



EMI Practices and Sustainable Development Goals of Education in Nepal: A Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

This study investigates the complex relationship between the push for English Medium Instruction (EMI) in Nepal and the country's commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims for inclusive and equitable quality education. While Nepal's national framework champions local knowledge and lifelong learning, a powerful trend is emerging among educators, parents, and policymakers who see EMI as a universal solution for educational improvement. This research, using a narrative inquiry approach, explores this contradiction. It finds that the motivation for EMI is often rooted in the perception that English unlocks global opportunities and social mobility. However, this paper argues that mandating English as the primary language of instruction, rather than empowering all students, can actually marginalize those from non-elite backgrounds, potentially pushing them out of the education system altogether and undermining the very goals of inclusion and equity that SDG 4 promises.

Introduction

A deep and unsettling contradiction that initially caught my scholarly attention and now serves as the central focus of this investigation defines the current state of Nepali education. On the one hand, Nepal has formally and admirably committed to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), promising through its National Framework to create an inclusive, equitable, and locally-



rooted educational system. Aiming to create a "Prosperous Nepal and Happy Nepali," this vision contrasts sharply with the dominant forces influencing our classrooms. All parties involved in education, from parents and students to educators and legislators, place a strong and nearly unquestioning emphasis on English language teaching (ELT).

This divergence is a reflection of strong international forces rather than just a misalignment of policy. The Nepali educational mindset has been significantly impacted by the marketization of English, which has led to a pervasive belief that the language is a universal pass to success. Despite explicit constitutional provisions for mother-tongue education and a body of learning theory that warns against requiring instruction in a foreign language a practice that is known to impede rather than promote learning this belief endures. The need for English is driven by real-world factors, such as a competitive job market that forces young people to seek employment abroad, English proficiency exams like the TOEFL and IELTS that act as crucial gatekeepers, and a competitive educational environment that forces schools to implement English Medium Instruction (EMI) just to keep students.

As a result, English has been portrayed as a magic bullet that will fix every problem in our educational system. This is demonstrated by significant policy changes, such as local governments requiring EMI from first grade and universities frequently altering the proportion of English in their curricula. However, this narrow focus runs the risk of weakening SDG 4's fundamental tenets. The haphazard imposition of EMI may alienate the most vulnerable students rather than foster inclusive environments.

My research is situated within this pivotal moment. This study attempts to explore this fundamental conflict, contending that the present, unquestioning



fervor for English-medium instruction poses a serious barrier to attaining the inclusive, equitable, high-quality education that Nepal's SDG 4 framework envisions. This paper aims to shed light on how our well-meaning quest for global connectivity may be unintentionally jeopardizing the promise of universal education by analyzing the viewpoints influencing this trend.

Methodology

I was aware that a typical quantitative approach would not be adequate to truly grasp the core of this problem. The views and opinions of Nepal's educational actors are intricate, individualized, and intricately interwoven with their social and professional lives; they are not tidy, objective facts. Thus, the foundation of this study is a qualitative research design that falls under the interpretive paradigm. I selected this framework because it recognizes that reality is a tapestry of meanings created by human experience rather than a single truth to be found (Ryan, 2018). Understanding the complex, individualized factors that led to the push for English in Nepali classrooms is my aim rather than making generalizations.

I used Narrative Inquiry as my main research methodology in order to access these lived experiences. People's stories, in my opinion, are more than just first-hand recollections; they are potent vehicles for social discourse and cultural meaning. Participants' stories provide a glimpse into their lives, illuminating how larger social forces such as the drive for EMI are experienced and dealt with on a daily basis (Niekerk & Baden, 2016). Following this methodology, I gathered the narratives at the heart of this study through extensive online interviews.



Although in-person communication is preferable, digital platforms offered a useful and democratic substitute that allowed for rich, conversational data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Two undergraduate students, one English professor, and one administrator are among my participants in this study, which I purposefully chose to be conducted at the Aadikavi Bhanubhakta (AB) Campus in Tanahun. An examination of pertinent books and journal articles provides additional context and support for their first-hand accounts, which serve as the main source of evidence for this paper.

Discussions and Findings

Educational Actors and the English Language Teaching: This section serves as the cornerstone of my research, which is devoted to investigating how the educational community in Nepal which consists of administrators, teachers, and students perceives the function of teaching English. Assessing whether these prevalent viewpoints help or hinder Nepal's efforts to achieve "Inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all," as stated in the Nepal National Framework for SDG 4: Education 2030, is my main goal.

I use a number of important sources to highlight these viewpoints, including the firsthand recollections of my research participants, pertinent theoretical frameworks, and previously published academic works. By combining these disparate pieces of evidence under thematic subheadings, I hope to paint a comprehensive and nuanced picture of how English is perceived in Nepali education and the practical ramifications of these perceptions.

The English Language for Socialization, Social identities, and Social Recognition: Since English is now the main language used for cross-cultural communication worldwide, education acts as socialization, preparing people to



navigate their environment (Yexian & Huizhen, 2014). This fact is supported by my research participants, who demonstrate how Nepalis living overseas develop their professional skills through interactions mediated by English (Grosse, 2004). Particularly among young people hoping to migrate to the West, this view of English as a means of achieving prosperity fuels a strong emphasis on learning the language.

Inconsistent educational policies that uphold English's privileged status are a manifestation of this social pressure. Although curricula have varied in how they teach English, current trends indicate an earlier introduction and more emphasis, which reflects a long-standing conviction in the language's significance (Bista, 2011). English serves as a potent social currency outside of policy. English proficiency is a major factor in landing a prestigious job in my community and is valued more highly than academic credentials alone. According to this view, English serves as a direct means of achieving social mobility and better life opportunities, in addition to being a language.

The English Language for Exploring Opportunities: English is now seen as a practical tool for economic advancement rather than for personal enrichment, and learning in Nepal has changed from having intrinsic value to having only practical utility. English proficiency is viewed as crucial for obtaining work, gaining access to education, and achieving social mobility, and this instrumental viewpoint is shared by both urban professionals and rural communities. This is supported by the experiences of my research participants: Barun's observation of his neighbor's failure abroad and Bal Prasad's career progression both show how English proficiency is becoming more and more important than formal education. Even mountain communities adopt English specifically for socioeconomic advancement, as demonstrated by the Khumbu



region case, solidifying its position as a useful tool for opportunity rather than an academic endeavor.

English for Higher Education: Because of its historical significance as an elite marker during the Rana era a symbol of prestige that still influences contemporary education English enjoys a privileged position in Nepal. A high-achieving student left school after his school implemented English-medium instruction (EMI), demonstrating the detrimental effects of the current push for EMI. This illustrates a pattern in which educational institutions put international appeal ahead of the needs of their students, erecting obstacles for non-native speakers. The issue is exacerbated in higher education, where Nepali-medium students are routinely disadvantaged by English-only entrance exams and instruction. As a lecturer, I have seen talented students struggle due to language barriers rather than a lack of knowledge, making English an unjust gatekeeper that prevents academic opportunities based on linguistic privilege rather than intelligence.

English to Attract the Students and Compete with the EMI Based Private School: Because of its historical significance as an elite marker during the Rana era a symbol of prestige that still influences contemporary education English enjoys a privileged position in Nepal. A high-achieving student left school after his school implemented English-medium instruction (EMI), demonstrating the detrimental effects of the current push for EMI. This illustrates a pattern in which educational institutions put international appeal ahead of the needs of their students, erecting obstacles for non-native speakers. The issue is exacerbated in higher education, where Nepali-medium students are routinely disadvantaged by English-only entrance exams and instruction. As a lecturer, I have seen talented students struggle due to language barriers rather



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English For the Internationalization of Higher Education, Local Knowledge and Culture: English is a crucial two-way bridge for internationalization in Nepal's educational system, enabling the export of local culture and the import of knowledge from around the world. ELT practitioners utilize English to communicate Nepal's native customs to the global community, as lecturer Bal Prasad pointed out. This exchange is useful because it attracts international students to study distinctive Nepali subjects like Buddhism while also preparing them for the global labor market. From ancient epics to modern literature, English makes our multicultural heritage accessible to people all over the world by facilitating its documentation and translation. The priority placed on the language by the educational community is essentially supported by its function as a cultural conduit that enables Nepal to share its identity on the international scene.

Sustainable Development Goal 4: Education 2030, Nepal National Framework: The fundamental tension between Nepal's ardent support for English-medium education and its dedication to SDG 4's goal of inclusive, equitable education based on local knowledge is addressed in this analysis. Nepal committed to providing "inclusive and equitable quality education" for all by ratifying the Incheon Declaration. This goal will be operationalized through a national framework that supports indigenous heritage and compassionate, all-encompassing education. The main question of this study is whether the current enthusiasm for English in the classroom is a driving force behind this vision or, on the other hand, its biggest hindrance.



Inclusive and Equitable Education: The unquestioned push for English-medium instruction is steadily undermining Nepal's constitutional and SDG 4 commitment to inclusive, equitable education. The case of a capable student who was forced to leave school serves as a stark reminder that the haphazard implementation of EMI, rather than encouraging integration and offering support, creates a barrier that alienates non-native speakers and leads to academic failure and dropout. This method imposes a discriminatory filter while ignoring the bilingual models demonstrated effectiveness. It hinders opportunities for students from rural and underprivileged backgrounds while favoring urban elites who have already had access to English. This policy does not promote equity by making fluency in English the primary barrier to advancement; it creates a system that favors a select few at the expense of the underprivileged masses it is obligated to uplift, codifying and exacerbating social inequality.

Indigenous Knowledge: The predominance of English-medium instruction seriously undermines the core tenet of Nepal's SDG 4 framework, which is to incorporate indigenous and local knowledge into education. Beyond tradition, indigenous knowledge embodies community-specific, sustainable wisdom that is vital to social and environmental well-being. However, as my research participant Bal Prasad pointed out, these cultures' complex ideas and specialized vocabulary are frequently impossible to translate into English, which leads to the marginalization of this crucial knowledge. This conflict is best illustrated by the Raute community, whose cultural identity is incompatible with an English-language curriculum that is centered on the West. The current system imposes a foreign framework that subtly diminishes local wisdom, rather than modifying education to respect their heritage. We are not just adding a language



when we prioritize English; the cultural foundations required to create an education system that is truly inclusive and equitable are being actively undermined.

Conclusion

The way that English is currently taught in Nepal shows that students, teachers, and local legislators all firmly believe that it is beneficial. Local implementation shows an overemphasis on English, despite national policies advocating for a balanced educational framework. The knowledge that fluency in English is essential for gaining access to postsecondary education and finding steady work, both domestically and abroad, motivates students. Teachers who hold this opinion see English as essential to their own financial stability and professional success. Local governments frequently implement policies to support English-medium instruction in response to this demand, occasionally without fully accounting for the unintended consequences.

However, the fundamental goals of inclusive and equitable quality education as stated in SDG 4 are seriously threatened by this collective focus. Instead of being a universal tool for progress, the mandatory imposition of English often acts as a barrier. Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are disproportionately affected, which can exacerbate social inequality by causing disengagement and dropout rates. As a result, this study makes the case for a more thoughtful and equitable use of English in Nepali classrooms one that maximizes its potential without undermining the core ideas of equitable access to education for all pupils.



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