

# **Ethnic group parents' beliefs toward English medium instruction in school: A case of Kailali district**

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## **Abstract**

*This research paper tries to explore the beliefs of ethnic group parents whose children study in private and community based schools in Kailali having English medium instruction (EMI). It has linked the education system in terms of English medium instruction. This study has built the framework of study on the basis of interview taken deeply from the ethnic group parents. The documented and recorded data show that English medium instruction is not on behalf of their mother tongue, learning style, environment and pace of learning. The only English medium instruction is applied currently in most of the private and government schools in Nepal. The beliefs of ethnic group parents illustrate that their children are not benefitted from English medium instruction regarding learning, doing homework and being interested in reading activities. Their views reveal the idea that use of only English medium instruction is being affected from the thinking of dominating their children's languages. Finally, the beliefs of ethnic group parents show that the use of their languages (i.e. Tharu, Tamang, and Magar) in the schooling can attract children to the schools, doing homework, and decreasing the dropout rate of children from the school education.*

**Keywords:** EMI, ethnic group, mother tongue, multilingualism

## **Introduction**

Education system is the backbone of a state which can determine the development or the degradation of it. Besides this, there is influence of globalization in every sector. The area of education cannot be exceptional from it. Along with this, English has established as a global language. There is hegemony of English language. I mean to say that English has become an international language of communication. With the pace of time, the developing countries like Nepal are being influenced from globalization. Consequently, the provision of English medium instruction has flowered into the angle of language policy in Nepal. English medium instruction was only the medium of instruction in private schools of Nepal earlier, but the trend has shifted to the government schools hereby. In Nepal, English language is used as medium of instruction in different private and government schools as well. English is taught from school level to university level, but its impact is the area to be studied. Therefore, as the researcher I was interested to study this area because I wanted to show the ethnic group parents' actual views towards English medium which is existing in community based schools in Kailali.

In different schools of Nepal, there is increasing the craze towards English medium instruction. If we ask the concerned authorities about it, they ponder that it has become a milieu for developing students' communicative ability in target language due to spread of the English

language. By doing so, students can dive in the ocean of knowledge. But, it has been commenced without taking care in language policy. Therefore, I selected this topic to elicit the beliefs of parents whose children are studying through English medium instruction at school. However, I perceived it as an attack on language ideology. I mostly have eyed on the parents from the ethnic group in Province no. 7. In step with advancing globalization, teaching English as an international language is increasingly emphasized in an expanding circle of countries in which English has no official status but is the de fact international language for global communication. (Coleman, 2006; Graddol, 2006; Kubota & Mckay, 2009; Smit & Dafouz, 2013; Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2011).

### **English Medium Instruction in Schools**

After my selection to this topic, I consulted different secondary sources went to the field and got the concept of it. I have centered English medium instruction in government and private schools in Kailali. They take English as the language of hope, progress and modernity. It is taken as a means of reflecting dignity and identity in the society. There is a belief that students who are instructed in English are able to speak English in each and every field. There are different schools in Nepal which English medium instruction is taken as granted. Along with this, there are some studies done in Nepal regarding English as medium of instruction. As Khatri (2017) says, “Many public school authorities are basically shifting their medium of instruction to English from Nepali in order to attract the large number of students who are now attracted to private English medium schools (p. 24)”.

In this study, I have selected English medium instruction in government and private schools of Nepal because these schools have started separate English medium classes for children. English medium instruction is considered in either way: positive or negative. In the same vein, Kangas and Dumber (2010) argue, “it would be appropriate to educate the children in their mother tongue in order to make the break between home and school (p.51).” Benson (2016) concedes:

The mismatch between home and school language has long plagued education system worldwide, but is particularly, problematic in low income countries those whose colonial legacies burdened them with exogenous language in formal and official domains... the use of learners’ own language for literacy and learning across curriculum provides a solid foundation for basic and continuing education and for transfer of skills and knowledge to additional languages.(p.3)

According to a recent British Council report on the global significance of English, some 1.75 billion people worldwide are now able to speak the language at a useful level; and the popularity of what Mark Robson, Director of English and Exams at the British Council, calls the ‘operating system of [a] global conversation’ (British Council 2013, p. 2), is forecast to register further growth, with about two billion people expected to be using English or learning to use it by 2020. As Jenkins (2003) observes:

Although English was well-placed to become an important international language by virtue of its colonial past, its hegemonic status in the twenty-first century owes much to the postcolonial period and particularly to the economic, military and cultural dominance

of the United States in the post-Second World War period". (p. 34)

Though English medium instruction is used in the schools of Nepal school, the ethnic group parents have distinct type beliefs towards it. Therefore, I preferred to perceive parents' beliefs. I found the English medium instruction, but its influence is not regarded. Moreover, I found students were imposed for learning rather than facilitating. Hu (2009, p. 48) reports that the common perception of EMI programs among both policy-makers and regular members of society is that they constitute the vanguard of educational reform, a cornerstone of quality education, and a vital means for China.

This saying reveals that English language is very essential in different countries including China to lead them in the stream of globalization and modernization. The English language has become means of changing states into global continuum. So, English medium instruction is applied regarding the teaching learning of English language. In the same way, Nepalese schools have launched the English medium instruction. However, it is perceived differently from different circles. Hereby, I mean to say that people from different strata take it in their own way. Because of that, I have done this research to draw the beliefs of ethnic group parents on English medium instruction.

Due to the hegemony of English as lingua franca for business, research and membership of the global community, education policy makers as well as parents, students and employers have been voicing their concerns for access to and the quality of English language education (Bolton, 2008). The education system of Nepal is run from two waves: government aided and private schools. Nepal is a multilingual country. Earlier English medium instruction was not in favor of schools. English medium instruction is used in different schools of Kailali district. It is implemented by schools, but its effectiveness in ethnic group children is not worked on till the date. So, this study tried to reflect ethnic group parents' beliefs toward English medium instruction in schools. The purpose of this study were to explore the beliefs of ethnic group parents on English medium instruction, analyze their beliefs on English medium instruction in private and public schools of Kailali and recommend some pedagogical implications. The research questions of this study were:

1. How do the parents of ethnic group perceive teaching their children through English medium instruction?
2. How do they explain the disadvantages of English medium instruction policy in schools?

### **Theoretical Framework**

A research is the connected form of theoretical part. During this study, I consulted different materials which paved the foundation of this work. Similarly, I grasped the theoretical knowledge to shape my present work. Mainly, I linked this work with the work of Communication Code Theory by Basil Bernstein (1971), Symbolic Interactionism by George Herbert Mead, and Instruction Theory by Jerome Bruner (1966). These theories build on the theoretical aspect of my work. I talk about them below with reason behind linking the present work with them.

First, I relate my study to Bernstein's Communication Code Theory (1971) because it makes the balance between elaborated and restricted code of children at school. I studied the beliefs of

minority groups' children's parents in the respect of English medium instruction. By doing this, I link this study to the communication theory by Bernstein which shows how people use the language in everyday conversation both reflects and shapes the assumptions of a certain social group.

The main aim of communication code theory is to create linguistically favorable environment for the working class children (Jora, 2018). Bernstein (1971) argues that forms of spoken language in the process of their learning initiate, generalize, and reinforce societal types of relationship with the environment and thus creates individual particular focus of significance. This means the way language is used within a particular societal class affects the way people assign significance and meaning about which they are speaking. People learn their place in the world by virtue of the language codes that employ. The code that a person uses indeed symbolizes their social identity. Similarly, ethnic group parents' beliefs show that subject matter taught in children's languages in the classes.

Another theory that I chose is Symbolic Interactionism. To quote Crossman (2018), it is a sociological theory that develops from practical considerations and alludes to people's particular utilization of dialect to make images and normal implications for deduction and correspondence with others. I linked this study with this theory due to its emphasis on valuing the dialects of speakers. Similarly, it is a frame of reference to better understand how individuals interact with one another to create symbolic worlds, and in return, how these worlds shape individual behaviors. I mean to relate here that children learn better and more if we create the opportunity for them to learn in their mother tongue rather than imposing them to learn in the foreign language.

The third theory that I chose is Bruner's Theory of Instruction (Bruner, 1966). According to him, instruction consists of leading the learner through a sequence of statements and restatements of a problem or body of knowledge that increase the learner's ability to grasp, transform, and transfer what he is learning. He further views that the sequence in which a learner encounters materials within a domain of knowledge affects the difficulty he will have in achieving mastery. In connection with this theory, I perceived the idea that there is heavy influence of language in the learning process. The intellectual development grows into children's repertoire. By doing so, if it is true that the usual course of intellectual development moves from enactive through iconic to symbolic representation of the world, it is likely that an optimum sequence will progress in the same direction (Bruner, 1966).

Cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner felt the goal of education should be intellectual development, as opposed to rote memorization of facts. As such I can say that children's cognitive development goes smoothly if we construct the learning in children's mother tongue. That was not stated explicitly by Bruner, but I received the proposition of learning aspect that evolves in the children.

Thus, my study is distinct type which advocates the children's language favored instruction. Correspondingly, I studied the beliefs of ethnic group children's parents on English medium instruction. I aimed to explore beliefs of ethnic parents on English medium instruction and analyze whether it facilitating or hindering children's learning. Owing to this aim, I wanted

to study the beliefs of the parents that I chose. Furthermore, I had a feeling that the medium of instruction may play crucial role in the learning wing of children. I wanted to make the focal point that schools are launching children facilitating multilingual practices or cultivating monolingual imposing in the learning process of them. After school how children behave and to what direction their learning is leading to is also my intention to go within. Finally, I liked to study their parents' beliefs on English medium instruction from the wave of perception.

### **Methods**

In the process of developing this paper, I followed the stepwise activities from the action of data collecting to analysis and interpretation. For this study, I used and focused the primary sources of data rather than the secondary ones. Regarding the secondary sources of data, I went through the materials such as Bernstein (1971), British Council (2013), Bruner (1966), Crossman (2018), Kangas and Dumber (2010), Phillipson (1992), Jora (2018), and others. In one side, it is an ethnographic research, and is based on critical theory of research in another. In the critical theory (Geuss, 1981), the critical type activities occur to the making of searching ideas. I followed it because I thought that how English medium instruction is influencing to the learning environment of children. In the same way, I tried to explore the influence of it from the perspective of their parents. Secondly, my study is a field based research. I selected four parents as informants required for my study. Before collecting data, I selected four parents whose children are being taught through English medium instruction. Then I wrote their beliefs on my diary, recorded on my smart mobile, and used open questionnaire.

For collecting data, I chose four persons whose children were studying at English medium instruction. I followed the purposive sampling because my purpose was to elicit the views of parents on English medium instruction. They were from Dhangadhi representing the ethnic group. Mostly two were from Chaudhary community, one from Magar community and another one from the Tamang community. I took deep interview of them. In the process of taking information, I convinced them to support me for telling their beliefs without any force and imposing. I wrote their beliefs on my diary and recorded on my mobile as well. Then, I analyzed the data on the basis of my research work. I went through the verbatim and vignettes whatever I got during the time of data collection. I have presented them in this paper's results and discussion section.

### **Results and Discussion**

I explore the beliefs of ethnic group parents on English medium instruction implemented in private and government schools. They responded that they did not have any idea and knowledge to use English language. They said that there has to be used their mother tongue for the classroom purpose. In the same, they responded that their children faced problems to understand the subject matter and became unable to communicate in English language. In one side, their children could not perform as they expected, and they were unable to deal with the home works assigned.

Many non-native English speaking countries have taken on English as a medium of

instruction (EMI) due to the growing need for developing communicative competence in English that may fulfill the increasing demand for English language for socioeconomic and sociopolitical development (Sah, 2015). The focal point I found was that the ethnic group children had lack of English language which Bernstein (1971) calls communication code theory in which children get chance to use their restricted code for their ease in the schooling. English medium instruction is the system in which students are taught directly and fully in English medium. The findings also relate the idea of George Herbert Mead (Crossman, 2018) which focuses on symbolic interactionism. That is meant to say that students can learn better if they are taught by relating the learning with their mother language. Similarly, another important aspect is that learning has to be based on instruction theory which Bruner (1966) calls the theory applied on behalf of learners. The following sections clarify why students need the use of their mother tongue or realize the concept of respecting multilingualism in the class.

### **Difficulty to Engage Children in doing Homework**

When I interviewed the parents, I found that only English medium instruction is not working for the betterment and achievement of students. Though schools are following the EMI, children are not achieving as they supposed to get. They are compelled to speak only English in the school zone. In this context, the minority group children are in challenging situation. Mostly teachers use the monolingual strategy of teaching. Sometimes, if students demand, the Nepali language is used. Accordingly, they are not interested in learning. As Bernstein (1971), the code used in the class highly matters in the schooling of children. They feel humiliated when they are unable to communicate in the target language. As a result, students are unable to perform the expected results in their schooling. They become passive in the class and at home because of the English medium instruction. The ethnic group parents viewed that their children are discouraged from using their language. In this ethnographic study, parents advocated in favor of mother tongue education.

As reported during this study, Ramdulari Chaudhary tells that their children only think they have to follow their teachers whatever they say in the class. They were not able to do the assigned homework. At the time, children come to parents for begging support. She stated that she was unable to help because she had not any knowledge about English. When her children do the homework, they replied that they were unable to solve the questions. They told her that she had to search a home tuition teacher for teaching them. Ramdulari conveyed her words to the side of the classes as in the form of multilingual access. She began as:

My children are not better in study. If I ask them why you are weak in study, they answer that they do not understand English language. [Laughing] I do not know English. I am always in tension when my children ask me about homework. I think, the school should manage the multilingual class. I have not the economic affordance to keep a separate teacher for my children.

From this verbatim, it can be said that the ethnic group parents are not able help their

children in doing homework. Their children felt difficulty for doing homework. As a result, there can come some trouble in their schooling. In the words of Bernstein (1971), the working class children's language has to be used for their regularity in schooling and their learning as well. I think the children's language have to be used in the class.

The complain of parents to children is that they move to play and watch TV when they are said to do homework. In the respect of my data collection, I found that children did not have any interest in doing homework. Instead they only turn the pages of book, but did not get anything from the book and notebook. Fulkumari uttered her children who were studying in private school. She drew her inner idea stating as:

My two sons go to school. They carry the bag and go to school and come back from school. [Putting her apron on her head] I have much problem because my children's education is not going smoothly. My husband is in India for labor work. He says send children to school always. But, I face the problem of solving the questions' under the homework of my children. I do not know anything they asked. They have language problem. So, English medium instruction should be mixed with our Chaudhary language.

To illustrate this verbatim, multilingual education is important. According to Fulkuamri, she has faced the problem of children in doing homework. When they ask question to her, she does not become able to say even if she likes to say something. In this way, English medium instruction has become a curse for the ethnic group parents and children. Therefore, they realize the need of their mother tongue in the classroom.

### **Poor Performance in the Academia of Children**

Ethnic group children's parents argue that the instruction teacher does in the classroom plays deserving role for children's better performance. Bruner (1966) depicts that instruction consists of leading the learner through a sequence of statements and restatements of a problem or body of knowledge that increase the learner's ability to grasp, transform, and transfer what he is learning. By connecting this idea with the parents' ones, learning is for transforming, but not just for copying. The parents I consulted viewed that their children's performance is not satisfactory. They become shy to say their children's result. Mote Magar, one of the respondents I interviewed has a separate experience about English medium instruction. He shared his ideas by saying that his eldest child has left school because of the language problem. His believes as:

[Itching the chin] my eldest son left the school because of the language problem. He never got pass marks in most of the subjects including English. He left the school. I work in a rice mill. I never went to my child's school. I think our children have to get some convince in our language in the school. My daughter also says, I will leave the school if I get poor marks in the exam in the coming year. She studies in class four in a private school.

This vignette illustrates that instruction is a backbone of motivating learners. Learners

gain poor marks if they do not get the instruction in their language. English medium instruction causes children performing ineffectively in the schooling. Accordingly, the ethnic group children face difficulties in the academia. Their interest orients them towards negative thinking to school. It reveals that children's language is significant for learning and performing better. Phyak (2007) states that the use of mother tongue in education pinpoints great urgency and importance since most of languages are on the verge of disappearing due to the lack of their literate tradition.

### **EMI as the Factor of School drop out of Children**

Many things become responsible in the regularity and continuity of children's schooling. Language is one of the major factors behind this. The ethnic group children's parents justify it. They say that English medium instruction is good only in name. But, it is not suitable in the case of their children's education. Language difference and the symbolic differences can hamper in the interaction between teacher and students. In this context, Mead argues that language develops from practical considerations and alludes to people's particular utilization of dialect to make images and normal implications for deduction and correspondence with others in communication (Crossman, 2018). Giri (2011) argues that the majority of people in Nepal have a neo-colonial belief: the English language ensures an access to a wide range of opportunities and better future of the growing generation of youths. They convey the belief that their children have left or in the mood of leaving school due to language factor. Whenever the language problem exists in the school, children reach in the state of leaving school. In my study, the two parents-i.e. Fulkumari Chaudhary and Dile Tamang believe the same thing as I stated. In common in present the belief of Dile. He states that:

My daughter has dropped the school. She never became happy during her school. My son says that his teacher only teaches in English language in the class. He teaches, but students do not get any understand. In our village fie, children have dropped school. [...] I think our children have to get education in our language. If so, the trend of leaving school may reduce. I request you, sir, convey my words to the concerned personalities.

This verbatim signifies that many of the ethnic group children leave school when they face language problems. In one side, they do not have affordable situation for studying, and they do not have instruction on their behalf. So, they drop the school. After that they rush to India for labor work or do early marriage. This is the plight of the ethnic group children that is believed by their parents towards the monolingual focused teaching. Though the parents feel difficulty to send their children to school anticipating getting education in English medium, their children are neither to perform better nor to continue education. Ojha (2018) argues that a corresponding shift of medium of instruction to English in some government schools aims to motivate parents to choose to send their children to these schools. English medium is preferred by parents, but not by children. Furthermore, this medium has become one of the major causes for ethnic group children to drop out school.



### **Conclusion**

This is a field based research. It has tried to explore the ethnic group parents' beliefs on English medium instruction. This study depicts that the mother tongue can be beneficial for such children. Consequently, they may be motivated to get education further. I have used the baselines of communication code theory, theory of symbolic interactionism and instruction theory. If we apply monolingual strategy in teaching learning of English, we cultivate linguistic genocide (Phillipson, 2000). Although English medium instruction is used worldwide, it is not on behalf of children's achievement and wellbeing. This is subtly shared by the parents of those children. The children are not benefitted from home to school. Parents' desire is to provide better education to their children in a comprehensible way, but it is not possible from the English medium instruction.

English medium instruction in community based schools in Kailali has not become successful for the case of ethnic group children. Due to this instruction, ethnic group children face difficulty for learning. They do not understand the subject matter because of English medium instruction. They bear the problem of doing homework, and they drop out school because of language problem. I have presented the data above in this paper which overpowers the difficulty in the schooling of ethnic group children. Their parents view that if their children get the chance of using their own mother tongue to some extent for understanding the subject matter. The ethnic group parents' beliefs signify that their children have difficulty in learning because of the lack of using their language for understanding content and other important information.

### **Implications**

This work is effective, fruitful and applicable from different ways. Language teaching and learning can be fostered by using it and teaching can be oriented to learner centered. The EMI has to respect the linguistic rights of children. Multilingual classes get significant values when we use students' languages in the classroom. The children from ethnic and minority groups can be motivated towards learning process. EMI in schools can be effective in non-native situations of teaching and learning of English language classes. Language planners, curriculum designers, language policy makers, researchers, and ELT practitioners can get it as a boon to study further as well.

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