

THE ROLE OF MOTHER TONGUE LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND/FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN MULTILINGUAL NEPAL

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Abstract

This article reviews the background to education policies addressing minority languages use in multilingual and multicultural Nepal. The Constitution of Nepal 2015 states that every Nepali has equal rights to receive education up to basic level in their own mother tongue. Furthermore, every Nepali community residing in Nepal has the right to preserve and promote its language, script, cultural civilization and heritage. Statistics show that over half of all Nepalese do not speak Nepali as their first language. Multilingualism is the act of using or promoting the use of multiple languages, either by an individual speaker or by a community speakers. It is believed that multilingual speakers out number monolingual speakers in the world's population. Like how a newborn child gets more nutrition from breast feeding than powder milk, children learn more in their own native languages.

Keywords: Language acquisition, ELT in Nepal, Multilingual setting and Mother tongue.

Introduction

Nepal is a Multilingual, Multicultural, Multiracial, Multi-religious and multi-ethnic country. It has very fertile land for languages where more than 123 languages are spoken and identified (CBS: 2011). Multilingualism is the act of using or promoting the use of multiple languages, either by an individual speaker or by a community speakers. Multilingualism and multiculturalism are present in many parts of the world today. We cannot deny that we live in societies that are constantly drawing on and using multiple languages. Multilingualism is a powerful fact of life around the world, a circumstance arising at the simplest level, from the need to communicate across speech communities' (Edwards 1994:1). Multilingualism in the region is a lifeline and has been in use for generations. Ferguson (1996b) observes that multilingualism was officially recognized in the third century B.C. One of the salient features of Nepal's linguistic culture is to maintain purity of language and preserve the sacred texts. As a part of linguistic tradition, the emphasis has always been placed on the purity and constancy of the text. In order to maintain the tradition, the focus is on memorizing the sacred text and transmitting it orally in a highly controlled manner to avoid the errors (Schiffman,

1996). The linguistic culture of Nepal seems to recognise that the spoken words have mystic power to invoke the intervention of the god (Awasthi, 2004). As language teachers and scholars of language education, we know that the presence of multilingualism challenges a traditional view of English language teaching. Language teaching in multilingual contexts, the theme of this issue, may take diversity of forms and apply to a variety of ideas, methods and techniques. Educationist recommend the use of mother tongue as medium of instruction. The first and foremost problem faced teaching English in multilingual context is the 'language' itself. Multilingual based education seeks to promote equity and excellence across such variables as race, ethnicity, social class and nationality. As being language teacher and scholars of language education, we know that the presence of multilingualism challenges traditional view of language education. The study proposes one alternative way of conducting English language language teaching practices while maintaining the nation identity. The method of teaching the English language have to be reviewed and revived. A large number of children from different vulnerable groups of Nepal have no access to school and are debarred from the right of achieving basic education and its benefits. The main focus of multilingual setting in education is an idea that enables all learners regardless of their gender, ethnicity, race, culture, social class, religion and exceptionality, have an equal opportunity to learn English language at school. It is deemed crucial in formulating inclusive national policy for achieving equitable and sustainable development in various sectors including education

UNESCO(2012)

Nepal has recently adopted a new constitution, allowing provinces to declare local mother tongues as official languages in their administrative areas. On the surface, it looks like a progressive constitutional provision. But it is not. The constitution envisions a commission to recommend which mother tongues can be used as official languages in which provinces. So the commission will have to rights to sideline multiple mother tongues while picking up just one or two languages. So there is not much hope about the new constitution preserving and promoting dying mother tongue. Many deride mother tongue education rights activists by arguing that the world has moved too far ahead and it is too late to move back. They say teaching English is important and mother tongue is not. They are right when they say English is important. But they are wrong when they say mother tongues are not important. *Every language that exists in the world is important, for they carry their own underlying linguistic structures, meaning and beauty.*

Language in itself is a huge repertoire of knowledge. So preserving dying mother tongues is important. It is not just a political issue. It is an issue of preserving our rich cultural heritages. Saving a dying mother tongue is equally, or even more, important than preserving a centuries-old heritage. Many countries have undertaken great efforts to preserve mother tongues. *Like how a newborn child gets more nutrition from breast feeding than powder milk, children learn more in their own languages.* As language teachers and scholars of language

education, we know that the presence of multilingualism challenges a traditional view of language education. This study proposes one alternative way of conducting English language teaching practices while maintaining the nation identity. The main focus of multilingual setting in education is an idea that enables all learners regardless of their gender, ethnicity, race, culture, social class, religion, or exceptionalities, have an equal opportunities to learn English language at school.

Educational Language Policy and Planning In Nepal

Nepal is a newly formed federal Democratic Republic country. Federal system expect the division of power among different layers of governance structure, between national and local. Although education is the central pillar of the newly states. Nepal has declared local mother tongue as official language in their administrative ideas. It is one mile stone of the government to give equal opportunities to the all local language. The space of English language in the new constitution of Nepal would be specified accordingly due to its unavoidable transaction in every sphere of life such as: education, mass communication, human rights, politics, foreign affairs, international conferences, technical streams, etc.

Nepal, like other countries of the Asia and Pacific region, is characterized by linguistic diversity along with its ethno-cultural multiplicity. However, this situation creates a great barrier for school going children in achieving better education. Basic education systems in these multilingual societies have almost been monolingual globally, using a dominant and official language in the country, practically used as medium of instruction at community school though English, a foreign language, has also been in practice as an alternate medium of instruction (Yadav 2013). Since effective teaching depends on clear and understandable communication, the language of instruction is at the heart of learning process. For this reason, mother tongue-based instruction is crucial to providing children with early access to education and enabling them to participate in learning processes according to their evolving capacities (UNESCO 2007). It should be implemented in linguistically diverse countries like Nepal for both educational and socio-political reasons relating to the educational wellbeing of linguistic minority children (Taylor 2010:138).

Educational opportunities can be made more equitable to children of diverse backgrounds only through dealing with them. Government of Nepal (GON), which participated in different international fora like Jomtin Convention and Dakar Forum, is committed to make equality primary education accessible to all children including children from indigenous people and minority groups. In pursuance of this commitment, one more goal for Nepal has been included besides other six universal goals of EFA for ensuring the right of indigenous people and linguistic minorities to basic and primary education through mother tongue. Addition of this area on indigenous people and linguistic minorities as an EFA goal is a very unique

initiative in the world. However the issue is global, as the same issues exist in vast majority of the countries in the world. There already exists right to mother tongue education in the national constitution and EFA. Therefore it is important that Nepal gave serious attention to this dimension of providing education to all. In addition, instruction in the mother tongue helps children' achieve universal primary education' (Goal 2, Millennium Development Goal, UNESCO 2012).

To achieve this goal a policy of transitional multilingual education policy has been put forward. According to this policy, a child will acquire basic educational skills through the medium of his/her mother tongue for achieving good and inclusive education and gradually switch to a language of wider communication (LWC) an official language so that s/he can have broader communication and "feel at home in the language in which the affairs of government are carried on" and finally learn an international language (e.g. English) for global communications, access to science and technology and as a library language (Fishman 1968:698).

First Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning

Mother tongue (native language) is the first language of a child who is physically all right not deaf. The first language is also term as native or primary language. Mother tongue is the first language of a child which he has learnt first and uses it for communication. Normally, a child is exposed to a language immediately after his/her birth. Every normal(Physically fit) child learns his first language in the first few years of his life. Actually he is competent enough to communicate in his language before he goes to school.

In modern age, people learn more than one language some learn two or even three languages simultaneously in their childhood. This happens particularly if the community where child was born and brought up is bilingual or multilingual. The child may be exposed to two different languages at the same time and learns the both. In such a case both languages can be called his first language. But if a language is learned after his first language, then it will be his second language.

It is also worth mentioning here that very often the term "Acquisition" and "Learning" are used in different sense. Acquisition is is related to the first language or native language which is acquired by children informally whereas learning is related to the second or foreign language which is learned by children or adults informally or formally depending upon the circumstances. Generally, we call first language acquisition and second language learning. First language acquisition is as natural for a child as breathing and walking. It is inevitable: a child has to learn it. He acquires it unconsciously and without any obvious effort. He acquires it in a natural setting and there is no time limit for it, that is, he learn his language until falls asleep. On the contrary, a second foreign language is usually learn in artificial situation (At

school) and help of teachers and textbooks. The exposure of language is very limited and the language teaching is not natural. The second language is defined as "A language other than the mother tongue that a person or community uses for public communication especially in trade, higher education and administration". Second language is not native language or mother tongue which is usually studied either for communication or for reading materials.

Krashen and Terrel(1983)give following points to distinguish between first language acquisition and second language learning.

	First language acquisition	Second language learning
1.	Similar to L ¹ acquisition	Formal language of language
2.	'Picking up' language	'Knowing about' language
3.	Subconscious	Conscious
4.	Implicit knowledge	Explicit knowledge
5.	Formal teaching doesn't help	Formal teaching helps

Historical Background of English Language Teaching in Nepal

The history of English language teaching in Nepal is about half a century. English education was formally introduced in 1853. English education was restricted only to the Royal family, Rana family and their relatives till 1880s. He made an arrangement to bring two English teachers, Ross and Canning from Britain for his brothers and nephew to teach English on the ground floor of Thapathali Durbar School. The first English teacher of Nepal was Guru Dhoj Rana. Durbar high school was the first school which was established in 1853 October to provide basic education with English courses for the Rana family, Royal members and their relatives in Nepal. Education was totally banned for the general people during the 104 years span of the Rana regime. Rana regime was known as dark-age since there was no democracy, freedom of expression, fundamental rights, human rights and no rights for people to get general public education.

The examination of school leaving certificate (SLC) was governed by Calcutta University, India until 1934. Rana Prime minister Chandra Shamsheer established Tribhuvan Chandra intermediate college in 1918 A.D. which is known as Tri-Chandra College. It was the first college in Nepal which was affiliated to Patana University, India. Formal higher education in English was started after the establishment of Tri-Chandra College. The Rana Rulers might have served the British Rulers by introducing English in Nepal to guarantee their oligarchy though Nepal had never been under political control of the British. English was introduced in Nepal during the colonization of British in India owing to the hegemony in culture, religion, open border system, similarly in social practices between Nepal and India and effectiveness of Macaulay's Minute on education in India. Graddol (2010) argues that "Thomas Babington Macaulay appears to denigrate the value of Indian languages, elevate the qualities of English

and declare that English should henceforth become the medium of education in India (p. 63). Macaulay drafted an educational document regarding the role of English education which was known as Macaulay's Minute on education in India in 1835. This became source for Nepali Policy Makers to provide English education systematically in the curricula of school and university in Nepal after the downfall of Rana oligarchy and inception of democracy in Nepal in 1950. Moreover, Hugh B. Wood, US Fulbright Scholar and educationist on an assignment in India was appointed as the Educational Advisor to the Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC) popularly known as the Wood's Commission in 1954. Wood had similar thinking as Macaulay; however, he couldn't succeed in making English as an official language like neighbouring country India because there was no English speaking community or well-established foundation of English language in Nepal. He supported the King directed Panchayat system to make Nepali language as a medium of the instruction and main official language under the policy of "EkBhasaEkBhesh" (one language and one uniform) regardless of the multilingual society in Nepal. The college of education was established in 1956 to provide two-year and four-year English education including running teacher education programs in approximately all subjects to produce prospective lower secondary and secondary level teachers in Nepal as per the recommendation of NNEPC in 1954.

Status of English in Nepal

English is a widely spoken language today, plays crucial role developing country like Nepal. It is an international language in the world. Currently the language most often taught as a second language around the world. It is an admitted fact that English has emerged as an International Language of the world. Many nations of the world are interested learning it as a second language and it also plays role as a global language. English is not a second language not an official language, not an international language, nor a language of wider communication or a language of group identification (Shrestha, 1983). However, English is used as a medium of instruction in many private boarding schools, colleges and universities but it has not received the same status in public schools of Nepal.

On the basis of numbers of native speakers, English has got 76th rank in Nepal. The total numbers of native speakers of English is 2032 (CBS: 2011). It has been used extensively from school to university levels for academic purpose. Language is a part of culture and culture is a part of language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture. (Brown, cited in Jiang, 1994. P. 147). Tribhuvan University, which was established in 1959, had given high priority to English language teaching as a compulsory as well as specialization subject in its curricula from grade one to research levels. English has been used as a medium of instruction in many private boarding schools, colleges and universities. English is global language, it is the

language of science and technology. English Language Teaching occupies a prominent space in schools and universities curricula to maintain nation identity. English has become one of the most important academic and professional tools.

Current English Language Teaching Practice in Nepal

Language occupies the central role in human self-expression, interpersonal communication, activity, identity and inclusion. It is deemed crucial in formulating inclusive national policy for achieving equitable and sustainable development in various sectors including education (UNESCO 2012). English is a language of opportunities and success for life in Nepal. English education was formally introduced in 1853 when Rana Prime Minister Jang Bahadur visited Britain in 1850s. English education was restricted only to the Royal family, Rana family and their relatives till 1880s. He made an arrangement to bring two English teachers, Ross and Canning from Britain for his brothers and nephew to teach English on the ground floor of Thapathali Durbar School.

The first English teacher of Nepal was Guru DhojRana. Durbar high school was the first school which was established in 1853 October to provide basic education with English courses for the Rana family, Royal members and their relatives in Nepal. Education was totally banned for the general people during the 104 years span of the Rana regime. English language teaching in school education was formally started with the implementation of National Education System Plan (NESP) in 1971. In the history of Nepal, NESP (1971-1976) recommended English as a compulsory subject from grade 3 to grade 10. English Language Teaching in Nepalese education system commenced smoothly only after the establishment of institute of education under Tribhuvan University in 1959. Tribhuvan University, which was established in 1959, had given high priority to English language teaching as a compulsory subject as well as specialization subject in its curricula from bachelors to masters and research levels. English language teaching and learning based on traditional Approaches, Methods and Techniques.

Linguistic Diversity in Nepal

Nepal is a multilingual nation. However, a single language has given power, prestige, recognition, identification. Now it may be argued that if diversity is a prerequisite to successful humanity then preservation of linguistic diversity is crucial to humanity. Language occupies the central role in human self-expression, interpersonal communication, activity, identity and inclusion. In Nepal population census was first launched in 1911 to carry out a survey of population and its related aspects including its growth, migration and social structure. It has, however, been only since the first modern census in 1952/54 that languages have been regularly reported. There is a variation in the enumeration of Nepal's languages in

the various censuses. Except 'other', 'unknown' and 'not stated' languages, there were recorded 44(1952/54), 36 (1961), 17 (1971), 18 (1981) and 32 (1991) languages in the last five censuses, Gurung (2002:37). Their figures have drastically increased to 92 in the 2001 and 123 languages in the 2011 census due to democratic awakening. From historical perspectives, Nepal has been an assortment of different groups of peoples with different cultures and languages over the ages. The two major groups in Nepalese society are Indo-Aryans from the south and Tibeto-Burmans or Mongoloids from the north, inheriting and blending customs from both sides. The minor groups migrated later include Austro-Asiatic and Dravidian stocks from the south as well as an ethnolinguistic isolate, namely, kusunda with the passage of time, Nepal has gradually evolved into a multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual country despite being restricted in area. The mother tongues enumerated in census 2011 (except Kusunda) belong to four language families: Indo-European, Sino-Tibetan, Austro-Asiatic and Dravidian while Kusunda is a language isolate consisting of a single language without any genetic relationship with other languages.

Language Families	Census population													
	1952/54		1961		1971		1981		1991		2001		2011	
	No	percent	No	percent	No	Percent	No	percent	No	percent	No	percent	No	Percent
Indo - European	6351,899	77.13	7449604	79.14	9062,435	78.42	12,417,886	82.66	14701283	79.50	17,982,769	79.1	21,753,009	82.10
Sino-Tibetan	1,795,337	21.08	1,813,083	19.26	1,982,635	17.16	1,811,944	12.06	3,908,698	16.76	4,183,995	18.4	4,584,523	17.30
Austro-Asiatic	16,751	0.20	29,485	0.31	23,853	0.21	28,208	0.19	33,332	0.18	40,260	0.2	49,858	0.19
Dravidian									15,17	0.1	28,61	0.1	33,65	0.13
Others(including the foreign languages)	70340	0.85	114,392	1.22	487,060	4.21	764,802	5.09	648,627	3.51	NA	NA	25,745*	0.09
Not stated	752	0.01	64,32	0.07					9,157	0.05	503,295	2.2	47,718	0.18

Total	8,235, 07	100. 00	9,412, 99	100. 00	11,555 ,9	100. 00	15,022, 8	100. 00	18,491 ,0	100. 00	22,738, 9	100. 00	26,494, 5	100. 00
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Conclusion

Nepal is a Multilingual, Multicultural, Multiracial, Multi-religious and multi-ethnic country. It has very fertile land for languages where more than 123 languages are spoken and identified (CBS: 2011). *Like how a newborn child gets more nutrition from breast feeding than powder milk, children learn more in their own languages.* As language teachers and scholars of language education, we know that the presence of multilingualism challenges a traditional view of language education. This study proposes one alternative way of conducting English language teaching practices while maintaining the nation identity. The methods of teaching the English language have to be reviewed and revived. The main focus of multilingual education is to enable all learners regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, culture, social class, religion, or exceptionality have an equal opportunity to learn English language at the school. In present, English language teaching is very unsatisfactory owing to lack of a concrete policy from the government regarding its status, lack of professionally sound teachers, lack of physical facilities and inadequate teaching materials. Teaching English in multilingual context raises a number of challenges.

Though we can successfully generalize and predict certain students thought, emotion and behavior patterns, there will always be exceptions to any rules we might formulate. It is deemed crucial in formulating inclusive national policy for achieving equitable and sustainable development in various sectors including education (UNESCO 2012). The main goal of English language teaching in diverse social background is to change teaching methods and techniques to provide equal opportunities. Students need a culturally responsive teaching, such that if a teacher is culturally sensitive, s/he will endeavor to know students backgrounds and capabilities and eventually make teaching preparation relevant to the needs of actual students with no one left behind. A large number of students have no access to English learning. So it is important to make serious plan from the government for equality.

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