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Implementing English as a Medium of Instruction: Qualitative Inquiry of Mathematics and Science Teachers

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Abstract

This study examines the views of public school teachers on pedagogical issues, including diverse learning styles, technology integration, facilitating students' engagement in learning, and addressing social-emotional engagement of learners, as they implement English as a medium of instruction in Nepal. The paper focuses on the challenges and opportunities of shifting Nepali medium of instruction to English medium instruction. The study employed qualitative research to explore the subjective experiences of science and mathematics teachers. The participants of the study were eight teachers of Sundarharincha Municipality, Morang. An interview guideline was prepared to collect the information from the participants. Their experiences were subsequently analyzed and interpreted under explicit themes and sub-themes. The main findings of the study showed that the teachers were found to be positive towards the implementation of EMI; however, they have experienced the burden of implementing English as a medium of instruction. The school administration claimed to have adopted EMI, but still the medium of instruction used in the classrooms is Nepali due to the lack

Academic Journal of Sukuna - AJoS, 5(1), 2025, ISSN 2594-3138 (Print) 141 of language proficiency of teachers and students, insufficient resources of the schools, and the lack of preparation for shifting the medium. As a result, EMI is a kind of burden for the public-school teachers and students in the present context.

Keywords: English Medium Instruction (EMI), Nepali Medium of Instruction (NMI) language policy, Multilingual, Lingua franca

Introduction

English is the widely used medium of communication in the world. As a master key, English opens the storehouse of knowledge in every field, especially geography, world history, science and technology, and so on. It is an international lingua franca for communication among the people of the world. People are well aware of the extensive use of English language and it has gained its popularity for communication in the international community.

In the era of globalization, it is clear that the global language is used to measure the competencies of an individual. As businesses look to expand into new markets and integrate global operations, they find that, more and more, their employees need to work together across geographic regions (Nunan, 2005). He links the learning English language with globalization and promotes a broader understanding of people. Therefore, people understand that language opens opportunities in the global industry.

Realizing the dominance of English in every aspect of human civilization, every individual, social, and educational institution are concerned with it and they are practicing the trend as the medium of communication and generating knowledge regarding it one of the indicators of human civilization. Many countries begin to use English as the language of instruction in their educational organizations (Ernawati et al., 2021). With this perspective, Genc & Yuksel (2021) further clarify that the English language is not only used to teach language but to instruct other academic subjects, especially in countries where English is not their mother tongue. This means most of the

educational institutions are using this language as a medium of instruction, believing that it is a key source for getting success in an international academic platform.

In Nepal, as Nepali is the common lingua franca, the use of Nepali Language in the multilingual setting seems very obvious and comfortable in Nepalese schools. So, only Nepali language has been used in the Nepalese public schools as the medium of communication and instruction for a long. On the other side, English-medium private and institutional schools and English-medium public schools have been practicing English as the medium of communication and instruction in their schools for long. The evidence shows that students in public schools learn English as a means of study, they experienced it just as a subject to be studied as their core course and the medium of instruction is solely Nepali. However, in the recent time Nepalese Public schools have now become aware of the dominance of English, and performance in English language has become a matter of prestige, as well, for them. This whole scenario is creating the environment for medium of instruction shift from Nepali to English Language. This shows that the medium of communication in schools is on the verge of shifting to English, which is what is referred to the EMI.

In a multilingual context, the shift from NMI to EMI seems challenging to the multiple stakeholders, specifically to the teachers during the teaching and learning process. In this regard, Joshi (2020) explored the necessity of promoting Nepali as a medium of instruction in the multilingual context of Nepalese education. This idea correlates with the idea of Phyak (2024) where he exclaims that EMI policy in the context of English ecology in higher levels of education in Nepal goes beyond the use of an English-only environment. He claimed that Nepali as a medium of instruction possesses the potential of being an inclusive and mainstream language in Nepal. Language change, even in a single subject, could bring severe disruptions to the learning process as per the linguistic psychology of school-level students. Shrestha

(2023) states that the teachers appointed 15-20 years before are still in service and are compelled to teach in English medium classes in public schools. It is not an easy task for them because they did not undertake their study in English Medium in their whole life.

As discussed in the above context, EMI underlies various challenges such as applying EMI in multilingual settings, teacher trainings, elaboration of subject matter, level-wise and subject-wise knowledge increment, etc., which are inherent in the transition to English as a primary medium of instruction. The Public Schools of Nepal have been using Nepali or the dominant mother tongue as a medium to instruct in schools. However, many public schools are shifting to English as a medium of instruction because of public pressure and the growing craze for the English language. It is obvious that public schools are advertising themselves to be better schools now, just because they have used EMI in their schools. So, some discussion question arises: Are public schools ready to use EMI? Can teachers who have long used Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI) transit to EMI effectively and sustainably? Is the education system operating more like a pendulum, following to the trend rather than applying a systematic and research-driven process? How do the teachers perceive and emotionally respond to this trend? As far as our knowledge goes, none of the research works are in this area. Hence, this study is of interest to explore these challenges from the teachers' perspectives.

This study explores the implementation of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in public schools, concentrating specifically on mathematics and science teachers. It aims to understand how teachers perceive and experience the transition from Nepali Medium Instruction (NMI) to EMI, providing information on their lived realities regarding this shift. Central to the investigation are questions that explore teachers' perceptions, the pedagogical challenges they encounter during EMI implementation,

and the approaches they employ to navigate these issues. The research seeks to uncover key problems in implementing EMI, particularly in teaching learning activities, and further aims to evaluate possible approaches that benefit teachers solve pedagogical. Moreover, the study is focused to provide a nuanced view, on the basis of the teachers lived experience, on the EMI transition and contributes practical insights for formulating future educational policy, decision making, and teacher support mechanisms.

English medium instruction has gained global concern, particularly for the adoption of globalization and the response of internationalization of education. Rose and McKinley (2017) analyze Japan's move toward English-medium instruction to make their education system global. They claim that EMI helps to make a shift of policy from traditional to market-driven education, best fit to a competitive world. Mahboob (2020) provides a post-colonial perspective of EMI implementation, and he proposes that EMI is very relevant in countries with a colonial past where the British established educational systems. In such a case, English continues to function as a social interaction and communication. He also addresses that English is not only about using English textbooks, but also transforming knowledge into English. On the same note, Murray and Scarino (2014) emphasized their study on the relational aspect of language education in the Asia-Pacific countries. They investigated that language learning is not unique to the different places where its variation is found in terms of ecological context.

Regarding the case of Nepal, the constitution of Nepal (2015) allows the use of Nepali and English or both in educational institutes (Government of Nepal [GoN], 2015). The Education Act (1971) emphasizes the use of English while teaching the English subject. Again, the Ministry of Education (2009) attempts to improve the quality of basic education and supports the use of twenty-first-century skills in the

Academic Journal of Sukuna - AJoS, 5(1), 2025, ISSN 2594-3138 (Print) 145 classroom, but EMI is not mandatory. There seems policy ambiguity that creates tension of EMI potential in the real classroom practice.

Through this short theoretical discourse, we can generalize that EMI has become a matter of global integration; meanwhile, there is a danger of the extinction of local languages and cultures. Anyway, EMI is promoted as a gateway to reaching the international standard.

In recent years, as a growing trend of internationalization, many countries have revised their national curricula as per the international standard with a strong emphasis on multicultural competencies. One of the main elements of this international adoption of curricula is the inclusion of EMI policy in basic and higher education. This emphasis is particularly on non-English-speaking countries where English is a foreign or second language. Nepal is not far from this trend where English takes a main position of commerce, education, communication, industry, and tourism.

The Education and Sports Ministry of Nepal emphasized English language proficiency and competency to compete with international standards. Along with this line, many community schools have shifted to EMI to arouse interest among the students and meet the ongoing demand of English medium schools. This policy aims to enable Nepalese citizens to get entry in higher education competently both in the nation and abroad. However, this trend raises some queries like equity, teachers' preparation, extinction of local culture and tradition.

There are no exact statistics in Nepal to determine the shifting ratio of public schools from Nepali medium instruction (NMI) to EMI, but this trend is happening throughout the country. The community schools' stakeholders have been suggesting using EMI as a main point of the school improvement plan in recent years because they suggest that teachers compete with institutional schools in terms of quality. Therefore, public schools are trying to implement EMI by giving appointments to novice teachers who do

Academic Journal of Sukuna - AJoS, 5(1), 2025, ISSN 2594-3138 (Print) 146 not have much experience, like expert teachers. Richards (2015, p.8) says, "They are typically less familiar with subject matter, teaching strategies, and teaching contexts".

Studies highlight the opportunities and challenges of EMI integration abroad and in Nepal in various research. Sah and Li (2018) revealed that the students are still lacking adequate content knowledge in English language skills, though they have adopted English as a medium of instruction. The study contributed to EMI-specific training for teachers, limited instructional settings, and poor communication skills among teachers. Similar issues are elaborated in Pun and Thomas (2020) study. They found that subject teachers often lacked confidence and negative beliefs in teaching English due to insufficient training and ineffective EMI implementation.

In a similar vein, Ojha (2022) attempted to find out the attitudes of secondary-level teachers using EMI; he revealed that teachers were generally positive towards the potential use of EMI to improve the educational quality, though they encountered hidden practical challenges. Globalization and socio-economic power in the English language have become another reason for the increasing trend of using EMI in public schools. EMI does not only mean to use English content, but it is the way of transforming information into English for students in some subjects. On the one hand, it has become the most demanding issue in community schools, and on the other hand, it can create the problem of the extinction of local languages.

While drawing upon a comprehensive analysis of long educational practices in Nepal, Nepali language has been used as the first official language since 1905, and this was made the language of education from Grade 1 in public schools in Nepal since 1976 (Government of Nepal, 2006). English has been taught as a compulsory subject in schools since the establishment of the Durbar High School. It is one of the oldest schools in Nepal and was established in 1886 during the Rana regime. However, this education was limited only to royal family members. Education in the English language

was open to the public only in 1951. Curriculum Development Centre has revised school school-level curriculum to address the main aims of Secondary Education (MoE, 2019). The main objective of school-level education is to empower students with a well-rounded education. It also enables them to lead fulfilling lives, contribute to society, and adapt to the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. With this perspective, there is a mushrooming trend of using EMI in many Nepalese public schools, though the education policy of the government has not made the necessary to the language medium. Nepal Law Commission (2015) declares that teachers can use Nepali, English, or both languages in the classroom as a medium of instruction. While teaching English as a compulsory subject, the medium of education shall be English.

Likewise, in the research work of Indonesian teachers and students' perspectives on EMI, they strongly accepted the policy of EMI in the classrooms (Setoningsih, 2022). Oktaviani (2019) also explained the pros and cons of teachers' perspectives for implementing EMI and their challenges. The main advantage of implementing EMI is that educational institutions meet the world's requirements in many aspects. However, applying EMI has certain difficulties, like training to implement EMI, limited resources, insufficient teaching materials, low proficiency of teachers, lack of teaching resources, and no proper guidelines for implementing EMI, and so on.

In most cases reviewed above, they focused on the issues of university or higher education. Only a few research works seem to have been conducted in the Nepalese context regarding the teachers' perspectives on EMI. Therefore, studying on the basic level of education regarding the use of EMI and the perception of teachers was found meaningful. The study in this context aims to explore the pedagogical issues of basic-level teachers implementing EMI in science and mathematics subjects.

English Language Teachers, educators, and administrative authorities have identified a plethora of pedagogical challenges associated with the implementation of

EMI. Foremost among these challenges is the proficiency level of educators and administrative staff in English, which significantly affects students' comprehension of complex subject matter. Moreover, students frequently encounter obstacles to active participation due to limited vocabulary and a lack of knowledge of the details of English syntax. Consequently, learners feel burdened with the cognitive strain of acquiring English as a second language to assimilate foundational concepts and things. Furthermore, the adaptation of curricular frameworks and the provision of adequate teacher training to facilitate effective EMI implementation in schools at present is not impossible, but it is challenging them.

This paper differs from other discussions on studying about the implementation of EMI in Education because we have studied the teachers' problem and perception in implementing EMI at the "basic level". Most previous studies primarily focused on the study of EMI on higher-level education and secondary level, getting the data from students, parents, and teachers, those neglected the research work on pedagogical issues, implementing EMI at the basic school level from the teacher's perspective. The present study, therefore, attempts to unravel the problem of how EMI in the public schools has played a role in equalizing the achievement gaps between NMI and EMI among the public-school students ultimately. Further, data collections for this type of study have been found in other places, but not done in the present study area.

A conceptual framework in research writing is a structured sketch that represents the theories and explains key concepts, variables and relationship that guide a study. Therefore, conceptual frameworks behind this study are teachers' perception, pedagogical issues and navigating complexities. The details of these indicators are given below:

Teachers' Perception

The use of English medium instruction in public schools in the context of Nepal certainly creates positive and negative impacts. Teachers are under observation whether they use EMI effectively or not. The use of instruction in non-English speaking setting brings challenges to the teachers where they have conventionally habituated to use Nepali as a medium of instruction. Teachers' opinions, attitudes and beliefs regarding the use of EMI, they might be unaware of their own biases shown the learners (Lipport, 2017). Therefore, teachers' awareness regarding the learners' performance in English classes need to raise positive attitudes.

Pedagogical Challenges

Pedagogical challenges refer to the difficulties and obstacles the teachers face in delivering effective instruction in teaching English-medium classes in multilingual settings. The challenges vary in number depending on the language proficiency in English, the students' language background, and the teaching context. The insufficient English exposure of both teachers and students is the key factor in creating pedagogical challenges. Teachers in the public schools are in a struggle with their English language skills, which can hinder communication and limit their ability to explain complex concepts.

Navigate Complexities

In order to avoid the complexities of using EMI in public schools, joint planning activities are required. Teachers are required to develop professional skills, and these professional skills are obtained through training. Supportive resources can help the teachers access teaching aids. Collaborative strategies like Peer learning, group activities are also helpful to bridge the language gaps.

Methods and Materials

The Participants of the study

In order to carry out the research work purposefully, we have selected eight teachers from Sundarharaincha Municipality, Morang, working in basic and secondary schools which included 4 mathematics teachers and 4 science teachers. The Participants include only teachers following national curricula of mathematics and science for grade 6-8.

Purposive sampling with maximal variations in qualitative research methodology has been applied in selecting participants to cover a wide range of teachers working in public schools who reflect different perspectives regarding the use of EMI. The selected eight Participants were basic and secondary school teachers, ranging from both school-appointed and government-appointed teachers working in public schools. The selected teachers' range of considerable teaching experiences and training of the participants, which is needed to gather general and acceptable data on teacher perception of EMI. The researchers aim at gathering village teachers' as well as city area teachers' having specific experiences of implementing EMI in public schools.

Procedures

The participant teachers were from five schools. The schools include two basic schools, one model secondary school of Koshi province, and two secondary schools following the national curriculum. The selected five basic and secondary schools are in Sundarharaincha Municipality. All of these are public schools funded by the government. For obtaining data, we prepared the interview guideline and had multiple communications. The experience of the teachers, as described by them, was recorded in audio and notes.

Analysis

While analyzing the interview data, the themes were generated randomly. Next, the themes were re-grouped into similar categories. Finally, the connections were made with the research questions. The qualitative data have been analyzed based on the teachers' attitudes and perceptions regarding the shifting trend of EMI in public schools. Some information on training, supportive materials, and language labs is considered to understand the diversity of teachers' pedagogical perceptions and practices.

Results and Discussion

Based on the methodology adopted in this research, interview guidelines were prepared, and the teachers visited their schools. A significant qualitative insight was brought from the basic-level mathematics and science teachers. Their perceptions and lived experiences on EMI implementation in public schools were interesting as well.

Mathematics and science teachers from rural and urban areas have different perceptions on the shift of NMI to EMI. The teachers' perception varies based on their appointment. Such as government-appointed teachers showed different attitudes toward EMI than school-appointed teachers. However, both of them have a common concern about the use of EMI in public schools, though they lack language proficiency and training.

Another interesting result was the challenges of public-school teachers implementing EMI. Almost all the teachers responded to the difficulty in explaining the terminology and abstract concepts in English for teaching mathematics and science. EMI teachers' difficulty is the lack of EMI-oriented training, visual aids, and extra supportive books.

Likewise, the study also revealed that the teachers are not able to use English as sole language of instruction, they are using common language along with English as a teaching strategy in order to ensure student understanding. The students' participation

and engagement in learning is very controversial due to the lack of sufficient explanation and elaboration in English. Further, the majority of the teachers viewed that they need to build up language capacity engagement activity by employing EMI-specific training, workshops, and seminars.

This section presents the results of the interview data. Based on the data, there were various perspectives/attitudes found towards the use of EMI across the schools of Sundarharaincha Municipality. It is found that all participants saw EMI as a pedagogical burden, but the school management committee and school administration promised better English skills and security of future jobs for their students which could be failing to keep. The obtained research data of EMI are illustrated by three major themes: (a) EMI as a burden for teachers; (b) Class Management and discrimination; (c) EMI as future preparation.

EMI as a Burden for Teachers

Teachers are aware of applying English as a medium of instruction in their teaching subjects. However, the non-trained and less experienced novice teachers find it difficult to maintain. Bista (2015) analyzed the practical challenges of teaching English in Nepal and identified infrastructural and technical barriers. The requirements of school resources are language labs, audiovisual materials, computers, and internet connectivity. Many schools have an insufficient number of resources, so quality enhancement is in question. Moreover, teachers have no opportunities to improve their English through interaction with native speakers. Hu and Lei (2013) conducted a case study on the professor and students, focusing on the "relentless internationalization and marketing of higher education," and concluded that English proficiency is urgently required for national, institutional, and personal development. The public-school teachers consider English language learning to the level of teaching students, and errorless communication is very difficult for them. Most teachers use mixed language (i.e. Nepali

Academic Journal of Sukuna - AJoS, 5(1), 2025, ISSN 2594-3138 (Print) 153 and English) in the class. They claim it is hard to use the English language to deliver the subject matter. Abhinash, one of the experienced teachers, explains:

Teachers' language proficiency is a major challenge to implementing EMI, especially for non-language teachers. Young and energetic science/ mathematics teachers might be more competent in subject matter than older teachers might be able to but they are still lacking in using appropriate classroom language.

The medium of instruction policy in English obstructs learners' understanding of complex scientific terms, formulas, definitions, and basic mathematical concepts of word problems. In this regard, Nayan, the youngest teacher among the participants, thinks the students from the Nepali medium class face major challenges. In science classrooms, technical words, their meanings, and definitions need to be clarified in students' common language. It is also seen that the students from multilingual and multicultural backgrounds do not want to communicate in English, though they have been admitted to an English-medium class. Similarly, Saha (2023) states that socioeconomically diverse students hardly aspire to communicate in English. One of the most controversial issues that emerged in the interview was the Lack of teacher training and methodology that can be employed in EMI classes. Teachers from basic schools are still lacking sufficient training, seminars, and workshops for EMI. Harinarayan, Jenisha, and Monika opined that we do not have training or workshops for EMI due to insufficient funding and a lack of planning in our schools.

This shows the lack of training, inability to develop proficient language skills, and non-English background of students are observed as the challenges for the shift to EMI. As stated by Dearden (2014), many teachers receive no specific EMI training, and as a result, do not develop the necessary linguistic competence and pedagogical skills to deliver content effectively in English. Similarly, Saha (2023) thinks that the major

Academic Journal of Sukuna - AJoS, 5(1), 2025, ISSN 2594-3138 (Print) 154 challenges include stakeholders' insincerity, teacher understaffing, inadequate technology, resources, and teachers' additional duties affect ELL support.

Class Management and Discrimination

In the process of data collection, eight teachers were interviewed, and all of them said that EMI is necessary in their subjects. The teachers understood the significance of English in this globalized world and were convinced to apply EMI, but the English Medium class management is often crucial. The government-aided basic schools are gradually changing the medium of instruction from the junior classes, whereas secondary schools can manage two medium classes in the same shift or a different shift. Here are two of the secondary teachers' statements.

We managed EMI classes in the morning time in our school because of the lack of furnishing, classroom limitations, teachers' management, and so on. English medium classes began from the junior classes. We change one class NMI to EMI every year.

One teacher of a model secondary school mentions:

We do not have two shift EMI classes, but we managed all EMI classes almost in the day shift, except classes 11 and 12. We have a sufficient number of classrooms and teaching staff. We managed Nepali and English medium classes in parallel.

This indicates that the implication of EMI for all is not possible. The students need to be divided in terms of the medium of instruction, which has created discrimination among the students, and it has become a burden to the teachers and management. Regarding the discriminations faced by the students Paudel (2021) offers a critical overview in the context of the rapid implementation of EMI in the Nepalese public schools that marginalized the local languages and their distinct culture. He argues

Academic Journal of Sukuna - AJoS, 5(1), 2025, ISSN 2594-3138 (Print) 155 that if EMI is not carefully implemented, it may create linguistic hierarchy and imperialism.

EMI as future Preparation

People commonly think the purpose of English in Nepal is to give students foreign language competency to study higher education and job opportunities in a foreign country. In this regard majority of the teachers agreed that parents force community schools to implement EMI to better prepare them for higher education and global opportunities. Abhinash, who is also the vice principal of a school, informed that although

the schools face challenges in implementing EMI, the school administration and management team encourages to adopt of EMI, particularly for protecting the public schools. He continued, previously there were a few students in our school, but when we shifted to EMI, the number of students increased gradually.

To support the shift, Nayan said, I think that shifting in medium is quite good because parents are paying huge amount in private schools in the name of medium.

Bhumi, a teacher and coordinator of English medium classes of secondary level, opined; I think Nepali workers in foreign or English-speaking countries require using English so the parents want their children to study in English medium.

In a nutshell, this research showed that, despite many challenges, the teachers were positive towards EMI implementation in public schools in Nepal. This study also revealed that the teachers are using a bilingual approach to facilitate learning activities due to the low language proficiency of both teachers and learners and the lack of English-medium teaching and learning exposure in the public schools. Therefore, the shift to EMI feels burdensome to the management and the teachers in public schools. Furthermore, language, culture, tradition, and socioeconomic status of parents are other barriers to implementing EMI. In the absence of the basic aspects of curriculum

implementation like textbooks, teaching materials, the students' and the teachers' readiness in English, the proper implementation of EMI was felt doubtful. In addition, it is found that the implementation of EMI is merely due to the community pressure for preparing the students for a competitive global market, but lacks concrete preparation. However, with the positive attitude of teachers, strong willingness of the school management committee, and the support of parents and students, this initiative can be a milestone for the schools if EMI is felt necessary aspect of learning for students. For this, government and policymakers urgently need to rethink the curriculum, teachers' preparation, and an appropriate action plan for school-level education.

It is seen that there is a pressing need for the government to align its language education policies with the realities and demands of public schools. This includes revising the current bilingual education policy to better support the transition to EMI in a manner that is equitable and sustainable for all students. Additionally, comprehensive training programs for teachers are crucial to enhance their language proficiency and pedagogical skills, enabling them to effectively deliver content in English. Furthermore, the availability of appropriate textbooks and teaching resources must be ensured to create a more supportive environment for both teachers and students.

Conclusions and Implications

The implementation of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in public schools in Nepal reflects a significant shift in educational priorities, driven largely by parental demand and the perceived success of private schools in providing quality education. While teachers recognize the necessity of EMI for enhancing students' language skills and preparing them for higher education and global job markets, they face substantial challenges, including inadequate language proficiency, lack of training, and resource constraints. The findings suggest that although there is a strong commitment from teachers and school management to adopt EMI, these efforts are often hindered by

systemic issues within the educational framework. Furthermore, the parallel management of Nepali and English medium classes has led to discrimination among students and increased burdens on teachers, highlighting the need for a more cohesive and supportive approach to EMI implementation.

Despite these findings and the useful implications obtained from this research article, the researchers realized that the present study does not focus on students' and parents' voices. This research used a Single instrument (i.e., interview with free discussion) to collect the data. There are ample possibilities for future studies that can concentrate on classroom observation and interviews with parents, management committees, and school principals to learn more about how English is used as a medium of instruction in the classroom.

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