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Use of EMI at Secondary Education: Exploring Non-English Nepalese Teachers' Ideologies

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Abstract

English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) is a teaching of non-English academic subjects using English where the very language is not the first language for most of the population. The study aimed at exploring the teachers' pertinent ideologies towards the use of EMI in the teaching of non-English subjects. The researcher used narrative inquiry as a research design where the purposive sampling strategy was used to select the sample from the target population. In-depth interview was used as a research method to collect the information from the participants. The interviews were conducted based on the interview guidelines. The information was recorded, transcribed, translated, coded, categorized, and thematically analyzed. The study found that the teachers possessed various deep rooted ideologies on EMI, such as EMI as a mediating tool to internationalize the education system, EMI as a linguistic capital in the educational market, EMI as a linguistic hegemony to the underdeveloped countries, and EMI standardizes the academics and improves the competitive capacity. It can be inferred that EMI has been ideologized by both practitioners and policy makers. Moreover, the real practitioners and their ideologies are to be considered while designing the policies, and planning the provisions.

KeyWords: Ideology, EMI, Secondary Education, Hegemony, Non-English

Introduction

English is an international language, and regarded as a lingua franca across the globe. More importantly, the teaching of English has become a universal demand. Moreover, English has been used as a language of instruction globally where English is not spoken as a native language. It has been widely practiced as a medium of instruction (MOI) in the teaching of non-English subjects, is referred as English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). As reported by Dearden (2014) EMI has become a growing global phenomenon. MOI refers to an instructional model of teaching non-English academic subjects through the medium of English in educational settings where English is not the mother tongue of most students, which aims to facilitate the learning of content knowledge and English skills as well (Sah, 2021).

The use of English is full of ideologies around the world. For instance, the beliefs like English internationalizes the education; learning English is a matter to be educated; English is the language of powerful people, and English is associated with social mobility and economic

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advancement. Supporting the idea, Tembe (2006) stated that being educated means having proficiency in English, and is concurred as prerequisite for upward mobility and global citizenship. Thus, English is used as a capital that uplifts the people's social and economic level.

There exist various concepts for the practice of a particular language in the field of education, especially in the position of MOI. English has been extensively used in different fields of human affairs, and most probably, one of them is the use of it as MOI, popularly known as EMI. The development of EMI is often linked to the process of neoliberal globalization in which the surging expansion of EMI is often ascribed to the demand for English in the economic market and for global communication (Sah & Li, 2018). Recent studies on EMI such as Watcher (2008), Jensen and Thogerson (2011), Early and Norton (2014), Cherif and Alkhateeb (2015) stated that many countries where English is not the national language are shifting their MOI towards EMI in the name of internationalization of education and upward mobility.

Sah (2015) and Rana (2018) argued that Ministry of Education provisioned for EMI schools, nevertheless it itself does not seem to be well prepared to meet the basic requirements for its successful implementation. In contrast, the National Language Policy Recommendation Commission (1993) recommended for employing mother tongues in schools as an MOI and subject of instruction (Yamphu, 2019). This ideological dilemma whether prefers to or deny the role of EMI which has created a great issue; whether to promote Mother Tongue Based – Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) or EMI.

The existing EMI policy and its practices are studied and explored, however the ideological perspectives on EMI have slightly been discussed by the researchers. Moreover, the belief system of teachers is to be explored as they are the major carriers of implementing particular policy in their act of teaching. Teachers' beliefs and assumptions on the use of particular language for different purposes can have a big impact on both policy and practice. So, I got motivated to conduct this study to explore the ideologies of real practitioners on the use of EMI in the non-English classrooms. Hence, the study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. How do teachers perceive EMI in the teaching of non-English subjects?
2. What are the ideologies that teachers have on the use of EMI in non-English classrooms?

Literature Review

English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI)

EMI is the use of English to teach academic subjects in countries or areas where English is not the first language of most of the population (Dearden, 2014). The use of English as MOI for teaching Social Studies, Mathematics, Science, and Economics can be taken as the best example of EMI in our context. The extensive use of English is often associated with the notion of internationalization, globalization, fashion, and media. Supporting the idea, Watcher (2008) talked about the internationalization of education where the countries around the world adopted EMI to meet the global market via educating their citizens in English. In many countries, where English is not the national language, there has been a shift towards EMI in higher education (Hughes, 2008, as cited in Jensen & Thogerson, 2011).

The rise of the British Empire increased the language's spread to British colonies and in many of these, it has remained as a the medium of education. The increased economic and cultural influence of the United States since World War II has also furthered the global spread of English. As a consequence, in many states across the world where English is not the predominant language shifted their MOI to the EMI in the schools. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, there had been a sharp increment in the number of universities across the globe which offered English Taught Programs (ETPs) that is degree courses which are taught through the medium of English.

There is a growing body of literature on this phenomenon which explores issues such as the development of EMI in different countries, reasons for the spread of EMI, lecturers' and students' beliefs on EMI, learning gains in terms of English proficiency and the effects on learning academic subjects through English. The spread of EMI has also been criticized and contested in many countries, and in the research studies. It has led to concern about the quality of education, its impact on students' learning, accessibility to education, and its impact on linguistic diversity and social justice. Despite its rampant spread, the effects of EMI on improving students' proficiency of English is still an under-investigated phenomenon in recent literatures.

EMI in Nepal

As the importance of English language increased globally, it has been employed as an MOI in different countries. Education act (1971) brought the provision of adopting English, Nepali or both languages as a medium of instruction in Nepal. In recent years, numerous public schools of Nepal shifted to English Medium from Nepali, and have adopted EMI as one of the increasing trends (Rana, 2018). The Englishization in education made the public schools to shift into English from Nepali for their survival in Nepal. Moreover, the public schools have adopted EMI to compete to the private schools. In this regard, Davies (2009; as cited in Phyak 2018) argues that the current EMI policy is developed with the essence of competing to the private schools as the English has ideologically been taken as the symbol of power and prestige. There are various factors that affect in the increment of shifts towards EMI; parental aspirations, global market, internationalize the education, linguistic capital. Supporting the idea, Phyak (2016) states that the parental aspirations over their children to be taught in English is a factor in the increment of EMI policy and most of the public schools are adopting English as the medium of instruction to attract the students.

Studies on EMI

As EMI is a growing global phenomenon (Dearden, 2014), the trends and the practices are being studied by many scholars around the world. Jensen and Thogerson (2011) observed the growing use of EMI by teachers. The study's results reveal that EMI yields predominantly negative outcomes rather than positive ones. The domination of English language affects the practice and the position of local languages in the nation. They found that more than two-thirds of the teachers agreed with the negative consequences of the EMI such as domain loss for national language, less dissemination of knowledge to the general public, and the poorer learning for the students. At the same time, similar majority of the teachers agreed with positive consequences of EMI such as internationalization of education. It was also found that the younger teachers were more positive about the increasing use of English language than older one.

English has also been ideologized as a mediating tool for learning. A study by Early and Norton (2014) in the rural Ugandan context explored the similar kind of ideology as Tembe (2006). Moreover, English is concurred as the prerequisite for upward mobility and global citizenship (Tembe, 2006). Similarly, Cherif and Alkhateeb (2015) set out a correlational study to investigate the students' attitude towards the use of Arabic as the MOI in the place of English in Arabian universities. They analyzed the data collected from the representatives of 295 Qatari University students which showed contradictions in the respondents' opinions favoring mother tongue based instruction in spite of an awareness that this would jeopardize their employment chances and future studies. They concluded their study with a way out to that dilemma of Qatari students that was the Universities can offer English for specific purposes courses or Arabics, and English tracks in majors that would meet the global job market. EMI has been used as the capital in the educational market (Sah & Guofang, 2018). In their study, the researchers found that EMI was introduced merely as a strategy to sell the tag of 'EMI education' in the linguistic market. They concluded their study that EMI was perceived as the linguistic capital in the market of schooling and was taken as a matter of burden for the teachers, and illusion for the students.

There have been some studies in the context of Nepal regarding EMI (Poudel & Choi, 2021; Saud, 2020; Ghimire, 2019; Saud, 2019). Throughout the literature reviewed above, it can be elicited that EMI has been practiced across the globe where English is not the language of most of the population. As the teachers are the major practitioners of the policy, I got motivated to explore the teacher's pertinent ideologies in the application of EMI in Nepalese context. Moreover, the reviewed literatures revealed the fact that researchers have escorted out their studies more on the perceptions, attitudes, challenges, motivational factors towards EMI, and beliefs, however, the ideological aspects have slightly been explored. Thus, this study attempted to address that very existing gap by exploring the teachers' ideologies on the use of EMI.

Methods and Procedures

For this study, I have used narrative inquiry as a research design under qualitative approach. Riessman and Quinney (2005) state that narrative research is a family of approaches which focus on the stories that people use to understand and describe aspects of their lives from the stories they tell. It is one of more recent qualitative research methodologies that focuses on life stories as the essence of people oriented sciences (Ntinda, 2019). It is increasingly used in the studies of social sciences for its unique value to representing social phenomena in its full richness and complexity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I employed both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary sources of the data were the secondary level public school teachers of non-English academic subjects; social, science and mathematics, and the secondary sources of data were the books, journals, and previously carried out research studies. I selected three teachers teaching Social, Science and Mathematics at public schools of Sunsari District as participants of my study for the in-depth interviews to elicit the information for the study. The participants were interviewed individually based on the interview guidelines. The collected information was recorded with the help of cell phone first. Then the recorded information was transcribed then I translated the needed one. After all, I coded, categorized, and thematically analyzed by comparing and contrasting with the earlier literatures. I followed the thematic approach of data analysis proposed by Barkhuizen

et al. (2014) where the researcher reads the data repeatedly, codes it, categorizes, extracts and recognizes the thematic headings.

Results and Discussion

As the major concern of the study was to explore the teachers' ideology on the use of EMI at secondary education in the public schools of Nepal, the collected information was analyzed thematically. After the analysis of the information, the following themes have been generated as the findings of the study.

EMI as a Mediating Tool

Internationalization of education has become a priority for many education systems in many countries where English is not the national language (Watcher, 2008). It is a process of integrating international, intercultural or global dimensions into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education (Knight, 2003). Nowadays, it has become important to internationalize education to compete in the global job market. As a lingua franca, English has become the language of communication among the people who speak different mother tongues across the globe, and has become the language of global education, politics and economy. Thus, people have been highly attracted to English.

One of the participants; Prahlad Ghale (pseudo name) [Social teacher] responded: Unemployment of the country causes to sell the labor in the international market where the language of communication is English that's why it is spontaneous to perceive that English is for the internationalization of education.

The excerpts above posited that English has become a dominant language across the globe which obliged people to attain proficiency in it. The finding of the study as informed by Jensen and Thogerson (2011) which stated that EMI was adopted to internationalize the education, and to meet the global job market. The respondent stated the significance of adopting EMI in Nepal; to sell the skills in the international market by internationalizing the education and the curriculum. It was also inferred that the unemployment is a rooted problem in the developing countries whose people are compelled to go to abroad for job opportunities where English works as a Lingua franca. In such a situation, English is only the solution. So that, the government is also constrained to start teaching English for the specific purpose, as a subject or as the MOI. The excerpts revealed that the embedded ideology behind EMI application were the job opportunities created by English, and belief in the competitive capacity developed via EMI education.

Similarly, another respondent Prbhakar Bashyal (pseudo name [ScienceTeacher] responded

English language is an international language. We teach science in English medium to the students so that they could communicate and compete globally. When a child learns English language, he/she can learn so many things from different sources. EMI also work as a bridge to connect the local knowledge to the global arena. . . overall the EMI internationalize the education.

In the above excerpt, the representative teacher claims that they taught science in English medium so that the language can bridge the students globally. Moreover, he stated that learning English is learning of many more things. It might be due to its domination across the globe. In the line of his argument, the study of Jensen and Thogerson (2011) talked on the internationalization of education as the cause of EMI whereas the response of Bashyal above

denoted the same thing. It was also found that people are accepting imperial English only because of its international coverage. The information showed that most of the private schools and some government schools have followed EMI to internationalize its curricula, cross boarder institutional partnerships in joint research, joint degrees and branch schools pedantically to internationalize the education system.

EMI as a Linguistic Capital

English is the language of most of internationally popular journals, websites, networks, books and documents so that people can use all those resources and materials in their classroom teaching. The world of science is also dominated by English. The universities publish important research studies in English and even the serious publications are done in English. It is also significant in the use of ICT tools.

One of the participants; Prahlad Ghale (pseudo name) [Social teacher] narrated:

English is spoken by most of the people across the globe, most of the books are published in English language, research studies have been conducting and publishing in English language and people may have in depth knowledge if the English materials are read. So I found it as material provider.

Hence, the excerpt shows that teachers have been taking English as a material provider. They found supplementary materials for their teaching, mostly in English language. As the stories or the experiences shared by them revealed that the research studies have been found in English language. Moreover, teachers found that they believed in English as a source of knowledge as Ghale narrated in the line that people may have in-depth knowledge if they read English materials. Different materials for teaching have been developed so far in English and they can act as good resources to the students. Having held this view, the participant of this study believed that English is the richest language for the literature or materials in the world. It is surprisingly true that teachers got equipped with the ideology, i.e. no English – no materials, and no materials – no teaching. The data showed that English is a material developer, and people of other languages are consumers. Throughout the analysis, it can be said that English can be used as a capital in the educational market.

Observing the increasing use of English in classroom delivery as well as in academic discourses, the participants of this study believed that EMI has been a core academic attraction for the parents and the students. In their experiences, parents demanded the use of English in the classes and even some of the students did the same.

The participant Prabhakar Bashyal (pseudonym) stated:

Definitely, why English is the core attraction is; I have already told you, firstly social prestige, and then ability to communicate in international level, job related facts, so many books have been printed out in English medium, and it is easy to gain the information, the instructions, in different kinds of electronic stuffs, are in English, so due to all these things, attraction of parents, teachers and students towards English is increased, and our aspiration is the same, on the basis of those attraction, that English should be made as medium of instruction

Hence, the information showed, EMI has become a source of parental attraction and the attraction of students because of its international value as lingua-franca. In the same way, parents also think that being able in English is the matter of social prestige and well being. Tembe (2006) stated that being educated in Uganda means proficiency in English and is

concluded as the prerequisite for upward mobility and global citizenship. So, EMI is attempted to be implemented at different public schools in Nepal in which the non-profit and donating organizations such as British Council, NELTA and American Embassy have been conducting different sorts of academic trainings in terms of developing English language to the ELT professionals so far. As he shared, EMI has lured the parents in the global and academic market place in terms of providing quality education through it and it has centralized the global academics. English has become the language of the demand at different offices and companies. Thus, the parents want to give English education to their children from the grassroots level. In such case, EMI has influenced the aspiration of parents and the demand of the children for their better carrier.

Similarly, a respondent, Prabhakar Bashyal presented slightly a new ideology which is similar to a saying that is ‘the limit of my language is the limit of my world’. He opined:

If the language is Nepali, limited people know it, only limited people read those documents, but if the language is English, most of the people read the documents across the globe. Nepali readers also likely to read English books, but they read Nepali books less. Most of the readers read the books written in English, there is also a matter of business for giving the information in many places. The popularity/ fame of writers is high if he/she writes in English language. So, all the people are ready to use English as international language

The excerpts above showed the superiority complex in between the languages. Medium was taken as a significant matter of knowledge dissemination. It is deplorable that the real knowledge is behind the curtain, and people are selling their language not knowledge. As he said if the language is Nepali, limited people read the documents. If the language is English, most of the people read the material. It showed that the real knowledge to be disseminated is deprived of only because of the medium. The school teachers have been adopting EMI in the name of popular language and as a matter of business to expand their information in many places.

Moreover, the information revealed the fact as watcher’s view of global citizens and the upward mobility of the people via English language. It can also be inferred that ideologies are integrated with the coverage of the language which is taken as the linguistic capital in the market of schooling (Sah & Guofang, 2018). EMI has just become tool to show the social prestige for parents as well as the students. The parental aspirations, availability of materials, resources, the concept of standard, job opportunities, competitive capacity, global citizen, and the superiority complex can be taken as the form of capital in the linguistic market.

EMI as Hegemony

In addition to taking English as an international language and a language of material developer, the participants of this study also perceived it as a language to create its own hegemony being irrespective to linguistic and cultural diversity.

One of the respondents, Prabhakar Bashyal commented;

Nepal is multilingual country where more than 131 languages are spoken. In this linguistically rich country, only using English in the classroom is the symbol of hegemony in terms of language use. We don’t let the students use their mother tongue to share their understandings to some extent. It spoils their linguistic human right to use their mother tongue outwardly

The excerpts above showed that the teachers were obliged and imperialized to use EMI in the classroom. The hidden ideology we found was their conceptualization of English as a powerful and ruling language across the globe. The respondent stated in the line that they did not let the students use their mother tongue to share their understanding in some extent. Moreover, the students were found that they got deprived of the linguistic human right to use their mother tongue in the classroom due to the English hegemony which can be denoted as a linguistic imperialism (Philipson, 2015). Throughout the data, it is inferred that English has been dominating the local languages of the nation.

Another respondent Pralad Ghale opined the same concept of adopting EMI. He stated, the teachers adopted English because of linguistic imperialism. He said, "EMI is a form of colony where the powerful states have been ruling over the less powerful country via expanding their language, culture and religion. So, EMI as a hegemony is accepted."

Hence, the information revealed that the world has a trend; the powerful countries like to expand their language, culture and religion. So, the people of underdeveloped and developing countries have been obliged to accept the bitter fact although they have a lot of minority languages in their country. Thus, it was found that adopting EMI was not only the interest of being a global citizen, but also a hegemony of power.

EMI for Improving Competitive Capacity

EMI has become a trend; followed by most of the developing and developed countries to some extent, in the field of education with the hidden belief of standardizing the academics as it is swiftly becoming mainstream in higher education institutions (HEIs) where English has traditionally held a foreign language status (Dafouz & Minano, 2016). It is just because of the writing system in English. English as linguistic capital (Sah & Li, 2018) plays pivotal role to ensure different kinds of global opportunities which addresses most of the students' dreams and the parental aspirations towards their children as it provides the social prestige as well as the honor in the society. On the other hand, the use of English as language of academia, research and the internet remains uncontested, as the growing number of publications, journals and conferences in this language clearly show (Mauranen, Hynninen, & Ranta, 2010, as cited in Dafouz & Minano, 2016).

The participant; Mr. Bashyal shared in the interview;

EMI has been taken as a standard. It matters in the marks that the students achieve in the examination. Students peruse a lot at home for the purpose of writing answer in English. EMI is effective to standardize the academics. It does not matter if the students are from public EMI or private schools, if they are good at English, they can compete in the global market. In the case of our school, the students, who chose English medium, have topped whether they go to Science, Mathematics, English and any other streams in average in percentage.

Hence, the excerpts revealed that most of the parents aspire to send their children to private schools with the belief of giving standard education to their children because of implementation of EMI which binds in the specific case of business studies and given the globalization of the world economy, high level of competence in English is viewed as a pre-requisite for all business students in the 21st century (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2012; Oria, 2012; Taillefer, 2007; as cited in Dafouz & Minano, 2016). English has been used as MOI in many private schools, colleges and universities, but it has not received the same status in public

institution of higher learning in Nepal (Bista, 2011). So, they regard the private school education standard because of the implementation of EMI.

A mathematics teacher Mrs. Siwakoti (pseudonym) shared in the interview:

'First of all, students should have knowledge. English has been used as our second language. Students can move ahead being competitive and capable on any position if they are educated and conscious. The students can transfer the knowledge they have with the medium of English language to compete globally.

As the excerpts implied that English is used only for the transmission of the knowledge that the students have. It is spoken world widely as a lingua-franca. So, the knowledge travels internationally if it is expressed in English which helps education be internationalized, standard, and the urgent need of English learning has added the further dimension with growing number of English medium schools across the nation (Bhatpara & Gautam, 2005, as cited in Bista, 2011). There appears to be a fast-moving worldwide shift in non-Anglophone countries, from English being taught as a foreign language (EFL) to EMI for academic subjects such as Science, Mathematics, Geography and Medicine (Dearden, 2014). English has been shifted from foreign language to MOI in Nepal which has created different ideological bases in which people believe that it standardizes the academics which helps students learn English so that they get preferable jobs in competitive global market. In this regard, Mr. Ghale (pseudonym) shared in the interview:

Now that is also inartificial, why because, for example; English as the most spoken language by large number of people in the world, and large number of books; let's say knowledge related materials, knowledge related subjects, because subject matters related to research are mostly in English language, so in comparison to other languages, it has wide area of the subject matters for the in-depth study. So I feel it inartificial.

The information presented that most of the international documents and other sorts of reading materials are produced and published in English, and the students should have good English to get the essence of those sources. So, EMI has received the high demand to be implemented at public schools as the parents believe that the schools with EMI, provide quality and standard education. It further shows that parents are attracted with the tag of EMI education in the linguistic market (Sah & Guofang, 2018).

Conclusion

This study has explored and analyzed the teachers' ideologies on the use of EMI. The narrative inquiry was adopted as a research design using in-depth interviews to collect the information. After the analysis and the interpretation of the information it was found that teachers have various ideologies on the use of EMI. Being based on the study, it has been explored that EMI helps to standardize and internationalize the Nepalese education. The inclusion of English from grassroots level to university level implies that the EMI policy has internationalized the education because the course content is found to be foreign in those levels.

Parents, based on the teachers' experience, feel proud if their children are send to EMI schools, even in public schools. People have been granting English as a matter to be educated particularly the teachers are equipped with the deep rooted ideologies; EMI standardizes the academics, improves the competitive capacity, makes global citizen, works

as a linguistic capital, and bridges the local knowledge to global arena. These ideologies are found in the community of the teachers who were currently teaching in EMI context.

The study is significant to the teachers, teacher educators, researchers, and to those who make the language policies. It is a contribution in the field of academia, and will serve as a raw material to the future researchers. Thus, it has a layered significance from the policy maker to the practitioners. The study implies that the teachers are the major practitioners of any policies. So, their ideologies are to be considered. Moreover, EMI has been ideologized as a capital in the global market which helps to internationalize the whole education system, but it has to be sighted on the local languages and their existence.

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