

Use of English as a Medium of Instruction: Socioeconomic Implications

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Abstract

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The use of English as a global lingua franca influences the adoption of English-medium instruction (EMI) in non-native English-speaking countries such as Nepal. However, attraction towards EMI may threaten linguistic heterogeneity and cultural maintenance. This study dives into the Indigenous parents' motivations for choosing EMI, focusing on socioeconomic factors and their views regarding the impact of EMI on the preservation of their mother tongue. This study involved a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with Indigenous parents whose children attend EMI schools. The study reveals parents' concerns about EMI as they compared the potential socioeconomic gains against the need to protect their cultural heritage. The study points out that the Indigenous parents' preference for EMI revolves around international migration, quality education, and socioeconomic mobility, all of which may erode Indigenous languages and exacerbate inequalities. Policy should ensure that the aspirations of Indigenous people are fulfilled without the cost of their language and culture, implementing multilingual approaches.

Keywords: EMI, indigenous language, language endangerment, mother tongue-based education, socioeconomic mobility

Introduction

English has spread throughout the world to the extent that it is crucial to be proficient in the language across domains such as business, international relations, and higher education (Byun et al., 2011). Over time, English is attracting more attention, especially in the field of the medium of instruction (MoI) in academic settings, particularly in non-English speaking countries. To elucidate this, Macaro et al. (2018) maintain that English as a medium of instruction (EMI) has become a sensation, especially in non-English speaking countries where they have started to provide instruction in English. In other words, EMI is the use of English as a primary language to teach non-language subjects with the intention of enhancing students' English proficiency and assisting their comprehension of

content matter (Rifiyanti & Dewi, 2023). Additionally, Zhao and Dixon (2017) define EMI as teaching non-language subjects employing English in an academic setting. In general, EMI can be defined as prioritizing English as a major language to instruct students in different non-English subjects.

Implementation of the EMI policy by an institution is not merely educational; it goes beyond educational motivation. One of the motivations is to attract international students worldwide (Hartle, 2020). Also, it is driven by the intention of increasing the reputation and ranking of the institution (Knagg, 2020). Another rationale to adopt EMI could be access to a vast degree of knowledge because the primary language of research and knowledge dissemination is English. In a similar vein, Gilanyi et al. (2023) claim that English's adoption as a language of instruction is linked with a boost in performance in school, as it provides a greater degree of access to educational materials and literature. Globally, EMI policy is motivated by luring overseas students, raising the stature of an educational institution, opening a door to a wide range of content matter, and improving educational outcomes.

There is a major demand for EMI in Nepali schools as well; most of the institutional (private) schools provide education in English, and many community schools are also adopting EMI. Parents often regard English as a form of linguistic capital in Nepal that can provide their children with better social and economic opportunities, which fascinates them towards EMI (Sah & Li, 2017). This adoption of EMI in education raises an intricate question regarding linguistic and cultural preservation, social inclusion, linguistic justice, and social and economic mobility, especially for Indigenous communities. According to the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities Act (2002) of Nepal, the Indigenous community is defined as a group having recorded or unwritten history, a unique cultural identity, traditional ceremonies, a distinctive social structure, and a native language. This act lists 59 Indigenous communities in Nepal, some of which are Magar, Gurung, Tamang, Newar, Tharu, Rai, Bhujel, Chepang, and Jirel.

Furthermore, Sah and Fang (2024) emphasize that EMI can be a key to the global job market and educational resources; however, it may also contribute to disparities, prioritizing the elite. Many parents advocate EMI to cope with globalization, ignoring the benefits of bilingualism. In the words of Katukula et al. (2023), several parents adhere to monolingual ideas that support EMI, assuming it would assist students to survive in a globalized world. However, studies show that children learn better if education is provided in their first language in the early stages of their schooling. EMI may restrict access high quality education to the students who are not proficient in English since they may face challenges in understanding the content and performing on tests (Kirkpatrick, 2011). Studies have claimed that mother tongue-based learning at early stages offers numerous benefits to children. To give insight into this, Ngouo (2022) reveals that research indicates that teaching students in their mother tongue might improve their understanding and memory, especially in early childhood education. Driven by perceived benefits of EMI, mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) is ignored despite the evidence from studies that MTB-MLE benefits students at early stages.

People often seek a balance between English and their mother tongue. In the same way, parents strive to ensure their children are fluent in English, along with the retention of their mother tongue (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 1994). Many Indigenous parents want their children to learn English; on the other hand, they are also concerned about keeping their language and culture intact. This urge to balance English with the mother tongue positions them in a complex situation. Biswas (2022) explains

that a desire to have the benefits of English for social and financial reasons without losing their native language places them in a challenging position. Additionally, Díaz (2023) argues that parents face the dilemma of reconciling the immediate economic benefits of English proficiency with the long-term cultural impact of leaving their native languages behind. Many parents are in a state of indecision because they are compelled to choose either their mother tongue to preserve the cultural heritage or English for practical reasons.

Nepal is a multilingual country. It incorporates 124 languages that are spoken as the first language, and only 0.35 percent speak English as a second language (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Despite being spoken by a small minority as a second language, there is a growing demand for EMI in Nepal. This attraction toward EMI may jeopardize Indigenous languages. Poudel and Choi (2021) highlight that native languages are under threat due to the development of EMI in multilingual countries like Nepal. Mainly, this is caused by a lack of institutional support and socioeconomic reasons, which trigger the language switch by the Indigenous groups of Nepal (Pun & Gurung, 2020). Many of the Nepali Indigenous languages are endangered, and some are on the verge of extinction. EMI may be highly sought after to fulfil financial and social aspirations; however, it must be implemented, ensuring the vitality of local languages. To support this, Mohanty (2017) suggests, “Multilingual societies need an egalitarian language policy perspective which can effectively prevent assignment of greater priorities to some languages over others” (p. 275). The trend of language endangerment in Nepal is alarming, which requires urgent measures to mitigate the damage.

This study intends to unveil the financial and social drivers, and other factors, driving the decision of Indigenous parents to choose EMI for their children. Also, how they view the impact of English on their mother tongue preservation. With the help of this broad study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding and insights into the motivating factors of Indigenous parents in opting for EMI for their children and whether they view English as a threat to their culture or as a tool to achieve social and economic mobility.

Review of Literature

English education in Nepal formally began after Jung Bahadur Rana visited England, where he got exposure to British society, which made him realize English was beyond a language for communication (Giri, 2010). However, English education was out of the reach of common people. Bista (2011) claims that English education was limited to the elite; common people had access to education only after 1951. This worked as a foundation for current EMI practices. At present, English is not merely a language in Nepal; it has established itself as an indicator of status. To elucidate that Phyak (2016) maintains that in Nepal, English has always been the language most closely associated with socioeconomic standing. Least developed nations like Nepal give preference to English in education, assuming it will provide them with the ability to keep up the pace with the rapidly changing world. In a similar vein, Khati (2016) notes that English language education is prioritized and has a high demand for coping with globalization in developing countries like Nepal. Most of the higher education providers employ EMI in Nepal. According to Phyak (2024), Nepal is one of the countries where English is practically used as a language of instruction in higher education; this trend is growing. Initially, EMI was adopted by Nepali private schools, whereas most of the public schools employed Nepali as the medium of instruction. The trend is changing gradually. To illustrate

this, Saud (2024) states that earlier Nepali community schools employed Nepali as a medium of instruction for a long time, but the trend of adopting EMI is growing in recent times. To further clarify this, Karki (2025) states that, influenced by neoliberal values, Nepali community schools are adopting EMI, with the intention of luring students, sustaining the school, and gaining social prestige. Historically, only the elite had access to EMI in Nepal, but it is changing as the government-funded community schools are also adopting EMI for numerous reasons.

Preference for EMI and Consequences

The growing attraction toward English and English-medium education has posed unforeseen challenges. One of the challenges is the adoption of EMI without sufficient infrastructure and preparation. To shed light on this, Mishra and Bhatta (2021) confirm that EMI was often perceived as an indicator of social standing, which encouraged public schools to adopt EMI without sufficient preparation. Although teachers struggle to deliver their content in English, they still favour EMI for its perceived benefits. This is confirmed by Subedi (2019), affirming that despite facing challenges due to a lack of subject-specific training and limited access to teaching, teachers strongly favoured EMI. Similarly, Karki (2021), in his case study in Jhapa (one of the districts of Nepal), found that EMI contributes to the increased rate of admission and institutional reputation; nevertheless, it affected the quality of teaching as it burdened the teachers who were not proficient in English. This trend of implementing EMI also raises the question regarding the constitutional right of children to learn in their native language, which is at risk due to the aspirations of stakeholders who view EMI as a tool to transform an institution. Sapkota (2023) proclaims that stakeholders perceived EMI as a means to quality education and transform the institution, which costs the children's right of access to education in their native language.

While English may be considered harmless at the surface level, it has the potential to put other languages at risk. This sentiment is echoed by Phillipson (2018), who argues that English has established itself as a preferred language of communication by marginalizing native language and culture. Similarly, Tollefson and Tsui (2003) expose how the dominance of English in the academic sphere harms cultural preservation by sidelining local languages. The supremacy of English tends to breach the rights of marginalized language speakers. To explain this, Joshi and Eslami (2024) maintain that the rights of the minority language speakers are violated in Nepal because dominant languages like Nepali and English are given priority in education policies. This preference for English in the education system can further strengthen inequalities for the students who are from lower strata, because they lack proficiency in English in comparison to their elite counterparts. This notion is highlighted by Dhakal (2021), who contends that when students from a marginalized community join EMI classes, their learning is disrupted because of a lack of early exposure to English, which further reinforces existing inequalities.

In Nepal, EMI has the potential to put indigenous languages at risk because of the less use of their first language by Indigenous students. Kadel (2024) highlights that the provision of EMI contributes to the loss of local languages as it promotes the excessive use of English by students at home. Furthermore, EMI can contribute to social injustices in many forms. Sah's (2022) qualitative study of EMI policies in Nepal, India, and Pakistan discovered that EMI is presented as a tool for gaining linguistic capital; however, it fostered class, racial, and gender-based inequalities

rather than promoting equality, as students from underprivileged backgrounds find it difficult to adapt. In the same way, Tollefson (2000) cautions about the disparities contributed by the expansion of English, even though it may be perceived as a tool to achieve financial benefits. EMI may offer benefits; nevertheless, if adopted haphazardly without proper planning and consideration can inflict linguistic injustices on minority language speakers.

Language Shift and Endangerment of Indigenous Languages

One of the major sociolinguistic challenges that exists today is language endangerment. There is a trend of shifting to dominant languages motivated by perceived social climbing and financial gain. Nepal is no exception in this global phenomenon. Many Nepalese local languages are lost altogether, or speakers have shifted to other dominant languages. To support this argument, Gyanwali (2022) states that language loss is a critical problem in Nepal, where 92 Indigenous languages are endangered. Many people who speak minority languages are shifting toward dominant languages, driven by financial motives. This is supported by Regmi (2017), who states that some of the languages are gradually shifting toward other languages, primarily to Nepali for broader communication, especially the Tibeto-Burman languages.

Minority language-speaking families choose English or Nepali to teach their children, believing these two languages are vital for their education and careers (Eagle, 1999). Another reason for language disappearance and shift is migration. People have been migrating since the dawn of civilization in the search for better prospects. When they migrate to urban areas, to adapt to that area, they start to adopt the dominant language. This phenomenon is perfectly captured by Gautam (2022), who asserts that language transition in young people results from migration of people to urban areas where Nepali is the dominant language of communication. Another reason for language shift is access to education. In Nepal, most of the educational institutes provide education in either English or Nepali. To access quality education, parents do not teach their mother tongue. In this regard, Gautam (2018) argues that access to quality education also plays a vital role in linguistic transition. He further asserts that the growing trend of international migration also plays a role in language shift. This rapid trend of language erosion can fuel the language endangerment in Nepal, particularly Indigenous languages.

Indigenous Parents' Dilemma: EMI vs Cultural Preservation

There is a tension among people when they have to choose between idealism and pragmatism. Ideally, they want to preserve their cultural identity, while as a pragmatic step, they want to fit in with globalization. In this conflict, often pragmatism that prioritizes English wins over idealism that advocates for maintaining cultural identity. On the other hand, this decision is not without remorse. In this regard, in a survey-based study, Rai (2023) discovered that parents perceived English as essential for global opportunities; meanwhile, there was growing concern regarding its impact on local languages and cultures.

Indigenous people face the challenge of achieving English language fluency for economic reasons and a desire to maintain their cultural heritage; they often find themselves in the intersection of globalization and preservation of their identity (Biswas, 2022). Moreover, Parents are also concerned about the educational challenges posed by EMI to their children. To elucidate this, Jora (2020) revealed that parents from an ethnic minority background acknowledged the value associated with English;

on the other hand, they were concerned about their children's educational challenges, and they also supported the use of students' first language in the classroom. This dilemma of choosing between native language and EMI for their children positions Indigenous parents in a difficult situation.

Stakeholders' Perspectives on EMI

Perspectives toward EMI are diverse. Stakeholders view EMI differently. Parents' strong preference for EMI was discovered by Khadka (2024) in his qualitative study; on the other hand, teachers who recognized the significance of both English and Nepali as a language of instruction had a more balanced view. Maharani et al. (2025) disclosed that Indonesian parents' social class influenced their decision to choose EMI. She further revealed that parents from a strong economic standing prioritize EMI schools. In his qualitative phenomenological study, Bhattarai (2025) discovered that both the parents and students had a prevalent appeal for EMI-based schools. Furthermore, Karki (2021) investigated the head teachers' viewpoints and discovered that they recognized the many issues related to EMI, yet they favoured EMI. Özçelik et al. (2024) revealed that Turkish tertiary-level students have positive attitudes toward EMI for its benefits in education, career, and honing their English skills. Farid et al. (2023) uncovered that students recognized the benefits of EMI; at the same time, they also faced challenges due to language comprehension and identity, leaving them with mixed feelings.

Challenges of MTB-MLE

MTB-MLE could be an alternative for EMI at a lower level. Transitioning to English at a higher level after teaching in the mother tongue at early grades. Multilingualism has several benefits; it enhances cultural competence, ability to adapt in social settings, and increases creativity and academic achievement (Okal, 2014). MTB-MLE offers learning in a language that students are comfortable with, which enables them to foster a stronger sense of identity and boost their academic performance (Bhatta, 2022). It can also play an important role in the maintenance of students' native language (Babag, 2022). However, a strong belief that English is the only practical and useful language creates challenges in implementing MTB-MLE (Tupas, 2015). Studies indicate that MTB-MLE has several advantages, but the notion that English is the ultimate language poses a challenge to implementing it.

MTB-MLE is recognized globally, yet Nepal faces resistance in implementation. Nepal has provisions to ensure the right of children to learn in their first language in an academic setting. The Constitution of Nepal (2015, Part 3, Article 31.5, p. 22) guarantees access to mother tongue-based education for every Nepalese community, those are inhabitants of Nepal. However, there are a few challenges to implementing MTB-MLE. Firstly, train teachers and develop suitable curricula to meet the diverse linguistic needs of the students (Malakar, 2023). Secondly, stakeholders' unwillingness to implement mother tongue-based education in the era of English domination and Nepal's mixed societies, which makes it challenging to choose a single language of instruction (Rai, 2018). Another challenge to implementing a multilingual language policy is Neoliberal ideology (Dhakal, 2021). MTB-MLE is supposed to benefit students from diverse backgrounds, but it encounters many challenges in Nepal because of a lack of trained educators, inadequate resources, and dominance of powerful languages.

Research Gap

This study intends to explore the perspectives of Indigenous parents on the implications of

EMI, focusing on socioeconomic factors. Also, how they perceive the impact of attraction toward English on the preservation of their mother tongue. There are limited studies on the perspectives of Indigenous parents toward the implications of EMI and how they perceive the impact of EMI on their cultural preservation. This study aims to fill that gap.

Methodology

This study employed a survey questionnaire, coupled with semi-structured interviews, to get insights into the perspectives of Indigenous parents towards the implications of EMI. Thirty-five Indigenous parents whose children study up to secondary school level were selected employing a simple random sampling strategy. Five parents were selected purposively for the interview, ensuring inclusive representation of caste, gender, and socioeconomic background. This study only incorporated Magar, Newar, Tamang, and Tharu among the Indigenous groups of Nepal. Close-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were employed to collect the data. Data obtained for the study were extracted from the first author's Master's in Education in English thesis (Basyal, 2025).

While conducting a survey using closed-ended questionnaires, participants were informed about the nature of the study. After obtaining consent from the participants, they were requested to complete the survey. Since they could not understand English, each question was asked in Nepali. The interviews were conducted in Nepali since the informants were well capable of communicating in Nepali. The length of the interviews varied from five to twenty-five minutes. The confluence of close-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews provided the study with a clear picture of how Indigenous parents view the implications of EMI, and whether they perceive English as a threat to their mother tongue and culture. Furthermore, the study employed the process of coding and analyzing the filled questionnaires to find out common patterns, themes, and ideas to get insights into the perspectives of Indigenous parents.

Further, while analyzing interviews, they were first transcribed. Each Interview was translated into English. After going through interviews meticulously, the coding framework was created, and codes were applied to find commonalities, recurrent themes, contradictions, and tensions in the interviews employing thematic analysis. To maintain the confidentiality of the interviewees, pseudonyms (Puru Bahadur, Chandra, Purna, Khemisara, and Hiralal) were used while analyzing and interpreting the interviews.

Results

This section presents the results obtained from the survey questionnaire into four different themes. Then, it presents the results gained from semi-structured interviews that are thematized into five categories. These results are integrated in the following Discussion Section.

Socioeconomic Motivations for Choosing EMI

A substantial majority of participants, 54.28 % strongly supported, and 28.57% accepted that English proficiency is crucial for their future success in various fields. 45.71% of parents firmly acknowledged, and 34.29% endorsed that EMI provides distinctive benefits in job opportunities and social mobility. Moreover, 28.57% strongly agreed and 48.57% agreed with the statement that their decision to adopt EMI was motivated by the expectation that it would work as a doorway to better employment opportunities. Similarly, 28.57% firmly endorsed and 48.57% accepted the belief that

sound English language skills are associated with higher status and better economic prospects. Figure 1 presents the key responses.

Figure 1

Socioeconomic Motivations for Choosing EMI

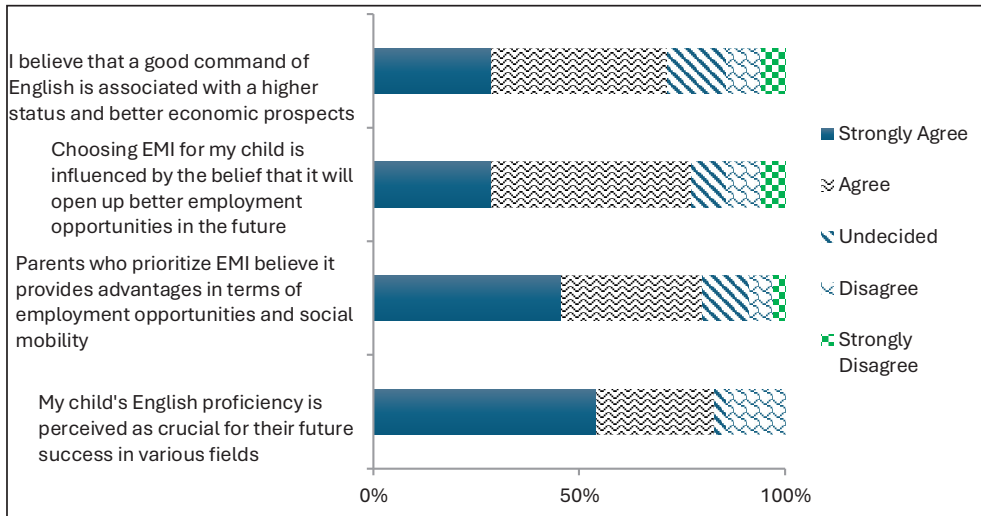


Figure 1 shows that the majority of parents believe that English is linked with upward social and economic mobility and success in several areas. Most of the parents' decision to choose EMI was for a better future career, social, and economic advancement.

Endangerment of Indigenous Languages

Regarding the dominance of Nepali along with the attraction toward EMI threatens Indigenous languages, 20% firmly acknowledged, while 31.43% endorsed. Likewise, 20% firmly concurred, and 42.86% accepted that the choice of EMI has increased the rate at which Indigenous languages are disappearing in their community. The majority of parents, 31.43% strongly believed and 45.71% acknowledged that endangerment of their mother tongue is contributed to by the attraction toward EMI. Figure 2 presents the key responses.

Figure 2

Endangerment of Indigenous Languages

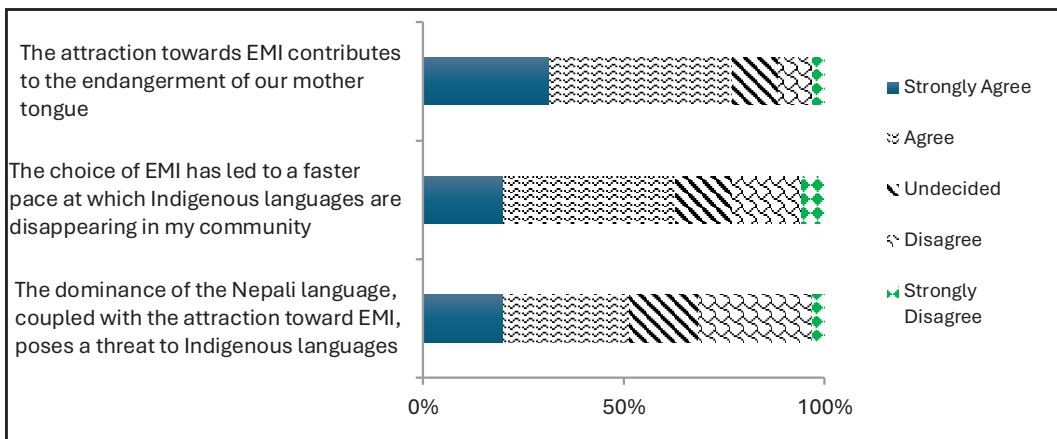


Figure 2 indicates that a large segment of parents accept that EMI's appeal causes the imperil of their first language and its speed of disappearance. Additionally, they acknowledge the supremacy of Nepali, and the attraction toward EMI puts Indigenous languages at risk.

Motivating Factors and EMI

Twenty percent of parents decisively supported, 40.0% supported, 14.29% opposed, and 8.57% firmly rejected the statement that a family's socioeconomic status is positively impacted when children are educated with EMI. Similarly, 14.29% strongly agreed, and 48.57% agreed on adoption of EMI is vital for their child's social mobility. Furthermore, 22.86% strongly believed, 42.86% acknowledged, 14.29% rejected, and 5.71% firmly opposed the statement that attraction toward EMI is viewed as a means of uplifting their child's living standards and status in society. Figure 3 presents the key responses.

Figure 3

Motivating Factors and EMI

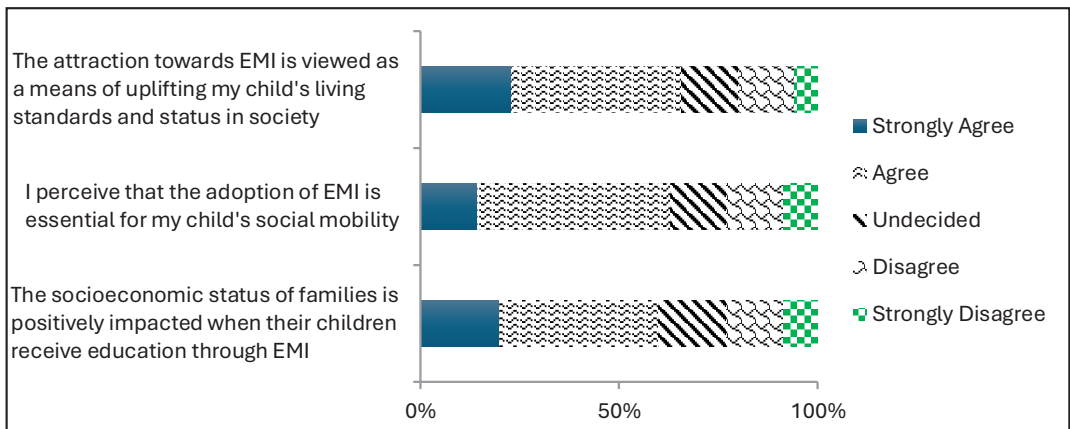


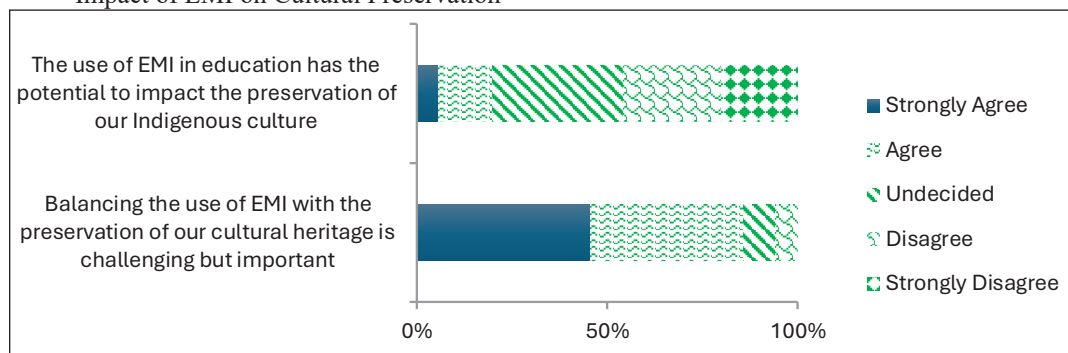
Figure 3 demonstrates that Parents perceive EMI as a tool to break free from a challenging economic condition and raise their social status. They have a positive outlook toward EMI for better financial and social outcomes.

Impact of EMI on Cultural Preservation

The majority of parents, 45.71% decisively concurred, and 40% accepted that balancing the use of EMI with the preservation of their cultural heritage is challenging but important. On the other hand, 5.71% firmly supported and 14.29% endorsed that EMI directly impacts the preservation of Indigenous culture. Figure 4 presents the key responses.

Figure 4 illustrates that parents believe EMI in education is important for social and economic reasons. They were also concerned about cultural loss ignited by EMI. They called for a balance between EMI and cultural identity.

Likewise, the following paragraphs present the analysis of data gathered through semi-structured interviews. Results are categorized into five different themes.

Figure 4**Impact of EMI on Cultural Preservation****Significance of English in the Globalized World**

Most of the parents admitted that English proficiency is indispensable in the modern world, especially in the field of technology and employment. Puru Bahadur emphasized that even to find low-paying jobs, you have to have expertise in technology and be proficient in English. He somehow contradicted himself, expressing that English must come after Nepali and local languages, highlighting the importance of national identity over the English language. He further clarified that English is only needed when someone is travelling to another country. In a similar vein, Khemisara stated that in the past, they had nearly zero knowledge of English, but the younger generation must know English. She further highlighted that learning English can be a tool for securing a good job and upward economic mobility. In the same manner, Chandra elucidated that English-speaking skills can uplift someone's status not only in their community but also internationally.

Motivation for EMI

Many parents view EMI as a gateway to better opportunities abroad. Khemisara shared that she enrolled her children in an English-medium school because her children could go abroad. Likewise, Chandra highlighted the socioeconomic challenge of Nepal, saying that due to the country's adverse situation, many students are compelled to go abroad for their studies and career, which is why learning English is important. Hiralal explained that Nepali medium education is limited only in Nepal, whereas English medium education is beneficial in every sector worldwide. Additionally, some of the parents choose English-medium institutional schools because of the quality of education. Most of the community schools provide education in Nepali, and institutional schools in English. In this regard, Puru Bahadur remarked that teachers are not irresponsible about teaching in community schools. Some of the parents send their children to English medium schools not only for the perceived importance of English but quality of education. Parents shared their views on the status of English speakers in Indigenous communities. Chandra admitted that knowledge of English is associated with intelligence or being educated, so respect is given to a person with good English proficiency. In contrast, Purna argued that respect given to English speakers is context-specific. He further elaborated that even a person who is proficient in Sanskrit and Nepali also gets respect and earns well. Khemisara, on the other hand, witnessed no such incident where respect is associated with English proficiency.

Mother Tongue Preservation Concern

Parents emphasized that language and cultures are key elements of personal and national identity. Purna and Khemisara put forth the importance of their native tongue. Purna further mentions that the preservation of the mother tongue is vital to the preservation of a national identity. Parents were concerned about the extinction of their mother tongue. Puru Bahadur remarked, "If the parents who have migrated to urban areas do not speak their mother tongue, how are the children supposed to learn their heritage language?" He was also concerned about the critical condition of Indigenous languages. Language shift among the younger generation is one of the contributing factors to the deterioration of Indigenous languages. One of the major reasons for language shift is the influence of the educational system. Several parents pointed out that Nepali and English medium schools reduce the use of the mother tongue by their children, which leads to language shift among Indigenous students. To shed light on this, Puru Bahadur highlighted that parents have started to teach their children Nepali instead of their native language because when they go to school, teachers do not understand students' native language. Another reason for language shift is the aspiration of settling abroad. Khemisara underscored that younger people are speaking English so they can go abroad and not learn their heritage language. It shows that education, migration, and economic pressures play key roles in the shift among younger generations.

Is English a Threat to Indigenous Languages?

Regarding the threat of English to Indigenous languages, the interviewed parents were harmonious with English. They frequently highlighted the importance of English in the globalized world, where people are constantly moving. Hiralal took one step further and expressed with conviction, English does not put other languages and cultures under threat. He claimed, "In my opinion, English is mandatory. I am confident that it does not harm other languages and cultures". Other parents regarded English as a crucial language. Parents repeatedly highlighted the significance of English as a global language rather than a threat to other cultures. Furthermore, when discussing about marginalization of Indigenous languages, Puru Bahadur noted, "Every official work is conducted in Nepali. The lack of acceptance of the Magar language in government institutions has gradually led to the deterioration of the Magar language." Dominant cultures are also hindering the transmission of minority languages. To highlight this, Chandra maintained that they were raised in a Brahmin majority community they assimilated with that culture, which led to marginalization of their native language. In contrast, some parents did not hold other languages responsible, highlighting that the decline of Indigenous languages is a matter of individual choices. Hiralal explained that abandonment of their native language is due to personal preferences, which leads to deterioration of their language, not Nepali.

Is Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) a Solution?

Several parents admitted that MTB-MLE is crucial for the preservation of their cultural heritage. Khemisara suggested that MTB-MLE should be implemented, and children must learn their mother tongue and simultaneously other languages for global needs. Similarly, Purna urged that the government must provide education in Indigenous languages. Conversely, for practical reasons, Hiralal argued that mother tongue-based education should not be implemented as it is not useful at the global level. Chandra shared that both English and the mother tongue are crucial, but culture should

not be neglected. The common concern among parents was the need to balance Indigenous languages with English language proficiency. Furthermore, Puru Bahadur shared an example from one of the states of India and suggested adopting that practice in Nepal, where they teach basic-level education in children's mother tongue, transitioning to other languages. Similarly, Purna emphasized that the mother tongue should be given preference; at the same time, English must be learnt to keep up with globalization and international migration. It shows that most of the parents want their children to learn English, but not at the cost of cultural identity.

Discussion

A substantial majority of participants believe that English proficiency is crucial for their future success in various fields. Parents highlighted the significance of English for better job prospects and economic advancement, especially for the younger generation. Furthermore, parents believe that English proficiency can raise their status globally. This aligns with previous studies in Nepali and South Asian contexts where EMI is perceived as linguistic capital and means of alleviating the social and economic standings (Phyak, 2016; Majidi, 2013; Sah & Karki, 2023). These findings confirm that EMI is associated with socioeconomic benefits. However, some parents expressed that English proficiency is associated with status, while others believe that it is context-specific. This contrast illustrates the significance of English and EMI is widely accepted but may not be universal. Furthermore, Most of the interviewed parents perceive EMI as a tool to grab opportunities abroad because of Nepal's migration trend triggered by harsh socioeconomic conditions. This echoes the previous studies by Ghimire (2019) and Khatri (2016), who assert that EMI is preferred in Nepal because of globalization and foreign employment.

The choice of EMI sometimes goes beyond socioeconomic reasons. Many parents prefer EMI-based schools because of the perceived quality of education. This perceived quality of education associated with EMI compels several Indigenous parents to choose EMI and many schools to adopt EMI because of parental and societal pressure and to cope with decreasing numbers of students. This mirrors the claim of Sapkota (2023) and Mishra & Bhatta (2021) that EMI is widely perceived as an indicator of educational quality. This leads several schools to adopt EMI without sufficient preparation (Subedi, 2019; Karki, 2021). Furthermore, this haphazard adoption of EMI may inflict disparities in the educational setting. In this regard, Dhakal (2021), Sah (2022), and Tollefson (2000) warn that EMI can inflict many forms of disparities. This shows that EMI, adopted for its perceived educational benefits, may contribute to injustice to students from marginalized communities.

Indigenous parents have a divergent view on the belief that Nepali's dominance, coupled with attraction toward EMI, harms Indigenous languages and speeds up the pace of their extinction, the same view held in studies by Poudel and Choi (2021) and Kadel (2024). Likewise, some of the interviewed parents believe that English does not pose a threat to their language in the globalized world, where people are frequently migrating, which contrasts with the previous studies (Tollefson, 2000; Tollefson & Tsui, 2003; Dhakal, 2021). A few interviewed parents expressed that the dominance of Nepali as the official language plays a role in sidelining Indigenous languages. In contrast, some parents do not hold any language responsible for the marginalization of their language, highlighting that it is the result of individual choices. This resembles the claim by Eagle (1999) and Gautam (2022) that English and Nepali are preferred over the mother tongue.

Most of the parents admitted that English proficiency is indispensable in the modern world, but some of the parents emphasized that it should not be prioritized over Nepali and local languages. A desire to balance proficiency in English with the preservation of one's own language and culture is a concern that cuts across both qualitative and quantitative research, and both issues were already raised by Biswas (2022) and Díaz (2023). Interviewed parents highlighted the significance of their mother tongue. Parents accepted the fact that English is a tool for survival in the modern, globalized world, but they continued to worry over the language shift of their children. Previous studies by Rai (2013), Biswas (2022), and Jora (2022) highlight the concerns of parents about mother tongue preservation while seeking English proficiency for their children for pragmatic reasons. Furthermore, the qualitative data revealed that the transmission of language to the next generation is hindered by urban-centred and international migration. This resonates with the finding of Gautam (2018, 2022) that language shift in Nepal is often caused by migration and the quality of education. It is another facet of a worldwide phenomenon whereby economic incentives often trump native language preservation. Furthermore, parents blamed Nepali and English medium schools for the language shift, reducing the use of the mother tongue at home. Overall, they expressed concerns about the deterioration of their mother tongue. Parents hold migration, and the education system prefers the dominant language.

Several parents acknowledge the role of MTB-MLE in preserving their language and culture, as claimed by Babag (2022). Some of the advocates for mother tongue-based education, while others question its relevance globally, as highlighted by Tupas (2015). However, there is a mutual concern to balance English language proficiency with mother tongue preservation. The vast majority of parents accept that balancing the use of EMI with the preservation of their cultural heritage is challenging but important. As a balanced approach, a few parents suggested a bilingual approach or a multilingual approach. This suggests that parents are divided on the significance of mother tongue-based learning in the world of English dominance and interconnectedness.

Conclusion and Implications

The study shows that Nepalese Indigenous parents mainly view EMI as a key to socioeconomic mobility, quality education, and global opportunities. English proficiency is considered linguistic capital as it is associated with status, employment, and migration prospects in today's globalized world. Meanwhile, some parents are concerned about the deterioration of Indigenous languages; they blame educational practices, migration, and English and Nepali dominance, which leads to language shift among younger people. The findings suggest that although English may be perceived as indispensable, it can further exacerbate existing inequalities. Additionally, it might hasten the endangerment of minority languages. While formulating policies, authorities need to ensure that students are equally proficient in English for their survival, and they are also well-grounded in their mother tongue for maintaining cultural identity. This demands an integration of English and the mother tongue in the academic curriculum. Schools can adopt translanguaging practices that allow the use of English, Nepali, and Indigenous languages in the classroom to make learning effective, ensuring the linguistic rights of Indigenous children.

Overall, the preference for EMI illustrates that before adopting mother tongue-based learning or multilingual policies, socioeconomic benefits should be considered, regardless of some of the parents' support for it. Nepal requires educational policies that incorporate the aspiration of parents for English

and the constitutional right to mother tongue-based education, and a balance between global need and native identities. Furthermore, policymakers have to meticulously pave the way to make the younger generation of Indigenous people feel proud of their heritage, so that they do not abandon their native culture and shift to the dominant culture, and take urgent actions to preserve Indigenous languages to maintain the linguistic diversity of Nepal and ensure the linguistic rights of Indigenous people.

This study was small-scale, which only incorporated a small sample of Indigenous people. It narrows down the generalizability of findings. Future investigations can encompass a broader and more diverse population. The attitudes of different stakeholders can be explored by looking at the experiences of students, teachers, school management committees, and policy makers. It is also recommended to study how EMI impacts students' learning and the maintenance of Indigenous languages in the long run.

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