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ELT in Mother Tongue Dominant Schools in Nepal

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Abstract

English language teaching (ELT) in mother tongue (MT)/first language (L1) dominant primary schools in Nepal, a multilingual country, without the use of L1 may pose difficulties to both teachers and students. Overemphasis on only-English/Nepali teaching may create language phobias among students at the early stages of their lives and can force some vernacular languages and cultures to die. Hence, MT-based schools may help to preserve the local languages and cultures by going against the trend of teaching only English or Nepali. This qualitative study explored three English teachers' teaching experiences in three Nepal Bhasa dominant primary schools at Kathmandu valley. Guided by the interpretive paradigm, the teachers' perceptions and teaching experiences were captured through interviews and classroom observations.

Findings show that teaching English in a multilingual class is challenging because teachers need to know and apply their students' mother tongue(s) to teach effectively. The use of L1 reduces learners' dropouts, builds a language learning foundation and using only English/Nepali disregarding L1 may kill indigenous culture. This study is beneficial for not only the teachers, but also the policymakers, curriculum developers, and other stakeholders to get insights for providing a rightful space to the use of L1 in ELT classrooms.

Keywords: ELT in L1 dominant schools, teaching practices, Nepali primary schools, ELT in a multilingual class

Introduction

Mother tongue plays a very influential role in English language teaching (ELT) and second language acquisition, especially in primary schools. Although at the end of the 19th

century, the supporters of the direct method banned the use of L1 in ELT classrooms, the L1 application has recurrently been acknowledged as a rich source of accelerating L2 (in this case, English) learning (Cook, 2001). A lot of studies have found that effective education happens when we educate the children in their mother tongues. As stated by Cummins (2009), L1 develops a learner's foundation for learning another language and hence, it is essential to preserve the L1. According to him, learners with a strong base in their L1 develop fast literacy abilities in the language taught at school. L1 is the best medium for teaching another language to a young learner since s/he can comprehend well and communicate freely (Ndamba, 2008). Teaching in L1 in the early grades helps learners to learn better than in L2 or any foreign language (Poudel, 2018). Therefore, preserving and promoting mother tongues is important while teaching English inside the classroom walls of a school.

In the context of Nepal, a lot of controversies arose regarding the incorporation of community languages like Tamang, Newar etc. in the school curriculum in addition to the official Nepali language. Joshi (2022) reported that the Constitution of Nepal 2015 largely favored education in the L1, but the current medium of instruction (MOI) policy has prioritized the historically dominant Nepali and English languages as the mediums of instruction. Due to an imposed MOI in schools, many mother tongues are on the verge of extinction (Gyanwali, 2022). For example, it is believed that Nepal Bhasa cannot help a Newar to survive in the outside world where Nepali and English are dominant. That is why, many parents have stopped transferring the language to their children. Butzkamm (2003) opined that the L1 is mostly considered as an evasive maneuver that needs to be applied only in emergencies. For more than a century, the existing ELT attitude has been discouraging the use of students' L1 in language teaching (Cook, 2001). We also feel that the use of L1 as an entrance door has been firmly shut in the ELT classrooms in Nepal.

However, some young parents want to preserve the L1 and so, inspire their offspring to communicate in Nepal Bhasa at home, as they think that the kids will learn Nepali automatically from their schools but not Nepal Bhasa. We believe that the use of Nepal Bhasa as an MOI within classrooms can help learners attain the target language (e.g. English) and it can be transferred to the outside world, where Nepal Bhasa is marginally used while Nepali and English are dominantly applied. This research is an initiative to find that midway. It may help in bridging the gap between what policy states and how the teachers or real stakeholders practice teaching English in Nepal Bhasa medium schools at Kathmandu valley. This study aimed to explore English language teachers' teaching practices in the Nepal Bhasa dominant primary classrooms in the Kathmandu valley. It also tried to find out the advantages as well as the challenges of using L1 in ELT classrooms.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this research to find answers from the context:

- 1) How do the teachers teach English in the Nepal Bhasa dominant primary level classrooms?
- 2) What advantages do they have using L1 in their classrooms?
- 3) Which challenges do they face while using L1 in English classes?

Need for Mother Tongue Based Schools

Nepal is a multinational, multicultural, multilingual, and multi-religious Himalayan state (Shrestha, 2012). As stated by Joshi (2016), when education was first made available to the masses after the descent of the Rana regime, it was exclusively in the Nepali language. He further argues that public schools follow the curricula in Nepali, as a second language is imposed among different ethnic groups, even in places where the majority of children do not apply it as the L1. It is mandatory to communicate in Nepali everywhere from school to official work whereas, nobody can use the L1 for any official use. Gautam (2021) claims that tribal language communities (e.g. Newar, Magar, Gurung, Tamang, Limbu, etc.) are shifting towards the use of Nepali and English as a symbol of modernization, superior identity, prestige, and high socioeconomic position.

Contrastingly, according to Cummins (2009), children's level of L1 proficiency is a strong predictor of their second language (L2) development. He also added, promoting L1 application in school develops the children's skills not only in the native language but also in other languages taught in school. In Nepal, the government also circulated a vital document (The Multilingual Education Implementation Guidelines - 2010) in order to implement an L1-based multilingual education program (Ghimire, 2012). Despite the policy support, this program has not received satisfactory responses since L1-based multilingual education schools did not flourish a lot. According to Ghimire (2012), the 1990 Constitution of Nepal recognized all the native languages of different Nepali communities as national languages and granted rights to the communities to open L1-based schools. Even the 2015 Constitution mandates all children of indigenous nationalities (Adivasi Janajati) to obtain basic education in their L1 (Fillmore, 2019). Nevertheless, this constitutional provision also failed to motivate the communities to establish such schools. Only one mother tongue school, named 'J S B K', has been established in the outskirts of Kathmandu valley. The school provides education in Nepal Bhasa and has been running successfully to date. Therefore, there is a need for more such schools in the country for the sustainability and preservation of the language.

Cummins (2009) states that it is imperative to continue to protect, improve and disseminate our native languages at home, school, and outside places to develop a diverse society and preserve our cultures,. In this regard, the people from the Newar community (8th largest ethnic group) are in the forefront of running several schools successfully till now. According to the 2021 Nepal census, Newar community consists of 1,341,363 people (4.6% of the total population). This study, therefore, explores three Nepal Bhasa schools of Newar community at Kathmandu valley as fields of study.

Benefits of Using Mother Tongue in English Language Classes

As language learning is an ongoing process, the learner's age, level, background and the teacher's perceptions should be taken into consideration to teach the language (Sipra, 2007). If the teacher uses only the target language in classrooms and ignores his/her learners' backgrounds, the learners may find language learning very stressful and may resent learning

that language. Moreover, it hampers their pace and willingness to learn and use the language. Harbord (1992) underlines the fact that teachers in an 'all-English classroom' are responsible for causing student incomprehension and resentment. In this regard, the mother tongue can assist in contextual learning, new lexical development and explaining complex ideas and syntactic rules. Teachers with required skills in the students' native languages find themselves more efficient in teaching than the ones who lack the skills (Rhalmi, 2009).

English language teachers teaching monolingual students with lower levels of English proficiency find their native language and cultural background as a scaffolding tool to optimize their target language learning. According to Sharma (2006), L1 instruction in ELT classroom is a rehabilitation tool for those learners who secretly bring their bilingual dictionaries into classrooms and hide them under the table. Atkinson (1987) strongly claims that the use of L1 can effectively and quickly assist in explaining words or concepts in English classes. Stern and Allen (1992) argue that whether we like it or not, an indisputable fact of life is the L1-L2 connection and new knowledge is gained based on the L1. Macaro (2005) highlights that avoiding the L1 increases learner's repetition, and makes him/her a slow speaker. The learner sometimes mumbles and finds difficulty in finding proper lexis, and uttering appropriate syntax. As a result, language teaching-learning becomes time-consuming, boring and less realistic. In tune with these facts, Nunan and Lamb (1996) argue that L1 instruction is inevitable in language classes, especially in primary levels.

English Language Teaching in Nepal

In every sphere of everyday life, English plays a vital role and it is a medium of intra and international communication and global exchange (Brutt-Griffler, 1998). Nepal has embraced English at the heart of educational planning (Sharma, 2006). English is incorporated in the national curriculum as a requisite discipline from the basic to the higher levels and has become an undeniable component of Nepali education system. Making English teaching effective in primary schools requires trained teachers, effective teaching strategies, appropriate resources, strong management, and good network and communication facilities. Unfortunately these facilities are mostly lacking in all educational institutions in Nepal.

In case of Nepal, English is gaining a superior position to Nepali and other national languages. Giri (2015) depicts the trichotomous positioning of English in Nepali education system – before 1950s (during Rana regime) English as the only MOI, then after 1950s as EFL, within a few decades as ESL or sometimes as ENL (English as a Native Language) forming a Nepali variety of English, (Nenglish in a comic way), though it is still at the inception level. Similarly, Sharma (2022) states that the Nepalese education system is affected by English language learning fever. Here, the hidden role of English language teaching-learning can be associated with culture, power, and identity. The policy of teaching only English promotes the hegemonic benefits of the Western states and their local collaborators (Ashcroft et al., 1989), and disperses capitalism in multifarious ways in the context of Nepal. Therefore, ELT in Nepal is either a symbol of superior status in society or a brainchild of linguistic imperialism.

Challenges of Multilingual Education System

Bhandari (2016) attempted to find out the drawbacks and rewards of teaching English in multilingual and multicultural Nepal. His findings suggested that the linguistically heterogeneous learners and their parents' negative outlooks are the key constraints for the effective implementation of multilingual education. UNESCO (2011) conducted a study to explore the realities of the Multilingual Education (MLE) program which indicated that the MLE program may not be effective without its conducive and realistic implementation in schools. The study also focused on the need for parents' awareness-raising program so that the parents can realize that education through L1 at the beginning of schooling will enrich their children's capabilities to learn another target language like Nepali or English.

Methods

It is important to follow certain philosophical stances like ontology, epistemology, and axiology and take a paradigmatic approach. As stated by Bryman (2008), "Research paradigms describe a cluster of beliefs and dictates what should be studied, how research should be done, and how the results should be interpreted" (p. 696). In this qualitative research, our ontological view was influenced by subjectivism to show multiple realities based on various factors like the different practices of teachers in Nepal Bhasa dominant ELT classrooms to enhance the learning of primary level students. The epistemological knowledge was gathered through interactions with the primary level English teachers. While carrying out the research, the values and ethics of the society, families, and the individual were maintained through investigating the multiple perceptions and truths of the participants. The interpretive paradigm was applied since the subjective experiences of participants were collected by meaning oriented methodologies, such as interviewing and participant observation. Teachers' lived experiences through the narrative enquiry method were collected and recorded in addition to the observations of their classes in realistic settings. Barkhuizen et al. (2013) mention that narrative enquiry helps researchers understand the inner psychological worlds of the research participants and help them reflect on their own works.

Research Sites and Participants

Three Nepal Bhasa dominant primary schools at Kathmandu valley were chosen as research fields. The three schools were (code names used) - the Rising Sun School (the first-ever Nepal Bhasa School established in 1990 with foreign support), Kathmandu Star School and Modern Beacon School. Three English teachers (one from each school respectively; pseudonyms given as Dilip, Rina and Srijana) as research participants were selected for the interview and observation through purposive sampling. The participants were selected based on having a good command of Nepal Bhasa and the English language. We managed to convince our respondents for the interview and class observation without any qualms. The participants were informed of the study and were given their own space and time to open up their minds to share their experiences. With all the formalities done, the final consent for conducting interviews and observations was taken from the school authorities.

Data Collection and Analysis

Observations and semi-structured interviews were the data collection procedures. To be consistent with all the three participants, an interview protocol (see Appendix) was prepared so that the same areas could be covered with each interviewee for the satisfaction of the research purpose. Initially, time and place were scheduled for an interview. A friendly environment was created before each interview and we made sure that all our participants were comfortable enough to answer our questions. The interviews (ranging from 40 – 60 minutes each) were conducted in Nepal Bhasa as the participants could feel comfortable enough to answer our questions. While interviewing, the conversation was recorded (with their consent) with a smartphone voice recorder. Interviews preceded the class observations but the interview and class observation of one research participant took place on the same day (i.e. three separate days required for three participants). Their ways of teaching in the ELT classrooms were observed for the whole class time (40 minutes) with a particular focus on how much they used their mother tongue while conversing with the children. Field notes were taken and later analyzed with reflective notes.

The recorded data of the interview and observation were transcribed into English, and were separated as per the research questions and coded with different colors. Later, meaningful patterns of concepts and themes were drawn out. Creswell (2007) states that in research, qualitative data analysis consists of organizing the data for analysis, then clustering them into themes via a coding process and accumulating the codes to finally represent the data in discussions, figures, or tables. In this case, we generated six different themes that are discussed in the next section.

Findings and Discussions

The findings categorized into six themes are: (i) Teaching Strategies Applied, (ii) Reducing Dropouts through L1 as MOI, (iii) Use of L1 for Building a Foundation, (iv) Use of Only English or Nepali Kills the Indigenous Culture, (v) Going against the Trend and (vi) Challenges Faced by the Teachers. These themes are also interpreted with the support of relevant literature and discussions.

Teaching Strategies Applied

Language teaching through code switching to L1 in the time of necessity is a usual psycho-linguistic process (Cook, 1996). The teachers teaching in the Nepal Bhasa dominant classrooms were found using multiple languages at a time - Nepal Bhasa and Nepali languages were more frequently used in English lessons. However, after observing their classes when the teachers were asked which language they frequently used in the English classes, most of them replied - Nepali. In contrast, Rina answered,

Nepali, English, and Newari. I think it's easy but when teaching in class, I teach in Nepali and English also, as children need to know English too. So, I have to go through all three languages, because when I teach them English words in Newari,

there are many Newari children. It is easy for them to understand and remember.

The only reason behind using three different languages was to ease the teaching-learning process and make the students learn the content well. Dilip also expressed that while teaching English and Nepali, the languages are mostly used with the occasional use of Nepal Bhasa for an explanation when necessary. However, our observations revealed that Nepali and Nepal Bhasa were used more than English in the classrooms. What they normally narrated and what they practised in class were quite different. Theoretically, they believed that frequent use of English in the English classes is a must but practically they used all three languages almost equally.

Teachers applied traditional lecture modes. However, some of the major practices observed were code switching, use of audio-visual materials such as charts, a rhythmic version of the text, and drama techniques to activate the auditory and visual stimuli of students. Srijana shared,

I use materials as well and say, 'Look here. What is this?' I teach them new words using chart papers and writing small and capital letters. I show them by drawing and colouring. I draw 'ka- kapa, kha- khala' in A4 paper and they seem to grasp it faster. They have books also. I show them videos on the projector. I surf the internet and use the science lab also.

With the internet and its features within the reach of a fingertip, the teachers and students can and should make the most of it. Rina also voiced,

Nowadays English can also be taught through mobile phones, using speakers so that all students can hear the audio and it can be used everywhere and it's handy as well. So, I use cell phones and speakers while I let students dance and sing on the grounds.

Her statement implies that audio-visuals can also be utilized in outdoor activities.

Other than the use of videos at school, learners can be persuaded to watch educational and informative videos on YouTube with parental guidance at home. A technique teachers used to teach was by acting. Srijana shared,

Since I act when I teach, the students seem to catch up faster. I use the board a lot too. If the lesson is about rabbits, I act and make them act like a rabbit too. I make them search for the answers to the questions given in the text.

Little students tend to focus more on the classroom when the teaching involves some actions and activities. She further added, *'When I am active, the class becomes interesting and teaching is fun. They give the answers quickly as well'*. Upon asking whether she felt comfortable with the Nepal Bhasa as MOI, Srijana answered, *'No. I teach in English only. I rarely use the Newari language. I enact and teach.'* Her responses indirectly indicate that she acts in the class to manage the class effectively and play different roles.

Reducing Dropouts through L1 as MOI

Children can express their emotions and feelings better in their mother tongue than in a different (second or foreign) language. In this regard, Dilip opined,

Some of the parents stopped teaching them their mother tongue while some left the school as they could not apprehend the language spoken in the schools. The learners whose native language was not Nepali, but Magar, Tamang etc. also faced the same problem. So, the parents started teaching them the language understood by everyone at school and the outside world i.e., Nepali. That's how the languages got endangered and many dropped out of school as they couldn't understand the instructions and information given by the teachers in school.

The teacher believed that if students were allowed to use their L1, they could be motivated to learn. In this regard, Benson (2005) reports that L1 use in the primary level (early years) develops students' literacy skills in the target language and makes them interactive in classrooms. It also reduces memorization and assists students to learn the new language creatively through interaction with others. Moreover, using the mother tongue can be a solution to minimize the rate of dropout as the students' comfort and willingness to learn, to an extent, depends on it. The students achieve the ability to obtain quality education if they are efficient in understanding the target language and culture (Dhakal, 2015).

In Nepal, many students whose L1 is not Nepali struggle in schools and have an average lower test scores (CERID, 2005). Mishra (2023) reports that the dropout rate is abundant in community schools and some reasons include failing in the exams, school facilities, punishment and economic status. Srijana opined that asking students to speak in a language foreign to them and limiting their voices is a type of punishment that may develop a sense of detestation and hesitation in them to attend the school. If young learners are not allowed to use their home languages in schools, they cut a sorry figure in the exams, repeat exams and classes for a high rate of failure and some ultimately drop out of schools. This is not an uncommon scenario in Nepal (Awasthi, 2004).

Both Dilip and Srijana emphasized the importance of mother tongue based education. After observing their classes respectively in two schools-the Rising Sun and Kathmandu Star schools, it was found out that the schools gave primary importance to preserving the Nepal Bhasa in the classroom. They felt that even the parents' interests helped preserve the Nepal Bhasa language to some extent. In this regard, Dilip posited,

Formerly, the parents also used to talk in Nepali and teach their first child Nepali so that s/he would get familiar at school but now they have taught their second child the Newari language. The school has preserved the language in this way also. Newari and Nepali are the media while English is the third language. And in doing so, it was noticed that Newari language was being conserved.

Revealing the threat of extinction of the Nepal Bhasa, Dilip stated, "Everywhere you go, you need to speak either in English or in Nepali. There isn't a place where you are required to speak in Newari which made it difficult for Newari-speaking kids." According to him, Nepali and English languages are used everywhere but Nepal Bhasa is not used as such. As a result, the Nepal Bhasa -speaking children face a lot of difficulties and some drop out from school

accepting their defeats of not being able to fight for grabbing the target language. Devkota and Bagale (2015) consider this type of massive dropout from primary schools by the students of the marginalized and socially excluded groups as a crosscutting issue that creates an obstacle in obtaining education for all (EFA) and hence, suggest reforms like enhancing teacher quality (child-friendly teaching), introducing alternative educational provisions for dropouts, encouraging local teachers and incorporating two MOIs (mother tongue as one).

Role of L1 in Forming Learners' Foundation

Education through L1 at the early stages makes learning a wonderful experience as the children will not struggle to grab the complex ideas of the target language. They will progress fast in learning the new language as their L1 will work as a facilitating tool (Heugh, 2006). Children blessed with schooling in their mother tongues in early grades appear to get significantly higher learning outcomes and literacy levels (Mackenzie & Walker, n. d.). Alidou et al. (2006) recommend incorporating local languages in early grades and even extending them to later stages as much as possible for positive outcomes.

Both Dilip and Srijana have been balancing three languages (Nepal Bhasa, Nepali, and English) in time of necessity while teaching English. Srijana opined, *“To those who speak Newari, I explain to them in Newari. It is quite difficult here. Those who don't understand the Newari, just sit there. They look confused, and so I explain in Nepali too.”* Dilip shared, *“Using the Newari language in the school as the medium of communication didn't mean that the other languages were to be boycotted.”* The prime motto of language use is to make the learners understand better. This can be reflected in the views shared by Srijana, *“I use English while teaching English and Nepali while teaching Nepali. I use Newari only when there is confusion and the students don't understand. That means English, Nepali, and Newari, all are used. This must be beneficial. The students also must understand properly.”* So, we can see how code switching from a target language to L1 works in mono or multi lingual class settings and why teachers need to learn all the mother tongues of the learners for their clear understanding of the lesson. Use of L1 builds a good foundation of language learning for students.

Use of Only English or Nepali Kills the Indigenous Culture

The overuse of English can be a threat to the local culture and language. Putting his opinion in favour of L1 as an MOI, Dilip stated,

People are adamant about the English medium but we speak Nepali/Newari at home. The English language is important as it is widely spoken but the method we use, is not correct. And its effective learning does not mean that our language and culture need to be neglected.

He indicated that we should not risk our language while teaching English. Moreover, he was worried thinking that even in the government offices and other places, only Nepali is the language spoken due to which the Nepal Bhasa is on the verge of being endangered. Nepali

and English are replacing other vernaculars and emerging as only dominant languages in Nepal. Dilip argued that people from monolingual contexts or cultures cannot understand the problem of multilingual contexts. According to him, “*The Japanese and the Americans have their native languages. Hence, they don’t understand the problems of multilingual communities. Likewise, the Brahmin and Chettri communities of our country are oblivious to this problem and only a few understand it.*” He added that even the government prioritizes Nepali or English only, despite knowing the significance of local cultures and languages. The students from monolingual communities such as Newar, Magar, Tamang, etc. need to learn languages other than their L1. This has resulted in their growing craze towards Nepali or English language while their native tongue is on the verge of extinction.

Studies have shown that English medium instruction (EMI) creates difficulties and challenges for learners and harms the development of indigenous culture and language. In the views of Sah and Li (2018), although the school they explored claimed to offer EMI education, the actual language of instruction in class was Nepali, since teachers lacked proficiency in English. Consequently, the students developed neither English language proficiency nor content knowledge and this EMI gave birth to educational inequality, linguistic marginalization, and injustice for underprivileged children. That’s why; McKay (2003) puts emphasis on integrating the learners’ local cultures with ELT inside the classrooms. In this regard, Ramirez (2023) believes that the students are silently crying out for an educational pedagogy that will prepare them to find opportunities, and feel proud of their identities and for this, they require a culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) that can ignite their desire to learn and become useful members of a society by bridging the gap between home and school. Culture, if integrated into a curriculum, can be learned and shared by the students in a relevant teaching context. Using L1 in English language classes is one way of preserving the culture of that group of learners.

Going Against the Trend

English is ideologically associated with power and prestige due to which the local cultures and languages are neglected (Sah, 2022). The participants’ views and love towards their L1 indicate that they are challenging the power dynamics. Dilip and Rina indicated that establishing a Newari School itself is an act of challenging the hegemony of English and Nepali.

Let’s cite an example of a pre-class observation in Modern Beacon School. All the students getting ready for the morning assembly started singing the Newari with the teachers. It was followed by the Nepali anthem. Then the students and the teachers greeted one another in the Newari language. The aroma of a mouth-watering cuisine (nine bean soup called Kwanti in Newari) came from the school Kitchen as it was an important festival (*Janai Purnima* in Nepali and *Kwanti Punhi* in Newari) in the Newari community on that day. The school celebrates every major festival so that students can know the local culture. Thus, they had been inculcating and preserving Newari culture.

Now let's talk about the core finding of the class observation (lower KG class taken by Srijana). Srijana drew pictures of everyday words on the whiteboard and sometimes also used flashcards in between. For more clarifications, both she and her students code-switched back and forth from Newari to Nepali to English or vice-versa, as the following sample conversation shows:

Teacher: *What is this* (shows an axe on the flashcard)?

Students: Axe

Teacher: *What do you call Axe in Nepal Bhasa?*

Students: *paa*

Teacher: *What do we call it in Nepali?*

Students: *bancharo*

It was interesting to see the teacher bring in real-world examples, present to the young learners with pictures, acting, flashcards and most importantly translating English into Newari and sometimes in the Nepali language. Learning is more effective when lessons are taught verbally, non-verbally and visually to the students. The teacher allowed students to express their understanding or feeling in whichever language they were comfortable with.

The above scenario reveals that the teacher wanted to go beyond the trend to preserve the L1 and ease the learning for Newari monolingual students. Although the focus was mother tongue (MT)-based instruction unlike other Nepali or English medium schools, the teachers and the students were allowed to use the other two languages (Nepali and English) as per the need. Sah (2022) reports that many Asian and African multilingual countries have shown their positive commitments for the adaptation of mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE), but most of the learners with lower socioeconomic backgrounds are deprived of such education. The EMI adoption serves the purposes of the advantaged students who can develop educational credentials to compete in future professional endeavors. According to Hornberger (2002), plurilingual practices in class may help the local languages to "evolve and flourish rather than dwindle and disappear" (p. 30). Therefore, the MT-based schools are putting their efforts to go beyond the trend to save the local language and culture.

Challenges Faced by Teachers

Almost all the teachers faced similar challenges in English classrooms. Dilip shared that due to the overemphasis on English and Nepali, the other language speaking learners are in trouble. They neither can speak Nepali or English nor can communicate in Newari. Similarly, another participant Rina revealed that her school aims to preserve the L1. According to her, it is quite difficult to run such a school as they have to compete with the English and Nepali Medium schools. In schools, teachers are bound by a strict routine and they get very limited time to complete the syllabus. The teachers code-switch from English to Nepal Bhasa or oftentimes the Nepali language for presenting their lessons in a more comprehensive way to the young learners. Some teachers felt that they required more professional development training to learn the novel teaching techniques and methodological

approaches to make ELT interesting and outcome-based for the learners coming from diverse backgrounds like Tamang, Magar and Gurung. According to the teachers, it is a great challenge to teach in multilingual classrooms and teaching a third language has more difficulties than teaching a second language.

Conclusion

From the data collected through classroom observations, interviews, and field notes, we have come up with some key insights – advantages of using L1 in classes, drawbacks, pedagogic implications and further scope of study in this field. The participants reported that the students feel comfortable to learn and share in the language they know better. According to them, the use of L1 has several advantages in ELT such as children get motivated to engage in active class participation and performances, they can autonomously express their ideas, and at the same time, they gain clear comprehension of the meanings of complex English words. Students react, realize, understand, remember, and reflect in their L1 better and faster. The teacher's use of the L1 can positively impact the learner's acquisition of the target language. Furthermore, this minimizes the dropout rates of the students.

There are also some drawbacks of using L1 in a diverse class. The participants opined that in schools, the children with local vernaculars as L1 find it difficult to compete with children with Nepali as L1. Hence, imposing English or Nepali as an MOI makes students less privileged in learning. Moreover, the teacher needs to be highly trained to apply multiple languages with caution. Otherwise, this may prevent students from being able to use the target language (English) productively. The overuse of L1 in the classroom seems to make some students teacher-dependent as they completely depend on teachers' translations. The participants expressed that overemphasis on the languages- English or Nepali is a threat to their culture. Therefore, their priority was to preserve their L1 without neglecting the role of English and Nepali.

Teachers should have pedagogic soundness to teach a multilingual class. They need to apply various techniques like making drawings and word associations, discussing synonyms and antonyms, using flashcards and asking for definitions and incorporating relevant audio-visuals to make the primary school children get more involved in group or pair activities with enthusiasm. It is also suggested that a foreign language is learned well when a suitable environment is created with a rightful space for both the L1 and the target language. Creating a favorable environment for the preservation of local culture and language, mother tongue-based education is a must and in this context, student achievement of learning a target language will also be fruitful.

This study has a limitation as it is a small scale research that has found out the importance of the use of L1 in multilingual classrooms where only three school teachers are interviewed and observed. More research in this field is necessary to obtain a wider picture of the present scenario in case of L1 use in an ESL/EFL classroom. Wider scale study will

enhance the generalizability of this kind of study. However, this research will add insight to the pedagogic practices in multilingual classes, particularly by the English language teachers. It will also ignite positive realization by the school authority, curriculum specialist, policy makers and many other stakeholders to incorporate L1 as a powerful tool in teaching a foreign or second or a target language.

Authors' Bio

Anupama Manandhar is an English Teacher at Ullens School, Lalitpur, Nepal. She has completed her MEd in ELT from KUSOED, Kathmandu University. She is a dedicated, and hardworking teacher who always looks for innovations in her teaching dynamics. In addition to her teaching, she sometimes does anchoring in public events. She loves to attend conferences and present her creative ideas.

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Dr. Laxman Gnawali, Professor of English Language Education at Kathmandu University, Nepal, taught English at primary, secondary and tertiary levels for fifteen years. After his second Masters from the University of Exeter, UK, he found interest in teacher education and training. His interest areas include language pedagogy, action research, and teacher professional development. He currently leads NELTA as its President.

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