

# Teachers' Perception of English as Medium of Instruction in Nepalese Community Schools

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## Abstract

*English as Medium of Instruction (EMI) has been a burning issue of the pedagogical field among the concerned stakeholders including teachers. The objective of this study was to find out the perception of the community schools' teachers in shifting the medium of instruction to English in the multilingual classroom contexts. It also aimed to explore the opportunities and challenges of shifting the medium of instruction Nepali to English in community schools. It is a qualitative design with a phenomenological study. The participants of the study were two teachers of a community school of Sainamaina Municipality of Rupandehi who are teaching other than English subjects in English medium. A semi-structured interview technique was used to gather information from the participants. The main finding of the study was that the use of EMI in community schools is beneficial. It is also found that teachers of community schools were positive in implementing EMI in conducting their daily teaching and learning activities even though there are certain challenges like linguistic difficulties, inadequate language abilities of teachers, cultural diversity, less effective pedagogy, limited resources, etc.*

**Key Words:** EMI, Institutional school, Community school, Perception, Identity

## Introduction

English bridges communication among people who have different native languages. Since the mid-20th century, the English language has gained a foothold as the world Linguafranca. It has become the language of international interconnectedness. A person without sound knowledge of the English language cannot fit in world communication. It is used significantly by a large number of the population throughout the world as a language of communication even if it is not the language with the largest number of mother-tongue speakers.

A medium of instruction (MI) is a language used in teaching. MI has always been a key

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issue among educational institutions across the world, especially in those nations where there is the direct or indirect influence of cultural, linguistic, political, or economic colonization. EMI refers to the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English. A large number of international education institutions expressed a significant interest in adopting EMI. Recently, almost all the courses in schools and universities are being taught in English. Crystal (2004) stated that the adoption of EMI has been sweeping across the higher education landscape worldwide.

The people of Nepal speak different languages as they belong to different ethnic groups and they follow different religions. According to the census 2011 AD, there are 123 linguistic groups in Nepal. This language situation shows that Nepal is a multilingual country. There are four language families: Tibeto-Burman, Indio-Aryan, Austro-Asiatic/Munda, Dravidian (Kansakar, 1996, p.1). But Rai (2016) says there are five families (Kusunda no family yet), fourteen scripts. CBS (2011) records 82.10% (21,753,009) people belong to Indo-European language family. Likewise, Sino-Tibetan is spoken by 17.30% (4,584,523), Austro-Asiatic is spoken by 0.19% (49,858), Dravidian is spoken by only 0.13% (33,615), 0.09% people speak other languages (including English) as their mother tongue and 0.18% languages are categorized as language family unstated. Among them, Nepali stands as the official language of the country. In Nepal, there are more languages with few speakers and few languages with more speakers. Nepali language is spoken by 44.64% population of the country as their mother tongue and others as a Lingua Franca. English is used as a means of communication only with foreigners and a means of instruction in the classroom. The CBS (2011) shows English is spoken by 0.01% of the total population of the country.

There are two types of schools in Nepal; Institutional and community. In institutional schools, the medium of instruction is only English; however, in community schools, Nepali is used as a medium of instruction. Poudel (2018) states that the institutional schools have won the hearts of guardians and students which inspired public models to realize that it was due to the medium of instruction. So recently, Community schools have started shifting their medium of instruction to English. They have been adopting EMI as a new linguistic market in education in recent years. This trend is due to globalization and the socio-economic power of the English language, viewing English as a linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1993) for better “socioeconomic mobility”

(Khubchandani, 1978, as cited in Bhattacharya, 2013, p.165) in the globalized socio-economic market. When the Constitution of Nepal (1990) followed the economic liberation policies (Phyak, 2016), private English medium schools mushroomed in Nepal. National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2007) stated, “The medium of school-level education can be in Nepali or English language or both of them” (p.34). Since then, community schools have been free to choose either English or Nepali language as the medium of instruction in their schools. As a result, a large number of community schools have adopted EMI in Nepal since 2010 (Sah & Li, 2018). So community schools are shifting from Nepali to EMI to compete with institutional schools and to justify the view that community schools are not different from institutional schools in terms of quality. It is a common perception among Nepalese people that children will have better prospects if they have English medium schooling (Aryal, 2013).

The shift from Nepali as a medium of instruction (NMI) to EMI has been a controversial issue in Nepal. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) clearly states that “Every Nepali community living in Nepal shall have the right to acquire education in its mother tongue, and the right to open and run schools and educational institutions as provided for by law” (Article 31, Clause 5). The constitution has recognized mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) at the school level. However, EMI has been adopted by institutional schools and this trend has been growing even in community schools. EMI has become a demanding phenomenon in community schools at present in Nepal and this issue is challenging the MTB-MLE policy of the government. But there are some questions related to the implication in real classrooms; what are the different forms of EMI currently being used? What kind of English is being used in EMI? Are there content areas where the transition to EMI is easier for teachers and/or for learners? Are there particular language problems associated with particular content areas? And are the teachers competent to deliver the particular subject matter in a second language?

In this study, I tried to examine how EMI is followed in community schools of Rupandehi, how the teacher perceives EMI, what challenges they face, and what identity they construct through it. As explored in data analysis, teachers have strong ideologies favoring EMI as, they think, it helps students to expand their knowledge and skill in English providing quality education ensuring a good job and opportunity in the future. Likewise, they believe that EMI facilitates students to create access to higher education and economic development in the global market. Conversely, the teachers

have dealt with challenges such as the student's difficulty in understanding new vocabulary, speaking in English with other friends, getting meaning from the textbooks, etc. It happens because of switching a school from the Nepali medium to the English medium without an adequate plan and preparation. The objective of this research is to study the perception of the community schools' teachers in shifting the medium of instruction to English in the multilingual classroom contexts. To fulfill this objective, I tried to answer the questions; how do the teachers perceive and practice EMI in community schools? This study was limited to finding out the perception of teachers towards shifting EMI in community schools in Nepal. It tried to find opportunities and challenges in the English medium in a community school. It was limited to a model school of Sainamaina municipality of Rupandehi. The information was collected through two teachers of the selected school based on interview guidelines.

## **Literature Review**

### ***EMI in Global Linguistic Context***

There is a fast-moving worldwide shift from English has being taught as a foreign language (EFL) to English being the medium of instruction for academic subjects such as science, mathematics, geography, journalism, law and medicine.

Bhattacharya, (2013) claimed that Indian Schools that present themselves as 'English-medium' but are not in practice, this study finds, set in place greater obstacles for poorer children due to the use of English textbooks. While this hinders students' development of critical thinking skills within the classroom, it has still larger implications for educational equity. Poor children in India, who represent the biggest market for such schools, thus acquire poor English skills.

Lei, & Hu, (2014) interpreted as globalization has fueled an ever-accelerating spread of English as an instructional language into institutions of higher learning around the world. As part of its ambitious development agenda, China has been actively promoting EMI in its top-tier universities in the past decade. Although by the end of the 20th century English had been firmly established as a core curricular subject from junior secondary school to higher education in China, there was growing dissatisfaction with the quality of instruction found in the traditional English classroom.

Dearden, (2014) states that EMI is increasingly being used in universities, secondary schools, and even primary schools. This phenomenon has very important implications

for the education of young people and policy decisions in Nonanglophone countries. Pressure on schools and universities in an international marketplace is great and some teachers see EMI as a challenge for them and a key to success for their students.

Erliana, (2018) showed the insignificant effect of EMI within ELT as the result of the use of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia. Despite the low-frequency use, the teachers have a positive response toward their own English and are aware of the importance of conducting teaching and learning processes using English. The EMI is not implemented purely instead it tends to be a bilingual class.

Sela, & Luke, (2020) argued that adopting EMI is essential for sustaining communication in the present era although the implementation of EMI is not always run smoothly due to some drawbacks that could not be avoided by the lecturer, learners and educators need to build awareness to its usage as well as make adjustment in conducting it fully in the classroom. One best thing to do is to incorporate the implementation of EMI with the use of technology in the teaching and learning process. By utilizing technology, it would easily be customized with the understanding speed of learners.

### ***Sociolinguistic Context and EMI Policies in Nepal***

Nepal geographically is a small country, but it is linguistically diverse. Talking about the linguistic diversity of Nepal, Turin (2007, p. 27) states that Nepal is a multi-ethnic country where each ethnic group has a language and culture. They take language as a means of reflecting their cultural and ethnic identity.

EMI is a burning concept in Nepal and this is a policy of the Ministry of Education according to which school and university courses are taught in English. Regarding the Medium of Instruction, the National Curriculum Framework for School Education in Nepal (MOE, 2007) states:

The medium of school-level education can be in Nepali or English language or both of them. However, in the first stage of basic education (Grades 1–3), the medium of education will generally be in the mother tongue. In the case of non- Nepali citizens, there will be a special provision to choose any other language as a subject instead of Nepali. The medium of the teaching of any language subject will be in the same language i.e. Nepali will be taught in Nepali (not in the children’s mother tongue).

The development of English education in Nepal can be discussed in three phases: during the Rana regime, during the Panchayat system, and after the restoration of

multiparty democracy (Phyak, 2016). The Rana period was the period of opposition to education as only a few elites, especially the Rana families, received an education. The Panchayat period followed the one-nation-one-language ideology in the education system of Nepal. The Democratic period (1990-2007) was the period of multilingualism in education allowing mother tongues in schools. Political interest in each shift seems to be the sole cause of the revision of the education system in Nepal.

### ***Study consideration on English as the Medium of Instruction***

Karki (2018) in his study found that one of the main reasons behind the shift in the medium of instruction to English in the Khumbu region is the desire for enhanced socio-economic benefits. The English language is believed to support businesses and add value to the social status of people. English is thus perceived to provide better opportunities for students. Meanwhile, institutionally, EMI has been working as a tool to attract students to schools that were in decline. The study also uncovered some positive impacts after the implementation of EMI, such as regaining parents' trust in community schools, an increase in the number of students, and students' ability to use English to assist their parents' businesses. He observed some negative impacts of EMI which included the decline in students' academic achievement, lack of exposure to local languages and less exposure to the national language, and limited classroom interaction and expression because of students' inability to use the foreign language effectively.

Ojha, (2018) stated that introducing EMI is not, a solution to overcoming the long-standing problem of degradation of quality education in community schools. He suggested that the community schools should focus on teaching effectively in their students' mother tongue rather than teaching in English and the medium should not be changed solely as a survival technique to compete with private schools.

Sah and Li, (2018) carried out a critical qualitative case study of an EMI-based, under-resourced public school in Nepal through Bourdieu's lens of linguistic capital. The study revealed parents, students, and teachers regarded EMI as a privileged form of linguistic capital for developing advanced English skills, enhancing educational achievements and access to higher education, and increasing the chance of upward social and economic mobility. In contrast to these positive perceptions of EMI with overtly superficial promises, switching to EMI, without enough teacher preparation and infrastructure support in the school, had contributed to several unplanned negative outcomes, including a contested process of developing English proficiency.

Ghimire, (2019) in his critical qualitative case study found that the students have deeply rooted beliefs in learning through English because it secures their future by assisting them to get a job in the country or abroad. The study also revealed that the students have difficulties in speaking English and learning new vocabulary even though they are learning through English, but their teachers facilitate them with the Nepali equivalents. It is also found that the students feel proud of being the students of EMI schools because there is a superior credit of their school in the district and they are also supposed to be better-qualified students in their locality.

Following the economic liberation policies in the 1990 Constitution of Nepal (Phyak, 2016), institutional English medium schools, commonly known as boarding schools in Nepal, have mushroomed. Since these institutional schools have always significantly outperformed the community schools in the Secondary education exam (SEE). Their high achievement has led the Nepalese people to consider English medium instruction as synonymous with a high-quality education. Following this educational trend, the Ministry of Education (MoE) enacted the Education Act (Government of Nepal, 2010), which legitimated the medium of instruction to be Nepali, English, or both in public schools. Thus, more public schools are opting into EMI despite the lack of prerequisites for EMI, such as educational infrastructure, linguistically qualified teachers, teacher education programs, and professional development (in-service) courses. Since 2010, a larger number of public schools have adopted EMI in Nepal, and most of them are low socioeconomic status (SES) schools with limited resources.

## **Methodology**

I used a phenomenological research design, which “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon.” (Creswell, 2007, p, 57) with the focus on participants’ perception of the event or situation (Williams 2007, p.67) I will select a model community school at Sainamaina municipality Rupandehi district. It is located in a mixed community along with the emigrants coming from hilly and rural areas. The school has been starting English medium since 2017 from grade one and grade nine. Now all classes are running English medium. It has both NMI and EMI, charging a small number of tuition fees from the English medium students in the name of aid from the community. But the teachers are the same for both English and Nepali mediums.

The participants of the study consisted of two teachers who are teaching other than English subjects in English as the medium of instruction. Among them, one was

the head teacher who himself teaches science in English medium. Another was the teacher who was teaching social studies in English medium but now he is teaching economics in English medium. (Social study is no more an English medium because of government policy). The participants were given alphabetical names as P1 and P2 for ethical consideration. They had been informed before, after, and during the research process about the objectives. They affirmed to be volunteers in the study and they selected purposely. I used a semi-structured interview technique to gather information from the participants' points of view.

I carried out this research in a two-step procedure: information collection and information analysis. In information collection, the participants were asked to express their perceptions and views regarding the issues using EMI other than English. They were requested to share the challenges and opportunities while teaching in real classroom situations. The interview was audio-recorded taking their permission. After collecting relevant information, interviews were transcribed, coded, analyzed good English knowledge, and interpreted using a thematic approach. As a part of the discussion; I drew some themes of the study according to the information collected from two teachers. Based on this discussion; I concluded my research with some recommendations.

## **Result and Discussion**

The central aim of this study was to examine the perception of teachers of community school using EMI regarding the needs, practices, and challenges they faced in implementing EMI. The attitudes, views, and perceptions of teachers are analyzed from various angles and perspectives. The data was collected using unstructured interviews with teachers. The data was collected in Nepali and translated into English. Both the respondents were from the same school which was recently declared as a model school by the ministry of education. The findings of the study have been discussed under three major thematic areas: motivation for shifting into EMI, the influence of EMI, and opportunities and challenges in the implementation of EMI.

### **The Motivation for Shifting into EMI**

EMI in non-English speaking countries increased dramatically. Many community schools in Nepal, which used to teach in Nepali medium, have switched to EMI from the elementary grades. The same situation is found in community schools of Sainamaina. The stockholders of community schools justify the decision by saying that there is a growing demand and pressure from parents and students for this change.



Participant P1 argued that *there was great pressure to introduce English as the medium of instruction in our school*. Khatri (2019) states that along with the global importance of English, the concept of EMI has become a growing global phenomenon in present-day academia. In this regard, first participant P1 stated that

*most parents are interested in EMI. Due to world globalization and the importance of English; parents are keen to send their children to English medium and force the school to shift EMI and the school is compelled to shift it.*

The most important motivational factors for shifting into EMI is the desire to gain access to the English language, and the economic benefits that are said to accrue to having proficiency in it are the major reason behind parents' willingness to move their children to private schools using EMI (Phyak, 2015). Participant P2 stated that "*It was our compulsion to shift English as a medium instruction from Nepali to compete with institutional schools.*" There is a growing interest amongst parents to educate their children in English medium schools and, for this reason, those who can afford it send their children to private schools which invariably use EMI. P2 said that *parents who are from poor family background forced us to implement EMI policy in our school*. To ensure their continued existence, many community schools felt compelled to consider moving from Nepali to EMI. In Nepal, there is a vast gap in terms of exam results between communities-based schools and private English medium schools; as people determine it from the annual SEE result in Nepal. A corresponding shift of medium of instruction to English in some government schools aims to motivate parents to choose to send their children to these schools. As Phyak (2016, p. 210) confirms, "public schools are shifting to EMI to compete with private schools". The official documents of the Ministry of Education accept this reality. For example, MoE (2014a), in its National Early Grade Reading Programme document mentions that "the main reason why community schools are shifting to English is to stave off the threat from private schools and to try and keep their enrolments from declining and responding to parental demand for English" (p. 8). The school authority and teachers take this shift in the medium of instruction as the need of the hour. Both participants have positive attitudes toward EMI in their schools. Because it is the global and internationally recognized language and it is the current need of this century. It is the language of higher social status and personality markers. Parents are demanding education in the English medium because it is beneficial for the students in higher studies, etc. They

say to give the quality of education; they started EMI. The desire to gain access to the English language, and the economic benefits that are said to accrue to having proficiency in it, is the major reason behind parents' willingness to move their children to private schools using EMI.

### **The Influence of EMI**

According to Macaro (2013), EMI is not a new phenomenon and besides this, no one can say that it is neutral and undesirable. Besides the global importance of English, EMI has become a growing global phenomenon in present-day academia. EMI is the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English Dearden (2014, p.1). In this regards my respondent P1 states that

*English is an international language; it is important to teach the students in English medium so that they have good proficiency in it. This will help them get better opportunities, not only inside the country but abroad as well.*

The global spread of EMI education has also influenced the Nepalese school system. Following the economic liberation policies in the 1990 Constitution of Nepal (Phyak, 2016), institutional English medium schools in Nepal have mushroomed. These institutional schools have always significantly outperformed the community schools in the Secondary Education Examination (SEE), the final examination in the secondary school system of Nepal. Their high achievement has led the Nepalese people to consider EMI as synonymous with a high-quality education. In this regard, participant, P2 who is also the headteacher of that school stated that *most of the students wanted to go abroad for their further studies so they need EMI*. Those students who want to go abroad for further study need to sit for English language tests like IELTS, TOEFL, SAT, and GRE. This is when they realize the importance of the English language and feel inferior to their competitors. Students with higher academic scores also cannot meet the entry requirement in language tests and get deprived of international academic opportunities. It is not the knowledge that stops them from such opportunities but the language (Kandel, 2015). Following this educational trend, the Ministry of Education (MoE) enacted the Education Act (Government of Nepal, 2010), which legitimated the medium of instruction to be Nepali, English, or both in community schools. The achievement gap between students from private and public schools has produced an ideological impression in parents that English-medium schooling provides quality education. In this case participant, P1 argued

that Ghimire (2019) claimed that the community school is now shifted into EMI because of the institutional schools, which were established rapidly in the country when the Government followed the neoliberal policy in education. The institutional schools were expensive but they became famous at the parents' glance; and they created pressure on the community school to shift their medium of instruction from Nepali to English, for managing quality education at a nominal fee.

### **EMI for Better Opportunities**

People think the purpose of English in Nepal is to give students a foreign language competence for communication with foreigners and to understand the world. Both participants agreed that parents forced community schools to introduce EMI to develop foreign language skills, enabling students to work in a foreign language environment and become bilingual and multilingual, enhancing their education to respond to globalization, and preparing students for higher studies. As an international language to interact with each other across international boundaries, English is established as a lingua franca. Participant P1 said *'Knowing English brings not only national opportunities to the doorstep but also opens new avenues on the international front'*. A person with a good knowledge of English is more likely to get selected in an interview for a job. English. In the same way, P2 stated *'parents think that if their children are not educated in English medium schools their future is miserable because English is associated with success in future life'*. EMI programs will improve students' English proficiency, and therefore result in a workforce that is more fluent in English. EMI is seen to give students a double benefit: knowledge of their subject, plus English language and make them more attractive in the global job market. Participant P2 believed EMI makes our students able to communicate with the students from other countries using English. Similarly, EMI builds the competence and confidence to use English for various purposes" In the same way the schools who were shifted medium of instruction benefited by increasing the number of students and quality of education. P1 who is the principal of the school said

*Previously there were a few students in our school but when we shifted EMI there increased the number of students we need to open the admission for limited seats because of infrastructure.*

Ojha (2019) mentioned the schools which did use EMI attracted the attention of parents and there was a significant increase in the number of students enrolled in these

schools. P2 said that students who are from private schools were also admitted to our school. This success in increasing enrollment, in turn, encouraged other schools to start EMI programs and to use English as theirs or selling point, as the private schools, to arrest the decline in their enrollments (Caddell, 2006). EMI is helpful for teachers also P2 stated that EMI helps teachers to enhance competence in English language usage and use and it is the real exhibition of the competence of the teachers.'

### **Challenges in the Implementation of EMI**

Although the trend to move to EMI is growing in community schools in urban areas and also expanding to rural villages, educationists and psychologists express serious concern over the use of a foreign language as the medium of instruction in the early grades. They assert that when children are taught in a language that is not used in their home and community, their learning is impaired (Khan, 2014). Children focus on memorizing facts without understanding and their creativity is not fostered to the fullest, resulting in a generation that is poorly educated (Baral, 2015). There are several problems with EMI implementation in community schools: The first problem shared by both participants was language problems. The teachers find it difficult to make their students use technical terms in the course. The students faced difficulties understanding the EMI course content when they did not know the necessary technical terms or academic vocabulary. In this regard, P2 said that *it was very hard to find corresponding words and sentences in English while teaching social, economic, science, math, etc. so that I have to use Nepali to explain the content*'. Taking an EMI course is sometimes difficult because some teachers' English level is not enough to give an EMI class. That's why they give some classes in Nepali yet they ask questions in English. In the same line, P1 said that *it was difficult to find the exact meaning of particular words so that we have to explain it in Nepali but students need to write in English so we give notes in English*. Teachers cannot speak English very well. So, it creates simplicity in content because of using simple words instead of academic and technical ones. This simplicity may hinder understanding the real meaning of the content. Another challenge of EMI shared by both participants was culture problems. Due to the cultural diversity and cultural differences in the English and Nepali community teachers felt they were equivalent in different words and themes. There is an obstacle for teachers when they attempt to transmit content knowledge related to culture. Participant P2 stated that there was a problem for explaining cultural, indigenous, and religious content in English. Besides this linguistic diversity is another problem to implement EMI in the community school. P1 said

*It is challenging the Nepalese English teachers to use EMI effectively in the Nepalese classes because there is very weak exposure to English among the students. Students in the class are from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.*

First language hindrance is another challenge of implementation of EMI in Nepal. P1 stated that to implement EMI in their classroom teaching due to the interference of students' mother tongues since students are from different ethnic and linguistic communities. It is also stated that students' mother tongue interference is the main cause to create difficulty in the smooth and effective use of EMI in the Nepalese EFL classrooms.

From the analysis of both teachers' responses, it can be interpreted that community schools' teachers have been facing various challenges in using EMI like language problems, difficulty to understand technical terms or academic vocabulary, culture problems, students' weak exposure to English language, mother tongue interference in the classroom, poor competence of students in English, lack of support and encouragement from the parents and society and no motivating environment for the teachers and schools are not resourceful and well facilitated (Khatri 2019).

### **Findings and Conclusion**

EMI at Nepalese community school for teaching academic courses has created positive attitudes on the teachers and students. The school teachers agreed that instruction in English can promote learners to be more successful in terms of both their academic and social dimensions of life. This study examined the perception of teachers towards using EMI in community schools. It explored the various opportunities, problems, and challenges faced by the teachers while adopting EMI in the community schools. The finding of this study revealed that the use of EMI in community schools of Sainamaina of Rupandehi is beneficial. It is also found that teachers of public schools were found aware of the basic concept of the notion of EMI. They were found positive in implementing EMI in conducting their daily teaching and learning activities. But it is very difficult to implicate EMI policy in the community school. The study found linguistic difficulties, inadequate language abilities of teachers, cultural diversity, less effective pedagogy, limited resources, etc.

The government should provide all training, courses, and infrastructure for the community school for instruction in the English medium. The schools which are willing to shift their medium of instruction must provide EMI training to their teachers so that

it equips them with skills to teach subjects like English, mathematics, social studies, and science through EMI. Furthermore, policymakers and governing bodies should monitor the preparation and progress of the schools before and after the implementation of EMI so that once a program begins it can be implemented smoothly.

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