

Potentiality of Mother Tongue Instruction and Multilingual Education Approach to Teaching English at Primary Level

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Abstract: The objectives of this study were to explore the participants' lived experiences on medium of instruction while teaching English in the classrooms and to explore the participants' lived experiences on Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education approach to teaching English at primary level. Phenomenological research design was employed to complete this study. A set of questionnaires, interviews and discussion were the major research tools and three primary level English teachers were the sample population of this study. Phenomenological interviews and a set of questionnaires were used to collect the data. The collected data were transcribed, translated, coded and interpreted and analyzed thematically. The result of this study shows that a suitable medium of instruction is the most important factor and MTB-MLE approach is an effective approach to teach English language for the children of ethnic group people at pre-primary level. This study has implications for social change as teachers who engage in collaboration with colleagues and reflective practice will positively affect student achievement. Students may be taught by teachers who have the knowledge, skills, and attitude required for a successful implementation of a multilingual approach.

Keywords: Mother Tongue Instruction, Multilingual Education, Teaching English at Primary Level

A. Introduction

Nepal is a known as a multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual country. Nepal is not away from different linguistic and cultural diversity. Linguistic diversity in the classes can be found when teaching English language occurs. To teach English Tamang language speaking community school may bring many complications, challenges for the teachers to teach English and students to learn English. Multilingual condition is always there in the classroom where the different language backgrounds' students are enrolled. In this regard, Poudel, (2010) states multilingualism as "a condition in which more than two

languages are used in the same setting for similar purposes". The concern of teaching English in a complicated and challenging context comes from the fact of language instruction and a suitable approach. Approaches and methods in language teaching: "An approach is a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language teaching and learning. An approach is axiomatic within one approach, there can be many methods, a method is procedural" (Richards & Rodgers, 2006). Even though the language policy is to use English only as a language of instruction in the English classes but the Tamang students in the classes have been challenged to learn English by using English as language of instruction at primary level. British Council's Chief Executive Officer, Davidson (2013), announced a policy change where the British Council had been taken a significant decision for promoting the use of multilingual approaches in the teaching of English language internationally in the future: *Support for English is as a language in addition to the languages spoken by individuals, not instead of them. It is English in the context of multilingualism that we wish to promote, not English as a dominant or domineering language* (Heugh, et al., 2019).

Most of the Tamang indigenous students are lagged behind from the quality, sustainable and long-lasting English education due to an appropriate language instruction and a suitable approach to teach and to learn English at primary level in Nepal, especially in Dhading rural areas. Language center policy at school is to use English as medium of instruction in the classroom besides Nepali class but English teachers are from marginalized group (e.g. Yadav, Gupta, Tamang). English teachers are not well trained and lack of English proficiency. Likewise, students are from Tamang language community and they have lack of English vocabulary, lack of communication or exposure at home, at school and at any social gathering. Most of the students do not understand the language used by their teachers in the classroom and they do not understand what their English taught in the class. As a result, neither they can improve in English language nor they can improve in their mother tongue and as well as in Nepali language from the lower level to higher level.

The study of teachers' perceptions and experiences about the recently facing challenges when the teaches teach English to the students of ethnic group (Tamang) in the classroom are quite relevant debatable issues in the present context from the prospective of enhancing and developing English as a lingua franca globally for the purpose of communication for speakers of different first languages with the dominant in the future. Students' first language (L1) plays a vital role in the second language (L2) classroom (Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). Teaching English to the ethnic groups' students at present context is seemed possible through the way of using a potential of MT instruction and multilingual approach at primary level. Multilingual approach, code-switching as a positive aspect of language learning relating to an interlanguage of the learners (Selinker,

1972). Students' prior languages means engaging students' prior knowledge while also achieving inclusion, both considered fundamental to education (Cummins, 2004). L1 translation equivalents help to quickly develop the size of learners' L2 vocabularies (Schmitt, 2008). Multilingual approach for language teaching is an issue for teacher educators, teacher trainers, curriculum developers, and policy makers in Nepal.

As the previous experiences of the English teachers, assert that the mother tongue has a meaningful and fruitful role in the process of second language acquisition and other additional languages. Many Studies have shown that learners rely on their background experiences and prior knowledge of their first language to acquire a second language. They transfer the structures and activities of their first language to learn second language for attempting bi-literacy or tri-literacy. Nancy Hornberger's continua of biliteracy (2003) identifies the major social, linguistic, political and psychological issues that surround the development of biliteracy, as they relate to each other (Garcia, 2009). In this regard, students need a minimum of six years (preferably eight years) of learning to read and write in the home/local language and learning through this language (i.e. mother-tongue medium), while the second and third language (e.g. English) is being taught well as a subject, before they can be expected to learn through the second language or English (Heugh, 2019). Using 'dual medium' approach, in which two languages are used purposefully- with part of the lesson in one language and part in another to achieve academic success for students earlier on, depending on the context. Although teachers in many countries feel they are doing something wrong when they use code-switching practices to help students understand the content of lessons (Heugh, 2000; Swain, Kirkpatrick & Cummins 2011; Lin 2013), when it is done systematically, it is good teaching practice. But this alternating of two or more languages needs to be in both spoken and written form for developing strong foundation in these languages in students (Reeves et al. 2008). Similarly, As Atkinson (1987), states that students' mother tongue shouldn't be completely ignored in the English classes since "the use of L1 can be very effective in terms of the amount of time spent explaining" (Atkinson, 1987).

In addition, the first language (L1) has a facilitating role in the process of second language acquisition (Schweer, 1999). Mother tongue has an active and a beneficial role in instructed second language acquisition/learning (Ferrer, 2011). The L1-L2 connection is an undisputable fact of life, whether we like it or not the new knowledge is learnt on the basis of the previously acquired language". L1 is inevitable during the second language learning process, particularly at low levels. Schweers (1999), finds out a high percentage (88.7%) of the students felt that mother tongue (Spanish) should be used in their English classes. As Noor, (1994), finds out the learner's L1 is very determining of second language acquisition.

Language Acquisition Theory

Stephen Krashen's Language acquisition theory supports students to learn new language consciously and unconsciously in second language acquisition. Language acquisition is unconscious and results from informal, natural communication. Language learning is conscious and driven by error correction (more formal). Grammar structures are acquired in a predictable order. Language acquisition occurs with comprehensible input i.e. hearing or reading things that are just slightly above our current language level.

By using the concept of this theory, teacher teaches second language on top of language acquisition in case of an ethnic group students. Ethnic group students learn their own mother tongue unconsciously without following rules but when they learn second or additional language, they follow the language structure consciously in the classroom and out of the classroom. Teacher uses different materials (visual, audio-video) to teach second language with different techniques (e.g. peers learning, group learning, focus group learning) and different activities (e.g. conversation, storytelling, singing rhymes). Children learn additional languages by following the rules but not follow rules when they speak their mother tongue.

In MLE approach used schools, teachers use the first language or mother tongue as a language instruction when they teach the second language or other additional languages. Mother tongue or home language has been learnt by children without a formal classroom but other additional languages have been learnt within the formal setting. Teacher teaches language skills and language aspects of mother tongue in the classroom in the beginning stages but the teachers teach language skills and aspects of language gradually by using similar activities and similar techniques.

The Threshold Theory

This theory claims on the relationship between cognition and degree of bilingualism. This theory was developed by (Cummins, 1980; Baker, 2006). The statement made by this theory is that the relationship between cognition and bilingualism can be explained by the idea of two thresholds. Threshold is based on the level of language competence of a child. The first threshold refers to avoid the negative consequences of bilingualism for a child. The second threshold refers to the experiences of possible positive benefits of bilingualism for a child.

This theory can be pictured as a house of three floors. The two ladders placed on the sides of the house indicate two languages that children learn. Language competence in the two languages is not sufficiently gained as expected due to their age group and remain at the bottom floor of the house. They become unable to cope with the classroom situation and

may have negative effect on their cognitive development. At the second floor of the house, children are found age- appropriate competence in one of their languages but at the top of the house children are found having balanced bilingual capacities. They become capable in both language and age-appropriate competence. Then only they become capable to accept the curriculum materials in both the languages.

This theory claims that minority children become unsuccessful in the second language competence if they do not develop their language competence in their first language. The more developed the first language, the easier it will be to develop the second language. MTB-MLE mainly focuses on the first language competency development then children are taught through the second language for their second language competence development in the classroom.

This theory talks about the issue of the distinction between surface level fluency and academic language skills. In this regard, Cummins (1980) labeled these distinctions in terms of Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS refers to everyday conversational fluency while CALP refers to the academic ability of the students. CALP refers to the students' ability to understand and express ideas and concepts required for academic proficiency. CALP demands more of higher-order thinking skills like analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

MLE program emphasizes on Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and then focuses on Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). As a result, students develop their oral fluency level and develop their accuracy level through MTB-MLE approach in the school from the early grade. According to Cummins (1980), the students acquire most of the basic language skills such as the phonology of the language at early age. They do not seem to face any difficulty in the everyday use of the language. At the same, cognitive demanding aspects of the language can be developed through social interaction from birth. The use of the school language leads to be much more academically demanding than that of the everyday conversational language. Similarly, Cummins, (2004) defined as "the extent to which an individual has access to and command of the oral and written academic registers of schooling".

This study will explore to the effectiveness of medium of instruction and MLE approach to teach English language to Tamang students at pre- primary level school.

The objectives of this study are 1) to explore the participants' lived experiences on medium of instruction while teaching English in the classrooms; and 2) to explore the participants' lived experiences on the effectiveness of Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education approach to teaching English at pre-primary level

Research Questions were 1) how do the participants experience on medium of instruction while teaching English in the classrooms? 2) How do the participants experience on the effectiveness of MTB-MLE approach while teaching English in the classrooms?

B. Methods

We have employed phenomenological research design in this study because phenomenological research design explores the participants' lived experiences on a certain phenomenon with the functions of information. In the hermeneutic phenomenological research, Peoples (2021) says, "Phenomenological researchers pause and look at a phenomenon as the lived experience of some activity and illuminate its specific characteristic as experience rather than trying to turn it into an abstract structure and comparing it to other structures". She expresses that phenomenological research specifies the functions of lived experiences of the participants of a phenomenon rather than an abstract structure in comparison to other structures in the process of interpretation and analysis. In hermeneutic phenomenological research approach, the researcher learns "how individuals experience and interact with their social world, the meaning it has for them" (Merriam, 2002). Willis (2001) says that phenomenological researchers try to make a phenomenon a "meaningful named reality". According to Peoples (2021), phenomenological researchers construct a meaningful reality in the process of data analysis. Phenomenology is regarded as the art of interpretation of lived experiences of the participants by focusing on the essence in relation to its functions of the data (lived experience). Peoples (2021) said that phenomenological research is the understanding of lived experiences and meaning-making is essential in phenomenological research design. Polkinghorne (1983) stated that our every experience needs to be interpreted against the influence of our backgrounds in hermeneutic phenomenological research design. In addition, Smith (1997) says that interpretations are the rich textual descriptions of experiences of selected phenomena of individuals' lives in relation to our experiences as a whole. Our understanding shuttles again and again across micro and macro experiences by enabling us to decipher the meaning of a text in the hermeneutic circle (Polkinghorne, 1983).

In our study, phenomenological research design is suitable to explore the participants' lived experiences and meaning makings of those lived experiences on medium of instruction and their lived experiences on the implementation of MTB-MLE approach to teach English at pre-primary level schools. Phenomenology is the study of how individuals make sense of their own lived experiences. Phenomenological questions will emerge in the conduct of unstructured interviews. Phenomenological understandings, themes, insights will emerge while going through the steps of interpretive

phenomenological data analysis. The aim of phenomenological researcher is “to understand and describe phenomena exactly they appear in an individual’s consciousness” (Phillipson, 1972). Phenomenological researchers focus on the impacts of their lived experiences of a phenomenon. A lived experience is related to “its being experienced makes a special impression that gives it lasting importance” (Gadamer, 2004).

We have purposively selected three primary level English teachers those who teach in Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education implemented schools of Dhading district. I have used phenomenological interviews with a set of questionnaires to collect data as research tools in the field.

Before collecting data, the researcher took an ethical concern of the participants. The information collection instrument consisted of close and open-ended questions. The participants were asked to express participants’ lived experiences on their challenges while teaching English and their lived experiences on the implementation of mother tongue based multilingual approach to teach English for primary level students. Participants’ voice was recorded, transcribed in Nepali language, translated in English, coded, developed themes and interpreted thematically.

C. Result and Discussion

Teachers’ Challenges in English Classroom

Learning enough through English in order to learn through English in six years depends on how well the teachers already know English and how well they have been prepared to teach English (Heugh et al., 2019). Our participant (A) says: *Communication problem in English for me due to no exposure at home and at any place besides school, pronunciation problem because I am from Tamang language background family. English language is my third language and I speak my mother tongue Tamang language every day at home. We do not have an access and an environment to speak English even in the public places. Not only that, I have lack of training in English.*

Language Barrier in the English Classroom

According to Heugh, et al., (2019), assert that students cannot learn what they cannot understand. My participant (B) expresses: *Our Tamang students do not understand English language spoken by the teachers in the English class due to English vocabulary problem, problem in doing English subject classwork and homework, parents do not help them to do homework at home because their parents cannot read and write in English.*

Using Trans-language Method in English Classroom

The principles of dual –medium education have similarities with purposeful use of code-switching, as identified in the Welsh model of translanguaging described by Heugh, et al., (2019). Our participant (C) says: *I translate the text from English to Nepali to Tamang and most of the times English to Tamang language from vocabulary level to sentence level by following grammatical rules orally when I teach English in the classroom. This dual- medium instruction is very useful for me to teach English in our Tamang language spoken classes. I am so satisfied to use this translanguaging way to teach English for fruitful and effective result in student's learning.*

From the above expression, trans-language method is quite necessary in the process of teaching and learning L2 and L3 for the Language teachers and learners in the context of Nepalese classroom especially in language minority group students. To support, Reeves et al. (2008), state that alternating of two or more languages need to be in both spoken and written form so that students can develop strong reading and writing in each of these languages (Heugh, et al., 2019). The main purpose of translanguaging in the classroom is to build up the strong foundation of learning in students from the gross hood level. Translanguaging is an important practice among language minority children who serve as translators for their parents who do not speak the majority language. The value of the multiple literacies in which youth engage while translating for their families. Bilingual translanguage to include and facilitate communication with others, but also to construct deeper understandings and make sense of their bilingual world (Garcia, 2009). Translanguaging, as “a hybrid language use that is a systematic, strategic, affiliative and sense making process” (Garcia & Wei, 2014).

Language Policy and Practice in the Classroom at Primary Level

Language policy involves the intersection of language ideologies, management and language practice (Shohamy, 2006). Language policy creates an environment of language management and language use daily. Language policy works for investigating about language practices in the context of language ideologies and management efforts (Bonacina, 2010; Shohamy, 2006). Our participant (A) expresses: *In my school, language policy is to speak English in English class is compulsory. But it is not effectively implemented still. When I translate English to Nepali, most of the students do not understand so I translate English to Tamang language then only they understand me. When I use Tamang language as a language instruction they become interested to hear me and understand what I teach them from English text.*

Making a language policy and implementing that language policy are so far differential things in a real -life situation in favor of students' comprehension ability. Imposing EMI approach in the classroom is not seemed meaningful in the context of ethnic marginalized language group students by observing from the up to bottom language policy. Additionally, Henry, et al., (1997), state that language policy is not possible to understand any of the stories about policy in isolation. There is always a prior history of significant events, a particular ideological and political climate, a social and economic context, which shape the timing of policies as well as their evolution and outcomes.

Language Instruction in the English Classroom at Primary Level

Students need a minimum of six years (preferably eight years) of learning to read and write in the home/local language and learning through this language (i.e. mother-tongue medium), while the second and third language (e.g. English) is being taught well as a subject, before they can be expected to learn through the second language or English (Heugh, et al., 2019). Students in resource-poor contexts are likely to need at least eight years of learning English as a subject before they can learn effectively through English (EMI). Using 'dual medium' approach, in which two languages are used purposefully-with part of the lesson in one language and part in another - to achieve academic success for students earlier on, depending on the context. Our participant (B) expresses: *Though school administrator enforces me to speak English, I use Tamang language for better understanding in the class. Our Tamang students love to speak and listen their home language in the class of English. When I speak English, they do not give any interest in learning, they do not become active but they get frustrated. So, I have to speak Tamang language compulsorily in English class.*

According to the above expressions, an ethnic minority (MT) language instruction helps the students to make a transition from L1 proficiency to English language proficiency in students during the English classes. In this regard, the advantage of native-tongue instruction is that its's easier to read and write in a language you understand, so why do they not get bigger effects? Because of this cockamamie theory that academics have constructed that you have to reach a high level of proficiency in your native tongue before you can be transitioned to English (Cummins, 2004). Without developing mother tongue proficiency there is no way of reaching a high-level proficiency of English language.

Multilingual Approach to Teaching English at Primary Level

Multilingual approach is a holistic, inclusive, and integrated approach to language teaching to empower learners to use resources from learning prior languages (Sauer & Saudan, 2008). My participant (C) says: *It is helpful for the Tamang students to learn English*

language because MTB-MLE approach will help them to understand word and meaning. When they learn English through MTB-MLE approach, they feel easy to grasp the concepts, ideas, thoughts, general language rules in making sentences, connecting ideas in the similar activities between Tamang and English language.

From the above expressions of the participant focus on the relationship between the first learning and the second learning of the learners with help of similar activities, steps, concept and practice. Bi/multilingual education always integrates language and content. Bilingual instruction is always a join-fostering of balancing support for development of both home language and the additional languages as well as learning content (Garcia, 2009). Bilingual education is the construction of new understandings in curriculum always goes hand in hand with the development of language, especially of the additional language (Garcia & Wei, 2014).

D. Conclusion

Overall, most of the English teachers from Tamang language background at primary level have been facing the challenges to teach English and the students from the same language background also have challenges in learning English in the classroom in terms of English language proficiency, an appropriate language instruction and developing the level of English language competency in students. Translanguaging model seems applicable in the most of the English classes at the time of delivering message, lesson, contents to develop the level of comprehension in students' learning. The result shows that without the developing of first language competency there is no possible way to develop additional language (L2 &L3) competency in student. Multilingual approach has become an effective approach to teach the languages to the students in terms of feeling easy access to learn through known language to unknown language. Prior knowledge always helps to acquire knowledge in the process of achieving learning goal. The finding showed that all participated English teachers in this study have expressed their recent experiences and challenges to teach English is possible through the ways of dual-medium in the classroom.

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