



Far Western Review
 A Multidisciplinary, Peer Reviewed Journal
 ISSN: 3021-9019
 Published by Far Western University
 Mahendranagar, Nepal

Implementing English as a Medium of Instruction: Teachers' Lived Experiences in Public Schools of Nepal

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Abstract

This paper explores the lived experiences and views of basic level teachers of public school regarding the implementation of English as a medium of instruction (EMI). This study primarily focuses on the experiences of teachers of Kanchanpur district who teach health and physical education subject using EMI. This paper further explores how teachers apply the EMI, their level of training considering the difficulties they have when instructing content subject in English. The study adopts a qualitative phenomenological approach to record the practical experiences of teachers with the responsibility of implementing EMI. The data was collected through semi structured interviews with four purposively selected teachers, giving thorough insights. The findings demonstrate that while EMI is viewed as an initiative that attempts to give students global skills, teachers deal with difficulties like insufficient supervision and training, a lack of appropriate teaching resources, and students' divergent levels of English proficiency. These difficulties make it challenging to teach and learn effectively. The study also emphasises the significance of enhanced teacher preparation, more access to resources, and a method that considers students' previous linguistic backgrounds. By addressing these issues, EMI implementation might be improved and students could benefit academically and linguistically from the policy.

Keywords : Implementation, English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), lived experiences, attitudes, phenomenology

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Introduction

English has emerged as the most popular language for communication, trade, and education in today's increasingly globalised world. English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) refers to the use of English to teach academic subjects in countries or regions where English is not the first language (Dearden, 2014). Majority of the subjects for example science, mathematics and civics are taught in English in EMI classrooms instead of the students' mother tongue or national language. The main goal of EMI is to enhance students' English proficiency while simultaneously delivering subject matter, preparing them for global opportunities and enhancing their educational and professional prospects (Lasagabaster, 2022). However, challenges to its adoption are presented by language barriers, teacher preparedness, and resource availability, especially in non-English speaking contexts. EMI is used in public schools in several countries including Nepal, with the intention of students' language skills being enhanced and them being equipped for opportunities around the world. EMI is frequently seen as a tool for social mobility as it gives students the language proficiency they need to access global information, services, and employment opportunities (Barnard & Hasim, 2018). It is also seen as a linguistic equaliser, providing a common language of teaching that helps students' from various backgrounds succeed academically and professionally.

However, implementing EMI in public schools poses significant challenges, particularly in nations where English is not the predominant language. The effectiveness of this strategy is largely dependent on the teachers who are leading the charge on it. How EMI is used in classrooms is strongly influenced by their backgrounds, perspectives, and level of readiness (Rose, 2021; Lo & Othman, 2023). Despite EMI's promising potential, a number of challenges, including insufficient training for teachers, a dearth of resources, and students' low English proficiency, may make it difficult to implement. These difficulties are especially noticeable in Nepal's rural public schools, where both instructors and pupils might not have much opportunity to use the language outside of the classroom.

Various researches show that EMI is the linguistic equalizer, commodity, linguistic capital, lingua franca. So, EMI is the best policy to equip students with competence and confidence to deal with the globe. Though researches lack what is the actual scenario of the teacher preparation, material availability, and student's prior background. So, this research explores the real experiences of the teachers. The purpose of this study is to explore the actual experiences of Nepalese basic level school teachers who are using EMI in public schools, particularly when it comes to teaching subjects like health. This study looks at how teachers handle the intricacies of EMI in an effort to assess the policy's efficacy and pinpoint areas in need of development. The study also focuses at the support networks that are available to help teachers get over the difficulties they encounter and

if they are sufficiently trained to teach content courses using EMI. Learning from these experiences can enhance the implementation of EMI and provide equitable education for every student. Learning from these experiences can enhance the implementation of EMI and provide equitable education for every student.

Literature Review

Implementing EMI is challenging due to diverse teacher opinions and beliefs across countries. Dearden and Macaro (2016) assert that these variance range from enthusiastic support to concerns about the rapid introduction, lack of teacher agency, low linguistic proficiency, and insufficient support for EMI programs. The age and English competency of the teachers may contribute to this variability. They also state that the majority of educators think it is not their duty to help students become more proficient in English. Higher education typically deviates from Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) principles due to a lack of support and framework for subject specialist teachers to include language learning into content classes. The study indicated a lack of institutional support for the integration.

According to Sah and Li (2018), EMI is considered as a significant aspect of linguistic capital by parents, students, and instructors, with possible benefits including expanded English abilities, improved scholastic outcomes, better access to higher education, and more social and economic mobility. These positive opinions, however, frequently covered the fact that moving to EMI without sufficient teacher training and school infrastructure had a number of detrimental effects, including difficulties in improving English proficiency. Despite claims of delivering EMI, instruction was mostly in Nepali due to instructors' lack of English ability and the school's limited resources for a successful shift to EMI. As a result, students failed to develop both subject matter comprehension and English language abilities. EMI worsened linguistic marginalization and educational inequality, especially among children from poor socioeconomic backgrounds. The authors advocate for critical reflection on EMI adoption and the promotion of long term additive multilingualism in such settings.

According to Khatri's (2019) research, public school instructors have a good attitude towards utilising EMI in their regular teaching activities. Due to students' poor English competence, mother tongue interference, a lack of resources, and linguistic diversity in the classroom, secondary school teachers experienced difficulty adopting EMI. The study suggested that in order to promote EMI adoption, public school instructors should work in a friendly and motivating environment. It also underlined how important it is for schools to have modern technology and for educators to have thorough professional and pedagogical training. Similarly, according to Ghimire's (2019) research, students firmly feel that studying English will safeguard their future by increasing their

employment opportunities both locally and abroad. Teachers help students who struggle to acquire new words and speak English by offering Nepali counterparts. Students think they are more competent than their peers because they attend EMI schools, which are well-known in their area.

Saud (2020) draws attention to a significant trend: parents are increasingly advocating for EMI because they believe that English will be their children's "golden ticket" in the global economy. Although it's seen as a wise investment, the actual situation is different. There is a gap between official policy and reality in many public school classrooms. Teachers sometimes find themselves merging two or three languages instead of only English in order to stay up to date. Saud contends that schools should not jump towards English only requirements because of this. Instead, they must have open discussions with all parties like parents, educators, and officials to ensure that they have the necessary resources and training beforehand.

In a 2020 research, Gim looked at how the transition to English Medium Instruction (EMI) prompted Nepali educators to redefine their professional identities. This was not a passive transformation; teachers used a variety of languages to help their students manage this transition. Gim divided their experiences into three categories: successful adopters, resistant individuals, and those experiencing ambivalence. These categories highlight the human cost and complexity of policy changes; while some educators successfully adapted to the new requirements, others faced significant obstacles and chose early retirement, demonstrating that one-size-fits-all policies frequently ignore teachers' diverse emotional and professional realities.

Building on these viewpoints, Panthee (2020) identifies a mood of positive resolve in community schools, noting that many instructors embrace the move to English Medium Instruction (EMI). These educators aren't just following instructions; they sincerely think that teaching English to their kids is a valuable gift that will help them flourish in today's society. However, this optimism is frequently challenged by harsh reality. Many teachers fall into a "proficiency trap," in which their own language limitations and lack of particular training make it difficult to express complicated topics properly. They are effectively being expected to construct a new educational home without the necessary tools—from a dearth of English-language materials to the problem of educating a culturally varied student population in a language that feels strange to them in their daily lives. Finally, Panthee's study demonstrates that, while the attitude and motivation to change exist, the actual infrastructure is lacking, forcing instructors to bridge the gap between their lofty goals and the inadequate resources at their disposal.

On the other hand, Dhakal (2021) believes that socioeconomic inequities continue despite the country's commitments on national and international levels. However, the article recognises that teachers may play an important role in reducing these

discrepancies. According to Shrestha (2022) in NELTA E., while instructors generally support EMI, inadequate English competence and resource constraints typically lead to translanguaging in classrooms. Classroom observations show that EMI is effective when teachers use student-centered techniques, audio-visual aids, ICT resources, and locally available materials to impart English subject. Tiwari (2023) found that while English Medium Instruction (EMI) is mandated, teachers typically lack confidence in its successful implementation in the classroom. To effectively implement EMI, it's important to plan, prepare, and engage with teachers and stakeholders in individual schools.

According to Dahal (2023), English Medium Instruction (EMI) is essential for raising students' English language competency and expanding their job options. However, Dahal also stresses the value of teaching in students' mother tongue or first language, which promotes academic success, socio-psychological advantages, and high-quality education. Therefore, in order to address the educational demands of basic-level kids in public schools, it is imperative to merge both EMI and students' first language. Similarly, Rauteda's (2024) research revealed that instructors had a variety of deeply ingrained beliefs about EMI. EMI can be viewed as a tool to internationalize education, as language capital in the market, as a kind of hegemony for developing nations, or as a technique to standardize academics and improve competitiveness. The study shows that EMI has been idealized by both practitioners and policymakers. The article emphasizes the need to incorporate the viewpoints and beliefs of practitioners while developing EMI policy and planning.

A concerning language ladder that has developed in many schools is clarified by Sah (2024). Local and Indigenous languages are pushed to the bottom of this hierarchy, with English at the top as a sign of prosperity and worldwide success. This hierarchy represents a deeper idea that the economic power of English is more valuable than a student's native tongue, and it goes beyond simply which texts are utilised. Sah contends that schools are inadvertently dividing people by emphasising English as the sole route to a better life. This method raises fundamental questions about whether these schools are genuinely equitable and inclusive for all children, rewarding those who speak English while making others feel that their cultural identity is a hindrance to their success. However, Choi and Poudel (2024) found that schools often adopt EMI either entirely or partially for practical reasons, such as enhancing career prospects, which raises equity related concerns. Nonetheless, translanguaging techniques are widely used by educators and learners to assist students with low English proficiency and to handle language and content related difficulties. When theorising equitable language policies, the study highlights how crucial it is for language policy experts to thoroughly analyse contextual issues. It also offers doable actions to advance educational fairness, such as approving the use of community languages in schools.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach, using the phenomenological technique, to investigate the lived experiences of teachers implementing EMI in Nepal's public schools. Phenomenology focuses on understanding participants' real life lived experiences in order to convey the reality of EMI through the eyes of the teachers who are actively involved in its implementation. The researcher chose four basic level school teachers from Kanchanpur's Bhimdatta municipality who teach Health and Physical Education using EMI. These individuals were recruited via nonrandom selection based on their previous experience with EMI in public schools. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) were used to collect data, allowing for a more in-depth study of teachers' attitudes, obstacles, and tactics for EMI implementation. This approach offered extensive, in-depth insights on the experiences of the instructors and the variables affecting the difficulties and success of EMI in their classrooms.

Results and Discussion

The findings are analysed in terms of the themes that emerged from the information gathered from participant focus group discussion (FGDs) and interviews. An in-depth comprehension of the participants' experiences, perceptions, and viewpoints on the research was made possible by the thorough analysis of their replies that produced these themes. These major topics serve as the framework for the conversation in order to draw attention to common trends and important conclusions drawn from the qualitative data.

Teachers' Views and Attitudes Regarding EMI

Teachers support EMI due to its globalised and neoliberal advantages, but they are a little worried about the difficulties they encounter when putting it into practice without much planning, according to the focus group discussion with the participants. The respondents assured "We are definitely in favor of EMI due to its perceived globalized and neoliberal advantages; however, our primary concern is the significant lack of preparation and training provided for its implementation." Teachers' views regarding EMI vary widely, according to studies like those by Dearden and Macaro (2016), Khatri (2019), and Panthee (2020). While some educators believe EMI might help pupils become more globally competitive, others are concerned about its quick introduction and lack of preparation. One of the teacher opined "While we acknowledge the global and market-driven benefits of EMI and support the shift, the reality on the ground is that we are facing major challenges implementing it effectively because we were essentially thrown in without the necessary preparation, resources, or training". Although most teachers have favourable attitudes, mother tongue interference, a lack of resources, and students' poor English competence make it difficult for them to implement EMI. Additionally, there is a difference in their understanding of their position since teachers

feel that they are not the only ones responsible for helping students improve their English proficiency.

Teacher Perceptions and Challenges in EMI Implementation

The focus group discussion's analysis showed that participating teachers had a complicated dual viewpoint on the use of EMI. The globalised and neoliberal advantages of EMI were widely acknowledged by instructors, but this support was tempered by serious worries about actual implementation issues, which were mostly caused by a lack of resources and preparedness. The institutional switch to EMI was largely welcomed by teachers, who saw it as an essential tactic for raising student competitiveness and conforming to international educational trends. Adoption was strongly motivated by the apparent benefits. "The general consensus is that EMI offers attractive globalized and neoliberal opportunities for our students and the institution. That said, the immediate challenge, the one we are struggling with daily, is the reality of having to implement it with minimal to no preparation or support." Despite their positive opinions, participants stated that practical obstacles to efficient EMI delivery were constant and interrelated. Three main themes emerged from these issues: poor teacher preparation, a lack of infrastructure and resources, and linguistic/pedagogical obstacles. The stated insufficiency of professional development offered to prepare instructors for the demands of EMI was a recurring finding. Teachers' confidence and pedagogical practices weakened as a result of this lack of specialized training.

My biggest issue is the training...umm..or lack thereof. We're expected to implement this new EMI approach, but the reality is, I got maybe one afternoon session. I don't feel confident in the specific teaching strategies required. It feels like learning on the job at the students' expense. (Teacher 1)

Teachers reported limited access to subject-specific English resources and outdated classroom equipment, hindering their ability to provide engaging and resource rich EMI courses.

The challenge isn't just me; it's the resources. We are teaching a global curriculum without any decent, current English language textbooks or supplementary materials. Furthermore, the classrooms lack basic infrastructure like reliable projectors or internet access, which are essential for modern language instruction. (Teacher 2)

The shift to EMI posed pedagogical challenges, notably for translanguaging, which involves using students' first language (L1) with English to improve understanding. Teachers struggled to strike this balance without compromising their objective of improving English competence.

We constantly face this linguistic hurdle. When I try to explain a complex

concept, I instinctively want to use the students' first language (L1) to ensure understanding that's translanguaging, but finding the right time and the right balance is incredibly difficult. I worry I'm not helping them learn English if I lean too much on L1. (Teacher 3)

Teachers claimed that these difficulties reinforced each other, leading to a highly stressful teaching atmosphere with systemic failures weakening professional attempts.

The whole process is compounded. Even if I had better training, the lack of suitable resources and materials completely undermines my effort. Plus, when students get stuck, it takes so much time and effort to navigate their conceptual misunderstandings while maintaining the English-only environment. It's exhausting. (Teacher 4)

The data analysis reveals that fully integrating EMI in public schools presents various problems. According to the replies of the participating instructors, some of the issues include inadequate teacher training, a lack of materials and infrastructure, and linguistic difficulties when translanguaging in the kids' first language. Sah and Li (2018), Gim (2020), and Tiwari (2023) identify hurdles to EMI implementation, such as poor teacher training, school infrastructure, and teaching materials. Teachers frequently encounter linguistic issues, struggle to adapt their instructional approaches, and rely on translanguaging techniques to assure student comprehension. Schools with fewer resources, especially those in rural locations, have more difficulties. Effective EMI execution is further hampered by the lack of institutional support for incorporating language acquisition into topic courses.

Teacher Training and Preparation

The findings highlight how important it is to provide teachers with support and training. The EMI policy is undermined since most instructors are inadequately prepared to teach complex topics in English, leading to a dependence on Nepali or other regional languages. ("We are aware of the EMI policy, but the reality is our lack of subject-specific English proficiency means we often have to resort to Nepali, or whichever local language the students understand, to ensure learning happens. We feel this is a necessary compromise, even though we know it contradicts the goals of the EMI mandate" Teacher 3). Additionally, Saud (2020) and Dahal (2023) stress the necessity of giving teachers the pedagogical and linguistic resources needed for EMI. In line with the tenets of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), these researches recommend that teacher preparation programs emphasize content and language integration.

Socioeconomic and Linguistic Equity

The results of this analysis are consistent with recent studies by Sah (2024), Rauteda (2024), and Choi and Poudel (2024), all of which highlight how EMI policies

may exacerbate social inequality. Despite the widespread support for EMI's ability to produce linguistic capital that improves professional and career opportunities, these studies draw attention to an important warning: students from lower socioeconomic situations and those who speak local or Indigenous languages are frequently marginalised by its implementation. According to the comparative study, this discrepancy is a reflection of underlying social structures where local language resources are routinely overshadowed by English's supremacy. These research all consistently advocate for a change to multilingual methods. In order to successfully advance educational justice and inclusion, these methods would acknowledge the intrinsic worth of students' native tongues in addition to English training. The aligned literature suggests that the very nature of EMI can create divisions:

"...it often marginalizes students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and speakers of local/Indigenous languages. These disparities reflect deeper societal hierarchies, with English dominance overshadowing local languages." (Teacher 2)

Translanguaging as a Coping Mechanism

The systemic objectives of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) and the practical reality of its execution differ significantly, according to the study's findings. Teachers generally support EMI because of its perceived globalised and neoliberal benefits, but this support is strongly qualified by overwhelming concerns about implementation challenges, particularly poor teacher preparation, a glaring lack of infrastructure and necessary materials, and the linguistic difficulty of delivering complex content. Importantly, the research indicates that the majority of instructors feel unprepared to teach substantive courses only in English, which inevitably results in a dependency on Nepali and other regional languages. The need for language compromise to ensure student comprehension compromises the official EMI policy aims. This difficulty correlates with literature showing societal disparities caused by strict English supremacy.

The use of multiple languages in EMI classrooms highlights the need of translanguaging as a practical teaching technique. The evidence supports Sah's (2024) and Rauteda's (2024) conclusions that students from lower socioeconomic and Indigenous language origins are typically marginalised by EMI's aspirational linguistic capital.

Teachers use translanguaging to bridge the gap between topic understanding and inadequate English ability. This directly addresses comprehension challenges caused by resource limitations and insufficient training. The study suggests that while EMI has potential career benefits, its current implementation structure is flawed. A shift towards multilingual and inclusive approaches that recognise and leverage students' first languages is needed to promote educational equity.

The Implementation Gap and Educational Inequality in EMI

The study's actual data, which reveals serious shortcomings in infrastructure, resources, and teacher training, clearly supports the finding in the literature (Sah & Li, 2018; Dhakal, 2021) that inadequate implementation keeps EMI from producing the desired results. The discovery that teachers are forced to use Nepali and regional languages highlights a significant shortcoming of the strategy in terms of offering a sustainable, supported teaching medium. Teachers are faced with a pedagogical conundrum as a result of this lack of support: they must decide whether to prioritise student understanding by translanguaging (risking policy deviation) or carefully follow the EMI policy (risking content loss). This undermines the purpose of enhancing both English proficiency and academic achievement, creating a compromised learning environment. The disconnect between top-down policy demands and classroom reality is the main barrier to successful EMI deployment.

Furthermore, the study's findings support the critical social commentary that EMI, as currently performed, exacerbates rather than reduces educational inequality. Teachers' issues lead to increased learning loads for pupils, particularly those from marginalised socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds. When the system fails to provide teachers with the resources they need to teach successfully in English, the kids who require the most language scaffolding have the biggest academic achievement disparities. Empirical evidence suggests that EMI regulations should be re-evaluated to improve sustainability and context-sensitivity. To foster an equitable and inclusive educational environment and prevent EMI from reinforcing existing societal hierarchies, a policy shift that recognises and strategically leverages translanguaging, viewing students' first languages as a valuable resource, is crucial.

Stakeholder Involvement in EMI Policy

This study consistently shown that successful EMI implementation requires active and inclusive engagement of all stakeholders. Participants' emphasis on involving teachers, parents, students, school administrators, and policymakers is consistent with existing literature (Saud, 2020; Tiwari, 2023; Dhakal, 2021). External studies show that EMI rules would be poorly executed and ineffectual if there is insufficient consultation and preparedness among stakeholders. The study argues that challenges like inadequate teacher training and resource gaps stem from exclusionary top-down policymaking that ignores classroom reality. The research suggests a need for a transformation in governance and policy creation that considers the viewpoints of people directly affected. The research unambiguously advocates a more inclusive approach that takes into account practitioners' practical experience as well as students' individual needs before formalizing EMI regulations. This study offers a paradigm for resolving previously reported inequities. By including marginalized perspectives, policymakers might create sustainable

EMI models that promote multilingualism (translanguaging) rather than punish it. Building a collaborative, context-sensitive infrastructure that recognizes and empowers all parts of the educational ecosystem is key to EMI's success in this environment, rather than focusing just on English domination.

The Necessity of Additive Multilingualism in EMI

According to the findings from this study and associated literature, a purely English-only approach to the English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) policy is unsustainable and detrimental to educational equity. The importance of using students' first language (L1) in education highlights the necessity for a policy change towards additive multilingualism to improve learning outcomes. The current implementation lacks enough support for teachers and students, resulting in poor academic achievement and marginalisation of kids from non-dominant language backgrounds. By supporting the deliberate integration of students' first language (L1) with English, Dahal (2023) and Sah (2024) strengthen this conclusion. By appreciating both local and global languages at the same time, this additive method provides a sustainable remedy. The policy can actively assist students' cognitive, sociopsychological, and academic growth by changing the language framework from a subtractive model which ignores the L1 to an additive one. The study unequivocally shows that implementing this balanced linguistic approach is the only practical way to improve educational results while addressing the equity issues brought up by EMI and making sure that language variety is valued and used as a resource rather than a barrier.

Conclusion

This study explored basic level teacher experiences and attitudes regarding using EMI in Nepal's public schools. The study analysed challenges, teacher preparation levels, and classroom implementation of EMI. Despite educators' awareness of EMI's potential to boost students' global competitiveness, they face challenges such as insufficient English proficiency, limited resources, and inadequate training. Teachers often employ translanguaging to address language difficulties, which highlights a gap between EMI policy and classroom practice. Furthermore, the majority of educators lack the essential training to teach content courses in English, lowering the effectiveness of EMI. The study found that the lack of institutional support and stakeholder consultation during the rapid implementation of EMI exacerbated educational disparities, particularly among students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds with limited exposure to English. These challenges suggest that EMI policies should be more context-sensitive and incorporate both English and students' mother tongues in order to encourage additive multilingualism. If EMI adopted a flexible strategy that enhances teacher preparation and considers the language realities of the community, it may be more successful. This would align EMI

with the goals of educating students for opportunities in the global marketplace and guaranteeing equal access to excellent educational opportunities.

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