English Language Teaching in Nepal: Research, Reflection and Practice

Edited by David Hayes

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FOREWORD

I was delighted to learn that the British Council planned to publish a collection of research papers on English language teaching and learning in Nepal. I feel privileged to offer my views in the foreword to this publication. The British Council initiative in the current context of Nepal is very timely and may prove instrumental in (re)shaping our language policies. It can provide an impetus to future plans for language learning, reducing policy-practice gaps and enhancing students' language competence. I appreciate the skills demonstrated by Dr David Hayes in bringing all the chapters together and giving a cohesive shape to the ideas and inputs provided in the volume. The British Council team has been inspirational to the professionals, researchers, policy makers and practitioners by taking the lead with such an innovative project. I feel very happy that the British Council Nepal has produced such a seminal piece of work.

Recent changes in Nepal's political architecture have led to discussions on how people's linguistic rights, enshrined in the Constitution, receive a respectful space in our policies and practices. The constitutional provisions have placed emphasis on how we facilitate children's learning, helping to enhance their neuro-cognitive processes and develop their capabilities, opening ways for the all-round development of their human capital. Local realizations and global realities have led to a change in our perceptions about language, power and pedagogies. Our discourse on language is in the process of reconstruction and reorientation: we are setting the agenda both for language and development, and language and learning. English language teaching and learning need to be looked at alongside how we respond to children's learning of national language(s), building on a firm foundation of mother tongue medium education.

Nepal's collaboration with the British Council is marked by remarkable gains for capacity building and human resource development in the country. The scholarships offered through British Council fellowship programmes have proved instrumental in addressing Nepal's development needs and facilitating transformation through bilateral agreements. Further, Nepal's collaboration with the British Council has proved meaningful for conducting English Language Teaching (ELT) surveys, improving curricula and teacher training packages, initiating examination reforms and skills development programmes and enhancing capacity at institutional and individual levels.

The publication of this British Council volume, comprising research findings and innovative ideas, will serve as a resource kit for language planners, policy makers, practitioners and stakeholders. The publication is ground-breaking and has employed a unique way to blend ideas, drawing on national and international perspectives and practices, theorizing the issues generated from practical experiences and research based empirical evidence. Emerging issues in English language teaching and learning have been captured, bringing in scholarly knowledge from established researchers and professionals engaged in pedagogical processes in schools, university campuses and other fields of language learning.

The publication is divided into three sections. The first section provides international perspectives on English as a medium of instruction, action research and teacher improvement and examination reform, connecting them to the situation in Nepal. The second section offers reports on British Council sponsored research studies; while the third covers a wide range of issues and case studies on English language education in many areas of Nepal. The central agenda of these three sections is concern about the quality of English language teaching. As a whole, the volume offers us a wealth of information on understanding the situatedness of teaching English and provides us with multiple perspectives through which to understand the complexities of learning English in Nepal.

This British Council volume will help to demystify the misconceptions that persist in policies and practices. In particular, the 'English-Only' fallacy has proved detrimental to effective delivery of ELT in Nepal. I firmly believe that this collection will provide a stimulus to generate new ideas on ELT and will serve as a tool for strengthening policy making processes and revisiting pedagogical practices. More importantly, the publication will help to address the information gaps we are facing in the country, provide evidence for making English more situated and interlinked with mother tongues/first languages, and open up ways to more effective English language teaching and learning in our education institutions. The discussions generated by the book will, I hope, offer new thoughts and develop insights into sustainable solutions to improving speakers' English language competence, enhancing individuals' capabilities and addressing Nepal's need for development.

I wish this publication every success.

Lava D Awasthi, PhD
Chairperson
Language Commission

FOREWORD

The British Council's mission is to promote knowledge and understanding between the UK and countries around the world. Language is an invaluable tool for helping people build trust and understanding with others, and so the development of English has been fundamental to our mission since our creation in 1934.

When I worked as a volunteer English teacher in Gorkha district in 1991, my students wanted to learn English so they could pass their board exams and have a chance at studying at University in the capital of Kathmandu, or further afield in India, or simply to quiz the tourists trekking through their villages. Higher Education was usually offered in English, and the language of tourism, one of the country's main sources of employment, was English. This demand for English remains strong today. It can play a part in determining an individual's future success in either education or employment, serve as a route to social mobility or as a tool for participation in a global society. Improving English language proficiency is a therefore a stated national priority in Nepal. Policy makers and parents believe that English Medium of Instruction (EMI) is more effective than just one English-as-a-Subject lesson a week, fueling a move from local languages of instruction to EMI.

The British Council advocates for an evidence-based and context specific approach to English language teaching. We believe that children learn best in a language they know and understand. We know that if a teacher's own English language proficiency is weak, they will find it difficult to use English language materials to teach content across the curriculum, or to conduct accurate assessments in English. Our recently published white paper highlights that, as a result, learning all subjects through English may have a subtractive effect on a child's ability to grasp and understand content, or on the development of his or her cognitive skills, thus risking the achievement of inclusive, quality education. If the system is well-resourced and supported, then transitioning to English once the home language and literacy is strong is more likely to yield better results. In a context complicated by linguistic diversity such as in Nepal, however, the choice of language of instruction is never simple, and English is often considered the best option.

Despite the evidence, perceptions and beliefs often prevail, and it is likely that English as a Medium of Instruction will remain a preferred option for the foreseeable future. As a result, teachers need continuous professional development so they can improve their own language proficiency, pedagogical knowledge and skills in English language teaching and language education more broadly. But teachers cannot be successful if the systemic support in the form of appropriate teacher education and development policies, assessment strategies and approaches, and language-supportive curricula do not exist. This publication brings together the voices of academics, researchers and teachers from across the country, the South Asia region and the UK to address all of these aspects. The authors examine, using evidence generated both internationally and in Nepal, what is needed to generate the desired results on the ground.

My thanks go to Dr David Hayes for leading this project, and to all the authors for their significant contributions to this volume. I also thank my colleagues at the British Council Nepal, in particular Jovan Ilic, Rhona Brown and Vaishali Pradhan, who conceptualised this volume of research as part of their ongoing dedication to the development of quality English language teaching and learning across the country. I have no doubt that this volume will stimulate considered debate around the role and position of English within the education system in Nepal, and will enable stakeholders and agents of change to make informed choices, thus making a significant impact on the quality of English language teaching, learning and assessment in Nepal in the years to come.

Alison Barrett MBE
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Key Issues in English Language Teaching and Learning in Nepal

David Hayes

This collection of papers is focused on English language teaching (ELT) in Nepal and provides a timely discussion of important issues which have recently been drawing increasing attention from policy makers, researchers and teachers alike: the efficacy and impact of using English as a medium of instruction (EMI), the impact of terminal examinations on teaching and learning in the classroom, and training for teachers of English to improve their skills to enable them to cope with the myriad challenges they face across the country. The book is divided into three sections. In the first section, action research and teacher improvement, English as a medium of instruction and examinations are considered from an international perspective which then draws lessons from international experience to consider in Nepal. The second section reports on three research studies sponsored by the British Council in the areas of English as an MOI, the links between achievement and resourcing in community (government) schools, and the impact of the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) on teaching and student motivation to learn English. The third section comprises eight case studies which focus on reflective writing in secondary schools, practical facets of teaching and learning with English as an MOI, characteristics of teachers of English, teaching in under-resourced environments and a large-scale in-service teacher training project. What marks all of the contributions to this volume is a concern for the quality of English language education in Nepal and a desire to ensure that the life chances of students in Nepali schools are enhanced by the educational opportunities open to them, of which English is a crucial element.

International perspectives

In the first of the international perspectives Rhona Brown discusses what is probably the most important educational issue in Nepal today, namely English medium instruction. Though it seems difficult to establish just how many community schools in Nepal are making the change to EMI, the numbers are clearly significant and – as other chapters in this volume document – there is a growing feeling that adopting EMI is strongly favoured by parents and is seen as the only way in which community schools can reverse the trend of declining numbers. There is a real fear that community schools may either close or be left for only the children of the lowest socio-economic groups. Those parents who can afford it are turning away from community schools, attracted by EMI which private schools offer and which, in turn, is said to lead to improved examination results for students. Whether the use of EMI is best for children whose first language is not English, particularly at the primary school level, is highly debatable. International research, as Brown clearly shows, concludes that young children

learn best when they are taught in a language which is familiar to them from their environment. Ideally this would be their first language but, in multilingual contexts this is not always possible and a regional or national language may have to be selected. Further, teachers who are able to implement EMI are lacking in many countries. Brown cites Dearden (2014) who recounts the conclusions of one study which found that 83% of reporting countries faced a shortage of qualified teachers, a situation which many of the chapters in this volume confirm is equally true in Nepal. Politics, parental beliefs and perceptions of English as a skill which offers economic benefits seem to take precedence over findings from educational research. However, even the association between English and economic development, both national and personal, is questionable. The research Brown cites leads to the conclusion that English only brings gains when it is associated with high level skills for employment in other areas, e.g. an English-speaking engineer may earn more than an engineer who does not speak English. If English is largely an aspirational language and any link between the language and personal or national prosperity is difficult to establish (Hayes, 2017), the basis for using it as a medium of instruction (MOI) in contexts where children have little exposure to it outside of the classroom is called into question. Brown argues that there is a need for both decision-makers and parents to be better informed about issues surrounding the MOI, especially as research also indicates that the higher learning outcomes in English which parents so desire for their children can be achieved when it is not the MOI but when it is simply a subject and instruction is in the students' first language. As Brown concludes, "whatever approach is taken at policy level needs to be backed up by evidence; planned for across the education system including curriculum, teacher training and assessment; and supported by parents, teachers and children in schools". The coming years and political changes in governance to a federal model provide Nepal with an opportunity to rethink the role of English in the education system with a view to ensuring opportunity for all children regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds.

Another important area which concerns parents, teachers, students and policy makers alike is the examination system, as Prithvi N. Shrestha discusses in Chapter 2. The new Education Act of 2016 provides an opportunity for Nepal, if it proceeds to phase out the SLC as the act states, to develop a new examination system which better meets the needs of selection, certification and accountability that Shrestha identifies. Following a review of educational, political and economic factors in examination reform – the 'environmental scanning' which, to a large degree, determines the direction and shape of reform – Shrestha examines case studies of reform in Hong Kong SAR, Kenya, Singapore and Norway. These diverse case studies all offer lessons for reform in Nepal in the areas of: environmental scanning itself; conduct of stakeholder consultation and needs analysis; processes of examination development; effective piloting and validation; and effective implementation of reforms. Shrestha notes that stakeholder engagement in Nepal has not moved beyond limited consultation with subject experts and teachers to the students, parents, employers and higher education institutions who are also affected by any examination reform. Further, there has been no real analysis of the actual English language needs of the job market or higher education: as it stands the SLC focuses on "reading, writing and grammar tasks that have very little to do with the job market and higher education needs despite the curriculum embracing a communicative approach". With limited research into examination impact in Nepal there is a danger of any new system failing if its implications for

the teaching and learning context are not adequately considered. In this respect, links to the English language curriculum are essential – a mismatch between the curriculum and the examination will have negative washback on methods of teaching as experience tells us that teachers and students will always be focused – understandably so – on the examination. Finally, teacher professional development is required for any new system to ensure that teachers have the 'assessment literacy' (and the English language skills) to implement it as the designers intend. To date this has not happened in Nepal and reforms seem to have confused teachers more than enlightened them. Shrestha thus proposes a framework for examination reform in Nepal to maximize the chances of it bringing about positive change for all those involved. This framework proposes scanning the environment, engaging with key stakeholders, ensuring clear links between the curriculum and the examination, investing in continuous research and evaluation, and offering professional development to teachers. If the framework is followed, the chances of examination reform making a positive difference to the education system will be genuinely enhanced.

Whatever role English plays as a medium of instruction or as a subject and whatever form school leaving examinations take in the future, teachers in schools will continue to need assistance to help them to fulfil their roles in changing circumstances. However, it is also likely that educational administrators will lack the human and material resources to provide sufficient assistance in a timely manner. Self-initiated continuing teacher development is thus likely to remain important in compensating for deficiencies elsewhere in the system. In the third of the international perspectives chapters, Amol Padwad discusses the part that action research (AR) can play in development for teachers in their school contexts noting that at its heart AR recognizes that teachers are responsible for tackling problems and implementing solutions in their own classrooms. Not only that, if AR contributes to the professional development of teachers by increasing their self-awareness and self-confidence, it can also contribute to whole school improvement. Padwad explores the principles on which effective AR is based and relates these to a series of AR projects in Chile, Turkey, India and Nepal. Lessons from the projects indicate that they are all characterized by a "combination of ongoing support, especially conceptual and effective, coming from mentors and peers with greater autonomy for the participants to work in their own individual ways". Teachers clearly need to be supported in the process, not just by mentors, but also through collaborative work with other teachers who best understand the constraints of the teaching-learning environment as well as the opportunities for change. Providing solutions to problems need not be the only goal of AR projects: often the process of *understanding* classroom issues is just as important. Further, as teachers engage in AR it seems that the process often leads to improved teacher-student relationships since classroom issues are often explored *with* students, rather than seeing them simply as objects of study. The potential benefits of AR are, then, many and varied: if teachers are able – individually and collectively – to improve their professional capacity to meet the challenges of their classrooms, this can have a positive impact on their students and, in turn, can be a major contribution to school improvement in the resource-constrained circumstances of Nepal.

Sponsored research studies

In Chapter 4, Min Bahadur Ranabhat, Subodh Babu Chilwat and Richard Thompson provide more details of the state of English medium schooling in their study of its spread across the country, noting that there are contradictions between official policies on Mother Tongue Based Multi Lingual Education (MTB-MLE) and the Per Child Funding (PCF) funding formula which seems to promote EMI as schools use the lure of teaching in English to increase enrolments. This is irrespective of the capacity of teachers to implement EMI, a serious constraint which we have noted before. Ranabhat and his colleagues focused on Chitwan as a sample district as it is centrally located and has a heterogeneous population relatively representative of Nepal's ethnic and language variety. They investigated the situation in ten community schools, half of which used Nepali as the MOI and half of which used English. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held with parents and Resource Persons, while interviews were conducted with teachers, headteachers and the District Education Officer (DEO). The research prompted the DEO to collect statistics on the numbers of EM and non-EM schools in the district as a whole, finding that of the 377 community schools 196 (52%) identified as EM schools. However these were unevenly distributed, being rare in the rural north and predominant in more urban areas. Interestingly, student numbers in community schools continue to decline in spite of the growth of EMI. Though there were strong parental voices in support of EMI, with parents judging schools more positively when they are EM, FGDs with the Resource Persons revealed that this group did not see English-medium as the key to high quality schooling. With their extensive knowledge of conditions in a variety of schools, they identified teacher effectiveness – equated with well-trained teachers using appropriate pedagogy – as central to quality education. However, more and better training for teachers (as well as Resource Persons and headteachers) was identified as a need across the research interviews, with existing provision inadequate. If parental demand for EMI continues, training needs will only intensify and, if not satisfied, the gap between those who can afford 'good' education and those who cannot will increase. As Ranabhat and his colleagues say: "Economic status is determining access to what Nepalis regard as quality education: high standards of teaching and learning with the acquisition of a high standard of English, secured through EM schooling." This chapter provides an extremely important example of what is required in terms of collecting data and investigating a range of stakeholder perceptions so as to provide a solid evidence base for policy making. It deserves to be replicated across a cross-section of other districts in Nepal.

The study in Chapter 5 by Jari Metsämuuronen and Jovan Ilic is equally important as it explores reasons why, in spite of poor resources, some students in community schools are able to achieve as highly as students in institutional – or private – schools. This is important as institutional schools generally take students with higher socio-economic status which is, in turn, related to higher intellectual and academic capital. From the dataset used in the 2012 'National assessment of student achievement for Grade 5', Metsämuuronen and Ilic identified community and institutional schools at the same achievement level for analysis. This yielded a reduced dataset comprising 50% of students and 49% of schools. They then explored difference between the school types in four directions – demographic factors, student factors, teacher factors and school factors – using descriptive and inferential statistics. The analysis revealed many interesting findings. First

of all, the best performing community schools in terms of English achievement are evenly distributed across the country rather than being concentrated in Kathmandu or the main tourist areas. It is also interesting that students in these community schools feel they are treated more fairly and experience slightly fewer instances of bullying than students in institutional schools: both of these factors are likely to contribute to students' motivation to learn. Teachers in community schools were also generally older and more experienced than those in institutional schools. Hiring policies in private schools favour younger – and cheaper – teachers but they were also more likely to be better qualified academically. Interestingly, these younger teachers were also more likely to be more confident in their skills than older teachers in community schools. It seems that experience does not equate with confidence. Turning to what is happening in the classroom, students in community schools work together in groups slightly more than students in institutional schools, while the latter spend more time on creative speech and speaking skills. It may be that students in community schools who work together in groups benefit from the peer learning process: stronger students become more confident as they help their weaker peers, while weaker students benefit from additional instruction which they may be able to comprehend better than the adult instruction provided by the teacher. Turning to areas of concern for community schools, Metsämuuronen and Ilic note the role that parental literacy may have in student achievement. The parental literacy rate is significantly lower in community schools, which leads to lower intellectual and academic capital than that of students in institutional schools. Metsämuuronen and Ilic conclude that "If development is to focus on the 'poorest of the poor' then developing literacy capacity amongst parents of the poorest is arguably a more effective strategy than the focus on access." Further field research and classroom observation is urgently needed to explore the phenomena discussed in this chapter.

Saraswati Dawadi's turns our attention to the impact of the School Leaving Certificate examination in Chapter 6. After providing the background to the high-stakes SLC, Duwadi investigates the perceptions of 120 secondary level English teachers in six districts across the country. Several studies in this collection indicate that teacher-training is an issue that needs to be addressed and Duwadi's respondents reinforce this as 28% of them had received no pre-service training and only in-service while a substantial minority of 17% had received no training whatsoever. A questionnaire explored teachers' perceptions of both the SLC itself and the impact it has had on their instructional practices; and was followed up by interviews and classroom observations. The negative washback effect of the SLC is widely known in Nepal, dominating instruction in Grade 10 such that, as Duwadi found, for many students Grade 10 is largely a test preparation grade. The SLC thus "seems to lead to a series of negative consequences on student motivation, classroom instruction and content selection". This type of washback effect is not unique to Nepal but the consequences remain profound for students who have to spend so much of their time in test preparation rather than in enhancing their English language skills for real world purposes. Recommended teaching methods in the curriculum will always lose out to the demands of an examination if the two contradict each other, understandably so as students' future is dependent on their examination results and teachers are judged by their students' performance. However, Duwadi suggests that other influences may also be at play when it comes to teachers' classroom performance "such as teachers' beliefs, qualifications, gender, training status and experience, and contextual factors such as large

classes, students' low levels of English and parents' and schools' pressure to raise students' scores". It seems that it is a combination of factors which combine with the high-stakes SLC to impact classroom practice. Better teacher-training or smaller classes could indeed help teachers to resist examination pressures; but the greatest impact on classroom teaching is likely to come if the test had more room for creative expression rather than memorizing sample answers. As ever, examination washback is likely to determine the future of classroom teaching in the higher grades and Duwadi's study reinforces the need for the examination reform model advocated by Shrestha in Chapter 2 to be implemented as soon as possible.

Case studies

The first of the case studies, by Ushakiran Wagle, discusses her attempts to adopt a reflective orientation to her higher secondary English writing classes, documenting an example of the kind of Action Research advocated by Amol Padwad. 'Reflection' and 'reflective practice' have become an orthodoxy in educational circles in the last twenty years or so when talking about classroom teaching (Walsh and Mann, 2015) but all too often those talking about reflective practice recommend it for others without demonstrating how they use it in their own classrooms. This is not the case here. Wagle clearly articulates the "'insider account' that provide[s] up-close and detailed views of reflection" called for by Walsh and Mann (2015, p. 352) to counterbalance the lack of data-driven studies they identify in much recent literature on reflective practice (RP). She describes her motivation for adopting RP and the frustrations she encountered as she implemented the process which was primarily designed to improve students' writing. Reflecting on her own experience in the lessons enabled her to see how she needed to guide students in what was initially an unfamiliar way of working. The chapter shows both the ways in which she improved her own practice and also how her students' ability to reflect on their learning improved, linking what was learnt in the classroom with experiences from their own lives while at the same time completing required coursework. Wagle shows the importance of being willing to try new approaches in an environment dominated by traditional, teacher-led practice without guarantees of success and, as she says, to learn "by committing mistakes, which teachers themselves are often reluctant to risk and criticize in their students".

The second of the case studies provides an account of the historical development of teaching English in Nepal since the 19th century. In chapter 8 Eak Prasad Duwadi chronicles the development of the education system in three phases. He shows how education and access to English was at first restricted to the children of the ruling élite before being democratised in the 1950s, with literacy rates rising from 5% in the 1950s to 66% in 2011. Duwadi also discusses a number of important issues which recur in other papers in this volume, overly formal initial teacher-training, the politicization of the teaching force, inadequate resources and a lack of focus on speaking and listening skills in the classroom. These present considerable challenges to the education system but their resolution is vital if improvements in the quality of education are to extend across the country.

The next two chapters focus directly on English medium instruction in community schools. Chapter 9, by Laxmi Prasad Ojha, examines EMI policy and practice in

the Far-Western Region finding that pressure from parents is the main reason behind the change from Nepali to English as the medium of instruction. While this is understandable from the perspective of parents who have seen private school students educated in English performing much better in the SLC than community school students educated in Nepali, Ojha's case study shows that schools are generally insufficiently prepared for the change to EMI with English language proficiency of subject teachers being a major concern. In practice teachers use a mixture of Nepali and English to ensure student understanding which casts doubt on the viability of using English as the medium of instruction. As Ojha notes, EMI is not a panacea for declining standards in community schools nor is it in consonance with government policies which – in theory at least – promote mother-tongue based multilingual education at the elementary level. In similar vein, Chapter 10 by Jeevan Karki discusses EMI in Mt. Everest Region. He notes that government statistics on schools adopting EMI are non-existent which makes policy-making in this area very difficult. As in the Far-Western Region, schools are under pressure to stem enrollment losses arising from parental perceptions of the necessity for their children to receive education through the medium of English if they are to be prosperous in a globalized economy. However, EMI may actually constitute a handicap if students are required to learn in a language they do not understand. Karki's findings reinforce those of Ohja: the introduction of EMI is not well-planned; there is inadequate teacher preparation; teachers' own English language proficiency may be inadequate; and he also notes that EMI has had a negative effect on students' achievement in the national language, Nepali. Further, few schools teach in a local language, using the weekly weightage provided for local languages in the curriculum for additional English language education instead. From these case studies it is clear that there are major challenges in implementing EMI in community schools across the country and that there is insufficient data on schools making the change from Nepali to English. As a first step, the Ministry of Education would do well to conduct research to answer Karki's questions:

- What is the rationale for EMI?
- What is the right age to start EMI?
- What is the role of local languages?
- What is the model of assessment for EMI?
- Which subjects are to be taught in EMI?

Sound research seems a necessary prerequisite for any schools which still wish to consider adopting English as the medium of instruction.

In Chapter 11, Gopal Prasad Bashyal extends the discussion to classroom secondary school English teaching, researching teachers' perceptions of themselves as teachers and the techniques they use in their classes. His case study found that, while teachers articulated views supporting the desirability of using a more student-centred communicative approach to teaching English in questionnaire responses, their actual practice was not consistent with their expressed views. Indeed, classroom observations revealed that teachers spent most instructional time on reading passages with students answering comprehension questions even though the curriculum limits reading to 40%. Further, almost all teachers paraphrased or simplified the texts and translated them into Nepali. The majority also explicitly taught grammar rules. Very little

role play, pair or group work were observed. Teachers justified their observed approaches in focus group discussions as a necessary response to students' low levels of English and lack of English in the immediate environment which would promote learning. As Bashyal observes, teachers themselves are also "in need of continuing, high-quality professional development opportunities" to help them cope with the challenges of their classrooms and any opportunities that they do present to enhance the English language skills of their students.

Ashok Raj Khati continues the focus on teachers in Chapter 12 with a case study centred on five adjoining Village Development Committees in the lower Mt Everest Region. His primary concern is with teacher identity, specifically the way that teachers position themselves in relation to their schools and the surrounding communities, the traditional roles that they embody as transmitters of knowledge as well as more contemporary roles stemming from the association of English with forces for modernization and progress at both local and national levels and economic advancement at a personal level. However, Khati's case study also makes clear that longstanding perceptions of particular ethnic groups in Nepal influence the way that they are treated as teachers, irrespective of their formal qualifications. We must remember then that teacher identities are not just constructed by the self but are, in part, constructed by others within their socio-cultural contexts. Teacher identity in Nepal, as in other contexts, is a complex phenomenon and one which we would do well to study in more depth if we are to understand fully what impacts education in classrooms, schools and the communities in which they are situated.

Laxman Gnawali's chapter brings our attention to factors affecting teachers' ability to implement the English curriculum as expected, focusing on the mismatch between the idealized classroom environment which prospective teachers encounter during their pre-service training and the actual environment as experienced in the majority of community schools. Instead of well-resourced classrooms and environments conducive to learning, many schools have few resources, classroom environments are far from stimulating places to study and students' achievement levels are below grade-level expectations. It is little wonder that some teachers find it difficult to cope with these realities, struggling even to manage the class. When students perform poorly, however, it is not the conditions which come under scrutiny but teachers themselves who are deemed somehow deficient. Arranging communicative activities in a class of 60 students, as reported in this study, is immensely difficult and teachers feel deficient because they are unable to give personal attention to all their students. Conversely, small multi-grade classes of 15 students present different challenges of motivating students who are there only because their parents are too poor to send them to private schools. Conditions have been exacerbated in some areas by the earthquake of 2015, with students still attending classes in makeshift shelters. It is a testament to teachers' professionalism that in most cases they develop strategies to cope with the poor conditions they face, whether this is teaching imaginatively with home-made (or even no) resources, using their personal funds to buy charts and pictures, making use of the local community to provide opportunities for group work outside the classroom or performing dramas without props. As with Khati's study, educational policy-makers could only benefit from more in-depth research into teaching-learning conditions so as to fashion a curriculum which was suited to the realities of schools and classrooms in Nepal rather than the idealized contexts

presented in pre-service teacher training programmes.

The case studies conclude with an analysis in Chapter 14, by Vaishali Pradhan, of a major project to improve English teaching, the National Initiative to Improve Teaching in English (NIITE). This project is run by the British Council in partnership with the National Centre for Educational Development (NCED) and follows on from a series of earlier projects which aimed to improve practice at the classroom level. NIITE was designed to meet the demands of teachers whose schools were shifting to EMI while also strengthening national in-service teacher-training provision. Effective monitoring and evaluation is a key, though often neglected, component of projects of this nature. In the case of the NIITE project, it was built in from the start to ensure sustainability and to maximize impact. An interesting feature of the evaluation was the decision to interview students to gauge their responses to the methods and techniques their teachers had learnt from in-service courses, again something a-typical in a project focused on teachers. Pradhan discusses how the project adapted to a changing context, most notably the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in 2015. NIITE has managed to achieve impact with a comprehensive model of delivery, moving from language development to pedagogical skills and using a blended approach to allow teachers to take more responsibility for their own learning. Self-directed learning is likely to become more necessary in the future as teachers will need to respond to changes resulting from the deliberations of a newly formed language commission. NIITE should have given the nearly 10,000 teachers who have participated in the project a sound foundation in this regard.

Taken as a whole, the chapters in this volume provide numerous insights into policy and practice in English teaching in Nepal. They contribute to a solid foundation for the evidence-based educational policy making that is critical if English language education in Nepal is to make a meaningful contribution to improving the lives of all children in schools across the country and not just act as another means of differentiation between those in higher and lower socio-economic groups – bluntly put, between the rich and the poor.

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About the editor

David Hayes is an Associate Professor at Brock University, Canada, and an independent education consultant. He holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics from the University of Birmingham, UK. His research interests include second language education and peace-building, English language education in primary schools, and social attitudes towards English. He is the author of 'Factors influencing success in teaching English in state primary schools' and editor of 'Innovations in the continuing professional development of English language teachers', both published by the British Council, London (2014). He was also lead researcher on the 2016 British Council/Department for International Development study 'Social attitudes to the English language in Bihar' (British Council, Kolkata). Other recent publications on students' attitudes to English and primary English language teaching have appeared in the *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* (2016, 2017).

English and its Roles in Education: Subject or Medium of Instruction?

English and its Roles in Education: Subject or Medium of Instruction?

Rhona Brown

Introduction

The teaching of English is a feature of policies and practices in education systems around the world. If Graddol's (2006) predictions are correct then we are currently at a global peak in the number of people learning English as a subject: 2 billion learners worldwide. It is hard to find a country which does not include English in schooling in some form; if not as a subject in the state curriculum, then almost certainly available through private schools and other institutions. In Europe, languages in general are given significant space in school curricula and English is by far the dominating foreign language. In secondary education, the percentage of students learning English is more than 90% (Eurydice, 2012). However, globally, a more recent and "rapidly growing phenomenon" (Dearden, 2014) is the teaching of other subjects in English, or English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). There is a distinct pattern to how and where this is happening with Milligan and Tikly (2016) stating that:

> Almost all low- and middle-income, postcolonial countries now use English or another 'global language' as the medium of instruction at the secondary and tertiary level. An increasing number use English language as a medium of instruction in the latter stages of primary schooling and at pre-school levels although it is not the mother tongue for the majority of learners (p. 277).

There is concern, though, about the lack of research as to how, why and when EMI is introduced and the implications it has for quality teaching and learning (Dearden, 2014). For example, training and retaining a professional workforce of teachers with the knowledge and skills required to meet a country's education goals is already a huge challenge. In the comparatively well-resourced schools of Europe, around 25 per cent of all school principals report difficulties in filling teaching vacancies for language teachers, including English language teachers (Eurydice, 2012). When looking at the capacity of teachers to deliver in EMI, which is largely a developing country phenomenon, 83 per cent of countries in one study responded that there was a shortage of qualified teachers (Dearden, 2014).

Governments worldwide are making crucial education policy decisions based on the evidence that improvements in learning outcomes and increases in cognitive skills are directly and powerfully linked to increased economic growth (e.g.

Hanushek & Wößmann, 2007). For example, Nepal's School Sector Development Plan (2016 – 2023) relates the aim "to ensure equitable access to quality education for all", to the country's vision of graduating from the status of a least developed country by 2022, to a middle income country by 2030 (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016). It would seem then that the shift to EMI should also be supported by robust evidence to demonstrate that the same gains could be achieved when the teaching and learning which constitute this quality education occur in English. However, government policy and practice for language in education is not immune to other pressures from society at large and does not always prioritize research evidence as the foundation for decision-making and policy implementation.

In this complex and contested area, this chapter aims to break down some of the arguments around English and its roles in education. Bunce, Phillipson and Rapatahana (2016) point out the dangers of "an uncritical acceptance of English" and Phillipson (2013) likens the largely unchallenged spread of English to the pervasive wave of corporate globalization and neoliberalism with all their accompanying threats. Therefore, the chapter will start by investigating whether English should be included in formal education curricula in developing countries or not. Then it will explore, if English has a justified role in education systems in developing countries, whether it is as a subject or as the medium of instruction. Either way, the role should be carefully thought through with clear, logical justifications for when, how and why it is used. International evidence on improving learning outcomes in developing countries will help frame questions around the place of EMI. Finally, the chapter will examine the situation in Nepal to draw together practical examples of a number of the issues discussed, in particular the challenges of closing the policy-practice implementation gap.

Should English be included in formal education in developing countries?

The spread of the English language and of English language teaching have been well documented (e.g. Crystal 2012; Graddol 1997, 2006; Jenkins, 2007; Kachru, 1990, 2006) but there has also been criticism that English has been presumed to carry with it benefits and status that are not backed up by evidence especially when it "is equated with modernity, progress and consumerism, whereas other languages are not" (Bunce et al, 2016, p.3). This section will investigate some of the main arguments presented for the benefits of learning English and of its inclusion in school curricula.

One key reason often given for the importance of English as a school subject is that it is a key skill for students to develop in order to access further education, training and employment. In terms of employability and the labour market in South Asia, English, among other skills, has been identified as lacking (Erling, 2014). South Asia has a very young population with around 40 per cent under 20 years old (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2013) but youth unemployment, and underemployment, is high. This ranges from around 20 per cent graduate unemployment in Nepal to 65 per cent in Afghanistan (ibid), though the situation in Afghanistan is, of course, exacerbated by continuing conflict. In this climate, some sectors, and in particular multinational corporations, offer a high return on investment for English skills (Euromonitor, 2012). The services sector, including call centres and other services of business process outsourcing (BPO) is growing.

India's exports in Information Technology BPO grew from a value of $4 billion in 2000 to $48 billion in 2009 (Shepherd and Pasadilla, 2012) and in this area in particular English is especially desirable. However, these links to sector-specific needs for English seem somewhat overstated when the bigger picture is considered. It is certainly true that in Bihar, for example, there is a need for English in IT and BPO; however, this sector is small compared with the 75% of the population who are primarily involved in agriculture for which the English demands are very low (Hayes, 2017). Overall, it seems that the sectors in Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICs) which need English, though growing, are still relatively small and require high levels of other skills in addition to English compared to the much larger informal sectors.

Attempts have been made to define the key skills required for economic growth in LMICs and the place of English. According to the World Bank (Dundar, Millot, Savchenko, Aturupane and Piyasiri, 2014), in a study on skills for economic growth and competitiveness in Sri Lanka, there are three classes of skills: cognitive, technical and non-cognitive ('soft' skills).   English is classified as a technical skill here, alongside computer use. Sri Lanka's 'Skills Toward Employment and Productivity' (STEP) survey, showed English language as third in the overall ranking of skills. Job-specific technical skills came first, followed by Sinhala/Tamil. In third position, English proficiency ranked higher than leadership, numeracy, problem-solving, team working and several other 'soft skills'. In terms of the effect on wage premiums, the position of English is not as high, coming in fourth position after technology, mechanics and computer use. However, it still delivers a significantly higher return than manual skills. There was found to be a serious mismatch in supply and demand with 80 per cent of employers expecting high-skilled workers to have strong English skills when only around 20 per cent of Sri Lankans are fluent in English (Dundar et al., 2014). This indicates that a language gap exists and that there is still a need for English language learning in schools to prepare students for the workforce. Once again though, the benefits of English are more for the better educated and in more highly skilled jobs, not in the informal sector.

With youth unemployment so high in South Asia, an increasing number of young workers are seeking employment in foreign countries. Remittances from Bangladeshi migrant workers exceed $10 billion annually which is 12% of GDP (Erling, 2014). However, the majority of these workers have low levels of education and skills which results in low wages, and puts them in poor working conditions and vulnerable positions. Similarly, in Nepal, which has a significantly higher unemployment rate than Bangladesh, remittances make up an enormous 29% of GDP and reach 56% of households (Helvetas, ND). In Bangladesh, it has been suggested, though, that training in vocational skills, including English, would boost the remittance earnings by a further $20 billion (Haque, 2010 in Erling 2014). It may be that some other countries receiving high numbers of migrant workers will follow the example of Malaysia and make basic proficiency in English a requirement for all foreign employees. This requirement was introduced in 2003 just as Bangladesh signed an agreement to send 200,000 workers to Malaysia (Graddol, 2006). Though English alone would be unlikely to secure more highly paid work, it may go some way to increasing opportunities and reducing vulnerability when working abroad as workers would be better equipped to communicate with authorities and employers and better able to access information in an international language.

Finally, English is increasingly linked with the language of higher education.   In the last 20 years, the internationalisation of higher education has been shaped by high level regional agreements and programmes to promote convergence of degree structures and increased mobility of students and staff (Kirkpatrick, 2017). For example, around 3 million students have participated in courses outside their home-country university through the Erasmus scheme (ibid). This pattern is now being replicated in other regions of the world, including Asia, and one key facilitator in this process has been the increase of EMI courses in universities. Once again, there are opponents of this move, among them for example, Phillipson (2006, p. 68) citing "the risk of being anglicized in one's mental structures"; but, regardless, "the speed at which universities are internationalising and English is being used as the academic lingua franca is accelerating" (Dearden, 2014, p.29) Therefore schools, parents and governments who want to prepare students for further studies will be likely to prioritise English at secondary school, or sooner.

The arguments above go some way to justifying the inclusion in formal education of English as a subject. There are certainly reasons why, for some children, and for some sectors of the labour market, English is an important skill to develop. However, the return on investment of English in isolation and of English skills for all children, should not be overestimated. Hayes (2017) reports on several fallacies of English language teaching in Asia, claiming that rather than English being linked to national or individual prosperity or economic gain, its role is largely aspirational and political. Hayes (2017) demonstrates that for each piece of evidence indicating the need for English and returns on English in a globalised economy, there is an equal number of counter claims. He cites Arcand and Grin (2013, in Hayes, 2017) whose analyses showed that there was no association between competence in English and GDP per capita; and The Economist's 2011 (in Hayes, 2017) finding that when there is a correlation between English skills and economic development, it is largely in small wealthy countries such as Sweden, or export dependent countries such as Singapore.

Likewise, English should not be seen in isolation when attributing value to skills for employability.   Though Erling (2014, p18) states that English language skills are rewarded in the labour market, she points out that, "returns are heterogeneous and [...] accrue along with other socio-economic variables". Furthermore, it is difficult to separate returns for English and for any other language skills (Erling, 2015), or indeed for quality education in general (Erling, 2014). Therefore, English is one of many in a package of skills for employability and "individuals need a multiplicity of skills to achieve diverse life goals" (OECD, 2015, p. 22). Some of the other 'soft' skills required, such as critical thinking, problem solving and creativity are arguably best developed and fostered in the students' most familiar language which also has implications for language of instruction.

The majority of the arguments discussed above have focused on the links between skills development in education and economic growth for individuals and countries. However, considering the wider context, education should not just be seen in terms of employability and economic development. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) clearly show that sustainable development requires a much broader approach and the role of English is limited in many of these areas. For example, it is hard to imagine that quality English language teaching and learning would directly lead to reduction in fertility rates, improved

disaster preparedness or increased farm outputs[1]. These are all key areas for an LMIC's development, and all areas where local languages would be more likely to assume the most important role in conveying key SDG messages and working with communities towards the achievement of the goals.

To sum up, then, it seems that English remains one of the package of skills that young people in LMICs can draw on as they leave school to pursue further education, training and employment. There is some evidence to suggest that English can offer a high return on investment especially in more highly skilled work in the specific and small sectors mentioned, but there is much less evidence to support the benefits it brings to people working in low-skilled work in the much larger informal sectors. This may be why English continues to be such a political and aspirational language rather than one that the majority of students in LMICs have an actual, immediate need for.

Should English be a subject or a medium of instruction?

The preceding section of this chapter laid out some of the justifications for including English in school curricula in order to support students, where relevant, to develop skills which will then help them to access future opportunities. However, the section also highlighted that the benefits of English should not be overestimated and priority needs to be given to the development of a whole package of skills, with English no more important than other cognitive, non-cognitive and technical skills. The discussions regarding when English should be introduced to the curriculum is beyond the scope of this article but it is worth noting that there is a global trend to introduce it in the earlier grades of primary school. In Europe, this trend is true of all foreign languages (Eurydice, 2012) but in Asia, despite warnings to the contrary, many governments are implementing policies prioritizing English as the first foreign language, and increasingly at primary level (Hayes, 2017). There are a number of major concerns around the early introduction of English as a subject, in terms of capacity and resources and conflicting priorities with essential literacy and numeracy skills (Hayes, 2017). However, the focus of this section is on a different, though associated, language trend: the introduction of English as a Medium of Instruction. The issues around this subject are very complex, involving politics, social aspirations, rights and theories of learning. However, a key thread that runs through the arguments here is the dangerous misconception that, if English is good, then more English is better. This misplaced assumption which is also influencing the early introduction of English as a subject, is predicated on the belief that if learning English is good and useful, therefore learning everything in English is the best way to improve students' ability in the language.

One of the major flaws in the assumption is that the language itself is at the centre of the arguments, rather than the learners' or teachers' capacity in that language. Yet, the 2016 Global Education Monitoring Report notes, alarmingly, that "About 40 percent of people around the world are not taught in a language they speak or understand" (UNESCO, 2016a, p. 14). This might be because a child speaks a local language at home but is taught in a national language at primary school,

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[1] See: http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/

for example Kihaya and Kiswahili in Tanzania. Alternatively, the schools might use a global language as a language of instruction, often a 'legacy' language from a former colonizing power such as French, Spanish or, first and foremost, English, or one regarded as promoting economic growth (Milligan & Tikly, 2016). A child in this situation may be expected to navigate three languages, for example in Nepal, Tamang as a local language at home, Nepali as the official language and English if in an EMI school. In the next section I will explore some of the reasons that governments and schools opt for English Medium Instruction and the implications of this choice for teaching and learning.

■ **Political factors in selecting EMI**

The first set of reasons for selecting EMI can be categorized as 'top-down' political reasons. As mentioned previously, one of the main reasons that English is prioritized in education is because of the belief that "widespread proficiency in English is a key indicator for expected economic development" (Milligan and Tikly, 2016, p.277). One additional aspect to this is that of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). It has been shown that FDI from countries such as the USA and UK tends to be higher in countries where English is the lingua franca. A useful comparison shows FDI from English speaking countries to Pakistan at 35% compared to Cameroon at only 2%. The former has English as an official language and, in the latter, French is dominant over English (Euromonitor, 2012). Though a number of other factors are inevitably at play, these figures indicate the kind of messages that governments are receiving when tackling decisions around education and economic development.

There are other factors influencing governments' decisions on languages in the classroom apart from goals of economic growth. In countries with multiple languages, the identification of languages in education and as official and national languages is overtly political. "Governments have cited goals such as the reduction of ethnic tensions and national unity as reasons to use foreign languages in education" (Bender, Dutcher, Klaus, Shore and Tesar, 2005, p.3). In the case of Sri Lanka, for example, the roots of the civil war can be traced back to the "Sinhala only" act of 1956 which marked the beginning of "acute Sinahalese-Tamil animosity" (Brown & Ganguly, 2003, p. 112). Sri Lanka's current tri-lingual approach of Sinhala, Tamil and English as a bridging language is a testimony, at least at policy level, to the stark lessons learned. In Nigeria, it has been said that the choice of English as the official language is the only way to unify the three major regions which were thrust together to form the 'artificial' nation of Nigeria, and which have within them, over 500 ethnic groups and languages. The use of English as the official language therefore prevents the conflict which would inevitably arise if one of the dominant 'local' languages was given this status (Danladi, 2013). In Tanzania, a country with 126 local languages, teachers are specifically posted to different areas of the country to mix up the ethnic groups and foster tolerance and peaceful co-existence. This approach has been widely regarded as beneficial in nation-building as Tanzanians were, "spared the psychological trauma that was to be the fate of many of their similarly colonized brethren" (Goke-Pariola, 1993, p.38). It does, however, mean that teachers often do not share the same mother tongue as their students and so this impacts on decisions around language of instruction. These examples demonstrate the complexities and sensitivities of implementing language policies and illustrate that, in some countries, the need for language as a tool for unity and social cohesion may at times seem to

outweigh educational factors from a learning-outcomes perspective. However, although some countries have opted for a 'neutral' language to ease social and ethnic tensions, it is important to recognize that English is far from neutral and introducing an outside language can marginalize minorities even more: "Language, ethnicity and poverty can interact to produce an extremely high risk of being left far behind. Students from poor households who speak a minority language at home are among the lowest performers" (UNESCO, 2016b, p.2). Therefore, language of instruction, as well as being a matter of education policy and practice, is also related to equity, inclusion and social justice.

An alternative, more equitable approach to language policy taken by some countries has been to use several or all languages, rather than selecting a single national language to avoid conflict. For example, the Government of Eritrea opted to provide education in all of its languages when it became independent, one reason being to avoid internal disunity. (Bender et al., 2005). Similarly, as Nepal moves towards a federalised state under the new 2015 constitution, it has been suggested that all 123 of Nepal's languages will be recognized as national languages and decisions on languages of instruction will be made at state level to meet local needs. English is recognized as one of these 123 languages, though it is not indigenous to Nepal.

■ Parents' beliefs and demands for EMI

As well as these top down influences on language in education, pressure is also exerted from the bottom up, especially from parents. Parents receive many of the same messages and impressions of English as the 'magic bullet' for individual prosperity as well as wider economic development. English and other dominant world languages are seen as the "language of progress" (Bender at al., 2005, p. 4) compared to local languages which can be seen as those "of the poor and the oppressed" (ibid, p. 4). In South Asia, with high migration and the growth of sectors such as tourism and IT, for many parents the benefits of education are equated with the acquisition of English (Seel, Yadava and Kadel, 2015). In-keeping with the false assumption of 'English is good, so more English is better', parents are demanding EMI in their local schools, even at primary level. Seel et al. (2015, p. 30) outline a number of valid justifications for this socio-cultural change in the case of Nepal:

> It is understandable that those that have been marginalised in the past and now seek greater inclusion would want to gain access to languages that have clearly brought influence and opportunity to others and view with suspicion approaches that appear to hold back or delay access to these languages. It is also understandable that those who have recently escaped dire poverty, or in some cases lost their traditional social standing, might imitate the behaviour of elite groups that have long-since sent their children to prestigious English medium schools. Young people, also, might opt for English […] to associate themselves with 'modernity' and distance themselves from what they have come to view as 'backwards' traditions of their own family or community.

This demand for greater access to English and in particular to EMI is shown not only through the increase in the number of parents moving their children to EMI private schools, but also in the growing number of government schools which

have converted to EMI in response to their falling rolls and the demand in Nepal. There is no doubt that the interests and needs of these parents and students need to be heard. However, what is urgently required is for the right message to reach them about the best way to improve English language skills and, more importantly, to improve overall learning outcomes across the curriculum. This message must address the misconception that the best way to improve levels of English competence is to use English as the language of instruction rather than to teach it as a foreign language (Brock-Utne 2010; Qorro 2009). In short, the message needs to be that good teaching of English as a subject is most likely to increase learning of English; learning in a familiar language is the best way to develop knowledge and skills in other subjects; and a solid foundation in mother tongue will support learning of and in other languages.

■ Teaching and learning factors related to EMI

The most concrete reasons against EMI, especially in the early stages of education, are well documented and related to basic facts about how students learn and how teachers teach. Trudell's recent literature review (2016) of language of instruction presents us with this very clear summary of the evidence:

> The research indicates that using the mother tongue in the classroom enhances classroom participation, decreases attrition, and increases the likelihood of family and community engagement in the child's learning. Research also shows that using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction enhances the child's cognitive learning processes, and that learner-centred learning has to be carried out in a language the child speaks in order to be effective. (Trudell, 2016, p. vii)

Trudell's summary is comprehensive in that it covers multiple factors related to effective learning at individual student level (cognitive processes), in the classroom context (attendance, participation and pedagogy) and wider community levels (essential support for learning outside the classroom). It is worth noting that the evidence feeding into this summary comes from studies of what works, i.e. mother tongue, and what does not work, i.e. when the language of instruction is not the mother tongue such as English. When looking at the impact of using a language other than the mother tongue, it is hard to imagine how such a system could be endorsed in policy or practice as it is likely to result in increased student drop out and a decrease in out of school support by parents and carers, for example with homework. A medium of instruction not understood by the learner impedes learning and holds them back in terms of cognitive development. Attempts to implement learner-centred approaches are also likely to fail when teaching in an unfamiliar language. Furthermore, research shows that girls, especially those from rural and non-privileged backgrounds, are particularly disadvantaged by non-mother tongue education (Benson, 2005). Considering it is already a challenge for many girls in LMICs to enrol in school, the finding that girls who learn in a familiar language are more likely to stay in school and perform better on achievement tests (Benson, 2005) should serve as a powerful incentive for mother tongue or familiar languages in education.

The argument seems clear-cut, so why is the medium of instruction in schools such a contested issue and why has the research evidence on the importance of mother tongue not been enough to convince governments and parents? At this point

it is useful to think back to some of the contexts described earlier; for example, Nepal with 123 languages or mother tongues, or Tanzania with 126 languages and a teacher deployment policy which mixes ethnic groups. In reality, the practical challenges of teaching the school curriculum in a multiplicity of mother tongues are enormous. Two practical examples from Trudell's (2016) review illustrate the issues. First, the mother tongue needs to have reached a certain level of written development with a writing system which allows it to be effectively taught. Second, there needs to be an accompanying pedagogy, especially in reading to build a strong foundation in literacy. This shows, then, that a policy level move to mother tongue based education should set in motion a number of hugely complex steps involving, among others, language research and development, capacity building in expertise in mother tongue linguistics and pedagogy, curriculum reform and teacher education initiatives. To look at just one challenge from this list, research in Africa demonstrates that pre-service training for primary teachers left them poorly prepared to teach basic reading skills in the mother tongue or familiar languages (Akyeampong, Lussier, Pryor and Westbrook, 2012). An additional example from Seel et al. (2015) points to the significant challenge of developing and making available a range of resources, not only text books, in multiple languages. These challenges are further exacerbated by the fact that education policies are often not backed up by classroom practice on the ground. For example, in many Eastern and Southern African countries, education policies promote the use of local languages but in the classrooms, international languages are commonly used (Trudell, 2016).

In these complex contexts, then, the binary approach of 'this language is for school' and 'that language is for home', is not feasible; but nor is the idea that all students can be taught all subjects at all levels in their mother tongue. The ideal in these linguistically diverse contexts is for "children to continue to develop competence in L1 (mother tongue) and self-confidence as learners, while also learning an additional language or languages" (Ball, 2011, p.8). This widely recommended approach is known as mother tongue based bi- or multi-lingual education (MTB-MLE). It not only includes the languages to be taught and the language of instruction (LoI) but also the sequencing of language learning and shifts in LoI, the need for specific MTB-MLE pedagogy and appropriate curriculum and materials (Seel et al. 2015).

Research not only confirms that children learn best in their mother tongue, but also that, if the language of instruction is to change at a later point, then this mother tongue foundation is the best "prelude to and complement of bilingual and multilingual education" (Ball, 2011, p. 6). In the face of parental demands for EMI, Ball's evidence is reassuring:

> research increasingly shows that children's ability to learn a second or additional languages (e.g., a lingua franca and an international language) does not suffer when their mother tongue is the primary language of instruction throughout primary school. Fluency and literacy in the mother tongue lay a cognitive and linguistic foundation for learning additional languages. (Ball, 2011, p. 6).

Two key theories which support this are the *'threshold level hypothesis'* (Skutnabb-Tangas and Toukomaa, 1976 in Ball, 2011) and the *'interdependence hypothesis'*

(Cummins, 1984, in Ball, 2011). The former simply states that children must first achieve a certain level or threshold of competence in their mother tongue before they can successfully learn an additional language, without losing competence in one or both languages. If this level is not reached then weaker school performance overall and low competence in both languages can be expected (referred to as 'semilingualism'). Cummins's 1984 interdependence hypothesis built on this notion and introduced the concept of *'cognitive academic language proficiency' (CALP)*. When CALP has been achieved, the learner can use the target language as a 'cognitive tool', not merely for communicating in everyday contexts, but in abstract, decontextualized ways. This has serious implications in issues of EMI, as, according to Cummins's theory, a learner would only be able to access the curriculum in English and learn subject content successfully if he or she had first achieved CALP in English. If this level of language proficiency had not been achieved then both academic learning and English language learning would be negatively affected (Ball, 2011). It has been suggested that it takes 5 to 7 years for children to develop CALP in an additional language and so the theory also has important implications for teaching and learning in EMI contexts. If Cummins's theory holds true then it would take children 5–7 years of learning English as a subject, and learning it well, before they would be able to use English as a 'cognitive tool' to understand subjects across the curriculum.

A 2007 review of medium of instruction in education in Ethiopia presents a good example of some strong practical evidence which backs up these theories (Heugh, Benson, Bogale and Yohannes, 2007). The country context involved a number of the issues and challenges already outlined here, such as multiple local languages promoted in policy as languages in education, a national language taught as a subject, and varying approaches to implementation of EMI according to public pressure and decision-making at school and regional level.

> classroom observation and assessment data demonstrate that English [Medium Of Instruction] MOI does not necessarily result in better English learning; in fact, those regions with stronger mother tongue schooling have higher student achievement levels at Grade 8 in all subjects, including English. Students who learn in their mother tongue can interact with the teacher, with each other and with the curricular content in ways that promote effective and efficient learning. (Heugh et al. 2007, p. 6)

This is the kind of evidence that needs to be presented to parents, schools and other local and national level decision-makers to support the implementation of approaches which best support learning. Since achievement in English is so often held up as a key learning outcome, its inclusion here is particularly important; higher English learning outcomes have been achieved when it was not the MOI.

Of equal importance to a focus on learning processes in issues of language of instruction, is a focus on teaching. Not only do many students in EMI schools struggle to achieve learning outcomes and express their ideas in English, many teachers are not sufficiently competent to deliver subject content in English (Roy-Campbell & Qorro, 1997). Successful EMI requires teachers who, first of all, are proficient in English; second, who are confident in their subject matter content knowledge and third, who have the pedagogical content knowledge and skills to teach their subject effectively to students for whom English is not their first

language. However, as Dearden (2014) clearly outlines below, in many LMICs there are severe constraints when it comes to recruiting and retaining teachers:

> In many countries the educational infrastructure does not support quality EMI provision: there is a shortage of linguistically qualified teachers; there are no stated expectations of English language proficiency; there appear to be few organisational or pedagogical guidelines which might lead to effective EMI teaching and learning; there is little or no EMI content in initial teacher education (teacher preparation) programmes and continuing professional development (in-service) courses (Dearden, 2014, p.2)

If EMI is to be introduced in a particular context, then this clearly flags up the need for the introduction to be carefully planned in terms of teacher capacity. Enhancing teacher capacity for EMI requires training in effective pedagogy. A number of pedagogical approaches have been developed for delivering subject content integrated with the target language. For example, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), widely used in Europe, and more recently, Language-supportive Pedagogy (LSP), used in Sub-Saharan Africa, have both laid out the scaffolded approach required for teachers to effectively support learners. However the cognitive and pedagogical demands placed on teachers to use these approaches are high, as well as there being heavy resource requirements.

In developing countries, where linguistically diverse and resource constrained circumstances occur, it is challenging to plan for and deliver teacher education and on-going support to meet the needs of teachers and students whatever the MOI. We should remind ourselves that challenges are not confined to English but also persist in MTB-MLE, which requires all teachers, not only language teachers, to have a basic understanding of language development as well as the skills to support language and content learning for different age groups, often when teaching children in their mother tongue for the first time (Seel et al., 2015).

■ Focus on Nepal

To close, this section will look at experience in Nepal to illustrate several of the issues which have been discussed earlier in this chapter. I do not aim to present a complete analysis of languages in education in Nepal but rather to highlight a few of the many tensions at play in a linguistically diverse context with a linguistically and politically complex history.

Nepal has made good progress in recent years towards achieving the targets set as part of the global Education for All agenda. In particular there have been significant improvements in early childhood care and education, ensuring free, compulsory primary education, and gender parity in education (UNESCO, 2015). Two other strongly interlinked SDG targets, however, have presented a significant challenge, viz.:

> Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills (UNESCO, 2015, p. 45)

> Ensuring the rights of indigenous people and linguistic minorities to quality basic and primary education through their mother tongue (UNESCO, 2015, p. 53)

The Ministry of Education's School Sector Development Plan 2016 – 2023 (SSDP) demonstrates, at the policy level, the government's priorities and commitment to address these issues. In particular, the SSDP has laid out Nepal's approach to languages in education as mother tongue based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) (for Nepal this means mother tongue, Nepali and English), with a strong link to notions of quality, equity and inclusion. A key part of the quality focus in the SSDP, the National Early Grade Reading programme, supported by several donor funded Early Grade Reading projects, is already being implemented in several of the major languages across many districts. The SSDP also encourages EMI schools to return to providing English as a subject only (Ministry of Education, 2016). It remains to be seen how this will be borne out as Nepal moves into a federalised structure in 2017 with more policy level decision-making happening at local government level.

In contrast to espoused policy, in recent years at the district level, and not as part of the previous School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) or current SSDP, schools have been able to request a change to EMI, and this has been granted by the District Education Office, in conjunction with the Department of Education. Changes appear to have been made on an ad hoc basis with no specific criteria or capacity requirements set. Textbooks are available in English for schools who take this path and the final school leaving certificate can also be taken in English as well as Nepali. Seel et al.'s (2015) comprehensive study describes the current situation as follows:

> The transition of many schools to English [Medium of Instruction] MoI seems to have been largely as a response to parent's demands and the need to keep enrolment numbers high. The lack of books and materials, or even of teachers who speak English, does not seem to have cautioned schools away from embarking on the change. In reality, most 'English medium' schools would seem to be using Nepali quite extensively alongside English, but without the benefits of a planned approach to bilingual teaching. Training and resourcing for English falls vastly short of what is required, even to achieve effective teaching of English as a subject. (2015, p xii):

A number of other studies highlight the significant policy-practice implementation gap (Phyak 2014; UNESCO, 2011) but Phyak (2014) also points out that, though mother tongue educational policies are well-intentioned and guided by goals recognising diversity and decreasing marginalisation, there are good reasons why they face resistance in implementation. He explains:

> As cultural and linguistic capital of linguistic minorities are not recognised in the wider educational market, indigenous communities are found ambivalent with regard to the relevance of their own languages in school. (Phyak, 2014, p. 127)

To further elucidate this situation, we should recognise that the current language in education policy stands in contrast to the period from 1950 to 2006 when a

'one language, one nation' policy was enforced as Nepal's multilingual diversity was regarded as a threat to national unity (Phyak, 2014). During this era, indigenous minority languages were not allowed to be used in schools, and were even prohibited in the playground. However, towards the end of this period, Nepal started opening up more to foreign donors and multinational companies. At the time there was also a dramatic expansion of the information communication technology sector. These factors combined meant that English was perceived as the most important language (Phyak, 2014). The Ministry of Education recognised this importance and allowed private schools to open as English medium, at the same time as local languages were banned. This then created a context where children speaking local languages were disadvantaged and even excluded from school compared to their native Nepali speaking peers while at the same time, there was a growing elite of those educated in EMI schools.

An additional reason for community schools' motivation to move to EMI, again in contradiction with the stance taken in the SSDP, has been pointed out by Phyak (2011):

> Educational language plans especially the MTB-MLE seems to contradict with the Per Child Funding (PCF) policy in practice. To increase the number of students to receive more funds as per the PCF policy, the community managed schools are implementing English medium of instruction. But they are not worried about the availability of competent teachers and resources to teach all subjects in English. (Phyak, 2011, p.41)

However, overall, it is difficult to analyse the trends in shifts in MoI as the current Education Management Information System (EMIS) does not record data on EMI and non-EMI schools. The number of schools requesting to change, being approved to change and the rise and fall in roll for EMI and non-EMI schools seem to be recorded at local level but not reported upwards in the system. Furthermore, data is not disaggregated by medium of instruction in Nepal's National Assessment of Student Achievement (NASA).

Insight into the trends can be gained from other sources, however. Issues around languages in education are regularly reported in the national media in Nepal. One example here includes a quote from the principal of a government school which has recently made the shift to EMI.

> It is true that community schools were gradually losing grounds to private schools. It was an imminent threat and we would have to shut the schools if we had not made improvements to accommodate the aspirations of the students and their parents. […] We figured out the factors because of which we were losing students to private schools. Of these, English as a medium of instruction was the most crucial factor that parents considered while shifting their wards to private schools from government schools. We changed this. (Tiwari, 2017)

The article claims that national School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination results indicate that this school has made the shift to EMI successfully, with "excellent results". This anecdotal evidence needs to be backed up by hard figures, especially while English as a subject continues to be one of the weakest in average score on

the SLC. The 2014 SLC results showed that, based on average scores across the country, English was the second weakest subject; only science had a lower average score. The average score for English was 33 per cent compared with 47 per cent for Nepali (Government of Nepal, 2007). However, the 33 per cent average includes a range from 25.5 per cent in mountain and hill regions to 51.5 percent in the Kathmandu Valley. It is not known how many of these students are from EMI or non-EMI schools but it would seem clear that students from regions at the low end of the SLC scale, who are taught in Nepali, would be further disadvantaged by a shift to EMI, and those already being taught in EMI have been done a disservice as it would show that more English, does not necessarily equal better English.

Evidence supporting MTB-MLE may increase as the Early Grade Reading programmes and other MTB-MLE programmes take hold over the period of the SSDP. A small scale Multi-lingual education (MLE) project in 2007, with a follow-up study in 2011, gives some evidence of the direction of travel (UNESCO, 2011). In the seven project schools, across 6 districts, each with a different mother tongue, which were involved in the initial MLE intervention, there were a number of very positive outcomes. The follow-up study found that, overall, there was a positive learning environment in the schools and that pupils were happy to go to school and could understand their lessons. This correlated with a decrease in drop-out. Finally, both parents and teachers supported the approach in the schools, though parents also stated a preference to start teaching English as a subject from the beginning of primary school (UNESCO, 2011). However, assessments were still only in Nepali so the project was not able to produce evidence of strengthened mother tongue learning outcomes. This is perhaps another symptom of the fragmented approach to implementing MTB-MLE and another example of the policy-practice gap. Another finding highlighted the challenge of implementing MTB-MLE in linguistically heterogeneous communities and the risks associated with segregating pupils with different mother tongues (MTs) in the same school (UNESCO, 2011). An associated challenge is finding enough teachers with the capacity to deliver effectively in the different MTs as well as in Nepali, and later possibly English. Finally, since the project sat outside the national system there was a lack of sustainability and integration. As the SSDP, NEGRP and other national quality programmes are implemented sustainability and integration should become less of a problem, but, as previously mentioned, with new federalist structures soon to be put in place the situation may change again.

Though this section has only touched upon some of the challenges and opportunities for quality MTB-MLE in Nepal, it has highlighted several of the key components that need to be in place in order for the policy-practice gap in languages in education to be reduced. The following recommendations, drawn from the examples discussed, are in line with Seel et al.'s (2015) conclusions in their *Medium of Instruction and Languages for Education (MILE): Ways Forward for Education Policy, Planning and Practice in Nepal.* The first six of the nine recommendations in Seel et al. (2015) are related to the development of a comprehensive MILE policy which is undoubtedly necessary. However, the points below will focus more on addressing aspects of implementation.

Firstly, key stakeholders need to be on board with the policy change. In this case, parents are a powerful lobbying force and without clear evidence that MTB-MLE can work for their children, that their MT has significant value as a fundamental

tool for learning and that English being taught well as a subject can meet their aspirations for their children, it is unlikely that the trend towards more EMI schools will stop. Studies such as Heugh et al.'s (2017) in Ethiopia show that with evidence of improved learning outcomes across the curriculum, including in English as a subject, MTB-MLE can be strongly advocated for by parents.

Secondly, teacher capacity and quality needs to be assured. This capacity must be in terms of (a) their proficiency in the LoI, regardless of whether it is MT, Nepali or English; (b) their knowledge and pedagogical skills in teaching their subject, be it mother tongue literacy in early years or science in Nepali or English at secondary level; and (c) their pedagogy for teaching in multi-lingual contexts. This places high demands on teachers and therefore requires additional capacity building in teacher education and on-going support at national and state levels.

Combining these first two points, the ad hoc approach to changing the MoI in a school needs to be addressed. If a school is to change to EMI, for example, at upper secondary level, there should be a quality threshold to be met to ensure that the school has the capacity to deliver the curriculum effectively in English. Factors such as per child funding, should not be a justification for a shift in MoI. Overall, however, an essential step will be to strengthen the reporting and evidence around languages in education; both to support evidence-based decision-making and as an advocacy tool to support new policy on MTB-MLE.

Conclusion

This chapter started by investigating whether English should be included in formal education curricula in developing countries or not, and, if so, as a subject or as an MoI. Evidence shows that in terms of skills for employability and, in particular, in terms of aspirations towards employment that requires these skills, English still has an important role to play in school curricula. The complexities and challenges involved in languages in education, in Nepal as elsewhere in Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa, show that there is not a simple answer to the second part of the question. MoI is a politically sensitive issue in linguistically diverse contexts and decisions need to be made based on national priorities around stability and social cohesion; inclusion, rights and equity; and improving learning outcomes. What is clear, however, is that whatever approach is taken at policy level needs to be backed up by evidence; planned for across the education system including curriculum, teacher training and assessment; and supported by parents, teachers and children in schools. In countries such as Nepal, where EMI is commonly sought after, rightly or wrongly, but condemned in policy, there are many opportunities coming up to reposition the role of English in line with the country's goals and aspirations. Nepali federalism aims to better address the governance needs and rights of a diverse population and current policy prioritises an inclusive MTB-MLE approach which includes English both as a subject at primary level and as an option for MoI at secondary level. The next ten years will be a key time to build up the necessary evidence bank to evaluate the impact of language education decisions on learners and assess the role of English in the new linguistic landscape.

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English Language Examination Reform: International Trends and a Framework for Nepal

English Language Examination Reform: International Trends and a Framework for Nepal

Prithvi N. Shrestha

Introduction

Examinations[1] are central to many education systems around the world. Examination in this context refers to externally organized educational assessment of individuals for certain purposes. Examinations are commonly administered in schools at the end of a level (e.g. primary or basic education) or at the end of schooling (e.g. secondary level). Therefore, both the government and the public are highly concerned about them. These examinations have three key purposes: *selection, certification* and *accountability* (Hill, 2013). School examinations help to select who should have access to secondary education, higher education or employment; they certify what skills and knowledge a student has achieved and which level they have passed. They also serve the purpose of assessing the effectiveness of the curriculum, evaluating schools and motivating teachers and students to enable their better performance. Depending on how well these examinations serve the stated purposes, they are reformed after a certain period of time if not deemed suitable by the government and other key stakeholders.

The government of Nepal is currently implementing a new education policy following the Education Act 8th Amendment of 4 June 2016 (eKantipur, 2016). Understanding international trends and success factors of the examination reform is thus timely. Against this background, this chapter presents current developments of state-level examination reforms in various countries, discusses their implications for education policies and proposes a framework for examination reform for Nepal. The chapter aims to provide an international perspective on examination reform in order to inform the future development of policies and practices in ELT in Nepal.

This chapter is based on desk research on examinations and their reforms globally. Although the chapter is about English language examination reforms, it draws on the literature related to general education where relevant. The chapter begins by exploring why governments reform school examinations. In particular, the chapter focuses on the external environment: political, educational and economic factors which influence the nature of school examinations in different ways (Shohamy, 2007). These factors are important because a combination of at least two of these factors or all are taken into account when a government decides to reform

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[1] 'Examinations' and 'tests' are used interchangeably in this chapter.

its school examination system. Having considered these factors, the chapter showcases case studies of examination reform in other countries from Africa (Kenya), Asia (Hong Kong SAR and Singapore) and Europe (Norway), drawing on the most current literature. How examination reforms were carried out in these countries, and their consequences and lessons learned are discussed. From these case studies, key issues for Nepal are identified. In order to give the reader a perspective on the examination system in Nepal in relation to the other countries discussed, this chapter then briefly reports on the history of examination reform, particularly English language examinations in Nepal.

After providing the context of the examination system in Nepal, the chapter makes a proposal for a framework of English language examination reform for Nepal based on research and current good practices. This section will specifically focus on what Nepalese education policy makers can do to reform examinations that have minimal negative consequences and how they can carry this out. Drawing on Shohamy (2007) and McNamara and Rover (2006), the proposed framework will discuss how it needs to consider the essential aspects of examination reform: stakeholder engagement, needs-basedness, links with the curriculum, intended and unintended consequences, and continuous research and development. Finally, a set of recommendations for Nepalese policy makers are made.

Why examination reform?

So why do we need examination reform? Nepal is currently undergoing substantial educational reforms. This also means reforming examinations, especially the ones at the end of secondary education. The School Leaving Certificate (SLC) is a national examination at the end of secondary education (Grade 10). It has been criticized for being an unfair one and irrelevant to both further studies and employment (see Mathema, 2007; Mathema & Bista, 2006). Therefore, together with the educational reform, the school examination is in dire need of reforms for positive outcomes. The reform, however, needs to be considered in relation to a number of factors potentially influencing it.

School examination systems are established by a government or its agencies and thus play a vital role in serving the government's interests. This means examinations are likely to change when the government assumes they are not working or when it introduces a new educational policy. Changes in the examination system may be driven by a number of factors in the external environment as observed by the government. These factors which exert substantial influences on examination reforms may include *educational, political* and *economic* factors. Two other influential factors are *social* and *technological* but they appear to be less powerful than the other three when it comes to examination reforms by a government, although technology is increasingly affecting educational reforms. Given their pivotal role in reforming examinations and their potential influence in the Nepalese context, they deserve some discussion before considering how other countries have managed examination reforms.

■ Educational factors
A country's education system is influenced by new trends in education in the region and/or globally. These trends commonly result from changes in the philosophy of education. For example, until recently teachers were considered

as knowledge holders in the tradition of a transmission model of teaching and learners as 'empty vessels' which needed filling with information or knowledge from the teacher (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). The classroom practice and materials were designed to suit this purpose and so was the examination which required learners to memorise the information provided. However, in the second half of the last century, this view of teaching was increasingly replaced by other alternative approaches that promote more dialogue and interaction between the teacher and the learner. This view was reflected in teaching materials and teacher education programmes in many countries although any positive change in classroom practice was often reported as minimal. This type of reform can be clearly found in the field of ELT across the globe (Richards, 2008).

Examination systems have also been reformed as a result of this new educational knowledge. One clear example of this in ELT is the drive towards communicative language teaching (CLT) from the 1970s. This led to communicative language testing (Canale & Swain, 1980) which changed language testing and examinations both in the commercial sector (e.g. IELTS and TOEFL which are major commercial tests used globally for university admissions and employment in English speaking countries) and schools in most countries in the world. In a bid to promote CLT, many English language education projects were initiated by governments and funded by agencies such as the Department for International Development (UK), the US Department of State and the British Council [for examples of these projects see Pincas (1995) and Tribble (2012)]. Such projects often included reforming national English language examinations in schools alongside curricular reform, textbook development and teacher-training. For example, instead of only testing learners' reading and writing skills, their listening and speaking skills are also tested in national level school examinations in English. This change in turn is believed to have positively affected classroom practices. That is, teachers not only teach reading and writing but also concentrate on listening and speaking skills (see e.g. Qian, 2008).

■ **Political factors**

Educational factors alone do not influence educational and examination reforms. The political context of a country significantly determines both types of reform. Despite a proposed examination reform being educationally sound, unless the government or the ministry of education sees it serving their interests, it cannot happen. On the other hand, though a proposed reform may not be completely congruent with widely accepted educational values and philosophy, it may still go ahead due to the government's agenda. Therefore, the political factor is probably the most powerful in bringing about any change to the school examination system (as an example see the case of Hungary and Slovenia in Pizorn & Nagy, 2009).

Political decisions are made to reform examinations for various reasons. It could be because other governments are doing so in the region and thus the government wants to integrate its system with others in the region, which may then lead to political and economic benefits for the country. This happened in Macedonia where the government wanted to push for European Union membership (Murchan, Shiel, & Mickovska, 2012). It may be that a donor agency is interested in funding the reform and so there will be foreign money coming to invest in education in the country as in the case of the English in Action project in Bangladesh (Shrestha, 2013). It could equally be a tool for maintaining political power in the government

and continuing their domination, possibly favouring certain types of individuals and communities through changes in the examination as discussed by Little (1997) in Sri Lanka.

■ Economic factors

In the increasingly globalized world, educational reforms are seen by governments as a tool for economic advancement and participation in the global economy and the employment market. As a result, any reform in examinations is expected to demonstrate this. Furthermore, in the context of the global domination of the English language, its economic value is perceived highly by individuals and governments (see e.g., Erling, 2014; Shrestha, 2013) and any reform in English language examinations in particular also tends to be driven by economic factors.

The impact of economic factors on English language examinations can readily be observed, though it is more pronounced in commercial examinations such as IELTS and TOEFL including their variations. They are often promoted to suit different employment markets (for example, see the IELTS test website: https://www.ielts.org/what-is-ielts/ielts-for-work). Some of these English language tests are even targeted for specific employment markets or age groups, influenced by perceived economic benefits to test users. For instance, Cambridge Language Assessment offers its BULATS (Business Language Testing Service) to employers and educational institutions globally in four languages including English. The test is intended to reflect workplace language needs and standards given the value of communication skills in the workplace. Recently, the US-based Educational Testing Services (ETS) introduced TOEFL Junior® and TOEFL PrimaryTM focusing on school learners aged 11+ and those in primary schools respectively. These new tests seem to be driven by the growing economic value of the English language and the government's drive for English medium instruction in schools in non-English speaking countries like Nepal (Dearden, 2014).

The trend of international English language tests being influenced by economic factors has extended to national English language examinations too. For example, the end of school level English language tests in many countries including Nepal now incorporate listening and speaking components into the test because people with good verbal communication skills have a higher prospect of securing better jobs than those who lack them (see e.g. Casale & Posel, 2011 on South Africa). These tests help to certify the prospective employees' language skills and also help employers make selections of employees with appropriate English language skills. A clear example of economic value driven English language test reform by a government is the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) in Bangladesh promoted through different large-scale projects like English in Action in 2012 (for a review, see Das, Shaheen, Shrestha, Rahman, & Khan, 2014). The existing English language test in the SSC was reformed and the new test includes listening and speaking tests because the old test did not offer any indication of test-takers' verbal communication skills in English, which many Bangladeshi employers seek in their prospective employees as they participate in the global economy. The reformed test, however, may not necessarily address real needs in the workplace. This is so because often workplace needs change rapidly while the test may remain without any updates, thus creating a mismatch between what the workplace needs and what the test offers.

Examination reform in other countries: case studies

In this section, I present a selected number of case studies in which I look at examination reforms in four economies in the world: Kenya, Hong Kong SAR, Singapore and Norway. These case studies are selected because (1) they provide us with insights into what works best and what may not work when changing an examination system, and (2) they represent diverse contexts and the most recent examination reforms in the published literature. Additionally, the reforms in these case study countries were influenced by the factors discussed in the previous section. I will be particularly focusing on English language examination reforms although some case studies are on general examination reforms in schools due to their relevance to Nepal. The case studies are presented in alphabetical order.

■ Hong Kong SAR

The first case study is from Hong Kong which has its own education system as an autonomous region of China, classified as a developing economy by the UN[2]. The examination reform reported in this case study is based on David Qian's (Qian, 2008, 2014) research papers and the Hong Kong examination authority's website. This case study is specifically about English language examination reforms since 1997 when Hong Kong was handed back to China by the UK.

Although Hong Kong's education system was largely modeled on the one in the UK, after 1997 a number of changes took place which affected the examination system too. Hong Kong had two main public examinations at the school level until 2011: Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examinations (HKCEE, end of Grade 11) and Hong Kong Advanced Level Examinations (HKALE, end of Grade 13) (Hill, 2013). These two examinations were run by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA). The two examinations included English language examinations which functioned as gatekeepers for selection to further and higher education and as an indicator of students' general English language proficiency. In addition to these two exams, students in Hong Kong schools sat up to four additional public examinations in English let alone mid and end of semester examinations. This shows the examination-oriented culture of Hong Kong. As high-stakes examinations, HKCEE decided whether a student could continue to senior secondary education and HKALE determined if a student could enter university.

HKCEE had two versions of the English language test: Syllabus A and Syllabus B. Although candidates could choose which one to sit, Syllabus B was meant for higher proficiency candidates. Until 2007, the test was norm-referenced (ranked against other candidates) and had four papers: 1) Writing (26%), 2) Reading comprehension and usage (24%), 3) Task-based integrated listening, reading and writing (32%), and 4) Oral English (18%). From 2007, the test was changed to a standards-referenced one (assessed against set standards or criteria) and had three papers: 1A) Reading (20%), 1B) Writing (20%), 2) Listening and integrated skills (30%), and 3) Speaking (15%). An additional component of school-based assessment was introduced to HKCEE in 2007 which was weighted at 15% of

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[2] This classification is based on the UNO's World Economic Situation and Prospects 2014 available from: http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/wesp/wesp_current/2014wesp_country_classification.pdf

HKCEE. Until 2007 the results were reported using a grading system from A – F (A being the highest and F a failure) as in the GCSE in the UK. From 2007, HKCEE results were reported as performance levels: Level 5* - Level 1 (Level 5* being the highest level).

HKALE had an English language paper called Use of English. The test assessed candidates' English language skills which were deemed to be required in tertiary education and future employment. This test originally had three sections: 1) Reading speed, 2) Reading comprehension and written composition and 3) Listening test. It underwent a number of changes and the final version of the test (i.e., 2010) included these components: 1) Listening (18%), 2) Writing (18%), 2) Reading (6%) and Language Systems (12%), 4) Oral English (tested in groups of 4, 18%), and 5) Practical skills for work and study (28%). This version of the test seemed to have given importance to practical communication skills. The grading used in HKALE was similar to that in HKCEE: A – F. A minimum of grade E was required for university entry.

The Hong Kong government has recently made some radical changes to the examination system. It introduced School-Based Assessment (SBA) in 2007 with the aim of improving teaching and learning in schools. SBA carries 15% of the examination marks and is closely aligned with the curriculum. More importantly, the long tradition of a norm-referenced examination was changed to a standards-referenced one. Thus, the focus shifted from assessment of learning to assessment for learning, a form of alternative assessment (see Lynch, 2001 for a discussion).

As part of the examination reform, from 2012, students in Hong Kong secondary schools need to sit only one national examination instead of two. HKCEE and HKALE were replaced by the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) in 2012 which includes SBA. According to HKEAA (2016), the English language examination has this format: 1) Reading (20%), 2) Writing (25%), 3) Listening and integrated skills - listening, reading and writing tasks related to study and workplace contexts (30%), 4) Speaking – group interaction and individual response (10%) and 5) SBA (15%) - an individual oral presentation and a group interaction (http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/hkdse/hkdse_subj.html?A1&1&2_1). Each part of the examination assesses candidates' achievement against a set of learning outcomes in the four skill areas: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The introduction of SBA to the school examination has had mixed responses from different stakeholders (Qian, 2008; 2014). While the reform was welcomed as an innovative approach, many teachers showed resentment and resistance due to the demanding nature of SBA, teachers' lack of assessment literacy, timely professional development support and shared understanding of the approach. There were other additional concerns about SBA which relate to reliability and validity across teachers and schools and the whole notion of how to incorporate assessment into teaching and learning. More importantly, despite the widespread appeal of SBA as a form of assessment for learning in western countries (Stanley, MacCann, Gardner, Reynolds & Wild, 2009), it has a long way to go in an examination-oriented culture like Hong Kong.

The reform in Hong Kong and its challenges are of importance to Nepal. This is especially because of the proposed changes resulting from the new education

policy (see MOE, 2009), though the Education Act has not yet been passed in parliament.

■ Kenya

The second case study is from Kenya, an East African developing country. This case study is based on work by Paul Wasanga and Anthony Somerset (2013). Somerset contributed to the reform process of the examination system in the 1970s and 80s and Wasanga manages the current examination system in Kenya.

The formal education system in Kenya has eight years of primary and four years of secondary education. This is followed by tertiary education. The end of the primary and secondary levels are marked by two national examinations: the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). These two examinations replaced the older examination system in 1985. The Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) has been responsible for these two examinations since 1980.

Wasanga and Somerset (2013) report that the earlier version of KCPE contained only multiple choice questions in all subjects, including English, until 1973 when it was realized that the multiple choice questions were mainly recall-based and lacked assessment of any higher order skills and creativity. As a result, the test had negative washback effects on classroom learning where the focus was on memorizing facts. Further, the test also advantaged certain types of students (e.g., those from high socio-economic backgrounds). In order to address this problem, a composition paper was introduced to the English language test in addition to the multiple choice test. Other subjects also started including questions that tested higher order thinking and problem-solving skills from 1974 onwards. The new version of the KPCE English test still faced a problem despite having a composition paper because it asked students to describe something predictable (e.g. 'My home'). Therefore, it was subsequently reformed in 1980 to include more open-ended and creative tasks in the composition paper by focusing on communication skills.

According to the authors, the rationale for the reform appears to be economic, educational, political and social, driven by four factors: 1) relevance of the test to the test taker's future lives (economic); 2) fairness of the test to those who are disadvantaged (social); 3) prediction of 'right' students for limited secondary school places (political); and 4) quality enhancement of education across primary schools and geographical regions (educational).

As part of the reform, its effect was monitored from 1978 onwards. The monitoring found that, despite these positive factors influencing the test reform, English tests continued to favour students with higher socio-economic status. This meant changing the focus of English test from assessing more idiomatic language used in everyday conversations to the way it is used in wider contexts for receiving and communicating information. The reform process also involved disseminating examination feedback to enhance education quality to different stakeholders, especially head teachers, schools and the public. This led to the publication of tables showing school performance across districts and the nation which immediately caught the attention of the news media and the general public. Wasanga and Somerset (2013) argue that this type of dissemination had a positive

effect on schools which improved, among other things, the quality of classroom instruction and teacher support. However, the school level performance tables became controversial and were thus discontinued.

A major output of the test reform in Kenya was the introduction of an annual newsletter, reporting which concepts and skills were found to be difficult by the candidates from the previous year and suggesting how they could be taught more effectively. Until recently it was distributed freely to each school. This annual newsletter seems to be the most sustainable and systematic component of the test reform that has helped to improve the quality of education in Kenya. In its more current version, the newsletter focuses on the questions in the KCPE examination that are answered correctly by 30 – 40% candidates only.

It is argued that the KCPE English examination has promoted inequalities among students, schools and socio-economic groups, especially after a recent increase in the number of private primary schools, a trend noticed in Nepal too. Many aspects of the Kenyan examination reform may be considered for Nepal.

■ Singapore

This third case study relates to a relatively affluent country in East Asia, Singapore. This case study draws on a paper by Christina Ratnam-Lim and Kelvin Tan (2015) who examined the recent large-scale implementation of formative assessment in Singapore.

Singapore has a system of six years' primary and four years' secondary education followed by two years' post-secondary education. At the end of each level, there is a high-stakes national examination: Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), General Certificate of Education N and O Levels (Secondary) and General Certificate of Education A Levels (Post-Secondary). These examinations directly affect the admission of a student to secondary, post-secondary and tertiary education. The examination system had been considered a fair means of evaluating educational attainment although the system has been criticised for making the education system too examination-orientated and having negative washback effects such as, *inter alia,* teachers teaching to the test from the primary level, widening socio-economic gaps, devaluing vocational education and 'education for earning, not learning' (Ratnam-Lim & Tan, 2015, p. 62). As a result of these criticisms, in 2009 the Ministry of Education introduced a school-based assessment system, similar to SBA in Hong Kong, called 'Holistic Assessment' and implemented it in all primary schools in 2014. The idea behind this assessment approach is overall development of a learner by emphasising skills development and providing constructive feedback to support meaningful learning rather than just focusing on examination results. However, the implementation of this approach has met with a number of challenges resulting from social, political and economic factors prevalent in the country which influence all stakeholders, especially teachers and parents.

The key reform to PSLE has been in two areas: 1) Qualitative feedback for improvement and 2) 'Bite-sized' assessment as an alternative to one-off examinations (i.e., mini assessment with formative purposes). In terms of implementing these two aspects of assessment, teachers play a key role as implementation agents, a role which may be influenced by parents' attitudes

towards assessment. Ultimately, Ratnam-Lim and Tan (2015) argue that teachers' understanding of assessment and their actual practice can make the reform a success or a failure. They report that many teachers and parents believe that the intention of Holistic Assessment is good and signals the value of both academic and non-academic development of a learner. The new system also lessens anxiety or stress among students. However, in practice, teachers were still teaching students to the test and some teachers are not equipped with the skills necessary for providing constructive feedback to their students. More importantly, many teachers felt that the new assessment system increased their workload due to smaller assessments turning into mid-year and end-year assessments. Furthermore, parents still want their children to prepare for the examination (PSLE) which puts pressure on teachers.

Providing constructive feedback to students has been challenging though considered useful. This concept is interpreted differently by teachers and parents. There is a question of who it is for: parents or children? Equally, due to the number of students in the classroom (30 – 40), teachers are unable to provide personalised feedback to students and the feedback is standardised and thus of little value. This practice is a result of the old habit of teachers providing summative feedback.

Bite-sized assessments were not without problems either. Teachers saw them as tests because scores on these assessments counted towards the final grade. This meant more stress for the students, their parents and teachers due to the greater frequency of the assessment. Ratnam-Lim and Tan (2015) report that teachers spend more time on conducting assessments which then leaves less time for teaching. Teachers also tend to teach their students to the mini-test. In the context of Singapore, all this could be related to the emphasis laid on meritocracy and the importance of high-stakes examinations. Thus, the well-intended formative assessment system ended up being subservient to the high-stakes PSLE. The challenges faced by a school-based assessment system need to be considered for Nepal where the new education policy proposes school-based assessment, which may encounter difficulties similar to those in Singapore.

■ Norway
This last case study is on a developed western European country, Norway. The case study is based on a paper by Sverre Tveit (2014). The examination reform reported here is from 2006.

Norway has 10 years of compulsory education for under 16s. Primary education lasts seven years followed by three years' lower secondary education. Students completing lower secondary education have the right to three years' upper secondary education before entering university. Traditionally, unlike Singapore and Hong Kong, Norway has been against any formal assessment or examinations of students in lower secondary education (Grades 8 – 10).

The Ministry of Education and Research implemented a reform called *The Knowledge Promotion* in 2006 in order to raise achievement for all students. The reform emphasizes an outcomes-based curriculum which seems to be in response to the international positioning of Norway through tests such as PISA[3] (Tveit, 2014). For example, Norway was ranked 24th on PISA reading assessment in 2006, 12th in 2009 and 22nd in 2012. The curriculum was reformed accordingly by focusing on measurable outcomes. Importantly, it stresses skills like expressing oneself orally, expressing oneself in writing and reading. A set of competence aims were designed for students to achieve by the end of each level.

As a result of the curricular reform, new assessment procedures and instruments have been implemented. The key ones include formative assessment, national tests and examinations at different levels. The formative assessment approach adopted is based on international developments in the field of *assessment for learning* as theorized by Black and Wiliam (2009). The teacher assesses the quality of students' work on an on-going basis and provides formative feedback to support learning. The Norwegian reform is heavily informed by research which also highlighted important issues such as teacher assessment literacy. In order to improve teacher assessment literacy, they are provided with professional development support. Teachers were trained to make learning goals more specific and to emphasize skills.

A national test system was established in 2004 to monitor the quality of education and hold schools and municipalities accountable for school quality and student achievements. There are compulsory national tests for Grades 5 and 8 (English, reading and maths) and Grade 9 (reading and maths). These tests provide information about students' achievements and skills to different stakeholders (e.g., parents, school leaders). They are also meant to help teachers identify their students' strengths and weaknesses to improve their teaching. Research, however, shows that this has not happened.

The other major assessment instrument is examinations. In Norway, there are two types of examinations: external and local. Students sit one external and one local examination at the end of Grade 10. In the upper secondary, students take three to four examinations, one of which is a compulsory external examination of the Norwegian language. These examinations are used as a school leaving certificate. A six-point marking scale of 1 to 6 is used, 1 being a fail. Examiners are offered continuous professional development through training and seminars, and are provided with a comprehensive assessment guide and achievement level descriptors.

In addition, students in lower secondary and upper secondary are awarded overall achievement marks for certification purposes. Starting in Grade 8, these marks are based on various tests, assignments and other student work throughout the year. The emphasis is on students' growth over the course of the school year and skills such as creativity and collaborative skills. Students are awarded an overall

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[3] *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA): this is a triennial international survey which aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students. PISA is organized by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

achievement mark for each subject. A six-point marking scale of 1 to 6 is used, 1 being a fail.

These examination reforms brought a number of challenges too. These challenges are highlighted by continuous research on curricular and assessment reforms. One obvious challenge is tensions between policy and practice. The new policy means using teacher assessment for certification purposes (high-stakes) which also serves as formative assessment (low-stakes). In the absence of a clear national guideline on standards descriptors and potential inconsistency among teachers assessing students, validity, reliability and fairness of assessment are questioned, a case similar to Hong Kong and Singapore. The case has been complicated by the fact that formal marking has always been prohibited at the primary level. More importantly, there is a dilemma whether to have measurable learning outcomes and national standards to make assessment consistent and comparable which may promote instrumental learning rather than deep learning. The Norwegian case shows the importance of multiple assessment instruments and continuous stakeholder engagement, equally applicable to Nepal.

A brief history of English language examination reform in Nepal

Having considered school examination reforms in other countries, it is important to provide an overview of examination reform in Nepal. As in many countries, amidst so many political changes since 1990, the Nepalese government has initiated educational and examination reforms in the last three decades which seemed to result primarily from political changes and as a response to ongoing educational reforms in other South Asian countries. Although Nepal does not have a long history of a school examination system, it has undergone some major reforms in terms of its English language examinations.

Nepal has a system with 12 years of school education as in many Asian countries. Until this year (2016), it had four stages: (1) Primary - Grade 1 to 5, (2) Lower Secondary – Grade 6 to 8, (3) Secondary – Grade 9 and 10 and (4) Higher Secondary – Grade 11 and 12. More recently, the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) 2009 – 2015 (MOE, 2009) has divided the system into two phases, like in Kenya, which will be implemented from 2017: Basic School (Grade 1 – 8) and Secondary School (Grade 9 – 12). As in many Asian countries (Hill, 2013), students in Nepal sit a number of tests and public examinations in school and they all are high-stakes with severe consequences for students and their parents. These tests and examinations are norm-referenced and marks from 1 to 100 are awarded to students in all subjects including English. They must secure a minimum of 32 marks to pass the examination.

Until now, the main school examination has been associated with the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) at the end of 10 years' schooling and this will be the focus in this section. The SLC examination board was established in 1934 when Nepal was under the autocratic Rana regime (for a review of the education system and English language education in Nepal, see Mathema, 2007; Shrestha, 2009). The SLC examination is centrally managed by the Office of the Controller of Examinations (OCE), a constituent body of the Ministry of Education. The actual administration of the SLC is the responsibility of the District Education Office in each district. This

examination has always been high-stakes and determines students' future study or career. English language is one of the six compulsory subjects in this examination and constantly has a high failure rate (Mathema & Bista, 2006).

It has not been possible to find or access written records of the nature of SLC English examinations prior to the 1980s and research on the SLC English test is limited to only a few studies. Based on my own personal knowledge and experience[4] and the available published literature, the SLC examination began with single papers in all subjects across the country. However, five regional versions (one in each of the five regions) of the SLC examination were introduced in 1998 to avoid test security problems and to minimize costs.

The SLC English examination has always been biased towards reading and writing. Listening and speaking skills were not tested prior to 1998 although about 5% of marks were allocated to test syllable stress and intonation through multiple choice questions in writing. Reading was assessed through gap-fill, multiple choice, true-false and matching items. Out of two reading passages, one was from the textbook and the other was an unseen one. There was an emphasis on decontextualized grammar and vocabulary items and candidates could answer most questions by memorizing. Writing was assessed through a written composition task already known to the candidate. However, with the curricular reform in 1998, the SLC English paper changed drastically, as shown in the table below, and has continued in this form to date with some minor modifications.

Table 1: SLC paper 2016

Skills	Question types	Marks (%)
Listening	Audio or examiner voice: Multiple choice, gap-fill, true-false, ordering (any two)	10
Speaking	Interview, cued situation, story-telling, describing pictures, charts (any two)	15
Reading	Two seen texts from Grade 10 Two unseen authentic texts (e.g., chart, graph, table, advert, etc.) Multiple choice, gap-fill, true-false, ordering, short questions, matching	40
Writing and grammar	Guided writing (two) Free writing (one) Grammar	35

Despite the changes to the examination, there has been no major shift from testing students' memory (e.g. seen reading passages, decontextualized grammar) to creativity and real communication skills in English. Unlike in countries such as Hong Kong, the reform in Nepal seems to be 'cosmetic' only, which may be due to the

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[4] In the mid-1980s, I was an SLC candidate and experienced myself how the SLC examination impacted on my career path. Despite my keen interest in science, I could not enrol in a science programme due to my SLC marks. So I studied English language.

change in neighbouring countries and thus political. The same situation is reflected in other examinations held at Grade 8 which do not assess speaking and listening. A change to the grading system was introduced to the SLC in 2016. Instead of marks, students were awarded letter grades A+ to N, in which A+ is the highest. This grading system is similar to most South Asian and many other countries in the world.

For a variety of reasons including a high rate of failures, the SLC examination has been criticized (Budhathoki et al., 2014; Mathema & Bista, 2006). Possibly in response to this and as planned in the SSRP (2009), the Education Act (Eighth Amendment) 2016 was passed by parliament on 4 June 2016. It states that the national SLC examination is to be phased out and will be replaced by a regional examination in Grade 10 which will be conducted under the guidelines of the new National Examination Board. There will be a national level Higher Secondary Level Certificate (HSLC) examination at the end of Grade 12. The SSRP also proposes a continuous assessment system at all grade levels in schools to promote learning. This is similar to the case study countries like Singapore. Its implementation and success remain to be seen.

A potential model for examination reform in Nepal

Based on the review of school curricular and examination reforms in other countries and Nepal itself, a potential model for examination reform is proposed in this section. It takes account of social, political, economic and educational factors which influence all aspects of the English examinations.

The figures below present a possible process and a model of English language examination reform in Nepal. Figure 1 shows a cyclical, or even spiral, and dynamic process of examination reform. The reform process needs to be staged and should include essential elements such as needs analysis and environmental scanning. Each stage needs to feed into the subsequent stage. This process needs to be carried out by incorporating the model presented in Figure 2.

Figure 1: A possible process for examination reform in Nepal
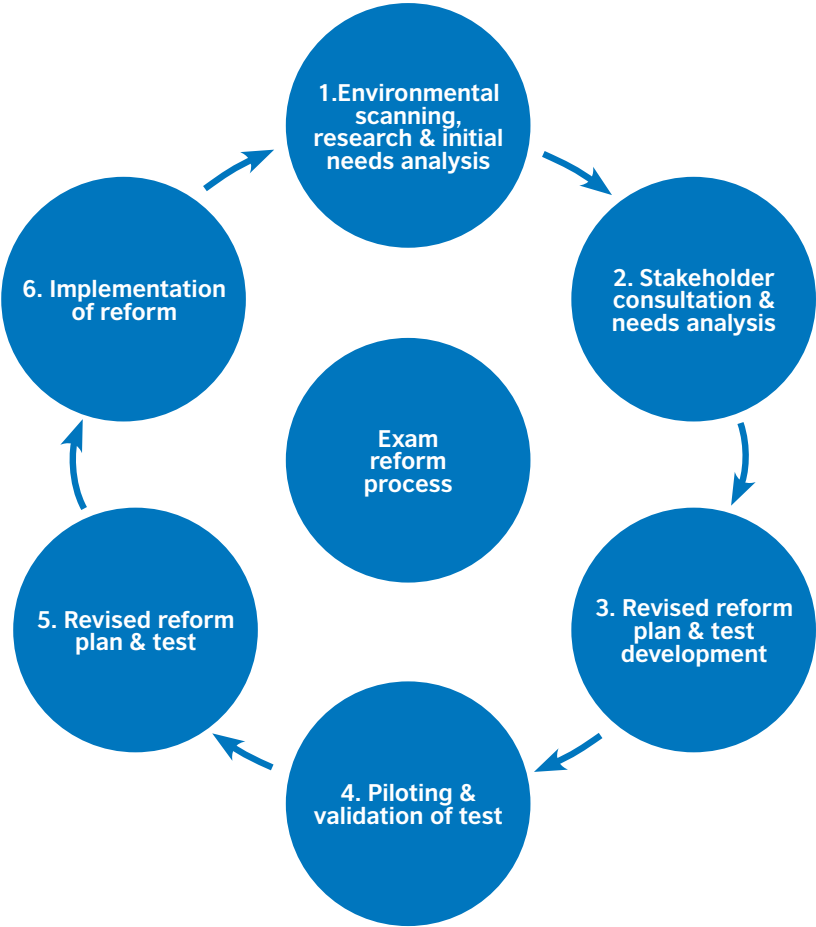
Figure 2 shows different elements of the examination reform that need to be considered in the process for its success. Except for Environmental scanning, which is discussed in Section 2 above, each element is described below.

Figure 2: A potential model of examination reform in Nepal
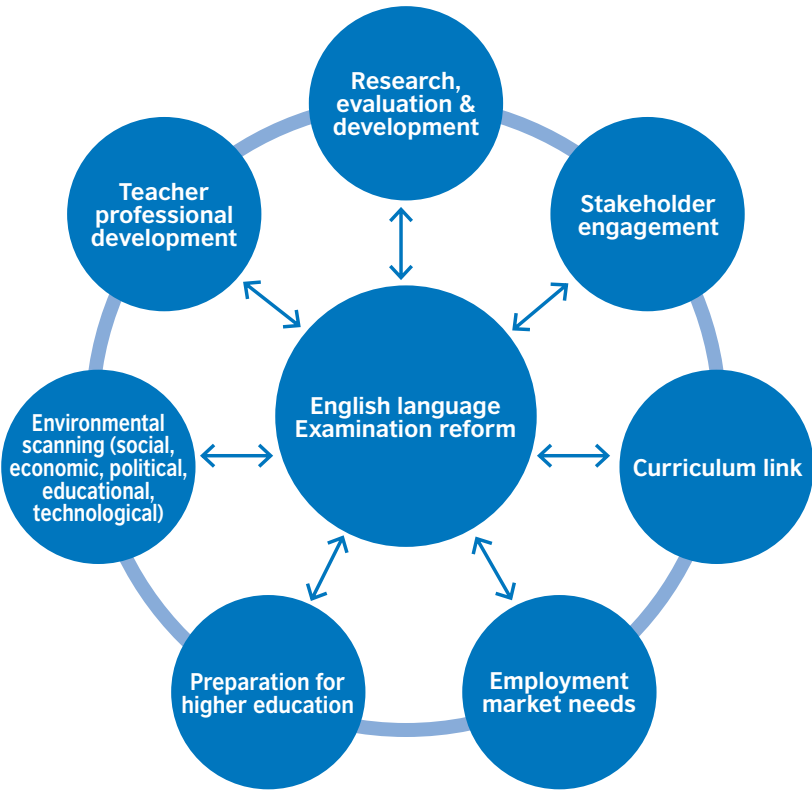
◼ Stakeholder engagement

As noted earlier, a number of stakeholders have stakes in school examinations. Among them, students, teachers and parents are probably the most directly influenced by any change or the use of the examination for different purposes. The other important stakeholders are employers and higher education institutions. To date, there has hardly been any official engagement with these key stakeholders while planning the examination reform in Nepal. The most that has happened is a consultation with some subject experts and teachers. Yet, any examination reform, however well-intended and educationally sound it may be, needs to engage students, parents, teachers and employers in order to measure the test impact on them (see Dawadi, in progress). In particular, with the imminent introduction of the continuous assessment system in schools, teachers' assessment literacy may jeopardize its intended purpose, as has happened in Bangladesh (Das et al., 2014), if teachers are not engaged as part of the examination reform plan and lack appropriate assessment skills. There are implications for English teachers whose language proficiency may not be adequate for teaching.

◼ Real needs based to suit the job market and higher education

The English language is dominant in the job market. Current school English examinations, such as the SLC, do not deal with the English language needs

required in a job. The SLC is heavily focused on reading, writing and grammar tasks that have very little to do with the job market and higher education needs despite the curriculum embracing a communicative approach (Mathema & Bista, 2006). As in Hong Kong, the English examination needs to integrate the language skills and assess students' communicative skills required both in study and workplace contexts. These skills obviously need to be taught as part of the curriculum. As the majority of school graduates pursue higher education and there is an increasing trend to introduce English medium instruction in Nepalese universities, the school leaving English examination reform should consider what English language knowledge and skills are needed to study at university in order to narrow the gap between school education and higher education.

■ Continuous research and development

It is essential that the validity of a test is continuously investigated and monitored so that it serves the intended purpose and its unintended consequences are minimised. An examination is meant not only to serve the purpose of certification but also to have positive effects on teaching and learning, and any other use such as employment, study and immigration. In the context of Nepal, only a few studies (e.g. Budhathoki et al., 2014; Mathema & Bista, 2006) have been conducted to investigate examination impacts. The recommendations of such studies have not been fully considered. Equally, the newly proposed continuous assessment system does not seem to have been piloted yet. As a result, any examination reform is likely to be distant from the reality of the Nepalese context if it is simply copied from another country. Even when there is carefully planned research within the reform, things can go wrong (see Qian, 2014). Continuous research helps to identify both intended and unintended consequences of an examination. Thus, it helps to develop a more inclusive and fairer examination, ensuring its validity. This may also mean considering a range of options to meet the needs of the key stakeholders.

■ Curriculum linked

Any examination is meant to assess skills and knowledge taught in the curriculum. If the English language curriculum aims to develop communicative skills in English, both teaching and assessment need to reflect this. As noted earlier, the school English curriculum promotes communicative skills. However, the English examination tests those skills in a significantly limited way. It is, therefore, essential for the English test to assess English language communication skills relevant to study and the workplace, as in Hong Kong. For example, the speaking test should be made more realistic by making it a pair or group interaction rather than a teacher-student dialogue. The English language test questions should not test students' memorization skills. Instead, they should assess their creative and critical thinking skills and communicative competence in the language as reflected in the curriculum.

■ Teacher professional development

In almost all the case studies above, when the examination reform was implemented, despite good intentions, the reform encountered problems associated with teachers. In particular, teachers' lack of the professional skills needed for assessing their students was causing difficulty to the implementation of the reform even in a well-developed country like Norway. Teachers' assessment literacy in Nepal is possibly significantly low, given the lack of resources and

opportunities for their professional development. The situation is worse in public schools in the rural area of the country where schools lack qualified teachers. All of this is exacerbated by teacher's low proficiency in the English language itself. Therefore, English language examination reform in Nepal needs to provide English teachers with professional development opportunities for improving their English language proficiency as in Bangladesh (Shrestha, 2014) and develop assessment literacy through workshops and seminars. Without this, the reform is likely to fail.

At the time of writing this paper, the examination reform in Nepal seems to have confused teachers, students and parents due to the lack of clarity on the reform process and communication with these stakeholders. For example, although the SLC is being phased out, it is not clear by when the new system will be in place and what the school textbooks will be like. The best the Ministry of Education seems to have done is consult education experts from universities regarding stakeholder engagement. So in relation to the proposed model, there have been attempts to engage only one or two types of stakeholders, ignoring key stakeholders such as teachers and students. However, partial environmental scanning, especially of political, economic and educational factors, does seem to have been carried out.

Conclusions/Summary

This chapter began with reasons why school examinations are reformed. In particular, the effects of political, economic and educational factors were discussed. These factors play important roles in reshaping the school curriculum and the associated examination. In addition, other factors, such as social and technological, influence examination reform in terms of its implementation and success. If these factors are not taken into account, any examination reform is likely to encounter many difficulties. Therefore, examination reform in Nepal should consider how these factors affect the reform and how any risks can be mitigated.

In order to showcase how examination reforms have been managed in other countries, four case studies were presented. They represented both developing and developed economies, and very different contexts (Hong Kong SAR, Kenya, SIngapore and Norway). The success of the examination reform varied from one country to another and some of the challenges they faced were quite similar; for example, implementing school-based assessment in Hong Kong, Singapore or Norway. The reforms in these countries were influenced by the factors discussed above, although the effects of some may have been stronger than others, according to context. Examination reform in Nepal could draw on the lessons learned in these countries and lessen potential risks.

Based on these case studies and the wider literature on examination reform, a framework for English language examination reform in Nepal was proposed. In particular, an iterative process of the examination reform with clearly identified key stages was presented. This process should take into account the various components of the model proposed. The process needs to:

1. scan the environment (i.e., social, political, educational, economic and technological);

2. engage with key stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, employers, higher education institutions, English language education experts) from the start;
3. ensure clear links between the curriculum and the examination;
4. invest in conducting continuous research and evaluation to ensure the validity of the test and develop inclusive tests to meet the changing needs of test users; and
5. offer professional development opportunities to teachers.

It should be noted that the relationship between these components is not linear but dynamic. Most importantly, the examination reform process is cumulative and continuous which the proposed model advocates. The reform process should also consider all contextual variables which may support or hinder the process.

As part of the current reform process in Nepal, the steps taken to date are partially in line with the proposed model here. They include partial environmental scanning by education experts, consultations with education and testing experts from universities and a limited amount of research and evaluation. The reform process could make a real and positive difference to all stakeholders and the country's education system and economy if it followed the model proposed in its entirety.

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Action Research and Teacher Improvement

Action Research and Teacher Improvement

Amol Padwad

Introduction

In educational research there has been a noticeable shift of focus from outsider research to insider research in recent years. Instead of academics trying to develop understanding of classrooms and teaching and learning, and then developing prescriptions based on their understanding which teachers are required to put into practice, research has shifted to teachers themselves developing their own understanding to inform their practice. Action research (AR) is part of this shift and is becoming increasingly valuable not only for language teachers-researchers as an important avenue for their own professional development, but also for others – teacher educators, policy makers and curriculum designers – as a significant source for broadening and deepening their understanding of the classroom and the teaching-learning process. Sagor (2000) points out that there are at least three things to which AR can potentially contribute: promoting the evolution of the teacher as a reflective practitioner, promoting overall school improvement and school priorities and promoting a research-oriented professional culture. Consequently, AR is being more actively embraced and promoted in education policies, programmes and training projects. Research and thinking in the field is enriching the conceptualisation of the notion of AR and helping to make its contours clearer. Various models of AR are also evolving and are being applied to varying degrees of success in different contexts.

In this chapter we look at how AR is being conceptualised and how it is being practiced. The chapter has two broad sections. The first section presents an overview of the notion of AR, key stages in AR and the benefits of and common challenges in teachers' undertaking of AR. The second section discusses examples of teacher engagement in AR from Chile, Turkey, Nepal and India in order to show how AR has been variously incorporated in these situations to promote teacher development, with a direct or indirect focus on school improvement. Some insights and lessons from these AR initiatives are also presented, which may be useful for any attempts to exploit AR for school improvement in contexts like Nepal.

Understanding Action Research

■ Rationale underlying action research

A useful explanation of the rationale behind AR can be found in Altrichter, Posch and Somekh (1993) who draw on Schön's (1983) distinction between technical and reflective rationality for the purpose. Schön argues that educational innovation typically operates on a classical research-development-dissemination model,

in which researchers produce some theoretical framework to solve a practical problem with the results then disseminated to teachers to be applied in their classrooms. This 'technical rationality', which forms the foundation of political and administrative interventions in education, is based on three basic assumptions:

- There are general solutions to practical problems.
- These solutions can be developed outside practical situations (in research or administrative centres).
- The solutions can be translated into teachers' actions by means of publications, training, administrative orders, etc.

(Altrichter el al., 1993, p. 201)

This is contrasted with 'reflective rationality', which follows three quite different assumptions:

- Complex practical problems demand specific solutions.
- These solutions can be developed only inside the context in which the problem arises and in which the practitioner is a crucial and determining element
- The solutions cannot be successfully applied to other contexts but they can be made accessible to other practitioners as hypotheses to be tested.

(Altrichter et al., 1993, p. 202)

These assumptions form the basis of the whole concept and the movement of AR. They challenge the 'hierarchy of credibility' (Altrichter et al., 1993, p. 202) promoted in technical rationality, which regards people higher up, that is, closer to theory developers and policy makers, as being much more credible than practicing teachers. Countering such 'genuine mistrust of practitioners' (Altrichter et al., 1993, p. 202) AR seeks to make teachers as credible as other researchers and solution developers. In fact, teachers' unique contribution of insider knowledge of the complex world of the classroom is being increasingly recognised and valued in the AR literature accumulating over the years (Babione, 2015; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Mann, 1999; Norton, 2009; Sikes and Potts, 2008).

The rationale for AR may, then, be summarised by way of the following arguments:

- Teachers are better placed than outsiders to investigate the specific practical issues they come across in their work.
- If it is teachers who are ultimately responsible for tackling problems and implementing solutions, it makes better sense that they are involved in investigating problems and working out solutions.
- Research is not the exclusive domain of specialists trained for the purpose; teachers can be researchers too.

■ Notions of action research

In the broadest sense, AR may be explained as the research which teachers do in their classrooms and schools. Apart from 'action research' many other terms have been used for this kind of research – practitioner research, classroom research, collaborative enquiry, critical enquiry, teacher research or exploratory practice (Allwright, 2003; Bailey, 2001; Burns, 2005b, 2010; Roulston, Legette, DcLoach and Pittman, 2005) – with the latest addition of exploratory action research

(Rebolledo, Smith and Bullock, 2016). Though some of these terms have been used interchangeably in many studies, they are not exact equivalents; they exhibit numerous shades of differences, for example, in their focus, priorities, approaches, methods and purpose. Consequently, various definitions of AR also abound. One popular definition (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999, p. 22) defines AR as "all forms of practitioner enquiry that involve systematic, intentional and self-critical inquiry about one's work in ... formal educational settings." Another definition (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004, p. 9) considers AR as research by "classroom practitioners ... who are involved individually or collaboratively in self-motivated and self-generated systematic and informed inquiry undertaken with a view to enhancing their vocation as professional educators." Across the varied range of definitions and conceptualisations of AR, one may identify some common features that characterise AR, which may be listed as below:

- AR is undertaken by teachers, individually or collaboratively, with or without the support of others.
- AR is based on the data that primarily come from teachers' work contexts, especially their classrooms and schools.
- AR involves systematic collection and analysis of data for a specific purpose, which usually relates to clarifying aspects of teaching or learning or seeking solutions to some problem.
- AR involves some voluntarism and self-initiative from the teacher-researcher.

(Adapted from Carter and Halsall, 1998 and Lankshear and Knobel, 2004)

In terms of its goals, AR is seen to work in three ways: as a form of personal professional development of the teacher, as a means of finding solutions to practical classroom problems and as a way of promoting institutional and social change (Altrichter et al., 1993; Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999; Hammersley, 2004). However, Allwright and Hanks (2009) hold a different view, relating different kinds of research to each of these goals. They argue that the research aimed at bringing about some change, including solving classroom problems, ('action for change') is what properly constitutes AR, while the research that aims at enhancing understanding ('action for understanding') constitutes what they call 'exploratory practice'. Their argument represents one of the two widespread but different interpretations of the key word 'action' in AR literature, namely, true AR must lead to some action, i.e. change in classroom or school practice. The other interpretation argues that every AR need not end up in a solution to a problem and may not always lead to any immediate change in practice. It, therefore, does not separate research to enhance understanding from AR. Perhaps indicating a middle way, Rebolledo et al. (2016) use the term 'exploratory action research' to include both exploration and action as valid aims of AR. In this chapter the term AR is used in a broad sense, encompassing all three goals of enhancing understanding, bringing about change and contributing to professional development, and refers to both kinds of action – action for change and action for understanding.

■ **Benefits of action research**
Several studies point out various benefits of AR for teachers, as also for their learners and institutions. Some key benefits for teachers can be summarised from a number of studies (Crookes, 1993; Roberts, 1993; Burns, 1999; Kincheloe, 2003;

Edwards. 2005; Atay, 2006). These studies point out that teachers' engagement in AR may lead to:

- Heightened understanding of the classroom and teaching-learning processes
- More reflective and analytical approaches of teachers to learners and teaching
- More informed classroom and professional judgments by teachers
- Less dependence on external solutions to classroom problems and work challenges
- A decrease in the sense of isolation and frustration among teachers

There may also be other benefits such as developing a problem-solving mindset in teachers, increasing their confidence to deal with professional challenges, raising their professional status and helping them make connections between 'academic' research and their classroom practice. Burns (2010, p. 7) particularly points out that since AR is "so immediate to our teaching situation, ... doing AR can reinvigorate our teaching, lead to positive change, raise our awareness of the complexities of our work, and show us what drives our personal approaches to teaching."

In short, AR may significantly contribute to the overall development of the teacher as a professional. All gains made through engaging in AR eventually lead to teachers' enhanced professionality, which Stenhouse, one of the earliest proponents of AR, defined as

> a capacity for autonomous professional self-development through systematic self-study, through the study of the work of other teachers and through the testing of ideas by classroom research procedures. (Stenhouse 1975, p. 144)

The relationship between teachers' engagement in AR and its impact on schools is still under-researched. Only a small number of studies are available on this issue (Calhoun, 1994; Durrant and Holden, 2006; Elliott, 1991; Frost, Durrant, Holden and Head, 2000; Halsall, 1998; Joyce, Calhoun and Hopkins, 1999; Sagor, 2000; Street and Temperley, 2005), mostly from non-Asian contexts, and not many are from ELT. However, these studies generally suggest that AR brings about a positive impact on schools stemming from greater teacher awareness and confidence, improvement in their practice, better understanding of the consequences of their decisions and actions and more appropriate approaches to their work. Zeichner (2003) also reports a link between teachers' engagement in AR and improvement in learners' attitudes, behaviours and learning.

■ Challenges in AR

In spite of the rapidly growing interest in and support for AR, the number of practicing teachers engaging in research remains very small. In his overview of teacher research literature Borg (2010) finds that though there is a substantial body of literature, a vast majority of studies relate to research done by others and not by teachers themselves. He goes on to observe that even after so many years "Peke's (1984, p. 24) question remains relevant to our field: 'If good reasons exist for teacher involvement in research, why is it not more common?'" (Borg, 2010,

p. 407). One answer perhaps lies in the fact that there are several challenges and barriers in doing AR, many of which still continue to pose difficulties for teachers' engagement in AR.

The challenges teachers face in AR may be considered in three broad groups: work conditions and culture, teachers' own traits and general policies and provisions. A representative, but not exhaustive, list of challenges from each group is given below (adapted from Borg, 2010; Padwad, 2008; Padwad and Dixit, 2013).

Work conditions and culture
Teachers often work in unsupportive environments where they face various issues, such as:

- A general apathy about research and teacher professionalism
- Lack of peer support, collaboration, opportunities to share, and hence a sense of isolation
- Heavy workload, pressures of ensuring high student performance at examinations
- Lack of resources, time, funds and access to literature
- Lack of purpose to undertake AR
- Lack of incentives and/or tangible benefits of engaging in AR
- No recognition by peers or authorities for engaging in AR

Teachers' own traits
Some challenges arise from teachers' personal professional competence and thinking:

- Personal beliefs about research, for example, research as a large-scale statistical activity or research as the preserve only of university academics
- Concern about making private problems public, fear of being exposed as less competent
- Lack of conviction about the value of research done by teachers
- Limited awareness about research, its purposes and methods
- Lack of relevant research skills and knowledge; in many cases, lack of necessary language competence to cope with research demands

General policies and provisions
Challenges also stem from overall education policies, regulations and provisions at both the larger systemic level and the institutional level:

- Absence of or inadequate scope for AR in policies and regulations
- No or poor provision for school heads and administrators to support AR
- Very low priority given to AR in resources allocation
- AR seen as the teacher's personal concern and not as an institutional undertaking

■ Doing AR
Broadly speaking, literature on AR (e.g. Burns, 2010; Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988; McIntyre, 2008; Norton, 2009; Sagor, 2000) suggests the following key stages in any AR:

- Identifying an issue or concern
- Designing a research study to explore it
- Carrying out the study
- Evaluating/reflecting on the study; gaining insights
- Modifying practice in consequence

However, as discussed earlier, there are differing views about whether the last stage in the list – of modifying practice – is a necessary part of AR.

These stages imply that out of numerous difficulties, concerns or curiosities teachers regularly come across in their work they decide to go into a deeper exploration of one. This concern or curiosity is then converted into a 'research question' with an accompanying plan of the what, how and when of the exploration; that is, what kind of information they may need, who/where they may get it from, how they would collect it, how they would analyse and make sense of the gathered information and, finally, what they would do with the insights gained and lessons learnt from the investigation. However, in reality, such studies do not generally seem to move in a linear progression from one stage to another, but are seen to work through a more complex process consisting of cycles or spirals, in which teachers keep shuttling between different stages of a study and also move along recurring cycles of AR studies. Three graphical representations of the AR process are reproduced below as examples.

Figure 1: AR Spiral (McIntyre, 2008, p. 7)
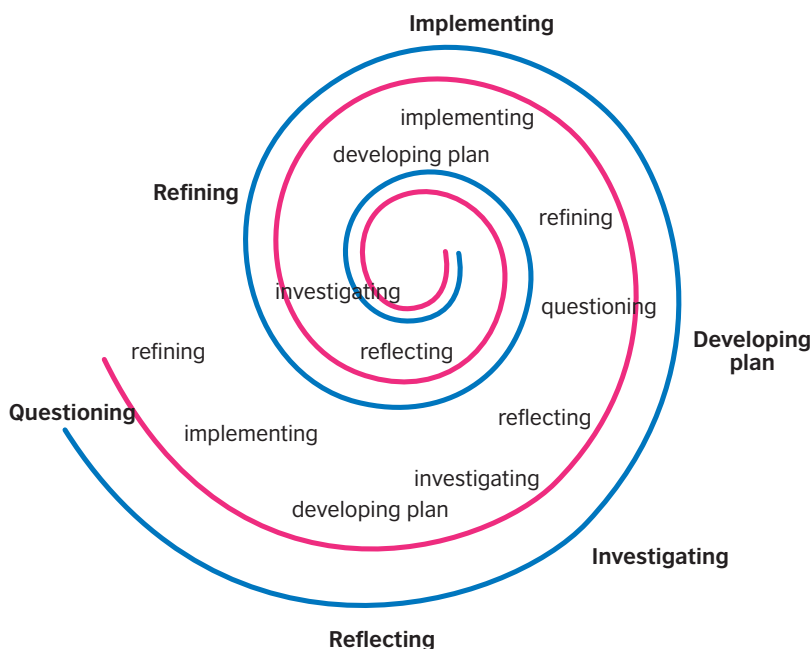
Figure 2: Cyclical AR Model (Burns, 2010, p. 9)

Reflect

Plan

CYCLE 1

Observe

Action

Reflect

Revised
Plan

CYCLE 2

Observe

Action
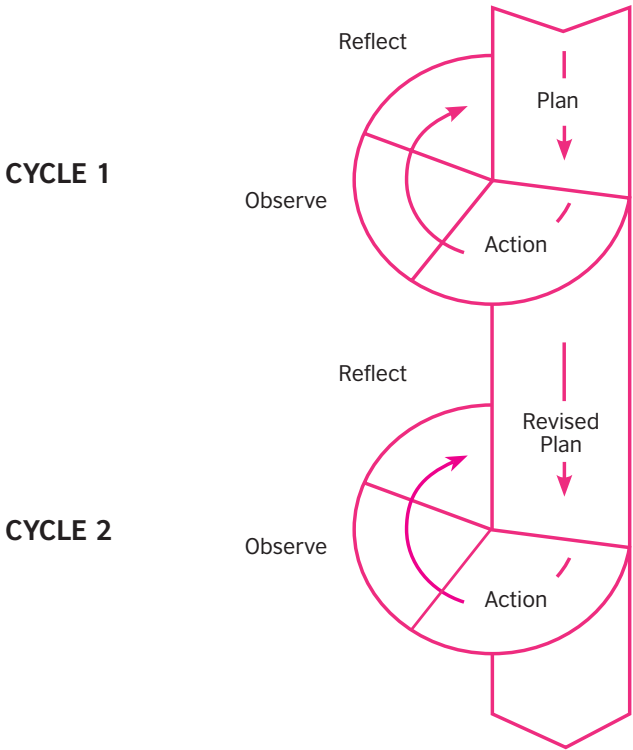
Figure 3: Complex AR Model (Henning et al., 2009, p. 9)
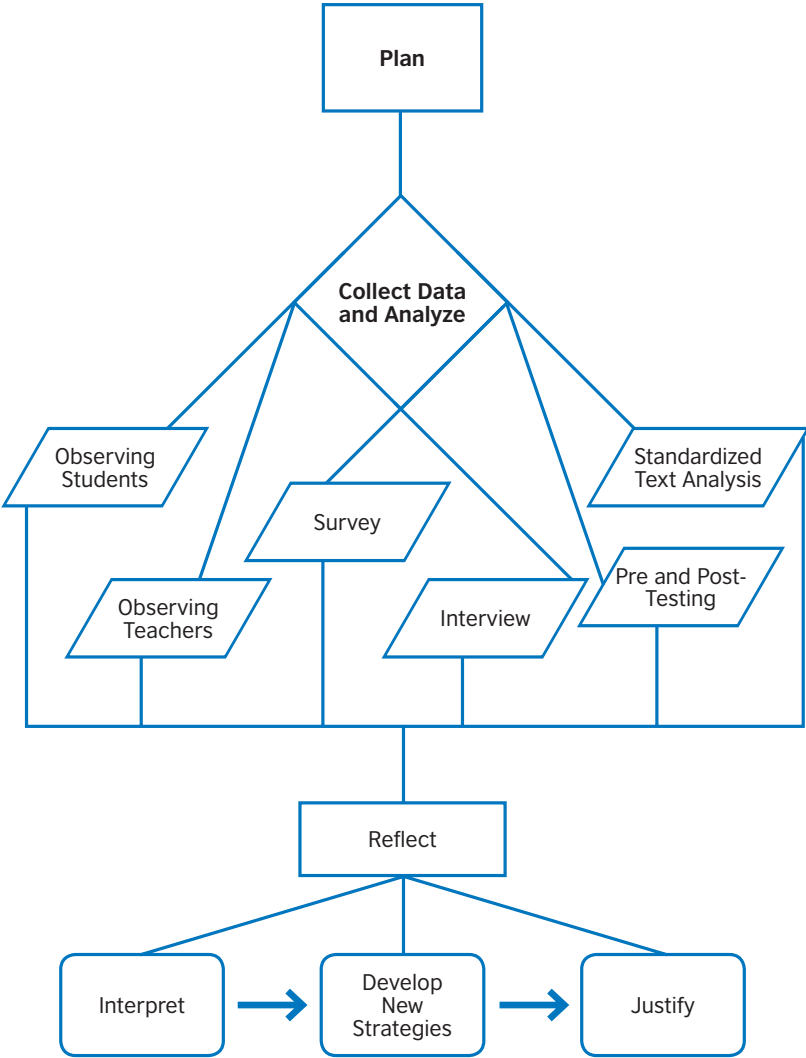
The key AR stages represented in these figures do not include the stage of dissemination which is an integral part of academic research. There are different opinions on whether reporting of outcomes – through conference presentations, journal articles, book publications and so on – should constitute a necessary part of AR, as it is in academic research. Most AR literature seems to accord relatively low importance to formal reporting and dissemination of AR. However, some like Sagor (2000) strongly argue in favour of wider sharing of AR outcomes. According to Sagor (2000), reporting on AR is a powerful means of countering the isolation of teacher-researchers, besides giving them a highly rewarding feeling that they are contributing to a collective knowledge base. Going by the considerable

increase in the number of AR studies being reported in journals and collections being published as books, it seems that sharing and dissemination are beginning to figure among the priorities of AR. It also makes sense in view of the argument that AR can serve as an important source of information and insights on classroom processes and practices explored by an insider researcher.

There are, however, two issues that need to be considered in this context. The first relates to the norms and means of dissemination, whether AR reports should follow the standardised norms and language of reporting to be received on a par with academic research. Many like Sagor (2000) recommend informal and less intimidating settings, like staff lunch meetings and teacher conferences, and simple narrative forms of reporting. Rebolledo et al. (2016) actually follow a story-like reporting format complete with photos, cartoons, emoticons and pieces of conversation (see Section 3 below for more details of their AR project). The second issue in terms of dissemination relates to generalisability and wider applicability of the reported research. How far may the reported findings be generalised for other contexts? How widely can they be applied? In the words of Altrichter et al. (1993, p. 202) mentioned at the beginning of this section, the findings from one AR study "cannot be successfully applied to other contexts but they can be made accessible to other practitioners as hypotheses to be tested". In other words, in AR one study's findings are another's hypotheses.

To sum up this section, the rationale for AR is based on the argument that practical problems and concerns of a classroom or school need specific solutions or ways of addressing them, which can only be worked out inside their context where the teacher is a better placed and more credible agent for such working out of solutions. There are numerous benefits of AR, not only by way of immediately relevant solutions and ideas but also in terms of improved teacher professionalism and understanding, both of which ultimately benefit the school and its learners. However, there are also several challenges in AR associated with teachers' work environments, personal traits and systemic policies and provisions. Though different models of doing AR exist, they share a common set of key stages, viz. identifying a problem, working out a plan of study, carrying it out and reflecting on the outcomes to draw lessons and insights. This takes us to some actual examples of doing AR. In the next section we look at several recent examples of interesting AR initiatives and try to draw useful ideas and implications from them for other AR undertakings.

Action Research in practice

In this section we will look at four recent AR examples – from Chile, Turkey, India and Nepal – which provide interesting insights and lessons on the role and contribution of AR to teachers' own and consequently schools' improvement.

■ AR in Chile, Turkey, India and Nepal
In 2013 the first cohort of 40-50 teachers in the Champion Teachers project in Chile, jointly promoted by the British Council and the Ministry of Education, came together to undertake what was eventually called 'exploratory action research'. In this project the participating teachers, mostly from the state sector schools, explored various issues of their interest through small-scale context-specific action research studies. They were supported over the year by some university

academics as mentors, who primarily helped them to better understand their concerns, work out plans of exploration and actually explore them. The teachers not only benefitted in terms of deepening their understanding of the issues being explored and gaining insights into how they might be addressed, they also improved their skills of exploration, learnt about 'researching' and showed remarkable changes in their perceptions and attitudes about teaching-learning. The success of the first cohort prompted the project to continue with another cohort the following year, in which some first cohort participants took on the role of mentors. At the time of writing the third cohort is about to complete their studies. Details of the project are available in Rebolledo et al. (2016) and also online at http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/attachments/british_council_champion_teachers_1.pdf.

In a somewhat different way, but undertaking a similar journey, teachers from various universities in Turkey have been undertaking AR studies "led by internal trainers, [with the] classroom as research setting, ongoing support, writing and publishing, supported by following conferences" for over five years now (Dikilitas et al., 2015, p. 2). The Turkey project originated in 2010 as an in-house activity within one institution, Gediz University, in which several teachers undertook AR and presented their studies to colleagues at an in-house conference at the end of the year. However, over the years, the scope and reach of this annual activity increased and now it is a nation-wide activity culminating in large-scale annual teacher research conferences.

A similar initiative was launched by the All India Network of English Teachers (AINET) in India in 2015, led by the author. In the first round of this project about 40 school teachers volunteered to undertake AR studies on issues of their choice and interest with the support of mentors and peers. The initiative later won funding support from the British Council ELT Research Partnerships (ELTREP) awards scheme. The participants in the project, most with no previous experience of research, undertook AR studies on various practical classroom problems from their own work settings. In the process they were supported by mentors and fellow-participants. The first round is nearing completion, with the participants working on finalising their research reports to be published as a collection of teacher research studies. Some of these studies and studies-in-progress were presented at the AINET International Conference in January 2016 and are available in the conference proceedings (Dixit et al., 2016).

An AR approach was also innovatively followed in the two one-week-long Nepal Hornby Residential Schools organised in Kathmandu in 2013 and 2014 by the British Council and the Hornby Trust, UK. The participants, about 30 school teachers from Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, had come together to deliberate on 'Teaching and learning English in low resource classrooms', the theme of the two schools. Unlike conventional training programmes, these Hornby schools adopted an exploratory approach, encouraging the participants to collaborate with each other in voicing their concerns, sharing ideas and experiences on how to explore and address the concerns, and making collaborative plans to actually carry out explorations when they went back to their schools. Videos and stories of how the participants identified issues, got ideas from each other on exploring and addressing them and planned further action are available at http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/low-resource-classrooms.

■ **Lessons from the AR studies**

All these instances of AR are firmly situated in their specific contexts and have emerged out of the local exigencies. But in spite of the diversity of genesis, modus operandi, participant profiles and priorities, all of them have certain things in common:

- Though education authorities are involved in some cases, they all have a strong bottom-up nature. Whether in the Turkey and Nepal projects with stronger involvement of institutions and authorities, or the Chile and India projects, which are essentially voluntary initiatives of participating teachers, teacher participants are central to discussions, planning and decision making.
- There is a significant teacher voluntarism and insider leadership visible in these initiatives. In the Turkey and Chile projects the participants from earlier rounds of AR are seen taking on mentoring and other leading roles in subsequent rounds.
- There is a clear emphasis on exploration and collaboration. Though there are AR studies in search of and trying out solutions in all projects, there are also a considerable number of other studies aimed at enhancing understanding of an issue and not immediately concerned with finding solutions.
- In all these projects the teachers seem to be flexible and adaptive in approaches and methods and to value the process of exploration as much as, if not more than, the outcomes of the AR studies. As the reports on the Turkey and Chile projects (Dikilitas et al., 2015; Rebolledo et al., 2016) show, the AR studies did not stick to a pre-decided path or plan the entire process in advance, but frequently changed their course as circumstances demanded. Neither were they rigid about methods, tools or norms of research.

What seems to stand out as a characterising feature of these initiatives is the combination of ongoing support, especially conceptual and affective, coming from mentors and peers with great autonomy for the participants to work in their own individual ways. Right from choosing an issue and planning a study to exploring it in various ways and presenting it to others, the participants were supported at every stage without taking away their right or freedom to make choices and take decisions. Thus, the studies proceeded in a constantly adaptive mode, adjusting to continually changing needs and circumstances.

A number of key insights from these AR studies, which may be useful in other similar initiatives, can be summarised as follows:

- Teachers need regular support at every stage of this challenging process, as corroborated by the actual experience in several teacher action research initiatives (Dikilitas et al., 2015; Rebolledo et al., 2016). Unlike in academic research, in AR it is not enough just to support teachers in building up their research competence and actually carrying out research. They also seem to need a more empowering and enabling sense of conviction about the gains to be made by undertaking AR and about the value of their own research. They also need support to overcome the constraints of their own beliefs and assumptions and to cope with the

stress of working in apathetic environments.

- Collaboration seems to be a key contributor to such empowering and enabling support. The support of outside mentors may be useful to teachers in conceptualising and designing AR studies, ensuring their feasibility and validity and improving research knowledge and skills. But fellow-teachers as collaborators also provide valuable support with their insider knowledge of the context, better understanding of the affective challenges of the AR process and ideas rooted in their experience of the reality. In the Chile project the inclusion of some first cohort teachers as mentors for the second cohort was a huge support because these peer-mentors "not only clearly understood the context of the teachers [they were] mentoring, but [were] able to relate the value of the process to [their] mentees far more effectively because of having first made the EAR journey [themselves]" (Rebolledo et al., 2016, p. 3). In the Nepal Hornby Schools it was the constant collaboration with peers – sharing one's concerns, inviting ideas and suggestions on how to explore and address them, making collaborative action plans in groups of people with common concerns – which deepened the participants' understanding of their problems and raised their confidence in doing something about them.

- A look at the issues or concerns chosen for exploration by the teachers shows that they are directly related to specific teaching-learning contexts and have an immediate and practical relevance for the teachers. Here is a sample list of topics researched by the teachers, which is fairly representative of common teacher concerns:
  - Students' speaking anxiety in the classroom; pair and group activities in the classroom; team teaching; student beliefs about learner autonomy; error correction in pronunciation (Turkey project: Dikilitas et al., 2015)
  - How to wrap up classes; seating arrangements and groupings; improving participation and inclusion; why students don't speak in English (Chile Project: Rebolledo et al,, 2016)
  - Improving group activities in the classroom; how students use the textbook; managing homework correction; handling many classes in a room without partitions (Nepal Hornby School: http://www. teachingenglish.org.uk/low-resource-classrooms)
  - Writing habits of students; student perceptions about the textbook; problems in reading aloud; why students don't do homework; student expectations from teachers of English (India AINET project: Dixit et al., 2016)

It should, therefore, be obvious that both the process of exploring these issues and their outcomes would directly contribute to improving teacher understanding and teacher action in dealing with the issues. There are then greater chances of arriving at specific solutions to specific problems.

- However, these projects also point out that arriving at solutions to problems need not be the sole concern of AR. Greater importance is given to exploring issues, concerns and problems as thoroughly as possible before any action is planned to address them. In fact, the projects seem to take a conscious stand that exploration in and by itself can be a worthy end of AR:

Teachers were encouraged not to immediately plan an intervention as in

some forms of action research. Instead, the desirability of an exploratory first phase was strongly emphasised which would involve extensively clarifying the existing situation – the nature of a given 'problem' or other kind of issue – before any action for change was conceived or undertaken [....] Researching in order to understand a given situation was, then, seen as key – as an important preliminary to new action, but also, potentially, as a sufficient end in itself. (Rebolledo et al., 2016, p. 6)

■ Teacher and school improvement through AR

The general benefits of engagement in AR abstracted from various studies (see section 2.3 above) seem applicable to these AR initiatives too. The reports on the four AR projects discussed show that the participating teachers gained in the following key ways:

- New perspectives on looking at issues and problems they regularly came across in their work
- New skills and knowledge about coping with them, particularly skills of converting problems into explorable propositions; and planning and implementing exploratory studies
- Heightened confidence and optimism that they can handle their challenges, coupled with a sense of agency
- Concrete solutions, or at least clear directions towards them, for specific problems in the teachers' immediate circumstances in many cases

In addition, other benefits in the projects appear to be particularly valuable and likely to have long term impact:

- In many cases the process of AR has led to better and closer teacher-teacher and teacher-student relationships. Many teachers directly involved their students in the studies in various ways as informants, as collaborators and even as co-researchers. Within the project and outside, the teachers also worked with other teachers from their own as well as other schools, sharing ideas, experiences and concerns. For many teacher participants it was an uncommon – if not the first – experience of engaging with students and colleagues in making sense of their situations. In the course of such engagement they not only received valuable help, ideas and support, they also developed a closer rapport with their students and peers.

  ...[T]eachers' final reflections have also shown how simply consulting students about important issues (that is, exploring them *with* students) has in itself helped to ameliorate an initially problematic situation. (Rebolledo et al., 2016, p.7, emphasis in original)

- Numerous collaborative groups and networks have emerged out of these initiatives. Most of these groups consist of not only the original teacher-researchers from a particular project, but also their peers, new teachers interested in undertaking AR, teachers looking for ideas and suggestions for their own problems and even academics interested in AR. There are already some vibrant web-based communities, Facebook groups, email lists and smaller localised teacher development groups, which are carrying forward the interest and action in AR.

- As a consequence of this, at least two kinds of shared pools of ideas, suggestions, expertise and resources seem to be building up, one related to AR and the other to numerous practical issues and challenges in teaching and learning English.

It should not be very difficult to see that with all these tangible and intangible gains teachers have from engaging in AR, they significantly improve their professional and personal capacities. It should also not be difficult to see that, in the long term, this is a huge contribution to school improvement too, since schools come to have more aware, more mature and more effective teachers.

Conclusion

AR has emerged not just as a powerful way of enhancing teacher understanding and teacher professionalism, but also as an authentic and valuable source of information about the classroom and a productive way of impacting classroom practice. However, when teachers decide to be researchers they are faced with numerous challenges associated with their school environment and work culture, their personal and professional qualities and the overall education system, including its policies and regulations. AR is a complex and demanding process and teachers need both affective and professional support at every stage of it. Yet the benefits of engaging in AR outweigh the challenges and the stress it brings, and hugely enrich the teachers, ultimately benefitting their learners and schools. Numerous examples of AR initiatives, including those described in this chapter, suggest that collaboration among teachers provides empowering and enabling support and is essential to the success of AR, in addition to the technical and conceptual support mentors and research advisors may provide. Such collaboration may emerge from school-wide collective AR initiatives, groups built around an AR project or simply wider networking and sharing amongst teachers. It is heartening to see that numerous online communities and groups already exist with a specific interest in AR which offer teachers various opportunities for collaboration.

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The Spread of English as a Medium of Instruction in Nepal's Community Schools

The Spread of English as a Medium of Instruction in Nepal's Community Schools

Min Bahadur Ranabhat and Subodh Babu Chiluwal, with Richard Thompson

Aims of this research

The expansion of English-medium (EM) schools in Nepal over the last 10-15 years is a highly significant development not only in the area of education but also for Nepali society as a whole. Any community (government) school can decide to change from Nepali to English as its medium of instruction. A discussion is required within the School Management Committee (SMC), after consulting teachers and parents, and then with the decision made a formal letter is sent signed by the SMC Chair to the District Education Office (DEO) and to the Resource Person (RP), the local link between schools and the DEO. There is no scope in administrative regulations for intervention by the DEO for this decision to be overturned and no 'quality threshold' to be met, with no official policy advice available for SMCs and schools. There is no central record in the Ministry of which schools have changed to EM.

There is an information void about what is actually happening across Nepal in terms of community schools styling themselves as EM schools. Data on medium of instruction is not collected through the national Education Management Information System biannual data returns from schools (in what are known as 'FLASH' reports) and it has not been requested from or reported by Districts to the central bodies. Medium of instruction status is not recorded in the national programme of testing nor in relation to the national examination system. This may be in part due to the highly politicized nature of the debate around 'going EM' and its link with other national values that would make such reporting and analysis contentious. Ethnic and linguistic divisions and struggles for greater equality continue to dominate much of Nepal's politics and the lives of its peoples (Von Einseidel, Malone and Pradhan, 2012), as the country is increasingly a part of a globalizing world.

The absence of data collection within Nepal's education sector means 'going EM' has been a poorly measured and under analyzed phenomenon. The aim of this research study, therefore, was to go to school districts and report on the actuality of community schools and English-medium teaching, with the intention of informing debate and policy.

■ Research questions

Four research questions informed our study, as follows:

1. How many government schools have moved to English as their medium of instruction?
   a. Is this an urban phenomenon?
   b. Is the phenomenon linked to social class and caste?
   c. Is ethnicity a factor?
2. What are the perceptions of headteachers, teachers and parents, on the drivers for EMI? How is EMI seen to equate to quality in education?
3. Are we heading towards an almost wholly EMI schools system?
4. What equality implications can be seen?

These questions were formulated so as to establish the pattern of EM and non EM community schools in the area of study, investigating also the implications of that pattern and the perceptions surrounding EM schooling of those most involved locally in this phenomenon.

Literature review

Successive national census data record many languages and dialects in Nepal, one of the most multilingual states on earth (Pradhan and Shrestha, 2005). The 2011 Census recorded 123 languages spoken as a mother tongue with only 44.6% claiming Nepali as their first language. Nepali is the widely used lingua franca and the language of the state. However English is rapidly gaining ground, particularly in the private sector. Other voices in Nepal see the multilingual nature of Nepal as a source of richness and identity to be treasured and sustained with Awasthi (2011) regarding policies for monolingualism as "imported ideologies":

> Languages are the means of promoting Nepal's unity in diversity, and developing harmony and understanding at local, national and international levels. (Awasthi, 2011, p.85)

In terms of policy, Phyak (2011) commented in a paper for the Asian Development Bank (ADB) School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) Mid Term Review:

> The MOE [Ministry of Education] does not have any policy regarding the English medium of instruction in schools (although there is a tide of English in schools). Moreover, educational language plans especially the MTB-MLE [Mother Tongue Based Multi Lingual Education] seem to contradict with the Per Child Funding (PCF) policy in practice. To increase the number of students to receive more funds as per the PCF policy, the community managed schools are implementing English medium of instruction. But they are not worried about the availability of competent teachers and resources to teach all subjects in English. (Phyak, 2011, p.41)

Phyak suggests a policy vacuum exists in relation to English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in community schools and that there are contradictory drivers for change. The Medium of Instruction and Languages for Education (MILE) Report (Seel, Yadava and Kadel, 2015) represents a major effort by the government and partners to help construct a comprehensive language policy for its schools.

Beyond a policy for community schools, Bhatta and Budothoki (2013, p.25) comment on a "further need to deconstruct this state discourse, or lack thereof, around private schooling" which is EM. Elsewhere, Khaniya believes that "the private schools have achieved high respect from the community by using English as the medium of instruction" (Khaniya, 2007, p.231). However "the responsible authority who are involved in policy decisions and implementation should have clear visions about the why and how of the private sector in education" (ibid, p.238).

The issue of competence to operate as an English Medium school was raised in the Monitoring and Evaluation Report of the British Council Nepal 'English for Teaching: Teaching for English Plus' (ET:TE+) programme (British Council, 2014). There was concern about the personal standard of English of community school teachers, as identified through use of the British Council's international-standard 'Aptis' language competence test:

> The low levels of competence in English – well below that required to teach English to others and to teach other subjects through the medium of English - cast doubt on the wisdom or the ability of government schools to go 'English Medium' unless and until many of their teachers have improved their own competence in English or what being an 'English Medium school' means in language terms. If the standard of English is inadequate, trying to teach subject content through that medium will fail, while English itself is a much-failed subject at School Leaving Certificate [SLC] in government schools. (British Council 2014, p.26)

Some evidence on the impact of EMI is available from India. Nair (2015) analysed Young Lives longitudinal data of attainment in maths by primary school children in the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, which suggested that "introducing English medium of instruction at earlier grades during school life may negatively affect learning outcomes of students" (Nair 2015, p.4).

Contributory causes include student factors – unfamiliarity with and lack of fluency in English; greater confidence in Mother Tongue (MT); and teacher factors – competence to teach in EM. Ranabhat also refers to this in the context of Nepal (Ranabhat, 2014). However when we turn to the views of parents and pupils themselves we find strong support for EM schooling. Bhatta and Budothoki (2013, p.17) reported that

> The major desire for private schooling is based on the fact that private schools use English as the medium of instruction. In our numerous interviews with parents and students, this was stated as the primary motive for their participation in private schooling. Coupled with this is the high quality of education that is imparted in private schools, including regular classes, and more intensive and individualized supervision and care of the students.

Similarly, Subedi, Shrestra, Maharjan and Suvedi (2013) asked a large sample of parents about their choice of schools and found that:

Overall, 75 percent of the parents whose children are attending private schools believe that private schools are 'good' in terms of providing education to their children, while 40 percent of the parents whose children are attending public schools feel this way. The main reason for preferring private schools is quality education (53 percent) and English medium classes (21.5 percent). (ibid, p.60)

The issues of quality education and EM appear to be strongly linked in the minds of many parents and young people. A Nepali Times news reporter, following up on the British Council's 'ET:TE+' report, wrote:

Part of the reason seems to be related to migration, where Nepalis in the Gulf and Malaysia find that they earn less than their Filipino or Indian counterparts because they don't speak English, and send word home to use their money to send their children to English schools. (Gurung, 2014)

Liechty (2003, p. 213) in his study of middle class Nepalis in Kathmandu writes that for them

English proficiency is simultaneously the key to a better future, an index of social capital and part of the purchase price for a ticket out of Nepal.

However, we need to look critically at the quality and usefulness of the English actually available to most Nepalis. Blommaert (2005), studying urban language innovations, writes:

The varieties of English spread across society enter a local social-semiotic economy, and so offer opportunities for localising transnational indexicalities to speakers, the effects of which are highly meaningful locally. The problem is: they are only meaningful locally, they do not count as 'English' as soon as trans-local norms are imposed on them. The kinds of English we have seen in our discussion above are what we would call 'low-mobility' forms of English: they only count as English in that particular environment. (p. 410)

Indexicalities identify the status and power of these kinds of English together with other languages in a pattern of social interaction familiar from the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1992, p.64):

Different agents' linguistic strategies are strictly dependent on their positions in the structure of the distribution of linguistic capital, which can in turn be shown to depend, via the structure of chances of access to the education system, on the structure of class relations.

In Bourdieu's theory, those of higher socioeconomic status have greater access to high value English, which in the Nepal context means the better-quality EMI institutional schools clustered in major urban areas, particularly the Kathmandu conurbation. The evidence is that the poor quality of English available in community (and probably some institutional) schools gives 'low mobility' English. The hoped-for benefits of good quality, high mobility competence in English are unlikely to arise and inequalities are likely to be reinforced.

Methodology

This research has taken a qualitative approach, deemed the appropriate methodology to address the research questions which are concerned with attitudes, values and beliefs in relation to English Medium in schools including the needs and expectations of participants. Researchers built a developing, holistic picture of the issues under consideration through semi-structured interviews recorded in field notes; and reported in detail through field reports.

Decisions taken were:

- To concentrate fieldwork in one District. No single District can represent Nepal's diversity ethnically, linguistically, politically and economically, but a single district would provide a coherent geographical entity within which to collect new knowledge on EM in community schools
- To collect central District data from the District Education Office
- To conduct semi-structured interviews and discussions with central staff – District Education Officer and Resource Persons
- To conduct fieldwork in a sample of 10 community schools. A multistage stratified sampling approach was adopted. In the first stage, the district would be divided into five geographic clusters based on geography and population (e.g. sub-metro, municipality and Village Development Committee [VDC]). In the second stage, schools would be randomly selected from the total school list to represent each selected cluster: one EM and one non-EM school to be selected from each cluster in consultation with DEO officials
- Through fieldwork visits to each school, conduct semi-structured interviews with key staff and conduct focus group discussions

Data were brought together in Kathmandu, quality controlled and then entered for analysis electronically, employing Microsoft Excel and SPSS software.

The study used the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA). Informed consent was sought from all participants, with the right at any time to withdraw that consent. Participants were assured that data would be anonymised and confidentiality ensured. No incentive was offered to participants and no offers were made to meet any of their expenses.

Data collection and analysis

■ Sample district
The District chosen was Chitwan. Chitwan was selected because it is centrally situated in Nepal, with a heterogenous population relatively representative of Nepal's ethnic and language variety; and because it was known from other research to have a number of English Medium community schools.

■ District profile
Situated within the middle Terai region of Nepal, Chitwan is often described as more advanced in terms of infrastructure and income than any district outside the urbanized Kathmandu valley. The Royal Chitwan National Park attracts a considerable number of foreign tourists. Also, with the building of new educational

institutions in sectors such as agriculture, medicine and engineering it has attracted attention from throughout the country. The Submetro area in particular has seen rising living standards. Administratively, the district comprises 1 Submetro municipality, 8 municipalities and 8 Village Development Committees (VDCs), with five electoral constituencies. Bharatpur is the district headquarters of Chitwan. The total population of the district recorded in the 2011 Census was 579,984.

In Chitwan the Brahmin Hill (28.6%), Chhetree (11.4%) and Tharu (10.9%) remain the dominant groups. Tamang, Gurung, Newar, Chepang/Praja, Kami and Magar also have a presence within the district. In terms of religion, the majority of people in Chitwan are Hindu (81.4%) followed by Buddhists (13.0%), Christians (3.4%) with smaller shares of Islam, Kirat, Sikh, Jain and other religions. Language wise 70.1% of the total population speak Nepali; 10.2% of people speak Tharu. Tamang is spoken by 4.9% followed by Chepang with 3.7%. There are also various languages having smaller groups of users (CBS, 2011).

■ Sample schools

To generate our sample of 10 community schools, the district was divided into 5 areas with 2 schools to be taken from each area, one an EM school and the other a non-EM school. The areas were drawn up to cover the entire district and to include the most urban and most rural areas as well as the largest ethnic minority group in the district, the Tharu, as follows:

- Sub-metro area (Bharatpur): most urban part of the district
- Municipality in the West of the district
- Municipality in the East of the district: area with significant Tharu population
- Municipality in the South of the district: relatively remote area of fertile farmland on the Indian border
- VDC in hill area in the North of the district: rural and thinly populated part of the district with a largely Janajati (indigenous) population

The research model was to choose at random one EM and one non-EM school in each area. This proved to be impossible as the District Education Office had no list of schools by EM/non-EM status (see below). The method adopted therefore was to take a known EM school in each area provided by the DEO's staff, four of which were Higher Secondary Schools (HSS), and then add in each case the nearest non-EM school to that EM school.

Our ethical approach to the research was approved by the DEO. In relation to each school, consent was sought from the head teacher and the School Management Committee and all data collected was signed off by the individual and stamped by the school.

Table 1: Schools included in the sample

School	Address	Year going EM (BS/CE)[1]	Current EM status
EM schools			
Narayani Model Higher Secondary School	Submetro	2067 (2010)	EM SLC entries
Annapurna Higher Secondary School	West Chitwan	2068 (2011)	up to G9

School	Address	Year going EM (BS/CE)[1]	Current EM status
Janajagriti Higher Secondary School	East Chitwan	2066 (2009)	EM SLC entries
Someswor Higher Secondary School	Madi, South Chitwan	2067 (2010)	up to G5
Tribeni Baraha Secondary School	Muglin, North Chitwan	2065 (2008)	up to G7
Non-EM schools			
Devjyoti Lower Secondary School	Submetro	2067 (2010)	planning 2074 (2017)
Basundhara Rastriya Primary School	West Chitwan	-	planning 2074 (2017)
Malpur Secondary School	East Chitwan	2068 (2011)	planning 2074 (2017)
Rastriya Primary School	Madi, South Chitwan	2070 (2013)	no plans
Devibhanjyang Rastriya Primary School	Muglin, North Chitwan	-	no plans

Three of the sampled non-EM schools had in the recent past changed to English Medium and then reverted to Nepali Medium instruction. This is discussed below.

■ Research tools
Research tools used were:

- District Education Officer Interview Sheet
- Resource Persons Focus Group Discussion
- Headteacher Interview Sheet
- Teacher Interview Sheet
- Parent Focus Group Discussion

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[1] Note: Nepal uses the Bikram Sambat calendar, which is +57 years different from the western or 'common era' (CE) calendar.

These tools are available as an Appendix to this chapter. Research tools were printed in English but a Nepali translation was made available as a prompt sheet to share with interviewees. Interviews tended in practice to be conducted in a mix of English and Nepali, with most of the discussion in Nepali. All fieldworkers were native Nepalis with a good command of English.

Findings

■ EM and non-EM community schools in Chitwan

Data was found to be available on the total number of community and institutional schools in the district. Schools in Chitwan fall into one of thirteen Resource Centre (RC) areas.

Table 2 : Number of Community and Institutional schools: Chitwan district (Source: DEO Office, Chitwan, 2072/2015)

Type of Schools by Resource Centre area	Number of Schools		
	Community School	Institutional School	Total
Bhandara	43	6	49
Khairehani	25	19	44
Jhuwani	30	23	53
Pithuwa	33	17	50
Shaktikhor	35	2	37
Kabilas	24	1	25
Muglin	32	4	36
Lanku	31	49	80
Geetanagar	30	17	47
Parbatipur	26	14	40
Dibaynagr	23	8	31
Madi	21	3	24
Ayodhapuri	24	4	28
Total	**377**	**167**	**544**

Sixty-nine percent of all schools are community (government) schools and 31% are institutional (private) schools. Kabilas and Muglin are the two RC areas in the rural North of Chitwan and have the lowest numbers of institutional schools. The two RC areas in the Submetro area are Lanku and Geetanagar and these show high numbers of institutional schools, particularly the 49 such schools in Lanku which covers central Bharatpur.

Number of EMI and non-EMI community schools in Chitwan

Our field staff on arrival found that the District Education Office held no data on which community schools were EM and which remained non-EM, that not being a part of the standard government dataset they hold, for example not part of the FLASH data. The DEO made a decision to collect this data and, at the regular meeting of RPs on 2nd Jestha, 2073 (15th May 2016), he instructed all his RPs to check and confirm data on their community schools as EM or non-EM. The results of this data collection are given in Table 3.

Table 3 : EM and non-EM community schools by RC Area
(Source: DEO Office, Chitwan, 2073/2016)

Resource Centre area	Number of Community Schools		
	EM schools	non-EM schools	Total
Bhandara	11 (26%)	32 (74%)	43
Khairhani	10 (40%)	15 (60%)	25
Jhuwani	26 (87%)	4 (13%)	30
Pithuwa	20 (61%)	13 (39%)	33
Shaktikhor	0 (0%)	35 (100%)	35
Kabilas	3 (13%)	21 (87%)	24
Muglin	4 (13%)	28 (87%)	32
Lanku	26 (84%)	5 (16%)	31
Gitanagar	27 (90%)	3 (10%)	30
Parbatipur	24 (92%)	2 (8%)	26
Dibaynagar	14 (61%)	9 (39%)	23
Madi	17 (81%)	4 (9%)	21
Ayodhyapuri	14 (58%)	10 (42%)	24
Total	**196 (52%)**	**181 (48%)**	**377**

A small majority of the 377 community schools identify as EM schools: 196 out of 377, which is 52%. The distribution of EM across the district is, however, uneven. EM schools are rare in the rural North (Kabilas and Muglin) and dominant in the Submetro area (Lanku and Gitanagar); both of these findings mirror the distribution of institutional schools. Lanku has just 5 non-EM community schools, alongside 49 EM institutional schools and 26 EM community schools. This means that 94% of all schools in Lanku are EM. Across the two RC areas in the rural North, the percentage of EM schools overall is below 20%. EM appears to be more of an urban than a rural phenomenon. However in the South (Madi and Ayodhyapuri) there is a different pattern with few institutional schools but a large number of community EM schools. This area is populated largely by higher-caste Brahmins and Chetris. It is a rich agricultural area with families capable of supporting their

children through an EM education. This finding reinforces the view that it is family economics, often closely linked to caste, which is the key factor in supporting EM schools.

According to the DEO and his staff, schools are continuing to notify them that they are changing to EM. Three of the five non-EM schools in our sample plan to convert to EM in 2014. The data suggests that EM has less of a foothold in stand-alone Primary schools. Some of these are in urban areas but most are in more isolated locations.

Table 4 : EM and non-EM community schools by level
(Source: DEO Office, Chitwan, 2073/2016)

Level of school	EM	non-EM	Total
Primary	83 (39%)	130 (61%)	213
Lower Secondary	48 (68%)	22 (32%)	70
Secondary	28 (58%)	20 (42%)	48
HSS	37 (80%)	9 (20%)	46
	196 (52%)	**181 (48%)**	**377**

Several informants believed that demand for English Medium teaching at Lower Secondary level and above is in part due to pupils attending institutional schools in Grades 1-5 but then seeking to transfer to a community EM secondary school. This might be because of a school's good reputation as a successful HSS; or in part for financial reasons (see below, 'Views of Parents'). For example, at the time of the visit, Narayani HSS (with EM instruction for SLC entries) had 272 pupils on roll in Grades 1-5 and 995 on roll in Grades 6-10 with up to 7 sections per Grade.

Reversion from EM to Nepali Medium in community schools
As noted above, three of our five randomly-selected non-EM schools had within the last five years made a change to EM but had subsequently reverted to teaching in Nepali. Two of them – Devjyoti LSS in the Submetro area and Malpur SS in East Chitwan, a Tharu area – plan to try EM again from 2074 but the third, Rastriya PS in Muglin, has no current plans to try again. In interviews, headteachers explained their reasons for these changes: see below, section 5.3.

Small schools
National FLASH data indicates that there are more than 6,000 community schools in Nepal with fewer than 50 students and, according to the DEO, in Chitwan there are 15 primary schools that have fewer than 30 students. These schools are located particularly within the hilly and rural areas of the northern and western parts of the district. In the previous academic year (2072/2015) eleven primary schools had been merged by the DEO office due to insufficient numbers of students.

Enrolment trends
In Chitwan pupil numbers continue to grow in institutional schools and to decline in community schools. In 2071, 57.6% were enrolled in community schools, down

from 65.5% in 2069. Numbers overall are growing more slowly than the District's population as a whole. Reasons suggested include:

- patterns of economic migration into and out of the district
- smaller families from a dropping birthrate

Table 5 : Enrolment trends: Chitwan district
(Source: DEO Office, Chitwan, 2072/2015)

School/Level	School Year 2069/2012			School Year 2071/2014		
	Community	Institutional	Total	Community	Institutional	Total
Primary School	44,597	27,593	72,190	38,579	33,033	75,512
Lower Secondary	27,591	13,059	40,650	25,627	17,464	43,132
Secondary School	14,488	7,478	21,966	14,128	9,338	23,525
HS School	6,717	1,347	8,064	7,969	3,598	11,567
Total	**93,393**	**49,477**	**142,870**	**86,303**	**63,433**	**149,736**

Evidence of outcomes

At Grade 8, the conclusion of the Lower Secondary/Basic Education phase, pupils sit external tests coordinated by the DEO. These tests cover all subjects of the national curriculum and can be taken in English or Nepali medium. Data on outcomes is available from the DEO.

Table 6 : District-level Grade 8 results in sample EM community schools
(Source: DEO Office, Chitwan, 2073/2016)

School	No. of students in G8		Dropout	No. of students passing		No. of distinctions	
	EM	Non-EM		EM	Non-EM	EM	Non-EM
Narayani	102	98	1 Non-EM	102	97	64	5
Annapurna	21	44	5 Non-EM	21	40	6	2
Janajagriti	54	45	2 Non-EM	54	43	8	-
Someswor	-	180	22 Non-EM	-	146	-	3
Tribeni Baraha	-	52	4 Non-EM	-	48	-	1

There were no dropouts from the EM pupil groups with a 100% pass rate and a large number of distinctions. Narayani is widely-regarded as the best school in the district and six of its students scored in the district Top Ten in this District Level Examination.

More noticeable for our purposes is the fact that the three Higher Secondary "English Medium" schools where EM has moved beyond the primary phase are only partly EM. They are all fully EM in the primary phase, and then dual-language schools in Grade 6 and above. When asked about this, headteachers described a system whereby at the end of the Primary phase (Grade 5) a school exam was set in English for those students who wished to study in an English Medium class; this was for those already at the school and for those from other schools wishing to join for further study. The process necessarily involved families deciding whether they wished their child to try for the EM stream. This tended to result in the more capable pupils being constituted as an EM stream and the weaker pupils as a Nepali Medium stream. The logic given by the headteachers was that pupils who were weak in English at Grade 5 would benefit most from continuing in Nepali Medium as their English would not be adequate to cope with the secondary curriculum taught in English. However another consideration would be the willingness or ability of families to pay the higher costs associated with English Medium study (see below, 'Views of parents/community members').

At higher grades, according to the DEO, only 4 of the 48 secondary schools in the district (Chitwan Higher Secondary School, Janajagriti Higher Secondary School, Narayani Model Higher Secondary School and Prembasti Higher Secondary School) presented candidates for the Grade 10 SLC exam in 2072/2015 in English-medium, indicating that it is still a minority who experience English as a medium of instruction at this level.

■ Views from the district centre
The District Education Officer in Chitwan has recently taken up post, and has clear views about the way forward for community schools: they need to focus on meeting the demands of parents and the community. This would include using English as the medium of instruction from nursery to upper grades, in addition to other features generally associated with private schools such as full school uniform, more computers and IT equipment and extracurricular activities including sport, dance and music. He also expressed strong support for regular meetings and feedback from teachers to parents and guardians on learning achievement and progress. His policy stance is to advocate for EM. He had just for the first time received a request from the Regional Education Office for data on EM schools, and following our interview initiated a complete survey of Chitwan schools by the team of RPs.

The interview with RPs demonstrated rather different views from these local, experienced educational professionals to that of the DEO. RPs agreed that there is strong parental demand for children to be taught in the medium of English, and strongly agreed that it is a good thing that community schools are going EM. However they strongly disagreed that English is the key to quality education. One RP said, *"It is not true that English Medium in itself makes our education good, if we can make good curriculum, Nepali Medium can also make our education good"*.

In their view, teachers are the main agent for maintaining the quality of a school. Teacher effectiveness is a basic component and the most important predictor of school effectiveness. Almost all teachers are officially fully trained but almost all teachers are still using traditional "Talk and Chalk" methods and do little preparation for their teaching. Looking at teachers and the change to EM, the RPs said that teachers are not well prepared before going to class except those teachers who had taken EM training. They agreed that old teachers close to retirement were unwilling to try to teach in English as it would be a huge challenge for them. Though they agreed with EM in principle they saw and themselves experienced difficulties. They believed that the government should retire older teachers and bring in new, well qualified teachers. If that could be done, going EM would be far more likely to succeed.

RPs pointed out that the pupil population in community schools is drawn mostly from poorer communities: 68% of Dalit and Janajati (some of the squatter population as well) and 32% other castes. There are extra costs for parents in an EM community school as the free government textbooks are only provided in Nepali so parents need to buy EM textbooks themselves – these are often imported from India where the curriculum is different. The resulting cost for poor families may mean children are unable to continue their studies. RPs feel the government needs to change policy and provide free textbooks in English. RPs also noted that many pupils move from private institutional primary schools to community secondary schools where they can receive scholarship funding as well as lower school costs such as fees, a change which is driven by economic reasons. The RPs did not believe that EM in itself increases inequality.

Both the DEO and the RPs felt strongly that training was needed for the RPs in order for them to successfully perform their role in monitoring and advising schools about EM instruction. One RP said:

> Our training and monitoring modalities are very weak, needing good training to develop skills to monitor EM schools by EM experts and demonstrate with training methods and instructional materials and equipment.

■ Views from the schools

Views of headteachers
Headteachers were in agreement that EM is a strong parental demand. This was the major reason for introducing EM given by headteachers in all the EM schools visited and described as a key pressure in non-EM schools. Eight of the 10 schools added that going EM was a step to prevent loss of pupils to competitor schools including private EM schools.

None of the headteachers had received any training in EM and its implications for their schools. In the EM schools both headteachers and SMCs had wanted to convert. All five had talked with their RP and four had consulted the DEO over the change. The schools gave only verbal information to the DEO or RP but didn't receive any further support or advice about the plan to go EM from the DEO or RPs. They had all also consulted their teachers. Someswor HSS had organized a one day work-shop about EM with a national education expert to build teachers' confidence to teach in EM.

From the headteachers' perspective, their teachers were initially worried about EM after the plan to convert was first discussed at a meeting but they discussed it together, the English teacher offered to help them, then they agreed and they made their commitment to EM class teaching. Headteachers believed that their teachers were adequately prepared for the change.

Generally RPs' visits to schools were for administrative supervision to check school data or to participate in a school function, ending with verbal wishes for the good future of the school and quality education. Headteachers felt that RPs and other visitors were positive but not constructive with respect to EM. Some schools had also been visited by Regional Education Office staff and members of the District Education Committee but none of these had dealt with medium of instruction. None of the various visitors had come to discuss teaching or classroom activities.

All five EM schools had accessed outside EM training in the last year and three out of five, large HSS schools, had also organized discussion and practice teaching through EM internally using their own resources. In one school, Narayani HSS, the senior English teacher has published a book on teaching English. Chitwan was a pilot area for the British Council's ET:TE+ training which was very popular. It also has a large and active Nepal English Language Teachers' Association (NELTA) branch that actively promotes and supports EM. The headteacher of Annapurna HSS is a former NELTA branch Chair. This district therefore has some capacity to support EM teaching, capacity which may not be present elsewhere in Nepal.

As far as resources were concerned, all the schools visited had different kinds of charts or posters located in the school office but very few schools had posters or paintings on class walls to help the students with English. An exception was Basundhara PS which had attractive wall paintings in each class. Basundhara PS was built by a foreign donor to educate orphan students, then after 2060 B.S. (2003) the school was handed over to the community. There are 50-1000 books in English in the libraries of EM schools; three smaller non-EM schools had no separate library and fewer than 30 books in English. The EM schools reported having more computers, for staff and pupil use, and four had internet access in the school while none of the non-EM schools had internet access. These differences in resourcing are likely to be connected to the HSS status of four of the EM schools: typically HSS schools are able to generate extra income from community resources, alumni and other donations and rental income from properties as they are located in urban areas. This extra income has allowed them to acquire more EM resources.

In contrast two small non-EM primary schools, Rastriya Primary School in Madi, south Chitwan and Devibhanjyang R Primary School in rural Muglin, were being helped to provide a "Tiffin Programme" for students – a free midday food distribution programme funded centrally and supported by NGO/INGO. Each school was also receiving an additional Rs12/student from the DEO to support pupils and to help student retention. Ninety-five percent of pupils at Devibhanjyang R Primary School (number on roll 115) come from the Chepang community, a marginalized minority community. Rastriya was one of the three schools which had attempted to convert to EM but then reverted to teaching in the medium of Nepali. According to the headteacher the school now had no plans to reconvert to EM. Some active parents had been keen to continue in EM but the school

recognized that the parent body as a whole simply could not afford the additional costs of buying EM textbooks and other associated costs, with no external sources of support for resources. It was not a change of mind or lack of desire to secure good English for their children. Teachers were not confident enough to teach in English and the school could not attract a good teacher of English to lead on EM and train others. This view was repeated in other schools that had begun but then abandoned EM.

The EM headteachers all said that there had been a strong impact on parents' satisfaction and also an impact on pupils' test results. There had been a positive impact on student enrolment, retention and dropout. All the sample EM schools set an entrance exam in English for new student enrollment which was very popular, with many parents registering their children to take the exam. All the EM schools operated an EM student club to provide extra time and opportunity after school to develop skills in the language.

All the Higher Secondary EM schools have an English Department; in several schools, the English Department teachers help and discuss how to teach in EM in staff meetings every month. They look after all the teachers as well as having internal staff acting as developers. In Annapurna HSS the headteacher gives follow up EM training on how to teach in EM for his own teachers and teachers from other schools in the RC area every month, and the school has also provided extra resource books for EM. All five EM headteachers said their teachers were now happy and confident to teach in EM; all five non-EM schools said their teachers would not be.

Only one school, Narayani Model HSS, has a strict policy or code of conduct for the use of the English language. Students who do not use English in the school area will be verbally disciplined or given a fine of up to Rs.10. That money goes to their class activities and/or is given as a prize to good performing students. At Annapurna HSS the Rules & Regulations for the students and the school's Teaching Improvement Plan (TIP) are publicly displayed.

Views of teachers

We set out to learn more about the teachers' use of English. Eighty per cent said they used English daily outside school with friends, and 90% described their own standard of speaking and verbal understanding as good or quite good. Teachers in EM schools were more confident in using English in formal contexts or with foreigners. All teachers interviewed knew the pedagogical terms 'student-centred teaching' and 'communicative language teaching', but many were much vaguer on what those terms actually meant in the classroom. This finding is consistent with previous evidence from evaluations of the ET:TE+ and National Initiative to Improve Teaching in English (NIITE) programmes. Our field staff confirmed that in their informal lesson observations they saw a great deal of very traditional teaching.

We also asked teachers about the use of language within the school. Results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7 : What language do you use to talk to …

Respondent group	Language used	School status	
		EM	non-EM
Headteacher	English	0	1
	English & Nepali mix	2	0
	Nepali	3	4
Fellow teachers	English	0	0
	English & Nepali mix	4	1
	Nepali	1	4
Parents	English	0	0
	English & Nepali mix	0	0
	Nepali	5	5

All talk with parents in all schools is in Nepali. More English is being used with fellow teachers in EM schools but this data indicates a lot of code switching between languages, and certainly does not indicate immersion in English. All the teachers reported that they had not used English to talk with fellow teachers, the headteacher or parents before the school considered EM and before the current enormous interest in English. So there has been some increase in the use of English.

When the conversion to EM was proposed within a school, by the headteacher and with the knowledge and support of the SMC, teachers were worried thinking it a big challenge at first. However, after discussion and practice with fellow teachers, support from their English department teacher and in some cases getting external EM training, teachers interviewed in EM schools said they were happy and confident to teach in EM. However, during the teacher interviews, older teachers did raise more problems and difficulties, while younger teachers were more optimistic, willing to change to EM and more ready to challenge competition from private institutional schools.

Seven teachers in our sample EM community schools had received external EM training from NELTA or the government's NIITE programme, but only two received this training before their school went EM. Based on this experience, most of them wanted there to be more EM training available using British Council-trained trainers and smart boards as well. A teacher at Narayani HSS added that besides other training if they had a volunteer teacher (native English speaker) it would help with conversation skills and pronunciation.

According to all the teachers interviewed in non-EM community schools, the government should provide proper EM training for all teachers in advance of starting EM teaching, to develop their teaching methods and remove fear of English. One teacher wrote:

I don't think we are capable enough to use English as a medium of instruction. We don't have the team of proficient teachers who speak English like native speakers. Our students are facing a lot of difficulties to exchange ideas due to poor vocabulary, to increase level of understanding and to integrate the knowledge which the teacher is imparting into their minds, with their own natural setting. Teachers are unable to get command over a non-native language. We can't manage pronunciation, stress, pauses and intonation. No special training is provided to the English and other subject teachers. A short period of training, in my own opinion can't develop English language proficiency and content teaching skills. Although we have tried our best each and every year, we have been facing boundless challenges of implementing English as a medium of instruction.

Views of parents/community members

Parent focus groups across all ten schools strongly agreed that it was important their children learn good English, and they all agreed or strongly agreed that they wanted their children to be taught in the medium of English. Focus groups in EM schools had a positive view that their school and its teachers wanted to develop their teaching methods while in non-EM schools there was much more doubt. Parents in EM schools were more likely to voice positive evaluations of the performance of their school: all five focus groups in EM schools evaluated their school's performance as 'good' but only two non-EM schools did so. The finding therefore is that parents hold strong views about English and judge schools more positively when they are EM. Going EM is perceived to be one important thing that good schools do.

The most-mentioned key reason for sending children to a particular school was affordability for the family. Parents said they couldn't afford to send their children to a fee-charging institutional school: when asked 'If you had money would you wish to send your child to a private school?' all five groups of parents in non-EM schools agreed while the views of parents in EM schools were divided. There is the cost of fees but also various additional costs such as the purchase of textbooks. Costs are much lower in community schools, especially non-EM schools, and scholarships are available for children from disadvantaged groups. Ability to pay is a key factor. This has serious equity implications.

A second key reason was proximity, especially in the more remote rural areas where choice of school is very limited. There is an abundance of choice in, for example, the urban Lanku RC area in Bharatpur where there are 80 schools in a compact area. A third reason, as noted above, is the importance of acquiring a good standard of English to give their children a chance of a better future.

Parents and community members at the community schools surveyed commented that they were happier with school performance at the secondary level than at primary level and wanted teachers to focus more on good teaching and learning at the primary level. This appears to be related to the reported pupil movement at Grade 6 from private primary to community secondary schools.

◼ Key findings

Key findings are summarized in the following bullet points:

- The DEO had no data on which community schools were EM and which were non-EM but could collect it via the RPs.
- In Chitwan 69% of schools are community schools and 31% EM institutional schools, which are most numerous in the Submetro area.
- New data records that 52% of the community schools are EM schools, 48% are non-EM. In total 67% of all schools are EM.
- EM is more of an urban phenomenon but not entirely so; in South Chitwan, a rich agricultural area, many community schools have gone EM.
- Fewer primary schools have converted to EM, with a likely link to their locations.
- Some schools have tried in the past to become EM but reverted to teaching in Nepali medium.
- Chitwan has some small schools (less than 50 pupils), which present further challenges in terms of EM.
- In the absence of a clear government policy the DEO's personal view on EM is important.
- RPs did not see EM as key to quality education – it is teacher effectiveness which creates quality education, and there is a lot of poor pedagogy from teachers who have had insufficient training.
- DEO and RPs agree that appropriate training is needed for RPs.
- Headteachers, teachers, parents, the DEO, the RPs – all agree that there is strong parental demand for EM schooling.
- Headteachers also felt being EM prevented the loss of pupils to competitor schools; going EM had improved recruitment and retention and reduced dropout and brought pupils back from private schools.
- No training, briefing or support was available to headteachers about changing to EM.
- Training for teachers in EM teaching is essential, needs to be of sufficient length and of good quality, and preferably made available before the school transitions to EM.
- Teachers had been anxious about moving to EM but reported in many cases that following internal and external support they were now confident.
- However, some teachers articulate concerns about the quality of English available in community schools.
- Older teachers were less positive than younger teachers.
- Money matters to schools: converting to EM brings extra costs to the school in attempting to provide appropriate resources for teachers and pupils. Some schools are in a much better position to bring in extra resources than others
- Money matters even more to parents and guardians: many of them would like their children to learn good English but know that they are excluded through poverty

Discussion

◼ Policy and information gap

The absence of a clear government language policy in relation to tuition in English Medium leaves headteachers, schools and communities to fend for

themselves and to attempt to make what they judge to be the best local choices. The government does not attempt to collect data on these choices and has no idea how many community schools have changed to EM, want to go EM, have tried EM and returned to non-EM, and so on. They do not know what the problems and successes are. Our experience in Chitwan has demonstrated that this data is straightforward to collect and the act of collecting it informs debate and the formulation of local policy and training provision.

■ Data on EM in community schools in Chitwan

A majority of community schools in Chitwan are now attempting to function in English Medium, which together with the institutional schools sector means that two thirds of all schools are EM schools. There is genuine uncertainty however about how strictly EM they are, with evidence of code-switching and concern about the poor standard of English available to teachers and being transmitted to pupils. There are schools in flux – moving in and out of EM – and elite community schools running parallel language streams. We are not at present heading towards a 100% EM school system.

Evidence from RPs links EM schools to urban areas and communities with parents and guardians in better economic circumstances. There is a problem for small schools, typically primary schools in more remote rural contexts, in attempting to introduce EM instruction. There are many such schools in Nepal – more than 6,000 schools have fewer than 50 pupils. A national policy on EM in community schools would need to bear in mind their needs and how those needs could be met.

■ Parents' views, aspirations, and school choice

As with other researchers, we find strong parental demand for their children to acquire an excellent standard of English (Bhatta and Budothoki, 2013; Subedi et al., 2013; British Council Nepal, 2014) and to receive their education in the medium of English. This aspiration is shared across geographical areas and ethnic groups. Parents and guardians' ability to gain access to that desirable good standard of English is directly related to their economic circumstances. Parents choose community EM schools because they cannot afford private school fees or EM textbooks, and can get scholarships to enable them to keep their child in school rather than leaving to help support the family economically.

■ Equality issues

Economic status is determining access to what Nepalis regard as quality education: high standards of teaching and learning with the acquisition of a high standard of English, secured through EM schooling. Community schools converting to EM is a step towards closing an equity gap with effective EM institutional schools. A new gap then opens within the community sector between those schools that are able to convert successfully and those schools that are not.

There are steps government could take to narrow the equity gap but these would require a clear policy, consistent political support for that policy and an injection of resources to make EM affordable and of good quality. This would include making government textbooks available free in English as well as Nepali; and supporting 'Room to Read' initiatives that can make material available in English, such as 500 books in a bookcase for a school.

■ **Training issues**

More and better training was a very strong theme of our fieldwork interviews:

- Training for RPs, in order for them to advise, support and challenge schools
- Training for headteachers in all aspects of moving to and then leading an EM school
- Training for teachers: some good and popular training has been available in Chitwan but no one thinks there has been enough or that the resources exist locally to meet the needs

This training of necessity needs to be able to relate to "what is possible under difficult conditions, with large, multilingual classes and scarce resources, and where students come from poor or marginalised backgrounds" (Westbrook, Durrani, Brown, Orr, Pryor, Boddy and Salvi, 2013 p.1). Training also needs to begin from where the teachers are, often with a weak mastery themselves of the language.

Conclusion

This research has established that data on EM schooling can be collected at school and district level in Nepal including the attitudes and values involved in the move of community schools to teaching in the medium of English, and the barriers to that conversion with its economic underpinnings and equality implications. A limitation of the research is its small scope: we were able to look at just a handful of schools in one District of Nepal. A different pattern and a different balance of views may exist in other areas, remote in the mountains or on the broad terai, or where there is a different social or ethnic mix.

Looking forward, the research did not attempt to go into school classrooms to measure the actual use of English or to assess the quality of that English and the success or otherwise of EM teaching in community schools. It would be instructive to know more about language interaction at the micro level. There is also scope to study the impact of a range of current limited scale initiatives on EM/non-EM provision – textbooks in English; provision of additional support and free reading texts in English; the value of English Clubs for students to practice the language; and local staff training to deliver quality teaching in English. These are all potentially rich and fruitful areas for further study which would increase our knowledge of the subject and could better inform policy and resourcing.

Acknowledgements

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Why Some Low Resourced Community Schools in Nepal Perform Well in English

Why Some Low Resourced Community Schools in Nepal Perform Well in English

Jari Metsämuuronen & Jovan Ilic

Introduction

The National Assessment of Student Achievement (NASA) dataset indicates that in Nepal there are many students in community – or government – schools at the same average English proficiency level as those with higher socioeconomic status (SES) in institutional – or private – schools. The question is: what are the factors promoting the success of these community schools in relation to the institutional schools – what is done differently to gain high scores without the same level of resources? This chapter seeks the answer to this question from three perspectives: school demographic position, student behavior, and teacher actions.

■ English in schools in Nepal

English as a lingua franca, as the language of business, and as a school subject and medium of instruction are all gaining increasing global traction. In Nepal, English fulfils the function of a lingua franca after Nepali, is increasingly the language of business, especially in the tourism sector, and is vital for students wishing to study abroad, as well as for migrant workers (Graddol, 2006; Phyak, 2011). In Nepal, English is usually taught from Grade 3 onwards in government funded community schools. In the institutionally funded private schools, English is usually the main instructional language. Exceptions are private religious schools where the instructional language may vary from Arabic to Sanskrit. In the main cities, from the first year on, children who will later apply to the private schools tend to attend a private day care institution. In most cases, the instructional language in these institutions is English. Hence, children attending private schools in the cities have been instructed in English almost their whole lives even though they would have been born into non-English speaking families. In the rural areas, children in private schools start English in formal schools as English-medium day care institutions are rare in rural areas. In these rural areas, there are also private schools where the instructional language is something other than English, mostly Nepali but also other languages such as Madhesi.

■ English testing at Grade 5

English language proficiency at Grade 5 in Nepal was assessed in 2012 (ERO, 2015). The English achievement results were linked to the International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) database using a published, two-paged text ("Antarctica: Land of Ice", see Foy & Kennedy, 2006, pp. 2-3) with four items and their item parameters (Foy & Kennedy, 2006, pp. 5-7; Martin, Mullis & Kennedy, 2006, pp.

277 & 284). The text was originally aimed at Grade 4 *native* English speakers and hence, it was adjudged by the test designers to be suitable for Grade 5 students for whom English was a second language, given that many of these had been studying in English-medium schools for some time. The PIRLS dataset and the 2012 NASA English dataset were linked together by using Item Response Theory (IRT) modeling. The actual level of English proficiency was assessed on the basis of the Common European Framework of Reference for Language[1] (CEFR) standards by using the three-phased, theory-based, and test-centered standard setting method for the wide range of proficiency levels (Metsämuuronen, 2013; for a description of the process used at Grade 8, similar to that used at Grade 5, see Metsämuuronen, Acharya & Aryal, 2013).

The average reading proficiency at Grade 5 in Nepal seems to be significantly lower than the international average of Grade 4 students in the PIRLS database. The typical 5th Grade student of English in Nepalese community schools is at the CEFR level of A1.3 ("can read familiar and some unfamiliar words and can understand very short messages dealing with everyday life and routine events or giving simple instructions"). In Nepalese institutional schools, the typical English reader is at the CEFR level of B1.1 ("can read a few pages of a wide variety of texts about familiar topics, following the main points, key words and important details even without preparation").

When the instructional language is mainly English in the institutional schools, this has a remarkably positive effect on English proficiency for the students. However, the variation in both the community and institutional schools is notable. When omitting ultimately deviating outliers in the dataset, the ability level of the students in the community schools varies from 150 to 551 units (range 401 units) on the PIRLS scale, as used in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) studies. In the institutional schools, the students vary from 244 to 629 (range 385 units). Ignoring outliers, the mean for both sets of schools is clearly lower than the international average (see Fig. 1).

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[1] Council of Europe (2011). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment.* Council of Europe.

Figure 1 : Distribution of student achievement by school type
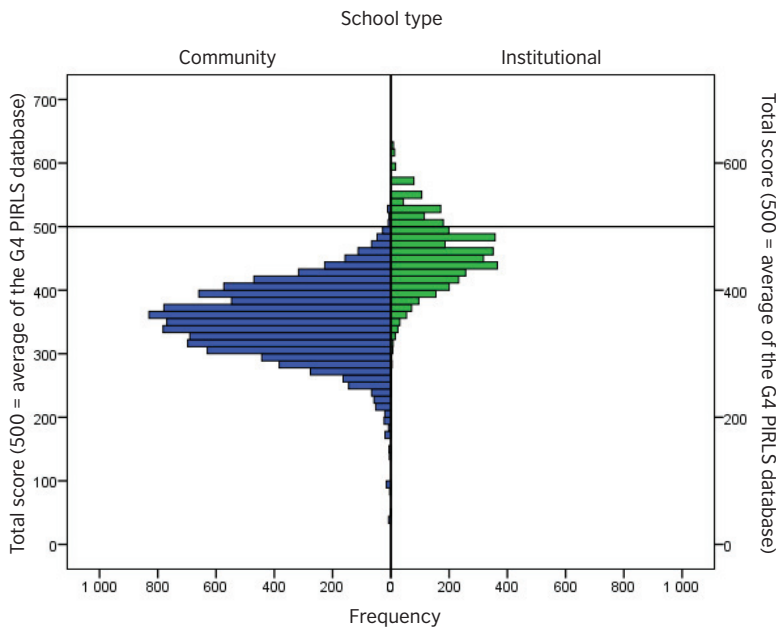
■ SES in Nepal and its connection to English achievement

Socioeconomic status (SES) plays a significant role in the educational reality of Nepal (see, for example, Metsämuuronen, 2013). The connection is seen in the assessments of student achievement in Mathematics (Acharya, Metsämuuronen & Koirala, 2013), Nepali (Acharya, Metsämuuronen & Adhikari, 2013) and Social Studies (Shakya, Metsämuuronen & Upadhaya, 2013). It seems also quite a stable phenomenon (ERO, 2015). In NASA reports, SES is defined by seven indicators including parents' education and occupation and students home possessions and accessories as well as whether the child attends a private school or not (see Metsämuuronen & Acharya, 2013; ERO, 2015). The lowest SES group includes children from community schools with parents of less than grade 10 studies (at the extreme, both are illiterate) farming as an occupation, and with not more than 5 out of the 11 identified home possessions (such as a dictionary or a desk for homework) and only one of three accessories (mobile phone, TV, or computer). At the other extreme, the highest SES group includes children with parents of at least grade 10 studies without farming as an occupation and with 6 or more out of 11 home possessions, at least two out of three accessories, and the child also attending a private school. The difference in achievement between the lowest and highest SES groups in grade 5 English proficiency was remarkable: 40 percentage points of the maximum score which equals 113 units in the PIRLS scale.

At the school level, knowing the schools' average SES and student achievement, the average SES explains 46% of the variation in achievement, which is very high (see Fig. 2; the correlation between SES and achievement is r = 0.68). Further, from the SES point of view, knowing the average socioeconomic status of the school determines in practice whether a child attends a private school or not. There are

a few interesting institutional schools with a low average SES; however, in general, institutional schools deviate remarkably from community schools in achievement on the basis of SES, as seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2 : Average SES and achievement in English in the sample schools
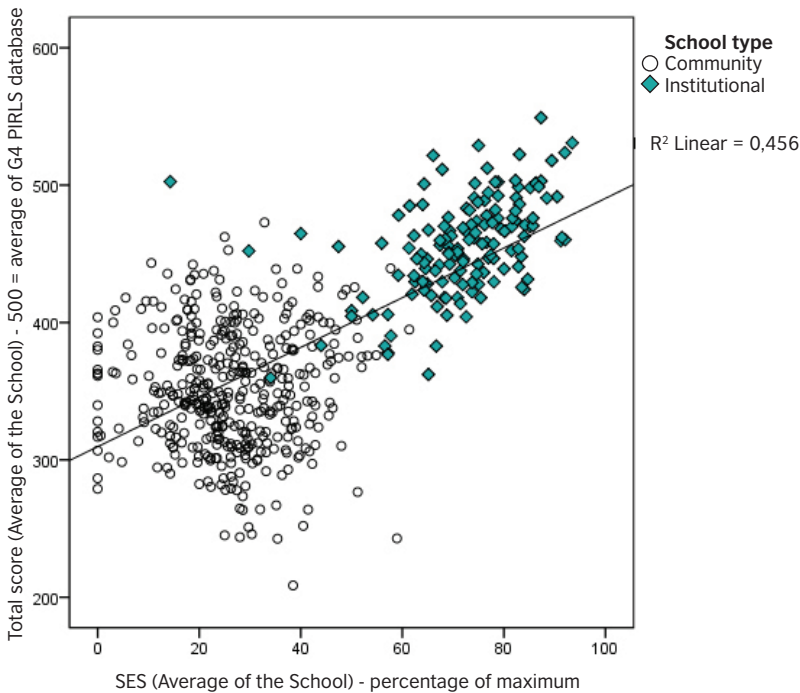
Kafle and Metsämuuronen (2013), following Metsämuuronen (2010; 2013c), discuss the possible effects of high SES for children in Nepal. First, the parents' education and especially their literacy skills lay the ground for the child's early development, in particular their range of vocabulary, as well as the child's motivation to learn. Second, more educated parents seem more motivated to push their children to study harder in order to improve – or at least maintain – their social position. Third, educated parents understand the value of education for future prospects and development. Fourth, educated parents can give tuition to their children in the early years of schooling which may help children substantially in these years.

Metsämuuronen (2017, pp. 106-7) has further discussed the SES and condenses its effects into two main concepts: intellectual capital and academic capital. Instead of being a biologically-determined factor, intellectual capital is seen here as a consequence of the socialization process of the child. Higher intellectual capital refers to a broader vocabulary (see, e.g. Fernald, Marchman & Weisler, 2013; Cartmill & al., 2013, Hart & Risley, 1995; Biemiller & Slonin, 2001)[2], faster *word*

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[2] Christ and Wang (2010) noted that some children come to school knowing far fewer words than others. According to Hart and Risley (1995), when children from families with low incomes were 3 years old, they knew 600 fewer words than children the same age from families with upper incomes. By grade 2, the gap seems to widen to about 4,000 words (Biemiller & Slonim, 2001).

mapping and word awareness (see Christ & Wang, 2010; Justice & Ezell, 2001), greater ability in classifying concepts into subcategories (see, e.g. Bloomquist, 2009) and, hence, better possibilities in theoretical and abstract thinking, as well as wider possibilities in abstract thinking by using, for example, metaphors or figure of speech. Academic capital can be seen in earlier reading, writing and numeracy skills, greater appreciation for study and schooling in the family, parental push for higher achievement, and, in academic families, supporting the students in serious academic paths in education. In Nepal, parental illiteracy appears to be negatively tied to the occupational background of the parents, to a low motivation to educate their children, to poverty, or, in some cases, even to the caste of the family (Kafle & Metsämuuronen, 2013). The School Sector Development Plan has resulted in significantly higher enrolment rates as Nepal has strived to meet Millenium Development Goals (MDG); however dropout rates remain high so the positive effect of the enrolment is negated (Government of Nepal, 2009; 2012). It would be worth investigating the extent to which drop-out rates relate to illiterate families, and illiterate families who have recently enrolled children in education for the first time.

Whilst knowing that schools consisting of children from socioeconomically privileged families acquire a remarkable advantage over schools with children from less privileged families, it is interesting to note that the average English level in most of the institutional schools is at the same level as it in the best performing community schools (Fig. 3). There are high performing institutional schools with English language levels higher than in the best community schools – and similarly, there are very low performing community schools below the lowest performing institutional schools, as one would expect when noting the influence of SES factors. However, there are community and institutional schools performing at the same level, which leads to the questions:

- Why are some institutional schools with much higher intellectual and academic capital not performing better than community schools without such capital?
- Why are some community schools with much less intellectual and academic capital performing as well as and sometimes better than some institutional schools?

The remainder of this chapter explores factors underlying the success of high performing community schools. The research question is:

- What is done differently in high-performing community schools in relation to institutional schools at the same level?

Figure 3 : Schools with the same achievement but different SES
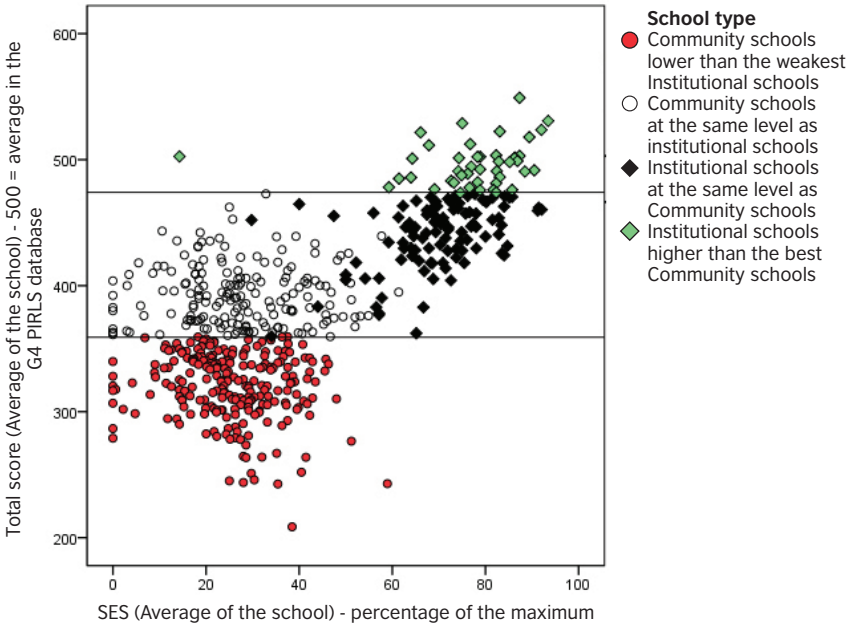
Research methodology

■ Sample and data

The dataset for our research is the same as that used in ERO (2015). In the process of testing the English achievement of 5th graders, 13,794 students, 563 schools, 530 head teachers and 500 teachers from 28 districts participated in the survey and testing. Three test versions (in what follows, E1, E2, and E3) were administered. All versions were administered simultaneously in the same classroom. The sampling covered the whole of Nepal and a proportional stratified sample with random selection was used. The strata were:

1) Ecological zones (Mountain, Hill, and Tarai)
2) Developmental regions (Eastern, Central, Western, Mid-Western, and Far-Western)
3) Districts (75 altogether)
4) School type (Community and Institutional), and
5) School location (Rural and Urban).

Kathmandu Valley was taken as a single geographical stratum as it is the most densely populated area in the country with more economic and social opportunities than other areas.

For our analysis, a reduced dataset was used. Only those schools at the same achievement level from the community and institutional groups were selected. The reduced dataset included 50% of all students (4,334 from community schools and 2,545 from institutional schools) and 49% of all schools (176 community schools and 102 institutional schools).

■ Test instruments and their validity and reliability

Table 1 shows the average marks calculated for the three test versions E1, E2 and E3 separately. On the basis of the pretested items, versions E1 and E2 were parallel whereas E3 was shorter and, apparently, slightly more difficult than the other two. All the versions were linked with each other and IRT modeling by One Parametric Logistic Model software (OPLM) (Verhelst, Glass & Verstralen, 1995) was used to calibrate and equate the test scores with each other. Four PIRLS items were used in linking the test scores to the international database.

Table 1: Construct validity and reliabilities of the scores

Topic	Marks			Percentages			Percentages in Curriculum	Reliability			
	E1	E2	E3	E1	E2	E3		E1	E2	E3	E1–E3[1]
Total	71	75	60					0.95	0.96	0.94	0.95
Reading	28	23	24	39.4	31.1	40.7	25	0.92	0.89	0.89	0.90
Writing	26	31	17	36.6	41.9	28.8	25	0.81	0.82	0.79	0.81
Grammar	8	11	7	11.3	14.9	11.9		0.75	0.79	0.64	0.73
Vocabulary	9	9	11	12.7	12.2	18.6		0.71	0.82	0.80	0.78
Listening							25				
Speaking							25				

[1]Weighted mean of reliabilities in E1–E3

The test items were classified into four categories: Reading, Writing, Grammar and Vocabulary. Organizing Speaking and Listening sessions with objective and subjective tools would have been financially prohibitive as so many schools lack electricity and general equipment for administering tests. Hence these skills were omitted from the final test. Overall Alpha reliabilities of the separate tests on each version were very high (α = 0.94–0.96). The focus on reading and writing nonetheless reflects everyday practice in Nepalese classrooms where priority is given to grammatical accuracy and grammar translation as a methodology.[3]

The items used in the tests varied from objectively scored items (that is, multiple choice , fill in the blank, true or false and very short answer items, constituting 52% of total items) to subjectively scored, usually productive, items (short answer type and long answer type items, constituting 48% of total items). All the cognitive levels of Bloom's taxonomy (see Bloom *et al.* 1956; Metfessel, Michael, & Kirsner, 1969) – condensed into four categories – are met, though weighted towards Application (44%) and Comprehension (44%) at the expense of Knowledge (3%) and Higher Skills (8%), and so were geared to applying language rather than recalling simple facts.

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[3] Note that, to counter these practical difficulties the British Council has recently trialed its own Aptis digital speaking and listening English language tests on laptops and iPads at low and sustainable cost. This was part of the review of the School Leaving Certificate in partnership with the Ministry of Education that also includes the Norwich Institute for Language Education (NILE) and Kathmandu University for other components.

■ Analytical tools used in the analysis

Basic statistical methods were used in the analysis: means, Standard Deviations, percentages, and frequencies), correlation (Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient) and comparison of two means (t-test), as well as statistical inference (p-values, effect sizes) as and when appropriate. Cohen's f (Cohen, 1988) was used as the indicator for the effect size. Because the student sample size was very large, the indicator for significance (p-value) is well below the conventional boundaries of statistical significance ($p < 0.001$) and so effect size is more appropriate as an indicator for the differences. Cohen's boundary for low effect (that is, a small difference) is $f < 0.10$, for medium difference $f \approx 0.20$–0.3 and for high effect (that is, a remarkable difference) is $f > 0.40$.

The chief analytical tools used were Logistic Regression Analysis (LRA) and Decision Tree Analysis (DTA). The first was used in finding the predictive factors for community and institutional schools and the latter in finding cut-off points for the continuous variables. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used in the General Linear Modelling (GLM) when several means were compared. Two-step Cluster Analysis was used when profiling the school using several factors at the same time. All analyses were conducted in an SPSS22 environment.

■ Limitations of the dataset

We should keep in mind that the respondents were 5th graders with – in some cases – limited understanding of their parents' education or occupations. Equally some of the students may have had somewhat limited reading skills – they may not have understood the questions correctly so their answers may or may not hold true. Hence, it is necessary to allow for some error in the students' dataset. However, the number of respondents was very high and, hence, the averages are not likely to be much affected by these possible errors.

Results

As the analysis is exploratory in nature, no theoretical framework is presented in explaining the differences between the school types. However, an educated guess is that relevant differences may be found in four directions:

1. demographic factors
2. student factors
3. teacher factors, and
4. school factors.

Of these, the demographic factors may be used more in contextualizing the two types of schools. Of the student factors, a positive attitude towards English as a school subject, for example, or a kind of "Jokk-Mokk effect"[4] where the girls in rural areas perform much better than boys to ensure their study places in the cities, may be a relevant explanation for the high performance of the students in the selected community schools. Of the teacher factors, teachers' classroom behavior is one of the most interesting factors to study: what is done differently in the high performing community schools? School factors are omitted in this article as relatively few factors concerning pedagogical matters were investigated.[5]

It is worth noting that in international research most of the variation in learning can be connected to individual characteristics of the students and notably less to teachers or schools. On the basis of a meta-analysis of 800 studies, Hattie (2003; see also Hattie, 2016; Hattie, Masters, & Birch, 2015) concludes that the effect of student characteristics is 50%, of teachers' 30 %, of the school 5%, of the principal 5%, of the home 5%, and of peers 5%. In our reduced dataset the school effect is 42%, estimated on the basis of multilevel modeling and intra-class correlation. Most of this student effect can be explained by the strict selection process of institutional schools. The reasonably high effect indicates that the ability level of the students is very much the same in each school and that there are differences between the means of the schools. In the entire dataset, including those schools which are very high and very low-performing, the school effect is 72%, which is a very high value against an international average in the region of 25%. In Finland, for example, the value is near 10% (Kuusela, 2006; Metsämuuronen 2010; 2013c) which indicates that there are no differences between the schools and in each school there are very high and very low performing students. An effect size of 72% means that almost all the variance in the students' dataset can be explained by differences between the schools of the children [0% = no differences between the schools, all school averages the same].

■ Demographical factors explaining the differences
The first interesting difference between the community and institutional schools is that 78% of the low performing private schools come from only 7 districts out of 75: Kathmandu (21%), Kaski (14%), Kailali (10%), Lalitpur (10%), Baglung (9%), Bhaktapur (7%), and Chitwan (7%) while the best performing community schools are more or less distributed evenly across all districts. Some condensing can be seen in the location of the community schools – almost 30% of the schools came

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[4] The phenomenon of the girls being much better than boys in Mathematics is evident in some isolated islands such as Sandgerdi in Iceland (see Walt, 2005), and specifically in Lapland in Northern Sweden. The phenomenon was noticed first in the isolated town of Jokk-Mokk in Swedish Lapland. It seems that the Danish proferssor of educational psycology Niels Egelund used first the term "Jokk-Mokk effect" for the phenomenon (in Ripley, 2005, p. 60). The point in those isolated areas is the low motivation of the boys to learn as described by a school principal, Gudjon Kristjanson, on the island of Sandgerdi: "*A boy sees his older brother who has been at the sea* [for earning money without much education] *for only two years and has a better car and bigger house than the headmaster* (Walt, 2005, p. 57). The girls are studying harder than the boys to get study places in further education. A teacher with 25 years of experience, Kristjan Asmundson, from Sandgerdi described the situation thus: "*The boys said that girls were better anyways … They didn't even try.*" (Walt, 2005, p. 57).

[5] See Pradhan, V. in this volume for classroom observation tools focusing on pedagogy in Project NIITE, British Council Nepal.

from Baitadi (8.5%), Kathmandu (7.4%), Parsa (7.4%), and Kapibastu (6.3%) – but the main message is clear: the best performing community schools in terms of English achievement are *not* located in the capital city area or in the main tourist areas, but are evenly distributed.

In terms of absolute numbers, the majority of the best community schools come from the Central (28%) and Far-Western (19%) developmental regions (see Fig. 4). Proportionally to institutional schools, though, the majority of the best community schools come from the Eastern developmental region; the ratio of the high-performing community and institutional schools in the Eastern area is roughly 80% to 20%. In the Valley, the figures are the opposite: the ratio is roughly 25% to 75%. Geographically, the high performing community schools are mainly located in the rural areas (82%) while the high performing institutional schools are located more evenly in rural (39%) and urban areas (58 %) (see Fig. 5).

Figure 4 : Geographical locations of the schools

■ Institutional schools at the same level as Community schools
■ Community schools at the same level as Institutional schools
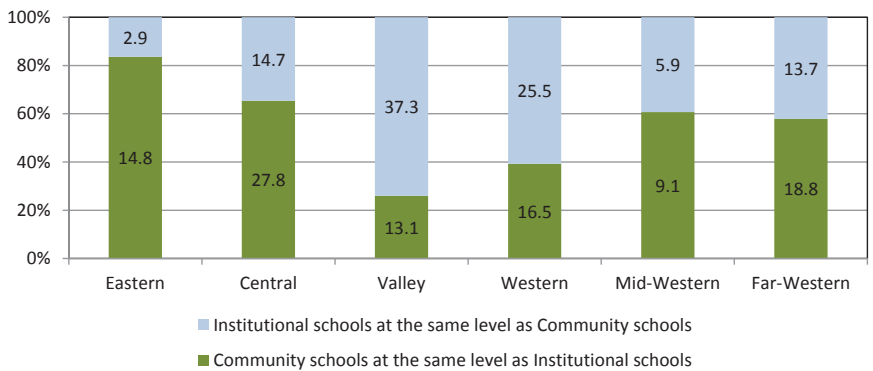
Figure 5 : Rural and urban location of the schools

Chart: Percentage of the schools (y-axis, 0–100). Categories: Rural, Urban.
- Rural: Community schools at the same level as Institutional schools = 82.2; Institutional schools at the same level as Community schools = 39.4
- Urban: Community schools at the same level as Institutional schools = 17.2; Institutional schools at the same level as Community schools = 57.6

■ Community schools at the same level as Institutional schools
■ Institutional schools at the same level as Community schools

■ Student factors explaining the differences

Students gender

The students' gender does not explain the differences between the schools: boys and girls are more or less evenly distributed in both community schools (49% boys and 51% girls) and in institutional schools (56% and 44%). Though the proportion of boys is statistically significantly higher in the institutional schools ($p < 0.001$) the difference is marginal ($f = 0.06$) with the significance reflecting the very large sample size.

Homework

Another relevant similarity between the students in the two types of schools is that they spend exactly the same time on their homework (2–3 hours), though a potentially interesting difference between the schools is the amount of homework set. Teachers in institutional schools give marginally more homework ($f = 0.14$) and also check the homework slightly more often ($f = 0.12$) though the differences are not remarkable between the school types. However, when analyzing these factors together with the LRA, and adding whether the teacher checks the homework or not as an individual (dummy) variable, interestingly it is 2.7 times more probable that homework will *not* be checked in the institutional schools in comparison with the community schools (see Table 2).

Table 2 : LRA for homework given and checked

Variables in the model	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Constant	-1,74	0,10	307,76	1	<0.001	0,18
Homework not checked (dummy)	0,98	0,18	28,42	1	<0.001	**2,67**
Q14_and_Q15 homework given and checked	0,35	0,03	180,46	1	<0.001	1,43

Students' attitudes

Students' attitudes toward English were assessed by five statements related to the utility of English and one question on the self-concept of English as an easy subject. The question and statements were as follows. A five and four point Likert scale, as used in the international assessments, was used for rating.

q18: How easy do you find the English subject? [5 point scale]

q19a: English subject helps me in daily life [4 point scale]

q19b: I need to do better in English to read the subject in the upper grades [4 point scale]

q19c: English is necessary in order to work abroad [4 point scale]

q19d: English is necessary in order to study abroad [4 point scale]

q19e: I need to do better in English to get a desirable job [4 point scale]

The statistically significant difference between the items was negligible. All averages were between "somewhat agree" and "fully agree". Overall, students in these schools are very motivated to learn English.

School as a learning environment

One specific thing raised by the community school students is that they feel more often that the teacher treats them fairly (f = 0.13). Also, there are slightly fewer bullying incidents in the community schools. These phenomena do not, in all probability, explain the high results in high performing community schools. However, it is instructive to remind ourselves that many things in school may lower motivation in the learning processes – two of which may be the teacher's fair behavior and bullying (Metsämuuronen, Svedlin, & Ilic, 2012).

■ Teacher factors explaining the differences

Age and qualifications

The teachers in the institutional schools are notably younger (27 years on average) than those in the community schools (35 years) (f = 0.45). DTA defines the ages of 26 and 36 as the thresholds for grouping the teachers: if the teacher is 26 years

old or younger the probability of coming from an institutional school is 3.6 times higher (see Table 3). On the other hand, if the teacher is 36 years old or older, the probability of coming from a community school is 4.6 times higher (1/0.22 = 4,6). This implies that the teachers in the community schools are more experienced as teachers (on average, 11 years of experience) in comparison with the teachers in the institutional schools (5 years of experience). This may reflect the hiring policy of the private schools: the younger teachers are cheaper to recruit than experienced teachers. However, it seems that the teachers in institutional schools are also more academically qualified than those in the community schools; if the teacher has a Bachelor or Master of Arts, (instead of School Leaving Certificate [SLC] or Intermediate in Arts [IA]), the probability of coming from an institutional school is 3.8 times higher than coming from a community school.

Table 3 : LRA for teachers' age and qualification

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Constant	-1,54	0,35	19,47	1	0	0,22
AGE lower than 26 (dummy)	1,27	0,34	13,67	1	0	3,57
AGE higher than 36 (dummy)	-1,53	0,50	9,44	1	0,002	0,22
Qualification SLC, IA vs. BA, MA	1,33	0,33	16,01	1	0	3,79

Teachers' self-reported competence in English language

Teachers' competence in English was assessed by their self-reported confidence in different areas of the curriculum, such as in writing sentences or letters, vocabulary or synonyms, reading stories or essays, and various grammar topics. Altogether, 24 individual topics were covered in the questionnaire. The scale used was "not at all easy", "not easy", "somewhat easy", "and easy".[6]

Overall, the less experienced, younger, and more educated teachers in the institutional schools had more confidence in their skills (f = 0.34). Three areas stand out amongst the factors: confidence in writing letters, in synonyms, in reading stories. When the teacher was very confident in their skill in writing letters, this opinion was six times more probable in institutional schools than community schools; confidence in synonyms was four times more probable and in reading stories three times more probable (see Table 4).[7]

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[6] Because of the financial constraints that limited the NASA database to grammar, reading and writing skills, the self-reporting tools did not include speaking and listening.

[7] During the baseline evaluation for the English language teacher training cascade project (ETTE+, British Council Nepal, 2012), a majority of the teachers indicated that they had never been tested for English language proficiency ever before in their careers.

Table 4 : LRA for teachers' confidence in English subject

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Constant	-3,67	0,64	32,59	1	< 0.001	0,03
Confidence in writing letters (dummy, somewhat easy or easy)	1,83	0,45	16,60	1	< 0.001	6,21
Confidence in synonyms (dummy, somewhat easy or easy)	1,40	0,50	7,90	1	0.005	4,07
Confidence in reading stories (dummy, easy)	1,19	0,31	14,56	1	< 0.001	3,29

Typical classroom activities

Different options were given to teachers to explore what kind of activities they were using in their classes. The options followed the PIRLS and TIMSS questionnaires, viz:

T21_1 Reviewing homework %
T21_2 Listening to a lecture-style presentation %
T21_3 Working on problems with your guidance %
T21_4 Working on problems on their own without your guidance %
T21_5 Listening to you re-teach and clarify content/procedure %
T21_6 Taking test-quiz %

T21_7 Participating in classroom management tasks not related to the lesson's content/purpose %
T21_8 Other student activities %

Two final options referred to possible non-primary ways of enhancing the learning process. One may note that one of the teacher's actions is to leave the students to work alone – that is also a teacher activity. The objective was to find out what percentages of the typical week were taken up by these activities. Hence, there are two ways of seeing the differences: by using individual activities and their percentages and by focusing on the profiles of all the activities at the same time.

When it comes to individual activities, one notable difference arises from the dataset: teachers in the institutional schools devote remarkably more time (29% of their week) to "other" activities than teachers in community schools (18%) (f = 0.23). According to DTA and LRA, the threshold is 15% of the weekly time: when the teacher used more than 15% of his/her weekly classroom activities for something else (other than actual teaching and guiding), the probability is 2.7 times towards institutional schools.

Cluster analysis of the profiles show that the two most important discriminating factors between the schools are the afore-mentioned "other" activities and *Participating in classroom management tasks not related to the lesson's content/ purpose.* In both factors, teachers in the institutional schools spend more time on these more or less secondary activities. Adding together the time spent on these activities, teachers in community schools spent 21 + 18 = 39% of the classroom time on these two activities while teachers in institutional school spent 29 + 29 = 58%: the difference is almost 20%. When changing the percentages to actual hours (assuming 1 hour of English per school day and six days per week) of the six hours per week in use, teachers in the institutional schools spent 3.5 hours on a secondary activity other than the actual teaching-learning process. As teachers in the community schools spent 2.3 hours per week on these secondary activities, students in the community schools receive one hour per week more teaching. Equally, we should recognize it may mean that options 1-7 do not adequately reflect what is happening in the classrooms of Nepal, hence the high score for 'other'.

There is potentially a further question here: namely what is the difference between the high performing institutional schools and the low performing institutional schools in regards to time spent on these non teaching/learning activities? "Management tasks not related to the lessons content/purpose", which can be taken as the clearest non-positive classroom activity, rates at 19% in the low performing community schools, at 21% in the best community schools, 29% in the low performing institutional schools and in the best institutional schools is as high as 35%, almost double that of the low performing community schools. When counting these two clear non-pedagogical activities together, the percentages are, respectively, 37%, 39%, 58%, and an extraordinary 73%. If the last option "other" was something else other than active pedagogical actions, it means that in the best institutional schools, only 27% of the week's activities are devoted to traditional teaching-learning processes.

Figure 6 : Use of time in other than the traditional teaching-learning process in the schools

T21_7 Participating in classroom management tasks not related to the lesson's content/purpose %

T21_8 Other student activities %

T21_7 and T21_8 Together
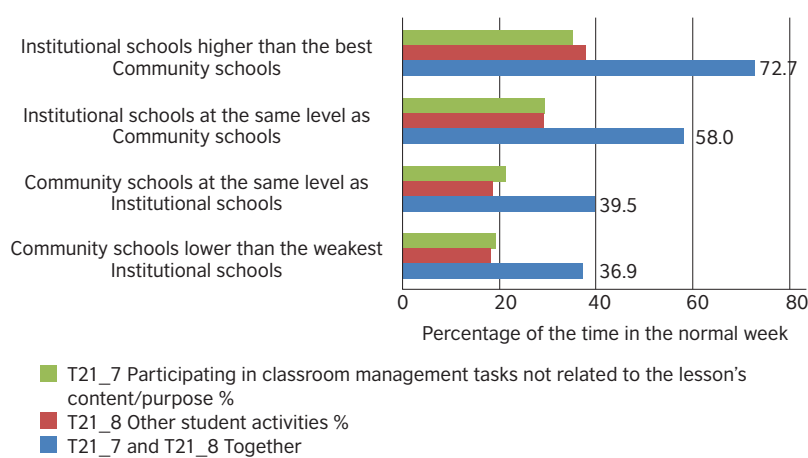
There are potentially three ways to explain the phenomenon:

1) In the best institutional schools the students are so good as a result of the selection process that from the beginning there is no need to teach them English.
2) In the best institutional schools the teaching is mainly relying on tuition.
3) The best institutional schools have created such an extraordinary pedagogy that once again there is minimal need to teach English.

Options 1–6 for the classroom activities above, used by the PIRLS/PISA/TIMSS communities, such as Reviewing homework, Working on problems with teacher's guidance, Working on problems on students' own without teacher's guidance, or Re-teaching and clarifying content/procedure, were presented to the teachers as relevant options for their classroom activities. However, it seems that in the best performing private schools in Nepal, these actions were *not* relevant for the teaching-learning process, inferring from the fact that the teachers spent over 70% of their time in classroon on activities other than those. So potentially these results, if substantiated, imply that the list of relevant classroom activities may need to be revised. Further research would be advisable on what really is done differently in the institutional schools and the community schools to produce these results. There may be a need for further field research and classroom observation as the tendency in the figures is clear but their interpretation is not as clear.

What the students are doing in the lessons
Another way to investigate classroom activities is through a set of questions concerning what the teacher asks students to do in the lessons. Eight options were given with the scale *never, in some lessons, in half the lessons,* and *in every lesson*:

T22_1 Creative writing work
T22_2 Creative speech and speaking skills work
T22_3 Work on problems for which there is no obvious methods of solution
T22_4 Interpret data in tables, chart, or graphs
T22_5 Working together in small groups
T22_6 Relate what they have learned to their daily life
T22_7 Explaining answers
T22_8 Deciding on their own procedures for solving complex problems

As with the classroom activities, the set of factors can be viewed in two ways: by focusing on the individual factors and by focusing on all the variables at the same time.

Of the individual factors, DTA and LRA found two which separate the schools from each other, though the differences are not very wide between the schools. In the institutional schools, the creative speech and speaking skills work is emphasized more while in the community schools working together in small groups is emphasized slightly more. Actually, the same two variables appear to be the most powerful clustering factors in the two-step clustering of the whole set of variables.

The use of group work – specifically in the form where the better students are helping their less achieved peers – has been found to have an interesting and a surprising effect also in some longitudinal research. In Finland, in mathematics

(Metsämuuronen 2010; 2013; Tuohilampi & Hannula, 2013), group work was connected to better results and higher increase in achievement. If the student at grades 6 to 9 studied in a group where the teacher used peer work practices "often" or "quite often" the results were statistically better that when using these methods less often (Tuohilampi & Hannula, 2013, p. 273). In the larger research studies with a longitudinal aspect, the achievement level of the students increased more in the groups where the students helped each other, where the teacher is pondering together with the students whether the results of the mathematical problem make sense, and the students explain to others how they solved the problem (Metsämuuronen, 2013, p. 113). According to Tuohilampi and Hannula (ibid., p. 273), in Finland in all schools studied, the teachers had the practice of letting the students help each other but the difference was in the frequency with which this occurred. Why the method could be effective may be explained by the fact that the more advanced students most probably become more confident in the subject matter by teaching their weaker peers, while their weaker peers make progress due to a simpler way of teaching the subject matter compared with the teacher's more adult approach. The results are not necessarily strictly applicable to language learning. However, the method may be worth trying.

Conclusion

We wish to highlight key points in the following areas:

■ Demography
School demographic location reveals that the best-performing community schools are evenly distributed across the whole country while the institutional schools at the same level are condensed mainly in seven districts, which potentially bodes well for development of rural areas. Despite a high concentration of resources, infrastructure and development aid in urban centres this is not reflected in an uneven distribution of high performing schools. As high performing schools are just as likely to be found in rural areas then the life choices available for parents and pupils, and teachers and head teachers, remain unaffected.

■ School effect
The school effect is very high in Nepal (72% in the whole dataset) and even in a reduced dataset, with less variation between the schools, the school effect is 42%. These are high values compared with an international average of 25%. A limitation of this study is that relatively few factors concerning pedagogical matters were investigated, but the high figure for school effect suggests further investigation is more than warranted. See Pradhan in this volume for classroom observation tools focusing on pedagogy in Project NIITE, British Council Nepal, where a pedagogical focus in training resulted in significant improvements.

■ Students and parents
Students' gender, attitude, or working habits in relation to homework do not explain the differences. There is less bullying in the community schools and the students more often feel that they have been treated fairly by their teacher. The parental literacy rate is significantly and markedly lower in the community schools, suggesting that focusing on parental literacy to improve results of students may be an effective strategy. If development is to focus on the 'poorest of the poor' then developing literacy capacity amongst parents of the poorest is arguably a

more effective strategy than the focus on access. The education cluster of donors have succeeded in improving enrolment rates in Nepal in recent years with the focus on MDG through the School Sector Development Plan, but the associated increase in drop-out rates and the potential long term negative impacts of this is less discussed.

■ Teachers

Teachers in institutional schools are notably younger (27 years on average) than those in the community schools (35 years) indicating less experience in teaching. However, the teachers in institutional schools are better qualified than those in the community schools. Teachers in the institutional schools also spend remarkably more time of their normal week (58%) on *Participating in classroom management tasks not related to the lesson's content/purpose* and in *"other"* works which may not be related to the teaching-learning process directly. If the "other works" do not include direct pedagogical content, students in the community schools receive remarkably more teaching than their peers in institutional schools. Further field research and classroom observation is needed to interpret this remarkable phenomenon and to clarify what is happening to make these classrooms and schools successful. There is potential application of this phenomenon not only to the less performing schools in Nepal, but also to other schools outside of Nepal.

■ Language of instruction

English as the Medium of Instruction has a strikingly positive impact on student's English language levels. However, further research is needed to gather data on classroom practices, as this is counter to global evidence that strongly indicates that mother tongue instruction during the formative primary years is most effective and is advised prior to learning through a second language. This has been recognized in The Juba Declaration to which the British Council subscribes. Nonetheless the results presented here are striking and, when combined with the high school factor and the remarkable amount of time teachers spend on non-teaching/learning activities, there is sufficient evidence to warrant further research in what possibly are some quite extraordinary schools in Nepal.

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The Impact of the School Leaving Certificate Examination on English Language Teaching and Student Motivation to Learn English

The Impact of the School Leaving Certificate Examination on English Language Teaching and Student Motivation to Learn English

Saraswati Dawadi

Introduction

Many countries around the world use high-stakes examinations[1] to bring about desired changes in their education systems and there has been extensive research on the impact of those examinations. High-stakes examinations can serve several important functions, besides measuring the purported skills of test takers. The School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination in Nepal, the focus of this chapter, besides certifying the school level achievement of students, also acts as a gateway to higher education, a measure of the quality of education and a basic license for official employment. Additionally, it is the sole factor that dictates one's career path, as the scores decide which course a student can study in higher education (Shrestha, 2003). The SLC results may, in addition, be taken as a measure of "what strengths and weaknesses exist in the education system at a given point in time and how the education system is performing over the years" (Mathema and Bista, 2006, p.4).

However, the SLC examination as a whole is not free from criticisms, despite several efforts made by the Nepalese government to make it capable of triggering positive impact on instructional practices and on its stakeholders. To be more specific, it is usually argued that the SLC examination has a negative impact on instructional practices while examination reform initiatives of the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Nepal seem to be directed more towards administrative reforms than improving the quality of the examinations themselves (Budhathoki, Khatri, Shrestha, Sigdel, Panta and Thapa, 2014).

The SLC English examination, the test under investigation, is similarly the object of considerable criticism. Pinpointing the weaknesses of the examination format, Giri (2005) recommends changing it and making it compatible with the curriculum. He argues that "changing the nature of the English test could exert positive washback

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[1] 'Examination' and 'test' are used interchangeably in this chapter, though I recognise the distinction between formal examinations and classroom tests.

effects and potentially change the entire English language teaching and testing practices in Nepal" (Giri, 2005, p.10). It is worth mentioning that there have been some changes in the examination format recently; however, very little is known about their pedagogical impact. But, if the impact of a high-stakes examination is not known, this might have undesirable consequences in society (Messick, 1988). It is potentially like "a police force without a court system, unfair and dangerous" (McNamara, 2007, p.280). Therefore, the rationale for this study begins with the need to explore the impact of the SLC English examination on instructional practices and student motivation to learn English.

Background to the study: the impact of high-stakes tests in other countries

The effects of high-stakes tests on teaching and learning are called 'washback effects' (Green, 2007; Khaniya, 1990), which can be either positive or negative. Recent educational practice indicates that tests are designed to prompt students and teachers to adjust their behaviors to fall in line with the testing apparatus (Carless and Lam, 2014). "Underlying this power-coercive, top-down approach to educational reform is the assumption that high-stakes tests possess the power to exert an expected influence on learning because of the consequences they bring about" (Luxia, 2007, p.52). Unfortunately, however, this may not happen in all contexts.

It is usually argued that an initial step in washback is for a test first to influence teachers' perceptions and attitudes, which should in turn affect their instructional practices (Abu-Alhija, 2007; Onaiba, 2013). Yet, Tsagari (2006), who investigated the influence of the First Certificate in English examination (a high-stakes test in Greece) on Greek teachers' perceptions, found that its impact was to make teachers feel anxious and stressed and that they tried hard to cover all the contents in the syllabus. Similarly, Onaiba (2013) reported negative attitudes of Libyan teachers towards examinations. In contrast, Wall's (2005) observations and interviews with teachers from Sri Lanka found that they had mixed but mainly positive attitudes towards the Sri Lankan O Level examination. Additionally, Amengual-Pizarro (2009) reported that the majority of teachers in her study had positive attitudes towards the English test in the Spanish University Entrance Examination; they thought the test to be useful, necessary and reliable.

It is contended that tests also affect teaching content and methodology with teachers designing their teaching materials and content around tests, a process called curriculum alignment (Cheng, 2005; Choi; 2008). However, Gorsuch (2000), who explored teachers' classroom practices in relation to EFL curriculum reform in Japanese high-schools, reported that teachers did not focus equally on all the language skills despite the reform which urged teachers to use them. Similarly, secondary school English teachers in India tended to marginalize oral skills on their teaching agenda as they were not tested in the examination, though the teaching syllabus focused on developing these skills (Agrawal, 2004). Onaiba (2013) also reported that Libyan teachers tended to select content directly related to the test and narrow down the syllabus to meet test content, though their teaching methodology was not affected. Other studies (e.g. Andrews, 1995; Cheng, 1998; Luxia, 2007) have reported that language tests affect teaching content but not teaching methods.

Elsewhere, Nikolov (1999), having observed 118 lessons in secondary schools in Hungary, reported the effects of the Hungarian school-leaving examination on the pedagogical practices of secondary classes. She found that the most frequent task types in the lessons were "question-answer, translation, reading aloud and grammar exercises in the form of substitution drills" which were typical language examination techniques of the examination in operation at the time (Nikolov, 1999, p.243). Similarly, Ahmad and Rao (2012) reported that higher secondary level teachers' teaching methodology in Pakistan was directly influenced by examinations. Luxia (2007) also claimed that teaching methodology in secondary schools in China went against the National Matriculation English Test designers' intention.

Some other studies have explored examination effects on student learning. For instance, Hughes (1988) reported that a new English test implemented in a Turkish university greatly improved students' English proficiency, a year after the test was implemented. However, as pointed out by Tsagari (2006), his methodology is problematic as the students' performances were compared using another test (the Michigan Test) to which the university test had no resemblance. Similar kinds of demonstrable gains in student learning that can be tied to the use of a newly designed test have been documented by Saif (2006). Data, generated through interviews, observations and test administration, illustrated that a new spoken test implemented at the University of Victoria, Canada had a positive relationship with teaching and learning outcomes. Additionally, in Shohamy, Dointsa-Schmidt and Ferman's (1996) study in Israel, the majority of students, who were preparing for a high-stakes English test, expressed positive views towards the test; they reported that the test promoted their learning.

In contrast, other studies have reported negative washback effects of language tests on student learning. For instance, Cheng (1998) reported negative effects of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination in English. Similarly, Takagi's (2010) study of Japanese students preparing for the University Entrance Examination found that the students were not motivated in developing communicative English language skills; they focused only on the skills assessed by the exams. Likewise, Xiao, Sharpling and Liu (2011), having collected data from test takers of the National Matriculation English Test in China, reported that "the development of learning strategies and reading skills was overshadowed by the high-stakes nature of the test" (p.103).

In contrast to this literature on high stakes tests around the globe, very little is known about the impacts of the SLC English examination in Nepal. To the best of the author's knowledge, only one empirical study (Khaniya, 1990) has explored the washback effects of the SLC English examination, and this was almost three decades ago. This study collected data from different types of schools in Nepal, different in terms of their teaching focuses: skill emphasizing schools (Type A) and exam emphasizing schools (Type B). A new examination was designed and the results in the new examination were compared with the existing one. The results indicated that Type A schools obtained significantly higher scores in the new examination than Type B (F= 144.08; p<.06). However, the study lacks evidence about actual instructional practices and whether they were affected by the test; the results alone do not tell us anything about what was actually taught under the influence of the test. It seems to have been taken for granted that the schools

were teaching English differently because of the SLC English examination. Thus, the study seems to have deterministic assumptions and to be based on conjecture (Alderson and Wall, 1993).

The SLC and the Nepali education system

The context for this study is the SLC examination conducted at the end of 10-year school education in Nepal to students of 15 to 16 years old. The examination has been centrally controlled by the SLC examination Board, a constituent organization within the Ministry of Education. The Board has been conducting the exam every year with a steadily increasing number of candidates from a few hundred to 774,970 in 2016 (Rauniyar, 2016). In 2016 a letter grading system was introduced into the examination, though practice since the test's inception has been the scoring of answer sheets.

The SLC English examination, the test under investigation, focuses primarily on candidates' reading and writing skills rather than on more communicative competence models. The examination is divided into two parts: a written test and a speaking test. The written test (that covers 75% of the grade) tests the reading and writing skills of students and is centrally controlled by the Board, whereas the speaking test (that covers 25% of the grade) tests listening and speaking skills and is currently conducted by the schools themselves, although it was also controlled by the Board in previous years.

It is also worth mentioning that the Ministry of Education has recently amended the Eighth Education Act. The new act has categorized school education into two levels: basic education (Grade I to VIII) and secondary education (Grade IX to XII). Accordingly, the current SLC examination conducted at the end of grade 10 has been scrapped and the new school leaving examination, which will be controlled by the newly established National Exam Board (MoE, 2016), will be conducted at the end of grade 12.

Given the very limited research into the impact of the SLC and the changing scenario in the Nepalese education system, this study is designed to fill a substantial gap in the literature. The specific research questions to be addressed are:

    a. How do secondary level English teachers in Nepal perceive the SLC English examination?
    b. Does the SLC English examination affect instructional practices? If it does, what is the nature and scope of the effects?

Methodology

■ Participants
The participants in the study were 120 secondary level English teachers representing six different districts in Nepal: Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Chitwan, Nawal Parasi, Lamjung and Tanahau. The districts were selected on the basis of the Development Regions of Nepal, three districts (Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Chitwan) from Central Development Region and the rest of the districts from Western Development Region. Then, 20 teachers from each district were randomly

selected. The teachers were in the 25 to 58 years age range, with 3 to 34 years teaching experience. The vast majority of teachers were Master's degree holders and many of them had gone through different kinds of teacher training programs. However, while some teachers (55 %) had received both pre-service and in-service training, others (28%) had received only in-service training and a substantial minority (17%) were deprived of any sort of teacher training. They teach five to six classes every day and have 10 to 45 students per class at Grade 10.

■ Research tools

The tools used in the study were: a questionnaire that consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions about teachers' opinion on the SLC English examination, a class observation scheme and interview guidelines (see Appendix 1). The questionnaire was written in English as the vast majority of teachers in the study had earned Master's degrees in English or in English Language teaching and are teaching English to secondary level students in Nepal. The questionnaire was also piloted on six other teachers with similar backgrounds, which ensured teachers' ability to understand the language used in the questionnaire. However, participants were free to use either English or Nepali during the interviews, as they wished.

■ Data collection procedures

After obtaining oral consent from the teachers to participate in the study, they were asked to fill out the questionnaires privately and these were collected later. Then, eight teachers (four from each Development Region) were randomly selected for class observation and one class of each teacher was observed, using the observation scheme, to check consistency with teachers' expressed views. Finally, each teacher was interviewed immediately after the class observation. Prior to the interview, they were told that they could use either English or Nepali or mix both languages during the interview. The researcher started the interview mixing both the languages to make them feel comfortable to use the language of their choice. However, almost all the teachers preferred English over Nepali during the interviews. Following Cavendish (2011), all the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using a clean transcript, eliminating the pauses, false starts and fillers that are common in everyday speech.

■ Data analysis

The quantitative data collected through the questionnaire were analysed using SPSS 22, which provided the mean scores and percentages for each item. The qualitative data were analysed using NVivo 10 (Lewins and Silver, 2014). While coding the data, the abduction method was used to capture all the issues emerging through the data.

Results

The results of the study are presented in two sections, according to the research questions.

■ Teachers' perceptions of the SLC examination

The first area of exploration was teachers' perceptions of the SLC examination. In this section, two sub-themes relating to teachers' perceptions are categorized, namely: a) teachers' perceptions of the reasons behind implementing the grading

system; and b) teachers' attitudes towards the SLC examination and its quality.

a) Teachers' perceptions of the reasons behind implementing the grading system

Table 1 summarizes teachers' perceptions of the reasons behind introducing the new grading system, giving the mean scores on a Likert scale of agreement.

Table 1 : Teachers' perceptions of the reasons behind implementing the letter grading system

Q12. In your opinion, what are the main reasons for introducing the grading system in the SLC English test?							
Variables	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	mean	SD
Just to increase the pass percentage of students.	26.4%	52.1%	5.8%	8.3%	6.6%	3.84	1.11
To bring positive changes in teaching and learning English.	10.4%	15.5%	7.6%	57.3%	9.1%	3.83	1.07
To eliminate the risk of cheating and other malpractices.	13.2%	31.4%	16.5%	22.3%	14.9%	3.40	4.04
To disseminate the results quickly, adequately and as transparently as possible.	12.4%	38.8%	19%	19.8%	9.1%	3.25	1.18

Questionnaire findings in this category revealed, to some extent, teachers' mixed views, though there is a considerable agreement and disagreement with the first two reasons: increasing the pass percentage of students (26.4% strongly agree, 52.1% agree) and bringing positive changes in teaching and learning English (75.3% strongly disagree, 9.1% disagree).

The above finding was reflected in the perceptions elicited from interviews conducted with a sample of the teachers. During teachers' interviews, most of the teachers declared that the major aim of imposing the letter grading system was to increase the pass percentage of students, but not to bring about positive changes in classroom practices. The following is a representative quote:

> In the previous years, more than half of the students could not pass the SLC examination, which had been a shame for the whole country. But this year the vast majority of students are able to go through the examination

because of this grading system. It seems that this system is introduced just to increase pass percentage of students, but not to bring positive changes in teaching and learning activities.

Both the questionnaire and interview results indicated mixed views of teachers regarding the possibility that the test eliminates the risk of cheating and other malpractices in the examination. For example, Teacher A argued that *"The grading system is an attempt to discourage students from cheating in the examination."* Two more teachers expressed similar views. However, the rest of the teachers did not think that the grading system would eliminate the problem of cheating in the examination as reported by Teacher D: *"Students' scores are simply converted into grades and there is no change in the examination system. So, we cannot expect that this grading system eliminates cheating in the examination."*

About half of the teachers (51.2%) seemed to believe that the grading system aims to disseminate the results quickly, adequately and transparently. However, during the interviews, almost all the teachers reported that they did not experience any difference between the scoring system and the grading system in this respect. Also, they thought that the results were not transparent.

However, as they noted in the space for open-ended responses, it was found that some teachers surveyed had positive views towards the grading system. They perceived decreasing the rate of drop-outs and following the international testing format as other reasons behind implementing the grading system. Here is a representative view:

I think the government of Nepal has introduced the grading system to meet the international standard. Whatever the reason is, the grading system has dramatically decreased drop-outs rates as almost all students got chance to go to higher education.

Some surveyed teachers and four of the interviewed teachers also reported that they did not know the relationship between students' grade and their subject selection in higher education. They reported that they are confused about how students' grades on different subjects affect the students' subject choice at Grade 11. One of the teachers reported,

I do not understand the meaning of getting C or D grades. I mean, I do not know whether the students who get C Grade on a particular subject are allowed to study the same course or subject at Grade 11. For instance, if a student gets C grade in English, is he allowed to study major English at Grade 11? Or, is there any rule like the students must get A Grade in minimum five subjects if they wish to study science at Grade 11?

However, many teachers appreciated that the grading system had a positive impact on educational practice. They also argued that for consistency the grading system should not be applied only to the SLC examination but should be applied right from the beginning grades.

b) Teachers' attitudes towards the test fairness and its quality
Q13 asked for teachers' views about the test fairness and its quality. The findings

are presented in Table 2. More than 50% of teachers considered the exam to be fair (19% strongly agreed, 46.3% agreed) and a good indicator of students' ability in using the language skills (11.6% strongly agreed, 58.7% agreed).

Table 2 : Teachers' attitudes towards the test fairness and its quality

Q13. How do you judge the SLC English test?							
Variables	**Strongly agree**	**Agree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**	**mean**	**SD**
It is a fair test in terms of its grading system.	19.0%	46.3%	13.2%	17.4%	3.3%	3.60	1.08
It is a good indicator of students' ability in using language in real life situations.	11.6%	58.7%	14.9%	12.4%	1.7%	3.66	.90
It reflects students' weaknesses and strengths clearly.	18.2%	38.0%	17.4%	20.7%	5.0%	3.44	1.15
It can discriminate well among the students.	5.8%	41.3%	16.5%	29.8%	5.8%	3.11	1.08

However, the interview results did not verify the findings of the questionnaire. All the interviewed teachers raised questions regarding the test fairness and its quality. The following quotation illustrates this point:

> *The exam results do not reflect students' real levels in English and also cannot discriminate well among students as almost all students get full marks in the speaking test. The schools send scores without testing their students. So, some students, who cannot utter even a single sentence in English, are also very likely to get full marks in the speaking test, which is not fair at all.*

Similarly, in the survey almost 50% of teachers believed that the test discriminates well among the students (5.8% strongly agreed, 41.3% agreed) but, in contrast to perceptions of test fairness, almost all the interviewed teachers reported the same view. Some teachers' open-ended responses to Q13 indicated that we need a more collaborative testing approach and some improvements in our test design. For example:

> *The test should focus more on communicative skills of the students. For this, we need a more collaborative approach of testing. We also need to change the current question pattern which encourages recitation. We need to*

focus more on creative questions so that students will be discouraged from cheating in the examination.

■ Test impact on instructional practices

The second area of exploration concerned the impact of the test on teachers' everyday classroom instructional practices and four sub-themes relating to test impact were categorized, namely: a) test impact on students' motivation to learn English; b) test impact on teaching content; c) test impact on classroom teaching methodology and; d) test impact on classroom assessment.

a) Test impact on student motivation to learn English

Teachers' responses, as summarized in Table 3, indicate that the test affects students' motivation to learn English; the vast majority of teachers opine that the test motivates students to learn English (27% strongly agreed, 54.5% agreed). However, most of the interviewed teachers argued that the test motivates students to develop only reading and writing skills, but not listening and speaking skills. Many teachers (63.6%) also believe that the test has had a positive impact on reducing drop-out rates.

Table 3 : Test impact on student motivation to learn English

Q14. What are the impacts of the test on student motivation to learn English?							
Variables	**Strongly agree**	**Agree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**	**mean**	**SD**
The test motivates them to learn English.	27.3%	54.5%	4.1%	12.4%	0.8%	3.95	.94
The test discourages them from learning English.	0.8%	12.4%	8.3%	62.8%	14.0%	2.40	2.17
The test does not affect their motivation to learn English.	4.1%	18.2%	8.3%	53.7%	14.9%	2.42	1.08
The test has led students to drop out of secondary school.	3.3%	21.5%	10.7%	40.5%	23.1%	2.40	1.16

Teachers also showed their concern about the test design. Teacher C stressed:

> *Some questions in the examination are repeated every year and are designed in such a way that it just tests students' memorization. Consequently, students prefer to memorise answers over developing their*

language skills. Therefore, I see the problem in question designing. Why can't we design questions in such a way that students are discouraged from reciting answers?

Teacher E added:

This exam never motivates students to use integrated skills. It also does not cover the whole syllabus. It only tests reading and writing improperly, and to some extent grammar, and neglects testing the communicative aspects of the language, though the existing teaching syllabus recommends them.

Despite the above negative views almost all the teachers praised the examination in terms of its power to control drop-out rates. They believe that because of the grading system, more students are getting access to higher education and there is a sharp decrease in drop-out rates, which had been a serious problem in previous years.

b) Test impact on teaching content selection

The survey results (summarized in Table 4) show that the examination had a very limited washback effect on teachers' choice of teaching content as the majority of teachers seemed not to teach only the test content. They also seemed to have an equal focus on all the language skills and also on integrated skills.

Table 4 : Test impact on teaching content selection

Q15. What contents and/or skills are focused on in your teaching of English to Grade 10 students?							
Variables	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	mean	SD
I focus only on the contents that are examined in the test.	3.3%	16.5%	6.6%	59.5%	13.2%	2.36	1.02
I focus more on reading and writing than on listening and speaking.	6.6%	28.1%	8.3%	43.3%	13.2%	2.71	1.20
I focus more on listening and speaking than on reading and writing.	5.0%	16.5%	7.4%	59.5%	10.7%	2.45	1.05
I focus more on integrated skills than on individual skills.	25.6%	52.9%	8.3%	12.4%	0.8%	3.92	.91

Variables	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	mean	SD
I have a great focus on grammar and vocabulary.	25.6%	47.9%	5.8%	15.7%	4.1%	3.75	1.13

However, the questionnaire results do not correspond with the interview results. During the interviews, almost all the teachers reported that they focus only on the skills/contents that are tested. Here is a representative view:

> I do not teach all the contents given in the text book. I spend quite a lot time on the contents that are possible to be asked in the examination. The thirty years' experience I have as an English teacher helped me to expect the questions that might be in the exam. Therefore, I focus on those sections of the textbook and skip others. For instance, I concentrate on the reading passages and grammar section and ignore listening and speaking exercises. Frankly speaking, I do not teach listening and speaking as the skills are not tested in the examination.

Additionally, most teachers also reported that they do not have any audio material to use in their school and also they have not yet seen the Grade 10 curriculum. They just rely on the textbook in their teaching.

With regard to developing integrated language skills in students, there is a discrepancy between what teachers expressed through the questionnaire and their classroom practices. The questionnaire data indicated that the overwhelming majority of teachers focus on integrated skills. However, six of the interviewed teachers stated that they teach the language skills separately. During class observation as well, it was observed that teachers were teaching language skills (such as reading) separately and none of the teachers were seen teaching listening and speaking skills. Nonetheless, two teachers reported that they do focus on integrated skills.

The vast majority of teachers reported that they have a great focus on grammar and vocabulary (25% strongly agreed, 47.9% agreed) and the interview results revealed similar findings. It was revealed through the interviews that selecting the grammar sections and teaching them deductively to students in separate lessons was a common practice amongst these teachers.

c) Test impact on teaching methodology
The teachers were asked to report whether they think that their teaching methodology has been affected by the SLC examination. Among the 120 teachers surveyed, 96 teachers (80%) agreed with the statement and then provided responses to Q16. Their responses are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5 : Test impact on teaching methodology

Variables	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	mean	SD
Q16. Are there any effects of the test on your teaching methodology? (Delete as appropriate)Yes/ No. **If you answered NO, go straight to question 17; if you answered YES, continue this question.**							
I feel that I am driven by the test rather than the textbook/ curriculum.	13.54%	33.3%	13.54%	32.29%	7.29%	3.13	1.21
The test has led me to teach in ways that contradict my own ideas of good educational practice.	8.33%	55.20%	15.6%2	20.83%	-	3.51	.91
I focus on skill development in my students.	40.32%	48.95%	6.25%	.96%	-	4.35	.64

The results are highly compatible with the teachers' views reported in interviews where teachers revealed they are driven by the examination rather than the curriculum and they feel that their teaching practice contradicts their own idea of good teaching. Teacher H reported:

> *My way of teaching has been very different from how a teacher should teach regarding the principles of the prescribed curriculum. I am usually the dominant speaker in my class adhering to a teacher-centred approach in my instruction although I think that students learn better if I use communicative methods. The curriculum also recommends me to apply communicative techniques and activities. But, the problem is that if I use communicative methodology, I can't complete the course in time and do not have enough time to prepare my students for the examination.*

Teacher B added:

> *I usually focus on teaching language rules directly using Nepali sometimes and ask my students to memorize the rules. This is because of the SLC examination and because of three other reasons: big classes, students' low levels in English and insufficient time allotted for teaching English.*

Although the vast majority of teachers surveyed reported that they focus on skill development in their students, during class observation it was seen that most of

the teachers were using teacher-centred methods and encouraging their students to recite answers. During the interviews, most of the teachers also stressed that they needed to focus on the exam rather than on skill development. One teacher expressed it in this way:

> I usually make my students practice exam-related activities and train them on mock exams similar to the SLC exam. Also, I encourage them to memorize some answers. My focus is on helping students to get good scores as my teaching quality is judged on the basis of the grades they get in the examination. So, it's my compulsion.

During the class observation, none of the teachers were found using any other teaching material except the English text book. However, two of the interviewed teachers commented that they sometimes use other teaching materials such as pictures, newspapers and audio-video materials. All the interviewed teachers reported that they use commercially produced test preparation material entitled 'Ten Sets', which is a collection of the test questions from previous years.

d) Test impact on classroom assessment
Finally, the teachers were asked to give their views about the test impacts on their classroom assessment. The results are presented in table 6.

Table 6 : Test impact on classroom assessment

Q17. How do you assess your students?							
Variables	**Strongly agree**	**Agree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**	**mean**	**SD**
I use real life tasks.	25.6%	64.5%	5.8%	3.3%	-	4.13	.66
My classroom tests mirror the tasks of the SLC English test.	15.7%	67.8%	5.8%	9.1%	0.8%	3.89	.80
I use the SLC English test papers from previous years.	22.3%	55.4%	6.6%	12.4%	2.5%	3.83	.99
I test only the skills tested in the SLC examination.	3.3%	33.3%	11.7%	45.8%	5.8%	2.82	1.06

The impact of the test on classroom assessment is not clear. The vast majority of teachers reported that they use real life tasks to test their students (25.6% strongly agree, 64.5% agree) but nearly the same number of teachers also reported that their classroom tests mirror the SLC English examination (15.7% strongly agree, 67.5% agree) and they use the old test papers to test their

students (22.3% strongly agree, 55.4% agree). However, almost all the teachers interviewed mentioned that they do not use real life tasks but they use old test papers to ensure that the SLC examination tasks are mirrored in their classroom tests. As one teacher said:

> My classroom tests are very similar to the SLC test. I follow the pattern of the SLC test right from the beginning of the academic year so that my students get practise with the SLC test. I usually do not design test items myself. I select them from the SLC questions collection.

Responses to Q.17 also revealed that a large number of teachers test only the skills tested in the SLC examination (3.3% strongly agree, 33.3% agree). During the interviews as well, five of the teachers (out of eight) reported that they test only the skills tested in the SLC examination.

 Additionally, the teachers were also asked to report whether they run classes for test preparation. The results indicated that 119 out of the 120 teachers run test preparation classes. Then, those 119 teachers were also asked to report an approximate number of classes they run for test preparation. It was found that the number of classes varied among the teachers.

Table 7 : Test preparation classes run by the teachers

Q. 18 Approximately how many classes PER YEAR do you spend preparing students for the test?	1-10 classes	11-20 classes	20-30 classes	More than 30
	28.1%	34.7%	10.7%	24.8%

Those 119 teachers were also asked to mention the time they start to run test related activities.

Table 8 : Time teachers start to run test preparation activities

Q19. When do you run the test preparation activities?	1-2 months before the test	3-4 months before the test	5-6 months before the test	7-8 months before the test	9-10 months before the test	Through out the year
	39.7%	1.6%	5.8%	0.8%	19%	33.1%

Interestingly, 33.1% of teachers reported that they run such activities throughout the year and a further 19% start 9-10 months before the examination, implying that the majority of classes are in a state of almost constant preparation. The largest single group of 39.7% of teachers said that they start such activities just 1-2 months before the examination with smaller numbers of other teachers in between this and the 9-10 months range. However, whenever they start, the focus in those classes seem very similar as all the interviewed teachers reported that students just repeat what they have already learnt, and practise with the 'Ten Sets' in these classes.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the SLC examination, to a large extent, has negative washback, which is incompatible with the intended washback envisaged by the exam constructors.

Discussion

The findings of this study were grounded in data gathered in three phases: survey, class observation and interview. Discussions of the main findings are guided by the themes developed on the basis of the two research questions.

a) Teachers' perceptions of the SLC examination

The first area of exploration was teachers' perceptions of the reasons behind introducing the letter grading system in the examination and the examination quality. Questionnaire results revealed mixed views about the reasons for implementing the letter grading system in the SLC examination. However, unlike Wall (2005) and Amengual-Pizarro's (2009) findings, most teachers in the study held negative attitudes towards the test. Their perceptions of the reasons for implementing the grading system were to some extent inconsistent with the underlying theories behind the grading system as they believe that increasing the pass percentage of students, rather than bringing about positive changes in teaching and learning English, was the main reason behind implementing the grading system. The incompatibility between teachers' perceptions and policy makers' intentions suggests negative reactions towards the implementation.

The results also raised questions about the fairness of the test and its quality. Although slightly more than half of the teachers surveyed considered the exam to be fair and a good indicator of students' ability in using the language, all the interviewed teachers disagreed with this contention. The teachers argued that the exam results do not reflect students' real levels in English and also cannot discriminate well among students. Indicating that the problem lay mainly with the speaking test, they maintained that schools give full marks to all the students in the speaking tests without testing their skills. Consequently, the test neither reflects students' weaknesses and strengths, nor discriminates well amongst students.

As reported by the teachers, the examination does not seem to be able to control malpractices associated with the test. This argument is, to some extent, verified by Das's (04 April, 2016) report about students who were expelled from the examination hall of the SLC examination because of their attempt to cheat and Jha's (07 April, 2016) report on an attempt to send examination supervisors in an illegal way by some Ministry of Education personnel, which supported that cheating in the examination persists.

However, some surveyed teachers and all the interviewed teachers welcomed the grading system as they thought that the grading system decreased drop-out rates and more students obtained access to higher education in the current year. Some teachers also reported that the grading system needs to be introduced right from the beginning grades. They also reported that the grading system confused them a lot, particularly in relation to students' subject choice in higher education.

b) Test impact on instructional practices

The second area of exploration concerned the impact of the test on teachers'

everyday instructional practices. The questionnaire and interview questions regarding this theme were developed following washback hypotheses taken from Alderson and Wall (1993, pp. 120-121) that a test will influence "what teachers teach, how teachers teach and what students learn".

The results of this study provide support to Alderson and Wall's (1993) assumption that the test affects what students learn. The vast majority of surveyed teachers reported that the test motivates students to learn English. However, the interview results indicated that the test motivates students to develop their reading and writing skills, but not listening and speaking skills. The main reason behind this is that tests in reading and writing skills are controlled by the exam Board while tests in speaking and listening are controlled at the school level. This is consistent with Takagi's (2018) finding that takers focused only on the skills assessed by the test, suggesting a negative impact of the test on student motivation to improve speaking and listening skills.

The SLC examination also seems to induce pervasive negative washback on teaching content selection of the current curriculum as teachers focused on activities/lessons from various units in the prescribed textbooks, and neglected others that were deemed important in the curriculum. Thus, consistent with Onabia's (2013) findings, the results indicated that teachers narrowed the content of the curriculum to mirror the content of the examination. The findings also echoed those of Andrews (1995), who claimed that teachers gave too much emphasis to exam-related materials, which he considered "a limiting of focus for teachers and students rather than a broadening of horizons" (p.80). Such findings were also recorded by a number of other previous washback studies carried out in different contexts (e.g Cheng, 2005; Abu-Alhija, 2007; Choi, 2008) where the teachers were found to restrict the curriculum only to those aspects most likely to appear in the examination.

Additionally, all the interviewed teachers were found using only the textbook as teaching material for their usual classes and commercially produced test preparation material for test preparation classes, though two of them said that they sometimes used self-made materials. This finding is contrary to Watanabe's (2000) and Tsagari's (2009) findings that teachers used a variety of self-made materials.

The results also suggest that the SLC examination impacted, to a certain extent, upon teachers' instructional techniques. The interview data, complemented by class observation, revealed that most of the teachers were reluctant to apply a communicative approach upon which the principles of the current Grade 10 curriculum of English are based. Very similar to the claim made by Onaiba (2013), most teachers, in response to test demands and their students' expectations, appeared to adhere to teacher-centred approaches to language teaching with a dominant role in classroom instruction. The most frequent activity carried out by teachers during the class observations was reading of the text by the teachers and describing the text using both Nepali and English, followed by question-answer recitation provided by the teachers. Communicative activities such as group work or discussion with integrated language tasks were not evident in any class, even though the SLC English curriculum expects students to develop those skills in more learner-centred classrooms. Additionally, almost all of the interviewed teachers

stated that they do not teach listening and speaking as these skills are not tested by the SLC Board and they are free to send any scores they want. The findings reflect those of Gorsuch (1999) and Agrawal's (2004) studies, in Japanese and Indian contexts respectively, that although the curriculum urged teachers to use communicative and integrated language skills, they tended to marginalize skills not tested in the examinations.

The test also seems to affect classroom assessment. The vast majority of the teachers reported that their tests mirror the SLC English examination tasks and they even use the old SLC examination questions to test their students. A large number of teachers test only the skills tested by the SLC. Additionally, almost all the teachers run test preparation classes, though they vary in terms of the number of these classes that they take and the time they begin to run them.

Thus, teachers seemed to be driven by the SLC examination rather than the curriculum. The teachers themselves feel that their teaching practice contradicts their own idea of good teaching. They were not self-satisfied with their teaching approach and the exam-tailored activities they performed in their classes. However, they felt compelled to raise students' scores in the test as their own quality would be judged on the basis of their students' SLC grades and there is unhealthy competition between the schools. This finding, to some extent, is compatible with that of some other studies (e.g. Burrow, 2004 and Amengual–Pizarro, 2009) that teachers changed their teaching methods according to the demands of the test. However, the finding is inconsistent with the findings of others (Cheng, 2005) that the way the teachers carried out their teaching remained unchanged even after implementing a new testing policy, i.e teachers kept on using their traditional techniques although the new testing policy had a great focus on communicative skills, and those by Onaiba (2013) and Wall and Alderson (1993) which found limited clear-cut evidence of the relationship between the tests and teachers' teaching methods.

Nevertheless, considering the inconsistent results of previous studies in this regard, one might argue that in this study it is not evident that the SLC examination is the solitary reason behind these practices. Other variables may come into play such as teachers' beliefs, qualifications, gender, training status and experience, and contextual factors such as large classes, students' low levels of English and parents' and schools' pressure to raise students' scores, suggesting that teachers felt extra pressure from the exam, resulting in "a tension between pedagogical and ethical decisions" (Spratt, 2005, p.24). However, although it seems that the degree of test impact depends on how different test related "variables interact with the test, the test per se still, in many cases, remains the overriding variable that does have a direct effect on washback" (Onabia, 2013, p. 249).

Conclusion

This study aimed at investigating secondary level teachers' attitudes towards the SLC English test and its washback effects. The data, contrary to Wall (2005) and Amengual-Pizarro's (2009) findings, revealed mixed but mainly negative attitudes of the teachers towards the SLC English examination. The test seems to lead to a series of negative consequences on student motivation, classroom instruction and content selection. Very similar to what has been found in Chinese and

Pakastini contexts, as reported by Luxia (2007) and Rao (2012) respectively, the teaching methodology in Nepalese schools goes against the curriculum designers' intentions. Although the curriculum urges teachers to use communicative and integrated language skills, they just follow a traditional teaching approach, narrowing down the curriculum to mirror test contents. The development of listening and speaking is thus overshadowed by the examination. Additionally, classroom assessment practice is negatively affected by the test; a large number of teachers do not design test items themselves; instead they just select the items from the SLC questions collection. However, the test seems to be able to decrease high drop-out rates and give more students access to higher education.

The results of this study suggest that the listening and speaking elements of the SLC English examination also need to be controlled externally to motivate both the teachers and students to focus on these skills. Students' communicative skills should be tested and teachers should be encouraged to use communicative methods in their teaching while unhealthy competition among the schools to raise students' grades should be controlled. Additionally, the test should be designed in such a way that it creates a space for testing students' creativity and discourages them from memorising answers and cheating in the examination. It is also recommended that the grading system should be introduced right from the beginning grades of formal schooling to bring consistency in testing practice. Finally, the teachers seem confused about the value of different grades, particularly in relation to their subject choice in higher education. They do not know whether the students with Grade C on a particular subject are allowed to study the same course at Grade 11. Thus, more information should be given to teachers on the issue as soon as possible.

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About the author

Saraswati Dawadi completed her Masters in English Education from Tribhuvan University, Nepal in 2004, and an MA in TESOL from Lancaster University in the UK in 2014. She also received a Masters in Research Studies from the Open University, UK, in 2015 where she is currently a PhD scholar. Her doctoral research focuses on the social and educational impacts of the SLC English test, particularly the pre-test and post-test impacts on students and their parents. Her interest in this research area is derived from her own experience of taking the test and working with students in diverse social contexts in Nepal.

Appendix 1: Research tools

A. Questionnaire

Dear Teacher,
I would like to let you know that I am conducting a small research survey on the SLC English test. It would be a great help for me if you could fill out the questionnaire. Please be assured that your participation in the study is completely voluntary and all the information you provide me through this questionnaire will be anonymous and will be used only for the research purpose. Please read the instructions very carefully before responding to each question and provide answers as accurate as possible. If you have any doubts about any of the questions/items, please contact me at 014670619 or 9841757120. Alternatively, you could reach me at saraswati.dawadi@open.ac.uk.

PART I: Please tick one appropriate answer or provide written answers.

1. Your gender:
   ☐ Female   ☐ Male   ☐ Others

2. School's name and district: _____

3. Your school type
   ☐ Private   ☐ Public

4. Your academic qualification:_____

5. Your age:
   ☐ 21 – 30 yrs ☐ 31 – 40 yrs   ☐ 41 – 50 yrs   ☐ above 50 yrs

6. Number of years you have been teaching English:
   ☐ 0 – 5 yrs   ☐ 6- 10 yrs   ☐ 11 – 15 yrs   ☐ 16- 20 yrs
   ☐ above 20 yrs

7. The typical size of each class at grade 10 you teach in terms of student numbers
   ☐ 10-20   ☐ 21 – 30   ☐ 31 – 40   ☐ above 40

8. Number of periods you teach English per week:
   ☐ 6 – 10   ☐ 10 – 15   ☐ 16-20   ☐ 20 – 25
   ☐ more than 25

9. Have you taken any courses in language testing and evaluation?
   ☐ yes   ☐ no
   If yes, please specify_____

10. Have you had any kind of teacher training?
    ☐ yes   ☐ no
    If yes, please specify_____

11. Medium of instruction in your class_____

PART II: Please read the following items carefully and tick ( ) the one that suits you best.

12. In your opinion, what are the main reasons for introducing the Grading System in the SLC English test?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Just to increase pass percentage of students.					
To bring positive changes in classroom practices.					
To eliminate the risk of cheating and other malpractices.					
To disseminate the results quickly, adequately and as transparently as possible.					
If others, please specify here:					

13. How do you judge the SLC English test?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
It is a fair test in terms of its grading system.					
It is a good indicator of students' ability in using language in real life situations.					
It reflects students' weaknesses and strengths clearly.					
It can discriminate well among the students.					
If others, please specify here:					

14. What are the impacts of the test on student motivation to learn English?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The test motivates them to learn English.					
The test discourages them from learning English.					
The test does not affect their motivation to learn English.					
The test has led students to drop out of secondary school.					
If others, please specify here:					

15. What contents and/or skills are focused in your teaching English to Grade 10 students?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I focus only on the contents that are examined in the test.					
I focus more on reading and writing than on listening and speaking.					
I focus more on listening and speaking than on reading and writing.					
I focus more on integrated skills than on individual skills.					
I have a great focus on grammar and vocabulary.					
If others, please specify here :					

16. Are there any effects of the test on your teaching methodology? (Delete as appropriate) YES/ NO.

If you answered NO, go straight to question 17; if you answered YES, continue to answer the question below, 'Are there any effects of the test on your teaching methodology?'

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel that I am driven by the test rather than the textbook/curriculum.					
The test has led me to teach in ways that contradict my own ideas of good educational practice.					
I focus on skills development in my students.					
If others, please specify here:					

17. How do you assess your students?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I use real life tasks.					
My classroom tests mirror the tasks of the SLC English test.					
I use the SLC English test papers from previous years.					
I test only the skills tested in the SLC examination.					
If others, please specify here:					

PART III : Please TICK the appropriate answer or provide written answers.

Do you run test preparation classes? (Delete as appropriate) YES/ NO.

If you answered NO, go straight to question 20; if you answered YES, continue question 18 and 19.

18. Approximately how many classes PER YEAR do you spend preparing students for the test?
    [ ] 1-10 classes

    [ ] 11-20 classes

    [ ] 21-30 classes

    [ ] More than 30 classes

19. When do you run the test preparation activities?

    [ ] 1-2 months before the test

    [ ] 3-4 months before the test

    [ ] 5-6 months before the test

    [ ] 7-8 months before the test

    [ ] 9-10 months before the test

    [ ] Throughout the year

20. Is there anything else you would like to share about the SLC English test and your classroom teaching? If yes, please state below.

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    Thank you very much for your support!

B. Teacher interview schedule

Interview opening:
Getting to know each other
Telling the interviewee the purpose of the interview
Explaining the purpose of audio recording and asking for permission

Assuring the interviewees that the interview data will be kept confidential and used for research purpose only

Themes	Interview questions/prompts
Grading and test impact	• What do you think is the main reason for introducing the grading system in the SLC examination? Why do you think so?
General perceptions about the test	• Do you think that the SLC English test is a fair test (why/why not)? • Do you think that the test is an accurate measure of student achievement? • How does the test affect students' motivation to learn English? • Do you think that your students' learning is affected by the exam? If yes, in what ways?
Teaching content	• Do you select teaching contents according to the test? • What skills/aspects/contents do you mostly focus? Why? • Discussion about the class observation regarding the contents.
Teaching methodology	• Do you think that your teaching methodology is affected by the test? How? • Discussion about the observed methodology...
Classroom assessment	• How do you usually assess your students? • Are your classroom assessment tasks similar to the test tasks? How?
Test preparation	• How often do you run test preparation classes? Anything else they would like to tell

(Note: These are just guidelines. More questions will emerge through the interviews)

Interview ending : Thanking the interviewee.

C. Class observation scheme

Teaches' name _____ School's name _____ Topic _____

Date _____

Time		Teaching material	Skills focus	Teaching content	Teaching activities	Student work mode	Time	
From	To						Teacher	Student

Key:

Teaching materials : a) textbook b) teacher's guide c) commercial publication d) self-edited material e) others

Skills focus : a) listening b) speaking c) reading d) writing e) integrated skills

Content : vocabulary, grammar, poem, story, etc.

Activity : the column is open ended

Student work mode : a) individual b) pair c) group d) choral

Language : a) English b) Nepali

Reflective Writing Practice in Higher Secondary EFL Classrooms

Reflective Writing Practice in Higher Secondary EFL Classrooms

Ushakiran Wagle

Introduction

Like many trainers, wherever I go to conduct workshops I ask my participants to write reflections to give me an idea of what they have learnt during the session. They write what they liked most, what they disliked and what they are going to take away from the session. As Gibbs (1988) claims, experience is not enough for learning, rather reflection upon the acquired experience is essential for learning to occur. When we write a reflection, we visualize and remember the content discussed in the class. This helps us to retain what we have learnt, to make the learning deep rather than superficial and easily forgotten. Though I firmly believed in this idea of reflective writing for learning, I used to use this technique only in training sessions. When I came back to my classroom to teach my regular EFL lessons, I never asked my students to write reflections. When this thought occurred to me, I started asking my students to write reflections on the lesson they had had – not just reflections on special events that had taken place in the class but the regular classes they experienced.

In order to explore the effectiveness of reflective writing in regular classes, I engaged in reflective writing practice in my own classroom for about six months. The data collection is ongoing and I now plan to ask other English language teachers to start the same kind of process to assess the effectiveness of introducing reflective writing practice in Higher Secondary EFL classrooms in Nepal more widely. Specifically, I intend to see the impact of reflective writing on students' writing skills development as well as on enhancing the understanding of the lesson taught. I also hope to make recommendations for reflective writing activities which can be introduced in regular classes without affecting the completion of the required course.

The context: Nepalese Higher Secondary School classrooms

There are multiple issues connected to writing in Nepali schools. One common problem EFL teachers in Nepal face is that the textbook and associated tasks are not designed according to students' actual levels, making basic understanding difficult. Subedi (2015) also claims that teachers do not normally engage with students when they make plans for writing, at the point at which they really need help from teachers. This suggests that we neither have the time to appreciate students' efforts to work nor do we have ideas about how to help students so

that they know they can be creative while writing compositions. In addition, in our classrooms, both students and teachers share the common experience of using an alien code, English, for self-expression. My intention was to try to deal with some of these problems so I could assist my students' learning more effectively.

The intervention reported here is based on my own experience of teaching high school students at one of the private colleges in the Kathmandu valley. I had 45 students in the class and the intervention took place during one period of 45 minutes every day. As the reflective writing was solely based on individual ideas regarding the classroom experience, I did not have any resource difficulties even though the classroom was neither well-furnished nor well equipped with electronic media. Even the traditional seating arrangement with fixed furniture was not a hindrance. Further, the intervention I was carrying out did not prevent me from completing the course prescribed by the government for that level, an important consideration for both teacher and students. Though I had two different books to complete, one a complete grammar and the other containing different genres like poems, stories, essays and drama, the reflective writing practice went well.

The research project

Having students who always hesitated to write in their second (third or fourth in some students' case) language, teaching was a difficult task. I knew my students hesitated to write anything, especially writing answers to questions after reading a text, and so I did not know whether they would be prepared to write reflections on their classroom activities. Thus I planned to introduce the reflective writing as a regular activity in the classroom. I had two main research questions:

1. Does the reflective writing technique work in higher secondary EFL classrooms in Nepal?
2. If so, what are the advantages of using this technique?

■ The research process
I have a large classroom of 45 students with different levels of English language competence. Therefore, to narrow down the scope of the research project, at the beginning I overlooked factors like the level of their English and their sentence construction while they were writing their reflections. As mentioned earlier, my students hesitate to write and so my first attempt was to encourage them to write without worrying about grammatical or other mistakes.

As McGuire, Lay and Peters (2009) stress, in the use of pedagogical approaches to prepare students with the necessary knowledge and skills for reflective writing, it is important to give them ample chances to think about writing. First of all, I did not ask students to write answers to comprehension questions after I completed the chapters to make them feel that reflective writing was an easier task. Secondly, I asked them to listen to me and observe the steps carefully as I went through the reflective activities. I explained the text, asked some of them to be volunteers to role play and sometimes asked them to read and design a poster presentation. In addition I asked them to try to think about aspects of their real life situations to show how their understanding of the subject matter changed after reflecting on their own experiences. While doing this they were merging their existing experiences with the new experiences gained.

According to Kolb and Kolb (2005), an experiential learning cycle has four different phases of learning, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 : The Experiential Learning Cycle Source (Kolb and Kolb, 2005)

In this cycle, the first thing is concrete experience, which the participants undergo during the session. This leads to observation of the process where the students get a chance to observe how I as a teacher completed the activities. While reflecting on how I conducted the class and the reasons for my behaviour, students would also be writing about the shortcomings of the class and better options to complete a similar task. Kolb and Kolb (2005) believe that in education it is necessary to focus on engaging participants in a process that best enhances their learning.

Agreeing with this, I decided to focus on engaging my students in reflective tasks. In addition to the few days of writing practice on what they understood by the end of the class, I asked them to start writing a few lines on what I did and how that helped them shape their understanding. Despite having a traditional classroom setting, the stepwise tasks I set were giving both me and my students continuous opportunities to analyze our learning. All of the activities were a part of the everyday classroom. They did not require students to put in any extra effort, rather they reduced the time they spent on completing the comprehension questions given. Encouraging students to write what they have learnt during the discussion session and the lecture provided, I was side by side motivating them to write about the theme of the chapter. Following this, they would also write about the situations in the text that touched them emotionally (e.g. the actions of the characters, scenes and conversations). As Gambrill (2005) says, reflection forces us not only to think critically, but to have a stance and our own opinion too. The traditional function of text-based comprehension questions – to find out whether students can grasp the ideas and the information provided in the text – was not neglected either. From the base of the more reflective activities, students who had written their two page reflections had actually covered answers to almost all of the post-

chapter exercises.

Of course, any new activity takes time to get used to and the first few written products from the students were quite shallow. Due to the fixed seating arrangements of the classroom, some students even copied answers from one another rather than writing on their own. Also, rather than looking at the classroom activities from a critical point of view, they tended to summarize them in a superficial way, such as:

> ### Sample reflection 1
> *I like today's class. I enjoyed doing the task teacher gave. Teacher asked us to write about today's class. Today's class was awesome as she taught the new essay named "Two long term problems: too many people, too few trees." This chapter brings out deforestation and overpopulation as two long term problem.*

> ### Sample reflection 2
> *The lesson was asking questions about experience. The structure to use is have you ever + and third form of verb. We did all the exercises in our exercise book and that was helpful. She also sang a song so that we can remember the structure to use.*

The quality of these reflections made me so frustrated that I almost declared that reflective writing practice could not work at the Nepalese Higher Secondary level. I felt that I was failing as the activity I introduced was negatively impacting the class. The post-chapter exercises had at least helped students to reach a comprehension level where they could understand, translate, summarize and discuss the content given in the text. But the reflections they wrote contained no levels other than listing, locating and naming. Understanding why students were not able to move from simply recalling the classroom activities was necessary now.

Reflecting upon my own experience I revised the plan for my class. As students' written work showed no real reflection, I started guiding the students to answer particular questions while writing their reflections such as:

> *How might the ideas of the chapter be used as a guide in your life?*
> *What intuitions have you developed as a result of this chapter?*

Realizing that these questions might create confusion in my students, I further developed a table and a checklist – based on Gibbs (1988) reflective cycle – to help them to understand what they were supposed to do during reflective writing.

Figure 2 : Checklist for reflective writing

Time/date and the title of the lesson	
Describe what your teacher said during the lesson	How did you feel? One activity you liked One activity you disliked
Describe some incidents that touched you	Reasons for liking that incident

Slowly, they added answers to these questions as well and as a result I could see clearly more written reflection. The effort made to introduce the newer ways and the newer activities added to their writing and helped both me and my students. Rigorous practice on the same task every day after every session also made them realize the importance of the task. Hence, after providing guidelines, students' writing developed and they offered more reflective pieces, as we can see in the two sample reflections that follow.

> ### Sample reflection 3
> Teacher started with the story of how her grandparents used to come to Kathmandu and dip into the Bagmati river to purify themselves. Listening to her I felt like how would that have been possible? Because growing up inside valley I have observed the Bagmati closely for last 10 years and it was never like that. I was wandering why she started with that but later I came to know that today's class was basically based on nature conservation. Suddenly I realized what we have done to our nature. Even if I haven't seen the Bagmati so clean, I can understand that it might not have been like this from the beginning. Human beings are interfering the nature and the best examples are the rivers and other surroundings here.

> ### Sample reflection 4
> The world is growing smaller with the use of internet nowadays. One can learn and copy other's culture. Today's chapter gave ample opportunity to know about the pre and post pregnancy culture of different place. As the essay is written far before, the condition might not be similar now. But thinking of my own context [a typical eastern village of Nepal] I could sense that the writer was right. There are many misconceptions about child birth in traditional places where the care and attention given to the mom or to be mom is incredible.

Evaluation and reflection on the research project

With reflective writing, I feel that I have been able to liberate my students from being passive listeners. I have also had no difficulties in completing the required course because the students came to a better understanding of the text on their own, linking what they had learnt in the classroom to their lives and to their own contexts across the country for a deeper understanding of real-world issues. Sample reflection 5 illustrates this level of understanding.

> ### Sample reflection 5
> A new chapter was started today which was about saving the nature. The example teacher gave was about the clean environment of Kathmandu. I came to Kathmandu for the first time was only when I completed my SLC. I was born, grew up and had my study up to grade 10 in a hill district in the eastern development region. Thus I couldn't relate to what teacher was saying. But yes, I could obviously understand that rivers in my village are really very clean and we still swim in there. The good news is rivers in the village are cleaner than in the city but the bad news together comes and that the reason for having clean rivers is migration. People from my village in the name of searching for facilities transfer themselves to the lowland terai

and the rivers there have already started polluting. Rivers of Kathmandu are polluting because there are many students like me and professionals like my English teachers are here to pursue the higher achievements.

Even when dealing with the grammar section of the textbooks, students were encouraged to write reflections, giving rise to their own understanding of the grammar of English, as we see in sample reflection 6.

> ***Sample reflection 6***
> *Teacher started with 'have you ever seen a penguin come to tea' nursery rhyme. At the beginning we enjoyed as she was singing. Later she asked one of our friends to come to the front of the class and write the first line of the rhyme. After he did so she asked us to see what structure was used. We started analyzing the text and came up with the structure that is used to describe experience or to ask about the experience.*

Reflecting on my own behaviour as the teacher, I cannot deny the reality that I gave cold looks to my students several times because they were not able to come up with good pieces of writing. Of course, this was partly my fault for not thinking first of all about how to guide students in reflective writing and assuming they would know what I wanted them to do. At first, this was discouraging for both teacher and students and simply resulted in copied versions of reflection. Reflecting on this experience, I see that I was not paying enough attention to the process of learning in the way that is encouraged by learner-centred teaching (Reimer, 2013). If I were to start the project again, rather than asking students to write reflections straight away, I would first work with them on how to reflect. I had initially tried to use reflection as a different task at the beginning of this research, because of which students felt that they had been given an extra burden. However, the successful completion of the intervention with adequate guidance made me realize that reflection is not a different task separate from required activities; rather it is the major part of completing the assigned reading itself.

Overall, introducing reflective writing practice in the classroom helped students understand and improve their own writing. They gradually became more responsible when they started merging their local and personal ideas, comparing and contrasting them with the given reading. By the end of the academic year, students had a portfolio filled with their own reflections on the texts. I did not have to give them notes nor did they themselves have to buy model answers from the market (in Nepal publishers typically prepare these answers for all the comprehension questions given in the textbooks and it is common for students to buy and rote learn them to prepare for their exams). Rather, they had answers for each and every post-chapter exercise in their hands which were very precise and, more importantly, were in their own handwriting and words. In this way, reflective writing also worked as a positive time saver in our classroom as students did not have to rote learn someone else's answers.

Conclusion

All the changes in the students' work were possible due to rigorous practice in reflective writing with reflective writing strategies built on personal experience. It is important to realise too that, often, the results of this intervention were based on learning by committing mistakes, which teachers themselves are often reluctant to risk and criticize in their students. However, learning from mistakes, the careful attention given to both my teaching strategies and the students' work, and the incremental involvement of students inside the classroom over an extended period of time was what was responsible for the success of this classroom experiment.

From my experience, we can see that it is possible to introduce reflective writing practice in Nepalese EFL contexts where, in most cases, the classroom settings are stereotypically traditional. Traditional classroom settings, multicultural contexts and large numbers of students in the classroom are usually considered to be disadvantages in using anything but traditional teacher-led classes and rote-learning techniques. However, reflective writing can be implemented in a heterogeneous classroom by shortening the time of the teacher input to 25-30 minutes and using the remaining 15- 20 minutes of time to let students write their own reflections, guided at first and increasingly independent later on. I shall continue to use reflective writing and urge other teachers to try this for themselves. As Rodgers (2002, p. 842) reminds us: "Thinking, particularly reflective thinking or inquiry, is essential to both teachers' and students' learning".

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Historical Developments in the Teaching and Learning of English in Nepal

CHAPTER **8**

Historical Developments in the Teaching and Learning of English in Nepal

Eak Prasad Duwadi

Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to provide an historical overview of the development of English language provision in Nepal from the 19th century, when it was first introduced, to the present day. The development of English has had an impact on educators and students as well as those involved in official language policies and planning in Nepal. The chapter provides an outline of the development of the education system in Nepal and then discusses English teaching in three phases – prior to 1950, from 1950-1990 and post-1990 – before focusing on current challenges in English teaching in Nepal.

The development of the education system prior to 1950

In ancient Nepal, being educated was regarded as one of the greatest human qualities and virtues despite the fact that formal education was restricted to the élites while boys and girls from lower castes would learn practical skills like ploughing, farming, keeping livestock and making tools within the family. How education, and within that access to English, became available to everyone in Nepal has a long history, one full of struggles. Historical records concerning the presence of English in Nepal reveal that, long before the beginning of formal schooling, it was in use as early as the seventeenth century (Giri, 2015). By the nineteenth century, as Giri (105, p. 94) argues "A landmark of English education, [...], was through the commencement of the recruitment of Gurkha soldiers as part of the famous Sugauli treaty in 1815, the training for which took place in English".

English style education was introduced by the Prime Minister of the time, Jung Bahadur Rana, after his visit to Europe in 1850-51 where he had seen and was impressed by the achievements of the British in particular: "after his trip to Europe, Jung Bahadur realized the importance of English for communication with the outside world and felt that his sons should be given a 'western education'" (Sharma, 1990, p. 3). Education was thus, at first, restricted to the children of the ruling Rana families and not available to the general population. Teaching was provided for these privileged children at Durbar School, the first modern school in Nepal. Though there is no direct evidence of the teaching and learning methods then, like the school itself it is most likely that it was modelled on traditional British school lines.

The development of the education system from 1950-1990

Education became formally available to the general public after the establishment of democracy in Nepal in 1951, although well-to-do families had been educating their children (mainly boys) in India prior to that. The small numbers being educated at that time can be seen in the fact that the 1950s adult literacy rate (age above15 +) of the country was just 5 per cent with about 10,000 students in just 300 schools and two colleges (Thapa, 2011). However, after the establishment of democracy and the advent of greater social equality in the nation, in 1954 the Government of Nepal appointed Dr Hugh B. Wood (a US Fulbright scholar in India) as advisor to the Nepal National Educational Planning Commission (NNEPC). The report of this commission had a profound influence on Nepalese education and became the foundation of language education policy in Nepal (Giri, 2015).

After the introduction of a comprehensive National Education Sector Education Plan (NESP) in 1971, the education sector began to enlarge. The NESP attempted to create a single unified system of public education and to empower district education offices to run schools (Thapa, 2011). Within the two levels of primary and secondary education, there are two types of schools and colleges: Community Schools (government schools) and Private Schools. In addition there are also a few missionary foundation schools (such as St. Xavier's and St. Mary's), gumbas (schools for selected Buddhist children), madrasas (schools for Muslim children) and Gurukul (Sanskrit schools).

At the tertiary level, Tribhuvan University was established in 1959 as the first university in Nepal, though there are now nine in the country. Tribhuvan University has given high priority to having its curriculum in English and it is a compulsory subject until the bachelor's level irrespective of students' specialization in their studies. In 1981 the university implemented a change in the structure of English syllabi, allotting a weighting of 200 marks instead of 100 to campus level English language courses, and other content courses in English. Furthermore, even if the teaching and learning method is in other languages (mostly in Nepali), the questions for final examinations are set and asked in English. English itself is also taught up to Master's level at the faculty of Education and Humanities and Social Sciences.

Therefore, before 1950, English was limited only to the élite, while from 1950-1990 it was available to the general public. After 1990, Nepal opened up completely to the rest of the world with globalization, the internet, English language newspapers, social media, and other publications as we shall now discuss.

Teaching English post-1990

The national literacy rate increased to 65.94 % in 2011 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Although considerably less than for males (75.1%), female literacy (57.4%) has also been improving in Nepal. This increase in basic literacy is attributable to the expansion of education since the 1950s which has been accompanied by a general desire for getting children educated which is seen all over Nepal. Currently, the school level of education consists of four to five years of pre-primary, eight years of primary, and four years of secondary. Unfortunately, 13% of children drop-out of school before completion. There are several

reasons for this, including child marriage, migration, poverty and the high rate of unemployment amongst educated people (leading to questioning of the value of education).

In the last three decades, English language teaching has improved greatly in Nepal. The change can be noticed in terms of the structure of education, pedagogies and institutions of higher learning (Bista, 2011). However, while gross enrolment of children in school has increased rapidly, the quality of public schools has deteriorated and the private sector commands authority in the school system, based on better results in the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examinations formerly held after class ten, and now to be held after class twelve. The growth in the private sector came about due to the prevailing school liberalization policy in 1998 (Thapa, 2011) and the demand for admission to private schools has since been widespread, especially from well-off families.

The significance of English in Nepalese society is also reflected in the way in which it is embraced in the education system (Giri, 2015). English is taught as a foreign language from Grade 1 to Grade 12, and is increasingly being used as a medium of education, a key selling point for private schools, though it is rarely used as a language of communication. Giri (2015) states that as a consequence of the prominence of English, speakers of other languages have abandoned their languages and adopted English in the belief that it will ensure a better future and access to wider socio-educational resources and opportunities. English is thus seen to be important because of the development of science and technology and is regarded as a vital tool for all students to become successful in local, national and international communication. Increasingly, too, thousands of Nepalese youth go abroad seeking employment opportunities every year and English is deemed to be important for this. Bhattarai (2005) indicates that there are more than 500,000 documented migrant workers, including 100,000 female migrant workers.

Problems and possibilities of English education in Nepal

Developing proficiency in English amongst school students is of pressing concern to education ministries around the world (Hayes, 2012), not just in Nepal. English has become available through mass media such as radio, television, internet, and newspapers, particularly expanding after the 1990s with the opening of Nepal to tourism. Though English is widespread in many areas of Nepali life and is seen as a passport to a better future, according to Kaplan and Baldauf (2008) the lack of textbooks and of trained teachers, and the presence of ineffective management have seriously hindered the establishment of both first language education and first grade primary English education today in Nepal. A number of challenges in English education have also been noted by Bista (2011) in terms of curriculum, textbooks, methodologies and use of teaching resources both at school and college levels. For example, many schools in rural Nepal do not receive textbooks until the end of the academic session. In this section I will deal with some of the challenges facing English language teaching and learning in Nepal today.

To uncover the issues and challenges facing English language teachers and learners today, a questionnaire was posted in three closed professional groups of English Teachers from April–May, 2016. Altogether 30 responses were recorded from teachers working in the colleges and universities in Nepal. Numerous issues

were raised by the respondents, including teachers' attitudes, their competencies as teachers and English language proficiency, and the way they treat students in the class, to lack of resources and facilities.

One of the major problems seems to lie in teachers' mind-sets, specifically their political affiliation as they are often the cadre of a particular party. Battarai (2014) reveals that in every political movement or activity schools and colleges are frequently and badly affected. When there is a change in the leadership of the government university administrators are also changed, sometimes leading to the destabilization of a university. Consequently, it is said that teachers devote more time to local politics than preparing their lessons and evaluating the students.

Teacher training is also generally scarce and is overly formal in style (perhaps with a poor balance between grammatical focus and conversational skills); pronunciation and intonation are further issues as too little attention is paid to developing intelligibility of students' speech; teachers also have insufficient skills to evaluate students' progress adequately. Teachers seem to lack the skills to teach to students' needs; there is a lack of interaction in the classroom, lack of exposure to the language and traditional teaching methods predominate, leading to students only focusing on grammar: for too many students learning English simply means learning grammar.

Many respondents reported that the lack of trained teachers and adequate resources are the major problems we have in Nepal. The teacher education colleges and universities, in fact, have also not been able to discharge their responsibilities well. Moreover, problems lie in the mind-set of policy makers and administrators. A nationwide survey involving 450 secondary schools and approximately 22,500 students and case studies of 28 effective and ineffective secondary schools carried out within the Study on Student SLC Performance (Mathema and Bista, 2006) reveals that hardly any teaching and learning takes place in many public schools in rural areas. Similarly, according to one of my respondents, *"There is a common view that anyone can teach English. If the teachers do not know English themselves, how can we expect them to teach the children?"* The lack of qualified teachers, confusion regarding teaching methodologies, the general attitude towards English with two extremes – English-mania (English is everything) vs. English phobia (English is very foreign and extremely difficult) – combined with problems in the language policy of the government are the major problems in Nepal. The ELT condition in Nepal is thus far from satisfactory.

The outcome of teaching and learning English cannot achieve the expected curricular goal, developing communicative competence in the language, because Nepalese learners lack sufficient practice in speaking as more focus is given in the classroom to reading and writing. There is no proper balance among all the four skills while they are being taught. All four language skills are equally important; however, listening and speaking are prerequisites for learning other skills. Conscious effort is needed for the perception and comprehension of the language items to develop communicative efficiency. Survey respondents indicated that students need to understand listening texts: they should also understand how sounds are made and how stress and intonation are used.

The country needs a clear-cut education policy to meet the challenges of the 21st century (Bhattarai, 2014), which at present is lacking. The following are the solutions provided by my respondents:

1. There should be clear policy provisions on who can teach English: for instance, in many public schools, teachers with very low levels of English are found to be teaching English.
2. The education and training provided to student teachers before they have undertaken any teaching has to go through a massive overhaul if noticeable improvements are to be seen in English language teaching in Nepal.
3. Better learning and teaching environments should be created.
4. Besides reading and writing skills, the other language skills should be focused on.
5. The use of inductive methods of teaching should be practiced in schools and colleges.
6. Rewards for the best teachers should be initiated.
7. Above all, we should avoid the two extremes: English is everything (English-mania) vs. English is very foreign and extremely difficult (English phobia).

Conclusion

The English language is not a new introduction to Nepal as it entered the country in the early nineteenth century, but it took a long time before it became accessible to the general population. When public schools were opened in the 1950s, and a university was established in 1959, students slowly started learning English. The development of English language teaching and learning in Nepal reached its climax in the 1990s as this was the period of the opening of Nepal to tourism. The most recent development affecting the spread of English is technological innovation with the widespread introduction of English TV channels, movies, and access to the internet. The rate of English language use will further grow as many youths have migrated to different parts of the world and need English for employment. The major hindrance, however, to improving education is unceasing political instability.

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Shifting the Medium of Instruction to English in Community Schools: Policies, Practices and Challenges in Nepal

Shifting the Medium of Instruction to English in Community Schools: Policies, Practices and Challenges in Nepal

Laxmi Prasad Ojha

Introduction

Recently many government, community schools in Nepal, which used to teach in Nepali medium, have switched to English medium instruction (EMI) from the elementary grades (Republica, 2016). They justify the decision by saying that there is a growing demand and pressure from parents and students for this change. Although EMI is widespread now, the move has been criticized by educationists and psychologists who state that it is not the solution to an already ailing school education system. They argue that use of a foreign language to teach basic concepts of science, numeracy and literacy in the early grades is detrimental to the cognitive development of children in the long run (Cummins, 2006; Phyak, 2016). Nevertheless, there is a growing interest amongst parents to educate their children in English medium schools and, for this reason, those who can afford it send their children to private schools which invariably use English as the medium of instruction. A corresponding shift of medium of instruction to English in some government schools aims to motivate parents to choose to send their children to these schools. However, there are doubts regarding the success of their EMI programmes, doubts which focus primarily on the poor English language proficiency of the teachers and a lack of adequate resources (Giri, 2011). Hence, in this chapter, I will discuss policy regarding the use of medium of instruction in public schools in Nepal as well as how different stakeholders perceive the use of Nepali versus the English language as the medium of instruction in schools. I will explore the factors that motivate schools to shift to English medium and analyze the possible impact this might have on the cognitive, social and economic development of the children.

From a case study conducted in the Far-Western Region of the country, I analyse the causes and results of the shift to EMI, incorporating the views of key stake holders obtained through interviews and focus group discussions. The changes which have occurred in the condition of the schools due to the introduction of EMI and the problems faced by schools in implementing this new practice will also be discussed. The findings of the study suggest that EMI has been adopted in public schools in Nepal without careful planning and the necessary preparation to make

it a success. The study further reveals that schools are shifting to EMI mostly because of demand and pressure from parents. I conclude that it is necessary to have broader discussions among all stakeholders and experts on the rationale, procedures, challenges and potential impact of the introduction of EMI before any programme is launched so that it can actually bring about the desired changes in the education system.

The educational context

English has always been the language most associated with high social and economic status in Nepal (Phyak, 2016). It was the medium of instruction of the first school, Durbar School, established in 1854. Initially open only for children from the ruling Rana family, the school played an important role in establishing the English language in Nepal. Tri-chandra College, established in 1918 as the first higher education institution of the country, followed it and used English as the medium of instruction. This continued until the Nepal National Education Planning Commission (1956) recommended using the Nepali language in education throughout the country, aiming to unite the nation by using a single language. King Mahendra, during the one party dictatorial *Panchayat Era* (1960 - 1990), adopted a policy to promote the Nepali language and used the slogan *ek desh, ek bhasha, ek bhesh* (one country, one language, one attire). Nevertheless, despite these policy provisions and government interventions to establish Nepali as the sole medium of instruction at the school level, many socially prestigious schools continued the use of English as the medium of instruction as the élites used English as one of the means to maintain their social and economic dominance (Baral, 2015).

After the restoration of democracy in Nepal in 1990, governments adopted a liberal policy to allow the establishment of private schools which then "expanded at a dramatic pace, both in terms of numbers and in relation to the student base it was directed at" (Thapa, 2011, p. 36). These private schools, opened in district headquarters and other cities, used English as the exclusive medium of instruction and made the language accessible to people who could afford to pay the tuition fees. In addition, the private schools had high pass rates for their students in national examinations such as the Grade 10 School Leaving Certificate, spreading the perception amongst parents that quality education was synonymous with private schools and proficiency in English (Ghimire, 2016). Private schools thus were largely responsible for the 'English mania' in Nepal and used it to attract more students (Eagle, 1999, Phyak, 2013).

Meanwhile, community schools performed poorly in SLC examinations, mainly due to poor management and lack of resources, and lost the confidence of parents for the education of their children (Mathema, 2007). They witnessed a huge decline in the number of students as parents who could afford it opted to send their children to private English medium schools. To ensure their continued existence, many community schools felt compelled to consider moving from Nepali to English as the medium of instruction (Phyak, 2013). Initially, only a few schools dared to make this change, mainly because of the lack of confidence of the teachers to teach in English as a medium of instruction (Baral, 2015). The schools which did use EMI attracted the attention of parents and there was a significant increase in the number of students enrolled in these schools. In some cases students from private schools also shifted to these community schools (Republica, 2013). This success in

increasing enrollment, in turn, encouraged other schools to start EMI programmes and to use English as their major selling point, like the private schools, to arrest the decline in their enrollments (Caddell, 2006).

However, schools which decided to shift to EMI did not adapt their systems to the change sufficiently, thinking simply that changing the medium of instruction to English was the panacea for the problems they had been encountering. Teachers who had been teaching in Nepali medium for years were suddenly expected to teach in English without receiving any training to improve either their English proficiency or their pedagogical skills to teach in a different language. Most of the teachers use a mixed-language approach, using Nepali to translate and explain the content to the students but assessing them in English (Dearden, 2014). The schools have thus demonstrated change only in selected areas: they use textbooks written in English, the students read and write answers in English, and written examinations are conducted in English while Nepali is used for most day-to-day instruction.

Though the trend to move to EMI is growing in community schools in urban areas and also expanding to rural villages, educationists and psychologists express serious concern over the use of a foreign language as the medium of instruction in the early grades. They assert that when children are taught in a language that is not used in their home and community, their learning is impaired (Khan, 2014). Children focus on memorizing facts without understanding and their creativity is not fostered to the fullest, resulting in a generation that is poorly educated (Baral, 2015). These concerns notwithstanding, parents seem to think that if their children are not educated in English medium schools their future is bleak because English is associated with success in later life (Phyak, 2015).

The study

The main aim of this study was to examine the perceptions of a school principal, parents, teachers and students from a community school using English as the medium of instruction regarding the needs, practices and challenges they faced in implementing EMI. The data was collected using unstructured interviews with the principal and parents, and focus group discussions with teachers and students. The data was collected in Nepali and translated into English. All the respondents were from the same school located in one of the district headquarters of the Far-Western Region of Nepal. All together 22 respondents associated with the school – the principal, 5 teachers, 7 parents and 10 students – were consulted to elicit the required data. Parents, teachers and students who were available on the school premises during the visit to the school in April 2016 were selected using judgemental non-random sampling for the study. The data collected from the various stakeholders was analysed qualitatively using an interpretative paradigm. It was classified into various themes relating to the use of English as the medium of instruction that emerged from the interviews and focus group discussions.

Findings and discussion

The themes emerging from the interviews and focus group discussions were:

1. Motivation for selecting EMI
2. The decision making process for changing to EMI
3. The impact of EMI
4. Challenges in the implementation of EMI

Findings related to these themes are discussed below.

■ Motivation for selecting EMI

Previous research (Davis, Phyak, & Bui, 2012; Khati, 2015; Phyak, 2015) shows that the desire to gain access to the English language, and the economic benefits that are said to accrue to having proficiency in it, is the major reason behind parents' willingness to move their children to private schools using EMI. As a result, community schools have witnessed a sharp decline in the number of students in recent years which has, in turn, motivated them to adopt EMI to attract and retain students. As Phyak (2016, p. 210) confirms, "public schools are shifting to EMI to compete with private schools". Even official documents of the Ministry of Education acknowledge this reality. For example, MoE (2014a), in its National Early Grade Reading Programme document mentions that "the main reason why community schools are shifting to English is to stave off the threat from private schools and to try and keep their enrolments from declining and responding to parental demand for English" (p. 8). The school authority and teachers take this shift in medium of instruction as the need of the hour. The head teacher of the school under study here reported strong pressure from parents to introduce EMI and also argued:

> Since English is an international language, it is important to teach the students in English medium so that they have good proficiency in it. This will help them get better opportunities, not only inside the country but abroad as well.

The head teacher's comments reinforce the public perception of EMI as a means to provide students with the English language skills which will enable them to get access to enhanced employment opportunities.

This perception has spread to students themselves who spoke of the chances of a better education and job for their motivation to study in English medium. In this regard, one of the students said: *"If we study in English medium, we can improve our English language and this will help us get better jobs later"*. Indicating the possible benefits of English language proficiency, another student added: *"Those who know English well can get good jobs; therefore we like studying in English medium schools"*.

■ The decision making process for changing to EMI

As in other aspects of school decision-making, the school management committee (SMC) and the school administration (including teachers) are responsible for any shift in the medium of instruction. The national School Sector Reform Plan (2009 – 2015), a major policy and programme document to reform the education system of

Nepal, has made it clear that the choice of medium of instruction in schools will be determined by the SMC in consultation with other stakeholders. This policy seems to be operating, as parents interviewed report that they want their children to study in English medium.

Generally, only those parents who cannot afford to send their children to private schools choose community schools and the shift to EMI helps them to feel that their children have access to greater opportunities in life. One parent stated: *"I cannot pay the fees of the private schools for my child but the school has helped poor people like me to educate our children in English medium"*. Another commented:

> I am not in a good financial state and therefore I cannot send my children to private schools. Other parents like me asked the school to start English medium instruction here and they listened to our voices. Now my children get the opportunity to study in English and this has given me hope that they will be able to improve their English. I can provide them with a good education at a minimum cost now.

These parents' views reveal the collective decision making process being used in schools to take the decision to shift the medium of instruction to English. The principal confirmed the process, saying, *"We decided to start EMI because the parents demanded it time and time again. We also thought that teaching in English would improve the reputation of the school."* Not all stakeholders were unequivocally supportive of the decision, however. Teachers, who had the greatest role in implementing EMI, were worried about how they would cope with the change, with one of them commenting, *"We were not confident that we could teach in English medium because we were so used to teaching in Nepali medium for years"*.

Although students are also stakeholders greatly affected by any change in the medium of instruction, the study revealed that they had almost no role in the decision. As one of them commented, *"The teachers didn't ask the students about the English medium classes; they decided and started teaching in English"*. Nevertheless, they seemed to have a positive attitude towards the decision made by the school to shift to English. For example, a student studying in Grade 10 regretted that he could not receive his own education in English because the school started EMI one batch after his admission to the school:

> If I had had a chance to study in English medium, I would have done far better than now. Other students who got enrolled one batch after me are lucky because they can study in English medium in a government school.

This reveals that students studying in the same school – with the same resources and the same teachers – think that those who study in English medium have an advantage over the ones studying in Nepali. Students seem to share the widespread perception that they can do better if they are educated in English medium.

It seems, then, that the school chose to shift to EMI primarily due to the demand from parents and that, as they were supposed to do, the SMC consulted

stakeholders before taking the decision.

■ The impact of EMI

The use of English has had a great impact on community schools in Nepal. One of the major changes is visible in the increase in the number of students enrolled in these schools after the introduction of EMI (Republica, 2016). Not surprisingly, the schools themselves take an increase in the number of students as a significant achievement, as the head teacher of the school studied commented:

> *After the introduction of EMI in our school, some of the parents have brought their children to our school from [English medium] private schools. This is a great achievement as we have gained the trust of the parents. The number of students seeking admission is increasing every year but we can't enroll all of them due to limited classrooms and teachers.*

However, when asked about the academic achievement of the students, the headteacher and the teachers did not seem to have a very clear idea about their levels. One of the teachers mentioned that *"the students have better English language proficiency and the overall result of the school has improved"* but did not give specific details. Parents were also happy about the impact of EMI. One of them shared her view that she feels *"happy as the children can speak English after getting enrolled in this school"*. All the participants in the study agreed that both the local community and the students have developed a positive attitude towards the whole school after the introduction of EMI. This could be true in other areas as well given that reports indicate many schools which had very few students in the past have regained life and are operating with increased enrolments after they introduced EMI (Republica, 2013).

Though the increase in enrolment is positive, the impact of EMI on students' academic achievement is still not clear as no research comparing achievement levels pre- and post-EMI in individual schools in Nepal has been found. However, Pinnock (2009), reviewing evidence from international learning assessments in other countries, found that when the mother tongue is not the medium of instruction "the language used to deliver the school curriculum pulls down the educational performance of many of those who do not use it at home, particularly those who do not have regular access to it outside school" (p.8). Thus, using a foreign language as the medium of instruction always carries the danger of putting the educational achievement of children at risk, especially in situations where the teachers themselves are not fluent in the language of delivery.

■ Challenges in the implementation of EMI

Lack of English language proficiency of the teachers is the biggest challenge community schools are facing to implement EMI (Giri, 2011). Most of the teachers in community schools have never studied in English themselves, were never trained to teach in English and have been used to teaching through the medium of Nepali for years. As a result "subjects such as Social Studies and History are taught in a mixed approach but assessed in English" (Dearden, 2014, p. 26), a situation confirmed by the teachers in this study. In a context in which the pedagogy for Nepali medium instruction itself is generally regarded as flawed and has not been able to deliver good results, use of a foreign language for instruction will compound the difficulties for both students and teachers (Baral, 2015). For

teachers who are not able to deliver the curriculum effectively in their mother tongue, using English to teach the same content is almost guaranteed to do more harm than good. The students are unlikely to understand the content taught in English by teachers who do not have appropriate proficiency to explain concepts in an intelligible way.

With respect to these challenges, the views of the teachers, parents and headteacher in this study were found to be contradictory. One of the parents said that *"teachers should not have any problem teaching in English to the children as they know more English than the young ones"*, perpetuating a myth that only limited English is needed to teach at lower levels of schooling. In contrast, data in this study reveals that the teachers themselves face difficulties in explaining subject matter in English confidently and, therefore, they frequently make use of Nepali in the classroom. One teacher stated *"It is difficult for us to teach in English medium because we have forgotten the English language and have been used to teaching in Nepali for years"*. The headteacher acknowledged teachers' initial difficulties but argued they had now become accustomed to teaching in English saying, *"They didn't feel comfortable to teach in English medium in the beginning but now most of them report that they have developed proficiency and confidence to use EMI"*. Interestingly, the headteacher's view did not match with students' experience. One student, when asked whether the teachers teach exclusively in English or use Nepali as well in the class, explained:

> Teachers use Nepali to explain the content and allow us to ask questions in Nepali but we have to write our answers only in English because the teachers tell us that we are studying in English medium and the examinations will be conducted in English medium.

Use of Nepali is also partly a response to students' needs, as one of the teachers said *"The students don't understand the content if it is not explained in Nepali as well as in English"*. The students and teachers thus seem to have developed a practice in which studying in English medium means reading books and writing answers in English but explaining content in Nepali. Proficiency of the teachers appears, then, to be a major challenge to implement EMI in government schools while use of EMI from the early grades is also difficult due to the low entry levels of English proficiency of the students.

Community schools seem to be in a hurry to shift their medium to English in response to public pressure but have not made the required preparation such as providing English language and pedagogy training to the teachers or arranging materials to teach in English medium prior to making the change to EMI. The twin demands of expecting the teachers to become fluent and then deliver quality education in a foreign language almost overnight seem to make the realisation of high quality EMI in community schools a mere dream (Baral, 2015).

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the development of EMI in a government community school in the Far-Western Region of Nepal. From the data, it is clear that the schools have shifted to EMI to ensure their continued existence and the decision has nothing to do with delivery of quality education. Teachers are not prepared to teach in English medium, neither psychologically nor in terms of their English language proficiency. Using a foreign language such as English as the medium of instruction also has a negative impact on the cognitive development of the children in the long run, especially if EMI is introduced from the early grades. The data indicates that schools should not be in a hurry to adopt EMI without evaluating their capacity to implement it effectively. Schools that want to introduce EMI should have broad discussions amongst the stakeholders, prepare the teachers properly and manage necessary resources to make it successful. Moreover, policy makers and regulatory bodies should monitor the preparation and progress of the schools before and after the implementation of EMI so that once a programme begins it can be implemented smoothly.

Introducing EMI is not, then, a solution to overcoming the long-standing problem of degradation of quality education in community schools. Nor is following the EMI trend blindly in consonance with the policies developed by the Government of Nepal to promote education for all through mother tongue based multilingual education. Thus, it is suggested that government community schools should focus on teaching effectively in their students' mother tongue rather than teaching in English and the medium should not be changed solely as a survival technique to compete with private schools.

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Is English Medium Instruction Working? A Case Study of Nepalese Community Schools in Mt. Everest Region

Is English Medium Instruction Working? A Case Study of Nepalese Community Schools in Mt. Everest Region

Jeevan Karki

Introduction

English has been taught as a foreign language in education systems around the world for many years but, recently, there has been a shift to English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). Dearden (2014, p. 4) asserts this is a global phenomenon:

> There appears to be a fast-moving worldwide shift, in non-Anglophone countries, from English being taught as a foreign language (EFL) to English being the medium of instruction (EMI) for academic subjects such as science, mathematics, geography and medicine.

In Asia, China, South Korea and Japan, along with the ten countries that comprise the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have all promoted the use of English in primary and secondary education and many have introduced EMI courses at the tertiary level. Nepal has also been a part of this global phenomenon. English has been taught as a foreign language in schools since the 1950s but there is now an increasing shift from Nepali to English as a medium of instruction in government community schools in Nepal.

The provisions of the Educational Act (1971), the National Curriculum Framework for School Education in Nepal (2007, p. 24) states with respect to medium of instruction that:

> Mother tongue will be the medium of elementary education. The medium of school level education can be in Nepali or English language or both of them. However, in the first stage of elementary education (Grades 1-3), the medium of education will generally be in mother tongue.

Schools adopt EMI based on this statement and in the absence of guidelines to systematize EMI practice. A draft 'guidelines of medium of instruction in school education - 2013' (DoE, 2013) has been produced but it has not yet been validated. The draft proposes that children should be educated in their mother tongue from early childhood to class three except for language subjects, then proceed with the gradual introduction of the national language in class four and five, partial EMI from class six and full EMI from class nine to university level.

In addition to the vagueness in policy formulations, it is perhaps even more surprising that the government of Nepal does not have basic statistics related to EMI, not even the number of schools practicing EMI. Schools can even adopt or withdraw from EMI whenever they wish. There is a clear contradiction between practice and policy. English is used from pre-primary both as subject and medium in Nepal although the policy clearly states the use of mother tongue in elementary education (grades one to three) is expected. By comparison, larger Asian countries such as China and South Korea start English teaching as a subject from grade three and Japan from grade five (Hu and McKay, 2012), while EMI is a very recent practice there. To attempt to uncover reasons for the change to EMI in community schools in Nepal and to assess how this change has been implemented in practice this chapter, therefore, discusses a case study of EMI practice in Mt Everest region.

The case study

■ Research questions
The following questions were formulated for the case study:

1. Why do the schools in the region choose to adopt EMI?
2. What challenges were experienced and what efforts were made to respond to the challenges?
3. What has been the impact of EMI in the schools and the local community?
4. What is the future of EMI in the region?

■ Research site
The site is located in eastern Nepal in the Mt. Sagarmatha (Everest) region, also known as Khumbu region, in Solukhumbu district, which is the gate way to the world's highest peak. It covers three Village Development Committees (VDCs): Lukla, Namche and Khumjung. There are twelve schools altogether in the region, which includes one higher secondary school, one secondary school, four lower secondary schools, and six primary schools. EMI was introduced in eleven out of the twelve schools of Khumbu region in 2010, a joint decision of the School Management Committees (SMCs), head teachers and teachers while one school had started EMI earlier in 2005. The eleven schools introduced EMI in class one and two in the first year and then up to class six the very next year. In contrast, the remaining school introduced EMI in all classes in the same year in 2005. All subjects except Nepali are taught in English from the pre-primary level. Likewise, tests are also conducted in the English language.

Out of the twelve schools, four schools (two from Lukla and one each from Namche and Khumjung) were chosen as the focus for the study. The Navodaya Primary School, Namche (founded 1957) was chosen as it was the first school to adopt EMI in this region. There were 175 students and 9 teachers at the time of data collection. The second focal school was Sagarmatha Secondary School, Khumjung (founded 1961), which is considered the best school in the district and also one of the leader schools in this region, with 343 students and 18 teachers. Jeevan Jyoti Higher Secondary School, Lukla was chosen as another focal school because it is the oldest school and the only higher secondary school (founded 1957) in the region. There were 332 students and 21 teachers in this school. The last focal school was Krishna Lower Secondary School, Lukla (founded 1986), which was considered one of the best lower secondary schools in the region: there were

378 students and 14 teachers in the school at the time of data collection. EMI was introduced first in 2005 in Navodaya Primary School while the other three schools introduced EMI only in 2010.

■ Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants in the study. Altogether three students, three head teachers, four teachers, three parents, one teacher trainer and one resource person were selected and data were collected from them. A maximum variation sample was selected to ensure the collection of genuine data. Information about the participants is presented in the table below. Pseudonyms are used for the participants and their schools.

Table 1: Details of schools and participants

Sn	Name/class	Sex	Name of Schools	Age group	Desig-nation	Ethnicity
1	Shyam- IX	Male	Jeevan Jyoti HSS, Chaurikharka	13-14 yrs	Student	Chhetri
2	Mani- VIII	Male	Krishna LSS, Lukla	13-14 yrs	Student	Magar (Indigenous)
3	Sabita- VII	Female	Krishna LSS, Lukla	13-14 yrs	Student	Tamang (Indigenous)
4	Pasang-Lhamu	Female	Sagarmatha SS, Namche	35-40 yrs	Teacher	Sherpa (Indigenous)
5	Dorjee	Male	Sagarmatha SS, Namche	50-55 yrs	Teacher	Sherpa (Indigenous)
6	Sherdhan	Male	Jeevan Jyoti HSS, Chaurikharka	50-55 yrs	Teacher	Rai (Indigenous)
7	Binod	Male	Krishna LSS, Lukla	30-35 yrs	Teacher	Rai (Indigenous)
8	Naubir	Male	Navodaya PS, Namche	40-45 yrs	Head	Dalit (so-called lower caste)
9	Ajit	Male	Krishna LSS, Lukla	40-45 yrs	Head teacher	Newar (Indigenous)
10	Bhakta	Male	Jeevan Jyoti HSS, Chaurikharka	50-55 yrs	Head teacher	Rai (Indigenous)
11	Surya	Male	Navodaya PS, Namche	35-40 yrs	Parent	Sunuwar (Indigenous)
12	Mahal	Male	Krishna LSS, Lukla	35-40 yrs	Parent	Rai (Indigenous)
13	Lakpa	Male	Jeevan Jyoti HSS, Chaurikharka	35-40 yrs	Parent	Sherpa (Indigenous)
14	Raju	Male	District Education Office	50-55 yrs	Resource Person	---

Several factors were considered while choosing the participants. First of all, only those participants who had been through the EMI programme or had a clear understanding about it were selected. Other factors like access to participants, their readiness to participate and inclusivity, both in terms of socio-cultural identity and belonging to different schools were also considered. While selecting the students and parents, advice was taken from head teachers and teachers to establish if the participants were in a position to speak about EMI.

Shyam, a Chhetri class nine student was selected from Jeevan Jyoti Higher Secondary School, because he was one of the senior students and in the second batch of EMI students. He was a very important participant as he had studied in English medium from the beginning in a private school, then was moved to this school where he studied in Nepali medium for one year before the introduction of EMI. Mani, an indigenous male student of class eight and Sabita, an indigenous female student were selected from Krishna Lower Secondary School trying to maintain a balance in gender.

Three head teachers were selected, one each from the primary, lower secondary and secondary levels. Naubir (a Dalit, the so-called lower caste) was the head teacher of Navodaya Primary School and was the first person to start EMI in the region, six years earlier than the other schools. Ajit (a Newar, an indigenous ethnicity) was the head teacher of Krishna Lower Secondary School and Bhakta (of indigenous Rai ethnicity), the head teacher of Jeevan Jyoti Higher Secondary School. A balance was sought from all three levels of schools.

In the same way, four teachers were selected from three different schools. There were two types of teachers (i.e. private and government) in the region and hence both types were included equally. Two of them were government-funded permanent teachers, whereas the other two were school-funded private teachers (though working in government community schools). Among them, Pasang Lhamu, a female Sherpa teacher from Sagarmatha Secondary School, was a government-funded permanent teacher. Dorjee, a male Sherpa teacher who was selected from the same school, was a private teacher. Two teachers were selected from this school as the head teacher was hospitalised and not available and also to include one female government funded teacher from the Sherpa community. Sherdhan, a Rai teacher selected from Jeevan Jyoti Higher Secondary School, was another government-funded permanent teacher. Binod, a private Rai teacher, was selected from Krishna Lower Secondary School.

Three parents were selected from three different schools. Mahal, a Rai parent having two children in class seven and four was selected from Krishna Lower Secondary School. He was a banker in a government bank. Lakpa, a Sherpa having two children in class seven and four, was selected from Jeevan Jyoti Higher Secondary School. He was a business person. Surya, a Sunuwar (an indigenous ethnicity) was a trekker and business person, having two children in Navodaya Primary School. Unfortunately, female parents could not be included as they declined to participate, stating that they did not know much about the changes going on in schools.

Raju, the government Resource Person (RP) for the Khumbu region was selected for interview as he was the government representative and school supervisor for

the region.

■ Methods of inquiry

Secondary data were collected for this study in the form of language policy documents and primary data came from interviews with service providers, i.e the head teachers and teachers, and beneficiaries, i.e. the parents and students. An interview was also conducted with a teacher trainer and government Resource Person (RP). Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the primary data.

To begin with, language policy was studied in the national curriculum framework for school education in Nepal of 2007 and educational act of 1971. Then one-to-one interviews were conducted with the participants in order to explore their perceptions, beliefs and practices. The interviews lasted from 10 minutes to 30 minutes depending on the participants. They were conducted in Nepali, recorded and transcribed for the analysis.

After that the data from the participants were coded to facilitate analysis. Each transcribed interview was read thoroughly and provisional themes were assigned. From this, four major themes emerged viz. reasons and rationale behind EMI, challenges of EMI and responses to them, impacts of EMI, and the future of EMI, all linked to the objectives of the research. The major ideas of all participants were organized under the themes. Then the data were analysed and connections were also made with the available literature.

Findings and analysis

The findings of the study are discussed under the four thematic areas viz. reasons and rationales, challenges and efforts made, impact, and the future of EMI.

■ Reasons and rationale behind adopting EMI

The basic reason behind the shift to EMI agreed by all the respondents was the need for the English language in the Khumbu region which was a tourist area. Apart from tourism, the perceived importance of English as a global language which is essential for job, business and studying abroad, was another reason. Ajit, a head teacher, spelled out the fact, stating:

> In this Khumbu region, children will be useless if they do not know the English language. In future, if they don't have any other skills, then they will have to work with tourists. Those who have good English, they get opportunities.

The concern of the head teacher here was to develop the conversational English of children in a tourist region, which seems logical. However, it is not reasonable to develop English language skills at the expense of academic content in other subjects. When children from diverse linguistic backgrounds are taught in a language which is not their home language they experience two major challenges; first the challenge to learn the language and the next to learn academic content in that language (UNESCO, 2007).

One of the most interesting reasons head teachers gave for adopting EMI in their schools was to stop students transferring to private English medium schools, mostly in Kathmandu. For example, Bhakta mentioned that *"the major reason is*

stopping the students going to Kathmandu for education as they preferred to study in English medium schools there." Similarly, they considered EMI as a tool to attract students into their schools. Naubir, another headteacher stated: *"the main reason was there were very less students in our school compared to others."*

It is a reality that EMI has been used as a tool to attract parents to send their children to these community schools. Schools also believe that English medium can help them to regain the trust of the public and improve government education. For Phyak (2016) this is only the 'romanticization' of English as a panacea for improving public education. He states that the belief that English medium can improve public education lacks research-based evidence and seems inappropriate in Nepal's multilingual context. In this regard, the leading national Nepali newspaper (Kantipur, 2017) reports that, for schools to perform better, factors like the leadership of head teachers, teachers' effectiveness and active involvement of the community in school management should be improved.

With respect to the parents, they were found to be highly influenced by the practice of EMI in private schools. Mahal, one of the parents, said: *"There is a trend of educating children in private schools. Educating children in English medium community schools is similar to educating in private schools."* This supports the view that community schools are introducing EMI to compete with private schools which, according to Phyak (2013; as cited in Phyak, 2016) is merely a reproduction of the monolingual ideology of private schools in the guise of competition and quality of education.

Furthermore, parents equated English medium education with quality education, which according to Sharma (2016) is the 'English as a quality' myth. This again shows that parents consider private schools better because of English medium instruction and they think English is everything for their children. Not only parents but students too have been influenced by this common perception of English. They equate English with prestige and power in society. Shyam, a class nine student, said: *"When we can speak in English with someone, we are considered as educated. We are respected and marked differently in society too."* This is a long-standing perception, as Davies (2009, p. 46) discusses from his observations during an ELT survey in Nepal in the 1980s: *"For us, English was a means to communicate with the world outside; for them to have English on the curriculum was a mark of being modern whether or not much learning took place."*

Another reason given for adopting EMI in school education was the provision of English as a medium of instruction in higher education. Bhakta, a head teacher, said:

> *When students pass the SLC exam, they go to Kathmandu for further study. The students wishing to study science must study it in English medium and those students who are taught in Nepali medium find it very difficult to cope with this change. Therefore, the schools are compelled to shift the medium of instruction.*

Clearly, it is an important issue for students taught in Nepali medium when they have to pursue further study in English. However, if the concern here is to develop proficiency in the English language, this could be enhanced by improving existing

English language teaching methods in English as a subject classes, rather than by teaching all academic subjects in English medium from the early grades. Forcing children to learn in a language they do not understand creates an educational handicap (UNESCO, 2007). Foreign languages should be introduced gradually to the children. This view further suggests that first of all children's competence and confidence should be built in their home language (L1) orally then reading and writing introduced in L1. After that the official language (L2) of the nation should be introduced first orally and through reading and writing. Finally, a foreign language should be introduced only when children are competent and confident in the L1 and L2. Based on this principle the Department of Education (DoE, 2013) in its proposed guidelines to systematise the medium of instruction clearly states that children should be educated in their mother tongue up to class three, and then the national language (Nepali) should be introduced in class four and five. Later, only partial EMI should be introduced from class six and full EMI from class nine onwards.

■ Challenges of EMI and responses to them

A number of challenges were explored in the implementation of EMI. One of the major issues was implementation of EMI without any planning and preparation. Only one school was conscious about some level of preparation. Naubir, the head teacher of Navodaya Primary School went with his staff to study the practice of EMI for 40 days in a renowned private school near Kathmandu before making the language shift. However, the local District Education Office (DEO) did not have any policy on EMI and the RP of the DEO said the school did not need any approval before making such a huge decision. The DOE does not have a current record of how many schools in the district are implementing EMI nor do they have any programmes to monitor and support it. The official monitoring body is thus unaware about what is going on in schools while a few influential people in the community and their schools are making these important decisions.

In the implementation of EMI a major challenge agreed by head teachers and teachers is the English language proficiency of teachers, which is similar to Dearden's (2014) findings. In her study of 55 countries around the world, 83 percent of countries do not have EMI qualified teachers. Needless to say, this hugely affects teaching and learning in the classroom. Binod, one of the private teachers, shared his experience stating, *"I think it has been very difficult for the government teachers; there is problem for them in even simple sentence structure. So I wonder how they would face the class."* Accepting this fact, Sherdhan, a government teacher, said:

> *The major difficulty is English language. There is no good base of English in old teachers, who have studied English from class four only. Therefore, the level of English language is very low, so it is very difficult for the teachers like us.*

This government teacher has accepted that EMI has been more challenging for teachers of his generation. When teachers are not confident about their own English they are unlikely to be able to deliver the requisite academic content in class.

In response, schools have appointed private teachers with better language proficiency. These teachers have been funded by International Non-Government Organisations (INGOs) or Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and also from fees collected from students. Language proficiency is then considered in the allocations of courses. According to Bhakta, a head teacher, *"the general and simple courses are given to the government teachers and difficult courses are given to private teachers who are competent in English."* However, this practice shows that EMI has been costly for parents too as they are paying for the private teachers in schools. According to government policy, basic education (grade 1 to 8) is free but parents in these schools have been compelled to pay fees. Moreover, there was no assurance that the language proficiency and pedagogical skills of all private teachers was adequate. In response, ten days professional development language and skills training for in-service teachers was being organized by NGOs annually in the region.

Another challenge experienced by teachers and students was to balance language and academic content in class. Binod, a social studies teacher, commented:

> We have to balance both content and language in it. Sometimes, they [students] do not understand the contents so they can't express and at other times, they understand the contents but can't express because of the lack of adequate vocabulary.

Similarly, students also agreed they had difficulties in studying social studies, science and mathematics because of language. Mani, a student from class eight, said that *"the most difficult one is social studies because we have to study history and all in it. Science and maths are also difficult to understand so the teachers sometimes explain them in Nepali language."* This view was shared by Sabita, a female student from class seven.

Language is a tool to deliver academic content. In some academic subjects, the content is challenging, which requires a teacher to simplify it with effective language. However, when there is a problem with language, interaction, expression and communication are limited or unlikely to occur. Consequently, there is incomplete or no learning. In order to respond to these challenges, teachers said that they used Nepali or a local language to translate concepts and the students also expected the same. Binod commented: *"It is difficult to make them comprehend what we are communicating. So I have to use half of Nepali language while teaching."*

Nevertheless, schools believed that an English only policy helped students learn English better. Therefore, it was mandatory for students to converse only in English on school premises; otherwise, they were penalized. Sharma (2016) believes this is an 'English only' myth, asserting that educators and parents have a strong belief that children can learn English quickly and effectively if they are forced to speak only English in school and are taught only in English. However, he refutes this myth citing the finding of Espinosa (2008) whose decade long research involving 18,000 English language learners in California showed that, while teaching in English seemed to help children learn English faster in the short term, students in bilingual-medium caught up and did better in English in the longer-term, in addition to developing far better academically and socially.

Research suggests that too much emphasis on only one language generates a feeling in children that their home languages are inferior and disregarded (UNESCO, 2007). Teaching in a language the students do not understand ignores the students' own knowledge and experience and gives the impression that only the dominant language and culture are important. This prevents the development of multilingual, multi-literate and multicultural citizens.

Another genuine challenge for the students was found to be in assessment. Shyam, a grade 9 student, shared what his classmates thought: *"They [his friends] say that I can comprehend the questions in English and can respond to them properly but they couldn't comprehend the questions and would score less than me."* This raises the serious issue of whether assessment is designed to measure language proficiency of students or content knowledge. If the aim is to assess content knowledge, the linguistic barrier will impede this.

Additionally, parents were unable to support their children at home because of the language barrier. Lakpa, a parent of two children, said: *"In the beginning, the children used to ask a lot to assist them in homework. Sometimes we were unable to help them because of the language."* Some parents, therefore, had paid for extra teachers to support their children before and after school, which was again an economic burden for them.

Finally, there was a lack of adequate teaching and learning resources in the schools: libraries and internet facilities were available in very few schools. To compensate for this lack of resources, some teachers used their own smart phones to collect resources.

■ Impact of EMI
EMI has been practised for five years or more in this region (one school had even completed eleven years of EMI). Against this backdrop, its impact was also studied. Impact is discussed in terms of positive impact and negative impact.

Positive impact
Head teachers, teachers and parents believed EMI helped to develop the conversational English of the children. Both parents and teachers believed that children were able to assist in the businesses of their parents, which required the use of English with visitors to the region. Referring to the immediate impact of EMI on families, Pasang Lhamu, a teacher, gave this example: *"All parents cannot use the English language but now the children can see the menu and the parents can take orders and cook."*

It is also believed that EMI is helping to regain the trust of parents in community schools. Naubir, a head teacher, believed that there had been a big change in the attitude of parents. He commented: *"The wealthy parents used to send their children to private schools in big towns earlier but now [after the implementation of EMI] they complete the primary education of their children over here."* There was thus increased enrolment and decreased student transfer to private schools due to EMI in schools. EMI even attracted students from other Nepali medium schools from other regions. Ajit, another head teacher, said a few parents even brought students back from the private schools of Kathmandu. Naubir said he had had only 30 students before the introduction of English medium but after 11 years of EMI

there were now 175 students in his school. Similarly, there used to be around 300 students in Ajit's school before EMI and there are 378 students at present. These increases in enrolment confirm that EMI has been an important tool for community schools to regain the trust of parents.

Another major positive impact was the academic status of community schools being equivalent to private schools. Naubir stated this fact:

> Our success was measured when the children started studying in Kathmandu after finishing the education here. They were able to get enrolment in any school in Kathmandu in the same grade they were currently in rather than the lower grade, unlike other students from community schools.

This was a significant achievement for them. Typically, if a child passes class three from a community school, he or she is most unlikely to get enrolment in class four in a private school but is degraded to class two believing the child cannot cope with the education system in private schools. Naubir also believed that the products of his school could study as well as the children in Kathmandu and converse in English with others.

Negative impacts

One of the major negative impacts of EMI has been a decline in students' achievement. According to the head teachers, in the first few years it was challenging for students to comprehend test papers in English which resulted in a decline in their performance in exams. Stating the reason behind it Ajit, one of the head teachers, explained that *"the children were unable to explain and express in English properly though having knowledge in Nepali"*, which shows that language was a significant barrier for them to express their subject knowledge. The teachers indicated that the problem still exists. Dorjee, a teacher, said that *"the teaching and learning couldn't have been effective because of language in the beginning. We are facing this problem now too"*. He further believed: *"Some children can comprehend around 60% of the contents but they can't express all. Even the teachers are unable to do so, and how can we expect this from the students."*

After the introduction of EMI, students were given less exposure to their local language and they are even weaker in the national language, Nepali. Binod confirmed this: *"I think it [EMI] has affected Nepali as a subject negatively."* Mahal, a parent, also accepted the fact. He said: *"I found them weaker in Nepali in comparison to English."* Sabita, a class seven student, shared the view: *"All subjects are okay but the Nepali grammar is difficult now."* One of the main causes behind this is the lower importance given to local languages. Except for Nepali itself, none of the other subjects are taught in Nepali as a medium. The weekly weightage given to Nepali language education was 25.57% in primary and 14.28% in lower secondary and secondary levels. The curriculum in the primary level has the provision of teaching 12.5% weekly weightage for a local language. However, only one or two schools are found teaching their local language and the others are teaching additional English language education.

Schools seemed to have introduced EMI to strengthen the English language proficiency of children and in the name of improving English they had even cut off the weightage of local language education and replaced it with additional English

language classes. Likewise, the exposure given to the lingua franca of children, i.e. Nepali, has also been considerably downgraded. Indicating the contradictory policy of government on mother-tongue-based multilingual education Phyak (2016, p. 200) asserts that:

> Instead of teaching through ethnic-minority language, English is increasingly used as the de facto medium of instruction from grade one onwards. This raises the important question: despite the official policy promoting the use of local languages, why does English receive more attention in practice?

Signalling the result of such practice, Piller & Cho (2013; as cited in Phyak, 2016, p. 203) emphasize that "the English-only policy suppresses free speech of students that results in a lack of creative and critical thinking in the learning process."

■ The future of EMI

Both the schools and local communities seemed to have positive attitudes towards the English language and head teachers believed that English medium was now well accepted. Teachers also believed that EMI would continue as it had gained more importance in the Khumbu region. However, the future of EMI is seen to be uncertain for four major reasons.

First, the funding for private teachers is uncertain. Recently, one of the leading INGOs has stated that their funding of around 27 private teachers in the region would stop after two years. Ajit, a head teacher, agreed that there is no future for EMI if the funding is stopped. He noted:

> It will collapse because the number of teachers provided by the government is insufficient. For instance, only 50 percent are government teachers out of 14 teachers and the rest are funded by donors. Therefore, when the fund for private teachers is stopped, we can't imagine running school even in Nepali medium. The same is the case in other schools in this area.

Bhakta, another head teacher, also believed that government teachers alone were unable to implement EMI and therefore there was a need for English-proficient manpower as additional teachers.

Second, there are no EMI guidelines except the policy statement in the educational act and curriculum. In effect, EMI is merely a duplication of what is happening in private schools. Several questions are unanswered because of the lack of guidelines. These include:

- What is the rationale for EMI?
- What is the right age to start EMI?
- What is the role of local languages?
- What is the model of assessment for EMI?
- Which subjects are to be taught in EMI?

In opposition to current practice, the proposed but not yet validated 'Guidelines of Medium of Instruction in School Education – 2013' has proposed to educate children in their mother tongue from early childhood to class three except for

language subjects. It then proposes to introduce the national language gradually in class four and five and start partial EMI from class six and full EMI from class nine to universities.

Third, there is no clear theoretical and research grounding for EMI as implemented in these schools. The teachers and parents seem to be attracted towards EMI mostly to develop the conversational English of students. They do not seem to worry about the academic, social, intellectual and emotional development of children and their creativity. Sabita, a class seven student, said: *"I would be happy if the school would change the medium of instruction into Nepali as it is easier to comprehend the lessons in it."* This reflects the mind set of many children who are struggling to cope with EMI. There is a need for empirical research on the effectiveness of EMI which, at present, does not exist. EMI according to Sharma (2016) has been merely guided by the English myths, which are English only, English always, English early, English as quality and English everywhere.

Fourth, the NGO providing the professional development of in-service teachers in Khumbu region has terminated the programme from this year. Such programmes, according to the teachers, were important in strengthening their language proficiency and pedagogical skills. More assistance of this kind is badly needed but may not be available in the future.

Conclusion

English language teaching is practised from the early grades to the university level in Nepal and the recent phenomenon of EMI reflects a desire to enhance students' proficiency in the English language. The study found that one of the main reasons behind the shift in the medium of instruction to English in the Khumbu region is the desire for enhanced socio- economic benefits. The English language is believed to support businesses and add value to the social status of people. English is thus perceived to provide better opportunities for students. Meanwhile, institutionally, EMI has been working as a tool to attract students to schools which were in decline.

The study also uncovered some positive impact after the implementation of EMI, such as regaining parents' trust in community schools, an increase in the number of students and students' ability to use English to assist their parents' businesses. On the other hand, some negative impact was also observed. This included the decline in students' academic achievement, lack of exposure to local languages and less exposure to the national language (which is also the lingua franca), and limited classroom interaction and expression because of students' inability to use the foreign language effectively.

The English language skills of community school students are considered poorer than those of private school students. Therefore, community schools are shifting the medium of instruction in order to enhance these English language skills, although this could negatively affect children's access to the academic content. Phyak (2016, p. 212) notes: "As teaching English as a compulsory subject in the early grades has already been a problem, its expansion as the medium of instruction creates another layer of problems for teachers and students." Thus it would seem preferable, instead of expecting EMI to strengthen English proficiency,

to find ways in which the existing English language curriculum could be taught more effectively. To assist with this, more empirical research on teaching English as a subject should be conducted and best practices should be documented and disseminated.

As the recent implementation of EMI in community schools in Nepal is an extension from private schools, rigorous empirical research must also be carried out in private schools to evaluate educational achievement in terms of the overall national goals of education, not just in terms of English language proficiency. There is also an urgent need for EMI guidelines in both private and public education. This could systematise the random shift in medium of instruction and respond to issues such as the place of mother tongue and local languages in education, the right age to change medium of instruction to a third language if it is to happen at all, which subjects to teach in English, models of assessment, and so on.

This study ascertained that the position of EMI in the region was uncertain. It has been sustained mainly because of private teachers from a younger generation. However, funding to employ them has become uncertain. Further, there are no EMI guidelines, clear government policy or strong theoretical grounding for EMI. Unfortunately, there is neither vision nor the support of government to systematize the practice. To conclude, this study has found that there is an urgent need for further research on EMI, specifically empirical research on its effectiveness.

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ELT Methods and Techniques in Nepali Secondary Schools

ELT Methods and Techniques in Nepali Secondary Schools

Gopal Prasad Bashyal

Introduction

This case study investigates methods and techniques prevalent in secondary level English language teaching classrooms in Nepal. It also identifies approaches and teaching styles as perceived by the teachers. A sample of twenty-four English teachers from three districts of Nepal participated in the study by responding to a questionnaire designed to elicit information about their perceptions of teaching English and the application of methods and techniques in their classrooms. This was followed up by observations of classroom teaching and focus group discussions which allowed for a deeper understanding of ELT in Nepal. The chapter begins with a brief literature review on the position of English and ELT in Nepal and a review of popular applied linguistics and ELT methodology texts. It then outlines the method of research and discusses the findings on existing ELT methods before concluding with recommendations for the development of ELT in Nepal.

The context

A glance back at the history of English in Nepal reveals that King Pratap Malla (1624-1674 AD) "had his literacy in English boastfully inscribed on stone slates" (Giri, 2015, p. 192), his presumed ability arising from business transactions with Tibet and North East India. Although events like the settlement of European missionaries in 1661and recruitment of Gurkha soldiers after the Nepal-British East India Company Sugauli treaty in 1815 contributed to its spread, English was formally imported into Nepal during the Rana oligarchy. Durbar School was established in Kathmandu in 1892 following Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana's visit to England. At first restricted to children of the ruling élite, Durbar School was opened to children of other private citizens in 1902. English education became more prominent in the 1950s with the appointment of Dr Hugh B. Wood, a US Fulbright scholar, as adviser to the Nepal National Education Planning Commission set up in 1954 (Awasthi, 2003). English in today's Nepal is officially a foreign language but in practice for many people it is "anything but a foreign language" (Giri, 2015, p. 95) and "Its current domination in all spheres of life makes the language indispensable and on a par with Nepali" (Giri, ibid, p. 94).

Background to the case study

An early study into ELT methods in Nepal was included in a survey completed in 1983 (Awasthi, 2003). This was a holistic study of the status of ELT, development

of materials, examinations, performance of teachers and students, and methods which resulted in a number of policy recommendations. Regarding methods, the study concluded non-communicative techniques such as grammar-translation, rote-learning, choral repetition, gap-filling, and lectures were the major techniques of teaching English (Phyak, 2016). These 'traditional' teacher-centred methods are widely regarded to be still in use today.

Against this background, this case study looked at ELT methods and techniques being practiced in secondary level classrooms in Nepal at this time. The following questions guided the study.

1) What do teachers believe about their teaching approach?
2) As language teachers, what essential skills do they have?
3) How would they describe their teaching approaches/methods?
4) How would they describe their teaching styles?
5) What teaching techniques and activities work best in the context of Nepal? What do they usually apply?

Questions number 1) and 2) above were designed to enable me to understand perceptions of teachers about their own teaching and themselves as teachers. The remaining three questions are concerned with ELT methods which are commonly practised in Nepal.

Conducting the research

■ Selection of participants
A sample comprising a total of twenty-four teachers from three districts of Nepal participated in the survey. The districts were Palpa, Gulmi and Surkhet. The districts and teachers were randomly selected.

■ Research instruments
A questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was produced and distributed to the teachers. Some of the questions provided teachers with options to choose from; the questions also had space for teachers to make open-ended comments. The first part of the questionnaire collected biographical information: each respondent's name, gender, school, academic and professional qualifications, years of teaching experience, and type of school. The second part focused on ELT teaching methods. The items asked respondents to describe their teaching approaches and teaching styles, qualities and roles of a good English teacher, and the techniques and activities they apply in their own classrooms. The questionnaire was adapted from a survey in Renandya, Lee, Wah and Jakobs (1999).

A classroom observation checklist and focus group discussions (FGD) questions were also designed and used to verify the actual practice and reported responses. This kind of triangulation of data collection - questionnaire, observation and FGD - gave direct insights about practices prevalent in the classrooms to increase the accuracy of the study.

■ Procedure
Distribution and collection of questionnaires was carried out in April and May, 2016. The researcher personally informed participants of the purpose of the

research and requested them to answer as fully and honestly as possible (to avoid answers designed to please the researcher). Classes of teachers were observed and data were collected in a checklist (Appendix 2). Altogether 12 classes were observed with 6 teachers from Palpa, 2 from Gulmi and 4 from Surkhet. The FGD was administered in all three districts. All teachers whose classes were observed were involved in FGD and engaged in the discussion on the five major questions (see Appendix 3).

Research findings

■ Participants

All of the teachers were secondary level English language teachers, though seven of them also taught at Higher Secondary level. These teachers represented institutions from both urban and rural areas. Only two teachers were female. All the teachers were from government-aided community schools.

Table 1 : Participants

Districts	Participants		
	Male	Female	Total
Palpa	17	01	18
Gulmi	01	01	02
Surkhet	04	00	04
Total			**24**

The teachers varied in terms of teaching experience, ranging from three years to 23 years.

Table 2 : Teaching experience of participants

Years' experience	No. of teachers	Details: years (no. of teachers)
3 -5	3	3 (1), 5 (2)
6-10	5	8 (2), 9 (1), 10 (2)
11-15	7	12 (2), 13 (1), 14 (3), 15 (1)
16-20	6	16 (2), 18 (1), 20 (3)
21-23	3	21 (1), 23 (2)

■ Teacher beliefs about their approach to teaching

There was an open-ended question for the teachers to describe their beliefs about teaching. All teachers responded willingly but their responses varied since some of them mentioned methods they generally apply in the classroom whereas others were concerned with their perception of teaching as a profession and their roles as teachers. It seems that the teachers are not very rigid about approach, method, technique, style and mode of teaching. The responses are summarized below.

- Most of the teachers believe that teaching is an honourable, innovative and creative profession that requires them to be well prepared and planned, and encourage the students.
- Teachers are always learners. Due to this studious nature, teachers find ways round any complexities which other people think impossible to overcome.
- Teachers should be self motivated.
- Teaching should be student-centred, through group work, project work, task based techniques, problem solving style and using a participatory and interactive mode of teaching.
- There needs to be a cooperative environment in the classroom.
- Teachers are dedicated and can change the teaching-learning process.
- Teachers are models.
- The teacher is an inspirer and a facilitator creating an environment to foster students' potential.
- Teaching and learning are also influenced by various socio-cultural and individual factors.
- Teachers ideally believe that they should support students in developing communication skills to face the growing challenges of information technology and multiple business purposes but they grumble at the necessity of using Grammar-Translation and other traditional methods in the classroom.

■ **Skills of language teachers**

The teachers described a range of skills they think necessary for English teachers. All the teachers opined that they need to have pedagogical skills and the ability to create a conducive learning environment. A majority of them (62.5% of respondents) emphasised having a good command over the English language as an essential skill. A strong focus (29.2%) is given to planning skills, particularly daily lesson plans, as well as to selecting methods appropriately (25%). They also focused on being resourceful in selecting reference and teaching materials (12.5%) and knowing the student's cultural and socio-economic backgrounds (12.5%). The complete list of skills and qualities elicited from the teachers is given in Table 3 below.

Table 3 : Skills of an English language teacher

Skills	Responses (%) (n=24)
Good command over the target language	62.5
Planning (including daily lesson plans)	29.2
Ability to select methods appropriately	25
Being resourceful by collecting reference and teaching materials	12.5
Knowledge of cultural background and socio-economic environment of students	12.5
Mastery of language skills like pronunciation, paraphrasing, writing	8.3

Skills	Responses (%) (n=24)
Motivating students	8.3
Command over subject matter	8.3
Conducting participatory and interactive classes	4.2
Knowledge of child psychology	4.2
Knowledge of technology (IT)	4.2
Communication	4.2
Management	4.2
Evaluation	4.2

■ Teaching approaches and methods used

Teachers seem to be shifting from a focus on traditional teaching approaches and methods to more contemporary ones. No teachers reported fully implementing traditional methods such as grammar-translation and structuralism. They were conscious about the desirability of using the communicative approach (41.6%), conforming to official prescriptions that the purpose of teaching English at secondary level is to develop communication skills (CDC, 2015). However, a considerable number of teachers, 29.2%, reported that they mix grammar-translation, structural and communicative approaches to teaching. A similar number of teachers use both the structural and communicative approaches (see Table 4).

Table 4 : Teaching approaches and methods used

Approaches/Methods	Responses (%) (n=24)
Grammar-translation	0
Structural	0
Communicative	41.6
Structural and communicative	29.2
Grammar-translation, structural and communicative	29.2

Most teachers supplemented their choices with the comments that they intended to use the communicative approach but the level of the students, the school environment and their usual styles of teaching pushed them to follow the grammar-translation method and structural approach, which was the major focus of the previous curriculum.

■ Teaching styles

The vast majority of respondents said they tended to apply a learner-centred style of teaching (70.8%). In open-ended comments, they justified their choice with the activities they generally use in the classroom: pair work, group work, role play, and other activities based on a learning-by-doing approach. They think learner-centred teaching is motivating but also time consuming. A few teachers (12.5%) mentioned

that they apply both the teacher-centred and learner-centred styles of teaching. A very experienced teacher with three Master's degrees mentioned that he was between these two styles of teaching. Only one teacher was bold enough to select teacher-centred teaching by itself.

Table 5: Teaching styles

Teaching styles	Responses (%) (n=23)
Learner-centred	70.8
Teacher-centred	4.2
Between them / Both	12.5
No response	12.5

■ **Techniques and activities**

The teachers varied in responses when asked about their teaching techniques and activities (see Table 6). Teachers had to choose any five common techniques and activities they use in the classroom and also to supply comments about their choices. It seems that the majority of teachers always use question-answer and comprehension questions (25%). It is interesting to observe that project work, demonstration and drills seem common practices, and lectures and role play activities are sometimes used. Similarly very few teachers always use techniques like elicitation, role play and group work; and no teacher reported using any other technique than those given in the questionnaire. It is also noteworthy that the 20% of teachers who did not select any techniques and activities from the given list mentioned in their open-ended comments that they use question-answer, comprehension questions, drills, demonstrations and role play activities.

Table 6 : Teaching techniques and activities

Techniques and activities	Responses % (n = 24)				No responses
	seldom	sometimes	often	always	
Question-answer	4.2	8.4	25	25	37.4
Elicitation	4.2	0	20.8	4.2	70.8
Role play	4.2	20.8	16.7	4.2	54.1
Comprehension questions	0	4.2	16.7	25	54.1
Project work	4.2	37.5	0	4.2	54.1
Demonstration	4.2	25	16.7	0	54.1
Drills	0	16.7	16.7	0	66.6
Lectures	12.5	20.8	8.2	4.2	54.1
No responses	-	-	-	-	20

Triangulation of questionnaire, classroom observation and FGD data

To get an overall picture of methods and techniques being implemented by this sample of secondary level English language teachers in Nepal, triangulation of data collection through the questionnaire, classroom observation and FGD was conducted. Though teachers claimed to see the value of a student-centred, communicative approach and hesitated to label their teaching as teacher-centred and deductive (Table 5), they still commonly practice traditional teacher-centred, grammar-translation and structural methods. Table 6 also shows a significant number of teachers are reluctant even to say what methods and techniques they use in the classrooms. This apparent reliance on traditional methods is a serious threat to the quality of Nepalese ELT when communication skills are both promoted by the curriculum and required in the wider society when students leave school.

There is reliability of information across these three data sources as teachers agree that they always use question-answer and comprehension questions, and often demonstrate model structures and sentences which their students then practice. Though the Secondary English curriculum distributes teaching time of 40% to reading, 35% to writing, 15% to speaking and 10% to listening, in class there is maximum practice of reading passages and answering comprehension questions. During the classroom observation, it was found that only a few teachers (20.8%) had prepared lesson plans and that these were very brief and incomplete. There are also severe limitations regarding the use of reference and other teaching materials in the classroom. The textbook is often supplemented by a practice book from a private publisher which is suggested by the teacher who typically assigns some exercises as practice in the classroom or to do as homework. In the observed lessons, no teacher was found using supplementary teaching materials such as newspapers or CDs or grammar or practice books, though some showed a few materials they claimed to have used on other days.

Almost all teachers paraphrase or simplify the texts along with a few immediate quick comprehension questions (91.5%). This explanation of texts is followed by textbook exercises, mostly written exercises comprising synonyms or antonyms of words, filling the gaps, true/false, matching and short comprehension questions. About 80% of teachers dictate answers to guided and free writing exercises. While teaching grammar and language functions, all teachers demonstrate model structures and sentences followed by drill practice by students. The majority of teachers (66.7%) explicitly teach grammar rules. Only a few (12.5%) tried eliciting structures and grammar rules from the students. Similarly, though the teachers tried not to use translation during the observation period, almost all teachers (91.5%) translated reading passages into Nepali. Only a few instances of role play and pair and group work were observed (16.7%) and though, in general, the teachers say they wish they could implement the communicative approach, they allowed very little time for student talking; there is almost 80% teacher talking time in the classrooms. Despite most teachers not using communicative approaches to teach English, some schools have begun English medium instruction. Only a few (8.3%) of the teachers in the sample used English as a medium of instruction but these teachers could engage their students more in speaking and elicited students' responses time and time again.

During FGDs, teachers justified their selection of approaches, methods and techniques by the level of students and the school environment. A teacher confessed his dilemma as follows:

> *I do not prefer using the same method for a long time. I prefer using a combination of different methods and techniques in a class period. This helps to support different level students. Mostly I prefer using communicative, participatory, task-based as a principle but sitting arrangements, lack of teaching-learning environment, lack of learning materials, level of learning capacity of students etc are problems to implement these methods in the classrooms.*

Another teacher said he enjoyed teaching English and getting knowledge of the culture of an English speaking community but that his teaching was limited to basic knowledge and skills so that students could pass the exams. He frankly said:

> *I usually prefer using question-answer, reading and underlining difficult words/phrases, matching meaning, choosing correct alternative, fill the blanks, true or false, putting in correct order type of exercises.*

Teachers say they want to practice the communicative approach as the curriculum suggests but the students' level of English is too poor to enable them to communicate and interact in English. Since English is a foreign language in Nepal, there are several challenges to creating an English speaking environment in the classroom and it is also impossible to assign project work to practice communicating in real life like situations. Despite all of these grievances, teachers opined that, at least in theory, the communicative approach is their preferred English teaching approach.

Implications

This study observed the tortoise-like pace towards a paradigm shift in teaching and learning in Nepal, with ELT teachers moving very slowly towards more communicative, learner-centred teaching methods. Several negative factors seem to be impeding progress, including the language level of the students, the legacy of grammar-translation and structural methods, the lack of an English environment in school, the efficacy of ELT teachers and the fact that English is mainly taught as a subject and not as a language for communication. Why is the grammar-translation method so popular? Perhaps because this is the easiest method for teachers who have not had extensive training to use; and, in an 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie, 2002), is one which their own teachers may have used. In spite of Nepalese teachers being aware of current teaching approaches and methods, and even though the curriculum prescribes them, a large number of teachers are not yet competent in the knowledge and skills required to practice them in the classroom.

Evaluation and reflection on the research

Although triangulation of data on the perception of teaching approaches, skills, techniques and activities reveals that they are broadly comparable across all teachers, data on methods and styles show some differences. Respondents who have fewer years of experience seem to have said what they ideally believe or wanted to implement whereas replies from teachers with more experience seem to reflect the reality of their classrooms. In the survey, teachers reported favouring communicative and learner-centred approaches, and hesitated to declare themselves traditional teachers following GT and teacher-centred methods. However, their responses on teaching techniques and activities, set against the observation and FGD data, showed the reality – there may be a stated desire to move towards communicative and learner-centred approaches but there remains a tendency to use traditional GT, structural and teacher-centred methods.

The study also gave insights into designing questionnaires carefully. For example, it revealed that closed questions for eliciting data on broad themes should be verified immediately by questions which require supportive details. This was most obvious during analyzing teachers' responses on teaching style – learner-centred/ teacher-centred – which was mostly recorded as being learner-centred (70.8%) but actually this seemed an idealised response since it contrasted with the other responses in the questionnaire (see Table 6), focus groups and observations.

Conclusion

English language teaching in Nepal is an exciting profession, due to the growing use of English and the ever-changing nature of language and its links to life and living. We observe rapid shifts in educational paradigms in the present day due to digital communication technology which can help teachers along the path to pedagogical change. An approach to language pedagogy is "a dynamic composite of energies within a teacher that changes (or should change, if one is a growing teacher) with continued experience in learning and teaching" (Richards and Renandya, 2010, p.11). Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011, p. xi) highlight the value of methods which "serve as a foil for reflection that can aid teachers in bringing to conscious awareness the thinking that underlies their actions".

English as a lingua franca has become a global language and requires appropriate pedagogical methods so that learners can develop fluency and communicative competence. For this, a feel for change is insufficient to ensure change: teachers need to find appropriate methods of teaching and, in so doing, grow their professionalism. Learner-centred teaching has the potential to help our learners to become more independent in planning, designing and deciding their learning processes and thus becoming autonomous lifelong learners. Unfortunately, this study observed that many teachers are still applying traditional, grammar-translation methods, teacher-centred techniques and activities like question-answer, demonstration, drill and dictation though the English curriculum requires them to practice student-centred communicative methods. We can conclude that the practice of ELT methods and techniques in Nepalese classrooms is not compatible with the curricular expectation of developing communication skills. Teachers' current awareness of methods needs to be transformed into future performance in the classrooms. They realise student-centred teaching is good for

their students but their knowledge of its practice is not adequate. They urgently need to dispense with the hangover of traditional grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods based on structuralism and accept a more dynamic ELT pedagogy in an age of rapid advances in information and communication technology, for which English is a prerequisite. ELT in Nepal has enormous potential for growth and teachers are in need of continuing, high-quality professional development opportunities to help them to realise this potential.

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About the author
Gopal Prasad Bashyal is an Instructor at Educational Training Centre, Palpa, Nepal. Having more than two decades of teaching experience at all grades and levels of school and university education, he is now also working as on-call trainer for British Council for Connecting Classrooms. He has gained and shared a wider knowledge of teaching, professional growth and teacher education. He has Master's degrees in English education and English Literature from Tribhuwan University, Nepal. He received his CELTA, TEA, MToTs and ToTs from NCED, NELTA, EFLU Hyderabad, British Council, RELO Kathmandu and other different institutions. He is also a textbook author, ELT reference books writer, and columnist on education and contemporary issues. He has presented workshops and written for various journals at local, national and international forums. He is also a freelance trainer and explores opportunities to enhance quality education and professional development. Interested in research and evidence-based writing, in this case study he has studied and analysed ELT methods and techniques prevalent in Nepal. His study appeals for an urgent shift towards more student-centred communicative approach to teaching English in Nepal.

Appendix 1 Questionnaire

English Language Teaching Survey

Dear colleagues,
The purpose of this survey is to identify current methodologies of teaching English at Secondary level in Nepal. The information you provide in this survey will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Data analysis will be done in terms of averages and percentages, and will produce a report analyzing all responses collectively. Please take the time to fill out every single item in the questionnaire.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Gopal Prasad Bashyal
ETC Palpa

I. General
1. Name _____

2. Sex : male / female

3. School _____

4. Highest academic/professional qualifications. :
   _____

5. Number of years of teaching experience _____

6. The type of school you are teaching in public / private / other
   _____

7. Current position _____

II. Teaching
1. Describe your personal philosophy and beliefs about teaching and learners that influence your approach to teaching.
   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. What do you think are the most essential skills of a good language teacher?
   _____

   _____

_____

_____

_____

3. How would you describe your teaching approaches/methods? Please tick.

   Grammar translation / Structural / Communicative
   Comment:

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

4. How would you describe your teaching style? Please tick the appropriate one.

   Learner-centered / Teacher-centered
   Comment:

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

5. What teaching techniques and activities work best in your classrooms? Also describe the circumstances of your class.

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

6. What techniques do you commonly use in your classroom? Tick any five among the given ones. Also tick how much they are used. 1 seldom 2 sometimes 3 often 4 always

( ) question answer 1 2 3 4   ( ) elicitation 1 2 3 4

( ) role play 1 2 3 4   ( ) comprehension questions 1 2 3 4

( ) project work 1 2 3 4   ( ) demonstration 1 2 3 4

( ) drills 1 2 3 4   ( ) lectures 1 2 3 4

( ) Others; please specify _____

Comments:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix 2 Classroom observation checklist

I. General

i.   Name _____

ii. Sex: male / female

iii. School _____

iv. Highest academic/professional qualifications. :

_____

v.   Number of years of teaching experience _____

vi. The type of school you are teaching in public / private / other

_____

vii. Current position _____

viii. Lesson item : _____

ix. Grade: _____

ix. No. of students : _____

II. Teaching

i.   Skills of teaching : _____

_____

_____

_____

ii. Activities practised and assigned : _____

_____

_____

_____

iii. Approach / method / technique : _____

_____

_____

_____

iv. Reference and teaching materials : _____

_____

_____

v. Encouraging and responding to students : _____

_____

_____

vi. Overall comments: _____

_____

_____

Appendix 3 Questions for FGD

i. Why did you become a teacher? Do you like teaching English? What encourages and discourages you in the classrooms?

ii. What skills do you think are essential for an English language teacher?

iii. What methods do you use in the classroom? Why do you use them? What are the supports and problems in applying them?

iv. What activities are usually preferred and effective? What are the problems to apply them?

v. What supplementary materials do you refer to and use in the classroom? Do your students have other reference materials than textbooks?

Socio-Cultural Characteristics of English Teachers in a Nepali Hinterland: A Case Study

Socio-Cultural Characteristics of English Teachers in a Nepali Hinterland: A Case Study

Ashok Raj Khati

Introduction

EFL (English as a foreign language) teacher identity in recent literature has been described as an immensely complex phenomenon and a profoundly individual as well as a social construct (Barkhuizen, 2017). English language teachers, like other groups, may become stereotyped based on particular location, gender, age, ethnicity and social class. This case study, carried out in the lower part of Mt. Everest region, situated in the eastern Himalayan region of Nepal, explores the characteristics of English teachers concerning social and cultural aspects of their context. The study reveals that a particular social and cultural situation brings about different roles, identities and particular characteristics on the part of English teachers. The phenomenon of teacher identity and characterization is thus an evolving concept as it is constructed and reconstructed in particular times and socio-cultural contexts.

My context

I have taught English for fifteen years in rural and urban EFL settings in Nepal. When I first commenced teaching English in the far-western region, two decades ago, I had a feeling that I was perceived as more informed and better educated than non-English speaking teachers. This resulted in the students and parents having greater trust in me and my teaching. However, when I joined an English medium school in Kathmandu, I did not feel I was better educated than the other teachers as all the subjects were taught in English. Nevertheless, as the English teacher, I was given the role of academic coordinator, an additional responsibility in the school. I had to manage and coordinate morning assembly, term examinations, educational excursions and extra-curricular activities in the school. These responsibilities were devolved to me due to the perception of the school administration that I was an expert in English.

When I left the school in Kathmandu, I joined a rural community campus in Ramechhap, located in the mid-eastern region. I taught English there as a full-time lecturer for six years. Being the only full-time English teacher, I used to feel privileged at the campus and in the community. The principal mentioned that whenever the college had a vacant position for a full-time teacher, they were under pressure from guardians and students to appoint English teachers. From this position of prestige, I was instrumental in retaining students in the campus who

were migrating from the rural to urban areas, indicating that an English teacher like me could be perceived as having an added value to the school other than the ability to teach English.

At the same time, the society where I live and the culture I carry into the profession affect the way I think and perform in English language teaching situations. My parents had a strong belief that children need to be fluent in English. As a result, I studied English, taught English and even enrolled my own children in English medium schools. Based on my experience, I have always felt that English teachers are perceived differently from other academic subject teachers in my socio-cultural context. I believe that my subject speciality influences my identity as a teacher, creating a particular personality. However, I recognise that my view of own identity may not be shared by others; and that teachers from different cultural backgrounds may not have the same perceptions of English language teachers. In this light, exploring the socio-cultural characteristics of EFL teachers in the multilingual and multicultural context of Nepal is a topic worthy of examination.

Teacher identity

In this section, I discuss basic insights from the literature on teacher identity with particular reference to English teachers.

Identity refers to a specific characterization of something or someone. Wenger (1998) views identity as showing the social, cultural and historical aspects of a person. She stresses the role of social settings and it is through participation in such settings that people construct their identities. They learn to understand themselves, their actions and mind. This conceptualization implies that some aspects of identity are temporary, constantly in the process of construction and reconstruction.

Teacher identity has been an emerging area of study in the field of EFL teaching over the last decade (Nelson, 2008) and there have been different views of teacher identity put forward in recent literature. One view considers that personal emotions, belief, knowledge and attitude are important in shaping teacher identity (Phyak, 2011) through which teachers acknowledge or make a claim for their *self-identities* (Buzzelli and Johnston, 2002). Another view provides a place for the construction of teacher identity through negotiation in a socio-cultural context. Duff and Uchida (1997, p. 1) argue that "teachers [...] in any setting naturally represent a wide array of social and cultural roles and identities". Becoming a teacher is considered a constantly developing process, as teachers need to adapt continually to new situations, developments and changes in the subject area. EFL teacher identity is closely linked to foreign language learning itself which may lead to concepts of a 'native' and 'non-native' identity (though these terms are themselves contested). Several previous studies give insights into the struggles of non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) when their authority is questioned by their students and these studies place emphasis on teachers being proficient users of English so as to be accepted as professionals (Medgyes, 1999; Thomas, 1999).

Menard-Warwick (2008) investigated how cultural identities of foreign language (FL) teachers develop and manifest themselves in the classroom. Her two

research participants, two female NNEST teachers of English who had worked for many years in the United States, described their identities as "split, hybrid, mixed" (p. 635). Likewise, Fichtner and Chapman (2011) "have shown that FL instructors engage with their cultural affiliations intellectually and open-mindedly, by embracing 'the other' culture, but not viewing it as their primary cultural affiliation" (p. 134). They explained that many of their participants were opposed to performing or representing 'the other' culture.

Therefore, in relation to the identity of EFL or ESL (English as a second language) teachers, previous researchers have done much to explore issues surrounding the linguistic authority and credibility of NNEST teachers (Fichtner and Chapman, 2011). In recent years, however, there has been a growing interest in the social and cultural dimensions of teacher identity. In Vietnam, Ha and Que (2006) discovered that the identities of a teacher were closely related to the expected role of teachers as moral guides. Ha (2008) has further noted three factors – family, school and conscience – which shape the construction of teachers' identities in Vietnamese society. In this connection, Varghese, Morgan, Johnston and Johnson (2005) state that teacher identity is a social matter because the formation, negotiation, and growth of teacher identity is a fundamentally social process taking place in institutional settings such as teacher education programs and schools (p. 38). This implies that the construction of teacher identity is a process in which teachers engage in interaction not only with other members of the teaching community but also with broader socio-cultural contexts (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Kogan, 2000). With a focus on professional identity, Vesanto (2011) found that being a language teacher encompasses several roles – the role of an educator, the role of a language teacher, the role of a culture teacher and communal roles. She further explained that teachers' personal or professional identity is context-related, socially constructed and also determined by time, the school, the students and their own personalities (Vesanto, 2011, p. 74). Hence, socio-cultural characterizations of English language teachers have been found to be split, hybrid and mixed in many cases.

The study: research process

The purpose of the study discussed in this chapter is to explore the characteristics of English teachers in a Nepali hinterland. The specific questions I have attempted to answer are:

1) What are the perspectives of students, teacher trainers and community members towards English teachers?
2) How do English teachers themselves view being an English teacher and ELT (English language teaching) itself?

The study is qualitative in nature using an interpretive research paradigm as the researcher has analyzed the different perceptions of research participants to explore characteristics of English teachers in context. I have used the case study as a research method as it enables me to examine the data closely within the specific context, i.e. a limited number of events or conditions, and their relationships. The method is particularly important as the examination of the data is conducted within the context of its collection (Yin, 2003); that is, in the situation in which the activity takes place.

I collected and generated the data through focus group discussions (FGD) and open-ended interviews with five secondary level English teachers, five tenth grade students, two teacher trainers, two community members and a head teacher. It is important to include the perceptions of students, as there is an outside perspective which says that it is not the teacher who creates his /her identity alone but others who contribute to shaping it too. Teachers' primary purpose is to serve students who construct teacher identity through different interactional discourses in the school and outside of it (Khati, 2013).

In the study, the languages of data collection were both Nepali and English. I used English to interview English teachers and teacher trainers, whereas in the FGDs and when interviewing community members and students I used Nepali. The sampling procedure was purposive. I have been working in this part of the district for the last two years in the capacity of a teacher trainer. I work with English teachers in assigned training venues and schools. I also have to work with children's clubs and community members. Therefore, it is not difficult for me to get the consent of research participants, collect data and to be in frequent touch with them. Likewise, I have an inherent sense of understanding of the teachers of this area in relation to social, linguistic, economic and cultural features.

I selected the lower part of Mt. Everest Region, situated in the eastern Himalayan region of Nepal, as the research site. The research site comprises five adjoining Village Development Committees (VCDs); Nele, Kangel, Panchan, Mukli and Tingla. In this lower part of Solukhumbu, communities such as the Rai, Sherpa, Tamang, Bhujel, Gurung, Magar, Chhetri and Brahamin live together. These communities vary regarding religion, language, art, literature, culture and social values. It is a multilingual, multicultural and multi-ethnic community.

The schools in this community have average facilities and learning resources. The mega earthquake in 2015 caused great damage to physical infrastructure, teaching materials and other learning resources of these schools. With respect to teachers, they must have a teaching license to get entry to the teaching profession. To receive the license, a teacher must pass an examination. Government agencies appoint teachers in community schools. Students from these communities come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and use their first language at home. Nepali is the lingua franca among the speakers of these communities whereas English is taught as a compulsory course in school from grade one to the university level. Since Nepali is the official language of Nepal, people use and experience Nepali in the wider sphere of their lives. The majority of the students come from a very low economic family background and almost all students attend government-funded schools.

After collecting the data, I read and transcribed it. Then, I developed themes and concepts inductively from the data. I developed hubs of themes, made interpretations and wrote reports. While writing, I critically analyzed the data under these different themes. To safeguard the participants' anonymity, I used pseudonyms throughout the analysis and writing up of the findings.

Findings: Major characteristics of English teachers

■ Positioning in the school and community

English teachers in this part of the country seem to have higher social status in the community than other teachers and assume a variety of roles in school. They acquire this higher social status in several ways. They hold high social prestige; they are respected, and they are believed to know the world more than others in the society. Speaking of a local teacher, one of the community members put it this way:

> Ramesh is an English teacher in our village. He talks to foreigners; he writes letters abroad, and he also uses computers better than others in the village. He must be communicating with the entire world. I respect him. He knows everything. He hugs the people from abroad and shakes hands with them. He is a wonderful teacher in this locality.

This comment shows this English teacher has local and global networks which enable him to be perceived as an extraordinary personality in the society who is able to have friendly relationships with foreigners. Another English teacher, from a Rai linguistic and cultural background (an ethnic community in Nepal), held similar views and expressed them this way:

> I know I am respected in my community as I have been teaching English for 20 years. My students are spread over the world. They have very successful professional and personal lives. They greet me, bring gifts for me and have great honor for me. In addition, their children in school have great faith and honor for me which is a real part of my inspiration and makes me feel like a respected professional.

Another teacher, a Sherpa (an ethnic group living in the high Himalayan region) placed emphasis on her ability to communicate freely in English at school and in other work. She explained:

> I love learning new ideas in English. I always enjoy interacting with many foreigners. In the holidays, I work for trekking agencies in the capacity of a trekking guide. I feel excited and highly motivated to teach English in my school. I have found that my family and community have always been supportive of me to teach English effectively in school.

The children of Sherpas seem to be particularly highly motivated to learn English and use English well. This teacher's comment shows that her particular community has a very good attitude towards the English language and English teachers. It also indicates that she is well respected in her community, though this may not always be the case for teachers in other communities.

Another illuminating aspect of the study is that English teachers in this region play a crucial role in their schools as interpreters and documentation officials in support of school development. Janabi, a teacher, articulates the role in this way:

> I have to interpret English for people from abroad in schools to the head teacher, other teachers and the members of SMC [School Management

Committee]. These people are from our donor agencies which have been supporting the schools in many ways. I often get the responsibility of writing proposals, letters to several governmental and non-governmental organizations and other credentials in English for students and teachers. This is my additional responsibility in school. I do feel happy when I am able to maintain good relationships with organizations for the welfare of children in my community.

Janabi shows that apart from teaching English, teachers have additional roles and diverse responsibilities in schools. She confirms that English teachers construct their identity according to the special demands of their contexts. They do not remain focused only on English teaching, nor do they have uniform characteristics in all circumstances.

The study also reveals that English teachers are perceived to be leaders in schools and their community. They bear the responsibilities of leading the academic side of school, examinations, ECA (extra-curricular activities), project work and field trips. Aboout this particular characteristic of English teachers, a student gave her views in this way:

I think the English teacher of my school is very smart and confident in all areas of teaching. He also leads morning assembly and makes us do different things every day in addition to our day-to-day learning. He always brings new ideas and practices. He has a good command over Nepali and the English language. On top of this, he leads and coordinates the ECA event every Friday along with project work and field trips.

Moreover, the study reveals another fact that English teachers appear to be more proficient with technology than other teachers. A head teacher stated the point clearly:

Among twenty-two teaching professionals, there are four English teachers in my schools. They are far better and faster in using the computer, mobile phones and the internet. I think the use of English in social media like Facebook and other applications in computers has been an added advantage for them. I often consult them when I need assistance in this regard at personal and institutional levels.

This finding might be misrepresentative in the sense that there may be many teachers from other academic subjects who are also good at using technology, but the idea of English teachers in particular as technocrats is plausible as knowledge of the English language undoubtedly assists in the use of information technology.

■ Knowledge transmission and criticality
The study also confirmed the traditional identity of English teachers in Nepal as transmitters of knowledge, as we see in this comment from a teacher trainer:

I have been working with English teachers in this region for five years in schools and training venues. What I have found is that the majority of English teachers provide a good explanation of the text given in the textbooks. They often try to use very simple and short expressions to make

students understand the complex texts. Teachers often practice student-centered activities in training venues. But most of them do not apply inductive methods in their English classrooms. They open the books and begin describing rules, translating texts and providing tips to students on what is to be done. When I observe their lessons, they generally combine several activities and create variety there. Then they follow the same route of lecturing and explaining the things the next day [when the trainer is not there]. This is a common trend in schools. However, some of them do attempt to make the lesson interactive and student-centered.

Alongside the traditional transmissive role, changes can be seen in recent years in some cases; that is in a higher degree of interactivity between teachers and students in some lessons. On occasion, it seems that they are combining the traditional approaches with newer ones.

Another observation revealed in the study is that English teachers are more critical of ideas than other teachers, as another teacher trainer commented:

I have not only worked with English teachers in this region,but I have also worked with teachers from other academic subjects too. Most English teachers are critical of ideas inside and outside the schools. Maybe they are just talkative! Even in training venues, English teachers present their thoughts about several issues – they comment and critically analyze problems and issues.

This backs up my own observation and experience in this part of the country in the past two years that English teachers are quick to react to issues and ideas in the different situations they come across.

■ Ethnic outlook

Nepal is a multi-ethnic and multilingual country and Nepali classrooms are often heterogeneous. Many teachers join the teaching profession with an ethnic identity, as an English teacher from the Tamang community explained:

I feel very proud of being an English teacher from an ethnic community. I think students, guardians and community people from other communities perceive me very positively. Ethnicity matters when we have different mother tongues than Nepali. My first language sometimes interferes with learning of English sounds, and that affects the teaching of those sounds too. I might lose face on some occasions in the classroom among students who are particularly from a Nepali language background. Nepali has an official role in Nepal, and it has received prestige. However, I always try my best to pronounce English sounds correctly as far as possible.

Non-Nepali ethnicity is not always viewed positively as we can see when this teacher has lost face with Nepali-speaking students. Another teacher from a Madhesi background (an ethnic community living in the lowland region of Nepal) had similar negative experiences of teaching English in the hills and mountains simply because of his first language – Maithali – as he explained

My first language is Mathaili. The Maithali language has its own phonological patterns. When I speak Nepali and English, my first language is dominant in my speech. On the other side, Nepali-speaking teachers seem to be considerably better in the pronunciation of English sounds. Students and teachers in school particularly laugh at the way I speak some words and phrases in English. I have been rejected by a school, simply because I cannot teach English as a Maithali speaking teacher, even though I have met all the requirements to teach. I think I need to improve my pronunciation of English sounds.

In this part of the country, Madhesi and other teachers have a distinct identity which is shaped by the way they use the English language. Participants' views in this study imply that the identities of English teachers are categorized in relation to certain accented language traits that mark them as ethnically distinct.

■ Personal traits

The study uncovered two perceived personal characteristics of English teachers in this Nepali hinterland, although personal traits were not the major focus of the study, i.e. that English teachers are friendly, and have a caring attitude which contributes to positive motivation amongst students to learn. The data indicates that English teachers are perceived as being friendlier to students than other teachers, as we can see in this comment from a student:

My English teacher is very frank and loving. He looks as if he is my friend. He always speaks in English with us. His English is very simple and it's easy to grasp the shorter expressions. Further, he inspires us to speak English. He enjoys and plays with us and we have a lot of fun.

Similarly, a high school student finds his English teacher to be very caring:

My English teacher cares for us very much which makes us feel safe. He is kind, and he responds to us at a feeling level. He is open and understands the feelings of students. He is a happy teacher. Ultimately, we also want a happy teacher and want to be happy.

These personal characteristics of teachers have potential implication to enhance the teaching and learning of English if replicated more widely. They help students to sustain motivation and perform better in English language learning.

Discussion

The most critical observation of the study is that English teachers do not possess uniform characteristics in all socio-cultural settings. This observation, which is connected to a theoretical and historical context, prompts me to analyze two viewpoints from insider and outsider perspectives on teacher identities.

■ Homogeneous identity

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) have studied teacher identities from a narrative point of view, uncovering insider perspectives on teacher identity. They stress that identities and stories depend on life situations and social conditions but, complementing their individual identities, in different situations there are many

aspects of teachers' identities which are considered to be fairly fixed. The narrative approach has similarities with the structural stage approach where identity is considered to develop through stages over time (Kroger, 2000). These stages change but the basic structure of teacher identity remains the same. For example, the perception of teachers as being respected in society has remained the same for many years, as has the notion that teachers are the sole source and transmitter of knowledge in schools. Teachers hold a set of moral values and concepts of right and wrong in the Nepali context. Furthermore, certain requirements such as qualifications (for instance, M.A./M.Ed. in English), training (for example, 10 months training from the Ministry of Education) and a teaching license to get entry into the teaching profession also bring a degree of homogeneity to the profession.

■ Heterogeneous identity

This perspective contrasts with the previous one in that it is not the teacher alone who creates his/her identity; it is also constructed by others as confirmed in this study. Professionally, teachers primary purpose is to serve students. Kroger (2000) declared that students help to create teacher identity through different interactional discourses not only inside the classroom but also outside the classroom. This indicates a dialogical perspective on teacher identity that highlights the role of social situations, particularly interaction with others. Therefore, EFL teacher identity is always dialogical and socially and culturally constructed.

English teachers are perceived differently regarding social recognition and they perform different roles in different societies and cultural settings. In Nepali society, teachers' positional and authored identities retain power as active change agents and the sole source of knowledge and information. They bear more professional responsibilities in countries like Nepal than in the west, as we can see in the findings which show that English teachers are given additional roles as academic coordinators in the schools, as interpreters and in the preparation of many official documents in English. They are perceived as having enhanced professionalism as they have wider social networks and are more technology-friendly. In this latter respect, they have the potential to benefit more from online teaching resources than other subject teachers which, in turn, enhances their prestige and perceptions of their professionalism.

Conclusion

The study reveals that English teachers in this particular social and cultural situation contribute to society to a greater extent than just by the teaching of English as a subject inside the classroom. They are perceived to be higher status professionals, work as interpreters of English, and through English, they seem to be more adept with technology than many other teachers. Furthermore, English teachers are highly respected in society because of their multiple roles. They are leaders in their communities because of their use of English, the language of resources, and facility with the language is associated with good interpersonal skills. More conventionally, English teachers are also found to be transmitters of knowledge in the traditional sense but, on occasion, this is allied to more interactive teaching methods. They are perceived as having critical thinking skills and to be caring and friendly with the children that they assist to learn English. However, ethnic characterizations appear to reside as invisible social

characteristics in this Nepali hinterland, colouring perceptions of certain teachers from indigenous ethnic communities.

Thus, a specific socio-cultural situation engenders particular roles, identities and characteristics of English language teachers. These different social responsibilities, roles and activities affect the way English teachers think and the way they perform in EFL teaching and learning situations. Socio-cultural factors shape the distinct identities of EFL teachers, for whom identity is both an individual and social matter. In conclusion, teacher identity is always evolving, constructed and reconstructed across particular times and contexts. This is as true for teachers of English as it is for teachers of other subjects in Nepal and teachers in many other contexts too.

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Teaching English in Under-Resourced Environments

Teaching English in Under-Resourced Environments

Laxman Gnawali

The context

Mainstream English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher training programmes in Nepal, as in many other countries, present to the trainees a picture of idealised classrooms which are well-laid out, materials rich, learner-friendly, within teacher's control and generally conducive to learning. They inculcate in teachers an understanding of classrooms as places where they can deliver lessons which provide ample language exposure to learners. These programmes typically require trainees to undergo a practicum in laboratory school conditions in the cities where the trainees orchestrate well-planned lessons (Wallace, 1991). Contemporary language teaching approaches also create an expectation that the teachers will be working in these idealised classrooms where pair work and group work (Richards, 2015), role plays (Ur, 2010) and intensive listening tasks (Harmer, 2003) can be organised as the norm. Learners are expected to be negotiators of meaning (Larsen-Freeman, 2011) and outcomes based instruction is possible (Leung, 2012).

However, real life classrooms in most government schools (also known as community schools) in Nepal are very different from the ones pictured during the training courses and in the mainstream English language teaching (ELT) methodology books: they are far from the ideal. Teachers find it very hard to connect the under-resourced classroom realities they have to cope with to the ideal picture and the methodologies they have learned about while training. Hence, in this chapter, I report on a small scale qualitative study carried out in the rural districts of Nepal where the typical conditions do not match those teachers are exposed to during their training. I first explore the issues and challenges teachers face in the rural Nepali context and then the strategies they apply to manage these realities.

The socio-economic context of Nepal is very diverse, as is its geography. Economic disparities and socio-cultural nuances not only impact how people live but also the way classroom activities run in general and English language lessons in particular. Parents of most children who attend community schools are not well educated and have low socio-economic status. That most community schools use Nepali as a medium of instruction makes English language pedagogy a real challenge, particularly for EFL teachers. In fact, English is taught as a formal subject rather than as a living language. The situation is aggravated by the fact that resources are meagre and classroom environments are not conducive to learning. Community schools lack resources and lag behind in the achievement levels of students (Kansakar, 2011). Teachers face difficulties in simply managing the classes, let

alone organising communicative activities – which may not happen at all. Ironically, the students' failures in English are often ascribed to teachers' under-performance, and the plight of the teachers working in under-resourced classrooms is habitually ignored.

The research approach

With the above scenario as the backdrop, I developed a research project to answer the following research questions:

1) What are the issues and challenges Nepali EFL teachers face working in under-resourced classrooms?
2) How do the teachers cope with the challenges these classrooms pose?

In order to explore these issues, I carried out a small scale study in a sample of rural community schools in Nepal. I conducted two rounds of telephone interviews with 14 EFL teachers from rural community schools in Gulmi (hills), Dhanusha (Terai) and Sindhupalchowk (mountains) districts (see Table 1). The schools were purposively chosen from three ecological zones as the conditions differ greatly due to their socio-economic and geographical diversity.

Table 1: Research participants

Participants (pseudonyms)	Districts	Sex	Level taught	Teaching experience
Babu	Gulmi	M	Secondary	23 years
Binita	Sindhupalchok	F	Primary	11 years
Daulat	Sindhupalchok	M	Secondary	11 years
Daya	Sindhupalchok	M	Primary	12 years
Dinanath	Dhanusha	M	Secondary	13 years
Dipak	Sindhupalchok	M	Secondary	11 years
Geetika	Gulmi	F	Primary	8 years
Grishma	Sindhupalchok	F	Secondary	8 years
Kavita	Sindhupalchok	F	Primary	7 years
Mamata	Sindhupalchok	F	Primary	12 years
Nira	Dhanusha	F	Secondary	13 years
Ramprit	Dhanusha	M	Primary	3 years
Rasun	Gulmi	M	Primary	33 years
Tek	Gulmi	M	Secondary	20 years

Nepali was used for the interviews. Because I wanted to capture the diverse conditions and lived experiences, I prepared probing questions in my interview protocol (Yin, 2011). Once the first round of the interviews was completed, I transcribed the data and went through them. The questions largely elicited responses that related to the research questions I was trying to answer. In some cases either the information was not clear and/or further details were needed and

so I interviewed the participants again with specific questions. I then examined the transcripts from both rounds. Data was analysed inductively, with themes deriving from the interview data, and findings were drawn. To maintain the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were used. The findings are presented and discussed below under two broad themes related to the research questions, i.e. 'difficulties in the classroom' and 'teachers' coping strategies'

Difficulties in the classroom

■ The classrooms

The classrooms were reported to be problematic in most cases. Some teachers complained that their classes were too crowded with over 60 students in a class. Dinanath, a secondary teacher from Dhanusha, confessed *"I can't check homework due to the large number of students."* This was echoed by Dipak, a secondary teacher from Sindhupalchok, who said *"I teach a class of 60 students, and going through their homework is a huge task and I am almost always unable to meet the deadline."* Grishma, who teaches in a secondary school in Sindhupalchok, finds herself helpless in the class. *"I feel helpless as I cannot give personal attention to all students in a class of 56. Individual feedback to every student is almost impossible."* Due to the huge number of students, she was not able to devote enough time to personally advise each and every student in the class, making her feel that she could not cope.

Conversely, there were schools, mainly in Gulmi, that had as few as 10 or 15 students in a class. To make things more complicated, the classes were not single grade but were multi grade in some cases, with two to three grades in the same classroom. This was the result of parents' tendency to prefer English medium private schools to community schools: teachers explained that the few remaining students actually were those whose parents could not afford private schools for their children. Rasun, a primary teacher in Gulmi, lamented, *"We have to compete with the boarding schools established next door and we can't win."* Tek, a secondary teacher in another village in this area, indicated an ironical situation, *"Sending children to a boarding school is a status symbol. There are many community school teachers who send their own children to a boarding school."*

The teachers also noted that the furniture in the classroom was fixed which inihibited the pair and group work recommended. Benches and desks were designed to seat four to five students, could not be moved and were very tightly arranged. Nira, a primary teacher in Dhanusha, confessed, *"I rarely organise group activities as students can't get to move."* Ramprint, another primary teacher there, noted, "I organise group work only with one group at a time." He would get one group of students performing group work in front of the class while others watched, but he did not do this very often.

Even the poor situation in Gulmi and Dhanusha was relatively good when compared to Sindhuplachok which was hard hit by the great earthquake of 2015 and where most schools did not even have a permanent room for a class. Students attended classes in makeshift shelters due to the earthquake. Mamata, a teacher from Sindhupalchok, summed up the situation: *"There is no classroom as such due to the earthquake; some organizations have provided a few essential materials needed for the class."*

◼ The students

The students' level of English language skills was another issue the participants worried about. Teachers reported that their students were rarely at their class level of proficiency; as a result they expected the lesson content to be explained in Nepali. Classroom discussions in English were a rare thing, as Daulat, a secondary teacher from Sindhupalchok put it, *"Only about 10% of the students can speak according to their level, the rest cannot keep up."* However, teachers who taught at the primary level reported that students couldn't speak English at all. Teachers' responses portrayed a paradox: because students couldn't speak English, no discussions took place, and because no discussions were held in English, their speaking did not improve. They were caught in a vicious circle. Grishma described her students thus:

> Students not understanding English is a really big problem, they tend to prefer Nepali before English, and I am really stuck as to how I can teach students to choose English first when speaking.

The curriculum required students to participate in discussions but they did not do so even if discussions were organized. They could not even understand teachers' instructions if given in English. Grishma's students expected her to teach them what could be included in the national examination. She further added, *"My students often ask me 'Is this important? 'Will it come in the examination?' and I have to say yes."*

Under the liberal promotion policy in Nepal, students are promoted from grade to grade even if they fail in all subjects and there are few students at the appropriate grade level for English. Babu, a teacher from Gulmi noted, *"Students graduate from lower grades without knowing any English."* Without the required language base from previous grades, teachers are at a loss how to introduce a new topic to the students as the syllabus requires. Dipak, a teacher from Sindhupalchok, commented, *"The first difficulty is that students haven't built up the language base so it is very difficult for me to teach new things to them."* Geetika, from Gulmi, said, *"The students have not been able to learn English properly. As they go on to higher classes, their weak base makes it difficult for us to teach new things to them."* Babu complained that students took advantage of the "child-friendly classrooms" policy (the government policy that children should feel no fear) and tried to avoid any task given. Homework was not completed at all or was copied from peers.

Students are an issue for the teachers from another perspective. They speak different local languages which the English teachers may not understand. Binita had such a situation. Her primary students in Sindhupalchok spoke Thami as their first language, which she could not speak, and they did not have good proficiency in Nepali, thus creating a greater divide in teacher-student communication. She held this situation responsible for the students who learned less English than Nepali speaking classmates: *"Students from the Thami community prefer to speak their own language, and so pronouncing words in English is very difficult."*

Parents' support is also crucial when students do not fare well. Kavita from Sindhupalchok reported that the parents of her students were supportive: *"The parents and guardians are concerned about their wards and are supportive of the school. They even funded a class dictionary as well."* But this was not the case

with other teachers who complained that parents had very little idea of what their children were expected to do at school. In the words of Daya, a teacher from Sindhupalchok: *"Indifference towards their children's studies is the main problem."* In principle, each school has a parents' association that is expected to support the school and the School Management Committee comprises parents as well. However, lack of their own education and challenging economic conditions are perhaps the main reasons why many parents were not closely involved in their children's school activities.

Students seemed at least to retain positive attitudes to learning English. *"I find that the students are sincere and honest"*, as Kavita put it, but the problems lay in the fact that they missed classes, did not complete their tasks, and had no support at home, all leading to poor learning of this foreign language. Daya summed the situation up in this way:

> There isn't a conducive learning environment in their homes; the families that these children come from are from a really difficult financial background, sometimes with no mothers or fathers. They aren't very regular in their classes as well. Sometimes I feel helpless as my teaching does not work.

■ Teaching-learning materials

When I asked what materials were available to them that they could readily use, teachers reported that most schools had chalk and markers, boards, textbooks, the curriculum and teachers' guides. Girshma and Daulat reported having practice books, dictionaries, newspapers, and old question papers but these extra resources were limited in number, were confined to the staff room and were not available to the students. Kavita revealed, *"My school received support from charities and NGOs, but it was only for a short time."*

Listening activities are said to help improve speaking skills and I asked participants how they conducted them. Geetika said, *"We don't have the materials so I skip listening exercises."* Teachers complained that the school authorities were not aware or not willing to ensure necessary resources for the EFL classroom. Though there is a provision for listening materials to be provided to schools by the Ministry of Education and there may be a set in one or two schools, in most cases they do not even reach the schools. When I asked Babu, who was also a head teacher, about this, he retorted, *"If you don't want to use them, you [the teachers] can make any complaints."* Thus, he seemed to be saying it was as much the teachers' lack of motivation for listening activities as it was lack of materials.

Teachers' coping strategies

The discussion of difficulties in the classroom shows that teaching English in community schools is a really demanding task. The classrooms, the resources and the students all pose a challenge to the teachers. Nevertheless, in spite of all these difficulties, 21% of community school students passed the 2016 SLC examination, including English, indicating that teachers had some success. Students seem to learn enough English to pass the examination despite the fact that their only learning opportunity is within their classrooms. To assess how this was achieved, I asked teachers how they coped with the demanding conditions and how they were able to facilitate the learning that was possible.

Conditions were difficult, they had to work in under-resourced situations, and within their communities teachers did not feel they were recognised, with a focus on the failure rates at SLC and the low language proficiency of students rather than what they were able to achieve in unpromising conditions. However, teachers somehow managed to cope with the situation and did not give up. They reported a variety of ways to cope with the under resourced conditions, one of which was to use whatever was available. Daulat who had the luxury of having a dictionary in the class said, *"I do not tell the meanings of words, rather I ask them to find the meanings from the dictionary."* He believed that if he developed students' dictionary using habit, they would use it even when not asked by the teacher. But more imaginative were the materials he used in teaching prepositions. He said, *"I taught prepositions by using a small ball which students had made out of old socks."* It was also interesting to hear from Kavita who taught without any extra materials: *"I taught tag questions silently. I simply wrote examples on the board and did not speak. I used gestures only. And that worked."* That there were no materials did not mean no teaching. Geetika got her students to draw pictures for the stories she was teaching: *"I gave the outline and asked them to prepare a picture series and display them in the class."* However, the pieces of paper to draw on were the pages from the students' own writing books and not provided by the school.

One other interesting and poignant fact was that teachers used their personal resources for classroom teaching. Binita noted, *"I buy alphabet charts and picture charts and distribute them among the students".* Other teachers shared their stories of using personal technology. *"When I have to show some video, I use my own laptop"*, Daulat reported (though he was the only teacher who said he had a laptop of his own). Nira read out passages onto her mobile phone and used them as listening resources. Mamata downloaded teaching related apps like ABCD and children's songs on her cell phone and used them to teach the children in her primary classes, saying, *"At first I didn't have a proper cell phone, but when I bought one and showed it to the class and played the apps, the students were really happy."* When asked who paid for the data costs, she smiled and said she did.

Teachers organised in class some of the activities that they had learnt during their training courses, making sure that they cost nothing. Dipak managed to get students to discuss topics in Grade 10 by bringing in contemporary issues to provoke interest in class discussions. *"I found that students are active when talking about health, current events or incidents about famous people."* Dinanath set group work outside the classroom, *"When I asked students to interview people in their community and find out about their daily activities, they enjoyed the task."* Students' own pens and writing books were the only resources used for these interviews. Tek got a group of Grade 9 students to perform a textbook story as a drama. He prepared the script and students performed it without any stage props and he was a proud teacher: *"Students were highly engaged. I could see happiness in their faces."*

Conclusion

All the participants in this small-scale study were community school teachers holding permanent positions for which they had to be trained. Their experiences show that they are working in a different world from the one envisaged by the content of their training, as well as by the ELT methodology books produced by

authors based in western countries which they use. There is a mismatch between training input and classroom reality. In their classes, these teachers have to face a lack of student readiness and a lack of resources while their school management lacks understanding of the EFL specific needs of the teachers. In such situations, some teachers embrace helplessness but others take personal initiatives to make a difference. They try activities that require no materials, and engage students' attention. Some teachers use innovative ideas to utilize whatever is available; others go to the extent that they use their own personal materials to ensure that the lessons are delivered.

Though the conditions are challenging, the teachers in this study provide a ray of hope through their thoughtful and unselfish responses in helping students to learn. However, to better prepare future teachers to face the challenges and to help them achieve the minimum objectives outlined in the curriculum, changes seem necessary both in the training courses and the ELT literature that teachers are expected to learn from. Teacher-training courses should not idealise imported pedagogy but instead inform teachers about the local realities of schooling so that they are better prepared for the conditions they will have to face. In this vein, the teaching practicum should not be organised in laboratory schools in the cities but in real world classrooms so that new teachers will be better prepared to deal with under-resourced contexts. Trainers too need to redefine the way they think about EFL pedagogy in Nepalese rural community schools. If that were to happen, there would then be an opportunity to prepare context-specific methodology texts for community schools to replace the imported methodology books which have little to say about the challenging, under-resourced conditions which are prevalent in Nepal.

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Project NIITE: National Initiative to Improve Teaching in English

Project NIITE: National Initiative to Improve Teaching in English

Vaishali Pradhan

The context

British Council Nepal's involvement in the area of ELT and in-service teacher training has gone through many phases in recent years. Our intervention started with a regional British Council funded project 'English for Teaching: Teaching for English' (ETTE) in 2008. This initial project ran for four years after which, in 2013, it was resurrected for one more year as a further intervention in Nepal only, known as 'ETTE+'. This second phase sought to make both the materials and the implementation modality more sustainable and impactful by introducing follow-up activities in between face-to-face training. In 2014, using key learning points from ETTE and ETTE+, we wanted to see if it was possible to sustain its impact on what teachers do in the classroom through a further intervention. This initiated the joint Nepali government and British Council 'National Initiative to Improve Teaching in English' (NIITE) project which aimed to strengthen the national in-service teacher training programme, meet the demands of teachers shifting to English Medium Instruction (EMI) and build on the legacy of earlier British Council projects. The main focus of all three phases has been teacher development and on-going support using a cascade model, although the nature of the training and the trainees has changed since 2008 when ETTE started.

NIITE has been developed in partnership with the National Centre for Educational Development (NCED) and has responded to the demand for training for teachers of other subjects through the medium of English. Its objective is 'to improve the classroom performance of teachers of English and other subjects in EMI settings in government schools'. The project has been running since November 2014 and the second year of training was completed in June 2016. The first year of the project was large-scale, developing over 125 master trainers who delivered training to 7,500 teachers in all 75 districts of the country, with a special extended focus on three pilot districts – Nawalparasi, Surkhet and Jhapa. However, training in the second year reduced significantly due to the major earthquake in May 2015, focusing only on the three pilot districts when NCED had to cut its training budgets and divert funds to school reconstruction. Nevertheless, the demand continued and the project team announced continuation for a third year with budgets being ring-fenced for English training and incorporated into the NCED's revised teacher training framework. The project, in its final year, is scheduled to run in 68 districts of Nepal.

This case study will focus on the third phase of our intervention, NIITE, and will discuss how the team attempted to embed robust monitoring and evaluation tools

to ensure sustainability and impact. It will also focus on the benefits of merging the technical capacity of the Government of Nepal's teacher training wing and its demand led in-service teacher training provision with the technical capacity of the British Council. Since its inception in 2014-15, the project has gone through various changes, adaptations and revisions in order to maximise its impact. This study provides details on how the project stands as of the time of writing.

Background

According to the School Sector Reform Plan (2009-15), schools in Nepal were allowed to choose any one or a combination of English, Nepali and mother tongue as a medium of instruction (MOE, 2009). In general practice, schools chose the medium of instruction in response to local demands from teachers, parents and the community. Many schools opted for English as a medium of instruction (EMI), thus resulting in a high demand for training in this area. In order to find out how pressing this demand was, a robust baseline survey was conducted in 2014 with 720 teachers, 361 head teachers and numerous school management committees (SMC) from across the country. The survey results indicated not just a high demand and need for EMI training but also highlighted various risks and challenges that any intervention would face.

Out of the total number of head teachers interviewed, 49% stated that English was the key to quality education in their school. Interactions with the SMCs, teachers, parents and other community members echoed similar thoughts. Very strong parental support was witnessed for learning good English (98%), and learning through the medium of English (93%). It was also noted that such demands and perceptions have led many government schools to switch their medium of instruction to English (see Tables 1-3 for numbers in the three pilot districts). The numbers were particularly high in Jhapa with 75% of state schools choosing English as a medium of instruction at some or all grades.

Table 1 : Schools using EMI in Jhapa district

Total number of state schools in Jhapa	366
Schools shifted to EMI	75%
Primary schools (1-5) shifted to EMI	80%
Lower secondary (1-8) shifted to EMI	15%
Secondary schools shifted to EMI	5%

Source: NELTA, Jhapa branch

Table 2 : Schools using EMI in Nawalparasi district

Total number of state schools in Nawalparasi	531
Schools shifted to EMI	40%
Primary schools (1-5) shifted to EMI	126
Lower secondary (1-8) shifted to EMI	30
Secondary schools shifted to EMI	56

Source: Board of Community Schools for Educational Movement (EMBOS) Nawalparasi

Table 3 : School using EMI in Surkhet district

Total number of state schools in Surkhet	513
Schools shifted to EMI	23
Primary schools (1-5) shifted to EMI	17
Lower secondary (1-8) shifted to EMI	2
Secondary schools shifted to EMI	4

Source: District Education Office, Surkhet

Addressing this demand, however, looked like an enormous task given the very low levels of English that teachers have in schools. Although the English proficiency levels of teachers in state schools have not been officially recorded, data from the ETTE+ project show that out of 300 teachers who sat for the British Council's English language proficiency test, Aptis[1], 90% were at A0/A1 level which meant they had little or no knowledge of the language. During the baseline in 2014, 41% teachers from EMI schools described their present standard of speaking and understanding of English as "not very good" with about 6% describing it to be "very weak".

Equally concerning is the fact that research into the introduction of EMI in the early years of primary school does not support effective learning as children's cognitive and academic language proficiency (CALP) is insufficiently developed in English (UNESCO, 2008). Children's development of literacy skills in Nepali is thus held back as they struggle to achieve this at the same time as learning something in an unfamiliar language. Research also suggests that in order to ensure effective teaching in classrooms, using language proficiently is not sufficient on its own (Bunch, Abram, Lotan and Valdes, 2001). Pedagogical skills as well as pedagogical content knowledge are as important. Among the indicators of classroom observations during the baseline, pedagogical skills like "using pair work and group work", "teacher encourages higher order thinking skills", "teacher summarises points at relevant intervals" and "teacher asks open ended questions" were all recorded as "never observed" in as high as 97% of classes. It is not possible to tell

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[1] Aptis is a modern and flexible English language proficiency test designed by British Council to meet the diverse needs of organisations and individuals around the world.

if these trends would be the same if teachers were teaching in Nepali, but evidence suggests that teachers draw on a more limited range of pedagogical techniques when teaching in a less familiar language.

It was therefore important to understand this challenging context and the nuances involved while implementing the project, as we were attempting to support the pressing needs of teachers in EMI schools while keeping in mind global research and our organization's position on EMI. As much as it was important for the government to own the project it was crucial for us to ensure maximum impact. This was done with the help of agreed participant selection criteria, materials that followed a blended approach of face-to-face, radio and mobile technology, classroom observations for teachers and the use of trainers who were trained and supported by British Council.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Baseline

Our baseline survey was designed to support the project by gathering a range of data on the competences, capabilities and status of teaching and learning in state schools using (or considering using) English as their medium of instruction. A randomised control trial was also done with samples of teachers outside the pilot districts who attended the training and also from those beyond the scope of the project. Coupled with a team conducting the observations and data collection was a documentary crew who captured visual data from the field. Numerous raw footage of 40-minute classes was captured to be used for comparisons at the end of the project period.

■ Method
In order to generate valid, reliable and comparable data between data sets a random sampling procedure with three data sets was designed.

Data Set A: Pilot Districts
In each pilot district 100 trainee teachers from the full training cohort were selected by adopting a simple random sampling procedure. The total sample size was set at 300 teachers.

Data Set B: Other teachers receiving NIITE training in Year 1
The sample size of 300 teachers was chosen through random sampling from the full training cohort in the 42 other districts participating in the project.

Comparison of data between Data Set A and Data Set B would therefore be on a 1:1 ratio generating a randomized control trial since the selection procedure for each group was completely randomized to ensure that the selection of teachers would be unbiased.

Data Set C: Teachers not participating in NIITE
This sample of 120 teachers was drawn principally from the geographical areas used in Data Sets A and B with fieldwork visits to randomly choose non-participating teachers in state schools.

■ Data collection
Something unique that was incorporated in the survey was unannounced school

visits to conduct extensive classroom observation and collection of associated data. The Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) team observed three lessons with every teacher in the sample. These observations could have been for any subject in the curriculum. In order to ensure validity and reliability, each lesson was observed by two fieldworkers making separate records and then preparing an agreed shared assessment of the lesson. The observations were recorded on a proforma devised by a team of experts within the project (see Figures 1 and 2 below).

Further data was collected through school data sheets, individual teacher questionnaires and focus group discussions with head teachers, community members and school management committees.

Figure 1: Lesson Observation Sheet 1

**National Initiative to Improve Teaching in English
Lesson Observation Sheet 1**

Cover Sheet

1. Before the lesson

School:	District:	Date:
Class:	Teacher:	Subject/topic:
Students enrolled	Girls:	Boys:
Students present	Girls:	Boys:

2. During the lesson
Record the activities in the lesson for each 5 minute period by placing a (E) if the activity was conducted in English, (N) Nepali, or (MT) another mother tongue.

Activity/Time	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40
1. Students use higher order thinking skills								
2. Teacher explains								
3. Teacher asks a question								
4. Students all respond								
5. Individual student responds								
6. Student(s) ask question(s)								
7. Teacher responds to student question(s)								
8. Teacher uses the board								

Activity/Time	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40
9. Students work in their books from the board								
10. Teacher reads aloud from textbooks								
11. Students all read from textbook								

Figure 2 : Lesson Observation Sheet 2

**National Initiative to Improve Teaching in English
Lesson Observation Sheet 2**

School:		Date:
Teacher:		Signature
Observer 1:		Signature
Observer 2:		Signature

Instructions
Please complete this observation sheet **after the lesson** and record **how often you observed the behavious**. Work with your co-observer and **record agreed responses**.

Observable behaviours / frequency of occurrence in the lesson	Never observed (0)	Rarely observed (1-2)	Occasionally observed (3-5)	Consistently observed (6+)
1. Students use higher order thinking skills (discussion etc.)				
2. Teacher relates lesson to previous classwork.				
3. Teacher explains lesson points clearly and accurately				
4. Teacher emphasises key points of the lesson				
5. Teacher uses a variety of materials				
6. Teacher uses chalkboard effectively				
7. Teacher shows enthusiasm for the subject				
8. Teacher knows students' names				

Observable behaviours / frequency of occurrence in the lesson	Never observed (0)	Rarely observed (1-2)	Occasionally observed (3-5)	Consistently observed (6+)
9. Students answer questions individually				
10. Teacher uses group work				
11. Teacher uses pair work				
12. Teacher moves around class to monitor				

■ Findings

Results from the classroom observations showed a limited range of pedagogical techniques used across the majority of teachers. In 97% of lessons there was no sign of group work, in 94% no pair work and in 95% no requirement for students to develop and use higher-order thinking skills. The analysis of the language aspects of the survey showed great limits on how English was employed in the classroom by both teachers and students. A minority of teachers prioritised English in their own language use while many used a majority of Nepali.

The data collected from teachers' self-evaluation questionnaires about their own level of English was alarming. Forty-two percent of the teachers said that their speaking and verbal understanding of English was 'not a very good standard' and 18% of the teachers from the EMI schools involved in the sample said that they were not confident to use English in their classrooms. Students appeared to be using either English or Nepali in responding to the teacher, perhaps in response to rules of classroom practice laid down. Using English in unplanned circumstances, however, was rarely observed.

Teachers' use of English and Nepali showed variation depending on the activity. Teachers' explanation of tasks and subject content in the classroom was recorded as an activity to a greater or lesser extent in 95% of all lessons, with 22% in English, 35% in Nepali and the highest score 43% in an English/Nepali mix.

Both teacher use of questions [here taken from Sheet 1 use of closed questions] and teacher feedback featured in 94% of lessons. The language for teacher questioning was a balance across the three main language categories - English 34%, Nepali 32%, English/Nepali 34%. However 'Teacher gives feedback' scored a much higher 64% in English which was the highest score for use of English found in the survey. However, the majority of the times this was limited to simple formulaic response statements like 'Correct', 'Good', 'Well done'.

Data collected from the baseline thus gave clear indications of the pedagogical aspects that needed to be included in the project and the language areas that needed to be considered.

Response to national policies and demands from teachers

All education initiatives in Nepal are governed by the School Sector Development Plan (2016 – 2023) which was recently signed off by the Government of Nepal and all education development partners. The main drivers for this plan have been the achievements, lessons learned and unfinished agenda from the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP 2009–2016), and the Education for All programme (2001–2015).

Although this plan encourages schools that have currently moved to English medium instruction to return to providing English only as a subject in order to ensure quality in basic education, the reality is completely different. According to NCED, the demand for training on EMI from teachers at both primary and secondary level is still on the rise.

We acknowledged that in certain cases there may be a lack of alignment between language policies adopted by ministries in the countries in which we work and the British Council's stated position on the use of mother tongues as the medium of instruction (as set out in the Juba declaration; in McIlwraith, 2013). Whilst not disregarding such policies, we agreed to work with NCED to help ameliorate the situation as best possible; however only after agreeing to certain mandatory criteria to be put into place, as explained below.

■ Selection of teachers taking the course

Although learner (and parental) aspiration for English was genuine, we did not want this to be realised at the expense of teaching and learning in local or familiar languages at lower grades. Therefore, to ensure that the course delivered impact, we agreed:

- Selection of teachers was not dependent solely on demands; language proficiency, school context and grades were considered seriously
- The course was open only to teachers teaching grade six or above
- The course was open only for teachers from schools who have changed into EMI in all grades (up to class 10/12) as this would facilitate a supportive environment to see a transition for both learners and teachers to a new medium of instruction. Within this group, schools that had implemented medium of instruction in mother tongue in lower grades and had gradually shifted to English in higher grades were given priority.

■ Language proficiency of teachers

Another challenge that is evident when trying to introduce EMI in basic education contexts where English is not the first language, is the limited English proficiency of teachers. This L2 proficiency gap, which is widely recognised to exist in Nepal, was seen as a major barrier to learner (and teacher) ability to successfully engage with the curriculum and achieve learning outcomes.

Although the best case scenario would be for teachers taking an EMI course to have basic proficiency in English, we realised this was largely not currently feasible in our context. We therefore supported teachers with a blended approach to learning, viz.:

- A general English proficiency component was included as part of the course. This included everyday greetings, classroom language and effective instructions in English.
- Self-access materials were included to help teachers improve their English proficiency. These were provided through a radio series which was accompanied by worksheets and a mobile application called *Teachapp*
- All manuals followed a language supportive approach

■ Quality assurance and training delivery

As mainstreaming the project into national training provision was our primary objective, the delivery model followed the government's in-service Teacher Professional Development (TPD) programme. This programme aims to:

- improve teacher's capacity and motivation by making all training needs based
- make a visible change in teaching performance by improving teacher capacity
- significantly improve students' academic performance by helping teachers teach effectively

As part of the TPD programme, in the first and second year of the project, teachers initially received 6-days of face-to-face training. This was followed by teachers doing an action research in class, equivalent to three days, and was concluded with one day of counselling. However, after the SSDP was rolled out, year three of the project had a slightly altered delivery model. Teachers received 10-days of face-to-face training and a blended learning package which was concluded with a written test followed by one or more classroom projects that needed to be reported in order to be fully credited for the training.

Figure 4 : Training formats

Year 1 and Year 2	• 6-days face-to-face • 3 days equivalent of action research • 1 day counselling • classroom observations for sample teachers in pilot districts
Year 3	• 10-days face-to-face • 5 days equivalent of classroom projects • developed in collaboration with NCED taskforce • blended learning approach with self-access content on mobile app and online content to improve both English language proficiency and pedagogical skills • language supportive approach • final day written test • classroom observations for sample teachers in pilot districts

We strongly believed that the face-to-face course in isolation was not enough to build the capacity of the teachers and make them confident to deliver lessons in English medium. Further post-training support and follow up activities were

important in order to see impact.

Various steps were identified to ensure that training had maximum impact and learning was transferred into the classrooms.

a. Comprehensive model of delivery

i) Manual: The 10-day face-to-face manual focused on a simple-to-complex structure. The initial materials focused on language development and classroom management skills and gradually moved on to content specific pedagogical skills using a 'Language Supportive Approach' (LSA, see Figure 5). Demonstration lessons from the trainers and micro-teaching sessions by teachers were a major focus of the manual.

Figure 5 : Examples of how LSA was embedded in NIITE 3

Lesson Planning	Lesson Delivery	Peer Support and Professional Development
• Evaluating textbook content and anticipating problems in most familiar language • Identifying gaps in own knowledge and finding ways to address it. • Adapting content and creating supplementary resources and activities in most familiar language	• Students generating ideas and consolidating key concepts in MT • Introducing, contextualizing and practicing key vocabulary – with translation • Students using MT for tasks using higher order thinking skills • Teacher feeding in useful language for students to express some ideas in English • Supporting learners' reading, writing, speaking and listening by providing clearly labelled, relevant support activities • Integrating regular pair and group work to support students in using English in a safe environment	• Working with other teachers to fill gaps in English knowledge and skills • Developing and sharing resources with other teachers

ii) Blended learning: Apart from face-to-face training, self-access materials were provided to teachers to develop their knowledge and skills to take

more responsibility for their own Continuing Professional Development. These materials, *TeachApp* and *Teach English Radio*, were not only mapped to the training manual but also included extra information and references to support their learning.

Figure 6 : Self-access materials

TeachApp	A comprehensive mobile application with free resources mapped to both the manual and British Council's Continuous Professional Development framework. This framework provides guidance for teachers to understand their own needs and stages of development and identify the right activity to develop themselves and meet their own challenges. These resources are both in Nepali and English.
Teach English Radio	This is a series of audio materials covering 12 different topics to enhance the pedagogical skills of teachers of all subjects. The material is bilingual and is accompanied by worksheets with pre-, while- and post-listening activities.

iii) Assessment: As NIITE was one among the many certified training programmes delivered through the TPD programme of NCED, a comprehensive assessment was conducted at the end of the training. The teachers were evaluated on various aspects which included attendance, participation during sessions, a written test on the 10th day of training and completion of school based activities which teachers conducted in their classrooms after the face-to-face component.

b. Quality of trainers

A three point criteria was agreed for selecting trainers. This included language proficiency at upper intermediate level, basic level understanding of how teachers learn and having a minimum of four years' experience in training teachers. This was done to ensure we had qualified trainers capable of delivering training and supporting teachers in post-training activities. Intensive training-of-trainer sessions were provided which included skills on observations and mentoring. Trainers were also observed during delivery and received feedback on their performance as a means of quality assurance.

c. Observation and mentoring of trainee teachers

This was conducted through a cadre of trained personnel capable of observing classroom teaching, giving constructive feedback and supporting teachers in their continuous professional development

Monitoring and Evaluation: End-line

Due to the numerous changes and adaptations the project went through in its final year, decisions were made to revise end-line tools in order to capture relevant data. A new data set D was added for teachers who received the training under the revised TPD model. This sample of 75 teachers was included to help us make a direct comparison between teaching behaviours across the data sets. Along with all of the quantitative data tools, we also included a qualitative component

to capture the strengths and weaknesses of the revised manuals and other interventions, as well as the enabling and constraining factors for teachers to apply new learning. Some of the revisions to the tools included:

- focussed interviews with teachers to gauge their understanding
- interviews and discussions with students to ask for their response to the new methods and techniques of lesson delivery
- interviews and focussed discussion with trainers to understand the challenges and opportunities they faced when delivering training and conducting post-training activities.

The end-line evaluation is due to begin after all direct project implementation is complete.

Progress to date

NIITE has made significant progress towards achieving its objectives over the past two and a half years, having delivered face-to-face training to as many as 9,850 teachers across the country as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4 : Numbers of teachers receiving training

Activity	Y1	Y2	Y3
Master trainers trained	125	0	50
Districts reached	75	5	68
Pilot districts followed	3	3	3
Teachers trained	7,500	450	Tentative 1,900*
Teachers observed after completion of training	90 (only from Pilot)	75 (only from Pilot)	75 (only from Pilot)

*data not yet received

Regular classroom observations, monitoring and discussion with teachers and trainers involved in the project throughout the last two and a half years have indicated an increased awareness and demonstration of communicative teaching in classrooms. A Grade 8 teacher from Jhapa said, *"The training focused on improving my own English as well as built my knowledge and skills of teaching my subject in English. I am now aware of various techniques to get my students involved in their learning process"*. The self-access materials have also been shown to support teachers' learning after face-to-face training. A Grade 6 teacher from Nawalparasi remarked:

> *I have learnt a lot of things after reading the articles in the app like classroom management ideas, setting up group work, writing my lesson plans and giving feedback to my students. The materials are localized and follow a bilingual approach. But the best part is that I don't need to be online to read the articles. It's very easy.*

Our government stakeholders have also appreciated the efforts of the project and realise the impact it has made so far. The District Education Officer, Surkhet, commented:

> *Teachers in Surkhet district have benefited a lot from NIITE training. This training has provided teachers better skills to teach in the classroom. The teaching technique has changed. Since this training is all about teaching in the most practical manner by introduces games and other activities, we have seen children more involved in the classroom. This training has made learning fun by involving students directly with their teachers and has strengthened teacher-students relationship.*

Conclusion

Since the introduction of the project in 2014, NIITE has gone through numerous adaptations and revisions in light of policy changes, demands from teachers, growing complexities around language and education and the British Council's global stance on EMI. Nevertheless, staying true to the essence of the project, every change aimed to strengthen the national in-service teacher training programme and build on the robust monitoring and evaluation tools to ensure sustainability and impact. Over the two and half years, the project has reinforced the partnership between NCED and the British Council and has enhanced the technical capacity of the state teacher training wing.

With federalism and local governments planned for Nepal and with the changing contexts in the education system, the way forward for language and education policy and practice seems uncertain. A language commission has been formed to provide guidance to federal structures in developing language policies across all public spheres, schools and colleges being one of them. However, many questions remain unanswered at the moment. Among these, key questions are:

- What exactly is the right approach to address demands from teachers which might not necessarily be in line with research evidence but is strongly backed by parental pressure?
- What is the best method of addressing languages in education – MT, MTB-MLE, EMI, LSA – and how easy or difficult is it for a diverse country like Nepal with over 123 languages to implement any of these methods?
- Is it fair to ignore the interests of parents wishing to provide their children with an education in EMI?
- How can we support schools transitioning from a Nepali medium approach to EMI?

Amidst debates and discussions around the best approach to education – Mother Tongue based (MT), Mother Tongue Based Multi Lingual Education (MTB-MLE), EMI, Content Language and Integrated learning (CLIL) and numerous others – the NITTE end-line data seems crucial to show how teachers respond to the kind of input that the project has given over the years. It is hoped that this data will also show us the way forward and assist us in deciding on future interventions to help answer one or more of our unanswered questions.

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About the author

Vaishali Pradhan is Programmes Manager – English for British Council, managing the delivery and coordination of all English projects in Nepal. She has worked in the field of education for the past eight years with a focus on training teacher educators, primary and secondary level teachers and school leaders on 21st century skills, communicative teaching techniques and action research. Her previous experiences include working with organizations like the Norwegian Refugee Council and the United Nations. She has a Masters in Mass Communications and Journalism, a Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA) and an ongoing DELTA.

English is gaining in importance in Nepal as a whole and in education in particular, as in so many countries around the world where it is seen as a key driver for socio-economic advancement for individuals as well as national economies. The extent to which this is a perception or a reality is contested but there is no doubt that English functions as an aspirational language for many people in Nepal. In recent years there has been an expansion in English-medium education amongst government (community) schools, partly as a response to the perceived successes of students in institutional (private) schools, which have for long used English as a medium of instruction, in national examinations and in gaining access to higher education. There has, however, been a lack of systematic research into how English is being taught and learned in schools across Nepal, whether as a medium of instruction or as a subject.

This publication, which is the first of its kind to bring together papers investigating key issues in English language teaching in Nepal, is therefore timely and important. It encompasses international perspectives on English as a medium of instruction, examination reform and teacher development through action research which offer interesting insights for practice in Nepal, as well as research and case studies investigating issues as diverse as methods in use in schools, socio-cultural characteristics of English teachers, reflective writing in secondary schools and teaching in under-resourced environments. The British Council, the editor and the chapter authors hope that readers will find in this volume much interesting information about the current state of English language teaching in Nepal as well as insights into how it may be improved and made more relevant for learners in schools across the country.