



## Language in Education Policy at the Local Level: Ideologies and Practices

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### Abstract

Language in education policy is a contested issue in multilingual nations like Nepal. Policy makers in these contexts face the dual challenge of incorporating the demands of ethnic and linguistic identity through multilingual education, with the desire for global language learning through English Medium Instruction (EMI). Against this backdrop, this paper aims to identify the language ideologies of local level authorities and teachers in the process of local level policy formation in Nepal to understand how these actors navigate the inherent tensions between multilingual education (MLE) and EMI policy demands. Using a phenomenological research design, I draw on the first-hand experience of local-level officers and teachers through interviews and FGDs. Local level authorities lack knowledge of the need for medium of instruction policies and have not yet approved medium of instruction policies for their region. However, during the interviews and discussions, local authorities appear to be guided by a neoliberal ideology that supports standard and global language above local indigenous and minoritized languages for education. However, school teachers are against the imposition of a language policy that prioritizes a single language over others. Teachers wish to be given agency to decide on the language to be used in the classroom based on the learning needs of their students. The study therefore offers implications for TESOL professionals and policy makers on the need for policies that balance the global role of English with support for linguistic diversity and teacher agency.

**Keywords:** Medium of instruction, multilingual education, teachers' language ideologies, linguistic ecology

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## Introduction

Language in education policy is widely recognized as a contested issue in multilingual and super-diverse contexts, where decisions about the medium of instruction are shaped not only by pedagogical concerns but also by political, ideological, and historical forces (Mohanty, 2006; Liddicoat, 2007; Saud, 2025; Tollefson & Tsui, 2004; Vertovec, 2019). In Nepal, language policy has passed through multiple ideological phases. During the Rana regime (1846–1950), English education was restricted to elites as a strategy to maintain power and social hierarchy (Sharma, 2011; Weinberg, 2013). After 1950, the state adopted a “one nation—one language” ideology, institutionalized through the Nepal National Education Planning Commission, which promoted Nepali as the sole medium of instruction to achieve national unity and linguistic assimilation (NNEPC, 1956; Weinberg, 2013). This monolingual orientation marginalized indigenous languages while privileging Nepali and foreign languages. A significant shift occurred after the restoration of democracy, when the 1991 Constitution recognized Nepal as a multilingual and multicultural nation and introduced mother tongue–based multilingual education (MTB-MLE), particularly for early grades, as a means of valuing learners’ linguistic resources and strengthening educational foundations (Phyak & Ojha, 2019).

In the post-2006 period, language in education policy has become further complicated by neoliberal ideologies and the global expansion of English as a lingua franca. English medium instruction (EMI) has increasingly been perceived as linguistic capital associated with quality education, social mobility, and participation in the global market, despite limited research-based evidence supporting its effectiveness in multilingual contexts (Saud, 2024; Sah & Li, 2017; Phyak, 2016). Policy ambiguity intensified after the amendment of the Education Act in 2006, which allowed Nepali, English, or both as media of instruction (Phyak & Ojha, 2019). The promulgation of the 2015 Constitution and the introduction of federalism further decentralized authority over language, culture, and education, enabling provincial and local governments to formulate their own language policies (Phyak, 2011; Sapkota, 2012). As a result, local practices range from the promotion of indigenous languages through MTB-MLE initiatives to the expansion of English-medium schooling, reflecting competing ideologies of identity, development, and power (Phyak & Ojha, 2019; Fillmore, 2019). In this context, this study aims to explore the plans and procedures adopted by local governments for language in education policy, to examine the language ideologies of local authorities and schoolteachers, and to understand how linguistic diversity is being addressed in classroom practices within Nepal’s federal system.

## Literature Review

Nepal is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, reflecting a mosaic of cultural, geographical, religious, and linguistic plurality. According to the National Population and Housing Census 2021 conducted by the National Statistics Office (NSO), Nepal is home to 124 mother tongues spoken across its population, reaffirming its complex linguistic ecology under the Federal Democratic Republic system. Nepali remains the largest mother tongue, spoken by 44.86% of the population, followed by Maithili (11.05%), Bhojpuri (6.24%), Tharu (5.88%), and Tamang (4.88%) as the next most spoken languages. Other languages such as Bajjika, Avadhi, Nepalbhasha (Newari), Magar Dhut, Doteli, Urdu, and Yakthung/Limbu also contribute significantly to Nepal's linguistic landscape. The census also recorded a wide range of smaller languages, many spoken by very small populations, highlighting both linguistic diversity and vulnerability among lesser-used tongues. Additionally, a variety of second languages are used across the country, with Nepali functioning as a dominant additional language for nearly 46.2% of the population, followed by other languages such as Maithili, Hindi, Bhojpuri, and English (NSO National Report, 2021).

At the regional level, linguistic diversity remains pronounced. For example, Sudurpaschim Province, located in the Far Western part of Nepal and bordered by Lumbini Province, Karnali Province, China, and India, illustrates intra-provincial multilingualism with approximately 83 languages spoken in the province alone, including languages such as Doteli, Nepali, Tharu, Baitadeli, Achhami, Magar, Hindi, Tamang, Newar, and Gurung (Yadava, 2017). Such heterogeneity within regional contexts indicates that linguistic diversity is not solely a national phenomenon but is intensely localized and contextually distributed. The presence of major mother tongues alongside numerous minor languages demonstrates how population size and geographical dispersal influence language vitality and societal representation.

Language policy and planning have evolved significantly over the decades, transitioning from early frameworks guided by modernization and national development priorities toward more critical perspectives that emphasize issues of equality, justice, and linguistic rights (Ricento, 2000). Education policy is a formal discourse addressing both formal and nonformal educational systems, including operational mechanisms and institutional structures that govern schooling. In its broadest sense, language policy refers to deliberate actions aimed at influencing the structure, function, and acquisition of languages or language varieties in society. Within education systems, language in education policy refers specifically to legislation, guidelines, and institutional practices determining the language of instruction and literacy language(s) used in basic education. This includes decisions about the medium of instruction (MoI), the

role of learners' first languages (L1), and the responsibilities of implementing agencies (Tollefson, 2008; Dutcher, 2003).

Approaches to language policy can be broadly categorized into top-down and bottom-up perspectives. The former centers on government decisions that prescribe language use in official domains such as schools, media, and public administration without necessarily reflecting the complexity of linguistic diversity in everyday life (Schiffman, 1996; Phyak, 2017). In contrast, bottom-up perspectives view language policies as emergent from actual language practices, beliefs, and communicative behaviors of individuals, communities, and institutions. Both perspectives underscore the importance of considering sociopolitical and socioeconomic contexts in policy planning and implementation, as these conditions influence language choices in homes, schools, and communities.

Language ideology plays a central role in shaping language policies. Blommaert (2006) argues that language policies are invariably rooted in linguistic ideologies—systematic beliefs about what forms of language are desirable or ideal within society. Schiffman (1996, 2006) explains that language policy is socially constructed and shaped by the linguistic culture, a repository of collective beliefs, values, and attitudes toward languages. Farr and Song (2011) further emphasize that language ideology and policy are inseparable, meaning that underlying beliefs about languages inevitably shape policy outcomes, even if ideology does not determine policy directly (Sonntag, 2007). Thus, both explicit policies and implicit sociolinguistic norms impact educational opportunities and language use.

Within education systems, the choice of MoI significantly influences student learning, identity formation, and social inclusion. Studies consistently show that children educated in a language unfamiliar to them—especially when it is a national or foreign language—experience disadvantages in comprehension, participation, and academic success (Ball, 2011). This is particularly pertinent in Nepal, where languages such as Nepali and English have historically been privileged. Early language policy in Nepal, shaped by the Rana regime, privileged English education for elites and associated Western education with social status, while later federal policies reinforced Nepali as a means of national cohesion. This legacy continues to influence contemporary educational practices and parental expectations.

The theoretical foundation of the present study draws on two influential frameworks: Ricento and Hornberger's (1996) Language Planning and Policy (LPP) "onion" model and Spolsky's (2011) theory of language policy. Ricento and Hornberger conceptualize language policy as operating across national, institutional, and interpersonal levels, emphasizing interaction between top-down directives and bottom-up practices. Their onion metaphor illustrates how each level permeates and

influences the others, often producing ambiguity and conflict in policy implementation. Teachers are highlighted as key policy actors who interpret and enact policy in classrooms, effectively shaping policy in practice (García & Menken, 2010).

Spolsky's (2011) framework complements this model by defining language policy through three interrelated components: ideology (beliefs about language), practice (actual language use), and management (deliberate efforts to influence language behavior). Language policy is understood as a social phenomenon shaped by both internal and external factors. Beliefs guide language choices, practices reflect real-life language use, and management involves interventions such as laws, regulations, and institutional directives (Spolsky, 2004, 2011). Together, these components provide a comprehensive lens for examining how language policies are formed, interpreted, and implemented.

Empirical studies in Nepal and beyond further illuminate the complexity of language in education policy. Awasthi's (2004) ethnographic study demonstrates that Nepali-only and English-only medium-of-instruction policies create linguistic hierarchies, marginalize non-Nepali-speaking children, and negatively affect their academic achievement, identity, and well-being. Burton's (2013) study in the Philippines shows that effective mother tongue-based multilingual education requires interaction between national policy and local interpretation, rather than rigid top-down enforcement. Research in Nepal's Far Western region reveals a growing shift toward English medium instruction driven by competition with private schools and parental pressure (Ojha, 2018; Paudel, 2020; Saud, 2020). These studies highlight the widespread belief that English equals quality education, despite evidence that EMI often hampers comprehension and cognitive development. Teachers frequently rely on translation and translanguaging, revealing a mismatch between policy ideals and classroom realities.

Fillmore's (2019) study of MTB-MLE initiatives in Kavre and Panchthar districts shows that local governments can adopt multilingual policies when supported by evidence-based guidance and institutional collaboration. However, such initiatives remain limited and largely experimental. In nutshell, the reviewed literature underscores that language-in-education policy in Nepal is shaped by historical legacies, ideological contestations, and evolving federal structures. While significant research exists on medium-of-instruction debates, there remains a clear gap in studies focusing on local governments as policy actors. This study addresses that gap by examining the ideologies, plans, and practices of local authorities within Nepal's federal context, informed by established theoretical frameworks and grounded in empirical realities.

## Methods and Procedures

I adopted a qualitative phenomenological research design to examine the lived experiences and language ideologies of key stakeholders involved in language in education policy. This study was guided by the interpretive research paradigm, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and that knowledge emerges from multiple perspectives of both the researcher and the researched. In line with this assumption, qualitative research recognizes the existence of multiple realities rather than a single objective truth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I purposively selected three local government units in Kailali District, namely Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City, Tikapur Municipality, and Kailari Rural Municipality, to represent urban, semi urban, and rural contexts with varying degrees of linguistic diversity and geographic location. The selection of these sites was based on the inclusion of different types of local governments, linguistic composition, and their location across the district. Dhangadhi Sub Metropolitan City represents a linguistically diverse urban context, Kailari Rural Municipality reflects a linguistically homogeneous rural setting, and Tikapur Municipality represents a semi urban and linguistically heterogeneous context, thereby enabling a comparative understanding of language ideologies across settings (Yadava, 2017; Bhasha Aayog, 2075). In addition, I selected one school from each local government to explore school level practices related to language use and medium of instruction. I engaged mayors or, where necessary, deputy mayors as key informants to understand policy level perspectives, and I involved teachers to gain insights into everyday classroom realities and practices.

I generated rich and in-depth data through prolonged engagement using interviews and focus group discussions. I conducted interviews with representatives of local governments to explore their experiences, priorities, and plans regarding language in education policy, while I facilitated focus group discussions with teachers to elicit shared and contrasting views on language practices, rationales, and challenges within schools. I audio recorded all interactions and maintained detailed field notes to capture contextual information. I transcribed the data verbatim and systematically coded and categorized them by identifying recurring patterns and meaningful relationships. I employed thematic network analysis to move from basic codes to organizing and global themes and interpreted these themes critically using participants' exact words in order to preserve authenticity and do justice to the voices of key informants (Cohen et al., 2011). To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, I used triangulation, member checking, peer review, and thick description as recommended in qualitative research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I maintained ethical standards throughout the research process by informing participants about the purpose, relevance, and implications of the study, ensuring voluntary participation, and protecting confidentiality in accordance

with ethical guidelines for social science research (Cohen et al., 2011). I presented the findings thematically and drew conclusions and practical recommendations grounded in the empirical evidence generated through the study.

## **Results and Discussion**

I started preliminary preparation after I got information about the acceptance of my proposed study. I further strengthened review of relevant literature and prepared broad interview and Focus Group Discussion guideline. Then, I prepared request letter for field visit from my working institution getting oral consent from the Ministry of Social development authority. Since it was the time of Corona Pandemic second wave, the field visit was not as easy as I expected it to be. The schools were about to postpone face to face teaching learning activities. Getting access to mayors and deputy mayor was quite challenging due their engagement pandemic management endeavors. Keeping this aside for few weeks, I shifted to schools. At first, I contacted three schools that I have selected purposively and finalized the schedule for Focus Group Discussion. I started the field visit from the first week of Chaitra and completed the first-round visit before lockdown. I could not perform face to face interview with all mayors of selected municipality. However, I utilized telephonic interview tool instead to draw required ideas on language in education policy, plans and strategies.

Based on the ideas drawn from different sources, I have transcribed, coded, and categorized key information. The categorized themes are given meaning by interpretation and discussion along with relevant theories and previous.

### **Language in Education Policy: Local Governments' Perspective**

After the dawn of federal system of government, the discourse of restructuring, names and identities of the states became hot issues in the political discourse. The three layers of government were formed with the delegation of several kinds of rights and responsibilities. The newly promulgated constitution also envisions multilingual, multicultural, multi- religious and multiethnic policies in all spheres including education. Among the key concern agendas of local government visualized by the new constitution, language and education are pivotal areas. The political transformation has brought about some crucial changes in the existing language in education policies by creating broader space for the promotion of multilingual environment. This is further supported by the resolution and decision made by the newly elected Mayors in the first day of office. Phyak and Ojha (2019) reported that the Mayors of Kathmandu, Kirtipur and Ghorahi have decided to legitimate Nepal Bhasha and Tharu as the language of official use. On the contrary, the representative of Suryabinayak Municipality decided

to implement English medium of instruction in all community schools up to grade three. These declarations and decisions were immediate and unplanned. The subsequent section reflects the preparedness and progress of local levels in the issue of language in education policy.

## **Language in Education Policy: The Least Prioritized Issue**

The local governments have not been able to focus on the issue of education during their four years of tenure. The local bodies have spent first two years in the process of being familiar with new system and understanding roles and responsibilities. It took several months for them to build the foundation in terms of physical infrastructure (Municipality office, ward office), human resource management and other micro management. They could not manage the key human resource to handle the education department for long. When the local bodies were having it smooth motion, the pandemic shifted their priority to community health and its development. In that situation, going in depth of different issue of education was difficult. Within the education, they gave major concern to school building, and teacher management. One of the mayors remarked:

Our progress in education sectors is remarkable. However, we vision could reach to the making medium of instruction policy, the software part of education. In our context development is realized only when there is physical output. The language in education policy formation requires a team expert and deep study. We will seek the experts from the federal government and work on it very soon. (Interview Vignette: Head, Local Level C).

The language in education policy is created, interpreted and appropriated in different layers. Based on Johnson (2013) the policies are shaped by intersexual and interdiscursive links to past and present policy texts. After the creation, it is put to motion and made open to interpretations and finally taken for implementation. The progressions go through different levels of governmental language policy (federal level/creation, state level/interpretation, local level/appropriation); or which can transpire throughout all levels (Johnson & Johnson, 2014) in top down approach of policy process. In this vein, local governments are in the position to implement language in education policy created at Federal level. In new political system of Nepal, the local governments are policy arbiters and the school system as the implementers. Zhao (2011) argues the people with power, people with expertise, people with influence and people with interest have role key actors in the policy formation process. The grassroots people who neither have power nor have capacity to influence the decision making process are considered as the people with interest (Phyak, 2013). In the current process of language in education policy formation process in the local level, it seems

that the people with interest, who should be the active agent of the process, will be ignored that according to Zhao (2011) may result the failure of macro policies when they are put to practice. Unlike the top- down process, bottom up approach put the teachers and school system at the center and gives active agency to them in the process of policy formation.

## **Language as the Medium or Subject**

Languages at school are used in different two ways: one as the subject and the other as the medium. English and Nepali are taught as the subject from grade one. Additionally, Primary Education Curriculum 2005 has made the provision of the local curriculum. Schools can develop and implement local contents of 20 percentage weight age in social studies, creative and expressive arts and physical education. On the hand, learners' mother tongue, Nepali and English languages are used as the medium. However, local authorities do not seem to identify if the schools of their municipality is using language as the medium or as the subject. It is evident from their perspectives I asked them about the language in education policy:

We have prepared the policy and decided to teach local curriculum. Local culture, tradition is taught as the separate subject in many schools (Interview Vignette: Head, Local Level A).

The use of language as the medium is related to leaning and comprehension of the subject while the language as subject is related to the content. The information drawn from interview also revealed that they are unaware about the policy provisions and language sequencing framework as suggested by Ministry of Education (2015). The framework suggests that mother learner's mother tongue is used as the medium from ECD to grade three and can continued as the subject up to secondary level. Similarly, Nepali language can be used as the medium of instruction the students whose mother tongue is Nepali, in other case it is used as the subject up to grade three. In the secondary level, Nepali can be used as both medium and subject. The framework further suggests that English language is used as compulsory subject up to grade six; as medium of instruction for mathematics and science from grade six to eight; and as medium instruction all subjects except the language subjects in secondary level. This trilingual policy offers learners (whose language is other than Nepali) an opportunity learns and uses three languages (his/her mother tongue, Nepali and English) in the course of education (Seel et al., 2015).

## **Global or Local: An Ideological Dilemma**

Being multilingual country in one hand is strength; however, it gives rise to challenges in the management of Languages. The presence of multiple languages in

the classroom has guided the policies into two major directions: Global and Local. Ministry of Education (2016) claims that ‘many educationists ‘many educationists and some political groups have advocated that education should be provided to children in their mother tongues, and MoE has a policy of supporting mother tongue-based multilingual education up to grade 3’ (p.29). On the other hand, the popular discourse of globalization, internationalization and market economy (Phyak, 2016) has encouraged the public-school shift to English medium. The ideological dilemma between global or local is emergent among the local government heads. For example, Mayor B says:

If home language is used as the medium, it is very supportive for the learner. I do agree with idea of teaching in local language in first few years then shifting to Nepali and English (Interview Vignette: Head, Local Level B).

The schools are demanding for English from the nursery. Therefore, this year, the village Assembly has approved the decision to launch an EM school in each ward. For this, 0.2 million budgets have been allocated. Based on the evaluation of these model pilot schools, the decision for further expansion will be made. We have supported by providing textbook to EM schools this year as incentive (Interview Vignette: Head, Local Level B).

In one hand, the local representatives give strong argument in favor of local language for cultural identities of ethnic minority children. They advocate for the use of home language in acquiring equitable and quality education. On other hand, they could not be untouched by neoliberal ideology of giving importance to English which is evident in the opinion of Mayor B:

Teaching them Tharu might lag them behind. We are teaching local curriculum in lower levels. That is enough to make them aware about the original culture and rituals. Describing in the home language is ok but spending two to three years in local language medium will not convince the guardians. I am not planning to implement this system. It is difficult to manage. (Interview Vignette: Mayor A).

The ideological dilemma between the local and global language in education policy is evident in the excerpts. Such policy provisions created at the macro/ top level ignoring the active engagement of teachers working at the grassroots hardly meets the needs and requirements of the children. Both mayors fragile support for local language as the medium instruction seems to reflect the political diplomacy of not hurting anyone. This also gives rise to the question ideological double standard.

### **Language in Education Policy: Schools' Perspective**

School system that includes School Management Committee (SMC), Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Teachers and students are in the center of policy formation process. Their experiences, ideas, opinions and argument can certainly be the guidelines

for local level policy on education formation and implementation. Considering this acclaimed fact, I visited three schools situated in three different local levels of Kailali District. According to School Sector Development Plan (2016- 2023), classification of school in terms of language of catch communities, two schools belong to the third type where the learners are from diverse linguistic backgrounds with no common mother tongue. And one school is identical to the second type where the learners homogeneously (90%) speak a language other than Nepali as their mother tongue on the entry of ECED or grade one. The local level government has not prescribed any specified language in education policy to be implemented. However, two schools using Nepali as the official medium of instruction to deliver the curriculum. Unlike this, one school has implemented English medium instruction since last 6 years. The subsequent section presents the discussion on the teachers' rich on the ground experiences on the use of language, their language ideology and practices.

### **Language in Education Policy: Rigid or Flexible?**

Language policy in school as recommended by the official policy documents is to be mother tongue (grade1-3), Nepali and English in the step incremental manner (The Constitution of Nepal, 2015; School Sector Development Plan, 2016). The macro level policy in education clearly speaks on trilingual or multilingual language in school education. However, the teachers at the implementation have differing voices and ideologies. Upon being asked about the suitable language to be used for quality learning, a teacher argued that:

We do not have very strict policy on the use of English inside the classroom. In the basic level, the teachers use the learners' mother tongue and Nepali. Since teachers are also from non-Nepali speaking group. Even Nepali speaking teachers can use Tharu language. We focus on content with the flexible use of languages. The use of Nepali language and English is almost equal in the secondary level. While the use of Tharu, Nepali is more frequent than English in basic level (FGD Vignette: Head teacher School C)

It indicates that the teachers do not have strong ideology for using English unlike the private schools' ONLY English policy. The use of learners' home language is shaped by comprehension and concept while the argument for the use of Nepali and English guided by the assumption that the standard and language of prestige help them to grab the better opportunities in national and international market place. Analogous to this, teachers state:

I have the opinion that the students have to be taught in national language... After completing the school education, they may go to different part of the country where they need the national language to communicate (Teacher FGD: School A).

In resonance to this, another teacher argues:

I prefer the use of Nepali and English both in case of teaching science. English improvement is essential with reason that they will have mobility to foreign countries. And the medium of instruction at college level (science) and medium of final examination both are in English. We have been wasting time in translating into Nepali; instead, we can initiate English medium of instruction in all levels. (Teacher FGD: School B).

The teachers reveal that Nepali - the language of wider communication and English- language of prestige and status marker better serves the students in their future career. Such language ideology according to Sah and Karki (2020) undermines the potential of students' mother tongues and perceive them as the language of communication only at home. At the same time, it unpacks the neoliberal ideology of globalized world where language is taken as commodity to be cashed in for economic benefit (Fillmore & Paudel, forthcoming). In the issue of rigidity and flexibility in the use of languages for learning, there was common consensus among the teachers that monolingual policy valorizing particular language and stigmatizing another language does not create equity and justice in learning. One fit all kind of policy created by the macro level arbiters cannot address the demands of all classroom. The appropriate language in education policy keeps the learning at the center maintaining the justifiable balance in the use of mother tongue, Nepali and English in different contexts and levels.

### **Medium of Instruction: For Learning or Advertising?**

Another important discourse is evident among the teachers that should medium keep the learning at the center or use it the marketing policy to boost up student enrolment. As Ojha (2018) claims that community schools have witnessed a sharp decline in the number of students in the recent years that motivated them to adopt EMI to attract and retain students. This is further supported by the official documents of Ministry of Education (2014) admitting the reality that the community schools could not stop shifting to English medium to stave off the threat from the private schools and keep their enrollments from declining. It is also echoed in the head teachers' opinion:

Mainly, we were under the pressure to compete with the private schools that were attracting the students in the name of English medium. There was also trend of shifting to English among the communities (Teacher interview vignette: School C).

The head teacher's comments reinforce the assumption that English medium is popular slogan to attract the attention of the parents who cannot afford to send their children to private schools and shift to English helps them to feel that their children

have access to greater opportunities in life (Ojha, 2018). The head teacher is reluctant to share when I asked about the academic achievement of the learners. The issue of improved learning outcome of the students after its implantation is questionable with the previous human resources who according to the head teacher did not consider themselves ready to teach in English medium:

The teachers (not all) were against this policy. They claimed that they would not teach in English. We convinced them, encourage them. The teachers with the age of their retirement wished to get early retirement with the fear of not being able to teach in English (Teacher interview vignette: School C).

Proficiency of the teachers seems to be the major challenge of EMI schools in assuring the quality education. This is also evident in the study by Karki (2018) that unpacks the reality that after the introduction of EMI, students ' achievement is declining. The children were unable to explain and express in English properly though having knowledge in Nepali. The evidence reveals that teachers use Nepali to explain the content while it is mandatory to write in English.

Unlike this, teachers advocating local language as the medium believe the official use of language as the medium in education should focus on the leaning. A teacher opines:

Language is means of communication. It should be easy and comprehensible. Where medium is difficult and complex, learning cannot be imagined. While making the decision about the language to be used in the classroom, learning should be in the center. Local teachers are to be given agency in selecting language for instructional practices (Teacher FGD: School A).

In this regard, Burnett (2012) argues that familiar language as the medium is supportive for educational achievement. This argument rests on the idea that students understand more of what they are taught and retain the information better. Research has shown conclusively that children whose early education is in the language of their home tend to perform better in the later years of education (Thomas & Collier, 1997). For the students of minority language communities, shifting from home to national and national to global language impairs learning.

## Conclusion

The study shows that language in education policy is a highly sensitive and complex issue in a multilingual context like Nepal. Choosing a single language as the medium of instruction without considering local linguistic ecology, teachers' professional capacity, and students' language backgrounds often leads to weak implementation and limited learning outcomes. The findings indicate that local governments are increasingly interested in introducing English as a medium of

instruction, often as pilot initiatives, but these decisions are frequently made without adequate planning, teacher readiness, or professional development. As a result, the expected quality of teaching and learning is rarely achieved. The study also highlights that rigid, uniform language policies imposed from higher levels do not fit diverse classroom contexts. Instead, flexible language use guided by teachers, who best understand classroom realities, more effectively supports student learning. It can be argued that language policies should be guided by learning needs and educational equity rather than popularity or publicity, and teachers should be given greater agency in determining context appropriate medium of instruction.

The findings imply that policy makers and local authorities need to approach language in education policy with greater sensitivity and contextual awareness. Clear implementation guidelines, meaningful decentralization of authority, and strengthened capacity of local education offices are essential for effective policy enactment. Schools and local stakeholders, including School Management Committees, parents, and teachers, should engage in informed and participatory decision making that prioritizes long term learning outcomes over short term enrollment goals. Greater emphasis is needed on strengthening classroom pedagogy, teacher student interaction, reading resources, and the use of mother tongue as a foundation for learning, with a gradual transition to national and international languages. This study is limited by its phenomenological approach, which focuses on experiences rather than institutional outcomes. Future research could explore specific schools as case studies, examine language shift among minority learners, or assess the effectiveness of English medium instruction in terms of teacher readiness, student engagement, and learning achievement.

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