



# English Language Education at Vietnamese Buddhist Universities Compared to Buddhist Universities Worldwide

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**Abstract**— *The present paper examines the position of English language teaching in Vietnamese Buddhist colleges and compares this situation to that found in Buddhist universities around Asia and the West. In a time of globalisation, English has become the lingua franca in academia and elsewhere not only for academic exchange and research but also transnational Buddhist dialog. While the Vietnamese Buddhist academies have experienced significant institutional expansion, this has not yet necessarily translated into monastic students with robust English-language skills necessary for meaningful connections in global academic networks. Building on applied linguistics theories, such as EMI/CLIL (English-Medium Instruction / Content and Language Integrated Learning), combined with sociocultural frameworks, our study proposes that the knowledge gap seen in language use is not the result of cultural unfitness or intellectual inability but systemic and pedagogical incongruities. In the context of Vietnamese Buddhist learning, English is seen more as an adjunct than critical tool for thought and doctrinal reflection. It also goes into psychological factors including foreign language anxiety, shyness and lack of confidence being substantiated by some Vietnamese recent studies. In comparing Buddhist universities in Singapore, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Australia and the United States it is concluded that institutions which manage to integrate English as a core academic medium effectively produce more globally engaged monastic scholars. The paper closes with a call for reform that would enable English to become an upāya-type skillful means of contemporary Dharma transmission. This shift requires an institutional policy adjustment, integrated pedagogical methods and emotional support for the learners.*



**Keywords**— *English Language Education, ELT, Vietnam Buddhist University*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Indeed, the three first decades of the twenty-first century have been a transformative period for Buddhist higher education with monastic scholarship becoming rapidly globalized, exchanges across national borders multiplying and collaboration across cultural divides gaining momentum. The metropolis constructed out of Dharma transmission has become a world wide academic pursuit where Buddhist learning enter into conversation with the world wide standards science, pedagogy and communication. Philosophical conferences concerning Buddhism are held in cities such as Singapore, Kyoto,

Sydney, and Los Angeles; early canonical texts have been digitized and spread through transnational databases; the movement of monks and nuns between Asia and the West is a normative practice. At the heart of this entire universe is a common academic language: English. Irrespective of theological affiliation or country of origin, it is in English that Buddhist thought now engages with the modern world.

In this emerging intellectual ecology, the ability to speak and read a language is not just convenient; it is also both a condition of scholarly visibility and epistemic playing field (or so we argue). It is implied that language competence (English reading, writing and speaking) is the pre-requisite

for publishing, presenting research works as well as academic discussion. As a result, English in Buddhist higher education is no longer an extracurricular foreign language but an instrument of the mind. In English-infused Buddhist studies as a medium of instruction, language of research and the lingua franca of inter-monastic communiqué it appears as a forceful factor in Vipassanā's intellectual modernization. On the other hand, if it is marginalized to the fringes and reduced to supplementary grammar or translation drills, it may become nothing more than a token.

Symbolically located in this reconfiguration of planetary coordinates are Vietnamese Buddhist institutions. These academies have drawn more resources and students, and expanded in size in terms of infrastructure, student population as well as scope of curriculum over the past 40 years. The B.A.s at VBA's in Ho Chi Minh City, Hue and Hanoi churn out hundreds of graduates each year, many who continue to post graduate studies or become teachers for the Sangha. Their courses cover the entire range of classical Buddhist philosophy as well Pāli and Sanskrit studies, ethics psychology and social service fields and are testimony to both intellectual excellence and spiritual depth. And yet, despite this institutional strength, there is one shortcoming that has been both intractable and well known: the poor English competence of their monastic students and alumni.

This deficiency carries tangible consequences. Not many Vietnamese monks or nuns could learn further research in international Buddhist conferences and publish on overseas English journals. Translation of Vietnamese Buddhist studies into English is spotty, but the import of Western or regional English-language research far eclipses domestic output. This asymmetry is not just linguistic but epistemological, because without proficiency in English, Vietnamese monks and nuns are relegated as the receptacle rather than the engine of global Buddhist exchange.

This paper aims at identifying the theoretical, institutional and psychological sources which contribute to this gap between Buddhist universities in Vietnam and those in Singapore, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Australia and USA. It argues that the relative incompetence in English of Vietnamese monastics is not simply a manifestation of intrinsic intellectual or cultural insufficiency, but is constituted through the interrelationship between prevalent pedagogical models and material contexts. Out of these, the marginalisation of English and its teaching as a subject outside that of Buddhism as opposed to one through which doctrinal and philosophical meanings are constructed. Put more simply, English is made to be of Buddhism not in Buddhism.

To underpin the claim, reference is selectively made to some of recent Vietnamese work in this area including especially Phan Thi Ngoc Le (2025) on page 1610 volume 7 of ICTE Conference Proceedings who carried out an empirical study that examined psychological barriers related to student success of English-speaking presentations. Though Le's study took place in the more general university environment, its insights can be easily applied to monastic education, where comparable affective and cognitive processes are at work. Le pinpointed anxiety, shyness, lack of confidence and low motivation as the hindering factors for speaking performance. Her findings from quantitative and qualitative studies of students in a Presentation Skills course taken at Vietnam National University, indicated that even well-trained participants, when it came to live communication experience panic resulting from worrying what other people will think about them and were overly anxious to show their best side. This cluster of psychological variables (referred to as foreign language anxiety) was determined to be a more powerful predictor for success in second/foreign language use than linguistic ability alone (Le, 2025, pp. 56–60).

Even in the Buddhist context, Le's findings take on added relevance. Monastic learners are trained in an ethic of humility, self-discipline, and putting the self on the line important qualities for spiritual practice but not necessarily valuable criteria when speaking forcefully in a new language. A monk who is reluctant to "show the self" in public speech can unconsciously assimilate linguistic silence as a moral value. Therefore, the deficiencies of Vietnamese monastics in expressing ideas in English are not simply a matter of poor vocabulary or grammar, but should also be seen as examples of cultural-psychological disjuncture between monastic modesty and the concrete stylistic requirements of academic discourse.

More generally, the institutional ecology of Vietnamese Buddhist education is a contributing factor. In contrast to education in Singapore or Thailand, where English medium instruction (EMI) is increasingly the norm for religious higher learning, Vietnamese academies still deliver all doctrinal and philosophical units of study through the medium of Vietnamese or else, Sometimes 8 Dr Kenneally & Blind conventionally added-do quadratic Sino-Vietnamese and classical languages (i.e., Pāli). English, where it is provided, is an optional offering or a course of study (usually light credit-weight) also frequently uncoupled from core academic subject matter. Therefore, learners of English meet it as an item to be studied, not an instrument for thought. This structural division produces a compartmentalized form of bilingualism: monks think in Buddhist doctrine in Vietnamese and learn English as a mechanical code unrelated to such doctrinal reasoning.

In comparison, institutions such as the Buddhist College of Singapore (Singapore), International Buddhist Studies College (Thailand) and Nan Tien Institute (Australia) operate with English as the primary means for communication and cognitive language. Lectures in Abhidhamma, Mahāyāna philosophy, and Buddhist ethics are conducted in English; teachers tutor research, including writing and peer review, in English; students present at international colloquia with English as the unmarked norm. So the linguistic environment becomes ever more closed: English proficiency is not an external criterion, it defines the interior of how one participates. In such a situation, fluency is simply the side effect of disciplinary osmosis.

But Vietnamese schools continue to be positioned within a monolingual national context with little use of English outside the classroom. Monastics seldom speak and study with foreign students or teachers including international scholars for any length of time on campus, not do they have institutionalized relationships with Buddhist universities in British which teach in English. What that creates is an environment of low exposure, so English ability plateaus despite some presence in the curriculum.

The task is, then, pedagogical and philosophical. For pedagogy, it demands a restructuring of curricula to join language with content in the EMI or CLIL. In a philosophical sense, it requires a return to the question of language in Buddhist education. For the teachings of the Buddha have in general, over history, adjusted to linguistic diversity from Pāli to Chinese to Tibetan — in order to transport insight among cultures. For us, of course, in the modern world, English serves this mediating role. Instead of being inauthentic, attempting to study Buddhism in English is an extension of the tradition of *upāya* even if we regard it as a very temporary measure.

The core argument in this article is that the inferiority of English among monastic trainees does not owe to cultural incompetence, but communication gaps and pedagogical misfits. English as now taught does not form so much a part of the constitution in Buddhist intellect, as it does an adjunct to its formation. It will not shift as an organ of thought—a site for reading canons, formulating doctrine, or participating in global scholarship—until it is repositioned. The challenge for educators and policy-makers then is to conceive of English not as a foreign language at all but as bridge between Dharma and modernity; an updated instantiation in fact, of the long historical trajectory by way of which Buddhism has always sounded its voice anew in every tongue.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. Language, Thought, and the Medium of Buddhist Scholarship

An implicit philosophy of language underpins every type of education— an un verbalized view of how the form of language mediates its content. This interrelationship has been crucial to the development of Buddhist lineages. From the conversion of Magadhan dialects into Pāli, to the Sanskritization of Mahāyāna texts and later Sinicized versions of the canon, every age has readapted doctrinal language into a new idiom. Never has language resources been neutral; they rather are a deposit of cognitive experience that has much to say on how reality, doctrine and practice are apprehended.

And in the 21st century, English is the newest member of this historical line of adaptation. As the world's lingua franca of academic exchanges, not only does it help one to communicate, but also to legitimate forms of knowing. To study something in English or teach it at the university means to operate within this sphere of international scholarship; for here resides peer reviewed (and genius as well;) citation and research accessibility. Thus, for Buddhist higher education, English functions as an external language of access, and also an internal one of reasoning. As English becomes the “interlocutor” through which Buddhist ideas are explored and repackaged, it promotes something that we might call cognitive bilingualism, thinking about Buddhist philosophy across two semantic domains at once. If, on the other hand, it remains the sole foreign language offered in isolation it will fail to live up to its transforming potential.

This is the theoretical assumption of this study, that the linguistic media has a direct influence on epistemic reach. The gap in English proficiency between Vietnamese Buddhist academies and their foreign counterparts, then, might best be understood not just as a pedagogical deficiency, but as indicative of the structural discrepancy between language policy and knowledge production.

### 2.2. English Medium Instruction (EMI) and CLIL in Religious Higher Education

In applied linguistics, the constructs EMI and CLIL have gained prominence as vital to our understanding of the intersection of language and content. Although the term EMI as suggested by Macaro (2018) is defined as the teaching of academic subjects in English, where this is not the students' first language. Though was not an actual concept formed from the theoreticians it is possible to consider CLIL as a European instance of content and language integrated learning for two reasons: there are educational reforms in Europe, only few countries have these programmes and they must not necessarily be adopted by schools.

One important point of divergence between these models concerns the role played by English. In the traditional language classroom, Teaching English as a Foreign Language tends to be very objectified - ELT seems often only to be a set of grammatical rules and vocabulary lists. In contrast, EMI and CLIL have English as the medium of interaction with disciplinary knowledge. This transition has profound implications for the classroom: students read real texts, debate ideas and write analytical essays in English outside of their scientific studies which leads them to develop greater academic literacy (as well as understanding of concepts).

What is more, findings from empirical studies in the latter part of this century tend to confirm that integrated programs are effective. As shown by Byrne and Macaro (2019) as well as Dafouz & Smit (2020), the resulting observations are that EMI students generate contrasting levels of disciplinary vocabulary retention, pragmatic fluency, and intercultural competence from their counterparts in traditional English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programmes. Significantly, no additional instruction hours are added to achieve this improvement but the teaching of English is embedded in content and is experiential.

Applying these insights to Buddhist higher education leads to an inevitable conclusion: if Buddhist colleges and universities do not adopt EMI or CLIL in some way—by teaching Abhidhamma, Buddhist logic, or morals in English—their students' language development will be stunted. This is symptomatic of the structural distinction we see between Vietnam and countries such as for instance Thailand or Sri Lanka where main Buddhist universities already have English-medium colleges (see for instance the International Buddhist Studies College at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University).

### 2.3. Quality Assurance and Linguistic Policy

Competence to work in language does not flourish in a vacuum; it is supported by institutional structures that mandate quality control and reporting. Within secular higher education, accrediting bodies such as TEQSA (Australia) and WSCUC (U.S.) also spell out requirements for English competency of faculty and students. The Nan Tien Institute, for example, has to show that their curricula meet national English standards (TEQSA, 2023). These kinds of mechanisms require curriculum developers to align pedagogy, testing, and faculty development with empirically measured linguistic results.

Vietnamese Buddhist institutions, on the other hand, work within a semiautonomous religious system. Their titles are recognized by the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and not by the Ministry of Education and Training's international

accreditation system. As a result, there are no uniform entry or exit expectations for English proficiency. This lack of external assessment means that there is a wide range: some of the academies focus on Pāli and/or Chinese to the exclusion of modern languages, others run courses in English to differing degrees or duration. Lacking clear objectives, even if students are motivated there is no clear incentive to become communicatively competent.

The ICTE 74 study is an exemplar snippet of how systematic quality assurance can work. Le's (2025, p. 61) investigation showed that the students' entering levels, B1 level under Vietnam's national six-level framework was a must in order to take Presentation Skills course. This requirement allowed for a basic communicative foundation to be in place so that the instructor could focus on higher-level speaking skills (e.g., audience analysis, organization, and critical reflection). Reliability coefficients greater than 0.70 indicate that learning was evident through a structured 15-wk process of theory, practice and feedback. The lesson was clear: when explicit linguistic standards are enforced as policy, students learn. On the other hand, when rule exists informally or not at all, stagnation occurs.

### 2.4. The Psychology of SecondLanguage Performance

If structural and policy factors explain some of the institutional differences, performance at individual level is largely influenced by psychological determinants. We have seen that linguistic SLA has been confirmed to acknowledge more and more the key role of affects, motivation, self-efficacy, and anxiety, in prompting successful learning. Krashen's (1982) "affective filter" hypothesis is fundamental one here: emotional stress can create a barrier to turning comprehensible input into acquired competence.

Findings from Phan Thi Ngoc Le's (2025) descriptive study at Vietnam National University validate this theoretical view. In the course of her classroom observation, interviews and surveys revealed fear, shyness, negative self-perception and poor motivation as major obstacles to fluent oral English (pp. 56–60). Students would often pause, forget a word or use clumsy expressions (not because they didn't know the grammar) - but it was psychological interference. The current study also supports some preceding studies such as Brown (2001), Gebhard (2006) and Elhadi (2017) that revealed significant negative fear of negative evaluation and relatively low self-esteem have an effect on learners' willingness to communicate.

To translate these findings to a monastic educational setting much cultural nuance has to be weighed. Vietnamese monastery cultures are inhospitable to communicative expression (in beginner Vietnamese), focusing as they do on principles of humility, restraint, and deference. A young

monk might see perfect spoken English as an assertion of self in a way that is out of place in monastic decorum. Thus, psychological barriers are and cannot just be situational; they are also socially constructed. Now you have a double emotional filter: the fear of language coupled with religious humility.

From an educational standpoint, this place where psychology meets culture demands specific prescribed responses. Le (2025, pp. 62–64) found that by repeatedly performing in front of their peers and receiving consistent feedback, the worries were greatly reduced and they gained confidence to perform the task. It seems that Buddhist academics may significantly benefit from implementing a communicative practice, structured diary-keeping, and mindfulness-based anxiety management which are in line with the Buddhist contemplative tradition and tackle linguistic anxiety effectively.

### 2.5. Integrating Sociocultural Theory

A second important underpinning theory is based on the Vygotskian sociocultural tradition which from 1978 (as with the cognitive tradition) has been concerned with learning being constructed through mediated activity; that it takes place in a specific social context and cannot exist anywhere else but within this (Zone of Proximal Development, ZPD). From this perspective, the learning of a language cannot be reduced to a simple acquisition and accumulation of knowledge in isolated items; it is an experience like being part in a community of practice. If we apply this insight to Buddhist education, English competency is not achieved through textbook study alone: it comes about via active participation in real communicative events—sermons, discussions and research colloquia which were run in English. Without this social scaffolding, learners will tend to become stuck at the plateau of passive competence.

This perspective highlights the importance of Vietnamese Buddhist academics to develop communities of practice in English. This is true of international Buddhist universities: students at the International Buddhist Studies College in Thailand or at the University of the West in California don't merely get drilled with English, they are thrown into an English-speaking context. Peers and faculty from diverse language backgrounds naturally create a ZPD with English as the medium for understanding each other.

By contrast, the monastic space in Vietnam is almost entirely homogeneous linguistically. If there are no chances to interact for real, the social component of language learning is deprived from light and air. Thus, any theory of reform would need to both bring together English Medium Instruction (EMI) and sociocultural scaffolding in

which English is a tool and outcome of collaborative Buddhist inquiry.

### 2.6. Synthesis: A Tripartite Model

Pulling these threads together, we can understand the development of English for Buddhist higher education in threefold: a) The characteristics of English learning emanating from theoretical understanding, philosophic framework and practical reality.

**Institutional environment** - policies, accreditation, curriculum design, which governs the level of EMI and CLIL use but also the means of quality assurance.

**Pedagogical Process** -This includes the classroom process, teacher quality, and assessment practices which enable language and content to be integrated.

**Psychological Context** — the affective and sociocultural aspects contributing to learners' confidence and motivation.

Phan Thi Ngoc Le(2025)'s research informs this third domain empirically, whilst the international Buddhist universities are good example of how configurations of dimensions one and two can be organised successfully. The Vietnamese situation is about the three aspects in disproportion: institutional frailty, pedagogical fragmentation and psychological resistance feed each other to form a cycle of restricted linguistic output.

The model introduced in this article combines applied linguistics with sociocultural and affective psychology, treating English proficiency not as an isolated ability but a complex policy-, pedagogy- and psyche-dependent phenomenon. Only by confronting all three levels at once can Vietnamese Buddhist education move beyond its present confinement to a particular language and engage seriously in the global intellectual conversation around contemporary Buddhism.

## III. CURRENT ENGLISH EDUCATION IN VIETNAMESE BUDDHIST INSTITUTES

### 3.1. Institutional Landscape and Historical Development

To understand the current situation of the teaching of English in Viet Nam Buddhist institutions, it is important to see such educational systems in a historical and institutional context. After the fall of South Vietnam in 1975, Buddhist education went through a process of centralization by government and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam\\_Buddhist\\_Sangha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_Buddhist_Sangha) (Giáo hội Phật giáo Việt Nam) control. The foundation of major universities in Ho Chi Minh City (1984), Hue (1997) and Hanoi (2005) marked the historic entry of monastic curricula into the tertiary education system; formal monastic schools were now seen as fully national

establishments. But unlike the secular universities under the Ministry of Education and Training, Buddhist academies are subjected to ecclesiastical administration where their curricula generally reflect a stronger emphasis on the cultivation of doctrinal proficiency, moral ethical growth, and counseling abilities.

The western education also has been introduced at these schools during 1990s and was taught as optional in English or Chinese. This decision was more pragmatic than academic – it was in order to teach monks and nuns enough English to be able to communicate with international pilgrims, or read basic Buddhist teachings. As the world-openness and opportunities for studying overseas became broader, administrators of that time responded by adding formal English modules to the curriculum structure at the secondary and high school levels. However, these modules were still placed on the margin of learning. Today, all three academies require students to take a set of English courses—usually English 1–2 or English for Buddhist Studies 1–6—with a total of about 8–12 of the approximately 130 credits. This ratio, as measured against educational programs in Singapore and Thailand where English is the medium of instruction, highlights the still subordinate role that language plays in Buddhist education.

### 3.2. Curriculum Content and Pedagogical Orientation

From the review of course outlines and syllabi from 2022 to 2025, most Vietnamese Buddhist English courses show evidence of traditional grammar–translation. The teaching materials used are locally produced textbooks, focusing on Buddhist terms, short reading passages about the life of Buddha as well as translation exercises from English to Vietnamese. In those courses, the listening and speaking elements are significantly scarce and we hardly use authentic materials like academic articles or global meeting papers.

This compares with the approach of Phan Thi Ngoc Le (2025) with Vietnam National University (VNU). In her Presentation Skills class, for example, students work in repeated rounds of theoretical learning followed by practical applications such as solo presentations and discussion groups, slide design practice and peer reviews. Emphasis in the course design is placed on critical thinking, creativity, and confidence building among students (Le in 2025, pp.61–63). On the other hand, Buddhist English courses also focus a great deal on accuracy of vocabulary and grammar (even more so than fluency and communicative competency). The addition of oral based activities, even on a small scale involves listening to the recitation of prewritten dialogues as opposed to actual spontaneous interaction.

Evidence of a further pedagogical constraint is revealed in the methods of assessment used in such courses. End-of-course exams focus mainly on reading and translating, and little or nothing on listening or conversational composition. This disproportion is a reflection of institutional values: written exams are less time consuming to organize and sit well with the monastic focus on memorization of scriptures. Nevertheless, as the ICTE 74 report pointed out, the absence of such formative oral testing denies learners beneficial guidance forming part of any anxiety-reducing and performance-enhancing response to language delivery (Le et al., 2025: 59–60).

### 3.3. Faculty Qualifications and Teaching Resources

The teachers in the Buddhist academy greatly affect the quality of English education. Most teachers in these schools are monks or nuns with experience studying overseas and who have no formal qualifications in TESOL. Their language abilities of English are to be commended, but all too frequently their teaching takes the form of how they were taught rather than in line with current second-language pedagogy. A small group of lay teachers with English degrees are also employed on a part-time basis. But their scanty knowledge on Buddhist terms and thoughts serves as a disjunction between language teaching and doctrine.

Limited resources only make the situation worse. Few academies have multimedia laboratories or digital educational platforms and class sizes are mostly more than 50 students thereby limiting the opportunities for speaking individually. The Presentation Skills course in the VNU Le (2025) witnessed, on the other hand, used interactive and F2F situations over 15 weeks when audio-visual media were applied as well as peer response. These are the conditions in which learner motivation and growth could thrive. The lack of such facilities in most Buddhist colleges means very limited availability for authentic communicative use.

### 3.4. Learner Profile and Motivation

The linguistic profile of Buddhist learners contrasts starkly with that of those from the secular domain. Most monastics go to the academy after several years of temple duty or from ordination training, when they are in their late 20s or thirties. They receive very little exposure to English in their secondary schools, especially in rural areas where temple life is the predominate way of life. The daily regime is mixed with educational courses and religious worship, which do not leave enough opportunity to self-study.

Their orientation toward learning English is predominantly instrumental rather than integrative. Monastic students usually only learn to speak English because they have to as part of their course study or because they want to undertake postgraduate studies overseas, and it is not necessarily

about a deeper interest in the culture that underpins the language. As observed by Le (2025, pp. 57–58), motivation is in close interrelation with affective factors like confidence and anxiety: Low motivation can heighten fear of failure wherein high anxiety may lower motivation. In monastic circles, this feedback loop is heightened by norms of modesty that discourage assertiveness. Therefore, even very able learners may be reluctant to take part in English using activities.

### 3.5. Psychological Barriers and Cultural Factors

The affective factors in evidence in ICTE 74 – anxiety, shyness and lack of confidence – are especially salient within Buddhist classrooms. Le (2025) noted Vietnamese learners frequently “lacking of words and do hesitate” when they speak English because the lack of psychological encouragement, not ignorance. Buddhist learners feel no differently, diversified by cultural paralysis. The spirit of humility (*khiêm hạ*) and respect for seniority, and detachment from compliments make speaking in public to be a morally delicate obligation. In an English Dharma talk before other monastics, a monk might be afraid of sounding presumptuous and a nun may have internalized social constraints telling her to hold back.

These are attitudes that together could be called ethical anxiety – a composite of linguistic nervousness and moral timidity. This obstacle requires pedagogical tact to be overcome. Teachers should model speaking English not as an act of self-display but of fellow-feeling, linking the *wācā* to Buddhist concepts of right speech (*sammā vācā*). People can then reframe their understanding of how discourses should be enacted. This has the power to reduce cognitive dissonance, but it also means that the very practice of communicating becomes a mode of spiritual conditioning.

### 3.6. Structural and Environmental Constraints

Outside of classroom teaching, the wider sociolinguistic community in Vietnamese monasteries provides little access to English. Rites, sermons and community maintenance are conducted in Vietnamese or Pāli with the exception of a few prayers. Among the collection, mostly vietnamese commentaries can be found and few subscribes to english buddhist magazines. Without sinking into it, we lose the language. And even students who are able to read and write after they’ve already attended English courses, they somehow, when not practicing it, forget their language skills.

On the other hand, monks and nuns at the Buddhist College in Singapore live in a bilingual environment where daily interactions in English between preceptors (monks and nuns), lay volunteers, overseas lecturers, as well as visitors are common. Likewise, at Thailand s International Buddhist Studies College, English is the medium of instruction and

the social glue for students, forming a language system that feeds on itself. Vietnamese institutions, on the other hand, are still linguistically insular—a closed loop of Vietnamese communication amid English classes that rarely extend beyond controlled parameters.

### 3.7. Unclear Policies and Lack of Universality

Nationally, B1 is the lowest language standard prescribed by Vietnam’s Six-Level Foreign Language Proficiency Framework for university students. But Buddhist colleges, not all of which are fully state-accredited, are uneven in their application. Some schools make no formal diagnosis at the time of entry; others give informal oral tests. There are no such regulations from any established institution for me to pass an exit English at the level B2 / ELTS 5.5 as required by many of my international Buddhist universities etc. The absence of policy match makes invalid program effects.

Le (2025)’s article can be seen as an implicit demonstration of the gains that could be obtained with rigorous implementation: B1-level students followed a well-scaffolded and teacher-led 15-week course in theory-into-practice that resulted in quite some visible progress and measurement results that have not been called into question (pp. 61–63). This same strategy in Buddhist institutions would do wonders for accountability and engagement. But without any regulatory compulsion, English proficiency is again a matter of personal drive not institutional framework.

### 3.8. Emerging Innovations and Prospects

While these are tough times, innovation is starting to reveal itself. Ah Long (pseudonym), a Buddhist, learned English during short-term workshops at the Ho Chi Minh City Academy in which international textbooks, including those of *Buddhist English* (edited by Suwanrat & Thompson 2022) were employed and sometimes foreign lecturers came for some days. Hue Academy experimented online cooperation translation project with temples in Thailand and Sri Lanka. Whilst these are small, they at least signify that the importance of English as a medium of international communication is increasing.

What’s more, when young monks and nuns start to see English as a spiritual implement rather than a teenage academic chore. Motivated by outreach through social media and international Dharma teachings, they want to bring Vietnamese Buddhist culture to the world. This change of heart — from duty to calling — could become the motivational wellspring for something grander.

### 3.9. Synthesis

In conclusion, the teaching of English at Vietnamese Buddhist institutions is subject to limited resources, other schools of thought or courses and lack of institutional

encouragement. Little success is achieved in a context of grammar-translation approach, absence of a benchmark for the proficiency and adequate lack exposure to In Real Life (IRL) communication. The psychological factors described by Phan Thi Ngoc Le (2025)—namely, anxiety, shyness, lack of confidence and low motivation—are amplified by monastic cultural norms which praise humility and silence. Organisational constraints, such as limited resources and non-accreditation status, sustain these weaknesses.

It's a moving target, though. There are some signs of change, but they only reflect a possibility for future revival: incremental reforms and new outlooks among younger monastics. In order to realize this potential, Vietnamese Buddhist education must reconfigure its idea of English as a fundamental mechanism of Buddhist studies and the communication of dharma, employing integrated pedagogical models and achievable standards. Then and only then, it will be able to fill the gulf: increasingly wide between domestic and "overseas" Buddhist scholars.

#### IV. A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON INTERNATIONAL BUDDHIST UNIVERSITIES

##### 4.1. Rationale for Comparison

For an evaluation of the place of English-language education within Vietnamese Buddhist institutes, we must also consider other examples from Buddhist Universities in Asia and the West that have incorporated English into their programmes. In comparison, the spectrum of policy and education philosophies claim not only very different educational policies but also contrasting views of the relationship between linguistic competence and religious scholarship. The five case studies—Singapore, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Australia and the United States also illustrate this progression from bilingual or co-existence models of teaching and learning to full-fledged English medium instruction. Together, these cases illustrate the structural and cultural conditions under which English proficiency flourishes in Buddhist higher education.

##### 4.2. Singapore: Bilingualism as Institutional DNA

The bilingual Buddhist education in Singapore is a model for the Muslim holy state to follow. The Buddhist College of Singapore (BCS) operates under the Ministry of Education's bilingual policy, which maintains English as an official language alongside Chinese. English as the language of instruction All universities, regardless of their religious affiliation, are affected or influenced by national policies on English as the language of instruction.

English is immersed throughout all levels of learning at BCS. BA in Buddhist Studies After completing either high school or the equivalent, students enter a two-year English

Foundation Program before entering the four-year Bachelor of Arts in Buddhist Studies. After receiving that fundamental education, they enter academic courses, which are taught mostly in English. The faculty has published and lectured in both languages and the library contains Pāli-Sanskrit/English canon translations. This also follows from if the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach: English is no longer a subject of study to learn by heart, but a means to read, hear and understand Buddhist philosophy.

Why is Singapore's Model effective? The effectiveness of the model in Singapore can be attributed to three related factors. One, a strong national education policy that mandates uniform teacher training and accreditation or other standards in assessment such as equivalence to IELTS or CEFR. Second, the sociolinguistic context of English outside the classroom is one in which both languages are used and in fact are reinforced by temples, lay associations and media. Third, the college's culture values English as a critical competency for Dharmaservice and enables Singaporean monastics to extend their outreach internationally. As a result, the postgraduate profile that BCS has established joins deep doctrinal knowledge with polished informetric skill—a combination that Vietnamese schools also hope to cultivate, but have (so far) put in place only partially.

##### 4.3. Thailand: The Monastic University System as a Medium for Internationalization

Thailand Second, and in some respects intermediate, there is a model of internationalisation on offer by Thailand. The two primary Buddhist universities, MCU (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University) and MBU (Mahamakut Buddhist University) have parallel programs in Thai language and English language. For example, in the DDM shedra-IBS model developed at MCU, EMI represents the strategic integration of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in a traditional monastic university.

This applies to all IBSC programmes at the bachelor's, masters and doctoral levels of study; courses are taught in English and you must be able to prove your proficiency through a documented proficiency (i.e. IELTS – 5.5 or equivalent). Its curriculum has been designed to meet international academic requirements, including Buddhist hermeneutics, philosophy, and education industry courses and research method modules with a focus on English academic writing. The faculty is complemented by visiting international lecturers who work in cooperation with the Thai monks, thus creating a culturally and linguistically diverse atmosphere.

It is also in line with Thailand's national tourism and cultural export policy, as MCU has developed its own

model of internationalization that views English language learning (ELL) as a tool to exert soft power. Fluent English-speaking monks have important functions in the interchange of faith traditions, international missionary work, and educational diplomacy. On the other hand, while Vietnamese Buddhist education is embedded in a policy environment that is less internationalised, it has not yet fused English instruction with national cultural strategy. MCU demonstrates that when the learning of English is institutionally valued as academic and civic capital, capacities for proficiency accrue naturally.

#### 4.4. Sri Lanka: Colonial Inheritance and Forced English

The Buddhist and Pali University in Sri Lanka (BPU) is an epitome of past heritage and present change. Thanks to colonial history, English has been a working language for learning in Sri Lanka and for some faculties — as per BPU's own regulations — it is either the main or second medium of instruction. English for Buddhist Studies is a compulsory module on the first year and students are then eligible to study more specialized courses like Academic Writing and English Translation of Pāli Texts. English is invariably used to teach and submit thesis in graduate studies.

The Unique case of the Sri Lankan situation is a linguisticization. In Sri Lanka, English does not stand outside as a foreign and elitist target added to the already existing academic fabric of everyday life; it co-exists with Sinhala and also Pāli. This trilingual environment promotes a growing frequency of exposure and, applying the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (Vygotsky 1978), has a beneficial effect on learning by doing in natural settings with humans. And the nation's interuniversity partnerships — especially with Buddhist institutions in Singapore and Malaysia — foster transnational communities of practice. By contrast, Vietnamese academies are still linguistically monolithic, leaving students with no such collective niche.

#### 4.5. Australia: English as Academic Legitimacy

In Australia, an educated nation that uses English as the language of and for academic study, the Nan Tien Institute (NTI) is a model that demonstrates how Buddhist higher education can necessarily be on par with universities in a secular context without losing its religious dimension. NTI is registered with the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and is held accountable for language literacy, research ethics and quality of teaching. It is all taught in English, but the entry requirement for non-native speakers is at least IELTS 6.5 (at TEQSA, 2023).

As a pedagogical strategy, NTI combines Buddhist wisdom teachings with Western scholastic approaches such as

critical analysis, rigor of evidence and peer-reviewed publication. Students produce analytical essays, research reports, and reflective journals entirely in English, internalizing these patterns of scholarly communication. In this sense then English isn't just a resource; it is the currency through which academic credibility is established. Accordingly, we are producing graduates who can contribute to global conversations on a number of fronts in areas such as religious studies, ethics and mindfulness research.

In the context of ABET education for Vietnamese Buddhists, the NTI model illustrates the impact external accreditations can have. Since the teaching of English must comply with national standards, it is budgeted, managed and evaluated regularly—procedures that do not often accompany Vietnamese self-regulated education in Vietnam. Beyond this, though, it shows how external accountability can be an effective lever for ongoing language growth.

#### 4.6. United States: Blending of Buddhism and Western Pedagogy

In North America institutions like the University of the West (UWest) in California and Institute of Buddhist Studies (IBS) at Graduate Theological Union represent Buddhism in mainstream English-language academics, alongside schools that are generalizing access to knowledge and learning for lay students. Both are accredited by the WSCUC, and follow the United States tradition of a liberal arts education. They have faculty from Asia, Europe and the United States who teach Buddhist doctrine as well as general education and research techniques.

The pedagogical model privileges attentive inquiry, discussion-based learning, and argumentative writing. Students are assessed by essays or presentations and peer-reviewed projects—modes of assessment that naturally presuppose highly developed linguistic skills. A monastic student shares classroom banter and social networks with lay people of all religious persuasions, an interaction that promotes dialogue between cultures and reduces communicative apprehension. Vietnamese though are socially homogeneous, with hierarchical monastic environments and so the chances for English as an egalitarian interaction are less.

From a policy perspective, both UWest and IBS show that it can be advantageous to fit into the national higher education systems for language learning outcomes. All of these are state-accredited degrees, operating under federal financial aid regulations, and therefore require English proficiency as a condition of enrollment, while also affording it as the outcome. The partial independence of Vietnamese academies from the state's management

structure serves to protect doctrinal conservatism, but it also insulates academies from these systemic quality levers.

#### 4.7. Comparative Synthesis

A comparison of the five examples highlights a strong change in institutionalization scale of English as an instruction language:

Country/Institution	Medium of Instruction	Entry Requirement	Quality Assurance	Linguistic Environment
Singapore (BCS)	Bilingual (English / Chinese)	Foundation English Program	National MOE standards	Fully bilingual society
Thailand (MCUIBSC)	Fully English	IELTS $\geq$ 5.5	University + government oversight	International monastic community
Sri Lanka (BPU)	English + Sinhala	Compulsory English I	State university system	Trilingual academic culture
Australia (NTI)	English only	IELTS $\geq$ 6.5	TEQSA accreditation	Native English society
United States (UWest / IBS)	English only	TOEFL / IELTS	WSCUC accreditation	Multicultural, English dominant

From this analysis, three generalizations arise:

1. **Policy Alignment:** Institutions connected to national educational systems that maintain formal language policies: Singapore, Thailand and Australia show the greatest proportions of English proficiency among monastic students over more isolated/purely religious or independently administered centers.
2. **Functional Integration:** English used as a tool of learning content rather than an end in itself enhances sustainable competence among learners.
3. **Cultural Enrichment:** The native-like proficiency of the bilingual or multilingual environment provides continuous exposure to English language and readily leads to reinforcement of this language in the classroom.

Vietnamese Buddhist establishments, in this context, fall at the farthest end of the integration continuum. But here language learning is most evidently marginal, there are few clear standards of competence in English and the linguistic environment continues to be overwhelmingly monolingual. The comparative findings thus provide empirical support for this paper's main contention, which is that there exists a direct link between English proficiency and the degree to which institutions structure and embed English in both their cultural and epistemic infrastructures.

#### 4.8. Implications for Vietnam

The insights offered by a wide-ranging collection of international experiences are rich and tangible food for thought for the reforms that will be necessary. The exemplary records of Singapore, Thailand emerging

directly for... Clearly, the realities of partial English as a Medium Instruction (EMI) realisation in terms of action within the contextually rich and culturally diverse landscape of Asia are vibrant. Sri Lanka offers a good exemplar of how its past bilingualism can be critically utilized and used to depict, for comparison's sake, education as it is now. In addition, the examples of Australia and the US are excellent illustrations of the many advantages of external accreditation and rigorous accountability that facilitate quality in education.

These various models taken together, in the case of Viet Nam as a whole, suggest that the way to modernize language is not a priori one in which one either has spiritual authenticity or is required to sacrifice it. Quite the opposite: judicious incorporation of English in education has potential to revitalize Buddhist education, make essential inroads into the dynamic global discourse on ethics, mindfulness and cross cultural understanding.

What ultimately brings these impressive success stories together is not just the sheer accumulation of experience in learning English, but its qualitative change: it becomes an instrument of intellectual liberation and freedom. When Vietnamese Buddhist academies fully embrace this modern paradigm—enacting genuinely progressive policy overalls, integrating curriculums with sincerity and depth, and providing students placeholder page with the psychological resources to meet these changes—they will no longer remain institutionally trapped in insular preservationism, but emerge as full partners in the burgeoning global renewal.

## V. THE GAP, INSTITUTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

### 5.1 Institutional Structures and Resource Inequality

A critical structural constraint for Vietnamese buddhists who do not possess proficiency in English is the institutional fragmentation of the education. The country's leading Buddhist academies are part of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, now out-of-synch with the national ministry of higher education's internationalization moves. Consequently, the quality of their English is not assured by standards required at state level (such as exit requirements that are IELTS or CEF aligned). By comparison, institutions such as those in Thailand, Sri Lanka and Singapore are all either state-chartered or accredited by regional agencies that make it a graduation requirement to be able to demonstrate proficiency in at least one foreign language.

And the difference in resources only adds to the burden to these schools. Facilities Buddhist schools in richer countries Yes No have access to digital libraries, multimedia labs and visiting faculty programs which go a long way in contributing towards creating an English language ecosystem. By contrast, Vietnamese schools with their limited funds and voluntary lecturers find it hard to have such a condition. The importance of the physical learning space is underscored in a VC account (Le, 2025, p. 61) which had "a particularly successful course", Presentation Skills that was conducted over 15 weeks on campus and was entirely face to face allowing students to receive ongoing feedback. On the other hand, there are numerous Buddhist academies that do provide exposure to English in large classes or over weekends but with limited speaking practice.

### 5.2 Pedagogical Philosophy and Monastic Learning Environment

Vietnamese monastic education is deeply entrenched in the transmission model, including techniques such as recitation practices, memory work and interpretation. These are indeed helpful methods for learning scripture, however they may not be all that valuable when it comes to developing communicative proficiency. Findings Based on the analysis of ICTE 74, all students who improved their presentation skills modelled through feedback and practice through repeated discussion as well as peer correction from task-based activity (Le, 2025, pp. 6264) They are not dissimilar ranging from the tenets of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) theory, but infrequently found practiced in Buddhist academies. When the focus becomes purely cognitive, this results in a judicious approach to language study that values precision over fluency and treats individual expression as secondary to the demands of the gazette.

Teacher qualification is another important factor affecting this educational picture. A lot of English teachers in Buddhist schools are monks who have a Masters degree in Buddhist Studies, not TESOL. These educators may be spiritually committed but less experienced in current SLA methods (scaffolding, formative assessment delivery), the latter being even extended control mechanisms against anxiety. The ICTE findings reveal the role of teacher feedback and a supportive classroom in reducing psychological obstacles (Le, 2025:5759). Such support or affirmation not being given, the hesitation of monastic disciples is likely to grow.

### 5.3 Psychological Factors for Monastic Students Only

The anxiety-shyness-low confidence-low motivation (ICTE 74) construct is particularly well suited to understanding the 'real' lives of monastic students. Buddhist monks are taught to smother ego and reject opulence. And when used in the context of learning languages it generates inhibitions with respect to speaking that stem from fears about sounding immodest or making errors in front of others. Brown (2001) and Gebhard (2006) have earlier recognized shyness, anxiety of being evaluated are potential factors that obstruct oral proficiency; Le (2025) also noted the same problem in Vietnamese university classrooms. Monastic Mind Games In monasteries, these psychological barriers may be compounded by a culture of deference, novices who are afraid to talk in front of elders or seniors, lessening their ability to practice.

Second, the motivation of monks is quite different from that of lay learners. Although lay learners often study English in order to support their future careers, monastics may be less inclined to expect a pragmatic return on their investment in language learning, particularly if they plan to take up residence within the community. In the absence of proximal instrumental goals, intrinsic motivation decreases. But Buddhist teachings also contribute a counterbalancing motivation: the Bodhisattva ideal of compassionate utterance (*karuṇāvākya*) can be reconstructed to see English as a tool that generates global compassion and transmits teachings – link that many education programmes have yet to clarify.

### 5.4 Sociolinguistic Environment

Language acquisition and performance are also important with respect to environmental exposure. In places like Singapore and Sri Lanka, English is a co-official language consecrating bilingual practices even during religious encounters. For example, temple discussions are typically carried out in English and local languages, creating a diverse language atmosphere. Vietnamese monastics, on the other hand, live in a mostly Vietnamese-speaking

environment, where English is confined primarily to the classroom. If the language is not heard every day, the delay of its use makes the development of their capacity slower and produces attrition (knowledge loss) and fossilization (maintenance of mistakes). This kind of environmental deficit offers a compelling way to address the question of why many hard-working learners fail to develop fluent production.

## VI. COUNTERARGUMENTS AND REBUTTAL

6.1 "The weakness of English is not a vice but cultural priority"

An often repeated justification is that Vietnamese Buddhist institutions simply want to maintain Pāli, Sanskrit or Classical Chinese literature as main language of the sacred texts and give English second place. This cultural view of the world is not wrong but it fails to consider a profound epistemic revolution taking place in international Buddhist studies. Today, works on the classics of the world and theories about translation and comparative philosophy take place, overwhelmingly in English. To fail to recognize this is potentially to submit interpretive authority to foreign academics. As a result, linguistic conservatism that neglects English unknowingly marginalizes Vietnamese intellectuals within the global Buddhist conversation.

6.2 "Vietnamese Are Born Being Shy"

The findings of the ICTE 74 study that LeIngram., pp.5758) rejects also question about the Vietnameseness of shyness: They adduced evidence each craintif veient (have had no reason to fear), there was a further dimension involved in explanation. The study presents situational factors that dominate student's engagement, and suppose the fear of making mistakes, anxiety over negative evaluations, and insufficient support in the classroom as major influences on their engagement. Incorporation of practice with peer feedback into the VNU course led to a significant elevation in student confidence. Therefore, the solution is not a cultural determinism but an intelligent rethinking of pedagogy – a necessary approach for the monastic educational environment.

6.3 "English Is Subordinated to Spiritual Practice"

Some monks argue that it is not talk but devotion which is the foundation of Buddhist education. Yet, historical fact demonstrates that the importance of language skills to the preservation and dissemination of the Dharma has been a constant factor in its history from its Sanskritization in India, through Sinicization in China, into our own Anglicized age. Each language change has expanded the spheres of Dharma's influence. English now fills the same instrumental role. Teaching in English is not the

Westernisation of Buddhism, it is making the teachings universal, more accessible to people everywhere in the world.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REFORM

7.1 Implement Stages of tasks in the EMI/CLIL Classroom

Buddhist institutions of higher learning must introduce integrated English-medium modules in hybrid mode with doctrinal content by language method. For instance, a class on *The Life of the Buddha* could include reading in English combined with assessments that motivate bilingual thinking. This gradual EMI integration will serve break to the language down as a cognitive weapon, rather than a punish for outside.

7.2 Institute Standardized Benchmarks

A national partnership of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and ministry of education should set up standard input and output levels in line with CEFR- preferably, B1 for entering and B2 as it was proposed by Le (2025) in terms of VNU model. The introduction of outside testing would encourage uniform standards of instruction while enhancing portability of credit world wide.

7.3 Professionalize Teacher Training

Monastic English teachers need to earn systematic TESOL credentials or integrate with lay universities to upgrade their teaching licence. Training should include best practices for providing psychological support also specified in ICTE 74: systematic feedback, anxiety reduction exercises, and peer review (Le et al., 2025, pp. 59-64). This 'training into empathy' would make for better, more empathetic teachers with a methodologically sound education in the classroom.

7.4 Create an English-Medium Monastic Context

"Pasta lessons," bilingual sermons, and exchange programs can help transform passive knowledge into active language skills. Successful models from Thailand and Sri Lanka have shown that immersion can lead to religious fluency. Collaborating with English-speaking monasteries or interacting with online communities might provide meaningful communicative practice.

7.5 Integrate Psychological Literacy in the Curriculum

Expanding on the ICTE 74 affective barriers categorization, Buddhist schools need to provide workshops in mindful communication and language confidence strategies. The task of balancing language development and meditation can be further facilitated by appropriating the process of anxiety reduction into a particular variety of bhāvanā, or mental cultivation.

### 7.6 infrastructure and Research Infrastructure

Monastics will read what is written in English if you subsidize the purchase or licensing of digital libraries, open access journals, and translation projects. Joint partnerships with institutions like MCU or NTI might lead to joint publications and faculty exchange, allowing Vietnamese scholars to become part of global networks.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

What this does, is divide the Two Vehicles between Vietnamese Buddhist institutions and World Buddhism. The gap in the English levels of their students scholars is not a given nor an impossible task. The findings— especially Le’s (2025) psychological and pedagogical insights— suggest that communicative inadequacy results from systemic weaknesses rather than spiritual deficiency. Such an instrumental view of English has restricted the scope of learning, but where it is used as a language of inquiry, such as in Singapore, Thailand, Sri Lanka Australia and USA monks can develop into cosmopolitan scholars.

Accordingly, reform requires both a structural (curricula structure, resources) as well as a psychological (faith in oneself and motivation) turnabout. In Vietnamese Buddhist education, English should be recontextualized as not a foreign imposition but a compassionate instrument—a modern-day upāya (skilful means)—of spreading the Dharma across boundaries. In this way, linguistic ‘enlightenment’ is a form of spiritual enlightenment, which enables people to communicate openly and honestly with the rest of the world.

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