

## Navigating linguistic diversity: Implementing English medium instruction in Nepal's community schools

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This study explores the multifaceted experiences and perspectives of teachers, students, and parents regarding the implementation of English medium instruction (EMI) in community schools in Nepal. Utilising a qualitative case study research design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders to uncover the challenges and benefits associated with EMI. The findings reveal a range of strategies employed by teachers to enhance EMI effectiveness, including the use of visual aids and bilingual resources, while highlighting significant socio-economic disparities in access and outcomes. My study also underscores the crucial role of teacher preparedness and parental involvement in fostering successful EMI environments. Additionally, the research addresses the cultural implications of EMI, particularly the tension between promoting English proficiency and preserving local languages and cultural identities. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding EMI in developing contexts and offer valuable recommendations for policymakers and educators aiming to optimise educational practices.

### Introduction

English is taken as a world *lingua-franca* in a multilingual world. It has become a global language of education, science and technology, commerce, law and communication, is also considered as the language of hope, progress, and opportunities for young generation as present world (Crystal, 2003; Spolsky, 2012; Mukminatieu, 2012). The extensive spread of English throughout the world has an impact in multilingual countries, especially Southeast Asian countries like India, Srilanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, etc., where English is not the native language. With or without developing determined policy or due to grassroots' pressure, these countries have shifted classroom instruction of teaching non-English subjects to English, which is challenging for them (Kirkpatrick, 2017; Paudel, 2017, Paudel, 2021). Use of English as a medium of instruction has created a debate among academicians, parents, teachers and students.

English as a medium of instruction (EMI) is generally a classroom language used by the teachers to teach the subjects like social studies, science, mathematics, moral education, economics, etc., in regions or countries where the majority of the population does not speak English as their first language (Dearden, 2014). According to Pérez Gutiérrez & Gutiérrez Baffil, (2020), EMI involves “teaching a subject using the medium of the English language, but where there are no explicit language learning aims and where English is not the national language” (p. 1). These definitions highlight that EMI refers to teaching non-English subjects in English, especially in countries where English is not the native language.

Globally, EMI is adopted in diverse contexts, from European universities driven by the Bologna Process to Asian countries like China, Japan and Nepal, aiming for global competitiveness (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014; Galloway et al., 2017). Its significance may lie in enhancing English proficiency and providing access to global educational and professional opportunities. There are many arguments on why educational institutions have shifted their medium of instruction to English. Research has shown that EMI has become widespread in non-English speaking countries' classrooms to encourage students to get higher levels of knowledge, obtain English language proficiency, access better job opportunities in global markets, and increase professionalism in academic research, teaching materials and innovative pedagogical practices (Dearden, 2018; Kirkpatrick, 2017; Rose et al., 2020). Similarly, Macaro (2018) argued that effective EMI implementation can boost students' language skills and academic performance. EMI could enhance higher education students' English language proficiency (Floris, 2014; Simbolon, 2018). In Kim's study (Kim, 2014) the participant students took EMI positively for their motivation, creating a conducive learning environment and using supplementary materials. Similarly, Ozer (2020) and Anaam and Kerouad (2024) found that many lecturers and teachers appreciated EMI for improving language proficiency and developing bilingual expertise, though some struggled with extra lesson planning time and a lack of training. Despite these challenges, EMI was consistently used, underscoring the need for better institutional support, training, and compensation.

However, some research concedes that due to insufficient language competence, both teachers and students have been facing several problems in their teaching and learning even if they accepted EMI into their classes (AlBakri, 2017; Paudel, 2017; Paudel, 2021). In the same vein, Chen and Wright (2020) argued that EMI classes were not problem centred with a focus on activating new learning and knowledge presentation through demonstration. Macaro and Akincioglu (2018) claimed that teachers themselves do not have sufficient English language competency, so they cannot give students as much input and linguistic feedback as required. Similar to them, some researchers have stated that students do not get proper, adequate and sufficient support from their teacher due to poor English proficiency, work overloads and lack of proper knowledge for constructing materials for teaching in English (Byun et al., 2011; Wu, 2006; Floris, 2014; Kim, 2014; Paudel, 2021). Similar to this, Annam and Kerouad (2024) claimed that due to a lack of prior EMI teaching experience and training, adopting EMI is difficult for teachers and they took it as burden. Likewise, Marudadorai et al. (2023) and Rahman et al. (2021) argued that while novice teachers and lecturers faced challenges in EMI adoption, support systems and training were crucial. Marudadorai et al. highlighted the need for professional development to ease the struggles of novice teachers in Malaysian international schools, while Rahman et al. (2021) noted that Malaysia's ambition to become a higher education hub positively influenced lecturers' attitudes, fostering support for students' challenges in EMI.

## Global practices and EMI in Nepal

The historical development of English medium instruction (EMI) varies across regions, reflecting local educational goals and sociopolitical contexts. In Europe, the Bologna Process in the late 1990s aimed to create a cohesive European Higher Education Area, leading to the proliferation of English-taught programs, especially at the graduate level, to attract international students and enhance cross-border academic collaboration (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). In Asia, countries such as Nepal, China, and Japan have adopted EMI more recently to internationalise their higher education systems and improve global competitiveness. China has significantly increased EMI programs at universities due to the government's emphasis on English as a global lingua franca (Galloway et al., 2017). Japan uses EMI to foster global talent and improve English proficiency, aligning with national internationalisation policies (Brown, 2014). India implemented the *three language formula* (TLF), recommending the use of a regional language or mother tongue, Hindi, and/or English, along with an additional modern Indian language in all schools (Mohanty, 2019). In South Korea, EMI aims to create a globalised workforce, with many universities offering English-taught programs to prepare students for international careers (Byun et al., 2011). European countries like the Netherlands and Sweden have a high prevalence of EMI programs, particularly at the masters level, where English is often the primary language of instruction (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). In Bhutan, Wangdi and Dhendup (2024) claimed that Bhutanese teachers supported ELF in Bhutanese classrooms but were concerned about its effect on test scores, suggesting ELF-informed materials are needed. Chaiyasat and Intakaew (2023) showed that the CLT approach which uses English along with Thai, reduced classroom silence among Thai EFL students, emphasising cultural and pedagogical factors.

In Nepal, a multilingual country where National Population Census (2021) recorded 124 languages spoken and 142 ethnic groups, EMI is increasingly integrated into school education with the aim of improving English proficiency and educational standards. In the Nepali classroom context, EMI presents unique challenges and opportunities. Teachers often navigate a complex linguistic landscape where students speak multiple native languages, requiring innovative instructional strategies to ensure comprehension and engagement (MoE, 2016). However, reflecting the growing recognition of English as a key to economic and academic advancement, EMI has become the preferred option for community schools, while institutional schools have consistently used English as the medium of instruction (Sah, 2015; Sah & Li, 2018). Community schools are run by the government using its funds, while institutional schools are run by private owners using their own funds. According to the National Curriculum Framework (MoE, 2007, p. 34; MoEST, n.d.; MoE, 2016), school-level education can be conducted in Nepali, English, or both. However, in the initial stage of elementary education (Grades 1-3), instruction is generally provided in the mother tongue. The Ministry of Education's new MoI Roadmap (MoE, 2014) suggested the following: for Grades 1 to 3, the medium of instruction (MoI) should be the mother tongue (MT); from Grade 4 onwards, MT should be taught as a subject with Nepali as the MoI; for Grades 6 to 8, Nepali should be the MoI for non-

technical subjects, while EMI should be used for mathematics, science, and computer studies; and for Grades 9 to 12, EMI should be used for all subjects (MoE, 2016).

Following the adoption of Nepal's new Constitution in 2015, many local governments have opted to transition their formerly Nepali-medium schools to EMI, aiming to compete with private schools (Sah & Li, 2018). According to Sah (2022), this shift is influenced by the allure of economic globalisation in Nepal. Khatri (2016) stated that EMI can be a boon to improve students' English proficiency, providing them maximum exposure and it also opens the doors for the students in both local and global markets. However, Shah (2015) asserts that EMI cannot be successful if implemented without any policy and in a hurry. Similarly, Paudel (2017) found that implementing EMI in diverse context classrooms of Nepal is difficult because of the lack of proper preparation and training for the teachers. Paudel's (2021) research concluded that the local languages are in an extinction phase due to extensive use of English and its entry even in medium of instruction. Shah and Karki (2020) argued that although the aim of EMI in Nepal was to achieve English language proficiency and quality education, it has created a comprehension crisis and inequality in knowledge for minority students due to insufficient English language proficiency and skills of both teachers and students. Khatri and Regmi (2022) claimed that in the public schools of Nepal EMI practice posed problems both for teachers and students and remained just as a slogan, insufficient for effective student participation in classroom activities. Baral (2015) also found that EMI encourages memorisation without understanding rather than developing creativity and critical thinking ability. In EFL contexts, where teachers do not have sufficient English language proficiency, adopting a foreign language in classroom instruction may decrease students' academic performance rather than making them academically sound (Sah & Li, 2018; Giri, 2011).

As an educator, I have observed that English medium instruction (EMI) in Nepal's community schools is whimsical due to a lack of specific government policies and inadequate teacher training. Like my experiences, Marsh (2006) noted that many international institutions expressed interest in adopting English as the main language of instruction between 1995 and 2005. Institutional schools in Nepal adopted English for all subjects except Nepali, resulting in good student learning outcomes. Parents view English as a measure of quality education, leading to increased enrollment in institutional schools. To satisfy parents and boost enrollment, community schools began shifting to EMI. Macaro (2018) likened the unstoppable momentum of EMI to a train that has already departed the station.

These trends suggest that EMI is spreading in developing countries with a belief in modernisation, advancement, increased English proficiency, socioeconomic enhancement, and quality education. Recently, the Nepal government decided to teach social studies and moral education in Nepali in both community and institutional schools. Current research highlights EMI's benefits, such as increased English proficiency and global competitiveness, and challenges like inadequate teacher preparation and marginalisation of local languages. However, specific insights into the experiences of students in Nepal's rapidly implementing EMI without comprehensive policies or adequate teacher training

are lacking. My study aims to fill this gap by examining the effects of EMI on student learning outcomes and educational quality in Nepal. It will provide valuable data to inform policy decisions and instructional strategies, ensuring EMI advances education without compromising linguistic and cultural diversity.

## **Theoretical perspectives**

The implementation of EMI is grounded in several theoretical perspectives related to language acquisition, bilingual education, and cognitive benefits. One key theory is Stephen Krashen's input hypothesis, which posits that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input that is slightly above their current proficiency level (Krashen, 1985). In EMI settings, students are immersed in English, which provides abundant opportunities for receiving and processing comprehensible input, thereby facilitating language acquisition. Another important theoretical framework is Cummins' (1979) distinction between basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). Cummins (1979) argued that while BICS involves everyday conversational language skills, CALP is essential for academic success. EMI aims to develop both BICS and CALP by immersing students in an English-speaking academic environment, which enhances their ability to use English for both social interaction and academic purposes. The cognitive benefits of EMI are also supported by research on bilingual education. Studies suggest that bilingualism and multilingualism can lead to improved cognitive flexibility, problem-solving skills, and metalinguistic awareness (Bialystok, 2001). In EMI contexts, students can develop these cognitive advantages as they navigate and learn content in a second language, which can enhance their overall cognitive development and academic performance. Thus, all these theoretical perspectives are considered throughout this study.

## **Research design**

The research design used in this study was a qualitative case study. English medium instruction (EMI) in community schools of Nepal was taken as a case. I used a case study design with the aim of providing rich, contextualised insights into the lived experiences of students, teachers and parents. Case study can be a useful tool for exploring in-depth information on the particular case within specific situation (Yin, 2014). Given the shift to EMI in the context of recent phenomena, this case study allows in-depth exploration of how this particular policy is perceived, experienced and enacted in a real world situation (Stake, 1995). Case study can be an effective design to explore the role of EMI in multilingual context of Nepal from a tripartite perspective.

## **The participants**

The participants (N=15) in this case study were the students, teachers and parents (five of each) who are perceived as the three main stakeholders in education. They were selected from five community schools (three from each school, i.e., one teacher, one student and one parent) of Nepal, which had implemented EMI. Demographic information for the participants is presented in Appendix A. This selection was justified for several reasons.

Firstly, this approach allowed for a focused and in-depth exploration of the impact of EMI across a diverse set of educational contexts, ensuring comprehensive coverage of varying perspectives and experiences. Secondly, by including multiple schools, the study could capture the depth and complexities of EMI implementation in different settings, facilitating comparative analysis and the identification of common themes or unique challenges. Thirdly, the chosen number of participants per school struck a balance between achieving data saturation and maintaining manageable data collection and analysis processes within the study's timeframe and resource constraints.

### **Research tools**

For this study on EMI in Nepal's community schools, interviews served as crucial research tools to gather comprehensive data on the experiences and perceptions of participants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with students, teachers, and parents, to elicit detailed narratives and insights into their experiences with EMI implementation. According to Merriam (2009), interviews are essential for exploring participants' perspectives and understanding their lived experiences in educational settings. The interviews were conducted and recorded in Nepali language. The semi structured interview questions are given in Appendix B.

### **Data collection and analysis**

The semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and in depth analysis. Concurrently, classroom observations were conducted to observe teaching practices, student interactions, and the overall learning environment under EMI. For the collected data, thematic analysis was used following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines, to identify recurring themes and patterns across interviews and observations. The guidelines incorporated familiarisation with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report. By triangulating data from interviews and observations, this study provided a comprehensive understanding of the role of EMI on teaching and learning in Nepal's community schools, contributing valuable insights to educational policy and practice.

### **Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations in this study on EMI in Nepal's community schools were paramount. Participants, including students, teachers, and parents, were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits before obtaining their voluntary informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity was strictly maintained throughout data collection, storage, and dissemination. Special care was taken to ensure that participants were not influenced to participate, and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Additionally, ethical guidelines regarding respect for cultural sensitivities and the protection of vulnerable groups, particularly minors, were rigorously upheld.

## **Ensuring quality standard**

To ensure the quality standard in this study, rigorous methodological procedures, including clear research objectives, appropriate selection of participants and schools, and systematic data collection through interviews and observations, were implemented to capture diverse perspectives comprehensively. Triangulation of data sources; interviews and observations enhanced the validity and reliability of the research findings. Additionally, peer debriefing and member checking were employed to validate interpretations and enhance trustworthiness.

## **Results**

The shift from conventional Nepali medium to English medium in community schools of Nepal marks a significant departure in teaching and learning process. The shift intended to enhance English language proficiency and students accessing higher education and global opportunities. However, such a shift in medium of instruction presented a multitude of challenges for teachers, students and parents, basically for navigating linguistic and cultural diversities and ensuring standard educational outcomes. This section presents teachers', students' and parents lived experiences and practices for navigating and negotiating the evolving landscape of EMI in Nepal's school education under five different themes:

- Navigating linguistic landscapes: Challenges and strategies in EMI classrooms;
- EMI and educational equity: Access, opportunity, and outcomes;
- Teacher preparedness and pedagogical practices in EMI;
- Students' voices: Experiences and perceptions of learning through EMI;
- Parental perspectives: Aspirations and concerns about EMI;

### **Navigating linguistic landscapes: Challenges and strategies in EMI classrooms**

The shift of medium of instruction to English in the multilingual classroom context of the community schools of Nepal created some significant challenges for all the stakeholders, specifically, teachers, students and parents. Goma, a science teacher, highlighted the difficulty of ensuring students comprehended complex scientific terminology in English, given their diverse linguistic backgrounds:

One of the biggest challenges I face is ensuring that students understand the scientific terminologies in English. Many students come from different linguistic backgrounds, who have no English at home, and are not proficient in English. To reduce this problem, I often use visual aids and real-life examples to explain concepts. I also encourage peer discussions in their native languages before we discuss as a class in English because I have no other option than engaging them in discussion in their native language. This way, they can build a basic understanding of the concepts. (Goma)

Similarly, Lata, a social studies teacher, started his lessons with a brief summary in Nepali and gradually shifted to English, employing bilingual resources and providing vocabulary lists to help students' comprehension. He shared his experiences as:

Shifting to EMI has been difficult for both the students and me. Some students, especially those who speak local languages at home struggle for comprehending my lectures in English. To facilitate them, I start my lessons with a brief summary in Nepali and then gradually shift to English. I encourage the students to use bilingual dictionaries and other bilingual resources and so do I. Before teaching lesson, I provide them with vocabulary lists and their Nepali equivalent because I myself feel difficult to explain all the concepts in English. (Lata)

Students also shared their struggles and the ways of dealing with the situation. Ramesh, a Grade 8 student, initially felt lost in his science classes due to difficult terms in English. He now uses a dictionary application at home and seeks help from friends and teachers during break time discussing the material in Nepali. He shared his experiences and practices:

When I was exposed to English language instruction, it was really hard to understand what the teachers were saying in English. I felt lost in science class because the terms were so difficult for me to understand. I used to rote [learn] the words and sentences without understanding. But now I feel a bit comfort due to use of dictionary application at home and bilingual dictionary at school. (Ramesh)

Sita, a Grade 10 student, appreciated the future opportunities EMI might bring, but she was also obliged to learn in Nepali language for making her learning easier. Although it is difficult to learn, she is proud of learning in English. She shared, "I like learning in English because it makes me feel like I'm preparing for the future".

Parents expressed both support for and concerns about EMI. Ramji, one of the parents of the student in Grade 8 believed EMI will offer his children better opportunities, but he noticed their struggles with homework. To support them, he enrolled his children in extra English classes and encouraged them to watch English educational programs. Similarly another parent, Kamala, stated:

When my daughter's school shifted to EMI, she struggled greatly. She couldn't understand the lessons, so she would frequently become irritated and return home early. We were too preoccupied with it. In an effort to encourage and inspire her to learn, we have been holding one-hour English-language family reading sessions after supper. During these sessions, we read children's books together and have bilingual discussions in Nepali and English. My daughter seems to be benefiting greatly from this.

Concerning the administrative support in implementing EMI, one of the teachers, Karan, a health and physical teacher stated:

Implementing EMI in our school has been a great challenge. The school has conducted only a day training for the teachers when we regularly complained about our difficulties.



No other extra supports and facilities are given to us. Still we are struggling on EMI.  
(Karan)

These voices illustrate the diverse challenges and strategies employed by teachers, students, and parents, in navigating the linguistic landscapes of EMI classrooms, highlighting both the obstacles and the adaptive measures taken to facilitate learning.

### **EMI and educational equity: Access, opportunity, and outcomes**

In Nepal's community schools, the effects of EMI on educational equity showed both opportunities and disparities in results and access. A maths teacher named Prajwal expressed his worries on the injustices brought forth by EMI as:

While EMI is meant to provide opportunities for all students, in practice it frequently causes the gap between those who speak English well and those who don't. Students from affluent families manage better since they have better resources and can hire private tutors. But individuals from lower-class backgrounds, who may not even speak English at home, suffer a great deal. This discrepancy indicates that not every student is receiving equal learning chances, which is concerning. (Prajwal)

Parents also observed the unequal impacts of EMI. Subina, a parent, shared her worries about her child's struggle with EMI due to their lack of English proficiency:

My son is a bright student, but since the school switched to EMI, he's been struggling more than ever. We don't speak much English at home, and we can't afford extra tutoring. It's heartbreaking to see him fall behind his classmates just because he's not as good at English. This shift to EMI feels like it's benefiting some students while leaving others behind. (Subina)

Students themselves recognise the differences in how EMI affects their learning. Aashish, a Grade 9 student, described his experience with the challenges and benefits of EMI:

At first, I found EMI really hard because I wasn't used to learning everything in English. My parents don't speak English, so I couldn't get help at home. But some of my friends who have been to English medium schools before or who have tutors seem to do much better. I think EMI could be good for everyone if we had more support, like extra classes or resources in both languages. (Aashish)

Goma, a teacher, also acknowledged the equity issues, emphasising the school's efforts to level the playing field:

We recognise that EMI can create disparities, so we've been trying to address this by providing additional support. We've set up remedial classes for students who are struggling and offer resources in both English and Nepali to help bridge the gap. Our aim is to ensure that all students have equal access to learning opportunities, regardless of their background. (Goma)

Research has shown that while EMI can potentially enhance students' English proficiency and open up global opportunities, it also poses significant challenges to educational equity. Madan, an educational researcher and teacher, noted:

The implementation of EMI in Nepalese schools is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it can provide students with valuable language skills and access to global knowledge. On the other hand, it risks marginalising those who are less proficient in English, exacerbating existing inequalities. Ensuring that EMI supports all students equitably requires careful planning, adequate resources, and continuous assessment of its impacts. (Madan)

These perspectives highlight the complex dynamics of EMI in community schools, where the promise of greater opportunities must be balanced against the reality of existing inequities. Efforts to provide additional support and resources are crucial in ensuring that EMI contributes to educational equity rather than hindering it.

### **Teacher preparedness and pedagogical practices in EMI**

The implementation of EMI in Nepal's community schools has highlighted varying levels of teacher preparedness and diverse pedagogical practices.

Goma, an experienced science teacher, shared:

Switching to EMI was a big change for me. Initially, I felt overwhelmed because my training was primarily in Nepali. To cope, I started using more visual aids and hands-on experiments. I also attend workshops and online courses to improve my English skills and learn new teaching techniques. However, more comprehensive professional development programs for EMI would be beneficial. (Goma)

Prajwal, a maths teacher, expressed:

As a maths teacher, I naturally feel more comfortable with EMI. However, my colleagues, especially those teaching mathematics and social studies, struggle. They often revert to Nepali when students aren't understanding, which defeats the purpose of EMI. There's a need for more targeted training and resources to help all teachers feel prepared and confident. (Prajwal)

Lata, a social studies teacher, emphasised:

I was hired recently and found myself in an EMI environment. While my English is good, teaching complex historical concepts in English is challenging. I've been relying on lesson plans from colleagues and online resources. Continuous professional development and mentoring from experienced EMI teachers are needed.

From the students' perspective, the varying preparedness of teachers is evident. Anjali, a Grade 10 student, described her mixed experiences with EMI:

Some of our teachers are really good at explaining things in English, and they make the lessons interesting and easy to understand. But others just read from the textbook, and it's hard to follow. I wish all teachers could get the same training because it makes a big difference in how we learn. (*Anjali*)

Regarding the use of EMI in teaching social studies, Anjali's experience is similar to teacher Madan as both of them experienced that social studies teachers just recite the book in English rather than the explanation of the texts. This shows that EMI is challenging for social studies teachers.

Parents, too, noticed the discrepancies in teacher preparedness. Giriraj, a parent, shared his observations:

I've seen a big difference in how teachers handle EMI. My daughter's English teacher is excellent, but her mathematics teacher struggles with the language, which affects my daughter's understanding of the subject. I believe investing in teacher training is crucial to make EMI successful. (*Giriraj*)

Educational researcher as well as teacher, Mr Madan emphasised the importance of systematic and sustained professional development, saying

I enjoy English and science classes where teachers explain well. In social studies, teachers just read from the book, making it hard to understand. (Madan)

These voices underscore the need for robust and continuous professional development to support teachers in effectively delivering EMI. While some teachers are adapting well and using innovative strategies, there is a clear and pressing need for more comprehensive training programs to ensure all teachers are equally prepared and capable of providing high-quality education through EMI.

### **Student voices: Experiences and perceptions of learning through EMI**

The implementation of EMI in Nepal's community schools has had a profound impact on students' learning experiences and perceptions. Students have varied responses to this shift, revealing both enthusiasm and challenges. Sita, a Grade 10 student, shared her excitement about learning in English:

Learning in English makes me feel more connected to the world. I like that I can understand and use the same language as people in other countries. It motivates me to study harder because I know it's important for my future. I dream of studying abroad one day, and being proficient in English will help me achieve that. (Sita)

However, not all students share the same level of enthusiasm. Ramesh, a Grade 8 student, expressed his struggles with the new medium of instruction:

At first, I was excited about learning in English, but it quickly became very hard. I don't always understand the lessons, and I can't keep up with the pace. My parents don't speak

English, so they can't help me with my homework. Sometimes, I feel left behind and frustrated. (Ramesh)

Students also pointed out the variations in teaching effectiveness in EMI. Nisha, a Grade 9 student, highlighted the differences in how subjects are taught,

In subjects like English and science, where teachers explain well in English, I enjoy the classes and learn a lot. But in social studies, some teachers just read from the book, that's hard to follow. (Nisha)

Peer interactions and group work have also been affected by EMI. Anjali, a Grade 10 student, noted the challenges and benefits of group activities:

Group work has become more challenging because not all of us are equally good at English. Sometimes, it's hard to communicate and share ideas. But at the same time, it forces us to practise speaking and listening in English, which is helping me improve my language skills. (Anjali)

The pressure to perform well in an EMI environment has added stress for many students. Aashish a Grade 9 student, shared her concerns:

There is a lot of pressure to do well in EMI classes because everyone knows that English is important for our future. I feel anxious sometimes because I don't want to make mistakes or look foolish in front of my classmates. It's stressful, but I also know it's pushing me to learn more. (Aashish)

Despite the challenges, some students appreciated the long-term benefits of EMI. Sita, a Grade 10 student, reflected on her overall experience:

Even though learning in English is tough, I can see the benefits. My English has improved a lot, and I'm more confident in speaking and writing. I think EMI is preparing us better for higher education and future job opportunities. It's not easy, but it's worth it. (Sita)

Teachers have also observed changes in student engagement and participation. Karan, a science teacher, commented on how EMI has influenced student motivation:

I've noticed that students are more motivated to learn because they understand the importance of English. However, the challenge is to ensure that this motivation is maintained despite the difficulties they face. We need to support them continuously and make learning as engaging and accessible as possible. (Karan)

These student voices highlight a complex landscape of experiences and perceptions regarding EMI. While there is a recognition of the potential benefits, the challenges are significant and multifaceted. Ensuring that students are supported through effective teaching strategies, additional resources, and emotional encouragement is crucial for the success of EMI in enhancing both language proficiency and overall educational outcomes.

**Parental perspectives: Aspirations and concerns about EMI**

The shift to EMI in Nepal's community schools has elicited mixed reactions from parents. They see it as a pathway to greater opportunities but also have significant concerns. Giriraj, a father of two, said,

I want my children to have the best opportunities in life. Learning in English opens many doors, whether for higher education or good jobs, both here and abroad. (Giriraj)

Similarly, Shamana, a mother of a Grade 9 student, voiced her worries,

I believe that English is important for my daughter's future. However, I worry because she struggles with the language. She often comes home frustrated, and I can't always help her because my English isn't strong either. (Shamana)

In the same vein, Ramji, whose son is in Grade 8, noted disparities in teacher preparedness,

Some teachers are excellent and really help the children understand their subjects in English. But others are not as confident, and it shows in the children's performance. (Ramji)

Kamala, a mother of a Grade 7 student, discussed the financial burden,

I had to invest in extra tutoring for my son because he wasn't coping well with EMI. It's an added expense, but necessary. Not all families can afford this. (Kamala)

Ramji also emphasised cultural concerns,

While I understand the need for English, I don't want my children to forget our mother tongue and culture. There needs to be a balance. (Ramji)

Subina pointed out the need for better communication from schools,

The school needs to communicate better about what EMI entails and how they are supporting the students and teachers. (Subina)

Despite these concerns, parents like Kamala remained hopeful,

I see the potential of EMI in providing our children with a competitive edge. Yes, there are challenges, but with proper support and continuous improvement, I believe it can be very beneficial. (Kamala)

These parental perspectives highlight high aspirations and significant concerns, emphasising the need for better teacher preparedness, financial support, cultural balance, and clear communication from schools to ensure EMI provides equitable and high-quality education for all students.

## Discussion

The transition of Nepal's community schools to EMI presents a complex environment with numerous challenges. Parents, teachers, and students have highlighted these difficulties, particularly in ensuring comprehension among students from varied linguistic backgrounds. Educators like Goma and Lata employ creative tactics such as visual aids, multilingual resources, and promoting peer discussions in native tongues to bridge the linguistic divide, emphasising the importance of a bilingual strategy to enhance comprehension and participation in EMI classrooms. Research has shown that EMI in non-English speaking countries can improve students' knowledge, English proficiency, job opportunities, academic professionalism, and innovative pedagogical practices (Kirkpatrick, 2017; Liu, 2017; Rose et al., 2020; Macaro, 2018; Macaro et al., 2019); Floris, 2014; Simbolon, 2018; Kim et al., 2017; Khati, 2016). Teachers, despite their difficulties, have accepted EMI positively and supported their students by explaining concepts in Nepali before classroom instruction (Dearden, 2018; Floris, 2014; Simbolon, 2016).

However, EMI implementation also reveals significant disparities in access and educational outcomes. Students from affluent backgrounds benefit more from EMI due to better resources and private tutoring, while less privileged students struggle, widening the gap between proficient and non-proficient English speakers. The experiences of students like Aashish and parents like Subina underscore the need for additional resources and remedial classes to ensure equitable learning opportunities. Teacher preparedness is another critical factor influencing EMI's success. While some teachers feel confident, others struggle with the transition, as found in similar contexts like Indonesia and Turkey (Coleman, 2006; Drljača Margić & Vodopija-Krstanović, 2018; Simbolon, 2016). The reliance on visual aids, bilingual resources, and continuous professional development are essential strategies, but comprehensive and ongoing training programs are necessary to equip all teachers effectively.

Students' experiences with EMI vary widely. Some, like Sita, appreciate the long-term benefits and global opportunities associated with learning in English, while others, like Ramesh and Aashish, struggle with comprehension and increased stress. Research findings indicate that insufficient language competence among both teachers and students has led to numerous challenges (Albakri, 2017; Paudel, 2017, 2021; Chen & Wright, 2020; Macaro & Akincioglu, 2018; Byun et al., 2011; Wu, 2006; Floris, 2014; Kim et al., 2017). This shift towards EMI, driven by the allure of economic globalisation, faces difficulties due to a lack of proper policy, preparation, and training for teachers (Shah, 2015, 2020; Paudel, 2017, 2021). The present study indicates a significant improvement in teachers' preparedness for EMI in Nepal compared to Paudel's studies from 2017 and 2021. However, social studies teachers still face challenges due to the subject's multidisciplinary nature, necessitating targeted professional development and bilingual resources to enhance effective EMI implementation and ensure student comprehension.

Parental perspectives on EMI reflect a blend of high aspirations and significant concerns. They recognise the importance of English for future opportunities but highlight the

challenges their children face. Successful EMI implementation requires collaboration between parents, teachers, and schools to ensure equitable benefits for all students. The findings align with Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis, indicating that more comprehensible input leads to better learning outcomes. Overall, while EMI aims to enhance English proficiency and education quality, challenges remain in achieving these goals fully due to resource, training, and preparedness issues.

The implementation of EMI in Nepal's community schools offers potential global opportunities while posing significant challenges. Effective bilingual pedagogical practices, targeted support to address educational inequities, comprehensive teacher training, supportive learning environments, and collaborative efforts are crucial for ensuring that EMI enhances English proficiency and provides equitable, high-quality education for all students in Nepal. Addressing these multifaceted challenges is essential for the successful realisation of EMI's potential benefits.

## **Conclusion and implications**

The transition to EMI in Nepal's community schools presents a complex landscape with both significant opportunities and formidable challenges. Teachers, students, and parents have voiced their experiences, highlighting the multifaceted nature of this educational shift. The collective insights underscore the need for effective teaching strategies, additional resources, comprehensive teacher training, and collaborative efforts among all stakeholders to ensure that EMI enhances English proficiency and provides equitable, high-quality education for all students in Nepal.

This study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small, limiting the generalisability of the findings to the broader population of community schools in Nepal. Additionally, the research relied heavily on qualitative data, which, while rich in detail, may not capture the full extent of the issues faced across different regions and demographics. The study also did not account for long-term outcomes of EMI implementation, as the data reflects experiences and perceptions at a specific point in time, infrastructures and policies. Despite its limitations, this study has several implications for educational policy and practice.

Firstly, it underscores the need for comprehensive teacher training programs tailored to EMI, ensuring that teachers are well-prepared to deliver effective instruction in English. This training should include ongoing professional development and practical teaching resources. Secondly, the study highlights the importance of providing additional support for students, particularly those from less privileged backgrounds, to mitigate disparities in educational outcomes. Remedial classes and bilingual resources are essential to ensure equitable learning opportunities. Thirdly, there is a clear need for effective communication and collaboration between schools and parents, fostering a supportive environment for students navigating EMI. Schools should regularly update parents on EMI practices and involve them in the educational process.

The findings emphasise the importance of balancing EMI with the preservation of local languages and cultures, ensuring that students remain connected to their heritage while gaining proficiency in English. Addressing these multifaceted challenges is crucial for realising the potential benefits of EMI and providing high-quality education for all students in Nepal.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Demographic information of the participants

Teacher pseudonym	Age	Gender	School (pseudonym)	Years of teaching experience	Teaching subject	Qualification
Goma	45	Female	School 1	15	Science	BSc
Lata	54	Female	School 2	20	Social Studies	MA, BEd
Karan	38	Male	School 3	8	Health, Physical and Population	MEd
Prajwal	41	Male	School 4	13	Mathematics	MEd
Madan	47	Male	School 5	17	Researcher and Computer teacher	MPhil

  

Student pseudonym	Age	Gender	School	Class
Ramesh	13	Male	School 1	8
Sita	16	Female	School 2	10
Aashish	15	Male	School 3	9
Anjali	17	Female	School 4	10
Nisha	16	Female	School 5	9

  

Parent pseudonym	Age	Gender	Related school	Child in class
Ramji	43	Male	School 1	10
Kamala	39	Female	School 2	9
Subina	42	Female	School 3	10
Giriraj	52	Male	School 4	9
Shamana	37	Female	School 5	8

**Appendix B: Semi-structured interview questions****For teachers**

Name:

Gender:

Age:

School:

Teaching subject:

Qualification:

Years of Experience:

- How do you ensure that students from diverse linguistic backgrounds understand complex subject matter taught in English?
- What specific strategies do you use to support students' comprehension in EMI classrooms?
- How do you feel about balancing between using English and students' native languages during instruction?
- How prepared did you feel when the shift to EMI was implemented in your school?
- What challenges did you face initially, and how have you adapted your teaching methods to cope with EMI?
- Have you received any training or professional development to help you teach through EMI? If so, how has it helped?
- What kind of additional support do you think would help you teach more effectively in EMI?
- How do you perceive the impact of EMI on students from different socio-economic backgrounds?
- What strategies do you employ to ensure that all students, regardless of their English proficiency, have equal access to learning opportunities?
- How has the school administration supported or hindered the EMI transition?
- What are the main obstacles you face in teaching through EMI, and what additional support do you think is needed from the school administration?

**For students**

Name:

Gender:

Age:

School:

Class:

- How did you feel when you first started learning through English as the medium of instruction?
- What difficulties did you face, and how have you dealt with those challenges over time?
- Are there any subjects or lessons that are harder to understand in English compared to others? Why do you think that is?
- How do you support your learning in EMI, both in and outside the classroom? Do you use any specific tools like dictionaries, apps, or extra classes?
- Do you feel comfortable asking for help from your teachers or classmates when you don't understand something in English? Why or why not?
- Do you think learning in English will help you in the future, for higher education or job opportunities? Why or why not?
- How do you think EMI has affected your overall learning experience compared to when you were learning in Nepali?
- How has EMI affected your interactions with classmates? Do you find it easier or harder to work in groups or participate in class discussions?
- Do you feel more motivated or stressed by learning through EMI? Can you explain why?

**For parents**

Name:

Gender:

Age:

Related school:

Class/ classes of the child/ children:

- What were your initial thoughts when your child's school shifted to EMI? Did you see it as a positive or a challenging change?
- Do you believe EMI will provide your child with better educational or career opportunities in the future? Why or why not?
- How do you support your child's learning at home, especially when it comes to English-language homework?
- Have you noticed your child struggling with EMI, and if so, how have you tried to help them?
- Have you had to invest in additional resources like private tutoring to support your child's learning in EMI? How do you feel about that?
- Are you concerned that the emphasis on English might affect your child's proficiency in their native language or understanding of your culture? How do you balance this at home?
- Do you feel that the school has communicated effectively about what EMI entails and how they are supporting both students and teachers?
- What kind of support or information do you think the school should provide to parents to help their children succeed in EMI?

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