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## **Perception of Tamang Community Students towards the English Language: A Case Study of Shadananda Municipality**

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### **Abstract**

This research explores the perceptions of Tamang community students in Shadananda Municipality, Bhojpur district, toward their mother tongue and the English language. The study aimed to answer the following research questions: Why is the perception towards their mother tongue decreasing? Why is the perception towards English increasing? And what strategies can develop a positive perception of their mother tongue while promoting English learning? The objectives of this research were to explore the perceptions of both languages among the students and to emphasize the importance of preserving the mother tongue while developing English communication skills. Employing an exploratory qualitative research design, the study utilized focus group discussions with twelve students from grades 10 and 12 and interviews with two secondary level teachers from community schools. The findings indicate a declining interest in the Tamang mother tongue due to the perceived lack of opportunities for its use and its perceived limited value for future prospects. Conversely, students show an increasingly positive perception of the English language, recognizing its importance for securing jobs, pursuing further education, facilitating communication, and accessing technology and global media. The research also identifies challenges in developing English communication skills, including the influence of the mother tongue's phonetic patterns and the prevalent use of translation methods in teaching. The study suggests strategies for revitalizing the mother tongue, such as raising awareness of its significance, creating supportive environments for its use in various settings, and integrating it into school activities.

*Keywords:* perception, multilingual, bilingual, dead language, marginalized language

In the present context, English is a lingua franca and a global language. English is used as a medium of communication. In this present era, people's enthusiasm for English is increasing day by day. They want to get high proficiency job. To get this, English language is obligatory. There is great variation in the reasons for choosing a particular language as a foreign language: they include historical tradition, political expediency, and the desire for commercial, cultural, or technological contact. This article shows that students from Tamang communities expressed their perceptions of the English language for commercial, job-oriented, and communication purposes.

The Tamangs are an ethnic group indigenous to Nepal, comprising 5.6% of the country's population, according to the 2011 census. They have their distinct mother tongue. In Shadananda Municipality, Tamang students have opted to study their mother tongue as an optional language. However, they perceive it as insignificant and show a lack of interest in learning it. Based on my observations, their engagement with their native language appears to be declining.

Preserving the mother tongue while integrating a second or third language remains a formidable challenge in today's context. The majority of instructional materials are available in either Nepali or English, which hinders students from maintaining proficiency in their native language. Although there is a growing interest in learning English, limited exposure and the absence of an immersive English-speaking environment have resulted in underdeveloped English language skills. Consequently, both their Nepali and English proficiencies fail to progress effectively.

Having taught at a school serving the Tamang communities in the Bhojpur district for three years, I have observed that most students are keen to learn English. They expressed a strong desire to become fluent in the language. However, when I inquired about their mother tongue, I discovered that they possessed minimal knowledge or exposure and felt hesitant to use it. Consequently, I am concerned that, given their high regard for English, their native language may soon fade away.

Children from the Tamang community show less interest in their mother tongue and are more inclined toward learning English. They perceive speaking their mother tongue as traditional and backward, while speaking English is viewed as a marker of being a high-class individual in their society.

The primary objective of this research is to delve into the perceptions of language among Tamang community students in Shadananda Municipality, Bhojpur District. Specifically, the study seeks to understand how these students view their mother

tongue, particularly in the context of its declining usage and cultural significance. Additionally, the research aims to explore their attitudes toward the English language, which appears to be gaining prominence and preference in their academic and social spheres. By examining these shifting perceptions, the study seeks to shed light on the interplay between cultural identity and the increasing emphasis on global languages.

To achieve these objectives, the study poses critical questions about the evolving linguistic dynamics within the Tamang community. It examines the factors contributing to the declining perception of their mother tongue, taking into account the potential influences of modernization, educational policies, and societal preferences. Conversely, it examines why English is perceived more favorably and its role in shaping aspirations and opportunities for Tamang students. Ultimately, the research aims to identify strategies that strike a balance between these trends, fostering a renewed appreciation for the mother tongue while embracing the benefits of English proficiency. This exploration is pivotal in preserving linguistic heritage while equipping students for global engagement.

### **Delimitation of the Research Inquiry**

Delimitation refers to the specific features that define the scope and boundaries of a research area. It limits the researcher from going beyond the area of the existing research. No study can encompass the entire population under investigation. Moreover, no research can employ every available tool or address every aspect of the subject area, owing to constraints in time, budget, and resources. In the same way, this research has some limitations. This article primarily examines the pedagogical approaches implemented in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms to develop communicative competence in English at the secondary level. The study was based on a small sample of informants. This study was conducted within the area of Shadananda Municipality, Bhojpur district. Altogether, there are 13 secondary-level community schools. This study was conducted within two secondary level schools, i.e., Sharaswati Secondary School and Chandra Surya Secondary School. Six students from each school, all of whom were in grades ten and twelve, participated in the focus group discussion. Similarly, one/one teacher from the same school of Shadananda municipality Bhojpur district was interviewed. This study paper provides information only about perceptions of the English language and the Tamang language among students in grades 10 and 12 within Shadananda Municipality. This study is delimited to Tamang community students who face problems in communication cause of their mother tongue. This

article presents how students developed their communicative skills after learning their mother tongue. Although there were no informants from outside the Tamang community, because of the small sample size and limited amount of data from the focus group discussion (FGD) and interviews, the findings cannot be generalized in a large sample and territory. I analyzed the collected data descriptively.

### **Literature Review**

The researcher has strengthened this research by a rigorous exploration of the materials. I collected relevant materials from various sources. Some of the materials were sent to me by my facilitators. Most of them were articles that I gathered from online sources, while the online libraries I discovered during my exploration were also of great help. According to Johnson (1997),

In early immersion, the second language is used in the kindergarten and for most subjects starting from the first grade. In late immersion, students may receive one or two years of formal instruction in the second language before starting subject matter instruction in the second language. Late immersion programs begin around sixth grade, but again, there is variation. (p.4).

Each and every research is based on the previous studies in the same field to fulfill the target of objectives. Several research studies have been carried out at national and international levels. They have some connection with my research, too. As a researcher, one has to accumulate plenty of insights from the previous studies, which provide him/her basic framework to prepare further new research. This research article is also based on the previous research carried out in the same field. Hence, I made a rigorous attempt to the different studies related to my topic. There are limited numbers of studies in related perceptions of Tamang community students towards the English language. Few studies were conducted on this subject out of the country.

Regarding methodology, Creswell (2015) has written a book entitled *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. This book provides a comprehensive, balanced, and inclusive overview of the field as it currently stands. This text provides thorough coverage of the methods and procedures used in quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research. It helped me learn how to conduct research and see a project through to its completion, including the preparation of an article, and it also helped me learn how to read and evaluate research reports.

To explore the role of English in education, I referenced Brown's article (2018). The main objective of his article is to find out the role of English as a subject in the instruction process. This article has researched the role of English in Education: Is It a Subject or a Medium of Instruction? This article employs a qualitative analysis method. This article has demonstrated that the English language is a widely used medium of instruction and that in certain parts of the world, its use is increasing. A central message of this article is that teaching English deserves significantly greater attention from planners, policymakers, and researchers than it has received so far.

Similarly, I studied Hayes (2018), who conducted a study titled “*English Language Teaching in Nepal: Research, Reflection, and Practice.*” This study is valuable for understanding the condition of English language teaching in Nepal. The publication, which comprises research findings and innovative ideas, serves as a resource kit for language planners, policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders. This groundbreaking work employs a unique method to blend ideas by drawing on national and international perspectives and practices. It theorizes issues generated from practical experiences and research-based empirical evidence. Emerging issues in English language teaching and learning are captured, bringing in scholarly knowledge from established researchers and professionals engaged in pedagogical processes in schools, university campuses, and other fields of language learning.

Furthermore, I studied Larasati (2021) about students' perceptions of bilingual language used in EFL classrooms. The purpose of this study is to ascertain students' perceptions of students' use of bilingual language in English language instruction in the classroom. This study employs a qualitative approach as the foundation for its research. The study enrolled 241 students in grade 11 at SMA N 5 Tegal. The data collection techniques used are the Likert Scale Questionnaire and the Semi-structured Interview.

To explore the various trends and impacts of multilingualism and language shift among the Tamang, I studied Gautam (2023) article. This article aims to propose strategies for preserving and revitalizing minority and endangered languages experiencing shifts due to socio-political factors in urbanizing areas such as Bosan and Dakshinkali. Informants were purposively selected from two Tamang-speaking communities: viz., Bosan and Dakshinkali. This study was conducted using both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. The results found, as Gautam (2023) stated:

Tamang people in the southern part of Kathmandu valley are also influenced by globalization, international linkages, and their participation in various social, cultural, and ceremonial activities in the diverse mixed society, motivating a shift towards new languages from their heritage language. (p.13).

### **Methodology**

This study is based on the exploratory design of qualitative research. I used a qualitative interpretive exploration method in order to identify the Perception of the Tamang Community's students of Shadananda Municipality Bhojpur District towards the English Language. I have purposively selected the case of 6 students, i.e., three boys and three girls, of grade 10 from Chandra Surya secondary school and 6 students, i.e., three boys and three girls, of grade 12 from Shadananda Secondary School of Shadananda municipality. The research participants were two teachers from the same school. One of them was engaged in teaching English to tenth-grade students, while the other taught English to twelfth-grade students. I visited the school with the permission of the respected head teacher and subject teachers to gather information from the students. To maintain the anonymity of the research informant, their real names were replaced with pseudonyms. A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and interviews were research tools for data collection. The FGD was conducted with the selected secondary-level students in their classroom for one and a half hours. Similarly, 10 to 15-minute interviews were conducted with each of the teacher participants. Some of them are in my neighborhood; I met them several times and had informal conversations with them. The conversations were not recorded to maintain the natural setting. Instead, I wrote a descriptive account of the interview experience. I prepared such a note immediately after the conversation with them. I recorded the FGD and transcribed it in written form. I analyzed the data by developing meaningful codes and categories, leading to the generation of final themes of the interview and FGD data.

### **Results and Discussion**

The following main themes are derived by analyzing the FGD with secondary level students and the interview with the teachers as well.

#### **Perception towards Mother Tongue**

The findings show that, overwhelmingly, students and teachers support the new constitution provision, with most of the teachers and students agreeing that children

have the right to education in their mother tongue. Students and teachers almost agree that using the mother tongue helps students acquire information about their religion, culture, and customs. However, this understanding did not translate to real sense. In Bhojpur's Tamang community, 90% of students did not prefer to learn their mother tongue because there is not any place for using their mother tongue outside of this community. I asked the students a question during FGD. Why did you not speak your Tamang language? One of the class 10 male students stated that there is no opportunity to get a job and to pass the exam by learning and speaking our mother tongue.

I asked a participating teacher during the interview why he did not motivate students to learn their mother tongue. The teacher expressed his view like this:

Students did not show interest in learning their mother tongue. We, the teachers, also have limited exposure and speaking ability in teaching the Tamang language. So, motivating students to learn their language is useless work.

The various responses from teachers and students indicate that they hold negative perceptions towards their mother tongue. They have no interest in their mother tongue.

### **Developing Perception towards the English language**

English has been a very important language to survive in the 21st century world. It is taught as a compulsory paper from the beginning of school education to the master's degree in Nepal. English is the language of globalization. English is used in every setting, including schools, colleges and universities, the communication sector, and technology. I asked Teacher 2, an English teacher, why students are interested in learning the English language rather than their mother tongue. What are the main reasons behind it? He stated:

Students want to secure their future study and aim by using the English language. They use modern technology, and they know about the scope of the English language. They think that using their mother tongue is worthless. English is the superior language of the world. They found everywhere using English language. This community school's students feel that without English, we cannot compete with the students from boarding schools. These are the main reasons for choosing English rather than the mother tongue.



I asked similar questions to the participant students in FGD why they were interested to learn English rather than their mother tongue. They replied:

The Tamang language has no scope for the future. Where can we use the Tamang language outside of this community? Even within the community, not many people speak the Tamang language correctly, despite living here. However, most people from outside this community and within it also use the English language. We find English in every sector, like media, medicine, modern technology, and the medium of communication. We need to learn English for going abroad. Our neighbors' relatives who had come from abroad advised us to learn English, as without it, there would be no work. So, we have an interest to learn English”.

From these views of teachers and students, we can infer the reasons for learning English rather than Tamang languages are the following: for going abroad, for securing study opportunities in the future and to achieve their aim, for communication, for using modern technology, for knowing the name of medicines, for using international media, lack of opportunities in mother tongue, for using instructional materials.

### **Challenges relating to Developing English Communication Skills in a Bilingual Society**

Effective communication is a ladder of success in higher studies, and English language is used as a medium of communication in most countries. With the help of communication, students make good relations with others. They can share their idea also. However, findings indicate that in the Tamang community of Shadananda Municipality, Bhojpur, Nepal, students lack a good command of the English language. So, they do not communicate effectively, although they have an interest. The primary reason for this is that, in the Tamang community, Nepali is used most of the time for communication, which has an impact on the Tamang language. English has been taught as a foreign language or third language at the school level.

I asked the English subject teacher to share his experience on teaching English in this Tamang community's students. He stated:

Students have a lack of English exposure, but they want to communicate in English. They have the effect of mother tongue or regional language. They speak English words by using a Tamang tone. For example, they said 'English' as Engalish and 'class' as kalaas etc. so it is more difficult

to develop English communication skill. Additional pronunciation practice has also not been effective.

I asked why they do not communicate in English, although you have an interest in the student in FGD. One of the grade 10 female students stated:

We have no environment to speak English. At home parents use our mother tongue word in the middle of Nepali language such as aappa for calling 'father', aagu for calling 'uncle', nana for calling 'elder sister', etc. like at school teacher uses Nepali language while teaching English and did not give opportunities to speak English for us. Without much practice and use of the English language, we cannot speak English properly.

Based on interviews with teachers and FGD with students, the following are the reasons for the problem faced by the students in English communication.

### ***Effect of the Mother Tongue's Tone***

Bhojpur is a land of villages. Here, all of the students belong to a village, so the effect of their regional language tone or mother tongue tone can be seen clearly in their communication skills. Not only students but also teachers are affected by their mother tongue. While talking, both the teacher and students use the exact English words. This has affected the pronunciation of English words.

### ***Translation Method***

In Bhojpur, most of the schools use the translation method for teaching English from the starting class. The teacher translated English text into Nepali. By this method, the students only understood the content of the text but cannot learn communication skills and cannot develop English Exposure. They become accustomed to this method from the start, but at a higher level, this method is not used, so they face problems in higher studies due to this.

### ***Error in English***

Most students make errors unknowingly, and when they become habitual, they are unaware of the types of mistakes they are making. As a result, they continue to repeat the same errors without realizing it.

### ***Ways of Preserving Mother Tongue***

A 12th-grade student said that their mother tongue is their identity, so they preserve

it to preserve their culture. Another student, Student 3, said that if culture dies, their identity also dies, so to preserve culture, they should preserve their mother tongue.

Due to the enormous effects of Nepali and English languages, the Tamang language is being marginalized. There are more ways of promoting perception towards mother tongue. I asked participating teachers in an interview how they could develop perceptions of the Tamang community's students' perceptions towards their mother tongue. The teacher expressed his views:

We should explore the mother tongue of the Tamang community's students by educating the community's people on its importance and creating environments that facilitate communication using their mother tongue in meetings, workplaces, programs, and other settings. Please encourage them to use their mother tongue, etc.

Based on the findings from the focus group discussions with students and interviews with participating teachers, the following are possible ways to explore mother tongue in the students of this Tamang community at school: telling stories using ancient, traditional photos and discussing the things in the photos, engaging students in role-playing games in their native language, inspiring students to participate in discussions every day and encouraging them to speak in their native language, taking them for visits to areas where the mother tongue is always used, encouraging students to sing songs in mother tongue, And encouraging practicing the language at home and in the surrounding community.

Being bilingual or multilingual is ok, but we must not forget our mother tongue. We must practice and respect our mother tongue even if English is commonly used. With the activities above, children will be inspired to practice the Tamang language again and become proficient.

### **Conclusion**

The main objectives of this research on the perception of Tamang Community's students towards the English Language, carried out at Shadananda Municipality, Bhojpur, were to explore the perceptions of mother tongue among students of the Tamang community in Shadananda Municipality, Bhojpur District, and to encourage them to learn the English language with communication skills after learning their mother tongue. Under the qualitative research interpretation, focus group discussions and interviews were used as tools for this research with secondary-level students and teachers to answer these questions: Why is the perception towards their mother

tongue changing? Why is the positive perception towards English increasing? And what strategies can develop a positive perception of their mother tongue while promoting English learning? This research is limited to students of the Tamang community at the secondary level in grades 10 and 12.

A multilingual is someone who speaks and uses more than two languages. Multilingualism is that which controls more than two languages like a native speaker. Here, multilingual are those students who use the Tamang language, Nepali language, and English language. However, this research finding indicates that most students use the Nepali language and have limited knowledge of their mother tongue and the English language. Students have a great interest in English language communication, but due to a lack of skill and exposure, they struggle to communicate effectively in English. On the basis of this research finding, there are mainly three factors to lacking communicative skills in English: the effect of the mother tongue, using the translation method in the learning process, and the lack of correcting errors in English speaking and writing. There are various reasons for developing perception towards the English language with the Tamang language. Securing a future both inside and outside the country, communicating with friends from other countries, and competing with students from boarding schools are the main reasons for developing a perception of the English language.

Findings show that students have a lack of interest to learn their mother tongue. The lack of job opportunities, the uselessness of the mother tongue outside this community, and the neglect of using their mother tongue within the Tamang community are the main reasons for the limited perception of the mother tongue. There are different ways to promote perception towards mother tongue. Some of these initiatives include encouraging students to learn their mother tongue, providing opportunities for travel within the same community, offering instructional materials in the Tamang language, and promoting an understanding of their culture, traditions, and the importance of preserving the Tamang language. This approach aims to foster equal behavior for both language learners.

Being multilingual or bilingual, we can secure our future. Students can learn English as well as their mother tongue. Using the communicative method in teaching both languages, providing equal opportunities to learn both languages, supplying adequate instructional materials in both languages, and creating both language speaking environments at school are the main ways to develop English communication skills while promoting perception towards the Tamang language.

### **Implications**

This study on Tamang community students' perception of the English language is beneficial for school administrators, teachers, students, parents, the Curriculum Development Center, policymakers, and other stakeholders. It is helpful for school administration to create both English and Tamang language speaking environment, to provide instructional materials, to understand students' perception towards English language and Tamang language than behave accordingly. It is useful for teachers to bring about changes in teaching methodology, to provide opportunities for using both languages in the classroom, to motivate students to use their mother tongue, and to help them develop English communicative skills. It is useful for students to learn how to improve their mother tongue and English language together, to understand the importance of their mother tongue, and to develop perception towards both languages. Likewise, this study is useful for policy makers to make policies of using both languages at school and official works of local bodies. It is also implicated for curriculum development centers to develop teaching learning materials and textbooks in both languages.

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