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# Implementing English Medium Instruction in Nepalese Public Schools: Teachers' Perceptions

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## Abstract

This study explores the perception of teachers towards English medium instruction (EMI) along with the challenges in implementing EMI in public schools of Nepal. Adopting phenomenological qualitative research design, three secondary level English language teachers from three community schools of Kailali district running EMI up to secondary level were purposively selected as research participants. A semi-structured interview (30 minutes each) was undertaken with the participants to collect information. The study reveals that even though teachers have positive attitudes toward EMI, they are still facing difficulty in implementing EMI successfully in the schools. The research participants perceive some challenges such as lack of competence in English, uncertain roles and responsibilities of teachers, lack of teacher training or workshop, lack of authentic resources and instructional materials, lack of infrastructure, students' motivation towards learning and lack of awareness of the parents. Similarly, the study also reveals that the schools are unable to implement EMI effectively because of a lack of clear government policy, lack of effective supervision mechanism and inadequate support from the government and community.

**Keywords:** Medium of instruction, language policy, implementation, English language teaching, challenges

## Introduction

English language has a broad range of uses in almost all industries and fields around the world, not just one nation or area's language either. It has essentially

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covered every location and bit of information in the modern world (Khatri, 2019). According to Freeman (2007), there is a huge surge in the demand for English all over the world. It is not simply because of shifting demographics, but also because of the globalization trend. As a result, English language has been used by the modern world to communicate its advancements, changes, innovations, and many other things. The world has shrunk and become simpler as a result of the widespread use of English. Because of the ease of a lingua franca increasingly utilized as a second language in major areas of the world, English is gaining popularity across political and ideological lines (cited in Gnyawali, 2010, p. 7). People appear to be obliged to study it due to rapid developments in science and technology, politics, and the economic world.

In recent years, public schools in Nepal have been adopting English medium instruction (EMI) as a new linguistic market in education (Saud, 2020). This trend is attributed to globalization and the socio-economic strength of English language, which is viewed as a linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1993) for improved “socioeconomic mobility” (Khubchandani, 1978, as cited in Bhattacharya, 2013, p.165) in the globalized socio-economic market. The English language occupies an impeccable and important place in the socio-economic system, and so, the drive for its study is paramount. English is, thus, socially, economically, and educationally raised higher than any other local languages (Giri, 2010, pp. 64-65). According to the National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2007, p.34), “the medium of school level education might be in Nepali or English language or both”. Since then, public schools have had the option of using either English or Nepali as their medium of teaching. As a result, since 2010, a considerable number of public schools in Nepal have implemented EMI (Sah & Li, 2018). Community schools in Nepal, as Ojha (2018) mentions, are aggressively shifting to EMI from the traditional Nepali medium instruction. There has been a growing demand of parents for EMI viewing English as a linguistic capital in the global socio-economic market. People have taken it as an economic investment in education. Even though there is high demand of English medium instruction among everyone, and teachers have positive attitudes toward EMI, teachers of the secondary level are facing different challenges while implementing EMI in classroom (Khatri, 2019). Similarly, Saud (2020) argues that there seems a noticeable gap between the true spirit of EMI policy and actual classroom practice in public school education. Thus, the objective of this paper is to identify the perception of teachers towards EMI and to analyze the challenges in implementing EMI in public schools of Nepal. To achieve the objective, the study deals with three basic research questions: How do teachers perceive EMI in the context of Nepal? What are the major challenges the in implementation of EMI

policy in public schools? What can be the ways to minimize the challenges for better implementation of EMI in the Nepalese context?

### **Literature Review**

Even though there has been a high demand and wider adaptation of EMI in the community schools of Nepal and teachers have positive attitudes towards EMI, there are several challenges in its implementation (Khatri, 2019). There are various problems that are common in the successful deployment of EMI. The policy, as well as stakeholders such as school administrators, teachers, and students, face such issues. Teachers, parents and students have a positive attitude toward EMI. However, teachers have to face a variety of challenges while using English as a medium of instruction such as students' limited exposure to the language, mother tongue interference in the classroom, poor English competence of students, a lack of support and encouragement from parents and society, and a lack of a motivating environment for teachers. Despite the fact that the official EMI mandates that core subject areas be taught in English, Sah and Li (2018) contend that the school has adopted their own EMI practice, combining English and Nepali as the MOI due to the inadequate competence of their teachers and pupils. Teachers who have been taught in Nepali experience significant difficulties in delivering English lectures. Teachers, on the other hand, are aware of the issue, but they lack the English ability required for EMI. They are well-known for communicating everything they know in English.

EMI is in practice in most of the schools of Nepal. However, there are many issues related to students and teacher in implementing EMI effectively in the classroom. In this regard, Poudel (2010) asserts that neither the teachers nor the students are satisfied with the use of medium of instruction in higher education classrooms due to the issues like linguistic limitations, communication issues, content delivery issues, and comprehension issues. According to Sah and Karki (2020), pupils that switch to EMI are not adequately equipped. They don't know enough English and don't live in an English-speaking environment. Despite the fact that English-medium textbooks are available to them, they lack the necessary skills to comprehend them. When pushed to use English, they either switch back and forth between English and Nepali or remain silent. Despite the objective to use EMI to build linguistic capital and compete with their private school classmates, Sah and Li (2018) contend that teachers' (and students') lack of English proficiency has undermined both content knowledge and English skill learning. Although the students are clearly capable of improving their learning, teachers are skeptical that their overall accomplishment has improved. This demonstrates how EMI has made it difficult for kids to improve their English language skills.

In a similar vein, Dearden (2014) revealed that a lack of EMI-qualified teachers and teaching resources, as well as questions about which subjects should be taught through English medium, the age at which EMI begins, the lack of a standard level of English for EMI teachers, the role of the teacher, and the role of language centers and professional development are the issues that affect EMI practice globally. Because these are global difficulties for EMI implementation, they appear to be the same in Nepal. Similarly, Giri (2011) believes that the largest issue community schools face in implementing EMI policy is teachers' lack of English language competency.

The ability of teachers to communicate effectively in English is critical to the efficient execution of the EMI policy. Similarly, regarding the proficiency of teacher, Sah and Li (2018) asserts that teachers in non-English areas in public schools are typically not native English speakers, and the Teachers Service Commission examination in Nepal does not assess teachers' English competence. However, Sah and Karki (2020) argue that most teachers are either underprepared or unqualified to teach EMI classes. Teachers, you observe, feel under pressure when they must communicate or teach in English solely. Similarly, Galloway and Rose (2021) assert that language-related problems and linguistic readiness have been identified as important impediments to the implementation of EMI in a growing number of studies. These issues, which have arisen as a result of the unbridled expansion of EMI services, influence practitioners and students, and underscore the importance of ELT practitioners in providing linguistic support. While talking about subject teachers' perspectives and practices in EMI, as well as students' motivation, Jiang et al. (2016) reveal that successful education was maintained through the use of pragmatic tactics, but the aim of increasing English proficiency was not met since language teaching was not prioritized. The perceptions of EMI among subject teachers harmed prospective students' linguistic gains.

Even though previous research works on EMI explore the practice of implementing EMI in various academic contexts, research studies on investigating perception of teachers in the context of Nepal are inadequate. Similarly, the research is insufficient to explore the challenges in implementing EMI in public schools of Nepal. Moreover, research works are scarce in identifying the ways how teachers minimize the challenges for better implementation of EMI in the Nepalese context.

### **Methods and Procedures**

This study is based on a qualitative phenomenological research design. Three community schools, which run EMI up to secondary level, were purposively selected as a research site. The schools selected for the research were DSS, GSS and SSS (pseudonyms). From the three schools, the study uses three secondary level English

language teachers (one from each) who were purposively selected as research participants. A semi-structured interview was undertaken with the participants to collect information. For data collection, I physically approached each of them and had a 30-minute interview with each of them and additional information was obtained from telephone conversation. The interviews were taken in Nepali language because the research participants felt comfortable using Nepali during the interview. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English language for further discussion. The privacy of the school and the research participants is maintained in the paper to avoid ethical issues.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The finding of the discussion is based on the three broad research questions: What are the perceptions of the teachers towards EMI? What are the major challenges (and their possible causes) in implementation of EMI policy in public schools? What can be the ways to minimize the challenges for better implementation of EMI in the Nepalese context? To answer these questions, six interview questions were asked to the participants. This section discusses the major findings obtained from the interview of the research. The findings are mainly discussed under four categories: Teacher's opinions towards EMI, the present situation of schools, challenges in implementing EMI and ways to minimize for better implementation of EMI.

#### **Teachers' Opinions toward EMI**

The first question of my study was related to the attitude or perception of teachers towards EMI. While talking about their attitudes toward EMI, two teachers show a positive attitude towards it. They agreed that EMI is necessary in present day world because it enhances the ability of students and helps them to assimilate in this globalized era. Participants from SSS responded as:

English medium instruction is the requirement of the current world. In fact, EMI prepares the present generation to assimilate in this era of globalization. As English language is being recognized as lingua franca everywhere, English medium instruction can't be undermining.

Similarly, participant from GSS said that:

For me it is necessity of present time. Yes, it is important because it enhances the ability of students and connects with the world.

The responses of both participants show that they have a positive attitude towards EMI and they also agree that English language is necessary as a medium of

instruction in their context. This perception towards EMI is also similar to the perception of English language teachers explained by Khatri (2019), Ojha (2018), and Sah and Li (2018) in their research.

However, participants from DSS accepted the importance of EMI but shows negative attitude towards EMI at the elementary level.

Although EMI is liked by some students and parents for it paves the way to high paid jobs, I think it is not good for the children studying at elementary level because they feel difficulty in expressing their ideas. Moreover, it works as the gatekeeper to the language minorities and stops them from entering the world of higher studies.

From the above response we can say that he accepted the demand of EMI in present world, but he rejected the appropriateness of EMI at elementary levels. He argues that EMI creates loss of minorities' languages and learners feel uncomfortable while expressing their feelings in English language.

### **Present Situation of EMI in Schools**

Regarding the present situation of EMI in their school, all the participants agreed that EMI is not that much successful in their school due to the lack of proficient teacher (i.e., old teacher not being competent) and students' adaptability to this language is at a poor level. They said that EMI was adopted to make student proficient, however, instead of progressing, they are falling behind. Participants from DSS responded:

My current school is adopting EMI from junior classes to higher level. However, I don't see must of the students being proficient at gaining English language skills up to the mark. Various basics might be the reason behind low level of student's adaptation to this language and teacher's competency.

It is clear from his expression that even though the school is adopting EMI, it does not seem to be beneficial for students due to lack of teacher's proficiency as well as learner's level. In similar vein, teacher from SSS responded:

The school management community had decided to implement EMI some 5 years back with the dream of improving the academic status of the students. However, instead of improving their level, they are lagging behind. It is because many old teachers are not competent in English. So, I think, EMI is not successful in our school.

This response shows that EMI is unsuccessful in their school. The school adopted EMI for betterment of students; however, they are unable to raise the level of students due to lack of competency of old teachers who are working from years. Furthermore, participant from GSS added that:

EMI is not that much successful in our school. EMI was adopted to make the students as capable as the private school but due to lack of competent teacher in all the subjects that is not possible.

The participant from GSS school also agreed that EMI was not successful in their school due to lack of expert teachers and were unable to make students proficient as students of private school.

The responses of all the teachers reflect that EMI is not that much successful in their school due to lack of competent teacher and language adaptation of students (Sah & Li, 2018). Even though EMI was adopted to make the student proficient and competitive in the present world, they were unable to do that. They were supposed to make the students as competent as the student from private schools, but they are not successful in effective implementation of EMI in government schools.

### **Challenges in Implementing EMI**

EMI is very much important to make the students competitive in this era. However, teachers have to face different sorts of challenges while implementing EMI in public schools. In respond to the question what the major challenges are your schools is facing in running EMI successfully, the participants' from DSS responded as:

The main challenge is lack of teaching authentic resources. The other problems are lack of competent teachers, lack of teacher training, instructional materials and human resources. Complex students tend to ignore the fundamentals of English language they rather employ exam passing techniques. Teachers' role and responsibility is also another challenge.

This statement denotes that the school is having problem in implementation of EMI due to lack of qualified teachers, instructional material, training, resources, role and responsibility of teacher and student's carelessness towards learning. Similarly, the participants' teacher from GSS responded:

The challenges while implementing EMI are lack of competent teachers, lack of teacher training, lack of human resource. There is also another issue i.e., communicative issue.

This response reveals that communication problem, insufficient qualified teachers, inadequate training for teachers, and a lack of human resources are obstacles to implement EMI successfully. Furthermore, participants' teacher from SSS responded as:

The students tend to ignore the fundamentals of English language they rather employ exam passing techniques. Teachers' role create problem. The challenges of implementation of EMI are lack of teaching resources, lack competent teachers in subject matter, lack of training, Communication issues between teachers and students, and complex and tricky grammar of the language itself.

This statement illustrates that problems arise from teacher's role to student's exam-oriented learning. Lack of teaching resources, a shortage of experts and training, communication problems between teachers and students, and the language's complicated and difficult syntax are the hurdles associated with implementing EMI.

While talking about the challenges, the participants reflected that they are facing several challenges in implementing EMI successfully. All the participants believed that the persistence challenges occur due to a lack of pedagogically competent teachers (Sah & Li 2018; Dearden, 2014) or lack of language proficiency (Sah & Karki 2020; Giri 2011) lack of training, lack of instructional materials, lack of appropriate methodology (Sah & Karki, 2020), communication issues between student and teacher (Poudel, 2010), lack of teaching resources, teachers role and responsibility (Dearden, 2014), and lack of students awareness about the use of language and the complexity of language itself.

### **Ways to Minimize the Challenges for Better Implementation of EMI**

It is crucial to minimize the challenges for better implementation of EMI. Regarding the question, what can be the solutions to minimize the challenges for better implementation of EMI in your school, participant from SSS responded like this:

The school administration should provide pedagogical training to the teachers regarding EMI. There should be strong infrastructures and teachers should take their responsibility and teach in better way. They should be autonomous self-learners to improve their English.

The participant explicates that teachers should receive EMI pedagogical training from the school administration with well-equipped infrastructures. Similarly, teacher should accept their responsibility as well as the student's needs to be self-learners too. Similarly, a teacher from DSS reflects that:

Students should be taught in English medium from the basic level by trained professionals. There should be regular inspection of EMI by concerned authorities. Resources and instructional materials should be in easy access of learners and instructors. Induction to novice teachers, trainings, workshops etc. should be adequately organized and main thing teacher should be more concerned about the methodology.



This statement shows that both students and teachers should have easy access to resources and teaching materials. Teacher should get training regularly and they should be observed by the concerned authority. Students (including elementary level) should be instructed by a qualified teacher with an appropriate methodology, teaching materials to minimize the challenges at implementation level. Furthermore, participants from GSS said that,

There should be the proper management of human resources and proper supervision of government and stakeholders. The teacher should be known own self of their role and responsibility provide training and creative and motivating instructional methodology.

This response explains that the teacher himself/herself should be aware of their role and responsibility and the concerned authority should supervise and manage the resources that are needed at the school. Similarly, innovative and inspiring teaching strategies should be used in the classroom for better implementation.

These perceptions of the participants show that all the teachers have similar types of solution for better implementation of EMI in their schools. They reflect that the school administration should provide pedagogical training to the teachers regarding EMI (Khatri, 2019). That is to say, induction to novice teachers and old teachers, training, workshops etc. should be adequately organized. They further argue that teachers should take responsibility (Ghimire, 2019) and use a creative and motivating instructional methodology for betterment. They observed that students should be taught in English medium from the basic level by trained professionals and resources and instructional materials (Khatri, 2019) should be easy access for learners and instructors. It means there should be strong infrastructure. Furthermore, they argued that there should be proper management of human resources and regular inspection of EMI by concerned authorities (i.e., government and stakeholders). Similarly, Ojha (2018) also agrees that policymakers and regulatory agencies should also keep an eye on how schools are doing both before and after EMI is adopted so that the program can start and run successfully. They also focus on autonomous self-learner because without learner's autonomy we can't imagine the learning.

### **Conclusion**

This study reveals that even though teachers have positive attitude towards EMI, the status in implementation level was not good. They were found to be enthusiastic about using EMI in their regular teaching and learning activities. Similarly, the teachers stated that they would prefer to use EMI in their instructional activities than teaching in the learners' native language. However, it can be concluded that due to obstacles and challenges such as lack of competent teachers,

role and responsibility of teachers, lack of teacher training or workshop, lack of authentic resources and instructional materials, lack of infrastructure, the complex and tricky grammar of the language itself, language not being used for primary communicative purpose in the school premises, students' motivation towards learning and uneducated parents, public school instructors are unable to implement EMI effectively and efficiently in their regular classes. The finding shows that such problems occur due to a lack of Government's and stakeholders' proper plans and policies, lack of supervision, awareness, training and responsibility from teacher's side. Based on these findings, it is suggested that public schools should create a friendly and welcoming environment for teachers to encourage them to use EMI in the classroom. School should be made more resourceful and equipped with technology. Furthermore, teachers should be pedagogically and professionally sound. The school administration or the concerned authority should provide pedagogical training, workshops and seminar to the teachers.

Despite the new insights gained from this research, there are a few limitations that must be addressed. This is a small study including only three English teachers who are teaching at EMI adopted school. Thus, the results may not be generalizable. In the future, it might be done on a greater scale and might help the researcher in their study of EMI related problems. Furthermore, this might be helpful for the concerned authorities who want to make improvements in EMI programmes. It can be significant for language planners and policymakers who need updated information about the issues raised in policy for further research and improvements of EMI.

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