

# Student and Teacher Perception on English Language Use in Foreign-University-Affiliated Colleges in Nepal

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## Abstract

*Foreign-university-affiliated colleges in Nepal offer a new dimension in education delivery with many opportunities and benefits. Students in these colleges are exposed to an international curriculum and a prospect of learning in an English language environment. On the one hand, Nepalese students can complete their higher education in Nepal and the nation could keep the tuition revenue from leaving the country. On the other hand, students from other countries could be attracted to these colleges and help boost the national GDP of Nepal. Furthermore, a better English language prospect has tremendous benefits to students in today's connected world where Nepalese students can globally compete in terms of jobs or other professional prospects. The perception of Nepalese students and teachers on the English language use is generally positive despite many differences in terms of the factors such as urban vs. rural, private schools vs. government schools, as well as their educational background and place of origin. This paper examines the prospect of English language use in foreign-university-affiliated colleges in Nepal and the significance of such colleges as well as the importance of the English language to Nepal.*

**Keywords:** English language, foreign-university-affiliated colleges, Nepal, teacher perception, students perception, economic impacts, globalization

## Introduction

Education is directly linked with the quality of life of a person in today's competitive and connected world. Education impacts not just the students and their parents but also the concerned government bodies due to its significance to a nation. On a personal level, better employment opportunities and favorable life prospects are often imperative on educational qualification. In particular, a job market usually looks at factors such as GPA, university affiliations, and academic programs. Furthermore, academic degrees

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from western countries are generally given more preference in a developing country like Nepal because of the practical nature of their education (Ullrich, 2019). Due to globalization and its effect on the commodification of education, many Nepalese opt for their higher education in English-speaking western countries, like the US, UK, Australia, or Canada. This is because of the advantage of foreign academic credentials and better life prospects overseas or at home upon graduation. Over 76,000 Nepalese students sought to study abroad in the year 2017 which is a significant jump from the decade earlier with around 10,000 students and this number is projected to increase even further with countries like Australia and Japan attracting a vast number of students from developing countries like Nepal (Nepalisansar, 2019). Thus, we see a steep egress of Nepalese young minds out of the country with better foreign education being one of the prime motivating factors.

For many Nepalese students who cannot afford the exorbitant foreign university tuition fees or who get denied in their student visa application to foreign countries, foreign-university-affiliated colleges in Nepal offer an alternative opportunity to receive foreign academic degrees while studying in their home country. Budhathoki (2013) posits that there is growing popularity in international academic programs in Nepal. Here, the term 'Foreign-university-affiliated colleges' refers to private colleges in Nepal that are partnered up with universities in native-English speaking countries. These colleges have an image of imparting education in an English language environment due to foreign curriculum and learning materials. Moreover, better overall classroom instruction and teaching environment are generally expected in foreign-university-affiliated colleges when compared to government or other private colleges in Nepal. Any such expectations concerning English language use must be congruent with the reality on the ground. Otherwise, such colleges cannot continue to move along the demand of the present Nepalese youth who value the experience of gaining education in an English-medium environment. Hence, the crux of this paper is to explore the prospect of the English language and examine the student as well as teacher perception of the English language use in foreign-affiliated colleges in Nepal.

## **English in Today's World**

The English language stands as a significant communication tool in today's global sphere. Rao (2019) states that the significance and the importance of the English language in today's converged and interconnected world as a lingua franca cannot

be overlooked. English is significant due to its worldwide influence and far-reaching impact across every socio-economic aspect (Giri, 2015). Similarly, English is crucial in the present global context because it is used in virtually all areas that affect people's lives. This is especially true with the global dominance of English-speaking countries like the US and the UK in the economy, education, and entertainment. Furthermore, Crystal (2012) posits that the global spread of the English language is attributed to the extrinsic reasons that have to do with 'Power' such as political (military), technological, economic, and cultural contexts, and especially in the form of colonialism of the British rule around the world with the maxim 'the empire on which the sun never sets' and more recently with the advancement in the United States in the field of science and technology, internet, military, "politics, economics, the press, advertising, broadcasting, motion pictures, popular music, international travel and safety, education and communications" (pp. 156-157). The importance of English in today's world is reflected by Kachru's three concentric circles that show that English is spoken not only in the native English-speaking countries and previously colonized countries like India, Nigeria, Malaysia, and Singapore, but also in the greater expanding circle with an increasing number of people in countries like Nepal learning and using English (Kachru, 1990). Therefore, being proficient in English is commonly seen as an invaluable competence in today's society.

### **Prospect of the English Language in Nepal**

The use of English in Nepal over time is as irregular as its mountainous terrains. The English language saw its relative proliferation in Nepal after the end of the Rana regime in 1951 and before that English language education was limited to the ruling class (Pandey, 2020). Another milestone in the use of the English language occurred in Nepal with the establishment of Tribhuvan University in 1959 that "gave high priority to its curriculum in English" (Bista, 2011, p. 1). This meant that sons and daughters of ordinary Nepalese people have their reach to English language education. Pandey (2020) states that the introduction of the multiparty democratic system in Nepal in 1991 further expanded the reach of English to local levels across the country; however, English medium education was still unattainable for children belonging to economically poor families because of the disparity in the tuition fee between private English-medium schools and public schools. On the other hand, Bista et al. (2019) state that the drastic increase in foreign remittance

in Nepal has enabled ordinary families in urban and rural regions to send their children to private English-medium schools. Generally, we see an increasing and positive change in English language education and its use in Nepal.

Coming to the recent decades, the English language has seen extensive use and appeal in Nepal. Various factors contribute to the general attraction towards the English language among the younger generation in Nepal. Rao (2019) postulates that education is a significant component in people's lives and English plays a pivotal role in their learning process with English being one of the core course subjects. Many parents in Nepal look for better English language teaching when deciding on a school for their children. Bista (2011) mentions that there is a move towards sending children to English-medium schools and colleges in Nepal. Moreover, the higher education domain is overshadowed by the English language due to the global dominance of English in academic resources. Huttner-Koros (2015) observes that a vast majority of international research journals are published in English. According to Giri (2015), English is widely spread in Nepal with private schools generally using it as the principal language. Hence, we see that the English language plays an important role in the lives of the Nepalese people.

The appeal of English is especially pronounced with the younger generation in Nepal. Khati (2013) mentions that Nepalese youths are attracted to the English language due to the wider social context, such as entertainment media, education, and employment. Phyak (2011) states that English is taught to Nepalese children from the beginning school level thereby further attracting them to the English language. Generally, children in Nepal are exposed to English language material from an early age through online resources like YouTube which has videos on various genres like nursery rhymes, songs, vlogs, news, documentaries, and podcasts. Jones and Cuthrell (2011) state that digital technology like YouTube has become a new learning platform. Pandey (2020) agrees that the inclination or attraction towards the English language is significant among teenagers and youths in Nepal. Therefore, English is not limited to a medium of communication for the youth population in Nepal.

Despite a general positive inclination towards the English language, the reality on the ground is far from adequate in terms of the level of English language proficiency in Nepalese people. In general, both teachers and students in public schools have

very low English language proficiency levels and this is further exacerbated by ineffective English language curricula, textbooks, and pedagogical practices in Nepal that seem to do too little in helping students develop their English language proficiency (Phyak, 2016). One of the main reasons for this is a lack of proper classroom instruction in the English language. English is best taught when all four language skills are covered for increasing the language proficiency in learners. However, according to Bista (2011), English is generally taught in Nepalese schools as a subject as opposed to language skills, and many academic institutions use the Nepali language as a medium of instruction. The obvious drawback to this approach is that students might rely on rote learning to pass their English examinations with little to limited language capability. In particular, the blighted prospect of the English language is seen in Nepalese government schools where students can barely speak in English and where the Nepali language is used as a medium of instruction (Bista, 2011). One of the main contributing factors to the inadequate level of the English language in Nepalese schools and colleges is the lack of qualified English language teachers who are competent in English language teaching with proper language training to impart practical language education to their students (Paudel, 2021). This has resulted in a continuation of poor English language levels in the Nepalese people.

The dichotomy of English language level among Nepalese people is sharply contrasted with a minority group in urban areas with better resources and attending English-medium schools against a vast majority of the population all over the nation with limited opportunities and being relegated to government schools with subpar English language teaching. So, even with students who get native-English language exposure through online media like YouTube, due to the lack of a proper English language environment at home and school, it is generally seen that Nepalese school-aged children cannot continue their development in English language skills. This is especially evident in the higher education field which usually receives the least focus on the English language use with the progression in school grade levels. Aryal et al. (2016) observe that there is an absence of an increasing level of English language teaching and learning through the advancement in grades in Nepalese schools. Consequently, many Nepalese students show negative improvement in their English language proficiency as they progress from lower-level to higher-level academic grades.

## Education and its Commodification

Universities in developed countries are an attractive academic haven for students from developing countries. More recently, education has seen the benefits of globalization with thousands of students from Nepal choosing the universities in the native-English speaking countries for their tertiary-level education each year (Tamang and Shrestha, 2021). Each student spends thousands of dollars each year in tuition fees alone in western countries. Such trend leaves a developing nation like Nepal in an economic shortfall with more of its citizens opting for their education abroad.

Education is perhaps the least considered sector to be affected by free trade. However, Altbach and Knight (2007) point towards the current trend in globalization along with a general propensity towards free trade by nation-states around the world that have affected the delivery of education and has caused it to transform from a noble or benevolent public service or social obligation to more of a commodity or business traversing across the transnational borders and thereby significantly contributing to the GDP of countries, especially the native-English speaking ones. Furthermore, the prevalent Free Trade General Agreement on Trade in Service (GATS) that was established in 1995 opened new doors for internationalization of education incorporating the condition for cross-border education supply including “*distance education or e-learning and franchising courses or degrees*” (Altbach and Knight, 2007, p. 291). Thus, the economic pie as a result of the commodification of education has become bigger over the years with a few slices available to developing countries.

Franchising the education provider’s name is a form of partnership that is financially the least taxing to foreign universities due to the non-necessity of the initial investment capital. For a developing country like Nepal, this is a win-win prospect of domestically offering foreign academic programs and degrees. However, Altbach (1999) argues that such partnerships often lack direct control or supervision by parent universities on the academic operations in the host countries. Here, parent-university refers to the main university which gives its partnership or affiliation to colleges located overseas. For example, it is generally observed that many of the franchised colleges in Nepal do not have a local parent-university representative. Given a lack of oversight from the main university administration, the quality of the academic programs and the academic environment cannot be guaranteed to match that of the main university. Hence, there needs to be a quality control

mechanism in the delivery of education and the overall academic environment in foreign-university-affiliated colleges in Nepal to meet the expectations of the students and their parents.

## **English in International Trade and Job Market and its Significance to Nepal**

Today's world is dominated by international brand names of companies from around the world that are competing for their slice of global consumerism. Even though a large number of companies, especially technology-related ones, are from the United States and other developed countries, developing countries like Nepal have a newfound reach in novel markets. However, language can be a big impediment for Nepalese businesses. According to Halliday (2019), English covers a significant place in the global sphere through its dominance in today's world. Furthermore, Rao (2019) posits that people with better English language proficiency find themselves at advantage in today's job market which includes international and multinational businesses or organizations. In the recent decade, Nepal has opened its doors to foreign investment and multinational companies covering a major part in the business surge (Mishra, Degtereva, and Paneru, 2017). Better proficiency in English can open up new doors for Nepalese students, professionals, and entrepreneurs in the international trade and job market. Therefore, the significance of the English language in Nepal is immense because it can aid in the economic development of the country.

## **Foreign-university-affiliated Colleges and their Significance to Nepal**

In the context of Nepal, foreign-university-affiliated colleges have offered a much-needed relief with franchising or partnership programs with foreign universities. This is because a large number of its youth population could remain in the country while pursuing foreign academic curriculum and achieving foreign-university credentials and who would otherwise opt for their higher education in western countries. Miller-Idriss and Hanauer (2014) find out that the regional surge in foreign university branch campuses in the Middle East has positively contributed to the growth of human capital including technical and intellectual capability that is needed for the new economies in the Arab world. Youth remaining in Nepal and getting western education have many benefits to the country including the availability of qualified human resources in its development.

A general perception of the standard of higher education in Nepal among Nepalese people is not very favorable. Many factors contribute to this common discontent among Nepalese. One of the major contributing factors is the poor English language environment in the public higher secondary educational institutions (Bista, 2011). Furthermore, Snellinger (2010) points out that student politics on college campuses is negatively perceived by many in Nepal. As a result, each year thousands of Nepalese students leave for western countries to pursue their higher education, and millions of dollars exit with them (Tamang and Shrestha, 2021). This financial deficit adversely affects the GDP of Nepal. If Nepalese students could be provided a rich and effective learning environment at home, then the country could save on a big chunk of the outgoing tuition revenue.

Colleges in Nepal that offer western curriculum can benefit from the enrollment of foreign students. Because of the relatively cheaper tuition fees and living expenses when compared to the countries like the US, UK, Australia, and Canada, Nepal can be a good alternative destination for students from other developing countries who may be seeking first-world university degree credentials. Foreign-university-affiliated colleges in Nepal can offer the first world academic degree programs. Having a large number of foreign students can positively impact the GDP of Nepal. However, poor or inadequate English language levels in these colleges can adversely affect the prospect of international students choosing Nepal. According to Kowarski (2017), students need to consider the language when choosing an international university. Hence, ensuring English language instruction in foreign-university-affiliated colleges is a win-win case in the context of Nepal.

## **Prospect of English Language Use in Foreign-university-affiliated Colleges in Nepal**

Foreign-university-affiliated colleges in Nepal have a unique prospect in offering an international curriculum in English-medium instruction. On the surface, it is generally seen that the perception portrayed by the foreign-university-affiliated colleges in Nepal is that of branch campuses of western universities offering foreign curriculum in an English language environment. As such, it is an opportunity in the field of English language teaching in Nepal where students get an opportunity to be exposed to the native-English language curriculum and the compatible English



language environment. Altbach and Knight (2007) state the prospect of English-medium academic programs and degrees is an incentivizing factor for colleges in developing countries when it comes to partnering up with universities in native English-speaking countries. Thus, there is a better prospect of English language use in foreign-university-affiliated colleges when compared to other private or public higher educational institutions in Nepal.

### **Nepalese Teacher Perception on English Language Use**

English is generally taught by non-native English teachers in Nepalese schools. According to Seki (2015), training programs are available for English language teachers in Nepal with basic educational qualifications with subject specialization requirements mandated by the concerned governmental body. However, the majority of English language teachers in Nepalese schools typically rely on the traditional pedagogical methodologies or approaches such as Grammar Translation, and this is further exacerbated by the frequent use of the Nepali language in English classrooms (Bista, 2011). This is especially true in government schools which generally lag behind in educational quality when compared to private schools. Moreover, the level of English language proficiency among students in private schools in Nepal is generally better than that of students in government schools (Aryal, Short, Fan, and Kember, 2016). Yet, despite the challenges in the English language teaching (ELT) field, Bhandari (2020) posits that ELT teachers generally have positive perceptions and experiences when it comes to incorporating new methodologies in their classrooms. Overall, English language teachers in Nepal have a favorable inclination towards the use of the English language.

Teachers who are better proficient in the English language usually receive preferential treatment when it comes to hiring and promotions in the teaching field in Nepal. According to Phyak (2011), many schools in Nepal hire teachers from Darjeeling and other parts of India due to their perceived better English language proficiency when compared to the local teachers in Nepal. Thus, many teachers in Nepal feel motivated to become better in the English language to meet the demand and to help them sell their service in the competitive market. Yet, it is safe to say that for many Nepalese teachers who are limited in their English language skills, the prospect or pressure of the English medium classroom instruction can pose a daunting challenge. Thus, the perception of the English language among Nepalese teachers is not homogeneous but

rather diverse and dependent on individual situations and factors such as urban vs. rural, private schools vs. government schools, as well as their educational background and place of origin.

## **Nepalese Student Perception on English Language Use**

The English language offers better future prospects in terms of personal growth and career prospect. Many students in Nepal see English-speaking countries like the US, the UK, Canada, and Australia as a land of opportunities with many individuals leaving for the western countries for their higher education. In his research study on finding out about the perception of Nepalese students and their parents on the English language learning, Khatri (2016) finds that Nepalese students have a positive attitude and perception towards the English language with many of them viewing English as favorable to their career growth whether it is inside or outside of Nepal. Thus, the English language is integrally connected to academic and professional aspects in Nepal.

The English language can be likened to a hydra with its tentacles touching on every dimension of people's lives in Nepal. Duwadi (2016) states that with the expansion of broadband internet across the country, there is a bigger influence of the English language in all aspects of life. Furthermore, it is generally seen that the use of smart devices like mobile phones and tablets has significantly increased from the early ages in Nepal with many children having easy access to English language material in a digital platform like YouTube or Facebook. This, in turn, helps cultivate a favorable attitude towards the English language in the younger generation in Nepal. Consequently, many school children in Nepal can speak fluent English due to early exposure to the native English language material. According to Giri (2014), even students in rural areas in Nepal use a sizable number of English words in their conversations. Hence, Nepalese students generally seem to have a favorable perception when it comes to the use of the English language.

## **Conclusion**

The English language offers many benefits to those belonging to Kachru's outer and expanding circles. These advantages go beyond the educational or financial prospects and impact all aspects of life. The young generation in a developing country like Nepal grow up watching English language material including movies

and music produced in western countries. Western multinational companies have their footing around the world and these companies offer better employment opportunities to the local population. Poor proficiency in the English language often precludes individuals from working or studying in native-English speaking countries. For example, English language tests like IELTS are acceptable proof of English language proficiency for higher studies, work-based visas, and migration in native-English speaking countries. These western countries benefit from the skilled labor migration from developing countries as well as added revenue generation from the tuition fees paid by the students from the Kachru's outer and expanding circles. With a move towards providing quality education that is on par with the western university curriculum along with an emphasis on the English language environment through foreign-university-affiliated colleges, Nepal can put an end to the significantly greater economic deficit caused by the loss of tuition dollars and its talented minds leaving the country. A good outlook in recent years in Nepal is an upsurge in private colleges that are partnered up with universities in English-speaking countries. These foreign-university-affiliated Nepalese colleges offer a good incentive for the Nepalese youth to experience western education without leaving their country. Furthermore, if there can be a level of assurance or guarantee in the quality of education and English-speaking environment in these colleges, then youth from other countries would be attracted towards completing their higher education in Nepal. All in all, the perception of students and teachers in the foreign-university-affiliated colleges in Nepal on the English language use is important in making sure that the general outlook or image as portrayed by these colleges live up to the expectations of all stakeholders.

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