



Journal of Bhuwanishankar (JoBS)

A Peer Reviewed Research Journal

ISSN: 2961-1938 (Print), 2961-1946 (Online)

Attitudes of Secondary Level Teachers towards EMI in English Medium Schools of Mahendranagar

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Received: March 15, 2022 Accepted: July 27, 2022

Abstract

English Medium Instruction (EMI) is a growing phenomenon in Nepalese private school education. Learning engagement through EMI in different subjects is believed to be effective for developing learners' communicative competence and comprehension skills. However, The English proficiency of the teachers, and their positive attitude towards English language and the use of judicious classroom language policy are considered crucial for the effective output of EMI without affecting the learners' mother tongue. In this context, this study aimed to present the attitudes of secondary-level teachers towards English Medium of Instructions (EMI). It further attempted to find out the effects and challenges of EMI in the context of English medium schools in Mahendranagar, Kanchanpur. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed to extract the lived experiences of the participants with EMI. The researcher adopted a non-random convenience sampling method to collect information from two secondary-level teachers teaching Mathematics and Science at private English-medium schools in Mahendranagar, Kanchanpur. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the lived experiences of the participants with EMI. The findings of this study revealed that teachers were positive towards EMI although they encountered challenges to its effective implementation. The results imply that EMI helps teachers in their profession, as competent English-Medium instructors are well paid and offered better career opportunities. Similarly, it creates a platform for the learners to develop communicative competence in English and meet their career goals. Despite these plus sides, EMI can pose a threat to our national or local languages if it is used exclusively without appropriate and judicious language policy.

Keywords: English Medium of Instruction (EMI), attitudes, communicative skill, policy

Background

English is a global and international language. It is playing a vital role in case of communication, teaching, and learning. In this regard, English Medium Instruction (EMI) has been a common phenomenon in schools and colleges. It is believed that EMI can help people across the world to share the linguistic code and facilitate the transactions of everyday life. Dearden (2014) says that English has become a globalized

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language connected with the socio-economic development of people in the competitive world. Therefore, EMI has become a much-hyped issue that attracts a wide range of studies. Although English is not an official second language in Nepal, it has constituted a dominant part of education, thereby limiting the spaces even for the national language, as well as ethnic/indigenous and other foreign languages (Giri, 2011; Phyak & Sharma, 2020; Poudel & Choi, 2021; Sah, 2020). In the context of Nepal, English has been prescribed as a compulsory subject at primary, lower secondary and higher secondary levels. It is taught as a compulsory and optional subject at different universities. English is not only taught as a compulsory subject but also adopted as a medium of instruction in most private schools in the country. Phyak (2016) states that private English medium schools, commonly known as boarding schools in Nepal, have mushroomed. English language has colonized the educational system around the world because of which it has been internationalized and many universities around the world have been incorporating it into their academic curriculum. They aim to meet the growing demand for English in the international market and address the need for English proficiency in international students. One of the progressions is the emergence of EMI across the educational sector, which is highly dominating at each educational level. In Nepal, the medium of instruction is shifting from Nepali to English even in public schools. For instance, Sadharan Secondary School (a public school) in Mahendranagar, Nepal has adopted the EMI policy from grade eight to ten. Several studies (Dearden, 2014; Smith et al. 2017; Jiang, Zhang, & May, 2019; Macaro, Tian, & Chu, 2018) reveal that the trend of EMI in teaching academic subjects such as business, psychology, mathematics, and science at the university level is increasing in many countries where English is not the native language. It is used as a medium of instructions for teaching different disciplinary subjects in the academia.

Introduction

English Medium of Instructions (EMI) refers to the use of the English language in teaching various academic subjects in the classroom. Macaro et al. (2018) refer to EMI as the use of English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English (p.37). It is the use of English language as a medium of instruction not only in ELT classes but also in other subjects such as mathematics and science, where English is not the first language of the learners. Liosland (2010) says, "EMI is also often referred to as 'Teaching through English' or 'English-taught programs. All terms are distinguished from 'Content and Language Integrated Learning' in not having language learning as a goal in itself (p. 99)." EMI deals with teaching different academic subjects through English language. It is the medium, not teaching the content or learning language. According to Macaro et al. (2018),"English Medium of Instruction

(EMI) is defined as the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English" (p. 37). Sah (2022) defines EMI as "an instructional model of teaching non-English academic subjects through the medium of English in educational settings where English is not the mother tongue of most students, which aims to facilitate the learning of content knowledge as well as English skills" (p.742). It is highly favored and recommended not only in education but also in workplaces, technology, global advertisement, mass communication, international trade, and tourism. It is taken as the main key to establishing quality education across the world. However, there exists a strong debate among scholars on EMI policy. Sah (2022) argues that EMI is taken as a door for more career opportunities and economic development, whereas Khati (2016) warns that it poses threats to the national languages and this may result in serious problems in a long term. He argues that communities are losing their original linguistic flavor because of the hybrid use of local, Nepali, and English languages. Thus, the controversy among the languages spoken in the country is noticeable. There may also exist some unseen and unexplored effects and challenges of EMI at the practice level. Therefore, the researcher conducted this study to explore the attitudes of secondary level teachers towards EMI, challenges in the classroom practice, and the effects of EMI on the learners' first language.

Literature Review

The growing interest of private and public schools of Nepal in English Medium Instruction (EMI) has drawn the attention of researchers and policymakers. Poudel and Choi (2021) researched 'Policymakers' agency and the structure: The case of the medium of instruction policy in multilingual Nepal' to explore how policymakers in local governments exercised their agency for the medium of instruction and multilingual education. The researchers admitted that mid-level policymakers were pressurized both by top-down and bottom-up processes. The bottom-up force from the parents proved more powerful in this case and they ultimately integrated with the wider discourse of globalization and neoliberalism. This study also showed that the practice of EMI in schools was due to the pressure of parents. Likewise, Khati (2016) researched on English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers to find out their attitudes towards the effects of English in creating career and economic opportunities as well as their perception of the development of local languages. The study revealed that all the participants were highly attached to English to attain career gains and economically sound life. They were also found reluctant to use their local languages as they faced cultural inferiority among the speakers of dominant languages. At the same time, it was found that the communities were losing their original linguistic flavor because of the hybrid use of the local language, Nepali and English languages.

Sah and Li (2017) mentioned in their research paper that the results of EMI-based students were unsatisfactory, as the majority of them failed in subjects like social studies, economics, science, and mathematics because of their low level of English skills. As a result, teachers, students, and parents reverted to the Nepali Medium of instruction for these subjects in grade IX and grade X. Therefore, switching to EMI without enough teacher preparation and infrastructure support in the school resulted in several negative outcomes, including a contested process of developing English proficiency.

Despite the school's claim to offering EMI education, Nepali was the actual language of instruction in the school due to teachers' lack of proficiency in English and the school's inadequate resources and preparedness for a shift to EMI (Sah & Li, 2017, p. 2). Similarly, Ghimire (2019) in his case study of Shree Devasthan Secondary School clarified that the SLC results of 2012 having EMI-based students secured better results than the previous batches which had Nepali Medium of Instructions. Macaro and Han (2019) carried out a research following a mixed method design regarding the competencies that an EMI teacher needs for effective EMI course delivery and professional development. The study revealed that teachers generally had a positive attitude towards EMI certification and professional development programs, although few universities had made either a priority. It further implied that competencies required for effective EMI teaching include not only English proficiency and teaching skills through L2 but also skills of instruction in respective academic disciplines, which are challenging for the design and implementation of EMI professional development leading to teacher certification. Reilly (2019) mentioned that English was viewed positively and as suitable for use within universities. English skills were viewed as a valuable resource. Students and faculty members also displayed positive attitudes towards the use of a multilingual language policy in the universities. However, it also showed that a majority of students and staff were in favor of using both English and Chichewa, a Malawian language. While there were positive attitudes towards a policy that uses both English and Chichewa, the ability of individuals to freely adopt translanguaging in Malawian universities was constrained by an education system that promotes an English-only approach as the most viable option. In such a situation, Reilly proposes an alternative approach to language education policy in Malawi which moves away from English monolingual policy.

Pun and Macaro's (2018) research focused on the functions of the teacher's L1 use in the class and suggested that it was used primarily to communicate meaning when there was a communication breakdown. They studied early EMI teachers and late EMI teachers as they interacted with students by asking high-order questions and low-order questions respectively in a science classroom. Early EMI teachers were found making more use of L2 whereas late EMI teachers were found making more use of L1. Pun and

Macaro (2018) believe that the current Medium of Instruction (MOI) policy in Hong Kong seems to create more flexibility for schools to choose their MOI, aiming to end the segregation between Chinese Medium of Instruction (CMI) and English Medium of Instruction (EMI) streams. Yet a more flexible policy does not ensure that all the problems can be solved. Hence, they suggest that EMI teachers should be trained to increase students' confidence in English skills and develop their awareness of using suitable questioning techniques in promoting higher-order thinking.

The research papers reviewed above are relevant to the present study. They have argued both for and against the EMI policy. Some have favored EMI as a gateway to opportunity, others have viewed EMI as a threat to minority languages. Some researchers have presented EMI as a challenge due to a lack of proficiency, good skills, and competency in English. They have proposed an alternative method of code-mixing and translanguaging policy too. The present study is different from the prior studies as it attempts to explore the attitudes of teachers towards EMI along with the effects and challenges that EMI policy has created in private boarding schools of Mahendranagar, Kanchanpur, Nepal.

Methodology

This study aimed to present the attitudes of secondary-level teachers of private schools toward EMI as a medium of instruction along with its effects and challenges in the context of Mahendranagar, Kanchanpur, Nepal. It attempted to explore the attitudes, opinions, and experiences of the participants. The researcher employed a phenomenological research design that describes a phenomenon and lived experiences of individuals. He used a purposive non-random sampling procedure and selected two secondary-level teachers teaching Mathematics and Science in two private boarding schools in Mahendranagar for data collection. He administered semi-structured interviews for face-to-face interaction and recorded the responses of participants by using an audio recording device as well as field notes during the interview. In addition, the researcher reviewed relevant secondary sources such as Poudel & Choi (2021), Phyak (2013), Sah (2022), and Khati (2016). The researcher went through the data several times to generate codes and shape them into meaningful and manageable chunks for thematic analysis after collecting the qualitative data.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the qualitative data analysis of the phenomenon from the reviewed papers and primary data obtained from the semi-structured interviews. Here, the researcher has drawn the themes of the study based on the information collected through semi-structured interview with two secondary-level teachers teaching at two private schools in Mahendranagar. The relevant insights from the reviewed papers have also been included.

Attitudes of Teachers towards EMI

The teachers in private EMI schools were found positive towards EMI as they preferred English to Nepali and put efforts into using EMI. In the interview, they revealed that the school management always expected them to conduct the classes in English and create English speaking environment in the school premises. The two respondents, a science teacher (T1) and a math teacher (T2) at the secondary level, responded as follows:

T1: I am in favor of EMI. English medium schools are making progress in the field of education. I have heard that the language policy of our government has been concentrated on EMI in Education for quality education and a good base of students in English as English is an international language. For example, Shadharan Secondary School, one of the government schools in Mahendranagar, has already implemented the EMI policy in grades Eight, Nine, and Ten.

T2: As a matter of fact, of course English is very important because it is an international language. It is useful almost everywhere and every area. Therefore, EMI should be followed continuously in Nepalese schools.

The teachers admitted in the interview that they were required to use EMI as they were the teachers of private schools where the EMI policy was implemented. Moreover, EMI was also a demand of the student's guardians. Their views imply that EMI is better than other mediums of instruction to be used in their regular classes in school.

EMI as a language policy in private schools

The teachers of private schools are required to teach different subjects using EMI except Nepali. Both the teachers in the interview agreed that they were bound to use English in all subjects except Nepali. In response to the to English-only policy, one of the participants remarked, "Of course, yes, it is mandatory to follow EMI in private boarding schools. The school management always expects us to conduct the class in English and make English speaking environment in the school premises".

In the conversation, one of the teachers said that EMI was considered a key factor for academic and institutional success. Therefore, school management of boarding schools seems to be in favor of promoting and implementing EMI at all levels of the school. However, following EMI in junior classes is quite challenging because English is not the first language for the students, due to which they have relatively poor proficiency in English. In such a situation, the teachers switch to the Nepali language or the learner's mother tongue to clarify the content. In this regard, one of the participants said, "Especially, I use English language, but sometimes for the needs of students, when there appear complications, and difficult scientific terminologies, students do not understand what I mean. Then, I use Nepali as well".

Better results of EMI schools in SEE

EMI is considered one of the key factors for the better performance of private schools than public schools in SEE. One of the participants of the interview revealed that the students from Janajyoti Secondary School (an English medium school in Kanchanpur) secured a 100% result in SEE -2077 BS. Previously, the school did not have a satisfactory results when the medium of instruction was Nepali.

In the interview, participants also indicated that good effort of students and teachers, effective teaching and learning, good management of schools, and roles of parents were also crucial besides EMI.

T1: Yes, it is found that private schools have better results in SEE those that of public schools. But, I think EMI alone is not enough for better results. We need the good effort of students and teachers, effective teaching, effective learning, good management of schools, and the roles of parents.

T2: If we talk about results, yes, private schools have better results than that of public schools. EMI is also a part of the successful result, but is not the one only the reason. Other facilities that impact teaching and learning and good school management also play a role.

The remarks of the participants suggest that switching to EMI without enough teacher preparation and infrastructural support results in several negative outcomes. It means only adopting EMI does not guarantee better results in SEE, although it is a key factor. Other factors, for instance, trained, skilled, and qualified teachers, effective classroom environment, and required infrastructure should also be managed in schools.

Switching to learners' first language in EMI classes

This study revealed that there was the use the Nepali language even in EMI classes, according to situations. If the learners did not understand the content clearly, the teachers might choose an alternative medium of instruction. It could be done to facilitate the weaker students. The participants in the interview stated:

T1: First, I try to use very simple words and use more and more related simple terminologies. If they do not understand again, then, I use Nepali language for teaching.

T2: Well, I explain the same thing repeatedly in English to make the students understand. I repeat lectures almost in English, but in the case of difficult terminologies, I switch the codes to Nepali language and follow English back.

In the above responses, both the math teacher and the science teacher agreed that they

used Nepali language occasionally for instructions instead of English because they found difficulties and misunderstandings of students regarding specific terminologies.

EMI for career opportunities in Nepal and abroad

The participants in the study stated that EMI played a pivotal role in teachers' professional development. They stressed that sound proficiency in English could lead to their upward mobility through well-paid jobs and opportunities both in Nepal and abroad. In this regard, both teachers in the conversation were found positive towards the English medium of instruction. They mentioned benefits of EMI based on their experiences in personal, pedagogical and professional fields. They indicated that EMI helped them in enhancing competence in English language.

T1: As English is an international language, EMI is good for teachers as it is good for their professional development and also it is good for students for their future careers and opportunities. They get good opportunities because of their good spoken English. It also supports them for further study and better careers in foreign countries.

T2: As a matter of fact, let's say, if a mathematics teacher can speak good English, He can easily find a teaching job in Nepal. He can be a math teacher in India, Bangladesh, and any other country.

From the above responses of the teachers, it can be inferred that they are well aware of the importance of the EMI in their own pedagogical and professional practices. They favor EMI because they believe that the English language opens the door to better careers and opportunities in our country and abroad.

Currently, there is a trend that learners of higher education in Nepal are striving to get study visas and employment, especially in Australia and European countries, because these countries have a high-value currency in the world. Regarding this context, one of the teachers' responded:

T2: Let me say, if a math teacher has good spoken English, s/he not only gets a job in Nepal but also grabs good opportunities in the teaching profession in India, Hong Kong, Bangladesh, and overseas.

The above responses indicate that EMI is good for those who want to go abroad for study and employment opportunities. It implies that English is valued as a prerequisite to a higher international degree and a key to upward mobility. The sound knowledge of English prepares even mathematics teachers to grab good opportunities in career development and teaching profession. Similarly, EMI is considered important not only for teachers but also for the students who wish to possess higher education and

employment in foreign countries like America, Bangladesh, India, Australia and Hong Kong.

Challenges of using EMI in the classroom

The study revealed some challenges in adopting EMI in the classrooms such as low proficiency of students and teachers in English. As English is not the students' or teachers' first language, there is a challenge of poor language skills and proficiency. Werther et al. (2014) state that one of the major challenges of EMI is the low proficiency of lecturers in using the English language. It means the English language proficiency of teachers and students is critical for EMI policy. It means proficiency of teachers and learners in English language is very important for EMI policy. In the absence of English language proficiency, EMI may not be an effective medium of instruction.

From the analysis of the teachers' responses, it can be inferred that private-school teachers have been facing various challenges in using EMI because there is low competence and exposure of students to the English language. The mother tongue interference in the classroom also affects teaching-learning activities.

The participants in the interview revealed that the English-only policy in the classroom controls the unnecessary noise of students. It increases interaction skills and questioning abilities in English. Similarly, teaching in English forms the habits of students in learning lessons, and gradually they start catching the idea of the lesson taught in the classroom. However, in classroom engagement, some students remain passive when they do not understand the lessons due to some unfamiliar English words during the class. The participants in the interview further revealed that a few weak secondary-level weak students' classroom engagements seemed less interactive due to a lack of their competence in the English language.

T1: Some students are from different language backgrounds. Therefore, they may have difficulties understanding the instructions.

T2: There is an orthodoxy that mathematics itself is a difficult subject and teaching mathematics in English may badly affect the course because sometimes the students do not even understand the questions.

From the above responses, it can be inferred that there are both positive and negative effects of EMI. On the one hand, English medium instruction enhances the good environment of the classroom with students' discipline and interactive participation. On the other hand, their different linguistic backgrounds may influence their studies and learning due to their differential L1 influence.

Effects of EMI

Studies have unveiled both positive and negative consequences of EMI. Sah (2022) admits that EMI opens the doors to more career opportunities and economic development. He mentions that the English language has great importance in the present world. No doubt, it will remain a vital linguistic tool for many purposes, such as business, academics, and tourism. Therefore, most of the students join private schools to get an education through the English medium. Contrarily, Khati (2016) argues that EMI poses threats to the national languages and this may result in serious problems in a long term. He states that communities are losing their original linguistic flavor because of the hybrid use of local, Nepali, and English languages.

In the interview, the participants mentioned both consequences of EMI policy in private schools.

T1: There are positive and negative effects. The positive effect is that the English-only rule in the classroom forms a good habit of practising English from early classes. Good competence in English will be helpful to understand the content in higher classes. They get good opportunities later. But, they may have less exposure to express the content in standard manner their own language too.

T2: EMI can improve interactional skills, questioning abilities and the disciplined atmosphere of the classroom. However, all students may not understand the content clearly. Another problem is too much focus on English, not on the first language, makes the students feel that English is everything to them.

The above-mentioned views of participants imply that there should be systematic planning for language policy. Only blind devotion to the English language can be counter-productive. Alternatively, English can be promoted as an additional language. Our local languages, cultures, and identities need to be preserved by adopting an appropriate medium of instruction.

Conclusion and implication

The study concludes that EMI is a growing phenomenon in Nepalese private school education. It is taken as a platform for the learners to develop communicative competence in English if trained, competent, and qualified teachers guide them through EMI. Proficient graduates in English are believed to meet their goals in Nepal, and abroad in further study and employment. Similarly, EMI practitioners claim that EMI also supports teachers for their professional development, career opportunities, and upward mobility. If they are competent, they will be well paid and offered better opportunities in academia, and other organizations. In this regard, the teachers of private schools in Mahendranagar, Kanchanpur show positive attitude towards EMI, as they believe that EMI is supportive for better learning output, and future performance and career

opportunities of both students and teachers. Despite the good effects of EMI, they also acknowledge that the students remain passive when they do not understand the lessons due to the availability of the content in English and their weak English comprehension skills in English. Moreover, an equally important and serious issue to be considered by the language policymakers is that EMI can pose threats to our national or local languages if it is used exclusively without an appropriate and judicious language policy, which is crucial for the effective EMI output without having detrimental effects on learners' mother tongue. Considering this issue, this study offers insights to language policymakers into adopt a judicious policy regarding English language teaching being critical about the negative consequences of EMI. Moreover, school administrators and teachers as well as the supporters of EMI, will gain insights into the downsides of English-only policy from this paper as it awares them of the linguistic consequences of uncritical implementation of EMI.

Limitation of the study and recommendation for further research

This research study was limited to attitudes of secondary level teachers towards EMI in the context of English medium schools in Mahendranagar, Kanchanpur, Nepal. For the purpose of the study, the interview was the only tool used to collect primary data from two participants. Further research can be conducted by selecting larger samples and adopting multiple tools so that findings can be implicated in the wider context. Similarly, future researchers can explore the issues related to language policy, multilingual education, English language dominance and so on using other qualitative, quantitative or mixed approaches and multiple tools for data triangulation.

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