

Mother Tongue Based Education: Critical Reflection of Policy to Practice in Nepal

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Abstract

Adopting Nepal's linguistic diversity, the Constitution of Nepal (2015) has assured constitutional recognition to all mother tongues spoken within the country as national languages. In this context, the primary aim of this study is to discuss which languages have been used as mediums of instruction in Nepal and to examine their current status. This study explores the meaning and importance of mother tongue education. It also examines the legal provisions in relation to the use of mother tongue in education and the actual practical situation of its use in schools and universities. It reviews the achievements of mother tongue education in both informal and formal education, and identifies the challenges observed in practices. This study also asserts ways to improve mother tongue teaching and learning in Nepal. This study employs a qualitative document analysis method to explore how education policies are implemented in practice in Nepal.

Keywords: *Mother Tongue Education, Multilingual Education, Medium of instruction, Language Policy, Curriculum Framework, Educational Rights, learning outcomes, assessment alignment, higher-order thinking, curriculum design*

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Introduction

Mother tongue education is the current constitutional provision in Nepal. According to the Constitution of Nepal 2015, mother tongue education is a fundamental right of every individual [Article 31(5)]. Other policy documents such as National Curriculum Framework (2079 BS), also state that mother tongue can be accepted as a medium of instruction in education. However, these robust legal mandates are still not materialized in the education sector of Nepal. Hence this key area requires attention of educational research.

The term "mother tongue" refers to the first language that children speak at home with their family (Multilingual Education Implementation Directives, 2009, p. 2). The use of the mother tongue in education means teaching students in their own native

language. Seal et al. (2016) have stated that the mother tongue should be used not only as a full medium of instruction but also as a means of verbal support whenever necessary. This pedagogical approach suggests that cultural preservation and cognitive development of children can go side by side.

Constitutional guarantees of mother tongue education are challenged by the existing realities, such as global expansion of English language and its dominant presence in Nepalese education and state privilege to Nepali language. These realities leave inadequate room for using mother tongue as medium of instruction, as the socioeconomic advantages promised by English as a medium of instruction are clearly evident.

This paper seeks to analyze the legal documents that provision mother tongue education, evaluate extent of their implementation across general, traditional, and higher education sectors in Nepal and further, aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the current status, identifying both the strides made and the persistent barriers that hinder the full realization of mother tongue-based education.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative document analysis method to examine the status of mother tongue education of Nepal. It is used to systematically review and interpret authentic documents in order to identify meanings, themes, and patterns related to the research problems (Dhakal 2021; Rasmussen, 2024). It examines policies, reports, and records, and helps to better understand and develop practical knowledge about social or educational issues.

Legal and policy documents serve as the primary sources in this study. These are the Constitution of Nepal (2015), the Education Act (1971), and the National Curriculum Frameworks (2006, 2019). Secondary sources include government directives, curriculum guidelines, implementation reports, and academic literature related to multilingual education in Nepal.

The data analysis focuses on three main dimensions. Those dimensions are legal and policy provisions regarding the use of mother tongues; structural implementation within the general and traditional education systems (Bešter & Medvešek, 2014). And, the implementation constraints and achievements observed in formal and non-formal education sectors (Bustos-Orosa & Symaco, 2025).

These documentary data were critically assessed. Based on this analysis, the alignment between legal provisions related to mother tongue education and the actual status of its implementation was assessed (Shan, 2025; Taringa & Manyike, 2024). This

method provides for a systematic evaluation of the gap between policy and practice based on existing official records, without relying on filed data, and provides a comprehensive policy review.

Legal Provisions for the Use of Mother Tongue in Education

The use of mother tongue in education is enshrined in the constitutional provisions. If the constitution prohibits the use of the mother tongue in education, it cannot be practiced; however, if the constitution permits it, the use of the mother tongue becomes legitimate. Among the constitutions formulated in Nepal, the Interim Constitution of Nepal (2007) is considered the most liberal regarding the use of mother tongue in education, though it has not been fully implemented in practice.

Part 1, Article 6 of the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 grants equal constitutional recognition to all mother tongues by stating that "All the mother tongues spoken in Nepal are the languages of nation." Likewise, Part 3, under Fundamental Rights and duties related to Education and Culture, Article 17(1) states that "every community shall have the right to acquire basic education in its mother tongue as provided by law."

Likewise, the Constitution of Nepal (2015) under Part 3, Fundamental Rights, in the section related to the Right to Education, states, "Every Nepalese community residing in Nepal shall have the right to get education in its mother tongue and, for that purpose, to open and operate schools and educational institutes, in accordance with the law" (Article 31.5).

Furthermore, under Part 5 of the Constitution, which deals with the Structure of the State and Distribution of State Power, the schedule includes the authority of the provincial and local levels regarding the preservation and promotion of languages, scripts, cultures, arts, and religions. This power decentralization is provisioned

intending to empower local governments to manage linguistic diversity effectively.

Regarding mother tongue education, the Education Act, 1971 (with amendments), Article 7(2)(a) explicitly mentions that "primary education may be provided in the mother tongue." Similarly, the National Curriculum Framework for School Education, 2019 (Second Edition) mentions the following provisions regarding the language of instruction: for facilitating learning at the basic level, the medium of instruction shall be either the mother tongue or the Nepali language, to ensure the child's right to learn in the mother tongue, it may be used both as a subject and as a medium of instruction at the school level (p. 35).

Although various provisions exist in the Constitution, Acts, Rules, and Regulations regarding the use of the mother tongue in education, in practice, however, the implementation of these provisions has not been effectively realized. This gap between policy and practice forms the core problem addressed in this research.

The Situation of Mother Tongue Use in Education

While discussing the situation of the use of the mother tongue in education, it is contextually appropriate to include both school education and higher education. School education refers to classes 1–12, while higher education refers to education at the bachelor's level and above.

In the restructured education system of Nepal, school education is organized up to grade 12. In accordance with this, it includes 1–2 years of Early Childhood Development and Education, basic education from grades 1–8, and secondary education from grades 9–12 (as stated in The National Curriculum Framework for School Education, 2019 [Second Edition], p. 45). Basic education is divided into levels: grades 1–3 as Level 1, grades 4–5 as Level 2, grades 6–8 as Level 3, and secondary education is divided into

levels: grades 9–10 as Level 4, and grades 11–12 as Level 5.

In Early Childhood Development, children aged up to 4 years are taught; Level 1 includes children aged 5–7, Level 2 includes 8–9, Level 3 includes 10–12, Level 4 includes 13–14, and Level 5 includes 15–16 years. Based on this structure, mother-tongue education has been provisioned within school education.

Mother tongue-based teaching in school education of Nepal, is segmented into two different categories as the general education and the traditional education group. These both groups work as parts of the formal education system. This dual structure of education shows Nepal's attempt to include diverse cultural and religious educational tradition within one unified national framework.

Curriculum for the General Education Group

For the development of the mother-tongue education curriculum and textbooks, several guidelines have been formulated and implemented — including the Guideline Book for Mother-Tongue Curriculum and Textbook Development for Basic Level (Grades 1–5), 2008, the Guideline for Mother-Tongue Curriculum and Textbook Development for Basic Level (Grades 6–8), 2013, the District and Regional Curriculum Coordination Committee Directives, 2004 (First Amendment), which provide for the teaching of national languages of Nepal and traditional religious education in grades 9–10, and the Mother-Tongue Education Implementation Directive, 2009. All of these have been integrated into the Curriculum and Textbook Development and Distribution Directive, 2022, which is currently in effect. This directive governs the preparation of curricula and instructional materials for both compulsory and elective subjects from Early Childhood Development and Education up to Grade 12.

At the basic education level (Grades 1–3), Mother Tongue Skills is included as the fifth subject, with 5 credit hours and 160 annual working hours. Additionally, an optional subject called Local Activity Subject is included.

In basic level education (esp. in Grades 4–5), Mother Tongue is placed as the seventh subject, with 4 credit hours and 128 annual working hours, along with Local Subject as an optional subject. Likewise, in basic education (Grades 6–8), Mother Tongue is again the seventh subject, with 4 credit hours and 128 annual working hours, accompanied by optional subjects such as Local Subject and Sanskrit Language.

This clearly indicates that mother-tongue education has been placed only as an optional subject. As a result, in practice, some schools have replaced it with subjects like English, Computer, or Local Studies — which is not legally valid. The secondary level curriculum of Nepal includes Mother Tongue Studies under optional subject group. It is included as the first optional subject in Grade 9, 10 and third optional paper in grades 11, 12.

Curriculum for the Traditional Religious Education Group

To integrate the Gonpa (Gumba), Gurukul, Madrasa, and Mundhum education systems—which exist outside the formal education structure but provide education through their own resources and teaching processes—into the national education system and to achieve the goal of education for all, the Ministry of Education has

introduced a program to mainstream these traditional systems. According to this program, the Madrasa Education Curriculum for the Basic Level (Grades 1–5) was developed in 2011, the Gurukul Education Curriculum for the Primary Level (Grades 1–5) in 2008, the Gonpa (Monastic) Education Curriculum for the Primary Level (Grades 1–5) in 2008, and the Mundhum Education Curriculum for the Primary Level (Grades 1–5) in 2015, all of which are currently under implementation. In the same way, the Sanskrit and Ved Vidyashram Secondary School Curriculum for Grades 9 and 10 was developed in 2011, and the curricular framework for Grades 9–12 was introduced in 2012, including provisions for Gurukul, Madrasa, and Gonpa education systems.

Mother Tongue in Education: Medium and Subject

The term mother tongue in education refers to: (a) the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, and (b) the mother tongue as a subject (Multilingual Education Implementation Guideline, 2009). Using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction means that, except for language subjects (Nepali and English), the language of instruction for all other subjects should generally be the local language. However, this provision has not been formally or fully implemented in practice. As a subject, textbooks in various mother tongues have been developed and published since 1998 for grades 1–5 at the basic level, and they have been used sporadically in some schools.

Table 1. *Mother tongue languages with developed textbooks in Nepal*

No.	Language	Grades Available	Remarks	No.	Language	Grades Available	Remarks
1	Maithili	1–9		16	Mugali	1–5	
2	Bhojpuri	1–10		17	Tharu (Central Region)	1–5	

3	Awadhi	1–10		18	Tamang	1–5	Sambhota script variant
4	Tamang	1–5	Devnagari script variant	19	Dhimal	1–5	
5	Limbu	1–9	Kirat Sirijanga script	20	Magar Aathar	1–8	
6	Bantawa Rai	1–7		21	Bajjika	1–5	
7	Chamling Rai	1–7		22	Kulung	1–8	
8	Sherpa	1–5		23	Chepang	1–5	
9	Gurung	1–5		24	Khaling Rai	1–5	
10	Magar Dhut	1–7		25	Bayung Rai	1–5	
11	Newar (Nepal Bhasa)	1–9		26	Majhi	1–3	
12	Tharu Dagaura	1–5		27	Doteli	Grade 1	
13	Sunuwar	1–5		28	Thakali	1–3	
14	Rajbanshi	1–5		29	Hindi	Grade 1	
15	Yakkha	1–5		30	Rana Tharu	Grade 1	Developed based on Early Grade Reading Program

These textbooks and supplementary reading materials are developed to help school-level students achieve the objectives of the curriculum, enhance their knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and ultimately foster the innate talents within individuals to develop as creative citizens (Balbodh–36, 2002, p. c). In

this regard, the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) has prepared children's reference materials such as stories, biographies, and cultural texts in each mother tongue. The children's reference materials have been developed in the following 15 languages:

Table 2. *The supplementary reading materials developed by the CDC in mother tongues*

No.	Language	Remarks	No.	Language	Remarks
1	Maithili		8	Doteli	
2	Bhojpuri		9	Thakali	
3	Limbu		10	Chamling Rai	
4	Gurung		11	Tharu	(Includes variants like Dangaura or Central)
5	Awadhi		12	Sherpa	

6	Magar	(Includes variants like Dhut or Kaike where applicable)	13	Bantawa Rai	
7	Newar (Nepal Bhasa)		14	Urdu	
			15	Sanskrit	

Traditional Education: School Level Details

Regarding the traditional religious school-level education includes Gurukul, Madrasa, Gumba, and Mundhum education (NCF, 2019, p. 20). Each system has its own curriculum. These curriculum use mother tongue in teaching. They connect language learning with religious belief and cultural practices.

Gonpa (Gumba) Education

According to the Gonpa (Monastic) Education Curriculum for the Basic Level Grades 1–5 (2008, p. 3), Gonpa education is divided into two sections: Grades 1–3 and Grades 4–5, as follows:

In Grades 1–3, two subjects are taught — Social Studies and Creative Arts and Local Subject – Bhote Language — with a total of 100 marks and 6 credit hours of instructional load. In Grades 4–5, the curriculum includes Social Studies (5 credit hours, 75 marks), Creative Arts (3 credit hours, 25 marks), and Local Subject – Bhote Language (6 credit hours, 100 marks). According to the decision of the Government of Nepal, Ministry of Education, dated 4 May 2013, and based on the Curriculum Structure for Grades 9–12 (2012, p. 8–9) approved for trial implementation, Gonpa Education has been included under the Traditional Religious Education Group for Grades 9–10 and Grades 11–12.

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education, 2019, places Gonpa (Buddhist monasteries), Bihar, and Madrasa Education under a single thematic structure at the basic level Grades 6–8 (Level 3). Therefore, the subject structure for

Gonpa/Bihar and Madrasa Education (Grades 6–8) is as follows:

For Gonpa and Bihar (Grades 6–8) — in addition to compulsory Nepali, English, and Mathematics — students may study either Science and Technology or Buddhist Philosophy (5 credit hours, 160 annual working hours); Social Studies and Moral Education (in the respective traditional language of instruction) (5 credit hours, 160 hours); Bhote or Pali Language (4 credit hours, 128 hours); and Local Subject, Buddhist Education, Sambhota Grammar, or another related subject (3 credit hours, 96 hours).

For Gonpa/Bihar Education (Grades 9–10), the curriculum framework includes the following subjects: Buddhist Philosophy – 5 credit hours, 160 annual working hours; Social Studies (taught in the respective traditional language of instruction) – 5 credit hours, 160 annual working hours; Optional I: Bhote Language – 4 credit hours, 128 annual working hours; Optional II: Buddhist Education – 4 credit hours, 128 annual working hours. Similarly, for Bihar Education, in addition to the elective subjects of general education, students may study Pali Language as Elective I and Pariyati Education as Elective II.

For the Gonpa and Bihar Education (Grades 11–12), the curriculum includes: Buddhist Education – 4 credit hours, 128 annual working hours; Social Studies and Life-Oriented Education (Adapted) – 5 credit hours, 160 annual working hours; Optional I: Buddhist Philosophy; Optional II: Astrology, Ayurveda, Fine Arts, Buddhist Rituals, or Sambhota Grammar; Optional III: Bhote

Language. Each elective subject carries 5 credit hours and 160 annual working hours.

Madrasa Education

According to the Madrasa Education Curriculum for Basic Level Grades 1–3 (2008, p. 3), the subjects and their respective credit hours and marks are arranged as follows: Social Studies (in Urdu language) carries 3 credit hours and 50 full marks; Diniyat (Religious Studies) carries 4 credit hours and 100 full marks; Arabic Language and Urdu Language are taught, each carrying 3 credit hours and 50 full marks. For Grades 4 and 5, the curriculum includes: Social Studies (in Urdu language) with 4 credit hours and 50 full marks; Diniyat with 6 credit hours and 100 full marks; Arabic and Urdu Languages with 7 credit hours and 100 full marks.

For Madrasa Education (Grades 6–8) — in addition to compulsory Nepali, English, and Mathematics — students may study either Science and Technology or Diniyat (5 credit hours, 160 annual working hours); Social Studies and Moral Education (in the respective traditional language of instruction) (5 credit hours, 160 hours); Urdu Language (4 credit hours, 128 hours); and Ethics (Diniyat) or Quran (Arabic) (3 credit hours, 96 hours).

The disciplinary structure of curriculum of Madrasa Education (Grades 9–10) includes: Diniyat – 5 credit hours, 160 annual working hours; Social Studies (in the respective traditional language of instruction) – 5 credit hours, 160 annual working hours; Arabic Language and Literature with Grammar, and Urdu Language and Literature with Grammar as core subjects.

Similarly, the curriculum structure for Madrasa Education (Grades 11–12) includes: Urdu Grammar and Literature or Arabic or Pariyati Education – 4 credit hours, 128 annual working hours; Social Studies and Life-Oriented Education (Adapted) – 5 credit hours, 160 annual working hours; Optional I: Quran or Islamic History; Optional II: Hadis; Optional III: Fiqh. Each elective

subject likewise carries 5 credit hours and 160 annual working hours.

Gurukul Education

As mentioned by the Curriculum of Gurukul Education for the Basic Level (Grades 1–5) (2008, p. 3), Gurukul education has into two parts. The first includes Grade 1-3. The second part includes Grade 4-5. In Grades 1–3, students study Sanskrit Composition for 6 credit hours and 100 full marks. In Grades 4–5, they study Sanskrit Composition (5 credit hours, 100 marks), Sanskrit Grammar and Moral Education (Daily Conduct) (4 credit hours, 50 marks), and Vedas/Ethics (6 credit hours, 100 marks). These subjects build language, ethics, and cultural knowledge.

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education, 2019 has placed Sanskrit/Gurukul/Vedic School Education under a single subject structure for the basic level Grades 6–8 (Level 3). Hence, the subject structure for Sanskrit/Gurukul/Vedic Education (Grades 6–8) includes: Sanskrit Composition: 5 credit hours, 160 annual working hours; Vedas: 5 credit hours, 160 annual working hours; Ritual Practices (Karmakanda): 5 credit hours, 160 annual working hours; Sanskrit Grammar/Ethics (Niti Shastra): 4 credit hours, 128 annual working hours and Sanskrit Language: 3 credit hours, 96 annual working hours.

So, as to the Secondary Education Curriculum, 2011, Sanskrit secondary education was divided into Sanskrit and Vedic Vidyashram Secondary Schools (pp. 5–6). Under the Traditional Education Group, Gurukul education is also divided into two levels — Grades 9–10 and 11–12.

In Sanskrit/Veda Vidyashram/Gurukul Education (Grades 9–10), the curriculum includes: Sanskrit Composition and Vedas/Ethics (Niti Shastra): 5 credit hours, 160 annual working hours; Sanskrit Language and Grammar; Elective I: one subject chosen from Ritual Practices (Karmakanda), Astrology (Falit Jyotish), Yoga Education, Vastu Shastra, Ayurveda,

Natural Medicine, or Optional Mathematics and Elective II: one subject chosen from the classical branches of Sanskrit studies. Both Sanskrit Language and Grammar, Elective I, and Elective II have 4 credit hours and 128 annual working hours each.

In Sanskrit/Veda Vidyashram/Gurukul Education (Grades 11–12), the curriculum includes Sanskrit Composition with 4 credit hours and 128 annual working hours. Sanskrit Language and Grammar have 5 credit hours and 160 annual working hours.

After Tribhuvan University phased out the Proficiency Certificate Level (PCL), Maithili and Nepal Bhasa (Newar Language) were adopted to the higher secondary. Now, these languages are taught in Grade 11-12, instead of the former PCL.

Critical Reflection of Mother Tongue Education

Although more than a dozen international and classical languages are taught at Tribhuvan University, only two native languages of Nepal—Maithili and Nepal Bhasa (Newar)—have been offered as subjects of study. These languages have been taught since the Panchayat era and even before the restoration of democracy. However, at the Sanskrit University, curriculum for the Limbu and Tharu languages were developed after the establishment of the Republic. Since 2025, Kathmandu University has been running Post-graduate Diploma classes in Tamang language and Nepal Bhasa. Similarly, since 2025, it has been applying post-graduate classes in the Limbu language. This situation shows a major problem in higher education. Most of the Nepal's linguistic diversity is not included in university education.

Mother Tongue Education (Non-formal Education)

The Non-formal Education Center has published textbooks and supplementary books in 14 mother tongues, including Maithili, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Tharu, Limbu, and Bantawa Rai, and implemented teaching and learning activities are also being conducted.

This sector plays a crucial role in reaching out-of-school children and adults, yet it remains less resourced compared to the formal sector.

Mother Tongue Education: As a Medium and as a Subject

The mother tongue education being used in schools is categorized as a medium of instruction and as a subject in Nepal.

Mother Tongue Education as a Medium of Instruction

Since 2006, the then Department of Education has initiated multilingual education—using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction—in eight mother tongues of Nepal: (1) Rana Tharu, (2) Palpa Magar, (3) Rasuwa Tamang, (4) Athpahariya, (5) Urau, (6) Eastern Tharu, (7) Santhal, and (8) Rajbanshi. Although the Government of Nepal had planned to expand mother tongue–based instruction to 7,500 schools by 2015, the initiative could not gain significant momentum.

To facilitate learning at the basic level, the policy states that the medium of instruction shall be either the mother tongue or the Nepali language. In addition, for subjects other than Social Studies, Human Values/Moral Education, and those related to Nepali art, culture, and indigenous identity, English may also be adopted as a medium of instruction. However, in practice, mother tongues are rarely used; instead, Nepali and English have become the dominant languages of instruction.

At the secondary level, the medium of instruction is either Nepali or English. Notwithstanding the mother tongue being used for teaching subjects such as Social Studies, Human Values/Moral Education, and topics related to Nepali art, culture, and indigenous identity, instructional materials and the medium of teaching are designated to be in Nepali. The mother tongue, however, is not mentioned at this level. This exclusion at the secondary level severely limits the

continuity of mother tongue education beyond the basic levels.

Mother Tongue Education as a Subject

All the formal education subjects mentioned above, taught at the basic, secondary, and university levels, are mother tongues that are studied as subjects within the curriculum. However, the status of these subjects varies, with some being compulsory in traditional systems and optional in general systems.

Achievements in Mother Tongue Education

The teaching and learning of Maithili and Nepal Bhasa at Tribhuvan University began during the Panchayat era. After the restoration of democracy in 1990, and the movement of 2006 that established the democratic republic and defined the epoch, no new mother tongue programs were introduced at Tribhuvan University. Similarly, international and classical languages such as English, Urdu, Chinese, German, Korean, Spanish, Malay, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Arabic, Japanese, Bengali, Hebrew, and Hindi had already been taught at the secondary level since the Panchayat era. Among Nepal's national languages, Maithili and Nepal Bhasa were also taught during that time.

After the restoration of democracy in 1990, mother tongues began to be used in basic level of education. By 2025, textbooks had been prepared in 30 different mother tongues for teaching and learning. However, it is surprising that there has been no expansion of mother-tongue use at the secondary level. This is despite the political changes of 1990 and the establishment of a democratic republic in 2006.

Therefore, although the use of mother tongues has been implemented to some extent at the basic level, it has not been practiced at the secondary level in Nepal's national languages. Before 1990, there was little discussion of mother tongue education, though Maithili and Nepal Bhasa were

taught. During both the democratic and republican periods, there seems to have been more discussion but less action regarding the implementation of mother tongue education. This historical trend suggests a persistent policy paralysis regarding linguistic diversity in higher grades.

Problems in Mother Tongue Education

Although teaching and learning in the mother tongue has been observed since 1997/98, in reality, the teaching of mother tongue education—especially as a subject at the basic level—remains almost negligible. There are no textbooks viability and teacher quotas. Because of this, its implementation has become nearly impossible. The mother tongue-based education is still used informally as a medium of instruction. However, the government has not given it as official recognition. The implementation of informal education in the mother tongue is almost non-existent. The reasons for this are as follows: (1) Line agency officials do not treat this issue seriously, (2) The various bodies of informal education at federal, provincial, and local levels do not prepare plans or show interest in conducting informal education in the mother tongue, (3) There is lack of available teaching and learning materials, and (4) The concerned communities do not know that textbooks have been prepared in their languages.

In formal education, despite the existence of the Mother Tongue Curriculum Guidelines for the basic (grades 6–8) and secondary (grades 9–12) levels—and even though there is a demand from mother-tongue-speaking communities for teaching learning in their languages—the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) has not prioritized the writing of mother tongue textbooks for grades 6–8. On the pretext of delegating the task of textbook writing to the local levels, the CDC does not appear to have prioritized the preparation of mother-

tongue curriculum and textbooks for the basic level (Grades 6-8), in which the mother tongue is taught as subject.

As a result, instead of linguistic standardization, the delegation of curriculum development and textbook writing to local levels has led to linguistic fragmentation—causing the opposite of standardization. This has created a situation in which languages are becoming divided. Because textbooks for grades 6–8 have not been written, mother-tongue-speaking students have not been able to study optional mother tongue subjects at the secondary level (grades 9–12). This creates a discontinuity where students who learn in their mother tongue at the basic level cannot continue doing so at the secondary level.

The multilingual teacher training once conducted by the then National Centre for Educational Development (NCED) was not as systematic as training for other subjects. Furthermore, there has been no provision of training for secondary-level teachers to teach in or about mother tongues. Currently, teacher training comes under the working area of provincial governments. Provincial education training centers are implementing professional development programs for local-level educational staff, including school head-teachers, teachers, and other school personnel. However, these centers have not provided any training specifically for mother tongue teachers. The absence of permanent teacher positions allocated for mother tongue education may be the major reason behind this lack of training programs.

Although mother-tongue-speaking communities have requested Tribhuvan University to introduce mother tongue subjects, there has been no response to date. Although Limbu and Tharu have prepared their syllabuses at the Nepal Sanskrit University, teaching has not started. This happened because of the absence of dedicated departments and appointed teachers. This shows that higher education institutions have a structural barrier that

prevents mother tongue education from expanding.

Implications

The findings of the study hold important implications for the teaching and learning mother tongue education; several significant efforts need to be undertaken. Findings suggest that there is the urgent policy reforms or constitutional and legal reforms should be introduced to systematize and strengthen mother tongue education effectively. In addition, the full implementation of the Multilingual Education Implementation Guidelines should be ensured so that policies translated into actual practice in classrooms.

Moreover, to organize the teaching and learning of mother tongues in a structured manner, dedicated departments should be established within the relevant education line agencies. These departments should be responsible for implementing and monitoring mother tongue education, and it is essential that staff members who are speakers of the respective languages are appointed. As well as, a separate quota for mother tongue teachers should be created to ensure the availability of qualified instructors.

Finally, the Government of Nepal should ensure that the Janak Education Material Centre prints mother tongue textbooks in the same way as other subject textbooks and distributes them simultaneously to students who speak those languages.

Conclusion

Mother tongue-based education in Nepal is in a disheartening situation. The Constitution of Nepal 2015, education acts, and curriculum frameworks recognize mother tongue education. However, in practice, the implementation of mother tongue education is nominal. There is a vast gap between the policy for mother tongue education and its implementation in schools. Although, the development of textbooks in 30 mother tongues is a notable achievement. Still, due to the lack of teacher quotas, lack

of teachers training, lacking viability of teaching materials, and the optional status of mother tongue subjects, effective implementation of mother tongue education beyond the basic level has not occurred. Traditional religious educational systems provide a model for integrating and implementing mother tongue education. But in the general education system, Nepali and English are dominant. This has limited presence and influence of mother tongues and cultural practices in schools. For Nepal to truly embrace its linguistic diversity, efforts are needed to link policy provisions and classroom practices. This will help to ensure that all communities can fully entertain their fundamental right to mother tongue education.

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