

# English Teachers' Perception on the Use of EMI in Public Schools

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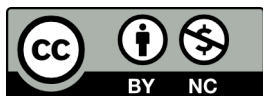
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## Abstract

*This research article examines the perceptions of English language teachers regarding the use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in public schools of Nepal. It aims to explore and disseminate the findings of English language teachers' perceptions of implementing EMI, especially in secondary schools. The narrative inquiry method was employed within the framework of the interpretative research paradigm. Within Nepal, some teachers and students preferred EMI, whereas most of the students and teachers liked and demanded the use of the mother tongues of the students. They urge multilingualism, at least bilingualism (the use of learners' mother tongues), facilitates the learning of L2 more than the use of a monolingual strategy. I have found from this study that we had better let the learners select the medium of instruction on their own. It can contribute to the learning of an L2, in three perspectives: by making the learners learn easily with a clear concept of the content; by reducing costs for materials and training for implementing the EMI, and, most importantly, by preserving the local language and culture of the people, ultimately their identity. It also keeps the way open for the use of the target language in the*

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*classrooms if the learners prefer. So, I emphasize the 'Learners' Preference Theory (LP Theory)'. The learners should be the center of the teaching learning process, and they should understand the content that is delivered. Not only this, our language, culture, and identity should also be preserved, and we should be aware that we may not be lost after a few decades.*

**Keywords:** Constructivism, EMI, instruction, interpretative, medium, preference.

## **Introduction**

English as a medium of instruction (EMI) is a teaching strategy in which teachers use English to convey the content to the classroom learners. Defining EMI, Macaro et al. (2018, p. 37) state that it is the use of the English language for teaching educational course subjects in regions where most people do not speak English as their mother tongue. They further state that EMI is a kind of policy or strategy taken by an institution or a nation to provide educational subjects through English rather than through the mother tongue or home language. According to Chalmers (2019, p. 5), EMI is “a model of education in which curriculum content is taught in a complete or partial amount in English to students who speak other languages in their homes and communities.” This means that EMI is a policy that educates children/students in the English language who speak other languages in their homes.

Regarding the medium of instruction in teaching English in secondary-level education in Nepal, most teachers (over 50%); responded that we should switch the code or use the students' mother tongues when they need clear comprehension. However, some other teachers said we should encourage the teachers, train the teachers, enhance the methodology with Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools, raise confidence, etc. And, no studies have claimed that it is the best strategy to promote students' learning of English as a foreign/second language. So, there is a clear gap in the selection of a better medium of instruction while teaching English with clear concepts of the learners about the content. This study is supposed to fill the gap.

## **Review of the Related Literature**

English as a medium of instruction (EMI) is a teaching strategy of English in Nepal. Simply, it refers to using the English language in the classroom by teachers and students. It occurs in countries or regions where English is not spoken as the first

language. Regarding English language teachers' perceptions of the use of EMI, there are many studies. Cosgun and Hasirci (2017, p. 12) have defined EMI as delivering the subject matter to the students by using the English language, assuming that lessons, assignments, and course materials are in English. In such an environment, the focus of faculty members is not to improve/develop students' language ability. This means that the main focus of the course is to be given on students' communicative abilities. This phenomenon has significant implications for the education of young people.

Defining EMI, Macaro et al. (2018, p. 37) state that it is the use of the English language for teaching educational course subjects in areas where most people do not speak English as their mother tongue. McMahon (2019) mentions that teaching course subjects through the English language at the primary level as a second/foreign language may be very hard or discouraging at first. Still, with the provision of the right training and support, it can be a very satisfying experience for the teacher. In other words, McMahon's opinion is that if training and other essential supports are provide to the teachers, we can implement EMI while teaching English. Ghimire (2019), carried out the research activity in Shree Devasthan Secondary School, Dumja, Sindhuli, Nepal, which has linguistically minority groups of people. He says there is no criticism about the increasing trend of EMI in countries' schools where people speak other than English, in recent days. He further emphasizes that EMI is increasingly used in universities, secondary schools, and even primary schools. So, it is clear that EMI is a style/technique of teaching the subject matter in the English language for non-English speaking children.

### **Research purpose**

This article aims to explore and share secondary-level English language teachers' experiences of using EMI and in discovering better ways of teaching English as a foreign language in the context of Nepal.

### **Research method**

This study is qualitative research. So, it has pursued a qualitative research design, interpretative research paradigm, and narrative inquiry method in investigating the English language teachers' perceptions and experiences in Nepal. The study has followed a semi-structured open-ended interview model to retrieve the perceptions of the participant teachers. The study has applied narrative thematic analysis to analyze and interpret the data to reach a conclusion.

The participant teachers were selected on the basis of purposive sampling under non-probability sampling methods, from English language teachers of secondary levels teaching in Dailekh district. They range from novice teachers to the subject experts teaching at the secondary level. The primary data were collected through interviews with the following English teachers:

**Table 1**

*Participants' Profile Summary*

SN	Participant Code	Aca. Qual.	Experience	Age	Working School
1	T1	M. Ed.	6 Years	38 Yrs.	Shree Pipal Chautara Secondary School, Dungeshwor RM - 5, Dailekh
2	T2	M. Ed.	18 Years	42 Yrs.	Shree Saraswati Secondary School, Narayan Municipality - 8, Dailekh
3	T3	M. Ed.	15 Years	34 Yrs.	Shree Red Cross Secondary School, Narayan Municipality - 6, Dailekh
4	T4	M.A.	17 Years	39 Yrs.	Shree Saraswati Secondary School, Narayan Municipality - 8, Dailekh
5	T5	M. Ed.	15 Years	34 Yrs.	Shree Pancha Dewol Secondary School, Bhairabi RM - 2, Dailekh

I met T1 in a shop on the way home. He teaches in a school of Dungeshwor Rural Municipality, where my home is located. He is an MA and M Ed. in English and has been teaching for six years. He responded that he uses about 50% Nepali in the classroom to make the students understand the content. T2 was met in his school, Shree Saraswati Secondary School, Narayan Municipality - 8, Dailekh. He is an experienced teacher and has been teaching English for eighteen years. He expressed that he uses Nepali (learners' mother tongues), nearly half of the classroom interaction. T3 has passed M. Ed. and has been teaching for fifteen years. He was visited and interviewed in a tea shop near his school. He expressed the need to speak the learners' mother tongues above 25% in the classroom. T4 was also met in his

school, Shree Saraswati Secondary School, Narayan-8, Dailekh. He is 39 years old and has been teaching English for 17 years. He is an expert and has been selected as a trainer of teachers in Dailekh district. He also expressed that he uses nearly half of the class time to make the content clear for the learners. T5 is also an experienced teacher; and has been teaching English for fifteen years in private and public schools. He is still attempting to implement the EMI but accepts the need to use Nepali for about 5% to clarify the content.

## **Findings and discussion**

The available literature and the interviews with the participant teachers have guided me to the findings as follows.

### **Sustaining the EMI**

Using English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in the second language classrooms has been a genuine issue these days. Many countries have followed in the footsteps of EMI. They believe that EMI increases the chances of exposure of the learners to the target language and provides opportunities for enhancing skills in it. McMahon (2019) says that EMI, which is a foreign language teaching strategy, can be difficult at first. But; if we provide the right training and support, it can be a very satisfying experience for the teacher. Emphasizing the implementation of EMI, Dahal and Gyawali (2022) write that the teachers and most of the students at the college level liked using EMI. Their study shows that EMI is increasingly implemented in the academic field. However, with the response of a few students, they conclude their study by suggesting to everyone in the English academic field that we should raise a positive attitude toward EMI from the policy-making level to the implementation level, such as in English classrooms.

Kulung (2021) notes that there are several advantages of using the EMI. It improves the English language skills of the learners, enhances their communicative skills, builds confidence in them, develops their careers, opens the door for them to study at higher levels, and participate in standard examinations, etc. It is a motivating factor to understand a foreign culture and spread own culture abroad, etc. Khatri (2016) states that EMI is undoubtedly a spreading phenomenon in the education system of Nepal and the world. It is believed to open the possibilities for educational and economic advancements at local, national, and international levels.

At our meeting, participant T5; narrated about what he experienced while implementing the EMI in his English classroom. In response to my inquiry about his perception of teaching English and implementing EMI as well as shifting the code in the English classroom, T5 replied:

*Yes, sir. Only a little. I manage instructional materials as far as possible at first. I use simple words in front of the students to make it easier for them to understand. I also organize game-like group activities to have them interact with each other. At last, I use Nepali to summarize the content to some extent for the students' better understanding.*

Thus, T5 concludes that if we are well-prepared for the classroom presentation, manage sufficient instructional materials along with modern multimedia, and organize an exciting and competitive environment in the class, we can improve the learning of English among the students by using the EMI.

In this way, Ghimire, McMahon, Dahal and Gyawali, Khati, and the narrative of my participant teacher T5 seem to be in favour of sustaining English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in the classroom. They opine that it can maximize the exposure of the learners to the target language. It can provide the learners with practice target language in their activities and learn it. With this, they can participate in pair and group activities and communicate in the Target Language (TL). Rather, they confront the idea that while implementing EMI, we should also consider communicative language teaching (CLT) theory. With communicative language teaching, they mean that learners achieve or gain communicative competence in the TL. The term was coined by Hymes (1972), and it meant to include socio-linguistic rules and appropriateness of utterance or expression with the knowledge of grammar. By so doing, they can enhance their communicative capabilities in the target language.

### **Switching the Code**

Regarding the use of EMI, Gallagher and Collahan (2014) find that when allowed to use their first language, secondary-level students in their practice of English, learners did much better than in earlier monolingual classes. They also found that the learners received better opportunities to interact with each other and did much better in their academic achievements. They were amazed to find social, emotional, academic, and linguistic advancements in the learners when allowed to

use their home language in the classrooms. Balter et al. (2023) believe that learners can learn a language (mostly a foreign language) and be able to communicate in it through bilingualism (learners' mother tongues along with the target language).

Paudel (2024) is also not in favour of EMI. He writes that rather than strictly implementing the monolingual EMI, translanguaging, or using multiple languages in language classes, has supported English language teaching. It also minimizes the monotony of the teachers in the classrooms because it allows the use of more than one language. The learners' L1 is used to exchange the meaning or comprehension of the content taught in the classroom. The study has concluded that rather than strictly implementing monolingual EMI, we should allow the appropriate use of the learners' mother tongues. Concluding her study, Shrestha (2023) puts forth the logic that EMI has been seen as ineffective and not helpful in achieving the goal of English proficiency in so many cases. Hence, the teachers have to shift the code or translate the content. She also sees that implementing EMI is very complicated in the EFL contexts because the students remain passive and so, the students' L1 is highly prioritized.

Subedi (2024) states that the main aim of English classes is to teach the English language. Regarding the medium of instruction in the English classrooms, he used to hear complaints that some schools have made it mandatory for students to speak English. Students were forced to use only the English language only in the classroom. In many cases, they were kept outside because they did not speak English. It has created psychological problems for the students. He suggests teaching English to the students by beginning with speaking and explaining in English. To explain a situation or a problem, we can use Nepali. He advises us to be bilingual. Bilingual means that when the students have a problem understanding, we use Nepali or the learners' mother tongues.

Regarding the implementation of EMI, I also have a memorable experience. When teaching linguistics to grade twelve students of secondary level (the-then higher secondary level) around 1998/99 AD, I attempted to implement the EMI in my English classrooms. I used the simple words in the class as far as possible. I also described the matter many times with much effort. However, the students demanded to describe the matter/text in their mother tongue, and so did I. I asked them to be patient and listen for some weeks to make a habit of listening and comprehension. They remained silent and kept on listening. But, when the time of teaching came,



I observed that they were puzzled and unsatisfied with the day's content. Instead of understanding, they requested the chairman of the SMC to have me explain the subject matter in Nepali (the mother tongue). Then, I had to return to the use of L1 of the learners, and I still do so in all the classes I facilitate.

In the study I conducted with some English teachers of Dailekh district, T1 uses Nepali for half of the class time, as the learners suggested that the teacher tell the subject matter in Nepali. T2 also uses Nepali for about 50% of the class time as they demand to understand. T3 uses Nepali for more than 25% of the class time; whereas, T4 also uses Nepali (learners' mother tongue) for about 50% as his learners responded that they can only understand when he explains the content in their mother tongue. Thus, some scholars focus on using the target language (TL) only, whereas others emphasize the appropriate use of the mother tongue. Among them, T1, T2, T3, and T4, expressed that the learners can collaborate, communicate, and then learn only when they understand the content. To make them understand the content easily and clearly, their teachers had to use their mother tongues. They expressed their perceptions as follows:

T1 narrated the experience of implementing EMI and teaching English he had, as:

*Surely. I prepared slides, along with lesson plans. I simplified the words as far as possible for their better comprehension and learning, but they all proved futile. Instead, they also talked to other teachers they could not understand without telling the content in Nepali. Then, the head teacher and other colleagues suggested I give at least the main summary of the content in Nepali for the school results. Some students demanded to continue English to English classes, but they were very few. I also sat with the poor students, but they ultimately demanded that the content be presented in Nepali. So, I further reduced my English use in class and increased my Nepali use. Now, I use a little more English than 50/50 percent. This is the reality, sir.*

So, T1 appears to be using both languages almost in equal extent. It means, he uses English (the TL) and Nepali (learners' mother tongues) nearly in the same amount in his real classroom. The reason behind this was to make the learners understand the content easily.



Enthusiastic with EMI, T2 attempted to implement it in his classroom. However, in his real classrooms, the learners did not look satisfied with EMI, and he had to return to using a bilingual strategy (Nepali and English) in his classroom.

In response to my query concerning the implementation of EMI, T2 explained:

*Certainly, I had tried two years ago. When I started teaching English using the English medium 4/5 days earlier, some supervisors arrived from Kathmandu and observed our school. They also observed my class of English. When they inquired about the students' understanding, they responded that they did not understand the teaching in the class. They wished I had told the text in their mother tongue. This is because they all came from community schools and had a very low English background. Since that day, I realized that I should say the text in Nepali at least once, and I began to use Nepali for the main idea of the text. When I used Nepali, they happily reacted and understood the lesson. Nowadays, I use 50% Nepali of the total class time.*

Thus, T2 reported that he also tried implementing the EMI in his classroom. After some time, he realized that he should explain the text in Nepali at least once to make them understand the content, and he began to use their first language to clarify the text's concept.

During data collection, I interacted with a third of my participants. In my query; about his perception of teaching English with the use of learners' mother tongues or implementing EMI, in his teaching, the response of T3 was::

*The reason is to make the content clearer, sir. Without telling the content above 25% in the students' first language, they seemed to lack a clear concept. So, to make the learners understand the content more effectively, we have to explain the content at least to that extent.*

It is clear that T3 attempted to implement the EMI in his English classroom and partially succeeded because of his good acquaintance with ICT or multimedia. However, he also faced the challenges of low-level students and difficulties in comprehending the lesson. Ultimately, he also found the necessity of explaining the text in the students' mother tongue for a better understanding of the text. Now, he uses over 25% Nepali in the classroom language.

The participant T4 during the interview; narrated his experience of teaching English in schools of Dailekh district in the following way:

*They said they could only understand when I described the things in Nepali. In Nepali, they could make a clear concept of the subject matter. So, they demanded it (using their mother tongue), and I returned to using Nepali. And, when I used Nepali, they could understand the content and participate actively in the class and group activities.*

T4 uses both languages in the classroom, for about 50/50 percent of the class time. He also attempted to implement the EMI strategy once. However, when he inquired about the students' responses, he found they could understand the subject matter when he described it in Nepali. In the text's description in Nepali, they could clearly understand the content and participated actively in the class activities, in the expected amount. So, he also concluded that the use of students' L1 helped them understand the content better.

Most of the participants, T1, T2, T3, and T4 in my data collection, recommend that we had better switch the code (translanguage) in the classrooms. It means we should let the learners use their first languages/mother tongues during pedagogical activities. It can make them learn or understand the subject matter clearly in their first languages. When the learners understand the content, it is very easy to teach them how language works. The learners can apply the knowledge of the language in the required circumstances. Switching the code also helps the facilitators. It can save the facilitators'/teachers' physical, mental, and financial costs and labours. It can save the teachers' time. Therefore, the supporters of this view, such as Gallagher and Collahan, Balter et al., Shrestha, and Subedi, claim that we should use the learners' mother tongues (L1s) in a suitable amount. They claim that when they clearly understand the content delivered by the facilitator, the learners can work together in pairs, small and large groups (miniature societies). Working in groups, according to 'social constructivist learning theory', makes the learners create/construct their learning by themselves.

### **Preservation of Identity**

This theme is in strong opposition of the first one (sustaining the EMI). Karki (2018) carried out a case study research and found that using English as a medium of instruction in community schools is just a tool to attract the parents' attention to

send their children to public schools and increase their trust in their quality. Timsina (2021) quotes that it is just 'romanticizing' or a hypothesis to think about EMI for improving the condition of public education. However, EMI is an inappropriate or unsuitable strategy for Nepal's multilingual situation. If the teachers use the learners' mother tongue, they can make clear concepts of the objects or notions in their home language, and learning can be effective and fruitful. Instead of using monolingual EMI that needs prolonged explanations and preparations, multilingual teachers can save time and give a clear concept of the content with feeling of intimacy and ownership.

Illman and Pietila (2018) state that recently, multilingualism has been understood as a tool for enhancing learners' language knowledge. Having language diversity in the classroom; and using a multilingual strategy raises linguistic awareness in the learners, acknowledges their similarities and differences, and supports them in learning the language. Regarding the implementation of EMI, Phyak (2018) complains that the ideology of 'Vikas' (development) has enforced a monolingual EMI policy in both public and private schools of Nepal by disciplining language activities. These language disciplining strategies reproduce sociolinguistic inequalities; and divide students in terms of socio-economic and language backgrounds. More importantly, imposing disciplines in language creates the school like a police station where the teachers' and students' right to speak multiple languages are suppressed and their self-esteem, identity, and opportunities to participate in interactions are badly affected.

Zhang and Wei (2021) also emphasize the use of the first language of the learners (here, mother tongues) in the second language classrooms. They mention that researchers find using the first language (L1) in the EMI classrooms as a mediator. They further mention that translanguaging practice is highly recommended in Arabian schools. Citing Belhiah and Elhami, they say that in Arabian and Persian schools, implementing a bilingual strategy is necessary to support the students' linguistic skills in both Arabic and English. They further argue that a bilingual strategy leads to stronger proficiency in the language learners, and it also recognizes and values the students' national identities and local cultures.

Bhattacharya (2019) comments that India has followed a trilingual (multilingual) educational system. It is because India has a vast linguistic diversity in the country. In this situation, a multilingual strategy is better than the linguistic imposition of English-only pedagogy. She strongly mentions that during the British

colony, the Indian educational system was suppressed by the medium of English. During this period, regional languages and cultures suffered very much. But, as Bhattacharya mentions, local languages and cultures of India were rooted in the hearts of the people. They also thought their language and culture were much more valuable than pursuing a new English medium of instruction. Consequently, the learners were found unable to do their best in their educational achievements because of the English language. Dahal (2023) emphasizes that EMI is a helpful tool for enhancing the students' spoken proficiency to some extent on the one hand, and/but, more importantly, rather than the EMI, the students' mother tongues (L1s) can deliver quality education. And, it can better promote students' social as well as psychological advantages and sound academic achievements.

Thus, T2 reported that he also tried implementing the EMI in his classroom. After some time, he realized that he should explain the text in Nepali at least once to make them understand the content, and he began to use their first language to clarify the text's concept. He found that the focus of teaching is to make the students understand the content, so he also started using L1 again, and now, he uses the mother tongue of the learners (L1) nearly 50% of the class time. In the experience of T2, we can see that the learners learn an L2 (here English) happily when we use their mother tongues in the classrooms. It seems that use of learners' mother tongues raises their psychological encouragement and feeling of intimacy and security.

It can be clear from the last part of the experience of participant T2, mentioned below. Though; it is repeated, the narrative of T2 is presented here again as follows:

*“Certainly, I had tried two years ago. When I started teaching English using the English medium, 4/5 days earlier, some supervisors arrived from Kathmandu and observed and observed our school. They also observed my class of English. When they inquired about the students’ understanding, they responded that they did not understand the teaching in the class. They wished I had told the text in their mother tongue. This is because they all came from community schools and had a very low English background. Since that day, I realized that I should say the text in Nepali at least once, and I began to use Nepali for the main idea of the text. When I used Nepali, they happily reacted and understood the lesson. Nowadays, I use 50% Nepali of the total class time.”*

Illman and Pietila, Phyak, Timsina, Dahal, etc. and the participant T2, firmly claim that the teachers or facilitators of the second language (here, in our context, English) should use the learners' mother tongues in their language classrooms. It can let the learners learn a second or foreign language in their home language in a friendly environment with pride and a feeling of security. It can help to learn them with a clear concept of the target language; most importantly, they can preserve their language and culture as every community and individual has an intimacy with the language and culture s/he had grown up. S/he does not like his/her language; and culture to disappear as time passes. S/he has the right to preserve it. If sensible and normal, one should attempt to preserve his/her language, culture and identity.

### **Conclusion**

As the purpose of the study, I pursued my search to explore the English language teachers' perceptions of using EMI in their secondary-level classrooms. In the course of my research, some scholars recommended that we have to strictly implement the EMI, whereas, more others prescribe to use the mother tongues of the learners. They claim that multilingualism, at least bilingualism, in a second language classroom can better help the learners. It means, when we use the learners' mother tongues to the extent available, they can understand the content easily. I found from this study that we should let the learners select the medium of instruction themselves. And, based on the three themes: sustaining the EMI, switching the code, and preservation of the identity above, I have concluded and theorized the issue as 'Learners' Preference Theory (LP Theory)' in the context of ELT in Nepal. This theory allows L2 learners to select the medium of instruction on their own. I firmly believe that we should let the learners choose the medium of instruction in the language classroom in which they understand the subject well. I emphasize that 'LP Theory' is the best way to follow in the classroom as it opens the option of pursuing EMI, strengthens learners' understanding, and preserves the local language and culture. This theory does not limit the medium of instruction to any one language. Rather, it lets the learners select the medium of instruction based on their own interests and level of language proficiency. With this, I am sure, the future facilitators and learners both will benefit in the realm of English pedagogy.

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