

## **Teachers' Preparations for Implementing Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education in Teaching English**

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### **Abstract**

Mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) in Nepal is a suitable and beneficial approach for students from indigenous language groups to learn English from their early grades. Teaching English through students' mother tongues helps them not only acquire English effectively but also understand subject matter more comprehensively. MTB-MLE integrates students' mother tongues into English education, enabling them to transfer knowledge, skills, learning methods, and experiences through their native languages to additional ones, fostering sustainable learning outcomes at the basic education level. This study aims to explore teachers' competencies in terms of pedagogical, curriculum, content, and methodological knowledge within MTB-MLE-implemented classrooms. It relies on secondary materials, including journals, books, and reports, which are reviewed and analyzed against relevant literature. The findings reveal that teachers' competencies significantly contribute to their professional growth and development, emphasizing the importance of theoretical and practical knowledge for effective English teaching in multilingual classroom settings.

**Keywords:** MTB, MLE, teachers' competencies, pedagogical knowledge, schema theory

## **Introduction**

Providing English education through students' mother tongue is needed and emerging issue for the students of ethnic group. Provision of child education in the language that they understand is based on their language right (Constitution of Nepal, 2015) promotes education through mother tongue for the students of ethnic group. In MTB-MLE, indigenous students learn read and write in their mother tongue at first and then they learn read and write in other additional languages respectively. Students' learning starts from the first language then gradually follows the additional languages. In this connection, Cummins (2000) stated that the extent to which an individual has access to and command of the oral and written academic registers of schooling. Mother tongue based multilingual education approach supports the students to transfer their knowledge, skills, learning methods and experiences through their mother tongue to other additional languages at basic level school education.

Implementation of MTB-MLE approach in community schools of Rubi Valley Rural Municipality of Dhading district motivates to teachers and students of ethnic group to teach English subject and learn English language from their mother tongue to English language with better understanding from the early grades. Some community schools of Rubi Valley Rural Municipality implemented MTB-MLE approach from kindergarten to grade three for the students of Tamang community. Teachers and students in the classroom were from Tamang language background linguistically. However, there were problems in teachers regarding their competencies and performance. They had insufficient knowledge about MTB-MLE approach, curriculum, teaching methods, materials, teaching contents and language instruction. Students had also problems to understand English language and subject matter because they had no any opportunity to speak English in their home and even in school. Teaching English is a very challenging job in the community of ethnic group. In this connection, Pandey (2020) states that "Becoming a teacher is the most challenging job(p.114)." Teachers face challenges in teaching methodology, teaching contents and language instruction in the context of Tamang community schools. This study aims at empowering English teachers' competencies in terms of pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, content knowledge and, methodological knowledge to implement MTB-MLE approach in the context of monolingual classroom setting.

In MTB-MLE program, students bring their language in school from their home. They start to learn read and write through their language. They get opportunity of using

their language in their classroom. They feel that the classroom environment as their homely environment because of their mother tongue use in the classroom. They interact with their teachers and friends freely and confidently in their mother tongue whenever they get problems in terms of learning English, Nepali and other subjects in their earlier grades. MTB-MLE approach integrates students' mother tongue in education. It motivates teachers to teach students in the language that they already known for effective teaching. Students feel proud to see their language use in education, they feel that their language is secured in English education. They transfer their learning concept, methods, skills, knowledge, ideas and experiences from their mother tongue to other languages gradually. Providing education to students of indigenous language group through MTB-MLE approach is applicable, suitable and appreciable in the context of Nepal.

Different researchers have forwarded their perspectives and experiences on the issue of using MTB-MLE approach in child education. Regarding language instruction, Atkinson (1987) states that students' mother tongue shouldn't be completely ignored in the English classes since the use of L1 can be very effective in terms of the amount of time spent explaining. MTB-MLE approach promotes students' mother tongue in teaching English. Out of 4,502,697 children enrolled at primary level school in Nepal, 1,602,047 children came from language minority groups and their school dropout rate was around 50% due to linguistic and cultural problem (Yadava, 2007). MTB-MLE for the primary level students is a meaningful and contextual teaching from the perspectives of transiting learning skills, building concepts, developing cognition and connecting ideas from the first language to other additional languages respectively for the ethnic group students. Ferrer (2011) suggests that mother tongue has an active and a beneficial role in instructed second language acquisition/learning. Stern (1992) claims that " the L1-L2 connection is an undisputable fact of life, whether we like it or not the new knowledge is learnt on the basis of the previously acquired language (p. 282) ". In this connection, UNESCO points out the benefits of MTB MLE to individual nations, and to the world, "Education has a vital role to play in building resilience against violent conflict. School in the twenty-first century need above all to teach children what is arguably the single most vital skill for a flourishing multi-cultural society-the skill of living peacefully with other people. Awareness of religious, ethnic, linguistic and racial diversity should not be banished from the classroom.

On the contrary, diversity should be recognized and celebrated". (UNESCO, 2010, p.36) Constitution of Nepal (2015) has been made the policies and language right

to provide education in students' mother tongue. This study concerns on the use of MTB-MLE approach to teaching English in students' mother tongue for their better understanding in subject matter and learning languages. Teaching English to early grade students of ethnic groups at present context is seemed possible through their mother tongue instruction. MTB-MLE approach has become an important issue for teacher educators, teacher trainers, curriculum developers, and policy makers in Nepal from the perspectives of providing quality and sustainable education to students and language teaching with cognitive development in students. Providing education through mother tongue to the students of ethnic group creates the identity of their mother tongue in education, it creates an environment of inclusive education in them, and they get motivated to read and write in their own language.

### **Theoretical Review**

This section deals with bilingual education, concept of mother tongue based multilingual education approach, schema theory, linguistic interdependence theory and multi-competence theory.

#### ***Bilingual Education***

In bilingual education, students get an education by using two languages alternatively. Integration of language and content goes together in the process of teaching pedagogically. There are two kinds of benefits of bilingualism. They are mentioned below as follows: (a) Cognitive advantages of bilingualism: metalinguistic awareness, divergent thinking, communicative sensitivity and ability to learn multiple languages (b) Social advantages of bilingualism: socioeconomic benefits, maximum global interactions, maximum local interactions, potentializing acts of identities and cultural awareness (Garcia, 2009, p.93-94). The models of bilingual education follow the following key components: Subtractive- moves towards monolingualism, Additive- attempts balanced bilingualism, Recursive- accepts the flows of bilingualism and Dynamic- encourages communicative and dynamic bilingualism (Garcia, 2009, p.55). Bilingual translanguage to include and facilitate communication with others, but also to construct deeper understandings and make sense of their bilingual world (Garcia, 2009, p.45).

#### ***Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education Approach***

Providing education to students in their language and familiar subject matter support them to learn new language and subject matters in different subjects from their

early schooldays. In this connection, Krashen (1989) advocated that the use of MT or the first language helps the L2/L3 input comprehensible or L1 supports students to learn L2 or L3. Students' home language or first language supports students to learn better English with a great amount of understanding teaching contents and they get an opportunity of sustainable learning. Similarly, Cummins' interdependence theory (1979) suggested that the use of students' L1 supports to learn literacy (reading and writing) and contents can be taught meaningfully from the early grades, and knowledge can be transferred across into the L2. Tenorio (2022) found that the effectiveness of learners' first language in primary education has set an emerging trend worldwide in the use of mother tongue in the early years of education (p. 2). Students' first language supports them to learn other additional languages easily by connecting their background language, knowledge and ideas with the second and third language acquisition.

In MTB-MLE approach, students' learning starts from their mother tongue and familiar subject matters. The language and knowledge brought from students' home to school retains the strong foundation of learning in students through MTB-MLE at primary level school education for the students of ethnic group in the context of Nepal. Students feel secured their language identity and their voice in education. They get motivated to learn read and write in their mother and in other languages. MTB-MLE approach supports to decrease students' dropout rate in schools. MTB-MLE implementation at primary level school education has been become effective, explorative and contextual trend of providing quality and sustainable education by transferring knowledge, skills and experience in learning through mother to other additional languages with the better understanding language and teaching contents. The potentiality of MTB-MLE approach implementation in Nepalese context is suitable and applicable for students' sustainable learning having teachers' competencies on pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, content knowledge and methodological knowledge that empower them in their professional growth and development.

### **Theories of Learning**

Theories of learning consists of Schema Theory, Linguistic Interdependence Theory and Multi-Competence Theory which are discussed briefly.

#### ***Schema Theory of Learning***

Anderson (1970s) is the exponent of the schema theory of learning. He conceives that organized knowledge is an elaborate network of abstract mental structure, which helps the learners to understand the world. This theory mainly focuses

on the importance of teaching general knowledge and generic concepts to the learners. According to this theory, learners' difficulties can be found due to the lack of proper general knowledge. It happens in cross-cultural situations. Comprehension of abstract messages depends upon the individual's ability to represent abstractions with concrete representations consistent with the message. Students' knowledge, interests, and personal experiences connect the ideas between schemata and the interpretation of meanings. An ability to learn is based upon the existence of a framework of general schemata (prior knowledge) to which new knowledge can be connected. The roles and responsibilities of teachers are very important to help the learners to build schemas and to make connections between their ideas. Zhao and Zhu (2012) stated that the Theory of Schema interprets that when people comprehend, they need to combine their own background knowledge with the information in a text and the prior knowledge and knowledge structure works effectively in people's cognitive activities. In MTB-MLE approach, students' background knowledge about their culture, tradition, surrounding environment and social atmosphere, plays the most important role in all aspects. Since the teachers of the program are from the language minority community, the teachers feel easier to enable the learners to see connection between their prior knowledge and their acquired new knowledge. It enables the learners to build a meaningful schema that can be carried out by connecting the ideas. And, this schema theory helps me to connect the different ideas in my study.

### ***Linguistic Interdependence Theory***

Cummins (1978) developed this theory in order to language teaching and learning. Cummins claims that students' mother tongue or first language's knowledge can be transferred while teaching and learning second language acquisition. This theory claims that students' basic interpersonal communication skill supports to gain cognitive academic language proficiency. This theory raises the issue of the distinction between surface level fluency and academic language skills. Cummins (1979) labeled these distinctions in terms of Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS refers to everyday conversational fluency while CALP refers to the academic ability of the students. CALP refers to the students' ability to understand and express ideas and concepts required for academic proficiency. MTB-MLE approach emphasizes on Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and then focuses on Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in the process of teaching learning activities.

### ***Multi-Competence Theory***

Cook (1991) refers to the compound state of a mind or concept of gaining knowledge in learners' mind from more than one language in the process of learning by using different activities and techniques. In MTB-MLE, students accumulate the concepts, skills and information from their mother tongue education to other additional languages, they store the information, knowledge, skill and technique in their mind, when they need, they can apply information, knowledge, skill and techniques in the different situation. Students can develop the competencies of multi-languages through their mother tongue education to other additional languages in the process of learning.

### **Empirical Review on Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education Approach**

Tamang (2019) studied on "Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education Program: An Effective Approach to Teaching in Rajbanshi Language Community". The objectives of the study were to examine to what extent MTB-MLE is effective to teach non-Nepali speaking students of grade 3 and grade 4 and, to compare students' performance of MTB-MLE approach implemented schools with the performance of English medium instruction (EMI) implemented schools. The finding significantly showed that the performance of MTB-MLE schools' students was better in comparison to the performance of English medium government school's students. The result of comparative study in reading assessment of English and Nepali subjects between MTB-MLE implemented schools and EMI implemented schools revealed that MTB-MLE approach is suitable, applicable and contextual for the students of ethnic group in the context of multilingual classroom setting.

Perez (2019) conducted a study on "A Comparative Study of the MTB-MLE Programs in Southeast Asian Countries." The objectives of this study were to determine how Mother-Tongue-Based Multilingual Education is implemented in Southeast Asian countries particularly in Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam and, to find out the similarities and differences in terms of language policy, curriculum, and teacher training. Findings of the study showed that language policies have been supported at implementing MTB-MLE in the five selected countries in Southeast Asia and mother tongue has been used as a medium of instruction in education at primary level. Selected five countries have used curriculum, use of teaching materials and developing materials in the similar way. Implementation of MTB-MLE program to the students of ethnic community becomes effective, supportive, constructive and

motivational in case of designing curriculum and teaching materials on the basis of local language and culture.

Caterial and Tantoy (2019) studied on “The Teaching of Mother-Tongue Based Multi-lingual Education of Pre-Service Teachers: Basis for a Training Program.” The objective was to describe the experiences of the pre-service teachers in the teaching of mother tongue as a subject and as medium of instruction. Findings of the study showed that the pre-service teachers’ experiences on MTBMLE was very challenging and the pre-service teachers encountered various constraints such as mismatch of teaching materials, lack of vocabulary, lack of knowledge about language structure and unavailability of contextualized instructional materials. Implementing MTB-MLE in the context of Nepal seems challenging in terms of not having qualified manpower, sufficient resources, teacher training and materials development.

Theresa and Valerio (2015) studied on “Current perspectives on mother tongue instruction in newly implemented k-12 curriculum of the Philippines”. The objective of this study was to examine the progress of child’s language development. Finding of the study presented that the indigenous languages and their suitability along classroom instruction were deeply strong and the pedagogical implications to use mother tongue as one of the mandates of curriculum from KG to 12 grades in Philippines. Perspectives and experiences on the implementation of MTB-MLE for the early grade students of ethnic group support to understand the concept and practice of MTB-MLE by including mother tongue in child education within the framework of intended curriculum. Fillmore (2014) studied on “Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education Policy and Implementation in Mindanao, Philippines: A Grounded Theory Case.” Findings of the study presented that the policy environment presented in Philippines is indeed supportive, and existing policies are approved by key stakeholders to implement MTB-MLE for the early grade students’ learning. The roles and responsibilities of stakeholders from different sectors become supportive having ownership to sustain the program after implementing MTB-MLE in the community of indigenous language groups.

Similarly, Burton (2013) studied on “Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education in the Philippines: Studying Top-Down Policy Implementation from the Bottom Up”. The objective of study was to develop language that establishes a strong education for lifelong learning. The finding showed that teachers and parents are the key



stakeholders to make MTB-MLE policy by including their knowledge, beliefs and language practice in developing teaching materials.

Implementation of mother tongue based multilingual education from the lower level to higher level becomes meaningful and contextual for the learners. The policy makers are suggested to consider about making curriculum and its practices including local language and culture into the developed teaching materials.

### **Discussions**

In this section, pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, content knowledge and teaching methods are discussed with the existing literatures.

#### ***Pedagogical Knowledge***

Pedagogical knowledge refers to knowledge which helps the teachers to provide a basis to teach language well. (Burns and Richard, 2012) suggest that pedagogical content knowledge includes: curriculum, planning, assessment, reflective teaching, classroom management, teaching children and teaching four skills. Teaching skills especially for the novice teachers are essential factors for the development of teachers' competencies. Novice teachers need a repertoire of techniques and routines, teaching procedures with an introduction and explanation task, setting up learning arrangements, checking students' understanding, guiding student practice, making transition from one task to another task and ending the lesson.

To have knowledge related to teaching pedagogy in teachers is an essential aspect that supports the teachers to be confident and competent in teaching profession. Teachers' pedagogical knowledge is an asset or pedagogical capital of teachers' experiences and expertise during their teaching life world. Pedagogical knowledge enhances teachers to be competent about the activities of inside the classroom and outside the classroom to achieve the goals of intended curriculum.

#### ***Curriculum Knowledge***

Curriculum is a plan of different activities with methods, resources, materials and contents. Curriculum helps teachers to understand the whole plan of teaching activities systematically and practically in the classroom. In addition, Mohanasundaram (2018) stated "Curriculum development is as planned, a purposeful, progressive, and systematic process to create positive improvements in the educational system" (p. 4). A planned, purposeful and progressive curriculum becomes systematic in educational system. Similarly, Schwab (1983) expressed, "Curriculum is what is successfully

conveyed to differing degrees to different students, by committed teachers using appropriate materials and actions, of legitimated bodies of knowledge, skill, taste, and propensity to act and react, which are chosen for instruction after serious reflection and communal decision by representatives of those involved in the teaching of a specified group of students who are known to the decision makers.” (p. 240) Curriculum theorist Schwab has expressed that the curriculum includes the learners of different levels, using relevant teaching materials and actions, teaching skills, knowledge, taste and language instruction. These things are essential for systematic teaching. Nur&Madkur (2014) said, “curriculum as a set of plans and arrangements covering education goals, contents, learning materials, and learning methods intended to serve as the guidelines in implementing the teaching and learning process to achieve the goals that have been set” (p. 120).

Sepyanda (2017) asserted, “Curriculum is a set of lessons and academic content used to be taught in a school. Curriculum refers to the knowledge and skills students are expected to learn, which includes the learning standards or learning objectives they are expected to meet and other components related to the teaching and learning process.” (p. 211) Curriculum is mainly designed to align teachers’ knowledge, skills and experiences with the objectives of intended curriculum.

Teachers’ awareness and competencies on curriculum knowledge of the related subject strengthen teachers to be competent for performance having knowledge, experiences and practice. Teachers’ competencies on curriculum knowledge relates to an understanding of teachers’ ability to connect the contents with an intended curriculum for an effective and a conducive classroom environment.

### ***Content Knowledge***

Teachers’ competencies depend on the role of content knowledge. Content knowledge refers to what teachers need to know about what they teach. Shulman (1987) asserted, “focus upon the teacher’s ability to reason about teaching and to teach specific topics” (p. 20). Shulman (1986) further said, “we expect the teacher to understand why a particular topic is particularly central to a discipline whereas another may be somewhat peripheral” (p. 9). Shulman (1987) said, “Pedagogical content knowledge is the category most likely to distinguish the understanding of the content specialist from the pedagogue” (p.8). Pedagogical content knowledge always focuses on the specific content to be taught as being a specialist about the teaching content. Again, Shulman (1986) pointed, “Mere content knowledge is likely to be as useless pedagogically as

content-free skill” (p. 8). Regarding the pedagogical content knowledge, de Berg and Greive (1999) said that “The product of transforming subject matter into a form that will facilitate student learning” (p.20). Transforming subject matter supports the students to facilitates in students’ learning. In this connection, Lowery (2002) pointed, “That domain of teachers’ knowledge that combines subject matter knowledge and knowledge of pedagogy” (p.69). The relationship between subject matter and pedagogical knowledge is quite interrelated to demonstrate the domain of teachers’ content knowledge. To be competent in subjects-specific knowledge, teachers should have a wide range of content knowledge for successful teaching. Teachers’ performance is determined by their competence of content knowledge. Pedagogically, teachers’ competencies on content knowledge supports the teachers to be specialist in the related subject.

### ***Teaching Methods***

Discussion method in teaching learning process is useful and suitable for higher level students. However, in MTB-MLE approach, teachers let students to interact about the pictures included in their textbooks in their mother tongue for the better understanding. In this connection, Blumberg (2008) says that interactions during this activity would encourage students to exchange ideas and experiences which run alongside with what is learnt from the lecturer. In this respect, Nystrand (2006) says that discussion used during lectures is an effective way to facilitate learning. Similarly, Sybing (2015) reports that discussions provide students with a platform to participate in their learning process. Discussion method is useful for higher level students that encourages them to interact each other on the given topics.

Regarding to role play method, Baruch (2006) stated, “Role-play provides one of the best ways to be provocative and encourage class interaction and arguments” (p. 53). Role-playing is an active teaching strategy that has been shown to promote such skill-based learning (Regan, 1993). Stevens (2015) said, “Role-play is one such small group activity that facilitates collaborative learning” (P. 482). Role play facilitates collaborative learning in students. Discussion method enhances the students to interact about the subject matter or topics with their friends and teachers without having hesitation and fear but they share ideas, knowledge and experiences with other friends confidently. They develop communicative competence when teachers use discussion method. Role play method supports the students to develop their confidence level to demonstrate their ideas, knowledge and experiences to be the leaders or captains of the

classroom. Students learn through role play by imitating someone's character or behavior. It provides students the opportunity of engaging in the different activities. Role play encourages the learners to learn through interaction. Role play facilitates the learners to learn through interaction, collaboration in a social environment.

### **Conclusions**

MTB-MLE approach in Nepal is useful in the context of providing child education to students of ethnic group for their better understanding and achieving good result in their learning. This study provides new insights to empower the teachers in terms of having curricular knowledge, content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and methodological knowledge that support teachers to build up their professional growth and development in the journey of their teaching profession. Without having knowledge in teachers about teaching methods, teaching materials, curriculum, content and medium of instruction, MTB-MLE approach cannot be successful and meaningful in the context of Nepal. Policy of language right (Constitution of Nepal, 2015) to providing child education in their mother tongue for ethnic group students is not practically implemented in real context due to various constraints such teacher training, local culture and language- based materials, lack of funding to produce materials, recruiting manpower, ignoring mother tongue in English education and lack of knowledge and practices of MTB-MLE.

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