Head Teachers' Ideologies Behind English Medium Instruction in the Community Schools

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Abstract

English, a global lingua franca, is neither a second nor an official language in Nepal. However, several community schools existing in Nepal have implemented English Medium Instruction (EMI, hereafter). Therefore, this study examines the ideologies of community schools' head teachers behind starting EMI. In addition to this, it aims to discover implementational challenges during the initial days of EMI adoption. I have adopted narrative inquiry approach of qualitative research to bring out the ideologies of the head teachers behind starting EMI in community schools in Dhangadhi. I purposively selected three head teachers and conducted semi-structured interviews with them to elicit stories. Interpretation of the stories revealed various ideologies of head teachers behind starting EMI in community schools. The study concludes that EMI in community schools is adopted to assist them in enrolling and increasing the number of students. Moreover, it has challenged the stereotyping of the public towards community schools. Likewise, the study reveals several legal challenges, like the admission of preschool-aged children to primary schools and tuition fees charged to the students, which is against the Constitution of Nepal 2015 faced by community schools in the initial days of EMI adoption. The study's findings present the adoption of EMI in community schools in the form of neoprivatisation. Finally, the study provides insights to stakeholders willing to initiate EMI community schools in Nepal.

Keywords: *EMI, neoprivatisation, stereotype, community schools.*

Introduction

I vividly recall the day I organized a focus group discussion involving Bachelor-level students for one of my research projects entitled "Challenges Faced by Nepali Learners in Speaking Skills." The discussion was focused on the English language environment experienced by students during their school days. Meanwhile, a student raised a question, *"Sir, why does everyone nowadays talk about the English language? Even government-funded schools started English Medium Instruction (EMI), and the students are being taught in English. Why is this happening?"* The question by the student inspired me to think about the phenomenon and I thought it is better to discover the head teachers' ideologies behind starting EMI in community schools because they are the executive bodies of the school. Ideology can be termed as specific ideas, views, beliefs, and values. Fowler (1986)

explains ideology as worldviews or mindsets that mean the way an individual interprets the world. Here, I explore the views and values of the head teachers behind initiating EMI in their schools. In the context of Nepal, flexible language policies seem significant stimulators to initiate EMI as described by Macaro (2015) as an "unstoppable train" (p. 7). It shows that the trend of EMI adoption in academia is growing rapidly. About the English language, Jaelani and Zabidi (2020) assert it as the world's common language. Command over English has become necessary for people worldwide to adjust to a multilingual society. On top of this, Hamid and Nguyen (2016) point out its emergence as a lingua franca in Asian countries. Similarly, Sharma (2022) describes that it is used in various areas, including education, media, and business. Regarding its use in education, Aizawa and Rose (2019) opine that EMI is widely adopted in the various regions of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East where English is not a first language. It means its use is spreading fast. Moreover, it has a significant role in media, academia, and trade.

Bista (2011) claims that the trend of teaching English language in Nepal has been enriched over the past three decades and several changes in the education system and pedagogies have been noticed. In Nepal, English does not have the status of a second language (Shrestha, 1983; Shrestha, 2008). Moreover, it is not a common language for broader social groups. Similarly, it is not a means of communication for wider social groups. However, several community schools have accepted it as a medium of instruction. Therefore, I wondered why the use of English is spreading so fast in educational institutions. At the same time, Dewan and Saud (2022) encouraged me to work more on the growing craze of English in public schools.

The Government of Nepal mandated English as a compulsory subject in class one from the academic session 2061 BS (2004 AD) and has a similar position in higher education. However, it is being used as an instructional medium in several community schools. In this regard, Bourdieu (1977) says that leading languages enforce diverse ideologies. Signs of similar practices are seen in EMI adoption behind community schools in Nepal. Therefore, the study seeks to reveal head teachers' ideologies in initiating EMI in Community schools. It further explores implementational challenges during the initial days of EMI adoption. The following research questions guide the study:

- Why did the head teachers initiate EMI in community schools?

- What challenges did community schools face in the initial days of EMI adoption?

Literature Review

Spread of English Language

English is a widely used language, spreading very fast globally. Political and economic power has contributed a lot to its widespread use. Likewise, the advanced development of science and technology has broadened its use (Crystal, 2003). English is a powerful language in the entire world. In present scenario, it is a demanding language in several areas, such as "education, administration, politics, trade, tourism, and diplomacy" (Sharma, 2022, p. 324). Correspondingly, Phyak (2015) asserts that English has created a significant space in a multilingual world to access global socioeconomic and educational resources as a language of international trade, business, and academia. It has assisted English speakers to

grab various global opportunities in media, academia, and trade in the international market. Widespread extension of English also has an infinite influence on teaching framework of Nepal. Khati (2016) asserts a growing attraction for EMI in educational institutions. In the current state, numerous community schools have shown a keen interest in EMI.

EMI in Nepal

This history of teaching English in Nepal goes back to the time of former Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana. He initiated teaching English in Nepal in 1951 at Durbar High School. The initiation taken by Jung Bahadur Rana stimulated others to follow the tendency of educating their children in English medium instruction. He said, *"Aruka Kura Chhadideu afna chhoralai angreji padhau"* "[Turn deaf to what others say, teach English to your son(s)]" (Sharma, 2011, p.39, as cited in Poudel, 2019). Since then, a gradual interest in English language teaching has been seen in Nepal. "The establishment of democracy can also be interpreted as a continuation of the path of public education that started 50 years ago rather than the establishment of comprehensive schools in Nepal" (Sharma, 2022, p. 329). Furthermore, according to Bista (2011), choice of parents to admit their children to English medium (privately owned) school has a significant role in drawing attention to EMI in public schools. Parents' attraction to English medium schools has an instrumental role in adopting EMI in public schooling in Nepal.

Growing interest and accommodation of EMI in public educational institutions of Nepal is seen vividly through scholarly lenses. According to Saud (2020), "Public schools in Nepal have been adopting EMI as a new

linguistic market in education in recent years" (p. 320). This is considered a significant aspect of the global economy. Since language is a powerful tool for communication, a linguistically skilled individual has the potential to deserve the possible opportunities in the global village.

Alternatively, Phyak and Sharma (2020) suggest seeing the growing use of English language as an inseparable component of global neoliberal dominance in less developed countries like Nepal. Both scholars express concern over the rapid expansion of EMI. Furthermore, Piller and Cho (2013) claim, "In addition to the human cost of high levels of social suffering, the spread of English MoI must be understood as a means of suppressing critical inquiry" (p. 25). It means it can have negative consequences beyond immediate human suffering, including overshadowing students' linguistic and cultural identity.

In the case of Nepal, Poudel (2019) explains, "the current Nepali medium of instruction has been sandwiched by the discourses of EMI and other mother tongue-based instructions" (p. 108). He further points out the superior social image established by EMI over other national and local/indigenous languages. This discourse creates room for critical reflection on language policies. Likewise, Ghimire and Koirala (2019) introduce a new term, neo-privatisation, for the trend of the adoption of EMI in public schools. Community schools have started adopting similar strategies to private schools to lure the parents and the students, which is reflected as neoprivatisation. Community schools in Nepal are following the same path as a strategy to enroll many students. Moreover, it is also to get the preferences of the parents.

Linguistic Multiplicity and Language Policy in Nepal

Nepal is a "multi-lingual, multiethnic, and multicultural nation" (Constitution of Nepal, 2015) where 142 ethnic groups speak 124 languages as their mother tongue (National Population and Housing Census, 2021). Nepal is a linguistically and culturally diverse country where Nepali language is the national language. The keen interest in English medium has been started after the establishment of Durbar High School in 1854. It has played a foundational role in initiating English medium in Nepal. During the period, education was only constricted to the elite social groups and it has become accessible to the common people only after the downfall of the Rana Regime. Then the Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC, 1956) played a praiseworthy role in promoting national integrity in Nepal. Similarly, All Round National Education Committee (ARNEC, 1962) and National Education System Plan (NESP, 1971) exhibited a compatible policy trend. Then, (NESP, 1971) introduced a concept of schools including both private and public sectors. After that, Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal (1990) promoted mother tongue-based education. Then, during the Panchayat system in Nepal, there was a "one-nation-one-language ideology" (Phyak & Ojha, 2019, p. 344). However, Democratic Period (1990-2007) followed the multilingual education system. Likewise, Interim Constitution of Nepal (2007) adopted a market-driven ideology in education. It has animated the privatization with English medium. In addition, the NCF (2007) and the Constitution of Nepal (2015) promoted mother tongue-based education. SSRP (2009) clearly mentions teaching English from grade one as a subject however in practice it can be seen that it is being instructed as a non-native language. Saud (2020) has viewed the scenario discussed above as "political motives rather than academic needs and foundations from the very beginning of formal education" (p. 321). Dhakal (2015) also opines similar ideas to Saud (2020) regarding the policy. It shows that political movements and motives are important in shaping language policy and education. It is seen as a conflict of interest in the political movement.

Globalization in Education as a Theoretical Premise

This study has adopted the theory of globalization in education. Green (1999) asserts that it is a fairly new concept in educational research. Furthermore, Green discusses the tendency of globalization where he presents several factors such as economic, technological, and cultural aspects as its determinants, whereas this kind of perception depends upon the personal standpoint (Parjanadze, 2009). Likewise, based on Appelbaum and Robinson (2005), the adaptation of the new way of operating business, the start of new multinational organizations, disparities in society, and the diverse patterns of migration around the globe contributed to the emergence of globalization. In the same way, Giddens (1990) views it as a universalization of modernity. It involves the concept of capitalization and the matter of commodification. From these scholarly ideas, the spread and adaptation of the English language in teaching-learning is seen as the impact of globalization. Since English is a global lingua franca, people from various countries witnessed the global opportunities and started replicating it. As a result of globalization, numerous countries have started adopting the English language. Moreover, it is commodified and also adopted in teaching-learning systems. The trend of adopting

English as a medium of instruction in various countries like Nepal is a result of globalization, which is growing very fast. Though several debates exist, English mania is spreading very quickly. It shows that the community schools in Nepal and Nepal's education system are also influenced by globalization.

Methods

This qualitative research adopted narrative approach to explore the head teachers' ideologies behind adopting EMI in Community schools. Ford (2020) illustrates that narrative approach enables researchers to explore "human experience through life story interviews, oral histories, or other human experiences" (p. 237). In this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with three head teachers of different community schools in Dhangadhi to gather the participants' personal experiences, beliefs, and ideologies (Morgan, 1996).

Participants Selection

I selected three head teachers from different community schools in Dhangadhi (Kailali district) purposively. I interviewed them individually at different times, places, and settings. I conducted in-person interviews with all the participants. Every participant had over twenty years of teaching experience. All of them are the initiator of EMI in their schools. Similarly, they have more than four years of experience in adopting EMI in their schools. In addition to this, the selected schools had a good number of students at the secondary level. However, the number was in descending order at the primary level. Two of the head teachers belong to English education background.

Data Collection and Analysis

At first, I telephoned them and detailed the purpose and process of the interview. Then, at their convenient time, I got an oral appointment to interview them. Likewise, to collect their ideologies behind starting EMI, I conducted semi-structured interviews. After their permission, I took short notes and recorded the interviews. I frequently listened to the audio to interpret the data. Then, I transcribed the tape record in non-verbatim form. I organized, elaborated, classified, and interpreted the data. I worked sincerely to maintain the quality standards of the study.

Findings and Discussion

English is accepted as a worldwide language of international importance. "The trend of using English as a Medium of Instruction has been growing in the global phenomenon of present day world academia" (Poudel, 2021, p.48). The tendency to use English as a means of communication is also rapidly proliferating. This study reveals that in Nepali academia, the interest in English medium of instruction is growing rapidly. Within this section, I have categorized the study's findings into five different themes. The findings include the differences in students' numbers before and after EMI adoption, challenges at the implementational level, the school's role in teacher professional development, and implementation of EMI in community schools in the form of privatization.

Differences in Students' Number before and after EMI Adoption

The findings reveal that community schools became successful to enroll a good number of students after adopting the English medium.

In this regard, the Head Teacher (HT1) admitted, *there came several students to admit even in the first session of EMI adoption. Only in nursery class, seventy-eight students got enrolled in the first year.* Similarly, HT2 confessed that the number of students in the primary level was in descending order before the EMI, and a good number (thirty-plus) new students were admitted after adopting the EMI in the first session. HT3 also reported a similar kind of record of the students after implementing EMI at school. In addition, HT2 stated that the good academic performance of the students and free DIWA KHAJA [lunch] program by the government have allured the students towards community schools. It shows that EMI has attracted the community to admit their children to community schools. The finding is aligned with Phyak (2016) whose finding also agrees that public schools adopt EMI to maintain student enrollment and address parents' demand for English medium instruction. Likewise, Khati (2016) agreed that EMI in public schools is similar to strategies of private schools (EMI-based schools) previously.

Challenges at the Implementation Level

The study depicts that community schools faced various challenges at the implementation level. The challenges are related to legal and behavioural aspects. In this regard, HT1 asserted that EMI in public schools attracted parents, and they started admitting their children under five years old to the schools, which is against the legal document (Education Act, 2028). According to the Article 2, clause A, of Education Act (2028), "Pre-Primary School means those schools that provide one year's pre-primary education to those children that have completed four years of their age" (p.3). However, the admission of pre-primary

school-aged children in class one (Primary level) became a major issue. To sort out this issue, they have the BAL SIKSHYA program in the present day.

Another common challenge that all the head teachers (HT1, HT2, and HT3) faced was the fee structure they charged. Based on Article 31, Clause 2 of the Constitution of Nepal (2015), "every citizen shall have the right to get compulsory and free education up to basic level and free education up to the secondary level from the state" (p.20). On the contrary, community schools charged fees from the students, which is a kind of ignorance of the Constitution. HT2 pointed out that the government is responsible for regulating this all.

According to the head teachers (interviewed for this study), teacher recruitment is another challenge. Public schools need to follow a long process to recruit new teachers, and it becomes more problematic to hire new teachers due to the dissolution of the school management committee since it is a responsible body for the recruitment process. In this way, they face some procedural and behavioural challenges while recruiting teachers.

Teacher Professional Development Program

Teacher professional development helps teachers make their teaching-learning activities well organized and systematic. Based on the study's result, all head teachers accept the need for teacher professional development programs. HT1 expressed, *We have hired some teachers from school's financial source because the number of permanent teachers is not enough. To manage teaching learning activities, we have some*

temporary teachers. To organize trainings for them, there is no concerned authority. The school manages some kind of training related to ICT and others. Similarly, available resource persons in schools also train those teachers sometimes. The response by the HT1 indicates that none of the governmental bodies are accountable for teachers' training programs in English medium. However, HT2 mentioned the opposite point of view. He added, "The school conducts Teacher Professional Development (TPD) training every session." Similarly, the school has distributed twenty-two laptops to twenty-two teachers for better teaching-learning activities, and HT2 claims that it has assisted teachers in better teaching-learning activities. Moreover, the school is committed to conducting various teacher-training programs in association with the education office. HT3 also opined similar kinds of ideas regarding TPD training for the teachers. It shows that the head teachers believe that teacher professional development programs assist in teaching-learning activities and are working on it. The study indicates that head teachers are responsible for effectively implementing EMI in their schools. However, several schools have introduced EMI without any training, workshops, or exposure to the teachers (Poudel, 2021). Consequently, those schools are encountering difficulties in effectively implementing EMI.

Are the Community Schools Adopting Privatization?

No head teachers admitted that they are adopting privatization in the public domain, but the way the English medium is initiated in public schools raises this issue. HT1 does not agree with the statement that public schools are adopting privatization and said, *"No, it is not so. We have just shifted working principles by giving more care and attention*

to the students using English medium." On the other hand, HT2 pointed out the irresponsible functioning of the local government to regulate it. He further said, *"We (Community schools) should not adopt privatization in the public domain. If we do so, it is against the spirit of the constitution."* Head teachers' ideology behind English medium is seen to fulfill the demand of contemporary society. HT2 added, *"It is to help the students compete in the international market."* I noticed the neoliberal ideology of head teachers, as Harvey (2005) states. He explains it as a market-driven transformation. Reisigl and Wodak (2009) also opine a similar idea. They mention that it is an international language that helps students access international opportunities in the global market.

EMI for the Survival of Community Schools

The study explored that EMI in community schools significantly contributes to their survival. HT2 and HT3 agreed that the number of students in the primary level was in descending order before the introduction of EMI. It means it could endanger the existence of community schools if head teachers did not initiate it. EMI has changed the stereotype of society towards community schools and has stopped the high dropout ratio of students at the primary level. Moreover, EMI in community schools has assisted them in chain-breaking the decreasing number of students in primary classes. The wave of new enrollment of students after EMI has a significant role in their survival. It minimized the dropped-out students and attracted the community people towards community schools. Ghimire and Koirala (2019) present similar kind of findings. Their findings indicate that declining student number and less parental preference have influenced community schools to adopt

English as the instructional medium. Similarly, Phyak (2013) points out that to safeguard the survival of public schools, numerous public schools are obliged to shift from Nepali to English as the instructional medium.

The findings portray that head teachers have started EMI in public schools to attract students and parents. Similarly, their ideology seems to have challenged the public stereotype towards the community schools. Since the head teachers (interviewed for the study) are found sensitive to the proper implementation of EMI, schools are running EMI smoothly. Otherwise, the experience of EMI can fail in public schools, as HT1 faced in the first attempt. The school initiated EMI without proper planning and they had to bear the loss during that attempt. Likewise, the study presents various legal and behavioural challenges while starting EMI in Public schools. Moreover, it has become an integral part of survival for public schools by attracting students, parents, and community people.

Ideologies Influencing the Adoption of EMI

The study has explored various ideologies of head teachers behind starting EMI in public schools. English is an international and powerful language. Community schools in Nepal have adopted it as an instructional medium. Bourdieu (1977) opines that influential language enforces diverse viewpoints, and signs of similar practices are seen in the implementation of EMI in public schools. The head teacher's ideologies in the findings reveal that they have adopted EMI to attract students, parents, and community people to public schools. Bourdieu's (1977) notion is seen as equivalent to the head teachers' ideologies. Similarly, the response of HT2 that the adoption of EMI *helps the students compete in the international market* signals that introduction of EMI in community schools in Nepal is an indicator of neoliberal educational ideology (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). As it is a global language, English has a significant role for Nepali students to get global opportunities and adjust in an international market.

Likewise, the study's findings highlight the necessity of teacher professional development programs to ensure better academic results (Noom-Ura, 2013). It assists both teachers and students in nurturing the best teaching-learning activities. Furthermore, adoption of instruction in English language in public schools is understood as a "neoprivatisation" (Ghimire & Koirala, 2019). However, the head teachers (interviewed for the study) did not agree on the neoprivatisation of public schools. Ghimire and Koirala (2019) point out that declining students' number in community schools and lesser preference by parents for those schools incorporated community schools to adopt the English medium as the private schools adopted it. Similar strategies adopted by the community schools as private schools did are viewed as neoprivatisation. Moreover, it can be considered as commodification and commercialization in education. The findings and discussion suggest that English as an instructional medium is a matter of serious concern. Influential language has given birth to the diverse ideologies of the head teachers. Moreover, it has kindly assisted community schools in enrolling a good number of students.

Conclusions and Implications

As a worldwide common language, English has an influential position in the globe. Despite Nepal being a "multiethnic, multilingual, multireligious, multicultural" nation (Constitution of Nepal, 2015, p.3),

community schools in Nepal are adopting English as an instructional medium. This study explored various ideologies of head teachers behind starting EMI in community schools. This study concludes that EMI in community schools has supported them in escalating the number of students. Moreover, it has challenged the stereotyping of the community people towards community schools. Likewise, it has taken the preferences of parents as well. Though numerous behavioural and legal challenges exist, community schools are eager to implement EMI. In the same way, it can be drawn that public schools are also noticed as sensitive to teacher development programs. The study's findings figure out the adoption of EMI in community schools in the form of neoprivatisation, which reaffirms the literature on neoprivatisation of education. Likewise, it is perceived as transforming education into a commodity and promoting commercial interests.

The study is anticipated to be a valuable resource for stakeholders: head teachers willing to start EMI, policymakers, and researchers. The study can make them aware of the challenges at the implementation level and other peripheral aspects. Similarly, it will be useful for the researchers and the policymakers by helping them identify the head teachers' various ideologies. Since this is a small-scale research, it has dealt only with the ideologies of the head teachers. The research indicates a need of further research in various areas such as linguistic imperialism in the public domain and denial of the mother tongue in English medium schools.

The Author

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