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Perceptions of the Teachers Towards EMI in the Public School in Surkhet

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Abstract

The present study tries to explore the perception of the teachers in public schools adopting English as a medium of instruction in Surkhet district. I adopted a narrative enquiry with teachers of public schools in Gurbhakot Municipality who were adopting EMI for classroom teaching from grades one to ten for more than five years. For the study, a qualitative approach and a narrative inquiry method were used. For data collection, a public school was selected in Gurbhakot Municipality, and four teachers were selected purposively. For eliciting data, semi-structured interviews and classroom observation were used. Teachers of public schools who were practising EMI thought that, according to the interests of the parents and students and the global use of the English language, EMI is almost compulsory for the better career of the children, but there are some problems when adopting it. This study concludes that the teacher gave more preference to the English language because they know the importance of English as an international language.

Keywords: EMI, perception, public school, teacher education

Introduction

Schools are teaching the English language all over the world. The number of people using the English language is steadily rising. As a dominant language in education, science, trade, and various fields, its prominence continues to grow. Moreover, with advancements in science and technology, the world is becoming increasingly interconnected, which further contributes to the expanding number of English speakers. English has achieved the status of a global language and is widely used as a lingua franca. As a result, both parents and students are increasingly attracted to English-medium schools. Parents see



these institutions offering better prospects for their children's future careers. In Nepal, this trend is evident as many Nepali-medium schools are transitioning to EMI in their classrooms, particularly in public schools, to align with the global educational standards. The present research work tries to explore the perception of the teachers for adopting EMI in classroom teaching.

Lasagabaster (2022) claims, "There is currently a global trend towards teaching university courses through English and an increasingly Englishized higher education market, but this is especially noticeable in Europe and Asia". An & Thomas (2021) believe "English medium instruction program is growing as a part of the internationalisation process. Interaction plays a paramount role in content learning, as it can facilitate knowledge construction for students while affording opportunities for deep learning. A classroom that promotes meaningful interaction between teachers and students nurtures cognitive engagement and encourages active participation from all learners, regardless of class size. In such interactive environments, students are motivated to think critically and collaborate with their peers, ensuring that everyone remains involved in the learning process throughout the lesson. The advocates of EMI claim that the use of English as a vehicle language helps students to engage in authentic and meaningful interaction, thereby contributing to the improvement of students' English proficiency while facilitating subject content learning (Hu & Duan, 2019). So, the English language is considered an important tool for effective classroom interaction.

The medium of instruction is the language that is used to conduct all the activities based on the curriculum. Dearden (2014) states EMI as "The use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or Jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English." It is argued that EMI fosters the learning quality when the teachers can directly link it to the context. So, English medium instruction is used not only to deliver content but also to develop language skills. Coleman (2011) argues that "English is assumed to play an important role in increasing employability, facilitating international mobility, unlocking developmental opportunities and accessing crucial information and acting as an impartial language." These are the reasons why it unconsciously attracted all.

Literature Review

English has become the global language of communication, education, trade, and media. As a result, there is a growing attraction among parents and students towards English-medium schools as they recognise the advantages these institutions offer in terms of opportunities and prospects. Private schools in the context of Nepal are delivering school education in English medium, and their direct influence can be seen in the public schools of Nepal. The flow of students towards English-medium schools is rising as a result, and some public schools are transitioning from Nepali-medium instruction in an effort to stem the flow of students to private English-medium institutions. However, the shift from Nepali-medium to English-medium instruction has been implemented without adequate preparation, which presents significant challenges. In this context, it is important to explore the teachers' perception while adopting EMI in public schools of Nepal. So,

it aims to investigate teachers' perceptions towards EMI, challenges in implementing it, and provide some pedagogical suggestions on the issue. In the present research work, I want to explore the perceptions of the teachers when they are implementing EMI in the public schools.

EMI Practices in the Classes of Non-native Speakers of English

Regarding EMI, there are many challenges in adopting it in public schools. Dearden (2014) researched "English as a medium of instruction – A growing global phenomenon". He tried to find out the initial picture of the rapidly growing phenomenon of EMI. The finding of the study was that many countries do not have the necessary educational infrastructure to support the quality of EMI provisions.

EMI plays a significant role in developing language proficiency in the students. Dhakal (2016) has carried out research on "English as a medium of instruction in the government-aided schools: teachers' perception and use" to find out the teachers' perception about EMI, along with the current situation of using EMI in the government-aided schools. He found that EMI plays a significant role in learning, and the teachers had an eager interest in using EMI in classroom teaching, which brought significant change in learning, especially in the development of language skills. However, he mentions that the teachers were dissatisfied with both the teacher training program and the availability of teaching material. So, his suggestion is to provide training to the teachers and the availability of the teaching materials for fostering EMI.

Teaching English only in the English medium sometimes creates a problem in the comprehension of the students. Here, Phyak (2017) has researched "Translanguaging as a pedagogical resource in English language teaching: A response in unplanned language education policies in Nepal". The researcher tried to observe critically how different circumstances occur through unplanned language policy in Nepal and how learners' own linguistic and cultural background can serve the valuable assets for teaching English in Nepal's multilingual settings. From the study, he found that "teach English in English" created a lot of problems in teaching and learning in the early grades. He concluded that the existing unstructured English language policy, grounded in a monolingual approach and the "The earlier the better" belief, has actually created challenging conditions for both the teachers and students, which puts them in trouble to achieve the goals of the curriculum for English language teaching. His suggestion is to use translanguaging pedagogy to address the difficulties created by an unplanned English language policy.

Teachers' professional development training is crucial for effective language teaching in the classroom. Since adopting EMI, teachers' professional development training plays a vital role in effective teaching and learning. Bhusal (2017) has carried out research entitled "Implementation of English as a medium of instruction: non-native teachers' perception". The main objectives of the study were to investigate the contemporary situation of English medium instruction practised by teachers of languages other than English as the mother tongue at the government school of Kathmandu Valley. The study revealed that the existing situation of EMI was not satisfactory in terms of teacher training, materials and language proficiency of teachers. The researcher concluded

that shifting the medium of instruction from Nepali to English in the public schools of Nepal has a lot of challenges that need to be carefully addressed for EMI to be effective.

English, as the medium language of the globe, trade, education, and commerce, has attracted the attention of parents to make their children learn the English language. Neupane (2017) has also carried out research work on "Parents' perception on English as the medium of instruction in the public schools of Nepal" to find out the parents' perception towards the use of EMI in public schools. Parents believed that EMI plays a crucial role in students' better language proficiency and which leads them to a better future career. They stated that it is necessary to implement English Medium Instruction (EMI) in the public schools of Nepal. However, the study showed that there are a lot of difficulties in implementing it due to the poor educational background of parents, the economy, and so on. The researcher concluded that the parents have a positive perception towards it because English education can help their children get better opportunities.

Adopting EMI with much preparation at school has created problems in the public schools. In one of the other studies by Gaire (2017), "A case study on expectations and challenges faced by public schools for the implementation of English medium instruction" to investigate the interest of stakeholders form EMI before practising and also discover the problems faced by the teachers, parents and school management committee to carry on the EMI program. The researcher found that adopting EMI was challenging because of several reasons, like expensive textbooks, poor availability of materials, and parents who were not ready to cooperate economically. Additionally, there was the problem of proficient language teachers to handle EMI effectively.

Regarding the policy and guidelines of school-level curriculum in Nepal, "Medium of instruction for school education shall be Nepali, English or both, whereas primary education can be provided in students' mother tongue (first language). Language as a subject shall be taught in the same language" (CDC, 2008). In connection with EMI, a famous linguist, Alan Davis, who led the first ELT survey in Nepal in 1983-1984, stated that the decision regarding language education in Nepal is guided by sentimental role rather than instrumental. Sentimental role emphasises the importance of a language to maintain group tradition and culture and to demonstrate differentiation from other groups, while the instrumental role concerns the value of language learning for job and other economic prospects (Davis, 2009).

Methods and Procedures

Research paradigm, influenced by research purpose and question, is the set of assumptions and worldview that impact the researchers' action (Guba, 1990). For my research purpose and questions, I used an interpretive paradigm and a narrative method for the study. The respondents were the four teachers of a public secondary school adopting EMI for more than five years. They were selected purposively related to the objectives of the research. Participants were directly experienced in adopting EMI for classroom teaching for more than five years.

Data collection was obtained from two instruments: observation and interview. The observation of the class was done four times, once for each participant's class. Similarly,

open-ended questions were used demanding the participants' feelings, experience, beliefs and perceptions towards implementing EMI. As the research procedure, the classroom observation was done as being passive observer. The information was noted while conducting teaching learning activities conducted by the participants. Then the semi-structured interview was employed to obtain in-depth beliefs, experiences, feelings and experiences of the participants. The information was recorded, and the recorded information was transcribed, coded and analysed for meaning making.

Results and Discussion

To find the perception of the teachers, a public-school adopting EMI in Gurbhakot Municipality was visited. The school was adopting EMI from grades one to ten for more than five years. The primary reason for adopting EMI in the public school was as per the demand and interest of the parents and the students.

Teachers' Perceptions in EMI Class

In non-English speaking countries, schools are adopting EMI as the medium of instruction in a significant way. This trend is evident in Nepal, where many community schools that previously taught in the Nepali language have transitioned to EMI starting from the early grades. Similarly, community schools in Gurbhakot have experienced a similar shift. The stakeholders of these community schools defend this practice by stating that the switch is due to the demand and expectation of the parents and students.

According to a T1 participant in the research, “the school is running classroom teaching in both English and Nepali medium from grade six to ten. EMI is compulsory from grades one to five. When they come to school with English medium books, they feel as if they are the students of an English medium private school.” Before practising EMI, the number of students was decreasing because they were moving towards the English medium private schools. In this regard, T2 said:

The decreased number of students raised the question of the number of teacher quotas at the school. Parent sent their children to the English medium private schools. Most of them wanted to see their children going to private schools with English books in their bags. I think parents' belief in quality education in English medium schools was the main reason for being shifted to English medium. To fulfil the desire of the parents and raise the number of students, we started teaching in English medium.

When they decided to implement EMI, it then raised the number of students at the school. The worldwide prominence of the English language has been interpreted and approached in various ways, leading to a range of policies and initiatives implemented across different contexts. Public schools in Nepal have been adopting English medium instruction as a new linguistic market in education, challenging the mother tongue-based multilingual education policy of the government (Saud, 2020). As per the question “what is the significance of adopting EMI,” The participants had the common answers. They were arguing that EMI provided lots of exposure to the students for learning the English language, and it helped them to develop language proficiency. It helped to develop the

language proficiency of the students.

Although the majority of the students were using Nepali as their mother tongue, they are now practising the English language for classroom activities most of the time. The participant responded, "These days, the students are motivated to learn in the classroom. They have come to school regularly. The dropout has decreased. The learning achievement and pass rate of the students have been increased". When I got the response from the participant, I came to know that students were motivated in learning. There was the active participation of the students towards every activity that is conducted inside and outside the classroom at school. The regular presence of the students in the classroom plays a crucial role in effective learning. So, EMI encouraged students to come to school regularly. It created a better learning environment at school. The dropout of students due to different reasons is one of the challenging issues in the public schools of rural areas. The response of the participant helped to decrease the dropout rate of the students from the school.

Similarly, the learning achievement and securing a certain grade for the grade promotion are other crucial matters in the school. Nowadays, the pass rate of the students not only in SEE and grade 12 but also in the basic level exam is challenging. The pass rate of the students is low. When they adopted EMI in their school, the pass rate increased. T4 said, "Regarding the quality of education, students are achieving better scores with remarkable results in the Basic level Exam."

The participant T3 said, "I cannot explain some of the contents to the students because of the problem with the English language". When I observed the response of the participant teacher, there were some challenges in adopting EMI in public schools. There is a lack of competent teachers to deliver and conduct the content and activities as per the provisions of the curriculum. Teachers who had been teaching for more than 20 years in the Nepali medium had some difficulties while shifting into EMI. T2 participant said, "We have the code of conduct to use the English language in the classroom". Most of the students find it comfortable to communicate with their friends using their mother tongue, i.e. Nepali language, in this particular context. Due to the language code in the classroom, it became less interactive. Some of the participants were using translanguaging for making sure of the comprehension of the students. However, there is the use of translanguaging has at least provided much exposure to the students for developing language proficiency.

Issues and Challenges in Adopting EMI in Public Schools

The implementation of English as the medium of instruction (EMI) and its apparent benefits, the reality of switching to EMI without proper teacher training and sufficient infrastructure support has led to various unforeseen negative consequences. One such outcome is the challenging and disputed process of developing English proficiency among students. Despite community schools claiming to provide English education, the actual language of instruction in these schools remains Nepali due to teachers' limited English proficiency and the school's lack of resources and readiness for the transition to EMI. This has resulted in significant confusion between the intended EMI approach and the actual language practices within the classroom.

In the response of teachers' support, all the participants had a similar response, as there was no proper supervision and feedback from the concerned people and organisations, and there is no facility for training for the teachers. T4 said, "We are not attending any training programs to run the class in English medium. There is no proper supervision and feedback from the concerned authority." Professional development of the teachers is a prerequisite for effective classroom performance of the teachers. Teachers who are practising Nepali medium instruction and shifting towards English medium are really challenged. For effective classroom teaching, there should be the facility of the teachers' training, continuous supervision and feedback to the teachers. The concerned authority seems to be unaware of this. There was an unavailability of teaching materials and even the textbooks on time.

"We appointed some privately sourced teachers", the head teacher said. He further stated that they had managed some teachers from their own source of school. It is really challenging for them. There is the provision of free school education. Schools are not allowed to charge any fees from the students. There is a lack of the necessary teachers' quota in the school. The head teacher expected the proper quota and the allotment of a proper budget for the effective implementation of EMI in public schools. One of the burning issues in public schools is the proper budget for them. The school should be equipped with the physical facilities with enough budget to conduct the academic activities.

Conclusions

The issue of medium of instruction has become a challenge in Nepal to address the demand of parents and students. Public schools are adopting EMI without much preparation and planning. This study concluded that the schools are adopting EMI as per the demand of the students and parents, but the teachers are facing a number of difficulties while implementing EMI in Gurbhakot, like rural areas of Gurbhakot. One of the most significant results of adopting EMI by the public school is that the number of students has increased, and the flow towards English medium private schools has decreased. The teachers practising NMI have been shifted into EMI. So, it has created a problem for the teachers. There is a lack of proficient English teachers to implement it properly. Therefore, teachers frequently use students' mother tongue in the classroom. Despite facing challenges such as linguistic barriers, inadequate language proficiency among teachers, diverse cultures, ineffective teaching methods, and limitations in resources, it was discovered that teachers in community schools demonstrated a positive attitude towards implementing English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in their daily teaching and learning process. The concerned organisations are not paying much attention to training the teachers. So, if there is the availability of competent teachers, teaching materials and textbooks, proper physical infrastructure, proper training for the teachers with necessary supervision and feedback, parents' and students' thrust towards the English language can be pacified.

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