



Basic level English as foreign language teachers' experience about English medium instruction

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ABSTRACT

Medium of Instruction (MoI) used in teaching basic level students plays a significant role in their overall development. It is controversial whether students' native language or English is more effective for teaching students who study at the basic level. Nonetheless, many community schools are switching their MoI from Nepali, the country's official language, to English. The current descriptive phenomenological research aims to investigate basic level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' perspectives on English Medium Instruction (EMI) at the basic level. Nine basic level EFL teachers who have been teaching at different community schools in Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan City, Banke district, participated in the research. I used non-random judgmental sampling to select the sample. The data was collected using unstructured interview. The interviews were conducted in face-to-face mode and each of the interviews was audio recorded, transcribed, and then thematized. The outcomes of the research were presented and discussed utilizing descriptive and qualitative data analysis techniques. The results indicated that EMI has been mandated despite the fact that instructors lack the confidence to implement it in the classroom. Based on the results, it can be stated that EMI should be implemented with thorough planning, preparation, and consultation with teachers and other directly and indirectly engaged stakeholders in particular schools.

ARTICLE INFO

Received : Oct. 18, 2022

Revised : Feb. 17, 2023

Accepted : Mar. 16, 2023

KEYWORDS

*Basic level, EFL teachers,
EMI, Experience*

Suggested Citation (APA Style 7th Edition):

Tiwari, H.P. (2023). Basic level English as foreign language teachers' experience about English medium instruction. *International Research Journal of Science, Technology, Education, and Management*, 3(1), 55-63. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7774555>

INTRODUCTION

MoI refers to the language used to teach academic subjects in educational institutions. It is the language in which teachers communicate knowledge and information to the students and students communicate with their students. According to Wang et al. (2022), EMI is the use of English as an instructional language to convey disciplinary knowledge to students who speak English as a lingua franca or who are studying English as a second or foreign language. Similarly, Dearden (2014) defines EMI as the use of the English language to teach academic topics in nations and jurisdictions where the majority of the population's first language is not English. EMI is a way of teaching non-English academic disciplines, such as science, social studies, history, and mathematics, in English to students whose native language is not English. As an MoI, English is utilized in three forms. It is taught as a mother tongue in nations such as the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (USA), and others where English is the native language. In nations where English is the official language, such as India, Singapore, etc., it is taught as a second language. In nations like Nepal, Japan, and China, English is utilized as a foreign language for teaching.

The constitution of the government of Nepal, enacted in 2072, stipulates that every Nepali community residing in Nepal is entitled to get education in mother language. Despite the government's determination, many community schools in Nepal have implemented EMI policies at the basic level. EMI is comparable to fashion in the Nepali setting. Some community schools implemented EMI to compete with English-medium boarding schools, which are quickly proliferating in every region of the nation. In addition, English is growing in popularity in Nepal and many other non-English speaking nations. Due to this popularity of English, parents prefer enrolling their children in schools where English is the medium of instruction as opposed to Nepali. Moreover, parents devote a large amount of their money to ensure their children's English proficiency. Parents believe that competency in English is only achievable if students attend schools where English is the medium of instruction. Thus, several community schools in Nepal have introduced EMI policies to satisfy parental demand. In addition, the use of EMI may also increase students' worldwide market competitiveness and employability (Coleman, 2006; Pecorari et al., 2011). In addition, those who are fluent in the English language are highly esteemed in Nepal. In contrast to other languages, English is regarded as the most respected foreign language. On the status of English in Nepal, Giri (2010) states that the English language holds an immaculate and important position in the socio-economic system; hence, the motivation for its acquisition is of the utmost importance." Thus, it is socially, commercially, and academically superior to all other local languages. Thus, the number of students in schools where EMI is implemented is on the rise. Due to the implementation of EMI, schools with a limited number of students were able to boost their student population. In order to boost the number of students and ensure their continued survival, several community schools around Nepal have introduced EMI.

However, several research studies demonstrate that there are many intricate conclusions about the results of learning and the impacts of EMI (Wilkinson, 2013). Arroyo-Barrigüete et al. found that there were no statistically significant differences in how well EMI and non-EMI students did in school. Thus, the language of instruction has no important influence on student success. A similar study conducted by Dafouz (2014) also shows no significant academic outcomes for the students who studied in English-medium schools. According to Al-Bakri (2017), implementing EMI had a demoralizing effect on students with little English ability and had a detrimental emotional influence on them. Furthermore, the insufficient English competence of EFL teachers has become a barrier to implementing EMI in classrooms. For this reason, the teachers need additional time to prepare for the lesson and complete the courses. Besides this, the students also have trouble understanding lectures. The linguistic background of EFL teachers may have a significant impact on the perception they hold towards EMI in their own context. Khatri (2019) has stated that most of the teachers and community schools are unable to employ EMI effectively and efficiently, except for a few schools. He further suggested that the ground level teachers are aware and are ready to adopt EMI in their classrooms, but they lack enough resources, support, and policy. Similarly, Shrestha (2021) discovered that teachers from both communities and private schools were reliant on Nepali. So, the implementation of EMI has created tension among community schools as well as tension among teachers in their classes to be dealt with in English without being trained. The study conducted by Erliana (2018) also concluded that the teachers in EMI classrooms continuously use the students' native language. Jiang et al. (2019) have also claimed that effective

implementation of EMI is quite impossible for EFL teachers who have low levels of English proficiency and are teaching English skills. Ojha (2018) adds that if teachers are not fluent in the target language, then employing that language as a medium of instruction poses a risk to students' academic success. In a similar vein, Sah and Li (2018) identified three key aspects of EMI: it is linguistic capital to compete with private schools, it is a burden for instructors, and it is an illusion for students. Educators have come to terms with the fact that their students have been doing poorly in social studies and science since the implementation of EMI, as students have found that they can comprehend the material better when presented in their native tongue (Khatri, 2016).

The majority of research conducted on EMI focus on its efficacy. Very few studies have examined the experiences of EFL instructors who have been teaching at basic in community schools. Besides this, many community schools adopted EMI as a fashion and implemented it without proper planning. They did not consult with the teachers before implementing the IME policy. They implemented it as per the wishes of the head teacher and SMC. So, they did not get the expected results. In fact, they are gradually returning to Nepali-language instruction from EMI. Therefore, the advice of the teachers is particularly important before implementing EMI with a MoI in the Nepalese context. With this in mind, the current research aims to inquire into the perceptions of basic EFL teachers on EMI in the community schools.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The present study aims at exploring the experience of basic EFL level teachers' experiences about EMI policy in the local context.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This section discusses the research methodology which I employed to conduct this descriptive phenomenological study. The research methodology helps in providing the scientific framework of research process. Each of the components of the research methodology which I included while conducting this research are described below.

Research design

This descriptive phenomenology-based research is based on primary data sources. Based on Davidson (2000) and Jones (2007), I chose the phenomenological technique as the best approach for my study from among the various qualitative research design approaches. A phenomenological investigation "is an effort to cope with unexplored interior feelings in daily life" (Merriam, 2002, p. 7). It is used to detect phenomena, concentrate on subjective experiences, and comprehend the structure of these lived experiences. Phenomenology identifies the significance of the human experience in relation to a phenomenon or significant collective event (Creswell, 2009). Moreover, it is utilized to define in detail the common properties of the observed events.

Research site

Nepalgunj, a sub-metropolitan city in Banke district of Nepal, serves as the location of my study. It is a local level of the Banke district. Accessibility and convenience were taken into account while selecting the study location.

Participants of the study

The participants in the research comprised nine basic-level EFL teachers who have been teaching at community schools, which have implemented EMI at the basic level. And these schools were situated in the Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan City of Banke district. There were five male and four female teachers among the nine research participants. I used purposive sampling to choose participants for the research.

Research instrument

I used unstructured interviews to obtain data because only unstructured interviews could provide the rich or comprehensive information essential for my study. There were several reasons why I utilized unstructured interviews as a data collection method. The first and most crucial argument is that only unstructured interviews might provide richer or more complete information. Second, unstructured interviews are based on an outline structure or some key questions, but with a degree of freedom for the interviewer to explore the topic in more detail, depending on how the conversation is going. In this context, Borg (2006) believes that the value of unstructured interview lies in its flexibility because interviewees have the freedom to talk and to express their thoughts in an open-ended way. Third, it also helps to achieve 'inter-subjective depth' (Miller & Glassner, 1997, p. 106), which is believed to be most essential and valuable in any kind of investigation. Fourth, it helps to discuss the idea in an encouraging and non-assessment atmosphere so that the respondents feel more secure and confident to share their beliefs freely. Fifth, the interviewee can expand upon unpredicted subjects that arise during the interview (Cohen & Morrision, 2000). Lastly, follow-up questions can improve the interviewees' responses, and qualitative interviews can reveal the interviewees' beliefs, ideas, opinions, and points of view.

The participants were also given the option of choosing which language to utilize throughout the interview. All of the participants wished to be interviewed in Nepali; thus, all of the interviews were conducted in Nepali in face-to-face mode. Each interview was audio recorded, and no time restriction was imposed so that informants could share their viewpoints for as long as they wished. The average duration of an interview was 34 minutes.

Data analysis

Initially, I performed verbatim transcriptions of audio-recorded interviews based on Turners (1931). I listened to and re-listened to each interview and reviewed the transcriptions to confirm the accuracy of the data. Thereafter, I provided printed verbatim transcriptions of the interviews to the participants for verification. Moreover, they were requested to examine and confirm the accuracy of the transcriptions. In addition, the participants were also requested to identify which portions of the transcripts they want to be omitted from the data. That was done to enhance the reliability and validity of my research (Doyle, 2007). After finalizing the data preparation, I analyzed and interpreted the data using Miles and Huberman's (1994) approach of theme analysis.

Ethical consideration

I attempted to follow all the ethical principles and practices while conducting the research. I put every effort to avoid bias and any kind of preconceived notions during the work. I had due respect to the informants and other concerned personalities who will have direct and indirect connection in my research. All teachers had freedom to participate or not, and they were also told that they could withdraw from the study at any time without prior notice. Moreover, the participants were informed of all relevant information, such as the purposes and procedures of this study, along with the potential risks, benefits and uncertainties. The information provided by the informants is not to be used otherwise. I was always aware of originality, confidentiality, fairness and legal issues that will arise while conducting the research. The Participants were informed that no real names would be used in the dissertation even if the participants told their real names in the interviews to reduce their anxiety and to guarantee confidentiality.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Nine distinct themes as the findings of the research have emerged from the interview data. These themes are presented and discussed below.

Teachers' beliefs about EMI

The findings revealed that the teachers had different beliefs regarding the implementation of EMI. Most of them viewed that implementing EMI in community schools is the demand of the present time. They opined that

their society considered learning English as the important matter so the schools should address the demand of the society. In this regard T1 said, "the importance and use of the English language is increasing day by day in the world. The present society gives importance to the English language. Community schools should walk towards the direction the society moves". Similarly, T5 opined that English is used in various aspects of our daily life and it helps to get a respectable job inside and outside Nepal. EMI helps to develop English language skills in students.

However, some of the teachers viewed the implementation of EMI in community schools as the fashion. They opined that it was necessary to learn English language but in the name of teaching English, implementing English medium forcefully was not proper action. Regarding this, T4 opined, Teaching English subjects properly would be sufficient to develop English language skills because persons who studied English as a subject from the fourth grade are also good at English. It is not proper action to implement English medium forcefully in community schools." In the same way, T2 argued "Students neither learn English nor Nepali from the present English medium classes. Teaching English as a subject by a qualified teacher would be better rather than forcing the teachers having non-English background to teach in English medium classes".

Based on the responses given by the interviewees, it can be said that teachers are aware of the importance of the English language. However, a few teachers are not in favor of the implementation of EMI in community schools just to develop English language skills.

School environment for EMI

All the interviewees responded that though there was not completely suitable school environment, their school administration was trying to improve the school environment for EMI. They viewed recruiting capable teachers from the schools own economic source as a beneficial task to run English medium classes. Similarly, they took the action of running separate classes for English and Nepali medium as an effective way to handle the present scenario. Few of them took the trend of using English textbooks published by private publications as a supporting task claiming that these textbooks include more activities and are easy to use. For example, T9 said:

There are only English medium classes from class nursery to class two but there are both the classes of Nepali and English medium from class three to seven. Some private source teachers have been appointed to run English medium classes. Some capable teachers of upper level also teach in English medium classes of primary level. English textbooks of private publications are used for English medium classes.

The above excerpt makes us clear that community schools are improving their environment for EMI and it is dependent on private source teachers.

Students' number in English medium classes

Most of the community schools implemented EMI to stop the trend of transferring students to private schools and increase their student number. Regarding the students' number in English medium classes I found contradictory opinions. There are fewer students in English medium classes in comparison to the Nepali medium classes in the school of T4, T5, T6 and T9. In this regard, T4 said:

There are more than double students in Nepali medium in comparison to the English medium classes. Most of the guardians of our students are of lower economic status and they cannot pay fees for English medium. There is a proper environment for teaching and learning in Nepali medium too in our school. Some educated guardians have also enrolled their children in Nepali medium.

On the other hand, there are more students in English medium classes in comparison to the Nepali medium classes in the school of T1, T2 and T3. They opined that people of their school catchment area seem highly attracted towards learning English and students come to their school after completing primary level education from private schools. There are almost equal numbers of students in the classes of both English and Nepali medium in the school of T7 and T8.

Thus, it can be said that although EMI has helped community schools to stop their students from going to private schools, it is not a sole way to increase student numbers. Guardians who are aware about the importance of English language and can afford the fees instruct their children in English medium whereas those guardians who cannot afford fees and are not aware about the importance of English language send their children in Nepali medium. This shows that EMI seems to have widened the gap between haves and have not in our society.

Use of Nepali in English medium classes

Regarding whether English medium classes are run in English, all teachers accepted that they used Nepali in English medium classes. Some of them (T1, T3, T4) confessed that both the teachers and students used Nepali and English equally. Other teachers claimed that they used English more than Nepali. In the teachers' opinion, students get puzzled if they do not describe in Nepali. The students also ask them to explain in Nepali. T1 gave the remarkable expressions regarding the use of Nepali as follows:

Sometimes I use Nepali more and sometimes English more. I am not satisfied without using Nepali. The students also seem satisfied if the subject matter is explained in Nepali. They ask me to speak in Nepali if they do not understand what I say in English.

On the other hand, T2 tries to create a full English environment. However, he is compelled to use Nepali because the students are accustomed with the trend of first telling in English and then clarifying in Nepali. All the teachers seem aware of the fact that English should be used maximum and Nepali should be used judiciously in English medium class. In this regard, T4 opined that teachers should use English in English medium classes according to the meaning of EMI. Otherwise, it would be better to teach in Nepali medium.

Based on the responses of the interviewees it can be argued that Nepali language is used more in English medium classes of community schools neglecting the meaning of EMI although the teachers are aware about the maximum use of English. Majority of the teachers teaching other subjects in English seem to have been habituated to using Nepali even in English medium classes. So, English medium is just a fashion.

Rote learning in English medium classes

All the teachers accepted that rote learning is emphasized in English medium classes directly or indirectly. Some of them asked their students to memorize the important points written in the textbooks and the notes written by them. On the other hand, few of them write notes of the long answer questions and ask their students to copy. Most of the teachers claimed that the students cannot write or give answers to long answer questions because of the problem of language. Students prefer mugging the notes prepared by the teachers rather than writing in their own words. Due to this, the pass rate of the students seems good. Regarding rote learning, T4 said "Students themselves write the answers of short answer questions. I ask them to copy the notes prepared for long answer questions. I do not force them to mug the notes".

Based on the opinions expressed by the interviewees it can be said that EMI is fostering rote learning encouraging students to memorize the notes prepared by the teachers. As a result, students' creativity, originality of thought, collaboration and cooperation skills seem to have lost as they cannot express their ideas, feelings and emotions in English.

Students' learning achievement in English medium classes

Most of the teachers teaching in the schools having separate English and Nepali medium classes opined that there was no difference in learning achievement between the students of Nepali and English medium. However, T6, T7 and T8 claimed that there was an increase in the students' learning achievement in English medium classes. In this regard T8 opined that learning achievement of the students of English medium is better than the students of Nepali medium because the guardians of English medium students are active and conscious towards their children's learning.

On the other hand, the teachers teaching in the school having only English medium classes in primary level viewed that the students' learning achievement has decreased because they do not understand subject matter clearly

and they cannot express the matters they know due to the problem of language. Regarding this, T1 said, "Teachers cannot make subject matter clear to the students. The students cannot express the matters they know due to language. They can write in examinations only the matters they have mugged. So, students' learning achievement has decreased in English medium".

It can be said that students' learning achievement may decrease if the students having both English and Nepali medium background are taught keeping together in the same classes.

Availability of teaching materials for EMI and their use

All the teachers opined that there were few teaching materials in their schools. Few of them were not familiar with the teaching materials available in their schools. However, they claimed that they use teaching materials to prepare themselves, asking their students to collect some locally available materials. T8 used some teaching materials having Nepali script too for making her students clear about the subject matter. Regarding the availability and use of teaching materials, I found the expression of T1 remarkable to mention here. She said:

There are some but not enough teaching materials in our school. Some teachers use them and some do not. There are attractive wall paintings in the classrooms. I have not heard any teachers requesting the school administration to manage the teaching materials they need.

Based on the opinions expressed by the teachers interviewed it can be said that few teaching materials are available for EMI in community schools. Those materials that are available have not been used properly.

Need of training for EMI

While taking the interview I attempted to find out whether the teachers had taken training related to EMI. Four teachers found training while five teachers are teaching in English medium without taking training related to EMI. Out of four trained teachers three teachers took the training given by local level and one took the training given by the school. The trained teachers opined that the training they took had helped them in their classes. The teachers opined that they should be provided English language training and other helpful training by school administration, local government and other related bodies. Even the trained teachers also viewed that there was a need for refreshment training. For example, T1 said, "I took training for EMI some years ago. It has helped me." Similarly, T9 said that she took training related to EMI two years ago given by Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan City. It was helpful to handle the English medium classes.

This indicates that though training is necessary to make English medium effective, some teachers are teaching in English medium classes without taking any training related to it. Only a few schools manage training for EMI from their internal source.

Challenges in the implementation of EMI

All the teachers stated that they were unable to handle English medium classes because they were not competent in English. T1 accepted that due to their old practice of using Nepali language the subjects like social, science, and moral studies were challenging to deliver in English. Similarly, T7 opined that initially, they were unable to deliver the content knowledge to the students effectively in English; hence, they used Nepali language in English medium classes. This also signifies that proper implementation of EMI is challenging not only for the students but for the teachers as well in Nepalese context. Another challenge which the teachers face is students' inability to comprehend the lesson delivered in English. In this regard, T5 opined that many students understand only basic statements of their teachers but they are not able to comprehend some texts by themselves. Some of the terms in subjects like social studies, mathematics and science are hard to understand. Similarly, T4 opined that the students want to do the exercises by themselves but sometimes the problem arises in comprehending the meaning. Similarly, T3 argued that some students are good in the classroom but their result is surprisingly low. The reason behind this can be; not comprehending the meaning of the question and unable to express their thoughts in English. Another challenge is implementing EMI without proper preparation and guidelines. Previous researchers have stated that there is no proper guideline for EMI. The community schools of Nepal have implemented EMI to

continue their existence. The administrators of my research also accepted that they have implemented EMI due to intense pressure from guardians.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Even if schools implemented EMI policy without preparing and consulting respective teachers, the basic level EFL teachers of community schools were positive towards EMI. If teachers have positive attitudes towards EMI, it can be used effectively. Therefore, it is necessary to implement it according to the advice of the teachers. To teach in community schools in Nepal, one must have received training and must have received a license. Therefore, all teachers teaching in community schools are trained. So, it can be implemented effectively. But, it seems necessary to continuously monitor the implementation of EMI to see if it is being used correctly or not. Some community schools charge high fees in the name of the EMI. The regulatory body like the local government should also monitor this. Apart from this, some schools have implemented EMI policy, but the classroom teaching is done in the mother tongue. Due to this, the effectiveness of EMI is decreasing. Therefore, it is important to implement it according to its name.

The community schools of Nepal should prepare both teachers and students in advance for the effective implementation of EMI. The Government of Nepal and local governments should make clear policy regarding the use of English as a MoI in community schools. Along with this, the teacher service commission should update the curriculum of school teacher service by including more content related to the knowledge and skills of the English language. Local government should assist the community schools which are willing to shift the MoI. Similarly, community schools should ensure the preparedness of their teachers before starting EMI. Frequent use of Nepali in English medium classes makes EMI meaningless. So, teachers adopting EMI should be encouraged to use English more in their classes. School administration should manage short term training, class observation, model class and feedback from subject experts and experienced teachers.

This study will prove to be a milestone in bridging the policy gap related to EMI mentioned by Phyak (2011). The study also sheds light on merits and demerits of using English as a MoIs in community school which in turn facilitates other teachers, head teachers, parents, school management committees (SMC), policy makers and all the related stakeholders who are thinking of implementing EMI in their prospective schools. Moreover, EFL teachers of various levels will be benefited in the sense that they will share their bitter and sweet experience regarding the use of EMI, and they will learn effective ways of using EMI. Lastly, not the least, primary level teachers, SMC and local level government will gain much of the benefit from this research work.

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