

# School and Language Policy

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## Abstract

This paper attempts to explore how and why language policies are made at schools. Language in education is the everlasting burning issue in this world of globalization era. There are several agencies to make, practice and influence language policy in education and other dimensions of the society. For educational dimension, school is an important agency to make and practice language policy. In the context of Nepal, nowadays schools are formulating their own language policies independently and abiding proximal agencies. This paper attempts to explore the lived experiences of the school teachers as administrators and teachers. Two secondary school head teachers, one from community school and another from institutional school were interviewed and had the informal communication as well. Two other teachers were also interviewed, observed and interacted. Schools were found to make language policy considering three aspects: institutional promotion, parents' interest, and contemporary living world's English language ideology. As they reported, students are not so important agency to contribute school language policy making process but parents and their interests are highly prioritized. They were reported that they did not consider national language policy, multilingual reality, diversity, language identity and cognitive investment of the learners. Teachers were educated in monolingual education, so they preferred monolingual language policy.

**Key words:** language policy, language policy feeders, language and education

## Introduction

Language is species specific that is only possessed by human beings. There are 'roughly 6,500 languages' (Klappenbach, 2019) which are spoken in the world at present. Including native and non-native speakers, 'English is the largest language in the world whereas Mandarin Chinese is the largest' if we count only native speakers (What is the most spoken language? (n.d.)). Some of the languages are well developed because they are used in multidimensional aspects e.g. literature, administration, business and others of human society. They have well developed orthographic system, advanced thesaurus, large number of speakers who hold political, economic, and socio-cultural ideology, identity and power prominently in the contemporary society or to some extent in the past and at present it has legacy. Primarily languages are for communication. From critical point of view, language is not an autonomous construct but it is a dynamic formation of relationships and practices constituted in large measures by struggle for power (Fairclough, 2001). Languages have the power relation of politics, economics, business and more prominently identity, and sentiment of belongingness as nationality. Language

assures belongingness that is why after the introduction of federalism in 2015 in Nepal, many local governments have introduced local languages in government offices as administrative and functional communicative language (Phyak & Ojha, 2019). However, the constitution of Nepal 2015 article 7 sub-article 2 has vested this right of making additional local languages as additional official languages to province, (Government of Nepal, 2015b). But at schools other factors are responsible to influence language policy. How these external factors influence language policy at school level is my interest of research. If a single language is considered to have, nationality is neglecting multi-nationalities and multilingualism (Saxena, 1997).

Languages are in conflict because they are dominated and driven by economic and political power or ideology so Canagarajah (2005) states that implementation of language policy may generate tensions. In the context of Nepal, government's language policy regarding education in the constitution article 31 sub-article 5 is "Every Nepalese community residing in Nepal shall have the right to get education in its mother tongue and, for that purpose, to open and operate schools and educational institutes, in accordance with law," (Government of Nepal, 2015a) to promote national languages through the education in children's mother tongue in primary or basic education. But in practice, parents are interested towards English language (Bhatta & Budhathoki, 2014 cited in Phyak & Ojha, 2019). These factors may influence institutional school promoters to make English mono-lingual language policy. Language dominance is guided by ideology of use of latent power not the coercive power as in war for colonization (Fairclough, 2001).

Domination of particular language in education is because of the politics of language and its power exercise. Not giving identity and recognition to multilingual learners in their educational uplift is a sort of social injustice. On the other hand, it is a hindrance for children in educational process created by language policy. The community which possesses wrong exercise of the economic and political power has the language being dominated on. This is the language that is used as subject and medium of instruction in educational process which is prone to marginalize many learners in their learning processes if their language at home is not used in their learning.

As the author has a lived experience of teaching English, he can feel that many people who are good at the English language are considered better than those who have knowledge of more languages. This is the social construct made by the people influenced by ideology and power. In the context of Nepal many institutional schools have been established and are supposed to teach their subjects in English medium (Bhatta & Budhathoki, 2014 cited in Phyak & Ojha, 2019). They make their own school language policy. Language policies are expressions of a long-lasting linguistic culture- i.e., of the cultural myths and cultural values pertaining to the types of linguistic accommodations, programs, and efforts that are in accord with the brunt of local historical experience and aspiration (Schiffman, 1996). As stated by Schiffman, this is the language policy which is generally made by the government in the state but the language policy cannot be confined only at government level. There are other agencies which develop their own language

policies and which influence government language policies either positively or as contradictorily guided by other political, ideological and economic hegemony.

Many parents whether they belong to fee payable group or not, they send their children to private schools even if there are other factors e.g. social value, market value for job, etc; out of them one is English language as the medium of instruction (Ojha, 2018). To attract the flow of students in government community schools, they have also changed their medium of instruction policy and some of them are using two mediums, Nepali and English, simultaneously. It means that they are also under the pressure of dominance of the English language. In Kirtipur Municipality, there are two model community schools, Mangal Secondary School and Janasewa Secondary School where both schools have been using both the mediums for instruction with section divisions. Almost all institutional schools have made English speaking zone so as to promote the English language as monolingual bias.

Most of the parents feel proud of their children speaking in English regardless of their knowledge in contents. Even if illiterate parents are very much satisfied with their children's English language performance. They have considered English as the prestigious language. Many parents have shared this with the author. Once a guardian who is originally from Biratnagar and who has three children studying in the school where the author teaches stated "Sir when we visit home town Biratnagar, many people try to compare my children with their children; when they find my children so good in English.., oh my god my children saved my prestige; I enrolled my children in good school!" When her daughter speaks English well, she feels proud of her. Similarly, one day at my school a landlady came to visit to me. My school children were playing in the ground during interval time. She shared that she has three grandchildren studying in private schools. Out of them one is a junior and he is in class three. She said "The small one fluently speaks English and all the time he speaks in English at home too then I have no hesitation to pay huge amount of money as they demand". She was very much happy to share these feelings and experiences even if I did not care it initially. When these words: English, fluency, and no hesitation to pay echo in my ears strike me. One day the author visited two private schools in Lalitpur Imadole area where there are sign boards written "English speaking Zone". One of the teachers at my school started to fine the students who use other languages in class rather than English. One guardian came and complained me "Sir my daughter does not want to come to school. She has to speak English otherwise she is charged fine".

Parents, schools and students are intertwined to each other or are knotted agencies that are dynamic feeders to conceive different policies of the school. Especially, private schools are supposed to keep the parents' interest in the first priority. They best supply the parents' interest, the best institutional enhancement they achieve. They make the policies which meet parents' interests, students' educational outcomes and institutional promotion. Out of many policies and programs planned by schools, one is language policy. These all scenarios mentioned above are related to language policy. All these ideas strikes me, this makes me seriously think on how and why private schools and school teachers make such language policy in their schools, what is the language ideology and how it is being

practiced in schools. How school language policies are made and influenced, who are these feeders of school language policies e.g. parents, society, other competent schools and what experiences the teachers and students possess regarding this school language policies (Ojha, 2018; Sah, 2015). What this language policy counts regarding knowledge, economic relation and multilingualism, and multiple competences. The interplay among them is the outcome as language policy. How the perceptions of parents towards English language influence the private schools making language policy at schools.

### **The Theoretical Framework**

In language policy making many agencies and institutions are involved. Language policy takes place in various forms and units, e.g., at school, at home in local level. Traditionally language policy was supposed to be made by the government only. But in the present time it is widely considered that language policy happens at various circumstances involving the various agencies.

Here in this paper, the author's focus is on how and why schools make language policy and what is the relation between language policy and education at school. Language policy is not neutral, but an ideologically guided complex phenomenon influenced by local and global sociopolitical dynamics (Tollefson, 1991). Language is one important part of education system. Mostly language policy at educational level is the issue of debate because in multilingual community where language is made as the medium of instruction with which who will be advantaged and disadvantaged in the educational process. Whether does the language policy made by school allow the students to invest their cognitive investment and identity recognition? These are crucial aspects in the part of learners in educational process. Language in education planning is one of the key aspects for implementing national language policies Language planning at schools has many folds language as problem, right and resource. So language policy in education specific in school has these main three dimensions.

In the context of Nepal traditionally private schools were considered to have language monolingual especially English language policy but now days other community schools are in competition to make their English monolingual medium school. They suppose that it assures the quality education. One of the head teachers from a secondary school in Kirtipur opines:

English medium has the quality education that is the beliefs the guardians have. We have English medium that is why we have large number of children, otherwise our condition will be like other community schools. It is the need of the time; otherwise who believes us? We are being model school because we have quality education through English medium, so the government believes us. If we have English medium, we are allowed to charge the children.

English medium has created injustice for many learners but school level language policy makers do not care this aspect. Neither they have valued the learners' cognitive investment nor do they care the self- language reflection. Regarding this, a head teacher adds:

It is impossible to give linguistic justice in school. They can use other languages in their community. Sometimes students feel it difficult to keep up with English medium but gradually they all enjoy it. English does not create any injustice for any students because English is equally new for all the learners. Sir we have made this policy an obligation because our student number in lower grades dramatically turned down. Then we started pre-classes with English medium.

English medium widens the students' status, and so the parents believe them. Government also promotes it. They have the perception that quality education is if there is English medium. They have social pressure to adopt English medium policy in their institutions.

Since language policy is arbiter (Johnson & Johnson, 2014) it can also be made by individual teacher. Institutional schools have their own perspectives on English language policy. They have English language policy for separate identity and parents' interest over their children to access the global citizenship through English medium education. One of the Principals of a private school in Lalitpur claims:

Ideal thing does not supply our hungry. We are in business even if it is service oriented. Business first focuses on profit, proper catch of interest of customers leads to the better rate of profit. Even community schools have two mediums in the same school, why they know the interest of parents and demands of the present time and contemporary society is very sensitive. Who will give us justice if we think language justice in our school? Nowadays we have challenges that community schools are turning into English medium schools.

It is clear that private schools have English medium policy with some differences, e.g., business orientation, interest of parents and needs of contemporary society and the world. Further information will come in the succeeding sections.

### **Methods**

On the basis of these stimulating data, the situation the author observed, and the various complaints and pleasures the parents and students shared him; he adopted the phenomenological research design. The author has attempted to reveal the various factors regarding how language policies are made by the schools and how the schools experience these mono-lingual bias language policies.

The purposively sampled target population of the research was one community school in Kirtipur, one private school in Lalitpur area, two head teachers and two teachers, one English subject teacher and another non -English teacher as social studies teacher, both of whom as language policy makers of their concerned schools. The author devised purposive sampling for the convenience of limitations, e.g., time, budget and coverage of the research plan. In depth repeated interview, observation, interaction with the two head teachers and two other teachers, and documents study were the techniques/methods and tools used for data collection. The author used three unstructured interviews to each sampled four teachers including head teachers, two semi-participant class observation each of two teachers, and one time interaction with each teacher but three times

interaction individually with the head teachers. The author attempted to collect information from them in the situation as they were performing their regular jobs e.g. in the head teacher office, canteen, in the staffrooms while checking students' home assignments. This helped him to explore data with their lived world on the phenomenon. On the basis of the collected data and its triangulation process building the themes like demands of the parents, need of the present education system, influence of the globalization, English as not only language but the commodity of career and business, institutional promotion, parents' interest, and contemporary living world's English language ideology, the critical analysis approach was adopted for data analysis. This approach attempts to draw the meaning from the data in the phenomenon considering socio-economic, socio-political and power hegemony regarding language policy at schools. Data collection and interpretation had the cyclic process. This process took place about 3 months and next one month was spent in preparing the final draft.

### **Results and discussion**

Since it is the phenomenological research design, first of all, the author had the lived data regarding the phenomenon. Similarly, he collected the data on the phenomenon from two secondary school head teachers: one private and another community school, and two secondary level teachers through unstructured repeated interview and discussion. In the course of data analysis due attention was made to draw the essence of experience, observation, interview and discussion on the phenomena. This was a less studied phenomenon type in the context of Nepal. Only limited studied resources were available on the phenomenon in Nepal. Thus explorations were made in the following categories.

#### **School**

School is a public institution which is supposed to deliver educational services. School is directed, controlled and conducted by the rules and regulations made by the state system (Education Act, 1971; U. S. Department of Education, 2009). Language is one inseparable aspect of education more prominent in school level. It is because learners at school levels are more fragile in terms of their linguistic development and their cognitive investment with the language they have in their homely environment and the knowledge before the school and out of the classroom they have, and the experience they possess. Schools make their policies and programs to promote their interest. Private schools, their one interests out of many others is financial profit; they manage more hours for English language world widely if they have the English medium instruction, (Ordonez, 2004; Sah, 2015). Almost all policies of private schools are oriented to effective service, parents' interests, and promotion of institutional interests. There are some differences between the interests of private schools and community schools regarding English language policy. Both of them seem to focus on contemporary society and in macro scale the world and interests shaped by socio-cultural and contemporary world of the parents as government of British Columbia proposed two agendas: the promotion and use of ICT's and English language learning, (Gonzalez, 2012). The private schools are found to make only English language policy in school for distinct educational quality through medium instruction as they claim that the English language as the lingua franca has the world wide access. More or less similar to this, community schools, on the other hand, have three interests. First



they can address the interests of parents (Ojha, 2018) who are extremely motivated to English medium education for their children. Secondly, they are promoted by state system that they are allowed to collect fee, the schools are made model schools and receive huge amount of fund from the government and other international and local NGO and INGO or other international government agencies for school infrastructures and quality promotion if they have English medium. Thirdly, they do so for the sake of competition to private schools and for their own surviving. As one of my participants from community school stated:

Sir, if we don't make our school English medium, we have to close school, even in Nepali medium section they do not come, they come here because we have English medium and they believe that our school teaches better in Nepali medium too. They (Nepali medium section) also study some subjects, e.g., mathematics and science in English.

The various pushing factors are there in the community schools to make only English policy. The community schools where only Nepali medium is used, the number of students is being decreased. There are many community schools which have less than 100 students in their schools even in urban areas in the Kathmandu valley.

### **Parents**

Parents in schools are vital agency to feed school language policy as primary educational resources for their children; advocating for school restructuring efforts; and participating in the development and implementation of programs that support partnerships and their interests (The Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). Nepalese parents, who understand the English language has the important role in education and for their children's educational career, and want their children to educate in English medium school whatever their first or home language is. Very few illiterate parents are also found to have sent their children to English medium schools. As one of my school children parents shared "Sir they saved my face otherwise this investment?" Parents are hegemonized by English language and English medium instruction but they are in reality not found to become conscious about their children's education. Parents are also directly or indirectly influenced by globalization and Englishization. They want their children to go to 'inner circle' country (Kachru, 1985). If their children are in such inner circle countries, they have distinct status and hierarchy in the society; they are, therefore, codifying English language. Schools make English language policy to address these interests of the parents. They provide policy feedbacks by different means through different participations and activities, (The Minnesota Department of Education, 2019).

### **Teacher**

Teachers in school education are the key practitioners, experiencing agents, policy feeders, and as the bridge makers between school administration and students. They supply the learning experiences effectively, creatively, efficiently, and with potential productivity. The teacher is the most pivotal agency of school language policy implementation. If school language policy does not afford the ownership to the teacher, it may face disruptive challenge in the implementation. The more teachers' participation as

school language policy feeders, the better school language policy implementation success rate would be amplified. Teachers are not participated in language policy making and they are not aware of language policy made by politicians and technocrats, (Gonzalez, 2012). Teacher as in the class makes language policy for the sake of teachers' own professional practice, effective language pedagogy and as the implementation of school's macro language policy.

### **Students**

Students occupy key roles in every educational policy and planning because all the stakeholders, parents, teachers, school administration, and other government policy makers focus their attention in their activities. This is the theoretical assumption but in practice, such policies disadvantage students if they are imposed by some others else ideology implicitly or explicitly. As stated by Gonzalez (2012), they are made by technocrats who may not have sound experience and practical knowledge for conceiving certain policy and their implementation. Sometimes, they fail to examine the feasibility as Shohamy (2006, p. 143) writes "Policies are imposed by policy makers through different mechanisms, for political and social reasons, without attention being paid to the needs and wishes of those affected by the policy and those expected to carry it out". Some students at schools are fossilized in learning because of language policy made by schools. One teacher at the author's school said that students cannot understand whatever she speaks if she does not speak in Nepali. Others also share that they have to say something in Nepali to much extent to make the students understand them. In this regard, as Mudaly and Singh (2018) puts, "Language sometimes becomes barriers for learners who are from multi-lingual diversity".

Following the result of the study, there are some matters which could make two things on the phenomenon; the first is to extend the concept and the second is to offer the further research. It will also widen the further discussion. Such aspects are discussed in brief in the following categories.

### **Language and learning ideology**

There are two purposes of language in education: learning language and learning contents where language as medium of learning and instruction. If language of education is widely used and it belongs to political excellence, learning in this language is hegemonic. On the other hand, if language as a medium of instruction is beyond the access of learners, then it may become counterproductive. If children are educated in their language<sup>1</sup>, they are more benefited rather than the education in other language from their home language because they are not supposed to invest cognitive repertoire. "Since language affects almost all aspects of daily life, there needs to be more of a focus on language barriers in education, which focuses on teaching and learning as well as policy changes" (Mudaly & Singh, 2018). Selection of one language in education is a matter of ideology not the matter of learning theory and practice (Fairclough, 2001).



### **Language policy and institutional/ school ideology**

Theoretically education in mother tongue or language 1 is widely accepted phenomenon, if the kids' home language is usable in education in terms of orthography, glossary to meet the basic educational process and products. But in practical, there is language hegemony in educational field. Institutional interests of the schools, parents' interest, hegemony of globalization, construct of quality education in English medium (Sah, 2015), monolingual teacher education etc. are the some visible obstacles of multilingual education. Elite schools may have much more time allocated to English instruction because most of their curriculum is taught in English using content based instruction (Ordonez, 2004). School language is also the indicator of socio-economic hierarchy. Many parents who belong to higher class in the society hesitate to send their children to community schools. One secondary level English teacher said that he felt comfort to teach the students from elite family because he should not teach them manner. In the same way one private school head teacher claimed.

Differences are the natural phenomenon; equality and justice are the matter of idealism. Sir we have seen all idealism but we should follow the current of time otherwise we will be left behind. Idealism does not let us survive.

Basic education in mother tongue is also an ideology of bargaining because they, who advocate mother education, do not want to educate their children in their mother tongue. As the participants in the interview claimed that they make English language policy at schools and teachers at class because they are following the current time and they cannot go beyond it for their first survive, and second for global adjustment.

### **Conclusion**

There is the issue that mother tongue education is for enhancing the access to education as transitional bilingual education (Yadava, 2007) to the marginalized community children or to recognize their identity and to encourage cognitive investment. The educational, cultural, nationality, identity, cognitive investment in learning, text identity, psychological readiness and other values in multilingual education are the most considerable aspects in language policy making. It is reported that these aspects of language policy consideration have not duly been internalized by the school while they are commencing their documented and non-documented language policy at school level. They are heavily influenced by interests of the parents and for private schools for institutional promotions. However, all the language communities including indigenous and minority languages are aware of their languages and its intimacy and identity value, they as parents are deeply convinced with importance of English language for their children and are silent supporters of school language policy. Language policy at schools is not bad things but they should widen their consideration while devising the language policy at their levels. It is difficult to say to maintain total the linguistic and identity justice but at least they can minimize the injustice and recognize the cognitive exploration with the children's home languages which could minimize the teaching efforts and maximize the learning investments.

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