

## English Language Education in Nepal: Need or Hegemony?

Govinda Prasad Khanal  
Siddhartha Multiple Campus, Kapilvastu

### Article History

Received  
18<sup>th</sup> March, 2022

Revised  
25<sup>th</sup> May, 2022

Accepted  
24<sup>th</sup> June, 2022

### Abstract

*English language teaching (ELT) has become much pervasive in Nepal in the recent decades since its entry in the mid nineteenth century. Recently, the trend of converting government aided community schools into English medium has become a common phenomenon throughout Nepal. This paper intends to explore the hegemonial nature of English language education in Nepal, which has pressurised several local languages including Nepali, the official language of Nepal. I have reviewed some documents to establish how expansion of English has pressurised the growth of indigenous languages including Nepali, with the possibility of the loss of indigenous properties including languages, cultures and values. It pictures out the possibility of hybridity in language and culture in the new generations of youths and children if undue priority to ELT continues in the academia.*

**Keywords:** English language teaching, hegemony, domination, endangerment

### Introduction

Whether English language is indeed a need in Nepal's education system or it is particularly a hegemonial impact has been a matter of controversy. Academics in Nepal have been divided about using English language in education in general and school education in particular. Although English has been accepted as an official or alternative official language in several countries including Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Jamaica, the Bahamas, Dominika, Barbodas, the Soloman Islands, and as an alternative official language in India, Singapore, Pakistan, Tonga, Tanzania, Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria, South Afrika, Philippines, Vanuatu and Rwanda (Crystal, 2003; Finegan, 2009), many Nepali and foreign scholars (Giri, 2010, 2011; Pennycook, 2017; Phillipson, 1997; Phyak, 2011, 2013, 2016; Rana, 2018) have strongly argued that English hegemony threats indigenous language, knowledge, values and culture. For example, Phyak (2011) argues that priority given to English as a medium of instruction in Nepali schools has weakened the multilingual education policy of the government

creating a hegemony of English language in common folks thereby endangering the ethnic languages of Nepal including Nepali. English has become more dominant in Nepal in the sense that several schools and colleges have adopted English as a medium of instruction, and it has restricted the use of Nepali, the official language and most of the indigenous languages within the country. Educationists have argued about the place of mother tongue, Nepali and English language in the curriculum, and their use as the medium of instruction. In this paper, I have argued that English language policy in Nepal is more of hegemonial in its nature and has gained emphasis from the government and the civilians producing a boomerang effect on Nepali, the only official language as well as hundred over indigenous languages and their ethnic identities, and argue that policies and programmes need to be developed so as to preserve ethno-linguistic diversity of Nepal.

### **A Hegemonial Entry**

The entry of English language teaching in Nepal was of much hegemonial in nature rather than the need of the nation. Junga Bahadur Rana, the first Rana Prime Minister of Nepal introduced English language teaching in Nepali education system in 1854 after his visit to Britain hiring British and Indian English teachers with the purpose of teaching English language to his children (Eagle, 2008; Sharma, 1990; Wood, 1965). He initiated English language instruction as he was impressed by the British education system and wanted to further impress the British rulers that he was in an alliance with them. The teaching English in the “period of educational opposition” (Wood, 1965) was not inspired by the motive of educating the citizens of the country but an attempt to please the British colonial power and seek favour for his government. Later, Ranoddip Singh, second Rana Prime Minister and the son of Junga Bhadur, systematised teaching of English at Durbar School moving it to its current location in front of Rani Pokhari (Weinberg, 2013).

English language teaching policies and practices in Nepal tend to have inspired from the psychology that English is a dominant language of international communication, economic prosperity and academic opportunities that opens up the doors of upward mobility. Phyak (2013) reported that students and parents preoccupied the notion that learning of English would create them more educational and economic opportunities, and without English they would be regarded as illiterate. Furthermore, Giri (2011) claimed that English was injected to Nepali educational plans and policies with foreign influence regarding it unavoidable for the political interest and economic development which has generated negative results due to lack of effective planning. Although Nepal National Educational Planning Commission (1955) rejected the use of English as the medium of instruction in primary education declaring it as the language of no “practical value”, English language was still prescribed from Grade Six as an optional subject which can be regarded as the hegemonial effect of English in the policy makers in Nepal. The Report rejected to teach English at primary level only because abled teachers were not available to teach English with the argument that “poorly taught foreign language is worse than not teaching at all”(Nepal National Educational Planning Commission, 1955, p. 93).

## Expansion of English: A Threat to Linguistic Diversity

There are a number of arguments (Eagle, 2008; Sontang, 1995; Weinberg, 2013; Yadava, 2007) that have highly criticised the language policies of Nepal for propagating the status of Nepali leaving the indigenous languages behind to perish and die. However, these studies have not seen other side of the coin as they did not think of discussing the imperial effects of English language on the indigenous language including Nepali, the widely used language of Nepal. The reason behind this could be that the legitimacy of English has been psychologically established and maintained in the common citizens and the policy planners. Nepali linguistic critiques and policy planners have paid little interest to explore the imperial and hegemonial effects of English in Nepal which can be better described with what Robert Phillipson (2007) called “conspiracy” and “conspiracy of silence”. For example, English language teaching was still in priority during so-called ‘Party-less Panchayati Democratic Polity’ when the policy of “one nation, one language” was adopted, and this was consolidated by the subsequent policies of the democratic governments without any disagreement from the contemporary academicians.

Although judicial use of English can be acceptable as a means of international communication and knowledge exploration, over-emphasis to English can be regarded no more than the neo-colonisation impact and hegemonial dogma that consolidates the western ideals creating a threat of linguistic genocide to indigenous languages including Nepali. The argument of English supporters such as Karn (2011) who argued that acceptance of English may be supportive to resist the threat to indigenous languages and cultures through localisation of English in Nepali context. However, he did not explain how acceptance of English as "Nepali English" would preserve the indigenous languages, cultures and values. However, Robert Phillipson (2006) argued that acceptance of English as a global language does not ensure opportunities to the speakers of other languages of the world because harms of it cannot be underestimated focussing on the benefits only. Similarly, Devkota (2018) argued that English language teaching has systematised social exclusion despite the inclusion policies of Nepal Government by depriving the marginalised Dalit communities in rural areas an equitable access to learning opportunities. Even the rural Nepali citizens struggling for daily needs are trying to teach their children in English medium schools as they have been hegemonized with English to perceive it as a symbol of status and upward mobility (Giri, 2010).

Recent educational policies of Nepal Government have tilted towards strengthening English domination neglecting its pressure on possibility of extinction of native languages, cultures and ideologies. For example, *National Early Grade Reading Programme (2014/15-2019/20)* states that instead of effectively implementing additive multilingual policy, community schools have inserted extra English as a subject of ‘pride’ instead of local languages, and many have adopted English medium instruction due to the fear of private school (Ministry of Education, 2014). Furthermore, English hegemony has been reflected in *School Sector Development Plan (2016/17-2022/23)* which put English as a priority subject to address parental and community demand of English (Ministry of Education, 2016), without referring to any

research displaying such demand from the community level. However, the scholars (Chalmers, 2007; Davis, Phyak, & Bui, 2012; Phyak, 2011, 2016; Rana, 2018; Sontang, 1995; Turin, 2004; Yadava, 2007) have warned of language endangerment, language shift and identity crisis to the indigenous communities owing to hegemonial plans and policies, which lead to injustice and anarchy as suggested by Devkota (2018), Giri (2010) and Giri (2011) rather than equal distribution of power and resources.

### **The Dream of Economic Prosperity with English**

The belief that English opens all the doors of opportunities for socio-economic development may not be acceptable because all the individuals' hope of affluence cannot accomplish by means of educating children in English language. If English language was the sole source of economic prosperity, why are the English-speaking nations like USA, Britain and Australia still facing risk of unemployment? Moreover, The English hegemony may lead the indigenous languages and ethnic cultures to the process of shift, endangerment and death. The data of Population Census 2001 and 2011 have revealed the changed status of languages of Nepal. For example, Nepali language speakers declined from 48.61% to 44.6% within a decade, and the ethnic population of all indigenous communities has decreased compared to the corresponding linguistic population. Linguistic and cultural crises were faced in post-colonial Sri Lanka, where unequal distribution of English consolidated class differences of 'haves' and 'haves-not' and strengthened Christianisation marginalising the Tamil speakers (Canagarajah, 2005).

### **Conclusion**

Pro-English educational policies of government are likely to promote English linguistic and cultural hegemony which might lead the future generation to 'diasporic' feelings within the native premises. Current policies which tend to be oriented towards early English instruction and English medium instruction will do more harm than benefit to the students and the county. Although English cannot and need not be rejected outright, reduction of hegemonial effects will certainly support to preserve Nepali linguistic diversity and cultural heritage, thereby protecting indigenous knowledge, values and assumptions. It is necessary to promote indigenous languages including Nepali adopting additive bilingual and multilingual policies without assigning special privilege to English from the early school education. Therefore, Nepal Government requires to develop long term language plans and policies so as to preserve age-old linguistic and cultural heritage of Nepal for future generations.

### **References**

- Canagarajah, A. S. (2005). Dilemmas in planning English/vernacular relations in post-colonial communities. *Journal of sociolinguistics*, 9(3), 418-447.
- Chalmers, R. (2007). Nepal and the Eastern Himalayas In A. Simpson (Ed.), *Language and National Identity in Asia* (pp. 84-99). Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press.
- Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a global language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University University Press.

- Davis, K. A., Phyak, P., & Bui, T. T. N. (2012). Multicultural Education as Community Engagement: Policies and Planning in a Transnational Era. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 14(3), 1-25.
- Devkota, K. R. (2018). Navigating exclusionary-inclusion: school experience of Dalit EFL learners in rural Nepal. *Globe: A Journal of Language, Culture and Communication*, 6, 115-133. <https://doi.org/10.5278/ojs.globe.v6i0.2331>
- Eagle, S. (2008). The language situation in Nepal. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1, 170-225.
- Finegan, E. (2009). English. In B. Comrie (Ed.), *The World's Major Languages* (pp. 59-85). USA and Canada: Routledge.
- Giri, R. A. (2010). Cultural anarchism: the consequences of privileging languages in Nepal. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 31(1), 87-100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434630903398103>
- Giri, R. A. (2011). Languages and language politics: How invisible language politics produces visible results in Nepal. *Language Problems & Language Planning*, 35(3), 197-221. <https://doi.org/10.1075/lplp.35.3.01gir> issn 0272-2690 / e-issn 1569-9889
- Karn, S. K. (2011). On Nepalese English Discourse Granting Citizenship to English in Nepal via Corpus Building. *Journal of NELTA*, 16(2), 30-41.
- Ministry of Education. (2014). *National Early Grade Reading Programme (2014/15-2019/20), Program Document*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Ministry of Education. <http://moe.gov.np/member.html>
- Ministry of Education. (2016). *School Sector Development Plan (2016/17-2022/23)*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Ministry of Education Retrieved from. <http://moe.gov.np/member.html>
- Nepal National Educational Planning Commission. (1955). *Education in Nepal*. Kathmandu, Nepal: The Bureau of Publications, College of Education. <http://moe.gov.np/member.html>
- Pennycook, A. (2017). *The cultural politics of English as an international language*: Taylor & Francis.
- Phillipson. (1997). Realities and Myths of Linguistic Imperialism. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 18(3), 238-248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434639708666317>
- Phillipson, R. (2006). English, a cuckoo in the European higher education nest of languages? *European Journal of English Studies*, 10(01), 13-32.
- Phillipson, R. (2007). Linguistic imperialism: a conspiracy, or a conspiracy of silence? *Lang Policy*, 6(3-4), 377-383. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-007-9058-3>
- Phyak, P. (2011). Beyond the façade of language planning for Nepalese primary education: monolingual hangover, elitism and displacement of local languages? *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 12(2), 265-287. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2011.584203>
- Phyak, P. (2013). Language ideologies and local languages as the medium-of-instruction policy: a critical ethnography of a multilingual school in Nepal. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 14(1), 127-143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2013.775557>

- Phyak, P. (2016). Local-Global Tension in the Ideological Construction of English Language Education Policy in Nepal. In R. Kirkpatrick (Ed.), *Language Policy* (pp. 199-217). Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Rana, K. J. J. o. N. (2018). Retention of English language tension in multilingual communities of Nepal: A review of teachers' narratives. *23*(1-2), 40-53.
- Sharma, G. N. (1990). The impact of education during the Rana period in Nepal. *HIMALAYA, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies*, *10*(2, 3), 6.
- Sontang, S. K. (1995). Ethnolinguistic identity and language policy in Nepal. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, *1*(4), 108-120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537119508428451>
- Turin, M. (2004). *Minority Language Politics in Nepal and the Himalayas*. Paper presented at the Crossing the Digital Divide: Shaping Technologies to Meet Human Needs, Kathmandu, Nepal. [www.digitalthimalaya.com](http://www.digitalthimalaya.com)
- Weinberg, M. (2013). Revisiting history in language policy: The case of medium of instruction in Nepal. *28*(1), 6.
- Wood, H. B. (1965). *The development of education in Nepal* (Vol. 5): US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education.
- Yadava, Y. P. (2007). *Linguistic diversity in Nepal: Perspectives on language policy*. Paper presented at the International Seminar on Constitutionalism and Diversity in Nepal, Kathmandu, Nepal.