

## **TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON ENGLISH MEDIUM INSTRUCTION IN ILLAM DISTRICT, NEPAL**

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**Abstract**

The transition to English as Nepal's Medium of Instruction in public schools, driven by alignment with private education and parental preferences, presents challenges due to language proficiency gaps, particularly in rural and lower socioeconomic areas. This mirrors broader shifts towards multilingualism and a generational language change. This study explores teachers' perceptions of the Medium of Instruction and its impact on academic performance through qualitative approach. Six English teachers from government schools in Illam district, were interviewed, and data was analyzed using Framework Analysis to identify key themes. Findings emphasize the importance of adapting instruction to accommodate linguistic diversity, despite government mandates for English. Effective use of technology and diverse teaching materials enhances engagement and learning outcomes. Teachers play a vital role in promoting inclusivity and peer learning, leveraging students' linguistic abilities. Allowing expression in familiar languages improves comprehension and engagement, necessitating flexible and inclusive educational practices. Adapting instruction to accommodate linguistic diversity, utilizing varied teaching materials and technology, and implementing English as the mandated medium fosters inclusive, engaging, and effective learning environments, promoting motivation and lifelong learning.

**Keywords:** *academic performance; language proficiency; linguistic diversity; medium of instruction; teacher perceptions.*

## **Introduction**

The Medium of Instruction (MOI) refers to the language used for teaching and learning, which may differ from the official language of a country (Khati, 2016). In Nepal, where educational policies have been inconsistent, there is a recent shift towards implementing English as the MOI in public schools, drawing significant attention from language policy researchers. This move, aimed at aligning public schools with private ones and meeting parental demands, has sparked debates regarding its impact on academic performance (Khati, 2016; Phyak & Ojha, 2019). However, transitioning from using the native language to English as the MOI presents challenges, especially since many teachers and students do not have English as their first language (Macaro & Han, 2020). Furthermore, English language courses have traditionally been offered separately from the mainstream education system (Poudel & Choi, 2021), leading to disparities in language proficiency, particularly among individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or rural areas (Bhandari et al., 2009; Shrestha & Gautam, 2022).

As educational administrators emphasize language as a subject, teachers are compelled to use it as the MOI, further exacerbating the challenges faced by students (Gyawali & Khadka, 2016). Teaching English in a global context requires not only proficiency in the language but also a nuanced understanding of cultural sensitivity and inclusive teaching practices (Copland et al., 2014). The evolving paradigm of multilingualism challenges the dominance of English-only instruction in recent years (Fang et al., 2023). Teachers have had to cope with issues such as a student's difficulty comprehending a new language, communicating with friends in English, deriving meaning from textbooks, etc. (Panthee, 2020). Despite these challenges, there is optimism regarding the future of English in Nepal, as evidenced by a language shift among the younger generation towards English, reflecting the complex language dynamics of the country (Sharma, 2022). However, the shortage of qualified English teachers and learning resources, coupled with the adoption of English medium schools by teachers lacking proficiency in English, present significant obstacles (Shrestha & Gautam, 2022).

Studying the MOI in public schools in Illam provides valuable insights into Nepal's education system, helping to identify effective teaching methods and inform policy decisions aimed at improving educational standards. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on language and education while offering practical insights for enhancing policies and practices in Nepal's public schools. Consequently, this study aims to gain insights into teachers' perceptions of the MOI and its influence on the students' academic performance.

## **Methodology**

Six English teachers from the government schools from Illam district, Nepal were identified as key informants. KII was conducted with key informant i.e., English teachers of the same schools. KII guideline was used as a tool to collect data and Face to face interview technique was used. The initial step involved in-depth data processing, starting with manual transcription of the recorded content. Subsequently, a meticulous translation was conducted, transforming the information from Nepali into English. Following this, a systematic analytical approach known as Framework Analysis was employed. In this process, the researcher independently re-examined the transcripts to formulate an initial coding matrix that encapsulated emerging themes and categories. The identified themes were then subjected to thorough discussion,

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refinement, and analysis, utilizing a collectively agreed-upon coded framework. This method facilitated a comprehensive exploration and interpretation of the qualitative data, ensuring a nuanced understanding of the underlying themes and patterns within the transcribed and translated content.

## **Results**

### **English as primary medium of instruction**

The teachers highlight the diversity of teaching experience and the utilization of different mediums of instruction in a school environment. Despite the variations in years of teaching experience, all educators emphasize the importance of adapting instruction to meet the needs of their students, including utilizing both English and Nepali languages, as well as other mother tongues when necessary. This theme underscores the value of linguistic diversity in education and the teachers' commitment to creating inclusive learning environments tailored to the linguistic backgrounds of their students.

*Well, as our government rule, we are instructed to use English language. It means, for the English teachers, they have to use English medium of instruction while teaching in the classroom. So, it's our obligation to use English medium while teaching. Because, yeah, I'm English subject teacher. So, of course, in this medium of instruction that I have to use.*

The complexity of language instruction in schools, balancing between governmental mandates, educational objectives, and the linguistic needs and abilities of students. It invites further discussion on how to reconcile these tensions and optimize learning outcomes in multilingual educational settings.

### **English as third language in Nepal**

While English holds global significance and is mandated by educational policies, its effectiveness in facilitating learning depends heavily on students' proficiency levels and comfort with the language. Educators face the challenge of balancing governmental mandates with the need to create inclusive and effective learning environments that cater to the linguistic diversity of students. As such, there is a call for flexible and adaptive approaches that integrate students' mother tongues alongside English to enhance comprehension and learning outcomes.

*According to the English language curriculum in secondary level, English subject should be taught in English. There is the demand of curriculum to use in English Compulsorily. But our students, most of the students are very poor in English. They can't understand what the teacher is saying. And they use English language, not one language, not second language. Some of the students use English as the third language. Their first language is their mother tongue then they use Nepali language as the second language. And they use English language as third language. So I should use all of those languages.*

The disparity between curriculum mandates and the actual abilities and linguistic backgrounds of students. The participant acknowledges the English language curriculum's requirement for

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English instruction in secondary-level education. However, they bring attention to the practical difficulties faced by students who struggle with English proficiency. The participant's description of the students' linguistic backgrounds paints a picture of complexity and diversity. Many students are not just bilingual but multilingual, with English often being their third language. This linguistic hierarchy, where English is not the primary or even secondary language for many students, underscores the difficulty they face in fully comprehending English-medium instruction.

### **MOI Shapes Students' Attitudes toward Learning**

The medium of instruction (MOI) significantly influences students' attitudes toward learning. By determining how content is delivered and accessed, MOI plays a crucial role in shaping students' perceptions of the learning process. Different mediums offer varying levels of engagement, relevance, feedback mechanisms, accessibility, and opportunities for social interaction and creation. Moreover, the MOI sets the tone for the learning environment, impacting the overall experience for students. A well-designed MOI can foster enthusiasm, motivation, and a positive mindset towards lifelong learning, while a less effective one may hinder students' engagement and hinder their learning outcomes. Therefore, careful consideration and strategic use of MOI are essential for creating an environment conducive to cultivating a love for learning and academic success.

*I think the medium of instruction plays a role in shaping students', attitude towards learning by influencing their engagements relevance feedback, accessibility, creation and social interactions. Creating a supportive and engaging learning environment. More thoughtfully instructional design and pedagogical approach and contribute to fostering positive attitudes, Motivation and enthusiasm for lifelong learning.*

The choice of medium used for instruction significantly influences students' attitudes toward learning by affecting various aspects of their educational experience. This includes how they engage with the material, the relevance of what they're learning, the feedback they receive, the accessibility of resources, their ability to create and collaborate, and the social interactions they partake in during the learning process. By prioritizing the creation of a supportive and engaging learning environment, educators can leverage instructional design and pedagogical approaches to further enhance these aspects. Thoughtful consideration in designing instruction and adopting suitable pedagogical methods can greatly contribute to cultivating positive attitudes, motivation, and enthusiasm among students, fostering a lifelong love for learning.

### **Technology Based Instruction is Trend**

Technology-based instruction within the classroom offers opportunities for interactive learning experiences, while face-to-face instruction emphasizes personal interaction between students and teachers. Virtual or online classes provide flexibility and accessibility, allowing students to engage with course materials from anywhere. Distance learning centers offer structured environments for remote learning, while models, videos, films, and radio clips enhance learning through multimedia formats.

*I have found some of the patterns and the course of teaching in my experience. Technology based instruction in classroom corresponding, face to face instruction,*

*virtual or online classes, distance learning center based then we can find models, video, films, radio clips, and readiness too.*

The mention of technology-based instruction highlights the role of digital tools and resources in modern educational practices. Additionally, the reference to video, films, radio clips, and other multimedia resources underscores the importance of multimedia learning materials in engaging students and facilitating interactive learning experiences. This approach aligns with contemporary trends in education that emphasize flexibility, innovation, and student-centered pedagogy

### **Good Impact of English as MOI**

The positive impact of English as the MOI is evident in the enthusiasm and engagement it fosters among students. When English is used as the MOI, students become more interested in speaking the language not only within the classroom but also in their interactions with friends and relatives outside of school. This continuous practice promotes language fluency and confidence in communication. Moreover, students actively seek opportunities to use English both inside and outside the classroom, indicating a genuine interest in mastering the language.

*It has very well impact on the student, giving medium of instruction. They are interested in speaking language with friends, relatives and so on. And they communicate to each other. They try to speak English always outside and inside the classroom. This is very good impact. I have found the very impact on the students. I have to use some tools and teaching aids also. And I have to use some technical tools also. And they directly go to the students. And then I persuade them and I try to increase their learning achievement.*

It is observed that when English is used as the medium of instruction, students become more interested in speaking the language with their peers, friends, and relatives, both inside and outside the classroom. This increased engagement in English language communication suggests that the medium of instruction plays a significant role in shaping students' language learning experiences and motivating them to use the language actively in various social contexts.

### **Teaching Materials for Support**

There is a vast array of teaching materials that can serve as valuable supports in the learning process. Textbooks and novels provide foundational knowledge and reading comprehension practice. Audio and video materials, including plays, radio programs, and podcasts, offer auditory learning opportunities and engage different senses.

*We can take as a supporter materials, for example, textbooks and novels, audio video materials, plays, radio programs, and podcasts, multimedia, applications, software platforms, and games, and social media, digital learning, resources, including video audio text, website, animations, and images, and lectures or recordings, we can find as a supportive material.*

The acknowledgement on the role of social media and digital learning resources, including websites, animations, and images, in supplementing traditional classroom instruction. These resources provide access to authentic language use, cultural content, and collaborative learning

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opportunities that enrich students' language proficiency and cultural awareness. Multimedia applications, software platforms, and educational games enhance interactive learning experiences, making lessons more dynamic and engaging. Social media platforms can facilitate collaborative learning and information sharing among students. Digital learning resources, such as videos, audio recordings, texts, websites, animations, and images, offer diverse content and formats to cater to different learning styles. Additionally, lectures or recorded presentations provide supplementary explanations and insights into complex topics.

### **Teacher as a Facilitator**

The role of the teacher as a facilitator in addressing language diversity and adapting the MOI to meet the needs of students emphasize the importance of considering students as active participants in the learning process and leveraging their linguistic abilities to enhance comprehension and peer learning. The teacher serves as a facilitator who can select appropriate language or instructional methods to accommodate language diversity in the classroom. This suggests that teachers should be sensitive to the linguistic backgrounds of their students and choose instructional approaches that promote accessibility and understanding for all learners.

*Our teacher is a facilitator to the students. He can choose some language or instruction. If there is any diversity, language diversity in the classroom, yeah. He can choose the student as a teaching learning material. Some students and the teacher must deliver subject matter to that person, that student and he can transfer these, his or her learning to the, his friends. That means taking students as guide as well.*

This highlights the collaborative and student-centered approach that teachers can adopt to address language diversity and adapt the medium of instruction effectively. Leveraging students as resources, promoting peer learning, and facilitating collaboration, teachers can create inclusive and supportive learning environments that foster academic success for all students, regardless of their language backgrounds.

### **Medium-Free Subject**

The participant suggests that employing a medium-free approach, where instruction is delivered in a language familiar to the students, can be more beneficial. This approach allows students to freely express their ideas and engage more actively in the learning process.

*The students, some of the students in my experience, they can't express in English medium. But they know in other medium. They can express their ideas or they can depict the main theme of the text in Nepali easily. But they can't express in English through English medium. If there is medium-free subject, then if we use that language, which is familiar to the students, then it will be better. The students should be given the right to express and to use their own language also.*

The importance of considering students' proficiency levels and comfort with different mediums of instruction. This highlight that some students may struggle to express themselves effectively in English, even if they understand the content well. This observation underscores the potential limitations of using a language that is not the students' mother tongue or primary language of instruction. The importance of adopting inclusive language instruction strategies that prioritize students' linguistic needs and preferences. It highlights the value of providing students with the

opportunity to express themselves in a language they are most comfortable with, ultimately enhancing their overall learning experience.

### **Discussion**

The present study showed that the teachers adapt instruction to meet the diverse linguistic needs of students, using both English and Nepali, and other mother tongues as necessary. This highlights the value of linguistic diversity in education and the commitment to creating inclusive learning environments. These results support research from China and Japan (Rose et al., 2021; Rose & Galloway, 2019), which suggests discrepancies in students' and instructors' reported English usage in English Medium Instruction contexts. Additionally, it was made clear by focus group discussions, interviews, and questionnaire replies that English Medium Instruction classes in Vietnam (Sahan et al., 2022) and Thailand (Galloway & Sahan, 2021) did not strictly follow the English-only curriculum. It was decided that using the local tongue would be beneficial, especially for explaining difficult ideas (Galloway & Sahan, 2021). In one instance, a teacher in Thailand worked with the students to create a policy in which he would speak in Thai while the lecture slides were in English. Several educators used translanguaging strategies that were comparable. Remarkably, a teacher in Vietnam defined three types of teaching methods: writing in English while speaking Vietnamese, or vice versa, and instruction and communication conducted fully in English (Sahan et al., 2022). This study highlighted that English teachers were required to use English as the MOI due to governmental policies. This can create tension between fulfilling curriculum mandates and addressing students' linguistic abilities and needs. Because many students use English as a third language, after their mother tongue and Nepali in the Nepalese context. This linguistic hierarchy poses challenges for students in comprehending English-medium instruction, as they often struggle with English proficiency. The effectiveness of both MOIs can also be viewed through the lens of Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 2011). Nepali MOI may reduce cognitive load for students, allowing them to focus on understanding the content without the added burden of language translation. English MOI, while beneficial for language proficiency, must be carefully managed to prevent cognitive overload. Teacher recognize the importance of clear language instruction in shaping students' attitudes towards learning. Using examples like translating English terms into Nepali, they highlight how linguistic clarity enhances comprehension and engagement with the subject matter. This adaptability in language use is consistent with Global Englishness methodologies, mirroring the standards of modern English usage (Rose & Galloway, 2019). These descriptions of flexible language use are similar to the translanguaging techniques included in the edited volume by Paulsrud et al., (2021) and the multilingual approaches studied by Baker & Hüttner (2019). Also, allowing students to express themselves in a familiar language can enhance their learning experience. This approach acknowledges the limitations of using a non-primary language for instruction and supports the idea of medium-free subjects to improve comprehension and engagement. Teachers will need to take a more inclusive stance on the function of language in the learning process and strike a more balanced balance between psychological and knowledge-based components in light of this growing interest (Parsons, 1998).

### **Conclusion**

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The study findings highlight the importance of adapting instructional methods to accommodate the diverse linguistic needs of students. While governmental mandates necessitate the use of English as the MOI, educators recognize the value of linguistic diversity and strive to create inclusive learning environments. Utilizing various teaching materials, such as textbooks, multimedia resources, and digital tools, enhances engagement and supports different learning styles. Technology-based instruction offers flexibility and interactivity, further enriching the learning experience. Teachers, serving as facilitators, play a crucial role in addressing language diversity and leveraging students' linguistic abilities to promote peer learning and comprehension. Allowing students to express themselves in familiar languages can significantly improve their engagement and understanding. Ultimately, a well-designed MOI, combined with thoughtful instructional strategies, fosters positive attitudes, motivation, and enthusiasm for lifelong learning among students.

### **Conflict of Interest**

There is no conflict of interest.

### **Funding**

The study is entirely self-funded.

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