



Teachers' Beliefs on Executing English Medium Instruction Policy in Community Schools

Nani Babu Ghimire (PhD)¹, Yam Prasad Pandeya¹, Bhanu Bhakta Gurung²

¹Assistant Professor, Siddhajyoti Education Campus, Sindhuli, Nepal

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0071-4017>

¹Assistant Professor, Siddhajyoti Education Campus, Sindhuli, Nepal

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-0755-785X>

²Assistant Professor, Sindhuli Multiple Campus, Sindhuli, Nepal

Corresponding Author: *Yam Prasad Pandeya*; **Email:** yamath33@gmail.com

Abstract

Community schools introduce English medium instruction (EMI) policy due to the growing influence of the English language in Nepal. This study aimed to explore teachers' beliefs in employing EMI policy in community schools. Using a qualitative ethnographic research design, the experiences of three Grade VI-VIII teachers from three EMI community schools in Sindhuli district were explored. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation and writing field notes. Interviews were audio-recorded, recorded data was transcribed assigning codes, codes were developed into categories and main themes were derived in terms of the categories. In order to analyze the data, we followed the six phases of thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). The findings reveal that the adoption of EMI policy in community schools is influenced by the ideology of English as a global language. The study also highlights that EMI is implemented as a strategy to retain student enrollment in community schools and curb the migration of students to private schools. Furthermore, it uncovers that teachers have developed multilingual beliefs and advocate for multilingual pedagogy as a more suitable approach for multicultural classroom contexts. The study recommends fostering multilingual awareness among teachers to support the development of a multilingual medium of instruction policy rather than relying solely on EMI in community schools.

Keywords: EMI policy, global language, students' enrollment, multilingual beliefs

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Introduction

English Medium Instruction (EMI) policy remains a subject of global debate (Phyak & Sharma, 2020). Some scholars support EMI policy, while others argue that it is not suitable for multilingual societies. Despite this ongoing debate, an increasing number of schools worldwide are adopting EMI. Following this trend, Nepali community schools have also adopted EMI policy to teach academic subjects in English. Dearden (2014) defines EMI as “the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdiction where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English” (p. 4). Likewise, according to Richards and Pun (2022), “the use of English to teach academic subjects such as Maths, Science, or Economics in English rather than in the students’ mother tongue or dominant language is known as English Medium Instruction or EMI” (p. 9). Justifying the reasons of introducing EMI policy in community schools of Nepal, Neupane (2023) argues that the mushrooming of private schools, increased globalization, and migration from villages to towns for better education raised concerns about the survival of community schools, making the shift in the medium of instruction a pressing necessity. However, Brown (2018) claims, “in-keeping with the false assumption of ‘English is good, so more English is better’, parents are demanding EMI in their local schools, even at primary level” (p. 21) in developing countries. In response to public demand, many community schools in Nepal introduce EMI policy with the belief that it can improve students’ English proficiency (Ghimire, 2021b; Saud, 2020). However, teachers face many challenges in teaching academic subjects in English due to their limited English language proficiency and the socio-cultural context of the schools (Khatri, 2019; Mahara, 2023). Although some researchers have studied the EMI policy, teachers’ beliefs about it remain insufficiently explored. In this context, understanding teachers’ beliefs about EMI policy is essential before its implementation in community schools.

Teachers’ beliefs, shaped by personal values, experiences, educational backgrounds, and career trajectories, significantly influence their agentic roles in implementing language education policy within institutions (Mifsud & Vella, 2018; Stritikus, 2003; Tao & Gao, 2017). In other words, teachers’ beliefs play a crucial role in shaping teacher agency. Teacher agency refers to the actions taken by teachers in their workplace, driven by their underlying beliefs (Ghimire, 2024). Moreover, Tao and Gao (2017) opine that teacher agency is a vibrant procedure which is shaped by the phenomena such as teachers’ beliefs, personal goals, curriculum and pedagogy knowledge. Biesta et al. (2015) reveal that beliefs and values play an important role in teachers’ work that create a wider institutional discourses which become helpful to achieve agency within the particular educational ecologies in which they work.

Furthermore, Varghese (2008) explains that bilingual teachers' beliefs about teaching and language are formed by their individual and professional understanding, and the institutions within which they work.

Teachers' action is developed and strengthened based on teachers' beliefs about their professional activities. Teachers' beliefs about EMI policy influence their approach, motivating them either to teach academic subjects effectively in English or to adapt the policy to align with the socio-cultural context of the schools. Without personal beliefs and values aligned with EMI policy, teachers may find it challenging to engage actively and creatively, limiting their ability to exercise agency effectively during the implementation of the policy. Teacher agency is shaped by the actions teachers take to negotiate and resist EMI policy in the classrooms (Phyak et al., 2022). While many scholars have studied various dimensions of EMI policy globally, including in Nepal, there has been limited focus on studying teachers' perspective on executing EMI policy in community schools. Specifically, teachers' opinion and ideas on developing EMI policy in community schools in Nepal remain underexplored in existing research. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by examining teachers' beliefs on executing EMI policy in community schools, specifically in the context of teaching academic subjects in English within Nepal's multilingual classrooms.

Methods and Procedures

The paradigmatic position of this study is interpretivism, as it focuses on understanding the subjective meanings and experiences of individuals in a social context. It is a qualitative research because it is "subjective" and "inductive" in nature (Muijs, 2004, p. 4). The research design of this study is ethnography. For Creswell (2012), "ethnographic designs are qualitative research procedures for describing, analyzing, and interpreting a culture-sharing group's shared patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language that develop over time" (p. 462). This study was conducted in Sindhuli district located in the mid-eastern part of Nepal. We selected three EMI community schools from three different locations – one municipality and two rural municipalities – as our research sites using a judgmental sampling procedure, ensuring that all selected schools had been implementing EMI for at least five years. We have assigned pseudonyms to these three schools as Kamalamata School, Bhimsen School, and Marin Thakur School. Three EMI teachers, each with over five years of experience teaching academic subjects in English at the Grade VI–VIII level, were purposively selected as participants to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon. To protect their identities, pseudonyms were used as Lalita, Prakash, and Binaya. We conducted in-depth interviews based on open-ended semi-structured guideline questions, participant classroom observation, and writing

field notes for collecting data to capture a comprehensive understanding of teachers' beliefs, practices, and interactions within their natural classroom contexts, ensuring triangulation and depth in the qualitative analysis. We interviewed the teachers repeatedly until data saturation was achieved. Additionally, we conducted the interviews in the Nepali language to ensure clarity and comfort for the participants. We followed the thematic analysis approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), who describe it as “a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data” (p. 78). According to Clarke and Braun (2017), “thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (‘themes’) within qualitative data” (p.297). Using this method, all audio-recorded data were fully transcribed and then systematically coded for analysis. The generated codes were systematically grouped into specific categories, and overarching themes were developed. These themes were analyzed and discussed in detail, drawing on participants' claims and supported by relevant literature. We analyzed and interpreted the verbatim and dialogic data obtained from engaged ethnographic study (Phyak et al., 2023). We adhered to key ethical principles of qualitative ethnographic research, such as maintaining honesty, reciprocity, and neutrality. Additionally, we ensured ethical interview practices and upheld confidentiality throughout the study (Ghimire, 2021a).

Findings and Discussion

Teachers' beliefs are important in the effective application of EMI policy, as their perceptions significantly influence classroom practices and student outcomes in multilingual environment. The findings and discussion in this study are organized under the themes: ‘the influence of English as a global language’, ‘EMI policy for retaining student enrollment’, and ‘teachers’ multilingual beliefs and practices in response to EMI policy’.

Influence of English as a Global Language

Teachers believe that the public, including themselves, is motivated toward EMI policy in community schools due to the influence of globalization and English as a global language. Globalization generally refers to the increasing interconnectedness of global networks, the organization of social life on a worldwide level, and the rise of global awareness, ultimately leading to the integration of a global society (Ibrahim, 2013). Moreover, all the participants in our study agreed that parents in community schools want to teach their children in EMI schools because of the impact of the English as a global language. For example, Lalita from Kamalamata School said, “English is a global language which is essential in many areas of our daily life. There is a growing demand for EMI policy, as the public

believes that their children can learn English through it.” She further added, “EMI is essential for competing in today’s globalized world and meeting the demands of the 21st century skills”. Describing global influence of English language, Rao (2019) utters that English language is spread all over the world into different fields such as science, engineering and technology, medicine, trade and commerce, scientific research, education, tourism, internet, banking, business, advertising, film industry, transportation, and pharmacy. Furthermore, Kadel (2024) states, “the main reason behind the use of English as a medium of instruction for non-English subjects in school education is that English has become the global language and global lingua franca in the world in the 21st century” (p. 112) . Kamalamata School is located in a village that is becoming more market-oriented, indicating modern development. Influenced by this development and the growing prominence of the English language, parents at community schools are increasingly aware of English’s role as a global language and its rapid spread worldwide. It reflects that English has an impact on every sector such as development, education, culture, trade etc. in Nepal. As a result, they have introduced EMI policy in their schools. As the English language is used nationally and internationally, teachers have a belief that students can survive everywhere in the era of globalization if they study in an English medium schools because the continued dominance of English as a language of privilege and global capital, idealized as a symbol of modernity and internationalization through EMI (Sah, 2022, 2024). For example, Prakash from Bhimsen School has a believe that “students can be easily sellable in the global market if they study in EMI schools”. For him, English medium is a tool as a global phenomenon that support students to learn English in community schools. Analyzing the motivation behind the development of EMI policy at the institutional level in Nepal, Rana and Sah (2023) conclude that graduates competent enough in English would be able to survive in the global competitive market, get jobs and contribute to the national economy. It demonstrates that the primary motive behind implementing EMI policy in community schools is to align with the demands of globalization (Ng, 2016). In Ohuabunwa’s (1999, December 14) words, globalization can be viewed as a process that is gradually transforming interactions between nations by removing barriers in areas such as culture, trade, communication, and various other fields. Binaya from Marin Thakur School stated, “we need EMI policy in our schools due to the rise of modern technology in this globalized world, which our students need to be familiar with.” For Binaya, EMI is a way of learning modern technology and it makes students’ life easy and comfortable in future. Rai (2024) maintains that they aim to implement EMI policy in schools, recognizing its essential role in the context of ongoing globalization and technological progress. Likewise, Prakash added:

Children can learn effectively in English, and English-medium education can support their future studies. For example, students aspiring to pursue engineering or medical science need EMI education. Similarly, those planning to go abroad for work or further studies also benefit from EMI education.

Binaya's belief on EMI policy suggests that it enhances students' abilities, enabling them to pursue technical education both at home and abroad, and securing jobs more easily in either context. EMI equips students to stay well-informed of rapid advancements in science and technology, meet the demands of the global market, and participate in an increasingly globalized world (Shrestha, 2023). In Rana and Sah's (2023) words, it is thought that students with degrees in English may receive offers to study at foreign universities. The assumption of teachers and the public that English is a global language, and therefore EMI is necessary in community schools, is influenced by neoliberal discourse and an English-dominated ideology in Nepali society (Phyak, 2013). English is an international and the most dominant language in the world which Crystal (1999) utter that "English is now a global language" (p.1). Dang et al. (2013) demonstrate that how globalization has spread the use of EMI policy in nations that do not speak English language natively. Furthermore, Sah and Karki (2020) found that EMI as a means of assisting students to acquire social and material capital to survive in the global economy through the learning of English and receiving a best education. However, according to Sharma (2016, May 16), "English is everywhere in the world as a global language is a myth" (p.1). He keeps his argument against teachers and public's beliefs and claim that giving emphasis on English medium education through EMI policy in community school is a kind of false belief or idea. Nonetheless, teachers hold positive beliefs about implementing EMI policy in community schools, as they view the introduction of EMI as a strategy to retain student enrollment in these schools.

EMI Policy for Retaining Student Enrollment

The teachers believe that community schools have shifted from Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI) to EMI to retain student numbers. Phyak and Sharma (2020) state, "public schools are introducing EMI policy to increase student enrollment" (p. 330). When private schools opened in villages, students were drawn to these schools, perceiving them as providers of quality education. To stop this shift, community schools adopted EMI policy. Kamalamata School is located in a semi-urban area. Recently, a private school was established in the locality, drawing the attention of parents towards English medium education. For instance, Lalita said, "parents sent their children to private schools, so SMCs implemented EMI policy in our schools to compete with them". Binaya agreed, stating, "we introduced EMI policy in community schools to compete with private schools." However, he also

cautioned, “we need proper infrastructure and teacher preparedness for this change. Currently, EMI is more of a desire than an effective method”. Binaya’s school is located in hilly area and school buildings are well constructed with the support of donor agency through Nepal Government after earthquake 2015. However, the teaching learning materials and orientations, workshops or trainings are not provided to teachers for teaching academic subjects properly in English. For him, it is a fashion in rural village to implement EMI policy to compete with private schools without proper preparation. Our ethnographic field engagement demonstrate that SMCs and head teachers implement EMI policy to retain students number in their schools under the guise of offering English medium education. They do not focus on pedagogical matter rather than given emphasis as EMI as a socio-political issue. In other words, we observe that they want to gather students in their schools through the name of EMI policy because they believe that “EMI standardizes the academics and improves competitive capacity” (Rauteda, 2024, p. 33) . Phyak and Sah (2022) also maintain that EMI policy has been developed and put into practice in the community schools to draw more students. Saud’s (2024) study also found that students have the tendency of shifting from private to EMI public schools in Nepal for government recognition of the certificates thereby reducing the financial burden of the parents.

Prakash, who teaches at Bhimsen School, shared a similar experience. Although the school is located in a rural area, it is becoming more urbanized due to road connectivity with two major highways in Nepal. This development has improved the lifestyle and economic standards of the local community. As a result, parents began seeking English-medium education for their children to provide quality education, leading to the establishment of new private schools. This caused a decline in the number of students at Bhimsen School. In response, the SMC introduced EMI policy to compete with private schools and prevent student loss. According to Prakash, “the school administration implemented EMI policy because students were being drawn to private boarding schools, and the number of students was decreasing. Schools are at risk of merging due to low enrollment”. In his words, there are two main reasons for this shift to EMI: to prevent school closures due to low student numbers and to improve students’ future by providing quality education through EMI. In Prakash’s belief, EMI is implemented in the community schools for acquiring quality education to develop students’ modern personality. Our ethnographic field observation shows that teachers have a belief that EMI policy can increase the number of students in the community schools by stopping the students going to private school. In their opinion, shifting community schools into EMI has been considered a fashion for quality education by copying the style of the private schools. However, Parajuli (2023) asserts that the right to an education in

learners' mother tongues up to the basic level in schools, as stated in the Nepalese Constitution, has been violated by the decision made by schools to switch from NMI to EMI. As claimed by participants, the increment students in their school is belonged to the ideology of 'learning-English-as-receiving quality-education' (Phyak, 2013) . Moreover, according to Phyak and Sharma (2020), reproduction of neoliberal ideologies put an increased pressure on community schools to compete with private schools which Phyak (2016) terms it as "boarding fashion" (p.221). EMI policy in community schools has been regarded as symbolic, cultural, and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1991; Phyak, 2013; Sah & Karki, 2020; Sah & Li, 2018) leading to a shift from NMI to EMI. This transition often overlooks the cultural and linguistic values as well as the significance of a multilingual society.

Teachers' Multilingual Beliefs and Practices in Response to EMI Policy

During our research site visits, we observed that teachers were loyal supporters of EMI policy, despite having classrooms filled with students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Our engagement with them involved extensive dialogues and collaborative workshops. As we explored their teaching practices in multicultural and multilingual environments, their awareness grew regarding the necessity of using multiple languages in their classrooms, acknowledging the multilingual and multicultural context of their society. Lalita expressed skepticism about the effectiveness of EMI policy, noting, "I do not think it is effective because the SMCs impose English medium even on students and teachers who struggle with English. How can we expect effective classroom interaction under these conditions?" Lalita's critique highlights how the imposition of EMI disregards the needs and interests of teachers and students alike. She further argued, "whether we learn in English or Nepali, the knowledge remains the same. Teaching in learners' mother tongue enhances interaction and meaning-making in classes". Lalita advocates for using students' mother tongues, believing it to be more effective and comfortable for meaningful classroom interactions. Parajuli (2023) emphasizes that schools need to prioritize language policy that align with students' needs and rights, ensuring their learning is maximized by incorporating their native languages and cultural backgrounds. During one field observation, the Principal Investigator (PI) engaged Binaya in a dialogue:

Principal Investigator: Do you need EMI policy in community schools?

Binaya: I think it is not essential because very few students understand what we teach in English. They feel difficulty with exam questions and writing answers unless they have memorized them.

Principal Investigator: Why do you think this happens?

Binaya: We have adopted a boarding school-style English education that

does not fit our multilingual context. So I teach academic subjects in learners' mother tongues focusing on our students' diverse backgrounds.

This dialogue illustrates how teachers and students view EMI as burdensome due to their limited English proficiency, opting instead to use mother tongues to accommodate their multilingual classrooms. Many teachers in EMI community schools, who themselves attended Nepali-medium schools and lack proficiency in English, find teaching academic subjects in English challenging. Moreover, the communities where these schools are located are predominantly multilingual, with students preferring to use their mother tongues in class. Reflecting on observations during a lunch break in the staffroom, the PI noted, “teachers conversed in Nepali, discussing personal matters and politics. Despite being an English medium school, English was not used informally among teachers or students” (Field notes, March 10, 2024). This observation underscores the disconnect between formal policy (EMI) and actual practice (use of mother tongues). Initially, head teachers enforced a strict English-only policy; however, Binaya recalled, “The head teacher initially forbade students from using their mother tongues, including Nepali, within the school premises and classrooms. Later, he allowed it, stating, ‘Teach in the languages students understand best’”. Over time, head teachers shifted from a monolingual to a more flexible approach, recognizing the inadequacy of a monolingual medium of instruction in multilingual societies. This shift allowed teachers to incorporate learners' mother tongues into classroom instructions. During classroom observations at Marin Thakur School, PI found that Binaya occasionally used the Tamang language. For example:

Principal Investigator: Do students use Tamang in class?

Binaya: They use Tamang language with their friends. They use Nepali with me. They also speak Tamang with the teachers who can speak this language.

Principal Investigator: Do students find it easier when taught in Tamang?

Binaya: Yes, they feel comfortable with it. I am from a Maithili background but occasionally use Tamang words. However, there is a shortage of Tamang-speaking teachers.

This exchange illustrates the use of multilingual practices in classrooms, reflecting teachers' belief in the necessity of multilingualism over strict EMI policy. Through dialogic engagement, teachers developed multilingual ideologies, emphasizing the importance of using multiple languages in classroom contexts (Xiong et al., 2023). The teachers develop multilingual beliefs because they struggle to teach academic subjects effectively in English, prompting them to employ multilingual pedagogy in their classrooms. Teachers recognize that leveraging students' mother tongues not only enhances comprehension but also fosters a more

inclusive learning environment that respects the linguistic diversity of their students (Duarte, 2020; Rai et al., 2011).

Conclusion

We explored teachers' beliefs, opinions, and ideas on how they navigate the challenges and complexities of EMI policy implementation in multilingual classrooms in community schools of Nepal, using an ethnographic research design. By taking teachers' lived experiences in their natural contexts, through interviews, classroom observations, and field notes, this study offers a detailed account of how the EMI policy is enacted in practice in community school.

In this study, teachers hold varied beliefs on developing and executing EMI policy in community schools of Nepal. First, the teachers acknowledge the influence of English as a global language ideology and the force to adopt EMI policy to ensure that their students are competitive in an increasingly globalized world. This indicates that the globalization of the English language significantly impacts teachers' decisions to implement EMI policy in community schools. Second, Teachers believe that the increasing number of private schools is contributing to the declining enrollment in community schools. To counter this trend, they support the introduction of EMI policy in community schools. In other words, teachers view EMI policy as a strategy to retain students, as parents and communities associate English proficiency with better career prospects for their children. This insight is particularly significant in the context of Nepal's community schools, where English is often viewed as a marker of social mobility and progress. Third, although teachers initially hold positive beliefs toward EMI policy due to the influence of English as a global language and neoliberal ideologies, they become more critical after engaging in prolonged dialogue. Over time, they develop multilingual beliefs, recognizing that a multilingual approach is more suitable for a multicultural society. In practice, they adopt multilingual classroom pedagogy as a response to the monolingual EMI policy. In other words, teachers' multilingual beliefs and practices emerge as a critical stance against EMI policy. Teachers hold strong beliefs in the value of students' mother tongues for learning, despite the formal policy pushing for exclusive English medium. Teachers share that while they understand the broader aims of EMI policy, they find it difficult to ignore the multilingual realities of their classrooms. As a result, teachers use their students' mother tongues as a resource to facilitate students for better understanding, indicating that their beliefs about language use in education are more complex than the policy allows for.

The findings from this study show how teachers deal with EMI policy in complicated ways. On one hand, teachers recognize the importance of English in

the global context and understand the rationale behind EMI policy. On the other hand, they are confronted with the practical challenges of teaching in a language that both they and their students are not fully proficient in. This tension between policy and practice is a recurring theme throughout the study, pointing to the need for a more nuanced approach to EMI that takes into account the local linguistic and socio-cultural realities of community schools. This study highlights the need to raise multilingual awareness among teachers, parents, SMCs, and students in order to create a multilingual medium of instruction policy instead of relying solely on EMI policy in community schools. This shift can reflect the linguistically diverse and socio-cultural contexts of our society. Policymakers and educators need to collaborate in adopting inclusive language policy and practices that recognize students' linguistic diversity and ensure equitable learning environments within EMI programs (Sah, 2024). Moreover, stakeholders need to consider integrating a multilingual ideology into language planning activities, ensuring that multilingual learners can effectively utilize EMI to access social and economic opportunities. To this end, community schools can organize language awareness activities to foster multilingual consciousness among stakeholders, helping them make informed decisions about MOI based on their ecological needs.

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Appendix I: Guideline Questions for Interview

1. Please provide your name, age, gender, address, and educational qualifications.
2. Are you a permanent, temporary, or *rahat* teacher?
3. Describe your teaching experiences.
4. Which grade and level do you teach?
5. What subjects are you responsible for teaching?
6. Can you provide information about the educational background of your school?
7. Does your school introduce an English medium instruction policy?
8. Do you teach in English medium?
9. What prompted the adoption of EMI policy at your school?
10. Who directed the implementation of EMI policy at your school?
11. Can you share your perspectives and convictions regarding the necessity of EMI policy in community schools?
12. What are the reasons behind the demand for EMI in community schools?
13. Is EMI policy deemed relevant and appropriate for your school setting?