

Using English as a Medium of Instruction in EFL Context in Higher Education

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Abstract

This paper attempts to find out the use of English as a Medium of instruction (EMI) in higher level in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. For the study, we selected 16 teachers and 80 students teaching and studying in Bachelor level in Mid-West University and TU affiliated colleges from the Surkhet valley using simple random sampling technique. Then, we distributed the questionnaire to the participants, observed their classes, and took interviews to collect the required information. From the critical analysis and interpretation of the information, we conclude that all the teachers and most of the students in higher level preferred EMI. Similarly, EMI in English subjects forced to implement EMI in other subjects in EFL situation, too. The result showed that EMI is being implemented but majority of the students in higher level have been facing various problems and challenges; specifically, most of the students were interested in learning English through mother tongue though they want to be enclosed with the EMI. This study concludes with suggestion to develop positive attitude towards EMI from practice to policy level with sufficient teaching learning aids, trainings and essential requirements in higher education in EFL context.

Keywords: medium of instruction, mother tongue, foreign language, EMI pedagogy, potential challenges

Introduction

Using the English as the medium of instruction (EMI) is simply regarded as the matter of the strategies of teaching through the English language and growing global phenomenon existing in the overall academic level. In other words, it refers to the teaching of English or other academic subjects through the medium of English. EMI is the way of instruction using English in

which the content is a substantive academic course, rather than a support to a substantive course or a means to introduce language learning (Dickey, 2001). Similarly, Dearden (2014, p. 2) defines EMI as the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries of jurisdictions where the L1 of the majority of the population is not English. EMI commonly refers to the use of English in the offer of university degree courses in higher education instead of the domestic language of the country in question (Karakas, 2015).

EMI is regarded as the major issues to define in the context of English education while most of the non-English subjects are adapting EMI. EMI fosters the ability to learn the English language and other English medium subjects. Similarly, EMI in EFL context refers to the use of the English language in the teaching learning activities without using the mother tongue. Regarding teaching of English in English language, Jane Wills (1990) views that teaching English through English means speaking and using English in the classroom as often as you possibly can, for example; when organizing teaching activities or chatting to your students socially. In other words, it means establish English as the main language of communication between your students and yourself (as cited in Dawadi, 2006, pp.111-12).

EMI is popular in the countries where the first language of the majority of the population is not English. In most of the countries where English is not the national language, there has been a shift towards EMI in higher education. This is the result of an ongoing internationalization of higher education where internationalization seems to be synonymous with EMI. The adoption of EMI has been sweeping across the higher education landscape worldwide (Crystal, 2004 pp. 27-46). Between 1995 and 2005, a large number of international education institutions expressed a significant interest in adopting English medium of instruction (Marsh, 2006, p. 29). Similarly, Sah (2015) highlights the use of EMI in educational activities that many non-native English speaking countries have taken on EMI owing to the growing need for developing communicative competence in English that may fulfill the increasing demand for the English language in order for socioeconomic and sociopolitical development. The rapid change to EMI in developing countries, for example, Ghana and Rwanda, unprepared for such a vast change is causing havoc in some educational systems. EMI, therefore, has become a much-hyped issue today and it attracts a wide range of studies globally.

English is the global language of education. Thus, as universities are becoming international institutions, EMI in higher education is becoming more common all over the world (Altbach, 2005, 2007; Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; Mok, 2007). Regarding the use of English, Marsh (2006) has stated:

English is now more extensively taught and replacing other languages as a medium of instruction in many places. Since English is the language of knowledge and international relations, more emphasis should be placed on English as the medium of instruction in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) at tertiary level (P. 30)

EMI is being grown in the educational paradigm. However, it hinders another language across the English language i.e., it has become the most dominant language in the world. How the world is being smaller due to the retention of globalization, in the same way the English language is being implanted across English-speaking communities/countries. People in the world are intended to be engaged in an English medium environment. Nevertheless, this is not their mother tongue or first language. So, they are learning English as a foreign or second language. Regarding this, many schools, institutions, and colleges have been established to expand the knowledge of the English language. Even from the pre-school period, English terms are taught to a child. In the foreign or second language context, the English language is regarded as the language of prestige especially in public conferences, seminars, training accounting and so on.

In context of Nepal, EMI is unquestionably a growing phenomenon in public education in Nepal (Khatri, 2016, p. 29). The goal of learning English is to gain access to a rich body of knowledge available in English. But, there is not any official policy or rational statement for the English language as a medium of instruction. However, most English medium schools claim the education they offer is of international level, competitive, modern and so on. The trend of medium of instruction in Nepal is in the direction of increasing emphasis on English (Weinberg, 2013, p. 73). The study concerned to the use of EMI in the EFL classroom of higher education, is expected to be useful for teachers and students in practicing EMI in English. Similarly, this study will be fruitful for linguists, curriculum designers, textbook writers, teachers and students.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to find out the use of EMI in higher level in EFL classroom, and identify the problems in using EMI in higher education. The following research questions supported to the objectives of the study.

- a. How often does the mother tongue hinder the use of EMI even in college level?
- b. What are the challenges found in teachers and students in using EMI?
- c. What strategies can be fruitful to foster the use of EMI at the higher level in EFL context?

Review of the Literature

Various scholars from the different universities and institutions have investigated EMI in the EFL context. Along with the research on EMI and its effect on the quality of education, the investigations were conducted on ways to effectively EMI. Klaausessen and Gaaff (2001 as cited in Cho, 2012) showed that workshops for instructors in the Netherlands had a positive influence on the perceptions of EMI and Paseka (2002 as cited in Cho, 2012) suggested that systematic and structural assistance should be provided to make the implementation of EMI successful. Moreover, EMI has been taken as a serious issue. Many researchers had conducted researches under various universities and research articles have been published regarding EMI in EFL context. Some of the researches carried out in the related area have been reviewed below:

In a descriptive study, Ibrahim (2001) investigated whether EMI can be an effective means of enhancing students' and teachers' language proficiency at university and to find out whether bilingualism necessarily leads to bi-literacy. He pointed out the problems with teaching content in English, such as the limited English proficiency of teachers failing to increase English skills of the students. With these findings, Ibrahim proposed a partial EMI programme, in which teachers and students were allowed to use their mother tongue in specific situations such as discussion sessions and questions. Likeise, Giliomee and Schlemmer (2006) found that the majority of parents reported an acceptance of the practical value of English, but Afrikaans-speaking parents wanted their children's right to study in Afrikaans preserved. Indian-speaking parents also worried about the maintenance of cultural heritage and ethnic identity in this context. Dawadi (2006) suggested that English language learning could be more effective and meaningful provided that the teachers present lesson in English medium rather than in mother tongue. It is also suggested that this technique also enables learners to communicate in English.

Wu (2006) investigated the students' attitudes towards EMI implemented to partial graduate courses in Chung Hua University. The researcher employed a questionnaire survey to investigate college students' attitudes towards EMI in a private university from the perspectives of the feasibility and the likely obstacles of EMI in an EFL learning environment in Taiwan. Most of the students in the study recognised the benefits of learning content knowledge through the English medium, and also confessing difficulties in understanding the content and learning materials and interacting with classmates and instructors in English. Rewarding teachers for offering EMI courses with extra hourly pay was found to be one of the effective promotional strategies of the university, the assessment methods of the students' learning achievement in EMI courses, however, was considered problematic in validity and reliability. In a different context, Teng (2009) explored the attitudes of the teachers about using EMI in their teaching techniques through a survey design. From the study, it was found that EMI teachers had positive attitudes toward EMI courses. The teachers were found to benefit from the practice of EMI, particularly in their English ability and teaching skills. Some of the teachers reported using teaching strategies such as simple words, examples, visual aids, lesson reviews, body language, and other techniques to facilitate comprehension of content knowledge by students. Their professional capability as EMI teachers has consequently been elevated steadily.

Poudel (2010) discussed some of the major challenges emerged recently in the multilingual classes in higher education of Nepal using both quantitative and qualitative methodology. From the study, it was also found that the teachers preferred to use Nepali and the students felt comfortable in their own mother tongue. However, their goal of education is to make the student in English. It reveals neither the teachers nor the students are satisfied with the medium of instruction that in the classes of higher education what they used in the English classroom. Similarly, Khati (2011) found the use of mother tongue by the teachers and students in secondary level and the ways of reducing the over-use of the MT in English classes. The study found that the teachers need to the MT because of the students' proficiency in English. Similarly, the students need the MT due to shyness in speaking in a large class. The study also suggested

that using shorter and simpler expressions, encouraging the teachers and students, chatting with/ among the students in English may enhance target language properly.

In a case study, Huang (2012) explored the design and implementation of EMI in higher education in Taiwan. His survey from the EMI programme administrators via interviews centering on their attitudes toward the design, implementation, and effectiveness of EMI practice in the university suggested that team teaching of content and language incorporated into the future EMI curriculum design and implementation. In a different context, Rogier (2012) investigated the effects of EMI on language proficiency of students enrolled in higher education in the UAE. To investigate the effects of EMI from an institution, faculty and student perspective in the context of higher education in the UAE was the purpose of the study. The investigation was explored through a retrospective panel study using a test/retest method to investigate score gains on the IELTS exam after four years of undergraduate study. It was found that the students generally did not feel that studying in English causes those problems and rate their ability in listening, reading, writing, and speaking in English as good to excellent. On the other hand, teachers did not feel students' language ability meets expectations for students studying in an English-medium environment and think that their students' weakest skills are in writing and listening. Baral (2015) in a qualitative research indicated that adoption of English as a language of instruction has not only limited students' creativity but has also hindered implementation of student-centered classroom teaching. It was also found that due to the lack of teachers' proficiency and sub-standard text materials have further compounded the problem thereby seriously limiting classroom interaction, and dialogue.

The aforementioned studies have focused on attitudes, proficiency, effectiveness, case study and another phenomenon of using EMI in general subjects i.e. non-English subjects. The present study differs from previous studies since this study has attempted to study the use of EMI in English classrooms of higher education in the context of Nepal. English as a medium of instruction has even been used in other subjects along with English subjects. Moreover, in Nepal, English subjects are taught as a compulsory subject up to Bachelor level and as a major subject to all levels. It has been different in terms of context, objectives, tools and sampling procedure and the way of analysis as well. We mainly highlighted the use of EMI in English subjects. It has also investigated the relevance and problems of using EMI in English subjects in EFL higher education and determinants in the utilization of EMI in EFL context. Thus, the study relatively differs from previous studies.

Methods and Procedures

The design of the study was descriptive. We focused on both qualitative and quantitative (mixed method) research design. Mid-Western University and TU affiliated colleges located in Surkhet were selected as the study site. Teachers and students of Mid-Western University and TU constituent and affiliated colleges were selected through purposive sampling procedure. 16 teachers (10 classroom observations and 6 interviews) and 80 students who were selected through random

sampling procedure was the sample population of the study. The tools for the data collection were a questionnaire for the students, interview for the teachers and observation for both teachers and students. Two sets of the questionnaire were prepared for the students i.e. closed-ended and open-ended as well as check-list for observation was prepared for the teachers. We got the recommendation letter from the English Instruction Committee and visited the Mid-Western University and the TU affiliated colleges in the Surkhet Valley and selected the required respondents i.e. students studying in Bachelor level to fill up the questionnaire. Accordingly, we distributed the questionnaire to students and after they finished filling up the questions we collected data himself. Then we appealed the administration and requested the instructors to get authority to conduct interview and classroom observation. The analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the selected students and teachers have been used to fulfill the objectives of the study following the qualitative and quantitative procedure (i.e., mixed method design). After collecting the data, the data were tabulated, categorised, described and compared systematically. We checked and moderated the data manually to reduce errors and inconsistencies for editing and coding and analysed from different angles/categories as well as closed-ended data collected by the students has been presented in the table and analysed.

Results and Findings

This section deals with the results and finding of the study based on the information collected from the participants. Preferences and use of EMI, problems in EMI in EFL contexts are the major considerations.

Preference and Use of EMI

The study found that about a half (45%) and nearly two fifth (37.50%) of them have positive attitudes regarding to the preferences to the EMI in English subject. Only a few (5%) of the students were found strongly agreed and one fourth (25%) of them used the English language in the classroom; however, they prefer EMI. Specially, English majoring students used the English language in the classroom than the non-English majoring students. Students in the higher-level feel hesitation to use the English language to speak with their friends in the classroom. Nearly, one third (31.25%) and more than two fifth (42.50%) of them found strongly agreed and agree simultaneously in terms of the essentiality of the EMI in higher education. Most of the students stated that their English teachers use the English language in the classroom.

The extent of using the English language by the teacher in English majoring classes is higher than the classes of non-English majoring. The use of EMI made difficult for the most of the non-English majoring respondents in comparison to the English majoring respondents. Majority of the students i.e. nearly two fifth (38.75%) and nearly a half (48.75%) of them had informed strongly agree and agree that their English teachers use to encourage them to learn through EMI. About two fifth (37.5%) were found strongly agree and two fifth (40%) of them were found Agree in terms of helping to be enclosed with the innovative technologies from EMI. Nearly, a half (45%) and more than two fifth (43.75%) of the total respondents claimed that EMI in English subjects helps to enhance EMI in other subjects as well.

EMI was being applied by the English teachers but students sometimes make them use MT. The trend of using MT in non-English majoring classes was more than in English majoring classes. There was great possibility to apply EMI in higher level because it was adopted since the elementary level. Learners' poor base, lack of training to the instructors, MT used in the classroom, lack of teaching-learning materials and so on interfere in using EMI in EFL context.

Align with the findings of Huang (2012) and Rogier (2012), all the English teachers preferred EMI in the English classrooms in higher level. The teachers who have been teaching English in higher level claim that they mostly use EMI in their classrooms but the extent of using this is greater in the English majoring classes. It is because of the irregularity, lack of labor, lack of appropriate teaching learning material and context, and other factors. The lecturers claimed that EMI is not properly being used in the context of Nepal since all the stakeholders are equally responsible for this. Similarly, Cultural sensitivity, teachers/lecturers' proficiency, college environment, students' irregularity, instantly supervision, existing trend of teaching strategies are the most eminent challenges of the use of EMI in higher level in EFL context.

Problems in EMI in EFL Context

In terms of language skills, more students were found having problems in speaking (40%) and listening (30%) in higher level in the EMI context. Half (50%) of the respondents were found having problem in listening because of keeping up the most appropriate pronunciation and about a half (47.50%) of them had problem of listening because of being unfamiliar with the meanings of certain words during the classroom practice. More than two fifth (42.50%) of the respondents had speaking problems due to the hesitation to speak English and feeling of difficulty in speaking fluently. More than one third (35%) of them had difficulty in pronunciation in terms of reading. Nearly a half (47.50%) had problem of writing due to the difficulty in constructing the complex sentences. More than two fifth (41.25%) were found having problem in using proper words and meaning for proper context in learning vocabulary. The similar number of respondents were found problem in learning vocabulary because MT accent hinders in English vocabulary. More than a half (52.50%) of the respondents were found being confused while practicing grammatical items. More than a half (57.50%) of them were found stating the language used outside the classroom and environment of the college as the most influencing factors to arise the problems in EMI context in higher level.

EMI in Classroom

From the study, it was found that the students were mostly seen passive in non-English majoring classes in comparison to the English majoring classes. Students' interest was not found effectively in the classroom in spite of their passion in EMI. Students would not emphasize themselves for learning properly. Mostly, lecturers were found trying to simplify the content and code-switching as well. The extent of using MT in the classrooms has been found variation as per the class to class and teacher to teacher. It was also found that the MT was used in the non-English majoring classes more than the English majoring classes. For reducing the use of MT, the lecturers used problem-solving strategies. Less collaboration was found in the observed classroom. Classes were merely found in lecture methods with less interactive situation. Teachers

were required and obliged to translate into the MT in the classroom. In the EFL classes, which had been facilitated through using technology-based teaching learning aids were found more interactive. Moreover, teachers were found using MT while motivating the students, translating the literary genres, generalizing cultural terms and other situations in which the students felt difficult to perceive their presentation.

Following Karakas (2015), EMI being one of the prominent factors in teaching learning activities, is regarded as one of the best techniques of teaching English as a foreign language. To be enclosed with the contemporary world, the English language is the best factor. For developing students' competency in the English language, first, EMI should be used in the English classes and later, it can be effective in other subjects, too. EMI seems to be familiar the students with the subject matter, learning resources and other essential components for developing education.

The study explored the importance of EMI in higher education and its various problems, affecting factors of using EMI and appropriate suggestive ways. The study focused on the questionnaire for the students of higher level, interview for the teachers teaching in the same level and observation of the respected classes of higher level. Until the students are not self-motivated to learn and perform through EMI, the teaching learning activities can not be effective in EMI context. During the observation, no students were found being self-motivated towards EMI although they have realized the importance of it. Baral (2015) stated that the students in higher level should be self-motivated to learning EMI to enhance their learning better and aligned to the finding of this study. Moreover, the teachers teaching English in higher level either teaching English as the major subject or as the compulsory subject, they were found having positive attitude towards teaching English through EMI, however, the MT has been used by them in a certain context. The teachers stated that the EMI develops the students' proficiency in the English language and is helpful in their academic competency. Primarily, the MT was used in the English classroom while dealing with the classroom learning problems. Comparatively, such activity had been done more in non-English majoring classes than English majoring classes.

Conclusions

The study was carried out to identify, analyse and interpret the use of English as a medium of instruction and its problems while using in higher education in EFL context. It was intended to answer the questions; whether EMI is used or not in EFL classroom. The study revealed that higher level students have been facing various problems and challenges because of EMI; however, they want to be enclosed with the EMI. It is summarized that if all the concerned bodies from practice to policy level have positive attitude towards EMI, abundant teaching learning aids are available, training for the instructors and other essential requirements are provided then EMI is possible to use in the higher education in EFL context. Further, it is concluded that most of the teachers and students in higher level prefer EMI although it has created tensions and challenges in their professional career.

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