ability.

Nearly a year since the Executive Yuan announced its goal of making Taiwan a bilingual nation by 2030, Chang's report has exposed the idea's lack of groundwork and practicality.

When it was proposed, many people criticized the policy as an unnecessary waste of resources, but it succeeded in its primary task of bringing the issue to the public forum. A concrete policy to become bilingual by 2030 inspires more energy than an abstract idea to "improve people's English."

However, the policy's aim to organize "a demand-driven push to strengthen the English-language abilities of all people" does not mesh with its short-term plan, which primarily consists of creating bilingual versions of government documents and services aimed at foreigners.

The only suggestions it offers to improve English-language education are to use "digital technology" and revise education-related laws to make it easier for education providers to offer greater innovation in their learning environments.

Asked if the government would seek additional funding for the initiative, National Development Council Minister Chen Mei-ling (陳梅玲) in an interview with the *Taipei Times* in December last year said that agencies could "use their existing funds to promote English," while individuals could use free online learning tools.

## Reviving English-language policy

Written by Taipei Times Editorial  
Friday, 19 July 2019 04:55

---

With such short-sightedness, it is no wonder that the policy has faded into the background. Without additional funding, how will agencies hire people to translate so much material? In addition, the problem with online learning tools is not that people are unaware of them — how many people have Duolingo or Drops on their cellphones, but never use them?

There is no lack of desire among Taiwanese to learn English, but there is a lack of institutional dedication. There is also no lack of desire among schools to offer English-language courses, but most struggle to find teachers and develop coherent curricula. This is where the government should focus its efforts.

Chang suggested that the ministry and schools work together to develop teacher-training programs and to provide incentives for teachers to offer classes in English, as the key to establishing an English-taught curriculum is systematic training for teachers in English and education.

At the university level, many professors have studied abroad and have sufficient command of English, but are hesitant to offer English-language courses, as they would need to put significant effort into brushing up their language skills and developing a new curriculum. With a little training and enhanced incentives — whether financial or otherwise — the quality of English coursework at a number of institutions could be improved quickly.

For other institutions, the government needs to seriously consider how to solve the teacher problem. The answer could be easing immigration requirements and increasing incentives for foreign teachers, building a more robust teacher training program or some other combination of ideas.

The bilingual policy, while a step in the right direction to initiate action on the issue, has so far proved to be little more than a slogan. If the government is serious about developing a more English-savvy populace, it needs to think about the meat before worrying about the dressings.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2019/07/19](#)