

# English Language Teaching in Buddhist Universities: A Study of Vietnam Buddhist University in Ho Chi Minh and Acharya Nagarjuna University in India

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**Abstract:** *English has become important, especially for higher education in an international academic discourse- influencing Buddhist studies. Global engagement, interreligious dialogue and scholarly publishing are increasingly reliant on English as a working language. This article provides a theoretical critique of the ELT Program at two Buddhist higher education institutions, the Buddhist University (TBU) in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and Acharya Nagarjuna University (ANU), India. In place of survey-based or empirical evidence, the article analyses curriculum philosophy, language policy and pedagogical orientation. English is the only language of instruction at ANU for post-graduate and doctorate students, including course work, academic communication and reference materials. Several decades later, the Buddhist University of Ho Chi Minh City provides primarily English as a foreign language and Vietnamese is still in usage for subjects. It is argued in this paper that these opposing models are reflection of different academic understandings of English, as either the primary academic language for knowledge production or a secondary and useful skill. It is argued that, without a significant move towards English-medium academic participation, Vietnamese Buddhist higher education risks becoming poorly integrated with the global.*

**Keywords:** Vietnam Buddhist University, Acharya Nagarjuna University, ELT, ELE

## 1. Introduction

In the complex and variegated world of modern university systems, English has transcended its traditional role as a second language to take on unprecedented importance as the principal vehicle for international communication about knowledge. It has transcended from the medium of ordinary means of communication to that learned language of scholarship, intellectual production and a storehouse for legitimation that spans the world in international academia. It is now extensively used as both the medium for research publication and for participation in international conferences, joint research projects, and extensive knowledge sharing networks available globally by universities practicing a variety of disciplines. Following this seminal change, mastery of English has become an indispensable and critical element in the instructional framework of the higher education systems universally. Emotion deeply impacts institutional policies, curriculum planning, and the teaching practices of educators and institutions.

Within this broad global frame, Buddhist higher education plays an identifiable and more significant role that is worth keeping in view. Contemporary Buddhist universities are no longer confined to attempts at religious training on a national or regional scale, but have set out to participate in the international academic discourse, enter into interfaith dialogue and take part in the global ethical debate addressed to all. Topics including Buddhist philosophy, meditation research, and the pragmatic influences of Buddhist ethics are often addressed in respected international journals, at global meetings, and on intercultural academic stages—most of which are inclined to work in (or translated into) English. As a result, for Buddhist universities aspiring to participate in any meaningful or substantial way with the global community at

large, English fluency is no longer simply deemed optional or added but rather essential structural requirement. It's a fundamental skill that affects their presence in the academic world, the depth and breadth of intellectual exchange and institutional relevance in an increasingly globalized society. In the face of this common global pressure that affects education in all foreign language contexts, Buddhist higher-education institutes throughout Asia exhibit a surprisingly diverse set of strategies for English language teaching. These divergences are neither purely cosmetic, nor merely pedagogical, but are deeply semantically rooted in ideological tenets which in turn express sometimes-not-so-subtle variegated understandings of what the English language means within Buddhist academic contexts. In some institutions, English is seen as a compensatory skill—a pragmatic instrument for minimal functional communication—whereas in diametrically opposed fashion other establishments regard it as an academic medium where Buddhist knowledge can be rigorously formulated, critically expounded and widely popularised. This degree of variability begs and raises serious questions about curriculum philosophy, language policy, and the academic trajectories that are designed for Buddhist scholars trained under contrasting models in which different roles of English are emphasized.

The paper attempts an ideological comparative study of two selected institutions that are representative of these diverse orientations: the Buddhist University (HU) in Vietnam and Acharya Nagarjuna University (ANU) in India. Both of these two prestigious places have deep Buddhist intellectual heritages and can be regarded as centers for Buddhist studies in the host countries. Their modes of English language teaching, however, differ radically in scope, orientation and academic location. Such distinct differences offer us a useful

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and interesting way of analyzing how English works, as an angular language to the academic curriculum or a central academic tool within Buddhist higher education system.

English, being the exclusive medium for academic instruction in Acharya Nagarjuna University, especially at PG and research level, has become an integral part of the higher education. All academic work including courses, seminars, tests and exams are fully conducted in English as well as all academic resources being in English. In this learning context, English is not taught as a language but becomes the vehicle for academic development. The students are encouraged to engage with the subtleties of Buddhist philosophy, intricate research methodologies and nuanced critical scholarship directly through the medium of English, developing a skill for critical thought, articulate discourse and knowledge production within a global academic context. This model of pedagogy strongly reflects established practices in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English-Medium Instruction (EMI) that emphasise the importance of securing disciplinary-specific language development through prolonged and meaningful engagement with specific academic disciplines.

Contrastingly, the Buddhist University in Ho Chi Minh City has a different pedagogical style. Here, very often English is seen as a subject that guides students at the preliminary levels of their education. However, Vietnamese is still the primary language of teaching in most subjects, from Buddhist philosophy to doctrinal studies, monastic training and administration. Although students do learn some basic English, their exposure to English as a language of academic thought and production is rather limited, unfortunately. In relation to this teaching model, English as a school subject takes a peripheral role being predominantly an auxiliary subject and is never intended nor does it attempt to be the main educational medium.

This striking difference between the two institutions is more than just a preference for linguistic flavors, but rather reflects deep down underlying institutional assumptions on the role and importance of English in Buddhist education. At the Acharya Nagarjuna University, English is considered as an important academic infrastructure and key resource for developing internationally competent scholars and researchers to meet the challenges of global interdependence. Conversely, at the Buddhist University in Ho Chi Minh City, English is often viewed as an applied skill—an end in itself but a secondary one when compared with that of rescuing and disseminating religious knowledge in the national language. These differing constructions in turn have important implications for what is taught, how it is taught, the values that are placed on different forms of assessment, and thus the identities of students as they progress through the system. Theoretically, this contrast highlights an important and vital difference between English as a discipline and that it may account for the concept of English as a medium for learning the variety of academic courses. It is well established within the applied linguistics research that advanced academic linguistic proficiency simply does not develop as a result of isolated or fragmented language instruction, but instead develops in response to extended and content-rich engagement with subject matter delivered through the target

language. English as a language of instruction While students may succeed in achieving basic communicative competence, they often fall short of securing proficiency in the cognitive-academic language that is crucial for meaningful participation in scholarly work when English functions merely as a stand-alone class. By contrast, in environments where English is used as a tool for minutely examining complex ideas, evaluating them critically and arguing about them vigorously, academic progress is closely associated with language development.

This distinction holds special and profound meaning in the context of Buddhist higher learning. The study of Buddhism involves a great deal of high-level abstraction; sophisticated ethical reasoning and interpretation of classical texts requiring deep understanding of language and logic. In the age of the internet it becomes more and more indispensable to be able not only to read but also write and articulate nuanced thoughts in English. Unless they find ways to structurally and systematically incorporate English as part of their academic instruction, these institutions run the risk of excluding their students from full participation in broader international discourses, irrespective of personal motivation or endeavor on the part of learners.

Significantly, it is not the intention of the paper that national languages be simply replaced or that rich and largely integral local Buddhist traditions with considerable cultural content be severely diluted. Instead, this is an interrogation about the ways in which our institutional language policy has a deep and profound impact on academic opportunity, scholarly autonomy and simply learning in general. Comparison between the Buddhist University in Ho Chi Minh City and Acharya Nagarjuna University shows that the role ascribed to English in a curriculum has far-reaching implications for academic achievement, global participation, and production of Buddhist knowledge in the modern era.

By narrowing focus to theory comparison alone, and without the mediation of surveys, interviews or empirical measurement, this essay hopes that attention be directed towards structural and ideological aspects of political language use – as they obtain in Buddhist higher education. Its objective, too, is to make a substantive contribution to wider debates on the design of curricula and on KeE at religious/philosophical universities around the world. In conclusion, it is suggested in the conclusion that the question at stake here does not pertain so much to whether Buddhist universities should incorporate English into their curricula or not, but where and how this language is rather placed within the system of learning- as a peripheral skill or as indeed a medium of scholarly thought and exchange.

## 2. Literature Survey

The issue The English Language Teaching (ELT) literature in the religious and philosophical domain highlights a growing gap between English for General Purposes (EGP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Crystal (2003) convincingly claims that, in fact, it is only when the English language operates as a vehicle of meaning extension rather than merely instrumental message transfer that it possesses a dynamic quality. In terms of education, Queen (2015)

astutely notes that institutions internationalizing are increasingly using English not only as a vehicle for interpretation and explication of doctrine, but also as the language of scholarly production and dialogue.

Extensive work on how to teach a first language as an additional language (Richards and Rodgers, 2014; Nation & Macalister, 2010) has demonstrated that if a student lacks the ability to participate at an academic second language proficiency level, then even in English-dominant environments like Canada students often fail to flourish as learners because they are not included in curriculum materials or objects of learning. Mavrou and his colleagues treat EMI settings, particularly at the higher-education level, as platforms that contribute to a long-term deep cognitive involvement with L2 and thus creating more enriched learning conditions. These models will reveal the similarities and differences between ANU and Buddhist University in Ho Chi Minh City, thus offering an enhancement to our understanding of how language-in-education matters play out in practice.

### 3. Problem Definition

This article approaches the structural imbalance in the place of English in Buddhist higher education, contrasting one institution, the Buddhist University of Ho Chi Minh City, with Acharya Nagarjuna University, India. This is related to institutional language policy which impacts how English as being taught and learnt is viewed by students. Use of English in the School of Buddhist Studies There is a basic grammar subject at the Buddhist University in Ho Chi Minh City called Beginner English. Though this instrucción is advantageous, it is also a derivative method of using Vietnamese for the study of Buddhism. The consequence is that English is isolated from the intellectual life of the institution.

This forms a high ceiling of pedagogy where students can reach proficiency and beyond, but possibly could not access advanced English academic discourse. It's not that they can't or don't want to, it's just that there isn't any continuous English practice. Without access to rigorous literature and research experience, preparation for the nuanced demands of ELA necessarily becomes a "lower-order" drumbeat behind English language as such.

The pedagogical ceilings have profound implications. Buddhist studies generally operates in an international scholarly context in which English is the native language of discourse. Vietnamese-trained graduates might find it difficult to rely on research, publish in international journals and take part in the global academic discourse, thereby downgrading their academic paths along with the prestige of the institution.

On the contrary, Acharya Nagarjuna University adopt only English for post graduation and Ph.Ds. In this university English serves as an academic language, all the activities such as the lectures, seminars or exams are in English. This method combines language acquisition with intellectual development.

The ANU model is consistent with English-Medium Instruction (EMI) and language for academic purposes, focusing on learning about language through content rather than teaching it separately. "At ANU students are developing academic English skills through reading, debating and writing about research, so it is acquired as part of natural language development."

The discrepancy between such models indicates that the problem is not learner motivation but rather institutional language policy and curriculum. From a situational perspective, Buddhist learners are inclined to maintain their religious belief and academic ambitions while being frustrated due to curricular restrictions by which they cannot attain high level of English when the language is downgraded. Institutional language policy has a direct bearing on educational outcomes. Restrictions on English to introductory classes relegate it as secondary to core content, while efforts to work English into discipline instruction affirm the scholarly stature of the language. This affects teaching, assessment, and academic expectations, which instigates cycles that either increase or decrease students' linguistic and critical thought development. In the Buddhist University, Ho Chi Minh City, decoupling language from discipline study restricts student access to English for academic purposes. By contrast, the ANU's embedded curriculum enables English to be used as a psychological conceptual instrument for greater interaction with Buddhist philosophy and research.

The structural disparity is grounded in the two academics' formulation of their academic identity. English-mediated graduands become global citizens while peripheral English graduands are unable to communicate their knowledge in any language. The problem is systemic, how institutions think about language and knowledge. When English is treated as a mere skill, we reduce its academic potential; when it's viewed as a way to get into the world of scholarly conversation and argument at the international level, many more doors are open to us. The juxtaposition of the two universities illustrates how curriculum and language politics determine the overall educational trajectory in Buddhist higher education.

### 4. Methodology / Approach

This in depth study is characterized by a sophisticated and fine-grained qualitative theoretical-comparative method that has been very well founded in detailed critical examination of curriculum, and complex dynamics around educational language policy. Most interesting is the fact that this study does not really use common techniques like surveys, interviews or most empirical measurements in quantitative research. Rather, the approach is carefully designed and has several important features, including:

- Comparative analysis of different curriculum philosophies,
- Comprehensive assessment of the medium-of-instruction: including the process of critical interrogation of both language selection in education and .
- A study of the English language as a medium of instruction in different academic subjects, including its role and implications.

- A theoretically rigorous more of an theoretical alignment with frameworks such as EAP and EMI, since there is such a good theoretical grounding.

Such a nuanced and penetrating approach is perfectly compatible with the precepts of comparative educational studies, which are founded on structural and ideological depth rather than raw numerical data in order to enrich our view of the educational ground under inquiry.

## 5. Results & Discussion

### 5.1 English at Acharya Nagarjuna University (India)

At ANU English is not only a medium but in fact the only academic language of instruction at Post Graduate and Doctoral Programmes. The study is taught exclusively in English. It concerns all essential components of scientific actions such as lectures, seminars, exams, supervision as well as the work on the dissertation and library correspondence. This rich and deep exposure to the language creates an academic space where English is constantly, purposefully brought to life - equipping students to develop advanced linguistic competence by being intellectually engaged over time--instead of isolated chunks of language practice.

From an EAP perspective, this model provides a concrete example of the underlying assumption that academic language ability develops from exposure to and experience with discourse related to different fields of study over time. In these varied and compelling environments, students don't learn about the English language - they learn in English. Cognitively demanding academic tasks—like scrupulously examining nuanced philosophical argument, synthesizing resource-intensive bodies of scholarly literature, and establishing well-founded, research-based claims—require that students work at higher levels of cognition; in the process they hone advanced language structures and rhetorical strategies. As a result, proficiency in English develops integrally as an intrinsic component of the culture of scholarship, closely tied with the acquisition and production of knowledge.

In ANU's case, English is not crucially delivered as a standalone and autonomous entity that replaces curricular content. Instead, it serves as a mediating cognitive tool for pupils to experiment thinking and express certain topics of Buddhist philosophy, epistemology, logic and research methodology. Students work directly with English-language Buddhist texts, academic articles pertinent to the current relevance of Buddhism, and a variety of theoretical models so that they can internalize both the content specificity of their disciplines as well as the conventions of academic discourse. Such integration is a natural consequence of the content-driven view of language acquisition, one that exhibits an informational model where meaning precedes form and intellectual activity drives linguistic growth.

This method has a profound effect on the development of academic identity. In an English-medium environment, a global standard of scholarship is ensured as students are taught to read critically, to write analytically and persuade

effectively in the international language; This necessarily includes instruction in international citation practice and peer-review. ANU graduates acquire the disciplinary knowledge and language proficiency required for engagement in international research and scholarship.

ANU's English - medium approach is advancing the academic portability and global network of the university. Graduates are able to publish their work in international journals, present at conferences around the world and teach Buddhist Studies to various populations. English language proficiency is embedded in the school's program objectives and graduate competencies.

This model represents implications of global trends on higher education across the world for standardization and international recognition based on English usage in academia. The use of English at the higher levels also enables the ANU to be part of a transnational academic network which supports academics and scholar to meet with colleagues elsewhere in the world. This is in no way a threat to traditional Buddhist languages, such as Pali or Sanskrit; it is rather English's adjunct purpose as a backdrop on which the picture of Buddhist knowledge around the world can be formed.

The ANU model demonstrates the possibilities for language policy to convert English from a topic of study into an intellectual production medium and how it can minimise those separations between learning languages and disciplinarity. "Graduates become academically literate Buddhist scholars who contribute to a global conversation and exemplify a multicultural, internationally focused Buddhist education.

### 5.2 English at the Buddhist University in Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam)

The Buddhist University located in Ho Chi Minh city, however, clearly places the use of English at an initial level and a position not as central to being used across the different dimensions of subject learning. "The dysfunctions originate from the institution >Institutions In this institutional context, English is usually taught at initial levels having a strong emphasis on basic grammar, basic vocabulary items and speaking skills at a low level. Although such instruction undoubtedly gives students valuable exposure to the language, it is peripheral to most of what the institution does academically. Vietnamese remains the language of instruction across most disciplines, from Buddhist studies and philosophy to ethics and some forms of administration, thus establishing the contours of the main intellectual area of learning and speculation.

This specific institutional setup makes English only a semiperipheral language in the larger academic ecology. Functional language abilities required for everyday communicative purposes can be acquired and students do have some access to English as a medium of response but it plays only a minor role in scholarly reasoning process and academic interrogation. So accordingly, academic reading and writing at the university continues to be marginal or non-existent in terms of four skills: critical thinking, academic reading, research paper writing and formal debate process all



conducted in English. Thus, English is hardly switched-on as an essential mechanism of critical thinking and the generation of academic knowledge.

Theoretically, this model of the curriculum is very consistent with an English for General Purposes (EGP) position. The EGP frameworks are geared to the development of core communicative competence and linguistic accuracy in everyday settings, yet do not prepare learners with the necessary skills and abilities required by academic discourse that critically prevails in higher education. Without ongoing, embedded discipline-specific language use, students struggle to develop the sophistication in cognitive- academic language necessary for making meaning out of complex scholarly texts or for producing sophisticated research-based English writing. The direct result of this is that the English-learning processing system never grows beyond its limited functional sphere, transcending neither critical activity nor advanced academic communication.

This fundamental limitation is exacerbated by the distinction between languages teaching and the content of disciplinary studies. English language classes operate independently from the complex and dynamic world of Buddhist Studies so that there is a structural disjoint between the acquisition of the English language, and its educational goal. Students are rarely called upon to read and interpret Buddhist philosophy in the English medium, make academic arguments, or explain academic ideas through English. Without integrative and meaningful tasks, learning of English is abstract, pragmatic and lacks intellectual depth. This structural disconnect undermines the likelihood of empowerment through engaging with meaningful content using language—a key feature of (and belief in) EAP and EMI.

In addition, this particular curriculum structure also heavily informs how student academic identities are constructed. Those who are trained heavily in Vietnamese develop strong disciplines of identity production through national language; but, they face linguistic alienation when faced with global academic market needs. Their ability to tap into international scholarship; share their findings through publication, or engage in global dialogues through travel and conference attendance is not limited by any insufficiency of intellect, rather by a lack of exposure to academic English. Consequently, the option of participating in worldwide academic exchange becomes an idealized aspiration rather than a realistic objective.

The Institutionalisation of English as a Subordinate Skill also implies that 'high academic discourse obviously happen in Vietnamese. This perception also serves to further the idea that English is an exterior skill, not an essential inner resource for academic power. Such entrenched beliefs over time significantly shape learner expectations, pedagogical practices and assessment criteria leading to a self-perpetuating cycle that allows English to continue having marginal status as it stays on the periphery of scholarly engagement.

This dominant model is deeply unsatisfactory in the rapidly changing context of Buddhist higher education today. With this growing globalization of Buddhism study in the English

language, institutions that do not adequately incorporate English into their internal structural system of teaching are at risk of becoming scholastically isolated. But however worthy Anglophone scholars may find it to keep local (in this case Vietnamese) alive as a language of Buddhism study, the lack of an EAP- or EMI-type refuge for that knowledge severely limits their capacity to export the rich resources of Vietnamese Buddhist culture into global academia.

To sum up, the syllabus conducted at Buddhist University in Ho Chi Minh City clearly implies an overwhelmingly English-for-General-Purposes (EGP)- oriented approach which confines English within the scope of general communication. In the absence of programmatic and deliberate transformation towards English as an exonymic academic lingua franca, student access to broad-based international academic conversation is structurally inhibited. This state of affairs demonstrates the importance and power of curriculum design and a language-policies-in-context in influencing academic participation patterns worldwide.

### 5.3 Theoretical Comparison

This contrast clearly demonstrates that language policy in the institution, instead of inherent abilities of learners, is what overwhelmingly shapes English for academic purposes in a Buddhist higher education domain. The way in which the exclusive use of English as a medium of instruction at both PG and Doctoral levels was consciously promoted at Acharya Nagarjuna University consolidates the centrality of English as the naturalised language for academic enquiry and debate. Critical thinking, extensive reading, clear writing and persuasive speaking is demanded of students in English at every level of scholarship. This high demand results in higher cognitive activation and longer exposure to the fine-grained structure of disciplinary discourse. In this learning context, English becomes much more than just a language – it is taught as an academic language in which students can fully engage theatremakers and academicians from around the world.

By way of contrast the buddhist University in Ho chi Minh City maintains Vietnamese as the main teaching language whilst relegating English to a subsidiary subject. This policy effectively relegates English to a marginalised status by getting it correspond only to the area of functional usage against its role as mediator in more advanced academic thinking and understanding. Students are thus not engaging broadly in cognitive interaction with English, and their academic work has been more or less locally or nationally-oriented without much of an opportunity for wide intellectual roaming. The above stark contrast between these two schools thus reflects that different schools' contrasts in academic English proficiency can be traced not to a difference of intellectual ability or motivation among the pupils, but to choices concerning the orientations of their curriculum and medium of instruction. A language policy ultimately determines learners' educational trajectories in the academic ecosystem by either facilitating English as an access to a world of wider scholarship, or confining it into a peripheral skill of very little importance.

## 6. Conclusion

This theoretical paper carefully argues that the general efficacy of English in Buddhist higher education is significantly determined by both institutional philosophy and curriculum complexity. The new and innovative English-medium academic program of Acharya Nagarjuna University allows them not only deep language access but also substantial intellectual entre into the global Buddhist world studiously oriented research and scholars cannot fail notice its graduates position within the larger, increasingly integrated worldwide community. In sharp contrast, the Buddhist university in Ho Chi Minh City has asserted Vietnamese as the chief medium of instruction, relegating English to a relatively marginal and preliminary vehicle for scholarly communication. The study finally suggests that for Vietnamese Buddhist universities to achieve a real level of international integration and collaboration, English must stop being confined to an academic subject and instead become fully acknowledged and exploited as a language of scholarship, serving the purpose of academic exchange and cross-cultural communication.

## 7. Future Scope

Recommended areas for future research may include the progressive and structured introduction of English-medium instructional modules in Vietnamese Buddhist universities. Moreover, there is a possibility that specific courses for EBAP could be created to increase the linguistic competence of the students studying under such system. However, comparative work that looks contrasting the activities and pedagogies of Buddhist establishments in countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar may provide useful contexts and tools to understand the regional variations. Furthermore, longitudinal theoretical research into the adoption of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in religious education might be able to provide us with a full picture about the potential impact and efficacy in long term. These directions of study will surely be able to create a model of Buddhist higher education, which would be both sustainable and locally relevant as well as respect global standards and enrich the academic world with nodes for many sandhi bones among humanity.

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