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## **English Medium Instruction in Multilingual Context: Exploring Teacher's Ideology and Practices**

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### **Abstract**

The present study explores the ideological perspectives of basic level teachers who teach through English medium in EMI classroom. Teachers' ideology has profound influence on their classroom application. The ideology of a teacher determines the path of teaching-learning pedagogy in the classroom. I have explored the experiences of teachers as an ideological phenomenon. Experiences help to develop one's ideology. In context of Nepal, teachers are found to use several strategies such as: Paraphrasing, translation, code switching to deliver the classes in EMI classroom. The study is of course qualitative in nature. The sample population consisted of four basic level teachers who have been teaching content subjects like Science, Social, Mathematics and Moral science in English medium. I used purposive non random sampling technique to select the sample population of the study. I employed interview and classroom observation techniques to elicit my data. The interviews were audio recorded with some notes. I analyzed the data qualitatively using the thematic analysis approach. Different codes were formulated to develop themes. The findings gained from the data interpretation showed that teachers used more mother tongue, especially Nepali language to make the text clear to the students in the classroom. Translation, code switching and sometimes paraphrasing were used as teaching pedagogies in a single class. Notably, there were inconsistencies between what the teachers said and what they practiced in their classrooms. It was found that Job market, internationalization and neo-liberalism have fostered in the growth of EMI. Another striking finding was students were found as passive listeners in the classroom. The

interaction was rare between the students and teachers. Students were assisted by writing answers of the comprehensive questions. Professional training, sufficient teaching materials and trained teachers need to be focused to make EMI meaningful.

**Keywords:** *ideology, internationalization, passive, qualitative, strategies*

### Introduction

English language has been widely enjoyed by a number of people all over the world since last many decades. Various countries practise it as their mother tongue while others have adopted it as a second language or foreign language. English is practised as a foreign language in Nepal. We have been practicing English as a compulsory subject for years and years and since the last few years, it has been turned into a medium of instruction. Many public schools have shifted their medium of instruction from local language to English despite the fact that there are no well trained teachers, resources. There are a number of reasons why people, especially non-native English are attracted to English language. Among them, globalization, neo liberalization and open marketplace, technological developments are some major factors that play for the promotion of English language (Burns & Vu, 2014). People like to travel, work and exchange their feelings for which they find English as a comfortable means of communication. Its consequences can be seen everywhere, primarily in developing countries. Now it has been difficult to stop the train of English medium (Sah, 2020) since it has already left the station. Therefore, policy makers, teachers, community members and other stakeholders have to play a significant role to promote English language in Nepal. Before, I discuss English language medium and its history in Nepal, I would like to present multilingual scenario of Nepal.

Nepal is one of the linguistically diverse countries in South Asia accommodating more than 123 languages (Saud, 2020). Despite being a multilingual country, Nepali language got its priority throughout the nation when we see the history of practising languages in Nepal. 'One nation one language policy played an important role to promote Nepali language. Because of this, it has become the language of legal affairs, business transactions, mass media and administration then and now. This study, however, discusses how teachers are practicing their classes through English medium instruction (EMI). More recently, the adoption of teaching content subjects through English medium instruction is seen to its optimum level in mostly developing countries where it is not spoken as mother tongue by most of the population. Different tests like; IELTS, TOFEL, GRE have helped to promote English medium.

Most of the Nepalese youths, for example, take these tests to make themselves eligible to work and study in English speaking countries. In recent years, there has been a significant rise in the number of Nepali students going abroad for higher studies. Of around 65,000 students who received a No Objection Certificate, required to study abroad, from the Education Ministry in the fiscal year 2018-2019, three-fourths were for English speaking nations. The British Council has been charging Rs 16,950 (NC) for the test but has raised the fee to Rs 21,500 starting from this year (The Kathmandu Post, 2021).

The craze of English is reached to its peak in Nepal. It is very difficult to obtain any job at present in Nepal. About ninety percent of jobs in Nepal require English (Jha, 1989). In such situation, people have no choice of other languages for their children. They consider English as a source of knowledge and a sole liberation from poverty. Its impact can be seen in most of our academic institutions. Public schools are shifting their medium of instruction from local language to English medium instruction (The Himalyan Times, 2018).

Language ideology is regarded as a social practice. The term ideology may be predominantly brought to mind a traditional Marxist conception of the term, which has often been conceptualized as a false consciousness. Based on this dominant perception (Mirhosseini, 2018), ideology tends to be usually understood as a bad belief and probably this very understanding has been the basis of the dichotomization of ideological orientations. While discussing ideology in relation to politics, the term generally depicts the bad practice for some other opponent group. But, discussing language ideology, Seargeant (2009) in the context of linguistic anthropology mentions an ideology as a “system of entrenched beliefs about aspects of the lived experience which structure one’s relationship to that experience”. The valuing of language, the establishment of language policies and linguistic identities are all shaped by language ideology. In other words, the language ideology is believed to be the concept of those people who are engaged in practising it to day to day life. In Darvin and Norton’s (2015) words “ideologies are dominant ways of thinking that organize and stabilize societies while simultaneously determining modes of inclusion and exclusion and privileging and marginalization of ideas, people and relations.” Ideology can benefit for certain group of people while it can harm other groups. Language planning can work to promote multilingualism or it can work to constrain it. It has been seen that the history of language policy is made to constrain and manage a small number of languages, often single language over pluralism ((Liddicoat & Leech, 2015)

From the historical dimension, Nepal has undergone circular changes regarding the medium of instruction (MOI). During Panchayat, the medium of instruction shifted from English to Nepali with a slogan ‘one nation one language policy’ while it was English during the Rana Resigm. Nepali language became the medium for education, media, business and transportation. The trend of language uses in education has been critically analyzed from socio-political, historical and economic agendas (Paudel, 2019). In the case of Nepal, the shift in the medium of instruction seems more political than pedagogical. These shifts, however, are historically informed and substantially unplanned. Privatization, and globalization (Mahmmad, 2020) can be collectively understood as attempts to westernize the education system of Nepal.

Although the issues of protection and promotion of the historically residing linguistic diversity have been addressed through the current constitution (Constitution of Nepal, 2015), English medium instruction has kept other languages in shadow. English medium instruction is expanding especially in the institutions without which most of them feel scare of losing number of students and ultimately cut off the budget. English medium

institutionalized schools have created an unequal environment in the society. At the meantime, it stimulates people to equate quality education with English. This has directly affected people's way of thinking about quality education. But as a researcher one has to think: Is it English only that attracts the guardians or is there something behind it? This question is yet to be answered.

There is very important role of teachers for imparting knowledge to the students. But it becomes difficult for them when the matter of choice of language comes in a situation where there are multilingual speakers in a single space. In such condition choosing one language over other languages as medium of instruction is very challenging. English is used as medium of instruction in private schools or public schools although constitution of Nepal (2015) promotes multilingualism. The practice of English medium instruction is largely linked nowadays with English printed textbooks, tie, and belt, different note copies for different subjects and other outlook of the students in the public schools. The present ideology of teaching through English medium instruction, however, differs from scholars who emphasize mother tongue education. For example; Garcia (2008) reveals that students' home language in the classroom is seen as 'scaffolding' in education. Similarly, Cummins's (2007) study has shown that first and second languages are 'interdependent' in learning. Therefore, to create space for the students, the teachers need to be aware of students' home language (Garcia, 2008) and allow them to use their languages in classroom. The contradiction between what scholars argue for and what is being practised in classroom provoke me to explore the present scenario of Nepalese classroom. Thus, in such controversial situation, I further tried to explore what the teachers think of EMI and how teachers perform by themselves in the classroom.

### **The Foundation of English Medium Instruction**

The foundation of English medium instruction has a clear link to the colonial history in non-Anglophone multilingual societies (Sah, 2020) such as India, Pakistan and even in Nepal, though Nepal was never colonized. This was seen in our neighboring country, India. This small group people had access to power, wealth and status and acted as the auxiliaries to the colonizers (Tsui & Tollefson, 2007). The common people also aspired to learn English when they realized its status through well paid jobs in India then. The Ranas in Nepal were well known with the activities of the British regime. They were willing to establish relationship with British regime to maintain their social status. They built English medium Durbar school hiring teachers from England in 1854. It was the first foundation documented in this history of Nepal for the beginning of English education. Since then, in one way or other way, English education has got its space in Nepal.

In neoliberal globalization, English language is considered the main source of economic market (Sah, 2020). English language abilities are considered as one of the most notable tools for personal as well as national development which are promoted through language policy (Sergeant & Earling, 2013). It is regarded as a means to promote quality education, a source to elevate poverty and a source of empowering the people. Luke and Graham (2007) claim that there is a global push for the English speaking labour forces to attract in the global market for different services. English language, therefore,

according to Bourdieu (1993) is a 'symbolic capital'. A person with English language is much valued in the society. In a sense, the acquisition of English is seen as a liberating tool for the poor and minoritized communities. Munandar (2015), along with other scholars, take a position on English as a tool for socioeconomic mobility without which they lack behind in global market. Many developing countries are therefore, developing their MOI policies based on EMI to enhance their citizenry to compete in the open market. In fact, English is receiving a greater space as a medium of instruction in our nation despite the fact that it is a multilingual state.

### **English Language Policy in Nepal**

Historically, English education began during the Rana oligarchy. It was adopted as an advantage in favor of ruling elites (Vir, 1998). Upon his return, Jung Bahadur Rana established the Durbar School on palace grounds. The school was only open to members of the Rana family, though it later moved off palace grounds and admitted some students from non-Rana (Eagle, 1999). Thus, the first government-run schooling in Nepal was in the medium of English. The idea of language hegemony was further strengthened with the introduction of English to education in the 1950s when Nepal moved on planning formal education for the first time (Giri, 2011). It was further strengthened in Nepalese education when the government introduced English as a medium of instruction policy in 2006 to meet the quality education (Ministry of Education, 2006). As a result, large number of public schools shifted the medium of instruction from local language to English to compete with the private institutions and to provide quality education. Since a large number of public schools began shifting their medium of instruction from local language to EMI, lately the Ministry of Education has designed a new medium of instruction (MoI) (2014) that recommends the following:

Grades 1-3: mother tongue as MoI

Grades 4 onwards: mother tongue as a subject and Nepali as MoI

Grades 6-8: Nepali as MoI for soft subjects and EMI for mathematics, science and computer

Grades 9-12: EMI for all subjects although it is well known that, most of the teachers in Nepal have not been yet prepared to enter in English medium classroom. On the other hand, many teachers are still deprived of using modern technologies which nowadays are regarded as best weapon for enhancing one's profession. In such situation, it is questionable; can the teachers easily make the lessons comprehensible for their students through EMI? I have tried to explore what the teachers think of EMI and how they deliver their knowledge to the students in EMI. Therefore, in the following section, I have discussed teachers' ideology regarding EMI.

### **Teachers Practicing English Medium**

The researcher noticed that there were students from Nepali language background, Bhojpuri, Tharu and even some of them were from Hindi background when the researcher observed the class. Despite the presence of different native speakers of

different languages, teachers were found mostly using Nepali or English as a medium of instruction.

According to Julie Dearden (2016), EMI is “the use of English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English” but it was found quite controversial when the teachers were observed. While observing social period for 35 minutes, the teacher was found reading the text in English and after every sentence he was translating it into Nepali. There was no single sentence that the teacher attempted to make clear to students in English except some chunks of English like: *Yes or No, Good*. While teaching, he frequently put yes/no questions to the students to draw his students’ attention.

The following vignettes depict what I found in his class:

### Vignettes I

*T: Today we will discuss about the composition of rural municipality...gaupalika ko samrachna kasri hunchha tesko barema aaj kura garau.*

*Ss: Ok sir.*

*T: We will talk how the members are chosen in rural municipality? Arthat ksri member hruko chhanaut hunchha tesko barema padhchhau.*

*After reading the text.....well chairperson arthat mukhiya ko ra vice-chairperson yi dubai jiter aauchhan (chair and vice-chair come being elected). Testai (similarly)9 wada ka partinidiharu pani chunaw jiter aauchhan. Gau sabhale 4 jana mahila ra 2 jana dalit community bat chuninchha (selected).*

*Did you get....bujhyau( understood)?*

*Ss: Yes sir (very few nodded their heads).*

Next day, the teacher discussed different activities of the chapter with the students. This has been shown in the given example:

*T: What is the differences between a community and a rural municipality? Community ra (and) rural municipality ma ke pharak chha (what difference)?*

*Ss: silent*

*T: Do the next exercise.. fill in the blanks...khali thau bhar. Can you do? Grn sakchhau?*

*Ss: Few said yes while other nodded their heads. The teacher helped them to fill the gaps.*

The teacher wrote the answer on the board scolding the students and asked the students to memorize it.

Both the classroom vignettes above showed that the teacher frequently used Nepali language to clarify the text. The teacher was found using translation as a tool to

clarify every sentence in the next dominant Nepali language. The students were only well disciplined listeners. The classroom was less interactive. Neither did the teacher adopt any particular strategy to practice EMI nor did he avoid the use of Nepali language where it was not necessary. The flow of English along with Nepali was going smoothly. For example: *what is the differences between a community and a rural municipality? Community ra rural municipality ma ke pharak chha? Do the next exercise.. fill in the blanks...khali thau bhar. Can you do? Grn sakchhau?* The vignettes also show that the teacher was helping the students understand English via Nepali. But there were students from other linguistic backgrounds as I have discussed earlier and he was not found using any one of the other speakers' languages like Bhojpuri, Tharu, Hindi except Nepali. This suggests that the teacher was not practising the true sense of multilingual awareness. While the researcher (Garcia & Li, 2014) shows that teachers can use translanguaging as pedagogy which must be purposefully. Translanguaging as pedagogy is contextualized through cases of how teachers with different characteristics use it in a variety of classrooms. An official translanguaging pedagogy includes more planned actions of the teachers in interaction with the students.

While observing the classes of three different teachers for three other days, they use different pedagogies. Pedagogical activities are the specific acts that the teachers adopt for learners for their learning. At present research, the following pedagogies were found:

**Translation.** In context of Nepal translation has been very effective pedagogical strategies while teaching second/foreign language to the native speakers of the particular language. It is not only used to teach language but also different content subjects. Scholars are divided for their positive and negative opinions regarding translation. Liao (2006) states that it helps learners check whether their comprehension is correct. On the other hand, scholar like Newson (1988) argued that using translation as a teaching and testing tool has many disadvantages. I believe it can be fruitful when it is used purposefully in the classroom to teach foreign language.

In my observation, T1 was using translation to clarify English text into Nepali which was not strategically planned. For example

*While discussing questions of the text the teacher translated each sentence into Nepali without checking the comprehensive level of the students.*

*T1: What is the differences between a community and rural Municipality? Community ra rural municipality bich ke farak chha?*

The above example depicts the scenario of the class. I found him every time translating the text from English to Nepali. I think the teacher found it the best way to ensure learners' learning. This pedagogical strategy of translation is still prevalent mostly in rural parts of our country.

**Paraphrasing.** When I observed the teachers classes, I found that few of them were also using paraphrasing as pedagogical strategy to teach their subjects in EMI classroom. The second teacher (T2) was heavily using this strategy to teach her course in

the classroom. The following given vignettes depict how she practises paraphrasing in EMI class:

After writing the title *A Thirsty Crow* on the board, she started reading the text.

*Long long ago there was a crow. The crow was very thirsty. You know tirkhayeko. It went on the search of water and found a pot with water in the bottom. You know it was .....(there is physical expression of the teacher. She showed with her two hands) means fedma .*

In this way, she went on paraphrasing the text. But there was a mixture of translation as well as paraphrasing. Actually, it was difficult to notice when she paraphrased the text and when she jumped to translation. Thus, the paraphrases that took place in the observed classrooms were frequently explaining English text in Nepali. However, the frequency of using these pedagogical strategies vary from teachers to teachers. I felt, T1 was much attached to translation whereas T2 was using paraphrasing and translation more and less in the same ratio. Besides, code mixing and code switching were also seen in the observed classrooms.

### **Teachers' Ideology of English Medium Instruction**

**English as a global language.** Globalization and English language are said to work as pull factors for one another. English Language plays a vital role in the progress of globalization. Globalization of trade and commerce with different setup values have increased the importance of English language. In this global village, English language acts as a repository of wisdom and wit. English language is a propeller for advancement of career and a machine to mint money. Therefore, people send their children to learn English in the hope that it would reduce their poverty. Learning English means having opened the doors of many opportunities.

**English as a Red Passport to Enter in the Open Market.** People today are in the position to accept that English language can open the doors of many opportunities. They regard it as a red passport to enter in the global market. Most of the jobs even in Nepalese market demand for English language (Jha, 1995).

**English Medium in its Disguise Form.** It was found that English is not implemented in schools only for quality education but also to meet the interests of many who are directly or indirectly involved in it. It was found that the committee members frequently call meeting for EMI in different schools. There is contradiction between what people think of it in the market and how it has been used in the schools.

**English Attached with Attire.** It is not only English medium that has attracted the attention of many of the guardians who are forced to send their children in English Medium School but also their attire. Schools uniform with well-polished shoes, tie, and belt have really entangled the mothers. Besides, different note books for classwork, homework, pray in English and tiffin boxes have added value to English medium. As such, middle class guardians, despite their difficulties, are ready to send their children to learn English.



### Conclusion

This study has analyzed teachers' ideology regarding English medium instruction in multilingual context. In multilingual countries like Nepal, it is hard to make one language as medium of instruction among many languages. We cannot deny the demand of the parents to teach their children in English medium school as the train of English (Sah, 2020) has already left the station. It is better to move along with it. The findings of the study showed there is threat of losing reasoning power from the students, however. Most of the learners depend on the classroom notes provided by the teachers. Therefore, environment should be created where they can maximize the practice of English language along with local language. Putting legs into two different boats may cause accidents until they are well balanced. Critics like Arcand and Grin (2013) argue that the use of local language as medium of instruction lessens the drop out of the students and repetition of the class. But it should be used purposefully so that the essence of English medium remains constant. It is not surprising to state EMI has created binary division between haves and have not in the sense that EMI does not only mean English but it also means tie, belt, shoes, tiffin and different notebooks for classwork and homework for which common people face problems to manage them with their little income. So, they should rethink about the policy which can be very possibly managed. Therefore, in places like this, policy makers should not let EMI to reproduce linguistically marginalized and linguistic injustice (Sah & Li, 2018) society.

The teachers use learners' mother tongue in the classroom to help them to understand the concept easily and also help them participate in classroom activities which I think is not bad, but it should be used purposefully. Different pedagogical activities such as code switching, translation, paraphrasing should be used in planned way to entertain the class. The students would be benefitted when these are used purposefully in the classroom. Thus, the findings of the study suggest that multilingual policy should be adopted to teach contents to the students. It may be in the form of MTB-MLE or any other form that suits to local context. Therefore, the policy makers, teachers and different stakeholders need to critically evaluate existing policy of dominant language and bring their own appropriate policy for enhancing learning activities of the learners.

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