

Languages in Education: A Critical Ethnography of a Micro-level Policy

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Abstract

This article explores the language policy in education (henceforth, LPE) at the local level. Adopting the critical ethnography study for 6 months at Vyas Municipality, I reveal what ideological awareness the policymakers and arbiters have on LPE and how do they interpret and appropriate it in multilingual school setting. The information collected through in-depth interviews, FGD, participant observation, and document reviews have been analyzed, interpreted, and triangulated critically. The study shows three major findings regarding LPE in local government; first, LPE has created a public debate and ideological discrepancy in multilingual school contexts; the second, the local LPE has diverse interpretation, appropriation, and practices; and the last, the English language policy (ELP) appears as a ‘black hole’, which has been gradually swallowing other local and indigenous languages. However, the language policymakers and arbiters have been gradually raising critical awareness for appropriate LPE and its practices that seems a positive advancement at the local level.

Keywords: *language policy in education, critical ethnography, ideological discrepancy, English as a ‘black hole’, critical awareness*

Introduction

Language policy in education (LPE) diversely termed as; language education policy, language-in-education policy, medium of instruction (MOI) policy – focuses on educational settings within language policy and planning (LPP) research, generally from basic to tertiary level (Menken & Garcia, 2010; Tollefson, 2013). Beginning in the 1970s, research on LPE focused primarily on debates about the value of monolingual and bilingual approaches to instruction. Nowadays, LPE is ubiquitous worldwide which has fascinated a great deal of consideration from scholars in LPP (Tollefson & Tsui, 2018). The field of language policy has rapidly expanded to include an increasingly diverse body of research including LPE which focuses on how language policy creation, interpretation, and appropriation in schools impact educational processes, and communities with particular attention to the minority and indigenous language users to use their languages (Johnson, 2013; Johnson & Pratt, 2014). Johnson (2013) states that schools are studied as sites of language policy processes that rely on the ideological spaces unique to the classroom, school, and community. Ricento and Hornberger (1996) present the metaphorical “LPP onion”, meant to depict the layers of LPP activity, and place the teacher at the center, thus emphasizing the power of teachers. “LP layers” of Johnson (2013) asserts the processes of creation, interpretation, and appropriation where policies are first shaped as a result of intertextual and interdiscursive links to past and present policy texts and discourses. After the creation of the policy, that is put into motion and made open to diverse explanations by language policymakers and arbiters. In a similar vein, critical ethnography creates

a connection between policy texts and the role that various actors play to resist and appropriate those policies in multiple layers (Hornberger & Johnson, 2011). The critical ethnographic approach interprets language policy as a multilayered construct where power relations, social structure, economy, politics, and ideology are intricately interwoven (McCarty, 2011, cited in Phyak, 2013). McCarty (2011) further claims the approach is an appropriate outline where LPP actors' (e.g. policymakers, students, teachers, and communities) voices contend with each other reflecting their social, ethnic, political, and economic meanings, agendas, and connections.

In the context of Nepal, the LPE has been a major disputed subject tracing from Rana autocracy to federalism with numerous trajectories. LPE under the Ranas served to boundary education to privileged, mostly Rana family members where the LPE was English. Durbar High School, the first school of Nepal had employed English language policy. Awasthi (2004) states that the LPE developed during the Panchayat regime focused the Nepali language and declared linguistic nationalism; therefore, the Nepali became a part of the nationalistic movement across the country during the period. The 1990 Constitution was a milestone from monolingual ideology to 'multilingual turn' (May, 2014), and ideological transformation in LPE in Nepal. However, the provision of educational and cultural rights was overtly stated in the constitutions for Nepal's minorities but lacked the practical implementations. Until the adoption of the Interim Constitution in 2007, the Nepali was the single language of government affairs, business, and education. The Nepali-medium mandate had come (directly or indirectly) from the Nepali monarchy, an authoritarian regime that held power for more than 240 years, and was part of the greater hegemonic, nationalist ideology that promoted 'one religion, one culture, and one language in the name of national unity (Awasthi, 2004; Yadava, 2007). At present, the political transformation of Nepal from a constitutional monarchy to a federal democratic republic, and from a Hindu polity to a secular country has brought some crucial changes in LPE (Phyak, 2016). The proliferation of the Constitution of Nepal (2015) legitimately transformed the country into a Federal Republican-Democratic nation that delegated the power of decision-making in LPE to the local governments (Poudel & Choi, 2020). The constitution provides 22 functions and matters of the local governments including basic and secondary education (schedule 8, no. 8) and protection and development of languages, cultures, and fine arts (no. 22). The local government is the authorized body to design and develop LPE at the local level concurrent with the federal and provincial government policies and framework. Therefore, the local government has been managing and adopting new challenges and opportunities to address the local issues in education and LPE. In addition, the responsibility of managing schools, teachers, education, language policy, or MOI in pedagogy has been transferred to the local government. Further, it can support framing curriculum and textbooks, conducting training for teachers, allocating budget, managing resources, and adopting plans, policies, and programs in schools. According to the constitutional provisions, the local governments have formed an education committee including experts, politicians, head teachers, and education officials headed by the Mayor/Chair of the municipality which is legally responsible for planning and monitoring local curriculum, create, implement, and appropriate LPE, MOI policies, and financial support for educational institutions. The constitution has provisioned that every Nepalese community residing in Nepal shall have the right to get education in its mother tongue (MT), to open and operate MT schools and educational institutes, in accordance with law (Article 31), and every person and community shall have the right to use, promote and preserve their languages and scripts (Article, 32).

In this milieu, the policymakers at local government and their ideology shape the LPE. However, very few local governments have drafted language policy document and LPE. Regarding Gandaki province (my study site), the provincial government has passed the education policy, 2021 and implemented to the region where the LPE has been addressed in the article no. 11.5. The article 11.5.1 and 2 state that multilingual education policy (trilingual) will be implemented for the basic level, and the textbooks, teaching and instructional materials, and other resources will be developed, printed and distributed with

the effective supervision and evaluation. Similarly, Vyas Municipal Education Act (2017) and Bylaw (2018) instruct to implement trilingual education policy i.e., Nepali, English, and mother tongue in its territory. The policy states, the local LPE will be Nepali, English, or both languages. Further, it states, mother tongue policy may be imparted up to the basic level (grades 1 to 5) and language subjects will have the same language policy.

With this backdrop, this study explores the ideologies of local-level policymakers and arbiters in creating, interpreting and appropriating the LPE in schools at Vyas municipality. The literature explores, the LPE in local government is a fresh scheme and the most wanted issue that has been diversely interpreted in national and local level and is debated widely in Nepalese academia and media (Poudel & Choi, 2020). Fewer studies have been conducted on the issue; therefore, I determine a gap to accelerate the study which may contribute to the policymakers and arbiters for creating equitable LPE at local government addressing the local context, needs, demands, and necessities.

Objectives of the study

The study intended to explore the ideologies of policymakers and arbiters on LPE, and the practices of LPE at Vyas Municipality.

Review of literature

Here, I present the brief reviews of theoretical, empirical, and policy literature related to LPE in Nepal and LPE in federal Nepal that have been related, compared, and contrasted.

LPE in Nepal: An outline

LPE receives critical contemporary concern in multilingual, multiethnic, and multicultural country Nepal. The historical route of LPE has been a prime concern in the country from Rana monarchy to federal democracy having numerous bends and jerks. The LPE in Nepal was formed concerning historical, social, political circumstances. When we observe history, numerous efforts, acts, and policies in the education sector have addressed the issues of language, and have influencing roles in LPE. Especially, these documents, policies and acts like: Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC, 1956); All Round National Education Committee (ARNEC, 1960); National Education System Plan (NESP, 1971); Education Act, 2028 B.S. (1971); National Education Commission (NEC, 1992); National Languages Policy Recommendation Commission (NLPRC, 1994); High-Level National Education Commission (HLNEC, 1999), Bilingual Education Study Report (2001); Vulnerable Community Development Plan (VCDP, 2004); Education Act of Nepal (2006); National Curriculum Framework for School Education (2007); School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP, 2009-2015); Multilingual Education Implementation Guidelines (2010); MLE Policy (2016); Federal Education Act (2018); Local Government Regulation Act (2018); National Education Policy (2018) concern to LPE and other issues in education. Here, I briefly sketch the reviewed literature and documents of LPE in Nepal after the establishment of federalism.

LPE in Federal Nepal

The Constitution 2015 introduced 'Federalism, Republican, and Secularism' in the country that eliminated the Constitutional Monarchy system and Kathmandu-centered government structure. Nepal is identified as a multilingual, multiethnic, and multicultural country, and the Constitution has preserved

the language rights of all citizens, and assures the citizens will not be discriminated against in terms of linguistic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds and they have the right to use and promote mother tongues (The Constitution of Nepal, 2015). The state has explicit LPP and acts guided by the constitution, and the Language Commission Nepal (LCN) advocates for the promotion and preservation of all the languages spoken in Nepal. Although the paradigm shifts have occurred in state and government ruling systems, the issue of LPP seems disputed subject among others. The manifesto has lots of advocacy on the different rights to its citizen which includes the rights to language, education, culture, and other ethnic heritages, specifically; I have discussed the provisions of LPE in the subsequent sections.

With the advocacy to ensure dozens of rights to the citizen, the Constitution of Nepal (2015) addresses in the article (6) and (7) about the languages of the nation and official language, respectively. Briefly to analyze the provision of language in the constitution, Nepal's multilingual way of life assimilated in the preamble, multilingual nation mentioned in Article 3, the national language included in Article 6 and Article 7 (1), (2) and (3) on the provision of official language, section 18 of the right to equality mentioned in article 7 (2) and (3), Article 31 (4) and (5) focus for right to education through Braille and sign language, Article 32 (1) and (2) envisions for the rights related to language and culture. Clause (6) of Article 51(3) provisions for language protection and development policy, in clause (7) of Article 51(3) highlights the multilingual policy. Similarly, article 57 focuses on the distribution of state power, includes the protection of the language of the states mentioned in the sub-schedule of sub-section (2). Similarly, subsection (4) spotlights the authority of the local body related to language protection and development are the important constitutional provisions related to the jurisdiction of the LCN. Further, the constitution states the rights relating to education and language in the article (31 and 32) as: *“Every Nepali community living in Nepal has right to education up to the secondary level in their mother tongue and start and operates schools and educational institutions as provided in the law and have rights to preserve and promote its language, script, culture, cultural civilization, and heritage”*.

The constitution has provisioned ideological and implementational spaces to the use of mother tongue at local level; this can be an upward step of opening the constitutional door for the transformation of Nepal towards a multilingual nation. For the protection, promotion, and development of languages in Nepal, the Constitution has furnished a new provision to establish LCN in article 287. The functions, duties, and powers of the Commission as specified in sub-clause 6 (c) and (d) are to measure the levels of development of mother tongues and make suggestions to the Government of Nepal on the potentiality of their use in education, and study, research and monitor languages (The Constitution of Nepal, 2015). In federal Nepal, no doubt, the country will transform into a multilingual nation system where the state can use the local languages in government, administration, offices, and education.

Being specific to LPE in federal Nepal, the MLE policy (2016) is identified as a prime document to regulate the MTB MLE program in the country which has endorsed a policy for recruiting a native-speaker teacher of the local language in each school. The guidelines further state that ...basic level education can be given in mother tongue to ensure access to quality education and the medium of instruction at pre-primary level shall be the local mother tongue except for other language subjects. The Medium of Instruction and Languages for Education (MILE, 2015) suggested drafting a comprehensive ELP and mother-tongue instruction policy in Nepal to ensure the children's literacy and basic cognitive ability (Phyak & Ojha, 2018). After the MTB MLE policy in the country, the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) has published curriculum and textbooks in 23 mother tongues and reference materials in 15 different mother tongues. Kandel (2016) states 6,598 schools are using their mother tongue as an additional medium of instruction in 70 districts with 732,962 students and more than 11,000 teachers are trained to teach in their mother tongue nationwide.

In addition, Higher Education Commission Report (2017) emphasizes to arrange mother tongue policy to teach Nepali and English languages and other subjects, to implement multilingual education in a multilingual community, and to use mother tongue as a language, as a subject, and as a medium. National Education Policy (NEP, 2018) has provisioned that to manage the linguistic diversity of Nepal, multilingual education policy based on students' mother tongue will be implemented. The policy instructed that the local level will make arrangements, plans, and implements to provide opportunities for learning in mother tongue in single mother tongue classes, and the multilingual medium based classes in mixed language groups.

Federal Education Act (2018) addresses that in addition to the national curriculum structure, the state government or local level may determine the curriculum of an additional subject of interest to inform the specificity, geography, history, or local language or culture of the concerned level. Local Government Regulation Act (2018) emphasizes the development, preservation, and promotion of local languages, use scripts and culture in education, focus to mother tongue policy in basic level, open mother tongue in schools, and enhance indigenous languages and multilingual policy in education.

The Gandaki Province Education Policy (2021) states “*concerning the linguistic, ethnic and cultural diversity in the region, the government adopts multilingual education policy i.e., Mother Tongue, Nepali and English*”. Especially in the basic level, to enhance the teachers' capacity to manage multilingual policy, the local governments will be assisted for trainings and required assistance. The policy aims to develop, print and distribute textbooks, teaching and instructional materials, and other resources mobilizing the local stakeholders and subject experts, and effective supervision and evaluation will be conducted. In collaboration with the local governments and private sectors, mother tongue communication materials, audio-visual materials and instructional materials will be developed and the schools will be motivated to adopt in teaching-learning.

Specifically, for the secondary level education, the policy instructs that while science, mathematics, and computer subjects should be taught through EMI but moral education, social studies, and health and physical education in Nepali medium instruction (NMI). The policy aims to have uniformity in the MOI in all the schools established in the province. The policy further has made provision for initiating the formulation and implementation of local curriculum to address the local needs, demands and necessities (Gandaki Province Education Policy, 2021).

Similarly, Vyas Municipal Government has prepared and implemented trilingual education policy concurrent with Gandaki Province Education Policy. For the formation of education act and bylaws of the government, the municipal government authority, policy makers, language policy experts, arbiters, and stakeholders conducted series of discussions and interactions regarding various educational and language issues in the territory as well as its effective interpretation and appropriation (G. S. Sharma (pseudonym) personal communication, August 20, 2021). Finally, the municipal government has produced the local gazette regarding the Education Act (2017) and Education Bylaws (2018) that instructs the educational institutions to adopt Nepali, English, and Mother Tongue education policy in teaching-learning process. The manifesto mentions that the language policy in school can be trilingual (as discussed previously), but for basic level (grades 1-5), mother tongue-based education is required, and to teach language subjects the same language policy should be adopted. Additionally, the government's Bylaw permits and assures to open MTB School within its territory and the right to establish a school by any community for giving education to their children in their mother tongue aligned with the Constitution of Nepal, 2015 and Gandaki province law and education policy.

The theoretical, historical, empirical, and policy reviews on language policy in education in federal,

provincial, and local governments significantly informed my understanding of the area. Reviewing the historical trajectories of LPE in Nepal and recent literature, I realize that there is a lack of study on LPE at local level. The knowledge gap generated two questions in my mind; what ideological constructs the policy makers have for the creation of LPE at local government? And how the LPE is implemented and practiced, and what is its impact? Being guided by these questions, I conducted the study at local government level (i.e., Vyas Municipality).

Methodology

The study employs the theoretical lens of ‘critical ethnography of LPE’ (McCarty, 2011) of qualitative research linking to the ‘critical-interpretative’ paradigm. This study is a part of six-month critical ethnographic fieldwork of my PhD project at Vyas Municipality in Gandaki Province, Nepal. A critical ethnography of LPP is a method/theory of examining the spaces for agencies, actors, contexts, and processes across the multiple layers of language policy creation, interpretation, and appropriation marrying with a critical approach focused to the educational context (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007). This approach uncovers ‘peeling the onion’ (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996), and ideologies and practices of the policy actors (i.e., policymakers, students, teachers, parents, and communities) who engage in policy creation and implementation procedures. Employing the non-probability purposive sampling, I selected Vyas Municipality because of its linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity as well as geographical and personal accessibility. I critically engaged in the fieldwork from February 2021-July 2021, especially at different wards of the municipality. During the fieldwork, I conducted eight in-depth interviews with policymakers, three with English, Social Studies and Science teachers, and two with parents from basic and secondary school at different wards of the municipality. Moreover, I observed two classes (one basic and one secondary level) to gather more information, conducted one homogenous focused group discussions (FGD) with community school teachers, and triangulated the data by obtaining their informed consent. For interviews, I developed guidelines to ensure uniformity and set the context, each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes where I allowed maximum flexibilities in structures and contents. During the time, I thoroughly maintained collaboration with the participants, maintained ethical considerations like the risk of harm, informed consent, deception, privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012) until I unpacked my fieldwork. I assigned codes for policy makers, schools, teachers, and parents respectively (PM: 1, PM: 2, PM: 3, PM: 4, PM: 5, PM: 6, PM: 7, PM: 8, S: 1, S:2, T:1, T: 2, P: 1, P: 2). Specifically, the schools that were selected purposively constitute significant student heterogeneity in terms of caste/ethnicity, language, diversified society, and culture. For the analysis of recorded interviews and information, I transcribed interview in Devnagari script, translated it into English, then drew codes to develop themes following step-by-step form making ‘web-like illustration’ (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Web-like illustration is similar to thematic networks and web-like map where I drew basic themes, organizing themes and global themes illustrating the relationship between the texts. Further, I utilized ‘critical discourse analysis’ (Fairclough, 1992) to interpret the sociopolitical meaning of what participants argue, and their ideologies on local LPE and practices in their contexts.

Results and discussion

This section explores, analyses, and interprets the ideologies and practices of language policy makers and arbiters on LPE based on the empirical evidence. Their views have been discussed thematically within the border of objectives and research questions. The collected data have been broadly interpreted and analyzed into three global themes: ideological discrepancy on LPE, diverse practices of local LPE, and English as a ‘black hole’: Swallowing other languages that have been linked with accessible theories and

quotation of the participants.

Ideological discrepancy on LPE

Nepal's Constitution 2015 has distinctly declared the rights of the local governments for 'protection, development and use of languages, scripts, cultures, fine arts and religions' (The Constitution of Nepal, 2015, Schedule 6 and 8), therefore, the right to get education to every Nepalese community in their mother tongue, and open and operate language schools has been provisioned in the manifesto. The federal system in the country has created 'ideological and implementational spaces' to LPE and MLE as a major argument and debate in the local governments. During my fieldwork, I encountered with multiple and divergent ideologies of the policy makers and actors regarding the creation, interpretation, and appropriation of LPE that has produced ideological discrepancy, mismatch, and tensions among the stakeholders. To be specific, Vyas Municipal Government has prepared and implemented Local Education Act (2017) and Local Education Bylaw (2018) with the clear instructions of trilingual policy in education, and the teachers as the final arbiters have expressed divergent ideologies regarding the existing LPE, here, T: 3 shared his views in favour of Nepali language policy in school:

I think, teaching and learning in Nepali language is good, the field of knowledge becomes wider and students also learn a lot. In fact, their knowledge is narrowed down due to English language. Students who have studied through English language medium have less than 50 percent knowledge than those who have studied in Nepali language medium. Of course, there is no English environment outside the classroom to practice. (From interview transcript, T: 3)

In the divergent way, the next teacher participant (T: 1) expressed his agency focusing the demand, need and necessity of English language policy (ELP) in education. He stated:

English language policy in education is necessary to produce manpower who can grab the opportunities in the world market; therefore, we have adopted ELP in school for five years. First, it was the demand of time, second, the pressure from parents ignited to adopt the policy. Majority of parents demanded for ELP in education, now it has been successful, for example, students' discipline, reading standard, enrollment and pass rate is increased. (Form interview transcript, T: 1).

But expressing the neutral perspectives on LPE, a teacher participant (T: 2) expressed that everyone has the right to exercise the powers granted by the constitution and the Local Education Act...Nepali language should be promoted as an MOI in Nepal but the English language should not be neglected because of international communication; therefore, LPE should be created by considering these things. The teacher noted people have migrated abroad; for that reason, LPE in Nepal have been declared observing foreign countries' policies that have shadowed our culture, tradition, and local flavor. He stressed every school should have the freedom to use LPE according to the resources, expertise, demands, and contexts, but imposed ideology and policy is against of nationality. Similarly, a policymaker (PM: 4) argued that there should be two/bi- lingual policy in education i.e., Nepali and English according to the time and context. He reasoned that the international world is Englishized, consequently; the schools in his ward have started English language policy (ELP) and EMI but weak students prefer Nepali language policy (NLP) and Nepali medium instruction (NMI). He added the logic behind adopting EMI is employment, attraction, and international opportunities.

The ideologies of policymakers and teachers at local level concern the impact of LPE and MOI on employment, income, and various measures of economic aspects (Tollefson & Tsui, 2018). The ideological

mismatches between the policymakers and arbiters have created tensions and challenges for the effective implementation of LPE at local level rather than a common understanding. To adopt EMI and NMI in education, the monolingual/bilingual, and dominant language ideology influenced the mindset of the policymakers, arbiters, and teachers greatly to.

The diverse ideological expressions of the policymakers and stakeholders in local government make a meaning that there still exists ideological variance, challenges to policy creation and implementation, dominations of Nepali and English languages, habits of monolingual and bilingual mind set, lapses on effective implementation of constitutional provisions, gaps in local education policy, and lacks of local government's expertise and monitoring. It reveals that local LPE formed by Vyas Municipal Government has been interpreted and appropriated differently by policymakers and teachers and practiced diversely in the schools. The policy is interpreted according to their determinations, interests, and rooted in vested ideologies. The local government's LPE could not be interpreted and appropriated effectively because of ideological discrepancy of policy arbiters and actors.

Diverse practices of local LPE

As a critical ethnographer, I conducted series of interviews and informal interactions with the policymakers, arbiters, and actors at the different wards of municipality, and observed the classrooms and the practices of local LPE (how the local LPE formulated by local government has been practiced/used in school premises? Is that completely or partially practiced? How do the policy arbiters implement and appropriate it?) in school premises. School is the center of language policy practices where the policy actors like teachers, students, and parents involve, interact and communicate, and reveal ideological and implementational space. When I visited two schools and observed classrooms as a participant observer, there appeared discrepancy between local LPE and its practices. Both the schools followed bilingual policies and practices in their documents, communication, teaching-learning process, and other activities. The signboards of the schools, quotations-pictures-drawings and charts on the wall, calendar, and letter pad were written in both the Nepali and the English languages but no sign of local languages was observed. The schools had practices of bilingual policy (i.e., Nepali and English) in their daily activities; although the local LPE instructed the use of mother tongue in basic level classes. Here I present a classroom scene and interaction where the teachers and students practiced bilingual policy.

#Vignette 1: language policy in school and classroom (School: A)

It's Friday, 4 September 2021, and the time is 1:00 pm. The bell rang for fourth period in School: A. It was English period in Grade 6. The female teacher entered to the classroom and I followed her taking the permission from her and the Headmaster as well. There were 17 students in the class who greeted standing together in English, saying "Good afternoon, Miss". The teacher greeted and signaled them to take seats. Then she asked them to show their homework (in English). She checked homework of 4 students randomly and informed the students about that day's topic (in English). She wrote the topic "T. S. Eliot" on the board and informed them that the topic is T. S. Eliot's biography. Then she asked the background information of the poet, Eliot to students (in English). The conversation was like:

T: Who is TS Eliot?

Sl: He is a writer.

T: Who is he? (Can you guess?)

S2: *English poet*

T: *(very nice) He is an English poet.*

Then the teacher asked S3 (boy) to read the first paragraph of the text. The student stood up and read in fluctuated voice with less correct pronunciation. Meantime, the teacher corrected his pronunciation. Then she asked S4 (girl) to read the second paragraph and also assisted her in pronunciation as well. Likewise, she asked S5, S6 and S7 to read the different paragraphs. After they read the whole text, she asked the students to copy word meanings as she wrote on the board (in English). She wrote the words playwright, critic, propagator, ancient, philosophy, inclination, landmark and so on with their meanings in simple English and equivalent Nepali words in the bracket. While writing the vocabulary, the teacher missed 's' in the spelling of 'masterpiece', the students pointed her mistake and said to correct (in English). The teacher excused and corrected the spelling, then asked... yes, it is ok now? Meantime, one of the students could not read the last word from the back seat and asked in Nepali language 'Miss tyo ke word ho last ma? (Miss, what is that word at the last?) Then the teacher replied in Nepali as 'tyo stirring ho. (That's stirring). After the students copied the words and meanings, the teacher instructed them to read the meanings with correct pronunciation.

T: *(students please follow me, ok?) Playwright - playwright - playwright...What's the meaning of playwright?*

Ss: *(together) a person who writes drama or play.*

T: *Yes, playwright is a person who writes drama or play. Good.*

In the similar way, she first reads, then asks and confirms the words and meanings. After the practice of all the words and meanings written on the board, she instructed the students to read and memorize those at home. The bell rang for next period. The teacher managed her teaching materials and thanked the students (in English). The students stood and said in loud voice 'Thank you Miss for teaching us nicely'. The class ended.

The language policy in school and classroom expose the inconsistency between policy-ideology and practices as instructed by local government. The language policy adopted by the school have been interpreted and appropriated randomly by the teacher in their classroom and teaching-learning process. Although the teacher was teaching English subject, the communication was bilingual (i.e., English and Nepali). The Vyas Municipal Education Act (2017) has instructed clearly to teach language subjects that the same language as the medium of instruction should be adopted but the teacher and students preferred speaking and writing in Nepali language since both the subject and medium was English. Similarly, when I observed School: B and one secondary level class (social studies), the teachers and students were interacting in English and Nepali language since the local education act urged to teach Social Studies in Nepali medium. To draw the collective voices from teachers on LPE, I conducted a FGD with teachers at community school, where they stated about the practices of ELP in their classes in this way:

We do not have 100 percent EMI policy in classroom; we use about 70 percent English and 30 percent Nepali when teaching social studies, moral education, history, and cultural subjects. Teaching in both English and Nepali has made easier to understand contents. So the bilingual policy is very good. We have been adopting mixed medium. (From focused group discussion, July 24, 2021)

I found three language policies in the schools i.e., English-only, Nepali-only and Hybrid (mixed)

language policy but most of the schools followed hybrid language policy (i.e., mixing both Nepali and English language) as per the need and preferences of the students and teachers.

Oposing the ELP and its impacts on education, research participant (T: 2) advocated that studying in English does not do justice to social studies, science, history, and geography subjects...teachers who teach in English medium have only linguistic skills rather than content knowledge, the depth of the subject and the language are completely different. Therefore, he suggested the entire schools and teachers to adopt common Nepali medium instruction (NMI) policy to preserve Nepali culture, knowledge, and skills in the education system. Addressing the issue of MTB-MLE policy at schools, he emphasized that teaching in mother tongue seems like a regression because in a multilingual society it is almost impossible to teach through everyone's mother tongues. He expressed language and culture must be preserved, however; separate mother tongue classes cannot be conducted in schools because of inadequate resources and contents in the majority of the language. To solve the emerging dispute of Nepali and English language medium policy in education, PM-4 stated that he had proposed for merging those schools but the municipality board did not allow such merging.

Ignoring the supporters of NLP and ELP in education, the mother tongue campaigners emphasized to establish mother-tongue-based schools in their territory. PM: 6 asserted that there has been a demand from Bhujels and Magars that the children should be educated in their mother tongue, where ninety percent of Bhujel and Magar students enroll. He assured to take the initiative to operate MTB MLE classes in those schools in near future. In the equivalent layer, next PM: 7 assured optimistically to establish basic level mother tongue-based schools in his area. He added *"there are 12 Darai pocket villages that make up 50 percent population in the ward; therefore, we plan to establish basic level mother tongue schools for the preservation and promotion of Darai language...the board meeting has decided to allocate a budget for the construction of MTB School. We will move it forward"*. In a divergent way, the PM: 6 showed anxiety and disability to set up MTB-MLE school, and to appoint language teacher because of budgetary and policy problems in the ward. He uttered:

... it is not possible to establish mother tongue school at ward level ...we do not have the capacity to hire teachers by spending 15-20 thousand on remuneration. Similarly, it is difficult to teach all subjects in the same language. We cannot implement such policies unless the municipality approves them. (From interview transcript, PM: 6).

But PM: 4 accentuated with the suspicion that if they establish a language or MTB school, only the school would remain, the students of those communities would not go there because of Nepali and English medium schools' attraction. For example, they had hired a Newari language teacher from Kathmandu to teach the children for 6 months at the ward but to their surprise, the children did not attend. Their parents did not allow. He blamed that people have been guided by Nepali and English language policy and ideology, the mother tongue has been less prioritized.

On the other hand, the remotest ward in the municipality has developed and implemented a basic level local curriculum in Magar language in the schools as a fine example of mother tongue policy in education. The Ward Chair (PM: 5) stated in optimistic way that:

The ward has a 92 percent Magar population. To conduct classes in the Magar language, initiatives are taken. Now, class 4 and 5 textbooks include the detailed type of religious rites, while at the lower level; we have created a curriculum by including songs and language rites in Magar language... The course has been implemented here since this academic year. We have created this course to cover the linguistic, cultural and religious aspects of the Magar tribe. (From interview transcript, PM: 5)

The chair added that to prepare the local curriculum, Municipal Education Section provided some budget, and for the process – leaders, experts, and local people were invited in seminars and interactions – gathered and discussed to understand the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural aspects of Magar tribe to include in textbooks. After the implementation of that curriculum to all the schools of the ward, he clarified; the students were amazed and happy, he explained, the textbook contents have been prepared in Devanagari script but have been processed for next set of curricula in ‘Akha’ (i.e., Magar language script), and plan to run a Magar MTB school in the ward. Despite the sophisticated demand of Nepali and English language medium policy in education, ward-14 has given exemplary work to prepare and implement locally prepared curriculum and textbooks. The noble work of the Magar community in the ward has altered the EMI and NMI as the default policies in the education system in Nepal (Poudel & Choi, 2020). The local people perceived the relevance of the mother tongue policy in education for their life chances, and practicality, and moved accordingly.

Adopting the mother tongue classes at the local level, the Chief of Education Section pinpointed that there seem possibilities of mother tongue classes in junior level but there are difficulties in upper classes because of teacher and resource shortage. He emphasized unless the federal, provincial, and local government has a clear provision in the rules, policies, and constitution, it is not possible and meaningful to give education in the mother tongue. It seems mother tongue education has been challenging unless textbooks are created, assessment systems are adjusted, jobs are provided and available, he stated. However, the officer (PM: 3) positively forwarded that Vyas municipality has created a local curriculum for grades 1 to 3, printed the textbooks of grade 1, and is preparing the curriculum and textbooks up to grade 8. These initiatives appear to suggest a positive way forward for the promotion and development of local languages. He clarified as the rights and responsibilities of education transferred from the center to the local level, its form and curriculum have to be changed and updated, needs to embrace geographical and linguistic diversity in the education policy. The policymaker (PM: 2) stated *“in order to preserve the language, the languages of different tribes should be introduced in the schools as an elective subject up to basic level in practical way, and the language policy in education should be made on the basis of geography, context and population”*. Additionally, the policymakers (PM: 1 and PM: 3) insisted that the creation and implementation of local curricula and textbooks, and the inclusion of nine different languages work as a milestone to preserve the local language and culture. Although the resources and materials have been prepared, the pandemic of COVID -19 and the nationwide lockdown hampered its effective implementation, they appended. A parent (P: 1) praised the work of the municipality to prepare local curricula and textbooks but suggested for using modern methods of learning, digital technology, virtual and social media to way forward the issue of language preservation and promotion at school.

The expressed ideologies and arguments of different policymakers in this section reproduce the meaning that LPE is an arena for action in influential movements for social change and benefits’ (Tollefson & Tsui, 2018), as a result, local governments have created spaces for varied ideologies on it. The emerging super-diversity in the municipality and the flow of people from ethnic, territorial, and linguistic backgrounds, policy makers-students-parents’ interests, domination of Nepali, and hegemony of the English language have complicated the local LPE, accordingly, the practices of LPE seem diverse in the region.

English as a ‘black hole’: Swallowing other languages

With the growing significance and the rising demand for English language policy in education, the superiority and hegemony of EMI is worldwide, and Vyas Municipality is not isolated from the global phenomenon. The Chief of the Education Section of Vyas municipality (PM: 3) informed that the Ministry of Education has instructed for LPE as; the first language should be Nepali and the second language

would be the local language, and the third would be English. Although, the Constitution, 2015 has not given the English language a official language status, it has been used in an unprecedented way in all the sectors as well as education. The officer stated in detail that the majority of the community schools in the municipality have adopted English language policy (ELP) because of replications. He expressed as:

There is no such compelling situation for ELP but seeing the students of the institutional schools wearing ties and boots, boarding the bus, and studying in English medium ... the parents have developed the mentality that studying in English medium makes the children qualified ... That is why even in community schools, students are taught in English for sustainability and continuity. Additionally, the community schools and their teachers have resorted to the English medium for their livelihood and professional security as the institutional schools have taken the students. (From interview transcript, PM: 3)

He asserted the national and international context and the pressure from the higher authorities have forced the implication of EMI in schools that has decreased the local flavor in education. It seems the power of the federal policy makers and LPE structures have limited the space of local government in the negotiation and appropriation of local LPE. Similar to the officer, one participant (Head) teacher (T: 1) conveyed the reality of adopting ELP at his school:

In our school, classes from nursery to ten are taught in English... First, it was the demand of time; second, it was imposed because people from other places came to our school society and demanded ELP. Majority of the parents said in the annual festivals and meetings that English medium is needed to increase the number of students. Therefore, it has been decided 5 years ago. (From interview transcript, T: 1)

Despite the implementation of the ELP at school, the school's environment and teachers' expertise have been a great challenge for the success. The teachers are not proficient in English medium, but school is adopting the policy by hook and crook, and has created pressure, the participants expressed with sorrow. Although the school employed the EMI practice for five years, the participant teachers have realized that it would be good if the NMI is applied in schools since the students can acquire real, authentic, and practical knowledge. Hence, the LPE and MOI policy seem to indicate discrepancy between the officially stated and enacted policies across the schooling system (Poudel & Choi, 2020).

A similar ideology is understood and enacted by the next policy maker (PM: 7) who strongly advocated the importance of ELP in schools. He added that 'aspiration for employment, economic and personal development' impulse the students and parents to learn in English in Nepal. His understanding lines up with the discourse of globalization and neoliberal ideological orientations with the ability in English for quality and successful life. The idea can be inferred that most Nepali take the English language as a vehicle or tool for their career development, job opportunity, security, adjustment, global communication, and survival; consequently, they are devoted to the English language by the heart and mind (Kandel, 2018). Guided by mother tongue language policy, PM: 8 of a typical Magar village described the impact of ELP in education, and stated:

There are no students in our community schools, everyone went to boarding school. All became market oriented. ... English language has pulled them... only English is not right. We also need to know our languages. If we say "don't teach in English, it's like being shot". (From interview transcript, PM: 8)

The expressed views make sense the private schools in Nepal commodify the value of English as a language of globalization, international market, and quality education (Phyak, 2016); as a result, most of

the parents seem interested to enroll their children in those schools, especially located in market areas. Giri (2015) mentions that people receive English as a matter of pride and prestige, therefore, the magnitude of the ELP has been powerful in Nepal. The students and parents from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in the region have high charm and attraction in English language and want to fulfill their dreams, and grab the opportunities and be secured through it, subsequently; the schools have been adopting ELP to make the students and parents happy, and sustain the school. Next participant (T: 1) claimed that teaching in EMI policy increased the pass percentage of students and improved the efficiencies, he added, the desire of the parents is the same; the small classes to implement EMI, that's why the demand of EMI classes has been increasing. He informed that after adopting ELP in school, 100 new students have been enrolled in this academic year. English is thought to open the door of possibilities for superior academic and economic offers at the local and international levels, and for endurance in the world, English is a must; it serves as 'oxygen to the life' (Kandel, 2018). A teacher leader (T: 2) showed his disagreement to adopt ELP in schools and blamed the implementation of EMI in Nepal is like producing workers for foreign countries; therefore, teaching English is for self-pity and remorse. He blamed that because of English, the trend of brain drain is excessive which has badly affected the country's educational and economic system.

In reality, the practice of ELP in education has shadowed the 'linguistic human right' of the students and has left little implementational space for vernacular languages, it perceives as a 'black hole' – (a mysterious, giant, and invisible hole in the universe having unlimited power to pull any objects towards self) gradually swallowing other languages. Phyak (2013) claims "due to its instrumental value, English is perceived as the most important language (even more important than Nepali) in education" (p. 5). In Nepal, people take English language as a matter of pride and prestige, therefore, the gravity of the language has been powerful and mysterious, like a 'black hole'.

Conclusions and Implications

LPE has been a challenging and debatable issue in the multilingual school setting in Nepal. The study revealed some weaknesses and limitations of local LPE at Vyas Municipality besides it unravels on-ground reality how the LPE is created, interpreted, and appropriated in schools. In addition, it shows ideological and implementational mismatches at Vyas Municipality; as a result, the LPP arbiters (teacher) appropriate and practice local LPE haphazardly. The constitution, and the local government's policies and acts have instructed for effective implementation of LPE concerning the need, interest, and necessity of locals. However, the local government authorities seem unsuccessful to capitalize the local linguistic diversity; for example, the mother tongue policy at basic level is not assured and practiced; only limited to the slogans. Similarly, the globalized and centralized ideology and legacy of LPE has badly influenced and shadowed the local LPE, consequently, the existence of local indigenous languages have been endangered. Next, the schools and teachers are obliged to adopt dominant languages and policies (such as EMI and NMI policies) in education because of competitive and imitative ideologies. The language policy arbiters claim that they are not informed and critically engaged in policy creation, interpretation, and appropriation processes by the concerned bodies. Therefore, the LPE in local government should be formulated with multilingual identities considering its real stakeholders and arbiters before its implementation in societies and schools. The EMI policy in education has pulled and pushed the global attention and Vyas Municipality in not an exception, therefore, local languages have been displaced because of EMI policy as a de facto policy in education. The LPE in Nepal is greatly influenced by political, social, and economic factors, and there reflect vested ideologies and interests of policymakers which ultimately have produced tension between ideology, policy and practices. However, some initiatives have been taken for local LPE, but the majority of the local governments have been unable to create, implement, and appropriate multilingual policy in their territories. To conclude, I suggest for raising more critical awareness to language policy

stakeholders, arbiters, and actors for creating appropriate local LPE at local level concerning the context, demand, and necessity.

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