

# Challenges & Opportunities of Teaching and Learning Practices through English in Nepal

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## Abstract

*This article critically analyzes the practices of teaching and learning English in schools and colleges in Nepal. By using the theory of representation, the research is accomplished. I have used secondary sources of materials including research articles, research reports, dissertations on the practices of English as a medium of instruction in schools and colleges of Nepal. This paper analyzes the probable opportunities and challenges as seen in the homogenous education practices in Nepal. It relates education with opportunities and highlights challenges as the implications of the teaching and learning English in Nepal. The paper encompasses the causes and effects of using English as a medium of instruction in all levels of education. Why parents, education entrepreneurs, teachers, and students prefer English to Nepali and other national languages as the medium of instruction is the core question to be answered in this research paper. The finding is the employment opportunity in the global spectrum and the language of power that alleviates the social status of the speakers of English people including guardians, school principals, and teachers choose English as the medium of teaching and learning in both private and public academic institutions. Despite numerous challenges, most of the Nepalese prefer to learn English and take it as a means of communication and knowledge attainment. By using the qualitative research design especially text analysis as the method, the paper is accomplished.*

**Keywords:** Education, Instruction, English, Diversity, Knowledge, Assimilation, Imitation

## Introduction

This article assesses different causes and effects of teaching and learning practices through English in schools and colleges of Nepal. Why do schools impose English as a medium of instruction mostly in private schools in Nepal? Privatization and liberalization are the western principles of expanding their cultural and commercial realms. There are different variables that lead the school management to decide about the medium of instruction in their institutions. First variable is the attraction of guardians towards English medium school. Concurrently, Nepalese people do not seem capable of resisting their desire from learning

English. The importance of English reflects in the social standing and career development. Meanwhile, the standard examinations of English language proficiency such as IELTS, GRE, SAT etc., which evaluate the aspirants' eligibility measures. To score high marks in such standard courses, guardians choose English medium schools for their wards from the elementary level. Despite the fact that most of Nepalese parents cannot afford expensive tuition fees and other facilities, they put their children in English schools hoping that their children will have better future with the power of English language.

There is a perception that quality education is possible only in English medium schools. Of course, quality education can ensure sustainable development of a country. Quality education for all is a crucial aspect of sustainable development. It is one of the most important aspects of Nepalese society because it contributes to the other aspects of socio-economic development. The concept of sustainable development that began with the ancient thought of coordination between agricultural development and human survival (Shi, et. al. 2019) has now become an accepted catchphrase in every aspect of social and economic development discourse (Mensah, 2019). Right to quality education is imperative in almost every democratic country including Nepal. The government of Nepal has made the inclusive education system imperative as committed to international treaties and conferences. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) accords inclusive education and states that every person has the right to free and mandatory basic education up to the secondary level. The inclusive education advocates for the right to get education in mother tongue of the children. However, the practice challenges the principle of inclusive education in terms of language as the medium of instruction in all private schools and in some of the public schools.

## **Discussion**

### **Impact of Western Education on Nepal**

Western education system has hugely affected Nepal in multiple ways. Ranging from social to scientific aspects, the effect of western education can be acknowledged. Because of liberalization and privatization, along with the cultural mobility, the transmission of cognition through numerous means has been possible in Nepal. Nepal has countless private modern schools that implement the western education policies despite the challenges from the policies of Nepalese government. The private schools are open to welcome changes seen in the western education system. In the lure of following the western education policies, the private schools in Nepal use English as a medium of instruction. They largely benefit from the application of teaching and learning through English primarily in two ways: commercially and culturally. The students who study at private schools feel proud and their parents maintain status quo by putting their children in English medium schools. Meanwhile, such children are culturally prepared to adapt to the western countries when they move there

for higher education. The impact of western education system can be seen in the curricula adopted by Tribhuvan University, the oldest and largest university for higher education in Nepal.

The promotion of science and technology in Nepal has become possible because of the adoption of western education system. Now Nepalese people have wider access to information and technology as they get opportunities to study at schools and colleges through English. The positive effect of western education system is unavoidable and noticeable almost everywhere. Nepalese people have better communicative skills due to their proficiency of English. Besides, it has widened the scope of employability. Western education has capacitated Nepalese youths to be saleable across the globe.

Despite numerous advantages, there are some negative effects of western education. For example, due to the massive use and application of western education system, the Nepalese seem to lose their connection from their ethnicity and community. Instead of acquiring knowledge through their native languages, they are inclined towards obtaining degrees through western education system especially the education imparted through English. Consequently, there is cultural erosion and the dominance of English marginalizes indigenous languages including Khas Nepali, Maithali, Newari, Bhojpuri, Tamang, Rai, Magar, Gurung, Tharu, Awadhi etc. Gradually the young generation gets disconnected from their root. The western education system encourages youths to leave Nepal and move to foreign countries especially Australia, the USA, the UK, and Canada for either higher education or employment. As a result, brain drain takes place in Nepal. Western education has heavily influenced Nepalese education. Since Nepal became a democratic country in 1950s, Nepalese education paradigm has transformed. There have been numerous amendments in the educational policies. International policies and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have affected the reforms in the aftermath. Nepal has inclined towards Westernized teaching strategies and approaches focusing on student-centered education approach (Ham & Menzie-Ballantyne, 2021, p. 1). The influence of western education can be related to the historical and political contexts of Nepal. The perceptions of teachers at schools and colleges in Nepal towards western education system are positive. They generally feel proud of teaching students through English. Similar impressions can be seen on the part of the school management in private schools as well since they have commercial advantages. Nepalese educational institutions find it difficult to surpass the western education system. According to Cremin (1970), the emergence of the mass public schooling has been guided by certain interests including in the United States expanding societal ambitions for access to public education that aimed to teach students especially the white boys to read and write to comprehend the Bible, contracts and laws. The historical

documents imply that the Indian oriental tradition of education has intentionally been manipulated by the ideas of Macaulay (1935) who invented a discriminatory incentivization strategy against the eastern tradition of education in 1835 during the British Colony in India. Consequently, it got to obtain high level of political influence in the region. The colonial education system affected the education of Nepal including other South Asian countries. Since then, Nepal has been following the Western education system.

Globalization, modernization, cultural diversity, accessible information and student-centered teaching paradigm have hugely influenced Nepalese education system. Nepalese youths migrate to foreign countries in general and western nations in particular. They learn cultural properties including English. With the knowledge of English when they move to foreign countries, they get better job opportunities. The schools especially private schools understand this situation and accordingly they manage to provide education through English. Teachers with the knowledge on English perform better as they have more access to information rather than those without knowledge of English. Consequently, private schools prefer to hire teachers with proficiency of English. This demand of English learned teachers enhances the importance of English medium schools. Yang (2006) has found the western education system as the means of western soft power to practice Anglo-American academic paradigms as norms for education across the globe used to retain superiority of power for knowledge production and practice in education. The education system in Indian-subcontinent countries has been impacted by western hegemony that discards indigenous diversity and needs (Yang, 2014). The very impact can be seen in the academic programs controlled by western power and structured based on western values and assumptions in culturally diverse society (Geerlings & Lundberg, 2018). The cultural hegemony has pushed Nepal to the margin in terms of education system of its own. The implementation of western education system in schools discourages students from retaining cultural values and the properties of Nepalese diversity. The power of western education system invalidates the knowledge produced by numerous educators in non-western nations (Geerlings & Lundberg, 2018) consequently the western research methods are taken for granted in order to generate scientific knowledge (Yang, 2006). Due to wide coverage of the western education paradigm across Nepal, the principle of social inclusion in terms of language questions equitable education system. Since all the community groups from all sectors of the country cannot afford private schools for their children's education, learning through English becomes an unfulfilled wish for them. They get hurt emotionally and get deprived of opportunities that can be achieved with the knowledge on English. English as a medium of instruction causes a social gap between those who can afford expensive private schools and those who are bound to put their children in public schools where teaching and learning

practices are through national languages especially Khas Nepali. Consequently, the community groups cannot get ownership and remain detached from the western education system that discards local contexts and traditional social values of Nepal.

The rise of western education system started in the Rana Regime that imported but it was expanded in democratic Nepal to promote education in 1950s. Until 1951, the literacy rate in Nepal was around two percent with a few primary schools and one University College for higher education (National Education Planning Commission, 1956). The community owned the schools and education system was contextual until 1971. According to Anderson & Lindkvist (2000), the National Education System Plan endeavored to bring about drastic change in the education by transforming the imported education system by neglecting indigenous knowledge and languages. The curricula were westernized and English became the prominent medium of schooling across the country (Phyak & De Costa, 2021). In fact, the local knowledge and native languages contribute to the development of society in multiple ways. However, the education system as adopted by the schools and colleges in Nepal excludes the curricula that address the indigenous knowledge and cultural values. Consequently, the youths are getting detached from their roots and gradually getting away from their homeland either for employment or for higher education. The western education has ensured tremendous opportunities for employment and has increased the global access of people on one hand; it has weakened the Nepalese culturally and socially on the other. Consequently, Nepalese youths get confused about their choice of education. Most of the youths do not seem convinced by the education system that is beyond their reach because of the expense as well.

### **Threats from Western Education System**

The extensive use of English as a medium of instruction in schools and colleges in Nepal has imposed a language barrier to numerous children as their access to knowledge through English rather than their native languages is not possible. Children understand the contents when imparted through the language they have acquired from their mothers. Mostly Nepalese mothers do not speak English and children do not know English during childhood. When they reach schools and get to learn diverse things through English, they generally find it confusing and puzzling. Ultimately, they cannot connect with the ongoing classes conducted through English.

Teachers outside the urban settlements in Nepal are not proficient at English but the books prescribed in schools and colleges are in English. Such teachers who were not schooled through English medium find difficult to teach subjects like science, mathematics, English, computer, technology in English etc. Despite the fact that students and their guardians are

tempted toward private schools and colleges that conduct the classes through English, they lack westernized knowledge. Ultimately, such students cannot compete with the students from the urban settlements where qualified and proficient teachers work in the private schools and colleges. Overall, this trend of adoption and implementation of western education system across the country creates inequality and lack of access to true knowledge among Nepalese youths.

In the private schools and colleges that implement the curricula based on the western education system have commercial motives to a large extent. Because of the commercialization of western education, there is a tough competition among private schools and colleges related to the results. The higher grades students of the respective schools and colleges can obtain the better business they can get. The highly graded students are usually the means of marketing private schools and colleges. Therefore, the school management is under pressure to ensure good grades rather than quality education. Indeed, the grades cannot always ensure quality education. There is a cyclic impact of the competitive market of the private schools and colleges and ultimately students come under *pressure to meet the high expectations* of the academic institutions.

The lack of technologies and resources with the families that put their children in the private schools and colleges creates another level of pressure. Parents and guardians face several challenges in availing the facilities and resources for different experiments and practices undertaken at westernized educational institutions. Mostly students cannot accomplish their *home assignments* independently. They need support and guidance of their guardians. In case the guardians are not highly educated and competent in helping to solve the problems of their wards, a frustrating situation emerges in the family. The students start complaining against their parents since they have to justify their failure in accomplishing the homework. Mostly parents lack knowledge on the western curricula which do not generally relate to their social and cultural contexts. When they get bound to guide regarding the irrelevant subjects and topics, they fail to do so. This failure defames them before their wards as well. Sometimes, the situation gets worse when the children stop communicating with their parents when they do not get expected help.

### **Endeavors for Inclusive Education in Nepal**

The government of Nepal has endeavored to make the Nepalese education system inclusive as reflected in numerous things such as introducing yoga in elementary education, elementary education in mother tongue, mainstreaming religious education, Hinduism, and Buddhism in the curriculum etc. After the establishment of republicanism in Nepal, multilingual teaching, mother tongue education policy, inclusion of the local norms, values,



and knowledge in the syllabus have been rapidly incorporated in the formal education system. Brinkmann (2017) has stated that there have been numerous problems in western education system in Nepal. In his perspective, only about half of the elementary school age children receive education with minimum learning standards. They have to pay a high fee in private schools for quality education. This trend adds a financial burden to the lower- and middle-class families. The western education tempts parents for educating their children in English medium schools and colleges. However, the public schools due to the focus of the democratic governments in republican Nepal have become better and now students even from the low-income families can benefit from the quality education.

### **Privatization and English Medium Instruction**

Privatization has emerged as a strong form of Western education system. Nepal has experienced the implications of privatization in education in terms of its expansion and state policy provisions. The legal provision of policy on the right to education became more progressive (The Constitution of Federal Republic of Nepal, 2015). However, the 'excessive growth of private schools began with the neoliberal policy adopted by the incoming political parties soon after Nepal became a multiparty democratic country in the early 1990s' (Sharma Poudyal, 2017). The situation remains the same with privatization intact if not expanded even after the promulgation of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nepal 2015 with the commitment of Compulsory and Free Basic Education and Free Secondary Education.

The most of private schools use English as the medium of instruction. In urban settlements, relatively the private schools and colleges have advanced infrastructure, committed teachers, strong management and regulation and regular parent-teacher meetings. They reflect the English school system and in a few extreme cases, they implement western curricula implementation. Generally Nepalese parents wish to send their children to the private schools and colleges as well. Nevertheless, some public schools in urban areas have started copying the practices of private schools as well. The use of English medium in public schools have been more motivated with the interest to compete with commercially motivated private schools (Ojha, 2018) but the public schools face numerous challenges to implement English as a Medium of Instruction due to the lack of English language proficiency of teachers and students (Giri, 2011) that terribly affects education quality in public schools. Hence, public schools and colleges are in dilemma as on one hand, they wish to imitate the private schools and on the other they are bound to compromise with the existing facilities and limited resources as these things are beyond their financial capacity.

## Conclusion

This paper has explored numerous challenges facing schools and colleges when implementing the English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in Nepal. Due to privatization of education to a large extent, the commercial motive of the academic institutions in private sector has been the focal aspect. The impact of western education system can be observed in the education system of Nepal as reflected in high attraction of Nepalese people towards English. The detachment of youths from their local contexts in terms of languages, cultural values and norms, and local resources forces them to migrate abroad for either further education or employment. Consequently, Nepalese society faces brain drain. The absence of competent and skilled youths ultimately lessens the possibilities of growth and development. This research has found that the recent trends in education system focus on the global needs and contexts rather than local needs and situations in Nepal. Because of the dominance of western education system, Nepalese youths mostly from private schools and colleges think beyond the national boundary for both employment and higher education. Nevertheless, the impact of privatization of education has widened the social gap between the lower-class people and the upper- and middle-class groups. Moreover, the marginalization of native languages and communities which do not have access to western education as implemented through English as a Medium of Instruction has taken place in Nepal.

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