

Perceptions and Practices of English and Nepali Medium Instruction

Bishnu Kumar Khadka, PhD
Assistant Professor (English Education)
luckybishnu@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aimed to explore the perceptions and practices of key stakeholders—students, teachers, school management committee (SMC) chairs, and parents—regarding the use of Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI) and English Medium Instruction (EMI) in government-funded community schools. A quantitative research design was employed, with a structured questionnaire distributed to 200 participants, including students (N = 100), teachers (N = 50), SMC chairs (N = 20), and parents (N = 30) from four government-funded community schools across Nepal. The schools were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation from both NMI- and EMI-based instruction. The study findings revealed a strong parental preference for English Medium Instruction (EMI), with 70% of parents considering it important or very important. However, teachers expressed a more balanced view, with 70% recognizing the significance of Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI) and 68% acknowledging the importance of EMI. Teachers perceived EMI as beneficial for improving students' English language proficiency (48%) and enhancing career prospects, while also noting that NMI fosters a better understanding of academic concepts (58%) due to language familiarity. Both parents and teachers observed that EMI can hinder students' confidence, with 32% of parents and 37% of teachers reporting that language barriers in EMI reduce students' self-esteem and classroom participation. Additionally, limited access to educational resources in Nepali was highlighted by 33% of parents and 35% of students. While the highest percentage of teachers (40%) and students (47%) preferred NMI, a majority of parents (52%) favored EMI. The findings contribute to the ongoing discussion on the medium of instruction in Nepal's education system, particularly regarding the balance between preserving cultural identity and improving future educational and career opportunities for students.

Key Words: Medium of Instruction, EMI, NMI, Multilingual Education, Learning Achievement

Introduction

The debate surrounding the use of English Medium Instruction (EMI) and Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI) in community schools has become increasingly prominent in Nepal's education sector. With the growing influence of globalization and the perceived value of English for academic and career opportunities, many schools have shifted towards EMI as a way to enhance their competitiveness and attract students. However, this transition has sparked discussions on the implications for students' learning experiences, cultural identity, and equity in education. While proponents of EMI argue that it provides greater access to global knowledge and opportunities, critics highlight challenges such as language barriers, the marginalization of local languages, and the potential to widen the gap between privileged and underprivileged students.

Nepal has long been a multilingual or plurilingual society, though historically, the country's elites have arguably exploited language as a means of controlling the uneducated populace (Giri, 2020). Its linguistic diversity includes around 30 million people from 125 ethnic groups or communities, speaking over 124 distinct languages (National Statistics Office, 2021). In recent years, the movement of people both within and across Nepal has significantly altered the traditional linguistic landscape and the ecology of diversity, with increasing language contact, particularly in urban areas. Nepal's constitution envisions a multilingual and multi-ethnic society, yet English and Nepali have firmly established their dominance in education, both as compulsory subjects and as mediums of instruction (MOI) (Adhikari & Poudel, 2023; Poudel & Choi, 2022, as cited in Choi & Poudel, 2024).

Nepal has initiated the Education for All (EFA, 2003) program with the objectives of ensuring that all children, particularly Indigenous tribal minorities, attend school and improving the quality of school education by 2015. One of the program's key priorities is to provide primary-level education in students' mother tongues. The Interim Constitution of 2007 also guarantees the right of every community to receive basic education in their mother tongue, as stated in Part 3, Article 17 (UNESCO, 2023). To implement this legal provision, the government has developed a national framework for 'mother-tongue based multilingual education' (MT-MLE) for non-Nepali speaking children, where the first phase of basic education (Grades 1-3) will be conducted in their mother tongue.

The most effective medium for teaching a child is their mother tongue or a language they understand well. A child's mother tongue naturally facilitates the expression of experiences and thoughts acquired during early childhood. Providing primary education in the mother tongue makes learning more accessible and actively engages children in the educational process (Dhakal, 2013). Using the first language (L1) enhances children's affective development by boosting their confidence, self-esteem, and sense of identity, which in turn increases motivation, creativity, and initiative. In L1 classrooms, children can fully express themselves and grow both intellectually and personally, in contrast to submersion classrooms where they may be forced into silence or rote repetition, often resulting in frustration, failure, or dropping out (Benson, 2005). Although multilingual education faces challenges in Nepal, UNESCO (2011) emphasizes that mother tongue-based multilingual education is crucial in a multilingual country like Nepal, promoting quality education for children of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Language is vital for promoting equality, empowering individuals, and fostering social inclusion within ethno-linguistic communities. In Nepal, children whose mother tongue is not Nepali face disadvantages compared to Nepali-speaking peers, who benefit from learning in their native language. This disparity often results in feelings of inferiority and academic struggles among non-Nepali-speaking children. Research indicates that early-grade education in a child's mother tongue enhances learning outcomes compared to instruction in a second or foreign language (UNESCO, 2003; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2003). Conversely, children taught in non-native languages are more likely to experience low academic performance, grade repetition, and school dropouts, a persistent issue in Nepal (Yadava, 2007; Awasthi, 2004).

The Medium of Instruction (MOI) is a crucial and often debated issue in Nepal, a country characterized by its linguistic, cultural, and ethnic diversity. In response, the Constitution of Nepal (1990) included provisions allowing primary education to be conducted in students' mother tongues, affirming their right to learn in their native languages (Government of Nepal, 1990). Building on this, the Constitution of Nepal (2015) further guarantees the right to receive basic education in one's mother tongue and the right to establish schools according to legal provisions, underscoring the significance of mother tongue-based education and community-led initiatives to teach in native languages. Similarly, the Education Act and related guidelines align with these constitutional linguistic rights. The eighth amendment to the Education Act specifies that the MOI can be Nepali, English, or both. Additionally, the MOI can be the same language used for teaching the language subject, and at the primary level—part of Basic Education—the MOI can be the mother tongue. However, despite these provisions, many community schools have transitioned to English as the MOI, leading to challenges for both students and teachers due to their limited language proficiency.

English holds a central place in Nepal's educational planning, driven by its perceived importance for the country's development (Kansakar, 1998, as cited in Sharma, 2006). Despite official multilingual policies promoting the use of Nepali, English, and indigenous languages in education, the dominance of English Medium Instruction (EMI) persists across schools and higher education (Choi & Poudel, 2024). The Government of Nepal introduced English as a subject from grade one in 2060 B.S. in response to rising demand, while private schools have used English as the medium of instruction (MOI) from nursery levels. This trend has influenced public schools to shift from traditional Nepali

Medium Instruction (NMI) to EMI to compete with private institutions (Phyak, 2021; Poudel & Choi, 2021; Sah, 2021). Since the early 1990s, EMI has also become the dominant MOI in Nepal's higher education sector.

The rise of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in Nepal aligns with global trends, driven by stakeholders' belief in the importance of English proficiency for global competitiveness and mobility (Poudel & Choi, 2021; 2022). Despite its perceived value, many Nepalese learners struggle with inadequate English proficiency. Previous research on the medium of instruction (MOI) has often been quantitative or mixed-methods, lacking focus on the varied contexts of schools. Furthermore, education policies, including the MOI provisions in the Education Act and the Constitution, are criticized for being unclear and inconsistent, fueling academic debate but offering limited practical guidance. Research gaps remain, particularly regarding classroom-level EMI practices and how teachers adapt to using English as the MOI in Basic Education classrooms. Studies have yet to sufficiently document the shift from Nepali to English as the MOI or explore the diverse challenges faced by teachers and learners (Poudel & Choi, 2021; Sah, 2021). In this connection, this study addresses these gaps by examining the perceptions of key stakeholders—students, teachers, and parents—on Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI) and EMI in community schools. By exploring the impact of NMI and EMI on learning outcomes and future opportunities, the study aims to inform educational policies and teaching practices in Nepal.

Methodology

The study utilized a quantitative research approach with a structured questionnaire to examine the perceptions of students, teachers, and parents regarding the use of Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI) and English Medium Instruction (EMI) in community schools. The research focused on secondary-level stakeholders from four government-funded community schools in Birendranagar Municipality, Surkhet, Karnali Province, Nepal, which conduct both NMI and EMI classes concurrently. A simple random sampling technique selected 50 secondary-level teachers, 100 students (50 from each medium), and 100 parents (50 from each medium) as the sample population. Data collection involved a close-ended Likert-scale questionnaire, addressing perceptions, attitudes, and practices related to MOI and its impact on learning access and achievement. Official documents on EMI and NMI policies and practices, as well as SEE result records of the target schools, were also analyzed. A systematic process ensured smooth administration of the self-administered instruments, including piloting and refining the questionnaire before data collection. The collected data were entered into SPSS version 20, where accuracy was ensured through data screening. Descriptive statistics, including tabulation and percentage calculations, were employed to analyze and interpret the data, providing insights into the general trends and summarized findings.

Results Analysis and Findings

The medium of instruction (MOI) in educational institutions is a critical factor that significantly influences students' learning experiences and outcomes. In government-funded community schools, where diverse socio-economic backgrounds intersect, the choice of MOI becomes even more consequential. In the context of education, especially regarding the medium of instruction, various stakeholders play crucial roles in shaping and implementing policies. Here's a breakdown of key stakeholders and their perceptions towards the practices of National Medium Instruction (NMI) and English Medium Instruction (EMI).

Perceptions of Parents Towards English Medium Instruction in Community Schools

In recent years, English Medium Instruction (EMI) has gained significant traction in Nepal's education system, particularly in community schools transitioning from traditional Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI). This shift reflects the increasing societal demand for English proficiency, widely regarded as a gateway to global opportunities and economic mobility. Parents, as influential stakeholders in their children's education, play a critical role in shaping the discourse on EMI adoption. Their perceptions of EMI often stem from aspirations for better career prospects, access to higher education, and international competitiveness.

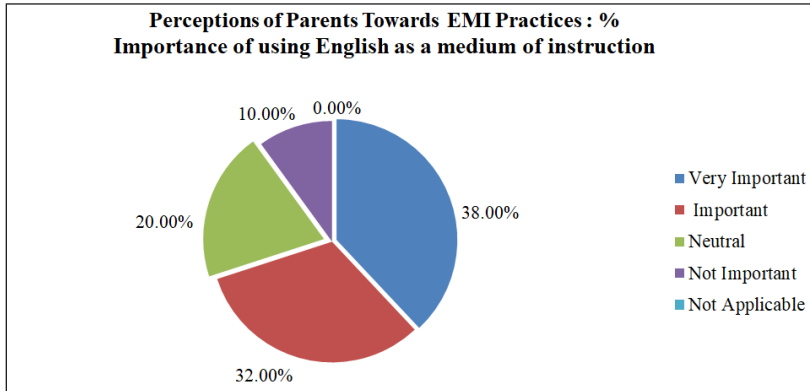


Figure 1. *Perceptions of Parents towards English Medium Instruction in Community Schools*

Figure 1 presents parents' perceptions regarding the importance of using English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in their children's education. According to the data, a significant portion of parents (38%) believe that using English as a medium of instruction is very important. This suggests a strong preference or recognition of the benefits associated with EMI, including better future job prospects, global competitiveness, and access to a wider range of educational resources. The data indicates a strong parental preference towards using English as a medium of instruction, with 70% considering it either important or very important. This trend highlights the perceived advantages of EMI, such as enhancing students' future career opportunities and ensuring they can compete in a globalized world. Overall, the data suggests that educational policymakers and schools might face strong support for EMI from most parents, although they should also consider the perspectives of those who are neutral or opposed to ensuring an inclusive approach to educational planning.

Perceptions of Parents Towards Nepali Medium Instruction in Community Schools

The medium of instruction (MOI) in schools plays a pivotal role in shaping students' academic achievement, cultural identity, and future opportunities. In the context of Nepal, community schools have traditionally employed Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI) as the primary MOI, aligning with the country's linguistic and cultural heritage. However, with the growing emphasis on English Medium Instruction (EMI) in both public and private education sectors, the role of NMI in fostering equitable and inclusive education has sparked significant debate. Parents, as key stakeholders in their children's education, hold diverse perceptions regarding the effectiveness, relevance, and impact of NMI in community schools. These perceptions influence their decisions about their children's schooling and reflect broader societal attitudes toward language and education.

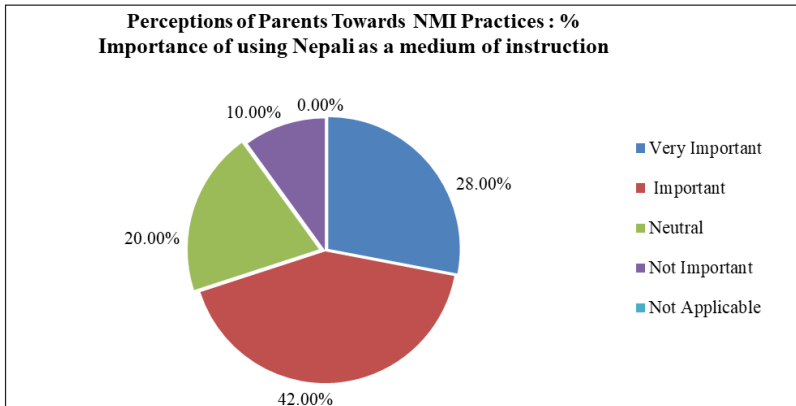


Figure 2 . *Perceptions of Parents towards Nepali Medium Instruction in Community Schools*

Figure 2 represents parents' perceptions regarding the importance of Nepali as the medium of instruction (NMI) in government-funded community schools. Most parents (42%) considered the use of Nepali as MOI as "Important." A significant proportion (28%) considered it "Very Important." Combined, 70% of parents (28% + 42%) view the use of Nepali as MOI as important to varying degrees. This suggests a strong preference for Nepali as the medium of instruction in government-funded community schools. The analysis of parental perceptions towards using Nepali as a medium of instruction in government-funded community schools reveals a predominant inclination towards its importance. This preference should guide educational strategies and policies to align with parental expectations, potentially enhancing educational outcomes. Understanding the underlying reasons for neutrality and opposition can further refine these strategies, ensuring they are inclusive and considerate of all parental perspectives.

Perceptions of Teachers Towards the Importance of English Medium Instruction

English Medium Instruction (EMI) has become a prominent feature in Nepal's education landscape, particularly in government-funded community schools striving to meet global educational standards. Teachers, as key implementers of EMI, hold critical insights into its significance and challenges. Many view EMI as essential for equipping students with the language skills necessary for higher education, employment, and global mobility.

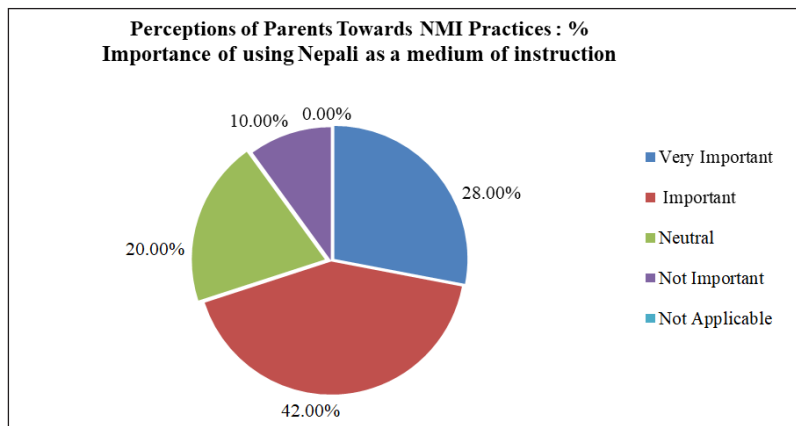


Figure 3. *Perceptions of Teachers towards Importance of English Medium Instruction in Government-Funded Community Schools*

Figure 3 presents teachers' perceptions regarding the importance of using English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in their education. A significant portion of teachers (36%) consider EMI to be very important. This high percentage indicates that many teachers recognize the benefits of being instructed in English, possibly seeing it as a key to accessing better educational resources, improving their English proficiency, and enhancing their future career prospects. The data indicates that a significant majority of teachers (68%) consider using English as a medium of instruction to be important or very important. Overall, the data shows a strong inclination among students towards adopting EMI. Educational institutions and policymakers should consider this majority preference when designing curricula and instructional policies.

Perceptions of Teachers Towards the Importance of Nepali Medium Instruction

Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI) remains a cornerstone of education in Nepal, particularly in government-funded community schools where preserving cultural and linguistic heritage is crucial. Teachers recognize NMI as vital for fostering inclusive education, promoting better comprehension among students with limited English proficiency, and supporting equitable learning opportunities. While acknowledging the global advantages of English, many teachers emphasize the importance of NMI in nurturing national identity and ensuring academic success for students in linguistically diverse classrooms.

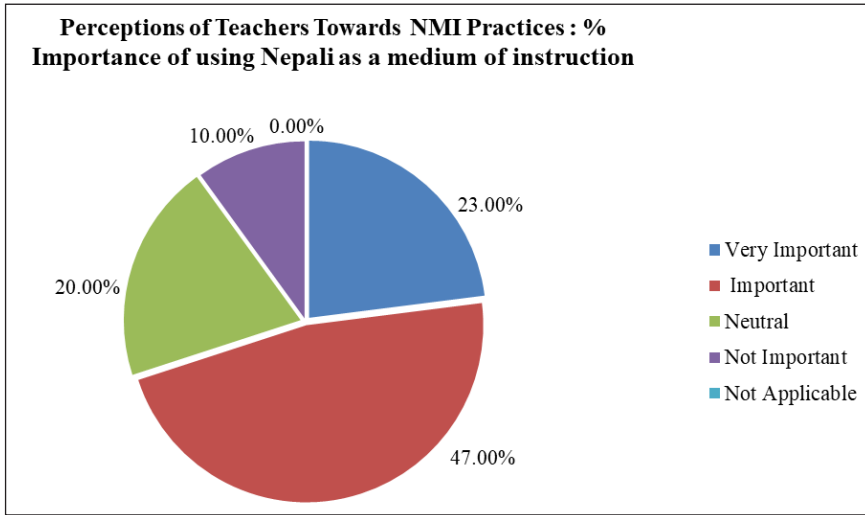


Figure 4. Perception of Teachers towards Importance of Nepali Medium Instruction in Government-Funded Community Schools

The data from Figure 4 represents the perceptions of teachers' perceptions regarding the importance of using Nepali as the medium of instruction in government-funded community schools. The largest segment, representing nearly half of the respondents (47%), considers Nepali medium instruction important. This majority indicates a general consensus among teachers that Nepali is a key language for instruction, possibly reflecting its role in national identity and ease of understanding for students in community schools.

Perceptions of Students Towards English Medium Instruction in Community Schools

English Medium Instruction (EMI) is increasingly prevalent in Nepal's community schools, reflecting its global significance. Students often perceive EMI as a gateway to better educational and professional opportunities, enhanced communication skills, and global competitiveness. Despite these perceived advantages, many face challenges, including limited language proficiency and a lack of resources to support EMI-based learning.

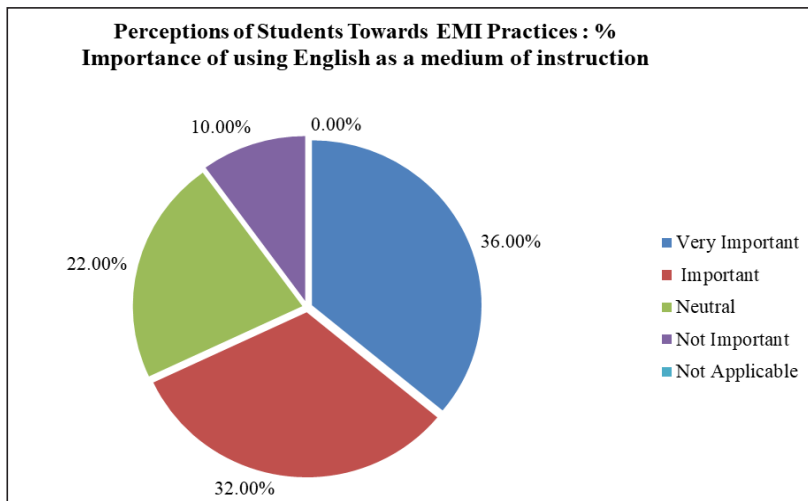


Figure 5. Perceptions of Students towards English Medium Instruction in Community Schools

The data from Figure 5 reflects the perceptions of students towards the use of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in government-funded community schools. Many students (38%) consider EMI to be very important. This suggests that these students strongly value the role of English in their education, likely due to its association with enhanced academic and professional opportunities. The data indicates a strong preference for EMI among students in government-funded community schools, with 70% considering it very important. This majority suggests that students see significant benefits in learning through English, likely due to the perceived advantages in higher education and employment opportunities.

Perceptions of Students Towards the Importance of Nepali Medium Instruction

Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI) holds significant importance in fostering cultural identity, linguistic heritage, and ease of comprehension for students in community schools. Students often view NMI as a supportive medium that enhances understanding, especially for those with limited exposure to English. Questions in this study focus on students' experiences with NMI, its role in their academic achievement, its relevance to preserving their cultural roots, and the challenges they encounter.

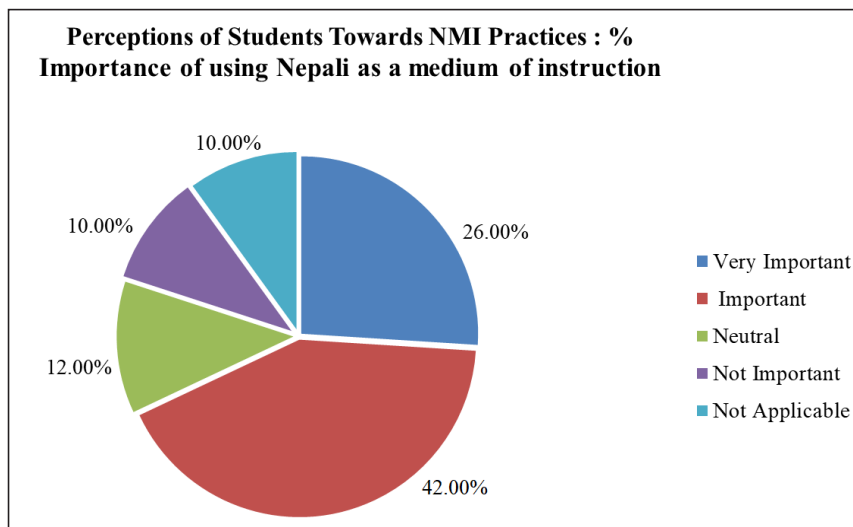


Figure 6. *Perceptions of Students towards the importance of NMI in Community Schools*

The data provided in Figure 6 represents students' perceptions regarding the importance of Nepali medium instruction in government-funded community schools. The largest group of respondents (42%) considered Nepali medium instruction important. Combined with the "Very Important" category, 68% of students see Nepali medium instruction as either important or very important. This majority indicates a general positive attitude towards using the Nepali language in their schooling. The majority of students (68%) view Nepali medium instruction in government-funded community schools as important or very important. This suggests a strong preference for, or recognition of, the value of learning in the Nepali language among the student population.

Perception of Parents Towards Benefits of English Medium Instruction

English Medium Instruction (EMI) is often perceived by parents as a pathway to better educational and career opportunities for their children in an increasingly globalized world. This study explores parents' views on the benefits of EMI, focusing on areas such as academic achievement, future employability, and access to resources. Questions address their expectations, satisfaction with EMI practices, and perceived challenges in its implementation.

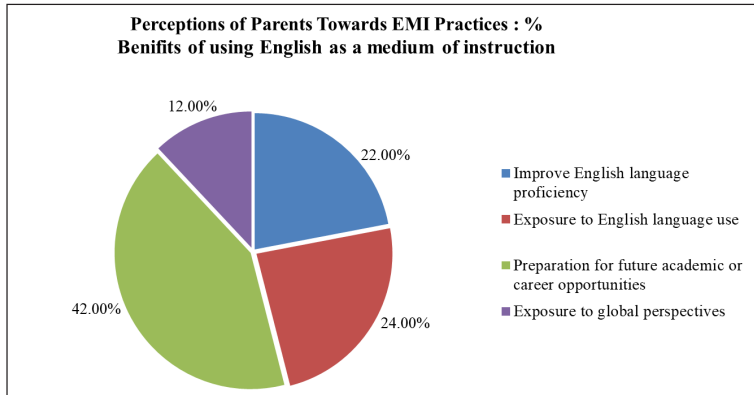


Figure 7. Perception of Parents towards Benefits of English Medium Instruction in Government-Funded Community Schools

The data from Figure 7 reflects parents' perceptions regarding the benefits of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in government-funded community schools. The largest portion of parents (42%) believe that the primary benefit of EMI is preparing students for future academic or career opportunities. The data indicates that parents of students in government-funded community schools perceive a range of benefits from EMI, with a strong emphasis on its role in preparing students for future academic and career opportunities (42%). This reflects a pragmatic outlook where parents prioritize tangible outcomes like higher education and job prospects. Exposure to English language use (24%) and improving English language proficiency (22%) are also significant benefits, highlighting the value parents place on their children's ability to use and master English. These benefits are closely related and emphasize the importance of daily practice and proficiency in English as critical components of education.

Perceptions of Parents Towards Benefits of Nepali Medium Instruction

Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI) holds significant cultural and practical value in Nepal's educational landscape, particularly in fostering national identity and promoting inclusivity. This study investigates parents' perceptions of the benefits of NMI, focusing on its role in preserving cultural heritage, supporting local language development, and enhancing comprehension for students in their mother tongue. The questions explore parents' satisfaction with NMI, its impact on their children's academic success, and its relevance in the broader context of education and employment.

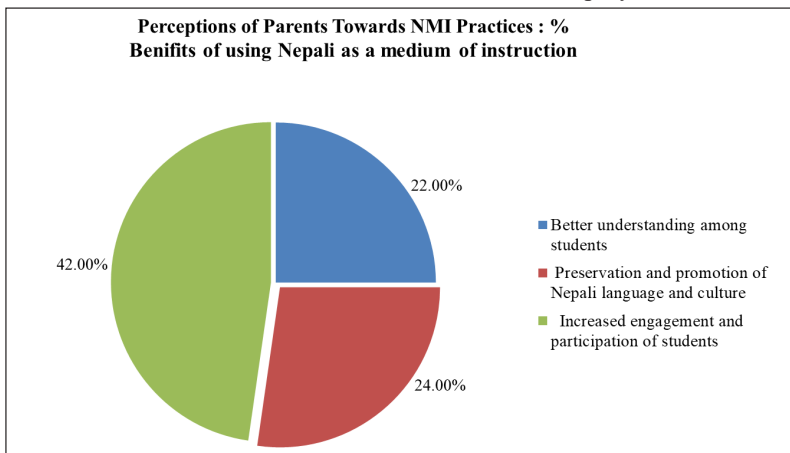


Figure 8. Perceptions of Parents towards Benefits of Nepali Medium Instruction in Government-

Funded Community Schools

The data in Figure 8 reflects the perceptions of parents' perceptions regarding the benefits of Nepali medium instruction in government-funded community schools. Parents see multiple benefits of Nepali medium instruction in government-funded community schools, with the largest emphasis on increased student engagement and participation (42%). This suggests that many parents believe that students are more interactive and invested in their education when taught in Nepali. Additionally, 24% of parents appreciate the role of Nepali medium instruction in preserving and promoting their language and culture, highlighting the cultural significance. Lastly, 22% of parents recognize that teaching in Nepali aids in better understanding among the students underscoring the practical educational benefits parents perceive.

Perceptions of Students Towards Benefits of Using English Medium Instruction

English Medium Instruction (EMI) is increasingly perceived by students as a pathway to academic and professional success in a globalized world. This study explores students' views on the benefits of EMI, focusing on its role in improving English proficiency, enhancing access to global knowledge, and fostering better career opportunities. The questions address students' experiences with learning through EMI, its impact on their academic performance, and its influence on their confidence in using English in various contexts.

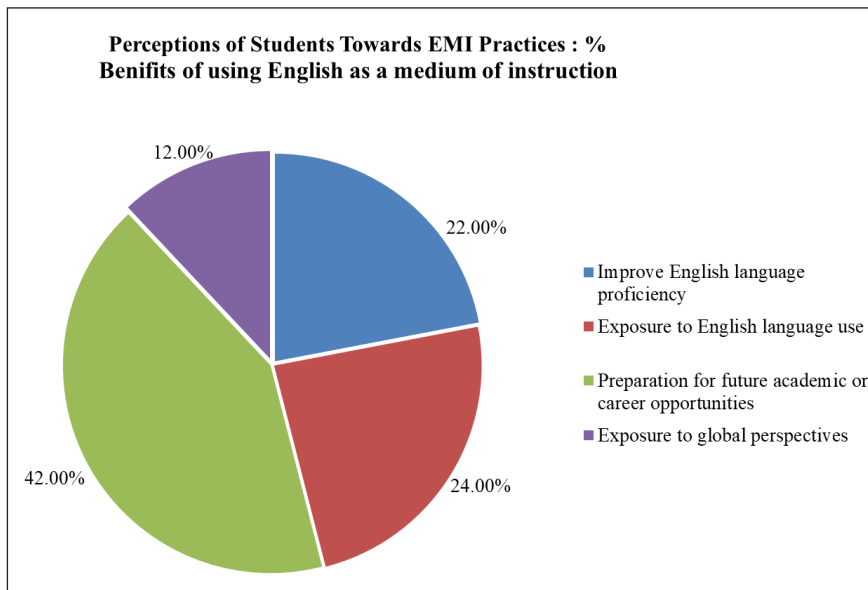


Figure 9. *Perceptions of Students towards Benefits of Using English Medium Instruction in Government-Funded Community Schools*

The data from Figure 9 illustrates the perceptions of students regarding the benefits of using English Medium Instruction (EMI) in government-funded community schools. The largest portion of students (42%) sees preparation for future academic or career opportunities as the primary benefit of EMI. This suggests that students are highly aware of the advantages that proficiency in English can offer in terms of higher education and job prospects. They likely view English as a key to unlocking better opportunities in a globalized job market and in pursuing advanced studies. Exposure to English language use (24%) and improving English language proficiency (22%) are also significant benefits, underscoring the value students place on their ability to use and master English effectively. These benefits are closely related and reflect the importance of practical usage and English proficiency for students' academic and personal growth.

Perceptions of Students Towards Benefits of Using Nepali Medium Instruction

Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI) holds significant cultural and educational value in Nepal, offering students an accessible and relatable learning experience. This study examines students' perceptions of the benefits of NMI, focusing on its role in preserving cultural identity, enhancing comprehension of complex concepts, and fostering a stronger connection to their native language and community. The questions explore how students view NMI's impact on their academic performance, comfort level in learning, and overall educational outcomes.

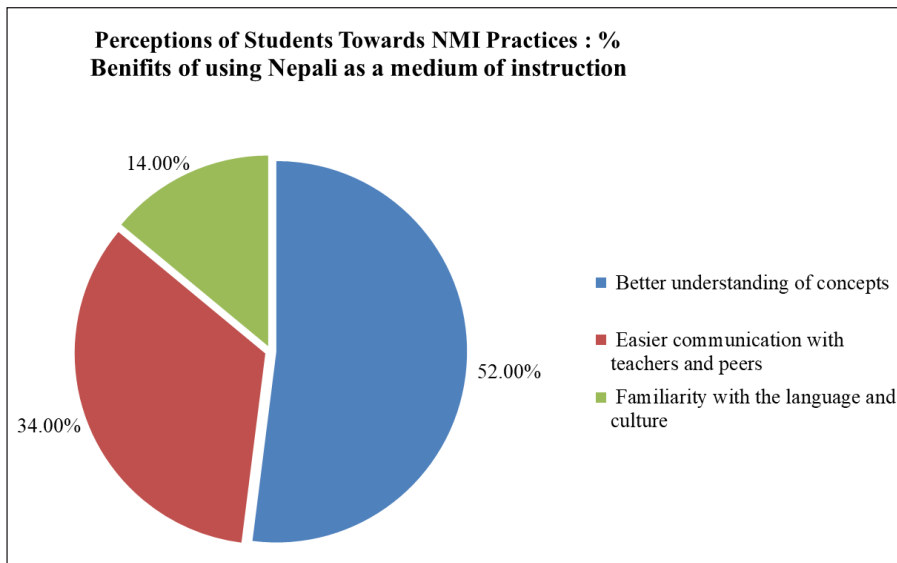


Figure 10. *Perceptions of Students towards Benefits of Using Nepali Medium Instruction in Government-Funded Community Schools*

The data in figure 10 represents the perceptions of students regarding the benefits of using Nepali medium instruction in government-funded community schools. A majority of 52% of students believe that Nepali medium instruction leads to a better understanding of concepts. The majority of students feel that Nepali medium instruction greatly enhances their understanding of academic material. This highlights the effectiveness of teaching in a language that students are most familiar with, aiding their cognitive processing and learning outcomes. Likewise, 34% of students feel that Nepali medium instruction facilitates easier communication with teachers and peers. Overall, students view Nepali medium instruction as highly beneficial, primarily for improving their understanding of concepts and facilitating communication. The lesser but still significant emphasis on cultural and linguistic familiarity indicates that while practical educational advantages are prioritized, the cultural relevance of Nepali instruction is also appreciated.

Perceptions of Teachers Towards Benefits of Using English Medium Instruction

English Medium Instruction (EMI) is increasingly adopted in Nepal's government-funded community schools, driven by its perceived advantages in enhancing global competitiveness and access to advanced knowledge. This study explores teachers' perceptions of the benefits of EMI, focusing on its role in improving students' English language proficiency, broadening career opportunities, and preparing learners for higher education. The questions examine how teachers view EMI's impact on students' academic achievements, engagement, and readiness for the globalized world.

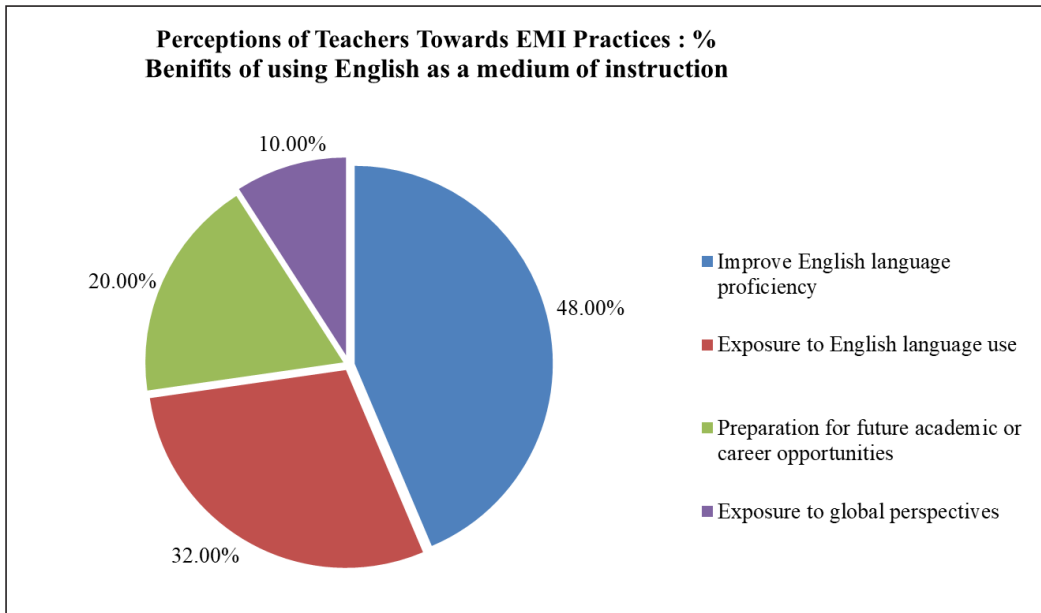


Figure 11. *Perceptions of Teachers towards Benefits of Using English Medium Instruction in Government-Funded Community Schools*

The data from Figure 11 illustrates teachers' perceptions regarding the benefits of using English Medium Instruction (EMI) in government-funded community schools. The data indicates that teachers in government-funded community schools perceive a range of benefits from EMI, with a strong emphasis on improving English language proficiency (48%). This highlights that teachers prioritize the development of robust language skills, which they see as essential for students' overall academic achievement and communication capabilities. Exposure to English language use (32%) is also seen as a significant benefit, underscoring the importance teachers place on regular practice and immersion in the language to build fluency and confidence in using English. Overall, the data suggests that teachers place the highest value on the direct linguistic benefits of EMI, particularly in improving English proficiency and providing regular language exposure.

Perceptions of Teachers Towards Benefits of Using Nepali Medium Instruction

Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI) has long been the traditional medium of teaching in many government-funded community schools in Nepal, rooted in cultural and linguistic familiarity. This study investigates teachers' perceptions of the benefits of using NMI, emphasizing its role in promoting linguistic and cultural identity, fostering better understanding of content, and supporting effective learning for students who are native Nepali speakers. The questions aim to explore how teachers perceive NMI's impact on students' academic performance, confidence, and overall learning experience.

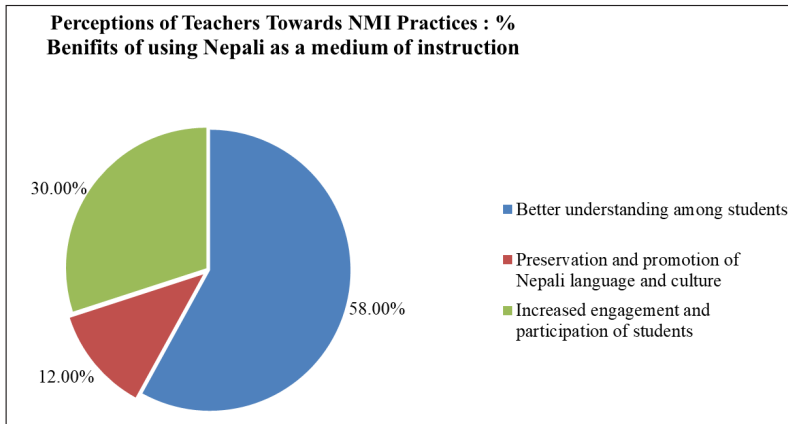


Figure 12. *Perceptions of Teachers towards Benefits of Using Nepali Medium Instruction in Government-Funded Community Schools*

The data in Figure 12 reflects teachers' perceptions of the benefits of using Nepali medium instruction in government-funded community schools. A majority of 58% of teachers believe that Nepali medium instruction leads to better understanding among students. This indicates that teachers perceive a strong educational benefit, as students will likely grasp academic concepts more effectively when taught in their native language. It underscores the idea that language familiarity significantly enhances comprehension. Likewise, 30% of teachers believe Nepali medium instruction increases student engagement and participation. Overall, teachers view Nepali medium instruction as highly beneficial, particularly for enhancing students' understanding of academic concepts and increasing their engagement and participation in the classroom. While the cultural and linguistic preservation aspect is less emphasized, it still holds value. According to teachers' perceptions the data supports the idea that using a familiar language in education can lead to better educational outcomes and a more engaging learning environment.

Preference of Medium of Instruction for Instructions by Teachers, Students, and Parents

The choice of medium of instruction plays a significant role in shaping the educational experience and learning outcomes in community schools. This study seeks to explore the preferences of teachers, students, and parents regarding the medium of instruction—whether Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI) or English Medium Instruction (EMI). By understanding their perspectives, the study aims to highlight the reasons behind their preferences, such as language comprehension, academic performance, cultural identity, and future opportunities.

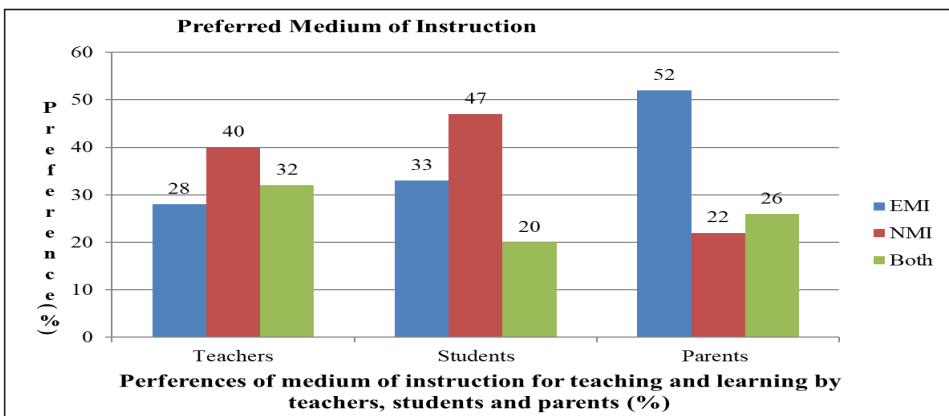


Figure 13. *Preference of medium of instruction for teaching and learning by teachers, students and parents*

Figure 13 provides data on the preferences for the medium of instruction for teaching and learning among three groups: teachers, students, and parents. The three categories of the medium of instruction are EMI (English Medium Instruction), NMI (Nepali Medium Instruction), and Both (a combination of English and Nepali Medium Instruction). The highest percentage preference among teachers is for Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI), with 40% favoring it. A lower percentage, 28%, prefer English Medium Instruction (EMI). 32% of teachers prefer a combination of EMI and NMI, indicating a significant interest in a bilingual approach. The preference for Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI) is the highest among students, with 47% favoring it. 33% of students prefer English Medium Instruction (EMI), which is slightly higher than the preference among teachers. Only 20% of students prefer a combination of EMI and NMI, the lowest percentage among the three groups. Unlike teachers and students, a majority of parents (52%) prefer English Medium Instruction (EMI). Only 22% of parents prefer Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI), which is significantly lower compared to EMI. 26% of parents prefer a combination of EMI and NMI, indicating a moderate interest in a bilingual approach.

The data highlights a diverse set of preferences for the medium of instruction among teachers, students, and parents. Teachers and students show a strong preference for Native Medium Instruction, while parents show a stronger preference for English Medium Instruction. There is also a notable interest in bilingual instruction, particularly among teachers and parents. This diversity in preferences suggests the importance of offering flexible and inclusive educational strategies.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis reveals significant insights into the perceptions of various stakeholders regarding the medium of instruction in government-funded community schools. There is a strong parental preference for English Medium Instruction (EMI), with 70% of parents considering it either important or very important. This preference underscores the perceived advantages of EMI in enhancing students' future career opportunities and ensuring their competitiveness in a globalized world. In this regard, it has been argued that the introduction of EMI in select public schools within Nepal's multilingual social settings exemplifies the growing dominance of English in education. In this connection Phyak (2024) argues that since 1990, neoliberal policies have driven a rise in private schools, which use English as the default medium of instruction, equating it with quality education (Phyak & Sharma, 2020). Attracted by this model, parents increasingly favor private schools, leading to declining enrollment in public schools. In response, public schools have adopted English Medium Instruction (EMI) policies to remain competitive (Phyak, 2021; Sah & Karki, 2020).

Parents primarily believe that EMI prepares students for future academic and career opportunities (42%), reflecting a pragmatic outlook where tangible outcomes like higher education and job prospects are prioritized. In this regards, it has been argued that Nepal's EMI policy in higher education reflects the ideological belief that non-English languages lack relevance for advanced studies, reinforcing the view of English as a global academic language (Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012). On the other hand, teachers show a balanced recognition of both Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI) and EMI. While 70% acknowledge the significance of NMI, 68% also see EMI as important or very important. Supporting this issue, Phyak (2024) claims that teachers' perspectives reveal that Nepali universities prioritize EMI due to the global prevalence of English-language materials. With most reference resources in non-local subjects available only in English, curricula are designed accordingly. This dual recognition highlights the complexity of educational needs where language proficiency and comprehension play crucial roles. In this regard, Choi and Poudel (2024) claims the EMI has become a ubiquitous practice in both public and private schools as the subjects such as science, mathematics and other technical subjects (e.g., accountancy, engineering) have been taught or allowed to be taught in English medium. This shows that language-in-education policies in Nepal are largely negotiated between English and Nepali despite the state-enforced multilingualism policy to create spaces for ethnic/indigenous languages within the school systems. Nepal's school practices have also reflected the unfounded folk assumption that EMI is the best solution to simultaneously develop students' disciplinary knowledge and English proficiency (Poudel & Choi, 2022; Rana & Sah, 2022).

Teachers perceive EMI as a means to improve students' English language proficiency (48%), essential for academic achievement and career prospects, yet they also acknowledge that NMI leads to better understanding of academic concepts (58%), emphasizing the role of language familiarity in enhancing comprehension. In this connection, Khadka (2024) argues that education is shaped and directed by the medium of dissemination. It is the language used as the medium of disseminating educational norms and values to the human capital of the nation. Students' perspectives align with these findings, showing a nuanced understanding of the benefits and challenges of both mediums. A significant portion sees EMI as beneficial for preparing for future opportunities (48%), yet they believe NMI greatly enhances their understanding of academic material (52%). This dual perception suggests that while students recognize the importance of English proficiency, they also value the cognitive benefits of learning in their native language. Recent research (e.g., Galloway et al., 2020; Xie & Curle, 2020) has pointed out perceived advantages of EMI, such as improved content learning, increased self-efficacy and motivation, and access to a broader range of learning materials. However, aligning with other studies (Adhikari & Poudel, 2023; Choi & Adamson, 2021; Hornberger, 2002, as cited in Poudel, & Costley, 2023), this study shows that while EMI may benefit those with strong English proficiency (as believed by some students and teachers), these benefits are not universal (Choi & Poudel, 2024).

Parents and teachers both note that EMI can lead to a lack of confidence among students (32% and 37%, respectively), likely due to language barriers that affect self-esteem and classroom participation. Additionally, parents and students highlight limited access to educational resources in Nepali (33% and 35%, respectively), pointing to disparities in the availability of textbooks and supplementary materials. Supporting this argument Choi and Poudel (2024) further claim that although the dual MOI schooling practices were unclear in terms of the choice of specific medium given the students and teachers' fluid use of Nepali and English, the school's EMI obtained overwhelming support from the parents. In Nepal, research (Gautam, 2021; Poudel & Choi, 2021, 2022, as cited in Poudel, & Costley, 2023.) has highlighted intergenerational changes in language use within communities, showing a growing preference among younger generations for dominant languages like Nepali and English. As a result, there is an unintended shift towards diminishing or even eliminating local ethnic and indigenous languages from everyday use (Choi & Poudel, 2024).

Implementing parallel streams enabled the school to serve two disparate groups of the student population. The students proficient in English from relatively well-off families and those who were transferred from the private schools to this public school were enrolled in the EMI programme. In aligned with this findings Sah and Karki (2023) claim that English-medium education as a form of "elite appropriation," which is reflected in the tendency of parents to prioritize investing in their sons' education over their daughters', leading to higher enrollment of boys in English-medium schools (Hultgren et al., 2024).

Teachers face difficulties in teaching technical terms in Nepali (50%), indicating challenges in conveying specialized vocabulary and concepts in the native language. The preferences for medium of instruction reveal a divergence among stakeholders: while the highest percentage of teachers (40%) and students (47%) prefer NMI, a majority of parents (52%) favor EMI. This discrepancy underscores the need for a balanced approach that addresses both the immediate comprehension and long-term proficiency needs of students. In this regard, it has been argued that EMI is often perceived as a marker of superior education, creating pressures on schools, communities, and individuals (Dearden, 2015; Erling, 2014; Sah & Li, 2017; Phyak, 2016, as cited in Poudel, & Costley, 2023). Many government schools have adopted EMI to compete with private schools, with several reporting increased student enrollment after making the switch (UNESCO, 2023).

The analysis regarding the perceptions and practices of NMI (Nepali Medium Instruction) and EMI (English Medium Instruction) in government-funded community schools reveals several critical insights. In aligned with the findings it has been claimed that implementation challenges persist due to limited resources, insufficient stakeholder involvement, and ideological barriers (Awasthi, 2004; Phyak, 2013; Poudel & Choi, 2021). A key strategic decision by head teachers is the implementation of EMI, driven by the belief that it mirrors the successful practices of private schools, leading to

improved student performance in the Secondary Education Examination (SEE). This strategic shift aims to address dissatisfaction among guardians, particularly concerning poor results in English, Mathematics, and Science, which have traditionally been weak areas for NMI students. In this regard, Choi and Poudel (2024) argue that the emergence of the new form of MOI practice, i.e., either more English or more Nepali medium distinct from the said 'EMI' or 'NMI' in monolingual sense, revealed fluid boundaries between the EMI and NMI. At the classroom level, the teachers and students exercised their agency to reach the goals of learning both content and language, irrespective of the institutional policy. In this regard, Khadka (2024) supports that the role of English in school education in Nepal has been pivotal since the inception of the education system, with English serving as a de facto medium of instruction across all levels of education. Both private and public schools in Nepal increasingly adopt English as a medium of instruction.

The adoption of EMI is seen as providing a competitive advantage by attracting students from private boarding schools with strong academic foundations. This move is anticipated to boost enrollment and improve the school's reputation by aligning it with the perceived superior standards of private institutions. Moreover, stakeholders believe that better academic performance through EMI will enhance the school's reputation and secure better future prospects, both for the institution and its students. Despite the perceived benefits of EMI, there are notable challenges associated with NMI. Shintan and Cozens (2018) argue that implementation of MLE has enhanced students' performance, teachers' skills, parents' engagements, and classroom learning environment. Stakeholders indicate that students in NMI programs are particularly weak in critical subjects, contributing to a negative perception of NMI as less effective. This dissatisfaction poses a threat to maintaining and attracting enrollments, with guardians increasingly seeking better educational outcomes for their children, thereby driving the push towards EMI. In this connection, it has been reported that the National Assessment of Student Achievement (NASA) report highlights disparities in learning outcomes between students whose primary language is Nepali and those whose primary language is another native tongue (Khanal et al., 2020).

Teachers' perspectives find it easier to teach EMI students, who generally understand the material more quickly and require less additional support, making the teaching process more comfortable and effective. Moreover, EMI students are perceived to be more engaged, consistently completing classwork and homework, which further contributes to effective learning. These students also have a stronger background in English, having been in English medium schools since nursery level, which facilitates their learning in EMI environments. In aligned with this findings Khadka (2022) claims that English is being used as the medium of imparting education, evaluation system and the subject matter to be taught and learnt or both for more than one and half centuries with a wide range of coverage from nursery to tertiary education. However, challenges remain. Despite their proficiency in English, EMI students struggle with subjects requiring writing in Nepali, such as Nepali and Social Studies. In this regard, Choi and Poudel (2024) argue that while explaining the contents and facilitating students in pair/group work during the lessons, teachers used Nepali alongside of English in the EMI stream. Conversely, NMI students, who find it easier to comprehend and perform better when subjects are taught in Nepali, struggle with English, Mathematics, and Science due to weak foundations in these subjects. These challenges highlight the need for a balanced approach that supports students' language proficiency and subject comprehension. Research highlights that mother tongue-based education greatly enhances learning outcomes (Benson 2004b; Trudell 2005; SIL 2006; UNESCO 2006; Kosonen 2009; Young 2009, as cited in Khadka, 2018). Teaching literacy in a familiar language is more effective than submersion, as it enables learners to utilize psycholinguistic strategies for reading and writing (Benson, 2005).

Conclusion

This study highlights the diverse perceptions and practices regarding English Medium Instruction (EMI) and Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI) in Nepal's community schools. While there is a strong parental preference for EMI, driven by the belief that it offers better opportunities for academic success and future career prospects, teachers and students exhibit a more nuanced view. Teachers recognize the value of both EMI and NMI, understanding the importance of EMI in enhancing English proficiency while also acknowledging NMI's role in improving comprehension of academic concepts

due to linguistic familiarity. The study also reveals concerns about the potential negative impact of EMI on students' confidence and participation, primarily due to language barriers, and the limited availability of educational resources in Nepali. The study highlights the importance of consistent language practice, effective teaching methodologies, and regular homework checks in enhancing student learning outcomes. Teachers' proficiency and confidence in using English as the medium of instruction are crucial for the success of EMI, while NMI students require improved foundational skills and additional support to overcome their academic challenges.

The findings of this study highlight a complex interplay of stakeholder perceptions and practical challenges surrounding the use of English Medium Instruction (EMI) and Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI) in Nepal's government-funded community schools. Parents overwhelmingly favor EMI due to its perceived advantages in providing future academic and career opportunities, aligning with their aspirations for global competitiveness for their children. However, this preference often contrasts with the views of teachers and students, who recognize the benefits of NMI for improving comprehension of academic concepts while acknowledging the importance of English proficiency. Teachers and students emphasize the cognitive and cultural value of NMI, suggesting that an inclusive approach to language policy in education is essential for addressing both immediate learning needs and long-term skill development.

The adoption of EMI in public schools reflects a strategic response to declining enrollments and increasing competition with private schools. While EMI has proven successful in attracting students and improving institutional reputation, it introduces challenges such as limited educational resources in Nepali and difficulties in teaching technical terms in both mediums. Additionally, EMI students often face barriers in subjects taught in Nepali, while NMI students struggle with English proficiency. These findings underscore the need for a balanced, context-sensitive approach to medium-of-instruction policies that promotes equitable access to quality education, supports multilingual practices, and addresses disparities in resource allocation. Schools must navigate these challenges with thoughtful policies that integrate both EMI and NMI to create a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

The strategic shift towards EMI, particularly among head teachers, reflects a desire to replicate the success of private schools and address dissatisfaction with students' performance in key subjects like English, Mathematics, and Science. However, the preference for NMI among many teachers and students underscores the importance of considering language familiarity and its role in fostering deeper understanding. The findings call for comprehensive teacher training programs, better resource allocation, and flexible educational policies that address the diverse needs of students in both EMI and NMI settings. In conclusion, while EMI is seen as a pathway to better educational and career outcomes, especially by parents, its implementation must be carefully balanced with the needs of students for linguistic accessibility and comprehension. Future policy and teaching practices should aim for a more integrated approach, leveraging the strengths of both EMI and NMI to enhance student learning, cultural identity, and overall educational success in Nepal's multilingual context.

References

- Adhikari, B. R., & Poudel, P. P. (2023). Countering English-prioritised monolingual ideologies in content assessment through translanguaging practices in higher education. *Language and Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2023.2217804>
- Awasthi, L. D. (2004). Exploring monolingual school practices in multilingual Nepal (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). *Danish University of Education, Copenhagen, Denmark*.
- Axinn, W. G., & Pearce, L. D. (2006). *Mixed method data collection strategies*. University Press.
- Bagwasi, M. & Costley, T. (2022). A defiance of language policy: Seamless boundaries between languages in Botswana classrooms. *Journal of the British Academy*, 10 (s4), 125-140. <https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/010s4.125>
- Bandhu, C. M. (2009). Strategies for teaching mother tongues in Nepal. In J. R. Awasthi, G. R. Gautam & B. N. Regmi, (Eds.), *Nepalese linguistics*, 24, pp.. 1-10. Linguistic Society of Nepal. https://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/nepling/pdf/Nep_Ling_24.pdf

- Benson, C. (2005). *Girls, educational equity, and mother tongue-based teaching*. UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000146952>
- Berliner, D. C. (2006). *Our impoverished view of educational research*. *Teachers college record*, 108(6), 949-995.
- Bolton, K., & Kuteeva, M. (2012). English as an academic language at a Swedish university: Parallel language use and the ‘threat’ of English. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 33(5), 429-447.
- Choi, T.-H. (2023). English fever: educational policies in globalised Korea 1981–2018. *History of Education*, 52(4), 670–686. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2020.1858192>
- Choi, T.-H., & Adamson, B. (2021). Toward an effective transition to adopting English as the medium of instruction: A case from Hong Kong. In L. I. Su, H. Cheung, & R. Jessica (Eds.), *Rethinking EMI* (pp. 161–176). Routledge.
- Choi, T.-H., & Leung, C. (2017). Uses of first and foreign languages as learning resources in a foreign language classroom. *Journal of Asia TEFL*, 14(4), 587–604. <https://doi.org/10.18823/asiatefl.2017.14.4.1.587>
- Choi, T. H., & Poudel, P. P. (2024). Enactment of English medium instruction in under-resourced educational contexts: A case of multilingual public secondary schools in Nepal. *System*, 121, 103223.
- Dhakal, K. P. (2013). Multilingual education in Nepal: Expectations and realities. *Journal of NELTA*, 18(1-2), 19-30.
- Fillmore, N. (2020). Mother tongue-based multilingual education in Nepal: Past, present, and emerging trends. *Annual review of comparative and international education 2019*, 231-254.
- Giri, R. A. (2020). Nepali English. *The handbook of asian Englishes*, 317-336.
- Hultgren, A. K., Wingrove, P., Wolfenden, F., Greenfield, M., O’Hagan, L., Upadhaya, A., ... & Tsiga, I. A. (2024). English-medium education in low-and middle-income contexts: Enabler or barrier to gender equality?.
- Karki, S., & Mix, T. L. (2022). Social control in women’s pursuit of secondary education in Kathmandu, Nepal: ‘if I can’t sign my name, I can’t maintain my privacy.’. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 31(4), 413-426.
- Khadka, B. K. (2018). Mother Tongue Education: A Quest of Quality and Access in Education. *Journal of NELTA Surkhet*, 5, 65-74.
- Khadka, B. K. (2022). Development of ELT in NEPAL: An overview. *Journal of NELTA*, 27(1-2), 124-140.
- Khadka, B. K. (2024). English in Education in Nepal: A Comprehensive Overview. *Journal of NELTA Gandaki*, 7(1-2), 43–55. <https://doi.org/10.3126/jong.v7i1-2.70184>
- Khadka, A., Chaudhary, T., Magar, K. J., Chaudhary, A. & Pokhrel, R. (2006). *Literacy in multilingual perspectives: Learning from Tharu, Tamang, Newar and Limbu language communities in Nepal*. World Education/ UNESCO Nepal.
- Khati, A. R. (2011). When and why of mother tongue use in English classrooms. *Journal of NELTA*, 16(1-2), 42-51.
- Koirala, B.N. (2010). Opportunities for multi-lingual education in Nepal. *Journal of Education and Research*, 2, 30-34.
- MOEST (2022). School Education Sector Plan- 2022/23- 2031/32.
- National Statistics Office [NSO]. (2021). *National population and housing census-2021*. <https://censusnepal.cbs.gov.np/Home/Details?tpid=5&tfsid=17>.
- Government of Nepal. (2007). *Interim Constitution of Nepal*. Nepal Law Books Society.
- Government of Nepal. (2015). *Constitution of Nepal*. Nepal Law Books Society.
- Hultgren, A. K., Wingrove, P., Wolfenden, F., Greenfield, M., O’Hagan, L., Upadhaya, A., ... & Tsiga, I. A. (2024). English-medium education in low-and middle-income contexts: Enabler or barrier to gender equality?.
- Phyak, P., Sah, P. K., Ghimire, N. B. & Lama, A. (2022). ‘Teacher agency in creating a translingual space in Nepal’s multilingual English-medium schools.’ *RELC Journal* 53(2), 431–451.

- Phyak, P. (2015). Language ideologies and local languages as the medium-of-instruction policy: A critical ethnography of a multilingual school in Nepal. In *Language Planning for Medium of Instruction in Asia* (pp. 127-143). Routledge.
- Phyak, P. (2020). Neoliberal placemaking and ideological constructions of standardized tests in Nepal's linguistic landscape. In S. A. Mirhosseini & P. De Costa (Eds.), *The sociopolitics of English language testing* (pp. 208–230). Bloomsbury.
- Phyak, P. (2024). English-medium instruction in higher education in Nepal. In *The Routledge Handbook of English-Medium Instruction in Higher Education* (pp. 394-409). Routledge.
- Phyak, P. (2021). Epistemicide, deficit language ideology, and (de) coloniality in language education policy. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 2021 (267–268), 219–233. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2020-0104>
- Phyak, P., & Ojha, L. P. (2019). Language education policy and inequalities of multilingualism in Nepal: Ideologies, histories and updates. In *The Routledge international handbook of language education policy in Asia* (pp. 341-354). Routledge.
- Poudel, P. P., & Choi, T.-H. (2021). Policymakers' agency and the structure: the case of medium of instruction policy in multilingual Nepal. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 22(1–2), 79–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2020.1741235>.
- Poudel, P. P., & Choi, T.-H. (2022). Discourses shaping the language-in-education policy and foreign language education in Nepal: an intersectional perspective. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 23(5), 488–506. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2021.2013063>
- Poudel, P. P., & Costley, T. (2023). *Understanding the impact of languages and language policies on children's learning outcomes in Nepal*. UNICEF Nepal
- Poudel, P. P., Jackson, L., & Choi, T.-H. (2022). Decolonisation of curriculum: The case of language education policy in Nepal. *London Review of Education*, 20(1). <https://doi.org/10.14324/LRE.20.1.13>.
- Rai, I. P. (2013). Issues of language planning in Nepal: Linguistic diversity, conflicts and peace building. In *Contribution to Nepalese studies*, 40(2), pp. 217-238. CNAS
- Rai, N. K. (Ed.) (2006). *Nepalese linguistics*. Linguistic Society of Nepal.
- Sah, P. K. (2021). Reproduction of nationalist and neoliberal ideologies in Nepal's language and literacy policies. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 41(2), 238–252. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2020.1751063>
- Sah, P. K., & Karki, J. (2023). Elite appropriation of English as a medium of instruction policy and epistemic inequalities in Himalayan schools. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 44(1), 20-34.
- Sah, P. K., & Li, G. (2020). Translanguaging or unequal languaging? Unfolding the plurilingual discourse of English medium instruction policy in Nepal's public schools. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 25(6), 2075–2094. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2020.1849011>
- Shintan, P. S. & Cozens, E. (2018). Multilingual Education in Linguistically diverse Nepal: The Role of Mother-tongue based Education for Better Learning Outcomes. *The Asian Conference on Education 2018: Official Conference Proceedings*. The International Academic Forum (iafor).
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2003). Linguistic diversity and biodiversity: The threat from killer languages. In *The politics of English as a world language* (pp. 31-52). Brill.
- UNESCO. (2003). *Language vitality and endangerment*. Document submitted to the International expert meeting on UNESCO program safeguarding of endangered languages: Paris.
- UNESCO. (2011). *Multilingual Education in Nepal: Hearsay and Reality*. UNESCO Kathmandu office.
- UNESCO. (2023). *Understanding the Impact of Languages and Language Policies on Children's Learning Outcomes in Nepal*. UNESCO.
- Yadava, Y. P. (2007, August). Linguistic diversity in Nepal: Perspectives on language policy. In *International Seminar on Constitutionalism and Diversity in Nepal* (pp. 1-18).