

The Evolution of English in Nepalese Education: Policies and Practices

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Abstract

This research explores the historical development of the English language and English Medium Instruction (EMI) in Nepal, examining its evolution, policy shifts, and sociocultural implications. Drawing on an extensive library study, the research traces the trajectory of English education from its initial introduction in the 17th century through trade and missionary activities to its current prominence in Nepal's education system. Key milestones include the establishment of Durbar School in 1853, policy reforms following the Rana regime's fall in 1951, and contemporary efforts to balance multilingual education with the demand for English proficiency. Findings reveal that English has transitioned from being an elite language to a widely taught subject, with EMI gaining popularity in private schools and gradually being adopted in public schools. However, significant challenges persist, including disparities between private and public schools, inadequate teacher training, and the marginalization of indigenous languages. Policies have oscillated between promoting mother tongue-based instruction and integrating English, reflecting tensions between globalization and cultural preservation. This study underscores the need for equitable and context-sensitive policies to address these challenges. It advocates for strengthening teacher capacity, developing multilingual teaching resources, and fostering awareness about the value of Nepal's linguistic diversity. By adopting a balanced approach, Nepal can leverage the opportunities presented by English education while preserving its rich cultural and linguistic heritage.

Key Words: Cultural preservation, educational inequality, English medium instruction, language policy, multilingual education.

Introduction

The historical trajectory of the English language and English Medium Instruction in Nepal reflects the nation's dynamic interaction with global forces, colonial influences, and local sociopolitical

shifts. Since its initial contact with Nepal during trade interactions in the early 17th century (Hodgson, 1874, Bista, 1971), English has gradually evolved from a language of diplomacy and elite education to a pivotal component of the national education system. The growing prominence of English in Nepal has been shaped by various historical milestones, including missionary activities, colonial legacies, and domestic education policies, each contributing to the language's place in the broader sociocultural and educational landscape.

The introduction of English education in Nepal is closely linked with significant events, such as the establishment of the Durbar School in 1853 and the subsequent incorporation of English in formal education during the Rana regime (NNEPC, 1956). Over time, English became an integral subject in Nepal's school curriculum, initially taught as a language and later emerging as the medium of instruction in private schools. These developments paralleled global trends, where English gained prominence as a lingua franca, fostering access to international opportunities in education, employment, and communication (The World Bank, 2017). However, the adoption of EMI has been uneven, predominantly confined to private schools, while community schools have traditionally relied on Nepali or mother tongue-based instruction.

In recent decades, the growing demand for English language proficiency has reshaped Nepal's educational policies, emphasizing English as both a subject and medium of instruction at various levels. Policy initiatives such as the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) and the National Education Policy of 2019 have highlighted the role of English in promoting globalization and national development. At the same time, these policies have attempted to balance the push for English with the preservation of Nepal's linguistic diversity, particularly through mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) in early grades.

Despite its rising popularity, the integration of EMI in Nepalese schools has faced significant challenges, including disparities between private and public schools, resource limitations, and debates about the impact of English on linguistic and cultural identities. This research explores the historical development of English language education and EMI in Nepal, tracing its evolution and examining its implications for the nation's educational system. By analyzing key historical events, policy shifts, and contemporary practices, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how English has shaped and been shaped by Nepal's unique sociolinguistic and educational context.

Review of Literature

The evolution of English language education and EMI in Nepal has been widely discussed in academic and policy literature. This section reviews existing studies on the historical development of English in Nepal, the role of EMI in education, and the challenges and implications of its adoption. These works provide a foundation for understanding the interplay between English, education policy, and sociocultural dynamics in the Nepalese context.

Historical Evolution of English in Nepal

Scholars have traced the introduction of English in Nepal to the early 17th century, during trade

relations between the Malla Kings, Tibet, and Northeast India. The arrival of European missionaries in 1661 further facilitated the use of English for intra- and inter-state communication (Stiller, 1993). The modern institutionalization of English education began in the mid-19th century, particularly with Janga Bahadur Rana's visit to England in 1851 and the subsequent establishment of Durbar School in 1853. This marked the introduction of English education modeled on the British colonial system in India, although it remained restricted to the ruling elites (Onta, 1996). However, it has been argued that the colonial legacy still continues in the Nepalese education system. In a recent study, Bhusal and Baral (2025) opine that Basic Level English Education in Nepal has rarely undergone a decolonial epistemic shift to uphold and safeguard multilingual and multiethnic local identities.

The Rana regime, which lasted until 1951, saw limited expansion of education, with literacy rates remaining below 5%. By the time of its downfall, the English language had been incorporated into the curriculum as a subject, though Nepali was the dominant medium of instruction in public schools (Bista, 2004). Post-1951, English began to gain a more prominent role in Nepalese education, with the People's Movement of 1950 and subsequent democratic reforms fostering an environment for educational expansion. In this regard, Giri (2015) epitomizes the faces of English as he opines that English in Nepal has evolved from being a foreign language to an essential part of daily life, used as an additional, second, or even primary language in various socio-economic and educational sectors.

Policy Framework and English Education

Education policies in Nepal have played a critical role in shaping the use of English as a medium of instruction. The Education for All (EFA) initiative (2001-2015), supported by UNESCO, emphasized inclusive education, particularly through the use of mother tongues in early grades. However, it also recognized the growing importance of English for global integration (Phyak, 2013). The National Education Policy of 2019 marked a turning point, advocating for flexibility in the use of EMI alongside mother tongue-based and Nepali instruction, depending on the linguistic composition of schools (MOE, 2019). The School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) (2016-2023) emphasized EMI as a strategic tool for bridging educational disparities. However, it acknowledged the challenges of implementing EMI effectively in community schools due to resource constraints and a lack of trained teachers (CDC, 2019). The SSDP also highlighted the growing demand for English proficiency, driven by globalization and aspirations for better economic opportunities (Pherali, 2020).

Challenges in Implementing EMI

The adoption of EMI in Nepal has been uneven and fraught with challenges. Private schools have embraced EMI extensively, often as a means of attracting students and meeting parental demand for English proficiency. Community schools, on the other hand, have struggled to implement EMI due to limited resources, untrained teachers, and insufficient teaching materials (Ghimire, 2019). Studies have shown that while private schools have successfully established English as the medium of instruction, the quality of education in community schools remains inconsistent, leading to a growing gap in educational outcomes (Subedi, 2021).

Another major concern is the impact of EMI on Nepal's linguistic diversity and cultural identity. Researchers argue that the emphasis on English often marginalizes mother tongues and

ethnic languages, particularly in multilingual and rural communities (Awasthi, 2004). This has raised questions about the balance between promoting English for global competitiveness and preserving Nepal's rich linguistic heritage.

Sociocultural Implications of English Education

The growing popularity of English has led to significant sociocultural changes in Nepal. English is increasingly viewed as a symbol of modernity and social mobility, with parents prioritizing English education for their children to improve career prospects (Sharma, 2017). However, this has also led to disparities in access to quality education, as private schools dominate the EMI landscape, leaving community schools to grapple with resource and capacity issues.

Critics of EMI argue that it creates linguistic and cultural alienation for students who are not proficient in English, particularly in rural and underprivileged communities (Phyak, 2011). Proponents, however, contend that English is a necessary tool for navigating a globalized world and accessing international opportunities.

Current Practices and Future Directions

Currently, English is taught as a compulsory subject from early grades to postgraduate levels in Nepal. While private schools predominantly use EMI, community schools are increasingly adopting English to meet the rising demand. However, the disparity in resources and capacity between these two types of schools remains a significant challenge (MOE, 2019). Future research and policy need to focus on creating an equitable framework for English education that accommodates Nepal's linguistic diversity while addressing the socio-economic divide. Strengthening teacher training, improving educational materials, and fostering a balanced approach to EMI and mother tongue instruction are crucial for achieving these goals.

The literature on English education and EMI in Nepal underscores its complex historical, political, and sociocultural dimensions. While English has emerged as a key driver of educational reform and global integration, its implementation in Nepal continues to face significant challenges (Sah, 2022). By examining these issues, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolution and implications of English language education in Nepal, providing insights for policymakers, educators, and researchers.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach, relying on a thorough analysis of historical documents, policy reports, and academic literature to examine the historical development of English language education and EMI in Nepal. The study aims to trace the evolution of English in Nepalese education, explore its policy implications, and analyze its impact on the sociocultural and educational landscape.

Research Design

The research is designed as a historical and document analysis study. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the historical progression, key milestones, and policy shifts related to English language education in Nepal. By synthesizing information from diverse sources, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive narrative of the role of English in Nepal's education system.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected through an extensive library review, which focused on three main sources. Historical documents, including primary sources such as government reports, education acts, policy documents, and the Constitution of Nepal (2015), formed a crucial part of the research. Additionally, academic literature, such as peer-reviewed journal articles and books, provided insights into the evolution of English in Nepal, the implementation of EMI, and its implications. Secondary sources, including studies and reviews by educational researchers, reports from international organizations like UNESCO, and findings from national commissions on education, such as the SSRP and SSDP, further enriched the study.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using document analysis methods, which involved two key approaches. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes related to the adoption and evolution of English, policy developments, and challenges in implementing EMI. Additionally, historical contextualization was used to place events, policies, and practices within their historical and sociopolitical contexts, enabling a deeper understanding of their significance and impact. While doing this, chronological development is taken into consideration.

Scope and Limitations

The study focuses on Nepal's education system, covering developments from the early 17th century to the present. While the research provides a detailed narrative of historical and policy developments, it is limited by its reliance on secondary data and does not include empirical fieldwork, such as interviews or surveys. This limitation is addressed by triangulating data from multiple sources to ensure reliability and depth.

Ethical Considerations

The research adheres to ethical guidelines by appropriately citing all sources and ensuring that the analysis respects the cultural and linguistic diversity of Nepal. Efforts were made to represent various perspectives fairly, particularly concerning the debates over EMI and mother tongue-based education.

By employing document analysis and qualitative methods, this research seeks to provide a better understanding of the historical and policy dimensions of English language education in Nepal. This methodology ensures a systematic and comprehensive examination of the subject, contributing valuable insights to the discourse on English education and its implications for Nepal's sociocultural and educational development.

Results and Discussion

Entry with Trade and Mission

In the early 17th century, during the reign of the Malla Kings in Nepal, English began to emerge

indirectly as a lingua franca in specific contexts. This was largely driven by trade relations with Tibet and northeastern India, regions where English had started to gain prominence due to the influence of European merchants and colonial expansion. While the primary languages of communication in Nepal remained local, the exposure to English through trade channels marked an initial, although limited, contact with the language. This phase set the stage for later developments in the adoption of English in Nepal's cultural and educational spheres.

In 1661, European missionaries played a notable role in introducing Nepalese individuals to new linguistic and administrative skills. These missionaries trained locals for both intra-state and inter-state activities, fostering an early interaction with European languages, including English (Vir, 1988). Their efforts were aimed at enhancing communication and governance capabilities, which were essential for maintaining connections both within Nepal and with neighboring regions. This initiative not only facilitated administrative functions but also subtly introduced elements of Western education and language, laying a foundation for the gradual integration of English into Nepalese society.

The year 1815 marked a significant development in Nepal's exposure to the English language through military contexts. Following the signing of the Sugauli Treaty, which ended the Anglo-Nepalese War, Gurkha soldiers began receiving training in English in India (Weinberg, 2013). This training was part of their integration into the British Army, as Gurkhas were highly valued for their bravery and discipline. Learning English became essential for effective communication and coordination within the British military structure. This period reinforced the importance of English as a practical skill and introduced it to a broader segment of Nepalese society, particularly those associated with military service.

Rana Regime and English

In 1846, the Kot Parba, a bloody coup, marked the rise of the Rana regime in Nepal. This event not only reshaped the political landscape of the country but also influenced the socio-cultural environment, including the role of language and education. The Ranas, who held autocratic power for over a century, were instrumental in promoting limited exposure to English, primarily to serve their administrative and diplomatic interests. While the coup itself was a political turning point, it indirectly set the stage for the controlled introduction of English in Nepal through policies that catered to the elite, ensuring their dominance and connection to the British Empire.

In 1851, Janga Bahadur Rana, the powerful prime minister of Nepal and the architect of the Rana regime, made a historic visit to England. This visit was significant as it marked Nepal's early diplomatic engagement with the West and provided Janga Bahadur with firsthand exposure to British governance, culture, and education. Impressed by the advancements in England, he sought to emulate aspects of Western administration and modernity upon his return. Although the impact on English education in Nepal was limited to the elite class during his rule, this visit played a role in reinforcing the significance of English as a language of power and progress in Nepalese society.

In 1853, Janga Bahadur Rana established the Durbar School, the first formal school in Nepal, primarily aimed at educating members of the Rana family and the aristocracy. Modeled on the British

education system in India, the school introduced English as a key component of the curriculum. This initiative reflected Janga Bahadur's aspiration to align Nepal's elite education system with Western standards while maintaining exclusivity (NNEPC, 1956). The Durbar School symbolized the beginning of formal English-medium education in Nepal, although it was strictly limited to the ruling class, perpetuating the social hierarchy established by the Rana regime.

By the end of the Rana rule in 1951-52, Nepal had developed a structured education system that included three types of schools: government, government-aided, and independent institutions. The system was organized into four levels—lower primary, upper primary, middle school, and high school—following a 2-3-3-2 grade structure. English had been introduced as a subject from grade 3, and by high school, it became the medium of instruction. However, despite these advancements, the overall literacy rate was still a mere 5 percent, with only around 10,000 students enrolled across approximately 300 schools and two colleges (NNEPC, 1956). This limited access to education highlighted the challenges Nepal faced in terms of educational development and the widespread disparity in opportunities, particularly outside the elite circles.

English in the Post-Rana Period

In 1950, the People's Movement in Nepal led to the abolition of the Rana regime, which had held autocratic power for over a century. This movement, fueled by widespread dissatisfaction with the Ranas' oppressive rule, marked a turning point in Nepal's political history. The end of the Rana dynasty ushered in the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, with King Tribhuvan returning to power, signaling the beginning of democratic reforms. The movement also paved the way for significant changes in the country's social and educational systems, including the gradual expansion of access to education and the further integration of English as a tool for modern governance and international relations.

In 1954, the Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC) was formed with 47 members, including key figures such as Dr. Wood, an education expert. The establishment of the NNEPC marked a pivotal moment in Nepal's efforts to modernize and expand its educational system. The commission was tasked with formulating a national educational plan that would address the country's pressing educational needs, including improving literacy rates and making education more accessible to a broader segment of the population. The involvement of experts like Dr. Wood underscored the importance of international collaboration and expertise in shaping Nepal's educational reforms during this critical period.

In 1956, the Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC) published the "Education in Nepal" report, which became the first formal document to address the country's educational framework. This report made several key recommendations that significantly influenced the direction of Nepal's education system. It reduced the emphasis on English, effectively marginalizing both English and ethnic languages in the curriculum. At the primary and secondary levels, a 5-5 grade structure was proposed, with a focus on a mother tongue-leading-to-Nepali model. The report excluded English from the primary level entirely, even as an optional subject, and emphasized the use of Nepali

as the medium of instruction at the secondary level. English was only included in the curriculum at the secondary level, if desired. The policy also advocated for the use of the mother tongue in the first two grades, transitioning smoothly into Nepali as early as possible in the primary education system. This approach sought to ensure linguistic unity and facilitate the early mastery of the national language, Nepali, while limiting the role of English in formal education.

Panchayat and English

In 1960, King Mahendra introduced the Panchayat system, a party-less political structure that centralized power under the monarchy. This move marked a significant shift in Nepal's governance, as King Mahendra dissolved the democratic government and suspended the constitution, replacing the parliamentary system with an autocratic, king-led rule. The Panchayat system curtailed political freedoms and civil liberties, consolidating the monarchy's control over the state. In terms of education, the regime placed greater emphasis on national unity and the promotion of Nepali as the primary language of instruction, while the role of English remained limited to the elites. The Panchayat period saw educational reforms aimed at strengthening state control over all sectors, including the curriculum, which was closely aligned with the government's ideological goals.

In 1960, the establishment of the All Round National Education Committee (ARNEC) led to significant reforms in Nepal's educational system. One of the major changes was the introduction of English as a subject in classes 6, 7, and 8, with 100 marks allocated, and in classes 9 and 10, with 200 marks, thereby increasing its presence in the curriculum. Despite these efforts, ARNEC was unable to guarantee free primary education, and private fee-collecting schools continued to operate, often providing better access to resources and emphasizing English in their instruction (ARNEC, 1961). In contrast, Nepali remained the medium of instruction (MoI) in most schools, underlining its role as the national language, while English was increasingly regarded as a subject of importance, particularly in private schools catering to the elite.

In 1971, the National Education System Plan (NESP) introduced significant reforms to Nepal's educational structure. One of the key changes was the government's decision to bring schools previously run under the private model by local communities under state ownership and management. The NESP also outlined a new structure for education, consisting of primary, lower secondary, and secondary levels with a 3-4-3 grade system. While the plan suggested introducing one of the United Nations languages, including English, from class four, it did not recommend English as a core subject in the curriculum. English was included only as an optional subject starting from class six. Nepali remained the medium of instruction up to the secondary level, after which English gradually took over in higher education. The NESP recognized three types of schools: government schools, public schools, and private schools, and it proposed measures to secure the welfare of teachers working in private institutions. Despite the focus on English, the document clarified that English was not considered a foreign language (EFL) but rather a second language (L2), or even a first language (L1) in certain contexts. The plan also emphasized national unity with the slogan "Ek Bhasa, Ek Des" (One Language, One Nation) (NESP, 2071). By this time, there were more private schools and colleges than government institutions in the same categories, reflecting the growing prominence of the private sector

in education.

English in Democracy

In 1990, the first People's Movement (Jana Andolan) in Nepal led to the restoration of democracy, marking a pivotal moment in the country's political history. The movement was fueled by widespread discontent with the autocratic Panchayat system, which had been in place since 1960 under King Mahendra. The protests and demands for democratic reforms resulted in the King's decision to lift the Panchayat system and restore multiparty democracy. This shift paved the way for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy and the adoption of democratic principles in governance. The restoration of democracy also had significant implications for education, as it opened the door for greater political freedoms, a more inclusive approach to educational reforms, and increased emphasis on the need for a more equitable and accessible education system for all citizens, regardless of social or economic background.

In 1990, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal was promulgated, marking a significant step toward recognizing linguistic diversity and cultural rights within the country. The new constitution declared that all languages spoken as mother tongues in Nepal were to be recognized as national languages. This inclusive approach acknowledged the rich linguistic heritage of the nation. Furthermore, it granted each community the fundamental right to operate schools up to the primary level in their own mother tongue, ensuring that children could receive education in a language they understood. This provision aimed to preserve cultural identities while promoting access to education in a way that was both inclusive and equitable, laying the groundwork for further educational reforms in Nepal.

In 1992, the National Education Commission introduced several significant reforms that shaped the direction of Nepal's education system. One of the key recommendations was the inclusion of English as a subject starting from class four, reflecting the growing importance of the language in the educational landscape. The commission also proposed a new structure for education, consisting of primary, lower secondary, secondary, and higher secondary levels (5-3-2-2). It emphasized the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the early grades, while also allowing for the use of international languages, including English, as a medium of instruction in higher education (Ministry of Education, 1992). This shift was part of a broader move toward liberalization, encouraging the private sector to play a larger role in higher secondary education and in the production of educational materials. At the same time, the commission acknowledged the effects of globalization, with English gradually reaching a broader segment of the population, becoming more accessible and widespread beyond the elite. These changes marked a critical moment in Nepal's educational history, laying the foundation for the integration of English into mainstream education while maintaining linguistic diversity.

In 1994, the National Languages Policy Recommendation Commission (NLPRC) made several key recommendations aimed at promoting linguistic diversity and improving education in Nepal. One of the primary suggestions was to provide education through the mother tongue in schools that served children from mother-tongue speaking communities. For schools with bilingual contexts, the commission recommended offering bilingual education, using both the mother tongue and Nepali, the national language. In multilingual contexts, the language of the nation, Nepali, was to be used as the medium of instruction. Additionally, the NLPRC proposed that the mother tongue be included

as a subject in all categories of schools, ensuring that children were able to maintain their cultural and linguistic identities. Another significant recommendation was to replace Sanskrit with the mother tongue as an alternative subject in the lower secondary level curriculum, making the education system more inclusive of diverse linguistic backgrounds (NLPRC, 1994). Notably, the commission did not recommend EMI in schools, as it focused on preserving and promoting local languages in the educational system. These recommendations aimed to strengthen the role of native languages in education while still ensuring proficiency in the national language.

In 2002/3, a significant shift occurred in Nepal's educational system with the introduction of compulsory English as a subject (EaS) starting from class 1. This change, as outlined by the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) in 2003, made English a mandatory part of the curriculum for all students from the very beginning of their formal education. With 100 marks allocated to the subject, English was given a prominent position in the early stages of education, reflecting the growing importance of the language in Nepal's development and global integration (CDC, 2003). This policy marked a pivotal moment in the country's educational reforms, emphasizing English proficiency as a foundational skill for students across all regions and communities.

Between 2000 and 2015, UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) initiative, a global movement aimed at providing universal access to quality education, had a profound impact on Nepal's educational landscape. From 2004 to 2009, Nepal implemented the Education for All (EFA) Programme, which was a key part of the broader Education for All National Plan of Action (2001-2015). Under this framework, Nepal worked towards achieving the goals of expanding access to education, improving educational quality, and reducing disparities in education based on gender, socio-economic status, and geography. The EFA initiative emphasized inclusive education, with a particular focus on marginalized and disadvantaged groups, while also promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. During this period, Nepal made significant strides in expanding primary education, improving literacy rates, and integrating education into broader development efforts. However, challenges remained in achieving full educational equity, particularly in rural and remote areas, where access to quality education continued to be a barrier. The EFA goals helped shape national educational policies and priorities, including the expansion of English language education as a part of globalizing Nepal's educational system. The plan sought to achieve universal primary education, improve learning outcomes, and provide opportunities for marginalized groups, including girls, ethnic minorities, and children with disabilities.

English in SSRP and SSDP Framework

From 2009 to 2016, the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) aimed to restructure Nepal's education system into two main tiers: basic education (grades 1-8) and secondary education (grades 9-12) (Ministry of Education, 2009). The plan was designed to improve the quality and accessibility of education, ensuring a more efficient and equitable system. The eighth amendment to the Education Act in 2016 formally implemented the SSRP, making it a significant policy shift in Nepal's educational framework.

One of the key features of the SSRP was its focus on using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the early grades (1-3), in line with the principles of the Education for All (EFA) initiative. This was aimed at improving literacy and educational outcomes by ensuring that children

received instruction in languages they understood, thus fostering better learning outcomes in their formative years. The SSRP reinforced the role of mother tongue-based education (MTBE) as an essential element in achieving the broader EFA goals, which sought to make education more inclusive and accessible for all children, especially those from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Ministry of Education, 2009). The shift toward mother tongue instruction was seen as a critical step in addressing the challenges of educational equity, as it allowed for a smoother transition to formal education for children from different linguistic communities.

In 2005, the Department of Education (DoE) initiated a Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MLE) pilot project in Dhankuta, aiming to enhance the educational experience for children from linguistically diverse communities. This project was later expanded to a national level in 2007 with the support of Finland, reflecting a growing recognition of the importance of mother tongue instruction in early education. The MLE approach sought to address the challenges faced by children who spoke languages other than Nepali, by providing education in their mother tongues alongside Nepali and English.

An assessment conducted in 2014 revealed both positive outcomes and challenges in the implementation of the MLE program. On the positive side, the evaluation found that MLE fostered more positive attitudes toward learning, improved student engagement, and helped bridge the language gap for children in linguistically diverse regions. However, weaknesses were also observed, particularly in the consistency of implementation across different regions and schools. Issues such as insufficient resources, lack of trained teachers in mother tongue languages, and logistical challenges in managing multilingual classrooms were noted as factors hindering the program's effectiveness. Despite these challenges, the MLE initiative was recognized as a significant step toward improving educational equity for children from diverse linguistic backgrounds in Nepal.

From 2016/17 to 2022/23, the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) outlined a vision for a more diversified and inclusive education system, particularly with respect to language of instruction (LoI) in schools. The SSDP proposed three categories of schools based on the linguistic composition of the student population. First, homogeneously Nepali-speaking schools (estimated to constitute 60-70% of schools) would not require significant intervention beyond strengthening English language teaching (EaS). English would be taught effectively from an early stage, but Nepali would remain the primary medium of instruction. Second, schools with students primarily speaking languages other than Nepali (estimated 10-15%) would use the mother tongue up to class 3 (Ministry of Education, 2016). After this, Nepali would gradually become the medium of instruction, ensuring a smooth transition into the national language. Third, schools with diverse linguistic backgrounds, where students speak various languages with no common mother tongue (estimated 15-20%), would respect the students' native languages but use Nepali as the medium of instruction from the beginning through to secondary level.

Additionally, the SSDP envisioned the possibility of using both Nepali and English as mediums of instruction from early grades, but only where there was sufficient capacity in terms of teacher proficiency and appropriate teaching-learning materials. However, the plan acknowledged challenges related to the effective implementation of EMI, particularly in community schools, due to a lack of qualified teachers and adequate resources. The 6th out of 10 schools facing this issue highlighted that

the advocacy for mother tongue instruction by some political groups posed a challenge to the adoption of EMI in school education. Thus, while the SSDP aimed to promote both Nepali and English in schools, the practical challenges made the full realization of this vision a complex issue.

New Constitution of 2015 and English

In 2015, the new Constitution of Nepal guaranteed the fundamental right of every Nepali community to receive education in their mother tongue, irrespective of the educational level. This provision underscored the country's commitment to linguistic diversity and inclusion, ensuring that all communities, including those speaking languages other than Nepali, could access education in a language they understood. This constitutional right was aimed at promoting equality in education and safeguarding cultural identities, acknowledging the importance of mother tongue education in improving learning outcomes and fostering a more inclusive educational system (GoN, 2015). By recognizing the right to education in the mother tongue, the constitution supported the broader goal of providing quality, equitable education for all Nepali citizens, regardless of their linguistic background.

In 2019, Nepal's National Education Policy took significant steps toward acknowledging and respecting the country's multilingual landscape. The policy recommended the use of Mother Tongue-Based (MTB) multilingual instruction alongside Nepali Language-Based Instruction (NLBI) and EMI, tailored to the needs and interests of students (Ministry of Education, 2019). This approach was designed to enhance learning outcomes by incorporating the linguistic diversity of the country into the educational framework. At the basic education level, the policy emphasized using the mother tongue as the primary medium of instruction, while also offering the option to teach subjects such as Mathematics and Science in English. This flexibility allowed for a balance between preserving linguistic diversity and meeting the growing demand for English proficiency in subjects that are essential for global knowledge. However, at the secondary level, the policy recommended using either English or Nepali, or both, as the medium of instruction. It did not see the necessity for continuing the use of the mother tongue at this stage, reflecting a shift toward greater standardization of education in the national language or English, particularly as students progressed to higher levels of schooling. This move aimed to strengthen English language proficiency and align Nepal's education system with global trends, even as it acknowledged the value of mother tongue education in the earlier years.

In 2019, the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) did not recommend EMI for soft content subjects at either the basic or secondary level. This decision reflected a cautious approach to the growing emphasis on English in education, particularly in non-technical subjects like social studies, languages, and humanities (CDC, 2019). The CDC's stance aimed to ensure that the use of English did not hinder students' understanding of these subjects, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a strong foundation in the national language and mother tongue for effective learning. The policy sought to balance the integration of English, especially in subjects where it was deemed necessary, with the preservation of Nepali and mother tongue-based instruction in areas that were crucial for students' cultural and linguistic development.

Current Status

Based on the status of English, Nepal is considered part of the Expanding Circle, as English

traditionally had no official status here, but plays important economic, educational, and social roles. Its influence resembles that of an Outer Circle variety. English usage has been growing across various sectors, including education (Pandey, 2020). Along with the increasing influence of English, now scholars have even recognized and highlighted the distinct variety of Nepali English (Nenglish) (Giri, 2020; Dewan, 2025). Giri (2020), for example, argues that Nepali English (Nenglish) has developed unique features distinct from British, American, and Indian varieties.

In practice level, English is taught as a compulsory subject in Nepal from Early Childhood Development (ECD) classes up to the master's degree level, reflecting its central role in the education system. In public schools, English is generally taught as a subject, while private schools are the primary institutions where EMI is used, especially for subjects like mathematics, science, and social studies. This has created a distinct divide in educational practices between public and private schools, with the latter often offering a more internationalized curriculum in terms of language. In community schools too, while English is increasingly popular, it is being increasingly taught as a subject and used as the medium of instruction. The rising popularity of English in community schools is driven by the increasing demand for English proficiency in the globalized world, as well as the perception that English skills can offer better educational and career opportunities. However, the widespread use of EMI in private schools has created challenges for community schools, where resources, teacher training, and materials may not always meet the requirements for effective EMI, further exacerbating educational inequality.

Discussion

This section interprets the findings of the study, situating them within the broader context of Nepal's sociocultural and educational landscape while engaging with existing literature and theories. The discussion is organized addressing the implications of the historical development of English language education and EMI in Nepal.

The introduction of English in Nepal, influenced by early trade and missionary activities, laid a foundation that evolved with significant political and educational reforms. Janga Bahadur Rana's visit to England and the establishment of Durbar School in 1853 marked critical steps in institutionalizing English education. However, the Rana regime's elitist approach limited access, embedding social stratification within the education system.

Post-Rana reforms democratized education, allowing English to reach a broader audience. These findings align with Shrestha (2008), who highlights that post-1951 reforms were pivotal in expanding English education. Nevertheless, disparities persisted, with private schools dominating EMI and public schools lagging, a trend corroborated by Awasthi (2004), who notes the duality in Nepal's education system as a barrier to equity.

The evolution of English education policies reflects Nepal's struggle to balance global aspirations with local realities. Early policies, such as the 1956 NNEPC report, emphasized mother tongue instruction, relegating English to secondary and higher education. The National Education System Plan (1971) reinforced this stance, prioritizing Nepali as the medium of instruction.

Contrastingly, recent policies, including the 2019 National Education Policy, acknowledge

the growing demand for English. This shift illustrates Nepal's alignment with globalization, where English proficiency is seen as essential for economic mobility and international competitiveness. However, the marginalization of indigenous languages raises concerns, echoing Skutnabb-Kangas's (2000) argument on linguistic imperialism, where dominant languages overshadow local tongues, leading to cultural erosion.

The dominance of EMI in private schools and its growing adoption in community schools highlight systemic inequalities. While private schools benefit from better resources and trained teachers, community schools face significant challenges, including untrained staff, insufficient materials, and resistance from stakeholders.

This disparity reflects Coleman's (2010) assertion that EMI often widens educational inequities, privileging affluent communities. In Nepal, the rising preference for private schools underscores this divide, with parents viewing EMI as a pathway to better opportunities. However, this has created a linguistic hierarchy, marginalizing students who struggle with English, particularly those from rural and multilingual backgrounds.

The proliferation of English has sociocultural implications, particularly regarding Nepal's linguistic diversity. While English is associated with modernity and mobility, its dominance has marginalized local languages, threatening linguistic and cultural identities. Policies promoting mother tongue-based education (MTBE), such as the Education for All (EFA) initiative, aim to address this issue but face challenges in implementation.

The tension between globalization and localization is evident, with English viewed as a tool for progress yet criticized for undermining Nepal's rich linguistic heritage. This dichotomy resonates with Phillipson's (1992) theory of linguistic imperialism, where English often gains prominence at the expense of indigenous languages.

Recent policies, such as the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP), indicate a shift towards a more inclusive approach, recognizing the need for multilingual instruction. By promoting mother tongue instruction in early grades and introducing English as a medium of instruction (MoI) gradually, these policies aim to strike a balance between linguistic diversity and global integration.

However, challenges remain, including inadequate teacher training, lack of materials, and resistance to change. The advocacy for "Ek Bhasa, Ek Des" (One Language, One Nation) in earlier policies continues to influence perceptions, complicating efforts to promote multilingualism.

The findings also highlight Nepal's dual aspirations: embracing globalization through English while preserving local identities. This duality reflects broader debates in language policy, where nations strive to integrate into the global economy without losing cultural distinctiveness. The experience of other multilingual countries, such as India, which balances English, Hindi, and regional languages, provides valuable insights for Nepal.

This discussion, thus, highlights the complexity of English education in Nepal, shaped by historical, sociopolitical, and cultural factors. While English has facilitated Nepal's integration into the global community, its dominance poses challenges for linguistic equity and cultural preservation. Moving forward, policies must address these challenges, ensuring that English education promotes inclusivity and respects Nepal's linguistic diversity. Strengthening teacher training, developing

multilingual materials, and fostering awareness about the value of local languages will be critical in achieving this balance.

Conclusion and Implications

The historical development of English language education and EMI in Nepal reflects the interplay between global influences and local realities. Beginning with the early introduction of English through trade and missionary activities, its role expanded significantly during the Rana regime, though access was limited to the elite. The post-Rana period saw the democratization of education, with English becoming an integral part of the curriculum, though disparities between private and public schools persisted.

Over time, educational policies have oscillated between promoting mother tongue-based instruction and recognizing the growing demand for English, influenced by globalization and societal aspirations for upward mobility. While English proficiency is now widely regarded as a key to economic and social advancement, the dominance of EMI, particularly in private schools, has exacerbated educational inequalities and marginalized indigenous languages.

Current practices demonstrate a growing trend towards EMI in community schools, driven by parental demand and competition with private institutions. However, challenges such as untrained teachers, inadequate resources, and the sociocultural implications of English dominance underscore the need for context-sensitive policies.

This research highlights the importance of a balanced approach that integrates English education with the preservation of Nepal's linguistic diversity. Policies must ensure equitable access to quality English education while promoting multilingualism and respecting the cultural identities of Nepal's diverse communities. Strengthening teacher capacity, developing context-appropriate materials, and fostering awareness about the value of local languages are essential steps toward achieving this goal. Furthermore, collaboration between policymakers, educators, and local communities is crucial in designing inclusive language education frameworks. Adequate funding and resource allocation must be ensured to support teacher training and material development. Schools should implement flexible language policies that accommodate regional linguistic diversity while maintaining high standards of English proficiency. Technology can play a significant role in bridging gaps in access to quality education, especially in rural areas. Regular assessment and feedback mechanisms should be established to evaluate policy effectiveness and make necessary improvements.

Ultimately, the evolution of English education in Nepal is emblematic of the broader challenges faced by multilingual societies in a globalized world. By addressing these challenges thoughtfully, Nepal can leverage the opportunities presented by English while safeguarding its rich linguistic and cultural heritage.

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